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The Church and Polish Feminism: Forever Enemies? A Secular Feminist Perspective

Abstract: *Kościół kobiet*, a book written by Zuzanna Radzik, feminist Catholic theologian, is my starting point for reflections on relations between feminism and the Catholic Church in Poland, presented in the paper. Analysing feminist debates on the issue, focused on struggles for reproductive rights, campaign against “gender ideology” and negotiations of the shape of liberal democracy, I argue they result from modern-secular perspective and reflect conviction of irreconcilability of women’s rights and interests of the Church. In the end I call for abandoning modern-secular framework as well as feminist politics of identity. I also suggest potential alliance between women’s movement and the Church.

Keywords: Catholic feminism, secular feminism, reproductive rights, anti-genderism

Lost hopes

2013, November 28th. Representatives of the Congress of Polish Women, the nation’s largest women’s right organization, write the open letter to Pope Francis, asking for help with stopping Polish bishops from a war on gender they have launched.¹

The letter reflects a popular way of thinking about the Church as divided between two factions: liberal (“open”) and conservative (“closed”).² Pope Francis is perceived as a representative of progressive tendencies and opposed to the Church

¹ ‘Letter from the Congress of Women to His Holiness Pope Francis’, https://www.kongres-kobiet.pl/en-EN/news/show/letter_from_the_congress_of_women_to_his_holiness_pope_francis, [acc.: February 1, 2017].

² For more details on the opposition between “open” and “closed” Church in Poland see: A. Kościańska, ‘The spirit of an “open church” has faded in Poland’, [in:] *Green Values, Religion & Secularism. Conversations with European politicians and activists*, eds. N. Ahern, E. Meijers, Amsterdam 2015, pp. 72–77; K. Szumlewicz, ‘Backlash po polsku, czyli Kościół, media i nie tylko’, [in:] *Kościół, państwo i polityka płci*, ed. A. Ostolski, Warszawa 2010, pp. 40–52.

in Poland, which has been dominated by conservative voices. Another underlying assumption of this document was, as Graff and Korolczuk indicate, “that the war on gender was a Polish invention unknown to and unsupported by the Vatican”.³ As a response, representatives of the Congress were told by the papal nuncio, who agreed to meet them, that confrontation is not a good way to resolve conflicts and the dialogue as well as positive attitude is important.⁴ As it is easy to guess, the anti-gender campaign has not come to a halt.

The visit of Pope Francis in Poland, which took place three years later, on the occasion of the World Youth Day, was watched with bated breath by many critics of the conservative tendencies in the Polish Church. It raised high expectations for change not only in the Church, but also in the anti-democratic politics of the Polish right-wing conservative government.

Long before the World Youth Day, Sławomir Sierakowski, the chief editor of the left-wing *Krytyka Polityczna*, called Francis “a leader of the global left”, who “fights against discrimination and exclusion” and “inspires the whole world”.⁵ This statement could be seen as an attempt to exceed common rhetoric based on the opposition between the secular as progressive, enlightened, liberal and the religious as backward and authoritative.

However, it was not the only reason behind a heated discussion evoked by Sierakowski’s article. Unsurprisingly, some polemics were written by feminists.⁶ They criticised the piece not because of their inability to overcome the aforementioned opposition but because of striking gender-blindness of Sierakowski’s calling a Catholic pope a leader of the global left, who “fights basically all (types of) inequalities”.⁷ Kinga Dunin, Agnieszka Graff and Elżbieta Korolczuk, unlike the authors of Letter from the Congress of Women sent to Pope Francis three years earlier, were aware that the head of the Catholic Church supports rather than condemns the conservative “war on gender”, opposes reproductive rights, and as a consequence, promotes discrimination of women rather than gender equality.

These expectations were confirmed during the Pope’s visit in Poland. His short, broadly discussed speech during the meeting with the authorities and bish-

³ A. Graff, E. Korolczuk, “Worse than communism and nazism put together”: War on gender in Poland’, [in:] *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe. Mobilising against Equality*, eds. R. Kuhar, D. Paternotte, London-New York 2017, p. 185.

⁴ ‘Papież Franciszek odpowiedział na list Kongresu Kobiet’, https://www.kongreskobiet.pl/pl-PL/news/show/papiez_franciszek_odpowiedzial_na_list_kongresu_kobiet [acc.: February 1, 2017].

⁵ S. Sierakowski, ‘Papież jest przywódcą lewicy’, *Dziennik Opinii* 1404, 2016, <http://krytyka-polityczna.pl/felietony/slawomir-sierakowski/papiez-jest-przywodca-lewicy/2016/> [acc.: February 1, 2017].

⁶ A. Graff, E. Korolczuk, ‘Papież, lewica i gender’, *Dziennik Opinii* 1413, 2016, <http://krytyka-polityczna.pl/kraj/korolczuk-graff-papiez-lewica-i-gender/> [acc.: February 1, 2017]; K. Dunin, ‘Impact factor papieża’, *Dziennik Opinii* 1408, 2016, <http://krytykapolityczna.pl/felietony/kinga-dunin/impact-factor-papieza/> [acc.: February 1, 2017].

⁷ S. Sierakowski, op. cit.

ops contained his anti-choice message.⁸⁹ Moreover, during the meeting with the Polish bishops, Francis mentioned “gender ideology” as one of the signs of the “sin against God the Creator” and a form of “ideological colonization”.¹⁰ This way, the Polish Church’s anti-feminist politics were legitimised by the progressive Pope, “the leader of the global left” and the hope of many Polish feminists.

These developments illustrate the betrayed — and perhaps poorly located — feminist hopes. These are the cases I could not get out of my mind while reading *Kościół kobiet* by Zuzanna Radzik. The book, written by a feminist catholic theologian, as Radzik identifies herself, was received with enthusiasm in liberal, leftist and feminist circles. Positive reviews or interviews with the author were published by, among others, *Krytyka Polityczna*, *Polityka* and *Tygodnik Powszechny*.

Such reception is no surprise. The author is known for her work on the Jewish-Catholic dialogue and her uncompromising articles in liberal *Tygodnik Powszechny*. *Kościół kobiet*, published in 2015 as a book about “ways in which women — successfully or not — are trying to regain the Church for themselves”,¹¹ could be read as a “feminist manifesto”.¹² Published by *Krytyka Polityczna*, it has a provocative

⁸ Zuzanna Radzik argues that Pope Francis’s words that “Life must always be welcomed and protected. These two things go together — welcome and protection, from conception to natural death. All of us are called to respect life and care for it” reject the rhetoric of reproductive rights and restrictions and emphasise Church’s and state’s responsibility to create systems of care (see: Z. Radzik, ‘Światowe Dni Młodzieży z Ojcem Świętym’, podcast Polskie Radio 24, <http://www.polskieradio.pl/130/2351/Artykul/1648343,Swiatowe-Dni-Mlodziezy-z-Ojcem-Swietytm> [acc.: February 1, 2017]).

As Stanisław Obirek argues, these words, as well as Pope’s condemnation of “gender ideology” were just a nod towards the tradition of local Church, shaped by the conservative approach of John Paul II (see: S. Obirek, ‘Lewica powinna uczestniczyć w sporze o nauczanie Franciszka’, *Dziennik Opinii* 1429, 2016, <http://krytykapolityczna.pl/kraj/obirek-lewica-powinna-uczestniczyc-w-sporze-o-nauczanie-franciszka/> [acc.: February 1, 2017]). This argument is shared by John L. Allen Jr, who identifies Francis’s pro-life statement as wrapping his unpopular pro-immigrant message “into the Polish flag” (see: J.L. Allen, ‘Pope wraps pro-immigrant message into Polish flag’, *Crux Now*, <https://cruxnow.com/analysis/2016/07/29/pope-wraps-pro-immigrant-message-polish-flag/> [acc.: February 1, 2017]).

In my opinion, however, both public opinion and priests perceive Francis’s statement as a clear legitimization of Polish Church’s obsession on “gender ideology” and reproductive rights.

⁹ ‘Meeting with the Authorities, the Civil Society and the Diplomatic Corps’, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/july/documents/papa-francesco_20160727_polonia-autorita-cd.html [acc.: February 1, 2017].

¹⁰ ‘Meeting with the Polish Bishops’, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/july/documents/papa-francesco_20160727_polonia-vescovi.html [acc.: February 1, 2017].

¹¹ Z. Radzik, *Kościół kobiet*, Warszawa 2007, p. 7.

¹² „My book is an action — a theologian Zuzanna Radzik says. *Kościół kobiet*, which just has been published, is a feminist manifesto, that hasn’t yet been seen in Polish Catholicism”, M. Dzierżanowski, ‘Katofeministki,’ *Wprost*, <https://www.wprost.pl/tygodnik/510075/Katofeministki.html> [acc.: February 1, 2017]; „I have called this book a manifesto because of its ideological clarity and well-thought-out picture of relation between women and the Church”, K. Wołodźko, ‘Kościół kobiet albo żaden?’, *Frona Lux* 77, 2015, <http://frondalux.pl/krzysztof-wołodzko-kosciol-kobiet-albo-zaden/> [acc.: February 1, 2017].

cover: a drawing of Mother Mary dressed in pink and knitting a colourful balaclava resembling these worn by members of Pussy Riot during their performances.¹³

The book, however, turned out to be a challenging reading for a secular feminist who draws on the condemned gender theory in her academic work, as I would situate myself.¹⁴ After my first approach to Radzik's work, I did not share the enthusiasm of the liberal readership. My awareness of anti-feminist politics of the Catholic Church and its power in Poland made me think about the figure of a Polish feminist catholic theologian as a contradiction in terms. I doubted that staying in the Church and identifying with such an anti-feminist institution could be called a feminist gesture. It rather seemed to be an act of political conformism, which, as I suspected, could even be harmful to the cause of women's rights in Poland. Creating women-friendly spaces not only does not influence any real political changes in the situation of Catholic women and the politics of the Church, but — by giving a dangerous illusion that it is egalitarian and inclusive, it precludes more productive as well as more revolutionary strategies.

Katarzyna Nadana writes ironically:

It only remains for us to wish good luck to the female theologians, who envied secular feminists their political and moral freedoms, and who would like to sustain the high spirits of the people who combine the criticism of the tradition with being rooted in it. May they never find out how much they do not belong to the tradition, according to those who claim that they are its heirs apparent and who are supported by all the powers of their religious institutions, which are still able to exclude and destroy them.¹⁵

1. The Catholic Church vs. feminism in Poland: a report from the trenches

1.1. Abortion wars

“Gender ideology” and reproductive rights, two issues mentioned by the Pope during his recent visit in Poland, lie at the very centre of the conflict between the

¹³ A colourful knitted balaclava has become a symbol of Pussy Riot and the protests which erupted after the conviction of its members.

¹⁴ Identifying myself as a “secular feminist”, I do not want to reproduce modern-secular paradigm and binary opposition between the secular and the sacred, the political and the theological. I agree that “we have never been secular”. Nonetheless, the term is used in order to characterize my position as a non-religious feminist author, convinced that any political goals and strategies do not need to be theologically legitimised and do not need support from any religious organization. The issue of residual spirituality in the system of feminist civic values exceeds the framework of this article.

¹⁵ K. Nadana, ‘A jednak winna... Polemika z artykułem Moniki Bobako’, *Bez Dogmatu. Kwartalnik kulturalno-polityczny* 96, 2013, p. 11.

Catholic Church and Polish feminist movement. Since they seem to be an essential component of the latter's identity, thinking outside this opposition is hard to conceive of.

Stanisław Obirek, theologian, cultural studies scholar and former Jesuit, argues that the anti-choice statement was Pope Francis's nod towards the local Church, which, to a large extent, had been shaped by the pontificate of John Paul II. The worshipped "Polish Pope" "not only made the pro-life crusade his main agenda, but also provided [the Polish Church] with rhetorical devices that have enabled a successful campaign for restrictive legislation. In Poland papal instructions have provided main arguments for "life defenders" who are against the "civilisation of death".¹⁶ Polish bishops' obsession with limiting reproductive rights (and their very real political influence) has resulted in Polish feminist movement's passion for the pro-choice position. Many commentators claim that the struggles for the right to abortion have been at the top of the Polish movement's agenda since the transition to democracy following 1989 and see them as a formative experience.

Agnieszka Graff, in her paper *Lost between the Waves? The Paradoxes of Feminist Chronology and Activism in Contemporary Poland*, published in 2003, which focuses on the identity of Polish women's movement, puts it clearly: "reproductive freedom remains the basic demand of the Polish women's movement. It is an issue we speak, write, dream and shout about — an issue that, to a large extent, defines our identity and our image in the public realm".¹⁷ She also refers to an event that has been called "a breakthrough" in the history of women's movement in Poland, namely the "100 Women's Letter", a protest addressed to the EU Parliament, calling for an open democratic debate on reproductive rights in Poland.¹⁸ Signed by some of the most prominent Polish women, it was written in 2002, in the wake of the National Referendum on European Accession. It revealed and criticized a silent pact between the post-communist government and the Church, which actually meant selling out women's rights, especially women's right to abortion in return for the Church's support for accession.¹⁹ According to Graff and many other feminist authors, the role of the Church in introducing the ban on abortion and then preventing liberalization cannot be overrated.²⁰

¹⁶ S. Obirek, 'Aborcja, Kościół i duch niezgody', [in:] *A jak hipokryzja. Antologia tekstów o aborcji, władzy, pieniądzu i sprawiedliwości*, ed. C. Snochowska-Gonzalez, Warszawa 2011, p. 46.

¹⁷ A. Graff, 'Lost between the Waves? The Paradoxes of Feminist Chronology and Activism in Contemporary Poland', *Journal of International Women's Studies* 2003, no. 2, p. 109.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 110.

¹⁹ 'List Stu Kobiet', http://www.zgapa.pl/zgapedia/List_Stu_Kobiet.html [acc.: February 1, 2017].

²⁰ W. Nowicka, 'The Struggle for Abortion Rights in Poland', [in:] *Sex politics. Report from the Front Lines*, eds. E. Parke, R. Petchesky, R. Sembler, Rio de Janeiro 2006, pp. 167–196; B. Stanosz, *W cieniu Kościoła, czyli demokracja po polsku*, Warszawa 2004; P. Szumlewicz, 'Zakaz aborcji, czyli władza nad kobietami', [in:] *A jak hipokryzja*, pp. 59–62.

Despite widespread social support for maintaining the right to abortion,²¹ mass protests against penalization and even 1.7 million signatures of citizens demanding a national referendum on that issue gathered in 1992, no public debate has ever taken place.²² Poland has one of Europe's strictest anti-abortion laws, which is often referred to as a "compromise bill". Adopted in 1993, it was actually a compromise between the ruling party and the Church. The latter, considering itself to be a legitimate key political actor, colonized public discourse, imposed its own language and excluded women's reproductive rights from public debate. As a consequence, social support for the right to abortion has been gradually decreasing.

In 2016 the Church is still situated as a key political actor lobbying for the limitation of women's rights. The question of abortion has again become a hot topic. In September 2016, the citizens' bill aimed at the total ban on abortion was tabled in the Polish parliament. Although the project of the bill was written by Ordo Iuris Institute for Legal Culture, in April 2016 an anti-choice campaign was launched in churches, when priests read out a letter from the bishops' conference calling for Poland's existing, limited abortion rights to be scrapped.²³ The signatures for the bill were gathered by activists backed by the Church.

As a response, pro-choice demonstrations and social media actions were organized. First, in 2016 Manifa, the annual feminist demonstration held on the International Women's Day, was held under the slogan "Abortion in defence of life".²⁴ Next protests took place in April 2016. In the Summer of 2016 the "Save the Women" Civic Committee succeeded in gathering 215 thousand signatures in support of an alternative citizens' bill in favour of liberalizing the anti-abortion legislation, improving access to contraception and sexual education.²⁵ The most significant event, the Black Protest, which took place on October 3rd 2016, has been described as a milestone for the Polish feminist movement. As the largest street demonstration in decades, it was not only politically successful (as a result

²¹ As shown in the surveys, social support for the right to abortion has been gradually decreasing: 'Opinie o dopuszczalności aborcji', *Komunikat z badań CBOS* 2016, no. 51, http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2016/K_051_16.PDF [acc.: February 1, 2017]; see also: E. Wejbert-Wąsiewicz, 'Jakie wnioski można wyciągnąć z badań socjologicznych na temat aborcji?', [in:] *A jak hipokryzja*, pp. 150–155.

²² K. Chmielewska, T. Żukowski, 'Aborcyjny kompromis?', *Tygodnik Przegląd*, <http://www.tygodnikprzeglad.pl/aborcyjny-kompromis/> [acc.: February 1, 2017].

²³ For the content of the letter see: 'Komunikat Prezydium KEP w sprawie pełnej ochrony życia człowieka', <http://episkopat.pl/komunikat-prezydium-kep-w-sprawie-pelnej-ochrony-zycia-czlowieka/> [acc.: February 1, 2017].

²⁴ It is worth pointing out that slogan directly calling for right to abortion came back on Manifa's banners after fourteen years; it seems that for years organisers have avoided such slogans perceiving them as too controversial and dividing the community.

²⁵ A. Czarnacka, '215 tys. podpisów za aborcją do 12 tygodnia ciąży. Projekt ustawy trafił do sejmu', *Polityka*, <http://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/spoleczenstwo/1671138,1,215-tys-podpisow-za-aborcja-do-12-tygodnia-ciazy-projekt-ustawy-trafil-do-sejmu.read> [acc.: February 1, 2017].

of the protests, the Parliament rejected its plan for a near-total ban on abortions), but also it has mobilized many women who have never actively participated in political life and have never considered themselves as feminists.²⁶ The Polish feminist movement again has consolidated itself in the struggle for reproductive rights.

1.2. War on gender

The right-wing “war on gender”, which Pope Francis supported during his visit in Poland, is another factor making it difficult to think outside the opposition between the Church and feminism.

Polish campaign against “gender ideology” began in the years 2012–2013 and, as Weronika Grzebalska puts it, “evolved around three specific triggers: the Istanbul Convention, Pedophilia Scandal in the Polish Catholic Church, and WHO recommendations for sex education in the schools”.²⁷ A vast majority of the initial interpretations of this phenomenon as well as of proposed counter-strategies were based on a false assumption that the war on gender was a Polish invention. The letter to Pope Francis written by the representatives of the Congress of Polish Women with the hope that he would prevent a further development of the anti-gender campaign was a consequence of this way of thinking. As many researchers argue, “there is no doubt that the Vatican has been at the centre of anti-gender mobilization since the mid-1990s”,²⁸ and the recent wave of attacks was launched in 2012 by Pope Benedict.²⁹

Although the Church’s impact on the anti-gender campaign cannot be underestimated, presenting it as the only factor is another false assumption that was reproduced in the early Polish debate. As Grzebalska reminds us, the strong involvement of bishops and priests in the campaign led some commentators to see it as a cover-up of the pedophilia problem in the Church,³⁰ whereas the actual range of this campaign is much broader. Graff and Korolczuk perceive it as a part of a larger transnational right-wing movement, easily adjusting to local context and

²⁶ According to police statement, there were 143 street demonstrations connected with the Black Protest, in which 98 thousand people participated (“Czarny Protest”. Manifestacje w wielu miastach w Polsce. Ile osób wzięło udział w demonstracjach?, <http://wiadomosci.wp.pl/czarny-protest-manifestacje-w-wielu-miastach-w-polsce-ile-osob-wzielo-udzial-w-demonstracjach-6043943038128769a> [acc.: February 1, 2017]). According to the calculations of party Razem (Together), the number of participants adds up to 162 thousand (<https://www.facebook.com/partia-razem/photos/a.430709850430410.1073741828.430323810469014/668187773349282/?type=3&heater> [acc.: February 1, 2017]).

²⁷ W. Grzebalska, ‘Poland’, [in:] *Gender as Symbolic Glue: The Position and Role of Conservative and Far Right Parties in the Anti-Gender-Mobilization*, eds. E. Kováts, M. Põimari, Budapest 2005, p. 83.

²⁸ A. Graff, ‘Report from the gender trenches: War against “genderism” in Poland’, *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 2014, no. 4, p. 434.

²⁹ Ibid.; M. Duda, *Dogmat płci*, Gdańsk 2016, pp. 145–147.

³⁰ W. Grzebalska, ‘Poland’, p. 91.

able to build networks between different social actors.³¹ Summarizing the existing scholarship, they write, “anti-gender mobilization partakes in a broader cultural conflict about modernity: “gender” is a stretchy category that serves as a screen for collective fears about change, loss of national identity, excessive influence of the West and its cultural expansion. A crucial source of anxiety is the rampant individualism of contemporary culture, the erosion of community and growing precariousness of everyday life”.³²

In Poland, the war on gender was strongly supported by the Church: “gender ideology” was consistently demonized in sermons as a threat to children, family and the nation, “presented as the heart of the “Civilization of death”, and as a source of perversion and degradation”.³³ Nonetheless, resistance to “gender” soon turned out to be a “symbolic glue”³⁴ that served to connect “various progressive issues under one umbrella term”³⁵ and to facilitate alliances between various political actors: Church officials, politicians, right-wing journalists and activists. Being addressed in the official programs of all three parties, it involved also voters during both presidential and parliamentary elections of 2015.³⁶

The well-orchestrated mobilization on the right proves the Church’s powerful position in the Polish society. According to Graff, “the political and cultural prominence of the Catholic Church” is what, alongside “general vulnerability of Eastern Europe to right-wing extremism”, “the relative instability of our democracies, the enormous frustrations and resentments about the economic situation, the weakness of women’s and LGBT movements, [and] the strength of nationalist movements”, makes Poland “a key battleground in the transnational culture war” and is the main reason for a great success of Polish anti-genderism.³⁷ The political consequences of this phenomenon should not be underestimated. As Graff and Korolczuk argue, “anti-genderism proved remarkably effective in political terms, as it enabled a political alliance between nationalism and religious fundamentalism, thus contributing to the right-wing electoral victory of 2015”.³⁸

What is also worth mentioning, the war on gender can be linked to a decreasing quality of public debate and an increasing acceptance of hate speech in the

³¹ A. Graff, E. Korolczuk, “‘Worse than communism and nazism put together’”, E. Korolczuk, ‘The War on Gender’ from a Transnational Perspective: Lessons for Feminist Strategising’, [in:] *Anti-Gender Movement on the Rise?*, Heinrich Boll Foundation, Berlin 2015, pp. 43–53; A. Graff, ‘Report from the gender trenches’, pp. 431–435.

³² A. Graff, E. Korolczuk, “‘Worse than communism and nazism put together’”, p. 185–186.

³³ A. Graff, ‘Report from the gender trenches’, p. 431.

³⁴ A. Peto, “‘Anti-gender’ mobilizational discourse of conservative and far right parties as a challenge for progressive politics’, [in:] *Gender as Symbolic Glue*, pp. 126–132.

³⁵ W. Grzebalska, ‘Why the war on “gender ideology” matters — and not just to feminists. Anti-genderism and the crisis of neoliberal democracy’, *Visegrad Insight*, <http://visegradinsight.eu/why-the-war-on-gender-ideology-matters-and-not-just-to-feminists/> [acc.: February 1, 2017].

³⁶ W. Grzebalska, ‘Poland’, p. 86.

³⁷ A. Graff, ‘Report from the gender trenches’, p. 434.

³⁸ A. Graff, E. Korolczuk, “‘Worse than communism and nazism put together’”, p. 176.

media.³⁹ A wave of hatred aimed at feminists, sexual educators, participants of IVF programmes, LGBT people and even children born after IVF cannot be inconsequential for social life.

Another, more specific negative effect of the anti-gender campaign is connected with what was its first trigger — the Istanbul Convention.⁴⁰ The Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, brought to the public in 2012, was opposed by then-Minister Jarosław Gowin, who called it a “carrier of gender ideology” and a “threat to the family”.⁴¹ Its ratification has been successfully blocked until 2015. As Konstanty Gebert, who emphasises the Church’s role in this process, bluntly puts it, “it is fair to say victims of domestic violence are also — indirectly — victims of the policies of the Catholic church”.⁴² After the populist right-wing Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice) came to power, war on gender spread to other issues. As Grzebalska sums up, “the newly elected Polish president vetoed a major transgender rights bill, a coalition of pro-life organizations submitted a petition calling for Parliament to withdraw the morning after pill from pharmacies and hospitals, the government cancelled the publicly funded IVF scheme and cut the funds from the Ombudsman due to accusations that the office promotes “gender ideology”, as well as announcing plans to eradicate any elements of sex and equality education from schools”.⁴³

This picture of contemporary Poland does not leave much space for thinking outside the feminism vs Catholic Church opposition. From a liberal perspective, this opposition goes even further: it is rooted in a much deeper antagonism between the Church and democracy.

1.3. War on liberal democracy

According to Graff, the context of the ban on abortion (women’s rights as a bargaining chip in a silent pact between the Church and the government, the lack of public debate, and the dismissal of 1.7 million signatures demanding a national referendum on abortion) “represents the power of the Church to upset democratic process itself, and the willingness of the political elite to give in to the pressure of clergy”.⁴⁴ Since the anti-choice campaign “began immediately after the fall of communism, religion has filtered deeply into the state structure”,⁴⁵ paralyzing

³⁹ Fr. Dariusz Oko’s statements are the most striking examples. See: M. Duda, op. cit., pp. 137–408.

⁴⁰ W. Grzebalska, ‘Poland’, p. 90.

⁴¹ A. Graff, ‘Report from the gender trenches’, p. 432; A. Graff, E. Korolczuk, “‘Worse than communism and nazism put together’”, p. 178.

⁴² K. Gebert, ‘God complex: Polish Catholic church’s Winnie the Pooh crisis’, *Index on Censorship* 2015, no. 2, p. 72.

⁴³ W. Grzebalska, ‘Why the war on “gender ideology” matters’.

⁴⁴ A. Graff, ‘Lost between the Waves?’, p. 111.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 112.

public debate by imposing its non-secular language. As a result, the separation between Church and state, a basic component of democracy, became just wishful thinking. Thus, according to Graff, the Church in Poland cannot be reconciled with either the feminist movement or democracy in general.

In her book *Magma*, published seven years later, Graff mentions “the shape of anti-abortion bill” and “the inevitable voice of a priest as the moral authority in public debates, particularly those related to sexual ethics and reproductive rights”⁴⁶ among many other manifestations of the Church’s excessive influence on Polish political reality. The examples given by Graff were used by Obirek to prove that the Church “spoils democracy and destroys the basic rules of social co-existence”.⁴⁷ However, in his liberal view of Europe, liberal democracy is not contrasted with the Church itself, but rather with its authoritarian political practices: “This conflict does not seem to be inevitable, since in the Catholic Church there are more and more voices calling for adjustment to both cultural pluralism and demands of the liberal [...] mind”.⁴⁸

Likewise, Barbara Stanosz, in her book cited by Obirek, writes about not only the opposition, but also about an “authentic and deep” conflict between the Church and democracy.⁴⁹ According to her, it is caused by Church’s demands for more and more privileges; these privileges cannot be given by the state without the violation of the principle of equality. In her opinion, the Church’s persistent efforts to limit personal freedoms are another transgression against democracy.

2. Towards armistice

2.1. Deconstructing the Church — democracy opposition

This simplification of the opposition between democracy and the Church echoes the Enlightenment-based teleological conception of history: “a model of progress built on the assumption that the world is on a predictable path away from restrictive religious traditions and towards liberal secularism”.⁵⁰ In this normative secularization theory, secularism is identified with “forward-looking ‘modernity’ and ‘democracy’”, which “demands the triumph of reason over superstition, sentiment

⁴⁶ A. Graff, *Magma i inne próby zrozumienia, o co tu chodzi*, Warszawa 2010, p. 75.

⁴⁷ S. Obirek, ‘Aborcja, Kościół i duch niezgody’, p. 48.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 47.

⁴⁹ B. Stanosz, op. cit., p. 41.

⁵⁰ L. Zwissler, ‘Feminism and Religion: Intersections between Western Activism, Theology and Theory’, *Religion Compass* 2012, no. 7, p. 361.

and belief”.⁵¹ Religion is defined as a residue of a pre-modern part of human history, and it is treated as an antithesis of rationality, liberty, liberal democracy, human rights, economic welfare, progress and individual autonomy.⁵² In this modern-secular framework, “the state becomes “modern” through the suppression of religion”.⁵³

As Monika Bobako explains, the modern-secular paradigm, based on the idea of linear progress, is not only wrong in its assumptions about history, but also results in dividing cultures into “primitive” and “civilized”. Historically, this way of thinking has been the foundation of cultural and biological racism.⁵⁴ What is most important, however, is its empirical inadequacy.⁵⁵ As shown in the following paragraphs, that is why it cannot give a reliable picture of relations between feminism, democracy and the Catholic Church or lead to a politically useful diagnosis.

In 2005 feminist activist Wanda Nowicka, concluding her paper on struggles for abortion rights in Poland, wrote: “In the long run, the growing secularism and individualism in the society as the result of modernization and integration with the European Union may change the political climate around these issues and eventually lead to legal changes”.⁵⁶ Her prediction has remained unfulfilled, which shows that thinking in terms of secularization thesis is incorrect. Although in the above quotation the necessity of the separation between the Church and the state is not directly addressed, the belief in progress towards liberal secularism, individualism and rise of human rights is undoubtedly expressed. Nowicka’s hopes have been thwarted because they were based on a false premise.

A similar assumptions also led Kinga Dunin to draw at least partly incorrect conclusions. Writing in 2002 about a public dialogue concerning process of integration between Poland and the EU, she blamed its lack of success on an axiological privilege of the Church’s rhetoric in public debates and on the incommensurability between liberal and religious language.⁵⁷ As Graff comments, there can be no real dialogue between liberal discourse on freedom and human rights and “a religious discourse the bottom line of which is the ‘will of God’, ‘absolute truth’ and ‘natural law’”.⁵⁸ Today it can easily be noticed that this diagnosis does not give a whole picture. Religious rhetoric cannot be perceived as opposed to “discourse of freedom and human rights”.

⁵¹ N. Reilly, ‘Rethinking the Interplay of Feminism and Secularism in a Neo-Secular Age’, *Feminist Review* 97, 2011, p. 15.

⁵² M. Bobako, ‘Postkolonialne rekonfiguracje. Feminizm, religia, postsekularyzm’, *Przegląd Humanistyczny* 449, 2015, p. 130; idem, ‘Feminizm i pułapka religiofobii. Rozważania na marginesie książki “Dlaczego Bóg nienawidzi kobiet?”’, *Bez Dogmatu* 96, 2013, p. 8.

⁵³ N. Reilly, op. cit., p. 15.

⁵⁴ M. Bobako, ‘Feminizm i pułapki religiofobii’, p. 8.

⁵⁵ As Bobako points out, the modern-secular framework cannot explain contemporary religious revival or negative consequences of modernization for women. See: *ibid.*

⁵⁶ W. Nowicka, op. cit., p. 195.

⁵⁷ K. Dunin, ‘Czarny ford i dwugłowe ciele, czyli Polak idzie do Unii’, *Res Publica Nowa* 2002, no. 6, pp. 29–36.

⁵⁸ A. Graff, ‘Lost between the Waves?’, p. 112.

As Korolczuk and Graff argue, the war on gender, although supported and inspired by the Church, can be interpreted as a manifestation of a new phenomenon: illiberal civil society. It is legitimised with reference to human rights and individual freedom. However, liberal language is adopted selectively: only deep-rooted values such as human life and dignity are addressed.⁵⁹ Such selectivity is striking also in religious anti-choice argumentation. Human rights are applied to “the unborn children”, whereby a fetal right to life is what needs to be protected. Moreover, in the heated debate about the conscience clause, the right to freedom of conscience is emphasised.

According to Korolczuk, in such a context the notions of individual freedom and human rights are used in order to interpret the interventions of the state or of transnational institutions as a violation. In the anti-gender campaign the opposition towards the state as an “impostor” involves the contestation of a liberal model of democracy, as the activists stress the rule of majority rather than protection of individual rights.⁶⁰ Thus, as Korolczuk concludes, they “oppose not only feminist views, but the very idea that individual rights should be protected by the state”⁶¹ and turn from “liberal” to “illiberal” democracy.

Although the Church (both the Vatican and local Churches) is the key political actor in anti-gender campaign, conservative politicians, journalists, bloggers and even grassroots activists (many of whom are concerned parents of young children) are also involved.⁶² Their strategies seem to be democratic as well, since they include “petitions, demonstrations, publications, workshops and conferences as well as political initiatives in the Parliament”.⁶³ That is why war on gender should be perceived rather as a manifestation of civil society than as its anti-democratic contradiction.

What is more, as Graff and Korolczuk argue, the success of the campaign against gender lies in “the effective employment of an anti-colonial frame, whereby ‘genderism’ is presented as a sinister global force, a new form of colonial power exercised by the UN, EU and WHO against the worlds’ poor [...]”.⁶⁴ While “‘genderists’ feature in the role of colonizers [...], the conservative right plays the role of the defender [of] authentic local culture”.⁶⁵ Polish anti-genderism has its own local specificity, which makes anti-colonial rhetoric particularly convincing. As Korolczuk and Graff put it, Eastern Europe is seen “as a part of the world that was left untouched

⁵⁹ A. Graff, B. Korolczuk, ‘Gender to śmiertelnie poważna sprawa’, interviewed by M. Surowski, *Dziennik Opinii* 1501, 2016, <http://krytykapolityczna.pl/kraj/graff-korolczuk-gender-to-smiertel> ‘Gender to śmiertelnie poważna sprawa’ nie-powazna-sprawa/ [acc.: February 1, 2017].

⁶⁰ E. Korolczuk, op. cit., p. 50.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² A. Graff, E. Korolczuk, “‘Worse than communism and nazism put together’”; A. Graff, B. Korolczuk, ‘Gender to śmiertelnie poważna sprawa...’

⁶³ A. Graff, E. Korolczuk, “‘Worse than communism and nazism put together’”, p. 177.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 189.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

by the sexual revolution and proved resistant to Marxism, thus it is hoped to save the West from its own decadence”.⁶⁶ In this region, gender tends to be discredited as totalitarian ideology, as

exemplified by the following statement made in 2013 by Polish Bishop Tadeusz Pieronek: “Gender ideology is worse than communism and Nazism put together” [...]. While the contested policies are coming from the West and are presented as Western impositions, “genderism” (a word used interchangeably with gender) is seen as a vast project of social engineering rooted in Marxism and comparable to Stalinism.⁶⁷

Thus, “gender ideology” is demonized as a cultural imposition which is Western and Eastern at the same time. The anti-feminist campaign launched by the Catholic Church is presented as a democratic grassroots movement against totalitarian ideology imposed from the outside.

The Church abandons neither the language of human rights, nor the democratic strategies. Scientific discourse, which in modern-secular perspective is seen as supportive of progress and democracy, and thus opposed to religion, also plays an important role in today’s Polish religious rhetoric. According to Magdalena Radkowska-Walkowicz, since science is seen as a vital source of legitimacy, “representatives of the Catholic Church, in their argumentation connected with reproduction, more and more often refer to scientific research, and enthusiastically use scientific language”.⁶⁸ Even if they perceive it as a rhetoric toolbox and instrumentalize it in order to mask their own ideological interests and achieve desired political goals, the medicalization of the Church’s language clearly shows we can no longer conceive of religion as a private, irrational, emotional and backward ideology in opposition to science as a form of public, rational, and progressive knowledge, which is neutral and epistemically privileged.

The Polish context shows that the secular-modern thesis is indefensible. Likewise, it seems that the opposition between women’s rights and religion, feminism and the Church should also be rejected.

2.2. Deconstructing the Church — feminism opposition

Graff, who in 2003 claimed that open conflict with the Church is inevitable,⁶⁹ realized the futility of this strategy eleven years later: “polarization is not useful for

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 176.

⁶⁸ M. Radkowska-Walkowicz, ‘Blastusie i syndrom. Rola języka naukowego w polskiej debacie o in vitro’, [in:] *Humanistyka i dominacja. Oddolne doświadczenia społeczne w perspektywie zewnętrznych rozpoznai*, eds. T. Rakowski, A. Malewska-Szałygin, Warszawa 2011, p. 306.

⁶⁹ “Feminists have invested great hopes in Poland’s EU accession, and yet we are asked to give up these hopes, to remain silent on the question of reproductive choice, so that Poland may join the EU unhampered by the Catholic Church. Clearly, the task of the women’s movement is to break this silence, and to challenge the values behind it in a lasting way. This will involve building a more ef-

us. Reducing Polish feminism to a movement of anti-Church resistance is a big mistake, for many reasons, not only strategic, but also ideological and intellectual”,⁷⁰ ‘it is necessary to overcome [the opposition between Christianity and feminism]’.⁷¹

This view is shared by Bobako, who argues that the polarisation between women’s rights and “religious values” does not leave much space for “voices that do not fit in a binary opposition between Polish-catholic ‘norm’ and atheist ‘aberration’”.⁷² Thus “such a discursive restriction of the space turns out to be very harmful to the struggles for women’s rights”.⁷³ The author also suggests that uncritical equation of anticlericalism and emancipatory attitudes is an “unfortunate side effect of such polarization”. In her view, “too often different rationalist strands turn out to be conservative and sexist, leftist or liberal atheism proves to be not necessarily feminist, and some forms of feminism, after taking anticlericalism away, definitely lose their critical fervor”.⁷⁴

Moreover, the opposition in question is based on an essentialist view of religion and the Church: both are seen as inherently androcentric, unchangeable monoliths as well as huge political actors that can be blamed for any manifestation of sexism.⁷⁵ Such a framework can be called, after Judith Butler, “a totalizing gesture of feminism”. As the author of *Gender Trouble* puts it: “The effort to identify the enemy as singular in form is a reverse-discourse that uncritically mimics the strategy of the oppressor instead of offering a different set of terms”.⁷⁶ Such a perspective not only reproduces masculinist colonial strategy, but also prevents us from recognizing the real power relations and sources of inequalities.

It seems clear that the secular-modern thesis and feminism vs Catholicism opposition, which echoes its spirit, lead us to a wrong diagnosis, unfulfilled predictions, ineffective solutions, deeper polarization of society and questionable political and intellectual alliances. On the other hand, it is difficult to avoid perceiving the Church (even if strongly divided) as a huge actor on a Polish political scene. The anti-feminist character of its rhetoric and politics is unquestionable, as is its influence on real political solutions and situation of women in Poland. It makes

fective media strategy, and will probably lead to a radicalization of the movement, *i.e.* a willingness to enter into open conflict with the Church, and a readiness to be chastised for this indiscretion by all sides of the public scene”. A. Graff, ‘Lost between the Waves’, p. 114.

⁷⁰ A. Graff, ‘Gdzie jesteś, polski feminizm? Pochwała sporu i niejasności’, *Krytyka Polityczna*, <http://krytykapolityczna.pl/kraj/graff-gdzie-jestes-polski-feminizm-pochwala-sporu-i-niejasnosci/> [acc.: February 1, 2017].

⁷¹ A. Graff, ‘Wiele twarzy feminizmu’, interviewed by A. Budzyńska, *Magazyn Kontakt* 107/2014, <http://magazynkontakt.pl/wiele-twarzy-feminizmu.html> [acc.: February 1, 2017].

⁷² M. Bobako, ‘Feminizm i pułapka religiofobii’, p. 7.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ See: A. Newman, ‘Feminist Social Criticism and Marx’s Theory of Religion’, *Hypatia* 1994, no. 4, pp. 15–37.

⁷⁶ J. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, New York 1990, p. 13.

thinking outside the opposition between feminism and Catholic Church in contemporary Poland difficult to accomplish. Fortunately, Zuzanna Radzik and her *Kościół kobiet* comes to the rescue.

3. *Kościół kobiet*. Towards an affirmative (re) reading

Although *Kościół kobiet* was enthusiastically welcomed in progressive (including feminist) circles, I am not its model or intended reader. In the introduction, Radzik declares: “The book *Kościół kobiet* results from my desire to share the space which I create for myself in the Church, a space that is populated by feminist theologians and nuns, the issues raised by them and their demands. I breathe their ways to formulate question, carefully read their answers. Their stories become an invitation to create such a space for myself, and not to give it up too easily”.⁷⁷ Her words, as quoted by Marcin Dzierżanowski, confirm what could only have been guessed: she wants to share this space with those Catholic women who feel lost in today’s Church.⁷⁸ However, she neither encourages anyone to stay in the Church, nor privileges any decision. There is only one thing she calls for: “If you stay in the Church, be loud. If you decide to leave, go out with a bang”.⁷⁹ I am not a model reader of Radzik’s book and my first attempt at reading it resulted in many doubts. Yet upon re-reading the book in the light of the ongoing debate about the relationship between Polish feminism and the Church, I am convinced that *Kościół kobiet* requires a more affirmative attitude. The question of combining feminism and Catholicism, which has occupied my mind, is not left aside by Radzik. On the contrary, it can be seen as the main theme of her book. This is what she asks all of her interviewees: nuns, theologians, women’s rights lobbyists, and female priests who have been excommunicated. Although she emphatically tries to understand each of them, she is not afraid to spell out her doubts. Her attitude of openness and dialogue is what impresses the most: in her interviews she succeeds in combining criticism and affirmative approach. That is why her book requires a similar reading. And it is why I would like to raise a question of what can be learnt from her book.

Inga Iwasiów’s review titled *Wiara, nadzieja, wytrwałość* is a symptomatic example of feminist reception of Radzik’s book. The author also wonders why women stay in an institution that is so hostile to them. She admits that she cannot find any other reason except a “metaphysical” one: “they are guided by pure

⁷⁷ Z. Radzik, *Kościół kobiet*, p. 7.

⁷⁸ “With this book I am looking for a space for myself in the Church. I would also like to show to the other women, who today feel lost in it, that they can find their place as well”. M. Dzierżanowski, op. cit.

⁷⁹ Z. Radzik, *Kościół kobiet*, p. 7.

faith”.⁸⁰ In Radzik’s book, however, one can find plenty of responses to this question and many of them cannot be reduced to “pure faith”.

Kościół kobiet begins with the author’s own answer. Referring to her own religious experience, she writes: “Personally I have not found any more nourishing reality [...]. I do not know a story more suffused with hope than the one shared by the Christian tradition”.⁸¹ In this statement faith is not as “pure” as Iwasiów claims: Radzik seems to experience the Christian tradition as empowering. Not mentioning it in the review, however, was not accidental. Iwasiów cannot interpret religious experience as empowering because of her position as a secular feminist and, perhaps more importantly, to a hidden assumption, shared by me during my first reading of *Kościół kobiet*, that the Catholic Church is always oppressive towards women.

Such an assumption is shared by many Western secular feminists, accused by Tina Beattie, British theologian, of anti-intellectualism and not taking religion seriously. “Many intelligent women all over the world — she says — combine feminism and their religious faith. When secular feminism refuses to notice this, it is also guilty of intolerance. It is almost a mirror image of Vatican language of exclusion and control”.⁸²

The feminist movement has a long tradition of perceiving discourses as either black or white, either oppressive or empowering. Michel Foucault calls for a more nuanced worldview: “We must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies”.⁸³ He argues that they should be rather conceived “as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable”⁸⁴ because

there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations, and serving as a general matrix — no such duality extending from the top down and reacting on more and more limited groups to the very depths of the social body.⁸⁵

Global women’s movements have repeatedly projected this binary opposition onto empirical reality, throwing out the baby with the bathwater in the end. Many kinds of women’s experiences have been marginalised since they have been ambiguous and have exceeded the rhetoric based on binary oppositions. Equating religion with oppression, victimizing Catholic women, exhorting them to leave the Church, and condemning female theologians for supporting the anti-feminist politics of the Church and its inner inequalities are equally short-sighted.

⁸⁰ I. Iwasiów, ‘Wiara, nadzieja, wytrwałość’, *Tygodnik Powszechny* 3440, 2015, p. 13.

⁸¹ Z. Radzik, *Kościół kobiet*, p. 5.

⁸² Quoted by *ibid.*, p. 291.

⁸³ M. Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, vol. I. *An Introduction*, New York 1978, p. 100.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

Religious discourse cannot be perceived as unambiguously oppressive on both intersecting levels: existential experience and global institutional politics. When Radzik writes about Christianity as a realm of hope and nourishment, she refers to her own experience. There are some feminist approaches that would take such declarations at face value. According to them, voicing women's experiences is a major task of feminist discourse. Since they are epistemologically privileged, they should be treated as a starting point for feminist theory and politics.

However, this may be suspicious for those who follow Joan Scott in rejecting the very assumption of "experience as evidence".⁸⁶ More constructivist approaches indicate that this perspective takes experience as self-evident and overlooks its discursive nature as well as power relations which shape both subjects and their experiences. Still, even accepting the constructivist standpoint does not necessarily imply exclusion of the existential level from debate on women's situation in the Church. As Butler puts it:

If religion functions as a key matrix for the articulation of values, and if most of the people in this global condition look to religion to guide their thinking on such matters, we would make a political error in claiming that religion ought to be overcome in each and every instance. Consider that religion is not simply a set of beliefs or a set of dogmatic views, but a matrix for subject formation whose final form is not determined in advance; a discursive matrix for the articulation and disputation of values, and a field of contestation.⁸⁷

Religion is not only a set of beliefs that can be rejected easily but rather "a matrix for subject formation" — this way of thinking leaves a space for subversion and resistance. Being religious and belonging to the Church cannot be equated with passive subordination.

The Catholic discourse cannot be perceived as unambiguously oppressive not only because it involves many different subject positions, but also because it differs over time and space. Radzik makes a significant contribution to the image of the Church as heterogeneous. Her interviewees' practices and her own theological reflections prove that when it comes to the global level of institutional policies, there are many Catholic Churches.

In many countries all over the world nuns are influential feminist leaders; often they were the ones who launched women's movements in their countries. One of the examples given by Radzik is sister Mary John Mananzan, a leader of the second-wave feminist movement in the Philippines. In the 80s, she founded the first feminist organization in her country and established the Institute of Women's Studies. In 2011, she became an honouree of Women Deliver, a list of one hundred most inspiring people, who improve the lives of women and girls around the world.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ For reconstruction of the idea of "experience as evidence" and its critique see: J.W. Scott, 'The Evidence of Experience', *Critical Inquiry* 1991, no. 4, pp. 773–793.

⁸⁷ J. Butler, *Frames of War*, London 2009, p. 122.

⁸⁸ Z. Radzik, *Kościół kobiet*, pp. 137–139.

For some underprivileged communities Catholicism is a space of resistance and empowerment. Radzik mentions, among others, *mujerista* theology, which “describes religious experience of Hispanic women in America”, which is practiced as a tool of liberation from ethnic prejudice, sexism and poverty.⁸⁹ In India, a feminist perspective has become a part of mainstream theology.⁹⁰ In 2010 Catholic bishops’ conference of India published a comprehensive document *Gender Policy of the Catholic Church in India*, having established gender mainstreaming as its priority strategy.⁹¹ As Radzik’s interviewees claim, parishes actively participate in combating violence against women and organize gender sensitivity workshops.

Giving such positive examples does not lead Radzik to paint a rosy picture of the Church. She remains aware and critical of deep entrenched tradition of gender inequality. Cases of successful implementation of gender mainstreaming policies are presented as rare exceptions. Achievements of female theologians, nuns, women working in Church administrations are portrayed as hard-fought and paid for with years of extremely hard work and struggles with discrimination.

Radzik is not trying to prove that Church is — or soon will be — a good place for women. Her goal is rather to convince her readers that Catholic feminism is not only possible, but even necessary. In my opinion, she is successful. And the most convincing argument, which should be taken very seriously by secular feminists, in particular those who perceive secularization as the most burning feminist goal, is given by Ivone Gebara. The well-known feminist theologian and nun from Brazil, quoted by Radzik, says: “leaving [the Church] also means disconnecting from the women, those who suffer the most — they’re all believers. [...] You can’t be a feminist while ignoring the religious affiliation of women”.⁹²

4. Strategies for the future

The question whether it is possible to be a Catholic feminist makes sense only in terms of politics of identity. The way it has affected my initial reception of *Kościół kobiet* proves how difficult it is to discard such a mode of thinking. Its fruitlessness, however, proves how necessary it is to abandon this conceptual framework.

The aforementioned words of Gebara are important because she turns away from thinking in terms of identity and introduces a perspective which is necessary for feminism. As a social movement, it must be pragmatic and community oriented. We

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 181.

⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 201–207.

⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 50–57.

⁹² Ibid., p. 199; I. Gebara, ‘Thinking differently is a right: interview with Ivone Gebara’, interviewed by Mariana Carbajal, <http://iglesiadescalza.blogspot.com/2012/08/thinking-differently-is-right-interview.html> [acc.: February 1, 2017].

— by which I mean secular feminists — need to accept the post-secular condition of the world we live in. Although calling for “more secularism” seems to be justified in the Polish context, in the long run it can become a harmful strategy.

First of all, it can result in a deeper polarisation of public debate. The Church, situated as immanently misogynistic and hostile to the very ideas of women’s rights and gender equality, will have neither interest nor legitimacy to implement any of them. As a consequence, there will be no chance for improving the situation of female believers. They will become isolated, and Gebara warns us about it.

Moreover, such polarization, alongside with the politics of identity, deprives the women’s movement of chances to create new strategic alliances. Abandoning identity politics makes the feminist movement less exclusionary and more open to unexpected alliances, based on shared emotions and political goals, rather than on collective identity. The example of the Black Protest shows that this strategy works. Its success resulted from its diversity, which was guaranteed by, among many others, its flexibility in defining participants of the movement in terms of identity. Thanks to this strategic openness, critiqued in some quarters as vagueness, the Black Protest could unite many women, including Catholics, in spite of the fact that it concerned such a contentious issue, which made opposition between Polish feminism and the Catholic Church so strong.

I am convinced that the strategy of temporary alliances with the Church is not only possible, but even necessary. Katarzyna Kucharska-Hornung, editor of the issue devoted to women in the church of the left-wing Catholic magazine *Kontakt* also calls for “little alliances for social problems, in which women are involved”,⁹³ giving a few examples of areas in which secular feminist and Catholic goals converge. A struggle against sexual objectification of women in language and visual culture is one of them. Another concerns fighting against domestic violence. In my opinion, however, what may constitute the most promising common goal is revaluation of care. Despite their differences,⁹⁴ Catholic and feminist movements can unite in struggles for recognition of value of care and its revaluation as an inevitable part of social life. This shared perspective might result in shared resistance to neoliberal politics. Neoliberalism refuses to recognize carework as not only a moral, but also social and economic value, which disproportionally affects women, who do more care work than men. A new form of political maternalism⁹⁵ is what Church and fem-

⁹³ K. Kucharska-Hornung, ‘Feminizm katolicki’, *Kontakt* 32, 2016, p. 4.

⁹⁴ In my opinion feminist task is not only to revalue care, but also to “degender” it, whereas the Church, influenced by John Paul II’s “new feminism” promotes gender essentialism and vision of care as women’s duty and vocation. However, as Zuzanna Radzik and Justyna Melonowska (among many others) argue, gender essentialism can be undermined from the theological point of view (see: Z. Radzik, *Kościół kobiet*; J. Melonowska, *Osob(n)a: kobieta a personalizm Jana Pawła II-Karola Wojtyły: doktryna i rewizja*, Warszawa 2016).

⁹⁵ Elżbieta Korolczuk calls for some new form of political maternalism as part of feminist strategies (see: E. Korolczuk, op. cit., p. 52).

inist movement could fight for together. *Kościół kobiet*, a book proving the Church does not have to be anti-feminist, is a step towards this difficult alliance.

Kościół i feminizm w Polsce: odwieczni wrogowie? Z perspektywy świeckiej feministki

Abstrakt

Książka *Kościół kobiet* Zuzanny Radzik, feministki i katolickiej teolożki, jest punktem wyjścia do przedstawionych w artykule rozważań na temat relacji między feminizmem a Kościołem katolickim w Polsce. Analizując feministyczną debatę na jej temat, skupiającą się na kwestii walki o prawa reprodukcyjne, kościelnej kampanii antygenderowej i negocjacjach dotyczących kształtu polskiej demokracji, przekonuję, że jest ona przejawem paradygmatu sekularyzacyjno-modernistycznego i przekonania o niemożliwości pogodzenia walki o prawa kobiet z interesami Kościoła. Postuluję porzucenie takiej perspektywy i zerwanie z feministyczną polityką tożsamości. Przedstawiam też propozycję potencjalnego sojuszu ruchu kobiecego z Kościołem.

Słowa-klucze: feminizm katolicki, feminizm świecki, prawa reprodukcyjne, antygenderyzm

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