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## The Image of Feminism in the Polish Women's Press in the Years 1989–1992<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

The research was aimed at reconstructing the media image of feminism which was presented in the most popular Polish magazines dedicated to women in the years 1989–1992. The research time period corresponded to the first stage of the system transformation in Poland. It was initiated by the year in which the Round Table Talks were held and it ended with the adoption of the so-called “Small Constitution” in 1992. There were three detailed questions formulated: 1. How was feminism defined in the Polish women's press? 2. How often was this topic subject to discussions? 3. Which determinant factors affected the image of feminism depicted by the editorial offices of the women's press? The text analysis and the content analysis revealed that the image of feminism in the Polish women's press in the period under study was fragmentary and cultural, historical and political aspects exerted a crucial influence on its structure.

**Keywords:** feminism, media image of feminism, Polish women's press, women's press in the years 1989–1992

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## OBRAZ FEMINIZMU W POLSKIEJ PRASIE DLA KOBIEŃ W LATACH 1989–1992

### Streszczenie

Celem badań była rekonstrukcja medialnego obrazu feminizmu, który był prezentowany w najpopularniejszych polskich pismach kierowanych do kobiet w latach 1989–1992. Cezura badawcza odpowiadała pierwszej fazie transformacji systemowej w Polsce. Inicjował ją rok, w którym odbyły się obrady Okrągłego Stołu, a kończył rok uchwalenia tzw. małej konstytucji w 1992 r. Sformułowano trzy pytania szczegółowe: 1. Jak definiowano feminizm w polskiej prasie dla kobiet? 2. Jaka była częstotliwość rozważań na ten temat? 3. Jakie uwarunkowania wpłynęły na recepcję feminizmu przez redakcje prasy dla kobiet. Analiza treści oraz analiza zawartości wykazały, że obraz feminizmu na łamach polskiej prasy dla kobiet w badanym okresie był fragmentaryczny, a zasadniczy wpływ na jego konstrukcję miały uwarunkowania kulturowe, historyczne oraz polityczne.

**Słowa kluczowe:** feminizm, medialny obraz feminizmu, polska prasa dla kobiet, prasa dla kobiet w latach 1989–1992

### Introductory note

In 1989 Poland, aside from the political transitions (the transformation of the political system)<sup>2</sup>, a gradual shift in world-view was initiated along with the attempts of lifestyle changes (e.g. by promoting a family partnership model). After 45 years of censorship<sup>3</sup> the press began to more frequently launch ideological debates on the trends which in the time of the Polish People's Republic had been forbidden (e.g. the national and democratic thought) or pushed out of the public discourse as it was in the case of feminism.

<sup>2</sup> Cf.: Anna Szwed-Walczak, "Obraz wyborów kontraktowych w Polsce na łamach prasy dla kobiet", *Czasopismo Naukowe Instytutu Studiów Kobięcych*, no 1 (6), 2019, 152–154; Paweł Kowal, *Koniec systemu władzy. Polityka ekipy gen. Wojciecha Jaruzelskiego w latach 1986–1989*, (Warszawa: Narodowe Centrum Kultury, 2015); Marek Białokur, Joanna Raźniewska, Krystyna Stecka (ed.), *Polska droga do wolności. Rok 1989: polityka – edukacja – kultura*, (Toruń–Opole: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Its relaxation could already be noticed during the Round Table Talks, informally it ceased to exist when the government headed by Tadeusz Mazowiecki was formed in August 1989. However, the official lifting of censorship was effected by virtue of the Act of 11 April 1990 on repealing the act on the control of publications and performances, the abolition of control authorities and on the amendment of the Act – The Press Act.

The subject of research interest was the media image of feminism in the Polish women's press during the first stage of the system transformation. The media image constitutes a reconstruction of a social, political and cultural reality suited to the addressee of the message. It is a world observed by the media. It is not an objective reality as it is marked by a certain worldview, determined by cultural and social factors. The media image of the world should then be treated as the lens of the context in which it is created<sup>4</sup>. The media researchers point to the fact that it allows a human being to "perceive a reality inaccessible to direct experience"<sup>5</sup>. The research on the world's media image most often employs the text, context and hidden meaning analysis<sup>6</sup>. This study analyses the text and content of the most popular magazines during the period in question, which apart from a guide's function, undertook social, political, cultural and economic themes in their deliberations<sup>7</sup>. These publications also focused on transformations that took place at that time. All the consecutive issues of weeklies "Przyjaciółka" [hereinafter referred to as "Female Friend"], "Kobieta i Życie" [hereinafter referred to as "Woman and Life"], "Zwierciadło" [hereinafter referred to as "Mirror"] (a monthly since 1991) and a biweekly "Filipinka" were published in that period. The analysis also included a biweekly lifestyle magazine "Uroda" [hereinafter referred to as "Beauty"]].

<sup>4</sup> Grzegorz Ptaszek, "Jak badać medialny obraz świata?", in: Iwona Hofman, Danuta Kępa-Figura (eds.), *Współczesne media. Medialny obraz świata*, t. 1: *Zagadnienia teoretyczne*, (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2015), 15–16; Bogusław Skowronek, *Mediolingwistyka. Wprowadzenie*, (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UP 2013), 118–119; Jan Szmyd, "Medialny obraz rzeczywistości jako główna orientacja poznawcza i praktyczna w świecie", in: Katarzyna Pokorna-Ignatowicz (ed.), *Medialny obraz rodziny i płci*, (Kraków: Krakowskie Towarzystwo Edukacyjne sp. z o.o. – Oficyna Wydawnicza AFM 2012), 13–14; Monika Żak, „Medialny obraz świata. Rola mediów w kształtowaniu wizerunku Policji”, *Media i Społeczeństwo*, 2018, no 8, 116–119; Bartłomiej Łódzki, "Medialny obraz rzeczywistości", *Studia Socialia Cracoviensia*, Vol. 9, No 1, 2017, 123–125.

<sup>5</sup> JK [Jacek Kołodziej], "Mediatyzacja (rzeczywistości społecznej)", in: Walery Pisarek (ed.), *Słownik terminologii medialnej*, (Kraków: Universitas, 2006), 118–119.

<sup>6</sup> Grzegorz Ptaszek, *Jak badać*, 17; Jakub Idzik, Rafał Klepka, "O analizie zawartości, czyli jak badać medialne obrazy świata?", in: Rafał Klepka, Jakub Idzik (eds.), *Medialne obrazy świata*, t. 2: *Polityka i bezpieczeństwo w relacjach medialnych*, (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Pedagogicznego, 2019), 11–28.

<sup>7</sup> Tomasz Mielczarek, "Współczesne polskie czasopisma wysokonakładowe", *Rocznik Prasoznawczy*, no. 2, 2008, 58–59; Ryszard Filas, "Zmiany w czytelnictwie prasy w Polsce 1989–1992 na tle przemian oferty prasowej", in: Alina Słomkowska (ed.), *Transformacja prasy polskiej (1989–1992)*, (Warszawa: Dom Wydawniczy Elipsa, 1992), 36; Zofia Sokół, "Transformacja czasopism kobiecych w Polsce (1989–1997)", *Rocznik Historii Prasy Polskiej*, no. 1–2, 1998, 192–202.

The research was aimed at reconstructing the media image of feminism which was represented in the most popular Polish magazines dedicated to women in the years 1989–1992. The research time period corresponded to the first stage of the system transformation in Poland. It was initiated by the year in which the Round Table Talks were held and it ended with the adoption of the so-called “Small Constitution” in 1992. There were three detailed questions formulated: 1. How was feminism defined in the Polish women’s press?, 2. How often was this topic subject to discussions?, 3. Which determinant factors affected the image of feminism presented by the editorial offices of the women’s press? The research time period is first and foremost related to the political transformation in Poland (shifting from the political system imposed after the Second World War to a more democratic approach to a social and political life), i.e. to the long awaited and widely commented in the press Round Table Talks (6.02 – 5.04.1989) as well as contractual elections (4.06.1989 r. – 1st round, 18.06.1989 – 2nd round), and secondly, the changes in the media system resulting therefrom: the abolition of censorship (04.1990), the elimination of the state monopoly and the opening of the media market to investors and foreign publishers. In the press segment dedicated to women it was manifested by the appearance of the German magazine “Tina” on the Polish market in 1992 (Bauer Publishing House<sup>8</sup>). The year 1992 closing the research period also bears a great significance due to the adoption of the provisional constitution which meant a departure from the so-called socialist constitutionalism<sup>9</sup>.

It can be noted that in the selected research period the emerging feminist movement in Poland<sup>10</sup> was under the influence

<sup>8</sup> About the publishing activity of Bauer Company see: Małgorzata Adamik-Szysiak, “Grupa Bauer Media w Polsce. Działalność i kierunki rozwoju”, in: Lidia Pokrzycka (ed.), *Inwestycje koncernów na polskim rynku medialnym. Wybrane zagadnienia*, (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2012), 51–96.

<sup>9</sup> Constitutional Act of 17 October 1992 on mutual relations between legislative and executive power in the Republic of Poland and on the territorial self-government, *Journal of Laws of 1992*, no. 84, item. 426.

<sup>10</sup> It does not mean that in the history of Poland feminism was not known. The beginning of the Polish feminist movement dates back to the turn of the 18th and 19th century so to the period when Poland was still partitioned. The first feminist book is claimed to have been *The Reminder of a Good Mother* of 1819 written by Klementyna Hoffmanowa, cf. Sylwia Witkowska, “Polski feminizm – paradygmaty”, *Dyskurs. Pismo Naukowo-Artystyczne ASP we Wrocławiu*, no. 25, 2018, 195–204.

of the so-called second wave of feminism<sup>11</sup>. Its start in Europe dates back to the late 60s of the 20th century and its end dates back to the 80s. Due to the existing political system in Poland, the impact of the second wave of feminism can be noticed at the end of the 80s of the 20th century. At that time the topic of gender inequality was frequently raised and the feminist movement postulated women's access to the areas previously reserved only for men (in a social, professional and political life). The cause of "women's oppression" was sought in the process of socialisation and upbringing which was different in the case of men and women<sup>12</sup>. The second wave feminism shaped the awareness of "we women", however it was accused of not addressing all categories of women, at the same attempting to represent each and every woman<sup>13</sup>. The feminist movement is not uniform as it was observed by Kazimierz Ślęczka, we can distinguish the so-called ideological syndrome of feminism which is based on the minimum of feminist beliefs i.e. the diagnosis of women suffering in society, the need for the change of women's situation, the necessity to initiate a programme of changes by women alone<sup>14</sup>.

## Feminism in the Polish press for women

Feminist discourse in the women's press under study in the adopted time perspective evolved gradually. Even though it was never the main topic of deliberations, it appeared in secondary narratives during interviews or the evaluation of the draft law per-

<sup>11</sup> Cf. June Hannam, *Feminism*, translated by Agnieszka Kafińska, (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Zysk i S-ka, 2012), 143–159.

<sup>12</sup> Ewa Malinowska, *Feminizm europejski, demokracja parytetowa a polski ruch kobiet. Socjologiczna analiza walki o równouprawnienie płci*, (Łódź: Wydawnictwo UŁ, 2000), 20; Sławomira Walczewska, *Feminizm wobec końca historii*, in: Zofia Gorczyńska, Sabina Kruszyńska-Zaprzaluk, Irena Zakidalska (eds.), *Płeć – kobieta – feminizm*, (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo UG, 1997), 78.

<sup>13</sup> The critics accused him of universalism and essentialism, emphasized that in the feminist discourse of the second wave there were no "non-white, non-western, non-heterosexual and non-middle class women", Katarzyna Gębarowska, "«Kobiety» jako zbiorowy podmiot ruchu feministycznego w Polsce. Polemika z Partią Kobiet i Kongresem Kobiet Polskich", in: Filip Pierzchalski, Katarzyna Smyczyńska, Maria Ewa Szatlach, Katarzyna Gębarowska (eds.), *Feminizm po polsku*, (Warszawa: Dom Wydawniczy Elipsa, 2011), 185–186.

<sup>14</sup> Kazimierz Ślęczka, *Feminizm. Ideologie i koncepcje współczesnego feminizmu*, (Katowice: Wydawnictwo „Książnica” 1999), 12.

taining to the legal protection of the unborn child<sup>15</sup>. The feminist subject matter was not undertaken directly in 1989, it was rather “smuggled”. The attention was paid to the fact that “being a female or male feminist” was not well accepted in Poland because of an improper appreciation of “womanhood”<sup>16</sup>.

In 1989 feminism was presented in terms of Utopian features or as frivolity. The editors-in-chief but also interlocutors in their interviews dissociated themselves from “being feminists” or belonging to the feminist movements. Not every magazine used the concepts of “feminism” and “a feminist”. See Table no. 1.

**Table no. 1.** Frequency of press articles containing references to feminism in the women’s press under the study (1989–1992)

Magazine title	1989	1990	1991	1992
“Filipinka”	0	1	1	0
“Woman and Life”	5	0	4	5
“Female Friend”	1	1	0	0
“Mirror”	3	1	0	1
“Beauty”	0	0	1	0

Source: based on own research.

The lack of feminism as the concept and its derivatives was noticeable also in a small number of press publications where such expressions appeared. They were most frequently used in the weekly “Woman and Life” whose offer was addressed to socially and politically active women, primarily the inhabitants of bigger cities. However, even this magazine alienated itself from feminism, e.g. by presenting goals of the Club of Women Filmmakers, newly established at the Polish Filmmakers Association in 1989, which stated that its activities did not carry any “feminist overtones”<sup>17</sup>. There were also descriptions of the reportage’s characters “They are not zealous feminists, which is popular in the West. They do not

<sup>15</sup> The draft law was prepared by the team of experts from the Polish Episcopal Committee for Family Affairs and then at the end of February 1989 submitted to the Sejm of the Republic of Poland by the Parliamentary Club of the Catholic and Social Association. The primary aim of the draft’s authors was the abolition of the Act of 27 April 1956 on admissibility criteria of abortion. The draft legislation provided for the penalisation of abortion.

<sup>16</sup> The Interview of Teresa Gałczyńska with Ewa Osiatyńska: “Wernisaz dusz”, *Kobieta i Życie* [hereinafter referred to as: *KiŻ*], no 2, 11.01.1989, 17.

<sup>17</sup> Interviews of Barbara Sas with Ilona Kondrat, “Damskie lobby”, *KiŻ*, no. 16, 19.04.1989, 9.

declare any manifestos. They are merely manifesting their female point of view on the stage. They are preoccupied with saving womanhood, not with its destruction"<sup>18</sup>. Thus, a destructive character of feminism was implied and confronted with women's defensive attitude which was supposed to embrace gender diversity, including a stereotypical approach to a role of women in a social life. Feminism was perceived as a threat to femininity and as the idea introducing an "alien" worldview which was incompatible with tradition and upbringing. It can be noted that the theme of feminist alienation was disregarded in "Mirror". This magazine already in 1989 identified itself with the postulates of the American feminist organization National Organization of Women which called for protests against the penalisation of abortion. It also made references to the activity of feminists from other countries, e.g. from Women Liberation Movement in France pointing to their achievements but also more long-term actions, i.e. seeking the work-life balance. In the case of "Woman and Life" international feminism was criticised for overly excessive attachment to economy and the exclusion of political deliberations<sup>19</sup>.

The magazine "Female Friend" (dedicated to women from small towns and villages) would also manifest distance towards feminism. The editor-in-chief of "Woman and Life" (running for the Parliament in 1989) interviewed by "Female Friend" expressed her denial by saying "I am not a feminist, at all! A gender for me is not a criterion of the presence in the structures of power but we cannot disregard the facts"<sup>20</sup>. Even though her electoral programme was based on "the actual women's empowerment", she avoided associating it with feminist ideology, which could also result from standing for election from the list of the Polish United Labour Party to the 10th term Sejm of the Polish Republic of Poland. On the one hand, there was an evident approval of the so-called second wave feminist programme, but on the other hand, there was a concern about being labelled "a feminist".

<sup>18</sup> Barbara Henkel, "Daleko sięgają gałęzie", *KiŻ*, no. 4, 25.01.1989, 14-15.

<sup>19</sup> The Interview of Wiesława Lipińska with Lilian Gotteff, the director of advertising and marketing of the French company "DIM": "Kobiety chcą mieć wszystko", *Zwierciadło (Mirror)* [hereinafter referred to as: *Zw*], no. 46, 30.11.1989, 4-5; E. W., "Za wolność waszą i naszą", *Zw*, no. 47, 7.12.1989, 3; Helena Kowalik, "Miękki kobiety uścisk", *KiŻ*, no. 33, 12.08.1992, 2.

<sup>20</sup> *Popieramy Annę Szymańską-Kwiatkowską, Przyjaciółka (Best Friend)* [hereinafter referred to as: *Prz*], no. 22, 1.06.1989, 4.

However, it was in “Woman and Life” where autocategorization was made as to the supporters of the idea or the feminist movement. In one of the interviews a female interlocutor remarked that feminist perspective allows for an appropriate woman’s assessment, emphasizing that “she is a worthy person because of the fact that she resorts to violence far less often than a man and she is peacefully tolerant in her duties”<sup>21</sup>.

Feminist knowledge smuggled in women’s press was superficial. Only interviews such as the ones with the founders of the Polish Feminist Association – Jolanta Plakwicz and Anna Siwek showed the feminist movement’s assumptions and its ideas<sup>22</sup>. Plakwicz declared that her environment presumed that “women are authorities when it comes to their own gender and we believe that if anything happens, we have the right to take a stance”. Siwek, on the other hand, responding to a question what it meant to be a feminist, answered in the following way: “to look at the world from a woman’s point of view and to evaluate this world from the same point of view. It involves discerning various divisions existing in this world, crucial for us women, especially gender division, and challenging this division as a factor discriminating against women. On the other hand, knowing and understanding that being a woman has its implications at all levels – physical and mental, economic and professional ones”<sup>23</sup>. “Mirror” (a magazine addressed to modern, professionally active women, inhabitants of big towns and cities) appreciated the role of Polish feminists by organizing a protest action against the act on the legal protection of the unborn child. The magazine’s interviews indicated that feminist environments in Poland were a small group which aimed to establish a feminist movement. However, this process was hindered by the fact that “in Poland women were not aware of the community of experience”, did not share it and did not give each other mutual support<sup>24</sup>. At the end of 1989 the presence of the Polish Feminist Association in the

<sup>21</sup> The Interview of Teresa Galczyńska with Ewa Osiatyńska; “Wernisaż dusz”, 17.

<sup>22</sup> The Interview of Krystyna Kaszuba with Jolanta Plakwicz, *KiZ*, no. 45, 22.11.1989, 5; E. Wierzbicka, “Zaczyna się RUCH”, *Zw*, no. 47, 7.12.1989, 2–3; The Interview of Elżbieta Wierzbicka with Jolanta Plakwicz and Anna Siwek: “Ruch – którego nie ma?”, *Zw*, no. 24, 15.06.1989, 3.

<sup>23</sup> The Interview of Elżbieta Wierzbicka with Jolanta Plakwicz and Anna Siwek: “Ruch – którego nie ma?”, 3.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, 3.



public space became a well-known fact. However, its activity was not reported in the women's press. References to its actions appeared incidentally next to news on other women's organizations or events in which the Association participated, e.g. in the Women's Discussion Forum in 1990, when it was unanimously agreed that "there is no democracy without women" and women were supposed to find their place in power structures by themselves. In spite of announcements of the necessity to establish Polish Feminist Party representing "interests of all women"<sup>25</sup>, these plans never came to pass.

A wider definition of feminism in "Woman and Life" appeared only in 1991 when it was acknowledged that the aim of feminism is gender equality. The Chairman of the Parliamentary Group of Women, Barbara Labuda, elucidated in her interview that "feminist sensitivity" meant: "the rejection of perceiving a woman as an inferior creature. Feminism also refers to a way women can organize themselves. It signifies their fight for dignity". Despite a broader presentation of feminist goals and their fight for gender equality, feminism in Poland was still not viewed as a positive phenomenon, even by women themselves. Labuda wrote: "even though a lot of women share my views, they refuse to own up to being feminists." She pointed out that: "feminism is not some kind of weird aberration but a feature of fully developed societies"<sup>26</sup>. The attempt to define "a feminist" was also made in a magazine addressed to teenagers – "Filipinka", where Hanna Jankowska, one of the leaders of Pro Femina Association stated that "a feminist is everyone who notices that women are at a far more disadvantageous situation than men"<sup>27</sup>.

There began to appear more and more open reactions to the activities of feminist and profeminist groups. Some analogies were drawn to already experienced feminist movements in the West. The observation was made that Poles in 1991 repeated the mistakes of western feminists and "English suffragettes". Firstly, they did not expect that the right to work was tantamount to the right to become unemployed. They were disappointed with free market which

<sup>25</sup> Krystyna Stachowicz, "Kobiety mówią NIE", *Zw*, no. 11, 15.03.1990, 2-3.

<sup>26</sup> The Interview of Iwona Konarska with Barbara Labuda, the Chairman of the Parliamentary Group for Women: "Czarownice w Sejmie", *KiZ*, no. 40, 2.10.1991, 5.

<sup>27</sup> The Interview of Katarzyna Sokolewicz-Hirszel with Hanna Jankowska, one of the leaders of Pro Femina Association: "Femina znaczy kobieta", *Filipinka* [hereinafter referred to as: *Fil*], no. 13, 30.06.1991, 2, 13.

at the moment of its introduction did away with part of kindergartens; single mothers lost their privileges and women striving for professional success were forced to assume male patterns of behaviour<sup>28</sup>. Secondly, when women were granted the right to vote, “they supported the most extreme parties, opposed to them,” which requested further drafting process of the act on the legal protection of the unborn child. Thus, it was exposed that feminist maturity was measured by someone’s approach to the issue of abortion and a draft law on the legal protection of the unborn child. The topic itself was regarded to be nothing more than a red herring. It was concluded that “Polish women constituting a vast electorate were closed in an open air museum”<sup>29</sup>. In 1992 feminist milieu, still taking shape, was to blame for this state of affairs<sup>30</sup>.

It was an increasingly frequent remark that “women represented the most evocative anti-feminist attitudes”<sup>31</sup>. Poland at that time was no exception. The feminism researcher Kazimierz Ślęczka has pointed out that feminism tends to have enemies among women and hostility results from the approval of a traditional role of a woman. Women assuming this role in accordance with the will of God and/or the voice of Nature, at times also the voice of the Nation (vide Polish Mother), performed an important mission for society, the people, humanity, God: they give birth to and raise children, create and cultivate home and hearth<sup>32</sup>. This way they fulfill the need to act and they gain appreciation.

It can be noticed that the beginning of the system transformation served as a springboard for Polish feminists to build a political environment. However, it was the draft law penalizing abortion that challenged them and became a stimulus for the formalization and unification of this environment. Women’s press did not make the task easy. Rarely did it inform about feminists’ activities but also about feminist postulates (the most seldom in 1990) even though they were covertly included in the category of women’s rights and freedoms but not connected with feminism. This concept was simply “alien”. It can be observed, though, that magazines addressed

<sup>28</sup> Iwona Konarska, “Pułapka”, *KiŻ*, no. 39, 25.09.1991, 4–5.

<sup>29</sup> Eadem, “Dwa teatry”, *KiŻ*, no. 18, 29.04.1992, 2.

<sup>30</sup> Iwona Kołodziej, “Bez nas”, *KiŻ*, no. 7, 12.02.1992, 7.

<sup>31</sup> Iwona Konarska, “Wręczamy «Róg» po raz trzeci”, *KiŻ*, no. 40, 30.09.1992, 5.

<sup>32</sup> Kazimierz Ślęczka, *Feminizm. Ideologie*, 42.

to active, educated women, inhabitants of big towns and cities (i.e. “Woman and Life, “Mirror”) published interviews with feminists or elucidated feminist ideas. Yet, they were also full of this “stereotypical” approach to feminism, particularly in 1989 when preventive censorship was still in place.

### **Circumstances of feminism reception in Poland in the years 1989–1992**

What did the precautionary attitude of the Polish women’s press towards feminism result from? It must be noted that “feminism as a perspective challenging the validity and the shape of the existing order was never and nowhere accepted with great enthusiasm. Instead it was claimed to be deprived of honour and faith and compared to «a witches’ coven»”<sup>33</sup>. The same situation was in Poland. As Sławomira Walczewska remarked: “in Poland feminism is discussed in the same way as women’s needs: airily, with slight detachment, doubt or even an irony”<sup>34</sup>. Cultural, historical as well as political conditions enhanced a negative understanding of feminism<sup>35</sup>.

The first ones were related to the feminine model of the “Polish Mother”<sup>36</sup> propagated during the process of socialisation and upbringing and formed at the end of the 18th century. Then as a result of the loss of the state independence, it fell to Polish women to uphold the national identity (the culture, the language and the faith) and to shape patriotic attitudes<sup>37</sup>. The reward was symbolic in its character and connected with the woman’s position in

<sup>33</sup> Sylwia Nadgrodkiewicz, *Seyla Benhabib – feminizm i polityka*, (Wrocław: Oficyna Wydawnicza ATUT, 2010), 19.

<sup>34</sup> Sławomira Walczewska, “Czy kobietom w Polsce potrzebny jest feminizm?”, in: Anna Titkow, Henryk Domański (eds.), *Co to znaczy być kobietą w Polsce?*, (Warszawa: PAN IFiS, 1995), 245.

<sup>35</sup> Sylwia Nadgrodkiewicz, *Seyla Benhabib – feminizm*, 19.

<sup>36</sup> Sławomira Walczewska noted the anti-emancipation character of the “Polish Mother” myth, she noticed that thanks to it women gained a status of citizens but it happened only after the collapse of the Polish state, see: Sławomira Walczewska, *Damy, rycerze, feministki. Kobiety dyskurs emancypacyjny w Polsce*, (Kraków: Wydawnictwo eFka, 1999), 53.

<sup>37</sup> Barbara Smoczyńska, “Matka Polka w polityce RP”, in: Marek Jeziński, Magdalena Nowak-Paralusz (eds.), “Problematyka kobieca – konteksty”, (Toruń: Wydawnictwo UMK, 2013), 96–97.

society<sup>38</sup>. A woman pursuing this model strengthened her vital role for the sake of the nation. This model somewhat imposed on women an obligation to perform traditional roles, which did not mean, however, that women resigned from their ambition to have their rights and freedoms extended in the public life. As it was indicated previously, they were one of the first in Europe who gained political rights. Still Polish women would juggle actions aimed at their empowerment and their commitment to the role shaped by the history of the nation<sup>39</sup>. In 1989 the Polish Mother model was still a reality. The research conducted by Renata Siemińska revealed that during the period of transformations the highest value in the Polish society was a family. Bearing in mind the inefficiency of residential construction and the lack of childcare infrastructure, the issue of gender equality gained a secondary importance<sup>40</sup>.

In 1992 the surveys on the preferred concept of family showed that 85% of respondents believed that a woman should be involved solely with household chores and a man was supposed to provide for his family, only 44% of the respondents opted for a partnership model of family, over half of the surveyed acknowledged that a working mother was not able to “offer as much warmth and safety as compared to a mother being a housewife”<sup>41</sup>. It is worth pointing out that in the period under study the magazines addressed to modern women began to promote opposite family models, in which a husband was a supportive character in a relationship and an enterprising wife would pursue her professional career. One example was a voting for “The First Lady of Business” organized by “Mirror” magazine<sup>42</sup>. Biweekly “Beauty”, a magazine also addressed to successful women, noticed the dissonance in women’s own definition of their social role. In the text “The Woman of the Times” by Balcerowicz we read that a woman “wants to be both a disobedient libertine and a matron burdened with nappies”. Also women’s models during the political transformation were subject to characteriza-

<sup>38</sup> Anna Titkow, *Tożsamość polskich kobiet. Ciągłość, zmiana, konteksty*, (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo ISF PAN, 2007), 48–54.

<sup>39</sup> Maria Ciechomska, *Od matriarchatu do feminizmu*, (Poznań: Brama, 1996), 126–127.

<sup>40</sup> Renata Siemińska, *Pleć, zawód, polityka. Kobiety w życiu publicznym w Polsce*, (Warszawa: UW IS, 1990), 391–393.

<sup>41</sup> Eadem, *Nie mogą, nie chcą czy nie potrafią? O postawach i uczestnictwie politycznym kobiet w Polsce*, (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2000), 12.

<sup>42</sup> “Pierwsza dama biznesu”, *Zw*, no. 5, 05.1992, 26–28.

tion. Magdalena Środa distinguished: 1) a feminist lady, compliant (due to a crisis) but active, underlining the importance of hygiene and ecology; 2) a resourceful woman who stocks up on shopping fearing any renewed economic crisis which meant the lack of food on shop shelves; 3) a woman of success who, “in order to face the fighting capitalism and attacking Catholicism, i.e. in order to meet the requirements of the consumer society and the requirements of the ascetic society, in order to satisfy both the body and the soul, must be like the Polish country: impossible, nonsensical and at the same time terribly realistic”<sup>43</sup>. Cultural conditions were inextricably linked to historical conditions. Therefore, their power of influence was stronger. They were reinforced not only in the processes of primary and secondary socialization or during upbringing but also in the process of education.

Historical conditions mainly accounted for Polish women’s disapproval of feminism as a movement. In “Woman and Life” it was noticed that women in Poland were granted voting rights in 1918 at the same time when the country regained its independence<sup>44</sup>, in 1952 they were guaranteed equal rights by the Constitution and in 1956 the statutory right of abortion<sup>45</sup>. The official interpretation stated that all the rights that Polish women gained were approved by state authorities without the necessity to organize any feminist political movement. As Sławomira Walczewska remarked “women in Poland did not have to demand the status of a citizen as other women from the Western Europe and the USA did. It all came to them from the outside, as a challenge, a duty, or even a moral imperative. It appeared together with the fall of the Republic of Poland and the Partitions”<sup>46</sup>. Its manifestation was the speech made by Tadeusz Kościuszko (the head of the first uprising against Russia) in 1794 addressed to women, calling them to join the fight by ensuring medical care to insurgents and preparing sanitary facilities<sup>47</sup>. During the period of the Partitions women replaced men fighting in national up-

<sup>43</sup> Magdalena Środa, “Kobieta czasów Balcerowicza”, *Uroda*, no. 5, 1991, 1, 20.

<sup>44</sup> Which was not so much the good faith of the authorities but the achievement of female organizations and their contribution to the fight for independence. As for the political activity of women during the time of the Partitions see: Sławomira Walczewska, *Damy, rycerze*, 57–65.

<sup>45</sup> Agnieszka Metelska, *Polki pokorne, Polki zbuntowane, KiŻ*, no. 50, 11.12.1991, 6–7.

<sup>46</sup> Sławomira Walczewska, *Damy, rycerze*, 41–42.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*.

risings and imprisoned for taking part in national rebellions against economic situation. In the time of the First World War due to mobilisation of men, women filled jobs in factories and offices<sup>48</sup>.

It must be noted that in spite of rather rapid (10 days from the date of declaring independence by the Polish state – 28 November 1919) issue of a decree on equal political rights regardless of sex, then in 1929 granting the right to study, Polish women did not make good use of acquired competences during the fight for Poland's independence, in the Second Republic of Poland. It is worth pointing out that they were active not only in medical service but also presented their skills in the armed combat<sup>49</sup>. However, it was rather tendentious and characteristic of women in Poland to withdraw from the public life after performing their mission for the sake of the nation and to assume a role of fighting supporters. The stereotype of a traditional female role was undermined only in extreme situations but as soon as the social life got back to normal, women faded into the background. It may have resulted from the fact that women fulfilled their aspirations by means of other methods as compared to men, they preferred exerting impact through social networks<sup>50</sup>. Thus, they remained unnoticed in the public space. Yet, it is worth adding that in the interwar period they already had their political representation in the Parliament (1,9% of MPs, 3,8% senators)<sup>51</sup>.

The period of the Second World War made this pattern repeat. After ceasing military actions women were encouraged on a mass scale to take up and pursue professional activities, justifying this with a social need and a patriotic duty. Getting a job, on the other hand, was instrumental in providing financial security to family<sup>52</sup>. Promoting employment support did not shift the mindset of Polish women. Even though women's education level was constantly growing, no new female role models emerged at that time. What was reinforced, though, was the exemplary Polish Mother's

<sup>48</sup> Ewa Woźniak, "Język a emancypacja, feminizm, gender", *Rozprawy Komisji Językowej ŁTN*, vol. LX, 2014, 297–299.

<sup>49</sup> Anna Titkow, "Kobiety pod presją? Proces kształtowania się tożsamości", [in:] Anna Titkow, Henryk Domański (eds.), *Co to znaczy być kobietą*, 24–25.

<sup>50</sup> Ibidem, 25.

<sup>51</sup> They were distinguished by a higher level of education and commitment to the regulation of social benefits. They could take up employment, but their earnings were lower. They became very active in scouting. Ibidem, 26–27.

<sup>52</sup> Ibidem, 29.

attitude of sacrifice for family and nation. Anna Titkow indicated that “the period after 1945 could be viewed as a lost chance for women.” At that time a new variant of patriarchy was established, characteristic of the communist and post-communist region of Europe, which Titkow defined as a sacrifice for family in terms of ensuring supplies and clothing, which involved gaining some managerial competences, combining household chores and professional work and expecting a reward in the form of merely fulfilling these requirements<sup>53</sup>. As Jolanta Plakwicz remarked in an interview for “Woman and Life” that the emancipation of women in “the Polish version” was about “women imposing everything on themselves”<sup>54</sup>.

Polish women’s aversion towards feminism in the first stage of system transformation was also politically conditioned. In the weekly “Woman and Life” it was observed that once the transformation was initiated in Poland, Czech Republic, Lithuania and Ukraine, “feminism was derided as some kind of pathology of social life”<sup>55</sup>. It is worth adding that in the period of the Polish People’s Republic the official state doctrine – communism, rejected “an individual approach to freedom. Feminism was treated as bourgeois philosophy. In the countries of Eastern Europe this ideology was forbidden and ridiculed”<sup>56</sup>. As Kazimierz Ślęczka pointed out “Communists in fact were afraid that «their» women might want to put the interests of their female community above the world proletariat’s interest”<sup>57</sup>. In the communist ideology there was a belief that the act of working makes humans free. In the Eastern bloc, which post-war Poland belonged to, women were given access to professions previously forbidden and legislation was implemented to protect pregnant women and mothers<sup>58</sup>. This way of reasoning appealed to women who were encouraged to take up employment in the time of the country’s rapid industrialisation, even though they received wages 30% lower than men’s average remuneration and additionally they worked night shifts in order to reconcile fam-

<sup>53</sup> Ibidem, 32–33.

<sup>54</sup> Interview of Krystyna Kaszuba with Jolanta Plakwicz, 5.

<sup>55</sup> Anna Brzozowska, “Życie i kobieta: Zadowolici wszystkich?”, *KiŻ*, no. 34, 19.08.1992, 2.

<sup>56</sup> Agnieszka Metelska, “Polki pokorne”, 6–7.

<sup>57</sup> Kazimierz Ślęczka, *Feminizm. Ideologie*, 13.

<sup>58</sup> Magdalena Nowak-Paralusz, “Dzieje historyczne jako tło dla współczesnej sytuacji kobiet w Polsce”, in: Marek Jeziński, Magdalena Nowak-Paralusz (eds.), *Problematyka kobieca – konteksty*, 143.

ily chores with their professional activities. Due to the lack of child-care infrastructure the state did not make it easy for them to seek social and professional advancement as well as political career<sup>59</sup>. Krystyna Stachowicz observed in “Mirror” that women in Poland had always been manipulated, “they were assigned a role which was in line with the current expectations and in accordance with the propagandistic scenario developed by men. Depending on the needs it was a woman driving a tractor, female work leader, mother and wife, supporting the 2+3 model of family, finally a woman reconciling professional career with a housewife role”<sup>60</sup>. Despite laws safeguarding gender equality rights<sup>61</sup>, women would still earn less, did not stand a chance of promotion and their representation in political structures resulted from the accepted “pattern”<sup>62</sup>.

In the case of Poland at the beginning of political transformation, the rejection of feminism may have originated from some disbelief in the efficiency of the feminist programme. Despite the legal provision of public rights and gender equality to women, they were not exercised in everyday life. As Krystyna Kaszuba mentioned in “Woman and Life” “we are economically independent, because almost all of us with no worse education than men – have a job, we are, so to say, at the preliminary stage of women’s “enfranchisement”<sup>63</sup>. Women were also discouraged by the fact that their role was constantly ignored in the history of Poland as well as their activity in “Solidarity”, particularly in the conditions of conspiracy<sup>64</sup>. Failure to address their own interests during the political transformation did not result from their passivity or the lack of aspirations but was the outcome of their identification with the nation – they perceived their fate as commonly shared with men<sup>65</sup>.

During the discussion in the editorial office of “Woman and Life”, the interlocutors concluded that “it was politics that destroyed

<sup>59</sup> Agnieszka Metelska, “Polki pokorne”, 6–7.

<sup>60</sup> Krystyna Stachowicz, “Kobiety mówią NIE”, 2–3.

<sup>61</sup> See: Barbara Nowak, “Gender discrimination in the workforce as a challenge to the Polish feminist movement”, in: Zofia Górczyńska et al. (eds.), *Płeć – kobieta – feminizm*, 147–156.

<sup>62</sup> Krystyna Stachowicz, “Kobiety mówią NIE”, 2–3.

<sup>63</sup> “O nas bez nas (2)”, ed. by Krystyna Kaszuba, *KiŻ*, no. 14, 5.04.1989, 2.

<sup>64</sup> Shana Penn claims that women coordinated the conspiracy work of “Solidarity” between 1981–1988, See: Shana Penn, *Podziemie kobiet*, translated by Hanna Jankowska, Maria Janion, (Warszawa: Rosner & Wspólnicy, 2003).

<sup>65</sup> Agnieszka Metelska, “Polki pokorne”, 6–7; Interview of Elżbieta Wierzbicka with Jolanta Plakwicz and Anna Siwek: “Ruch – którego nie ma?”, 3.



the role of women, ruined democracy and democracy also meant women's access to power". It was agreed that "women's feminist awareness" should be awoken "to make them speak for themselves and act without waiting until someone does a thing for them"<sup>66</sup>. Only on 4 October 1989 was the Polish Feminist Association registered and the institutional process of awakening "gender solidarity" began. What prompted the legalisation of the movement's activities was a draft law penalizing abortion but also the failure to appoint a ministerial plenipotentiary for women's affairs<sup>67</sup>. Finally, it is worth listing other organisations addressing the same issues, i.e. the Movement for the Defence of Women's Right in Poznań, Women's Self-defence Movement in Bydgoszcz, Women Defence Committee of the Polish Women's League, "Women's Dignity" Association in Toruń, Feminist Collective in Szczecin<sup>68</sup>.

### Recapitulation

During the system transformation, in spite of the evolution in the approach to feminism in the women's press, the issue was put on the back burner. What turned out to be of greater importance were the interests of the nation<sup>69</sup>, discriminatory aspects (such as a wage gap between men and women, the access to promotion and political space, the division of household chores) were pushed further into the background for "the time of stabilisation". It is worth referring here to the conclusion made by Henryk Domański who stated that it was a social paradox that "women agree to such a division of roles, in which their position is lower than that of men and men have the casting vote". Domański named this kind of attitude as "a paradox of the happy slave"<sup>70</sup>.

<sup>66</sup> "O nas, bez nas (2)", 3, see also about the attitude of political authorities towards women: AMO, "Punktujemy", *Fil*, no. 10, 20.05.1990, 2.

<sup>67</sup> Agnieszka Metelska, "Polki pokorne", 6-7; Interview of Krystyna Kaszuba with Jolanta Plakwicz, 5; Elżbieta Wierzbicka, "Zaczyna się RUCH", 2-3, see also: Interview of Zofia Zubczewska with prof. Ewa Łętowska: "Manowce równości", *KiŻ*, no. 33, 7.08.1991, 2.

<sup>68</sup> Elżbieta Wierzbicka, "Zaczyna się RUCH", 2-3.

<sup>69</sup> This activity is characteristic of collectivist cultures in which collective interests are more important and people's conduct is regulated by group norms. See: Renata Siemińska, *Nie mogą, nie chcą*, 10-11.

<sup>70</sup> Henryk Domański, *Zadowolony niewolnik? Studium o nierównościach między mężczyznami i kobietami w Polsce*, (Warszawa: PAN IFiS, 1992), 137.

It can be concluded that in the first stage of political transformation, the discourse on feminism depended on a given title of the women's press. Most frequently it appeared in magazines addressed to active, modern and educated women, the inhabitants of big towns and cities ("Woman and Life", "Mirror"). Its presence, however, was incidental. In the five women's magazines, being the subject of the research (in the period from 1989 to 1992) the concept of feminism and its derivatives appeared in 24 articles. What is significant is that the topic of feminism was brought into some prominence by chance, during debates on other subjects. It does not mean, though, that the issue of gender equality or women's discrimination in social and political life were not present at all. The very concept of "feminism" was viewed as controversial, which was caused by undermining and ridiculing it in the public discourse. It happened at times in 1989 that the rumours about supporting feminist ideas were denied in the women's press. When censorship was abolished, people more and more often admitted having "feminist sensitivity" and postulated the foundation of the so-called second wave of feminism. This was also related to the fact that the Polish feminist movement was taking its form at that time and organisations supporting feminist ideas had their activities institutionalised. The unpopularity of feminism in Poland resulted from cultural, historical and political conditions. The first ones were related to the impact of the Polish Mother model on women's life and the obligations towards family and the nation arising from it. The second ones justified the lack of necessity to have a feminist movement in place in order to generate gender equality solutions. Political conditions affected feminism in such a way that they deprived it of its ideological status and treated it as a utopia.

Hence, the image of feminism in the Polish women's press in the years 1989–1992 was fragmentary, consisting of "stage directions" placed in the titles of the studied interviews as revealed by interlocutors. It comprised: 1) concerns related to the "feminist" label, 2) interpretations of primary feminist ideas, characteristic of the so-called second wave of feminism, 3) hopes for raising feminist awareness among women and 4) disappointment with the lack of effectiveness of women's groups.

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