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The Rhetoric of Silence or Open Demands for Women's Rights in Public Space? A Case of The Polish Women's Press From 1989¹

Abstract

The subject of research is the discourse concerning equality in the Polish women's press (*Przyjaciółka, Kobieta i Życie, Zwierciadło, Filipinka*) in the first year of the system transformations. The assumption was made that silence was supposed to draw readers' attention to a given case, make them reflect on it, and stimulate initiatives. The aim of the research was to point to the context in which the issues of women's activity, the absence of gender equality in practice, were taken up in the Polish women's press. The research period included the whole year 1989. In order to perform the research the detailed questions were set out: (1) interpretations of which political events in Poland in 1989 generated silence?, (2) how was the silence tactics realised?, (3) in what way was the women's situation in Poland in 1989 accounted for in the women's magazines – was it dominated by the stereotypes in which there were presented female features that predestined women to be housewives?

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Keywords: women's press, women's rights, public space, Poland 1989, rhetoric of silence

**RETORYKA MILCZENIA CZY OTWARTE ŻĄDANIA
O PRAWACH KOBIET W PRZESTRZENI PUBLICZNEJ?
KAZUS POLSKIEJ PRASY DLA KOBIET Z 1989 R.**

Streszczenie

Przedmiotem zainteresowania badawczego jest dyskurs dotyczący równouprawnienia na łamach polskiej prasy dla kobiet („Przyjaciółka”, „Kobieta i Życie”, „Zwierciadło”, „Filipinka”). Cezura badawcza obejmuje rok przemian ustrojowych w Polsce. Celem badań było wskazanie, w jakim kontekście na łamach prasy podejmowano tematykę aktywności kobiet w przestrzeni publicznej oraz kwestię braku praktycznego równouprawnienia płci. W celu realizacji badań sformułowano pytania szczegółowe: (1) interpretacje jakich wydarzeń politycznych w Polsce w 1989 r. generowały przemilczenia?, (2) jak realizowano taktykę przemilczeń?, (3) w jaki sposób w magazynach kobiecych wyjaśniano sytuację kobiet w Polsce w 1989 r. – czy była ona zdominowana przez stereotypy, w których prezentowano cechy kobiece predestynujące je do odgrywania ról domowych?

Słowa kluczowe: prasa dla kobiet, prawa kobiet, sfera publiczna, Polska w 1989 r., retoryka milczenia

Introduction

The subject of research is the discourse concerning equality in the Polish women's press in the first year of the system transformations. The research is associated with the anthropology of silence regarding taboo, intentional silence in the public discourse, concerning the activity of women. What can be applied here is the concept of silence which Korwin-Piotrowska defines as “intentional omission of certain content during the speech,” viewed as the implementation of tactics.² The assumption was made that silence was supposed to draw readers' attention to a given case, make them reflect on it, and stimulate initiatives.

² Dorota Korwin-Piotrowska, *Białe znaki. Milczenie w strukturze i znaczeniu utworów narracyjnych. (Na przykładach z polskiej prozy współczesnej)*, (Kraków: UJ, 2015), 22; cf Lisa Block de Behar, *A rhetoric of silence and other selected writings*, (Berlin, New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1995), *passim*.

The aim of the research was to point to the context in which the issues of women's activity, the absence of gender equality in practice,³ were taken up in the Polish women's press. The public space is understood in the both political and social context put in a particular ontological-axiological order. It constitutes the range of activities of given individuals.⁴ In Poland in the first stage of system transformation the public space was not separated from the private one, unlike in Rawls's reflections on the public space.⁵ In both public and private space the role of women was determined by experience and tradition.⁶ Historians and sociologists indicate

³ There was a formal equality, a constitutional record including both genders equality before the law, access to education, work, salary, social insurance, holiday, honour, and public positions (Art. 67 and Art. 78 of the People's Republic of Poland constitution of 22.07.1952). It was even written that "Polish People's Republic strengthened women's (esp. mothers' and career women's) position in the society." As Baer noticed from "the western feminist perspective, women in socialism achieved the status which was formally equal to that of men, measured by the extent of the access to the job market, education, possibility to take part in socio-political life, and child-care facilities," Monika Baer, "Kategoria «kobiety» we współczesnych dyskursach politycznych. Przyczynek do dyskusji", in: Elżbieta Pakszys and Włodzimirz Heller (eds.), *Humanistyka i pleć III. Publiczna przestrzeń kobiet: obrazy dawne i nowe*, (Poznań: UAM, 1999), 231–232. However, legal circumstances did not change the social mentality in which a woman played the main role in a family life, but in career and political life she was subservient to a man and she faced the consequences of system transformation. Inequality in treating women was visible in lower salary, lack of representativeness in public life, or even the increase in women's unemployment during crisis.

⁴ Jolanta Gładys-Jakóbiak, "Kobiety w przestrzeni publicznej", *Kwartalnik Kolegium Ekonomiczno-Społecznego. Studia i Prace*, Vol. 3, 2012, 55.

⁵ John Rawls, *A theory of justice*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1980).

⁶ Titkow indicated that Polish women's identity was influenced by: aristocratic tradition (female aristocrats were equal to men), Poland's partitions during the creation of the symbolic image of "the Polish Mother" who sacrificed everything to maintain national identity. She was responsible for saving the mother tongue, faith, and the cultivation of culture. Back then her contribution to the family life was understood as an initiative for nation. A woman had to be prepared for replacing the man who committed himself to the national cause both in career aspect and on the battlefield. As Titkow noticed: "It was a very hard period of losing independence which created the genotype of a woman (which is still present in the sphere of attitudes and behaviours) who can face the hardest challenges created by the social reality," Anna Titkow, *Tożsamość polskich kobiet: ciągłość, zmiana, konteksty*, (Warszawa: IFIS PAN, 2007), 48–52. The situation was similar after the World War II – due to the lack of men who did not return from the war or Soviet camp, women were encouraged to sacrifice for the motherland and they were called on to take up a large-scale economic activity. The symbol of such a woman was a "female tractor driver." After a few years, however, many women were dismissed. An image of a "sorealist heroine," who abide by the state's laws and the society, was created in the People's Republic of Poland, Magdalena Frackowiak-Sochańska, "Superwoman – córki «Matek Polek». Co zyskują i co tracą współczesne Polki realizujące wzorzec superwoman?", in: Magdalena Baranowska-Szczepańska (ed.), *Ona w XXI wieku – interdyscyplinarny obraz kobiety*, (Poznań: Maiuscula, 2011), 285.

that the lack of collective awareness of Polish women resulted from the history of the Polish nation and a stronger sense of family togetherness rather than the social or political one.⁷ The research period included the whole year 1989. The study focused on the magazines for women with established market position in Poland at the end of 1980s, i.e. *Przyjaciółka* [Best Friend], *Kobieta i Życie* [Woman and Life], *Zwierciadło* [The Mirror], *Filipinka* [female equivalent of the name Philip/name of a hand grenade (from the name of the constructor – Philip)].⁸ In order to perform the research the detailed questions were set out: (1) interpretations of which political events in Poland in 1989 generated silence?, (2) how was the silence tactics realised?, (3) in what way was the women's situation in Poland in 1989 accounted for in the women's magazines – was it dominated by the stereotypes in which there were presented female features that predestined women to be housewives?⁹

It should be indicated that the magazines in question targeted certain groups of readers: the weekly *Kobieta i Życie* was aimed at women living in cities with secondary or higher education and political ambitions, the weekly *Przyjaciółka* at women living in the countryside and community workers, the bi-weekly *Filipinka* at female teenagers, *Zwierciadło* at modern, educated women who were socially and politically engaged. It is worth mentioning that *Zwierciadło* was a Polish Women's League magazine (during the People's Republic of Poland it was an organisation supported by the regime). The division of the press into age groups, places of residence, education levels allowed for its wide impact when it came to advocating citizenship attitudes among women. The research included 50 issues of the weeklies, 25 issues of the bi-weekly.

⁷ Joanna Helios, Wioletta Jedlecka, *Wpływ feminizmu na sytuację społeczno-polityczną kobiet* (Wrocław: 2016, e-monografia No 83, <http://www.bibliotekacyfrowa.pl/publication/80044>, 37.

⁸ Zofia Sokół, "Transformacja czasopism kobiecych w Polsce (1989–1997)", *Rocznik Historii Prasy Polskiej*, Vol. 1, No 1–2, 1998, 192–202; Ryszard Filas, "Zmiany w czytelnictwie prasy w Polsce 1989–1992 na tle przemian oferty prasowej", in: Alina Słomkowska (ed.), *Transformacja prasy polskiej (1989–1992)*, (Warszawa: Elipsa, 1992), 36.

⁹ Women assumed to the expressive roles that conveyed the functions which they performed (mother, caretaker), tasks (upbringing, organising domestic chores), and features (individually-analytical attitude towards the reality, commitment, empathy), Jolanta Miluska, *Przekształcenie ról płciowych a szanse kobiet. Humanistyka i płeć. Studia kobiece z psychologii, filozofii i historii*, (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2008), 22.

The applied research method involved a discourse analysis. As Nijakowski pointed out, discourse can be defined as “a text in the context therefore, not only a set system of signs but also a broader context of creating, exporting, and receiving the text.”¹⁰ Referring to the van Dijk’s considerations, the main focus taken into account was on the communicative, cultural, and social dimensions of discourse.¹¹ Also, in compliance with the research proposal formed by Foucault discourse is the medium of power and knowledge.¹² It can also be the subject of a contest – gaining the power of imposing the narration. As Foucault indicated: “in each society the creation process of discourse is simultaneously controlled, selected, organised, and redistributed by a certain number of procedures which are supposed to cast a spell on powers and dangers, capture the randomness of events, and get out of the heavy, unsettling materiality.”¹³

In the research there was an emphasis on the context of the text creation, meaning the political, legal, and economic circumstances¹⁴ in which the women’s press was released. Next, the attention was paid to the cultural and social¹⁵ conditions of the target readers of the magazines. They constituted the interpretative framework of the world which was presented in the magazines¹⁶ from the

¹⁰ Lech Nijakowski, *Domeny symboliczne. Konflikty narodowe i etniczne w wymiarze symbolicznym*, (Warszawa: Scholar, 2006), 17.

¹¹ Teun A. van Dijk, “Badania nad dyskursem”, in: *idem* (ed.), *Dyskurs jako struktura i proces*, transl. Grzegorz Grochowski, (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2001), 34; *idem*, *Discourse and context: a sociocognitive approach*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 7–10.

¹² Magdalena Nowicka-Franczak, “Postfoucaultowska analiza dyskursu. Przypadek sporu o Jedwabne”, in: Marek Czyżewski, Michał Otrocki, Tomasz Piekot and Jerzy Stachowiak (eds.), *Analiza dyskursu publicznego. Przegląd metod i perspektyw badawczych*, (Warszawa: Akademickie Sedno, 2017), 311–313.

¹³ Michel Foucault, *Porządek dyskursu. Wykład inauguracyjny wygłoszony w Collège de France 2 grudnia 1970*, transl. Michał Kozłowski, (Gdańsk: Słowo/Obraz Terytoria, 2002), 7.

¹⁴ Cf Gerlinde Mautner, “Analiza gazet, czasopism i innych mediów drukowanych”, in: Ruth Wodak and Michał Krzyżanowski (eds.), *Jakościowa analiza dyskursu w naukach społecznych*, transl. Danuta Przepiórkowska, (Warszawa: Łośgraf, 2011), 55.

¹⁵ John Fiske remarked on these aspects in the discourse analysis. According to Sasińska-Klas “Fiske was contextually ‘anchoring’ the media discourse in the framework of not existing social and political relations in the described place of event,” Teresa Sasińska-Klas, “Analiza dyskursywna i jej zastosowanie w badaniach na gruncie nauk społecznych”, in: Piotr Borowiec, Robert Kłosowicz and Paweł Ścigaj (eds.), *Odmiany współczesnej nauki o polityce*, (Kraków: UJ, 2014), 433–434; cf John Fiske, *Reading the popular*, (London, New York: Routledge, 1995).

¹⁶ Kamilla Biskupska, “Analiza dyskursu i krytyczna analiza dyskursu”, in: Marek S. Szczepański and Anna Śliz (eds.), *Współczesne teorie socjologiczne: w kręgu ujęć paradygmatycznych*, (Opole: UO, 2014), 370; Ruth Wodak, “Wstęp: badania nad dyskursem – ważne

perspective of the women's situation. "The discourse analysis involves the whole spectre of social problems associated with the unequal access to the valid discourse (eliminating, creating the reality not based on facts, making up myths, stereotypes, prejudices – according to the vision accepted by and convenient for the dominant class)."¹⁷ The discourse analysis allows not only for exploring the axiological system, but also for revealing the hidden spirit of the text.¹⁸

Political events in 1989 and the silence referring to the women's situation

It is worth pointing out that in 1989 the women's press belonged to the most frequently read press segments in Poland, and it was also popular with men. As the same copy was shared by many people (since it was passed on to the family or neighbours) it was hard to provide specific estimation as to the number of readers. The magazines chosen for the research were not only handbooks but they also dealt with social, political, cultural, and economic issues. They were of an opinion-shaping character and due to their readership, the interpretations of political events could potentially influence people's opinions and attitudes.

1989 was the year of social, political, and economic changes. From 6 February to 5 April 1989 there were the so-called "Round Table Talks" which initiated the implementation of the political decisions in the context of system transformations and democratisation of the social life in Poland. The aim was to achieve a peaceful agreement between the ruling coalition party (The Polish United Worker's Party, The United People's Party, The Democratic Party, and the licensed pro-government parties) and non-parliamentary "solidarity" opposition. Therefore, "the system transformation posed an opportunity to manifest the presence of particular social groups as well as safeguard their interests and rights."¹⁹ It was also a chance for

pojęcia i terminy", in: Ruth Wodak and Michał Krzyżanowski, *Jakościowa analiza dyskursu*, 25–27.

¹⁷ Barbara Jabłońska, "Krytyczna analiza dyskursu: refleksje teoretyczno-metodologiczne", *Przegląd Socjologii Jakościowej*, No 2/1, 2006, 62.

¹⁸ Małgorzata Lisowska-Magdziarz, *Analiza tekstu w dyskursie medialnym. Przewodnik dla studentów*, (Kraków: UJ, 2006), 26.

¹⁹ Anna Szwed-Walczak, "Obraz wyborów kontraktowych w Polsce na łamach prasy dla kobiet", *Czasopismo Naukowe Instytutu Studiów Kobiety*, No 1, 2019, 154.

women to change their position in the social and political life. However, there was only one woman out of 56 members present at the inaugural meeting. The issues important for Polish women were not taken into consideration during the proceedings, which intensified the discourse concerning women's presence in the public space. It was especially visible in the weekly *Kobieta i Życie* which for the sake of balance organised the "women's Round Table" where socially and politically active women were invited and they discussed the topics concerning the women's position in Poland. It is worth adding that in 1988 the weekly *Kobieta i Życie* started the discourse regarding women's absence in the government, their lack of decisiveness in politics, and barriers for promotion in their career.²⁰

The Round Table Talks led to the contract elections²¹ which were held on 4 June 1989 (and the second stage – on 18 June). It was another catalyst for the discourse activity concerning women's position in Poland. The press advocated gender solidarity and voting for female candidates, whose silhouettes were presented in magazines. Despite the fact that each of the magazines under study promoted the "Vote for women!" action,²² the number of women was still decreasing in the tenth term Sejm [the lower house of the bicameral parliament of Poland] of the People's Republic of Poland²³.

In 1989 the debate on equality was negatively affected by the draft of the act of protection of the conceived child. According to this draft, abortion was fully forbidden and both a person undergoing the treatment and a person performing the procedure could be sentenced to prison. Despite the fact that the draft was submitted to the Parliament on 28 February 1989, the first deliberations on it appeared in the women's press in April – at the beginning of the election campaign. Thereby, this topic drew attention to both

²⁰ Zofia Sokół, "Wizerunki kobiet na łamach tygodnika «Kobieta i Życie» w latach 1946–2010", *Rocznik Prasoznawczy*, No 6, 2012, 25–26.

²¹ Contract elections were not fully free. The coalition and the government side provided themselves with 65% of mandates for the Parliament, and the non-parties could have only 35%. Only the elections for the Senate were fully free, Andrzej Friszke, *Rok 1989: polska droga do wolności*, (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Sejmowe, 2009), 55–56.

²² In the elections the candidates were the representatives of the Polish Women's League which also published the magazine *Zwierciadło*, and also the editor-in-chief of *Kobieta i Życie*.

²³ The situation of women in the Parliament, Senate, and political parties was similar. According to Tadeusz Buksiński it resulted from the progressing brutalisation and primitivisation of the political life in Poland. Women started being active in media and non-governmental organisations, Tadeusz Buksiński, "Sfera publiczna (Die Öffentlichkeit)", in: Elżbieta Pakszys and Włodzimierz Heller (eds.), *Humanistyka i pleć*, (Poznań: IFUAM, 1999), 194.

the candidates for the Parliament and the voters, especially that legislative works on it started in May, so one month before the elections.²⁴

The above-mentioned events affected the topics of the women's press. However, the popularity of discussion concerning women's political rights, their freedom of choice as well as equal access to power in political and working terms appeared in the press under study at different frequencies and it was definitely not the prevailing theme (see Table 1).

Table 1. The number of the articles about gender equality in the Polish women's press in 1989

Title of the magazine	<i>Filipinka</i>	<i>Kobieta i Życie</i>	<i>Przyjaciółka</i>	<i>Zwierciadło</i>
Number of articles	10	28	20	48

Source: based on author's own research.

It can be noticed that the discourse on this topic was commonly discussed in *Zwierciadło* which was a magazine aimed at intelligent women. The editorial office of *Kobieta i Życie* which targeted first and foremost female city dwellers and social activists, also often raised this theme. The editorial office became particularly active before the contract elections when the editor-in-chief, was running for the seat in the Parliament. The topic of gender equality was less frequently discussed in the weekly *Przyjaciółka* which enjoyed the biggest readership (being popular in the working and rural environment). It was due to the established objectives of the magazine. The editorial office of *Przyjaciółka* did not create the attitude of a female rebel but it rather looked for a solution to the problem and reaching a social consensus. The bi-weekly *Filipinka* discussed the topic in the slightest degree. It is worth mentioning that *Filipinka* did not present the problems of girls viewed as a separate social group but still they were present in a youth problems repertory.²⁵ It does not mean that disparity which resulted from gender inequality was unnoticeable, the is-

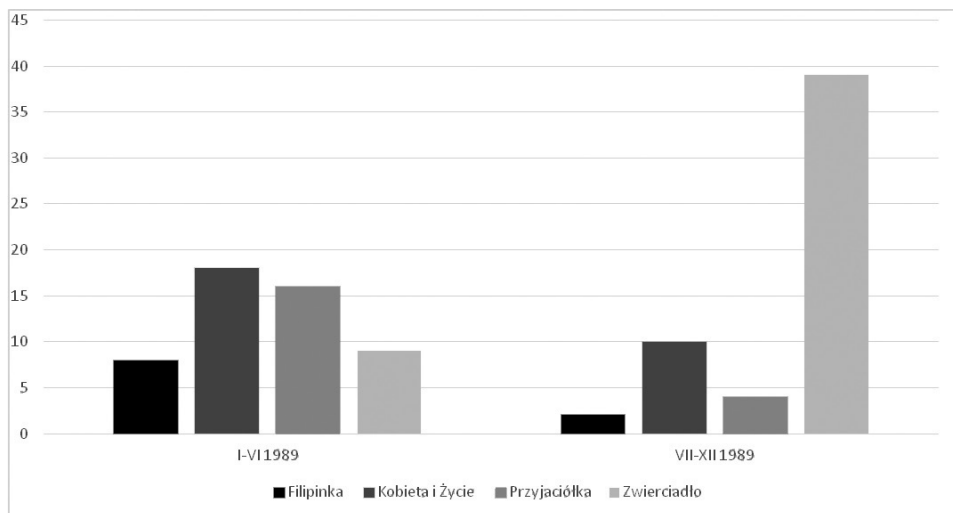
²⁴ Iza Desperak, "Antykoncepcja, aborcja i... eutanazja. O upolitycznieniu praw reprodukcyjnych w Polsce", *Acta Universitatis Lodzianensis, Folia Sociologica*, No 30, 2003, 201.

²⁵ Hanna Jaworowska, "Od Redaktora", *Filipinka*, 26.02.1989, 3; Joanna Młynarczyk, „Pochodowe? Alternatywne?", *Filipinka*, 7.05.1989, 5, 13.

sue was simply addressed in the context of the assessment of the girls’ future and their chances for career development after the age of 40.²⁶

It was also necessary to verify which of the mentioned events influenced the increase in the problem of gender equality in the women’s press. The research showed that in the weekly *Zwierciadło* this topic was usually raised between July and December 1989. It could be concluded, hence, that it was the decrease in the number of women in the Polish Parliament²⁷ that gave rise to the promotion of women in *Zwierciadło* who won a seat in the Sejm. In the remaining press under study the discussion on women’s position in the public space was presented simultaneously with the political events, mainly in the first half of 1989 (see Graph 1).

Graph 1. Frequency of the themes concerning gender equality in the women’s press with reference to the division into the first and second half of 1989



Source: based on author’s own research.

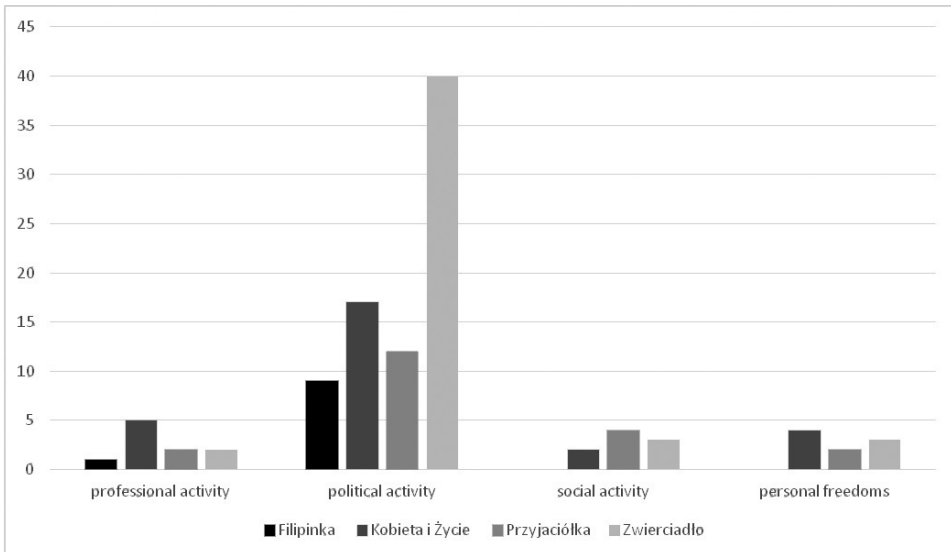
²⁶ AMO, “Punktujemy”, *Filipinka*, 7.05.1989, 10.

²⁷ In the People’s Republic of Poland the biggest number of women representatives was between 1980 and 1985 – 23%, in 1989 they had 13% seats in the Sejm and 6% in Senate, Magdalena Fuszara, “Kobiety w polityce w okresie transformacji w Polsce”, in: Magdalena Frąckowiak-Sochańska and Sabina Królikowska (eds.), *Kobiety transformacji 1989–2009. Podsumowania, interpretacje, prognozy*, (Toruń: Adam Marszałek, 2010), 20.

In addition to *Zwierciadło*, the topic of equality was primarily discussed during the “Round Table Talks” (February–April 1989) and before the Parliament elections in June 1989. It was caused by the emerging chance for changing the social and political situation of women in Poland. The women’s press editorial offices expected that would emerge a strong lobby pursuing the empowerment of the women’s social position in Poland due to their merits for the development of the country.

The next stage of the research concerned a range of topics which assisted the issue of equality. There were four theme-related categories: professional, political, and social activity of women, their private freedoms (see Graph 2). The first category concerned the diagnose of the reasons for women’s professional advancement barriers. The second category was associated with the absence of women representatives in Polish politics. In the third category there were articles which explained the circumstances of women’s social position in Poland. Finally, the category “personal freedoms” included texts which discussed the topic of the draft of the act on the protection of the conceived child.

Graph 2. Theme-related categories concerning women’s equality as presented in the Polish press



Source: based on author’s own research.

It can be noticed that in all the press under study the discourse was dominated by the considerations concerning women's political activity. The biggest number of texts appeared in *Zwierciadło*, but as it was mentioned before they appeared after the parliament elections. What can be also noticed is the absence of such deliberations related to women's social activity and private freedoms in *Filipinka*.

It should be noted that the problem of women's non-representativeness in the public space was not immediately referred to as gender discrimination and gender inequality. The silence and the lack of accuracy with regards to this topic can be viewed as a category of construing the knowledge, as it happens with a language.²⁸ In 1989 readers were expected to determine the problem on their own. It is worth pointing out that censorship²⁹ was present in Poland at that time. Firstly, the diagnosed gender inequality against the constitutional provision would undermine the legal order of the People's Republic of Poland and the efficiency of its enforcement. Secondly, the diagnose would hit the culturally shaped image of the "Polish Mother" of which Polish women were proud. Pointing to their marginalisation in the country could damage their sense of identity. In this case we can refer to the Siegfried Schmidt's concept of "blinder Fleck" which means an unconscious influence of the culture in which we live.³⁰ Thirdly, it would also exclude the social meaning of women's devotion to the family and the nation. Some researchers suggest that the women's silence should be considered as a kind of tool to reinforce their discourse³¹ which is an objection to the established reality. Editorial offices were gradually preparing their female readers to name the image of reality created in the press. Therefore, it can be noticed that the main motive of the silence was the fear which resulted from "the allegiance to the social conventions, such as the norms of sex, political, ideological,

²⁸ Dorota Korwin-Piotrowska, *Białe znaki*, 27.

²⁹ Preventive censorship in Poland ceased to function unofficially when the government with Tadeusz Mazowiecki was established in August 1989. Formally, it was lifted by the Act of 11 April 1990 on repealing the Act on the publication and performance control, abolition of control authorities, and the change of the Act – Press Law.

³⁰ Dorota Korwin-Piotrowska, *Białe znaki*, 34.

³¹ Mary Joanne Church Farrell, *The Rhetoric of Silence*, 1999, 3–4, https://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/obj/s4/f2/dsk1/tape9/PQDD_0021/NQ55328.pdf [accessed online: 20.01.2022].

and aesthetic life as well as the taboo variants arising from the set of these norms.”³²

The silence in the women’s press in that period was a way to draw attention to the significance of the absence of women in the public space. There are two types of silences: eliminating and postulating. The first type arises from avoiding irrelevant issues, and the second one is a form of understatement. The Polish women’s press advocated the postulating type which challenged a reader to surmise and consider the raised issue privately.³³ Euphemisms and rhetorical questions were used to describe gender inequality.

Euphemisms appeared in the first quarter of 1989 when editorial offices of the women’s press realised that gender equality in the social and political life would not be one of the assumptions of the transformation. Both sides of the political dispute agreed that there was no need to consider this issue due to the fact it was guaranteed in the constitution. Euphemisms could be noticed in the titles of articles and chapters and they referred mainly to women’s political activity. Their non-representativeness and absence in the public space were described with the use of eloquent titles, e.g. “Na ławce rezerwowych” [On the Players’ Bench],³⁴ “O nas bez nas” [About Us without Us].³⁵ Euphemisms were also used in articles such as “the absence of women in politics” or the need to organize the “women’s Round Table.”³⁶ It was pointed out that “the male lobby does not accept us to decide about the country’s fate”³⁷; “We account for the half of the country but we are not allowed to pass resolutions and make decisions ourselves. In general, nobody asks what we think, how we want to live”³⁸; “we have to be at least two times better than men to be equal with them.”³⁹

The broader perspective (related to the political system criterion) was also presented in order to depict women’s activity, e.g. “In socialist countries the women in power could be counted on the

³² Krystyna Pisarkowa, *Z pragmatycznej stylistyki, semantyki i historii języka. Wybór zagadnień*, (Kraków: Wyd. Instytut Języka Polskiego, 1994), 27.

³³ Paulina Barnaś, “O ciszy i milczeniu w piosenkach rockowych”, *Dydaktyka Polonistyczna*, No 3, 2017, 113.

³⁴ Danuta, “Na ławce rezerwowych”, *Kobieta i Życie*, 4.01.1989, 5.

³⁵ Krystyna Kaszuba (not.), “O nas bez nas (1)”, *Kobieta i Życie*, 29.03.1989, 4–5.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁷ “Nasze oczekiwania”, *Zwierciadło*, 23.03.1989, 5.

³⁸ “Komisja Porozumiewawcza Organizacji Kobięcych”, *Przyjaciółka*, 1.06.1989, 4.

³⁹ Zofia Als-Iwańska, “Nie obiecywałam złotych gór”, *Kobieta i Życie*, 12.07.1989, 2.

fingers of one hand.”⁴⁰ It was indicated that in the category of the career “especially managerial promotion was a very sensitive indicator of not achieving equality in practice by women.”⁴¹ It was also noted that “in the women-dominated trade there were only 7% of women in the dictatorial positions?! This lack of women in power is a symptom of their worse social status.”⁴²

Aside from euphemisms, rhetorical questions were also used in the women’s press discourse. They were associated with the so-called *meaningful silence* which could be defined as “an *interlocutory act* – due to its communicative character and potential focus on the sense. However, when it clearly performed the function of particular speech acts, it became a *semantic act* (semantic activity) (...). The meaningful silence is thus of an intentional dimension and its value reinforces situational context.”⁴³

By using rhetorical questions, female readers were encouraged to reflect on the topic of Polish women’s life. These questions concerned mainly the political or professional activity category. The first one discussed the absence of women in important political events, and asked “Tell me, why was only one woman among all the members of the ‘Round Table’? Is there no woman among us capable of representing our issues? Are only men clever and able to deal with politics?”⁴⁴ The readers were also provoked to act: *Who if not us?* [“Jeśli nie my, to kto?”]⁴⁵; “Are women not eager to rule and are they not fit to rule?, Will this stereotype, which had been so convenient for ages, affect the composition of the new Parliament?, Are there really no women to be given a seat in the Sejm and Senate?, Can you see any women in the public life or in your surroundings who could be on the electoral rolls?”⁴⁶

In the professional activity category the causes of the absence of women in managerial positions was indicated with the use of rhetorical questions, e.g. “How to make a career in the presence

⁴⁰ Danuta, “Na ławce rezerwowych”, 5; cf Jelena Zonina, “Rozmowa z Wiktoria Tokariewą”, *Przyjaciółka*, 21.09.1989, 5.

⁴¹ Krystyna Kaszuba (not.), “O nas bez nas (2)”, *Kobieta i Życie*, 5.04.1989, 3.

⁴² Alicja Bińska, “Rozmowa z Elżbietą Łęcznarowicz”, *Kobieta i Życie*, 7.06.1989, 2.

⁴³ Dorota Korwin-Piotrowska, *Białe znaki*, 83.

⁴⁴ Natalia Iwaszkiewicz, “Pisane kobiecą ręką”, *Kobieta i Życie*, 12.04.1989, 2–3.

⁴⁵ Krystyna Kaszuba (not.), “Jeśli nie my, to kto?”, *Kobieta i Życie*, 17.05.1989, 2–3.

⁴⁶ “One nie zawiodą!”, *Kobieta i Życie*, 17.05.1989, 4.

of frustrated husbands who did not make it themselves?”⁴⁷; “Do hard conditions, i.e. overload of duties when being a full-time ‘household worker,’ pose any barrier?”⁴⁸. The article entitled “Dlaczego ogórek nie śpiewa?” [Why does a cucumber not sing?]⁴⁹ explained that women were not provided with good social conditions (lack of kindergarten and educational-care infrastructure, lack of foodstuff) necessary to make a career. In *Filipinka* it was noticed that “only every sixth woman becomes a boss. You will also earn 30% less than men while working in trade, administration, health care and communication service. Statistically, at the age of 22 you will get married, but every fifth woman will be a divorcee. Yes, mind you, women live 8 years more than men. But is it a consolation?”⁵⁰.

Conversational implicatures, allusions, and suggestions were also present in women’s press. The use of implicatures was detailed in nature and it required the knowledge of a social and political context. They allowed for conveying information indirectly, with the violation of two maxims formed by Grice in the theory of conversational implicatures – the maxim of referring (relation) and the maxim of manner. The first one required the speech to refer to the topic, the second one postulated to form easy, unambiguous statements⁵¹ without intricacies. During the debate on the draft of the legal act on the protection of the conceived child, the press entitled the deliberations on this topic as “Piekło kobiet” [Women’s Hell]⁵², “Bolesna sprawa” [A Painful Issue].⁵³ After the elections, when the new government protracted appointing the representative for women, this occurrence was referred to as “embellishment” (one of the politicians replied to a female office worker as to the situation in question by saying “we do not need any embellishments”).⁵⁴ When there was a rise in food prices and the bill payments, *Przyjaciółka* indicated: “Only the child support allowance is not rising!”⁵⁵ which

⁴⁷ Danuta, “Na ławce rezerwowych”, 5.

⁴⁸ Redakcja, “Twardy stołek”, *Kobieta i Życie*, 11.10.1989, 3–4.

⁴⁹ Barbara Limanowska, “Dlaczego ogórek nie śpiewa?”, *Kobieta i Życie*, 15.03.1989, 2.

⁵⁰ AMO, “Punktujemy”, 2.

⁵¹ Grice identified four maxims of conversation: maxim of quantity, quality, relation, and manner, Herbert Paul Grice, “Logika a konwersacja”, in: Barbara Stanosz (ed.), *Jezyk w swietle nauki*, transl. Barbara Stanosz, (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1980), 91–114.

⁵² “Piekło kobiet”, *Kobieta i Życie*, 19.04.1989, 4.

⁵³ K.K-R., “Bolesna sprawa”, *Przyjaciółka*, 8.06.1989, 7.

⁵⁴ Anna Szymańska, “Ozdobnik”, *Kobieta i Życie*, 13.12.1989, 3.

⁵⁵ Ruta Pragier, “Nie rosną tylko alimenty”, *Przyjaciółka*, 30.03.1989, 6.

also meant a disregard for the situation of single mothers. A title “Kury biurowe i naukowe” [Office and Scientific Housewives] appeared when discussing the professional activity barriers.⁵⁶ On the one hand, it referred to the offensive, colloquial description of housewives [“a house hen” when translated literally from Polish],⁵⁷ on the other hand, there was an indication that in Poland also those women who were professionally active and ambitious were doomed to perform domestic chores and, therefore, they worked a double shift.

The additional content was also conveyed by using allusions. A proper decoding of a message required the addressee to understand the situational context.⁵⁸ Before the elections, during the electoral campaign there were slogans “Głosuj na kobiety! One nie zawiodą!” [Vote for women! They will not let you down!],⁵⁹ appeals “Those who are embedded in the reality and who know the daily concerns can change the reality in the most effective way. Vote for women!”⁶⁰ and the opinions “If more women were speaking publicly, poverty might not be prevalent in our country as women know hard situations best.”⁶¹ There were also allusions to the ineffectiveness of men in power.

Suggestions appeared most often in the category of “the freedom of choice.” It was claimed that accepting a new draft of the act on the protection of the conceived child “would hit woman’s personal freedom,”⁶² “woman’s dignity as a human being.”⁶³ Before the elections suggestions were used to promote engagement in political activity “We are a huge political power, we account for over 50% of the electorate, and in Łódź there are even more of us. It depends entirely on us whether this power is to be taken seriously.”⁶⁴ “Women – I appeal – vote for women! Let us not harm each other

⁵⁶ K.G.M., “Kury biurowe i naukowe”, *Kobieta i Życie*, 5.07.1989, 2.

⁵⁷ In Polish the term “kura domowa” [housewife] is pejorative and it refers to a woman who “focuses on the domestic responsibilities, brings up a child, does not socialise with other people, and does not succeed professionally, Piotr Fliciński, *Wielki słownik frazeologiczny*, (Poznań: IBIS, 2012), 161.

⁵⁸ Wojciech Suchoń, *Teoretyczne problemy logiki praktycznej*, (Kraków: UJ: 2008), 32.

⁵⁹ “Głosuj na kobiety!”, *Kobieta i Życie*, 17.05.1989, 13, 15; “Głosuj na kobiety! One nie zawiodą!”, *Kobieta i Życie*, 31.05.1989, 2–3.

⁶⁰ “Popieramy”, *Kobieta i Życie*, 1.06.1989, 3.

⁶¹ Natalia Iwaszkiewicz, “Pisane kobiecą ręką”, *Kobieta i Życie*, 12.04.1989, 2–3.

⁶² “Liga Kobiet Polskich”, *Kobieta i Życie*, 17.05.1989, 11.

⁶³ K.K-R., “Bolesna sprawa”, 7.

⁶⁴ Krystyna Kaszuba (not.), “Jeśli nie my, to kto?”, *Kobieta i Życie*, 17.05.1989, 2.

because who will present and deal with the most important issues for us?"⁶⁵; "We want to talk about our truths ourselves. Vote for us! Give us even a bit of power, use women's experience, knowledge, and imagination."⁶⁶

The presence of silence in the women's press and the use of euphemisms, rhetorical questions, conversational implicatures, allusions, and suggestions in return was a kind of safety valve and did not violate the image of a Polish woman which was created by the history, tradition, and customs. In *Zwierciadło* it was noticed that in 1989 the division of social roles between men and women was perceived traditionally in the Polish society. A woman took care of the household, a man was cut out for professional work and managerial positions.⁶⁷ This model was also reinforced among teenagers. The editorial office of *Filipinka* noticed that in youth organisations women resigned from representing them in the elections, which according to the editorial office resulted from women's fear, their instilled and culturally conditioned place in social life where they dealt with organisational work mainly at a low level, took care of proper functioning of processes without actually participating in them, yet, preparing the ground for men to act. It was indicated that only 4 women out of 120 nominated candidates from Polish Scouting and Guiding Association decided to run for a seat in the Sejm, and the youngest candidate was 27 years old.⁶⁸

The indefiniteness of the discourse concerning gender equality in women's press was associated with women's position in Poland in that period. Their position was reflected by the images of women construed in the female readers' letters, interviews, articles, and the choice of subject. In the periodicals under study in 1989 the role of women in Poland was defined through the prism of the "Polish Mother" symbol, i.e. her activity for the family and the nation. On the one hand, the emphasis was placed on the meaning of the symbol and its genesis, on the other hand, on the restrictions which this symbol introduced. Basing on the heroic and mythical image of the "Polish Mother," women wanted to continue this mission and pursued the perfection in their private and professional

⁶⁵ "Popieramy", *Kobieta i Życie*, 25.05.1989, 4.

⁶⁶ "Komisja Porozumiewawcza Organizacji Kobietych", *Przyjaciółka*, 1.06.1989, 4.

⁶⁷ Krystyna Stachowicz, "Rozmowa z prof. Jarosławą Bauerową", *Zwierciadło*, 2.01.1989, 5.

⁶⁸ Hanna Jaworowska, "Od Redaktora", *Filipinka*, 21.05.1989, 3.

life. Their attitudes were characterised by “the syndrome of mother’s bravery” which connected the tradition and aspirations for professional life awoken during the Republic of Poland.⁶⁹ In the final analysis tradition would always win and women resigned from their professional career due to their fear of family’s reaction, losing a husband, demoralising children (lack of time for a proper custody). The editorial office of *Kobieta i Życie* concluded “They save one, and regret the other – not expressed aspirations. Forever torn apart ‘Polish Madonnas’.”⁷⁰ In the periodical we could read that “emancipation in the Polish case” relied on the fact that “women always felt responsible for everything.”⁷¹ The house of a Polish housewife was described as “an eating and processing centre, a hairdresser’s and a tailor’s service, a cleaner and laundress workshop, a carpenter workshop, a locksmith and a house painter workshop, all but the lock.”⁷²

Another reason for using silence with reference to the lack of women in the public space was a reluctance to use a term “gender equality.” In the weekly *Kobieta i Życie* it was explained by the fact that the idea was used as propaganda by the authorities of the Polish People’s Republic. In spite of the constitutional provisions on women’s equality rights, Polish women did not have a real influence on political and social reality.⁷³ Instead, they were overwhelmed with duties and deprived of “their former function of a person who strengthens and builds family bonds.” It was diagnosed that equal rights in Poland meant in fact: no impact on social and political events, earnings lower than that of men, overload of duties, scarce opportunities for promotion, low self-esteem, the lack of faith in the meaning of work and equality itself.⁷⁴

Open and direct discussion concerning the lack of gender equality began in the second half of 1989 – after the so-called 1989 “contract” elections. This was caused by introducing systemic changes and, in consequence, redefining a notion of equal rights to make it correspond to its meaning in democratic countries. What gave an impulse to this action was a small number of seats in the

⁶⁹ Anna Sułkowska, “Rozmowa z Anną Szymańską-Kwiatkowską”, *Przyjaciółka*, 12.10.1989, 6–7.

⁷⁰ Redakcja, “Twardy stółek”, 3–4.

⁷¹ Krystyna Kaszuba, “Rozmowa z Jolantą Plakwicz”, *Kobieta i Życie*, 22.11.1989, 5.

⁷² Maria Zybort, “Dziś pani domu ma wychodne”, *Przyjaciółka*, 10.07.1989, 2–3.

⁷³ Krystyna Kaszuba (not.), “O nas bez nas (1)”, 4–5.

⁷⁴ Barbara Limanowska, “Dlaczego ogórek nie śpiewa?”, 2.

Parliament obtained by women. In the 10th term Sejm the group of 460 MPs included only 62 women, whereas in the Senate consisting of 100 senators there were only 6 women.⁷⁵ The press at that time was starting to publish news about the emergence of a feminist movement in Poland.⁷⁶ The chance for women's empowerment in the public space was viewed in fully democratic elections and generational change.⁷⁷

Recapitulation

Silence in the women's press as to their role and place in the public space was related to four thematic categories: political, professional and social activity as well as their personal freedoms – the right to decide about their motherhood. The fact that women were underrepresented in politics and managerial positions and the traditional division of roles within a family resulted in their resignation from professional career was not clearly emphasized, openly discussed or specifically defined. During the analysed period the most dominating category of women's activity was their political engagement. It was the area where major gender disparity was noticeable (with regards to representativeness, access to job positions, decisiveness) and it was acknowledged that transformation changes might contribute to at least its partial elimination. The popularity of this category was connected with the political events which took place in Poland in 1989. The Round Table Talks, the 1989 elections constituted a great opportunity to hold deliberations on the place of women in the public space but also to join the discourse on the future shape of the state. The Sejm work on the draft act of legal protection of an unborn child penalizing abortion proved to bear a lot of significance. It led to women getting united and it gave rise to the foundation of a feminist movement.

Silence used towards women's situation in the Polish public space fulfilled four basic functions: (1) it ensured protection from censorship, (2) it was a specific tactic aimed at making female

⁷⁵ "Kobiety w Sejmie", *Kobieta i Życie, Zwierciadło*, 24.08.1989, 5.

⁷⁶ Elżbieta Wierzbicka, "Zaczyna się RUCH", *Zwierciadło*, 7.12.1989, 2–3.

⁷⁷ Alina Tepli, "Nie czuję się przegrana", *Kobieta i Życie*, 12.06.1989, 2; Anna Szymańska, "Ozdobnik", 3.

readers reflect on their situation, (3) it did not cause the infringement of taboos and toposes, (4) it allowed for the avoidance of unpopular concepts and did not undermine the myth of the idealised “Polish Mother.” The strategy of keeping quiet was implemented by the use of euphemisms, rhetoric questions, conversational implicatures, allusions and suggestions. The editor’s offices were positive that female readers would decode the message faultlessly as it was embedded in the situational context. The lack of precision in defining the problem did not disrupt the social and political order. The role and position of women in Poland in the period during the period under study were judged on the basis of the traditional model of “the Polish Mother” and the division of roles into typically female and male ones. The 1989 press for women began to present the image of a woman who was politically active, aware of the importance of being in the public space but it did not belittle the woman’s role in the family life. It actually justified the necessity to join in the public life by women’s care of a family well-being, acknowledging that women were the most competent to improve the quality of life in Poland.

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