

DEMOCRATIC COMMUNITY AND PROBLEM OF EXCLUSION: ABOUT WOMEN'S UNDERREPRESENTATION IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

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Abstract

In democratic countries women's political participation continues to be lower than men's. Women are the second-class citizens. The aim of the article is to point out the mechanisms of exclusion that are rooted in the basis of liberal democracy. In the first part of the article I discuss the concept of the political agent, citizenship and public discourse and I explain why I see these categories as discriminating against women. Moreover, I analyze the liberal idea of difference as inclusion criteria that women are not able to meet. In the second part I try to answer the question if the non-exclusive public community could be possible. Invoking the concept of communicative democracy I propose some premises and strategies to implement in order to make women participation in the political community equal.

Keywords: *female citizenship, liberal community, political discrimination of women*

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Democratic Community and the Exclusion of Women

Despite changes in social perception of women's role that have occurred over the past decades, their participation in public life – including political life – remains at a low level on a global scale (see *The Global Gender Gap Report 2017*; Kwiatkowska 2018; Todorova 2018). This also applies to countries regarded as “mature” democracies. As the reasons for this situation are indicated by structural determinants (unequally distributed resources of time, money and skills), institutional determinants (including the type of electoral law, advancement of democratization, the method of emerging political representation, level of party competition), and cultural factors (stereotypes, values, traditional vs egalitarian view on gender roles, religion, socialization).

Therefore there are procedures “friendly” for women that are proposed and implemented, and which are to lead to increase in the representation of women in institutions, such as proportional system of counting votes large constituencies, high electoral thresholds, quotas, parities on party lists (Matland, Montgomery 2003). Undoubtedly the aforementioned actions aim in the right direction, but there is a question whether they catch the essence of the problem, the deep cause of women's exclusion. We may wonder if it is enough to open democratic institutions? Or, whether is it necessary to reflect upon preconceptions of the order of liberal democracy, and consequently, to change its fundamental structure (see Fraser 2013; Majewska 2014)? This question became the inspiration for the following text.

The concept of political liberalism contains a contradiction between the ideal of individual freedom and the equality in the public sphere, and the (hidden) premise saying that it is not women's destiny to act in this sphere on equal terms with men's rights (Beaumont 2016; Cook 2017; Środa 2003, Okin 1998; Pateman 1988). Although they are not explicitly excluded from politics, the categories regulating social life

resulting from the liberal-democratic political order define their status as “different”, or “alien”. The deep structure of liberalism built on such a specific attitude to gender becomes a source of cultural relations, definitions, justifications and expectations through which men and women perceive others and themselves, their abilities and their lives (Phillips 1993; Richardson 2005). This foundation exists independently of social practices, therefore institutional steps taken to increase the activity of women in the public sphere will not be effective without taking a critical reflection on the deeper causes of their exclusion (see Rorty 1996, Pate-man 1988). How is it happened that seemingly universal and neutral categories of liberalism, under the guise of “obviousness”, create boundaries difficult for women to cross?

The article has been divided into two parts. The aim of the first is to present the thesis, according to which the reason for the absence and exclusion of women from the political community can be seen in the very essence of liberal democracy - in its relation to the difference. Basic and seemingly universal notions taken from democracy's vocabulary, such as the public sphere, common good, equality, justice, citizenship, subjectivity exclude those members of the community whose characteristics, behaviors or views do not fit. This mechanism applies not only to minorities who want to find their place in the community, but also to the majority group – women who have been left out in liberal concepts (see: the liberal “logic of lack”, Środa 2003).

In the second part of this article, I try to find a different way of thinking about the community. I propose to redefine the concepts that constitute the democratic community, so that the gender difference can be expressed within its framework. My proposal is a theoretical postulate. Whether and to what extent it can be embodied in the legal and institutional system of a democratic community I remain an open question.

Part I:

Feminine subject in liberal concepts. Limits of belonging

The assumption that an individual or a group has no competence to participate in the democratic process is undermining the very principle of democracy (Marti 2006). At the same time, democracy is more than a rule or form of governing. It can be treated as a specific form of human political coexistence (Mouffe 1996), a model of life (Benhabib 1996), the order of values, meanings, symbols, and even the state of collective consciousness. Both in the formal (legal and institutional) dimension as well as in the social and cultural practices – in expectations, or assessments – the community excludes those who do not meet the criteria of belonging. The history of democratization – the progressive triumph of freedom, representing the interests of society – is also the history of exclusion or incomplete inclusion (see *the exclusive homogeneity of democracy*, Marti 2006).

As we know, the border of belonging to a democratic community has been formally opened and today in democratic countries they have the same rights to participate in political life as men. The definition of the role of women in society and their self-identification – the way they perceive themselves in this role – has also changed (see Kwak 2010). However, despite the formal equality of women, the growing acceptance of their political activity and their readiness to take such actions, they remain a minority in public life. There are more male politicians than female, and moreover, they hold higher, more decision-making, exposed and prestigious positions (see Daniłowska, 2017; Niewiadomska-Cudak 2017).

One of the reasons of this situation are the criteria of participation inscribed in the deep structure of the liberal-democratic order. They are not expressed explicitly and unarticulated in the discourse, and that is why whose fulfillment is more difficult for women than for men. The

condition for crossing the border of belonging to “demos” is a submission to a democratic process of levelling, matching, cutting. In fact, these tailor’s metaphors conceal the requirement of assimilation – the abandonment of behaviours, experiences and identity elements that do not fit in the standards describing the citizen, the participant of the discourse, the politician.

The question if the community needs to exclude in order to establish and function, I will consider later in the article. At this point in need to be emphasized that the mechanism of assimilation/exclusion itself does not explain sufficiently the situation in which women have more difficult access to the public sphere than men. Or the fact that their (women’s) status as citizens – full members of the community – often requires additional legitimacy. It is explained by the fact that the similarity of experiences forming the basis of liberal community concerns the experiences of men not women. The universalizing paradigm of contemporary democracy means in practice the expectation that a women wanting to function effectively in the public sphere should take on the role written for men, agreeing on the alleged universality of his experience. Her affiliation to “demos” turns out to be conditional, requires – under the thread of marginalization and exclusion – assimilation and adaptation to the existing male-centric model of the common good, political subject or concept of citizen (Phillips 1992, 1993; Voet 1998; Mouffe 2000; Bobako 2010; Marti 2006).

Feminine subject and the liberal concept of political subject

The liberal concept of a political subject relies on the expectations formulated for an active person in the public sphere. Although it demands the abstract, universal, gender blind, appeals to certain ideas about human being to imagine a human being as a man (heterosexual, adult,

white, possessing private property, see Majewska 2014; Richardson 2005).

This category of subject that stems from the idea of “natural” needs, characteristic to everyone, defines “political man” as rational, efficient and independent (Cooke 2017; Phillips 1993; Środa 2003; Bobako 2010; Funk 2004). Thus, the characteristics of women, which are an essential element of their identity, such as emotionality, interdependence, grounding, care, corporality stay beyond this definition and make the problematic status of a woman as a political being. Being recognized as an equal actor in a democratic public sphere and aspiring to participate in sovereign power requires a denial, or at least disguise some elements of feminine identity (Landes 1996; Phillips 1993; see also the conception of subaltern status Fraser, 2013). At the same time, because the role of *homo politicus* has been defined on the basis of male characteristics, it is difficult for women to play (Środa 2003). Benhabib (1996: 13) notes that only men’s bodies seemed to fulfill the ideal requirements of this contained form of subjectivity. In contrast, women were deemed to inhabit bodies that, rather than guaranteeing political liberties, were marked by their physically distinctive sexualities and irrational, hence apolitical, qualities.

Feminine subject and a liberal citizen concept

Likewise, the concept of a citizen seemingly neutral and abstracting from the differences between men and women, is based on criteria that a man can “naturally” fulfill but a woman could do it only conditionally and not in every situation (Lister 1997; Bobako 2010). The cultural construction of politics as the masculine sphere makes women the second-class citizens. Usually their situation, despite a stable, legal status is marked by degradation, prejudice and discrimination. As those who are not fully qualified for citizenship in liberal narratives women remain

aspiring to full participation, learning the existing rules, while men make free and conscious choice of liberal standards, to which they then adapt and demonstrate tolerance, justice and rationality (see: *learners vs choosers*, Forment 1996).

A citizenship understood as a willingness to participate in, and an involvement in community affairs requires time and energy. There are the resources that an ordinary woman does not have in the private sphere or she has less than a male has. In women's social role are inscribed the responsibility for the care of children, the sick, the old as well as the "able" men and these factors are a practical barrier to their political involvement (Phillips 1992).

Their care work builds the facilities, the necessary institutional support for activities for free men. They are autonomous citizens, possessing a sense of dignity and social respect, paid, and being able to implement any concepts of "good life" (Voet 1998; Środa 2003; Bobako 2010). Being a part of liberal division the feminine role of the guardian of the private sphere, not only impede the movement "outside" the home-space, but also it has other existential consequences. Women are socialized in the direction of being a non-political being, not decisive in matters concerning the community, not thinking about oneself as a causative subject – one that affects the future of society. They do not participate in the space of freedom, change, progress, which the public sphere can be. "It can be said that the man won the battle for the interpretation of culture understood as hierarchical, above all as bisexual and dual-zone (private and public sphere), while the woman was imprisoned in her sexuality, objectified in a world devoid of transcendence and condemned to reproduction"– writes Magdalena Środa citing Simone de Beauvoir (1949).

Women locked in the space of intimacy, stability, rest, but also silence, were omitted in the project of individualism and excluded from the Enlightenment emancipation narratives. The liberal concepts of

individual freedom and equality were based on masculine – not feminine experience (Środa, 2003).

Despite the formal right to vote, women have not become fully free citizens, in the sense that the conditions of the private sphere have limited (often prevented) full participation in making political decisions, as well as thinking about themselves in terms of influence and agency. Meanwhile, citizenship understood as a concern for the common good and the ability to put it above one's own interests requires separating the "I" from its own identity and adaptation to the norms of the public sphere (Phillips 1993). A citizen is able and ready to cross its own particularity, subjectivity, to move beyond the "I" and beyond the "mine", or "above" the privacy. This mental transgression – a commitment to the common good – is the essence of political activity. For women whose identity remains grounded in private relationships that form the private sphere, it is a difficult, non-obvious move.

Feminine subject and the liberal concept of discourse

Another criterion that makes it difficult for women to actively participate in politics is the access to democratic discourse and the possibility to express within it. Open discourse, being rational, free from discrimination and power relations constitutes the core of the public sphere. It is a testimony to the political empowerment of the members of the community. In principal, it remains culturally neutral and universal – within its framework any interested person can express views and agree on its own interests with other participants in the dialogue (Habermas 1996; Bobako 2010).

However, this concept contains hidden assumptions that make the democratic discourse an area open only to some people. Apparently every participant has equal access to the voice, but not every voice is well heard, not every voice is considered worth listening to (Foucault

1971; Mrozik 2014). Although women today are not formally excluded from the discourse, both its language, norms and mechanisms governing it, situate them on the margins of the community, in its silent area (Środa 2003; Gould 1996; Young 1996; Bartky 1997, Solnit 2014). Even if women have access to the field of discourse, they do not function in it on an equal rights, allowing them for free exchange of arguments because they do not meet the crucial criteria of political subjectivity and citizenship,

Liberal discourse positively evaluates and privileges assertive, emotionless, categorical style of expression – culturally attributed to men (see: *hegemonic masculinity/managing masculinity* Raewyn Connell, 2009). Women's manner of speaking and arguing, which results from the cultural construct of femininity, is devalued. The expected and considered as a "feminine" style of communication – emotional, modest, based on avoidance on confrontation, characterized by uncertainty – is identified in the discourse with weakness of arguments, lack of objectivity, and is rejected as a particular (Solnit 2014; Young 1996).

Moreover, the fear internalized in the course of social education, lack of self-confidence, inferiority complex and subordination, belief in the lack of political competences and self-devaluation of one's own position often place women in the role of a passive observer of events. "Significant absence" of women in the discourse means that they function in discussion rather as an object than a subject (Young 1996; Tannen 1996). Gender difference manifested in the style of communication, self-presentation, language, in the way of arguing differentiates the positions of interlocutors. In fact, the assumption of an equal status of participants seems to be an illusion (Bobako 2010; por. Habermas 1996). The cultural construction of discourse as a "male conversation" makes it exclusive and unfriendly for women.

Not solely the norms determining the proper way of conducting a discussion, but also the language of discourse is exclusive, its deep

structure is patriarchal. Women in public discourse speak a language whose concepts have been derived from the “male” political language, whose categories and symbolism refer only to a certain type of experience and a certain type of meaning. As we have mentioned, the ideas that are important from a political point of view, such as a citizenship, an independent individual, a virtue, public service, legal entity only “pretend” that they refer to women and men. In fact they are deeply marked by gender differences in every culture (Landes 1996; Środa 2003). “Women are given the same words men are given: masculine words. These words cannot express what women feel, however; masculine words can express only what men think women feel” (Putnam Tong 2009: 154). The language of discourse is therefore not a common communication space, but a “veil” concealing the experiences of women and not allowing them to speak (Phillips 1993; Mrozik 2014).

Discourse in democracy is exclusive also because it does not use mechanisms that allow expression of the gender difference. On the contrary, the common good and agreement set the goal and priority (Gould 1996). Meanwhile, these are concepts that are essentially exclusive. There is no consensus that does not enslave somebody, which in a full (and not adulterated) way would satisfy everyone (Mouffe 2000). In turn, the common good is based on a specific concept of good and good life, reflects some preferences, so it is only good for some (Phillips 1996; Środa 2003).

The scope of what is allowed in discourse is shaped by the expectation that differences that cannot be reduced to ideological divisions will be sacrificed in the name of the normative priority, which is a consensus. The multiplicity of ideas, preferences, alternatives is represented by “white, heterosexual men from the middle class” (Benhabib 1996, Richardson 2005). Thus, a different way of perceiving and assessing reality, with difficulty and not always breaks into the mainstream of

public debate. The perspective of women – their experiences, priorities, values – often remains beyond the reach of attention and audibility.

In Poland, the political activity of mothers is an example of the action of this muting discursive mechanism. Nationwide Movement of Single Mothers for the restoration of the Alimony Fund, the most active in 2002-2007 – led to partial success only when its character resulting from the experience of motherhood was camouflaged (see “strategic camouflage of motherhood”, Hryciuk 2017). It was not until the change in the language in which the postulates were formulated – their approach in terms of universal civil rights, and not the specific rights of women – mothers, changed the social resonance of their actions.

Agency of women is instrumentalized within the framework of discourse, segregated and rationed depending on social, political, ideological needs, subordinated to the interests of social structures. Moreover this mechanism directs the energy and potential of women in areas where it can be used without risk for a consensus-based community. Małgorzata Fidelis (2010) analyzing the gender policy implemented in the Polish discourse of the PRL period, notes that depending on the needs of the political system, women were encouraged to gain work (the figure of the *Work Leader*) as a part of the gender equality promoted in the discourse. Simultaneously, the importance of women's reproductive function and the need for their unpaid work in the private sphere was strengthened by the politically passive discursive figure of the *Polish Mother*.

Woman subject and a liberal concept of difference

The manner in which the constructed categories of political subject, citizen and discourse disclose the attitude that liberalism takes towards the gender difference. It depends on the expectation of a possibly far-reaching assimilation of the difference that is to fit into the “universal”

categories regulating social life. The liberal demand for equality, despite the differences, according to which we are different, but these differences should not count.

In practice it means to ignore everything that does not fit in the mainstream of political life. Determining the differences resulting from different experiences of men and women as being irrelevant to the decisions made, although it is supposed to give the impression of acting for the benefit of women's equality, in fact confirms and reinforces inequalities. It deprives women of a chance for equal – not identical – conditions for functioning in the public sphere (Phillips 1996; see also Benhabib 1996; Środa 2003; Bobako 2010).

At the source of this attitude – reluctance, fear of difference – lies the conviction that the difference disturbs the community, threatens the concept of the common good that unites it and stands on the path to consensus; therefore it does not allow to build and maintain a stable identity (see Benhabib 1996). It seems, however, that the pursuit of equality despite differences is the cause of the crisis of the community – disappointment and rejection by those who cannot or do not want to belong to it. From this standpoint we can ask if such an oppressive community that cannot answer to the difference differently than assimilating or excluding it, is still needed? Or is possible?

Part II:

Is a non-exclusive community possible?

“Democracy enjoys constant, permanent motion – a gentle kind of permanent resolution, a movable feast that affords each generation room for new appetites and new tastes, and thus allows political and spiritual migration to a new territory” (Barber 1996, s. 350).

It is characteristic of the present day to talk about the crisis of the democratic community. Difficult, more and more difficult is also the

answer to the question, what connects it and whether in the plurality of values, lifestyles, aspirations, views any sharing category is necessary at all (Taylor 1992; Środa 2003). Traditional answers, pointing to the category of the nation constituting the basis of “We”, universal human nature, rationalism, common good, shared moral principles, now are being questioned and require renegotiation (see Mouffe, 1996).

The category of collective identity is in no way evident today; on the contrary, it can be perceived as oppressive, excluding, closing the possibility of both individual and social development (Phillips 1992, 1996). In turn, individual human identity is often defined as “project” created in opposition and beyond the community, not “given” data, defined once and for all within its framework (Środa 2003; Bauman 2000).

It is perceived as a series of experiments that go beyond the boundaries of any affiliation, faith, morality, law (Giddens 1991). And yet increasing number of researchers indicate that a political community, however weak and not coping with the challenges of modern times, is needed. Individual identity cannot be constituted without reference to traditions, norms, morals, shared meanings. Fundamental to its creation is orientation towards the good understood in terms of the community – rejection of it – leads to existential uncertainty, anomie (Taylor 1992; Bobako 2010). Finally, being an area of political activity, expression, speech, action, change and progress, it has a culture-forming and emancipatory character (see Barber 1996; Phillips 1996).

Likewise the community can be the space and condition of freedom. Is this the community we know? It seems that the experience of freedom is not given to everyone equally. Many women remain “closed” in a hidden, invisible and silent order of existence or are limited in their public activity (Bobako 2010; Środa 2003).

They are expected to adopt a traditional social role and stay outside the public sphere, discourse, politics, influence or to adjust to male-centric categories. In that case playing the role of a man means losing the

culturally defined “femininity” and the chance to reconcile private and professional life, unless a woman decides to enter the role of a multi-purpose super-woman who “reconciles” all resulting from both paid work and unpaid caring work (see Fraser, 2013).

In turn, the price for the preservation of traditional “femininity” is lower to compare with men credibility in the political game and the status of a “other” – closely watched, subjected to continuous, based on ambiguous criteria assessment. Regardless of whether a woman tries to be “male” and is treated like a man, whether she remains “feminine” and treated differently, as “different” to the male norm (Connell, 2009) – she is somehow discriminated. Both the way of surrendering to cultural oppression and the path towards emancipation “from femininity to masculinity”, do not give women the possibility of real empowerment and self-determination within the community. One may ask if it is possible to emancipate and empower women in the framework of the liberal-democratic order?

I believe that yes, however, it is necessary to reject the belief in the political liberalism that the gender difference is irrelevant in the public sphere. Moreover we have to reject the belief that it is up to women themselves, their willingness, commitment and effort to have their full and equal participation in shaping the political community decision. A community open to the difference requires thinking about, discussing and redefining its founding concepts, redefining its basic goals, structures and ways of proceeding (Bobako 2010).

Below, in the last part of the article I propose a different, more affirmative understanding of the difference, and consider theoretically what its introduction to public discourse could be. I wonder how to redefine the categories of pluralism, the public sphere, the political subject as well as equality and justice in such a way as to remedy the “liberal mistake of omission” described by Magdalena Środa (2003).

Renegotiation of the category of difference

The difference does not have to be a barrier between people, the reason for privileging some and subordinating others. Understood not as a problem that needs to be solved but as a challenge, an invitation to dialogue, a starting point for reflection, leads to an attitude of respect, readiness to listen and accept points of view of others (Barber 1996). The consequence of such a redefinition of the difference is the rejection of homogeneity, which is based on the exclusion and treatment of difference as a value, as a social good, not sacrificing it in the name of the common good (Mouffe 1996; Young 1996).

Regarding the gender difference, recognition that would allow it to enter the public sphere and give it meaning would involve not only realizing its socio-historical conditioning but also that it is shaped in a relationship with the power (Bobako 2010, 2011; Mouffe 2000; Phillips 1992, 1993). The discriminating, devaluing nature of the category of “femininity” consists in the fact that in a political, cultural, social perspective, the women are characterized by a subordination and subalternity (Fraser 2013; Gould 1996; Bourdieu 1998).

Renegotiation of the category of pluralism

Perceiving the difference as a value and revealing the mechanisms that create it is irreconcilable with the understanding of pluralism as a stage to a consensus, as an inconvenience that will be overcome in the future. Therefore, also the concept of pluralism – the basis of modern liberal democracy – requires redefinition. Deprived of antagonisms, the coexistence of dissimilarity that assumes liberalism is not possible. Conflicts – if the differences are treated seriously – are inevitable and can have a positive, invigorating effect on the community. Facts of discussions, being a response to the constant challenge posed by a difference, are

a testimony to the vitality of democracy. Furthermore, they show that it is a dynamic process; a project that is constantly becoming, although it may never be fully realized. Recognizing the difference means understanding pluralism as an axiological principle that requires reinforcement and celebration (see Benhabib 1996; Mouffe 1996, 2005).

However, we must admit, not an uncritical celebration. Pluralism, of which the boundaries are not delineated or rather permanently delineated in the context of discourse, creates the risk of losing itself in the particularity of group identities, their own interests, and threatens chaos. Then it is not a recognition of differences but a capitulation towards them (Phillips 1996; Zwoliński 2010).

Hence, the challenge posed by the difference also consists in the need to maintain a balance between the recognition of otherness and the search for a universal plane, common for all. It requires an answer to the question, what may unite the non-exclusively community?

I believe that the common denominator that connects those who seem different, may be the attitude of community members, which assumes the ability and readiness for changing perspective. The ability to recognize their own position as a relative, inscribed in a context, and their own identity as being multi-faceted and particular (Young 1996; Phillips 1993, 1996; Habermas 1996).

Renegotiation of the category of public sphere

Non-exclusive community requires the existence of an open public sphere, taking into account the differences in opinions. One that is an ever-expanding field of participation and discussion, shaped by the involvement of people who want to recognize and deal with differences themselves. Public space understood in this way is the area of individual projects implementation, the place where held the common search for answers, active pursuit of goals, creation of values, testing of standards

(see “democracy as a system of action” Barber 1996, also „community built through commitment” based on active citizenship, Phillips 1996).

Worth noting, as a proposition of such a community, is the concept of Carole Gould (1996) of a “dispersed” discourse built around many local centers, where interests and needs may be discussed that do not necessarily concern the entire community. Similarly, Iris Young (1996) develops the idea of an exclusive public debate in her model of communication democracy – within its framework the difference is protected from the decisions of the majority through guaranteed pluralism of perspectives, styles of speaking, ways of expressing their experience. Unlike in Habermas’ deliberative model (1996), the cultural conditions of discourse – diverse positions and power relations in which the participants remain – are not forced out of public debate, but are recognized and discussed.

The discourse in a communication democracy is not universalized, it is subordinated to the pursuit of consensus, and the “Other” is not a mirror in which similarities are expected and sought. In turn, Anne Phillips (1996) proposes a departure from thinking about democracy in terms of the dichotomy of universalism vs particularism, difference vs equality. In her opinion, it is necessary to find an indirect way – to take into account the difference and to maintain a common ground that would give the opportunity to go beyond your own perspective. Perhaps the public sphere understood as an open space of interaction, dialogue, active participation, where common interests could be identified and create opportunities without coercion, could be a such common good (see Środa 2003).

A necessary condition for opening the democratic community to the gender difference is to rethink the border between the private and public spheres (Pateman 1988). Heterogenization of the public sphere, giving the possibility of expressing the difference, means including elements of privacy in it. Thus, we mean the resignation from understanding

politics as happening in the public arena and inclusion in the category of “politicalism” based on the domination and subordination of closed relationships in the private sphere. Shifting or unsealing the border between the private and public spheres would mean to give sense to the needs and problems associated with the private sphere, subjecting them to public discussion, and redefining the concept of citizenship, where the main motivation to act in the public sphere is not so much (not only) own, individual interest, but also needs to arise from the relational character of women's cultural identity.

Ensuring equal access to the public sphere for men and women and taking into account gender differences and the related differences in experience should be combined with a deep transformation of the family model and cultural ideas and stereotypes about the role of women and men in the family (Okin 1998; Środa 2003; Funk 2004; Bobako 2010).

A change in the distribution of time and responsibilities in the private sphere and equality in the division of care work and its inclusion in the extended category of citizenship (see the concept of “intimate citizenship” in Lister, 1997) would enable women to engage in collective action, gain experience in exercising authority and make political decisions. It would be an opportunity for women to practice an active, committed citizenship in which a participation is an essence.

Renegotiation of the category of political subject

The public sphere, which does not limit anyone's participation, nobody's personality or any subject, is a space in which a subject with heterogenic identity can participate actively. As far as functioning within this community is important for him/her (Voet 1998; Środa 2003; Bobako 2010).

The redefinition of the category of a political subject, the opening of this category, which could be the answer to the gender difference, may

rely on the incorporation of feminine features and aspects of life into thinking about a political subject. It is a proposal to rethink the concept of a rational actor prepared from feelings, needs, qualities, moods, talents towards the transformation of the subject as interactive, entangled in a relationship, dependent on others and responsible for other members of the community (see the concept of biological citizenship, Rose, Novas 2005; the concept of intimate citizenship, Lister 1997).

Renegotiation of the category of equality

I assume that in relation to the gender difference, reconciling the separateness of the experiences and identities of men and women should mean the redefinition of the rights of men and women, not their equating. This redefinition must take into account different life experiences, different needs, conditions and styles of functioning in such a way as not to set these properties in a hierarchical order.

The ideal of equality and justice in the public sphere is not satisfied when women are introduced into institutions created for men, corresponding to their interests, while at the same time asserting that the gender of a politician / participant in the public sphere or subject in the debate is irrelevant.

Expanding the public sphere by including “women's themes” in it and introducing women's policies into men's principles is not tantamount to changing the character of power, which remains “a conversation between gentlemen” (Solnit 2014).

Hence, a rethinking of equality and justice requires a qualitative change: it is not only an equal representation of women in the structures of power, but also a reconceptualization of these structures, a redefinition of the ways in which politics works and its primary goals.

Conclusion

A non-exclusive community, giving everyone equal opportunities to pursue their own project of a good life, which does not expect its members to become the same is possible, but requires the resignation of the undifferentiated society. Its condition is not the rejection of liberalism – it is still the most effective technique of dealing with diversity (Środa 2003) – but a critical reflection and redefinition of the categories that have funded it. Behind the all-embracing, generalizing ideas, such as humanity, equality, justice, law, freedom, democracy, there is a concrete challenge, which is the articulation of difference. Taking it seriously is not about overcoming otherness but about trying to understand it, making it the basic subject of democratic discussion.

As a part of a liberal-democratic community open to differences, which is often understood as a (not easy) meeting of people, it may be possible to build relationships between individuals, groups, men and women differently than on the basis of privilege and discrimination (see Benhabib 1996; Young 1996).

By introducing a gender difference into the field of discourse, where it will be faced with challenges, undermined and confronted, different experiences and identities of men and women will gain political representation. This meeting does not have to lead to an agreement - antagonism is inscribed in pluralism – it is important to recognize and undermine the relationship of power-subordination, which is inscribed in the gender difference. The requirement of accepting different perspectives for everyone – both privileged and subordinate participants of public life – means undermining certainty and “obviousness”, forcing self-reflection (Środa 2003).

Hence, we may ask if the presented proposition of democracy that recognizes the difference is an utopia? The purpose of this article was to present a theoretical proposal. It is a postulate to rethink the ideals

of the democratic order in the face of the challenges posed by a diverse society. Is the model of democracy open to differences possible to introduce? What activities at the level of everyday democratic practice would be aimed at such a reconstruction of the public sphere that it would become open to gender differences? How to involve women in making political decisions? Through what activities to increase their participation in social, political and economic life, how to encourage engagement? Will the participation of women in the public debate lead to its qualitative change? How to create a policy that responds to diverse needs and at the same time avoid social fragmentation, closure in group identities, hostile divisions? What should the justice model look like, in which equality would take into account different needs? How to define women's needs and experiences as a group and avoid the trap of essentialism? What form should a political representation take in a democracy open to differences? Who should represent women and their needs in their diversity? Finally, how in practice to reconcile the postulate of difference and equality?

Answers to these questions go beyond the issues raised in the article. However, I believe that it is necessary to rethink the theoretical assumptions of the democratic order to find these answers. Undermining the foundations of the democratic order, criticizing the underlying ideas, articulating the conflict does not mean its weakness and crisis. On the contrary, democratic politics begins where confidence ends (see Środa 2003).

Democracy is a debate about democracy, democratic citizenship means discussion, what it means to be a citizen, democratic politics is a discussion where its limits are. Democracy must define its categories through democratic struggles (Barber, 1996). The instability of the democratic order is also a threat and a blessing for it at the same time. From one side is threat because it requires constant struggle and readiness to defend it, it is so difficult because of lack a metaphysical ground

that provides ultimate legitimacy. From other side is blessing, because it does not allow dominance relations to freeze and become an indisputable, not requiring justification (Bobako 2010; Mouffe 1996; Gutmann 1996).

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