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## GENDER AND MULTICULTURALISM: REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH IN POLAND AFTER 1989 YEAR IN THE CONTEXT OF MULTICULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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The aim of the paper is to reflect on the condition of the research concerning gender issues in a culturally diverse society in Poland. After the political breakthrough in 1989, Poland emerged as a democratic state, where various categories of the Other came back to life. At the same time, new social minorities appeared. In the context of talking about issues of multiculturalism in Poland is a new aspect of gender, have not so much ignored, which overlooked in general discussions about the relationship between minority and dominant group.

**Keywords:** democracy in Poland, ethnicity, gender, multicultural communication, multiculturalism, post-colonialism, queer, research of gender and ethnicity, social minority.

“History demonstrates that, regardless the time and the location, the idea of incorporating an individual through citizenship was always related to exclusion. When all French citizens were declared equal, these were women who were excluded from the project. Several signatories of the US Constitution, advocating equal rights for all, owned the slaves. In quite a recent past, Solidarity movement in Poland, liberating Poland and nearly all communist states from communist regime, did not grant equal rights to women. “Gender of democracy in Poland is masculine” Maria Janion announced then. [...] The practice of exclusion known in history proves that every

new practice of incorporation results in certain exclusion actions” (Oleksy 2008: 9).

### Introduction

After 1989, Poland emerged as a fully democratic state. System transformation, including political, economic and social aspects, was a subject to a number of papers for many years. The changes permeating Polish society, both on macro and micro levels, were thoroughly analyzed. There appeared a new dimension in the research related to social minorities.

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Prevailing ideology of ethnically homogenous Poland, common in communist period, was rejected. The problem of ethnic minorities was considered to be inconvenient to be discussed. After the breakthrough of 1989, a certain space to analyze one's national identity was open; it was open regardless one's state affiliation. In a population census, the questions were added related to national identity. The responses indicated the fact Poland was ethnically diverse state. It is not surprising, considering Poland's multicultural history. Although after World War II ethnic structure of Poland was deeply transformed, Polish society never was homogenous in terms of ethnicity. In borderland this is particularly obvious. Immigrants or refugees arriving in Poland form a new category of category of ethnically/nationally Others.

In this time (after 1989), such subjects as ethnicity, ethnic minorities and ethnic relations became dominant among research threads. Numerous publications were launched, both presenting theoretical perspective of ethnicity and demonstrating particular analyses. Main academic centers working on these issues were Białystok, Kraków, Warsaw or Wrocław. However, for more than ten years of investigating ethnicity issues, there were practically no analyses combining gender and ethnic perspective in Poland. When discussing multiculturalism, gender issues form a new aspect, not being sufficiently considered so far (though not being entirely overlooked, either) in general debates focusing on the relations between minorities and the dominant group. It is important to emphasize the fact that a narrow/traditional understanding of multiculturalism has been used for years.

Robert Kusek and Joanna Sanetra-Szeliga, in their introduction to *Towards New Multiculturalism* declare:

"In 1989 we experienced a breakthrough considering both political revolution and a new kind of multiculturalism, being manifested by a wide range of kinds of 'distinctness' in a public life. Multiculturalism being understood traditionally is not a sufficient idea in a contemporary

pluralist society, being dynamic, undergoing frequent changes and mobile; in this perspective multiculturalism cannot be solely restricted to respecting national or religious differences. New multiculturalism is about searching for Other in various kinds of distinctness that can be found beyond the dominant discourse, in the absence – within sexual minority groups, among the elderly, the disabled, women" (Kusek, Sanetra-Szeliga 2010: 12).

There are at least several grounds where feminism, gender and multiculturalism might be united: the relation between dominant group and minority, the struggle for civil rights, preventing discrimination, identity policy, etc. In each category mentioned above, when they refer to individual experience, it is an individual identity constructed towards a dominant group that seems to be a major factor; so is the range of rights that an individual enjoys in a particular society. While analyzing Polish democracy from gender/queer perspective, Jacek Kochanowski refers to Anthony Giddens' definition of democracy that emphasizes the equality of all citizens and makes the political system guarantee the right for self-development as well as the right for decision-making to all citizens. Kochanowski draws our attention to the fact that: "[...] the system that assumes, authorizes or preserves the limitations to exercise the power to any social group or category is not a democratic system *ex definitione* or its democratic character is faulty. Sanctioning this deprivation could hold an open or secret character" (Kochanowski 2007: 46). Secret mechanisms of deprivation are especially significant, as they are maintained through a social discourse in an imperceptible and unnoticeable yet effective manner. They contribute to rejecting all the individuals who do not fall into any of Polish categories, perceived as normal, usual, obvious ones, from a public space.

Krystyna Slany, Beata Kowalska and Magdalena Ślusarczyk in the preface to their book *Gender Kaleidoscope* write:

"In Poland, like in other countries, the paradigms being true so far-especially structural-functional paradigm based on biological

essentialism lost their explaining power. Its key assumption was accepting natural differences between sexes that formed the basis for a certain social order. It was biology that determined the status related to sex, social roles, the share of political power and privileges, active performance in a public sphere. The separate worlds of male and female activity were complementary – it guaranteed a stable social construct. As the functional approach began being perceived as inadequate to analyze the societies facing sudden changes, there were opposite critical paradigms being formed. Among these paradigms there was feminism; it offered alternative and competitive explanations of the issues related to sex, accepting the importance of cultural and social factors while constructing it” (Slany *et al.* 2011: 8).

The authors make a further statement: “Polish gender studies have opened towards the latest trends – intersectional approach analyzing inequalities not only through sex, but also economic status, religion, race or sexual orientation, as these categories complement one another (Slany *et al.* 2011: 9).

At the end of the 1980s, there appeared several scientific analyses concentrating on relations between such categories as sex, race, ethnicity. It coincided with questioning the universality of a subject appointed during the second wave of feminism. As Nira Yuval-Davis argues, it was critical considering the first assumptions of feminism based on white middle-class women’s experience – it contributed to the development of multicultural policy of identity within further feminist standpoints (see Yuval-Davis 1999: 116).

It was initially mainly in American feminism where the ideas related to race appeared, due to the influence of the New Left. In the 1980s, there were many critical works written by African American women that denied the existence of a universal subject “woman” (see Braidotti 2009: 190–191). However, European experience is different, as its cultural context is different. Initially, racial issues were not to be

analyzed (though it is changing as a result of migration), these were rather ethnic or national factors that were considered. Rosi Braidotti argues that increasing racist, anti-Semitic and xenophobic attitudes in Europe make feminist theoreticians construct, among others, educational programs focusing on multiculturalism in European context.

Chris Shilling in *The Body and Social Theory* mentions the body being stranger’s body, belonging to a different race; his account is based on the relation between black slaves and their owners. The author demonstrates body discourse being interspersed with power relations (Shilling 2010: 69).

Listening attentively to the voices being silenced previously, feminist researchers initiated the polemics with the accomplishments in social science referring to society, culture, history. Factors such as ethnicity, nationality, social class, sexual orientation and disability began being perceived as central aspects of female experience; it was thanks to the Afro-American feminists as well as the feminists from the labor class (Chase 2009: 21).

Paradoxically, the fact Afro-American feminists started questioning feminism at the decline of the second wave was the reason to analyze the category of “whiteness” that, being deconstructed, demonstrated numerous inequalities and complexities. According to Virginia Olesen, it was not only subjectivity of Afro-American women that was pointed, these were also such factors as sexual orientation, disability, etc. (Olesen 2009: 349–350).

### **Postcolonialism versus postcolonial knowledge/power<sup>1</sup>**

The concept of colonialism refers to the rule, administrative power of certain states over other states or communities. It occurred as the consequence of British, French or American

<sup>1</sup> See Bienkowska-Ptasznik (2010).

imperialism, if only several states colonizers are mentioned whereas postcolonialism is the concept referring to the events happening after the end of the formal colonial rule, during the period of decolonization; it is also applied to define a critical scientific trend. In the latter meaning, postcolonialism is a range of theories struggling against the dominant Western narration, the imperialism of Western science. Four thinkers are believed to be the initiators of postcolonial approach in cultural studies: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Bill Ashcroft, Homi K. Bhabhy and Edward Said. These scholars, apart from Said, are not well known in Poland. *Orientalism*, published by Said in 1978, was published in 1991 in Poland (it was republished in 2005).

*Orientalism* by Said is based on the power/knowledge concept used by Michel Foucault. He analyzes the idea of “political representation” applied in literature works devoted to the Orient (Said 2005: 84). Said demonstrates that our knowledge of the East is constructed from the Western perspective of rationality, science, art – it is our Western narration on the East, the narration monopolizing the right to speak. In his opinion, Orient is a mythical structure of European discourse (Said 2005: 29).<sup>2</sup>

In 1985, Spivak posed a question if subordinate classes are able to speak out. This question was addressed to western academic discourse establishing its perspective as the one being obligatory to research and assess the world. It was a kind of crying for the possibility to use their own perspective and narration by those being marginalized within the society. Postcolonial theories were constructed on various, often distant, kinds of narration. Leela Gandhi believes they are partly influenced by Marxism as well as Foucault and Jacques Derrida. She stresses, however, heterogeneous attitudes towards colonialism expressed here.

Postcolonialism aims at highlighting and discrediting this homogenous notion of civic identity elaborated at Western universities and imposed on the rest of the world. Gandhi stresses the fact postcolonialism is related to gender studies as well as lesbian/gay studies, being created in the 1980s. These new academic disciplines, often referred to as the New Humanities, made an effort to highlight various kinds of deprivation and exclusion that confirm existing privileges and systems of power and then to regain these marginalized areas of knowledge that had been blocked and silenced by the traditional canon of humanities (see Gandhi 2008: 45).

### **Marriage/misarrriage of feminism and postcolonialism**

As it was mentioned above, postcolonialism meets other critical approaches by its negation of forced reality narration. Feminism is an example of this convergence, not necessarily being easy to achieve. Postcolonialism fights against the colonists and their feeling of superiority whereas feminism strives for equality for women’s expression. Feminism is a phenomenon that is difficult to be defined unambiguously, due to its multi-aspect and multidirectional character. Not only is it a social movement, ideology or policy, but it also forms an interdisciplinary scientific theory. Although the history of feminism goes back as far as the 18th century, it was no sooner than in the 20th century when academic feminism had been formulated. It is also worth emphasizing that the concept of “feminism” is a certain mental shortcut, as the scholars stress numerous definitions of this idea.

Feminist movement began as a socio-political movement striving for women’s rights, fighting against discrimination. It has never been a homogeneous movement. There are numerous ideological aspects of feminism, from liberal “mild” feminism to radical, Marxist feminism. Academic feminism was constructed on these

<sup>2</sup> *Orientalism* by Said was largely criticized due to its general character, presenting Orient as a whole, not differentiating between various societies/states. It is discussed more widely in Baldwin *et al.* (2007: 201–202).

bases mainly in the United States (US) in the 1960s. Anna Burzyńska describes its origin:

“Development of academic feminism nearly converged with the ‘second wave’ of socio-political feminism. Its academic character, however, did not mean rejecting the socio-political sphere. On the contrary, this variety of feminism, being taught and researched at the universities in the US, England and France, was always strongly connected with a political activity, often forming its intellectual grounds” (Burzyńska 2007: 399).

There were numerous theories related to femininity issues developed within academic feminism. What is significant, based on the conceptualization of a feminist subject, there occurred a heated argument within feminism, resulting in further academic implications. Ewa Hyży (2003), in her *Woman, Body, Identity* expands this issue, demonstrating the details of the dispute between essentialism and social constructionism.

In the 1990s, postfeminism, also called the feminism of the third wave, began – it expressed a critical approach within feminism, demonstrating that “[...] so far the feminist movement has accepted the perspective of white, heterosexual American and Western European women, being the representative of middle class but usurping to be the advocates of all women (Burzyńska 2007: 398). This approach was defined as a mistake of universalism and became a subject for many debates. Joanna Mizieleńska argues that while Simone de Beauvoir depicted the variety of women in her writing, later this variety was lost, in the 1970s women became “all women”, speaking on behalf of all women. Only later, it was accepted that

“Each woman lives in various contexts, not only is her life influenced by her sex, but also by the social class she belongs to, her race, ethnicity, sexuality, etc. Some of them seem to be the aspects of secondary importance, others gain certain significance as a result of certain events. [...] When making sex a superior category, other elements of female identity were regarded

as less important for the sake of the movement. Elizabeth Spelman, while criticizing a certain ‘unidirectionality’ of the feminist explanations, declares that, as a result of this approach a homogeneous concept of a woman as a ‘class’, ‘caste’ or a ‘minority group’ was established but a lot of aspects of woman’s experience were somewhere lost – as a result, feminist movement became the subject of criticism, also women’s criticism” (see Mizieleńska 2004: 114–115).

Elizabeth V. Spelman proves that focusing on women, not considering their race, ethnicity, etc. is both intentional and justified – it is the consequence of accepting a certain perspective, enabling perceiving different kinds of women’s experience. Yet it is worth remembering that the universal women’s voice is the voice of white women. Juliet Mitchell defends/justifies this approach, stressing that the universal subject – a woman – was a starting point in a debate concerning woman’s rights in general (see Mizieleńska 2004: 119). Nevertheless, contemporary feminist analyses indicate inequalities of various kinds related to sex, although obviously it is a women’s collective identity that is a superior narration, as it guarantees bigger effectiveness while struggling against social inequalities.

In 1993 Said advocated the oppressed classes to be given their voice. Although it is difficult to talk about the unity of postcolonialism and feminism, there certainly are the analogies on a general level of analysis. In his review of Gandhi’s book, Adam Pisarek writes:

“Post-colonialism and feminism had the same starting point. They analyzed and supported the deprived groups that were not able to express themselves due to structures of dominance being hard to be destroyed. The similarities are evident even in the sequence of actions – fight against the established hierarchy of sex or race, manifesto rejection of patriarchal or colonial authority – these events happened simultaneously in these two areas. It seemed it would be obvious if they co-operated” (Pisarek 2009).

Gandhi, however, stresses one essential issue: both postcolonialism and feminism strongly refer to cultural/racial/sexual dominance. They encourage to reject the dichotomous divisions created by this approach. Yet, it seems difficult to make these two approaches converge, as there is a lot of distrust related to each other. What are the reasons for this distrust? If the feminism is the subject of criticism from the postcolonial standpoint, one of the major features of this criticism is the fact that feminism is expressed by a woman-colonist – a white woman representing the Western culture and making this perspective universal being imposed on other women. (This approach has been maintained in a feminist perspective until the 1990s.) Feminism, on the other hand, criticizes postcolonialism as it perceives it to hold imperial attitude towards the Third World women, demonstrating it ignores gender issues and the differences between women's and men's experience.

### **Multicultural queer**

In the 1970s gender studies, based on feminist notions, appeared as a new phenomenon in higher education. The beginnings of gender studies were inspired by the concept of gender in social studies and, as a consequence, establishing the distinction between sex and gender. The concept of gender, being the result of social practice, resulted from Margaret Mead's anthropological research and further analyses made by Robert Stoller. In 1964 Stoller coined the concept of "gender identity"; in 1968 he published the work which crowned his analyses related to people whose sexual identification crossed the frames of biology. The investigation performed by Mead and Stoller largely transformed feminist analyses – as a result of this transformation, gender studies replaced women's studies. Another important figure was Annie Oakley, whose publications popularized the distinction of sex and gender in social science and

within feminism. At the beginning of the 1980s, inspired by Judith Butler and her concept of gender performativity, Teresa de Lauretis and Foucault, as well as gay/lesbian analyses, queer studies were established. What is significant, queer analyses went beyond a narrow category of sex and sexuality. They focus on identity issues and the concept of the "Other"; it allows applying these analyses in investigating issues of multiculturalism. Ken Plummer argues that queer deconstructs the discourse applied so far and introduces a new, more open perspective, rejecting all closed categories (Plummer 2009: 526–527).

Feminist and queer theories are the ones being frequently accused of not being objective due to the fact they are created by the representatives of minorities. What makes a common ground to these theories is the fact they are created by these being their subject. Although the tradition of these two approaches is well-established, they are still not recognized and appreciated in Poland and other countries of Central and Eastern Europe. In the 1990s, during political and economic transformation period in postcommunist countries, science focused on these changes. Many difficult problems occurring in these societies were discussed and analyzed, such as democratization, changes within social structure, socio-cultural transformation, labor market and unemployment. However, feminism, being a well-established theoretical perspective in Western countries, was not recognized to be a major problem deserving a serious approach. Although women's problems were being discussed, they still were not regarded as significant issues.

Queer theory has begun being analyzed in the countries of Central Europe only recently. It could be argued that after social divisions, social identities constructed like *us* and *them*, lost their perception as being a merely political phenomenon in postcommunist societies, there are many other reasons for divisions occurring there. The myth of a homogeneous society is about to collapse, including its ethnic

and religious homogeneity as well as the homogeneity related to individual sexual identities. Refuting the homogeneity myth is related to the violation of numerous taboos.

Queer theory, being the youngest and the most controversial, is the approach focusing on the minorities and their expression. It has been created as the criticism of applying the ethnicity/minority model by homosexual groups in order to construct their identity. It demonstrates that this model excludes those who do not fit the image of a white middle-class gay. In other words, queer theory undermines the assimilation model. It deconstructs various approaches applied earlier, criticizing them for submitting to majority discourse. Queer disproves all legal norms that allow dividing people into categories, locating them in ready/convenient/politically correct identity frames. Although queer theory originated in a homosexual environment, it gradually was applied to other groups of sexual minorities. Contemporarily, this perspective is being used in social studies generally. The advantage of applying queer approach is the fact it rejects all kinds of obviousness, being regarded as natural. It also criticizes having identity as a kind of compulsion. This compulsion is the result of the necessity to decide who one is or is not, to live in a binary system: “us”–“them”. This binary division prevents us from perceiving the whole spectrum of possibilities beyond the system. The sociological and anthropological analyses on the third (or even fourth) sex are referred to when a binary sex division is being undermined.

I believe that feminist or queer analyses will contribute to developing ethnicity studies, they will furtherly allow analyzing certain categories of ethnic or national identity from another perspective – they were so far interpreted as immature or temporary forms – I mean the category of *tutejszy*, meaning local, territorial, limited to a particular area, or mixed categories, like Polish/Belarusian, etc. In a queer perspective, they gain a new dimension; being located in a *tutejszy* category is not an immature identity

form any more – it is a category that allows questioning the necessity to identify with a particular ethnic group. *Tutejszy* overcomes national divisions, and, as history shows, the consequences of them could be dramatic. Polish multicultural analyses might include the analysis related to women coming from various ethnic and national groups. Women are located in the “Others” group together with men – it could be the reason why we are losing a significant element of cultural variety.

### **Conclusions: multicultural communication – the future in sociological research in Poland**

After 1989 multiculturalism became a major subject in sociological and pedagogical research in Poland. However, one needs to acknowledge the narrow scope of reflection over this matter. Researchers mainly focus on the relations between a culturally (or nationally) dominant group and ethnic minorities that have been residing in Poland for years and, as a result, are perceived to be an assimilated part of Polish society. The problem that I wanted to demonstrate in a previous part of an article is a reduced reflection considering gender category in the analyses related to ethnicity and cultural diversity in Poland. Since 2004, the year of Poland’s accession to the European Union and, as a result, borders being open, a new category of Others has appeared – immigrants, forming new ethnic minorities in Poland. Immigrants arrive in Poland either hoping to continue their journey to other European countries or to settle down here. The more culturally/ethnically different these people are, the more difficult it seems to continue the ethnicity research conducted so far.

Cross-cultural communication is a related issue; it could be considered both in relations among the Polish and ethnic minorities and the relations at the meeting point of cultures on a supranational level. The research concerning

multiculturalism conducted so far treats communication issues in a peripheral perspective. These are ethnic relations, stereotypes, prejudice that are analyzed, whereas practical issues related to culturally different groups co-operating with each other are neglected. Cross-cultural communication is a more commonly analyzed matter in economy or business training than in social science.

The researchers will probably be made to analyze cross-cultural communication more deeply due to new immigrants arriving, including refugees, as well as new economic relations. As it was demonstrated, gender, ethnicity, cross-cultural relations and cross-cultural communication form research areas that are constantly changing and, parallelly, extending their contexts.

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## LYTIS IR DAUGIAKULTŪRIŠKUMAS: TYRIMO, VYKDYTO LENKIJoje PO 1989 METŲ, REFLEKSIJOS DAUGIAKULTŪRĖS KOMUNIKACIJOS KONTEKSTE

Małgorzata BIENKOWSKA

Straipsnio tikslas – išnagrinėti tyrimo, skirto diskutuotiems lyties klausimams kultūriniu požiūriu įvairioje Lenkijos visuomenėje, sąlygas. Po 1989 metų politinio persilaužimo Lenkija iškilo kaip demokratinė valstybė, kurioje atgimė įvairios Kito kategorijos. Tuo pat metu atsirado naujų socialinių mažumų.

Svarstymų ginčytiniais daugiakultūriškumo Lenkijoje klausimais kontekste esama naujojo lyties aspekto, kuris bendrosiose diskusijose apie santykį tarp mažumos ir dominuojančios grupės, ne tiek ignoruojamas, kiek nepastebimas.

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** demokratija Lenkijoje, etniškumas, lytis, daugiakultūrė komunikacija, daugiakultūriškumas, postkolonializmas, *queer*, lyties ir etniškumo tyrimas, socialinė mažuma.