

THE PERPLEXITIES OF THE STRUGGLE WITH EXCLUSION. ON THE IDEOLOGICAL FORMS OF UNDERSTANDING GENDER

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The history of the idea of feminism shows a constant struggle between the fruits of theoretical analysis of the question of femininity or gender, and the ways for it to be implemented politically as well as the sudden changes in their social reception. The difficulty does not arise in this merely from the opposition of conservative thought to the progressive, or from the variety in attitudes current within feminism itself, but from the quality of thinking tout court. In transferring from reflection into the social functioning of the idea of 'gender' to the philosophical formulation of the discourse on the exclusion issue, I would like to follow changes in the meaning of 'gender' in the context of its ideological aspects in those theories which utilise the concept of 'gender'. Starting from the perspective of genderism, the understanding of which is strongly embroiled in a linguistic and geopolitical context, through gender politics – maneuvering between equality and difference, through to the very dialectics of thought, not simply about gender identity, driving the mechanism of exclusion, with which contemporaneity endeavours to fight.

Key words: discourse, gender, genderism, ideology

Despite the age-old effort to resolve the relationship between experience and reflection, fact and idea, belief and truth, the problem of the interconnection between being and knowing still stands as a challenge to the modern thinker.¹

Louis Writh

INTRODUCTION: GENDER CONTROVERSIES

Before the term 'gender' founds its place within a public forum and became an integral part of equality politics, feminism – both as an idea as much as in its political postulates – passed through several levels of social controversy. The call for universal

¹ Louis Writh, 'Preface', in Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia. An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954), xxix.

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suffrage during the course of the first few decades of the historic activities of women's movements was perceived as subversive and scandalous. Women themselves were unable to believe that they could strive for such a 'naturally' male privilege, while those who challenged this view were considered to be radical.² Women who wanted to vote, work, educate themselves or appear publicly were still a curiosity at the beginning of the twentieth century. For many of them – such as Emmeline Pankhurst, the British women's rights activist, imprisoned on numerous occasions, or for the leaders of the German women's movement forced to leave the country Anita Augsborg and Lida Gustava Heymann – it was to have tragic consequences.

The concerted and violent resistance against social changes in the field of gender originated first and foremost from the threat to the extant system of privileges. Millicent Garrett Fawcett, the leader of the British campaign for women's suffrage, rightly observed in 1913 that the women's movement 'affects more people than any former reform movement, for it spreads over the whole world. It is more deep-seated, for it enters into the home and modifies the personal character.'³ Changes concerning social models of gender reach back to the rudiments of culture, influencing all of its areas: economic, political, social, identity, and also the metaphysical. Nevertheless, one can observe that from the time of the uttering these words not much in this matter has actually changed. Feminism has heavily influenced social policy and consciousness, but the opposition of many spheres of society against total freedom in the understanding of gender is still a present phenomenon.

Of significance within the process of the public's acquaintance with subsequent stages in the controversy around gender is the constant tension between theoretically conceived ideas and social practice. This tension appears to be a problem for all socially engaged thought. The specific place in the history of humanity – where theory meets practice – is ideology: a coherent worldview designed to be imitated within a social reality. Here the aforementioned tension between theory and practice is resolved through a bilateral compromise. Theory designates the limits of its own critical power, practice adapts action to established principles. This compromise is governed by the interest shared by both sides. Ideology is therefore a theoretically supported system of ideas – viewpoints, convictions and beliefs – directed towards the realisation of someone's interests.⁴

² See June Hannam, *Feminism*, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 49-82.

³ Millicent Garret Fawcett, *Introduction*, in Helena Swanwick, *The Future of the Women's Movement*, (London: G. Bell, 1913), xii, quoted in Karen M. Offen, *European Feminisms, 1700-1950: A Political History*, (Stanford University Press, 2000), 2.

⁴ Here I am not dealing with an etymological understanding of the term 'ideology' as the 'science of ideas/thinking' (Greek. *idea*: form + *logos*: denoting a discourse of compilation), or the initial – epistemological – use of this concept by Destutta de Tracy in 1796. I first and foremost relate to the contemporary, critical – and also colloquial – understanding of viewing ideology not only as

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The pejorative nature of the term 'ideology' is based first and foremost on the accusation of self-interest. In opposition to so-called 'pure theory', which at its core assumes notions and phenomena free of judgement, ideology – in representing the needs of a concrete social group – uses and amplifies selected judgements. It strives in this way to achieve concrete goals expressing a vision of society contained in its foundational system of convictions and utilises all means possible to exert influence on social reality. Access to mass media, public funds, infrastructure are all significant in the political process of bolstering a given set of ideas. As Michel Foucault has shown, the structure of *pouvoir-savoir* constitutes the axis for the creation of civilisation, while the battle for the validity of one's own ideas is – at the same time – a struggle for power. To quote Karl Marx's well known words: 'The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas,'⁵ meaning that the viewpoint with political and economic power standing behind it is the only 'true' worldview, the one with the privilege to mould social reality at its disposal.

The ideologization of concepts about gender is still an issue to which one should return. The history of the idea of feminism shows a constant struggle between the fruits of theoretical analysis of the question of femininity or gender, and the ways for it to be implemented politically as well as sudden changes in their social reception. The difficulty does not arise in this merely from the opposition of conservative thought to the progressive, or from the variety in attitudes current within feminism itself, but from the quality of thinking *tout court*. Such will be the trajectory of this text. In transferring from reflection into the social functioning of the idea of 'gender' to the philosophical formulation of the discourse on the exclusion issue, I would like to follow changes in the meaning of 'gender' in the context of its ideological aspects in those theories which utilise the concept of 'gender'. Starting from the perspective of genderism, the understanding of which is strongly embroiled in a linguistic and geopolitical context, through *gender politics* – maneuvering between equality and difference, through to the very dialectics of thought, not simply about gender identity, driving the mechanism of exclusion with which contemporaneity endeavours to fight.

a coherent set of ideas but as a collection of particularist moral valuations, evaluations and principles of behaviour with pretensions to the universal (see Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*). Subsequently I consider a return to a broader yet post-critical understanding of the concept of 'ideology' as a theory *tout court*.

⁵ Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, trans. Roy Pascal, (New York: International Publishers, 2004), 64.

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PERSPECTIVE 1: THE IDEOLOGY OF INTENDED EXCLUSION – GENDERISM

The category of gender refers to a series of norms, guidelines and duties resulting from their affiliation to a culturally established gender identity. These identifications are determined by a particular interpretation: what is gender and what it should be. If it is the stiff image of two sexes, 'gender' will not become a leading notion within the concept of emancipation but merely a source of sexual discrimination. If, additionally, such an approach constitutes an integral element of social stratification, where the beneficiaries of the system of privileges are gender-normative individuals, then oppression and exclusion will be the consistent experience of those not fitting the model.

Within the Anglo-American tradition, such a set of convictions is called genderism.⁶ Admittedly there is little academic literature on this term and one comes across various shades of meaning, though its chief traits may be fairly clearly defined. For example, Steven Onken defines genderism as 'the structural-cultural judgment that it is right and natural to divide people into two and only two mutually exclusive sexes.'⁷ Darryl Hill and Brian Willoughby provide a more exhaustive definition:

Genderism is an ideology that reinforces the negative evaluation of gender non-conformity or an incongruence between sex and gender. It is a cultural belief that perpetuates negative judgments of people who do not present as a stereotypical man or woman. Those who are genderist believe that people who do not conform to sociocultural expectations of gender are pathological. Similar to heterosexism, we propose that genderism is both a source of social oppression and psychological shame, such that it can be imposed on a person, but also that a person may internalize these beliefs⁸.

⁶ The first use of the term 'genderism' is ascribed to the well-known American sociologist: Erving Goffman, who compared this concept to a description of individual behavioural practices deemed male or female. See Erwin Goffman, 'The arrangement between the Sexes', *Theory and Society*, 4 (1977), 305. In the field of psychological research, Joan Beckwith uses the term 'genderism' interchangeably with 'sexism' in describing the experiences of transsexual and transgender persons. See Joan B. Beckwith, 'Terminology and Social Relevance in Psychological Research on Gender', *Social Behavior and Personality*, 22 (1994), 329-336.

⁷ Steven J. Onken, 'Conceptualizing Violence Against Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Intersexual, and Transgendered People', *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services* 8 (1998), 17, quoted in Liz Airton, 'Untangling "Gender Diversity". Genderism and its Discontents (i.e., Everyone)', in Shirley R. Steinberg, ed., *Diversity and Multiculturalism: A Reader*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 242. In this text Liz Airton presents various understandings of the definition of genderism appearing in humanistic and social theories, chiefly in the context of transphobia.

⁸ Darryl B. Hill, Brian L. B Willoughby, 'The development and validation of the genderism and transphobia scale', *Sex Roles*, 53 (2005), 534.

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Genderism is understood here as an ideology that lies at the basis of the excluding convictions connected with gender. This definition was based on psychological research conducted on non-gender-normative students grappling with genderism, which manifests itself not only in the form of an emotionally expressed disapproval, but also in verbal and temporal violence.⁹ Emilia Lombardi, in analysing the connection between genderism and transphobia, makes reference to social research: 'Cope and Darke identified specific beliefs concerning trans-people based in genderism: Biology is destiny. A person with a penis must be a man, and a person with a vagina must be a woman. Trans-people are confused, if not mentally ill. Trans-people are frauds.'¹⁰ As she sums up: 'genderism is defined as the ideology that people's physical sex and psychological, social, and legal genders are linked and binary, and that anything different from this condition is abnormal!'¹¹ One can see therefore that in relation to those whose gender identity is not consistent with their birth sex, genderism is an important source of negative self-identification.

However, it should be noted that genderism is not synonymous with transphobia, for it has a much wider scope. I agree entirely with Liz Airton, who writes:

Genderism is more pervasively manifested as the fearful anticipation of non-conformity and any incongruence between biological sex, and the way these are lived and expressed through gender. In this way, genderism does not only characterize instances of injustice against gender non-conforming people; genderism shapes and scaffolds the ways in which everyone – whether trans, non-trans, gender non-conforming, gender-conforming, us, them, you or me – is socialized to be of one 'recognizable' gender, however this is locally understood¹².

Originally genderism functioned as a designation referring to the oppressive context connected with the legitimization of the gender binary as the only appropriate option for social life, as an ideology based on categories of gender, traditionally and conservatively understood. Yet at present, the word is used by certain groups in a pejorative, but completely different context.

⁹ See also Brent Laurence Bilodeau, *Genderism: Transgender Students, Binary Systems and Higher Education*, (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag), 2009.

¹⁰ A Cope, J. Darke, *Trans accessibility project. Making Women's Shelters Accessible to Transgender Women* (Canada: Violence and Violence Intervention and Education Workgroup, Ontario, 1999), quoted in Emilia Lombardi, *Public Health and Trans-People: Barriers to Care and Strategies to Improve Treatment*, in Ilan H. Meyer and Mary E. Northridge, eds., *The Health of Sexual Minorities. Public Health Perspectives on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Populations*, (New York: Springer, 2007), 639.

¹¹ Lombardi, *Public Health and Trans-People*.

¹² Airton, 'Untangling "Gender Diversity"', 230.

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For example, the views propagated by radical feminism, laying far outside mainstream, informally called Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminism (TERF),¹³ bases its vision of sex on genetic determinism. Within this perspective a real woman is one who was born with a vagina and with a pair of XX chromosomes. The idea of gender as a socially constructed model of sex, which determines gender identification, is decisively rejected by this splinter group of feminism, while transgender individuals are defined – pejoratively – as genderists. The term ‘genderism’ is therefore used *à rebours*: negatively evaluating not the stiffened binary opposition of gender – as a cultural stereotype – but gender dissemination as a theoretical fabrication. In May 2014 in Portland, Oregon a conference was organised around the slogan ‘Radfems Respond’, at which the panelists argued that transgender women should be treated as men, should not have access to areas designated for women such as public toilets, or take part in events organised exclusively for women. The view of feminists who hold this outlook is that a man – even if he decides to live as a woman – preserves his male social privilege. The very fact that a choice can be made, confirms this privilege. From this perspective transsexualism is genderism and a present day camouflaged anti-feminism.¹⁴

A similarly inverted use of the term ‘genderism’ exists in the case of the Polish public debate in 2013–2014 – although with other motives than in the case of TERF, because it aims to maintain traditional gender roles. Due to the high intensity of emotions that accompanied the proceedings, the word ‘debate’ is not totally adequate, perhaps ‘battle’, or even ‘war’, is more appropriate. As Maciej Duda writes in a work constituting a broad account of this situation, anti-gender narratives – with few exceptions – are not based on substantive criticism, instead they are constructed on convictions expressing worldview prejudices on the equality/gender discourse. The intensification in interest in the topic is illustrated by the numerous anti-gender discourse publications. As Duda shows, from 2012 to 2015, there were around twenty works published in Poland,¹⁵ including translations of foreign works, and in addition there was an immense number of more or less developed statements in various media. The producers of the aforementioned opinions were chiefly extreme right-wing, conservative circles, including radical Catholics, strengthened politically by connecting these issues to the general economic dissatisfaction of society.

¹³ This formulation amongst the radical feminists is considered insulting, although it aids in differentiating that particular fraction of radical feminism which does not recognise the ‘femininity’ of transsexual and transgender individuals.

¹⁴ For more on this subject see: Michelle Goldberg, ‘What Is a Woman? The dispute between radical feminism and transgenderism’, *The New Yorker* 4 August 2014, <http://www.newyorker.com> (accessed 7 May 2017) and the discussion on the subject: Julia Serano, *An Open Letter to The New Yorker*, www.advocate.com (accessed 7 May 2017) or Juliet Jacques, ‘On the “dispute” between radical feminism and trans people’, *New Statesman* 6 August 2014, www.newstatesman.com (accessed: 7 May 2017).

¹⁵ See Maciej Duda, *Dogmat płci. Polska wojna z gender*, (Gdańsk: Katedra, 2016), 9.

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However irrational it may sound to refute the influence of socialization on the shaping of sexual identity, the perspective that questioning established gender roles was destructive became popular among Poles, viewed as leading to the devastation of the family and Polish Catholic traditions. Public statements – expressed both by politicians and individuals with media authority – took the form of a conspiracy theory about feminists, ‘lefties’, and the European Union being directed against Poland’s independence. And with this, the old social phobias about outsiders were reactivated. Belief systems based on exclusion, well known to history, such as racism, anti-Semitism and sexism spread comprehensively in such conditions and at a staggering rate.

A detailed analysis of the causes, conditions or consequences of these events is not the subject of the present article. For the following reflections concentrating on the means for the functioning of mechanisms of exclusion it is interesting that one of the main discursive solutions of those opposed to everything connected with the category of ‘gender’ – whether in academic research or gender politics, but also in personal identity choices – was its comparison with the negatively valued term ‘ideology’ as well as the use within this context of the term ‘genderism’.

By way of illustration, I cite below a fragment of a conversation with Archbishop Stanisław Gądecki, published in the Polish newspaper *Nasz Dziennik* [*Our Daily*], which seems to me to be especially representative:

From the moment of Poland’s accession to the European Union in 2004, the Polish family has been struggling against aggressive propaganda from various organisations which, in utilising EU regulations, try to introduce child rearing into Poland styled after the gender ideology: civil unions, in vitro fertilisation as well as so-called equality politics... At present, a dangerous challenge is – promoted under the guise of an equality programme – the ideology of genderism. Certain parents like to teach boys that they should tidy up after themselves and not to wait until the girls do it for them. History teaches us that a crisis in the family may even lead to the collapse of nations, cultures, civilisations.¹⁶

Reactions to the archbishop’s words were dominated by references to cleaning up, however this fragment presents well the whole set of repeated convictions, expressed in academic publications and in mainstream journalism – in which there is to be found an understanding of the category of gender as a specific and individual instrument for the organised construction of an ideological system whose aim is the destruction of the traditional paradigms of life, and as a consequence even culture and civilisation. It also displays to a certain degree the fight against a supranational conspiracy.

¹⁶ Ab Stanisław Gądecki, ‘Polska rodzina cierpi od lat’, *Nasz Dziennik* 4 September 2014 www.naszdziennik.pl (accessed: 7 May 2017).

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I would like to point out that in accordance with the history of the concept, genderism is an ideology of stiffened binary gender roles where both sexes have their way of functioning closely ascribed to them, which is justified by a specific understanding of biology and tradition. While in the Polish public expanse genderism, through its mass use *à rebours*, started to function as the contrary – as an ideology espousing the destruction of the binary order of sex, adhered to and advocated by individuals abnormal in gender, convinced that the gender we experience is socially constructed. For many of those who follow a traditional model for the family – as can be most clearly seen in the above cited fragment – this very constructivism constitutes a threat to the values to which they subscribe.

A certain obvious inconsistency is connected with this view. If God or biology, or one and the other together are the indisputable guarantors of the traditional male and female roles – with the set of traits and characteristics culturally ascribed to them – then how can they be destroyed by the ‘gender ideology’? Here there is room for a characteristic paradox of the simultaneous rejection and recognition of the strength of culture’s interaction. As Maciej Duda notes: ‘This vision of the world may be explained with two concepts. Either we conjecture that gender as a natural or divine model may change and create sex anew, or we accept the possibility that gender may arbitrarily undertake a surgical operation changing boys into little girls.’¹⁷ Significantly, one of the anti-gender narrative slogans is warning against the free exchange of biological sex, in the fragment below in comparison with the specific reference to the famous statement by Simone de Beauvoir: ‘No one was born either a woman or a man. You have the right to choose your sex – this is the maxim of the ideology of gender, which dressed itself up in the clothes of science and poisons universities the world over.’¹⁸

Considering the factors favouring the adoption of such a set of convictions based on paradoxes and hasty interpretations, it appears that a certain inadequacy in the category of gender within Polish-language terminology played a major role here. There is no obvious equivalent within the Polish language and besides the feminist-emancipation context it is not really in use within Polish public discourse. Despite the many years of feminist activity in Poland, a theoretical description of the cultural phenomena connected with sex and its construction has turned out to be misunderstood within the popular media. The term ‘gender’ has not broken into the Polish language, as far as it constituted a reference to traditional masculinity and femininity. The term appears much later, as a symbol of sexual subversion and as such was to be rooted authoritatively within colloquial phraseology. Eventually following the battle described above, ‘gender’ was selected as Word of the Year 2013 in a competition run by academics from the University of Warsaw’s Institute of Polish Language and the Polish Language Foundation.

¹⁷ Duda, *Dogmat płci*, 29.

¹⁸ *Gość Niedzielny* 37 (2011), the cover, quoted in Duda, *Dogmat płci*, 139.

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Besides the linguistic matters, an important factor is also the specifics of the history of sexual emancipation in the countries of the former Eastern Bloc. Being, for many years, behind the Iron Curtain, struggling with a totalitarian system offering pseudo-equality and a secularity imposed from above, Poles on the whole associate the Church and the family with areas of freedom and opposition to the enemy state. All changes which have an impact on these areas are perceived as undesired and dangerous. The process of building a civil society in Poland, in which responsibility is taken for the shaping of state institutions, is slow and based on mistrust.¹⁹

Summing up, it appears that genderism – however we care to understand it – takes on all the pejorative connotations connected with the category of gender, appearing for its critics to be an ideology of intended exclusion. The exclusion underpinning genderism is an incessant appeal to the individual for a binary opposition between gender and need, to be critical in relation to it whether this be through its forced acceptance or – equally forced – infringement. Both of the above cited examples taken from completely opposite interest groups (Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminism and Polish anti-gender circles) applying a reversed almost mirror distorted usage of the term ‘genderism’ show how the categories we use are prone to diverse discursive games and how they require critical redefinitions. As Liz Airton writes: ‘Most studies of sex differences in educational outcomes do not even define the terms sex, gender, boy, girl, male, female, etc., assuming that the meanings we attach to these words are universal and universally understood.’²⁰ And even if these concepts are lexicographically defined, they are rarely problematised in new historical and geopolitical contexts. As can be seen following the heated debate on the conference topic in Portland, even the old feminist question, ‘what is a woman?’ has yet to find its answer, or at least not one which would satisfy all.

¹⁹ According to research Poland is a country with one of the lowest levels of social capital, an important indicator of which is precisely trust, see: Janusz Czapiński, Tomasz Panek, eds., *Social Diagnosis 2013. Objective Quality of Life in Poland*, (Warszawa: Rada Monitoringu Społecznego, 2013), available at www.diagnoza.com (accessed 7 May 2017). Poland is in this regard one of the lowest ranked countries examined in this survey *European Social Survey* (ESS) in 2006 and 2012 (Czapiński, Panek, *Social Diagnosis 2013*, figure 6.3.1., 297). Trust is correlated with, among other things, a represented world outlook and hence the lowest level of general trust is a feature of those characterised by conservative egalitarianism; the highest – open liberalism (Czapiński, Panek, *Social Diagnosis 2013*, figure 6.1.1., 282). Events around the controversy over ‘gender’ show that the level of phobia in relation to differences, including the sexual, is very high in Poland. As reported in *Diagnoza Społeczna 2013*: ‘One of the signs of low tolerance among Polish people is their attitude towards homosexuals (fig. 6.3.3.). According to the ESS 2010 (4th from last of 20 countries) and similarly (8.5%) to *Social Diagnosis 2013* even less (8%) decisively agree with the opinion that homosexuals should be allowed to live according to their beliefs’. Czapiński, Panek, *Social Diagnosis 2013*, 298.

²⁰ Airton, ‘Untangling “Gender Diversity”’, 233.

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Moreover, if the matter concerns the category of gender, then as far as it constitutes the basis for equality politics in many countries, then on the ground of critical feminist theories it is strongly undermined as giving rise to new forms of exclusion, through a tendency to simplify and reduce differences. Rosi Braidotti claims that the concept of gender has caused a crisis in feminist theory and practice. She argues that the gender perspective gives the illusion of symmetry and diverts attention from feminist demands. As she writes: 'the crisis of gender as a useful category in feminist analysis comes at the same time as a reshuffling of theoretical positions that had grown fixed and stalemated in feminist theory.'²¹ Beyond that she also notes: 'the notion of gender is a vicissitude of the English language that bears little or no relevance to theoretical traditions in non-European and Romance European languages.'²²

The aforementioned language question and the use of the term 'gender' in the policy of the European Union – made up of countries of varied theoretical discursive traditions – certainly should lead to a reappraisal in translation strategies in the field of gender studies and gender politics. However, it is difficult to doubt the category of gender theoretically, being a feminist in Poland at a time of a strong conflict over worldviews, in which the relationship to 'gender' and gender politics is appropriately demarcated on both sides of the conflict. This difficulty constitutes a separate – and equally significant – factor conditioning the situation of Polish gender and feminist theories. How much they can allow to self-reference themselves if they want to ring true within public reception. However, the problem lies in the fact that by limiting one's own critical thinking these theories risk an actual brush with ideology.

PERSPECTIVE 2: THE IDEOLOGY OF THE EXCLUSION OF EXCLUSIONS – GENDER POLITICS

Bearing in mind the difficulty formulated above, I would like to consider the ideology of comprehending the category of gender in the area of politics alone, or more broadly gender theory.

Many commentators on the 'Polish gender battle' have viewed the response of those circles supporting research into this category as defensive. Because anti-gender slogans contained a mass of distortions, pseudo-academic opinions and – above all – showed general ignorance of the topic, this response often depended on educational acts, and became the public translation of what 'gender' is as well as what gender studies involves.²³

²¹ Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects. Embodiment and sexual difference in contemporary feminist theory*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 141.

²² Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 142.

²³ See, for example: *Gender. Przewodnik Krytyki Politycznej*, (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo KP, 2014).

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The main line of defence of those charged as Polish 'genderists' – academic teachers, journalists, activists connected with *gender studies*, or feminist and LGBT circles – was to argue that 'gender is not an ideology, only a theory'. At first glance, the very construction of this sentence does not make sense. 'Gender' cannot be an ideology, it cannot equally be a theory, it is a concept. As such it may be an element of theory, equally of an ideology, as can be seen on the basis of the genderism example. However, in the situation under discussion this meaning has resulted from the functioning of the word 'gender' as a catchword, as a semantic cluster subjected to appraisal. On the cover of the Polish newspaper supplement *High Heels [Wysokie Obcasy]*, in which there was an interview with Barbara Limanowska – a Polish feminist activist, a consultant for the UN and OSCE on matters of women's rights, gender politics and countering human trafficking – one could read: 'Barbara Limanowska explains the most terrifying theory of the year' (2014 – MA), which, *nota bene*, conveys well the atmosphere of the discussion. In the interview Limanowska says:

Gender is a theory – not an ideology – from the realm of the Humanities, which allows one to look at the change in social relations through the relationships between men and women... Gender asks questions about who has power, who benefits, who has what duties and privileges. The asking of these questions and the discovering of objective answers is not an ideology. Obviously the answers may be awkward. And here we arrive at the crux of the matter: becoming acquainted with and understanding the relations of power leads one to conclusions which may be difficult to accept.²⁴

Despite full agreement with the statement that the asking of questions is not an ideology, I cannot stop on the reflection leading to this point and not ask the question as to the ideological nature of the use of the category 'gender' in equality discourse. As much as concrete theories on social relations constitute the basis for politics, including state finance – here the matter concerns *gender budgeting* – then in the same measure they represent someone's interests. As a theoretical unit, 'gender' is not a one-dimensional ideological category, for it may serve interest groups in opposition to each other. In such an understanding the use of the category 'gender' by discourses – whether they are conservative or progressive – are two conflicting ideologies, in as far as they find reflection in political acts and legislation. Behind each of these discourses lies a moral evaluation based on the feeling that one's own worldview is correct. In this case, reference to theoretical objectivism surely does constitute an argument in the discourse, however from the point of view of theoretical analyses *par excellence* – in its own way it constitutes one of the more serious academic questions. I shall recall my earlier remark that ideology is

²⁴ Barbara Limanowska, 'Barbara Limanowska tłumaczy co to jest gender', *Wysokie Obcasy* 6 January 2014, www.wysokieobcasy.pl (accessed 8 May 2017).

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the point where theory and practice meet orders them both to compromise, which in the case of theory is the abandonment of a certain stage of thought, the stage of analysing one's own premises even at the cost of questioning their validity. However, I do agree that in the case of an accelerated battle for social approval there is no other way out than to adopt certain simplifications in – so-called – good faith and in the feeling that one's own outlook is valid. 'Gender is not an ideology, only a theory' is just such a simplification, a reaction in answer to the key accusation of ideology.

Social practice often looks this way, yet on the theoretical ground the consideration of the question of specific ideology is nothing new to emancipation thought. Such accusations have been leveled against feminism not only from the side of groups oriented towards the gender status quo, but also from within the movement itself. Only after several decades of activism on the part of women's movements did the postulates connected with the right to education, work and the right to vote appear to present the interests of all women. And even this only lasted for a short time. Women's unity in the struggle with patriarchy turned out to be problematic from a new perspective. Together with the ongoing emancipation it occurred that women's interests are more varied, that the reduction of the experiences, needs and hopes of all women to a single common denominator, which was to be the fact of belonging to the female sex was, by nature, troubled. On the social level, the very idea of the equal rights between men and women is questionable. As bell hooks correctly noted what is essential is: to which men are women to be the equal?²⁵ The social situation of black men is often worse than situation of middle class white women. Race, class identification or sexual orientation may generate differences in social status, affecting the quality of life in a far more acutely than belonging to a given sex.

The excluding practices within the field of feminism were the consequence of adopting a specific vision for the movement, reflecting the reality in which a specific group of women live, experiencing the specific form of oppression for this group, and also – importantly – have not experienced other forms of oppression. Feminism stood before questions as to their own status: does an equality movement based on the category of 'woman' still have the right to exist? And if not, does feminism, as the dissipated voice of many interest groups, cultures and worlds has sufficient force for political interaction? And is it then still feminism as such?

If a 'woman' – as the subject of feminism – does not constitute a sufficient basis for social activity or political identification, then the challenge for feminist theories was to develop such a conception of female subjectivity which, in being the subject of social practice, would not simultaneously constitute a hardened, oppressive, or reductive category. The remedy for this problem appeared to be for a certain time the category of gender, presumably directing attention to equality rather than difference between

²⁵ bell hooks, *Feminist Theory. From Margin to Center*, (London: Pluto Press, 2000), 15-16.

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sexes. However, the risk of such an approach turned out to be the perspective of sexual unification in the name of the exclusion of excluding differences.

The supporters of the theory of difference, such as aforementioned Rosi Braidotti, consider the category of woman to have a lot to offer still on the subject of gender identity, while the modern concentration on difference does not necessarily denote an essentialist hierarchy. Still, Braidotti also understands the dangerous connotations of 'difference', particularly in countries touched by war and its consequences. She writes: 'Difference in the age of the disintegration of the Eastern bloc, is a dangerous term. As several feminist Yugoslav philosophers put it: when 'difference' is used negatively and divisively, a postmodernist attempt to redefine it positively becomes desperate and vain.'²⁶

In formulating a thesis on the influence of socialization on the shaping of gender identity and the adoption of social roles appropriate to stereotypical models of gender, the adherents of social constructivism saw in the category of gender just as much the cause of discrimination as a possibility for emancipation. The questioning of the exclusive influence of biology on human behaviour opened up the possibility of reinterpreting socio-political solutions thus far, allowing us to perceive their oppressiveness and open up space for a new interpretation. Therefore the ideas standing for gender, thus understood, became a significant element in the social struggle against exclusion and the basis of contemporary democracy. However, in whatever way they were to be perceived as morally appropriate, they do not represent the interests of the whole of humanity.

PERSPECTIVE 3. THE IDEOLOGY OF THOUGHT – PROBLEMS WITH THE DISCOURSE OF EXCLUSIONS

The impasse connected with the social definition of gender reveals itself in the political inconsistencies within pro-emancipation circles, but all of its implications fully unfold within the theoretical field. bell hooks even claims that Western philosophy is responsible for the strengthening of the hierarchical structures of domination and for the production of oppression.²⁷ Rosi Braidotti writes:

In the European history of philosophy, 'difference' is a central concept insofar as Western thought has always functioned through dualistic oppositions that create subcategories of otherness or 'difference-from'. Because, in this history, difference has been predicated on relations of domination and exclusion, to be different-from came to mean to be 'less than', to be worth less than. Difference has been colonized by power relations that reduce it to inferiority, as Simone de

²⁶ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 137.

²⁷ hooks, *Feminist Theory*, 36.

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Beauvoir pertinently put it in *The Second Sex*. Difference consequently acquired essentialist and lethal connotations; it made entire categories of beings disposable, that is to say, just a human, but slightly more mortal.²⁸

This is in no way a startling perspective within the field of philosophy itself. The criticism of traditional metaphysics – as the source of violence against the Other – has become one of the chief undertakings of contemporary philosophical thought, such as the concepts of Emmanuel Lévinas, Michel Foucault or Jacques Derrida, to name but a few. Philosophy strives therefore to go beyond the assumed previous ways of thinking preserved in the humanities, which often leads to radical findings so that thematization itself – description, definition, categorization – leads to the demarcation of ways of thinking which we consider correct and to the rejection of others. Going further along this route, we ourselves – who we are, or who we consider ourselves to be – our identity, subjectivity, is the product of just such a gathering of parts of the world and recognising them as ours. In such a depiction the struggle against exclusion is one of the most arduous human undertakings, for it is a struggle with one's own thinking and being, with one's very self.

The philosophical search for the essence of gender, and in particular with an identity true to a woman, illustrates this mechanism well. Strategically it has taken place in areas whose one characteristic feature was remaining in the margins of philosophical reflection, amongst subjects previously excluded from the main currents of academic debates. If being in power reason designated the norms of subjectivity, then the chief addressees for these norms were 'irrational' zones: corporality, madness, and subconsciousness.

To date the most influential is the current creating descriptions of 'femininity' on the basis of the specifics of its corporality: the biological, the physiological and the phenomenological. The aim was to boost the female corporal experience and to extract it from the shadows of misogyny. As Adrienne Rich writes: 'for many women I knew, the need to begin with the female body – our own – was understood... as locating the grounds from which to speak with authority as women.'²⁹ However, problems are here revealed in connection with the very discourse on exclusion. The defining of femininity through corporality represents, on the one hand, a possibility for boosting self-esteem, while on the other a continuation in thinking in categories of the classic dichotomy in which man represents *logos*, and woman – *eros*. In reducing the essence of femininity to the body we are adopting the traditional stereotypical model of gender and limiting the identification participation of women in what they have been excluded from, that is, in rationality.

Another example is the calling of 1960s feminism to make that which was private political, leading to reflection on the lobbies of social life. It opened up houses with their

²⁸ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subject*, 138.

²⁹ Adrienne Rich, *Notes toward a Politics of Location*, in Adrienne Rich, *Blood, Bread, and Poetry. Selected Prose 1979-1985*, (New York: W&W Norton Company, 1986), 213.

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kitchens, parlours and all, requiring continuous hustle and bustle: cleaning, washing, ironing, cooking, the changing of diapers. The designation of work to all domestic chores, as something which should be evaluated and paid for was an enormous step forward for the feminist movement and for women. This problem is well illustrated in Julita Wójcik's 'Peeling Potatoes' – a performance given at the National Art Gallery Zachęta in Warsaw in 2001. The artist, dressed in an apron, sits on a stool, bent over a bucket and peels potatoes, around her kilos of them pile up. The transferring of this act – the daily maintenance of family life – from domestic privacy to the National Art Gallery was to be a gesture of recognition and inclusion. However, the search for the specifics of the female subject within a daily experience, hitherto pushed to the margins of socially recognised life, simultaneously opens and closes the feminist perspective. Showing appreciation for domestic hustle and bustle makes one aware that things do not happen on their own: a clean and tidy home, dinner on a plate, or an ironed shirt. Yet, on the other hand, it consolidates the theory of women's natural predisposition to such a way of functioning. In other words, does private inclusion within the political not establish a female exclusion from so-called 'great power politics'?

In the case of the conflict connected with the category of gender mentioned above, a significant role is played by the simple reversal of the accusations of intolerance and discrimination, which in practice makes a constructive compromise impossible and shows the problematization of discourse based upon the category of exclusion. From this perspective, all thought which is placed in any understood truth whatsoever and in a sense of validity is thought of as representing someone's interests and is an ideology. This perspective forces the same to a second reflection of the category of ideology in its primary, that is, non-pejorative sense.

CONCLUSION: GENDER – THEORY OR IDEOLOGY?

In summing up the current considerations I shall start with Susan Griffin's text *The Way of All Ideology*:

When a theory is transformed into an ideology, it begins to destroy the self and self-knowledge. Originally born of feeling, it pretends to float above and around feeling. Above sensation. It organizes experience according to itself, without touching experience. By virtue of being itself, it is supposed to know. To invoke the name of this ideology is to confer truthfulness. No one can tell it anything new. Experience ceases to surprise it, inform it, transform it. It is annoyed by any detail which does not fit into its world view. Begun as a cry against the denial of truth, now it denies any truth which does not fit into its scheme. Begun as a way to restore one's sense of reality, now it attempts to discipline real people, to remake natural beings after its own image. All that it fails to explain it records

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as its enemy. Begun as a theory of liberation, it is threatened by new theories of liberation; it builds a prison for the mind.³⁰

In discussions where the argument is the accusation of ideology, such placement of the border between theory and ideology is something obvious. The unintended transformation of theory into ideology, is a side effect of a process of transfer from the objective level to the subjective, from the universal to the particular, from the level of a disinterested description to the level of the realisation of political interests. A task for intellectuals could be therefore defending theory from the pernicious influence of social practice. Such an approach raises the question as to the start of theory, about whether there is such a moment at which a theory is actually objective? And if not objective then at least disinterested? Because if anything was to differentiate theory from ideology then this would be the orientation towards the interests of a certain social group, interests which it wishes to advance above others.

According to Christine Delphy, representing materialistic feminism, there is no such moment. Not only the content of theory, but also the very principles of its establishment – the division into specific disciplines, fields of cognition, categorization – assume secret convictions on the subject of human nature, the nature of history, of what is social, etc. These convictions do not have a universal character by any means, for they are the product of social ideologies.³¹

However, despite the negation of the ideological 'purity' of theory at its sources, Delphy proposes a system of knowledge which would be free from ideology so understood, a system built on a sensitivity to social exclusion, taking into consideration the opposition of groups experiencing oppression. Conservative ideology in the face of changes often adopted a defensive stance, being a parochial bastion serving the defense of traditional ideas and convictions in the face of a terrifying 'liquid modernity'. Yet is the other side free of violence, dogmatism, or authoritarianism?

Returning to the words of Susan Griffin: why, in the history of mankind, do social theories as a rule change into ideologies? Obviously not for their own sakes. For adherents of social openness to gender diversification, genderism is an ideology of binary oppression. For radical feminists (TEFR) as well as Polish Catholic conservatives, genderism is equality politics covering transsexual and transgender individuals. Practice usually stands behind theories on gender. Ways of behaving, body language, dress, life style – all these parameters may be as much a manifestation of release from rigid cultural models, as their representation. This is happening possibly because – as I suggest – from the very inception of a theory someone's interest is embedded in it and this interest, more or less particularistic, activates the mechanism of inclusion-exclusion.

TRANSLATED BY Guy Torr

³⁰ Susan Griffin, 'The Way of All Ideology', *Signs* 7 (1982), 648.

³¹ See Christine Delphy, 'For a Materialist Feminism', *Feminist Issues* 1 (1981), 69-76.