
Between Feminism and the Catholic Church: The Women's Movement in Poland

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Abstract: This article looks at Polish women's movements in the context of how women's and social movements are defined theoretically and in the light of the development of the women's movement in Poland historically. It examines how the women's movement fits into Polish society in the light of public opinion on the women's movement, women's rights and issues of equality, also looking at how these views evolved over the 1990s, and the reasons behind them. It explores the different types of women's movements that exist in Poland, differentiating between them in terms of how much they conform to definitions of 'traditional' and 'new' social movements and in terms of the role they play in effectuating change, their relationships with domestic and international organisations, their relationship to the Catholic Church, their strategies, their formal and informal nature, and other distinguishing criteria.

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A scholar attempting to describe women's movements is confronted with the same difficulties that usually accompany any analysis of social movements. It is the diversity and variability of such movements that pose the difficulty, as these features are also inherent attributes of any group of social movements. Studies on social movements consequently suggest a variety of different ways defining movements. For example, Blumer [1946: 3] defines a social movement as a 'collective enterprise to establish a new order of social life'; Smelser [1962: 313] describes social movements as 'collective attempts to restore, protect or create values or norms in the name of a generalised belief'; and elsewhere emphasis is put on the fact that social movements strive to achieve change in the social order by non-institutionalised means [Wilson 1973]. Other scholars have suggested somewhat more precise definitions, analysing social movements as 'recurrent patterns of collective activities which are partially institutionalised, value oriented and antisystematic in their form and symbolism' [Pakulski 1991: xiv]. All these definitions actually have many elements in common, elements that Dahlerup also took into consideration in her work on women's movements in Denmark, suggesting that social a social movement be defined as 'a conscious, collective activity to promote social change, with some de-

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gree of organization and which the commitment and active participation of members or activists as its main resource' [Dahlerup 1986: 218]. In accordance with this definition, only movements that strive for change could qualify as women's movements; therefore, any movements aimed at maintaining the status quo, which often arise in response to pro-change movements, would lie outside the scope of an analysis of social movements.

Additional elements in the definition of social movements is that they represent some fundamental interest that is not addressed as a part of routine policies, that they lie outside the process of political decision-making, and that they are relatively permanent and of a certain size. A social movement is a combination of spontaneity and organisation. It expresses a protest against existing values and norms and often attacks the structure of power. As it does not participate in institutionalised power, it frequently employs direct action and disruptive tactics.

Dahlerup also notes that social movements very often organise movement events, and while organisations also do so it is chiefly social movements that resort to this measure. It is frequently by means of the events a social movement organises that it becomes known throughout a society more generally. Dahlerup also cites Zald's differentiation between social movements and 'social movement organisations'. A social movement is more than just an organisation, and as such it usually has many centres and sub-organisations. Its aim is not just to organise its activity, an nor is it the activity itself; it above all seeks to effectuate change: change in a way of thinking, political change, changes in everyday life, and consequently often even a change in the basic structure of power in society.

The transformation of social movements in Western Europe and the United States during the 1980s led to the need to distinguish between old or 'traditional' social movements and 'new' social movements. The most commonly cited features of the latter are the movement's transfunctional, fluid and open character, its inclusive, non-doctrinal and non-ideological orientations, the absence of formal membership and programmes, a socio-cultural, innovative, and self-limiting character, non-violent means, and discontinuity [Pakulski 1991]. A comparison between old and new social movements reveals differences between them in at least four aspects. The first relates to the relevant actors: the old movements usually involved social groups acting as interest groups, while in the new movements the actors tend to be groups acting on behalf of broader interests. The second distinct aspect is that old movements tended to deal with issues like economic growth, distribution, military and social safety, or social control, while the new movements target the environment, peace, human rights, or unalienated forms of work. The third aspect involves values: freedom, the security of private consumption, and material growth were the values of the old movements, in comparison with the new movements' values centred on the autonomous identity of the individual in opposition to centralised control. Finally, the mode of organisation has changed: the old movements were formally organised as large-scale associations; by contrast the new movements feature a lack of formal organisation and are spontaneous, with little differentiation between positions within the movement [Offe 1985].

Like all the other new social movements, the new women's movements emerged in a specific context, preceded by movements that had been organised by a previous generation of women. They were therefore able to draw on the latter's achievements and at the same time engage with them in a specific dispute or discussion of minor aims and especially the means of achieving those aims. It is worth noting, however, that both the old and the new women's movements share a common basic aim: to change the status of women in society [Dahlerup 1986; Stykarsottir 1986; Gelb 1986].

The circumstances most usually cited [Dahlerup 1986: 220–221] in connection with the emergence of a new women's movement include:

1. a pre-existing communication network in touch with new ideas,
2. the receptiveness of this network to new ideas,
3. a situation of strain or crisis that actually triggers the movement,
4. the international diffusion of ideas.

When analysing women's movements in Poland, both their socio-political background and their history must be taken into consideration, because the analysis of any modern social movement requires that answers be sought to a number of questions: in what types of society does the particular movement occur? What forms of continuity or discontinuity with the past exist? Which institutions are at issue? What are the general political stakes of the disputed issues. And what developmental possibilities are culturally available to collective actors? [Cohen 1985] Analyses of women's movements must therefore seek to find out what women's needs the activities or the women's organisation, movement or informal initiative respond to, what steps towards change are suggested, and what changes are desired. The aim of this article is to address these questions and attempt to determine whether the Polish women's movement can be called a social movement and whether it bears more in common with a traditional or a new women's movement.¹

Public opinion on women's rights and gender equality in Poland

Around the turn of the millennium in Poland public opinion polls were showing that it is primarily women who protest against the limited participation of women in government, though men are increasingly coming to share the view that the level of women's participation in the public sphere is too small. Polish society also believes that there is inequality of opportunities for women and men, as an absolute majority (74% of those asked²) maintain that women do have fewer opportunities for building a political career than men do. This opinion is cited slightly more often by women (78%) than by men, but it is an opinion that a clear majority of men also

¹ See M. Fuszara [1997].

² A survey by CBOS (*Centrum Badań Opinii Społecznej* – Public Opinion Research Center) in 2000 on a random sample of 1010 respondents.

share. In recent years the percentage of women who fully agree that women's chances for success in politics are smaller has increased considerably: in 1993,³ 64% of female respondents indicated that they felt certain about this, and in 2000,⁴ 78% of women thought so.

Public opinion polls in Poland have also shown that an increasing number of people believe that there should be more women in government, Parliament, public administration, political parties, industrial enterprises, and the judiciary.⁵ Opinions on this issue are closely linked to the gender of respondents, and it is much more often women than men who want women's participation in government to be expanded.⁶

There is also a clear connection between people's opinions on women's participation in government and their level of education. The higher the level of education, the higher the percentage of respondents who believe that there should be more women in positions of authority than there are now. There is a distinct difference between the views of respondents with secondary or higher education and respondents with primary education. The largest percentage of people who support increasing the number of women in positions of authority is among people with higher education; the majority of people with post-secondary education feel that there should be more women in the government, parliament, local government, public enterprises, banking and in political parties.

These trends are similar to trends that have been observed in previous years: there are far more women who advocate greater participation for women in government, while among men there are more who advocate less participation for women. However, changes are clearly occurring: the percentage of people who think that there should be more women in positions of authority is growing; the percentage who think that women should make up one-half of the members in all bodies of au-

³ A survey by CBOS in 1993 on a random sample of 1087 respondents.

⁴ A survey by CBOS in 2000 on a random sample of 1010 respondents.

⁵ Asked about women's participation, in 1995, 40% of respondents indicated that there should be more women in the government, and in 2004, 54% thought so; in 2004, 52% favoured more women's participation in Parliament and 52% in local government; in 2000 44% favoured more women's participation in public administration, while this figure was only 28% in 1995; in 2004, 49% favoured more women's participation in political parties, compared to a figure of 26% in 1995; in 2000, 42% of people favoured increased participation of women in industrial enterprises as opposed to 22% in 1995; and increased participation of women in the judiciary was favoured by 39% in 2000, up from 25% in 1995. From a CBOS survey in 1995 on a random sample of 1230, in 2000 on a random sample of 1010, and in 2004 on a random sample of 1002.

⁶ Asked whether there should be more women in the government, in 2004 60% of women agreed and 46% of men; for Parliament the figures were 59% of women and 44% of men; for local government the figures were 61% of women and 43% of men; in top positions in political parties the figures were 56% of women and 42% of men; in boards of industrial enterprises (in 2000) the figures were 52% of women and 32% of men; and in banking (in 2000) the figures were 53% of women and 37% of men. See note 5 for the source of the data.

thority is also growing; and the number of people who declare themselves in favour of only very limited participation for women (10% or less) in government is decreasing.

Women and men also differ in their opinions on whether the membership of women in bodies of authority has an effect on how seriously women's problems are dealt with and solved in accordance with women's interests, although in both groups there is a considerable number of people who think that the gender of a public official influences the way in which issues important to women are settled. In 2000, 33% of men and 46% of women (see footnote 2) held this opinion. The view that it is necessary that women themselves participate in governing bodies in order for problems important to women to be addressed properly is more common among people with higher education, people who live in larger towns or cities, management strata, the intelligentsia, people with higher salaries, and people with centrist political views.

In 1999 CBOS polled a random sample of 1090 respondents about the debate in the Sejm over the status of women in Poland. Respondents were asked to assess whether they considered it an important subject or not. The results convincingly indicate that the absolute majority of society considers the subject of this debate to be important, as although slightly more women (78%) view the subject as important, 70% of men also expressed the view that it as a very important or quite important subject.

However, the differences continue to grow between reality in Polish society and the model accepted by Poles – and especially by Polish women – in this sphere. While the overwhelming majority of Poles consider the situation of women in Poland to be an important or a very important subject, it is a subject that nonetheless is very rarely taken up. In fact, the issue is only raised when it is 'forced' on parliament in the form of an MPs' bill and when it is therefore impossible to avoid the debate. MPs' statements about the situation of women show that their opinions have diverged from those of society in general. The number of men and women who subscribe to the idea of a high proportion of women in governing bodies is growing, but there are neither more women in these bodies nor more MPs who acknowledge the importance of equal opportunities for men and women and equal representation [Fuszara 2002].

The results of public opinion polls indicate that the inequality of men and women in the labour market is another fact that society is increasingly coming to acknowledge. Polls show that women in Poland are aware of discrimination in the labour market and that in recent years this awareness has become more widespread. The majority of women and men believe that women have less of a chance than men of finding a job, getting a higher salary, being promoted to an executive position, or establishing a successful professional career for themselves.⁷

⁷ In 2000, 73% of women and 62% of men indicated they felt that women have fewer chances of finding a job; 76% of women indicated that women have less of a chance of getting a higher salary; 72% of women and 63% of men felt women have fewer chances of being promoted

In recent years the awareness of unequal opportunities in the labour market has become considerably more widespread in society and the percentage of people who are aware that a woman has fewer opportunities than a man to establish a successful professional career or occupy an executive post have grown. The higher the education level of the respondents, the more they perceive the existence of gender inequality. An awareness of inequality is associated more with education levels and a related understanding of social reality than it is with individual experience, and this is also evident in the fact that it is poorly educated women who are more seriously affected by both the threat of losing their job and by the difficulties in finding new employment, while the awareness of inequality is greater among the better educated.

People were also polled about the reasons behind the inequality of opportunities for men and women. In response women primarily cited the fact that women are burdened more by family commitments (55%). However, in the 1990s more and more women began to directly point to the discrimination of women by employers as the reason behind the poorer chances women have in the field of professional activity.⁸ At the same time the overwhelming majority of women (71%) are convinced that society holds a professionally active woman in greater esteem than an unemployed woman, while a very small percentage (2%) believe that a woman-housewife is viewed with respect [Fuszara 2002].

One response to this and other problems has been for women to organise themselves into groups. In Poland, women's groups have tended to emerge in spheres where women's issues have been identified and defined. The low level of women's participation in power was inherited from the communist period. But after 1989 the proportion of women in Parliament decreased even further. In reaction to this situation, initiatives and organisations have emerged with the aim of increasing women's participation. Also, the gap between men's wages and women's wages grew significantly after 1989, and the situation was compounded by the rise of a new problem that affected women to a greater extent than men – unemployment. In response to these problems, a number of organisations and initiatives emerged that act on behalf of professionally active women.

There have also been responses to other issues. A change to the legal code, which seriously restricted access to abortion, led to the emergence of groups that provide guidance in family planning and birth control. The initiation of a public discussion of violence against women gave rise to the first guidance and consultation centres focusing on this issue and to the establishment of shelters for women and children who fall victim to domestic violence. Finally, in response to the fact that old legal provisions have been shown to disadvantage women in the new socio-economic situation, some centres have been set up to deal specifically with the legal issues of women.

to an executive post; and 68% of women and 52% of men felt women have fewer chances of building a successful professional career. (See footnote 2 for information on the sample.)

⁸ In 1993, in a CBOS survey of a random sample of 1087 women this reason was indicated by 20% of women, and in 1996, in a CBOS survey of a random sample of 1101 women it by 26%.

The women's movement in Poland before and during the communist era

An aspect peculiar to the women's movement in Poland from the time of its very origin in the 19th century was its connection with the struggle for independence. That was the struggle of prime importance in Poland at the time, and no group, including the women's movement, could avoid taking up a position on it. The first organised group that aimed at improving the position and education of women were the 'Enthusiasts', the best known member of which was Narcyza Żmichowska. The group operated in Warsaw in 1840–1850. The Enthusiasts were engaged in the underground struggle for independence and were consequently also subjected to political oppression. Most of the activists were imprisoned and exiled by the Russian authorities, which ultimately led to the termination of the group's activities [Fuszara 2003].

It was nonetheless in the 19th century that the first signs of progress towards equal rights for women were witnessed. It was then that the first women's congresses were held (in Lvov in 1894, in Zakopane in 1899, and in Krakow in 1900 and 1905) to discuss the role and tasks of women, and this was followed in 1907 by the founding of the Polish Society for Equal Rights for Women, which among its goals also struggled to achieve women's suffrage. When Poland gained independence in 1918 women were accorded the same voting rights and eligibility as men.

Over eighty different women's organisations were established in Poland in the years between the First and Second World Wars. There were a variety of types, from professional groups to religious organisations. In addition, many women's journals and books intended for female readers were published. Women had their own Parliamentary Society, and there were women's funds and scholarships and women's clubs, like the Peasant Women's Clubs organised by the Farmer's Society.

The situation changed radically after the Second World War. The communist government abolished many of the non-governmental organisations that existed at the time. Foundations, for example, were abolished in 1952 (re-allowed in 1984). Some types of organisations disappeared completely, while others were altered and controlled by communist authorities (e.g. the Polish Scouts). The grassroots women's movement was supplanted by institutions imposed from without. 'Equal rights for women' became one of the slogans of the new socio-political system, and a single mass women's organisation called the Women's League was set up in 1945, the aims of which were to promote women's professional work, to organise assistance in everyday life, and educational activities. The League's first organisational code and its ideological declaration spoke of the essential role of Polish women in society in order to fulfil the tasks of the Party and the government. At the First Congress of the Women's League in 1951 it set as its goal to get millions of women involved in the League's activities. At the fore of the League's programme was the struggle for peace and the role of women in contributing to the fulfilment of the six-year economic plan. An increase in women's employment was planned as a means to achieve the latter aim: women were to make up one-third of all employees by the end of the six-year

period. The Second Congress of the Women's League was held after the democratic changes of 1956. Congress participants stressed the need to change the principles behind the League's existence: as opposed to its prior role as a political organisation carrying out Party instructions, it was to become a genuine women's organisation striving to address and resolve women's issues. The Women's League was established by the authorities as the only women's union, and it came into being without the involvement of women themselves. Like many other organisations set up in those times by the new political authorities, it was treated as a part of imposed rule and failed to promote the interests of the group it was originally intended to represent. Such organisations could hope for no social backing whatsoever. This was even reflected in statements made by Women's League activists at the League's Extraordinary Congress in 1981, when democratisation began to set in following the founding of Solidarity in 1980. Their speeches contained formulations like: 'the corset they once laced us with continues to disable us', 'why are we so weak and helpless', and 'democracy is impossible without the women's involvement' [Ratman-Liwerska 1993: 124].

Like many other social movements, the first women's grassroots groups began organising themselves in Poland in 1980–81 during the early years of Solidarity. And as in the case of the political developments in the 19th century, the breaks were put on this progress, too, when martial law was imposed in Poland in December 1981, and once again the main preoccupation became the struggle for independence, a national experience shared by both men and women alike.

In many respects 1989 was the beginning of a new era. Gender inequality was one of the new 'discoveries' in the newly emerging democratic society. But it should be noted that there was a great deal of inequality before 1989: women's wages were lower than those of men, they occupied very few managerial positions, they were absent from the political scene, and they never occupied positions of political power. But these inequalities were never discussed during the communist era.

Women's movements in contemporary Poland

In 1989, among the many other things that were going on, a proposed act on abortion was submitted to the Sejm for debate. The most interesting effect of this act was how it served to stimulate the activity of women's groups and efforts to articulate women's needs and to set up women's organisations. This trend is interesting because it was initiated 'from below' instead of being imposed on the women from above. Some of the events that were organised as part of the campaign against the proposed act gave rise to more permanent movements aimed at representing women's interests.⁹ Since the 1990s more than 300 women's organisations and initiatives have come into ex-

⁹ This is why the author's first article on women in Poland is titled 'Will the Abortion Issue Give Birth to Feminism in Poland?'

istence in Poland and are listed in a directory of such organisations.¹⁰ Among them are associations, federations, clubs, foundations, charity organisations, religious-based groups, groups within political parties and trade unions, and women's studies centres.

The situation of non-governmental women's organisations in Poland is somewhat complicated, as there are clear differences between these organisations. One crucial distinction is between those women's groups that are linked to the Catholic Church and the other, less traditional and more feminist organisations. But the main difference is in the stance on the issue of abortion, the issue of the family model, and particularly on the roles played by women in the family unit. These differences already became apparent when the reports were being prepared for the 1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing. As a result, two shadow reports were drafted in the Polish NGO sector: one was drafted by the 'Beijing Committee', appointed by representatives of various women's organisations, and the second by *Federacja Ruchów Obrony Życia*, a federation of 'pro-life' type organisations that also refer to themselves as women's organisations.

The government co-operated with and financially supported women's projects after the Beijing conference in 1995 up until 1997. After the 1997 elections a coalition government was formed out of the *Unia Wolności* (Union of Freedom) and *Akcja Wyborcza Solidarność* (Solidarnosc Electoral Action). The change in cabinet also led to changes in relation to women's issues and to women's NGOs, as the new government that was formed in 1997 primarily supported NGOs close to the Catholic Church. In 2002, when the Plenipotentiary for the Equality of Women and Men was established, the government again began to support women's organisations.

The feminist movement

Within the scope of a short article it is of course impossible to thoroughly discuss the entire mass of women's groups,¹¹ movements and initiatives that have emerged in Poland in recent years. It would also be difficult to describe them in general terms. But it is this very diversity that is one of the biggest advantages of women's movements in Poland today. This diverse group includes feminist, professional, and

¹⁰ 'In Poland recently 36,000 associations and more than 5000 foundations are registered. [...] In 48% organizations membership is mostly male, in 18% mostly female and in 30% both genders are equally represented. In boards of 28% no women is present and in 4.5% no men. In 66% of organizations boards are dominated by male, in 21% by female, and in 13% there is gender balance on the boards.' [Kurczewski et al. 2003: 45-46].

¹¹ In Poland there are over 300 women's organisations, but OSKA (The National Women's Information Centre) estimates that about 200 are actually active women's organisations. However, it should be noted that organisations connected with the Catholic Church are unwilling to co-operate with OSKA and others women's organisations, and consequently there is no information at all on many of them in the list of women's organisations.

religious movements, sections of political parties or groups formed at universities, and local Polish branches of international women's groups, but it would be possible to describe them more specifically according to their aims and types of activity. For example, among them there are many movements and organisations that deal with the issue of women in the professional sphere, and their main focus is providing assistance at two extremes of the employment spectrum: unemployed women, and women who set up or run their own, private business. Another type of organisations work with abused women and single mothers, and yet another type is engaged in promoting women's rights. Particularly numerous among the latter are organisations that defend reproductive rights, and many of them emerged in response to the tightening of regulations surrounding abortion. Another type of organisation and initiative focuses on women's participation in public life and especially on increasing the proportion of women in institutions, organisations, and power structures. Finally, there are some organisations and initiatives whose aim is to radically change the status of women in society, and they work towards this aim through a great variety of sub-aims and differentiated forms of activity.

In 2002–2003 many of the women's NGOs in Poland became engaged in various activities related to the country's accession to the European Union, and many of the activities related to women's rights in the European Union and the legal changes resulting from Poland's accession to the EU, though some of the activities targeting women were also organised by other NGOs. Interviews conducted with representatives of 30 NGOs¹² involved in such activities indicated that most of the activities organised were information campaigns and training courses for women on women's rights, explaining the operations of EU institutions and how to use EU funds, and, before the elections to the European Parliament, campaigns promoting the election of women candidates. Some activities were conducted on a national scale, others regionally, and others at the international level. There are two main reasons why there were so many initiatives: many women's NGOs have long been active in Poland, and activities of this type were financially supported by different sources both domestic and foreign.

The organisation most involved in informing the public about EU legal standards relating to women was the Women's Rights Centre, which prepared a publication containing EU regulations and tribunal rulings and with comments by Polish scholars. Similar initiatives were also organised by the National Women's Information Centre 'Ośka'. They published *Niezbędnik Europejski dla kobiet* (A Women's Guide to Europe), which is a small gadget-like brochure containing basic information about the position of women in the European Union, how the situation of Polish women would change after accession to the EU, and what the EU has to offer women. Some initiatives of this type were much narrower and local in nature.

¹² These interviews were conducted as part of the project 'Constructing a Supranational Political Space: The European Union, Eastern Enlargement and Women's Agency' with the support of grant no. BCS – 0137954, National Science Foundation, project co-ordinator: Prof. Janina Regulaska, Rutgers University, project co-ordinator in Poland: Prof. Małgorzata Fuszara, University of Warsaw

Women's NGOs closely co-operate with the Government Plenipotentiary for the Equality of Women and Men and with Voivod's' plenipotentiaries for equality. NGOs work with the government in implementing the government programme for women; they are able to comment on drafts of legal acts relating to women's issues. These organisations also act as mediators of information, including information on the European Union. Representatives of NGOs are able to participate in various seminars, workshops, and training courses organised by the Plenipotentiary for the Equality of Women and Men and by the Parliamentary Group of Women, and they then organise seminars, workshops and training courses of their own for other women. Although NGOs closely co-operate with the Plenipotentiary for Equality, there is rarely any regular co-operation between them and other ministries. Women's organisations, however, have tried to initiate such co-operation, and sometimes with success.

Another criterion for distinguish between organisations is the degree to which they are formally organised. It is worth remembering that discussions about whether to formalise activities have accompanied the part of the women's movement that is identified with feminism from the outset of the democratic transformation. The feminist movement, which by its very nature acts either in opposition to or outside patriarchal structures, has always found it difficult for various reasons, most often pragmatic, to consent to the requirement that it start operating in a formalised manner. Over time groups have emerged that refused to formalise their activities (for example, anarchist-feminist groups, or even the women's organisation *Kobiet też* ('Women Too'), which operated for several years). Some of the non-formalised and dynamically active groups are groups that were created ad hoc – most often for the purpose of organising some kind of event or campaign (e.g. the March 8th demonstrations) and frequently they are groups that were created by people active in women's and feminist groups. Formalised movements are in frequent and regular contact with formalised groups active in other countries, but some non-formalised groups (for example anarchists) also have very close and extensive international contacts. Non-formalised groups that form for the purpose of a specific campaign are an exception, and they tend to be variable and flexible, while their international associations exist more on the level of individuals than groups.

Some of the women's organisations¹³ that warrant mention are: the Polish Feminist Association – Women's Centre (PSF), which was the first new women's organisation in Poland and began functioning in Warsaw in 1980 in Warsaw, and eFKA Women's Foundation, set up in 1990 in Krakow. The Federation for Women and Family Planning, established in 1991 by different women's groups, is an interesting example of the federation type of organisation. The Centre for the Promotion of Women has been operating as an independent foundation since 1993. The Centre for Women's Rights was founded in 1994. La Strada Foundation against Trafficking

¹³ For more information on these organisations see their websites: www.oska.org.pl; www.efka.org.pl; www.kobiety.pl; www.federa.org.pl; www.rodzicpoludzku.pl; www.free.ngo.pl/temida; www.promocjakobiet.pl; www.free.ngo.pl/lastrada; www.dukgd.republika.pl

in Women has been operating in Poland since 1996. Ośka – The National Women's Information Centre – was founded in 1996. There are also business organisations like the Polish Association of Women Entrepreneurs, founded in June 1998. Some women's organisations are connected to political parties, for instance the Democratic Women's Union (DUK) founded in 1990, which has close ties to the Democratic Left Alliance. Among the organisations established earlier, under the previous regime, the Women's League and the Peasant Women's Clubs are still active.

Organisations that co-operate at the international level have more complex organisational structures. Probably the best example of inter-regional co-operation among women's groups is the Karat Coalition (Coalition for Gender Equality), the roots of which date back to the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995), when a number of women from NGOs in Central and Eastern Europe decided to form a coalition to advocate for the regionally specific needs of women. Karat was formally established in 1997 in Warsaw, and in 2001 it was registered as an international organisation. Karat receives the financial and moral support of UNIFEM.

Describing itself as 'a regional coalition of organisations and individuals that works to ensure gender equality in the Central & Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States countries, monitors the implementation of international agreements and lobbies for the needs and concerns of women in the Region at all levels of decision-making' (www.karat.org), Karat is comprised of NGOs from twenty countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Albania, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Georgia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovakia, Ukraine). Its main activities are advocacy at the national, regional and international levels, organising regional and international conferences, participating in conferences organised by the United Nations and in the preparation of UN documents, fundraising for regional projects, publications related to Karat projects, networking and information sharing (mailing lists), and publishing the magazine 'Fair Play'.

An interesting example of broadly based co-operation between women is the Network of East West Women – Polska (NEWW–Poland). This is an independent Polish association that shares the same mission and goals as the Network of East-West Women (NEWW) based in the United States. When NEWW was founded in the United States in 1990 its main goal was to support new women's organisations in Central and Eastern Europe, and it currently connects about 2500 women from 30 countries, across national and regional boundaries, to share resources, knowledge and skills. The majority of NEWW – Poland's current projects are related to gender and economic justice. It also offers legal counselling for women who are victims of violence and acts as the local partner for NEWW fellowship programmes (fellowships especially for women lawyers and economists) and annual conferences and meetings. NEWW–Poland is also part of the Pre-Election Polish Women's Coalition, and it recently translated the book *Our Bodies Ourselves*.

It is much more difficult to characterise the non-formalised groups that can be ranked among new social movements.¹⁴ New social movements are fluid in charac-

ter, open, inclusive, non-doctrinal and non-ideological. They typically lack formal membership and programmes and are not formally organised, they do not differentiate between the positions of individual members, they organise events rather than everyday activities, and they are socio-cultural, innovative, and discontinuous in character. In Poland this type of movement is becoming more and more popular, even if the particular groups are not as well known as traditional organisations. The best known such group is *Ulica Siostrzana* (Sisterly Street), an informal group that was set up at the beginning of 2001 by various women's organisations. Its purpose is a kind of 'de-elitism' of the feminist movement, removing the barriers between feminists and other women and appealing to a broad base of women, including women otherwise marginalised (e.g. mothers with young children, women from small urban and rural centres, etc.) from the mass women's movement in Poland. *Ulica Siostrzana* organises summer workshops every year.

Kręgi Kobiet (Women's Circles) are a difficult kind of group to characterise, as they are more than just a form of support or a self-development group, even though they do fulfil such functions. Women meet regularly as part of these groups, and most of the groups create and maintain their own women's rituals. Particularly important for participants in women's circles is the rebuilding of lost bonds between women – both close and distant in space and time. Most attention is therefore devoted to uncovering and sharing women's stories – their own and those of past participants – and especially in relation to women's spirituality.

Informal anarchist feminist groups also exist in Poland and often are associated with the alternative music scene. One of the first groups was the now defunct Women Against Discrimination and Violence (WAD), which brought together those active in the Polish alternative movement. Some of them created groups that continue to exist, such as *Emancypunx* and *Wiedźma* (Witch). These groups are usually fairly small, but their members tend to be bound by strong ties of friendship.

Institutionalised groups also vary. Some of them have a simple structure, others form federations, and there are even some organisations that have obtained advisor or observer status at international institutions. The latter monitor official state activity and 'supplement' it in areas overseen by state administration. They are organised as traditional social movements, and the benefit of being so is that they have the possibility of gaining an impact on administration, state policy, and the shape of legislation. But this comes at a price – a problem frequently mentioned in the case of institutionalised organisations, with their somewhat rigid structure, established by income sources – which is that they have a tendency to come to resemble state institutions. The activity that such organisations engage in mainly involves exerting pressure on state administration, working with it in its activities, and offering individual advice, etc. Conversely, the non-registered, non-institutionalised groups that are often created for the purpose of some specific 'event' or campaign do not have a direct impact on the activity of state institutions. By creating

¹⁴ www.emancypunx.prv.pl; www.wiedzma.w.pl; www.alter.most.org.pl/kurwa

'events' though, they are often better able to achieve their objectives or have a greater impact than the organisations that play an official kind of 'game' (often based on co-operation or on total criticism) with the system of state institutions. Ad hoc groups organising 'events' achieve above all else a significant impact on awareness, as they are capable of gaining a strong media presence and obtaining much wider publicity than traditionally active organisations.

The next criteria that warrant attention in describing the diversity of women's movements and women's organisations relate to activity strategy. Among the various strategies employed by feminist movements around the world, the one probably most frequently encountered in Poland is the 'equality strategy', which is associated with the traditional and early women's emancipation movement and ranks among the movements defined as liberal feminism. In turn, liberal feminism belongs to the branch of feminism defined as 'feminism of similarity', according to which the differences between women and men are largely social constructs, and women and men are in reality more similar to one other than they are different. The equality strategy aims mainly at establishing social and legal equality for both sexes. It is worth noting that at present it is this very strategy that is frequently applied in the activities of supra-national structures, such as the European Union or the Council of Europe. The equality strategy is therefore a feature common to many women's organisations in Poland, which unites them with organisations active on a geographically wider scale. It is worth noting, however, that the very notion of 'equality' and 'equal rights' has been evolving over the last few years: while once this was understood as granting identical rights, at present it is frequently acknowledged that the 'application of the same [rule] for different people' may actually lead to inequality. The understanding of equal rights as identical rights is being supplanted by an effort to achieve equal opportunities.

Conversely, groups that subscribe to a feminism¹⁵ of difference may apply other strategies. Without explaining this feminist position in detail here, it must be born in mind that advocates of feminism of difference set out from the premise that there are certain primary differences between women and men. This differentiation has not, in their opinion, been taken into consideration in the patriarchal world, which was constructed from the perspective of men's values, norms and needs. A transformation must occur, based on rebuilding the world in a manner that takes into consideration the needs and norms that are important to women. This outlook contains the considerably far-reaching vision of 'rebuilding' the world. It does not mean women are to be 'even' with men, but rather that culture is to be built with a view to what is 'feminine' and what is 'male', and take both into consideration. Although most contemporary, active feminist groups include among their overall ob-

¹⁵ In this article there is no need to take into consideration the more complex divisions within feminism in terms of its various kinds or factions. The Polish feminist movement is too thin for such distinctions to play an important role; the only division applied here is therefore the distinction between feminism of similarity and feminism of difference.

jectives such a requirement, that the world be rebuilt, they rarely make precise references in their activity strategies to the difference between the sexes, and they rarely emphasise difference or demand that this be taken into consideration. Polish groups that rank among advocates of a feminism of difference include the groups that organise 'done-paid' campaigns, whose objectives are to compensate women for the household work they perform. To this end the groups also try to restructure the way people think about and define what work is, so that the work that women have performed for wages without pay, unnoticed, or not defined as work, is taken into consideration for compensation.

The image of the Polish women's movement is not yet particularly extensive. It nonetheless comprises various perspectives. The Polish women's movement is viewed, described and evaluated by Polish women scholars slightly differently than it is presented by scholars looking at it from the 'outside'. In her analysis of the women's movement in Poland Gesine Fuchs [2003] pointed out that it frequently makes reference to the concepts of 'rights', the law and equality before the law, and European law. This would therefore situate it within the branch of liberal feminism. In Fuchs' opinion, the stress on rights and the law makes the Polish women's movement different from the women's movements in other countries. It should moreover be noted that people active in the Polish women's movement have discovered that the concept of rights and references to the law (including EU law) are the only arguments that politicians have difficulty undermining, ignoring or negating the importance of. What is interesting is that in analyses conducted by Polish men and women scholars, Fuchs' observation does not appear. This is even more significant in that a comparison of women's movements and the strategies and arguments they apply in Scandinavia and post-communist Baltic countries shows that in post-communist countries arguments referring to rights, and especially to individual entitlements, are still not accepted. Although it appears that these arguments are not yet accepted in Poland either, especially wherever the individual entitlements of women clash with the expectations that women perform and fulfil various family duties, group pressure for women's rights can sometimes open the door to further debate on the rights and entitlements of women.

Another key and distinctive factor distinguishing that distinguishes between women's groups is whether or not they are connected to the Catholic Church or to other, less traditional, more feminist organisations. Groups do not co-operate across this dividing line. But pro-life organisations in Poland also often refer to themselves as 'women's organisations'. Some of their activities will be described below.

Catholic women's NGOs in Poland

The main goal of some of the Catholic women's NGOs described below is to unite Catholic women, and some concentrate on supporting activity on behalf of women, practising the commandments of their faith. In others the prevailing feature in com-

mon is their 'environmental' character, assembling representatives of feminised occupations or former students from girls schools under the auspices of the Catholic Church. In the spirit of the Catholic Church, the programmes of the organisations mentioned below view women in the context of the family, and as a result the goals and actions these organisations set out are first and foremost pro-family and only then pro-feminine.

It must be noted, however, that organisations with a religious background often work for the preservation of the status quo, and not towards change, and some arise directly in response to pro-change movements. Therefore, according to some definitions of women's and social movements they are not really a part of the women's movement [Dahlerup 1986].

The first association to emerge since the Second World War with a truly nation-wide membership base that aimed at bringing together Catholic women throughout the country was the Polish Association of Catholic Women (PACW), created in 1990. The activity of the PACW can be viewed on three levels: formative (collective participation in religious rituals, lectures and discussions on religious subjects, organising pilgrimages); social (educational and informational activities, including religious instruction, preparation for family life, and guidance in methods of natural family planning); charitable (offering support for people in difficult living conditions). Some of the other Catholic women's organisations are federative. One such example is the Assembly of Polish Women (APW) - 'Woman in the Contemporary World', an assembly of Polish women that was founded in 1996. The basis for the assembly's activity is the Catholic Church, papal teachings and the Charter of Family's Rights, and its goal is to provide information and strengthen a positive view among women about their femininity and motherhood, encourage their acceptance of the concept of the complementary nature of men's and women's roles in the family and their willingness to fulfil the commandment of caring for other human beings.

One important task that some Catholic women's organisations fulfil is providing assistance to single mothers; for example, the Single Mother's Aid Foundation, established in 1990. The organisation runs educational programmes for mothers and support groups and meetings and supports the establishment, renovation and maintenance of single mother aid hostels and short-term shelters [Petrowa-Wasilewicz 2000; Lopez-Resterpo 1997].

Conclusion

In a survey conducted on a random sample of respondents in 1998 more than one-half of all men and women indicated they felt that 'nowadays in Poland women have the kind of problems that they should undertake to solve through collective effort', and nearly one-quarter denied the existence of any collective problems. Women more often than men feel that problems of this kind do exist, while men more often

deny their existence. Among women, views on women's interests are closely connected to education levels – the higher the education, the greater the percentage of women who perceive the existence of collective women's interests and the smaller the percentage of those who deny it. The situation is different among men. In general they less often recognise the existence of women's group interests, and this refers especially – which may seem surprising – to men with higher education.

What women's problems do people mention? In the survey abortion turned out to be problem number one (it was mentioned by 50% of respondents); next (much less often) they indicated equal rights and professional activity. But women also differ from men in terms of the problems they identify and consider important for women and associate with women's interests. They cited social and welfare issues twice as often as men, specifically mentioning childcare assistance (day-care for infants and nursery schools for small children), the protection of single women and single mothers, the problems faced by families with many children, family planning, and health (oncological problems). They also mentioned twice as often as men the need to solve problems of violence against women and children and the problem of alcoholism among husbands.

However, such statements are in general rarely related to any action or even willingness to be active on the part of women in general. Only one-half of the women surveyed who mentioned some problem as a women's problem were prepared to engage in any activity in order to solve that problem, and even fewer had ever done so. The reason for this is probably the character of women's identities. The majority identify with the role of a woman within a heterosexual marriage, and this constitutes a very specific obstacle for the development of women's solidarity. The existence of women's solidarity, distinct from familial and matrimonial solidarity, is perceived as contrary to the interests of the institution of marriage. The position and importance of a woman in the private sphere leaves no 'psychological room' for women to undertake any broadly based activity, which would necessarily be in opposition to patriarchal institutions and culture [Titkow 2000].

To conclude it is worth returning to the question of how to describe the Polish women's movement, and whether it bears the traits of a traditional or a new social movement. Women's movements in Poland often appear to be operating in a situation that resembles the Western or American women's movements during a period of a political turn to the right. The questioning of women's rights during the Reagan era in the United States is similar to the impairment of rights in Poland after 1989. Also, governments generally tend to use similar strategies: either they refrain from appointing women to high offices, or they prefer women who rise up the ladder in the world of men and see no need to effectuate changes that would benefit women [Sapiro 1986].

Women's movements in Poland emerged after communism in circumstances that meant women were forced to face new problems along with women's problems that had been concealed to that point and suddenly began to surface, and all this coincided with rise of rightwing ideologies promoting a traditional definition of the

role of women and their sphere of activity. The women's movements that emerged in this specific situation seem to have more in common with the traditional than the new social and women's movements. Their ideology is one of equality rather than liberation, and they often refer to the rights of women. As such the Polish women's movement shares many of the traits typical for the early women's movement. But this does not mean that it lacks all the traits of new movements. Although the women's movement is based on and revolves around registered institutions, its actual scope is much broader than the mere formal membership of organisations. Women who are active in such organisations are more susceptible to attempts to manipulate them and to use the movement for someone's private purposes. Therefore, many organisations emerge spontaneously, with a limited degree of differentiation between members' positions, which is a feature characteristic of new social movements. The diversity of movements and their fear of being manipulated leads to a reluctance to form more broadly based structures. However, they do unite for a common aim whenever the need arises and the aim is considered important by many organisations. Although women's movements strive to influence existing structures in an organised manner and thus tend to adhere to the rules of the game, which is a trait shared by traditional women's movements in many countries [Dahlerup 1986], they sometimes also resort to action that is inconsistent with those rules. What unites them is the emphasis on women's participation in the agencies of power and the stress on equal rights. On the other hand, Polish women's movements are similar to the movements in other countries in the West and especially in the United States with regards to the recurring issue of and struggle for freedom of procreation, including abortion, and the constant need to contend with rightwing advocates of reducing the field of activities open to women and establishing a traditional definition of the role of women in society.

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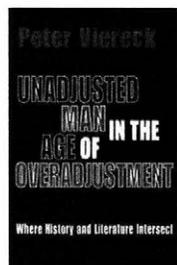
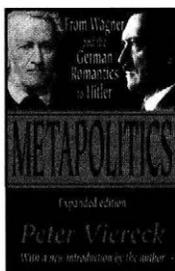
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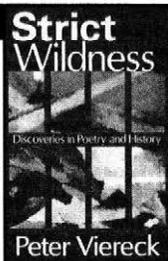
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