

GENDER (IN)EQUALITY IN POLAND FOUR YEARS AFTER ENTERING THE EU:
YOUNG POLISH FEMINISTS SPEAK THEIR MINDS
– CASE STUDY OF KONSOLA ORGANIZATION

by

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Abstract

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This dissertation concerns the study of gender (in)equality in Poland as it is experienced by the young Polish feminists themselves. Through in depth interviews, an ethnographic study of young Polish feminists belonging to the most active feminist organization in Poznan, Poland, supplemented by works of contemporary Eastern European as well as Western feminists I have tried to show how feminism is experienced, explained, lived through, fought for and talked about in contemporary European Union belonging Poland. I argue that feminism, although known on a large scale in Poland, still has a status of a problematic word on which a spell of suspicion had been set due to particulars of Polish history, including the treatment of gender issues by the Communist government, the Solidarity Trade Movement and the understated power of the Polish Catholic Church in this matter. Because each of these institutions created their own meaning of gender rights and feminism overall, these confusing messages have for years entangled and problematized the meaning of feminism, creating unflattering stereotypes of what feminism is as a movement, who feminists are, what they are fighting for and in what manners. Feminism became associated with images of burly women who burn bras, don't shave their legs and hate

men. Although feminism in Poland is still largely relegated to the academic sphere, the actions these young active feminists take, such as their growing presence on the local scale through organizing, sponsoring and coordinating feminist events, cooperation with other women's organizations in organizing, conferences and publications on the issues of women's presence on the local and national levels in the media, have been slowly paying off. Because of the efforts of women from KONSOLA, feminism is becoming a less problematic word in the contemporary Poland.

I am dedicating this work to Stanisława Jaskowska and Antonina Biskup, my maternal and paternal grandmothers whose strength, love and devotion encouraged me to seek my passion.

And to my niece, Hanna Biskup, in hopes that she will find feminism helpful in her worldly pursuits.

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project. It is because of them that I was able to pursue my passion, my degree and there is no doubt in my mind that I owe everything to them.

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation concerns the study of gender (in)equality in Poland as it is experienced by the young Polish feminists themselves. Through in depth interviews as well as ethnographic study of young Polish feminists belonging to the most active feminist organization in Poznan, Poland I have tried to show how feminism is experienced, explained, lived through, fought for and talked about in contemporary EU belonging Poland. I argue that feminism, although known on a large scale in Poland, still has a status of a problematic word, an “enchanted” or rather “hexed” word on which a spell of suspicion had been set; and although these young Polish feminists fight daily for its larger national acceptance, the progress that happens, if any, is slow.

The emergence of the Project

When famous writers are often asked for writing advice – what to write about, or how to start a writing project, the answer is often the same. “Write what you know” they say. And that is the advice I wanted to take on, but before I wrote the first few words, I had to find what I know, what I love, what interests me as a sociologist. On the following few pages I want to take the reader through the journey of discovery of what became an almost decade-long endeavor.

Having been in graduate school for about a decade now, many people (family, friends, acquaintances and even strangers) have felt the need to ask whether I remember the exact moment that the idea for the theme of my dissertation first appeared to me. And my response is always the same: I do, very vividly. It happened during my second year of graduate school, at the annual trip to my hometown of Poznan, Poland. That particular Friday evening in May I went to a barbeque at an old friend’s house, and after quick catching up, the topic of conversation started

drifting towards more personal issues – families, kids, relationships etc. A host of this social gathering, a person I have known my entire life, since we grew up together, literally across the street from each other (currently a proud husband and father of two) upon my hesitance to discuss the so-called “dating in New York” stories, said to me: “well, you should not wait too long to find someone... you should be thinking about marriage... I mean, you are approaching 30 and soon you’ll be an old maid.” And when I replied that as far as I know we do not live in the middle ages anymore, when I voiced my disagreement with his ever so pleasant comment, he quickly followed up by saying: “well... as long as you won’t become one of those man-hating feminists you should do ok”... I turned my head, looked him directly in the eye and with an evil wink I stated, “actually, I am a feminist”. His face went from pink to white to red and holding his son in his arms he proceeded to tell me that feminists are evil, men-haters, that I have changed immensely and that something must be wrong with me. Our other friends, male and female alike, instantly took his side. Interestingly, it was my female friends who were the first to agree with his statements. And no matter how hard I tried to explain that the myth of the man-hating, bra-burning, under-arm hairy feminism is just that, a myth; that many feminists actually fight for equality of both sexes, that equality of men and women does not mean re-ordering the entirety of social systems toward matriarchy, maybe a total of one person really heard me. It was not the first, nor the last time I was asked to explain what feminism meant to me (hundreds of similar situations have happened since that day). And even though in my response I quoted Cherris Kramarae and Paula Treichler (1985) arguing that “feminism is the radical notion that women are people”, my arguments were often lost on them.

That was the exact moment, when I saw the change in my friends’ faces when the first seed of my future research project was planted. At that moment I realized that the notion of

feminism in Poland is something that I want to explore. From that point on, whomever I came in contact with, my friends, family, acquaintances etc., I was “on”, asking them about feminism, what it is, what it means to them, how they view “it” and whether it is of any importance to them, their families, and even Poland. I also started noticing (as well as paying more attention to) gender and feminist issues in the Polish media, in conversations, in articles, in public forums, discussions etc. – suddenly gender relations in Poland became my obsession.

And yet, I have to say, as interesting as this topic is, writing this dissertation has been one of the most difficult things I have ever attempted. Although that sentence is cliché in itself, since my bet is that at some point every graduate student, even those who became tenured faculty for whom this process has been largely forgotten or those who left academia long behind, felt the same way. I never expected this process to be so problematic, so alienating and most of all, so time consuming... Not to make it sound unbearable – there were parts that I enjoyed immensely: learning that my ideas count, that my topic is interesting, doing research and finally writing about my interests held joy within. Looking back at it though, there were moments where I cursed myself for ever opening my mouth that day at that particular barbeque, times when I questioned my own sanity and instances where all I ever dreamed of was giving up and crawling somewhere on the couch away from my computer and the world of graduate school. There were quite a few occasions when I yearned for the so called “simpler” times, before my feminist consciousness “changed” me, as my friends have argued.

Biographical Note

I can trace the beginning of this journey to my hometown of Poznan, Poland. Growing up in a middle-class family, with a soldier father and a homemaker mom, feminism was not something that was ever mentioned. However, from a very early age my brother and I were told

that education is the key to success. Both of our parents have college degrees and there was not even a shadow of a doubt in my mind that we were going to go to college or university as well. It was a fact, not an idea. So alongside my older sibling, I went through the educational system in Poland which was still in the midst of change after the historic overthrow of the Communist government (1989). I remember being in a choir, singing nationalistic songs during school assemblies, reciting poems by Wladyslaw Broniewski (our school patron) about the fallen heroes of our nation while at the same time watching American TV shows like “Growing Pains” and “Full House” and dreaming of one day living in New York City or San Francisco where everything was plentiful, colorful, where nobody had to stay in line for food (or whatever product was at the end of the line), and where toys were readily available (and did not have to be purchased in Pewex¹ stores with foreign currency).

I do not mean to spend too much time on my childhood but I believe the context of our upbringing definitely had an impact on our own understanding of the world around us. I grew up in a household where a strict disciplinarian male was the head of the household. My father was an authoritarian who made sure that first thing we did after getting up was making our bed and that we always, always, always did our homework. His word was the rule and his favorite answer to our questions was “because I said so”. But my mother, a beautiful, sweet quiet woman, was the one who held my dad in check. And as I later uncovered, it was the women in my family that truly held the silent but ever so present power...

When I was about ten years old, my father joined the ranks of the United Nations Peacekeepers and soon began his trips to the Middle East and Africa. His posts took him, and

¹ Pewex (short for Przedsiębiorstwo Eksportu Wewnętrzznego - Internal Export Company) was a chain of hard currency shops in socialist Poland. They sold otherwise unobtainable Western goods in exchange for Western currencies (most commonly the United States dollar and the Deutsche Mark) or Pekao bank checks.

sometimes us too, from the Golan Heights, to Kuwait and Western Sahara. Because of him, at the age of twelve I saw Jerusalem, Bethlehem, the Pyramids in Egypt and even the dividing line between Turkish and Greek parts of Cyprus. And it has to be said, that because of these trips, my previously sheltered eyes opened and I believe so did my father's.

In 1997 my father accepted a position at UN headquarters in New York and in August of that year my family and I found ourselves on the plane to the "city that never sleeps". The next few months were quite a rollercoaster ride for my family and I. We moved to a lovely small house in Bayside, Queens and I enrolled as a senior in Bayside High School. That school year went faster than any one before and soon I was faced with picking college options and taking placement exams. I got into Queens College, CUNY and enrolled there with hopes of one day becoming a psychologist. And yet, after my first introductory psychology class I started doubting my ambition. Although the topic interested me, I soon found myself taking classes from a variety of electives to fulfill other school requirements and in such manner I stomped into an Introduction to Sociology class. The class I registered to take was held in a huge auditorium, had about 200 students and a lonely adjunct was teaching it². And yet, she, and the topics she introduced us to, have held my interest. That class, the first of many I would take in sociology, was the one that started it all. I was reading Marx and applying his theories to the society I found myself in. Suddenly things started clicking and I made sociology my minor (Psychology was my major from the begging) and later, my second major. It was during my second year in college when I took a Sociological theory class when I truly realized how different the Polish and American educational systems were. I remember that I was reading Marx and my professor

² This fact makes me smile today since now I am an Adjunct Lecturer, also at Queens College, also facing large classes and the problem of keeping the minds of young students interested in the same topics I found fascinating so long ago...

asked me what I thought about the text, Marx's writing on the topic of alienation and whether I have anything to add. I re-read what the textbook had to say on the topic, said I agreed and I was done. The professor then proceeded to ask me whether I have anything to add – whether I agree, disagree and why. I was dumbfounded. It was the first time I realized that my opinion is valued too – that I can offer some criticism, some opinion that differs from the one printed in the textbook and that such opinion is important too.

In Poland, during my school years, constructive criticism meant agreeing with the book and the person teaching the course – otherwise one was risking getting a failing grade. I recall many such situations – but one is especially worth telling here. I had to write a paper for my Polish literature class on the topic of a main character (Mr. Wokulski) from a novel “Lalka” (“Doll”) by Boleslaw Prus (1890). The title of the paper, provided to us by the person teaching the course was: “Mr. Wokulski – character study – a romantic living in the idealized world or sadly unprepared positivist soul?” I argued for the latter explanation but I soon learned that the only correct and accepted answer was that he was a romantic and no other answer, no matter how well argued was accepted. Needless to say I did not do so well on my paper...

The other difference that was staring me in the face was the discrepancy of what we were to recall from the information read. As here, so in Poland, professors used to quiz us about the readings. In Queens College however, and even in Bayside HS, the quizzes we were given asked us to identify some main concepts from the readings, asked us to describe/explain the concept and provide examples or questions we might have about it. In Poland, when the quiz was on the topic of the novel “Doll” we were asked not about the main concepts that Prus was writing about (class issues in Polish society) but rather “which eye was Wokulski's employer's dog missing?” or “what glove size was Wokulski's girlfriend, Izabella wearing?”... Apparently those details

were crucial for our understanding of the complicated situation in the occupied Poland which this publication described.

It was during that particular time in my undergraduate education that I began to slowly uncover the theme that later would become my dissertation. I immersed myself in feminist literature, and enrolled in the Women and Work class, led by Hester Eisenstein, a former head of the Women's Studies Program at Queens College. I started reading Simone De Beauvoir (1949) and Betty Friedan (1963), Kate Millet (1970), Shulamith Firestone (1970) and countless other authors and somewhere inside of me my own feminist consciousness started to emerge. I was learning about the suffrage movement here in the States, about the fight led by Alice Paul and Lucy Burns to have women participate in voting, about the waves of the American feminist movement, abortion rights and many other important gender and feminist related issues. It was then that I realized how many things I have been taking for granted, things that my predecessors could not count on or sometimes even dream of. And slowly but surely I started researching some issues on my own... I realized that Polish women received the right to vote in 1918, after World War I. When I was reading Friedan and confronting "the problem that has no name" I was thinking about my own grandmothers; my maternal one who was born in 1913 to a quite well-off family (she was driven to school by a chauffeur) who soon enough lost most of the wealth in the upcoming World Wars. Not only was her education and as well as marriage plans interrupted by the horrendous world conflicts, she was also the one who worked in the fields along with her brothers, sisters and parents collecting apples from the apple orchard, the only property that was left in our family. She worked her entire life, at home and in the field, and never complained about not having the wealth that she grew up in. I can never forget her hands – long, skinny fingers with lines all over... Those were the hands of the worker, not a dame. My paternal

grandmother had an even harsher life (although comparison of hardships is hardly of importance here). She was born in 1916, during World War I and her family, who was active in the resistance, was caught and punished by the German army. She ended up in a concentration camp and saw her own brother killed in front of her. The memory of the tattooed prisoner number on her arm haunts me till this day...

These women were just a few first ones that I thought about when I started to research this topic. It was through their stories that I started to research and find my own path. And even though I doubt if my grandmothers would call themselves feminists, their actions definitely classified them as such and in my mind that is how I think about them. And that is also the reason why I am dedicating this project to them.

This personal journey opened my mind to the issues I had never thought about before, such as employment laws, women's compensation in the workplace, household labor and many others. I realized how guilty of discrimination I was since I viewed my mother's job as a housewife as less important than my father's, paid employment in the Army. Cooking for us, cleaning after us and playing with us was apparently of lesser importance to me before. But with a changing view on household labor I also changed my view on employment issues. I started to inquire within my own family circle about women's compensation in the workforce and I realized how huge the gender pay gap was in some sectors. It was also during that time that I started looking for the history of Polish women's movement. I also immersed myself in the writings of young Polish feminists – like Agnieszka Graff, whose book “The World Without Women” (2001), on the absence of gender in the national debate in Poland, I devoured. With guidance from Graff as well as others (Janion 1996; Szczuka, 2001; Walczewska, 1999), I started learning about past and contemporary Polish women's issues and of course, I started to

compare what I learned about American feminist movement to the case of Poland. Needless to say, that sparked my interest in the debate between Eastern European women and feminists from the West. And on my travels to Poland I started my little side project. This is how this project, this study of gender (in)equality, in Poland through ethnographic research and in-depth interviews of young Polish feminists, took on its current shape.

Chapter Outline

On the following pages I would like to offer a quick guide through the chapters and their main arguments. In my introduction, as evidenced on the preceding pages, I took the reader through the brief history of my own interest in women's studies issues and the first steps into the project that would take over my graduate career. I believe that it is important to underline those steps, the particular social and political context I found myself in, since this is how I got to be where I am today, with this project in hand.

Before I go on however, I would like to briefly explain the set-up of each chapter. In each chapter I tried to cover different aspects of gender (in)equality in Poland (from historical to social issues – as outlined below). Then, in the second part of the chapters, I spend time discussing and analyzing my interviews with young Polish feminists on those topics. This chapter set up happened organically (meaning I did not start my writing thinking this is the way that I will be putting the information together) and since it seemed to work from the beginning, I just decided to follow it throughout this dissertation.

In the first chapter of this dissertation I outline the crucial works of literature that I have used throughout this project, the methods I employed to gather my data and all the technicalities that have been of importance to producing this written project. I especially take on the socialist feminist perspective since I believe it works best for this type of historical, social and political

research that took place in a former Communist country, whose legacy of gender equality still has to be questioned and deeply analyzed.

The second chapter of this dissertation outlines the 1970s and 80s in Poland – the years of my childhood – and the times of the rule and the failure of the Communist era in Poland. I spend some time discussing the issues of the historical transformation from an economic, political and social standpoint and the establishment of the new democratic and market-oriented capitalist Poland. I also point out the significant role that the Polish Church and the Solidarity movement have played during those times. My main point is to show how politics of gender equality have changed throughout those years, how they were often used for political gain by parties and organizations in power, and how ultimately those gender struggles set out the path that feminism later took in Poland.

In the third chapter I talk about the East European vs. Western feminism debate, how it was shaped in the past and what is at stake currently. I talk about the difficulty in framing and discussing the gender politics of Eastern Europe (specifically Poland) and how that process was informed by my education in the topic of Western feminism. I briefly sketch the important moments in Polish feminist history and talk more about specific struggles of women in Eastern Europe. I also highlight the difficulty and importance of dialogue between Eastern European and Western feminists and the importance of understanding specific contexts that women in those countries have found themselves in. I end the chapter (as I do all my chapters) with the views of the young Polish feminist on those topics.

In chapter four I discuss gender politics in Poland before May 1, 2004. I spend most of the time discussing the preparation for Poland to enter the European Union and the way that

gender politics have entered the accession debate. Furthermore, I write about the governmental body/bodies responsible for checking the requirements of Polish entrance, the lack of support for gender initiatives, and the issue of traditionalism of Poland vs. “westernism” of the EU.

In chapter five, I argue that the political shift to the right that followed Polish entrance to the EU had significantly harmed the fight for gender equality in Poland. I follow the rule of the minority government, the problematic stands of our deputy Prime Ministers and the victorious days of homophobia and bigotry. In addition, I trace the fall of the rule of the “terrible [Kaczynski] twins” and the welcoming of the new, supposedly more women-friendly Prime Minister Tusk. Moreover, I present the views of the young Polish feminists on the change in the government and what it means for gender issues on the local and national scale.

The last chapter, chapter six, traces the changes in the position of the Plenipotentiary Of Equal Status of Men and Women. Here I would like to offer an analysis of the position that was created on December 17, 2001 – and I would like to outline the hardships and successes of the two women that held that position in the past: Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka and Magdalena Sroda – both strong opinionated, educated women, self-proclaimed feminists. I want to analyze why the office was abolished on November 3, 2005 (after Sroda’s critical speech about the Catholic Church) and what led to the re-establishment of the office in March 2008. Also, I draw a comparison between the efforts of those two feminists and those of the current person holding this position, a woman who has no former education about gender issues – Elzbieta Radziszewska (appointed in March 2008).

Finally, in the conclusion, I try to provide the answer to the question asked by Ewa Stachniak (1995), “why we did not become feminists”. I will offer a few of my own opinions on

how did it start for all of us and why is it important? Why does feminism matter to me? Why does it matter to members of KONSOLA? How is it all important? How does it all tie with other parts of our lives? My point is that feminism still remains a movement of crucial importance to women in Poland, but in order for real change to happen, in order for Poland to become a more gender equal EU member, much work remains to be done. And those young women and men still fight for women's rights, for feminist goals, for acceptance of gender equality postulates on the local and sometimes national level, while often facing opposition, from mild ridicule to outrage and violent hate. But their fights continue, and therefore, hope for change is very much alive.

CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE AND METHODOLOGY

Having introduced the origins of this project as well as my involvement in it and its progress, I will now provide a disciplinary context for my research. I am approaching the subject of gender (in)equality in my native Poland largely from a socialist feminist perspective which rethinks the “women question” in Marx’s writing and tries to provide for a sufficient theory of women’s oppression. Marx’s concern lay with the larger structures such as classes and antagonisms between them, rather than with individual experiences across history. Here I wish to mention just a few of main Marxian ideas that proved useful for the socialist feminist theory and later elaborate on their validity in the case of Poland.

Thus, following the theory of class conflict developed by Karl Marx, who argued that individual's position in society is highly dependent upon their relationship to the mode of production (Marx and Engels, 1978) and adding feminist component to his argument, I, following the Marxist and socialist feminists (Kollontai, 1909; Zetkin, 1984), argue that gender inequality is determined ultimately by the capitalist mode of production. Taking this particular approach further, gender inequality can therefore be seen as part of class inequality and oppression, since the relationship between women and men in society is analogous to that between proletariat and the bourgeois (Firestone, 1970). Women therefore, have been oppressed for years because it serves the interest of capital and those who own it, predominantly men.

In her groundbreaking book, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (1970), Firestone argued that gender inequality originated in the patriarchal societal structures which were imposed upon women due to their biology, especially the physical, social and

psychological disadvantages imposed by pregnancy, childbirth, and subsequent child-rearing. In order for women to escape their biologically determined subjugated position in society, she pointed to the use of cybernetics to carry out human reproduction in laboratories, and also argued for the proliferation of contraception, abortion, and state support for child-rearing. Firestone famously described pregnancy as "barbaric" (1970: 11) and predicted the rise of such reproductive technologies as sex selection and in vitro fertilization (1970). In such manner and with help of these reproductive technologies, Firestone argues, the tyranny of the biological family would be broken since then men could also bear children. She also takes on the notion of romantic love and argues that through use of it this romantic love idea a man can idealize "one woman over the rest in order to justify his descent to a lower caste" (1970: 131), however, this is not his primary motive. This "love" is nothing but a façade to mask his primary interest, which is, of course, sexual in origin. Since men according to her analysis are "emotional invalids", women then cling to these men and to this idea of romantic love because of their subjugated and dependent political situation. So, according to Firestone, women love in exchange of security (139).

However, this ideology of romantic love and romance overall, is according to Firestone, an opiate that keeps women drugged. As she writes, "romanticism develops in proportion to the liberation of women from their biology" (146) because it endorses the idea that women should live for men and for romance (and sex), and in such manner political redemption is equated to sex. Women then become identified as "love" or rather, sex objects, which further contributes to their devaluation as class. She concludes her text with a general and allusive theory, which she calls the "dialectics of cultural history", arguing that the two different, according to her, cultures, those of males (a culture reflecting psycho-emotional invalidism of the male) and those of

females (one that has been repressed and confined to the private sphere) hopefully one day will synthesize into one. She also proposes “limited contract households” that would replace the traditional nuclear family (231), arguing that such households would include about ten people, third of which would be children, and responsibility for rearing them would be evenly spread among all members of the household and household chores would also be rotating among all members (232).

Another central issue of concern to socialist feminists has been the determination of the role of the household in capitalist society (Donovan, 1997: 76). Furthermore, socialist feminists inquire about the issue of the direct relationship women have to the modes of production as wage-earners and problematize the question of domestic labor and the value it has for the capitalist economy (Eisenstein, 1979; Zaretsky, 1976). Along with such inquiries, questions of the alienation of women and their specific class position in society also arise. Moreover, my analysis would not have been complete without the analysis provided by Heidi Hartmann in her groundbreaking essay “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union” (1981) which starts with a poignant but disturbing sentence: “The ‘marriage’ of Marxism and feminism has been like the marriage of husband and wife depicted in English common law: Marxism and feminism are one, and that one is Marxism” (2) and continues shortly to say that “either we need a healthier marriage or we need a divorce” (2). At the core of Hartman’s argument lies the proposition that Marxism is blind to gender bias and sexism. Her analysis of the systemic discrimination in capitalism further underlines separation between the public (male) and private (female) realms, and even more importantly, the fact that the first one is given more superiority and pre-eminence than the second one.

Furthermore, Nancy Hartsock in her 1975 article writes about the concept of praxis (here loosely defined as a process through which a theory is enacted, practiced, embodied, or realized), consciousness-raising and ideology and she argues that the Marxist idea of praxis has to be the “mode of operation” that will distinguish feminist revolution from any other. Hartsock writes, “the practice of small-group consciousness raising, with its stress on examining and understanding experience and on connecting with personal experience to the structure that define our lives, is the clearest example of the method basic to feminism” (1975: 35). In her later text, an article entitled “Staying Alive”, she additionally underlines the fact that since alienated labor still remains as one of the central modern oppressions, feminists have to develop a different and “new conception of work itself” (Building Feminist Theory, 1981: 112). She argues that what this feminist restructuring of work would entail is creating a new situation where thinking, doing, as well as planning and even routine work are all parts of work that everyone does so that in such manner we can not only develop ourselves further but also transform the “external world” (1981: 118). That is, as Donovan writes, “the classic Marxist concept of praxis as unalienated labor” (1997: 88).

In her latter work, published in 1983, Hartsock also pursues the importance of formulation of the feminist standpoint, which will enable a better understanding of “why patriarchal institutions and ideologies take such perverse and deadly forms” as well as “how both theory and practice can be redirected in more liberatory directions” (1983: 231). Such feminist standpoint would require us to understand the fact that positions of men and women are structurally different and therefore lived realities of lives of men and women are not alike either. So, according to Hartsock’s view, this feminist standpoint is therefore “rooted in the labor experience and practice of traditional women (Donovan, 1997: 89).

And so, following the concepts written on the “women’s question” from the socialist feminist perspective, on the following pages, I will further establish my place within the body of work on the topic of gender inequality in my native Poland. I will also frame my argument within the context of economic theory, Polish history, Eastern Feminist theory as well as within the larger feminist studies field.

Literature Review

In order to contextualize my project I wanted to provide a short sketch of Polish history since I believe the political, social and economic conditions that Poland went through after World War II had a definite influence on the way in which gender equality and feminism especially are discussed in the national arena.

In the next chapter, I describe what has happened to Poland after World War II, in terms of both, economic and social aspects. In the latter part of that chapter, I specifically take on the issue of the economic transformation that Poland went under during the late 1980s and early to mid-1990s. I especially focus on the roles of Jeffrey Sachs, the economic wizard who at one time was an advisor to Eastern European countries, the Soviet Union itself as well as Latin America on their transformation from Communism to market economies ; and Leszek Balcerowicz, distinguished Polish economist, one time Prime Minister and more recently a former chairman of the National Bank of Poland, in this now historic undertaking. In terms of the particulars of the transformation process I side with the socially progressive writer Naomi Klein on that subject (2008). Klein, a Canadian author and a well-known social activist who has repeatedly denounced the culture of corporate globalization (2000), has criticized the largely unproblematic acceptance of the Shock Therapy method that the “Indiana Jones of Economics” (as Sachs was poignantly named by the *L.A. Times* writer James Risen), proposed. Her arguments echo those of the

renowned political scientist Peter Gowan (1995) who argued that the method developed by Sachs and his co-theorists entailed seeking a solution to make Eastern Europe a part of the capitalist system rather than think about other, less Westernized alternatives. Using their critiques, I will try to show that alternatives to the Sachs and Balcerowicz's model of economic transformation were available but not pursued. Furthermore, I will also draw on the work of Leszek Balcerowicz himself, who later admitted that the unintended consequences of the transition (especially those human costs) were larger than was ever anticipated (Balcerowicz, 1997).

In the third chapter, I consider the problematic dialogue that Western and Eastern European feminists engage in. By Western feminism I mean body of the feminist thought that has developed in the United States during the so-called “second wave” of women's liberation movement that roughly began in the late 1960s and lasted through the 1970s, and emphasized issues of equal rights to work and pay as well as the issue of access to reproductive rights (among many others, of course). By Eastern European feminism, I mean the movement of women from Eastern Europe, who for the large part have rejected the notions that their Western counterparts fought for numerous reasons, among which was the fact that during Communism Eastern European women had been pushed into paid work and rather than seeing this as a move towards “equality”, actually yearned for the peacefulness and quiet family life. This, for them, was as far from “the problem with no name” that was so affectingly described by the American feminist Betty Friedan in her revolutionary book (1963) as the geographical distance between Eastern Europe and the US (other reasons are also explained in chapter three).

Moreover, I am largely framing my argument using Valentine Moghadam's paradigm of gendered revolutions (1997). Moghadam inserts gender as a distinct category through which one can divide and assess historical revolutions, and argues that there are two types of revolutions:

"the 'woman-in-the-family' or patriarchal model of revolution, and the 'women's emancipation' or modernizing model" (Moghadam, 1997: 137).

The first model, the woman in the family model, Moghadam argues, "excludes or marginalizes women from definitions and constructions of independence, liberation, and liberty. It frequently constructs an ideological linkage between patriarchal values, nationalism, and the religious order. It assigns women the role of wife and mother, and associates women not only with family but with tradition, culture, and religion" (Moghadam, 1997: 143). So in this particular model, revolutionary ideology is largely equated with a patriarchal paradigm, meaning that within the goals of those revolutionary movements, there neither exists a call for eradication nor even modification of a male-dominated family unit, but in a few cases, the opposite seems to hold true. Rather, women's roles are relegated and confined only to those of wives and mothers in the revolutionary experience as well as in the post-revolutionary society; their duties limited to those of sideline helpers and supporting their fighting husbands as well as raising "the future of our nations", children that would follow in the footsteps of the fathers and themselves become revolutionaries. This is exactly the reality of the intrusion by the government that spread beyond the work life and found its way into the domestic spheres (and even to a large extent bedrooms) that the Eastern European feminists found so problematic, not to mention, subjugatory.

The other model of revolutions that Moghadam writes about sees "that the emancipation of women is an essential part of the revolution or project of social transformation. It constructs woman as part of the productive forces and citizenry, to be mobilized for economic and political purposes; she is to be liberated from patriarchal controls expressly for that purpose" (Moghadam, 1997: 152). In this particular model, the underlying theme is the notion that emancipation of women is a crucial and fundamental part of a socialist revolution and the way to its realization

was through the socialization of domestic labor and the insertion of woman into productive-paid labor.

The Polish situation is quite unique when applied to Moghadam's paradigm. Although seemingly Polish citizens found themselves on the modernizing end of the revolutions after WWII, when the newly established communist government took over, the following years proved to be quite problematic for the women's causes (more on that in chapter 3). Furthermore, the second revolution, after the fall of the Communism (1989) was definitely more along the lines of the women-in-the-family or patriarchal model since the contribution of women to the fall of the hated government as well as their participation in Solidarity has largely gone unnoticed. I here follow the works of the Polish author, Ewa Kondratowicz (2001) and American feminist Shana Penn (2005), among others, who have helped to uncover the “lost” or rather largely invisible and yet so crucial involvement of Polish women in the political, economic and social changes of the late 1970s and 80s.

Furthermore, in the same chapter I am also adding to the ongoing debate on the problematic issue of the singular definition of feminism. The debate on what is feminism, who should be included in its crusade and how women's rights are to be fought for have been plaguing this movement since its inception. Such questions are also to be considered in this project, since this split exists also in terms of what is considered “Western” and “Eastern” feminism. Here I follow the arguments presented by authors such as Cervonka (2008), Funk (1993, b) and Snitow (1993), whose arguments lead me to believe that although dialogue and understanding between the Western and Eastern feminists can be problematic, it is definitely possible. The key for any successful communication lies in anticipation of such problems and the open-mindedness for new and creative solutions rather than in continuation of the problems with

semantics (Funk, 1993). I would argue that the most crucial thing in this current political climate, in Poland and in the US (and presumably elsewhere as well), where women's rights are often being used as political agenda items and then discarded after the election period, is to keep an eye on the larger issues – such as propagating and ensuring the survival of women's rights rather than fights for a change of a word etc. This of course also applies to the differences within Eastern feminism itself since it took many forms in many countries. My main point on this topic is the fact that there will always be some degree of conflict in the movement itself, since feminism has never been and most likely will never be some homogeneous totalitarian force. Therefore, we should move away from considering it as such and then, maybe our fight will not end in defeat.

In chapter four I am looking at the political process that changed the democratic Poland as we know it – the complicated issue of entrance to the European Union. By reviewing the procedures that Poland was to have adopted by the time of its historic entrance (on May 1, 2004), I problematize the gender question in this entire process. Using Leah Anderson's (2006) analysis as well as Mark A. Pollack and Emilie Hafner-Burton's (2000) critique I play a bit of a detective and try to uncover the problematic dilemma: although gender equality seems to be one of the staples of the European Union as an International Governmental Organization (IGO), the negligence of the Polish government in this manner has largely been pushed off the international and national agenda. The fact that the Polish Catholic Church has been quite a vocal, if not quite influential institution (not only on gender issues but on many other political, economic and social affairs as well) is also considered at some length in that chapter. I finish my analysis with an uneasy feeling that gender equality, although seemingly strongly enforced by the powers of the EU, has been quietly pushed aside in favor of economic factors. The effects of such choices are

clear today: gender equality in Poland is still only paper-thin – the words are in the laws, but the difference between theory and reality is still quite pronounced.

In chapter five I present the gendered interpretation of the political shift that happened after Poland joined the EU. Although the initial entrance was marked by hope in the eyes of many ordinary citizens, not to mention young and active feminists, the real focus of this project really is, this hope slowly started to disappear, until one day we, Polish citizens, found ourselves in the midst of the far-right opposition to the gender mainstreaming techniques that many other EU members have not only accepted but also implemented. The division of the Polish government as well as the overreaching power of the particular wing of the Catholic Church have led to the election of the Kaczynski twins to the highest positions of the government: with Lech Kaczynski becoming the President and Jaroslaw claiming the seat of the Prime Minister soon after. The results in terms of gender equality (as well as equality rights for sexual minorities) could have been quite disastrous, however the coalition government fell apart within a two year period. Nonetheless, even the theoretical setbacks that this right wing coalition provided had to be examined. The discussions that monitored the beginning and followed the breakdown of the coalition, the reemergence of gender-related issues, the promises of the more gender equal Poland and the reemergence of the Plenipotentiary are some of the key facts that I consider in that chapter.

There is one more thing that I have to add to the discussion of this particular chapter. As a social scientist, I have been taught to exercise my “sociological imagination” (Mills 1959), to review all the available information and make an educated decision and as a student and a lecturer on Sociology, I have tried to do so to the best of my abilities. However, I cannot pretend to say that while writing that particular chapter my own emotions and feelings did not influence

the words that were typed on those pages. When I started writing that chapter, I was afraid of not having enough to say, but by the end of it, I had to edit a chapter that grew to the size of about 50 pages. In other words, the chapter pretty much wrote itself. However, it was quite hard to stay objective when the turn to the politics of the right have been so severe and where potential consequences were so far-reaching. I will not deny the fact that my analysis of the coalition government led by the Kaczynski twins is extremely critical – especially where openly homophobic, patriarchal and sexist Ministers (not to mention one convicted felon) were setting up the changes in the educational and other social structures that would reverse Polish progress by thousands of years. I am therefore fully responsible for the particular bias of my approach in this specific chapter as well as in all other parts of this dissertation.

I wish to address one more issue that has occurred since I finished writing that chapter. On April 10, 2010 the Polish President, along with the First Lady, the chief of the Polish General Staff and other senior Polish military officers (as well as the president of the National Bank of Poland, Poland's deputy foreign minister, Polish government officials, 12 members of the Polish Parliament, senior members of the Polish clergy, and relatives of victims of the Katyn massacre; all together 96 people) died when the plane carrying them to the events marking the 70th anniversary of the Katyn massacre crashed. This tragedy, although it initially brought Poles together, later further polarized the nation due to the controversial choice of burial for the late President (many Polish citizens argued that burying Lech Kaczynski at the Wawel Cathedral, next to the bodies of the Polish Kings and national heroes, such as General Pilsudski, is a travesty since Kaczynski's troubled legacy could never be measured against such heroes and since his rule polarized rather than united a nation). Since this tragedy has happened largely after

my research have ended, I will not consider it in my analysis, but I do believe that it raises further questions about the state of Polish national security.

In the last chapter I take a look at the ever changing office of the Plenipotentiary for Equal Status of Women and Men. The office established at the rank of the Secretary of State among its activities listed the formulation of government policy concerning equal status and the initiation of legislative actions (through the office of the Prime Minister) and also the coordination and monitoring of the implementation of gender policy . I trace the changes that plagued this office, the ever changing persons who headed the office, their respective legacies as well as the way in which the office was used for political propaganda by the governmental powers in charge. This chapter has been written with tremendous help from the former Plenipotentiary herself, Dr. Magdalena Sroda, whose email correspondence with me was a wonderful and very fruitful research opportunity.

Lastly, although many studies have been conducted about the state of Eastern feminism and Polish feminism in particular (as I cited above), not much has been written about organized Polish feminism. That is not to say that Polish feminists have not been vocal – on the contrary. Magdalena Sroda (2009 and 2000), Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka (2005), Kazimiera Szczuka (2004; 2001) and Slawomira Walczewska (1999), among many others, have been writing about the state of Polish women's rights, the importance of Polish women's participation in politics (Sroda), the development of Polish feminism (Walczewska), and issues involving the participation and portrayal of women in the media (Szczuka). Even Polish feminists abroad have been vocal (Fuszara 1991, 1997 and 2000; Matynia 2003 and 2005). These works are of course crucial in that they add much information to the literature on equal rights of women in Poland. Furthermore, those nationally and internationally recognized Polish feminists have been

interviewed in a variety of magazines, newspapers, conferences and have talked about the importance and need for Polish feminism. However, there have been few studies conducted on the experiences of young Polish feminists themselves, their work in the organization, the issues they face, the knowledge they produce, etc. I believe that my study, although very introductory in scale, will shed some light on the previously unknown facts of what it means to be in a women's organization, what it means to be a young Polish feminist in the new democratic Poland and on the challenges of working in a climate that is not exactly welcoming to the notion of feminism. I believe that through this project I can at least blaze a new trail in the literature, and start a new discussion about the experiences of women who take on the responsibility of “spreading” the ideas of organized feminism and making it “welcome”.

Methodology

This dissertation is a case study of a single feminist organization, KONSOLA, located in Poznan, Poland. KONSOLA is a women’s organization not affiliated with any political party that gained organizational status on November 11, 1999. However, its establishers (Izabela Kowalczyk, Marta Maciejewska, Justyna Magdziarz, Klaudia Snochowska-Gonzales, Katarzyna Spychalska) had been working together informally since 1997. Currently KONSOLA has 12 stable members and about 15 cooperating persons. KONSOLA is constantly expanding its areas of involvement. At this writing its goals include (but are not limited to) recognition of women’s rights as human rights, fighting gender discrimination and violence against girls and women, promoting economic opportunities for women, and encouraging feminist research and gender studies programs .

I wish to show how members of KONSOLA view the Polish past in terms of gender equality, and how, through their organizational actions, they establish their own meaning of

feminism in today's Poland. I wish to focus on such topics as how these women and men themselves identify with feminism, with its state on the local, national and international level and question what can be done on those three scales, and how such goals could, if possible, be achieved.

In order to understand how gender equality and feminism especially are perceived and addressed by the KONSOLA organization I employed a mixed research design. My primary research was conducted using the interview method. I have interviewed six members of KONSOLA in person, on location in Poznan, Poland and the remaining persons I have interviewed via email. The follow up interviews were also conducted via email (the details of making contact and how interviews were conducted will be explained shortly).

Second of all, I also studied KONSOLA using the ethnomethodological approach, by going to their meetings, observing interactions between members and watching how events or other engagements were organized. Over the duration of my study I have attended about ten member meetings (over the period of four years) and around six events organized by the members (three movie screenings followed by discussion; two art shows showcasing the works of upcoming women artists from Poznan's prestigious Art Academy; and one panel discussion on the topic of feminists in media). At those events I not only paid attention to how the audience interacted with the given idea or topic but also the reactions of the media that followed the above mentioned events.

Third of all, since the majority of my time I was unable to partake in KONSOLA's events since I live in New York, I have also made use of new technological social media methods by participating in KONSOLA's website and email discussion forums and listserv. I believe this

access further deepened the connection between KONSOLA members, myself and the way in which I can learn about them.

Additionally I used historical and archival material as well as secondary sources (reports and books on the Communist Party, the Catholic Church and the Solidarity) to supplement my data and give it contextual information.

Advantages and limitations of the methodology used

One of the largest advantages of this study, I would argue, was the fact that I was personally able to meet with and talk to young Polish feminists. Since, like I mentioned earlier, almost all of the literature I was finding on Polish feminism was written either by theorists, academics or politicians, my goal was to get to the bottom and talk to persons personally involved in feminist organizations, those people who organize the events, marches and other kinds of measures that mention, talk about, and introduce ordinary Poles to questions of gender equality, women's rights and of course feminism in particular. So, in being able to personally meet some of these women and men was a tremendous advantage that I don't think I would be able to get otherwise.

Second of all, since I have meet with these members personally, and have corresponded with many of them for a period of a few years, since I attended their meetings as well as followed discussions on listserv the connection that I have made had become quite strong. What I mean is that since these members got to know me as much as I got to know them, since our relationship started to resemble a form of close acquaintanceship; I was able to really get a rich picture, rich data from them. They trusted me and I trusted them which made this project not only more "fun" to be involved with, but furthermore, I really felt that I was getting the truly rich

and honest answers, the intensive and extensive information, which I do not think I would have gotten had I followed a different research model.

Third of all, my research was designed to address questions for a very specific target population – young Polish feminists who are active in a feminist organization. Since Poznan had only one such organization at the time of my study, I was able to “tap into it” and really immerse myself in what it means to be a Polish feminist, what kinds of issues and problems one might encounter and what are the avenues through which one might reach the goals. Again, this goes back to the point I made a minute ago, about the rich data I was able to achieve through these interviews, attendance of the meetings and events.

Fourth of all, since I was questioning people about their own feminist identity, about their own histories that were often long and convoluted and at times complicated; interviews allowed me to address certain issues more fully. What I mean is that if there was a particular issue mentioned that I was not clear on, when someone mentioned something confusing, I was often able to ask follow up question that would explain the misunderstanding or confusion. And of course this worked on the other side: if the interviewee was not sure of my question, or what I was looking for, he or she was able to ask me to clarify the question for them. For example: in one case I was talking to a KONSOLA member when she mentioned how she would only vote for a given person (S. Sierakowski) because the rest is what she called “cement”; not having an understanding of her analogies, I asked a follow up question about the significance of the cement and its meaning for Polish gender equality politics.

On another note, the face to face interviews also carried additional advantage – nonverbal cues also offered a few advantages. At times, when I was asking about, for example, specifics of

what decisions of people like Giertych or Lepper meant for gender equality in Poland, the facial expressions or hand gestures further underlined the points that a particular interviewee was making. At times, I heard screams of joy when mentioning Dr. Sroda or angry shouts when the two men I just mentioned were talked about.

Furthermore, on top of the interviews (face to face and those conducted via email) I was also able to enrich my research using any and all literature available on the topic of gender equality in Poland – writings from diverse social fields including those from economy (Sachs, Gowan and Balcerowicz), sociology, media, history among others. And I am of course referring to positions not only written by Polish theorists but those from other Eastern European countries and those from Western Europe and US as well.

And the fact that I was able to correspond, although not extensively, with one of the women I have written about, one of the most prominent Polish feminist, Dr. Magdalena Sroda, was of a remarkable help and significance. Because of the fact that Dr. Sroda was willing to help me in verifying some of the facts and figures contained in the last chapter (chapter 6) of my dissertation, because of her gratuity in sending me information on positions that she thought would be helpful to my work this dissertation became richer and fuller.

However, several limitations of this study also have to be addressed. One such limitation refers to an issue I have mentioned before – the physical distance between New York and Poznan, Poland. Because of the fact that I live across the Atlantic from where the activities I write about take place, one of the issues was that I was unable to attend quite a few of the organized projects that KONSOLA had planned. For example: not being able to attend Manifa's

(the feminist marches organized every year on March 8th) was quite bothersome; or the fact that I was unable to help KONSOLA members in organizing events etc.

Another side to this disadvantage was the fact that when I was able to go to Poland, such trips did not come without the price. Since often I was able to travel only during summers, the costs rose as well. The average ticket to Poland was, during the time of this study an expense of \$800 which also limited my ability to freely travel to the site of my research interest.

Moreover, at times of course interviews themselves can be quite time consuming, with planning and coordinating meetings, follow up interviews etc. with schedules of various people involved. The women and men I have interviewed aside from their studies and their involvement with KONSOLA had of course full time jobs so sometimes coordination of time to meet sometimes took a few days.

In terms of sample size, although I agree that 13 persons is not a lot; however, for the size of an organization that at its core has only 12 full time members; and rest (15) are persons who are active only occasionally, is not a miniscule number. My original idea was to interview as many full members as possible but in reality not everyone was available during the times I was in Poland (since some of the members leave for the summer vacations or were working in another country).

Some might say that data received from such a small number of respondents cannot be generalized to a larger population, and while this is often true, such generalization was never my goal. I have stated in my methodology chapter that I am writing this project about a specific small population and problems they are facing, and I never attempted to argue otherwise.

However, having said that I do believe that even small sample studies can point to larger,

national issues – in this case for example, the small sample size reflects the core of the issue I am writing about: the lack of acceptance of the “f” word by Poles.

Feminism, the word and its connotation, is still a word that is quite problematic for many Poles to swallow. So the fact that KONSOLA had only 12 stable members, the fact that I was only able to interview half of them personally and others via email, further points a finger to this larger issue.

Why KONSOLA?

I have chosen to study KONSOLA for several reasons. First, it is a relatively new feminist association (as I mentioned it was first established in 1999), therefore its struggles are very much associated with the current political situation rather than with the problematic Polish past. Secondly, its headquarters is located in the center of my hometown of Poznan, a city where my family still has a residence, which added a convenience level to my research since I often (about twice a year) travel to Poland. Thirdly, I have established good links with this organization, having been introduced to them earlier and having participated in their listserv (details of which I describe below). Lastly, the feminists in that organization are in their 20s and 30s, are young and politically active, not just research oriented but also interested in further strengthening of the feminist links in Poland, making feminism “fun” (in their own words) and re-defining the problematic meaning of this word.

Sample size

The small sample size of my study is an issue of importance and I would like to address it at length. I realize that KONSOLA is a small organization, with its full active membership reaching only 12 people. Overall, as I stated above, KONSOLA consists of 12 full members and

15 cooperating members (cooperating members are women who used to be active members but now for various reasons, are less active, including moving to a different city, starting families, taking on a full time job; as well as women who would like to join KONSOLA in the future – who attend meetings but have not yet made the commitment to become members). I was able to interview half of the full members as well as seven of the cooperating members (four non-active members of KONSOLA and three women who wish to join the organization in the near future) for the total of thirteen persons. Details of how contact were made with the organization will be discussed below.

Several criticisms can be made about qualitative research, and small sample size in social science research is just one of the issues that some researchers have with this methodology. Among the most cited criticisms of qualitative research are the presumed lack of reliability and validity of its findings. In regard to field research, critics question the ability of qualitative research to replicate observations (in other words, reliability) to obtain correct answers or correct impressions of the phenomenon under study (in other words, validity) (Kirk and Miller, 1986). Other criticisms question the reactive effects of the observer's or the interviewer's presence on the situation being studied and selective perception or bias on the part of the researcher. Also of concern has been the researcher's inability to observe all factors that might influence the situation under study (McCall and Simmons, 1969; Shaffir & and Stebbins, 1991).

Here I would like to address a few of these points. First of all, small sample size studies do not allow for generalizations to be made about the topic or the outcome of the studies, which can be made using quantitative methods, such as surveys or questionnaires (Klinenberg, 2002). Other researchers in the ethnographic field of study (King, 2004) have even encouraged their students also doing ethnographic studies to ensure that their small samples are 'unbiased' or that

their single-case studies are ‘representative’ or ‘not selected on the dependent variable’. To ameliorate this problem, some researchers have tried to incorporate elements of quantitative methods into their design but others argue that such a solution is to some extent flawed (Small, 2009). Small argues that such practices “constitute little more than applying words without adopting their meaning, constructing sticks-and-leaves airplanes that will never fly” (10). In other words, triangulation of research methods might work, but not when qualitative and quantitative methods are combined for the pure reason of larger generalization of the results, which may lead to overgeneralizations of effects that may not even be there. I want to make clear that I am well aware that my study is just one case-study and therefore, I underline the fact that my results are specific to the context of what I am studying. This study’s purpose is not to make large, national generalizations about the state of feminism in Poland. Rather, I argue, this case study can outline a few of the specific problems that feminists in a medium size European city face in regards to acceptance of feminist theory, feminist practice and the implementation of gender equality regulations in daily lives.

Furthermore, as often is the case with case studies, Small writes, “rarely will students have enough well-selected in-depth interview respondents that their findings about subtle causal relationships involving multiple variables will be statistically generalizable to a large national population” (Small, 2006: 12). For that, Small argues, a survey is needed. Although of course we should recognize that although large scale studies are indeed extremely valuable, “there is a place for a small interview study to make meaningful contribution to knowledge, provided that language and assumptions through which it is interpreted differ” (Small, 2006: 15). Following his advice, I would argue that even such a small scale study as this one is, can provide us with invaluable information that adds to the larger discussion on the topic of feminism in Poland, its

acceptance etc. This is especially true since there is a void in the literature on the topic of how feminism is experienced by the Polish feminists themselves, as they state it in their own words.

Other researchers (Myers, 2000; Williams, 2000) have argued that in interpretative research, defined as not only those kinds of qualitative research in which concentration lies at the level of linguistic interpretation of actor's meanings, but those that include observation techniques which seek to make sense of actors' actions and language within their natural settings (210), some generalization not only can happen, but often is to some extent, inevitable. Furthermore, the author is in favor of what he calls moderatum generalizations (Williams, 2000: 215; emphasis in original) that one can detect from interpretative research. Such generalizations can be made either knowingly or unknowingly and in their simplest forms are the basis of inductive reasoning in what Schutz named 'the lifeworld' (Schutz, 1972). In other words, those are the generalizations of everyday life. If I attempt any generalizations at all, I would argue, they fall into that category of moderatum generalizations. If I make any inferences about the state of feminism in Poland, its acceptance or allergy to it, I do so in such a specific manner.

It is also important to note that in women's studies, there has been a long discussion of what methodology is best suited for the field (Bowles and Klein, 1983; Eichler, 1988; Fonow and Cook, 1991; Harding, 1987). Some researchers (Klein, 1983) have argued that feminist methodology at its core is different from "patriarchal scholarship" (or male-dominated research) and that it is closely related to the development of feminist theory. Others have raised questions about subjectivity in research and argued that feminist research cannot be expected to be value free, since it has to be grounded in women's culture and experiences (Du Bois, 1983). Others, like Toby Epstein Jayaratne (1983) have argued this point from another angle, arguing that quantitative methodology, as well as qualitative methodology, can and should form part of

feminist research, since the former can provide information not attainable through qualitative methods. Maria Mies (1983) further illustrates this issue arguing that feminist historians in the past have had quite a hard time trying to reconstruct women's histories using the predominant (androcentric) research methods. She talks about the issue of "double consciousness" (1983: 120) that has to be taken into account when one thinks about feminist methodology. What she means is this split women researchers felt being women on one side and scholars on another; a split that can lead to a schizophrenic situation since it forces women to "repress, negate or ignore their own experience of sexist oppression" and forces them to live up to "the so-called 'rational' standards of a highly competitive, male dominated academic world" (1983: 121). The solution that Mies attempts for is research that changes the vertical relationship between researcher and their research objects, from the predominant "view from above" to the "view from below" (123). In other words, women' centered research, for and about women's experiences cannot be an instrument of dominance and legitimation of power elites (as is the case of the former, view from above), but rather, has to be committed to serving the interests of the dominated, exploited and oppressed groups, in this case, women (which is exemplified by what she means as the view from below).

Furthermore, Mies underlines two more principles of feminist methodology which I would like to mention: one being the fact that such methodology has to be accompanied by the study of women's individual and social history; and the second, which talks about the need for collectivization of women's own experiences (1983: 127). In the case of the former principle, feminist scholars can inspire, and even more importantly, help other women in documenting their campaigns and struggles for change, which is something that to some extent I have tried to do here. As I mentioned in the Introduction, the field of Polish feminist research has been lacking

in terms of literature describing experiences of gender inequality and practices of feminism that young Polish feminists experience, as it is explained in their own words, in their own understanding. This project, although limited in its scale, can at least start such conversations and can facilitate further research in such direction.

Moreover, in the context of this research, the small sample size, I believe, reflects a larger, more national issue. Although KONSOLA is hardly the only organization for women in Poznan (and one of only 37 explicitly feminist organizations in the entire Poland; however, currently there are many organizations and associations serving many different purposes – from those offering help to battered women, to those helping small business women to others helping mothers and young children etc.), during my study, KONSOLA was the only organization that specified its feminist outlook. Furthermore, it was the only organization that had women's rights issues written into its organizational plan, on its website, on its pamphlets, on posters etc. This fact, of being openly feminist, has to do with the organization's small membership. Feminism, the word and its connotation, I will argue in the following chapters, is still a word that is quite problematic for many Poles to swallow. For many people it is still associated with the rule of the Communist government and its failed push for equal rights. Communism, although now a distant past for many, especially young people, is still a cloud that is hanging over the fight for women's equality. Many young Poles growing up hear the stories of how hard it was during the Communist rule, how individual's rights were eradicated, how people's parents have been unjustifiably interrogated or even punished by those in power. All those things, I believe, have created quite a barrier for feminism to break through. It also to some extent can explain why Polish people have been so suspicious toward any notion of “feminism” and what it carries. Even among my generation, as I mention in the Introduction, this view still persists. So the fact that

KONSOLA had only 12 stable members, and the fact that I was only able to interview half of them, further underlines this larger issue.

Those women who started KONSOLA and those members I interviewed do differ from the majority of the population in the way that they approach feminism. Why? Because most, if not all of them, have attended the newly created women's center courses at the Universities. They were the first ones to graduate with certificates in Women's studies programs and therefore they have been exposed to another meaning of feminism, feminist theory, and feminist issues. They formed their own knowledge about those notions, having been involved in more women-oriented studies. It is not necessarily the fact that Polish population stands against equal rights for women – because that is hardly the case. Many people I have informally spoken with, people of my generation, people of my parents and even grandparents generation do believe that women, if they so choose to, could work outside of the household and should receive equal compensation to their male counterparts for equal jobs, that women should have the right to divorce, escape abusive households, and even make decisions affecting their bodies (which are a few, among many other feminist goals). And yet, many do draw the line differentiating between what equal rights are and what feminism means and what feminists stand for (which I will be addressing in the next few chapters). So again, the small size of KONSOLA and my research population, I believe, does address this national problem of lack of acceptance of what feminism means to many, the fact that most young people are still skeptical when it comes to organized feminism and to the spread of “feminist propaganda” as some have so poignantly argued pointing to the feminist debate on abortion, the call for larger inclusion of women in politics (at the national levels) and the open discussion of women’s discrimination in every field of their lives.

Furthermore, as it will become clearer to my readers, my project focused mainly on the responses made by those six active members of KONSOLA who I have been able to interview quite at length (not only during our face to face interviews but also throughout the email list serve exchanges as well as via our conversations at meetings, events etc.). Whenever appropriate, I have also added the responses of the other cooperating members, mostly to highlight the similarities or differences in approaches to a given issue or to further pinpoint a larger issue at stake. I have done so for a particular reason. This project, from its inception, was about the active members of an organization who are trying to change how gender equality and feminism are viewed in Poznan and on a more national scale as well. Although I started my research with optimistic thoughts of interviewing all the members of the organization, reality quickly intervened. I soon realized that even in this most active feminist organization, only some of its members were actively pursuing the organization's goals. The other members were either inactive due to busy schedules of their daily lives, or only on projects that had to do with their personal interests, and a few mentioned the fact that moving to another city and sometimes country can effectively trim the time available for involvement with KONSOLA. Those six individuals (five women and one men) that I have interviewed at length (in person and over email), were the key people who dealt with issues of gender, gender equality and feminism. If there was a debate in the local media about any aspect of gender inequality or feminism (such as sexist ads appearing on city billboards, sexist remark made by a public official or any other cultural and social events that had anything to do with gender and of course feminism), those six individuals were the ones who were involved. Whether it was one of them giving an interview in the radio, writing an email to the editor of the paper or even participating in a TV programming

on such topics. Basically, those six individuals were the ones answering questions on gender and feminism in Poznan during the duration of my study of KONSOLA.

Making Contact

As mentioned before, in 2004 I made initial contact with a few members of the organization. The opportunity arose when a member of my family mentioned the fact that her close friend is a member of a feminist organization in Poznan. At that time, I was researching possible topics for my dissertation, and I was thinking about notions of feminism, globalization and theory and their impact on the daily lives of women. Although the topic of feminism in Poland has been of interest to me for a while, I was also researching other fields, pursuing my interest in sociological theory and issues of globalization. However, when the opportunity arose to meet with a young Polish feminist, I quickly “jumped” on it. I met Aga (all the names have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals I have interviewed) one April evening in 2004, in a small café in Poznan. At that informal first meeting, after introducing myself and my interest in the issue of feminism in Poland, Aga opened up and told me several interesting points and then talked about her involvement with KONSOLA, the emergence of her own, personal feminism, the need to see more gender equal Poland etc. After that meeting I decided to research KONSOLA and the topic of Polish feminism further and decided to join KONSOLA’s email listserv and see what this organization does, what it means, what the members do etc. Since then I have been a member and a participant in KONSOLA’s email discussion list serve (although I am not and have never been an active member of KONSOLA organization since that could violate my status as an independent observer and a researcher).

The initial research that I have conducted on this organization (prior to the interviews) left me with several conclusions. First of all, KONSOLA is a relatively small organization (the association consists of 12 members: 5 on management board and 4 in the control committee – the rest, 15 cooperating members are volunteers). From the initial listserv conversations I have noticed that although many persons have joined the email listserv, only a minority (mostly full time members) participate in it on a regular basis. However, I will discuss several important purposes of the listserv a little bit later in this chapter.

In terms of the meetings, during the initial meeting with Aga, I also learned that only about a half of the members do attend the meetings. In terms of the members of the management board – many of the original creators of KONSOLA have moved out of Poznan (most to other large Polish cities such as Warsaw or Cracow), having gotten jobs at several of Polish universities, major daily newspapers etc. and due to distance were unable to attend the meetings. Their involvement in KONSOLA's issues and events have been largely marginalized now, since other priorities have taken over (some started their families, some became involved in other projects near their new hometowns or universities and for some the interest in the feminist issues have changed and evolved) which is also the issue I mentioned earlier while discussing the small sample size of this study.

Since my interest in the issues of Polish feminism started growing after meeting Aga, I started to research the issue of feminism in Poland also through a less structured means. I began by posing questions about of what Polish feminism is, what it means to be a feminist in Poland, what about gender equality in Poland etc. to my immediate family members who still live in Poland, to my friends from childhood (of both genders) and to others, often strangers I have met at a café or a bar. The purpose of this questioning was for myself to formulate some idea about

how feminism is received in Poland, to familiarize myself with this concept since much of my education on the topic of feminism has taken place away from Poland and its particular political, social and economic context.

At the same time of my literature search on the topic of my interest, I have also started my IRB application. I have completed the CITI program in first in August 2007 (renewed in August of 2010) and later have applied for and successfully received the IRB approval for the research on the “Meaning of Feminism in Poland”.

My intention was to study the response of the KONSOLA members to questions of gender inequality and the state of feminism in the current democratic, EU member Poland. I also interviewed members of KONSOLA about the notion of “allergy to feminism” (an idea I borrow from Barbara Einhorn’s 1995 book, *Cinderella Goes to Market: Citizenship, Gender and Women's Movements in East Central Europe*), whether “allergy” is even an appropriate word for what is happening in Poland and if so, whether it can be fought, and how what character would a fight against it take. I have conducted my study through three months of ethnographic research in Poznan, Poland (I also spent additional weeks conducting research throughout early 2009, whenever I was able to visit Poland). From 2006 on, whenever I was able to be in Poznan, I have attended KONSOLA’s meetings, workshops, and events. Over the course of this research project, I have attended six member meetings, six KONSOLA sponsored events (three movie screenings followed by discussion; two art shows showcasing the works of upcoming women artists from Poznan’s prestigious Art Academy and one panel discussion on the topic of feminists in media) and have participated in countless discussions debating various feminist issues in Poland over the internet. Although at several points during meetings I have expressed my willingness to volunteer for a project (one was a gallery opening and another one was a movie

screening), due to circumstances beyond my control, I was unable to do so (the first event had to be canceled and the second one was rescheduled for a later time, during Fall of that year, and at that time I had to be already in New York).

During my three month summer stay in Poland (May, June and July) in 2008 I have conducted most of my ethnographic research. In order to interview members of KONSOLA I have sent an initial email introducing myself to the group (although those members who knew Aga and were friends of hers knew about my project earlier) and telling them a little about myself, my academic and personal affiliation and most importantly about my research interest. In that same email I also included my contact information in Poznan and soon after (about a day or two) several members responded to my inquiry. I was then invited by several members to attend the general meeting that they were having that May. In their responses, the members of KONSOLA indicated that they would like to ask me a few more questions (about myself and my project) and most of them also expressed interest in participation in my study.

The general meeting took place in a coffee shop/restaurant in the center of Poznan, rather than in KONSOLA's office because, the office (or rather, I should say a room the size of 8 feet by 10 feet, which is rented from the city by the funds available from the Global Fund for Women that sponsors KONSOLA's activities) itself is quite small and lacks a space where comfortable meeting of more than 5 people could be held. About ten people attended the meeting, nine women (including myself) and one man. Out of them, only four (three women and one man) were members of KONSOLA. The other 6 were volunteers who were interested in a few of the projects that were being considered by the organization, one person came because she heard about KONSOLA through a friend who attended women's studies classes at the University of Poznan and was interested in becoming a more politically active , and me.

The meeting proceeded as follows: first the current head of KONSOLA introduced herself, and asked everyone at the table to introduce themselves. Following the initial introductions, several issues regarding the upcoming events were discussed. One pertained to a grant application for financial support to Global Fund for Women, the second related to the need of changing room accommodations for an exhibition that was to be held in October of that year in one of the Poznan's galleries, and a third referred to a poster that was being produced for spreading the news about KONSOLA and its activities (this poster was to be placed at different departments of the University of Poznan). After those issues were discussed, a less formal part of the meeting began. During that time, the head of KONSOLA introduced me and gave me the floor. I then re-introduced myself to everyone at the table, elaborated on my interest in KONSOLA and further explained its relevance to my project. Following that I offered to answer any questions that attendees of the meeting might have had. One person (female member of KONSOLA) asked me about the procedures that would be followed and I spoke for about 10-15 minutes making sure to explain everything fully (a procedure which I will explain shortly). I then collected contact information from the interested members – 5 persons gave me their contact information and then a 6th person, one that did not attend the initial meeting, contacted me via email with her interest in participation in the study. Afterward's, the head of KONSOLA asked whether there are any other issues that participants would like to bring out, and during that time the one woman who was interested in becoming more politically active in women's issues spoke up and talked about her interests and asked about a few issues that concerned her (what membership in KONSOLA entailed as well as time commitment among other things). When her questions were answered, the head of KONSOLA then adjourned the meeting and everyone departed.

Interviews

After initial gathering of contact information at the general KONSOLA meeting, I then, during the following few days, contacted each interested person individually and set up time and place of the interviews. The place of the interviews I left open to the interviewees (in hopes of making this process most accommodating to the members) and so three of the interviews were conducted in KONSOLA's office (located in the center of Poznan) and three others were conducted in two different café's. The interviews all lasted between 45 minutes and two hours.

My plan was to conduct semi-structured open ended interviews. The questions I designed asked the respondents about their own relationship to feminism and gender equality, the acceptance of the feminist agenda on a larger political and social scale and the issue of allergy to feminism. I then asked about development of their own feminist identity and whether they see a relationship to Western feminist thought. Then I specifically inquired about their views on the past and current political situation in Poland. These questions were then followed with more specific inquiries about their meeting with/establishment of KONSOLA and on how KONSOLA is responding to gender issues and women's rights issues in Poland. Afterword I concentrated mostly on asking questions relevant to their views on the changing meaning and importance of feminism in Poland. The list of the concrete questions can be found in the Appendix.

Each in-person interview started with me presenting the interviewee with a consent form (which was approved in Polish and English languages by the IRB) and carefully going over it with the participants. Subjects then signed and dated the consent form and with the turning "on" on the recorder, the interview began (all subjects agreed to have the interviews recorded) and the recording continued until the interview was over. No one ever stopped the interview or asked to

have the recorder turned off. In other words, I did not encounter any problems while conducting the interviews.

In terms of the email interviews I conducted, a similar methodology was used. The first step was to contact the members with consent form and asking for contact if any questions persisted (no one asked for further clarification over email). Once the interviewee electronically returned the signed consent form to me, I then emailed them the list of the same questions that I asked the respondents in person. I then usually waited for answers for about a week (all members got back to me with their answers within ten days). Follow up interviews (those with members I have previously interviewed in person as well as those I have interviewed over email) were all conducted through email correspondence (Follow Up questions can also be found in the Appendix).

At this point, I would like to point to a somewhat interesting and relevant issue that I was made aware of while conducting the interviews. Although, as I stated above, no one refused to sign a consent form, the fact that something had to be signed for me to start the interviews made several of the in-person interviewees a bit uncomfortable but a few of them, after my careful explanation, signed the consent form without hesitation. Following the interviews, I did ask the participants (three of which were ones I saw as being uncomfortable) what was this discomfort associated with, all of them pretty much gave me the same answer. The reason for their reaction was the fact that signing something made an act more official, more formal rather than just casual. This fact has a historical presence in Polish history, since during the Communist rule formality was associated with the hated government, with lies of that government, and with the fact that your signature on a piece of formal paper could have been used against you at some point. And since informal routes were often the only ones that one could have gotten anything

through, since it was more about getting things done “our way” (as opposed to the official, government way), this hesitation with putting one’s signature on any form of an official paper can be understood. I spend quite some time discussing this notion with my parents as well as my peers and I noticed that this reluctance is stronger with age – persons of my parents’ age, now in their 60s, who were in their 20s and 30s during the Communist era exhibit this unwillingness far more strongly than persons of my generation. But even those for whom “Komuna” (as Poles sentimentally refer to the rule of the Communist government; interestingly this word is itself gendered female) is a distant past or a vague memory of lines to the empty-shelved markets still do carry this uncertainty about putting their names on anything deemed official, especially if the agency/school/organization is not very well known to them. And since those women and man I interviewed did not know particulars of what The Graduate Center, CUNY stands for (even though I tried my best to describe it fully), I do understand why the consent form I presented them with was met with slight hesitation at the beginning.

Interviewees

As I have mentioned before, I was able to conduct in-person interviews with half of the KONSOLA’s membership – six persons: five women and one man and seven cooperating members (all women) over email. The age of the respondents varied from 22 to 34 and the mean age was 24. Since Poland is quite a homogeneous population, the respondents were all white. In terms of their sexuality, three females identified themselves as lesbian and a few (three) mentioned husbands so most presumably identified themselves as heterosexual. In terms of class, most of the respondents identified themselves as middle-class. Although I did not ask a question about their socio-economic status, during the interviews, several of the participants made clear statements comparing themselves to working women. Others left less explicit clues about their

class standing, indicating instead the fact that their parents have paid for tutors, certification programs or otherwise have helped them not only in financial matters. I would like to point out here that in Poland higher education is largely free (I say largely because there are some aspects that do cost money – textbooks are not provided for students; certain certifications do cost significant amount of money and of course there are private institutions that charge tuition), so the fact that all of the interviewees have had or were pursuing a degree at the time of the interviews was not necessarily a strong indicator of their class position.

However, as I mentioned above, the class issue was reflected in the interviews, especially when I asked about the notion of availability of feminism and feminist theory to other women, younger or older, especially women, who did not pursue higher degrees. From the interviews as well as from my participatory observation of these and other women, it became clear to me (as I write in the latter chapter) that feminism is still largely associated with academic institutions, universities especially. The effect of this separation, compounded with the problematic historical understanding of what feminism and feminist theory, makes the issue of acceptance of feminism in Poland even more problematic, which is an issue I also explore a little later.

Listserv

As I mentioned above, the research for this project was largely conducted during my three month stay in Poznan, Poland. Since I live and study in New York City and my research project has been located across the ocean, the issue of distance has also been quite troubling. As I stated before, I had been in touch with KONSOLA's members via listserv and this method of study, although not without its own problems, has proven to be very accommodating.

What is a listserv? Basically, it is one of the first electronic mailing list software applications, developed by Eric Thomas , consisting of a set of email addresses for a group in which the sender can send one email and it will reach a variety of people. Today listservs are used quite often by organizations, associations, particular disciplines etc. The Graduate Center itself is a host for a variety of student, faculty and program listservs.

The listserv served several purposes in this study. First of all, since KONSOLA is a small organization, that usually holds about one meeting per month, many members communicate with each other via the listserv. So in other words, it is a sort of information module where interested parties email each other (or everyone on it) about events to be organized, meetings to be held etc. Aside from more technical and bureaucratic conversations that do happen quite often (about 2 emails per day), many members inform each other about one's activities by using this medium. For example, a few times when KONSOLA's members were applying for grant applications, they would send the application as an attachment so that all other members could see it and modify it, if they so choose. On many other occasions, the members used the listserv as a discussion forum for a particular issue that arose, i.e., an article in the press that pertained to their interests. For example, I have received many emails from one listserv member who emailed everyone with links to an interesting movie being shown in one of the theaters, or a problematic (from their viewpoint) article that showed up in the news, or a link to a radio program where a well-known Polish feminist would be speaking etc. This particular usage of listserv was of great utility for myself and this research project, as it often pertained to the question of feminism in Poland, its portrayal in the media, the understanding of feminism by the larger public, on a larger forum etc. Since I was unable to interview all the members of KONSOLA, this listserv served as a great supplement of the views that other members were expressing.

Second of all, the listserv also served another, even more useful purpose for my project. Since the interviews were all conducted in one particular period of time, and since travel between Poland and the US can be quite expensive, the listserv also served a purpose of “keeping in touch” with those members that I have interviewed and not only (since occasionally other members, either former members or those who planned to become members voiced their concerns, issues, prospects etc.). Through exchange of listserv emails, I was able to continue my conversations with members that I have interviewed. It was a form of informal follow up interview that I made use of. Informal, because having already signed a consent form once, I did not make the women with whom I exchanged the listserv conversations with sign another form. Rather, we often just exchanged messages in a more friendly manner. In those conversations, the members often expressed concerns that I had thought about and wanted to ask after the interviews were done (I had prepared several questions that could be seen in the Follow Up interview protocol in the Appendix). So, in such manner, the listserv also proved to be a tremendous addition to my research, not only since it often provided me with excellent information, but it was also a tremendous time and money saver too.

Finally, the listserv had also another, more subtle function. Not only did it further familiarize me with the running of KONSOLA, with the issues facing its members, with questions about feminism and its methodology etc.; it has also created more lasting relationships between the members of KONSOLA and myself. Since interviews are often quite impersonal, often stiff and formal, one rarely gets a feeling of what the interviewee (or the researcher) is “truly like”. What I mean to say is that many people do not really get to know the person that they are interviewing, often because it is not necessary, or actually undesirable. However, since my involvement with issues of Polish feminism has always been of professional and personal

importance, since I plan to dedicate much of my future to pursue those issues, and since one day I wish to be a part of a Polish feminist organization, I truly embraced this familiarizing aspect of the listserv. Not being able to be in Poland and participate in a feminist organization more fully, this method ameliorated some of those issues. First of all, through communication via the listserv, I got to know many of KONSOLA members better – I have seen their responses to issues of importance to them; they often expressed their opinions arguing for them quite strongly; they fought, talked and participated in conversations with each other and myself in ways that were way above and beyond the limits of a standard interview. This aspect of the listserv, I have to say, has been one of crucial importance to me.

Additional sources

In order to examine the influence of past political history on the issue of feminism in Poland, I have supplemented my research with extensive use of secondary sources on the topics of feminism during the rule of the Communist Party, feminism and the Polish Catholic Church and feminism and the Solidarity movement. Those materials (encompassing articles, books, music and even several movies) provide a rich historical, cultural and political setting which will further aid me in analyzing how the concept of feminism was related to and represented by these three focal institutions after World War II in Poland (1945-1989) as well as in the current political climate.

Another important source that I wish to mention is the informal email correspondence I have held with one of the most well-known feminists in Poland, a former Plenipotentiary of Equal Status of Women and Men in Poland, Magdalena Sroda. In 2007, during one of her many lectures across Poland, Dr. Sroda was in Poznan, speaking at a University of Poznan about the

issue of women and their political power in Poland (this lecture was a part of her upcoming book tour for her book entitled *Women and Power*, which was later published in 2009). My mother, who was very aware of the topic of my dissertation research, was in attendance of that lecture and spoke to Dr. Sroda after the lecture, explaining my particular interest in this project. Dr. Sroda graciously offered my mother her email address and two days later I had written my first email to the renown feminist and received an answer within the first 15 minutes after sending the message. Dr. Sroda has been a source of a huge personal inspiration to me and the ability to be in touch with her has helped this project massively. First of all, having learned of my interests, she has pointed out to me several literature positions pertaining to my topic; new positions that were just published in Poland by up and coming young feminists (including Dr. Sroda's former students) that I might have otherwise not been aware of since my access to Polish academic literature can sometimes be limited (i.e. not being affiliated with any Polish University, my access to Universities' libraries is quite narrow). Second of all, she graciously offered to discuss with me some notions of "allergy" to feminism, its acceptance in the national arena and gender inequality in Poland that I have been writing about. Specifically, since a part of my last chapter is written about her, some historical facts were verified by the source herself. Lastly, although I was unable to meet and interview Dr. Sroda directly, even though our email correspondence was often brief and to a large extent very informal (although she was well aware of my project and this particular chapter), it had definitely made me think of my project in a different, more political way. Through that particular connection I realized although this study is very introductory in its nature, it is useful, and it opens up many more questions that could be pursued at a later time, in a miniscule as well on a larger, more national scale.

Conclusion

This project, as I mentioned before, is not meant to be a large analysis of an organization or a study of Polish feminism or even a general outline of the state of the Polish feminism currently. This project is an exploratory study of a small feminist organization in one of the major cities in Poland. Through the use of interviews and participatory observation with additional uses of new technology such as listserv and emails and supplemented by secondary sources, my plan is to show why the issue of feminism and feminist theory in Poland is not only still largely relegated to the academic sphere, but furthermore, why it is still so vehemently opposed by the larger Polish population – as seen by the feminists themselves. In the chapters that follow I wish to trace how feminism in Poland first gained its problematic connotation, how the division between Polish and otherwise Western feminism can further fuel this tricky connection, and how the Polish government has approached gender equality and feminism in particular since we entered the governmental organization of the European Union. I finish my project by looking at what the office of the Plenipotentiary of Equal Status for Women and Men can offer Poles and in the concluding section of this dissertation I pose the question of what is that is to come.

CHAPTER TWO: POLAND UNDER COMMUNISM - 1945-1989

In the previous chapter I outlined the major works of literature on which I will be basing my arguments and explained the methodology of this particular study. At this point, I would like to start the analysis of the problematic relationship of feminism and gender equality to Polish society. In order to do so, I want to start with a brief contextual history of how Communism has shaped Poland, and what was the role of gender equality in this equation, how feminism became entangled with politics and how Poles reacted to the realities of the conditions they found themselves in. This history, I believe, is crucial to the understanding of why Polish feminism is in the particular space that it is: often problematic, regularly misunderstood, frequently looked upon with suspicion and even laughed on at the national level. As I will try to explain, throughout this dissertation, such treatment is not coincidental and the roots of it can be found in recent Polish history.

Poland under Communism

On September 2nd 1945, the horrific events of World War II (WWII) came to an end. After six years of bombing, killing and destruction, my home country, Poland, was able to breathe again. Polish people, along with the rest of Europe (and the world), were ready to start a new chapter, a chapter of reconstruction of political, social and economic well-being. And of course the path to recovery is never easy or straightforward; rather it is often quite tricky, to say the least.

Before I review what Communism³ brought to the Polish people, I would like to add a small personal confession about what communism meant to me. I am doing so, because today those years of Polish history are talked about often in quite negative terms. Many remember the “big brother is watching you” incidents, the lines for toilet paper, the ever so hard to get around bureaucracy of the era. When for the context of this research I thought about my memories of the era, when I talked to my parents, family, friends and acquaintances about their reminiscences of those times, we talked about the hardships but we also mentioned the silly. And here I would like to start on a semi-positive note; meaning, I want to start by mentioning some things that made me smile while thinking about the past. Although I will not, by any means, argue that the years under Communism were easy or fun, many Poles now go back to these times with sentiment. One such example is an autobiographical comic book written by Marzena Sowa (and illustrated by her partner, Sylvain Savoia) about Marzi (Sowa herself), about a 8-9 year old girl who experiences life under Communism in Poland (2007; 2008)⁴. Reading these, I saw my own life on the pages. Although I did not live in a huge apartment building complex as she did, I also experienced the things she talked about: the lines in the empty stores, the lack of products or the uncertainty of what tomorrow will bring and whether promises that government is giving our parents will come true. As a child at that time I too remember the games we invented, the toys we desired but could not afford, the hushed conversations our parents had around the dinner table discussing the paperwork necessary to order a new heating boiler, the lines for apartment sign-ups, the uncertainty of what will be for dinner tomorrow..

³ By Polish Communism, I mean the years 1945 to 1989 during which the Soviet government under Stalin imposed its dominance over the People's Republic of Poland. These years, while featuring many improvements in the standards of living in Poland, were marred by social unrest and economic depression. For more please see Davies, 1982.

⁴For more on Sowa and her books please see: <http://www.cafebabel.co.uk/article/23689/marzena-sowa-in-communist-poland-id-dream-about-getting-a-barbie-from-pewex.html>.

Another source of sentimentalism was sent to me a while ago, incidentally, around the same time I discovered Sowa's book. A friend of mine, having heard me talking about the Communist times in Poland, sent me a YouTube video entitled: "Born in the PRL"⁵ – a remake of the famous Bruce Springsteen song "Born in the USA". The music was the same, but the words were rewritten by a Polish rock band, Snake Charmer. The lyrics tell a story of a man born during the years of the People's Republic of Poland (PRL), meaning Communist rule. In the video, the singer talks about his experiences of living in the last years of "Komuna" - he was born when "she" [Komuna] was about thirty years old, supposedly in the late 1970's, since he sings about living in the gloomy block made out of gray cement pieces⁶. Throughout the video, certain mawkish images of products available during those times flash: since Poland was cut off from the capitalistic West, our government, knowing about the prosperous black market with products from bananas to chocolates, jeans and other goods, produced our own "alternative" merchandise that supposedly were as great as those available illegally. For example, in response to Coca-Cola, we had "polo-kokta", instead of real chocolate, we had products "of chocolate likeness" and fake orange juice in form of dried yellowish/orange-ish powdered sugar. The singer goes on to describe one August afternoon when a "mustached" man jumped over the fence, hinting ever so gently at the famous jump made by Lech Walesa that started the August strikes (in 1980) and led to the uprising of the Solidarity movement and its consequences⁷. The

⁵The video is available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bFfJSpwPmTk>.

⁶ Complete lyrics for this song can be found at http://www.tekstowo.pl/piosenka,snake_charmer,born_in_the_prl.html.

⁷ On the morning of 14 August of 1980 a mass of unhappy and angry shipyard workers were arguing with the shipyard manager. Lech Walesa, himself sacked from the shipyard, climbed over the wall, announced himself to the crowd and declared the start of an occupation strike. His jump became known around the world as the "mythical jump of Lech Walesa" or the jump that started it all, the jump to freedom or as others have called it, the jump that started the end of Communism in Poland. For more see Barker, 2005.

song then describes one Sunday morning in December when many kids that gathered in front of their TV's to watch "Teleranek" (a weekly program for children airing regularly on Polish public television channel one, on Sunday mornings at 9:00am), only to find the TV was silent. It was a few hours later when Polish citizens found out that martial law was instated (December 13, 1981), since as the song goes on to describe, Russian tanks took Poland as its aim. The song later describes the round table talks of 1989 and the fact that communism fell and in its place, "came USA". On its last note, the singer offers a reflection that although many argued that living under capitalism is easier (in a variety of aspects as one can imagine), he himself is happy to have been born during Komuna times that now feel like a completely different era, light years away. Why? Because it was a unique experience. And I have to say, to some extent, I too share his enthusiasm. Although life was hard then, since money could only go so far since often store shelves were empty, we, kids of that era, often had to rely on our imaginations to keep us entertained; we spent time outside on our lawns playing and talking to each other; we were creative and happy without the gadgets that so many of us today take for granted. Those years also forced us Poles to be inventive and original while fixing things – not having Home Depot to buy equipment to repair one's washing machine, I was taught by my father to fix things around the house with ordinary everyday things one might find in their garage. And most of all, we, Poles young and old were taught to work together for a common goal. That is why, among other things, I am nostalgic when I think about those years, when I think about those times. We might have not had much, but on some levels we were richer than ever.

Historical background

So what happened to Poland after WWII? In the second half of 1945, Poland found itself under the sphere of domination of the Soviets (then USSR). The previously democratic country,

for which our forefathers have fought so hard, now changed to an authoritarian type of a government under the rule of Stalin. At the now infamous Yalta Conference (February 4–11, 1945) the leaders of the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union (President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and General Secretary Joseph Stalin) met for the specific purpose of discussing Europe's postwar reorganization⁸. Poland was the first item on the Soviet agenda. Ironically, Stalin, just fresh out of administering the Katyn massacre⁹, argued about the importance of Poland due to its geographical position – as a corridor to invasion of the Soviet Union. What was decided (in terms of Poland) was as follows: Poland would lose its eastern territories (the border would now follow the Curzon Line) but was to be compensated for that by extending its Western borders at the expense of Germany. Furthermore, Stalin promised free elections in Poland despite the Soviet sponsored provisional government recently installed by him in Polish territories occupied by the Red Army. Furthermore Winston Churchill argued that the UK could never be content with any solution that did not leave Poland a free and independent state (Berthon and Potts, 2006). Stalin pledged to permit free elections in Poland, but as we know from the pages of history today, he forestalled ever honoring his promise. And yet again, just like in 1939, Western allies failed to help and Poland slipped under the influence of the power of Stalin (Davies, 1982).

⁸ For a great and comprehensive history of Poland please see Davis, 1982.

⁹ “Katyn massacre” or “Katyn Forest Massacre” refers to the mass execution of 22,000 Polish officers, policemen and civil servants carried out by the Soviet secret police, otherwise known as NKVD in April and May of 1940. The official document was approved and signed by the Soviet Central Committee of the Communist Party, including its leader, Joseph Stalin. In 1943 the Nazis exhumed the Polish dead and blamed the Soviets. In 1944, having retaken the Katyn area from the Nazis, the Soviets exhumed the Polish dead again and blamed the Nazis. It was not until the year 1989, with the collapse of Soviet Power, that the Premier Gorbachev finally admitted that the Soviet NKVD had executed the Poles, and confirmed two other burial sites similar to the site at Katyn. Stalin's order of March 1940 to execute by shooting some 25,700 Poles, including those found at the three sites, was also disclosed with the collapse of Soviet Power. The events of this horror had been made into a movie entitled “Katyn,” (2007) directed by the acclaimed Polish director, an Honorary Academy Award Winner, Andrzej Wajda whose father was among those killed in the massacre.

July 22nd 1944 became known as the day that Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa (PRL), the Polish People's Republic was born, according to the first official organ of power: PKWN – Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego (Polish Committee of National Freedom). In 1948 the Polish United Workers Party (PZPR)¹⁰ was established unifying the congress of the Polish Workers' Party (PPR) and Polish Socialist Party (PPS). The creation of PZPR was possible because the PPS activists who opposed unification (or rather absorption by Communists) were dismissed from the party. Similarly, the members of the PPR who were accused of 'rightist – nationalistic deviation' were expelled (Topolski, 2007). Under PZPR, in the new economic system, Poland moved toward a centrally-planned economy. Nationalization reform passed and in 1946 all enterprises with over 50 employees were nationalized, with no compensation to Polish owners. Private property and market were also subordinated to central planning government.

The punishment of Germany for the war was intended to include large-scale reparations to Poland. However, those were truncated into insignificance by the break-up of Germany into east and west. Poland was then to receive her share from the GDR. However, these efforts were truncated as the Soviets pressured the Polish Government to cease receiving the reparations far ahead of schedule, as a sign of the so-called 'friendship' between the two new communist neighbors and, therefore, now friends (Hofhansel, 2005). Thus, without the fully deserved reparations and without the massive Marshall Plan, Poland's postwar recovery was much harder than it could have been. Following these developments, it is no wonder that at the beginning the centralized Polish economy was growing (due to its low starting point and a high level of investment), but with time it started to slow down due to the failure of the government in

¹⁰In Polish: Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza (PZPR).

addressing more complicated economic problems such as quickly rising inflation levels. Soon enough, without other solutions, the government started to hike up food prices. Those mounting problems led to a the falling GDP during the late 1960s and beyond (Balcerowicz, 1997)

In December of 1970, Edward Gierek replaced Wladyslaw Gomulka (who held the position for 14 years, from 1956) as the first party leader. Gierek won people's support with a promise of change and the betterment of the standard of living of the individual Poles. However, his "golden era" did not come without a price tag. The brief growth of the Polish economy became possible due to enormous foreign loans that Gierek obtained, mostly from the USA and Western Germany (Topolski, 2007). The philosophy behind these maneuvers was as follows: those loans will increase potential Polish exports to such a degree than not only will Poland be able to pay off these loans quickly; in addition, this tactic will preserve a high level of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and consumption. But, as we know today, such a situation did not pan out. In reality, the loans proved to be too large and investments that they were tied to were ill placed and often ineffective. After the rapid growth of national consumption and GDP in years 1971-1978, Poland entered a long phase of national economic recession, on a top of constantly growing foreign debt (Topolski, 2007).

Polish women under Communism

It must be stated that gender equality lay at the core of Marxist-Leninist politics – where communism was the ultimate goal, promising finally equal opportunity for all. As Marx and Engels wrote in their Manifesto: "In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all" (cited in Tucker, 1978: 491). I would speculate that the way gender equality was used in Poland was for power, rather than true politically ideological reasons

(for the so-called “betterment of the nation”). Eradicating gender differences would not go against the traditional view of the woman and her role strongly supported and underlined by the Catholic Church, but it would also encourage women to become productive members of the economy and therefore help in reconstructing the war-devastated infrastructure. Unfortunately, the issue of domestic and reproductive labor was not addressed by the party in charge (Zajicek and Calasanti, 1998: 511). Ideologically then, at least in theory, women were supposed to be equal to men, were encouraged to work, and to become industrious associates in society. As Eva Welcnic (1993) notes, “it was Poland that emerged as a forerunner of women’s movements in the Eastern bloc”, given the fact that it had created the government’s Plenipotentiary for Women’s Affairs (more on the topic of the Plenipotentiary in chapter 6). The generous government of the People’s Republic of Poland even provided women with an organization that would take special care of their issues – Liga Kobiet Polskich (LKP)¹¹, which was the only legal women's organization allowed to exist under communism. The League’s activities were similar to those of other political organizations – sending members to meetings or conferences and making elaborate statements about the betterment of the women’s status. Leaders of LKP spoke frequently about the achieved equality of sexes in the socialist and communist countries. However “their words were not meant to represent reality, but to substitute for it. And they did. The regime was not afraid of big words and it knew how to manipulate them” (Gizycki, 1996).

It was a sort of Orwellian nightmare of “newspeak,” where one says things that have no basis and are contradictory to reality. The League of Polish Women was not an organization based on feminist or even gender-equal principles, but on the basis of an adjustment of women to the new socio-economic situation in which our nation found itself. In order to lead women into

¹¹ Eng. – literally, “The league of Polish women”, also referred to as “Women’s League”.

the workforce and help in rebuilding our economy, the party leadership, with the special help of LPK-disseminated images of the “new woman,” created a central image of femininity as that of “a strong, young and healthy woman driving a tractor or working in the construction industry” (Zajicek and Calasanti, 1998: 512). She was strong as a bull; and during the course of the day was able not only to lift bags of cement, drive a tractor, and help in building socialist housing, but also had time for cleaning, cooking, working and most of all being a productive member of society. This so-called image of “productivist femininity” (Zajicek and Calasanti, 1998: 512) stood in stark opposition to the image of women created by the church – the image of “Matka Polka¹²” who emphasized the physical and biological differences between the sexes. Because of such an image, women became viewed through a lens of “female-men”¹³, and this view is still widespread, as I will explain later. Interestingly, one important factor that was left out, was sexuality. Party women and women workers were not to be sexual. Good party women were to be builders, helpers, comrades but not lovers, mothers, wives. Sexuality was not something to be touched, approached or argued for, for sex, it seemed would distract Poles from the importance of Communist politics.

However, it is important to note that image alone, although significant, was not enough. To further solidify its politics, the state instituted several laws and policies viewed as favorable to gender equality. In order to support the ideology, new provisions were made that allowed women certain freedoms. A few that are especially important to mention: “state-funded kindergartens for the children of working mothers, easily accessible and fully paid maternity

¹² Eng. Polish Mother – meaning the traditional Catholic view of domesticated woman. For more please see Fidelis (2001).

¹³ Polish: babochłop. The closest literal translation would be “chicks with dicks” but what the Polish word means is very manly person with tiny female attributes (i.e. breasts). It is a very derogatory term.

leave, and divorce [became] just a formality” (Welnic, 1993: 310). One was especially important: in 1952, gender equality was codified in the new Polish Constitution, which gave Polish women equality in rights in political, social and economic matters of life. Other provisions allowed for women to work in non-traditional jobs, such as coal mining, and yet others provided gendered employment quotas (Zajicek and Calasanti, 1998: 512).

As often it happens in life, the reality of everyday living differed greatly from the disseminated gender equal “promised-land” picture that the government tried to put together. The reality was, for many women in Poland, quite hard. First of all, it is important to underline the fact that all those so called “progressive” political moves that were intended to ensure inclusion of women in the labor force were viewed by many Poles (women and men) as suspicious and problematic. They viewed them as further indoctrination of the hated policies of the foreign-instated power, that is, the USSR. Secondly, the reality defied theory when “even the women who wanted to join in the building of a Communist Poland complained of barriers in the party hierarchy” and “of patronizing attitudes displayed by their male comrades” (Stachniak, 1995: 70). In other words, gender equality was really paper-thin. Those women who went into the workforce often started and ended their careers in the fields of secretaries, typists and receptionists; they did not become bosses, managers or ministers. Furthermore, many women saw the LKP organization as ineffective and a dead-end, since they did not represent the needs of those it claimed to, and at the same time the Women’s Chapters of the ruling government party were quickly closed in late 1940s.

Since the government was stepping into the working lives of all Poles, because of failed promises, because of so much absurdity and bureaucracy, due to constant surveillance, a growing list of forbidden items or impossibilities of travel (especially to the West), Polish people took

their rebellion into the site of their homes, the sphere that has been traditionally been seen (and to some extent still continues to be seen) as the women's domain. One such mode of rebellion was the eradication of propaganda that kids brought themselves from schools. As the government expanded its list of prohibited books and articles (Osęka, 2008), mothers and grandmothers fought the quiet battle of straightening out the thoughts of children whose ideas were based on whatever they heard and learned in school about the greatness of the Soviet Union and its mighty leader, Joseph Stalin. As one woman recalled,

I still remember when I read my first 'revolutionary' composition to my mother. She listened patiently until I finished off my flowery declarations, proclaiming my love for the People's Republic of Poland, my Communist fatherland shining with justice and truth. My teacher praised me highly for it, but my mother's face froze. I can still recall her disdain, "People's republic, justice and truth!" We had a long talk then, a serious talk, made even more powerful by the need to keep it all secret. I was told that our society was infiltrated by informants, and that no so long ago, before Stalin's death, conversations like ours could have brought severe repressions (Stachniak, 1995: 70).

The point of this conversation was not to learn to vehemently oppose Communism, which at that point, was still firmly in power, but rather, she recalls, "it was my duty to preserve my independence of thought" (Stachniak, 1995: 72) because the propaganda of the government was omni-present¹⁴. It was a quiet battle that Polish women took upon themselves every day because it was left to them to teach children the true story of Stalin and Communism; it was their job to explain to young children how to maneuver in the world of historic deception and to install in them those truly patriotic values that their fathers fought for.

¹⁴ For an interesting illustration of life under Communism I would recommend Krzysztof Zanussi's 1996 movie, *At Full Gallop* (in Polish: *Cwał*).

In terms of feminism and gender equality, Polish women during the era of Communism did not feel a strong sisterhood bond with the feminists in the West. On the contrary, the goals of the feminists of the second wave seemed not only oceans away but sometimes even light years away. Polish women could have only dreamt of the “housewife's syndrome” (Friedan, 1983) since no one asked them whether they would like to work. The truth was that for most of the families, one salary was not enough to live on, so most of women had to work in order to keep themselves and their families above the poverty line (Stachniak, 1995). On top of their roles as workers, women in Poland (and other communist countries of Eastern Europe) were still mothers and wives and the political system also encouraged, or rather, forced them to also be politically active Comrades. In other words, Polish women had a “triple burden” (Einhorn, 1993) to carry on their shoulders. As Stachniak puts it, “In a country still recuperating from the cruelty of war, from Stalinist persecution, and from Communist reforms that left the economy chronically ill, Polish women, tired and overworked, could not see beyond the images of full stores, comfortable suburban houses, time-saving appliances, and sparkling bathrooms in the 'glorious' lives of American women” (Stachniak, 73). If the fight for American women of the era was for the right to shed the domestic routine and get rid of the “problem that has no name” (Friedan, 1963), their Polish counterparts were not on board. For Polish women, the fight was for survival of true Polish nationality. Polish mothers had to teach the kids how important our language and culture is, not the one forced by the media and governmental propaganda, but the true significance of our flag, the colors behind them (white and red representing purity and courage, respectively), the history of our nation, and its perseverance while facing the worst odds.

The beginning of the End

In the midst of the huge economic crisis (which was also related to the oil crisis of 1973),

Poland was entering another phase of change in the socio-political system. Polish people, tired of promises with no back-up, started to resent the government more and more. Opposition in the form of trade unions (even though those were made illegal by the government), student groups, clandestine newspapers and publishers started forming and gaining in strength. Students, workers, and ordinary Poles had had enough. After the mass strikes that hit Poland in August of 1980, after the mustached Lech Walesa jumped the fence, the party finally allowed Solidarity Trade Union to form – and within months Walesa’s movement gained notoriety not only in Poland, but also abroad¹⁵.

During this time of tremendous turmoil, on October 16, 1978, the Polish people experienced a sort of social and political miracle, when, during its conclave, the College of Cardinals in Vatican city elected the then Archbishop of Krakow, Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, as the 264th Pope. This event, monumental in its meaning at the time, further underlined the growing problem of the Communist government. Upon hearing this news, Gierek, the Party leader, allegedly said to his cabinet: “O God” and turning to his wife added “this is a monumental moment for Polish nation and a grave news for us¹⁶” Poland, a devout Catholic country, saw in the persona of John Paul II (Wojtyła’s chosen Papal name) hope for a brighter future, especially since Wojtyła openly supported Solidarity. When in 1979 the Pope visited Poland, half a million people heard him speak in Warsaw. Although he never called for rebellion, he did encourage the creation of an "alternative Poland" with social institutions independent of the government. In such a way, when the next crisis came, the nation would present a united front, as he later explained in his memoirs published after his death (Pope John Paul II, 2005).

¹⁵ For more on Solidarity, its inception and its goals please see: Staniszki, 1984; Garton Ash, 1984 and Ost, 2006.

¹⁶ There is a poignant moment portraying this particular scene in a biopic movie about the life of John Paul II entitled *Karol, the man who became a Pope* (2006). The quote comes from Walaszczyk et al, 2008.

Solidarity and the “woman question”

Before moving on to the economic and social transformation that Poland was about to embark on, I wish to address one particular issue that has often been overlooked. Although much has been written about Lech Walesa and the success of the Solidarity Trade Union, the question of women’s roles in this endeavor had just recently started to be addressed. In *Breaking the Barrier: The Rise of Solidarity in Poland*, Lawrence Goodwyn (1991) argues that strikes and social upheavals that swept Poland from 1956 to 1980 and that led to the creation of Solidarity Trade Union grew out of workers themselves not from the intelligentsia – although of course members such as Michnik and Kuron and others did play a role. But Goodwyn omits the important role that women played. Even Michnik himself, in his *Letters from Prison and other Essays* (1987) talks about Solidarity and its role without mentioning the gender component – he argues for importance of the opposition, the support of the Catholic Church but never mentions those who kept Solidarity going after the arrest of the Solidarity leaders in December of 1981, the women who practically ran the underground. Shanna Penn (1994; 2005) who had studied the movement and women behind it from a feminist perspective writes about a specific form of alienation – alienation from being acknowledged, from being a part of “something”. In her article (1994) she labels this women’s estrangement from Solidarity’s leadership and recognition of their work as Poland’s “best national kept secret”, a poignant title for an article. Penn’s interest in this topic later translated into a full book discussing this particular issue and her interviews with women such as Helena Luczywo, Barbara Labuda, Joanna Szczesna and Ewa Kulik among others. To further illustrate her point on the dismissal of women’s roles by the male leadership of Solidarity, I wish to bring one example which I think speaks volumes on this particular issue. Penn writes about Danuta Winiarska, one of the women activists who tried to revitalize the opposition movement after the arrests of male leadership. Fearing that as a woman, her

propositions and suggestions would not be listened to, and furthermore anxious to keep the momentum of Solidarity going, Winiarska came up with a plan to “invent” a male leader, a man named Abramczyk, whom she supposedly represented and whose messages she was just passing on. As Penn writes, “No one challenged her communiqué” (1994: 63). Furthermore, after Winiarska was repeatedly asked for meetings with the fake Abramczyk, she asked a friend to “fill in” this particular role. Her friend agreed, moved to Lublin, served as the figurehead, followed her instructions and in such a clever manner, Winiarska held on to the control of the underground. Although the idea of faking a person can be seen as quite drastic, Winiarska insisted that without “him” people would not have respected her initiatives, since, as she admits to Penn, whenever she tried to join an activist or study groups in the 1970s, her efforts had been completely ignored or relegated to serving coffee (1994: 63).

Penn is not the only author that tackled the problematic relationship Solidarity had with women. In her book, Ewa Kondratowicz, a Polish author who interviewed 20 female Solidarity leaders tackles another issue of importance – the two different notions of solidarity. Kondratowicz writes about “solidarity” as opposed to “Solidarity”: where the first one stands for solidarity to the nation, to survival of the opposition, and camaraderie that was often overlooked because it was not “outrageous” or “spectacular”, which the other kind was. These women did not jump fences, were not in the media, their faces were not represented on pages of Time or Newsweek magazines. Rather, their battles, their work, their dedication was a quiet one, often away from the cameras that reported the news to the nation. But this “solidarity” was one that was possibly stronger than mythical “Solidarity” trade union (2001). Why? Because it was them that really held the movement together in the moment where it could have fallen apart. One can only wonder what would have happened if women such as Barbara Labuda, Danuta Winiarska or

Helena Luczywo (among many others) did not step in. Solidarity could have fallen apart and who knows how the events would unfold.

And yet, the question remain, why did the *Women who defeated Communism in Poland* (as the second part of the Penn's 2005 book reads) never talked about their work? Because Solidarity was seen as a male movement, and women were there only to support their men. It was the male fight for democracy, and women were pushed to the side, and their involvement and roles became an afterthought for many for years to come.

Martial Law and the fall of Communism

With Solidarity membership soaring up to 10 million members, the ruling party knew that something had to give. As Naomi Klein so eloquently puts it, the Communist party was scared because Walesa knew “how to beat the system” since he and workers like him were “pupils of the system” (Klein, 2008: 173). But Solidarity's growing power and demands frightened Moscow and the central party felt a need to put pressure on the Polish leader, General Wojciech Jaruzelski, who in December of 1981 under continued push from the Soviet leaders to do something, declared martial law¹⁷. For a few years “police hour” (curfew) was in existence and any travel abroad (especially to the Western countries) became problematic, if not often impossible for many ordinary Poles.

By 1988 things were slowly calming down. In Moscow, a new moderate came to power in the person of Mikhail Gorbachev, and even Communists in Poland were slowly giving in to the pressure. From February 6 to April 4, 1989 the now legendary Round Table talks were held in Warsaw and in the finalized agreement the Central Party legalized Solidarity, allowed for the

¹⁷ Jaruzelski later wrote about his decision in his 1992 book, *Martial Law... Why?*.

formation of other independent trade unions, and an arrangement was signed to hold the first democratic elections. The results, as Klein reports, were “humiliating for the Communists and glorious for Solidarity: of the 261 seats in which Solidarity ran candidates, it won 260 of them” (175). However, it has to be noted that the elections were semi-free, because even before they were held, the Communist party was guaranteed 65% of the seats in the Sejm (lower house) and Solidarity was allowed to contest only the remaining seats. Nonetheless, Solidarity’s win was so far-reaching that it gave the union effective control of the government. The time for a transformation was upon the Polish people.

Fresh from its win, Solidarity needed a new economic plan for the betterment of the Polish condition. Shortly after Solidarity’s extraordinary victory, Walesa said: “To our misfortune, we have won” (cited in Klein, 2007). As Klein notes, the “debt was over \$40 billion, inflation was at 600 percent, there were severe food shortages and a thriving black market. Many factories were making products that, with no buyers in sight, were destined to rot in warehouses.” (174). It was quite a cruel reality – freedom was finally there, but not too many Poles were celebrating. Not only were their paychecks worthless, but furthermore, Poles also spent their days standing in lines for daily living products such as bread and butter, if there were still any left in the stores.

The new government suddenly had lots to deal with. Instead of re-building a new economy that Poles have so long dreamed of and argued for, the movement was forced to deal with a more pressing issue of avoiding complete meltdown and potential mass starvation (Klein, 2007: 175). Although the government was sure that certain changes had to be made, the questions remained – what and equally importantly, how? Where would the help from and how would it be implemented?

Jeffrey Sachs and “the Shock Therapy”

What was known was the fact that some form of monetary help was necessary for debt relief and aid in getting out of the crisis. As Klein poignantly writes, “if any government deserved that kind of lifeline it was the one headed by Solidarity, which had just pulled off the Eastern Block’s first democratic ouster of a Communist regime in four decades. Surely, after all the Cold War railing against totalitarianism behind the Iron Curtain, Poland’s new rulers could have expected a little help” (176). However, as Klein writes, aid offers were not lining up.

And then a specific answer seemed to come from the mystical West. The Chicago School economists who were heavily involved with the IMF and the U.S. Treasury saw Poland and its social-economic status at the time as a perfect example of a country, which if it went through “the shock doctrine,” could potentially become a successful market economy, one where capitalism would be effectively installed (Klein, 2007). In a country where the most precious assets were still owned by a state, and where potential for privatization was enormous, so too was the promise of a rapid profit for those who chose to get involved.

But first, the IMF let Poland fall even deeper into debt and inflation. Although the U.S. administration offered \$119 million in aid (a pitiful amount for a country facing such a socio-political and economic crisis), the deal was made with an understanding that the newly elected government was expected to pay all the debts accumulated by the previous regime.

And here is where, as Klein points out, Jeffrey Sachs entered the larger political arena. His achievements were quite well known by the time the Polish crisis came into view. The “Cowboy of Economics” as one journalist fondly called him (Risen, 1990), Sachs got involved in

the Polish case a little earlier, under the guiding direction of billionaire financier George Soros, with whom he traveled to Poland. With a readiness to help, and Soros' money to cover costs of Sachs and David Lipton (a free-market economist then working for the IMF), the mission to save Poland was put together. After Solidarity's win, Sachs started working with the newly elected government. As Klein notes, with his legendary reputation preceding him [referring to his work with the governments of Latin America¹⁸] and the high-level contacts in Washington to back him up, Sachs was seen as a messiah by some of the Solidarity officials. He was viewed as the one able to unlock the aid that Poland so desperately needed, and since "he helped Bolivia land loans with the IMF and renegotiated their debts, there seemed no reason to doubt him." (177).

On January 13, 1990 the magazine *The Economist* published a long article by Jeffrey Sachs (then of Harvard University), with the poignant title "What is to be done?". His article starts with the following paragraph:

The first, basic steps to the transformation of Eastern Europe's centrally planned economies are two. One, the eastern countries must reject any lingering ideas about a "third way", such as a chimerical "market socialism" based on public ownership or worker self-management, and go straight for a western-style market economy. Two, Western Europe, for its part, must be ready and eager to work with them, providing debt relief and finance for restructuring, to bring their reformed economies in as part of a unified European market (Sachs, 1990).

On the following few pages, Sachs described outlined the steps that the West should seek to reshape the life of the entire East European region. Sachs' agenda was about creating an international environment where the domestic aspect of his policy would be the only rational

¹⁸ In 1985, Bolivia was undergoing hyperinflation and was unable to pay back its debt to the IMF. Sachs, an economic adviser to the Bolivian government at the time, drew up an extensive plan, that later became known as shock therapy, which as its goal had cutting of inflation by liberalizing the Bolivian market, ending government subsidies, eliminating quotas, as well as linking the Bolivian economy to the US Dollar. After Sachs' plan was implemented, inflation fell from 20,000% per year to 11%, though according to critics, left the country worse off than before due to a rise in unemployment, a fall in industrial output, and a fall in per capita GDP (Greenwald and Love, 1989).

course for any government to pursue. His prescriptions were accepted and of course implemented.

But what were some of the specifics of his prescriptions for the countries of the East European region? In his influential article, “Neo-Liberal Theory and Practice for Eastern Europe”, Peter Gowan, a well-respected critical political economist, broke down and clarified Sachs’s policy model and the ideas behind it. Gowan’s article also provided an analysis of the success that the Shock Therapy model has promised and the actual outcomes. According to Gowan, Sachs’ model was formulated to answer one fundamental question: “how should the entire ex-communist region of Eastern Europe and the USSR be reorganized in order to achieve, in Sachs’s words, ‘a recovery of human freedom and a democratically based rise in living standards’” (Gowan, 1995: 5). In other words, Sachs was looking for a solution to make Eastern Europe a part of the capitalist system. And although there were some concerned (Gowan quotes Ralph Dahrendorf) about the “concerted, Western-directed plan for regional social engineering” (Gowan, 1995: 5), nonetheless, many accepted Sachs’s notion that the “West ... can plan in such a way as to enable the peoples of the region to avoid costly wrong turns, and he simultaneously believes that, left to their own collective efforts, they would take wrong turns or indeed might not opt for his goals at all” (Gowan, 6). Basically, Dr. Sachs’s prescriptions were going to work. Period.

So what were the details of the formula that put Poland on a fast track to capitalism? To summarize Sachs’ key points, his prescriptions were as follows:

- 1) Breaking up the East-Central European countries from the USSR (breaking up the “Comecon” - the economic organization of the Communist states in Eastern Europe)
- 2) Making a switch to a particular form of capitalist institutional structure in each state a precondition for normalizing relations with that state

- 3) imposition therefore, of a specific structure (“hub-and-spokes”) of the relationship between the West and East-Central Europe, with each target state in the region relating to the others principally via its relationship with the Western hub
- 4) starting the process of regional transformation in the states with the most politically sympathetic governments and then using both negative and positive incentives to extend the required mix of domestic policies across the region as a whole
- 5) the entire process would be carried forward by the capacity and will of Western states to provide, in the main via their multilateral organizations, the necessary positive incentives for cooperative governments and constraints for uncooperative governments
- 6) the revival of economic activity in cooperative target states would take the form of trade-led growth directed toward Western Europe, compensating for Comecon’s collapse
- 7) Cooperative states would gain full access to the market of the EC [European Community] (partly through radically changing some of its key institutional pillars, such as its trade regime and Common Agricultural Policy), very substantial economic assistance and eventual membership of a greatly enlarged EC (points outlined in Sachs, 1990).

Of course, Sachs’s ideas about the “westernization” of Eastern Europe were in line with the views of the American and British governments on the topic of transformation of Eastern Europe as a region. His views contradicted the alternative solutions that were more aligned with the French government’s approach, which included: 1) continuation of mutual economic linkage between the former Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) region, as well as the USSR; 2) Leaving the evolution of socio-economic forces in each country to the interplay of forces within the country concerned, without using Western pressure to impose a particular system; 3) Making the emphasis of Western policy that of economic revival in the region as a whole, using, for example, a regional development bank for that purpose; and finally, 4) Rejection of the perspective of bringing some ex-communist countries into the EC in the short or medium term. Instead, offering a pan-European confederation embracing both the EC and the East, including the USSR (Gowan, 1995; 6).

According to Sachs, breaking the Comecon region was a key point in the process of transformation of those Eastern European economies, which would in effect, start the competitive race by those countries in preparation for their entry to the West European market. For leaving the Comecon common market untouched, as “a precursor to integration with the West” would be nothing more than “a poor man’s club” (Gowan, 1995: 7). Any form of hybrid socio-economic system was also rejected by Sachs, because, he argued, on those grounds, market socialism would prove to be unworkable. “The East European states ‘must reject... ideas about a ‘third way’ and go straight for a western-style market economy” (Gowan, 1995: 7). So what would be the outcome of the Shock Therapy advocated by the Harvard economics professor? As Peter Gowan writes, “At a regional level the path lay through the gradual absorption of the states concerned into the Western economy institutionalized in the various multilateral organizations and especially the EC. The end product would be a unification of Europe in a single (reformed) EC market. This would generate, on a regional scale, the desired outcome of prosperous capitalist democracy” (Gowan, 1995: 8). That was going to be the best solution, at least the best for the West.

The Balcerowicz Plan

In Poland, the one person known for his implementation of Sachs’s Shock Therapy plan was economist Leszek Balcerowicz. As mentioned earlier, after 45 years of Communist rule, Poland seemed unfit, to say the least, to join the rest of the capitalist world. According to some sources (Polish Central Statistical Office, 1994; Gola, 2003), Polish inflation reached a staggering 640% in 1989 (compared to 1.5% in Czech Republic, 1.5% in Slovakia, 18.9% in Hungary, 10.0% in Bulgaria and 0.6% in Romania), and was constantly rising. In terms of technology and innovation, the majority of state-owned monopolies and holdings were deemed

ineffective and quite obsolete. Although unemployment in Poland was officially non-existent before the 1989 transformation (there was, of course unofficial latent unemployment but it was hard to assess its size), the wages were low, and the shortage economy¹⁹ was evident in the lack of even most basic foods in stores.

With the end of communism looming in the air, there was an overall agreement on the view that the transformation to capitalism and a market economy would bring an increase in the number of unemployed citizens (Gardawski, 2002). As Juliusz Gardawski writes, “even before martial law was declared in 1981, Professor Czeslaw Boborowski, the renowned Polish economist, predicted the rationalization of the economy would result in 3 million people losing their jobs. His forecasts proved correct” (Gardawski, 2002). In 1990, the unemployment rate reached 6.5%, then almost doubled in 1991 (12.2%) and continued to grow, reaching over 16% in 1993 and then slowly receding to just under 10% in 1996 - 9.6% to be exact (Polish Central Statistical Office, 1994; Gola, 2003).

So how did this huge transformation unfold? To make a long story much shorter, for the purpose of this project, I will only point to key moments and issues that started this change²⁰. In September of 1989, a commission of experts including Leszek Balcerowicz (Poland's leading economist and a president of the commission), along with Prof. Jeffrey Sachs, Prof. Stanislaw Gomulka, Dr. Stefan Kawalec and Dr. Wojciech Misiag prepared a plan of extensive reforms that when implemented, would start the Polish transformation from Communism to capitalism, as operating in Western Europe and the USA. On October 6 of the same year, this program was

¹⁹It is important to note that the shortage economy did not necessarily mean that items were not being produced, but rather, that the goods demanded vastly exceeded the amount of goods available at a given price.

²⁰For a more complete picture of the Polish transformation to capitalism please see Balcerowicz, 1997.

introduced and presented to the Polish population through public television, and in December, the Polish Sejm passed a packet of ten acts, which were all signed by the President on December 31, 1989. They were as follows:

- a) Act on Financial Economy Within State-owned Companies, allowed for state-owned businesses to declare bankruptcy and the fictional arrangement during which companies were able to exist even if their effectiveness and accountability was almost nonexistent.
- b) Act on Banking Law that forbade financing the state budget deficit by the national central bank and forbade the issuance of new currency.
- c) Act on Credits that abolished preferential laws on credits for state-owned companies and tied interest to inflation.
- d) Act on Taxation of Excessive Wage Rise, introducing the so-called “popiwiek” tax limiting the wage increase in state-owned companies in order to limit hyperinflation.
- e) Act on New Rules of Taxation, introducing common taxation for all companies and abolishing special taxes that could previously have been applied to private companies through means of administrative decision.
- f) Act on Economic Activity of Foreign Investors, allowing foreign companies and private people to invest in Poland and export their profits abroad.
- g) Act on Foreign Currencies, introducing internal exchangeability of the zloty and abolishing the state monopoly in international trade.
- h) Act on Customs Law, creating a uniform customs rate for all companies.
- i) Act on Employment, regulating the duties of unemployment agencies.
- j) Act on Special Circumstances Under Which a Worker Could be Laid Off, protecting the workers of state firms from being fired in large numbers and guaranteeing unemployment grants and severance pay (Poland, Economic Program: Main goals”; accepted by the Council of Ministers in 1989).

This packet of ten reforms was approved by the IMF whose support proved quite important since Polish national debt in various foreign banks and governments had surpassed \$42 billion US dollars (\$42.3 to be exact). That sum translated to almost 65% of the Polish GDP in 1989 (Poland, World Economic Outlook Database, April 2010). The IMF had granted Poland a stabilization fund worth about \$1 billion and an additional stand-by credit of \$720 million. Following the generosity of the IMF, the World Bank (WB) had granted Poland yet additional credits for modernization of the export of Polish food products as well as other goods. Foreign governments also followed the IMF and WB and paid off some of the former Communist debt -

about 50% of the sum of debt capital and all accumulated interest rates up to year 2001 (Polish Central Statistical Office, 1994; Gola, 2003).

Effects of the Balcerowicz Plan

With passing of the reforms and the larger socio-political change that was taking place on the Polish national arena, many Poles were anticipating positive outcomes of the transformation, although some critics (Nasilowski, 1997; Kolodko, 1992; Kaleta, 1994) feared the negative consequences. And the effects, those anticipated and the unexpected, were plentiful. In terms of the positive ones, many will argue that the packet of the reforms passed greatly limited the government's influence over the Polish economy (Balcerowicz, 1997; Gach, 1993). Price-fixing was lifted from many products, allowing prices to be dictated by the market, rather than the Central Statistical Office. With opening of our markets, the shelves filled out with a variety of products and even the phenomena of lines to the stores went away. Furthermore, internal debt was greatly reduced, by close to 3% of GNP (Gross National Product), since state subsidies to coal, electricity and petroleum were greatly limited. And even though the initial social cost of the transformation was considered quite high, with 1.1 million workers at state-owned firms losing jobs, by 1992 over 600,000 new private companies were created, providing employment for over 1.5 million people. Even inflation that was seemingly running out of control for the first few years, slowed down and the Polish economy seemed to be getting back on track (Semeko, 2004).

I do want to point out the fact that the idea behind the Balcerowicz's Plan was to sacrifice short-term gains for long term growth in Poland (Balcerowicz, 1997). Some argue that without that particular transformation, Poland would have emerged from the years of Communist rule as

a much poorer country. As support for those claims, those researchers point out to the fact that Poland's annual growth between 1989 and 2000 was the highest of all the post-communist economies (Havrylyshyn, 2007).

Yet not all effects were positive and some critics voiced their opinions quite loudly (Nasilowski, 1997; Kolodko, 1992; Kaleta, 1994). Among them was Polish populist leader, head of the Self-Defense Party and future Deputy Prime Minister of Poland, Andrzej Lepper²¹. As mentioned above, unemployment soared, due to the wave of bankruptcies of inefficient, state-owned industrial giants that left 20% of Poles without a job. Areas especially hit by this development were rural areas of Poland which were previously collectivized by Communist into state-owned farms²². However, supporters of the plan will quickly point out that these particular reforms only showed unemployment that was already present but not public acknowledged under the Communist regime. Maybe Poland should have followed models of transformation like that of Hungary and Czech Republic, as some prominent Polish critics of the Balcerowicz's Plan, Grzegorz Kolodko (1992), Prof. Zdzisław Sadowski and Ryszard Bugaj suggested. And even Balcerowicz himself admitted to overlooking some important social aspects in his plan: when faced with the immiseration and unemployment caused by IMF approved 'shock therapy' in Poland, he mused that he had forgotten to factor in the element of human motivation into his calculations (Balcerowicz, 1997).

In November of 1990 an entire world watched as Poland elected its national hero, the man whom Time Magazine named the "Man of the Year" for the year 1981 (Sancton, 1982) to its highest level position. Lech Walesa, the man who jumped the fence, the face of the Solidarity

²¹ I will have much more to say about Lepper, his party and his leadership in Chapter Four.

²² In Polish: Państwowe Gospodarstwo Rolne (PGR).

movement, became the first President in the fully democratic country. Finally Poland was shaking off the years of war and constant upheaval and was moving forward in a new market economy as prescribed by its economic leader, Mr. Balcerowicz. Jan Krzysztof Bielecki, at Walesa's request, formed a government and served as its Prime Minister until October 1991, introducing world prices and greatly expanding the scope of private enterprise. A new era for Poland had begun.

Young Polish feminists and their view on the past

As I am writing these words, the years of the transformation are long behind us. It was more than two decades ago when the new democratic Poland emerged but the distaste of what happened during Communism, of the lies and deceptions, the ever-present propaganda, the remembrance of unfulfilled promises and hardships of everyday are still fresh in memories of many. Whenever they are asked today about Communism, many ordinary Poles put on an ironic smirk and start to recall personal stories of struggle, the absurdity of the times and sigh. And that's the reaction of Poles, young and old, women and men, workers and those who belonged to the Party.

In terms of women's rights and gender equality of that period, Polish women often talk about the fact how cheated they felt. The government was promising new paths for womanhood, equality of opportunity for women workers and yet it failed to address basic women's problems such as household labor and childcare. When I asked the members of KONSOLA about their memories of Communism and the issues of women's rights during that time, many mentioned

the bitter legacy that Communism left in that field. As one of them stated, “that’s what mockery of feminism was about²³”.

When I asked Bozena, a young, slim, very outgoing and active member of KONSOLA on her thoughts about the Polish communist past and its influence on women's rights, she talked a lot about the famous *Man of Marble* (1976) movie by the world renowned Polish director, Andrzej Wajda. In it, a young film student, Agnieszka (played by then unknown Krystyna Janda, now a star of the Polish cinema and theater) is making her thesis movie about the fall from grace of a fictional heroic Polish bricklayer, Mateusz Birkut (played by Jerzy Radziwiłowicz), who became the Stakhanovite symbol of an of an over-achieving worker, in Nowa Huta, a new (actual) socialist city near Krakow. This woman, Agnieszka “so phenomenally played by Janda, this incredibly powerful and fighting woman is suddenly pushed away because here we have Solidarity...”, Bozena ironically stated and continued, “in the moment that Solidarity showed up, Janda, or rather Agnieszka, had to be put aside, so they had to find a place for her. And since it was known that she would not be staying home²⁴, because her character would not stand for it, they had to lock her up in jail so that men could fight for their rights 'with peace in mind'”. This of course is reminiscent of the infamous writing on the walls of Gdansk's shipyard, “Women don't interrupt us, we are fighting for Poland” (Graff, 2001: 24). In other words, women were helpful to the Communist government or to the Solidarity movement, but only to an extent. The moment women's ambitions crossed the invisible line of acceptable behaviors, suddenly they had to be put back in their place, Bozena sadly added.

²³ Bozena, personal communication (all the names have been changed to protect the interviewees). All the quotes from the interviews from now on will be labeled as follows: (name of the interviewee), personal communication.

²⁴In the movie, Agnieszka's character is not of the domestic kind and she is rarely shown in any traditional women's position – which is also why the doors in front of her are slammed often when she is doing her research.

Another member of KONSOLA, Gaja argued that “after WWII feminism in Poland did not really exist. It was later, with the Solidarity movement and during the transformation, that the talk about citizen's rights and women's rights started its real existence and entered the national arena” (Gaja, personal communication). She argues that this lack of a strong women's movement might be explained by our particular history. “We [Polish feminists] do not have such traditions, such history because we did not have sexual revolution or feminist revolution like in the USA... and that is missing and one can see that”. She paused and then continued, “here, in Poland, it was not like in Germany, where women publicly talked about having abortions, we did not have such an upheaval of all women. And most likely it will not happen anymore because in capitalism such uprisings are not profitable.” On some level this past, she argued, “is our main hardship – we did not have this history of revolts, such booms, such oppositions”. This is why, according to Gaja, the feminist movement now is in such particularly “hard and problematic position, because the chances for a stronger movement did not work out in our country”. She continued her argument in saying that “even during Solidarity, women were kept in their places. They helped to build this movement, helped to keep it going, stood next to their husbands, for what?..” Her words echoed the arguments of Ewa Kondratowicz (2001) and Shana Penn (1994 and 2005), who interviewed female members of Solidarity about their involvement in the movement and what Solidarity promised and then underdelivered for women’s cause. Gaja, after a brief silence, finished her statement: “Their [women’s] rights were once again forgotten once the change was about to happen”. And again, women’s equality had to await a better climate.

Karolina, a woman in her thirties, who is also a licensed psychologist, when asked about the past, argued that the entire Solidarity movement was closely tied with the Catholic church, and with its ideology. “So now, for about 18 or 19 years, the Church is going through a

Renaissance, is becoming stronger again” she stated (Karolina, personal communication). Its strength is visible in the fact that “now, it even has power over the law”, Karolina argued, alluding to the change in the abortion law. Polish law is notoriously regarded around Europe and even the world as one of the most repressive abortion laws, allowing for abortion to happen only under the following conditions: 1) when the woman's life or health is endangered by the continuation of pregnancy; 2) when the pregnancy is a result of a criminal act; or 3) when the fetus is seriously malformed²⁵.

When I shared with Karolina a conversation I had with my best friend, a Finnish woman, about the position of different European countries on abortion, my Finnish friend was floored after hearing that Polish law is so restrictive when it comes to, what she called, “basic women's rights”. Karolina just sadly smiled and bowed her head. When I asked her about whether she saw the legalization of abortion during Communism as an important step towards women’s equality, she quickly replied, “well yes, that was a plus, that was the government trying to help. But they [Communists] did so many things wrong, that one right does not make erase all the other incompetencies”. What were those, according to Karolina? “Well, for starters” she said, “women did not suddenly rise in power; they joined the workforce but that’s about it. They became secretaries and typists and suddenly they were supposed to feel empowered? My mom was working not only in the office but she also had to take care of me and my siblings. She came home often very late, had to take care of dinner and laundry and then she did the same thing the

²⁵ The case of Alicja Tysiac is especially poignant example of the law. Tysiac was a 35 years old mother of two, who had severe myopia. She was refused the right to an abortion despite warnings that having a baby could make her go blind. The European Court of Human Rights has awarded Tysiac \$33,000 in damages for the violation of her human rights. For more on Tysiac and her case against the Polish government, please see the ruling in the case of Tysiac v. Poland, The European Court of Human Rights (Fourth Section). I will bring up Tysiac’s case again in the following chapter. Available: <https://wcd.coe.int>.

next day.” Was this empowerment? “I don’t think so”, Karolina replied. “If anything, it was exhaustion. My mom did not meet the image of that the party was disseminating – the happy socialist worker, building new Poland... She was tired, often angry at bureaucracy she had to deal with and little deals here and there people wanted to make [in order to avoid the long bureaucratic way of doing things, a process that often took months and in quite a few occasions proved to be unfulfilling, because somehow one more document was always needed]... so many times she said she had enough of this, but she needed to work because we would not have survived on one income”.

Nina, a young KONSOLA member who is also quite involved in the Green Party movement in Poznan, with whom I met one afternoon in one of the popular cafes, argued that “Socialism and Communism did lift women up, but only to put them on tractors and that is where it ended. And that is where the glass ceiling appeared”, she argued referring to the fact that although women were able to join the ranks of the party but their careers were halted once they reached certain positions. “The same thing happened in Solidarity”, Nina continued saying, “which was a national social movement, but it still wanted to keep women at home” (Nina, personal communication). At this point Nina, mimicking Bozena mentioned the infamous writing on the shipyard's wall and without skipping a beat she went on to argue that “see, this is it, this antagonism, because if Communism said 'yes' to women, then Solidarity and the Church took the opposing side, arguing for their [women's] comeback to their homes, as the protectors of the family circle. And this is how it stayed.” According to Nina, there was a chance for a change. “Even in 1989 and 1990, where new chances appeared, chances to restore normal citizenship of women, it was left aside, abandoned in the name of burning Communist past, because these [rights of] women were reminiscent of the hated past”. Why this is the way things happen, is a

question that women still ask themselves. “I was too little then” Nina argued, but notes of anger were heard in her voice when said, “I can't comprehend why it happened that way”. But, she quickly added that “it is hard to put blame on feminists of that era, because, honestly, what could they have done? They could not carry the entirety of Polish society behind them...” And today? “Today, when women, feminists are a part of some national movement, at some point this entire issue of feminism becomes forgotten and women's role in that movement is shoved aside”. So here, yet again, the conclusion is mostly sad – we, women join movements and help in the betterment of our nation, and although along the way we might win small battles for the woman folk, we lose the metaphorical war.

Conclusion

I started this chapter with a melancholic look at the past, talked about the problems of reality of daily life, discussed the transformation process and ended with the views of young Polish feminists on this topic. In retrospect one has to wonder whether we, Polish women, really missed out on a possibility of change. While during the Communist times women's rights were used to push the party's propaganda and keep our economy going; while during transformation, women were crucial in keeping Solidarity alive, pushing their own agenda aside, and with the new democratic Poland the chances for change were again present, some again were lost. It is hard to argue that feminists during the times of Communism or during the transformation did not do their job properly, did not push the agenda far enough because the reality is, as Stachniak (1995) argued, women were often overworked, underpaid and hardly listened to. It is also possible that Solidarity would not have been as successful if it was not for women like Anna Walentynowicz (activist whose firing in August 1980 was the event that led to the strike in the Gdansk Shipyard) or Malgorzata Tarasiewicz (who, from 1989 to 1991 was a coordinator of the

Women's Section of Solidarity), or Barbara Labuda (a woman who kept Solidarity going after the arrests of the male leadership in 1981). The power of this great movement was the best nationally kept secret, as Shana Penn wrote (1994, 2001 and 2005). So even though today we, Polish women, might not find our rights and needs met at the level we wanted them to, some changes have been achieved. We did win some fights along the way, for example in terms of employment but we lost some as well (abortion). Could more have been accomplished? Without a doubt. But now it is not the time to lose ourselves in the past. Now, it is the turn of women like Bozena, Gaja, Nina or organizations such as KONSOLA or Women's Rights Center to take lessons from the past and move ourselves forward, toward the hopefully brighter future.

CHAPTER THREE: EASTERN AND WESTERN FEMINIST DIALOGUE: SOME ISSUES TO CONSIDER

In the previous chapter I have addressed some of the questions related to the economic, social and political transition that happened in Poland after World War II and in the later years. I tried to frame this transformation as it applied to gender and feminism as seen by the young Polish feminists themselves.

In this chapter, I would like to address some of the concerns relating to the dialogue between Eastern and Western feminists, since the fall of Communism opened the former Eastern European bloc to the market economy and capitalism, a system that has been present in the West for centuries. With opening of the borders came new ideologies and new ways of addressing different problems, including those of gender equality. On the following pages I would like to address some of the key issues in the dialogue between Eastern and Western feminism and feminist thought. Then, I go back to the Polish transformation and look at it using Valentine Moghadam's concept of gendered revolutions (2003) and explore the consequence of such a model for Polish women. I also explore the notion of an "allergy to feminism" (Einhorn, 1993) and I present the views of young Polish feminists on those topics.

Eastern Heart vs. Western Eye dilemma

Before I start writing about the specifics of the dialogue that Eastern and Western feminists engage each other in, I would like to add my own two cents to this discussion. I often found it somewhat challenging to write about feminism in the countries of Central Eastern Europe (CEE) while recognizing that one's education about women's rights issues and feminism in particular, has been framed almost completely by writings about feminism in the West. As I mentioned in the Introduction, when I started this project, I barely knew anything about the

issues of concern to Eastern European feminism and Eastern European feminists. It was through my later education which led to the birth of this project that I first touched and then immersed myself into the writings of Eastern European and then more specifically, Polish feminists (Fuszara, 2000; Graff, 2001; Sroda, 2000; Szczuka, 2004). It was then, while reading the wide array of literature on that topic that I uncovered the difficult dialogue that those two sides, Eastern and Western feminists are engaged in.

There is an ongoing debate within feminist studies about the issue of inclusion into feminism. Who is a feminist and who is not? Is the sisterhood really global, as Robin Morgan (1996) would like us to believe? When in the late 1960's the second wave of feminism started making its mark in the United States, when John F. Kennedy spoke about the New Frontier and equal rights for women, when Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), many started noticing that American women, white, black, rich and poor, contrary to the popular notion, were not too happy. Many were disgruntled by their diminished status in society and the inability to pursue successful careers to achieve equality in other spheres of life. Another layer of conflict emerged with the movement of Black feminists, feminists of color and lesbian feminists who felt isolated from the "problem with no name" of which Friedan wrote and argued for inclusion of ethnic, racial and sexual sensitivity to mainstream feminism (Smith, 1989; Hill Collins, 1990; Bunch, 1974 among others). In the dialogue between Eastern and Western feminism some of those kinds of challenges have also become visible.

Case in point: Poland. I would like to offer a play on Friedan's title and argue that in Poland the problem actually has a name, and that name is feminism. Inclusion into the "western" mode of feminism has been rather quickly absorbed by young Polish women, who grew up at the end of the Communist era and for whom this change in the political system was a normal

progression of sorts. With the change of the people in power, the narrative about the West became more socially accepted and with it came the ship called “feminism”. The young, often educated women jumped on that ship but others found themselves quite committed to staying at the metaphorical shore. For women in my mother’s and grandmothers’ generation, feminism, or rather the promised gender equality politics not only did not promise great things but added burdens they were not prepared for (as I wrote about in the previous chapter). The idea of women being equal to men was not the idea they fought, for they worked alongside their male counterparts in many professions. And the notions of identity politics, and LGBT issues were seen as too new and too different for many. When I discussed these issues with older Polish women, they often said that “those things” were not of concern to them. For them, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, life under Soviet government’s surveillance was about fighting for survival, and besides, if Western feminism meant the same kinds of gender equality that were proclaimed as “mission accomplished” by the former government, Polish women did not want to partake.

But before I get to the issues of disagreement between Eastern European and Western feminists I would like to note that Eastern European women were already dealing with issues of women’s rights from their own perspective. In the Polish case, the revolution of 1989, the uprising of Solidarity, the fall of Communism and the opening of the borders to the West, all left their marks on the position of women in the society. With the new independent Poland arising, women’s rights issues actually moved to the back of the agenda and slowly were erased from it. Using Valentine Moghadam’s paradigm of gendered revolutions (2003) I will further elaborate on this point on the following pages.

Then, I would like to come back to the “East vs. West” feminist dialogue. As Nanette Funk (1993b) writes, interaction between feminism in East and West will inevitably be problematic, but yet we need to analyze the tensions that underline the dialogue of feminists from those two sides. Funk argues that tensions will arise from several sources: Eastern incorporation into the West, restructuring of power and status hierarchies, and even Western ethnocentrism when it comes to feminism (Western Feminists claiming to know the “real women’s issues”). Concepts such as “feminism”, “emancipation” and “equality” will have different meanings in the East and West. Those disagreements, misunderstandings and mistakes, Funk continues, will happen and really, should be expected but that does not make the dialogue impossible. Funk argues that on the contrary, dialogue not only is possible, it is crucial to happen (1993). Feminists from both sides can learn much from each other and might come to the realization that actually, they do share many common concerns, values and goals (for example: issues of health, employment, family life).

On the following pages I would like to reiterate some of those discussion points in greater detail and then I will move on to the viewpoints on the East-West feminist dialogue of the young Polish feminists I interviewed and the particular issue of “allergy to feminism” (Einhorn, 1993) that arose in Poland.

Women in the Polish revolution

In her very influential book, *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East*, Valentine M. Moghadam (2003) examines two sets of cases of revolutionary movements in which the woman’s question figured prominently. The first set, which Moghadam calls “Woman’s Emancipation or egalitarian model of revolution” (2003: 81), draw its inspiration from the Enlightenment. National progress and societal transformation were seen by

the revolutionary leadership as crucially bound up with equality and the emancipation of women. As Moghadam writes, these particular “movements occurred within the context of the struggle against feudalism and backwardness and were in some cases inspired by socialist ideals. Education, employment, and unveiling were encouraged as a way of integrating women into the development of the country and thereby accelerating the process of social change” (2003:81). The Bolshevik Revolution is one example of such revolutionary model. Others include the Kemalist revolution in Turkey, and the Chinese and Cuban revolutions.

The second set of cases includes revolutions in which the leadership regarded “cultural identity, integrity, and cohesion as strongly dependent upon the proper behavior and comportment of women, in part as a reaction to colonialist or neocolonialist impositions. Veiling, modesty, and family roles were encouraged for women” (2003: 82). Moghadam names this the “Woman-in-the-Family or patriarchal model of revolution” (2003: 82). Examples of this set include the French Revolution of 1789, revolutions in Mexico, Algeria and Iran and the “1989 Revolutions” of Eastern Europe, including that in Poland.

Moghadam does not go into details of the Eastern European revolutions, but rather, argues that during times of social instability, economic difficulties and the confrontations with the unknown and uncertain West, “the image of the traditional woman seems to promise a return to a comforting, stable, and idyllic past; she is seen as the repository of old values and ways of life and is linked to a more ‘genuine’ cultural identity.” (106). At the end of the communist era in Eastern Europe, with fear of the unstoppable and very vague future, “the new leadership and elites initially evinced an ‘allergy to women’s rights,’ in Barbara Einhorn’s words” (1993: 106).

Although women have played an important role in almost every military and social conflict around the globe – whether it was as soldiers, as informants or in any other capacity –

their contributions were often omitted, seen as less important and quite irrelevant. In the Polish case, in 1989, it was the national social movement that made that change. Today, if one utters the word “Solidarnosc”, the image of the full-mustached Lech Walesa comes to mind. Walesa, the leader of the Solidarity trade union, became known across the world as the one who put the last nail in the coffin of Communism. His defiant actions against the hated government became known around the world, and his fame was only underlined by the inclusion of his image in Michael Jackson’s “Man in the Mirror” video and of course by his 1983 Nobel Peace Prize award, which he could not accept in person due to the repercussions of martial law that were still palpable in Poland²⁶. Without a doubt, Walesa has played a crucial role in the success of this particular social movement. But what about Anna Walentynowicz?

It was the firing of Walentynowicz, a union activist and a fierce fighter for the rights of shipyard workers (she was fired five months before reaching her retirement age, for disciplinary reasons, on August 8, 1980) that started the now famous August strikes and led to the creation of the Solidarity Trade Union²⁷. But her example does not stand alone. What about the thousands of nameless and faceless women who took on the task of running Solidarity after its male leaders were arrested in 1981? These unknown women were the editors, journalists and intellectuals who ran the underground and kept the country informed. And yet, their stories remained pretty much unidentified and their contributions are still unknown to the mainstream Polish media. Only in

²⁶Egil Aarvik, Chairman of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, on the occasion of the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize for 1983, Oslo, December 10, 1983 said these words about the missing laureate: “And, even though the state of emergency is rescinded and Walesa is freed, his freedom is limited. His own evaluation of the situation has not permitted him to be present here today. The Peace Prize laureate's seat is empty; it won't be his voice we hear. Let us therefore try even harder to listen to the silent speech from his empty place.” The entire speech can be found at: http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1983/presentation-speech.html.

²⁷ Walentynowicz died in a plane crash near Smolensk on April 10, 2010, along with President of Poland, Lech Kaczyński, First Lady Maria Kaczyńska, and many other prominent Polish leaders travelling to commemoration of the Soviet massacre of Polish officers in the Katyn forest during World War II.

the recent years have authors such as Ewa Kondratowicz (2001) and Shana Penn (1991, 2001 and 2005) brought them to light.

Solidarity, as Penn argues in her 2005 book, *Solidarity Secret: The Women Who Defeated Communism in Poland*, like so many other social movements before, used women for their own purposes. Although female membership in the trade union was quite substantial (about 45%²⁸), and women fought side by side with their male counterparts, their concerns (for childcare, healthcare, maternity leaves) went unheard. When Solidarity was gaining in power, it slowly started to push women and their issues aside. This push led first to “forgetfulness” of women’s issues and what followed was a transformation (with the helpful hand of the Catholic Church) of women’s roles. The supposed gender equality that was proclaimed but yet not really delivered by the hated Communist powers was slowly being extinguished.

In this new Poland, women were again seen as “special” and “maternal”. Their roles were redefined - from the (not quite) equal members and workers that they supposedly were under Communism, to “family mentors” whose roles were to be good mothers and wives, who should stay at home and raise the future members of our nation, just as in Moghadam’s paradigm. Furthermore, Solidarity’s (male) leadership also supported the policy to make abortion illegal and to abolish the Women’s Commission within the Solidarity trade union (Penn, 2005). The facts spoke loudly: “democracy in Poland is of the male kind,” as Maria Janion argued in her inaugural speech for the Congress of Polish Women in Warsaw (2009). Women were returned to the household.

²⁸<http://www.oska.org.pl/biuletyn/5/56.pdf>.

But can't we all just get along?

On top of dealing with such enormous social and political change, a new challenge was quickly approaching. With opening of the borders to the West, voices of Western feminists started to enter the (inter)national, multi-cultural arena. Now, Eastern European women not only had to deal with the switch in their roles, they also had to listen to what their “Western sisters” had to say on the topic of women’s rights in the East. And although Nanette Funk (1993) underlined the necessity and importance of such conversation, one has to anticipate the fact that such dialogue will not be without its problems. After all we are talking about dialogue between millions of women from a variety of places, cultures and spaces. Would this multi-cultural viewpoint help or hinder this discourse?

That important point about the East-West debate is brought up by Allaine Cerwonka (2008), who writes that a multicultural approach can be problematic because “many multicultural policies preserve cultural hierarchies” (817). Although different feminist theories from different regions are present in the debates, Western feminist thought is still considered “normal”, prevalent and therefore hegemonic. For example, in creating special issues of journals (such as *Signs*) dedicated to the problems of Eastern feminism, the structure of such publications “reinstates the Other as different from what is normal or mainstream and articulates their experience as exceptional” (817). Additionally, a power imbalance is implied in this relationship since the other functions as sort of a guest of a dominant group on their terrain. Is just pure articulation of our differences enough? Spaces as such are definitely necessary, for we need to understand the distinctions between us, but as Cerwonka writes: “although there is undeniable value in the critique of inequalities within academic feminism, the liberal pluralist solution of inviting CEE feminists to speak their difference ends up unwittingly reproducing the very hierarchies it sets out to dismantle” (819).

It is also important to underline that even while we are distinguishing different types of feminisms on the basis of geography, whether we juxtapose CEE feminism to Latina or Black feminism, we have to understand that there are internal differences between, say, Romanian and Polish women's experiences of communism (and even within Poland, not all women experienced Communism the same way of course). Following that thought, there are different historical, social and political implications for feminism forming in any given place and space, whether geographical or theoretical. Feminism in distinct CEE countries will form differently, but it is also important to see whether some stable underlying factors might be taken into consideration as common for certain countries, and certain spaces .

We need to acknowledge that when we are talking about feminism and women's issues in the CEE countries, we are talking about approximately 70 million women from different regions, cultures, and religions; women who speak different languages and whose experiences might, and often do, differ immensely. The only common denominator is the fact that they all lived under a system of Communism, which itself was different in distinct countries. Therefore, Western feminists should not assume that issue like gender, sexuality and even patriarchy will occupy the same dominant position cross-culturally (Roman, 2001). As Denise Roman writes about the case of Romania, her words also ring true for Polish feminists: “'gender-relevant language' that should empower women must first be created to carve discursive gender spaces and a gender politics beyond traditional patriarchal and heterosexual orders” (62). Basically, the terminology for gender related issues is not universal – in many CEE countries words like gender and gender politics are still a novelty and their meanings are not yet well accepted and understood by the majority of society. Therefore in CEE countries this gendered language, even if it exists, it does not carry the same dominant position as it does in Western countries.

Nanette Funk provides an example of Roman's argument when she writes about the Moscow Gender Center and the Prague Gender Center, both of which used the English term "gender," which does not exist in Russian or Czech specifically in order to create a "linguistic free space without negative preconceptions" (Funk, 1993a: 86). In the Polish language, the term "gender" which refers to a cultural construct also does not exist – we only have a word for sex. We use the English word "gender" to talk about cultural and social differences between males and females, and this word is not part of the common language but rather is being used almost exclusively by feminists and in such way is almost only relegated to the sphere of academia. However, while researching and writing this dissertation, when I spoke to ordinary Poles about this issue of language, I have come across persons who argued that language should not be the first thing we should consider changing, but rather we should focus on larger issues at hand – and there are plenty to pick from – starting from healthcare, moving through equal pay to the prevention of domestic abuse. But that stand also has an inherent problem: if we do not possess the language to fight for our rights, how will we fight for them effectively? Is one going to follow the other? Or will we be able to resolve these kinds of issues together?

And the list of issues adding to a problematic dialogue keeps on growing. Ann Snitow (1993) adds that no matter what definition of women (a definition which in itself is problematic, since there is no one uniform definition of "women" which everyone subscribes to) which we will try to use, or whatever word we substitute for feminism, the discussion about women or gender in the East will be a difficult one, to say the least. She presents a list of reasons why feminism is so fiercely resisted or absolutely ignored in East and Central Europe – including just plain sexism and conservative backlash. Her list includes several issues that are worth mentioning here. She starts off with the issue of "community of suffering," arguing that in a

country where everyone is suffering, it is selfish and vulgar to bring out women's suffering as a separate issue because at such difficult times solidarity between sexes is cherished and remains necessary for survival. Another position on the list is exhaustion; Snitow argues that women never really have time for a break, to pause and relax. Women have been continuously over-extended and the little time that they have for themselves they might not choose to spend it on organizing. The next position on the list is occupied by the issue of disillusionment with all politics. It was a common feeling experienced by Poles who seen all politics is corrupted, so nothing could really be counted on. Other positions on Snitow's list point to the issue of Identity Politics; essentialism and even ideas of past and future and the issue of the family closes the list. The cumulative result of such list is disturbing – resistance to feminist thinking or organizing seems to be over-determined (Snitow, 1993).

Although all of the matters raised by Snitow are important, I would like to focus on the first one, community of suffering. In Eastern European countries (although not exclusively there) women's issues were always set aside awaiting a better climate. In Poland, for example, larger issues almost always overshadowed the specific needs of women. A brief historical sketch will illustrate this point: in the late 18th century, Poland was partitioned three times by Prussia, Russia and Austro-Hungary (in 1772, 1793 and 1795) which resulted in the nearly absolute annihilation of Poland as a sovereign country for about 125 years. In 1918, at the end of World War I, on November 11, Poland became an independent autonomous country, and at that time, Polish women received the right to vote but parallel amendments in other fields (such as employment, protective legislation for their rights, contraceptive education, as well as rights to divorce and abortion) were not provided (Ciechomska, 1996; Davies, 1982; Topolski, 2007). Again during World War II and later with the years of the Communist rule and then throughout the uprising of

Solidarity women's issues were not front and center, but were remained behind. Other issues were considered more important – we were a country under attack, under foreign power; our fights were those of patriotic value – we were to fight for our independence, for Poland, for the ability to speak and write in our own language; we were all oppressed as citizens – and we were to fight for citizenship.

As I wrote in the previous chapter, when the Polish Communist Party took over, gender was supposed to not be an issue – gender equality was to be the rule, according to Marxist-Leninist politics. Unfortunately, as noted earlier, that equality was more present on paper rather than in reality. Huge disparities existed between the laws providing for childcare and employment benefits (among other things) and their actual implementation. Even during the uprisings of Solidarity, where women not only helped the men but pretty much ran the underground movement after the arrests of Solidarity's (male) leadership on December 13, 1981 their contributions were hardly ever acknowledged and their needs and demands have not been met at all. The writing on the Gdansk's shipyard said it all: "Women, don't interrupt us, we are fighting for Poland" (Graff, 2001: 24)... Basically, throughout Polish history, women were always left waiting... And even now, four years after Poland joined the European Union not much can be said about progress in gender equality issues (more on that topic in Chapter five).

Teaching Western feminism in Poland (and other CEE countries) also proved to be a somewhat problematic issue, as Eastern European students had a different take on this topic. Ewa Welnic (1993) writes about the painful beginnings when she taught a course on British women novelists (Welnic is a teacher of English at the Department of English at the Nicolas Copernicus University in Torun, Poland) and tried to tie in certain aspects of feminist theory. At that time, her (mostly) female students were not ready to "question the generally accepted norms

of a male-dominated society” and they did not see the point of discussing female writers separately. It was after quite some time that they could begin to understand what such stance, view and discussion can bring forward, why we should indeed discuss women writers separately.

Kornelia Slavova (2006) further underlines the inapplicability of Western feminism to Eastern Europe when she describes teaching her Bulgarian students Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). Slavova argues that bored American housewives crying out for a career sounded “outdated and irrelevant” to students whose parents went through the socialist state where work was viewed as an obligation. Suburban domesticity was not experienced by women living under the communist regime – rather they were expected to work by their socialist government that claimed it had already freed them. Therefore employment for pay was not seen as a privilege and did not carry this emancipatory association. That is why, Slavova argued, her students could not really understand Friedan’s point. In Poland this also rang true because under Communism it was pretty much a common thing that both adult members of the household had to work in order to survive the economic hardships of those years. As Majcher, Majoros and Peto write, “the male breadwinner/female homemaker model was never dominant in Poland, and a woman’s desire to quit her job was unrealistic in the face of the economic hardship that would follow or the loss of the independence that was linked to paid employment” (2004: 89). Of course, much has changed since those days and today’s Polish feminists living under capitalism see the dialogue with their Western sisters through a slightly different prism.

However, it is also important to note that for the dialogue between Eastern vs. Western feminism to develop, the differences should be noticed but cannot be seen as overwhelming. Although the geographical, historical and social disparities between Western and Eastern feminisms will exist, it is naïve to claim that influences from the West and East did not cross

each other, or that the East was completely sealed off from the West. Things did cross the “iron curtain”. Popular and cultural products, or people or political interests have seeped through and crossed the borders. There was in fact a “common cultural space” (Penezic, 1995: 71) that often went unnoticed. Examples of items in such space are plenty: Poles knew about and heard the Rolling Stones (whose 1967 European tour was the first time a rock band from the Western Hemisphere played behind the Iron Curtain). They craved Levi’s jeans from America, which were advertised in Western magazines that were smuggled in by an uncle or aunt from abroad. As I mentioned in chapter 1, due to the unavailability of many products, the Polish government allowed us to shop in “Pewex” stores²⁹, a chain of hard currency money stores where Poles could buy otherwise unobtainable goods (toys, jeans, Coca-Cola, alcohol, sweets and even electronics) from the West using Western currency (most likely American dollars or German marks) for payment.

But even outside the consumer economy, even on the intellectual level the influences crossed each other’s paths. Cerwonka (2008) writes about Zarana Papić, one of the founders of the feminist movement in the former Yugoslavia, who organized international conferences of women from the West and the East (the first was organized and held in Yugoslavia in 1978 and included H  l  ne Cixous well as numerous other feminists from Italy, Poland, Hungary, and Germany). And “since she was a part of the national intellectual elite”, Cerwonka writes, “Papić’s life suggests how other factors, such as social class and status, shaped the extent and nature of CEE feminists’ access to Western ideas and feminist communities.” (821).

Therefore we need to recognize that although identification of differences between East vs. West feminism is critical, by focusing just on the CEE feminist experiences or further

²⁹Pewex – shortcut of Przedsiębiorstwo Eksportu Wewnętrznego; eng: Internal Export Company.

dividing it into the Polish experience, the Yugoslavian experience etc., we might unwittingly reproduce the “highly political assumption that the East-West border was/is a fundamental marker of difference for how women’s and men’s lives are gendered” (821). Further, we need to understand that categories such as Eastern or Western feminism are not stable identities or analytical categories since there are multitudes of Eastern feminisms as well those considered Western feminisms. These categories are not rigid, nor are they exclusive and explicit. At times political systems and social systems change, and so do certain aspects of what is considered a given form of feminism.

As Cerwonka aptly notes, “the way CEE scholars use some U.S.-based feminists to represent hegemony of Western feminism while using others to serve as theoretical support for the critique of that hegemony is a perfect illustration of the way in which people engage in a selective use of feminist ideas as a consequence of specific circumstances and aims” (822). In other words, the dialogue is problematic from both sides: CEE feminists tend to view Western feminism as hegemonic while the other side argues that all CEE feminisms are similar. In the end what ends up happening is the misuse of specific feminist ideas that leads to more problems than solutions. There is a need for a deeper understanding of our own pasts and experiences in order to ameliorate this problem. As Nanette Funk argues, “the development of women’s consciousness and concepts cannot simply be understood in terms of transference of Western feminist categories to post-communist women.” (Funk, 1993: 88). Such forceful “help” would not be adequate since Western categories may not work or even be alien to post-communist women. However, it would be erroneous to assume that we should only focus on the importance of differences. “It would also be wrong” Funk continues, “to deny a strong resemblance in the issues women are confronted with” (1993: 88). The fight for equal pay, access to affordable

healthcare, reproductive rights are issues that many women, across the world are fighting for. The differences lie in the way we fight for them, since these ways are connected to our history, culture and nation.

As I noted at the beginning of this chapter, there is still an internal struggle about who is a feminists and who is not, who should be included and whom we should exclude or even what can be considered “local” or “global” feminism today, in the era of such advanced technology and ever so quickly progressing globalization. Consequently, we have to always keep in mind these kinds of discussions or even arguments when dialogue between different feminists surfaces. Feminism has never been and probably will never be some homogeneous totalitarian force and we should move away from considering it as such.

Before I move on to the interviews I conducted with the young Polish feminists from KONSOLA organization, I would just like to bring my own example of the hegemonic view of Western feminism that I encountered. A very good friend of mine since our days together in high school in Poznan, Poland, Sybil, now a marketing associate in a large mall-building company in London, UK, was talking to me about feminism a few months ago. She considers herself a self-taught feminist³⁰, never receiving any formal education on the topic of women’s studies or feminism per se. One day, during our internet conversation, she complained to me about a large number of women, mostly Muslim, wearing burkas on the streets of London. She said that these women should “leave those clothes behind”, uncover their hair and bodies because now they are free, now they can be themselves for now they live in the West. Leaving aside the questions about their religious affiliation and just focusing on feminism I wanted to discuss with Sybil the probability of these women belonging to a Muslim feminist group or practicing their own

³⁰ When I asked her for her own definition of feminism, she stated the following: “Feminism for me is the movement for social, political and economic equality between men and women.” (Sybil, personal communication).

feminist ideas, but Sybil was relentless. For her, the only feminism to practice was based on the Western ideas of freedom, women's rights and feminism. And the burka had no place in it whatsoever.

So is there another method that we can use when we talk about different feminisms? Is there a way of having a dialogue without using hegemonic or totalitarian viewpoints? Cervonka argues for what she calls, "feminism transculturation" (824), an elaboration of Chandra Mohanty's concept of "feminism without borders" (Mohanty, 2003). In this method, instead of seeing Western feminist theory as a homogeneous monolith that imposes itself on passive CEE feminist theorists, Cervonka writes, "we might ask how feminist ideas from elsewhere have entered these societies, under what circumstances they circulate, and how they have been creatively transformed" (825). As an example, Cerwonka uses the portrait of Betty Friedan, a well-educated Jewish woman, whose past as a labor activist has been interestingly omitted from her groundbreaking 1963 book. Why? Perhaps because, as Cerwonka argues, Marxist ideas that circulated in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union might have shaped the intellectual outlook of social critics like Friedan. Maybe "the political context of the Cold war prompted Friedan to place the white suburban housewife at the center of her feminist analysis and to trade her earlier Marxism for the less embattled ideology of liberalism" (827).

Cerwonka's concept of feminism transculturation is very interesting and in my view central to understanding the dialogue that East vs. West feminists have with each other. However, since in this dissertation I am focusing on only one country, Poland, the "feminism without borders" approach might not be the most adequate for the purpose of this research, but is an issue to consider for future research.

I will finish this section with a point made by an active practicing Polish feminist, who like me, started her feminist education in the West, more specifically at Amherst College in Virginia. Agnieszka Graff, a prominent Polish writer and a self-proclaimed proud feminist, adds a crucial point to the debate on Western vs. Eastern Feminist debate. She argues that Polish feminism is engaged in a historical paradox. Poland experienced the phenomenon of “backlash *before* feminism” (2003: 100; emphasis in original). Graff argues that Polish feminism found itself at a compressed historical point, “in terms of Western chronology, we skipped the radical 1960s and got a double dose of the conservative 1980s” (2003:108), referring to Reagan’s years in power during which feminism was pushed aside and even in some cases quite strongly opposed (Faludi, 1991). As the title of Graff’s article suggests, Polish feminism is somewhere between the waves of Western feminism. We are discovering women’s history, and fighting for reproductive rights, but are doing so with strong third wave accents, including queer theory, feminist music organizations and using new modes of social media (Facebook, Twitter) and the Internet. And we are engaging in a constant dialogue with our Western counterparts as well.

Young Polish feminists on the East-West feminist dialogue: their own words

Uncovering the problems in the dialogue between Eastern and Western feminism led me to investigate how young Polish feminists see the connection with their Western counterparts, the Western feminist movement history, problems and issues. Nina, one of the feminists from KONSOLA, when asked about how she sees the Western vs. Eastern feminist debate, answered that Central and Eastern European feminism will always be “looking over the shoulder at Western European and American feminism because that is some kind of determinant”. Nina argued that it is like “Graff wrote” meaning that “Polish feminism has a distinct chronology and therefore we cannot follow the same route that

Western feminists took on since we are dealing with two different cultures and two different histories”³¹. Although her point rings true, I asked her about the commonalities in terms of what feminists here and there fight for. “Abortion is a crucial example” she argued. “Because of our Catholic history, this basic right for women to make decisions about their own bodies is still not guaranteed. Polish women who decide to have an abortion are suddenly labeled as horrible and selfish. But nobody asks if she can afford to have that child – the priest is not going to help her in raising the child...” She smiled sadly and continued, “the issue is not whether we, Polish feminists, or Polish women overall share issues with our Western counterparts, because of course we do; the issue is how do we gain those rights, here and there”.

Bozena, another young feminist seemed a bit perplexed about the question – after a moment of silence she said, “Western feminism had some impact on Eastern feminism for sure, especially since in Poland feminism started later and we always have some years of delay when watching Western feminists”. After a brief pause, Bozena said “but you know, I never really thought about how it is... I think we follow and even feel jealous of how they have it there but here it’s different... or maybe not because in sum, we are fighting for similar things...”. Her argument echoed Funk’s writing – women, no matter whether they are from different cultures, of different ethnicities and with different particular needs, in the end are fighting for similar if not sometimes the same things. Women from Eastern Europe, Western Europe and even feminists from the United States had fought for recognition of their rights. Those fights might have come in different times and in different forms, but it does not mean that we cannot engage in a dialogue about them or learn from one another. And no one said that such discussion will be uncomplicated and effortless.

³¹Nina refers to the “waves” of American feminism: the first wave of feminism refers to period of feminist activities during the 19th and early 20th century focusing mainly on gaining women’s suffrage. The second wave addresses feminist activities between 1960s and 70s, especially political activism and sexual politics. The third wave of feminism discusses new generation of issues of sexuality and identity.

Bozena added that “ we [Poles] always look at the West and we want to be ‘the West’ but we are ‘the East’, and we should leave our complexes behind, and accept the reality in which we live”, echoing the argument her friend mentioned earlier – meaning the particulars of Polish history. She became silent for a moment and then finished her thought saying, “I am sure of Western feminism’ influence on ‘our feminism’ but concrete instances escaped me”. Yet she is certain that we are not taking all their examples because Polish feminism is on a different level than American or Western European feminism.

Interestingly, other members of KONSOLA that I interviewed did not have much more to add to that ongoing debate. It was not for lack of knowledge of the subject, since many referenced examples of Western Feminist writers (like Friedan, Millett or Morgan) or actions taken by Western Feminists (several women talked about the suffragist movement, a few mentioned authors such as Butler). However, the influence of one on the other seemed to be perplexing to them. I do not believe that the question was seen as unimportant or uninteresting, but rather since large scale gender equity changes are hard to see in Poland, it can be hard to pinpoint certain influences that come from abroad. Maybe now, in the era of the European Union (EU) those influences are also extremely complicated, coming from many places and spaces and maybe the question is not whether one does influence each other but rather whether it even matters? Although I would argue that we should not be nitpicking about the past, I think we have to understand the repercussions of our respective pasts. I think that knowledge of certain points and convoluted feminist history is crucial for a productive and successful dialogue to occur. We have to be able to understand where women are coming from and how history shapes the way feminism is being talked about, fought for, accepted or rejected in different countries.

What struck me while talking about Polish feminism with these women was the fact that it seemed that Polish feminism has been almost exclusively relegated to the academic sphere, or linked to human rights or NGO’s or to so-called Western private philanthropy. Young active members of

KONSOLA and of other organizations are mostly women who attended gender studies courses, became interested in the topic of feminism at some point and started writing about it or became active in some organization. They are all white, mostly middle or upper middle class women. All of the women and one man I interviewed had attended Universities (most had finished their MA by the time of the interview and two were in the process of scheduling the defense of their MA thesis), and most had advanced degrees in different fields within the social sciences. Their friends and acquaintances who also identified themselves with feminist ideology were also mostly people from the university. The people who came to KONSOLA's meetings, who were interested in the organization or those who participated in the events like Manifa's (which are yearly feminist demonstration in many Polish cities that take place on March 8th of each year in celebration of the International Women's Day; every year Manifa has a different goal it is promoting: promotion of women into Parliament; abortion or economic discrimination of women; in 2000 the first Manifa was organized in Warsaw, and with each year it has grown in size and support) or Equality Marches were, again, mostly young, educated women.

I started to wonder about other women – mothers, wives, daughters, workers, business women, elderly women, non-academic women – and I also speculated how many events are designed to reach out to them. When I asked about this phenomenon and about outreach to nonacademic fields/women Nina replied, “yes, [it would be great to open ourselves up to other fields] however then it [what we do] cannot be called “feminism” – because again, allergy to this word resurfaces, because it [feminism] is only absorbed in that form, only in those circles, let's say generally academic circles, and in other fields... well you can create workshops but even that proves controversial”. When I asked her what she meant by this statement, Nina elaborated: “when nurses trained other women about dangers of HPV, that wasn't really called feminism but rather social action for the benefit of women. And here feminism loses its name, because this word is received with a given understanding, and the problem is, I think, the fact

that we have to “disenchant” feminism, disenchant gender”. What she meant is that in order for feminism in Poland to be accepted by women of all ages and across class lines, the definition of the word itself has to go through a form of a cleansing process. “We have to take what feminism and gender equality meant under the communist regime and strip it off the negative connotations. “This word”, she continued “on some level, has to be redefined so more and more people, women and men alike, will find it comforting rather than problematic”. Because it has to be stated, that many Polish women when asked about issues of equal pay, maternity care, reproductive rights and other issues that feminists fight for, think along the lines of feminists, arguing for equality. And yet, once the “f” word is mentioned, everything changes and women are quick to say “but I am not a feminist...”. Why? “Because feminists are stereotyped as ugly, mean, men-haters”. At this point, in our conversation, Nina brought up the famous incident of anti-feminist posters³² that showed up in several major cities across Poland in 2005. The posters portray scantily dressed women whose heads were replaced by pictures of angry animals (cats and dogs) and the caption read: “You are nasty, ugly and stupid. Become a feminist.. [or go see a psychologist]”. Feminists all over Poland were extremely offended and fought (with success) for removal of those posters, arguing that it is a huge misrepresentation of feminist theory and the movement itself. So, as one can see, disenchantment of the word itself has to happen, a new meaning for this “f word” has to be developed and like Nina said, positive connotations of the word have to be created. “That would break this vicious circle. However, that is just the beginning of a process”, Nina stated.

She further underlined the fundamental issue that I think lies at the bottom of the problem, an issue that Eastern Women (and men) have in common – viewing Eastern feminism through the prism of a problematic definition of the word “feminism” itself. As I mentioned previously, some argued that

³² You can see the poster here: <http://www.digit.pl/grafika/2005.11/54/1.jpg> . The author of the poster is Wojciech Korkuc, who is also a member of the Movement for Moral Revival (polish: Ruch Odnowy Moralnej).

Eastern Women looked at Western feminism and rejected it seeing it as not fitting - not only due to different histories and cultures, but also through the prism that feminism became associated with, here in Poland. It became a word with a distaste left behind by the legacy of our history. This “allergy to feminism,” as Einhorn (1993) argues became a tainted prism through which everything regarding women’s rights related was viewed.

Allergy to feminism?

Can we really talk about what Maria Ciechomska (1996) called an “odium” or hatred to feminism in Poland? Young feminists in Poland tasted the language of women’s rights in gender studies courses, learned the history, understood feminism through a different lens, academic and personal – but others are stuck, as Nina stated, believing that “feminists are different, unattractive, awful women, mostly lesbians, whose goal is to get rid of men” and due to that fact it is really hard to reach out to other women, nonacademic women or to the Polish society overall. I myself have been met with such a “warm” reception – as I have mentioned in the Introduction. The moment I opened my mouth and identified myself as a feminist to my Polish progressive (or as I thought) friends, as if in some kind of a sci-fi movie, the silence became the loudest thing at the party, the eyes of my friends turned on me and a man I know since I was one year old looked at me and said, “you changed Maria, you have really changed...”

It is funny to think about it now but then I was extremely perplexed. I have visited Poland before, we met with the same circle of friends, discussed a variety of topics and yet that was the first time that I have heard how much I have changed. Others quickly followed, of course, looking at me with their brows raised and asking “are you really a feminist? Really?” and from there things did not get any better. I was suddenly pushed into a corner and forced to fight a battle I wasn’t even aware was going on. And even though I explained that feminism is not about hating men or wanting to eradicate half of

world's population, my explanations fell on deaf ears. The stereotypes prevailed. Nothing that I have said afterwards was really heard. And all my comments were suddenly deemed suspicious. It was at that moment that I started to wonder how strong this allergy to feminism is and I was extremely happy that opportunities arose to explore that topic with young Polish feminists during the interviews.

Speaking with Bozena in one of Poznan's busy café's, I asked her what she thinks about this phenomenon of odium toward feminism. "Lots of people are allergic to feminism in Poland" she responded, and continued saying, "people are afraid of this word, this is an 'ugly' word for them, but when one speaks of gender equality [rather than use word feminism] allergy fades away". So does it really boil down to semantics? Is this really what we are fighting over? A word? "Quite a number of women in Poland talk about being pro gender equality but they are afraid to admit that this is exactly what feminism may mean". But Bozena argued that "this is changing for the better, that a shift is coming and people's minds are opening," although why when pressed for explanation of this change – she could not say. Maybe the change is coming because of the EU, maybe because of women like her, who are outspoken, who talk about feminism using that forbidden word, and who act and are seen not as villains but as ones who are trying to help women even in the smallest way possible. And it is hard work. Trying to change the mind even of one person takes an enormous amount of work and understanding. Therefore I was not surprised when Bozena said that "sometimes I have enough of talking about how women are always weak and discriminated against and I look forward to seeing how much power women really have and what we can achieve if we only put our minds to it." Since feminism in Poland is attacked on a daily basis, one can understand her frustration. Keeping one's guard up all the time can take a toll on even the strongest ones.

When I asked Gaja, the current leader of KONSOLA, about this topic in the organization's small office, she quickly responded that, "generally the fact is that feminists in Poland are laughed at" and

went on to tell me how one of her friends, after finding out that Gaja is a feminist, proceeded to check whether her legs are shaven... This kind of ignorance is propelled by stereotypes that still exist and are perpetuated by media campaigns and reproduced in popular culture. “And even in an academic setting”, she stated, “discrimination raises its ugly head”. Gaja stated that although “most of my professors at the University support me, my stands on gender equality and feminism and know that I am a member of feminist organization, there are a few that have a problem with me”. She told me a story about an exam during which her professor wrote an evaluation about her and next to her name he put “how I cannot stand feminists” and yet, she passed the exam with A. But being known as “the feminist” also has its bad parts – when a subject of women’s issues is presented, everyone treats her as a “specialist in that subject”...”everything that has to do with women – it’s always me” she sadly whispered. “There is an allergy to feminism in Poland. There is something like that amongst women, which is sad, that women cannot call themselves feminists – they always say ‘I am a feminist but..’ or ‘I am not a feminist but I deal with women’s issues...’, she concluded.

Nina, a feminist who besides finishing her MA on the topic of the roles of women in media, also works at the University (in an administrative position) also spoke about the relationship between feminism and academia. Like Gaja, she sees problems with embracing feminism by academics. “Generally one would expect someone at their position [professors] to have an open mind” she stated, maybe more open than those popular opinions out there. “One would expect but...”, it wasn’t the case. She proceeded to tell me a few examples of how feminism is treated in academia. One of her former teachers and a journalist for a famous daily newspaper said the following things about Nina’s MA thesis: “girl, what are you doing with this feminism... do you have a husband?” and when Nina replied no, he shook his head and said “no no” and added “that’s my point”. This conversation was a hard pill to swallow for Nina because “I could not understand how come such an educated, supposedly open-

minded person, a professor, hearing the word ‘feminism’ reverted straight back to the stereotype associated with it... It seemed that what he wanted to say to me was ‘If you had a husband, you would have understood, he would teach you’... Nina sadly added “one can rest their case...there is not much left to add”. She also spoke about experiences with her friends that rang so similar in my ears – her friends also were trying to convert her, “to make [me] normal again”... As if for some reason such identification made me abnormal, different, other”. When I asked her what she thinks lies at the root of the problem, she made a point for problematic gendered education. “There are completely different approaches to educating boys and girls in Poland” she said, “Boys are viewed as active, girls as passive – that’s what we have been told for ages, from our childhood years and then nobody questions these stereotypes but accepts them as given and people just want to lead others ‘to the right way of behaving’”. She also added that the fact that “feminism in Poland is mostly framed in the abortion debate does not help”. Since Poland is such an overwhelmingly Catholic country, the equalization of the abortion debate with the goals of feminism is not facilitating the discussion for feminists one bit. And the media conveniently present that argument in a little snapshot: “they [feminists] want to kill children and that’s that. People are reluctant to see the details, rather they view this issue on the shallow basis that media shows it”, Nina argues. Basically, “the discourse is too simplified”.

In light of her answers, I asked Nina how she was able to find her own feminist consciousness among all these problematic notions, stereotypes and problems. She thought about her answer for a minute and then said that it took her quite some time (although she is only 26 years old) “but my journey was an individual one, finding myself in the literature available to me. And although I have found myself in feminism, I am also fighting off additional stereotypes since I came out as a lesbian a few years ago.” This is the exact illustration of the point I mentioned earlier, the complexities with feminisms everywhere and the question of belonging.

Paul, the only male member of KONSOLA I interviewed, argued that the “allergy to feminism in Poland definitely exists” and echoing the words of Gaja and Nina, assured me that “it shows its ugly head in academia as well” (Paul is also a student at the University). His argument was that the allergy exists “in large part due to ignorance and pervasive stereotypes that have been deeply rooted” (Paul, personal communication). He even said that he himself was a bit skeptical of joining KONSOLA because he was “afraid of radicals” but after meeting KONSOLA members, talking with them and spending time with them, he was happy to notice that these women were “normal” – otherwise he would have felt “let down”. I found his answer extremely interesting because he himself admitted to thinking of feminists in a stereotypical, well known and problematic way. His usage of the word “normal” really surprised me for I was not sure what exactly he meant by it. Before I had time to ask him a follow-up question about it, he already continued with his thoughts. “People are afraid to identify themselves as feminists because it is typecasting. However I think that many are feminists not even knowing about it. I am not afraid of such nametag because I know what it means, even if I am type casted in some way by others, I don’t care and others do” he stated. When I asked whether identifying as a feminist is crucial, he quickly said: “it is not that important whether one calls themselves feminist or not... their views, thoughts and actions are important... I am not for everyone suddenly realizing that yes, I am a feminist and putting a label on, or something, but it is worth thinking about this topic” he concluded. I then went back to his comments on “normalcy” of Polish feminists and with an apologetic smile Paul quickly admitted: “well, I have to say, now having heard myself, I see how influenced by stereotypes I was. What I meant was, I did not want to be around women who think that all men are oppressors, who think we are all out there to make women subservient. I wanted to fight for equality of both genders and since in our society women are the oppressed class, I wanted to help. And KONSOLA, in my opinion is there to help both – because by helping women, we can help men, and by that logic, we can help our society”.

Karolina, a licensed psychologist and the oldest (age-wise, 32 years old) member of KONSOLA I interviewed, said that “allergy” as a word is “right on target”. “It’s not a fear or anxiety about feminism but rather aversion to something new, to changes in our society – people want to throw something away before they even get to know it; something that disturbs the ordered things and disturbs the status quo”. She went on to say that feminists who start being active are sometimes afraid to talk about being feminists, instead they say that they are “feminizing” someone or something. But in her eyes “this is changing with generations – the next, new, younger generation is braver but older generation is still thinking about how this change will be received”. “Allergy is a very good word” she continued, but “if it exists now, if we are to call it in such way”, Karolina is unsure of how to change it, because if it is diagnosed as fear and anxiety – “, then education might be a way out. Maybe we can have an honest, clear and conscious conversation about what feminism really is, its history, its roots, its goals”. But we really have to be ready because “in Poland there is this incredible resistance against change, such strong defiance exists in such manner”. Her thoughts are that one ingredient that is crucial is time... “Maybe education and time will heal those wounds as well”...How much time, I asked? “Maybe 20 years”, Karolina stated, and added, “and I am being optimistic...”

Only one member of KONSOLA had a more positive outlook on the issue of allergy to feminism in Poland. Alina, a 28 year old active member, who holds a MA degree in Public Relations and European Administration, argued that “allergy is somewhat passing” and today “people do not treat feminism with hostility but rather with a sarcastic smile on their faces” and according to her, and that is “not an allergy anymore” (Alina, personal communication). Furthermore, she argued, “in some circles identifying oneself as a feminist brings out a discussion -why? how so?- which is a good thing – if others treat this discussion with disdain then one, I wants to discuss it even more”. “Discussion”, she argued, “leads to explanation, to clarification and maybe leads towards change.” However if they treat

the talk leniently with an ironic smile, then discussion is pointless. When I asked her how to disenchant the word feminism, Alina suggested that today's technology, such as "internet and pages such as YouTube or feminist portals and blogosphere can be of use". "The power of the social media should not be understated," Alina argued, "we now can use Facebook, twitter, different listserves; we can communicate with each other instantly and this sphere provides us with new and alternative ways of discussion, and we have to use them to our advantage."

Reaching out to others

While talking about the issue of allergy to feminism or the distaste that feminism leaves in Poland I was very interested to hear whether KONSOLA is able to reach ordinary women on any level besides the academic one. What they told me was that they as an organization are trying to reach out and are collaborating with other institutions for just that purpose. Gaja argued that "there are different types of feminism" and mentioned that KONSOLA collaborates with Babilad (translation: women's land) organization, whose co-creator is also a young feminist. However, Babilad does something completely different from KONSOLA – while KONSOLA focuses on more academic conferences or workshops, Babilad organizes personal development workshops for women, such as: make up courses, seamstress courses, belly dancing, yoga – "things that are not associated with feminism, traditionally viewed as "more womanly" things – for where will you see a feminist with make-up, who is making a dress for herself, who's belly dancing... since 'feminist only sit and connive against the entire world'", Gaja said with an ironic smile. Looking over the website for Babilad, the word "feminism" or "feminist" is not present, however in their mission statement, the creators do mention that Babilad "supports actions and projects directed towards women and sensitizing gender issues, as well as promote actions targeting promotion of tolerance³³". From my conversation with the women and man I interviewed (including also

³³ Retrieved from <http://babilad.pl/naszamisja.php>; my translation from Polish.

those women who no longer are active in KONSOLA) it seemed pretty clear that some of them see Babilad as filling the gap between the feminist and ordinary women – it is a space and a place where women can learn from one another – and through Babilad’s collaboration with KONSOLA, other women, the so-called ordinary women (mothers, wives, workers etc.) can be reached and perhaps even exposed to feminism, its ideals and goals.

There are other issues to consider with outreach actions. Karolina, when asked about reaching out to ordinary women and familiarizing them with feminism, somberly answered: “I am not sure whether we [KONSOLA] know how to [do that]... diversity is hard to swallow...”. She proceeded to tell me a story – when in 2006 “I was co organizing Manifa with the Anarchist Federation, Anarchists wanted to include working women in the March. So for about 2 weeks, I, alongside other women from the other organizations, went to the union workers, met with the leaders, explained what Manifa is about and received a positive answer. Yet, the moment the union leader (female) found out that feminists and lesbians are also going to be present at the march, that abortion will be the topic of the march, she took down the Manifa poster and never came”. Furthermore Karolina stated that reaching out to others means “a lot of basic work – you have to talk to them, you have to find them...you have to go to Cegielski’s factory³⁴ at 6 am and give them those fliers”. After a while she continued, “we often live in a world where we hang a poster at the University, we’ll give a flier away somewhere on the street and that is the end... I don’t know, I don’t really want to judge but I think there really isn’t a readiness for this hard work and ideas on how to reach such goals.” Bozena also viewed activities of Babilad as “a different kind of feminism” and argued that KONSOLA is an academic association so its goals are going to be different than those of other organizations, like Babilad.

³⁴H. Cegielski - Poznań S.A. is a well-known Polish manufacturing company from the city of Poznań. During Communism it was known as Stalin Metal Works in Poznań. It was also the site of the 1956 protests in Poznan.

Others also argued for the academic vs. other feminism split. Alina stated she was glad that KONSOLA has a more academic approach to feminism rather than offering some form of help. She argued that financially that would not be beneficial for association such as KONSOLA and additionally members of KONSOLA are not professionals trained to deal with various problems (such as discrimination or abuse). “Such associations as KONSOLA”, she continued, “that deal with feminism in mostly academic terms are good and necessary because one can spot youth in certain classes, and interest them further”. Alicja echoed Karolina’s argument and said that she too “saw a split into two groups: one actively helping and the other working in academic fields.”

The issue of the specificity of Polish feminism as a middle class phenomenon should be examined more closely. As I mentioned above, all the members of KONSOLA I interviewed had been in the process of or have already finished their Masters degrees. During their studies they have become familiar with the gender studies courses, classes or information which women of previous generations or women who did not attend colleges or universities have not been exposed to. The fact is that gender studies courses and programs at Polish universities have started quite recently. In Warsaw for example, at Warsaw University, the gender studies program started in the mid-1990s (1995 to be exact), while in the US and some other countries programs like that have been in existence since the late 1960’s. Why did we have to wait till then? These programs not coincidentally happened when women in Poland, in academia and elsewhere, were reaching some levels of power, permitting first the inception and then the development of these programs. As Elzbieta Pakszys, a well-known Polish professor, writes in the report on “Meta-analysis of gender and science research” in Poland (2009), the initial interest in gender research and women’s studies should be associated with the enormous socio-political transformation that started in the late 1980s in Poland. The fall of Communism and the change to the market economy have triggered a “chain reaction” in the former Eastern bloc. Pakszys writes that “the implantation of

women's emancipation/feminists ideas, however, took place mainly in some universities' units carried there often in the beginning by clandestine activity of the individuals who obtained earlier a consciousness raised enough (often informed abroad) to be ready and determined to proliferate them among the others being prone for this kind of agenda" (2009: 1). Further development and exchange of ideas was possible through various conferences, in Poland and abroad as well as through the support of foreign foundations (such as Soros's Open Society and Fulbright), which provided funds for research dedicated to these topics. These developments led to the beginning of publications of the first Polish collections of articles and books concerning women's issues, not only those imported from elsewhere, but also those beginning an independent discourse devoted to women's/gender issues in science. Hence, the formation of gender studies programs.

Although these programs are still a few and far between (located mainly at public Universities in major Polish cities: Warsaw, Poznan, Cracow, Lodz, Torun, Wroclaw and Szczecin) many do not have full time faculty associated with them, many are still "additional" certificate programs and quite a few have a fee attached (even though courses are taking places at otherwise public and free universities). The good news is that these programs are growing in numbers due to the interest that they are generating. So there is an obvious need for them. And nowadays, although still the attendees are overwhelmingly female students from humanities and social sciences, some men are starting to attend as well.

But I also wondered about the details of these programs. For example, as a student at Queens College, CUNY during my introduction to Women's Studies programs, I have read selections from Simone de Beauvoir (1989), Mary Wollstonecraft (1993) to Betty Friedan (1963) and Judith Butler (2006). In comparison, I was interested to see what these young Polish feminists were reading. In Warsaw for example, Dr. Wojciech Smieja from Slask University is offering a course on Gender and Queer Theory in contemporary humanities and the bibliography includes translated readings from Butler

(1990) and Foucault (1998) but also works of Polish feminists such as Agnieszka Graff (2008)³⁵. Other courses consider postmodernism and gender as well as representation of Jewish women in film. The courses that are being offered are definitely very diverse. However, they are not offered every semester but rather every two semesters and while that promotes diversity, it also has some significant drawbacks. For example: there are no “core courses” being offered each semester which leads to some areas possibly not getting enough coverage in the coursework. Since queer theory and LGBT studies are of interest currently, there are a few courses at different universities on those topics, but yet areas of women’s economic status, such as (un)employment and issues of maternity, have been largely neglected.

However, on a more positive note, recently some universities and private schools have started programs such as “All ages University” and “Third Age University” which in essence are similar to the Continuing Education classes that many schools in US offer. Mature men and women, people of all backgrounds and from all education levels, attend a variety of lectures and seminars led by scholars (as well as business professionals, athletes and politicians) and covering a multitude of topics. Last year, “listeners,” as the participants are called, enjoyed symposiums led by such people as Jolanta Kwasniewska (former First lady of the Polish Republic), Jacek Zakowski (a well-known Polish journalist) as well as Prof. Magdalena Sroda, former Plenipotentiary for Equal Status of Men and Women. These programs also offer language learning courses as well as classes from art education to physical exercises, and although these classes are sometimes quite expensive, the number of attendees has been growing each year³⁶.

³⁵ To view the course outline for Dr. Smieja’s course please visit: <http://www.gender.uw.edu.pl/en/studies/29.z.1>.

³⁶For more on the “All ages” and “Third Age” Universities in Poland, their websites and programs please see: <http://www.wsb.pl/oferta-uczelnia.uniwersytet-kazdego-wieku> and <http://www.utw.pl/>.

Although there is no denying the fact that that mere existence of these courses is a huge step forward for Poland, Polish women and Polish feminists, the relegation of gender issues to this limited, albeit very crucial sphere of academia, leaves many behind. It seems that feminists in academia are narrowing their viewpoint to the theoretical discussions of discourse, while leaving working women's issues behind. What is missing is the link connecting those young feminists with the problems of women in Poland overall. Those ordinary women, young and old who have not attended gender studies programs, who work, who have children, who attended different programs are left out of the discussion. Or their problems and issues are not addressed to the same extent. This then, leads to the class division problem between those educated in feminist studies and those who were not. While I do not argue that issues of one group should be viewed as more important than those of another, it is important to recognize the fact that such omissions will have consequences. And those are visible on the most basic level, for example, within a family.

Let me illustrate this point with an example: my mother, who never read de Beauvoir (1989), or Betty Friedan (1963), who used to be a chemistry teacher, an agricultural worker and now is an artist interested in gender issues, often states that for her theories on gendered power are hard to understand. For her, what matters is that she is insured, that she receives her retirement fund that she is able to provide for her family. Her friends as well, worry about unemployment issues, maternity leaves and job security. She understands the underlying theoretical issues but does not have a vocabulary that gender studies provide for understanding all this. Hence, our discussions often lead to misunderstandings on both parts. On a larger scale, these misinterpretations put academic women in conflict with working women and the inability to resolve these issues leads to further misapprehensions and sometimes outrage. In Poland this has been visible especially with the abortion issue – which feminists view as a crucial right of every woman while others, particularly older and religious women, see as a sin. This

point is underlined above when Karolina talks about trying to interest other women, older and working class women in Marches or other feminist issues. Similarly, Ewa Kondratowicz in her book *Lipstick on a banner*³⁷ (2001) talks about interviewing Anna Walentynowicz, the working class forgotten female hero of Solidarity, and the fact that Walentynowicz refused to be interviewed after finding out that Kondratowicz is a feminist and further, that she supports abortion. Older, less educated, working class women, like those from Cegielski's factory or Walentynowicz herself tend to be also more religious and therefore slightly less inclined to subscribe to the feminist stands on abortion, sexuality and women's rights. These women tend to have more traditional, possibly even church-aligned visions of gender roles (limited to those of wives and mothers) and anything that breaks this path can be viewed as unknown, problematic, weird and unpleasant and therefore has to be rejected soon if not immediately.

On the other hand, women in higher positions in Polish politics (like Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz, a current mayor of Warsaw and former Chairman of the National Bank of Poland, the Central Bank of Poland) openly speak about not being feminists. Gronkiewicz-Waltz even called herself the "feminist antitype" (cited in Graff, 2001:73) and argued that she stands against feminism due to the fact that "the Polish feminist movement is sick because it works for the benefit of men. For example, [it] wants to make divorces easier for men. I want to give woman a choice, to be able to stay at home. The idol of feminists is the tractor-driving woman from the 1950s, while I idolize a real woman and mother. That is why I am cutting ties with feminists. However, normal women from the European Union Forum, with central-rightists views support me" (Graff, 2001: 74; my translation from Polish). Why does Gronkiewicz-Waltz, one of the most successful high level female officials, argue so strongly against

³⁷ The title of the book refers to the fact that women were actually in charge of Solidarity after the male leadership was arrested on the night of December 13, 1981, when martial law was declared, and yet rarely are the sacrifices of these women talked about. If it wasn't for the lipstick (women), the flag of Solidarity would not fly high (for Solidarity would not survive).

feminism? Because, as Denise Roman writes, “to be a feminist is considered... as either shameful and subversive in an immoral way, or as a residue of communist politics” (2001: 61).

It is also important to note that women in powerful positions in Polish government are talked about as “being a man underneath”, “having balls” and even to some extent “being one of the guys”. In Polish we have a proverb stating “once you enter among crows, you have to screech the way they do” – in this case, meaning that once a woman or a few women were able to reach the high positions that previously were held only by men, once they climb the ladder and found themselves among (white) men only, they [these women] had to act like their male counterparts, or sometimes be even more ruthless and pushy. They had to prove themselves to be worthy of that position, they have to prove their ‘normalcy’ and the only way that was going to be done is if they were “men enough” and therefore left all the “women-like” qualities (and behaviors) behind the metaphorical doors.

But not everything is so gloomy. Small steps are happening on a larger scale as well. In addition to the efforts of programs such as “All Ages University”, one example is the Women’s Party (Polish: Partia Kobiet) which came into existence as a political party in January of 2007³⁸. The person behind it is a known Polish feminist author, Manuela Gretkowska – a founder and president of the party. The Women’s Party became known for its semi-nude posters of all the party members, all female, holding a sign (covering their private parts) with its slogan: “The Party of Women. Poland is a Woman³⁹”. Although some feminists and many non-feminists were critical of the poster (seeing it as objectifying women while others saw it as inappropriate and even shocking), it did catch the attention of national and international media outlets.

³⁸ For more on Women’s Party please visit: <http://www.polskajestkobieta.org/>.

³⁹ To view the poster please see: <http://franz.blox.pl/2007/09/Polska-jest-Kobieta-smutna.html>.

In terms of the issues that the party fights for, the legalization of abortion is one of the important ones, but Gretkowska argues that other key areas are women's rights and helping more women enter the male-dominated political world. In an interview for one of the Polish newspapers, Krakow Post, Gretkowska is quoted saying: "I want women in Poland to be treated as rightful citizens... Polish women also pay taxes like men, but our laws are not adjusted to meet women's needs. The female part of society feels discriminated against from birth to retirement" (Filipowicz, 2007).

Furthermore, the fact that average woman's old-age pension is much lower than a man's is a problem as well; since in Poland men can count on an average pension of 68% of their last paycheck and women on barely 51% (*Bankier.pl*; OECD 2011). This of course ties to the fact that women retire earlier to men and their pensions are also therefore smaller (60 years for women and 65 for men). According to the article, 6 million Polish women stay at home and depend on the earnings of their partners and because they are not putting the money they could earn (by having jobs) to the pension system, resulting in smaller earnings when they begin drawing pensions than those who have been working. Other key issues advocated by the Party are: equal pay for men and women, access to free contraceptives and enjoyment of the expanded child care. Part of the party's platform reads: "Dressed or naked, we are not only sex objects. We are innocent and honest - we have clean hands, clean hearts and clean intentions." Many women celebrities, such as actress Krystyna Janda and boxing champion Agnieszka Rylik, say they support Gretkowska. However, the sad part is that in 2007 parliamentary elections, the Women's Party received only 3% of votes - below the 5 percent needed to gain seats.

Another question that has to be asked is to what extent do feminists in Poland, especially those young ones I interviewed, represent the interests of Polish women overall? As an example, Majcher et al. talk about the debates on the extension of maternity leaves in 1999 (2004: 91) which were cut from

26 weeks (which was the law since 1974; Dziennik Ustaw z 1999 r. Nr 99 poz. 1152⁴⁰) to just 20 weeks. On one hand, feminists argued against those extensions claiming that they would further undermine the already weak position of women in the marketplace. Non feminist women on the other hand were for the extensions seeing them as an improvement of their financial status and the quality of childcare. And yet, ironically neither the feminists' nor their opponents' voices were crucial for the final decision in either case. The final decision in the case of women's lower retirement age has been to keep the minimum age for women lower than that for men, yet to make it voluntary (a woman may retire earlier or work for another couple of years), which does not solve the problem of women's being "pushed out" of the labor market. In effect, the problem of retirement age for both men and women has been postponed, awaiting a more complex solution. In the case of extended maternity leaves, after an initial period of extensions, they were shortened again to the previous duration due to budget cuts.

Although issues of equal employment, pensions, health insurance, etc. are issues of great importance to the young feminists and non-feminists alike it seems that young feminists from KONSOLA are focusing on a more academic way of "spreading feminism" – through conferences, workshops, literature publications and even art exhibits. Such methods, although important, might not entice other women, working women to come to them. Conferences usually take place during work hours on weekdays and often working women cannot take a day off to attend. Also, maybe the issues discussed do not seem important to working women, i.e. discussion on queer issues in Poland will be less attended than discussion on pension legislature.

The abortion issue has especially divided Polish women and whenever it is brought up, problems arise. On one hand, young feminists argue for the abolition of the draconian anti-abortion law that Polish government put in place in 1993, arguing for the right of women to their own bodies; on the other hand

⁴⁰ <http://www.abc.com.pl/serwis/du/1999/1152.htm>.

many working women oppose feminists' stands arguing with the politics of the Catholic Church about the importance of respecting life from the moment of conception. And additionally, this issue is even more divisive due to age category – many young feminists are in their reproductive years while working women, older women are highly unlikely to have another child yet they feel that they have a right to vote on the issue of abortion.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I aimed to underline some of the important topics that are being explored in the East vs. West feminist dialogue. This conversation continues and is going strong especially now when the borders between countries are being re-written, at least in the theoretical sense, with the emergence of an ever greater (larger) European Union. However, this phenomenon also raises many more questions than it answers. Is the American model of feminism fitting for the needs of EU women? For former CEE women? Who are the EU women? What about the divisions within the EU? With Nordic countries such as Sweden and Finland leading in gender equality issues, whose model of women's rights should Eastern women emulate? Should we just pick and choose ideas that we like from all the sides? Will the dialogue continue to evolve and change in this new era? Will the allergy start to ameliorate itself because of continuous exposure of women's rights in the EU arena?

It is hard to predict what will happen. But we can be sure of one thing. The dialogue between women feminists from different countries, cultures, socio-political standings is still crucial to the survival of the movement of feminism. Although the dialogue is often problematic, can sometimes fall apart, can be stagnant, nonetheless, it is important that we do talk. The words of the young Polish feminists echo that argument. With education, without borders, with EU breaking barriers much can change. Polish youth are now able to experience life as citizens of

the European Union, with rights equal to those of Western European citizens – a phenomenon that was unthinkable just a few decades ago. With increased exposure, and a well-educated society much can be changed. With our government under pressure from the higher powers within the EU changes for the better are more likely to come than without it. But this is all a sphere of speculation. We have to sit and wait for things to unfold....

CHAPTER FOUR: THE PROMISE OF EU ENTRY

In the previous chapter I have outlined some of the interesting and problematic points that are often brought up when dialogue between feminists from Eastern European countries and Western countries (represented mostly by feminists from the US) occurs. Some of the issues that I have discussed included the problem of inclusion in feminism and feminist theory, the problematic concept of what feminism is and how it is framed, as well as problem of language relevance, among many others.

In this chapter, I would like to focus on the actualities of what happened when Poland started its negotiations to enter the European Union (EU), the union of (then) fifteen countries, with its own specific guidelines on gender equality and women's rights. I would like to start by taking a look at how Polish people viewed the entrance to the European Union, then I would like to quickly review some of the EU gender laws that already exist and mention how Poland as a candidate country dealt with accommodation and implementation of those laws, and then I move on to see what young Polish feminists have thought about the promises of gender equal Poland, a new member of the European Union.

The promise of EU entry

As I am writing these words it is June 2009 and for over five years now Poland has been a member of the European Union⁴¹. And yet in several key areas we are still lagging behind other members – especially now, in this economic crisis, our unemployment is high (official channels are reporting that it is reaching 10.6%, compared to an average of 8.9% in 2008 and a predicted

⁴¹ Poland joined the EU on May 1st, 2004, along with nine other countries (the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Slovenia, Slovakia, Cyprus and Malta) finally ending the division of Europe decided by the Great Powers 60 years earlier at Yalta.

13% in 2010⁴²), and GDP has been falling throughout 2008⁴³ and of course, abortion is still illegal. But that is not all. As I am writing these words, in the library of my graduate school in New York city, on the day when the gay community here is commemorating the Stonewall riots, I recall a conversation I had not too long ago with a very good friend of mine who happens to be gay. He told me that he would love to visit me in Poland, but he is afraid to, after hearing about frequent assaults on gays and lesbians there (Feinberg, 2006). Sexual minorities in Poland have a very hard time in asserting their rights, not only due to overwhelming opposition from the Catholic Church, but also from the government that basically turns its back on this social problem and even at times attacking them (Report: Campaign Against Homophobia, 2007).

So why did we, Poles wanted to join the European Union in the first place? The reasons were many, according to the experts (and I will write about them shortly). For many Poles, my family among them, they were also personal. When I asked my mother to reflect on this change, she says that sometimes it is still hard for her to believe the events of the past two decades. She used to tell me stories about political repression when she was a student, and especially about the tragic night of December 13, 1981 when martial law was declared and she feared never seeing her husband again. She said that she could not believe that one day the borders would be open and we could and would travel anywhere – even to the US.

This message of freedom was also something I remember from my years of childhood – standing with my mom in lines several blocks long, without any knowledge of what was the product at the end or whether we would even get to buy it. I remember the empty shelves at the stores and the ingenuity of fixing the washing machine with a corkscrew and some rubber bands.

⁴²According to the figures from the Polish Central Statistical Office:
http://www.stat.gov.pl/gus/5840_677_ENG_HTML.htm.

⁴³Statistics taken from Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD);
<http://www.oecdpublising.org/Keygraphs/Poland-frame.html>.

I remember passing a Pewex store where such toys stared me in the eye and I remember hoping that one day I won't have to collect dollars to get them. I was hoping that one day Barbie dolls would be readily accessible for all of us, that I will be able to visit my friend in Germany and that all will be well. World Peace would be great too... But joking aside, I think that for many Poles, the entrance of Poland to the EU symbolized the destruction of the last obstacle, the hammering of the last nail into the metaphorical Communist coffin. The EU was the final stop on the road to the establishment of Polish strength and independence. We were going to become citizens of Europe, finally.

Well, of course on the large national scale, the economic, social and security benefits that EU entrance would promise were enticing. Poland, still recovering from the decades of the Communist rule and its closed-door policy towards the West, was still rebuilding its economy. Trade with the EU member states would have been of immense help and the free movement of labor was definitely one of the concerns discussed on the national forum. The security question was also of much importance. One of the reports published showed that the stronger feeling of security (on both national and local levels) was the first reason many Poles gave for their positive attitudes towards joining the EU (ARC Rynek i Opinia Report, 2007). Polish history is a violent one, with epic battles, several partitions and two world wars. Our closest neighbors, Russia and Germany, had, at one point in our history, been our greatest enemies. The betrayal by our allies (Poland had military pacts with England and France) at the beginning of World War II (WWII) and then at the end of the War by the Soviet Union (at the infamous Yalta Conference in 1945) has not been forgotten. For those reasons many Poles overwhelmingly supported (67% in March 1999, OBOP⁴⁴) the entrance of our country to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization

⁴⁴OBOP: Polish Central Statistical Office.

(NATO, which Poland joined in 1999) and spoke in support of later entrance to the EU, for they saw benefits in a few major areas: first, it was viewed as a long-term economic advantage, since it was bringing our emerging democracy closer to the West. After decades of Soviet rule and anti-Western propaganda many dreamed about the mystical West and the promises it brought. Secondly but also most importantly, because of our sandwiched geographical position, this pact was establishing the fact that we would not be left alone if any of our neighbors decide to attack us, and that the situation from 1939 would not repeat itself. In 1999 Poland joined NATO and ever since we enjoyed the military alliance it provided, but also have dealt with NATO-member responsibilities - reforming our own military and sending our soldiers to military missions in the Kosovo (510 soldiers), Afghanistan (1600 soldiers), and even Chad (400 soldiers) (Bieszynski, 2008).

Although becoming a member of NATO was important for Poland in terms of political and military security, Poles saw joining the EU as an even further extension of the economic and political security agreement. Not only would our borders would be safe, our economy would grow since now our crops⁴⁵ could be sold on an international market (Poland is still largely an agricultural country: today a little over 38% of Poles still live in rural areas, compared to a little less than 62% living in urban areas although statisticians have noted that more and more Poles are moving back to the rural areas according to GUS, 2010⁴⁶), not to mention free travel across the European continent. Poles argued that entrance to the EU would also lead to few more positive changes: feeling of unity with other members of the EU (feeling as a part of something larger) and even increased comfort of traveling to other EU member states. On a more practical

⁴⁵ Poland is a European leader in growing potatoes and sugar beets, but other popular industrial crops include flax, hemp, canola and turnip rape, poppy, sunflower, soya, hops and even tobacco.

⁴⁶ GUS: Główny Urząd Statystyczny; eng: Central Statistical Office.

levels, Poles argued that our country's infrastructure may gain: better roads would be built, new investments in Polish products would follow and freedom of internal (EU based) migration would definitely bring more money into Polish people's pockets because now Poles would be able to earn their wages in Euros or British Pounds, worth more than that of Polish currency (ARC Rynek I Opinia Report, 2007).

All these reasons were of immense attraction to the Polish government and as I mentioned, to the Polish people themselves. In 1991 Poland signed a Europe Association Agreement that instituted the goal of free trade development between EU member states and Poland over the next 10 years. To deal with this issue the government created the position of the Secretary of State for Economic Integration and Foreign Aid (Stawarska, 1999: 824). In 1993, the EU extended the possibility of future EU membership to countries from the former Soviet bloc on the condition of meeting the following three general criteria: "(1) stable democratic institutions and the rule of law; (2) a functioning market economy; and (3) the ability to adopt the *acquis communautaire*, a weighty, eighty-thousand-page document that contains all EU laws." (Anderson, 2006: 106; emphasis in original). In other words, this document lists the common foundation of rights and obligations which binds together the Member States of the European Union. The term itself is French: *acquis* meaning "that which has been acquired", and *communautaire* meaning "of the community". In 1994 Poland applied for full membership in the European Union.

How was this process going to be carried out? Although at the 1993 Council broad rules were given, no monitoring process, no oversight on this enormously large and incredibly important course of action had been established until July 1997, with the publication of *Agenda 2000*. This document basically is an action program whose "main objectives are to strengthen

Community policies and to give the European Union a new financial framework for the period 2000-06 with a view to enlargement” (European Commission, *Agenda 2000*, 1999). It was launched in 1999 in the form of twenty legislative texts relating to the following priority areas: (a) continuation of the agricultural reform along the lines of the changes made in 1988 and 1992, with a view to stimulating European competitiveness, taking great account of environmental considerations, ensuring fair income for farmers, simplifying legislation and decentralising the application of legislation⁴⁷; (b) increasing the effectiveness of the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund by greater thematic and geographic concentration of projects on specific objectives and geographical areas and thus improving management⁴⁸; as well as (c) adopting a financial framework for the period 2000-06 in order to enable the Union to meet the main challenges of the beginning of the 21st century, in particular enlargement, while ensuring budgetary discipline.

This document states that accession would not only depend on the ability of *acquis* adoption by a country but also on “full harmonization of national laws with EU laws prior to receiving membership status” (Anderson, 2006, 106). The *Agenda* also provided a timetable and called for Regular Reports (done on a yearly basis) which would give the EU an idea of how the country is progressing towards its inclusion into the union. The opinion on Poland published in the original *Agenda* reads that “since 1989, Poland has actively pursued a policy of strengthening its ties with the EU in all spheres and that the Europe Agreement has been effectively implemented in most sectors” (Stawarska, 1999, 828). The process lasted from March 1998 to December 2002, a total of 4 years. In the European Commission’s progress report published in

⁴⁷ For more on the topic of CAP in *Agenda 2000* please visit: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/publi/review99/08_09_en.pdf.

⁴⁸ For more on the topic of Structural Funds please see: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/index_en.cfm.

December of 1998, Poland was ranked as the second most ready country (out of the total of ten) to join the European Union – losing its first place only to Hungary (*Accession Partnership*, 1998). The report stressed the need for improvement in areas such as labor standards, the environment, as well as agriculture (Stawarska, 1999, 836). And in December 2002 the negotiations came to close.

Since this dissertation deals with gender issues, now I would like to first present the EU gender guidelines and laws for the prospective new members, then move on to a discussion of how (and if) Polish government addressed them. Finally, I would like to present the views of Polish feminists on that topic.

EU Gender laws

In 1996 the European Commission published a Communication on “Incorporating equal opportunities for women and men into all Community policies and activities” (COM (96) 67, of 21.02.1996) – which in essence means, gender mainstreaming.

Gender mainstreaming is defined as follows: “mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of women as well as of men an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres, so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated” by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)⁴⁹. The ultimate goal of mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality.

⁴⁹For more please see: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/GMS.PDF>.

A year later, the progress report noted that there has been a significant amount of progress in the field of gender mainstreaming, particularly in 3 key areas: employment policy and the structural funds⁵⁰, external relations, which include development co-operation and women's human rights; and education, training and youth policies.

However, the report also stated that “stronger efforts are needed to integrate the gender dimension in some EU policies such as enlargement process and the Information Society⁵¹.” (European Union press release, IP/98/210;) meaning that gender sensitive development is informed by the material realities of the group in question, whether its men or women. I am talking here about efforts to use gender sensitive programming aiming to bridge the gendered digital divide by situating women and men's lack of access to information technology within their everyday lived realities. Such strategies would go beyond questions of male prejudice and preconceptions to the development of projects that identify and address the concrete barriers that women and men face. Further, gender sensitive development strategies acknowledge that the gender digital divide partially reflects and can intensify gendered inequalities within households, communities, labour markets and the larger economy.

On November 23, 1998 Pdraig Flynn, then the European Commissioner responsible for Employment and Social Affairs (he served in this capacity from 1993 to 1998), addressed attendees at the European conference on Equal Opportunities and analyzed the progress made

⁵⁰European Structural Funds (which are: ERDF: European Regional Development Fund; ESF: European Social Fund; EAGGF: The European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund and FIG: Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance) are valuable instruments helping in attaining of equality between women and men as regards employment, training, access to the labour market and participation in the decision-making process. For more please see:

http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/employment_and_social_policy/equality_between_men_and_women/c10237a_en.htm.

⁵¹For more on gender mainstreaming within information technology please see: http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/gender/gender_mainstreaming_activities.html.

since the Fourth UN Conference on Women in Beijing (1995). According to Mr. Flynn, on an internal Commission level, mainstreaming moved very quickly into the policy level, which in itself can be argued to be a great success. How was this success measured? As Mr. Flynn underlined in his speech, arguing for the specifics of EU bureaucracy in this measure:

In 1995 after Beijing, we set up, inside the Commission, a small group of Commissioners, chaired by President Santer personally, who deal in detail with equality issues. We hold around four meetings a year and also meet the European Women's Lobby, the European Parliament's Committee on women's rights and the Advisory Committee on equal opportunities. We have also within the Commission appointed a working group of gender mainstreaming officials from the 29 Directorates-General and services to develop and monitor our performance. Awareness raising aimed at middle and senior management has been identified as a priority and specific training is being provided⁵².

And all of these efforts and their impact will be monitored regularly by the Commission.

What was even more illuminating in his speech was the fact that now “the new Treaty of Amsterdam specifically states in its opening articles – the articles that deal with the most fundamental ideals of the Union – that we have the explicit duty to eliminate inequality and promote equality in all our activity” (Flynn, 1998).

Flynn also underlined the importance of a dual approach in terms of gender mainstreaming efforts – there would be no abolition of specific legislative measures aiming at correction of current inequalities between men and women; rather, there should be a “complementarity between specific measures to combat inequality and general mainstreaming of equality in all policies”. What he meant was that for example, in terms of gender-equal employment, we not only have gender gaps and also pay gaps but also a diminishing working population. Therefore Mr. Flynn emphasized the need to not only attract women to the workforce

⁵² Speech by Pádraig Flynn, at the European conference on Equal Opportunities Follow-up to the Fourth UN Conference on Women European Conference Centre Madrid, 23 November 1998 (SPEECH/98/258).

but furthermore, adoption of policies that would make it easier to combine work and family responsibilities and at the same time encourage men to take an equal share of family and household responsibilities.

Key needs of women have to be considered and taken into account while adopting gender mainstreaming policies – issues such as women’s special needs in training under employability, their difficulties in obtaining credit under entrepreneurship, their need for flexible but secure work organization under adaptability. We cannot just look at and strive for gender equality, we have to make sure that we are understanding of the needs that have to be met. Otherwise the structure will fall apart.

Although one can argue that indeed much has changed from the Beijing conference in 1995 to the date of Commissioner Flynn’s speech, it has to be stated that for the most part this victory was achieved only on paper. It goes without saying that collaboration between governments of then 15 union states cannot be easy and the agreement to have common laws is of great importance. However, implementation will always differ from country to country, since different economic and social models require that and different cultural, religious and ethnic issues will influence that implementation as well. Therefore, on the issue of enlargement of the Union, the addition of ten more countries (8 of whom were part of the former Soviet bloc) will further divide and problematize this gender mainstreaming policy implementation. The experience of living through Communism and the legacy of its gender politics may prove to be a problem to the community of nations at large.

Although promises for progress of gender mainstreaming seemed to be quite impressive, the 2004 progress report on gender mainstreaming in policy areas was not overly optimistic. Within the entire European Union noticeable improvements included the rise in the women’s

employment rate from 50% in the early 1990s to 55.6% in 2004 (European Commission, 2004); and the gap in unemployment rates between men and women has been dropping, although very slowly. But, even though the gender gap in employment has been narrowing, the process remained snail-like (European Commission, 2004). And remaining inequalities also do not paint a pretty picture: “in paid labour, a 17.2% gap exists between men and women’s employment rates in EU 15...The unemployment gender gap is 1.8%” (European Commission, 2004) and 34% of women employees work part-time, compared only to 7% of men in EU15. Furthermore, the report reveals that once women are able to secure a job, they can expect to earn less than their male counterparts: the gender pay gap is 16% in the EU (for full time employment, 40 or more hours a week). On top of that, women are 3% more likely to fall into poverty than men. Issues of responsibility of sharing childcare, care for the elderly and household duties were also mentioned in the report. In this regard, the issue for women lies in the delicate balancing act of reconciling of family and work life. And sadly, in the key area of decision-making, women still lag significantly behind men. Just 25.4% of parliamentary seats in the EU are occupied by women. They also account for just 30% of managerial positions in private industry (European Commission, 2004).

There are a total of eight EU gender equity directives which deal with women’s work and family life. All of them are included in Social and Employment policies, chapter 13 of the *acquis communautaire*, and were thus a part of the accession criteria (Anderson, 2006). Although gender equity directives certainly did not dominate negotiations between member states and the candidate country, the EU’s formal commitment to national adherence to equal opportunities certainly was firm and clear. Throughout the reports that followed the *Agenda 2000*, the European Commission underlined the fact that there is “no accession without equal opportunities

between men and women” (European Commission, “Annual Report from the Commission,” 2003, 28) and emphasis was put on the necessity of development of “machinery to enforce these rights” (European Commission, Annual Report, 2001). The Commission also stated that “all types of [gender] inequality must be tackled.” (European Commission, Annual Report 2001).

Mark A. Pollack and Emilie Hafner-Burton (2000) have offered a critical look at the adoption and implementation of gender mainstreaming in the European Union in five issue-areas of EU policy: (a) Structural Funds, (b) employment, (c) development, (d) competition, and (e) science, research and development. Structural Funds allow the European Union to grant financial assistance to resolve structural economic and social problems and are composed of: the European Regional Development Funds (ERDF), whose principal objective is to promote economic and social cohesion within the European Union through the reduction of imbalances between regions or social groups; the European Social Fund (ESF), the main financial instrument allowing the Union to realize the strategic objectives of its employment policy; the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF - Guidance Section), which contributes to the structural reform of the agriculture sector and to the development of rural areas; and the Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance (FIFG), which is a specific fund for the structural reform of the fisheries sector.

In terms of the second issue area of the EU policy – employment, the employment title (Title VIII) of the EC Treaty, is there to provide mechanisms for achieving a high level of employment by the promotion of coordination between employment policies of the Member States, with a view to enhancing their effectiveness by developing a coordinated strategy for employment. The third key issue talks about development, which refers to the fact that the EU is one of the largest world’s providers of official development aid, focusing on African, Caribbean,

and Pacific countries (or ACP countries) as well as commitment to the former Soviet bloc, the Mediterranean as well as other developing regions. The area of competition sees as its mission the creation and maintenance of a competitive European market-place and the last key area, that of science, research and development pursues and promotes scientific research and development, mainly via a series of Framework Programmes that sponsor collaborative research and technological development across many sectors (Pollack and Hafner-Burton, 2006).

I would like to share some of Pollack and Hafner-Burton's conclusions. Among the members of the EU, there was a large variety across issue-areas in acceptance and implementation of the EU's gender mainstreaming mandate. However, the authors suggest that, "in terms of its procedures for gender mainstreaming as well as the development of gender-sensitive policies, the EU is rapidly emerging as one of the most progressive polities on earth in terms of its promotion of equal opportunities for women and men." (451-452). Nevertheless, the authors do reiterate a few important critical observations: first, there is the fear that a policy of gender mainstreaming will lead to desertion or negligence of specific, positive actions on behalf of women – meaning that if gender is everyone's problem it's really nobody's problem (2000, 452). In other words, critics of gender mainstreaming efforts argue that either specific policies on behalf of women will be discontinued or that the Equal Opportunity Unit, which played such a crucial role in the development and management of the mainstreaming approach, will itself be weakened in the name of that very same mainstreaming. This can lead to a significant setback to the promotion of gender equality in the EU and "women's advocates may therefore be expected to campaign for the retention of the Commission's dual-track approach, and the maintenance of a central role for the Equal Opportunities Unit" (452). Second, although many gender mainstreaming initiatives were undertaken, most failed to result in the creation of legally

enforceable laws. Hence these were pushed to the area of so-called “soft laws” that are only viable on paper, not in reality. In other words, the Commission argued for gender mainstreaming to be not a substitute for equal treatment guarantees or positive actions but rather a supplement to those so that one can talk about a long-term transformation of the EU policies in reaching the goal of equal opportunity between men and women.

On that particular issue, the authors offer another solution. Rather than the creation of legally enforceable rights, long-term transformation of the EU policy process to serve the goal of equal opportunity between woman and men should be taking place (Pollack and Hafner-Burton, 2000: 452). How would that be implemented and monitored? In this case the authors do not offer an answer. And lastly, the authors argue that an “integrationist” approach to gender mainstreaming (an approach that introduces a gender perspective into existing policy processes but does not challenge existing policy paradigms) should give way to an “agenda-setting” approach, where there is fundamental rethinking not simply of means or procedures of policy-making, but of the end goals or policy from a gender perspective. Under this model, women would not only be added to the mainstream, but would in turn reorient the nature of the mainstream itself (2000, 452).

From that logic, one then can argue that if candidate countries were seriously considering joining the European Union, the incorporation of EU equal opportunities directives into national laws as well as the construction of institutional structures that would support the implementation of those regulations would be given serious attention on the part of the prospective member country. Sadly, as I will argue on the following pages, this was hardly the case in Polish accession.

Equal opportunities in Poland before and during accession negotiations

As I mentioned above, it is a long road from negotiations to legal implementation. In the case of Poland, our government focused on the economic issues – trying to fix our economy so that the GDP went up, establishing the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) that would provide Polish farmers with a reasonable standard of living and preserve rural heritage, as well as creating measures to reduce the unemployment percentage. Social issues, and especially women’s issues such as equal opportunities for women and the creation of strong anti-discrimination laws were pushed aside. It seems that yet again the story repeated itself – in times of strife women’s issues were again pushed aside and told to await a better climate. Why was it that way? What has happened along the way? What follows is a brief explanation of the limited implementation of equal opportunities in Poland.

In 1997 a new Constitution was approved by the Polish Parliament (Dziennik Ustaw No. 78, item 483⁵³). This document contained a general clause banning discrimination in many forms, including discrimination based on sex and ensuring that men and women have the same rights in terms of educational opportunities, employment and promotion, the right to equal pay for work of equal value as well as the same rights to social security, public office and acceptance of honors and decorations (Anderson, 2006, 111). The exact clause reads as follows: “All persons shall be equal before the law. All persons shall have the right to equal treatment by public authorities” and “no one shall be discriminated against in political, social or economic life for any reason whatsoever” (Chapter II, Article 32 and 33). And yet, specific laws supporting and enforcing these general guidelines were never passed.

⁵³ The full text of the Polish Constitution (in English) can be found at: <http://www.sejm.gov.pl/prawo/konst/angielski/kon1.htm>.

In 2000, well after the 1998 accession negotiations with the EU, the Polish Ministry of Labor and Social Policy finally issued an ordinance banning gender requirements in job announcements. A year later, in 2001, an amendment to the Labor Code passed and brought Poland in line with the majority of EU equal opportunity directives opportunity directives. More specifically, it explicitly provided for legal assistance in cases of alleged wage discrimination based on sex and required employers to provide employees with information on these regulations. In addition, it shifted the burden of proof in cases of discrimination to the defendant, although only in limited circumstances. In June 2001 Poland and the EU completed the negotiations on the Social Policy and Employment chapter (Anderson, 2006, 112).

Leah Anderson (2006) has compared the accession processes of Poland and the Czech Republic and argues that the difference in which these countries tackled gender equity harmonization can be explained by the “opposition to social movements...especially in conjunction with political parties. When groups contesting EU gender equity laws were organized, as in the case of Poland, it was difficult for the government to adopt the EU norms.” (Anderson, 2006, 113). Interestingly, Anderson writes, the Czech Republic adopted gender equity legislation before Poland where feminist mobilization was greater during and after the accession process. In Czech Republic there was no serious threat to legal abortion and relatively little feminist mobilization. So why did the Czechs beat the Poles? Anderson argues that “it was the level of mobilization among citizens opposed to the EU’s equal opportunities policies that played the crucial role in the harmonization process” (Anderson, 2006, 114). Case in point: the crucial role played by the Catholic Church.

The Catholic Church has proven many times over that it holds significant power in Poland. Throughout history it was portrayed as a pillar of Polish independence, even in times

where Poland as a country was removed from the world map (1795-1918). During the Communist era, the Church (as well as the Polish Pope elected in 1978) gave people hope, stood against the hated foreign-installed government, and helped Poles believe that a better tomorrow would come. Entangled in that battle were the politics of equality, since a part of Catholic political and social agenda was “exposing the falseness of communism’s rhetoric of equality” (Graham and Regulska, 1997: 70) and instead arguing for distinct social roles that men and women carry. While the Communist Party preached gender equality, the Church encouraged Poles to pray and stand against the foreign ruler by rejecting its ideologies. Poles, Church officials argued, should be focusing on rebuilding our independent country together within the guidelines of Catholic faith. And within those strictures, Polish women were to be, most importantly, good mothers and wives, leaders of the new moral generation. By entangling faith with nationalism, the Catholic Church would steer Poles to the return of family life, the “new natural organic order in which religion and nationalism are the markers of authenticity” (Molyneux, 1994: 308) is assured. In this case the Catholic Church seemed to worry about a particular cultural issue – Poles losing their own Polish identity and that had to be prevented at any cost.

Additional resistance towards the gender equity directives of the European Union came when the opposition to the accession forged close ties with political parties of the Right. This collaboration resulted in prolonging the conflict, which in turn led to several years’ delay before the legislative reform of the EU was adopted (Anderson, 2006, 116). In 1997 the Democratic Left Alliance that prided itself on support of the EU policies lost its hold on the Polish government and the Solidarity Electoral Alliance (AWS), a party with close ties to the Church, took over. Thereafter followed a struggle for the social issues between the two parties.

During its two year reign, AWS made its position on gender equity quite clear. First of all, it allowed abortion policy to return to the 1993 law, making abortion severely restricted. The commonly known anti-abortion law, the “family planning, human embryo protection and conditions of legal abortion“ bill was signed on January 7, 1993⁵⁴ and the following three provisions became binding: abortion would only be permitted when pregnancy constitutes a threat to life or a serious threat to the health of the mother, which has to be confirmed by two doctors other than the doctor involved in the abortion; when prenatal examination, confirmed by two doctors other than the doctor involved in the abortion indicate heavy, irreversible damage of the embryo and if there is justified suspicion, confirmed by a prosecutor, that the pregnancy is a result of an illegal act (in this case, what constitutes an illegal act is judged by a prosecutor). Additionally, the doctor who performs an illegal abortion is subject to the punishment of up to two years of prison and any abortion must be performed in a public hospital.

Second, AWS changed the name of the position of Plenipotentiary for Women and Family to the Plenipotentiary for the family, removing gender equity issues from the office’s representative responsibilities (for more on the office of the Plenipotentiary for Equal status of Women and Men please see chapter six). Furthermore, the AWS leadership declined Polish participation in the EU’s voluntary Fourth Medium-Term Action Programme on Equal Opportunities for Women and Man⁵⁵, a program that, as Anderson notes, “the Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, Romania, and Slovenia all joined” (2006, 117). The program had six objectives which included: promoting equality in the economy; the reconciliation of working and family life; a better gender balance in the decision-making process; promoting the active exercise

⁵⁴Dz. U. z 1993 r. Nr 17, poz. 78.

⁵⁵ For more on that particular program please see Szyszczak, 1996.

of citizenship rights by women who are nationals or residents in the EU; [gender] mainstreaming and support of implementation and monitoring and assessment of the EU Action Programme (Szyszczak, 1996).

Moreover, in 2000 the Polish Parliament rejected a legislative proposal (supported by multiple parties) calling for the establishment of a parliamentary Commission on Equal Status that would analyze all legislation through the prism of consequences for both men and women. Anderson writes that “AWS defended its vote against the law, arguing that the bill was ‘unnecessary and artificial’” (2006: 118). The reform of Poland’s pension system in 1999 ignored gender issues so that the new law pretty much continued to discriminate against women and violate the EU directive on equal treatment in social security (Anderson, 2006; Bretherton, 2001). Basically, the right wing leadership, using its support from the Catholic Church, kept on actively rejecting laws that would have brought harmonization with the EU’s directives on gender equity. It was not until 2001, due to growing pressure from the European Union, that the AWS leadership reversed its three-year objection to gender equity laws and finally met most of the EU standards with a reformed labor law bill (Anderson, 2006: 118). Basically, as one can see the AWS did not comply on gender incentives until the last few months of its administration in 2001.

Anderson’s comparison between the gender equity directives implementation process in Poland and Czech Republic offers a valuable analysis. Although the Czech Republic did not have strong support for EU accession from feminist groups, since they were not as active as in Poland, as Anderson (2006) mentions, its government initialized the instrumentalization of gender equity policies earlier with much larger success than did the Polish government. Even though political support for gender laws was weak and the offices that dealt with them were

therefore institutionally weak and poorly funded, the Czech Ministry still upgraded its institutional support by creating a Government Council for Equal Opportunities of Women and Men and also participated in an EU-funded “twinning project” that sent Swedish officials to the Czech Republic (at their request) for the purpose of reviewing the legal and institutional harmonization with EU gender equity directives and offering suggestions for further improvements (Anderson, 2006: 122; Resolution 486 from the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, Czech Republic). The Polish government, in sharp contrast, did not extend any invitation to any EU officials.

The year 2000 was an interesting year for Poland. Our President, Aleksander Kwasniewski, was reelected for another five year term. Kwasniewski has been a great supporter of the EU and during his second term his talks about the EU entry made a splash in the media (The *Economist*, July 26th, 2001). But aside from many economic and political issues that were to be discussed at large in days to come, gender politics were left on the back burner. Although during Kwasniewski’s second term, the percentage of women in the government increased from 13% (roughly 60 women) in Sejm (lower chamber) to 20%, roughly about 93 women (and from 12% to 23% in Senat – upper chamber, where 1% equals 1 woman senator), many of the women elected came from right wing, conservative parties, whose agenda on gender politics was not really progressive⁵⁶. And not many women actually got to the senior positions within the government (with the exception of Hanna Suchocka, who was Polish Prime Minister in 1992-93 and Hanna Gronkiewicz Waltz, a former head of the National Polish Bank and currently a Mayor of Warsaw).

⁵⁶ Tarasiewicz and Czepczynski, Post-Communist Gender Studies Research Group, 2009.

In terms of gender politics, it is important to note that during the years 2000 to 2004 one issue became the emblem of gender equality and feminism in Poland – abortion. Abortion was first legalized in Poland in 1956 under the Communist government, but then became illegal in Poland in 1993, after the change in the regime. After a brief (5 month) stint in 1997 when the Parliament tried to enact a modification to the abortion bill, that would allow abortions to take place on the basis of emotional or social distress (which was deemed unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court) abortion in Poland again became illegal, reverting to the act from 1993.

The influence of the Catholic Church in framing the gender politics cannot be overstated. As I mentioned earlier, with the increasing disapproval of Communist values and the election of the Polish Pope (in 1978) the Church has been very vocal on the subject of women's rights and feminism. As Tarasiewicz and Czepczynski write in the report for the post-Communist Gender studies Research Group, "The 'Dictionary of Marriage and Family', published by this catholic association, defines feminism as 'a movement logistically incoherent and inconsequent'⁵⁷." And the bashing continues:

While pressing the absolute equality between men and women, feminism ignores the natural psycho-biological disparities between both sexes and related to those different social roles undertaken by humans (liberal feminism). Similarly illogical is a postulate of reconstruction of social order only based on women's point of view, which would be male discrimination (radical feminism). Correspondingly simplifying reality is the demand, founded on slogans of freedom and equality, on rights to abortion (moderate feminism)" (Słownik Małżeństwa i Rodziny, 2005).

This ever so "clearly stated" approach to gender issues and feminism altogether represents the viewpoint of a majority of Polish Catholic church hierarchy and some significant portion of the Polish Catholics. This quite limited discussion of gender issues in Poland was also

⁵⁷ Słownik Małżeństwa i Rodziny, (2005). <http://www.isnr.uksw.edu.pl/wsr.htm>.

clearly noted on the international stage when in June of 2000, at the International Conference on Women in New York, organized by the United Nations, Poland was represented by the ultraconservative male Minister Jerzy Kropiwnicki, who later on was sarcastically dubbed “the first lady of the Polish Republic” by the Polish media (Graff: 2001).

Although framed as such, abortion is, of course, not the only issue that represents gender equality. Polish feminists, in order to familiarize ordinary Poles with other issues and tasks of what EU gender equality can mean and how gender discrimination is felt, have been busy organizing events, marches and speeches on those topics. One of the main gender-related activities initiated by the feminist circles in Poland starting in 2000 is *Manifa* (slang for manifestations) – a women’s rights and feminist parade taking place each year on March 8 (which was the International Women’s Day – a holiday celebrated since the Communist times). *Manifas* started in Warsaw but now take place in several major Polish cities. Each year *Manifa* is held under a different theme – in 2000 the theme was: *Democracy without women is half of democracy*. In 2001, to further sensitize Polish society on gender equality issues and to promote the call of action for more women to be active in political life the slogan was: “*Let’s not let them close our mouths with anything*”⁵⁸. The themes in following years included: ‘*My life – my choice*’ and ‘*3 x yes: to sexual education, contraception, and abortion*’ (2002) and ‘*Our bodies, our lives, our rights*’ (2003). The marchers were protesting against domestic abuse, public sexism, using women’s bodies for outrageous advertisement campaigns⁵⁹, and violating basic

⁵⁸ The meaning of this slogan was to warn women not to give up their demands by accepting some minor (cosmetic rather than revolutionary in any shape or form) changes in the government etc. Women were encouraged to fight for all their rights and not allowing the government to buy them off in some way with a few compliments and promises.

⁵⁹ In 2003 Radio 94 FM (currently Antyradio), a for-profit radio station, had billboards all over Poland advertising their programming. The billboards portrayed women’s breasts where metal knobs replaced nipples and a man’s hand was heading to turn the knob. The wording underneath it read: “This turns us on”. Information on other such campaigns can be found at: <http://kobiety-kobietom.com/news/art.php?art=2859>.

human rights. The slogan was an allusion to the Polish translation/adaptation of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* which was being prepared for publication in 2003 (*Nasze Ciało, Nasze Życie*, 2004); and *'Girls, we need actions!'* (2004) where Manifa was focused on the issues of homophobia, discrimination and exclusion, and how the Catholic Church intervenes in the social and political life of women.

Going back to the issue of acceptance of the EU, one might ask whether Poles really wanted to join the EU? Was domestic approval for the entrance to the EU a real problem? Some argued that it was (Kaslow, 2002) since support for joining the EU had only a razor thin lead – 56% of Poles thought it would be a good idea for Poland to join the EU (Kaslow, 2002) but many were skeptical whether they would even go to the polls on June 8, 2003. Other authors argued that support for integration with the Western Europe, “often seen as regaining paradise lost, appealed to the imagination” (Stawarska, 1999: 824). What turned out to be an interesting twist was the fact that Catholic Church, an unlikely ally of the government, might have played a role in bringing people not only to the polls but also convincing people of the good that the entrance may bring to our nation and to the entire Europe. John Paul II, a Polish Pope (“our Pope” as many Poles will still say, differentiating John Paul II from the current head of the Vatican) elected during the Communist times, a man whose fame, authority and kindness touched even those who do not claim to be Catholic or even religious in the 95% Catholic country, also spoke in favor of the entrance of Poland to the EU. His hope was that Poland would “find its place in the structures of the European Union, and will not lose its identity but enrich the continent” (*Foreign Policy*, 2003: 18). And a week before the accession referendum, Catholic bishops in their sermons read a letter (appeal) asking everyone to take part in the voting.

However, not all of the Polish clergy stood behind the Pope on this issue. Many priests often delivered sermons with an anti-European message, blaming the West for secularization of young Poles. One of the famous (or rather infamous) critics of the European Union and Polish integration into it was Father Tadeusz Rydzyk, creator and head of the controversial Radio Maryja station – an extreme right Catholic station that reaches about 2 million Poles, whom the media calls “Mohair berets⁶⁰” (Kohn, 2005). Most of the ‘berets’ are largely elderly, quite to extremely conservative, less educated and living in the rural areas of Poland. Rydzyk claimed that:

That’s how I see this rapidity to join the European Union. Selling Poland. Throwing Poles on their knees so they could join, so they would ask: please take us, the poor ones. [EU] promises paradise which is false. Those are broken promises. They [EU supporters] say that this entrance will be the last act of the French Revolution. And this will become a destroyed nation, church will be destroyed, family will be destroyed, love for God and for other humans will be destroyed. And humans are meant to be productive⁶¹.

But how much does the Communist Past matter in terms of gender equity legislation? And what about the role of the Catholic Church? Interestingly, as I mentioned above, the Polish Pope repeatedly spoke about the benefits of Poland joining the European Union, while at the same time, taking a swipe against the EU’s gender equity policies by arguing that women’s roles as mothers of the nation should not be questioned. It is clear then that the Church in Poland still holds onto power when it comes to politics (Dominiczak, 2002). For a country that has legally

⁶⁰ “Mohair berets” is a tongue-in-cheek expression that stands for people who support the views expressed by Polish conservative Catholic movement with its main representative being the media strictly connected with Father Tadeusz Rydzyk. This expression originated from the characteristic headgear worn by the stereotyped representatives of this circle. The term “mohair berets” alludes to the colloquial names for such military units as special forces or Green Berets (called “red and green berets” in Polish).

⁶¹ My translation from Polish; http://www.radiomaryja.pl.eu.org/arch/carlos_bestja/cytaty1.html, Radio Maryja 09.01.2000.

separated state from church since 1952 (Fogo, 2010), it seems that more and more the dividing line becomes blurred.

Nowhere is it clearer than in the interesting paradigm that sets up the Roman Catholic Church in Poland as the protector of what is legitimately Polish, as opposed to what was imposed by the "foreign" Communist government backed by Russia. Therefore family, nation, independence is opposed to the empire and the annihilation of Polish identity, and sexual equality is implicated in this alien and subversive package. Unfortunately, such a setup of the model makes it virtually impossible to argue for sexual equality because it seems to be the equivalent of arguing for a return to the Communism that was such a threat to authentic Polish patriotism. So how then does the European Union enter this equation? Wouldn't it be viewed as another empire that is claiming what is "ours" and pushing us away from what is perceived as patriotic? The governmental push for the gender equality legislature in Poland (that is put upon us from above by the European Union) could be seen as such a subversive move (on the party of the government) by the Catholic Church since such legislation argues for a variety of roles for women, not just for preservation of their function as the patriotic mothers of our nation.

Case in point: recently (May 2010) Elzbieta Radziszewska, the Polish Plenipotentiary for Equal Status of Women and Men has sent the project of the EU bill for women's equality for consultation with the Polish Catholic Church officials - before introducing the project in Poland (Boltrukiewicz, 2010). The project, which according to the author, has been worked on by Radziszewska for the past five years and is about non-religious discrimination has been already presented for consultation with other religious representatives. And yet Minister Radziszewska stated that the opinion of the Church has no influence on the bill's final shape. What was the opinion that Church provided? The Polish Episcopate official, father Jarosław Mrówczyński,

advised her to stop working on the project of the bill, arguing that “there's a doubt existing whether it's necessary to create a 'lex generalis' doctrine regarding equality in Polish legal system. It seems that there's no need to create this. But the concept of standards in equality, expressed in the bill, may be a dangerous way for Poland to become subject of unspecified influences” (cited in Boltrukiewicz, 2010). In response the Left Democratic Union appeal to dismiss the minister was signed by The Union of Work and Women's Party along with other 13 feminist groups and organizations.

But what were these so called unspecified influences? How is it that the modern movement for gender equality and gender mainstreaming is immediately tied to “danger”? Danger of what? The past? Is it because the EU is now seen, at least in this matter, as the foreign power trying to get rid of our Polish-ness? The Polish episcopate seems to be contradicting itself here since on one hand it sees Polish membership in the EU in a positive light, as a chance for strengthening Christian opinions across Europe (especially in terms of universal human rights as presented by the Church – meaning protection of life from its inception). On the other hand though, this institution is suspicious (to say the least, and extremely critical to be honest) of what it might do to our Polish identity since what it notices in terms of cultural and social models is the loosening of morality, question of abortion, euthanasia, legalization of homosexual unions and their solicitation for abortion rights (Przeciszewski, 2007)⁶².

Aside from its economic problems, such as sluggish GDP growth, huge national debt, inability for Poland to meet the criteria of the Stability and Growth Pact which would enable us to also join the Euro zone⁶³, and high unemployment which were carefully considered as criteria

⁶² <http://dziedzictwo.ekai.pl/text.show?id=4501>.

⁶³ For more information on SGP please see: http://europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/stability_growth_pact_en.htm.

for joining the EU, gender criteria seemed to escape the national discussion. In short, the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) is based on based on Articles 99 and 104 of the Treaty Establishing the European Community (with the amendments adopted in 1993 in Maastricht), and related decisions. The pact consists of fiscal monitoring of members by the European Commission and the Council and, after multiple warnings, sanctions against offending members. SGP has been adopted in 1997 with hopes that fiscal discipline would be maintained and enforced in the EMU. Member states adopting the Euro have to meet the Maastricht convergence criteria, and the SGP ensures that they continue to observe them. The actual criteria that member states must respect are: an annual budget deficit no higher than 3% of GDP (this includes the sum of all public budgets, including municipalities, regions, etc.) and a national debt lower than 60% of GDP or approaching that value.

As I mentioned earlier, media concentrated on informing Poles about the changing economic competitiveness of Poland and its products but the issues of gender equality went unnoticed. The debate on how Poland was going to confront its traditional and often stereotypical gender roles was not happening on the main stage. If it was happening anywhere it was in feminist circles, far removed from public opinion. Our government seemed not to worry about the drastic difference in the way gender is approached by them versus countries such as Sweden, Denmark or Finland. Economics won over social issues. Actually, there was barely a fight or race. For most, those social issues did not seem to matter.

The person whose name was on everyone's minds and lips during the days in which Poland was preparing for its hopeful entrance to the Union of other 15 European nations was that of Danuta Hubner, the former minister in charge of European Integration, who served as European Commissioner for Regional Policy, from 22 November 2004 to 4 July 2009 (a position

from which she resigned to become the Member of European Parliament for the Civic Platform⁶⁴). Hubner's job as a European Commissioner for Regional Policy was to persuade both sides, the Poles and the European Commission, that Poland was indeed doing all it could to speed up our sluggish GDP growth, to lower interest rates and heighten our level of consumption so that the capitalistic system of the EU would find a happy home in its Eastern borders. In April 2003 I had the pleasure of meeting Dr. Hubner personally – at the time I was employed as an Event Coordinator at the European Union Studies Center (one of the Centers within the Graduate School and University Center, CUNY) and I was personally involved in planning her New York lecture appropriately entitled “Poland: A Future Member of the European Union”. I cannot say that I vividly recall all the points Dr. Hubner made during her visit, I do however remember that most of her talk (if not all of it) focused on the economic issues facing our country in the nearest future. I cannot recall a question even being raised about the overall gender mainstreaming initiatives or specific gender mandates that were a part of the overall accession package. And I do not mean questions just not being raised during her visit here – I mean in an overall, national debates gender questions were sidetracked or just never asked at all...

And what adds insult to injury is the fact that Hubner is a professional, very well educated woman who, I would assume, had experienced firsthand the hardships that many women in politics have to face. It seems like a lost opportunity to have this powerful female player sidetrack (or basically ignore) the social issues facing half of the nation.

It is crucial to underline the fact that there are extremely precise methodological requirements for gender mainstreaming to work across the entire Union: key officials responsible

⁶⁴ http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/misc/108992.pdf.

for overall mainstreaming strategy have to be appointed; training in gender issues for other officials, for those whose expertise lies elsewhere has to be provided; collection of statistics and other data disaggregated by sex (to be used for planning, monitoring and evaluating effects of policy on gender inequality) has to be supervised as well as other special techniques as “gender proofing” of documents (checking content of documents in view of gender and equality dimension) and “gender impact assessments” have to be prepared (Pollack and Burton, 2000).

In order for gender mainstreaming to be a success, its principles and practices have to be institutionalized and reach the status of norms and rules that would operate to aid or impede behavior in all aspects, and at all levels of the EU policy processes (Bretherton, 2001: 61). While such instrumentalization might have been happening at the economic level – in terms of structural funding – with gender mainstreaming that was not the case. Rather, within the entire EU, “in no policy area... has gender mainstreaming been firmly established” (Bretherton, 2001: 61).

What has to be understood is the fact that mainstreaming is not an attempt to remedy an absence of women in politics or in any other part of national life. It should reflect and provide an analysis of the roles and behaviors, not only of women but those of men as well and of the interaction between them. Therefore it is also not a mechanism that would simply “add” women to the equation. It implies contextual adaptation on part of both genders (Bretherton, 2001, 62) and continuous revision of the context itself.

Although Poland adopted the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, thus demonstrating a minimal level of political commitment to gender equality, it has lacked any form of comprehensive implementation strategy. According to Bretherton (2001: 65), in 2001 only one

of the Central Eastern European governments prepared such a guide, and it was Lithuania who joined EU at the same time with Poland and 8 other countries.

The national accession referendum took place on a lovely summer weekend, June 7 and 8 of 2003. The Parliament decided to have a two day voting period (usually voting takes place just on Sundays) in order to increase the turnout. About 59% of Poles went to the polls over that June weekend and over 77% of those voting declared their wish for Poland to become the new member of the European Union, compared to about 23% that voted “no” (Roguska, 2003). For the referendum to be valid, a majority had to vote – and the Polish High court declared this referendum valid. A month after the referendum about 42% of those asked about their feelings toward Poland joining the EU stated that their feelings are positive (hope, satisfaction or enthusiasm), while only 24% of those polled stated that they had negative feelings (anxiety, dissatisfaction or sadness) (Roguska, 2003)⁶⁵.

Young Polish feminists talk about entrance to the EU

Although the statistics showed that a majority of young, college attending or college educated (up to 24 year olds) Poles were pro-EU (63% according to Roguska, 2003), I wanted to further discuss this topic with members of KONSOLA. Was the entrance to the European Union important to them? If so, why? Would they think it was a positive step forward? How would EU influence Polish gender laws? Was it even a possibility? What did they think would change? How? And through what mechanisms?

Alina, a 28 year old who received her Master’s in Public Relations and European Administration, stated that “joining the EU is a great good for Poland”. She continued by saying “everytime that I read about a directive prohibiting discrimination of gays, lesbians and other

⁶⁵ The percentages do not add to 100% because respondents could pick one or more answers.

sexual minorities, it makes me extremely happy. For example, since I can see how different members of the European Parliament voted [on a particular issue], some this way and some even worse, and it makes me happy, it makes me happy that there is this chance, that there are those directives, that are laws given from above, where Poland, as a member of the European Union, can get there”. In other words, Alina saw the directives as a way of disciplining and keeping tabs on extremely conservative politicians whose goal is to push women back to the kitchen.

“Because I am afraid” she continued, “that we, Poles, are particular about certain changes, and that it is hard for us to take these challenges head on and to adjust to them. But if they are forced upon us from above [as those directives are], there won't be anything else for us to do but to implement them. And all that it is, is really a question of adjustment and breaking old habits. So that is why I view entrance to the EU as a great good for Poland”.

Another example of the good that EU is bringing to Poland, Alina stated is the fact that the EU pushed Poland to hire a new Plenipotentiary. Although, as Alina continued, “she [Radziszewska] does not have much chance, because she does not have any “troops” with her, or real financial backing, but rather she sits in an extremely small office, and so what that she is the Plenipotentiary, if all she has is a desk, a chair and her title. Her power is tiny”. Her power is extremely limited. But the fact that she is there, that at least this office exists again is important. “Overall”, Alina argued, “the fact that the EU has the right to punish/call Poland to order on the gender equality issue is a great thing”. And the fact that “in the last preamble to the European Constitution, human rights are clearly stated, it is great. Now, in any case, an individual can call upon them, and that for me is the most sacred thing, because that is where one can truly change things.” Her argument echoes one of the postulates of early feminism that women's rights are human rights too.

With entrance to the EU and the enforcement of the gender equality laws, there is also financial help available for organizations that are involved in and working on such projects. Alina agreed, saying that “since KONSOLA gets its financial backing from institutions such as Global Fund for Women, with opening borders to the EU, there might be more funding opportunities for organizations such as ours”. However, with a somber face, she recalled a story that she has read in one of the most widely read Polish daily newspapers (*Gazeta Wyborcza*) about how even that aspect of help might be problematic. According to Alina, “during the rule of Plenipotentiary Kluzik-Rostowska⁶⁶, there was an initiative for young women, to help those interested in opening their own companies. And so about 200 women were supposed to receive the funds, everything was accepted: their budget, their business plan and so they opened these companies. But it turns out that now that not only are they forced to endure certain costs, such as ZUS (Social Security in Poland), but the money from the EU did not come yet, because they were lost ‘somewhere along the way’ (the details of how this money disappeared are not well known; one can suspect corruption or even more likely, bureaucratic inefficiency). And soon these women will have to return this money [at the end of the fiscal year] because according to the grants rules – if you don't spend it, you have to return it – and they did not spend it all because they did not receive them in the first place.” “And here lies the huge problem”, she continued “because Poland lacks some form of power, authority that would make sure such situations do not happen. So, if there was a Plenipotentiary, with tools and power at her disposal, then maybe these women, who invested in their companies, would in reality receive these funds and be able to prosper.” But even after this gloomy story, Alina stated, that in terms of even

⁶⁶ I will say more about the office of the Plenipotentiary in chapter six. However, it is important to mention that Kluzik-Rostowska was not a full Plenipotentiary, since the office did not exist during years 2005-2007. She however, did take on some of the responsibilities of the office of Plenipotentiary during her reign as undersecretary in the Ministry of Labor.

small organizations, like KONSOLA, there are financial benefits that come from Poland joining the EU. She went on to say, that even though members of KONSOLA did not get a grant for organization of feminist festival from the government, they will now apply for funds from the EU or other European associations”.

Alina’s responses to the questions about the role of the EU had been very positive. Even through her body language (excited voice, rapid hand gestures) it was clearly visible how happy she was that the EU itself had formed and announced new directives prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual preference. However, she was also quite skeptical and grew a bit somber when talking about the fear that she notices – a fear that Poland, and really Poles, can be a bit apprehensive and very fearful of change. Transformation will take time but will have to happen, since as Alina notices, those changes are directed to us from above and therefore we have no other choice but to implement them.

Another member of KONSOLA, Bozena, echoed Alina’s enthusiasm when I asked her about her view on the entrance of Poland to the EU. The “EU can help us – but of course!” she exclaimed during our afternoon interview in the café. She continued saying, that “right now all those [gender] laws that are not being executed [in Poland] because so what if we are a democratic country but really it’s the government that is deciding and now, if we, as members of feminist organizations do not like something that is being done [by our government], now we can turn for help to the EU and since there are different laws now [set from the above], our government has to follow them. And that is our escape route, because otherwise, I believe no one would listen to us and right now, the Polish government is afraid of the EU. And that’s how it is.” Although optimistic, Bozena’s next statements carried a hint of reality, when she followed up by saying that “but it is also like that: some things we [Poles and our government] have to do,

some laws are put in place but in reality things look completely different... but at least there is this postulate, that the EU is an objective power and that it can be quite influential.” To some extent Bożena’s answers echoed Alina’s responses. For example the argument that in case the rights of a non-profit organization like KONSOLA are not being taken seriously or are blocked from being executed, now KONSOLA can contact the EU (specific branches of the EU dealing with such issues) and that in some way will put pressure on the Polish government mirrored Alina’s explanation of the force and influence that EU carries. What Alina and Bożena both saw as truly important was the fact that now there is a mechanism that can lead to enforcement of the rights that previously had been neglected. And on the top of that, someone within the government will have to be accountable for this negligence. But both feminists’ optimism was tempered with realism that just because theory is there does not mean it will transfer smoothly into reality.

I interviewed the current head of KONSOLA one afternoon in the association’s headquarters in Poznań. Sitting in the office surrounded by feminist literature, Gaja argued that since Poland entered the EU she herself has seen a few considerable changes. “Since we entered the EU many things have changed. Most importantly, now we are more ashamed of some things...” she said, and continued, “it is because the EU drew us closer to the West, to civilization where human rights are fundamental rights [and include] women’s rights [and] sexual minority rights... so here some people cannot be above the law anymore. Now we are under scrutiny... we are not on a proverbial desert island anymore, where anything goes, where jungle rights rule, where a woman is a commodity or a victim. But we [Polish society] have to be involved, we have to monitor what politicians are doing [and saying]. But because of the EU, even those most misogynistic men in the government, who hate women, who would like to limit

women's roles to those of “domestic hens⁶⁷” cannot openly say whatever they think without consequences. So the EU and those directives are there to keep tabs on us, to keep our consciousness in check.” One cannot help but go back in time to the infamous Tolerance March in 2004, which took place on May 7 in Krakow, not even a week after Poland joined the EU. A few weeks before the March even took place, some right wing and ultraconservative organizations tried to force the Rector of the Jagiellonian University as well as the mayor of Krakow to prohibit the March from taking place, thereby elevating the issue to a national debate on the rights of the LGBT persons. The March did happen, however it was disturbed by ultraconservative youth group, All-Polish Youth⁶⁸, who threw eggs, rocks and other dangerous objects into the crowd of 1200 marching. This case of enormous intolerance became infamous not only in Poland but also abroad, calling into question the basic human rights in Poland. The events of that day can be seen in Diana Voxerbrant’s movie entitled *The Moral Revolution* (2010).

Here again, then we can see the reiteration of the hope that EU will become a non-communist big brother, a caring institution, who will take little Poland by the hand and lead her in the right direction, but also punish her if she deserves it.

Karolina, a member of KONSOLA for several years (she joined in 2003) who has been actively working in gender issues for over a decade, also seemed to be mildly optimistic about the role of the EU, to say the least. “Although many of my friends and people in my immediate surroundings believe that the EU will have a great impact on the Polish government in many

⁶⁷Polish: kura domowa; eng: negative connotations of the word housewife.

⁶⁸ Polish: Młodzież Wszechpolska. It is an organization of nationalist youth group, formerly affiliated with the League of Polish Families, and their version of Catholic-National philosophy. Its agenda declares that its aim is to raise Polish youth in a Catholic and patriotic spirit.

social spheres, and especially ones related to gender, my friends and I understand that changes will require quite some time. At the beginning the effects may be rather weak and therefore hardly noticeable”. She went on to echo words of the other members I interviewed when she said that “in some cases, the EU will definitely be able to put pressure on us [on our government]” and with a shadow of a smile lurking on her otherwise formal face, Karolina added that “even if the results would be mediocre at best, it is good that something is happening at all”. She then recalled a story from March 2008, when President Lech Kaczynski used wedding images of gay couple (from USA, who married in Canada) in his annual State of the Union address and called their union “a shame worthy incident” (Hooper, 2008; *Gazeta Wyborcza*, March 20, 2008 and *Gazeta Wyborcza*, March 18, 2009). The outrage that this event created was heard all over Europe and although the President has never publically apologized, his spokesperson did offer an apology to the couple in question⁶⁹.

Karolina further explained, “the push [from EU for gender laws] may lead to the happening of something” (although many members have an issue with explicitly stating what that “something” might be), “it may be the beginning of the imposition of change, enforcement of some transformation for the better. In this case [the case of the gay couple] the effect was just so-so, our society did not really understand the perspective that they [sexual minorities] have the right to exist, and that we should talk about them in normal terms, not only in negatives.”

Karolina then became a little more optimistic. “I think that the EU will be trying to put pressure on Poland in this direction, and although some changes may be small, the important thing is that

⁶⁹Brendan Fay and Thomas Moulton, the couple whose wedding photos were illegally used by the Polish President were issued apologies by the Polish Consul in New York, Mr. Krzysztof Kasprzyk. The President of Poland did not apologize although his press secretary, Ewa Junczyk-Ziomecka, has answered an email from the couple, in which she invited the couple to Poland, a “country severely hard-bitten by history”.

things will start to change.” Her next words again reminded me of words of her colleagues, “we have to remember that this change is difficult because it is imposed on us from above, and we need time to accommodate to it. If we wanted a more gradual, so to say, more ‘natural’ change, well, we would have to wait for it for an extremely long time”. So, like the other ladies concurred, if the EU will start rolling the metaphorical gender ball towards Poland, some changes will be happening faster than they would otherwise. Maybe those changes, albeit hard for us to adjust to, would not have happened without Poland joining the EU in the first place.

Karolina also hinted towards another, a rather controversial “way out” of the gender problem for Polish people – immigration. At the beginning of our interview, she told me a story about her own feminist awakening. “I was in a relationship with a woman who spent the last 20 years of her life in Canada, and whose ideas about gender, gender equality and prosecution for gender discrimination were much different”. That person, Karolina argued, “was taught differently about gender – she was able to be an active feminist who very openly (and positively) talked about her experiences with feminism”. After the relationship ended Karolina realized that her own feminist consciousness has been awakened. “I familiarized myself with feminist theory, with goals of this movement and its practice” and she herself has become an active feminist. Now, she understood that it is good for her, that it is a part of her and it will always be.

But let me take her point even further and argue that Polish people now are also European Union citizens, can travel and live legally in Great Britain or Sweden and in many cases are able to receive some form of help (financial or otherwise social) – if they so choose. Already thousands of young Polish people left their native land to find economic opportunities elsewhere (mostly in Germany and the British Islands) and many are not coming back (Klos, 2006). Those who do go back, are seniors who after years of working for their retirement abroad are now

looking forward to a quiet peaceful life enjoying the fruit of their labors in their native country. How is the Polish government going to pay for social security to all these seniors if the working population disappears? How are they going to attract young people? It will definitely not happen if the government sticks to their problematic stand on social issues. Who wants to stay in a country where they are being openly discriminated against? And what about those like Alicja Tysiac⁷⁰, who exercised their constitutional rights only to find themselves further punished by the government? Will we really have to sue our government in The European Court of Human Rights for things to finally change? The shift needs to happen from within if the Poland is ever going to be a truly equal member of the European Union.

Going back to the immigration point thought, for me, a person living her adulthood in New York City, the sentence “if you don’t like it here, you can leave” has not been new – rather it is an old story (with many issues attached to it of course). But for Karolina to allude to but not say – in not so many words - if you don’t like it here, get out – was quite surprising. For me, as well as for many others, immigration was not a choice and I was really struck by a thought that just leaving everything behind without trying to fix it is a great idea. There is so much work to do in Poland in terms of feminism and her answer just caught me a bit off guard. But what she really meant, I realized a bit later, was a bit different. Karolina was not suggesting that feminists from Poland just get up and leave. Rather, her point was that if for some reason, a person cannot live in Poland because of gender or sexual discrimination, now the doors are open to the entire European Union and one can find a place for themselves elsewhere, but still work towards the

⁷⁰I mentioned the case of Alicja Tysiac in the previous chapter. Tysiac, a pregnant woman from Poland, diagnosed with a severe eye disease (myopia), tried to get an abortion to avoid an escalation of her disease. Her requests were rejected by several medical doctors and she underwent labor of her third child. Her condition later deteriorated, and she sued one of the doctors. Her criminal lawsuits were rejected in Poland and the case was appealed to the European Court of Human Rights, which accepted one part of the complaint, and the plaintiff was awarded damages.

good of the feminist goal in Poland. Sometimes, it seems, it is much easier to fight for a cause (especially a cause that deals with gender and sexuality) from the outside... It definitely has been my experience – as an outsider looking in, that much can be done from far away if one only wants.

Nina, a young and openly gay member of KONSOLA, told me one day during our interview in one of Poznan's great café's that before Poland joined the EU there was actually more talk about feminism in the media. "It seemed to me that during that time [before Poland entered the EU] there was a heightened awareness of feminism and women's issues overall, but unfortunately any attempts for a discussion with wide array of topics was squashed by the abortion issue. Because the way it is here [in Poland], is that we either discuss things a little bit, talk about how things are, or not at all and then the Church appears and the case is closed" she passionately explained. "Unfortunately, the way it is here, in Poland, is that the Church is involved in everything...which is regrettable. It seems to me that everyone involved in politics is afraid to do anything brave, towards [integration with] Europe because they are afraid of the Church, which is such an inborn institution here", she added. The institution of the Catholic Church in Poland is extremely longstanding and one has to give in to the idea that it is a "monolith of a kind", as Nina poignantly stated.

Her next point was an extremely critical view of the media in Poland (I should add that Nina has written her Master's thesis on Feminism in media – about how feminists started to show up in media from 1989 in Poland, using daily Polish newspapers *Gazeta Wyborcza*, *Trybuna*, *Zycie*). Nina argued that "Polish media do not show the variety of gender issues that exist in Poland. Diversity does not seem to be a topic of interest for the Polish population. The media picks an issue (i.e. abortion) and runs with it, forgetting about issues of gender

discrimination in employment, healthcare or even its ties to childcare and housework”. Ending her point, Nina explained that “right now [2008] politics in Poland are left in the sphere of the polls – issues are being talked about on the public forum, making them heard in a particular way, in a ‘scary’ way, concentrating on certain stereotypes (i.e. feminists are scary and unpleasant) and half-truths leads to pushing them aside, canceling them, or just straightforward rejection of ideas”.

It seems that most of the women I interviewed about the possible role that the EU would have on the imposition of gender laws in our country has been mostly positive. Most of the women were slightly optimistic in their hopes that the EU might be able to help, to pressure our government to institute the gender mainstreaming mechanisms that we signed onto. But the road from law to implementation to actual changes in the lives of everyday women is a long one and the effects might be too small for us to notice on the national scale. But hope exists.

Conclusion

Over six years have passed since Poles voted “yes” to the enlargement of the European Union and over five years have passed since that fateful day of May 1, 2004. Looking back, the reasons for joining were plentiful, from the economic, to the political and social, not to mention the issue of security. The negotiations for Poland to join the Union started in 1991 and continued for eleven more years. During those negotiations, expectations for Poland to perform well economically as well as politically were somewhat met, although the gender laws that the European Union had imposed were not. Gender and women’s rights issues were yet again pushed aside to await the better climate since economic and political issues were seen as priorities and took over the majority of national debate time. The European Union lacked specific monitoring power that would ensure that the entities of gender equity mechanisms were

transformed into Polish laws and enforced on daily basis. The process of gender mainstreaming in Poland then was mostly happening just on paper.

Adding to the problem of instrumentalization and implementation of the gender laws in Poland is the fact that the Catholic Church in Poland has been blatantly honest about its firm opposition to the “communism’s rhetoric of equality” (Graham and Regulska, 1997, 70). And its close alliance with the right wing parties in the late 1990’s did not help in making the gender issue more popular. During that time, anything to do with gender suddenly turned into discussion of abortion and not much has been resolved. But even with its problems, Poles wanted to join the EU and the members of KONSOLA I interviewed seemed overall hopeful. They saw the EU in terms of an older and wiser brother or sister whose eclectic views and diverse social agenda will have to have an impact on the Polish government. Although at times these young feminists seemed skeptical about the scale of the change that the EU can enforce, nonetheless all saw the entrance to the EU as a positive step toward a more gender equal Poland. At least if only in theory.

This optimism is of course not without its reasons. With EU membership came great strides – many Poles moved to Germany and Great Britain seeking better tomorrows (Klos, 2006). Young educated Poles, such as members of KONSOLA I interviewed, now have a choice whether to stay in Poland and actively work within the guidelines of the EU gender laws on the implementation of these regulations in our country, or some also have a choice to leave and see whether the grass is greener on the other side. Nonetheless, the institution of the EU, with its offices and laws, does serve as a guiding light where one can always go and argue one’s case.

CHAPTER FIVE: POLISH FEMINISM AFTER MAY 1ST, 2004

After the historic entrance

The first of May 2004 came and went pretty fast. Poles, along with members of nine other countries that joined the European Union on the same day, rejoiced. Although many realized that much may not change immediately, the overall feeling of optimism mixed with hope and happiness was almost palpable and even the smell of the air had suddenly changed. But as many of us learned, fairy tales rarely do come true. And reality proves to be far more interesting.

Having explained the Polish accession procedures to the EU and framing them using the gender lens, I would now like to focus on what followed. In this chapter I will explore the question of what happened after Poland joined the EU – especially in terms of gender policies and their implementation. First I present a brief description of what happened in the Polish political sphere; then I focus on the gender policies during the so-called political shift to the right; and finally I present the views of young Polish feminists on the changing scene of Polish politics and what it has to do with feminism and women's rights issues in this new democratic, EU member Poland.

The political shift

Within months of Poland's formal accession to the European Union, Polish leadership started a strong move to the right. Since 2001 the right wing parties such as PIS and PO had been gaining power while the left wing parties (like SLD) were losing parliamentary seats along with

the trust of the nation⁷¹. This shift happened due to the inability of the government (and its coalition parties on the left) to deliver on many important issues for Poles, including, but not limited to: building of motorways, botched reform of the health system, a general economic slump, and numerous corruption scandals (Millard, 2006). Internal problems within the party also led to a split. The SLD now was divided into two: SLD and the new party, SDPL⁷² and to make matters a bit more difficult, a day after Poland joined the EU, on May 2, 2004, the cabinet led by Leszek Miller resigned. The new cabinet and its leader Marek Belka (from SLD) did not succeed in charming the Polish people and only on its 3rd try did it eventually won parliamentary support. During all that turmoil, it is important to note that SLD saw its support crumble by three-fourths, from 41% in 2001 to only a bit more than 11% in the subsequent elections of 2005 (Gorka, 2010).

Who are the constituencies of these parties? PiS, the party of the Kaczynski twins', has lost its young voters. As Ciesla (2007) writes, PiS lost their young voters and their electorate "lost their diplomas, got older and moved to the villages". Young voters, 19-26, those who are in school and getting their diplomas are more likely to vote for a central leftist party such as PO (Szacki, 2011). Overall, younger voters, more educated and business people, those also living in the urban areas have been voting more leftists: for parties such as SLD and SDPL and PO, while those older voters (retired), those who work in the agriculture sector, and those more religious and less educated who often also tend to live in the rural areas, tend to vote for more populist parties, such as PiS, LPR and of course the Self-Defense Party.

⁷¹ PiS – Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, eng: Law and Justice party, a right conservative party; PO – Platforma Obywatelska, eng: Citizen's Platform, a centrist but still a bit to the right party; SLD – Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej, eng: Democratic Left Alliance, a left wing party.

⁷² SDPL – Socjaldemokracja Polska, eng. Social Democracy of Poland. The split occurred in April 2004, a month before Poland joined the EU.

In the fall of 2005 Poland held both parliamentary and presidential elections. The September parliamentary election results showed PiS gaining 27% of votes and becoming the largest party in the Sejm (lower house), followed by PO at 24%. The October presidential election resulted in the conservative leader Lech Kaczynski, former Mayor of Warsaw, becoming the President of the Polish Republic. It has to be stated that both elections had very low turnout rates (only 51% in the second and deciding round of the presidential election and just over 40% in the parliamentary election) which can be most likely explained by the overall disillusionment with politicians and politics by the Polish people at least since 1997 (Millard, 2006; Gorka, 2010; TNS OBOP, 2001)

Things were not looking up on the Polish political arena. The two largest parties, due to vicious political campaigns against each other during the elections and due to a further inability to communicate with each other on core issues, made forming a coalition between PiS and PO impossible. The leadership of PiS then decided to form a minority government and in May 2006 this gave way to a majority government with the smaller populist (and very conservative) parties, the Self-defense Party and the League of Polish Families⁷³. However internal struggles between PiS leadership and Prime Minister Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz were brewing. Jaroslaw Kaczynski openly criticized Prime Minister Marcinkiewicz for his staff hiring decisions and other PiS parliamentarians complained that not much could be done in the government because there was no communication between the Cabinet of the Prime Minister and PiS party offices (Walenciak, 2006). Kaczynski and Marcinkiewicz butted heads about whom they should nominate for the position of the Secretary of Treasury, Finance Minister and even Secretary of State, and the

⁷³ Samoobrona – eng: Self-Defense Party; Liga Polskich Rodzin – eng: the League of Polish Families, or LPR. Interestingly, the League of Polish Families was the only party that was decidedly opposing Polish entrance to the EU.

Prime Minister lost all those battles. But Walenciak (2006) writes, that is the “charming” side effect of politics – not everyone will get along and often angry sparks may fly between organs of power. The difference is that some politicians not only can control the metaphorical heat, they can also diffuse the situation and in some cases can come up with a compromise or some form of a resolution. But this feud was not all about business - personal reasons might have also played a role. Walenciak argues that Jaroslaw Kaczynski did not feel comfortable playing “second fiddle” to the camera friendly and quite popular Marcinkiewicz (2006). Furthermore, Marcinkiewicz’s autonomy and independence in decision making bothered Jaroslaw as well as leaders of the coalition parties. Soon after, in July 2006, Marcinkiewicz, following the ongoing rift with the party resigned and Polish President appointed his brother Jaroslaw Kaczynski, leader of PiS to the position of the Prime Minister (Rozlal and Andrusz, 2006)

Poland suddenly was in the hands of the identical twins and the ruling days of the Kaczynski’s brothers quickly became notorious. As an article in the *Economist* states, the Law and Justice party along with its populist allies “delight in picking fights with gays, feminists, liberals, the media, ex-communists, uppity foreigners (especially in Brussels) and anyone who crosses their path” (The *Economist*, May 13, 2006). At the time, quite a few people found the situation with identical twins in power quite comical. And although I can appreciate some ironic humor, I would like to stress the point that this situation in reality was far from humorous.

Gender politics of the Kaczynski’s brothers’ government

When the Kaczynski twins came to power in 2005, they promised a “moral revolution” (“Sex and Swastikas”, *Transitions Online*, December 15, 2006). However, the results were nowhere near anything either moral or revolutionary. Well, maybe that is not entirely true, since one of the first issues during the rule of the coalition government were attempts to further

strengthen the restrictions on abortion even though Polish abortion law is infamous for being extremely restrictive (as I have mentioned in the previous chapters). However what followed was like a mystery tale or a dark thriller movie that unfolded in most unpredictable and scary ways. In March of 2007 Roman Giertych, Vice Prime Minister and the Minister of Education (also the leader of the populist LPR party) tried to introduce a bill banning any discussions of homosexuality in schools, angering Human Rights Watch, which in an open letter to the Polish Prime Minister, Jaroslaw Kaczynski, warned about the violation of free speech if such bill is passed⁷⁴.

Andrzej Lepper and Self-Defense Party

But the Kaczynski brothers are not the only ones with somewhat problematic stands on human rights issues. Andrzej Lepper, the leader of the populist Self-Defense party and deputy Prime Minister, had caused its own controversies when it was revealed that he as well as other members of his party had demanded sex from women in exchange for jobs in regional party offices. Marcin Kacki, a newspaper journalist for the largest daily newspaper in Poland first broke this story in May 2006, when he published an interview with the victim, Aneta Krawczyk, in which she details her rise and demise in the local Self-Defense party (Kacki, 2006). Krawczyk, a 33 year old former seamstress, and mother of two, was in a dire financial situation when she first met the leader of the party and his friend in 2001 and after accepting a position in one of the party offices she quickly rose in the ranks of the party. For five years she seemed as an exemplary model of a business woman who is taking on the world. However, her employment and financial stability did not come without a price. She incriminated the party leader and

⁷⁴“Polish Anti-Gay Bill Criticized” BBC NEWS, March 19, 2007, retrieved November 5, 2008. (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6466205.stm>).

another high standing party politician and stated that she was not the only woman whose employment dependent on providing sexual favors (Kacki, 2006).

The leader's response to the allegations was quite improbable. "Maybe she has had bad luck in life," Lepper is quoted to have said about the woman who came forward with the allegations. "She does not have a husband and each of her three children is from separate men. Is this the kind of person that is taken to be a model citizen today?" (*Transitions Online*, December 15, 2006). His cavalier approach was demonstrated even further when another member of his party and a lawmaker in the European Parliament was accused of raping a sex worker in Belgium. Lepper chuckled and responded "How can you rape a prostitute?" (*Transitions Online*, December 15, 2006). Since the publication of Kacki's article a number of other women have stepped forward and confirmed Krawczyk's story. The official incriminated in the article, Stanislaw Lyzwinski, has since been expelled from the Party and shortly before elections in 2007 Lyzwinski was arrested for rape and sexual molestation. As of January 2010, he is still behind bars. In May 2008 a trial against these two men, Lyzwinski and Lepper started; however, the proceedings are classified due to a request from the victim's lawyer.

Lepper's political career has had some incredible twists and turns way before his rise to the position of Deputy Prime Minister. A former boxer, whose punching bag still has a space in his office (*Economist*, May 6, 2004), in 1992 he established the Self-Defense Party, a party for struggling farmers like himself (he was a pig farmer during the Communism period), and nominated himself for the leadership position, which incidentally he has held ever since the beginning. His political style is for many quite abrasive and possibly quite flamboyant. He seems to believe in loud actions and even louder words. In the early 1990s, when farmers were faced with bank repossession (as he was himself too) he warded off the bailiff by going on a hunger

strike (*Economist*, June 27, 2002). When one of the bailiffs was beaten senseless by the Self-Defense supporters, Lepper found himself facing an 18-month prison sentence for inciting violence. He managed to avoid the prison sentence by claiming that his wife was sick and he needed to take care of her. All he received was probation. But that hardly the end.

Throughout his career Lepper was charged also with assault, blocking roads and dumping grain on railroad tracks in the course of anti-government demonstrations (Bernstein, 2006). His populist actions brought the country to standstill for a month because of the road blocks. Although the government did threaten Mr. Lepper, nothing did happen. With the people feeling misled by the left wing politicians and the country feeling the economic downturn, Lepper sought his chance. He reorganized his party, hired a PR consultant and gave himself and the Self-Defense party quite a make-over. The grubby t-shirts that he was so fond of were replaced by blazers with white and red nationalistic ties, and a new over tanned (quite orange) Mr. Lepper reappeared on the political scene, shouting his slogans about being with the people. One has to hand it to him – Lepper had always had a talent for appearing in solidarity with those who were hurt – whether by Communism, or by the new dark force looming in the West – the European Union. The poor agrarian communities that include farmers, butchers and grocers, as well as steelworkers and miners all the way to car dealers, pensioners, the unemployed and the destitute had found their leader. His famous words “Moscow stole from you; Warsaw is stealing from you; Brussels will steal from you” have found resonance among the older, less educated people living in the agrarian sections of Poland (*Economist*, June 27, 2002).

Lepper gained notoriety after a newspaper article quoted him praising Hitler’s economic program and the way that the Nazi leader handled the masses. “At first, Hitler had a really good program,” Lepper was quoted as saying to a journalist from daily newspaper *Zycie Warszawy*

(*Warsaw's Life*) on April 15, 2004, "If he hadn't turned toward fascism, he'd really have reformed Germany thoroughly" he continued (Kosc, 2004). Another magazine ran a cover story poignantly entitled "Heil Lepper" showing a "sepia-tinted Mr. Lepper in a Hitlerian pose, a shadow on his face suggesting the late Fuhrer's toothbrush mustache." (*Economist*, June 27, 2002). Lepper quickly responded that he had not authorized his statements and that they were taken out of context by the journalist....

Although his unusual and sometimes quite extraordinary political style has gotten Mr. Lepper to the high places in the government, not everyone has been happy with such an outcome. In May 2006 a number of Polish youth protested against Lepper and the Self-Defense party joining the coalition government, shouting "Lepper to prison" in mockery (Espino and Bartyzel, 2006)⁷⁵. Other criminal charges were also filed accusing Lepper of slander and leveling corruption accusations against ministers and members of the parliament (Dempsey, 2007). Another controversy that followed Mr. Lepper was him being awarded two honorary doctoral degrees and an honorary professorship from the Interregional Academy of Personnel Management in Kiev, a private Ukrainian institution which actively promotes anti-Semitism. Abraham H. Foxman, US Anti-Defamation League National Director was quoted saying "By once again embracing MAUP [Interregional Academy of Personnel Management], Lepper has reinforced his credentials as a member of the same bigots' club as the racist and anti-Semite David Duke, the former Ku Klux Klan leader and Holocaust denier, who also teaches there." Mr. Foxman also added "The real test for the Polish government is -- how much longer will they tolerate participating in a coalition with parties whose leaders ally themselves with haters of the

⁷⁵ About 500 Polish students took to the streets of Warsaw arguing for the removal of Lepper and Giertych from the government.

Jewish people?⁷⁶" (The Anti-Defamation League, 2007). This episode was especially poignant due to the problematic history of Polish-Jewish relations⁷⁷.

Such a particular person as Mr. Lepper has proven himself to be, will create headlines and controversies on the global scale. It is indeed a curious law in Poland that allows a person with a criminal record to become a politician, and even get to the European Parliament. Many other European politicians raised their eyebrows after seeing, hearing and talking to Mr. Lepper, who rarely gets specific on policy issues and yet can provide quite an "entertainment" with his foulmouthed outbursts slandering whomever he can get. He even accused members of the Polish government of working with the Taliban to smuggle anthrax into the United States (*Economist*, June 27, 2002).

And then, on July 9, 2007 Prime Minister Jaroslaw Kaczynski dismissed Mr. Lepper from the government and from his post as an Agriculture Minister, explaining the decision on basis of the corruption charges that Mr. Lepper was facing⁷⁸. "Andrzej Lepper is under suspicion, and that is sufficient reason to ask him to leave the cabinet," Kaczynski was quoted saying (Dempsey, 2007). Following his dismissal and claim of innocence, Lepper threatened to withdraw his party of 46 legislators from the coalition. But in a surprise move on the same Tuesday evening, Lepper said, "The Self-Defense is staying in the coalition conditionally." (Dempsey, 2007). Interestingly, this was not the first removal of Mr. Lepper from the

⁷⁶ The entire article can be found at: http://www.adl.org/PresRele/ASInt_13/4971_13.htm.

⁷⁷ It is beyond the scope of this project to write about the problematic relationship that Poles and Jews have had for years. At one point Poland was one of the most tolerant countries for Jewish communities but at other times, Jews faced almost a complete annihilation at the hands of the German-occupied Poland. For more on this fascinating topic please see: Davies, 1982 and Bratkowski, 2001.

⁷⁸ The Anti-Corruption Office said that it was investigating allegations that more than 3 million zlotys, or about \$1 million, had been paid in bribes to Self-Defense officials to induce them to rezone farmland for commercial use.

government by Prime Minister Kaczynski. Lepper was first dismissed in September 2006 for criticizing government policy, but was reinstated three weeks later to keep the coalition from collapsing (Dempsey, 2007). But hope lives in the hearts of many who expect this termination to be final.

Roman Giertych and his fight for the morality of the nation

One can hardly imagine having one Mr. Lepper in the government, but apparently, for the Kaczynski twins it was not enough. The previously mentioned Roman Giertych, another Deputy Prime Minister, has been a major patron of All-Poland Youth⁷⁹, a group whose roots go back to the 1920s when its members were known for attacking Jewish students. Currently it is a strong nationalistic party with anti-immigration and homophobia slogans reminiscent of neo-Nazi movements. Giertych, as Minister of Education, tried to introduce classes on religion and patriotism to the school curriculum (*Transitions Online*, December 18, 2006). At the same time, Giertych tried to ban from the classroom the works of several well-known and respected authors such as Fyodor Dostoevsky, on the basis that he was Russian; Franz Kafka, because he was Jewish; Joseph Conrad, since he was a Pole that chose to write his novels in English; and Witold Gombrowicz, because he was a homosexual (Boyes, 2007: 30).

But who is Roman Giertych exactly? Mr. Giertych comes from a prominent family of Polish politicians. His father, Maciej Giertych, a social conservative politician himself, openly criticized homosexuality, abortion and any form of moral relativism. He also created quite a controversy when in November of 2006 (during his tenure in European Parliament) he was photographed saluting Nazi style with a flaming swastika in the background (*Transitions Online*,

⁷⁹ Polish: Młodzież Wszechpolska.

December 18, 2006). As it often happens, the apple does not fall far from the tree. The younger Mr. Giertych's worldviews are closely aligned with those of his father. Mr. Giertych Jr is a well-educated fellow. He graduated with a Masters in History and Law from the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan, started his own law firm in Warsaw and also went on to publish several books⁸⁰. In 1989 he re-activated the All-Youth Polish organization (which he was a part of during his studies), whose extreme far right conservative declarations of national values had a tone of extremism in it; he later became its chairman (from 1989-1994) and he remains an honorary chairman till this day. For quite a few years, Giertych was a member of the National-Democratic Party and the National Party, which later merged with several other organizations to form the League of Polish Families (*Liga Polskich Rodzin*, LPR) in 2001. On a positive note, LPR does stand for a few not unreasonable goals such as support of the death penalty, maintaining universal health care and public education as well as the withdrawal of Polish troops from Iraq. However, LPR vehemently opposes legalization of abortion, euthanasia, and gay marriage. In addition, LPR passionately opposed the Polish entrance to the EU claiming that the EU is a centralized, socialist superstate that could not be reformed.

On May 5, 2006 Mr. Giertych was nominated for the position of the Minister of Education, a move that sent waves of opposition thorough Poland. Students in Krakow, Lodz, Warsaw and several other major Polish cities protested against his appointment, arguing that a person whose political stance stinks of hatred, disdain and violence cannot possibly be in charge of educating Polish youth (Czeladko and Wójtowicz, 2006). On May 8, 2006 an action called

⁸⁰ Some of his publications include: *Kontrrewolucja młodych (The Contra revolution of the Youth)*, 1994 and *Możemy wygrać Polskę. Wybór felietonów z Radia Maryja 1997–1999* (We can win Poland back: selection of articles from Radio Maryja) 2001.

“Bez Giertycha⁸¹” started spreading throughout the internet. The founders created an open letter to the Prime Minister Marcinkiewicz asking for removal of Mr. Giertych from the Education Ministry. The letter went on to say that such a nomination is harmful to Poland and “shames us in the eyes of Europe and the entire world”. This action and the letter were created by three women: Agnieszka Arnold, film director; Krystyna Starczewska, educator and Irena Dzierzgowska, a former vice Minister of Education under Prime Minister Buzek. The letter was signed by 137, 876 persons in a matter of a few days and on June 8, 2006 the letter, along with all the signatures, was delivered to the office of the Prime Minister Marcinkiewicz.

Furthermore, a “new school year without Giertych” action was organized by students, who marched in many Polish cities hoping that the new academic year would start without the hated appointee. Unfortunately Giertych prevailed and as one of his first actions, the new Minister of Education removed the head of the Central Bureau of Teacher Advancement (CODN)⁸², Mr. Mirosław Sielatycki, claiming that an instructional packet⁸³ which CODN published (which interestingly was written by the Council of Europe, spoke about the importance of recognizing basic human rights, was translated into 19 languages and used all over the continent without any problems from other governments) and Mr. Sielatycki was therefore responsible for “promoting homosexuality” in schools. The decision to remove Mr. Sielatycki was opposed by the CODN employees, Polish Institute of Books as well as Amnesty International and Terry Davis, Secretary General of the Council of Europe (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, June 14, 2006). On May 30, 2007 the Labour Court reached the decision that Sielatycki’s

⁸¹ <http://www.bezgiertycha.rp4.pl/>.

⁸² Polish: Centralny Ośrodek Doskonalenia Nauczycieli, CODN.

⁸³ Text can be found at: <http://eycb.coe.int/compass/en/contents.html>.

removal was discriminatory and did not comply with regulations, and that the plaintiff is to receive monetary compensation for this entire ordeal (Pezda and Siedlecka, 2007).

Barely a month later, on July 9, 2006 another controversy was stirred up when David Peleg, the Ambassador of Israel to Poland, stated that he would avoid any contact with Mr. Giertych and other members of the Ministry of Education. His decision was partially based on the publications by Mr. Giertych's grandfather, Jędrzej Giertych (publications from the 1930s), that according to Mr. Peleg were drenched with nationalism and had an anti-Semitic basis. Peleg further asserted that his wish not to have any relations with Giertych is not based on any personal feelings toward him but rather towards the nationalistic party he leads and the ideology for which this party stands⁸⁴.

As if these controversies were not enough, Mr. Giertych soon again found himself under international fire for his speech during the informal meeting of European Union's education ministers on March 1, 2007, where he argued for the creation of European Great Card of the Rights of Nations, which would include, among other things, a complete ban of abortion throughout Europe, and an absolute prohibition of "homosexual propaganda" (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, March 6, 2007). Not surprisingly, many saw Giertych as a complete homophobe and refused to work with him on the creation of that document. Interestingly, Mr. Giertych had the audacity to claim that his position was representative of the entire Polish government, a claim that Jan Dziędziczak, then a spokesperson for the Polish government vehemently denied (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, March 6, 2007). This particular speech further angered many Poles, who repeated their calls for Giertych's dismissal.

⁸⁴ <http://wiadomosci.wp.pl/kat,1342,title,Ambasador-Izraela-bojkotuje-Giertycha,wid,8385714,wiadomosc.html?ticaid=1c22b>.

His notorious call for elimination of an entire list of books by Polish authors who were viewed by him as either state enemies, homosexuals or Jews from the educational curriculum did not help his popularity either. Ironically, as one source reported, one of the banned books describes the exact situation that Giertych sought to create: “In an almost literary ironic twist, Gombrowicz's famous novel *Ferdydurke* (published in 1937, now banned) mirrors this absurd situation. The novel witnesses a 30 year old man who is kidnapped by a teacher and forced to undergo grade school again, complete with full indoctrination in national identity through the literature of the Polish greats. A characteristic moment occurs when the students ask the teacher why they need to read (nationalist poet) Cyprian Norwid; "Because he's great! And he's a writer!" is the teacher's response. Such seems to be Giertych's reasoning, except in this instance the word "great" is replaced with the words "nationalistic, conservative, and doesn't encourage free thinking" (*Cracow-Life.com*, June 12, 2007).

With government led by the identical Kaczynski-twins, with Lepper and Giertych on board, Poles everywhere started to wonder what more can happen. The Kaczynski twins, the former child actors, who played twins who stole the moon in the movie with the same title (directed by Jan Batory, 1962) now starred in their own real version that should be entitled “about two who stole Poland.” I would just add that in this unfortunately real version of events, the Kaczynski-twins were not the sole actors. People like Lepper and Giertych added their own twists to the events.

In August of 2007 the beginning of the end of the Kaczynski twins' era became visible. With the accusations on the basis of corruption against him, Mr. Lepper and his party moved away from the PiS and LPR coalition, and soon this coalition fell apart, with both parties, Self-Defense and LPR, leveling accusations against PiS. In early September (September 7, 2007), the Sejm voted

to dissolve itself, a motion that was supported by PiS but opposed by the other two parties, which opened the way for new elections of October of that year (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, September 7, 2007)

The sweet smell of hope

During that time (right after the fall of the coalition government) I traveled home to Poznan to conduct several interviews with young Polish feminists, and I remember how the excitement about the new parliamentary elections was spreading throughout my family and friends. Personally, I was ready for change and it seemed that almost everyone I spoke to, whether they were elderly or young, family members or completely random people – everyone was talking about it. I heard snippets of conversations on the train, buses, waiting in lines at the supermarket – something was about to change – whether for the better or worse, that was to be seen. One thing was for sure though – the status quo would not continue.

On October 21, 2007, a week after my 29th birthday, the Kaczynski twins' government became a part of history. Voter frequency reached almost 54% (53,8%) and was the highest seen since the semi-free elections of 1989⁸⁵. The PiS party was defeated by the more centrist, less conservative Civic Platform⁸⁶ (PO) and its leader, Donald Tusk – with PO receiving 41.51% of votes, compared to only 32.11% of PiS. The other 3 parties that entered Sejm were the centre-left Left and Democrats coalition, the agrarian Polish People's Party, and the tiny 'German minority' group. The Self-Defense Party and the League of Polish Families were crushed, failing to reach the 5% electoral threshold for elections to the Sejm and consequently lost their seats. On

⁸⁵ In comparison, during the Parliamentary elections in 2005, the voter frequency was 40.6%. For complete results please see the National Electoral Commission website:

<http://www.wybory2007.pkw.gov.pl/SJM/EN/WYN/M/index.htm>.

Furthermore, the elections in 1989 were called semi-free because, as I have mentioned in chapter 2, because even before elections were held, the Communist party was guaranteed 65% of the seats in the Sejm (lower house) and Solidarity was allowed to contest only the remaining seats.

⁸⁶ Polish: Platforma Obywatelska (PO).

November 15, 2007 Jaroslaw Kaczynski, the unmarried cat-loving leader, stepped down from the position of Prime Minister and one day later, on November 16, 2007 Donald Tusk was sworn in. During the following days, the Civic Platform formed a coalition majority government with the Polish People's Party. The next chapter of the new democratic Poland was being written before our eyes.

But did we declare victory a bit too soon? Was the era of the “terrible twins” and their controversial politics really over? Were women’s rights and human rights organizations as well as feminists all over Poland and EU really able to breathe deeply and finally exhale without being scared? What did really change? Did anything?

One has to pause, take a deep breath and realize that Donald Tusk’s power play comes right after one of the least liked, “rude, silly and incompetent” (*Economist*, June 21, 2008) governments Poland had to date. The former Prime Minister’s and its government’s confrontational style, its incompetence in foreign policy, its vetting of government in hopes of purging former communists pretty much undermined the long term prospects of its own survival. Not to mention its hypocritical efforts to fight corruption elsewhere but not within, the reforms of the judicial system that led to abuses of power and its failure to reform public services or modernize a creaking infrastructure (The *Economist*, June 21, 2008). Gregory Slys, in his article “Tusk’s Tough Task” (2008), argues that the October 2007 election “was more of a plebiscite against Law and Justice than a positive vote in favor of Tusk’s party”. By default, Tusk’s Civic Platform was the “lesser evil” choice and that is why many Poles voted for them – not so much to have Tusk in power but to get rid of at least one of the terrible twins. And Tusk’s party was the one that could do it. The rest as they say, is history.

The evidence that Tusk was not as charismatic is a matter of sheer numbers. One cannot talk about Tusk's landslide victory or the terrible disaster for PiS. The margin between the two parties was just over a 1.5 million votes and with "209 seats⁸⁷, Civic Platform fell short by 20 seats of an outright majority and as such had to form a coalition with the Peasant Party, with 31 seats." (Slysz, 2008).

Tusk was coming to power at a particular time in Polish history. Now the economy seemed to be doing a bit better and his government had already improved relations with the European Union. In order to gain more popular support, Tusk committed himself and his government to a steady withdrawal of Polish troops from Iraq (Slysz, 2008) – and on Tuesday, February 12, 2008 the last of the Polish soldiers returned (although the number of our troops in Afghanistan had increased). But it is true that Tusk's political honeymoon would not last long and the signs are visible already. In its Campaign, Civic Platform promised "all things to all men" (Slysz, 2008) but in such a manner, the party is already setting themselves up for failure. It is a known fact that politicians run their (and their party) campaigns on promises (sometimes questionable or rather unobtainable promises). The problem lies in the fact that once elected these wonderful things that were promised rarely do come true. And Tusk's leadership was not an exception to this rule. The government has been more of a nibbler, rather than problem-solver, pecking at problems sometimes more usefully, and often ineffectually. And one cannot forget that although one terrible twin is out, the other, our President was to hold on to his power and position until reelection in 2010. Tusk has to keep in mind that the opposition has enough votes to deprive the government of the majority it needs to override a presidential veto (*Economist*, June 21, 2008).

⁸⁷ Total number of seats in Sejm equal 460 but 229 are needed for one party to win outright majority.

In February 2008, 100 days of Tusk's leadership had passed and one cannot name either a spectacular success that has been achieved or a terrible loss that happened. For the most part, key commitments (excluding the Iraq plan) did not move past the planning stage. For example, his key commitment to the economy was to introduce radical tax reforms including a 15% flat tax and the promise to slash corporate taxes. But this clashed with promises to reduce Poland's fiscal deficit. Although Tusk wants Poland to fulfill EU criteria and adopt the Euro sometime after 2012, whether it will happen remains to be seen (Slysz, 2008).

At this point, I have to address one important issue that has happened during the writing of this dissertation. On April 10, 2010, Polish President, Lech Kaczynski, along with the first lady and 96 others, among them, the chief of the Polish General Staff and other senior Polish military officers, the president of the National Bank of Poland, Poland's deputy foreign minister, Polish government officials, 12 members of the Polish parliament⁸⁸, senior members of the Polish clergy, and relatives of victims of the Katyn massacre died in a plane crash near the city of Smolensk, Russia. They were en route from Warsaw to attend an event marking the 70th anniversary of the Katyn massacre.

Feminist analysis of the Political Shift

In 2001 Agnieszka Graff, a self-proclaimed Polish feminist published *The World Without Women – Gender in Polish Political Life*, a book that offered an inside view about gender, or really, lack of it, on the Polish political scene. Graff, herself educated abroad (she graduated with a degree in English from Amherst College in Massachusetts) and in Poland (School of Social Sciences at Polish Academy of Sciences) received her PhD in English literature in 1999 from the

⁸⁸ Among those who have died were also former Plenipotentiary of Equal Status of Women and Men, Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka, and Anna Walentynowicz, the quiet hero of the Solidarity movement.

University of Warsaw and her interest in gender issues is quite vast. She has written on gender in both American and Polish cultures, the U.S. women's movement, on feminist theory, women writers as well as other issues such as masculinity studies, intersection of race and gender as well as the construction of race in literature and film.

In *The World Without Women* (2001) Graff argues that our Polish feminist future can prove to be anything but uncomplicated because the world might still be under the impression that: “French have their Cheeses, the Brits their Queen, and the Poles have their discrimination against women” (2001: 17). In 2008, Graff's article “The World Still without women” appeared on the pages of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, one of the most popular daily newspapers in Poland. It was meant as a response to her book, an updated version of her argument. In the article, she claims that she really hoped the title of her 2001 book would no longer apply, that by 2008 times would have changed and gender (and even feminism perhaps) would be at least a topic of many national debates, in which professional women and men alike would be able to discuss topics such as abortion, equal employment rights or sexual identity freely. Her exact words were: “Poland was supposed to civilize itself, modernize itself and then find a comfortable spot in the united, liberal and equalized Europe” (Graff, 2008). Of course hoping that such changes would happen without any backlash would have been naïve, and Graff realized that some kind of “scandal” might rise, but she hoped, “in the far away year 2008 what would separate us [Poles] from the European Union would not be our *particular* approach to gender equality but rather barszcz with mushroom pockets, poppy-seed cake and the uncanny ability to pronounce words like *Grzegorz Brzezyszczykiewicz*” (Graff, 2008; emphasis in original). Sexism in its Polish edition should have been some old, grotesque and anachronic thing conscious of its own ridiculousness. But was it?

Well, is it enough to count as a victory the fact that the current Prime Minister or other members of his Cabinet are not talking about throwing homosexuals out of schools? Maybe one can measure victory by the level of importance that the Prime Minister assigns to the politics of gender equality. In this case, victory has escaped us. As Graff writes, “in his three-hour long expose, Prime Minister Tusk spent exactly zero minutes and zero seconds discussing the problem of discrimination on the basis of gender” (2008). And even though leaders of the Women’s organizations in Poland sent the new Prime Minister a signed letter asking for a meeting to discuss the gender equality policies of his administration, the letter went unanswered.

Interestingly, while the government does not have time to discuss women’s rights issues with feminist organizations, it does have time to discuss issues of women’s rights with the clergy. Graff (2008) cites an extremely poignant case, in which Civic Platform argued that failed in vitro fertilization was to be refunded to couples unable to conceive. But the Polish bishops argued that such practices are sinister, vile and dishonorable, which led the Civic Platform leadership to reassess its position and now the party is saying that above mentioned procedures will not be refunded because suddenly Poland does not have money for them... Graff ends up calling the Civic Platform the “government of conservative liberals” and by the end of the article it is clear that her hopes that the new government will take gender issues seriously had been greatly diminished (2008).

Young feminists voice their opinions on feminism, its current state and its fight under the coalition

Although one evil twin has left the stage and was replaced by a seemingly much more open Prime Minister, many feminists are still waiting for the signal that women’s issues will now be taken more seriously. However, since this chapter talks about the state of feminism in Poland,

I wanted first to talk to KONSOLA members about what feminism means to them and then move on to its current state, to what happened to it during and after the drastic (but thankfully short) move to the extreme right in Polish politics. I think it is important to see how these members define feminism, how important they see it as being, and what can happen to such a movement if people like Lepper and Giertych have a chance to run the country. And whether Tusk and his leadership really changed anything for Polish feminists.

So what does it mean to be a feminist in Poland? Alina argued that “feminism to me means freedom, equality, self-determination. I am a feminist because it is a cultural mentality for me, I am not yet there, I am not the way I want to be yet”. When I asked to her to elaborate on her statements she argued that “what I mean is the fact that feminism encompasses all those different cultural things from the way women’s bodies are portrayed in the media, to issues of equality at work, decisions about our bodies etc. I am not there yet because I have not immersed myself in all those facts, I do not know everything yet but I am learning.” Every day, she argued, that she spends with this organization, she learns. “Through interactions with others, through what I read in papers – issues of importance to feminism are all around me.” She paused briefly and continued, “I identify with this word, with feminism, because it is a key word, a key concept that sometimes opens doors and sometimes closes them.” Even her friends, she argues “they always knew I am a feminist”, even in elementary school she would say “I am a feminist,” of course at that point she was unsure of what this word meant, but, she argues, “I had my own viewpoint and that’s what I identified with [equality of rights between men and women]”. That is why, she went on, “I joined KONSOLA, because I agreed with their goals: fighting discrimination of women”. It is important to add that Alina is also a member of other associations but KONSOLA is her primary goal. Why? “Because to be a feminist and not being

active – that’s not good. Being active is the base. Meaning, that is how things change, because we speak, we fight, we go on”. How does she fight? Well, “Manifa is of course an example” but Alina argues that she would like to focus even more “on molestation and sexual discrimination in workplace, including sexual harassment” because “here in Poznan no one really does this kind of stuff”.

When I asked her about whether the change in the political coalition (from PiS coalition with Lepper and Giertych to Tusk and PO) affected feminist issues in Poland, she argued that “not only did Poland experience stagnation, furthermore” she argued “possibly we even moved backwards.” Although with the “lesser evil of PO now being in power, no more open fighting is necessary, as it was during the previous administration, our needs [Polish women’s] hardly had been met”. Moreover, she continued, “what Polish feminists got from the new, the seemingly more open Prime Minister was a ‘plenipotentiary without the right tools [to do her job]’” which is what she sees as a first step backwards. “Right now”, she argued, “we are under the illusion that things are better, but it is not so”. Without a shadow of doubt “the government of PIS was terrible but it had one important characteristic: it made different circles come together which is missing now”. She paused briefly and went on, “now everyone has this illusion that things are ‘ok’ so everyone goes their own way and does something somewhere, because this large unpleasant enemy is gone”. Although it is good that Lepper and Giertych are no longer in power, Alina made an interesting point when she argued that maybe this switch to the right had a positive step, because it gave Poles a common enemy and, as she argues, “enemies unite people against them. And since this loud and hated enemy personified in the PiS leadership is gone, now people suddenly took a breath of fresh air and moved on to other issues, forgetting that the fight is not over yet”. Until we see change, she stated, we will continue the fight.

When I asked her about her affiliation with feminism Bozena responded that “for me this word, feminism, means the basic thing, equality between men and women”. She became a feminist because “I started to feel inequalities between men and women. For example when some feminist catchphrases were published in newspapers or when I saw women speaking about this subject, I started to search for such women, for such information but even though I was interested in the topic, at the beginning I did not think about joining an actual, formal association until I moved here, to Poznan about 3 years ago. Then I became active.” When I asked her why she chose KONSOLA, she smiled and said, “it is the only active women’s association in Poznan, and Poznan is where I live.” “In addition”, she stated “I also joined because feminism was always important to me and I wanted to be socially and culturally engaged in women’s issues and with others who fight for them.” Furthermore, she elaborated, “lots of girls in my circle [of friends] agree with the fundamentals of feminism but honestly, they are afraid of the word ‘feminism’ and although they often participate in feminist actions, they will not identify themselves as feminists, and I want to change that, I want to show them how much fun feminism is, how great it is to fight for something you believe.” She gave me an example of such a conversation, “I have this antifeminist [female] friend, and when we talk about women’s rights issues, she rejects this ‘nomenclature’ and pretends that the word feminism does not exist.” And yet, she argues “it appears that we actually have the same viewpoint and arguments. And then of course my friend says: Bozena, you are not a feminist, feminists are carnivores [men-haters and men-eaters], they don’t shave their legs, they burn bras etc. And then I have to again explain the difference between myth and fact, between propaganda and truth.” She sighed briefly and said, “but I am used to making feminism ‘nicer’ by now...” She also talked about stereotypes that she encountered at work [she works at a radio station] assembling a piece about Manifa. “Oh so you

are a feminist, a girl asked me, and I responded, yes I am, aren't you?, and the girl responded, "are you kidding? I like men". This is, sadly, not an uncommon assumption, the fear that feminism equals being a lesbian or hating men. "These are common stereotypes" Bozena argued "because that is how our media portray feminists - as these crusading women, often of course, lesbians who are not at all interested in men and want to destroy them. It is so sad." And that is why, she added, feminist work in Poland is so much harder.

When I asked her whether she sees any positive changes coming from the new leadership (in relation to gender and feminist issues), Bozena ironically smirked and said: "the [Office of] Plenipotentiary for Equal Rights of Men and Women was re-established, on March 8, 2008⁸⁹, as if given to us as a present! And to make matters worse, it was a farce – this woman [Elzbieta Radziszewka – politician from the Civic Platform party] has never dealt with women's issues before and suddenly she is supposed to be an expert? In feminist circles this gesture was seen as symbolic, rather than one that was thought through or intended to promote further discussion on topic of gender equity. Bozena argued that nothing much has really changed, and she talked about a lecture she attended recently, where "Tomasz Sikora, the well-known Polish literature critic, stated that during the reign of the terrible twins and their terrible coalition, people were forced to act – things were so bad, almost everyone was calling to arms." "It happened because" she argued, "the situation was approaching the fatal level which mobilized institutions and individuals to work together and integrate", her words echoing those of Alina. "Although now Civic Platform has the stage, and even though people obviously wanted the change to happen, the truth is that many improvements did not become visible. The only thing we really got rid of

⁸⁹As I mentioned earlier, March 8 is considered an International Women's Day, a holiday that is still celebrated in Poland. Again I want to add that I will be writing more about the Office of the Plenipotentiary in the next chapter.

was one twin.” Bozena exhaled and continued saying, "now our society is falling asleep again... when something really bad is happening, then we come together, integrate, become one nation, one Poland and when things get calmer, we don't care about one another at all... everyone cares for themselves..." There is a famous saying in Polish – “smart Pole after damage [is done],” and throughout the years it became crystal clear how much truth lies in that proverb. Poles do wake up but when unfortunately we only do it, when the situation is quite dire and not much else can be done... Since not much is happening, the question I was pondering was whether we need another enemy for unity to happen, for something else to happen? “That’s what I think” Bozena quickly replied. But natural optimism colored her next words – she followed up by saying that “soon enough another populist movement will happen, this fog will lift and people will see clearly and action will happen again”. “Things”, she argued “are going to get a move on”.

Another feminist, Gaja, the leader of KONSOLA told me a similar story to Bozena’s about her “feminist wake-up call”. She said that one of her first moments of awakening followed her reading Graff’s *World Without Women* (2001). “That book started my interest in feminism. Then I learned about gender courses [that were organized by KONSOLA], I signed up for them and started studying”. The courses, she told me, were taking places for two hours every other weekend [in forms of themed lectures], for a period of about two years. “I found them very interesting, and lots of people attended, since those courses were free of charge.” Then, she said, “KONSOLA was organizing Equality March and during one of those lectures I signed up to be a part of the cleaning team, I made friends with other women and soon after I became a member of this organization.” When I asked her what is it about feminism that she likes, that makes her want to be a part of this movement, she replied, “when I think of feminism I think of something fun, for example something like Manifa’s, with different activities, with active women, who are

happy with their lives and who help each other, who have solidarity”. “Feminist for me” she argues “can be a woman who will say about herself ‘I am a feminist’, who has this consciousness but I also know a few women who of course say ‘feminism = bleh, not good’ but are feminists because I define them as such – they are active, they manage a company, they study but never in their lives would they admit to be feminists because they are afraid of its social stigma... mainly it’s a problem with men”. In other words, it is this false association that in order to be a feminist you have to hate men. “I am a feminist, even though I like men”, she continued, “but many women fear that if they identify themselves as feminists, they will not be able to find a husband. Me, I am trying to show that things are different and that there are different kinds of feminisms”. She added then “that feminist identification is a very personal thing – not like religion, where if you don’t follow certain rules you cannot be a Catholic. Feminism does not make such a declaration mandatory – for everyone it can mean something different”. In case of herself, “I have very good associations with feminism. I am a woman and I never regretted being a woman, I very proud of it and I think it’s great to be a woman and that is what feminism is to me. I don’t hide my feminist identity, because I don’t think that [this is] anything to be ashamed of”. Her friends also know that she is a feminist because she always underlines it. “People who get to know me as a feminist see that I am not the way they thought I would be” but that is also because “many people do not know enough about feminism in the first place, they have no idea who a feminist is” since they hear all those media stereotypes. “Unfortunately, in Poland, feminist is always the one who burns bras”, she added ironically.

In terms of feminism in the current political climate Gaja also concurs with the notion that not much has changed since Civic Platform took over the government. In her view, “the programs of PiS and Civic Platform do not really deviate too much from each other – the

difference is again that of style rather than substance”. Gaja argues that “Tusk is viewed as more of a gentleman, compared to the paternalistic, unfriendly Jaroslaw Kaczynski”. She quotes an infamous Polish feminist, writer and publicist, Kinga Dunin who stated that “the change in the leadership of the Polish government is a cosmetic one – now the government sort of got a ‘face lift’ – it is easier and more pleasant to look at the current Prime Minister, although of course we have to understand that he is not in that position solely for us to look at him”. Gaja continued saying that “in the earlier ‘PiS and co’ era I saw our nation as more consolidated. Manifestations against the rule of Jaroslaw were happening, everyone hated him and people had enough of him, enough of the embarrassment his words and actions cost us”. Basically, “we were more united, there was this goal” – the goal to get him out. And now? “Now, with him gone, Poles took a deep breath and thought ‘uff, Tusk is here now, all is great, now it will be normal again’ and some may argue that on the surface things have changed. But time will tell whether the changes will run deeper than just a name tag change and a few promises here and there”. When I interviewed her in May 2008 Tusk was a Prime Minister for a very short time and to a question whether she expects any changes, she answered: “Kaczynski was a Prime Minister for a short period of time, right now Tusk is in the office for a short amount of time as well – [at this point in time] it’s hard to say anything”.

When on a sunny May day I met with Kinga, a member of KONSOLA for the past three years, I first asked her about what feminism means to her. And her reply surprised me a bit. “When I hear that word, feminism, I think of exclusion – a small group of women, aware of themselves and their rights that is excluded from the majority of this Polish patriarchal society... I think of misunderstanding.” Her story of feminist awakening is a more dramatic one. She talked about her fight with herself, fighting against feminism and being active in this direction. “I

used to say to myself, ‘no, I am not a feminist; I like men’” concurring with the prevailing stereotypes. “But then it turned out that feminism was the only way of life for me because I don’t like the fact that my rights are invisible, that they are not talked about... but I know and I still see that even people in my circles, i.e. work circles, still laugh, laugh at the word feminism, laugh at women who identify themselves as feminists and that they see me as belittled, devalued.” For those people, at her work “feminism [this word] is not to be taken seriously, it is some form of ‘unnecessary fabrication’... how is it that women have to fight for the rights that they already have?, they argue”. “Because for them, women of course are seen as equal until one points out to them the variety of levels where this does not hold true.” Today, “I am proud to identify myself as a feminist though”. And three years ago she joined KONSOLA because “I liked the spheres in which KONSOLA was active. I wasn’t ready to join Lambda organization yet [Lambda is an organization for gay/lesbian/bi/trans people] and I knew people that were on the board of directors of KONSOLA – people from my university, from my program – people I was close to, so in this “natural” way KONSOLA attracted me.” She then sadly added, “now those people are gone; they are no longer members and are no longer active.” Why not? “Maybe they no longer need feminism in their lives, at least that’s how they see it”.

When I talked to her about the current state of Polish feminism, this notion of cosmetic rather than real change was brought up again, and her answer was almost identical to the women I quoted above. She argued that “the current political climate is similar to the one that just passed and what the change stands for is the fact that now things are more ‘neutral’”. “Now”, she stated, “feminists are not attacked by some alarming projects such as the proposition to make abortion completely illegal, even in cases of rape or incest, but not too much is happening in the women’s rights sphere – at least not that I can see myself”. She brought up an interesting example of the

stagnation – the new Plenipotentiary for Equal Status of Men and Women, Elzbieta Radziszewska who was appointed on March 8, 2008 “did not go to the feminist manifestation, the large Manifa in Warsaw but rather, during that time, she went to church”... Karolina also underlined another important point, “the fact that there are not enough women in the Polish parliament, that some men laugh and scream when a woman does take a stand and speaks, many interrupt her and what is worse, they do not take her, or any other woman, seriously”. When one watches the parliamentary talks on a TV station it is quite a sad picture. “Polish women still seem like a nuisance in the world of politics because of that they are not given the same time, attention and seriousness as men”. Karolina’s next words sounded a bit somber, as she argued “I do not believe that much will change in terms of rewriting actual laws so that gender equality could expand. Some small fights can be won by feminists, but those will be the fights fought in limited space, not on a national level.” Why is that? She argued, “this is so because of certain stereotypes about roles of men and women that are very deeply ingrained into our society.” “What is womanly”, she argues, is seen as “infantile, of less importance and nonsensical”. She ended by saying, “I think that for the next few years not much will change and for sure we will not win the fight for abortion rights”. So what can win? “Maybe we’ll get a bone thrown our way, maybe some small issue won’t be so vehemently opposed on the large national scale... Maybe Prime Minister Tusk will utter the words ‘Polish women’ and ‘feminism’ in one sentence but that is it. I do not think I can count for more” she ended somberly.

Nina, a journalist major and an activist in KONSOLA as well as in the Green Party, talked to me about her feminist affiliation and the meaning behind it one day in a busy Poznan café. “When I think of feminism, I see textbooks” she smiled and continued, “it makes me think of words like socialism, communism, democracy... different ideologies. It also makes me think

of the women's suffrage movement in the US" she mused and told me that this is how she first learned about feminism. "I definitely identify myself as a feminist for few years now" because "above all it is a healthy way to live life". Nina's journey to feminism has been also mediated by her realization that she is also a lesbian. She argued that "first my lesbianism was sprouting in me and following that was my feminism, a bit differently than how it 'normally' happens I guess", she smiled and continued, "if someone made me choose between LGBT movement and feminism, I would probably choose feminism because when it comes to being active in the movement, my 'feminist' feeling is stronger". But thankfully, she never had to choose.

The problem with feminism in Poland, is one that her colleagues from KONSOLA mentioned as well, the division between people who say about themselves that they are feminists and people who think in such manner but would never call themselves feminists – i.e. "I am for gender equality but I am not a feminist". "Even in my own family", she argued "this is the case". "When I first mentioned feminism to my mother, she 'showed her claws', she was distancing herself from it but now, because of me she is 'into it' more, she understands what it is about but till this day she would never call herself a feminist." Nina's story reminded me of my own, and her mother, of my mother. Although at the beginning my mother as well was quite skeptical, today this situation has changed. Now it is often she, who upon seeing a book on women's rights in Poland, or an article written by a renowned feminist, is the first one to buy it for me, even if she yet won't call herself a feminist. And this distance is felt even more with the older generation of women. Nina told me about her Grandmother, who supposedly knows about everything [feminism and what it stands for], about Natalia's stands on issues, agrees with some stands but still takes on unfriendly position toward feminism. "The further you go up in generations, the bigger this distance to what feminism is gets, that's how it seems to me", she argued. When I

asked her why she decided to pursue her feminism with KONSOLA, she told me that “when I became interested in women’s issues, I did a little research and concluded that KONSOLA was the most active association in Poznan and I wanted to join a group where something was going on, where I could start looking at those feminist ideas growing in me, somewhere on the side, more individually, and consult them with ideas of my feminist peers and talk about how certain things are done in practice”. And she added, “KONSOLA won me over”.

When I talked to Nina about the state of feminism in current political climate in Poland, she argued that change might not be happening due to “the overwhelming power that the Catholic Church holds over the political agenda in Poland”. “Polish church” she argued, “has held power for such a long time. And that power only grew in times of uncertainty. If there was a fight against Communism – Church was there. Now with the EU, with the fear of the rules and regulations it brings, church is here again.” The other reason why change might not be happening as fast as one could wish, she claimed “is the problem with the Polish left”, she passionately explained. “Practically all of them are former Communists, and that is this layer of cement that was left behind, that didn’t get cleaned and that is the root of the problem. Even when there are some changes on the Left, this cement still stays, and it is a problem because basically the same rhetoric about gender equality is reiterated – same words, similar people, no new ideas and therefore no change.” But she does see a potential for change in the persona of Slawomir Sierakowski, a young Polish left-wing activist, political commentator, sociologist, literary critic. Sierakowski, according to Nina, “wants to create a new quality of the political left, a kind of the Western-European type of Left – that is, a modern left with modern ideas for modern society and a modern way of approaching life”. He “seduced” her (and many other women and men) because “he always, without being asked, talks about feminism as a one of the main postulates of this

new left⁹⁰". Others, Nina argued, "will try to get women's votes before the election and then afterward will abandon all women-directed initiatives. So for real visible and tangible change to happen, we might need more people like him". Unfortunately, not many have stepped up to the challenge. She ended saying that "Sierakowski is the only person she would ever vote for without any questions or doubts".

Paul, the only male I interviewed, had an interesting take on what feminism is to him. "For me", he argued "feminism is a natural liberation from medieval restrictions that still touch us and limit people, especially women, in some way". "Feminism is about changing the psyche of women and men, not only in terms of rights but also morality and people's psyche, meaning in the way we relate to each other, in creation of our relations from the first years of our lives. It talks about equality, about rational division of roles depending on everyone's needs and not on some imposed criteria from above". So is Paul a feminist? "Definitely yes" he answered. "It is important to me", he continued "when I make new friends to see what are their views on the subject of feminism. People who talk about women as subjects or criticize the idea of feminism lose a lot in my eyes." "However", he quickly added, "it might be so because they do not know much about feminism but one has to have some humility, right? And they should first find out something about the ideology before starting to radically criticizing it". His introduction to feminism came from "my ex-girlfriend. She opened my eyes to certain things, i.e. commercials that showed behaviors that were harmful, that I did not see in the right way before. Then I found myself at the Equality March, where unfortunately Police had to escort us out of the March [because the All-Polish Youth attacked the marchers with eggs and stones, screaming

⁹⁰ One of many of his texts on the need for women's rights and feminism on the national agenda can be found at: <http://www.krytykapolityczna.pl/Teksty-poza-KP/On-zas-bedzie-panowal-nad-toba/menu-id-129.html>.

homophobic and misogynistic slogans] and so slowly this started to grow in me and finally I realized that I can call myself a 100% feminist.” However “many of my male friends would probably not identify themselves as feminists.” Furthermore, he argued, in academia one can find even the most extreme opposition to feminism and other movements. “It is sad that at parties I meet people from my cohort [at the university] with a Nazi viewpoint – saying ‘homosexuals [should go] to the gas chambers’ and not too long ago my friend said that he wants to have a march in support of Josef Fritzl⁹¹. “Of course, this is an extreme example. Most people do not think in such terms”.

Interestingly, Paul had the most positive outlook out of all the interviewees on the changes that feminism is bringing to Poland in the current political state. Although “feminism is currently moving forward but in very slow motion, it is still moving toward something better for sure”. He viewed this issue in terms of a generational change, arguing that “you can’t put away your weapons - until young generation gets their point across, not too much is going to change”. “We [Polish youth] have to finally be heard. I am fighting each day, trying to talk to my [male and female] friends about what gender and feminism is, what it means etc. I fight using dialogue, conversations but social media now adds another aspect, one that can go from a small to a large scale”. He told me a story of how he tries to bring issues of feminism to class, “using articles from newspapers, looking at them through the gender lens”. “The fight is on”, he ended with a smile. And Paul, alongside with other KONSOLA members is definitely taking a part in it.

⁹¹ The case of Joseph Fritzl captured the media all over the world in 2008 when it was found out that he has kept his daughter captive for years in his basement, repeatedly raping her and fathering several children.

Conclusion

Without the shadow of a doubt, May 1, 2004 was a historic date for Poland. The entrance to the European Union was yet another marker of the new democratic country, one that has accepted certain values and was open to trade and collaboration with 15 culturally, historically and socially distinct nations. On that day Polish people, young and old celebrated and opened their hearts and raised their hopes toward the larger, greater and for years so elusive European Union. Now we were a part of it.

Although in feminist circles women rejoiced, women's rights activists know that hoping for sudden changes is unadvisable, not to mention naïve. Nonetheless with the Union on their side, feminists hoped that at least some amendments will take place. Their hopes however, were quickly crushed as the new coalition of the right wing parties took control over the government. With "moral cleansing" on their agenda, the Prime Minister and his deputies quickly stirred the political pot with quite surprising results. Suddenly many Poles found themselves in a country where Prime Minister and President were too much alike, where deputy prime ministers were accused of sexual harassment, homophobia and even promoting nationalism to the point of extremism and where a complete ban on all abortions was looming. Not to mention that actions taken by the Polish government created outrage all over Europe and our foreign relations were in a pitiful state. At that point, Poles finally woke up and decided that things have to change. The coalition had to fall apart and the reign of the terrible twins had to come to an end.

And such a time came, when in October 2007 Poles voted again and Prime Minister Kaczynski resigned, giving up his position to a younger, more energetic and seemingly far less conservative Mr. Tusk. Again hopes entered people's hearts and souls and many waited to see what this change may bring. But for some, the waiting was in vain. Although the government in

power was clearly less embarrassing on the international scale, in Poland not much has changed in terms of gender policy. Feminists waited urgently for some kind of sign from the Prime Minister, for his promises of openness to be fulfilled but nothing much came their way. The change, as many feminists pointed out, was more cosmetic than real. The women and man I interviewed argued that although the former government was terrible inside and out, one thing that they did, unintentionally of course, was the mobilization of masses against them. Now, with Civic Platform in power, many stopped fighting arguing that now things are better. The interviewees argued that just because it is better than it was (and it was really bad) one cannot give up, but rather, now it is the time to fight for more. Now it is not the time to sit down and be quiet – now it is time to make Mr. Tusk responsible for the promises he has not yet delivered on.

**CHAPTER SIX:
THE DISAPPEARING OFFICE OF THE PLENIPOTENTIARY
FOR THE EQUAL STATUS OF WOMEN AND MEN**

The preceding chapters have dealt with the Polish state of feminism under the Communist rule (chapter 2), the difficult dialogue between feminists from different countries (chapter 3), the promise of EU entry for Poles (chapter 4) and with what happened after the right wing parties took control over the Polish government (chapter 5). Now I would like to talk specifically about one particular aspect of gender equality, the office of the Plenipotentiary for Equal Status of Women and Men. This office was created with a goal of pursuing a policy of equality between women and men, and preparing the establishment of an ombudsman for anti-discrimination measures based on race, ethnicity, religion or belief, age and sexual orientation.

I also want to add that this chapter was written with support of one of the former Plenipotentiary herself, Dr. Magdalena Sroda, whose help and insights have proven to be of immeasurable help and to whom I am very grateful for all the support I have received.

The office of the Plenipotentiary for Equal Status of Women and Men has had a very convoluted although a short history in the Polish government. In this chapter, I will first present the brief history of this office, and then I want to particularly focus on the rule of the three representatives that headed this office from years 2001 till now. Particularly I want to talk about what happened under Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka, a Polish Left of center politician who headed the office from December 17, 2001 to August 16, 2004; then the changes that Magdalena Sroda, a professor of Ethics and Philosophy as well as a self-proclaimed feminist, brought and her rule as a Plenipotentiary for little over a year – from August 16, 2004 to November 4, 2005. And then I

wish to focus on the most recent (and current) Plenipotentiary, who took the reins on March 8, 2008 - Elzbieta Radziszewska, a Civic Platform politician, a medical doctor by training, and a woman who had no formal training in the area of women's rights.

However, before I move on to the discussion of the Office of the Plenipotentiary, I would like to briefly address the issue of Polish non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as they also have been instrumental in addressing Polish women's issues, gender mainstreaming efforts and the push for gender equality in many areas of Polish cultural, social and political life.

Polish women's NGOs became active in the late 1990s as the new democratic Poland was rising from the dust of the communist past. However, to argue that it was a new development would be erroneous. Some informal women's groups have existed during Communism but were unable to register themselves and only in post 1989 Poland could do so officially. Their development was also supported at numerous national and international conferences on women's issues, with generous help received from different foreign foundations (such as Fulbright and Soros among others) that offered grants for research to be conducted in those topics (Pakszys, 2009). However, these NGO's since their formal inception have been struggling with several key vulnerabilities as described by Joanna Regulska (1999). Here I would like to briefly address some of them to underline the ways in which their successes had been limited.

In her report, Regulska argues that specificity of recent Polish history, the rule of the authoritarian Communist regime, as well as the new conditions introduced during the economic and social transition period of the 1990s have created a particular environment in which Polish NGOs have developed (1999). Her analysis takes a four-fold approach, first looking at the

internal dynamics of the NGOs, and then considering the external influences of forces on local, national and international levels.

When considering the first element, the internal dynamics of the NGO's themselves, Regulska argues that even basic lack of organizational skills is something that plagues these organizations. Issues such as inability to organize, write proposals (for example to obtain funding), to set clear priorities is proving problematic. Furthermore, these often small organizations are unable to cooperate with other actors in the area, a step that would substantially raise the probability of their survival (this is true especially for NGOs located in rural areas where support, financial and otherwise, is smaller than in urban spaces). A related internal issue is the lack of volunteerism (Regulska, 1999: 63). It has been suggested that Polish people are more willing to give money than their time to support NGOs, an attitude that might have something to do with the way volunteerism was organized under the former regime where it was controlled systematically by the Communist ideology. But history is only part of the problem. As Regulska writes, often NGOs "simply do not have the skills to recruit and motivate interested individuals to work with them... leaders often do not know how to separate and delegate tasks for both staff and volunteers, yet good management is required to create the initiative, assign small tasks and motivate" (1999: 63).

Another vulnerability of Polish NGO's lies in the sphere of economics because with a few exceptions (such as Batory Foundation, Water Supply Foundation and Foundation in Support of Local Democracy), NGO's in Poland have very small funding venues. Theoretically of course there are avenues to gain funding from state, business communities, private giving or even from foreign sources, the reality is that while some of those sources do provide some funding, many are highly selective and others fund only specific programs or organizations

(Regulska, 1999). Additionally, the legislature on funding of NGOs can often appear ambivalent, which leads to further complications and destroys the climate of philanthropy that might have been established.

Other issues that plague Polish NGO's have to do with the fact that "NGOs and local governments indeed represent new sets of local institutions that did not exist in their current form before 1989" (Regulska, 1999: 65). According to Regulska, this represents "regime change: the devolution of power, democratization of practices, and greater institutional responsiveness to local needs" (65). However, still, the past has its influence, as "they often do not perceive themselves as partners, but rather as adversaries that represent two different constituencies—authorities and citizens—who locally confront each other in their struggle for resources and power (65). Problems also plague NGOs on the national level because as Regulska notes, "national state's policy toward the NGO sector in Poland is confused" (67). Poland faced a high rate of government turnover: "nine governments presided during the past nine years" (67) and as one can imagine, many had different ideas on how to deal with NGO's. For example, a few of "Polish Prime Ministers and their governments... felt obliged to take public stands regarding NGOs, and with each sending different signals, a clear policy is yet to be established. Various fiscal and financial provisions have been introduced, only to be either withdrawn shortly afterward, remain unimplemented, or to be hampered in implementation by excessively bureaucratic procedures" (Regulska, 1999: 67). Basically, unclear tax laws, imprecise legal regulations concerning financial and charitable activity, and burdensome financial reporting regulations have largely limited NGOs' ability to grow and to function effectively. And that of course, has continued and is still the case, even to some extent with KONSOLA.

Brief history of the office

Having addressed the issue of Polish nongovernmental organizations and some of the problems they face, I wish now to turn the attention to the one specific governmental office responsible for gender equality initiatives in Poland, the office of the Plenipotentiary of Equal Status of Women and Men. As we have seen, issues of women's rights, feminism as well as gender discrimination have rarely been at the center of the political debates in Poland. Usually these issues were mentioned somehow in passing, when a new political campaign begins either for a presidential or some other high ranking office, like Prime Minister etc. A candidate running for his or her election or reelection can sometimes be heard arguing that "all Poles, men and women alike" should be treated equally no matter their gender, class, ethnicity or even religion. But shortly afterwards, politicians are elected and their promises fade away and the status quo takes over yet again. The story of this office in Poland unfortunately follows that model.

The first government mechanisms for the advancement of women in Poland date back to the rule of the Communist government (it was then called the office of Plenipotentiary for Women's Affairs), as Eva Welnic (1993) states. However, during that time, as with many other gender initiatives, the office mostly existed on paper without a real person dealing with Women's Affairs. Following the UN Conference on Women which took place in Nairobi in 1985, in September of 1986 the Council of Ministers adopted a resolution that established the Office of the Plenipotentiary for Women, which was in full operation until October of 1989 (Gadomska, Korzeniewska and Nowakowska, 2000)⁹². Anna Kedzierska, the under-secretary of state, was the first Plenipotentiary and her office was under the administrative power of the

⁹² A table highlighting the major changes to the Plenipotentiary Office in Poland is outlined in Table 1, on the following page.

Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. However, as Gadomska writes, “it was independent within its mandate and had a separate budget” (2000).

Kedzierska was quite active in her office, implementing an agenda full of activities for the social and professional advancement of women (based on the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies⁹³) and assigning respective ministers to pursuing such goals. Furthermore, every year, particular problems that related to the advancement of women were selected and presented at the government sitting, leading to their inclusion in the government work agenda. Unfortunately, due to a lack of media interest in such matters, the public was quite unaware of the very active Plenipotentiary and the work her office was doing toward gender equality (Gadomska, Korzeniewska and Nowakowska, 2000).

Following the end of Communism in Poland, during the so-called Third Polish Republic⁹⁴, much was changing and governmental policies on gender equality and the advancement of women were also modified. The office with its power and position in the government went through several changes, not only in name but in its influence and political capacity. Political shifts in subsequent ruling coalitions changed the attitudes toward gender equality and women’s rights issues in Poland. As Nowakowska writes, “The trend toward belittling women’s problems was reflected in the modifications of the name of the office of Plenipotentiary. These names included: plenipotentiary for women, for women and family, for family and women, and in the end – for family” (2000). Throughout these many changes, the office’s budget was also severely cut and fell in its ranking receiving finally quite a low position

⁹³ The entire text of the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies can be found at the UN website: <http://www.un.org/esa/gopher-data/conf/fwcw/nfls/nfls.en>.

⁹⁴ The era of the Third Polish Republic starts with the fall of Communism in 1989 and continues till this day.

in the government structure. The limitations were quite striking, since suddenly the head of the Plenipotentiary office was a member of the government, and although as an under-secretary of state belonged to the government administrative structure, no plenipotentiary had the right to introduce bills or had a direct influence on the social policy of government. Basically, what happened throughout all the changes that the office went through, the role of the Plenipotentiary became limited to that of an adviser (Gadomska, Korzeniewska and Nowakowska, 2000).

In 1991 the office of the Plenipotentiary for Family and Women was re-established under the Prime Minister Jan Krzysztof Bielecki⁹⁵. The office was detached from its original attachment to the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and became an independent body directly subordinated to the Prime Minister. From April 1991 to January 1992, for less than a year, the office was quite active under the leadership of Anna Popowicz, former member of Solidarity and a fierce democrat who fought for women's rights issues. During her time in the office, she prepared, among many other things, a government program for improvement of the situation of women, children and families. She also vehemently opposed the introduction of legal restrictions on abortion and family planning. Popowicz's downfall came after she addressed a letter to the Main Medical Council, in which "she asked for caution in introducing changes to the Medical Ethics Code that in reality were limiting women's access to abortion" (Gadomska, Korzeniewska and Nowakowska, 2000). Since this independent office led by Popowicz became involved in defending women's abortion rights, shortly after that, she was recalled from the Plenipotentiary position by then Prime Minister Jan Olszewski⁹⁶ (Fuszara and Zielinska, 2002). Her dismissal definitely had political connotations. Since abortion is such a contested issue in

⁹⁵ Bielecki was the Prime Minister from January 12, 1991 – December 5, 1991.

⁹⁶ Olszewski served as a Prime Minister of Poland from December 23, 1991 – June 5, 1992.

Poland (Fuszara, 1991) and since she did not have the approval of the powerful Catholic Church (whose involvement in politics I have outlined in the previous chapters) her involvement was not appreciated on the political arena. So, in order to keep the status quo going, Popowicz's activism was squashed.

Hanna Suchocka, the first woman to hold the office of Prime Minister in Polish history, took the oath of office in July of 1992⁹⁷. Her appointment made many women happy, seeing this move as a step forward towards greater equality for women on the national arena. Despite numerous petitions from women's organizations, Suchocka did not appoint a new Plenipotentiary arguing openly that "she did not see any need for actions for the advancement of women or for the nomination of a plenipotentiary" (Gadomska, Korzeniewska and Nowakowska, 2000). The office subsequently remained vacant for several years, during both right-wing and left-wing governments (Fuszara and Zielinska, 2002). Thus, this vacancy continued until December of 1995 and even though the office officially operated throughout that time, issues concerning women went unaddressed.

The 1995 UN Conference on Women in Beijing, China was according to Nowakowska without a doubt a catalyst for the re-establishment of the Plenipotentiary office (2000). Due to the increasing pressure from women's organizations the coalition government at that time (represented by Democratic Left Alliance and Polish Peasant's Party) appointed Barbara Blida to the position of the Government Plenipotentiary for Family and Women. The decision was quite controversial, since Blida was also Minister for Construction and Spatial Management of the Republic of Poland (she graduated with a degree in sanitary engineering from Silesian University

⁹⁷ Suchocka served as a Prime Minister of Poland from 11 July 1992 – 25 October 1993.

of Technology), who had no interest in women's rights and gender equality issues. Polish feminists and women's rights activists saw it as a sign of disregard and marginalization of gender equality and women's issues. Blida herself quite openly talked about the fact that she was not interested in women's rights and that she took the position because the Prime Minister asked her to do so. As Nowakowska reported, at a meeting with representatives from women's rights organizations and the Parliamentary Women's Group, Blida "admitted frankly that she would gladly transfer that 'deadwood' to somebody else"⁹⁸ (2000). If the person representing such office sees her responsibilities as such a burden, what does it say about the state of gender equality politics in Poland? And feminism? One has to wonder...

Other authors have argued that basically for an entire decade, Poland did not have an independent office for defending women's rights, despite the country's international commitments, the lobbying activities by women's organizations and a glaring need for addressing these issues (Fuszara and Zielinska, 2002). Furthermore, this treatment of the office and the issues it represents testifies to the fact that the gender equality measures remain unenforced and the opinion of the women's community continued to be ignored.

⁹⁸ Barbara Blida continued her appointment as the Minister of Construction even when the ministry was transformed into the Central Office for Housing and Municipal Development until 17 October 1997. Three years later Blida was restored to serve in the Ministry of Regional Development and Construction, headed by Jerzy Kropiwnicki. Following tenure as a member of the cabinet, she continued as a member of the Sejm for eight years, but also ventured into business, becoming, in 2001, the president of J.W. Construction sp. z o.o., one of Poland's largest real-estate developers. According to media accounts and later official reports, Barbara Blida was named as one of the officials who received illegal payments from businesswoman Barbara Kmiecik, one of the richest women in the country during the 1990s (for falsification of the country's coal certificates). Kmiecik, after her arrest, allegedly named a number of officials, including Barbara Blida, although the authorities did not release any names, nor details of Kmiecik's revelations. On the early morning of Wednesday, 25 April 2007, representatives of ABW (Agencja Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego; eng: Agency of Internal Security) entered Blida's house in Siemianowice Śląskie with a prosecutor's warrant to arrest her and search the house for evidence. According to ABW reports, during the search, she asked for permission to use the bathroom, where she shot herself through the heart using her Astra revolver, with subsequent resuscitation efforts by ABW agents proving to be fruitless.

May 1995 brought another change in the person holding the office. The resolution of 12 of May 1995 by the Council of Ministers declared the Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Family and Women, which replaced the office of the Plenipotentiary for Women and Family, and the position went to Jolanta Banach, another Democratic Left Alliance politician. Banach, a former teacher and librarian was also active in the Democratic Union of Women, an association formed in 1990 in Warsaw, which declared their activity in the following values: liberty, equality before the law, the right to free choice, equal status, a comprehensive advancement of women, social protection, preventive health care and educate the public on the rights of women and human rights⁹⁹.

Even though the name of the office was changed again, suggesting that family issues were of greatest importance, the fact was that the advancement of women and gender equality became a priority for Banach. She immersed herself in preparation of a government document detailing the situation of Polish women and for the first time in history, Polish NGO's were invited and asked for help in preparation of that document. This idea however, was not well received by the Catholic organizations, who first joined but soon after left the Preparatory Committee arguing that their positions were not taken into consideration. Their biggest problem was the fact that they were against discussing issues of abortion, family violence and sexual education – issues that Preparatory Committee and Banach saw as quite important in terms of gender equality (Gadomska, Korzeniewska and Nowakowska, 2000). Their departure was seen as a political statement further establishing the divide between the way that the Catholic Church and others see women's rights issues.

⁹⁹ For more on this association please see: <http://www.dukrk.pl/news.php>.

However, the cooperation between Banach, her office and the Polish NGO's continued for another year, resulting in the establishment of a Standing Forum of Co-operation between NGO's and Government Plenipotentiary for Family and Women. Furthermore, regular meetings took place often with Banach herself, providing NGO's with better information on the issues of women's rights and gender equality in Poland (Gadomska, Korzeniewska and Nowakowska, 2000). This fruitful collaboration led not only to process of law creation but also brought NGO's closer together, facilitating exchange of experiences and overall amelioration of relationships.

It is important to note that one of the first initiatives that the Forum put forward was the National Plan of Action for Women that as prepared in accordance with the final recommendations from the Beijing Conference. The Polish National Plan of Action was geared to the needs of individual ministers, local governments and NGO's. Some of the important objectives included (but were not limited to): "human rights of women, women in power and decision-making, education, economy, women's health, women and the environment, violence against women, women and the media, mechanisms of co-operation of government administration with the NGO's, research strategies and gender-disaggregated data collection systems" (Gadomska, Korzeniewska and Nowakowska, 2000). In terms of long-term effects, this plan called for promotion and protection of women's human rights, respect of gender equality and non-discrimination in all spheres of public life. Detailed program tasks were designed with thought of improving the situation of women through equalizing opportunities created for women and men in public life. Although the National Plan was a great initiative, one of the authors of the report, Urszula Nowakowska, notes that one of its crucial weaknesses was the fact that the government did not allocate additional funds for its implementation (2000) and the ministries were obliged to implement the program using funds already allocated from their

yearly budget, which again underlines the paper-thin readiness for gender equality, rather than its serious consideration. However, the Plan was adopted by the Polish government on April 29, 1997 and until the change of the government in November of that year, it was, “step by step, implemented by appropriate ministries” (Gadomska, Korzeniewska and Nowakowska, 2000).

As one of the examples of actions I wish to mention “Combating Violence – Equalizing Chances” initiative designed to counteract family violence. This program was to be realized in collaboration with the UNDP Office in Warsaw and aimed at creating a comprehensive system of support for those victimized by violence in their families. This particular program consisted of training of activists from more than ten organizations (chosen through a competition from among groups involved in support for victims of crimes). After the program was finished those organizations that participated were to be funded by local governments. Unfortunately, the program was not fully implemented before the parliamentary elections in 1997 won by Electoral Action Solidarity. And so the efforts of the SLD government aimed at establishing, at the local level, local structures for the advancement of women, inter alia, plenipotentiaries for women, was wasted.

So, for that semi-brief period of time Poland was changing – women’s rights were talked about on some level, but yet the discussion did not reach the national arena. The discussions barely made it into the media. It was a quiet but definitely fruitful collaboration. Too bad that yet again ordinary Poles did not know much about it.

In November 1997, after another round of parliamentary elections, the office of the Plenipotentiary changed its name yet again. Instead of the office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Family and Women, now the new government renamed it the office of the

Government Plenipotentiary for Family. And for the first time, a male member of the government became the head person – Kazimierz Kapera, a politician from the ultra-conservative Christian Nation Union party was to direct an office whose role was to bring equality between the genders.... There is a double irony in the appointment of Kapera: not only is the party Kapera from known for its extremely old-fashioned and traditionalist viewpoint on social roles of women and men in the family; in addition, a few years earlier, Nowakowska notes, Kapera was recalled from a position of deputy minister of health due to his speech in which he “compared people of different sexual orientation to mentally ill patients” and made statements in opposition to the use of contraceptives (2000). The yet another name change of the office and nomination of such an ultraconservative person like Kapera to lead an office that was supposed to bring gender equality and women’s issues to the front very effectively explained and underlined the direction that the government was taking. Soon enough even staff within the office was replaced with those whose viewpoints were aligned with Kapera’s. The implementation of the National Plan of Action for Women was shelved (although never officially abandoned) alongside any developing local structures for the advancement of women. The move towards gender equality was yet again blocked and Poland again took two steps back instead of even a tiny one forward.

As I mentioned in chapter four, great expectations were connected to the entrance of Poland to the European Union. During the negotiations leading to the possibility of Polish entry, in 2001, the European commission had recognized the fact that in Poland, “Considerable efforts to align with EC *acquis* have been undertaken and should receive high priority [...]. While the amendments to the Labour Code constitute good progress, the necessary institutional framework for implementing and enforcing the *acquis* in this area should still established. Further, actions

should be undertaken to raise awareness of equal treatment for women and men, to improve the position of women in the labour market and to increase their representation in decision-making” (Wilkowska, 2003).

The truth was, as I hope to have I showed on the preceding pages, that in the past (from 1997 to 2001) gender equality has not been a high priority issue for the Polish Ministry of Labour and Social affairs. As Anna Wilkowska writes, there was a lack of political will “to conduct a pro-equality policy in the integration of international standards. In 1997, the national gender equality machinery was transformed into Plenipotentiary of the Government for the Family. As a result, gender equality issues were dropped from the scope of interest of this office, and it began to perceive women only in the context of the family.” (Wilkowska, 2003)

Anna Wilkowska, a prominent Polish lawyer¹⁰⁰ and a member of the Network of East-West Women (NEWW), wrote about some important changes that have happened in the Polish gender legislation since the entry to the EU. Most noticeably, she observed, changes fell into three spheres: new gender equality legislation; institutional mechanisms for gender equality; and social perception of gender equality (Wilkowska, 2003). For the purpose of this chapter, I would like to focus only on the institutional mechanisms for gender equality.

According to several authors, after the last election, and under pressure from the European Union and representatives from women’s organizations, a feminist-activist was appointed to the office in 2002 and the government changed the office into the Plenipotentiary for Equal Status of Women and Men (Wilkowska, 2003; Fuszara and Zielinska, 2002). This office was now a higher-level institution falling directly under the supervision of the Council of

¹⁰⁰Wilkowska was one of the lawyers representing Alicja Tysiac in the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

the Ministers. It was established on the basis of the Council of Ministers' Act of 20 October 2001. The person holding the office is also the Secretary of State in the Chancellery of Prime Minister (Wilkowska, 2003).

The duties of the Plenipotentiary include¹⁰¹: “accomplishment of government policy within the scope of equal status of women and men” and “making arrangements for establishing an office for counteracting discrimination based on race, ethnic origin, religion or belief, age and sexual orientation, including development of a schedule of measures aimed at creation of the office and preparation of legal acts drafts” (Wilkowska, 2003). More specifically, the duties consist of analyzing and evaluating the legal and social situation with respect to equal treatment and opportunities for both genders, working on actions aimed at achieving equal treatment and opportunities for both men and women as well as protection from discrimination based on sex in all areas of social life and promotion of gender mainstreaming activities and actions. Furthermore, the Plenipotentiary is also responsible for expressing opinion on legal acts and other governmental drafts that affect the situation within the equal status of women and men and development of such acts, and finally the head of this office is liable for cooperation with many entities, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and organization of the awareness campaigns (Wilkowska, 2003).

On the following pages I would like to review the work of three most recent (and most interesting in my opinion) Plenipotentiaries, those of Jaruga-Nowacka, Sroda, and Radziszewska, since their work was aligned with the time of my research.

¹⁰¹Based on the Regulation of the Council of Ministers of 25 June 2002.

“Ministra” Jaruga-Nowacka

Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka, a very attractive, married mother of two girls and a minister from the Labour Union party, took the reins of the Plenipotentiary in December of 2001. Asked whether she is a feminist, she replied, “of course I am” and continued with an explanation: “a feminist gives her/himself the right of deciding one’s own life, steps against any form of discrimination; discrimination on the basis of gender, age, belief or sexual orientation. Why would someone not want to be a feminist?” (Winnicka, 2003).

In her office, Jaruga-Nowacka did not want to be called a “minister”, but rather, “ministra” – in Polish a female conjugation of the word minister. She stood strong and proclaimed that “we”, meaning feminists, will fight for equal rights until even one of us, women still feels discriminated against (Winnicka, 2003). But Jaruga-Nowacka never claimed to be a superwoman or a miracle worker. She understood and often spoke about the fact that protection of, and fight for women’s rights will not be possible with such a low representation of women in the power structures of the Polish government. That was the crucial error lying at the basis of the discrimination problem. “There are no women at the top of the political parties, no female governors, no female marshals” she is quoted as saying. “Women [in party elections] were treated as a pre-race snack” (Winnicka, 2003), or in other words, those were elections sweeteners that were never really going to get very far.

As one of her top priorities, the new Plenipotentiary named eradication of gender discrimination in employment, abolition of female unemployment and facilitation of female advancement at work (a war on “the glass ceiling” so to say) and limiting violence against women in family settings. Additionally, liberalization of the abortion law and passing the equal

rights bill (including parity in filling important party and government positions) were also put on the table (Roguska, 2002).

The interesting fact is that when in 2002 members of Polish society were asked whether the office of the Plenipotentiary was needed (with Jaruga-Nowacka as the head), 45% of respondents claimed it is (30% said it is rather necessary and 15% claimed that it is very necessary) compared to 39% who thought it was not (23% said it was rather unnecessary, and 16% saw it as very unnecessary). Only 16% were unsure either way. Looking at these statistics via the gender lens, 52% of women and 38% of men agreed with the necessity of the existence of this office (Wilkowska, 2003; Roguska, 2002). When the public was asked about their views on issues that Ministra Jaruga-Nowacka should take on, the top priority was given to physical and emotional violence against women in families and places of employment as well as gender discrimination in employment (Roguska, 2002). The one issue that both men and women were against (although more women than men opposed it) was equalization of the retirement age for both sexes. Many feel that different ages of retirement for women and men (60 and 65 respectively¹⁰²) are not discriminatory.

Polish feminists accepted Ministra Jaruga-Nowacka without any protests. Many saw in her the executor of their wants, needs and issues. True to her feminism, Jaruga-Nowacka's office staff was all female – only the cleaning crew was male. When asked by some male minister about how she is able to have a successful career and a happy personal life, she quickly replies:

¹⁰²There are categories of employees entitled to earlier retirement, e.g. teachers, armed forces, miners, war veterans etc.). In addition to age, for employees born before 1949 and some groups of employees born between 1949 and 1968 minimum periods of social security contributions must also be satisfied – they are also different for men and women. For more information please visit: <http://www.agediscrimination.info/international/Pages/Poland.aspx>.

“And you sir? How are you able to have both?” Jaruga-Nowacka might be a lot of things, but scared, she is not (Winnicka, 2003).

Ending this section I want to add that Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka tragically lost her life in the accident that killed the Polish President, Lech Kaczynski and 94 other people on April 10, 2010 when the Presidential plane, Tupolev Tu-154 of the 36th Special Aviation Regiment crashed near Smolensk-North airport in Russia on its way to commemorate the Katyn massacre. Poland lost a true fighter for the rights of women and minorities. But hopefully, the legacy of this incredible woman will not be lost or forgotten.

The rule of Sroda

When in 2004 Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka was nominated to the post of Deputy Prime Minister, she gave the reins of the office to the previously little nationally then known Magdalena Sroda (Fuszara and Zielinska, 2002). In 1980s Magdalena Sroda was an active member of the Solidarity movement, and after 1989 she would not be involved in politics until 2004, when she was appointed by then Prime Minister Marek Belka¹⁰³ as the government's Plenipotentiary for the Equal Status of Women and Men. She has been vocal in advocating the separation of State and Church, LGBT rights, and more liberal abortion law. She is also known for her consistently anti-war stance on foreign policy.

With the entrance of Sroda onto the position, suddenly the smell of change was in the air. As Joanna Tanska noted, the staff of the office and the invited journalists got a taste of how different things were going to be on the ceremonial day of power transfer (2005). Jaruga-Nowacka showed up with her entire entourage, including her advisors, bodyguard and chauffeur;

¹⁰³ Marek Belka served as the Polish Prime Minister from 2 May 2004 – 31 October 2005.

she was in her best business attire, with her hair and make-up professionally done even though it was August and the air temperature outside rose above 90 degrees Fahrenheit. Magdalena Sroda showed up in jeans and short sleeve linen shirt, with a green bag hanging from her shoulder. And oh the horror – her feet were not dressed in gorgeous Mary Jane pumps or Manolos, but rather she was wearing leather manly-looking sandals with no socks! She was unconventional to say the least (Tanska, 2005) from the way she dressed to the way she conducted herself. It was as if someone opened the door and fresh air suddenly poured in. The change was not about the fact that one cared more about the issues of women than the other, since Jaruga-Nowacka definitely was one that fought for women's inclusion in the public space and so did of course Sroda, but rather it was a change from a diplomatically polished politician to this new unapologetic straight talker for whom suits and ties were not of importance.

Sroda's unapologetic style of work and her brave outspokenness have led to many outbursts against her – on one occasion, after a particularly infamous speech in Stockholm about the relationship between religion and violence against women, a man wrote in a letter to Sroda quoted by Tanska: "I thought you were a young woman, but after seeing you on television, I realized that you are old and soon enough you will stand in front of God, whom you hate so much" (2005). Apparently God really cares about age and appearance....

Sroda was a different kind of Plenipotentiary for several reasons. First of all is, she never was a politician. An academic at heart, she is also an ethicist, philosopher and most importantly, a feminist. She tried to escape politics, seeing it in the least popular kind of light. For her, many politicians are basically scared and undereducated people. Sroda on the other hand is not afraid – not scared of saying unpopular things and not afraid of discussion. She will stand behind her words, a quality that is often so terribly missed in politics. As an example of her tenacity one can

quote her now infamous “Stockholm speech”¹⁰⁴ in which Sroda condemned the Catholic Church for not openly standing against the violence against women. Sroda argued that Catholic Poland, although free of the honorary killing of women¹⁰⁵, has a problem with the occurrence of violence against women and this problem has its root in the strong influence of Catholic Church over public life. Although Catholicism does not support such violence, it does, in some way condone it. She argued that “there are some indirect relationships, based on culture, that are strongly based in religion” (Graczyk, 2004). Although her statement caused quite an explosion in Polish political circles, Sroda did not back down even after being reprimanded by the Prime Minister. Furthermore, afterwards she stated that she was actually quite pleased with herself: “I have to say that now, with the distance and the experience, I am quite content. This statement caused a quite a storm and I hope that it will also bring practical effects. Finally a discussion about Catholic church and violence against women has started” (Tanska, 2005). Tanska writes that “she [Sroda] is one of a few selected people whose word counts – even if one does not agree with her viewpoint” (Tanska, 2005). Agnieszka Grzybek, a former director of Oska (Information Center for Women’s Issues¹⁰⁶) argued that people are afraid of Sroda because she is very intelligent and has a cutting tongue. “It would be great if there were more women politicians like her, or experts like her within politicians. Unfortunately, she is the exception to the rule” Grzybek continued (Tanska, 2005). Sroda does not like to do things to attract attention from the media – her enthusiasm is not limited to demonstrations but rather is quite visible on a day to day basis in the issues she tries to tackle. Some argue that her predecessor, Jaruga-Nowacka, was all smiles to the

¹⁰⁴Sroda spoke at 2004 Stockholm conference on “honorary violence against women”.

¹⁰⁵ Sroda was referring to other religions and denominations that turn their eyes away from killing women who in some way have supposedly shamed their families: either by having affairs, by being victims of rape, having illegitimate children as well as other reasons.

¹⁰⁶ More information on Oska is available at: <http://www.oska.org.pl/>.

camera but lacked initiative for the actual hard work: the anti-abortion bill went unchanged, the bill on equal status of men and women was not passed, and even birth control pills did not make it to the list of refunded medicines.

The strained relationship between the two plenipotentiaries became visible after the Sejm debate on the equal status of men and women bill during which the male members of the parliament focused on criticizing Jaruga-Nowacka's legislative actions. Sroda, who was just appointed the new Plenipotentiary, instead of jumping in to protect her predecessor, talked about the form and substance of these accusations. Some (close workmates to Jaruga-Nowacka) were quite disturbed and angry arguing that if it wasn't for Izabela, Sroda would be a nobody, but it was "Iza who got her [Sroda] out of nothingness" (Tanska, 2005).

Maybe some do not like Sroda because of her no-nonsense attitude. From the beginning she argued that liberalization of the anti-abortion law will not be the focus of her office since she was a realist and did not believe that the political climate, or rather the political stands of the liberal politicians were adequate at the time to start a debate that would inevitably end in disaster. She was well aware of the fact that the Polish Catholic Church already not too fond of her would even further criticize her attempts in that direction. Therefore she focused her attention on the situation of women in the labor market, arguing that a financially independent woman is more capable and more prepared to handle other kinds of obstacles (Sroda, 2008)

Would this no-nonsense feminist be able to single-handedly change the mentality of Poles? Of course not, but the fact that she enjoys the working from the bottom of the problem, that she thrives in this drudgery is quite refreshing, according to Joanna Klimczyk, a lecturer at the Gender Studies program at Warsaw University (Tanska, 2005).

The fact that she is an academician is also not without its merit. She expects a lot from her students but her knowledge is vast and as a professor she turned lots of women “to feminism”. Those who had the pleasure of meeting her personally (as my mother did, and I over email) are quite surprised to find that the academic jargon is missing from her speeches and personal conversations. Many who came to her lectures are quite astonished how nice, personal and likable she is – not the feminist monster created by the media (especially by Radio Maryja). In her academic and her plenipotentiary jobs alike she stands by one rule: before you start criticizing something, first get to know the topic because only then discussion is suitable and worth anything.

The end of the office

As the Stop Violence Against Women Monitor (VAW) website article (contributed by Artur Czerwinski) noted, the Office of the Plenipotentiary was working hard towards implementation of the goals mentioned above for a period of about five years – from 2001 to 2005 (2006). However, after the elections of 2005, when the right wing coalition took over (a political shift, which I described in the former chapter) the new government in power issued an ordinance that ended the existence of the Plenipotentiary position. On November 3, 2005 Magdalena Sroda handed in her resignation from the position to the then Prime Minister Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz¹⁰⁷. Interestingly, as Czerwinski reports, in the aftermath of these elections, all ministers of the former government resigned from their posts (2006).

After Sroda’s resignation the formal authority of the Plenipotentiary was transferred to the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, and more precisely, was added to the responsibility of

¹⁰⁷ Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz served as Prime Minister of Poland from October 31, 2005 – July 14, 2006.

the Deputy Minister of that office¹⁰⁸. Two weeks later, on November 17, 2005 Joanna Kluzik-Rostowska, a former journalist (who incidentally met Jaroslaw Kaczynski during their her journalist career, as he served as the editor in charge of the newspaper she wrote for) turned politician, was appointed the new Undersecretary of State in the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the chief of the newly created Department for Women, Family and Anti-discrimination. As stated by Czerwinski (2006), the Regulation of the Council of Ministers of November 3, 2005 states that the new Department for Women, Family and Anti-Discrimination, with Minister Kluzik-Rostowska as head would be responsible for “coordination of the activities concerning the social status of women and the family and for realization of the tasks regarding counteraction to any discrimination in all the fields of social, economic and political life, excluding ethnic discrimination (Department of Religions and Ethnic Minorities in the Ministry of Interior and Administration of the Republic of Poland)”.

More specifically, the department’s responsibilities would include: an analysis and estimation of “the legal and social situation of women, the family and the discriminated persons, as well as initiate and coordinate all activities leading to the equal treatment of people who are discriminated in any field of social, economic and political life”; working on “the policy and law relating to the social status of women and family, as well as anti-discrimination”; presenting the government with “its opinion on the government regulations concerning the social situation of women and the family, as well as anti-discrimination”; as well as cooperation “with proper authorities of public administration and non-governmental organizations and institutions within

¹⁰⁸ Please see table 6.1 (at the end of this chapter) underlining changes that affected the office of the Plenipotentiary in Poland.

the scope of their responsibility for carrying out the tasks and programs for women, the family, as well as on anti-discrimination” (Czerwinski, 2005).

Additional duties also included initiation, coordination and monitoring of governmental programs for the women and families, promotion and popularization of issues relating to problems of anti-discrimination and equal opportunities as well as carrying out information and educational tasks for raising the consciousness of existing discrimination and its manifestations, as well as methods and strategies leading to counteraction to discrimination (Czerwinski, 2005).

However, even though this shift of power occurred, even though some of the duties that formerly the Plenipotentiary was responsible for (described above) are clearly similar if not worded identically to those that landed in the laps of Minister Kluzik-Rostowska’s new office, the situation rather becoming clearer, proved to be murkier.

With the old office dismissed and the new one still unsure of its role, Polish feminists looked toward the government anticipating the next move towards some form of an answer. And an answer they did get.... On June 17, 2005, the Polish Parliament rejected the draft of Equal Opportunities for Women and Men act. Although the draft was submitted to the Sejm and Senate in 2003, and it was in the third reading by 2005, the majority of the politicians, mainly from the right wing parties in power, decided to reject the draft. The rejected draft included provisions that guaranteed both men and women equal opportunities in every sphere of public and private life (Mrozik, 2005).

In particular, the act had included several key issues: it “introduced the definition of gender based discrimination and banned both direct and indirect one”; it also “obliged the state to support equal opportunities for women and men through provision of equal share in political,

social and economic power”; and “guaranteed that both girls and boys had the same access to education and their equality should be visible in school-books” (Mrozik, 2005). Furthermore, the act stated equal provisions for equal opportunities to work and equal access to social security and healthcare, and interestingly it stated that both women and men had the same rights and duties in family life, which meant equal share in their homework and childcare. Moreover, it also banned sexual harassment. Lastly, the Act established an independent Ministry of Equal Opportunities for Women and Men. The Minister in charge, appointed for five years, was to monitor equal opportunities regulations and programs and to intervene when the law was broken (Mrozik, 2005). To sum it all up, the Equal Opportunities for Women and Men act was supposed to specify constitutional statements on equal rights of women and men and to implement international obligations, including the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), Amsterdam Treaty (1997) and Directive 2002/73/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council (Mrozik, 2005).

As Mrozik (2005) reports, the only good thing that can be described is the fact that after several years of efforts made by women’s NGOs, in March 2005, the Polish Parliament established a Commission for Equal Status of Men and Women. The main tasks of the Commission included issues associated with constitutional rule on equal rights for men and women, including their equal opportunities in political, social and economic life. The Commission was to test out how equal rights regulations work in the legislative process. In addition, it was also supposed to supervise the tasks of Polish government obliged by international treaties to protect women’s rights and put equal opportunities into practice (Mrozik, 2005).

Teresa Jaształ, former teacher turned politician from the left (Democratic Alliance party) became the chairwoman in charge of the Commission. Interestingly enough, the Commission lacks representatives from the conservative right wing parties such as the League of Polish Families and PiS because these parties were against forming the Commission in the first place. In terms of what has been done by the Commission already – it was involved in checking the results of National Program of Activities for Women and specified its interest in the report of the State Inspectorate of Labour, which concern the observance of anti-discriminatory right by employers in the workplace (Mrozik, 2005).

Elzbieta Radziszewska

On March 8, 2008 during his press conference the newly elected Prime Minister Donald Tusk informed the Polish nation that Elzbieta Radziszewska will become the head of the reestablished Office of the Plenipotentiary for the Equal Status of Men and Women. After Kaczynski's rule during which nothing was being done towards gender equality, in his speech, Tusk further underlined the importance of equal treatment of persons and eradication of discrimination not only based on gender, but also on race, belief, point of view or age. Moreover, he emphasized the fact that collaboration between political parties, NGO's and media is crucial in order for equality to happen. "The bill [on equal status of men and women] is not the only issue that we are working on and that Elzbieta Radziszewska will be monitoring. We are also working on and awaiting large societal changes', Prime Minister added, according to the Chancellery of the Prime Minister¹⁰⁹.

¹⁰⁹ The full text of Tusk's speech can be found at: <http://www.premier.gov.pl/>.

In her acceptance speech Plenipotentiary Radziszewska acknowledged the hard work at hand stating that Poland is lagging far behind the European Union standards of equal treatment and status of men and women (*DziennikTVN24*, March 7, 2008). Radziszewska asserted that her office will work closely with the ministers in the Polish government and non-governmental organizations and that she also looks forward to discussions with the opposition. However and not surprisingly no specifics were given at that time.

Polish feminists were not overwhelmed with the news that Radziszewska will take over from Sroda. Radziszewska was not a known name in the gender equality movement. She was never as charming and lacked the charisma of Jaruga-Nowacka nor did she possess the knowledge and preparedness that Sroda brought to the table. Some of the women I interviewed saw this nomination as some ironic musing from the Prime Minister – since Radziszewska was named the Plenipotentiary a day before the International Women’s day was celebrated in Poland, with Manifa’s planned all over the country. This “grand symbolic gesture” toward the feminist circles left many women’s rights activists questioning the motives of the Prime Minister.

In February 2009, almost a year after the appointment of Minister Radziszewska to the governmental Plenipotentiary position, not much has been done. Although Poland is obligated by the EU Directive 43/2000 to set up an equality body to monitor discrimination and help the victims, no clear vision of the anti-discrimination policy has been sketched. As the article published on the website of the House of the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights in Poland states, “Left-wing political parties as well as NGOs working for women's rights claim that Minister Radziszewska refrains from getting involved in controversial issues, including crucial matters related to women's rights such as in vitro, maternity leave, and access to sexual education. In addition, Minister Radziszewska did not succeed in preparing a draft law on equal

treatment, which is much needed in Poland¹¹⁰” (*Human Rights House Foundation*, February 2nd, 2009).

In August of 2009 Plenipotentiary Radziszewska was interviewed by Marcin Zaborski, an editor at the Press salon radio show (a political program on the popular radio station in Poland). When asked specifically about the progress on the Equal Opportunities for Women and Men act, Radziszewska admitted that the bill has been rejected and will not resurface in its current form. When pressed more by Zaborski on that topic, on the so-to-say lost four years of work put into the act, on the question of what now, Radziszewska answered using generalizations without outlining any detailed plan of action¹¹¹.

Radziszewska was also criticized by her predecessors, Magdalena Sroda and Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka. Nowacka has said that Radziszewska is a “terrible” plenipotentiary. “The Tusk government was a light of hope after murky years of PiS rule. However, naming Radziszewska as the Plenipotentiary Tusk showed that human rights do not matter to him. Many times I have tried to interest her [Radziszewska] in women’s issues. She replied that she will not be involved with those. She pushes us towards an even greater discrimination.” (Grochal, 2009). Sroda is quoted saying, “Minister Radziszewska avoids issues dealing with discrimination arguing that her role is to monitor equal treatment so she will be dealing with everyone. It is as if a Health minister have said that he will take care of the healthy people because if he was not taking care of ill people he would not be treating everyone equally. The responsibility of a person who takes tax payers money to treat discrimination is taking care of those discriminated against. And in our country that [discriminated against] group is women.” (Grochal, 2009).

¹¹⁰ The text can be found at: <http://humanrightshouse.org/noop/page.php?p=Articles/9847.html&print=1&d=1>.

¹¹¹ The interview can be heard at: <http://www.polskieradio.pl/trojka/salon/artykul108181.html>.

Furthermore, Radziszewska is also having trouble getting women's organizations excited. Women's rights issues seem to be too controversial for her because she does not vote in matters crucial to the future of gender equality in Poland, for example in matter of in-vitro fertilization. Leaders of women's rights organizations in Poland are actually preparing a letter of complaint against her which will be send to the European Commission. Agnieszka Grzybek, former chair of Oska, accuses Radziszewska of not intervening when a 14 year old rape victim needed an abortion (refused); or when health minister refused to refund anesthesia during birth because "giving birth is supposed to hurt", Radziszewska was also quiet. Joanna Piotrowska from Feminoteka (a feminist organization that also serves as a source of feminist bookstore) argues that the new Plenipotentiary not only does not care about women, but furthermore, she [Radziszewska] does not view violence against women as one of her tasks – according to her, it's the Labor department's job (Grochal, 2009).

Interestingly, some remember that during the former tenure of the government, Radziszewska came out with an initiative to have the parliament under the patronage of Mother of God... and how can someone with such limited viewpoint stand up for women's issues? Jaruga-Nowacka further argues that such a person cannot fight for gender equality, for European standards of sex education, birth control availability or ethics at school. The current Plenipotentiary "does not have any contacts with the women's rights organizations, with the academic circles who take on women's issues or with non-governmental organizations. The lack of competence is blatantly clear. It is as if a pacifist got to be the defense minister" (Grochal, 2009).

Although the support for the Plenipotentiary Radziszewska has been rather bleak or really quite hard to notice, one cannot shake a feeling that there are some structural issues here at the

basis. First of all, Minister Radziszewska's office and its budget are rather small in comparison to Minister Sroda's ruling days, where the office had twenty people and about two million Polish zloty yearly. Today's office has 5 employees and does not have a separate budget. With such small crew and the leader that is quite unsure of its role it is hard to agree with Radziszewska's statement that her office is the "first governmental office in Polish history that treats gender equality from many complex interdisciplinary angles not only when it comes to discrimination on the basis of gender and sexual orientation but also on the basis of race, ethnicity, nationality, religion and belief, political affiliation, age and status." (Radziszewska, 2009). Sounds wonderful. And now, can we please see some results or gender equity initiatives leaving this office?

And the feminists think, "what's next"

With all those twists and turns that this one office went through it is not a surprise that the members of KONSOLA I interviewed had several things to say about the former heads of the office and the current one. One common thread that I heard through all the interviews, those I conducted personally and those I had over email, was the fact that not one person was happy with the appointment of Radziszewska.

Gaja, when we spoke about the campaign to "disenchant feminism," argued that Sroda, although crucial in talking in the media about the problem of discrimination against women, has been too well known to everyone as "a crazy woman" and this "unfortunate and false affiliation" has created more problems than good. On topic of Jaruga-Nowacka, Gaja sighed and stated that "she was more of a politician", arguing that she might have side stepped several issues as if not to taint her political career. "But she did what she could" and "she was the first one [Plenipotentiary] who actually stated with pride that 'I am a feminist' and that was important."

Nina on the other hand argued that Sroda, “this philosopher and ethicist and an academician” as she added with smile, “talks about gender issues and women’s inequality in such a great way – with ‘balls’, and everyone is captivated”. “People listened to her because she knows what she is talking about, and even if people don’t agree with her, they know she has basis for what she is saying.” Although this is also a double-edged sword, “because some may think that she is too tough, too strong and not feminine enough which they think grants them the right to call her not so pleasant names”. But, “oh well” she laughed and continued “this is who she is and if you don’t like her, too bad”. “My only regret is”, she added “that her tenure in this office was so short. Who knows what she could be capable of if she stayed there for a long time?” she mused. “Maybe our conversation now would be of a different kind, don’t you think?” I have to say, I agreed with her on this issue.

When I talked with Bozena about the changes in the post of the Plenipotentiary, Barbara was not really sure how women like Sroda are received by the opposition, whether they are viewed as opponents that one should fear. “Although at many of her public lectures people listen to her [Sroda], and she is a feminist who is clearly capable of influencing others” Barbara wondered whether she is a feminist and if she has the power to execute anything. “Maybe she has the power to do so because she is charming?”... “Ok, maybe charming is not the word, I mean, she enchants her audience and people agree with her for the time being... I mean, she is a great public speaker but is that enough?” In terms of the current Plenipotentiary, Bozena did not have much to add to the discussion. “What can I say?” she stated sadly.. “she did not do one thing for Polish women and I am disappointed. But then, she never expressed the willingness to really work on discrimination issues so I guess I should not be surprised.”

Karolina, when we talked about the Plenipotentiaries, focused on the figure of Magdalena

Sroda (clearly the most favorite of all the Plenipotentiaries among the members of KONSOLA I spoke with) and argued that “although she is super in what she does and how she speaks, she has too little strength to break through”. “People look at her and see that she is good at hard work but one that has little visible effects”. Why? “I don’t really know why” she argued. “Maybe because others would like her to be just a figure head? Maybe because Poles think that the person representing this office should just be there, talk and not do anything?” or maybe, she said, “Poles were just not ready for her rule”. And Radziszewska? “Well, I can’t really speak of anything yet, since she barely has been appointed, but from what I have seen, I am not expecting miracles at all” she sadly finished.

A few of the former members of KONSOLA wrote in their emails, “I loved Sroda and her time in the office. It was the only time in my opinion, where I saw gender issues really being talked about in unapologetic terms” wrote Anna, who had been living in a different city and has for that reason stopped her activity in KONSOLA. “She rocked”, wrote another member, Marta, “because finally there was a woman who not only said, yes I am a feminist and you better like it, but was unafraid of the attacks on her and argued her case with those that opposed her.” “Radziszewska clearly lacks Jaruga-Nowacka’s political style and Sroda’s ‘umph’ factor” added Milena, who is now affiliated with another feminist organization, since she moved to Krakow several years ago.

The voices of these women clearly underlined the different management styles, techniques and issues that former and current Plenipotentiaries carried out. And I have to say, that for me it is clear why Dr. Sroda received such a high marks. Because she not only cared about Polish women, but she also went on, rolled up her sleeves and really worked hard on making gender issues known on the Polish national arena.

Conclusion

The ongoing process of implementation of gender mainstreaming principles in Poland has been a rocky one for many reasons. One, as I am arguing in this chapter is the fact that the position of the Plenipotentiary for Equal Status of Women and Men in Poland, the office that has been primary responsible for proposing, instituting and advising on issues of gender equality had gone through several changes, a few that were quite contradictory to the goals that this same office has been trying to reach.

The different Plenipotentiaries that were heading the office also had different agendas. Although Jaruga-Nowacka, the politician, feminist and the first head of the office was quite outspoken about issues that she will take on, the results were not quite there. A few saw Jaruga-Nowacka as a “front face feminist”, alluding to the fact that she was vocal in terms of going to the marches, Manifa’s and other gender equality protests or happenings but lacked the ability to fight from the basics, changing the underlying structures and issues lying at the core of the problems. But to her credit, when Jaruga-Nowacka spoke, many listened. She brought the issues of women to a larger, national stage and even though the base of the problem has not been crushed, it was slightly shaken. One cannot also forget that although she is an outspoken feminist, Jaruga-Nowacka is also a politician and in my humble opinion, sometimes the politician silenced the feminist.

Magdalena Sroda brought a different kind set of strategies when she took over the office in 2004. The ethicist and philosopher, an academic at heart, she took the reins and started at the core. She quickly realized that liberalization of the abortion bill would not happen soon and decided to work on helping women in the current market economy. Her academic way of narrowing the problem, analyzing it and prescribing the best way to resolve it or her

unapologetic speeches on Catholicism and women's rights issues might have turned some people off but not being a politician she never really avoided an issue. And no one can miss the fact that she was thoroughly prepared to head that office, since her credentials were impeccable. But maybe that was also her downfall – the lack of the slickness that comes with being a politician. Sroda became known as the “controversial” figure in Polish politics and she had to be replaced by someone a bit quieter, more understated and easier to control.

And maybe that is why Elzbieta Radziszewska is still heading that office. Radziszewska was chosen, or rather “presented” to Polish women as a form of an International Women's Day gift package from the office of the Prime Minister. Her expertise in women's issues is, as I presented above, minimal; her interest in women's rights issues in initiatives is slim; her voice is left unheard. And to top it all, her budget was cut quite severely.

And what now? The office exists, Radziszewska once in a while is quoted in the media but overall the cooperation between the women's rights organizations, NGO's and the governmental Plenipotentiary office is minimal. That is hardly good news for the future of women's rights and gender equality initiatives in Poland. The job of the Plenipotentiary is hard enough without all these added pressures but what seems to be the key component of getting things done is missing here – teamwork is crucial. Leaders of women's rights organizations and Radziszewska (or whoever else will be the next Plenipotentiary) have to do two things first: listen and talk to each other. Otherwise, not much will change.

Table 6.1 Changes affecting the Plenipotentiary's office in Poland, from 1985 to 2008.

Year	Changes affecting Plenipotentiary's office
1985	UN Conference on Women in Nairobi, Kenya
1986	Council of Ministers in Poland adopted a resolution that established the Office of the Plenipotentiary for Women with Anna Kedzierska, under-secretary of state as its head; the office was a part of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare
1989	The office goes through several changes in its name from "Plenipotentiary for women", "for women and family", "for family and women", and "for family"; its power and that of its leader are severely cut and limited to that of an advisor
1991	In April of that year, office of the Plenipotentiary for Family and Women was established under the Prime Minister Jan Krzysztof Bielecki; now detached from the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, became an independent body directly subordinated to the Prime Minister
1992	In January, Anna Popowicz is recalled from the Plenipotentiary position by the Prime Minister Jan Olszewski, shortly following her letter to the Main Medical Council, in which she asked for caution in introducing changes to the Medical Ethics Code that in reality were limiting women's access to abortion
1992 -1995	Following Popowicz's dismissal, Office still operates but the leadership position was left vacant
1995	UN Conference on Women in Beijing, China
1995	Barbara Blida, Minister of Construction is appointed to head the office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Family and Women
1995	May, Council of Ministers declared the Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Family and Women with leadership position given to Jolanta Banach
1997	Office name is changed to the Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Family; first male leader, Kazimierz Kapera, politician from the ultra-conservative Christian Nation Union party quickly shelved most of acts that Banach instated

Table 6.1 Changes affecting the Plenipotentiary's office in Poland, from 1985 to 2008, continued.

2001	The Office of the Governmental Plenipotentiary on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men is reestablished; the person holding the office is also the Secretary of State in the Chancellery of Prime Minister; leadership in the hands of Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka;
2004	Magdalena Sroda takes over the position;
2005	November, Magdalena Sroda, who was in charge of the office handed in her resignation from the position to the then Prime Minister Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz following the right wing victory in the parliamentary elections;
2005	November (two weeks after Sroda's resignation) the formal authority of the Plenipotentiary was transferred to the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy; Joanna Kluzik-Rostowska, a former journalist turned politician, was appointed the new Undersecretary of State in the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the chief of the newly created Department for Women, Family and Anti-discrimination
2008	March 8 th (International Women's Day), Elzbieta Radziszewska is appointed the head of the Office of the Plenipotentiary for the Equal Status of Men and Women and heads it to this day.

CONCLUSION

Now that I have examined the notions of feminism and gender (in)equality in contemporary Poland, as they are seen through the eyes of young Polish feminists, active in the KONSOLA organization, I would like to return to several questions I have posed throughout this dissertation, pertaining to the concept of “allergy of feminism” in Poland, the question of why some Polish women have chosen not to become feminists (Stachniak, 1995) and what it will take to “de-hex” the word or create a new meaning for it. I have approached this topic from a Marxist (socialist) feminist perspective and have argued that throughout Polish history, women’s rights in Poland have been used as part of a political agenda (and sometimes propaganda) only to be discarded once deemed no longer necessary.

In the first chapter I introduced the reader to the specific methodology used for this study and the literature which for the most part framed my research. In terms of the methodology, I have studied KONSOLA members’ response to the questions of gender equality and feminism through in depth, face to face as well as email interviews. I have also attended several members’ meetings, interacted with them at their events and have also participated in the list-serve discussion forums for the period of several years.

I have examined the question of women’s inequality in Poland using the socialist feminist framework, trying to pinpoint the problematic relationship between women’s oppression and the capitalistic mode of production in which our society finds itself. I have tried to show that, in the case of Poland, women have been oppressed for years because such oppression has served the interest of capital and those who own it, men. Since the issue of household labor is of particular importance to socialist feminist theory (Donovan, 1997), throughout this dissertation I have tried

to show how Polish women have been repeatedly moved back to the domestic sphere by the powers of the government and the Catholic Church.

In the second chapter I presented the ways in which the Communist government that came to power in Poland after World War II has framed the question of women's rights and feminism. I started with a presentation of how Communism affected the lives of everyday Poles, the lines to the stores, the lack of products and the ever growing inflation; and moved on to a brief historical outline of the reigns of First Party leaders Gomulka and Gierek. I argued that the problematic strategies of the centralized government such as questionable nationalization reform, surrender of private property and market as well as inability to deal with growing inflation have led to the fall of the national GDP during the 1960s and beyond (Balcerowicz, 1997). With Gierek's borrowed money from the West (Topolski, 2007), the Polish economy experienced a brief spike, marking "the golden era" of the Communist years. Those borrowed moneys were to uplift the potential Polish exports to a degree that not only would enable Poland to pay them off rather quickly, but furthermore, with careful strategizing GDP and consumption would both be kept a high level. In reality, the loans proved to be overly excessive, while the investments that they were tied to failed to take off, putting the Polish economy in recession in the late 1970s. This situation was only made grimmer by the constantly growing foreign debt (Topolski, 2007).

I then moved on to what life under Communism meant for Polish women, their rights and the equality that the system promised. I argued that although certain aspects of gender equality agenda had been discussed and even implemented (especially when it came to reproductive freedom, since Communism legalized abortion in Poland), most of them ended up being a paper-thin version of the so called real thing. Women, although encouraged to seek employment, had to deal with problems such as the glass ceiling, and the organization that was supposed to help

women, the League of Polish Women, proved to be nothing more than a bureaucratic, ineffective mess. Women were also slapped with a “triple burden” (Einhorn, 1993) since on top of their roles as workers, then mothers and wives, the government “encouraged”, if not forced them to also be politically active Comrades. Furthermore, many Poles, regardless of gender, have seen the increasing intrusion of the government into the lives of ordinary citizens as suspicious and problematic, leading many to turn against the government and culminating in country wide strikes, rise of the Solidarity movement and the fall of Communism. I briefly also walk the readers through the trials and tribulations that the transformation process, developed by Jeffrey Sachs and implemented by Leszek Balcerowicz, brought. Following arguments presented by Naomi Klein (2007) and Peter Gowan (1995), I claim that the model of the “shock therapy” that Poland was forced to go under had mixed results. Although the introduction of the capitalism filled the store shelves and to some extent reduced the amount of foreign debt, the social costs of the transformations were also quite deep, leaving about 20% of Poles unemployed.

All these changes have of course influenced gender relations and feminism in Poland. Polish women often talked about how cheated they felt by the government that was promising new paths for womanhood, equality of opportunity and yet it failed to address basic women’s problems such as household labor and childcare. These concerns were reiterated by the young Polish feminists from KONSOLA organizations. Many have argued that the interplay of the relationship between the Communist government and the Catholic church have in fact led to a particularly problematic positioning of women’s rights (and feminism). This uncomfortable position then skewed the way in which these issues were viewed for years to come. On one hand, KONSOLA members argued, feminism became entangled with the failed promises of the Communist government and on the other hand, the church emphasized the importance of the

“special role” of Polish women as wives and mothers of the future nation. In other words, women were pressured to join the workforce and on the other they were told that their womanhood was actually realized best at home. These confusing messages have for years entangled and problematized the meaning of feminism, creating unflattering stereotypes of what feminism is as a movement, who feminists are, what they are fighting for and in what manners. Feminism became associated with images of burly women who burn bras, don’t shave their legs, hate men and try to eradicate them. As I have argued, these images are still present in the minds of Polish people today.

In the third chapter I asked the question, how to frame gender politics in the East, and with special attention being paid to the fact that my feminist education began in the West. I argued for the importance of Eastern-Western feminist dialogue despite the problems that such conversations may bring about. Following the writings of Nanette Funk (1993), Alaine Cerwonka (2008) and Denise Roman (2001), I tried to make the argument for understanding the diversity of women’s history and the specific struggles of women in the East and West. I, alongside those important authors, point to the crucial need for importance of understanding specific contexts in which we, feminists from different and diverse cultures and countries, have found ourselves in. In this chapter, I also frame the Polish revolution of 1989 using Valerie Moghadam’s concept of gendered revolutions (2003) and provide evidence that the case of Poland illustrates, what she calls, “Woman-in-the-Family or patriarchal model of revolution” (2003: 82). I also question the aftertaste that such a model left, what some have called “allergy to feminism” (Einhorn, 1993) or “odium towards feminism” (Ciechomska, 1996). My interviews with KONSOLA members concurred with the need for clarification of issues in terms of East-West feminist dialogue (understanding of women’s specific histories, their past and present; the

different kinds of feminism practiced by women in those countries; and the differentiation between the modes through which feminism is spread) and have also pinpointed the existence of this odium towards feminism in contemporary Poland, in terms of how women's rights (for example, abortion) are perceived. I was especially interested in how these young Polish feminists try to engage ordinary Polish women in feminism, how they try to re-define this word, through what measures and with what effects. Although from their answers, one can see that feminism in Poland is still largely relegated to the academic sphere, the actions these women take, their cooperation with other organizations (such as Babilad) have been slowly paying off.

In the following chapter, I talk about the state of gender politics in Poland before May 1, 2004 – before Polish entrance to the European Union. I begin with the economic, social and political discussions that took place when Polish negotiations to enter the then union of 15 countries started and I later pose the questions of where gender issues fit into all those conversations. Using Leah Anderson's (2006) framework I ask specific questions such as how was Polish entry to the EU seen on a national arena, what promises did the EU hold for Polish people and how the EU was monitoring the entire accession process, especially in terms of Polish gender laws. I then follow Mark A. Pollack and Emilie Hafner-Burton's (2000) critical look at the adoption and implementation of gender mainstreaming in the European Union in five issue-areas of EU policy, analyze some specific EU gender laws and what actually happened during the negotiations – the push for specific economic policies while sidelining gender equality measures. I also try to show that the European Union lacked specific monitoring power that would ensure that the entities of gender equity mechanisms were transformed into Polish laws and enforced on daily basis. The process of gender mainstreaming in Poland then was mostly happening just on paper.

I then explore these notions with the women (and man) from KONSOLA. Their optimism toward the EU was almost palpable, since most of them argued that now the Union might become a kind of an “older sister” or a guideline provider for Polish gender equality procedures. Although cautiously optimistic, these members recognized the fact that much will not change immediately but underlined the fact that the support for them and their initiatives, if needed, is now far more accessible. Furthermore, they argued, certain problems will now have to be quickly resolved if Poland does not want to be embarrassed in a larger, European arena.

In chapter five I move on to what happened after the historic entrance of Poland to the European Union. I specifically tackle the dramatic turn to the politics of the right that Poland took when coalition between the center right PiS party formed with populist parties of Self-Defense and the League of Polish Families (LPR) was formed. I am especially critical of the government leadership of the Kaczynski’ twins and their choices for the posts of Minister of Education, Roman Giertych and equally questionable Deputy Prime Minister Lepper (also leaders of the LPR and Self-Defense parties, respectively). I problematize not only their views on the roles of women, women’s rights and feminism but also on education, Polish history and Polish relations with the West (epitomized by the European Union). In terms of Giertych and his reign as a Minister of Education, I show how his move to ban certain books from the educational curriculum sent a wave of students’ protests across the country. Furthermore, from his choice of support for certain youth organizations whose agenda borders on extreme nationalistic, anti-Semitic and homophobic slogans to his controversial decision of removing the head of the Central Bureau of Teacher Advancement on claims that an instructional packet that CODN published “promoted” homosexuality in schools, Giertych proved himself to be a divisive, troublesome and overall terrible Minister responsible for education of young Poles. His often

crude and unprecedented statements have also led to tension on international level, leading to angering of such institutions as Human Rights Watch.

In terms of Deputy Prime Minister Lepper, I outline the questionable gender politics employed in the party he led, his view and treatment of women and even his own colleagues. His problematic past, his controversial statements and former arrest have raised eyebrows all over the European Union and even the world. Throughout the chapter I showcase their inability to bring a nation together and argue that in the end it was the troublesome coalition's outrageous homophobia and misogyny that have finally led to their demise and the end of the "terrible twins' era". I then move on to what followed, the election of Donald Tusk as the new Polish Prime Minister and the promises his leadership carried. Since my focus lies in the area of gender and feminism, I question his choice for the head of the Plenipotentiary office, his commitment to "hearing Polish women" and his stance of gender equality.

The chapter then again provides readers with a section on the thoughts and issues young Polish feminists had with the government in charge, what members of KONSOLA had to say about the days of the PiS, Self-Defense and the League of Polish Families coalition, and what thoughts they could offer for the future. Interestingly, the women and man I interviewed had argued that although the populist coalition was a terrible step backwards for Poland, in terms of women's rights and even human rights, it did achieve one important and noteworthy goal – it united Poles against them. Poles woke up from their political inactivity and not liking what they saw, finally started voicing their opinions and demanded change. With Tusk in power, women of KONSOLA argued, some gender initiatives of the previous coalition can be reversed but whether there will be a definite movement forward, the outlook does not look good. Interviewees were not impressed by the new Prime Minister's choice of the Plenipotentiary, a woman who lacked

an education in gender issues and who, on the nationally recognized feminist holiday (which the International Women's Day has become) instead of going to pro-women's rights marches and events, instead went to church.

In the same chapter I also explored the notions of what feminism means to these young women and men and how feminism can be practiced in contemporary democratic and capitalistic Poland. Their views point to the notion that feminism, although still relegated mostly to the academic circles, is starting to "brew" in other fields in which these members are involved. Since most (if not all) of them are actively using social media such as Facebook and Twitter, feminist ideas and issues of gender equality are now entering a new field, which may prove to be quite fruitful in terms of opening people's eyes (especially young people's) to what this movement is really all about.

In the last chapter I offer an analysis of the position that as its goal lists pursuing a policy of equality between women and men and preparing the establishment of an ombudsman to anti-discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion or belief, age and sexual orientation – the Plenipotentiary for Equal Status of Women and Men. I outlined the checkered history of this office and provided the reader with the hardships and successes of the two women that held that position in the past: Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka and Magdalena Sroda – both strong opinionated, educated women, self-proclaimed feminists and compare their rule to the woman elected to lead this office most recently, Elzbieta Radziszewska. I argue that the rule of Jaruga-Nowacka has brought the issue of lack of women's political power to the front, since ministra Jaruga-Nowacka openly talked about the low representation of women in politics. Although her promises of liberalization of the abortion law and passing the equal rights bill (including a parity on filling

important party and government positions) were also put on the table (Roguska, 2002), not too many of those goals were accomplished.

When Jaruga-Nowacka left the position to pursue other political goals, Magdalena Sroda, a philosopher and professor of ethics, took over. Her time in the office was marked by some controversies (since she openly criticized the Polish Catholic church on the basis of their inability and sometimes outright refusal to address questions of domestic violence), but she pursued her goals of ending gender discrimination at work fiercely. However, after the elections of 2005, when the right wing coalition took over (a political shift, which I described earlier) the new government in power issued an ordinance that ended the existence of the Plenipotentiary position.

Resurrected in 2008 by the new Prime Minister Tusk, the office of Plenipotentiary represented now by a medical doctor who had no idea about women's rights issues or how to pursue them entered a new chapter, that is still currently being written. It is however sufficient to say that Radziszewska has not won the support that the previous heads of this office enjoyed. Rather her inability to pursue the goals of ending gender discrimination had landed her in hot water with feminists, former Plenipotentiaries and even the media. Furthermore, KONSOLA members have repeatedly voiced their distrust about the seriousness of Radziszewska's efforts since she is yet to meet with members of feminist organizations in Poland. Poland does not need another figure head leading this office, the women I interviewed argued, but someone who knows what they are doing, who knows how to deal with the Catholic church and those members of the government who are still not too keen on seeing women's empowerment as a positive thing for Polish democracy.

My research then leads me to believe that, to answer Stachniak's (1993) question, many

Polish women did not become feminists because of the problematic connotation this word has gained throughout our convoluted history. Poland is still such an overwhelmingly Catholic nation, whose beginning as an independent country started with acceptance of Catholic religion by our first ruler that one has to recognize the power of this institution. And since the Catholic Church has its own, often traditionalistic and sometimes even patriarchal and submissive views on women's rights, it should come as no surprise that the fight for feminism will be framed in a specific manner. Furthermore, the Polish government had problematized feminism even more by creating contradictory meanings to what women's rights are, how to go about reaching them and in what manner they can be accomplished. Because of the presence of both of these institutions in politics, their colliding ideas have often left women confused, angered, and unsure of what feminism is. That is why many ordinary Polish women looked aside and left the fight. It seems to me that women in Poland got tired of being dragged into the struggle between government and the church and opted for being left alone since they had other things to take care of.

But today it seems, young feminists, those whose education about gender issues also came from the books written by their Western sisters, are picking up the fight where it was left off. With one exception though – they are now actively voicing their opinions, fighting for issues they see of importance and arguing for a real discussion of women's rights on local and national levels. These women and man have had enough and are finally taking things into their own hands. They are doing so through the use of social media, through organization of marches and events, lectures and movie screenings, and even through the nitty gritty everyday hard work. Although this young Polish feminist movement is still largely relegated to the academic sphere, things are slowly changing for the better. Even if the scale of these changes is miniscule, at least something is happening. And with the European Union by their side, these women and man have

faith that one day we will be able to talk about a more gender equal Poland. And I tend to think so as well.

In terms of future research I would argue for a study bringing out a more comparative aspect. One such possibility would be to compare gender equity initiatives as well as gender mainstreaming mechanisms in Poland with another member of the European Union. Hungary or the Czech Republic are one of the most obvious choices since both of these countries joined the EU along with Poland, since these countries also went through a radical transformation of their economic system and since all three countries could be viewed through the prism of the Communist past.

Another comparative research possibility would be to compare KONSOLA with other organizations, maybe not specifically feminist organization, but one that approaches modern Polish women's issues from a different perspective – such as Babilad. This organization tries to engage women in active participation in business life as well as provides women with activities ranging from clothes trading to dance classes to classes and meetings dedicated to women's art, women's development as well as women's physical and psychological well-being. I believe that through comparison of such organizations one might further develop a richer framework describing the understanding and acceptance of women's issues in Poland, from issues like how it is approached and viewed on the national arena to how such collaborations might change the meaning of feminism in Poland.

APPENDIX

General Interview Protocol

Date of the interview:

Name:

Affiliation/Membership:

Can you tell me whether you identify yourself as a feminist?

- What does such identification mean to you?
- Can you tell me how did you become interested in feminist issues in the first place? (explore family background, education)
- Are your peers in school/friends feminists?

Can you tell me how long have you been a member of/affiliated with a feminist organization?

- Why did you become involved with this particular organization?
- What do you see as goals of a feminist organization?
- What does your activity in the organization consist of?
- What would you like to see the organization do more, and what less of?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the organization?
- What did you see as the major pressures on the organization and from where did they come?
- Can you think of an example – something that the organization has dealt with recently – that illustrates how it works?

Has the membership of the organization changed over time?

- What types of people come to the meetings/join this organization?
- What do you think are the primary motivations for people to join?
- What do you think people bring to the meetings/take away from the meetings?

I would like to understand how you view the past Polish history and whether it had any influence on Polish feminism today.

- How would you characterize the influence of the Catholic Church and the Polish Pope in terms of the feminist matters?
- What about the Communist Party?
- What are your views on the NSZZ Solidarnosc?

How do you view the current political climate in terms of issues of women's rights?

- Do you think Polish feminists today have a voice? Are they heard on social/political/economic arena?

- What would you name as some of the main issues of importance to Polish feminists today?

Can you share with me your thoughts on how Polish feminism, its convoluted past and specifically your membership with this organization affected you?

General Follow-up Interview Protocol

Date of the current interview:

Name:

Affiliation/Membership:

Interviewed previously on:

Since our last interview, what would you say was the biggest accomplishment of KONSOLA?

- Why do you view this event as the most significant?
- Were you involved in its preparations?

What, if anything would you say has changed in KONSOLA (membership, participation, projects) since the last interview?

- Are those positive/negative changes? Please explain

We spoke about the particulars of Polish history after World War II during our last interview. I would like to understand how you view the entrance of Poland to the European Union (EU) and its correspondence to gender relations in Poland

- What do you think of entrance of Poland to the EU?
- What do you think of EU's stands on gender equality?
- Do you think that Polish government is moving toward more gender-equal stands on employment, healthcare or any other issues?
 - Please explain your answer

Is there any gender-related issue in particular that you can think of that has been addressed by the Polish government since May 2004?

Is there a particular gender-related issue that Polish feminists have been engaged in since the entrance of Poland to the EU?

- What is your opinion on this particular issue?

What issue related to feminism would you like to see addressed on the national scale in Poland or by the European Union authorities?

- Why this particular issue? Please explain

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Table 1. Respondent ID, gender, age, years of membership in KONSOLA, date of the interview.

ID #	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Years in KONSOLA	Date of interview
01	Paul	Male	21	0	05/21/2008
02	Gaja	Female	26	4	05/23/2008
03	Karolina	Female	32	Over 3 years	05/23/2008
04	Bozena	Female	24	Over 1 year	05/23/2008
05	Nina	Female	26	1.5	05/21/2008
06	Alina	Female	28	3	05/26/2008
07	Agnes	Female	27	3	10/25/2010
08	Alice	Female	30	5	11/21/2010
09	Milena	Female	29	4	11/13/2011
10	Janka	Female	25	3	11/25/2011
11	Kalina	Female	22	Over 3 years	11/23/2010
12	Bianka	Female	30	Over 2 years	10/23/2010
13	Matylda	Female	29	5	12/11/2010

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