

MATERIALS OF THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL  
GENDER WORKSHOP

**OVERCOMING GENDER BACKLASH:  
EXPERIENCES OF UKRAINE, BELARUS, RUSSIA,  
GEORGIA, ARMENIA AND POLAND**

KYIV, OCTOBER 24-25, 2013



**Organized by:** Heinrich Boell Foundation, Ukraine Regional Office

**In cooperation with:** Heinrich Boell Foundation International Offices of Poland,  
Russia and South Caucasus

**Location:** Kyiv

**Conference languages:** English/Russian

**Photo:** Heinrich Boell Foundation in Ukraine

# PROGRAMME

## October 24, Thursday

### 10.00 – 12.00 – **Session 1. Welcoming session and presentations of hbs gender work in the region**

Moderator: *Anna Dovgopol*

- *Kyryl Savin*, Head of hbs Kyiv office
- *Anna Dovgopol*, Gender Democracy Program Coordinator (hbs Kyiv)
- *Irina Kosterina*, Gender Democracy Program Coordinator (hbs Moscow)
- *Agnieszka Grzybek*, Gender Democracy Program Coordinator (hbs Warsaw)
- *Etuna Nogaideli*, Gender Democracy Program Coordinator (hbs Tbilisi)
- *Anna Preis*, Program Coordinator on Belarus (hbs Kyiv)
- *Katja Giebel*, Gender focal point (hbs Berlin)

12.00 – 12.30 – coffee-break

- 12.30 – 14.30 – **Session 2. Sexual and reproductive rights of women**

Moderator: *Agnieszka Grzybek*

- **Sexual and reproductive health and rights of women in Armenia**  
*Anna Nikoghosyan*, Programs Director, Society Without Violence NGO, Armenia
- **One step forward, two steps back:: discussions on sexual / reproductive rights in Belarus**  
*Tatsiana Shchurko*, sociologist, independent researcher, feminist activist (Gender Route, FROG)
- **Reproductive and sexual rights of different groups of Russian population**  
*Olga Isupova*, senior researcher, Institute of demography of Higher School of Economics
- **Assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs) and the nationalistic discourse in contemporary Poland**  
*Elżbieta Korolczuk*, sociologist, Södertörn University and Gender Studies at University of Warsaw, feminist activist, member of “Women’s 8th of March Alliance”.

14.30 – 15.30 – lunch

### 15.30 – 16.30 – **Session 3. Gender and education / gender education**

Moderator: *Irina Kosterina*

- **Feminist pedagogical experience: talking about gender in the third sector in Belarus**  
*Elena Minchenia*, Gender researcher, lecturer, Centre for Gender Studies, European Humanities University (Vilnius, Lithuania)
- **Gender and education / Gender education in Armenia**  
*Nonna Artushyan*, Co-founder and trustee, Society Without Violence NGO, Armenia

16.30 – 18.00 – coffee-break

### 18.00 – 20.00 – Open public discussion **“Tradition as unconditional good in conservative rhetoric”**

Moderators: *Anna Dovgopol and Anna Preis*

## October 25, Friday

### 10.00 – 11.30 – Session 4. Gender and education / gender education

Moderator: *Etuna Nogaideli*

- **In between cultural traditions and reactionary threats: is gender education possible in Ukraine?**  
*Oleg Maruschenko*, expert of Kroma Gender Center, editor of gender “Ya” journal, professor at the philosophy department of Kharkiv National Medical University
- **Between gender studies and „gender ideology“. Gender education in post 1989 Poland**  
*Magdalena Grabowska*, sociologist, Warsaw University
- **Gender roles in education in Georgia**  
*Maia Barkaia*, gender researcher.

11.30 – 12.00 – coffee-break

### 12.00 – 13.30 – Session 5. Cooperation between LGBT and non-LGBT organizations

Moderator: *Anna Preis*

- **Pink triangle: LGBT as a symbolic figure of modern russian politics**  
*Olga Burmakova*, PhD student of Gender program European University in Saint-Petersburg, feminist activist
- **Mainstreaming LBT issues in women’s rights agenda in Georgia: reality and challenges**  
*Lily Mamulashvili*, student of Psychology department in Tbilisi State University, queer feminist and LGBTQ activist, research assistant at WISG.
- **Cooperation between LGBT and mainstream human rights initiatives: Ukrainian experience**  
*Maksym Butkevych*, human rights activist, No Borders project

13.30 – 14.30 – lunch

### 14.30 – 16.30 – Session 6. Closing of the workshop and search for strategies

Moderators: *Anna Dovgopol and Kyryl Savin*

## SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS OF WOMEN





# Sexual and reproductive health and rights of women in Armenia

**Anna Nikoghosyan**

**Programs Director, Society Without Violence NGO  
Armenia, Yerevan  
anna.nik.swv@gmail.com**

Sexual and reproductive health and rights are a matter of social justice and equality. Women, young people and especially marginalized groups are the primary targets of existing inequalities. Gender based discrimination, stereotypes and violence against women and girls violate their human rights, limit their freedoms and decision-making in public and private life – even their decisions about their own bodies. Social taboos and norms about sexuality and gender prevent women and girls from obtaining the necessary information and services for their self-care and well-being.

This paper is going to focus on 3 main areas concerning sexual and reproductive health and rights of Armenian women: access to contraceptives, sexual and reproductive health services and abortion; sexual education in the country and harmful Armenian traditions with a particular focus on sex selective abortions and virginity.

## **1. Access to contraceptives, sexual and reproductive health services and abortion**

Modern contraceptive use is low in Armenia. A UNICEF survey indicates that 61% of women use contraception. However, reports by international aid agencies show that only 14.4% of Armenian women use modern contraception.

The Armenian government has taken steps to increase access to family planning services. As of 2000, the “For Family and Health” Armenian Association (AFHA) had established three family planning/sexual and reproductive health clinics in Yerevan city and six in the regions of Armenia. In 2002, the government passed the RA Law on Reproductive Health and Reproductive Rights of Human Beings (RH&RR), which recognizes each woman’s right to safe motherhood and to effective contraception to prevent pregnancy. Though AFHA’s clinics and the RH&RR law are considerable advancements, rates of modern contraceptive use remain low and access to family planning services is still limited. In rural areas and in some urban areas, family planning services continue to be unavailable, and women must travel for reproductive health services.

There are number barriers to contraception usage. The main reasons are:

- *Price:* Contraception is quite expensive for low and medium-income and especially rural women. One pack of birth control pills costs about \$15-20 in Armenia. For a village family barely making \$100 a month, it is completely unaffordable.
- *Mentality and social factors:* Besides the cost and access issues, social factors also influence a woman’s reproductive health. There are many husbands who do not allow their wives to use birth control and refuse to use condoms themselves. There are 2 main reasons for that. The first reason is that they consider the usage of condom to be decreasing their sexual pleasure. The second one is a matter of trust: the dominant type of HIV infection is husband-to-wife transmission, men refuse to use condoms as they see it as implying mistrust.

- *Lack of appropriate sexual education:* The third reason is lack of sexual education which usually results in unwanted pregnancies and transmission of STIs.

Abortion is legal in Armenia. A woman can terminate a pregnancy during the first 12 weeks on woman's voluntary basis. Between 12 and 22 weeks a woman can have an abortion only for medical or prescribed social reasons. Abortions after 22 weeks are permitted only by approval by a commission.

Abortion is the primary method of birth control in the country. Abortion rates are high and access to contraception is limited. According to the statistics, the average Armenian woman has more than 2 abortions in her lifetime. The median number of abortions for women over 40 is 8. Some have had as many as 25 by the time they have reached menopause. The high rate of abortion is the result of lack of access to reproductive and sexual health information and education and to family planning services.

In spite of the high abortion rates, women still face obstacles to accessing safe abortion. In the past 10 years, the cost of abortion has increased significantly. As a matter of fact, abortion services are not provided in rural areas and in some urban areas. Women who cannot afford the travel and abortion fees usually undergo unwanted pregnancies or make illegal and unsafe abortions. This also results in unsupervised abortions. Particularly, women are using an over-the-counter medication called Cytotec (the brand name for misoprostol) to induce abortions at home without the supervision of a trained medical professional. 40 cents worth of Cytotec can induce an abortion, whereas a surgical abortion usually costs about \$35-\$50 officially and much more in practice.

According to the health care experts, Armenian women used to apply all possible and impossible means to stop unwanted pregnancies – jumping from high places, introducing different objects and tubes into uterus, drinking various herb drinks and other “folk methods”. But now, the most common unofficial way of doing an abortion is to use Cytotec.

10 weeks pregnant 20 years old Lilit did not want to have a baby, because she had sex while not married. Her boyfriend left her when he knew her girlfriend was pregnant. Lilit did not want to tell she was pregnant to her parents. Taking the advice of her best friend, she took Cytotec at home. This resulted in strong bleeding and further operation on removal of reproductive organs as her life was under the risk.

## **2. Sexual Education in Armenia**

Article 5 of the RH&RR law focuses on adolescents' right to youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services and to sexuality education. But sexuality education programs in Armenian schools have not been officially or systematically introduced by the government.

In Armenia the instruction on sexual and reproductive health is included in the “Healthy Lifestyle” curriculum but it mainly contains information on contraceptives and STIs. Indeed, there is no information on sexuality, sexual rights and reproductive rights. LGBT mainstreaming is pretty much far from reality.

Parents usually are shy about talking to their children on sex and related issues. As a result, youngsters are obliged to derive information on this subject from sources like friends, television, street, magazines and the Internet. The problem is that these sources may not really provide them correct and accurate information. Moreover, sexuality is portrayed as negative and associated with guilt, fear and disease. The media often provide mixed messages, sometimes distorted or inaccurate. Furthermore, many people engage in unprotected sex which results in unwanted pregnancies and STDs because of their ignorance about means of contraception.

Sexual education is a taboo topic, which recently due to hatred speech against women activities, as promoters of immorality and destroyers of Armenian traditional values, became much more popular and painful topics in the society. Sexuality education programs that do exist are usually provided by non-governmental organizations which quite often face challenges while implementing such programs from school and university administration, parents and church. Just recently a parliament member Hayk Baboukhanyan sued one of our partner organizations because they have produced leaflets called “Let's talk about

sex!” The leaflets contain information about SRHR issues and are targeting mostly women and girls aged 18 and above. The parliament member says that such information is spreading immorality and is against Armenian traditions and culture. According to him women’s rights organizations spread perversion and make young Armenian women and girls become homosexuals and change their sex. This example clearly shows that comprehensive integrated sexual education is needed not only for youth but especially parliament members of Armenia.

### **3. Harmful Armenian traditions connected to SRHR of women**

Unfortunately, nowadays the traditions are mostly used as a shield for violating women’s human rights. Moreover, many of them have artificial, bad demonstrative nature. Armenia is a deeply rooted traditional society which exalts patriarchy and the total leadership of a man in the family. This patriarchal culture seems to inevitably validate violence as an acceptable, sometimes even desirable, attribute of masculinity.

Although not widespread but still continuing to be practiced especially in the rural areas, bride-kidnapping is also a bright example of a tradition that violates the human rights. It involves the abduction and usually rape of a woman. According to the tradition, the woman is forced to marry the man who abducted her in order to avoid the public shame. She is no longer virgin in the eyes of society, and since the virginity is a quite sensitive issue in Armenia, probably no other men except the abductor will tend to marry her.

Coming to the virginity and marriage, another tradition comes to show a distinct discrepancy between traditions and human rights. This tradition is the well-known “Red apple” ceremony. According to the tradition, the bed sheet stained by blood left by a bride on her wedding night is showed to the relatives of the groom (especially to the mother-in-law) to demonstrate the fact that the bride was a virgin. Then, whenever the relatives on the groom’s side are satisfied with their observations of the bloody bed sheets, they send a bowl of red apples to the bride’s parents’ house. The Red apple is considered to be a symbol of purity and innocence but in fact, it is a real manifestation of discrimination and violation of women basic human rights. Hence, Red apple is a tradition that highlights the fact that women cannot make independent decisions regarding their body and even if do so, their decision is widely condemned. Because of this tradition, Armenian families in fact, face serious problems, and this phenomenon is largely spread especially in the villages. According to the sociological survey “Keep me away from your stereotypes” carried out by Society Without Violence NGO in 2011, “75% of women think that the virginity of women is not important but what will say the neighbours and relatives”? This answer clearly shows that the tradition of Red apple remains as an artificial ceremony the primary aim of which is to avoid the public accuses and rumour. As a result of a discriminative approach toward virginity (men are encouraged to have sexual intercourse before marriage while women are condemned) the number of women restoring their hymen by surgical means has significantly increased. Thus, a logical question can be raised: “Do we need such traditions?”

In Armenia, traditionally newly married woman has to deliver a boy. Whenever the woman gives birth to a boy especially as her first child, the whole family celebrates this and honour the mother since she was good enough to deliver a boy. However, whenever a girl is born as the first child, the family members usually say to the mother: “No worries, the next one will be a boy!”

25-year-old Narine needed a son. “I have to bear a boy to inherit my husband’s family name. He should have a son by his side.” Her trip to Yerevan ended in yet another abortion. She had travelled for an ultrasound to check the sex of the fetus. The results showed the baby would be a girl, and thus she made the choice to end her pregnancy.

Narine’s story is in no way unique in Armenia.

As to the future children, Armenian society prefers boys much more than girls – around six times according to UNFPA “Prevalence and Reasons of Sex Selective Abortions in Armenia” research. According to the study each year Armenia potentially loses around 1400 girls because of their sex. Armenia has the world’s



second worst ratio of boys-to-girls in the world, second only to China, according to a World Economic Forum report. The average nation has a ratio of 106 boys to 100 girls; Armenia's average is 112 to 100.

Selective abortion has its socioeconomic motives. Traditionally, when a girl grows up and marries, she leaves her parents' residence. "The return on the investment, particularly in the rural areas, is low if you have one child and that child is a girl."

The positive cultures, norms and customs exist in all societies. Thus why not to point out and honour these values and challenge rather than those that are against human rights? I'm truly convinced that violence can be overcome only when the "culture of violence" is replaced by the "culture of peace" and only through development and modification of the violent traditions a nation can achieve the desirable democracy.

# One step forward, two steps back: discussions on sexual / reproductive rights in Belarus

**Tatyana Shchurko**

**Sociologist, independent researcher, feminist  
activist (Gender Route, FROG)  
Belarus, Minsk  
ta2ta@tut.by**

Different aspects of women's reproductive rights are brought up in the public space to one extent or another. Last year discussion of the Law on Reproductive Technologies turned out to be such an event. During the last month the general public was stirred up by the amendments to the Law on Public Health that were directly related to the women's reproductive rights. At that, the level of discussions on sexual/reproductive rights reminds me of going around in circles: a woman is still not regarded as human in flesh and blood taking a decision in certain social, economic and cultural situation.

In my turn, I am interested in the following questions: What are the reproductive rights of a contemporary Belarussian woman? Does she stand assured of these rights? Who has a legitimate right to control a woman's body, to provide or to limit her access to the reproductive rights? Is motherhood a duty or a right for the woman?

A number of different sources are the empirical material for this study, first, the state laws and by-laws, second, the articles published in the state newspapers, such as *Soviet Belorussia* (*Sovetskaya Belorussia*, 213 articles), *Medical Herald* (*Meditsinskiy Vestnik*, 177 articles), *Teachers' Newspaper* (*Nastaunitskaya Hazeta*, 52 articles) published from 1991 to 2012. Third, in the framework of our research we have studied the learning aids and methodological guides covering various aspects of reproductive health and sexuality (46 specialized books published in 1991-2011).

## **Politicians: *Woman is granted a right to take a decision regarding motherhood by herself*<sup>1</sup>**

To the fullest extent the development of the national reproductive policy took place after 2000 when a majority of laws on family and demographic policy, motherhood protection, directly related to reproduction, were adopted.

In Belarussian law reproductive rights is a possibility for all married couples and individual persons to freely take a decision regarding a number of the children, time between their births and to have information and resources sufficient for that.<sup>2</sup>

Reproductive freedom interpreted as freedom of reproductive choice is the core notion of the reproductive right concept. Correspondingly, reproductive rights at the same time protect the woman's right to independently and freely be in charge of her body and its reproductive functions. At the very least, the reproductive rights are related to awareness-raising among youth, motherhood protection, legalization and development of contraception and new reproductive technologies.

<sup>1</sup> Law of the Republic of Belarus of June 18, 1993, No. 2435-XII "On Public Health", Article 27. Available at: <http://pravo.by/main.aspx?guid=3871&p0=v19302435&p2={NRPA}>.

<sup>2</sup> Law of the Republic of Belarus of January 4, 2002, No. 80-3 «On Demographic Security of the Republic of Belarus», Article 1. Available at: <http://www.pravo.by/main.aspx?guid=3871&p0=H10200080&p2={NRPA}>.

In Belarus, women are guaranteed health care and in-patient treatment in the state health care institutions generally as women as well as during pregnancy, delivery and postnatal period. There are the norms for reproductive health care services in the area of labor, such as restrictions or prohibitions regarding certain types and forms of labor for all women as well as pregnant women and women with children, creation of environment necessary to combine motherhood, care for house, family and employment duties (privileges regarding vacations, social vacations and benefits, guarantees regarding the right to work, establishment of the system of children's institutions, household-related infrastructure). At that, parental leave to attend a child up to the age of three can be taken also by a father or other relatives.<sup>3</sup> Abortions and contraception have always been legal. Induced termination of pregnancy is carried out at will of a woman at 12 weeks. Abortion can be carried out at the later stage of pregnancy due to social or medical indications.<sup>4</sup>

Besides, the following forms of the assisted reproductive technologies are legalized in the country<sup>5</sup>:

*Artificial insemination* – a form of the assisted reproductive technologies involving artificial vaginal insemination.

*Surrogate motherhood* – a form of the assisted reproductive technologies involving association of sperm with an egg taken from the genetic mother's body, or donor egg cell, outside of a woman's body, followed by the development of an embryo and its transfer into a uterus of a surrogate mother who bears and gives birth to a child. Surrogate motherhood was legalized in the country in 2006 by amending the Code on marriage and family and by adoption a number of laws.

*Extracorporal fertilization* – a form of the assisted reproductive technologies involving sperm-egg association outside of the woman's body, followed by the development of an embryo and its transfer into the mother's uterus.

So formally the state does implement a certain policy supporting women in their desire to have or not to have children. However, first, the vested norms are not always implemented in practice, and, second, they are often contested by the state and other public space entities. Existence of the legal norms regarding the reproductive rights regulate only access to certain services and facilities but do not deal with the social relations and a position of women in the society. In the Belarussian society the woman is still viewed primarily as a mother and a 'protectress of the family hearth'. Correspondingly a number of the women's reproductive rights are contested from time to time by the society.

### **(Neo)conservative ideology and moral rhetoric: “Motherhood is the main mission of the woman”<sup>6</sup>**

In spite of the vested right of the woman to the free and independent reproductive choice the state policy is still based upon the traditional morality within which each woman's body is perceived as implicitly the mother's body. Motherhood appears as the 'natural' destination of the woman and ultimate expression of her femininity, the only 'normal' version of her life target. Women are vested with the responsibility for existence of the state, nation and the society. Correspondingly support of this system requires enforced control over the woman's body both by introducing the specific legal norms and by using the moral rhetoric. Implementation of the declared norms and reproductive rights faces among other issues the moral barriers.

<sup>3</sup> Law of the Republic of Belarus of June 18, 1993, No. 2435-XII “On Public Health”, Article 24. Available at: <http://pravo.by/main.aspx?guid=3871&p0=v19302435&p2={NRPA}>.

Labor Code of the Republic of Belarus: of July 26, 1999, No. 296-3. As of January 17, 2011. Minsk: Amalfea, 2011. Articles 14, 16, 120, 166, 168, 183-185, 189, 262-269.

Law of the Republic of Belarus of December 29, 2012, No. 7-3 «On the state subsidies provided to the families with children”. Available at: <http://rebenok.by/inf/state/18201-zakon-respubliki-belarus-o-gosudarstvennykh-posobiyyakh-semyam-vospityvayushchim-detei.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Law of the Republic of Belarus of June 18, 1993, No. 2435-XII “On Public Health”, Article 27. Available at: <http://pravo.by/main.aspx?guid=3871&p0=v19302435&p2={NRPA}>.

<sup>5</sup> Law of the Republic of Belarus of January 7, 2012, No. 341-3 «On assisting reproductive technologies”, Article 1. <http://www.pravo.by/main.aspx?guid=3871&p0=H11200341&p2={NRPA}>

<sup>6</sup> Lukashenko A.G. Napolnite Kazhdyi Den Mirom and Happiness (*Fill Each Day with Peace and Happiness*). In: *Sovetskaya Belorussia (Soviet Belorussia)*, November 13, 2007. Available at: <http://www.sb.by/post/61459>

In due time 2006 was announced the Mother's Year and in 2008 the annual holidays, such as the Mother's Week (October 8-14) and the Mother's Day (October 14), were introduced. In his congratulation in honor of the Mother's Day, A. Lukashenko indicated that *"Motherhood is the main mission of the woman on whom the future of the countries and nations, the development of civilization itself depend"*.<sup>7</sup>

The latest demographic program for 2011-2015 states: *"Reduction of a need in children, loss of families with many children as a national tradition have resulted in the fact that today a Belarussian family is usually a family with one child... In this situation one of the priority tasks of the demographic policy is to revive the importance of the family, family values"*.<sup>8</sup> This legal initiative produces reference to the moral rhetoric and ideology by manipulating a notion of reproduction.

All of this is happening of the back of the gender policy that has been implemented since 1996 and has been manifested in the adoption of the National Action Plans to Achieve Gender Equality for 1996-2000, 2001-2005, 2008-2010, and 2011-2015. In 2000 the National Council on Gender Policy was established at the Council of Ministers. However, the activities of this body constantly give rise to criticism of the gender experts because the Council is not an autonomous body and does not have the levers to influence the state policy. Also, in theory, the gender policy is aimed at liberation from the gender stereotypes and tight regulations regarding the role of women in the society. However, the plans themselves directly are aimed at assigning the role of the mother and the family institution to the women. For instance, *"strengthening of the family institution and family and marital relations, propaganda of the marital and family values, achievement of gender equality in the family relations, involvement of men in house labor and child-rearing"*<sup>9</sup> are a part of the goal aimed at achievement of gender equality.

Women are perceived as a 'reproductive potential' and 'demographic reserve'. In the official rhetoric, care for reproductive health is mostly perceived in the framework of care for the demographic situation and the gene pool of the nation.

*"Teenage girls are the key potential of the country that provides for the stability of demography, gene pool of the nation, and ultimately the future of the state"* (p. 140). *"The biggest value of the woman is her health. It gives her a possibility to give birth and rear children, to maintain the marital relations, to keep the house, to work, to participate in the social life actively"* (p. 171).<sup>10</sup>

Responsibility for increase in population is put on women and the state policy is aimed at stimulating their reproductive behavior. Correspondingly what is condemned is any phenomena preventing reproduction. For instance, the newspaper *Soviet Belorussia* has made the following statements:

*And this sad statistics is so annoying that it is getting really scary: who will need us when we are old? The population ages, the demographic threat is breaking loose from the tidy statistical columns and is taking some sinister meaning. And the eternal questions arise: who is guilty? What is to be done? The guilty have been identified fast; they are the women who have abortions (over 90 thousands abortions annually)"*.<sup>11</sup>

*"In the demographically disadvantaged country, such as ours, artificial termination of pregnancy should not be next to the most widely spread, and what is important, accessible surgery. This is clear. But now termination of pregnancy is a part of the state minimum health care system, there are practically no restrictions to it. What does that mean? It means that this surgery is quite accessible"*.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Lukashenko A.G. Napolnite Kazhdyi Den Mirom and Happiness (*Fill Each Day with Peace and Happiness*). In: *Sovetskaya Belorussia (Soviet Belorussia)*, November 13, 2007. Available at: <http://www.sb.by/post/61459>

<sup>8</sup> Edict of the President of the Republic of Belarus of August 11, 2011, No. 357 "On the National Program for Demographic Security of the Republic of Belarus for 2011-2015". Available at: [http://pravo.by/world\\_of\\_law/text.asp?RN=P31100357](http://pravo.by/world_of_law/text.asp?RN=P31100357)

<sup>9</sup> Ordinance of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus of August 16, 2011, No. 1101 "On the National Action Plan to Achieve Gender Equality for 2011-2015". Available at: <http://pravo.by/main.aspx?guid=3871&p0=C21101101&p2={NRPA}>

<sup>10</sup> Sidorenko V.N. Profilaktika Narusheniy Reproktivnoho Zdorovya u Sovremennoy Molodezhi (*Prevention of Reproductive Health Disorders in Modern Youth*). Minsk: BHU, 2009.

<sup>11</sup> Olhina P. Aist Priletaet Vse Rezhe (*Storks Come Much Less Frequently...*). In: *Sovetskaya Belorussia (Soviet Belorussia)*, May 30, 2003. P. 4.

<sup>12</sup> Habasova L. Bez Boli i Strakha Izbavit ot... Rebenka (*Without Pain and Fear Will Free You of... Child*). In: *Sovetskaya Belorussia (Soviet Belorussia)*. February 23, 2002. P. 21

Reproduction is closely linked to the woman thus creating the situation of gender asymmetry. In other words, the function of not only obligatory child birth but also their further upbringing assigned to the woman creates unequal situation for the women's position in the society. This includes the 'glass ceiling', difficulties with job placement, gender gap in labor compensation, and double load (work, home, family). Men rarely take the parental leave. The key responsibility for safe sexual behavior is also rested on women mostly.

The moral norms are transformed into the political tools of control over the reproductive behavior of women, characterize the level of reproductive freedom in the society. Primarily this is expressed by ideological assignment to women of the duty to produce new citizens for the state. It is this task that is repeatedly stressed in the legal documents, mass media and particularly in the statements of the country's leaders.

### Restrictions of the reproductive rights

Translation of the normative concepts where only the actively fertile body is legitimate puts in doubt existence of a number of the reproductive rights. Correspondingly what we recently see in the country is the attempts and direct actions to restrict certain reproductive rights. In particular, the reproductive technologies and contraception are subject to that.

For instance, the Law on Reproductive Technologies<sup>13</sup> has introduced age restrictions to use of the assisted reproductive technologies: *"in vitro fertilization and artificial insemination are not to be used for patients over 50 years of age"*. These restrictions are based not on the physical condition of a particular woman and her wishes but on some universal norm in accordance with which there is a notion of 'reproductive age', and supposedly when the woman reaches 50 years of age she loses her reproductive performance. Existence of the age restrictions brings a whole number of controversial questions on what reproduction is, what is its meaning in the national processes etc.

As for donorship, the requirement to men and women are different. For instance, the age restrictions are different and it is a requirement for a female donor to have a child:

- *"Men 18 to 40 years of age without medical contraindications to sperm donorship who went through medical screening can be a sperm donor"*
- *"Women 18 to 35 years of age without medical contraindications to egg cell donorship **who have a child** and went through medical screening can be an egg cell donor"*

In turn, only a woman who is married, 20 to 35 years of age, and who has a child can be a surrogate mother. Such requirements to surrogate mothers make the given right practically unachievable. It is quite difficult to imagine that a young married mother who has a child might want to become a surrogate mother.

Besides, the Ordinance of the Ministry of Public Health No. 15 on amending the list of the medical products sold without prescription was adopted on March 7, 2012; in accordance with the ordinance, oral contraceptives are now a part of the list of the medications that are to be sold on prescription only beginning with July 1, 2012.

The issue of contraception is directly related to the fundamental issues regarding how it is possible to control the reproductive process and who has a right to exercise such control. In this case the state claims this right. A woman that is regarded as the 'reproductive potential' and the 'demographic reserve' is forced to follow the order from the 'top' since she does not have a possibility to take charge of all reproductive rights. Moreover, introduction of such restrictions does not go hand in hand with the health care system reform. Many women face low quality of the provided services in the antenatal clinics, such as queues, offensive behavior, lack of attention on the part of the clinic managers etc. Besides, the level of contraceptive culture is still not high in the country. Against such background, the restrictive measures make access to contraception more difficult.

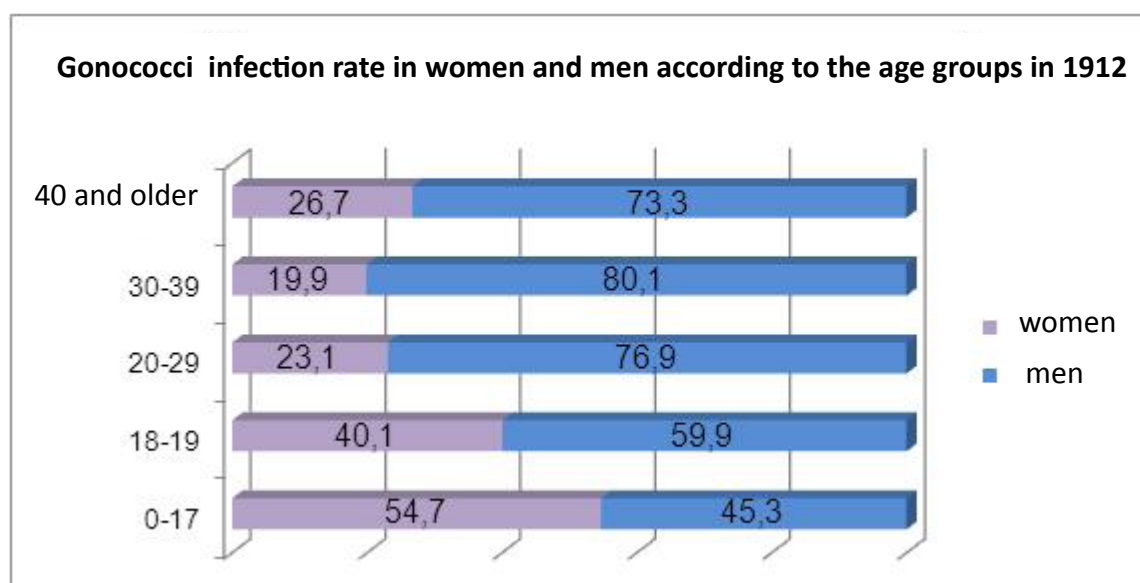
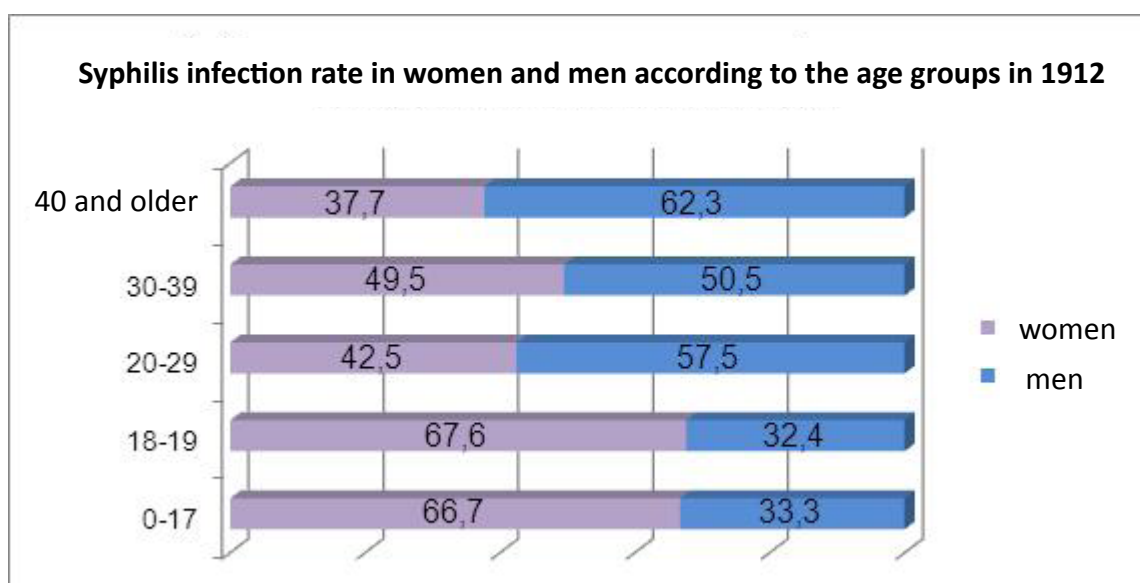
---

<sup>13</sup> Law of the Republic of Belarus of January 7, 2012, No. 341-3 "On assisting reproductive technologies", Article 1. <http://www.pravo.by/main.aspx?guid=3871&p0=H11200341&p2={NRPA}>

In accordance with the results of the survey of the situation of women and children carried out by the National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus in 2012, more than a half (63%) of married women or women who are in the unregistered relationships in the age 15 to 49 use some form of contraceptives. Unsatisfied need in contraception (to plan pregnancies or for birth control) totaled to 7%. That means that 7 out of 100 women of reproductive age are limited in their actions to plan pregnancies and give birth to wanted children.<sup>14</sup> In accordance with the 2010 data, 19.6% of women<sup>15</sup> use hormonal contraceptives even though 40% is considered to be the optimal indicator.

There are at least two barriers preventing free access to contraception, such as direct legal restrictions and lack of access to information, in particular, lack of sexual education.

As a natural result, teenage girls are a dominating population in the structure of STI morbidity. In 2012, women total to more than 65% among those who have been diagnosed with syphilis in the age group under 18 years of age. As for gonococcal infections, women totaled to 54.7%. As for the new HIV cases, in 2010 women totaled to 60.9% in the age group under 19 years of age.<sup>16</sup>



<sup>14</sup> Multiindicator cluster study to assess the situation of women and children. 2012. Preliminary Report. The National Statistics Committee of the Republic of Belarus, 2013. Available at: <http://belstat.gov.by/homep/ru/households/mics/results.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> *Zdorovye Naselenia Respubliki Belarus (Health of the Population of the Republic of Belarus)*. Minsk, 2011. P. 98.

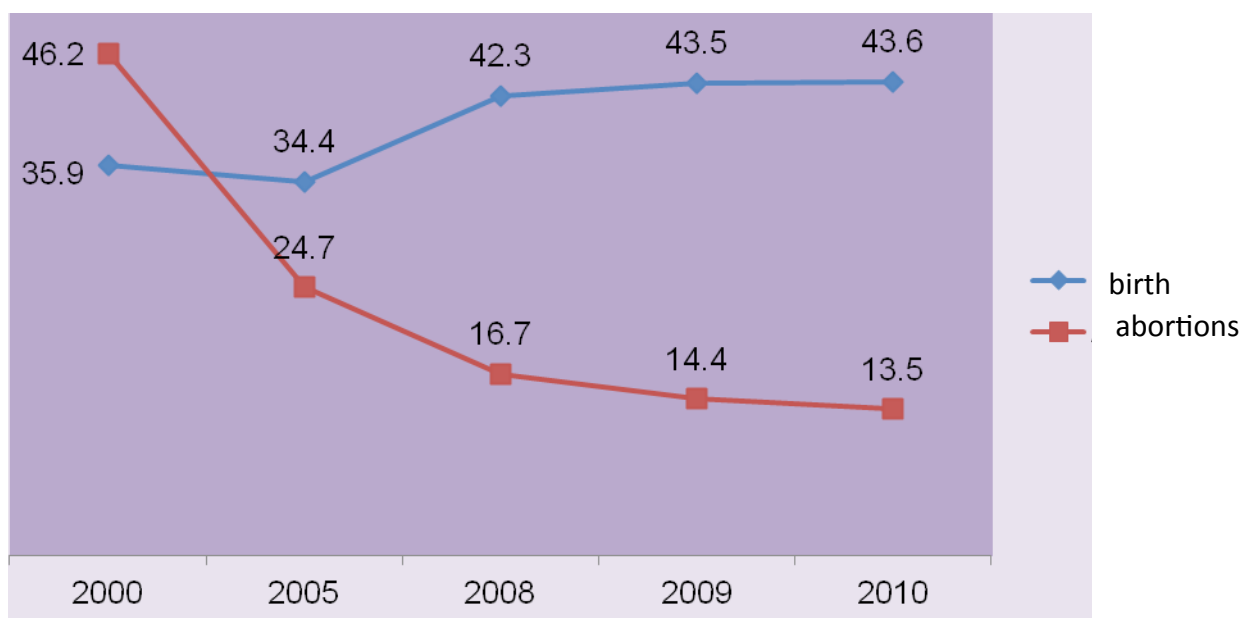
<sup>16</sup> *Zhenshchiny i Muzhchiny Respubliki Belarus (Women and Men of the Republic of Belarus)*. Minsk, 2013. P. 153-154. *Zdorovye Naselenia Respubliki Belarus (Health of the Population of the Republic of Belarus)*. Minsk, 2011. P. 36-37.



A need in legal abortions is regularly called in question in Belarus. In Belarus, artificial termination of pregnancy was always permitted; however, the official rhetoric demonstrated highly negative attitude toward it. Correspondingly, for instance, in its turn, Belarussian Orthodox Church and Mohylevsk Roman Catholic archiepiscopacy also suggest to amend the Law “On Public Health”. In this context they have submitted their proposals to the House of Representatives of the National Assembly. In particular, the question is prohibition of abortion and a number of reproductive technologies (in vitro fertilization, surrogate motherhood), sex-reassignment surgeries: *“Artificial termination of pregnancy (abortion) is unacceptable. From the moment of conception any infringement on life of a future personal is a criminal act... Artificial termination of pregnancy contradicts the principles of protection of motherhood and childhood... Modern assisted reproductive technologies do not conform with morality and are perceived as unacceptable as inconsistent with family values and traditions of a family – a union of a man and a woman”*.<sup>17</sup>

These proposals have never been legitimized but what is symptomatic is the fact that such proposals were initiated. Abortion is perceived as a reason behind the demographic crisis. However, these statements are purely populist. During the last 10 years, there is a significant drop in a number of abortions and growth of births in the country. Thus, in 2000 128.7 abortions fell at 100 births while in 2010 only 31 abortions fell at 100 births<sup>18</sup>

**Number of births and abortions per 1000 women aged 15-49**



This fact substantiates that permission or prohibition of abortions does not influence their number. The key factors are rather availability of other means to plan family, level of the development of the public health services, sexual education and availability of information. Possible prohibition of abortions will not result in improvement of the demographic situation in the country; to the contrary, it will result in a growth of a number of illegal abortions and as a consequence in a growth of female mortality, disability and traumatism.

The researchers describe the negative outcomes of the period when abortions were criminalized, in 1936 to 1956: criminal abortions were perceived as a norm in the Soviet society while a number of deaths of

<sup>17</sup> Resolution on amending the Law of Belarus “On Public Health”. Official portal of the Belarussian Orthodox Church, November 30, 2012. Available at: <http://www.church.by/resource/Dir0301/Dir0302/2012/Page4795.html>

<sup>18</sup> Zdorovye Naselenia Respubliki Belarus (Health of the Population of the Republic of Belarus). Minsk, 2011. P. 99.

women due to sepsis grew fourfold.<sup>19</sup> In 1935, deaths from abortion totaled to 26% of maternal mortality cases while in 1940 this figure totaled to 51%. In the beginning of the 1950-s their share exceeded 70%.<sup>20</sup>

In the beginning of the 1990-s, the discussions on abortions were perceived as natural. Fall of the Soviet Union and rise of the nation-states logically required to revise the social policies. Many aspects were thrown into questions and reconsidered. Including the woman's right to abortion. Until recently there were not attempts made in Belarus to prohibit abortions. However, this question is again a part of the agenda. This is related to a unique revision of the role of the woman. Reproduction and sexuality are the political categories continuously included in the power struggle since reproduction is a necessary condition for the existence of the state. That is why it is women who are first and foremost controlled by the state, society, family, group. All continuing discussions about abortions are basically a concern with social transformation of the family and gender relations.

Rosalind Pollack Petchesky points out that *"abortion is the base for wider ideological struggle in which the sense of family, the state, motherhood and women's sexuality is contested"*.<sup>21</sup> The researcher indicates that the debates about abortions are a response to the change in the position of women in the society, increasing emancipation of women, and escape from dependency upon men.

The issue of the reproductive rights requires shifting the focus from the policy of restriction and prohibitions to the system of prevention and education of people regarding birth control. In our country there are still no program of sexual education for children and youth. The state supports hypocritical morality trying to legislatively pretend that there is no sex nevertheless appealing to the notions of family, birth rate, motherhood etc. What is the result of such 'moral rhetoric' are the practices of direct restriction of the women's rights in order to accommodate the family and demographic policy based on the conservative ideology.

### **"Sexual as Political"**

Issues related to sexuality are actively forced out from the public space. Openly homophobic rhetoric is commonly expressed by the official persons and structures. The state is not yet ready to recognize importance of sexual education openly; a need to conduct any interventions regarding the sexual relations is not legally covered in the active laws and by-laws adopted both at the level of the government and at the level of the Ministry of Education and the structures subordinated to it. However, from time to time the sections on sexuality appear in some textbooks on educational work in schools. But the interpretations offered by these textbooks raise serious concerns.

Women's health is linked in a certain manner to such issues as female sexuality and virginity. Role of these aspects in keeping up female health and position of women in the society is not always clear. Issues related to the female body and sexuality is still an area of omission in the academic and public discussions. It is not customary to talk about that in the wide public space. Such disregard and suppression are by no means care about women's privacy and her comfort. To the contrary, 'silence' regarding the female body is not an absolute silence. It is accompanied by the 'discursive explosion' on the demographic issues as well as various practices of regulation of the female body. Women's sexuality is not turned loose. It is regulated, normalized and controlled. What plays an important role here is the systems of education and health care. Behind what is seen as 'silence' is the numerous tools, strategies and policies that are seething and working.

<sup>19</sup> Leбина N. «Navstrechu Mnogochislennym Zayzvlениam Trudiashchikhsia Zhenshchin...» Abortnaya Politika kak Zerkalo Sovetskoy Sotsialnoy Zaboty ("Responding the Numerous Petitions of the Working Women..." Abortion Policy as a Mirror of the Soviet Social Care). In *Sovetskaya Sotsialnaya Politika 1920-30-h Godov: Ideologia i Povsednevnost* (Soviet Social Policy of the 1920-1930-s: Ideology and Daily Life). Ed. by P. Romanova, Ye. Yarskaya-Smirnova. Moscow, 2007. P. 234-240.

<sup>20</sup> Sakevich V.I. *Chto Bylo posle Zapreta Aborta v 1936 Godu* (What Happened after Prohibition of Abortions in 1936). In: *Demoscope Weekly*, No. 221-222, Nov. 7-20, 2005. Available at: <http://demoscope.ru/weekly/2005/0221/reprod01.php>

<sup>21</sup> Petchesky R.P. *Abortion and woman's choice: the state, sexuality, and reproduction freedom*. Northeastern University Press, 1990. P.xi.

On the one hand, sexuality is not an entirely secret topic in the contemporary Belarus. Year after year a number of publications discussing various aspects of sexuality is growing. There is no such severe censorship in TV and mass media any more. Premarital and extramarital sexuality, premarital conception and birth of children is a widely spread phenomenon among youth today.

On the other hand, the conditions necessary to keep up health of youth are not shaped at the time of sexual liberalization. For instance, active family and demographic propaganda completely ignores a question of sexual education. Female sexuality is still something that is not generally talked about, it is not clear how to talk about that and is always associated with the ever-present question of morality and ethics. The state is not yet ready to recognize importance of sexual education openly. It means that a need to conduct any interventions regarding the sexual relations is not legally covered in the active laws and by-laws adopted both at the level of the government and at the level of the Ministry of Education and the structures subordinated to it. However, from time to time the sections on sexuality appear in some textbooks on educational work in schools. But the interpretations offered by these textbooks raise serious concerns.

For instance, the textbook for students of 6-11 grades *Teenager: Getting Ready to Adulthood (Podrostok: podgotovka k vzrosloy zhyzni)* includes the following version of the exercises called “Seal of Chastity”, the goal of which to demonstrate moral, psychological and physiological aspects of virginity, to create positive motivation to premarital abstinence and marital fidelity.<sup>22</sup>

1. A facilitator takes a jar of yogurt, asks who of those present wants to eat yogurt now and invites one participant who expressed a desire to eat yogurt (preferably a boy) to come to forward.
2. The facilitator suggests him to tear the jar open. After the jar is opened, the facilitator asks the questions: “Who would like to buy an open jar of yogurt for the same price?” “Isn’t this product dangerous for health?”
3. The conclusion is made that the opened jar of yogurt automatically loses its value on the one hand while on the other hand might be a source of a dangerous infection.
4. The facilitator takes a sealed envelope with a letter and turns its back to the students demonstrating the postal seal. Then the facilitator poses a question: “Who has a right to open this envelope?” Then the facilitator demonstrates its face where the addressee’s date can be clearly seen.
5. The facilitator tells that each girl is meant for only one man and poses a question: “Who is that only man in whom the girl can place her confidence entirely? Why?”
6. It suggested to the student to use this analogy to think about the ‘seal’ which seals every girl.
7. The facilitator takes a natural flower into his hands and offers everybody to take something from it as a souvenir.
8. After each participant takes something from the flower as a souvenir, the facilitator asks the students to compare the flower before everybody have held it in their hands and after.
9. The facilitator tells the students that after each sexual intercourse after separation the person necessarily loses a bit of soul which will never return.
10. The conclusion is made: the soul of a guy or a girl who has had premarital sexual relations looks just like the flower looks after it was held by a big number of people.

First, such exercises promote the abstinence standards only for women and, second, they do not meet the day-to-day realities which I have discussed hereinbefore. Virginity is still endowed with certain values and is presented as something that is unambiguously positive. At that, it is positive not because of health issues but due to social aspects of morality and ethics. A concept of romantic love is of primary importance here: one woman, innocent and pure, for one-and-only man (at that, his virginity is not a requirement) to bear children.

<sup>22</sup> *Podrostok: Podgotovka k Vzrosloy Zhyzhi. Programma Kursa dlia Uchashchihsia 6-11 klassov (Teenager: Getting Ready to Adulthood. Course Curriculum for the Students of 6<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> Grades)*. Minsk: BHATU, 2004. P. 32-33.

In the official rhetoric care of reproductive health is often expressed in the framework of care of the demographic situation and the gene pool of the nation. For instance, Aleksandr Kosinets, Head of the Vitebsk Regional Executive Committee, have described this issue in the following manner: *"Schools are not really concerned with the question of sexual education of teenagers. Meantime as a result of promiscuous sexual relations of teenagers, lack of attention to reproduction health, a significant number of young family couples consequently cannot have children"*.<sup>23</sup>

In contemporary Belarussian education, the education component is aimed at shaping 'real' men and women and at directing them toward love, family, marriage, procreation. Education is targeted at stressing the value of family and upbringing of children. This family model is rather conservative and does not include other types of families/relations. As a result, according to the statistics, women get married earlier and perform all household- and children-related duties.

In accordance with the official statistics, in 2011 the average age of marriage was 24.5 for women and 26.6 for men. At that, in rural areas women get married even earlier (23.9 years of age) while men get married somewhat later (26.7 years of age). At that, 50 women and only 1 man under 16 years of age got married. Similar is the gap in the age group of 16-19 years old: 7 020 women and 1 516 men of this age group got married.<sup>24</sup>

During the online conference, Marina Artemenko, deputy head of the department for population, gender and family policy, Ministry of Labor and Social Security, pointed out that in 2011 in Belarus 5 741 children were born to mothers 15-19 years of age, which is 53.5% less than in 2000. At that, 10 children were born to mothers under age of 15, which is 1.4% less than in 2000.<sup>25</sup>

Besides, 1 517 young men and 7 070 young women under age of 19 got married in 2011. 20.9 births fall on 1 000 women under age of 20. At that, while in urban areas this indicator totals to 14.3 births, in rural areas it totals to 52.8 births.<sup>26</sup> In 2010, 5.6% of a total number of pregnancies fell on the age group of 15-19 years of age.<sup>27</sup> According to the 2008 data, made 9.3% of all the abortions were performed on women under 19 years of age.<sup>28</sup>

The sexual rights are still a marginal issue in the public debates and specific regulatory policies which could provide access to information. In particular, one of the most serious problems is complete lack of sexual education, integration of its elements in such educational components as family education, sex education, reproductive health care, gender education. However, all these components, as is proved by the analysis of the textbooks, are aimed at shaping the traditional model of gender relations. Thereby sexual education is substituted by the moral rhetoric and ideology.

### Concluding remarks

Contemporary policy regarding the women's reproductive rights is rather ambivalent and conflictive. On the one hand, the country has adopted certain legal norms and legalized certain procedures. On the other hand, the traditionalist trends which are still strong in the society make it difficult to implement the women's rights by resting upon women enhanced responsibility and guilt. As a result there are negative tendencies in reproductive health care. An important aspect of the discussions of the reproductive rights is a question who is to take the reproductive decisions. In other words, some or other offenses of the

<sup>23</sup> Bohacheva O. *Kurs of Brake i Semye Planiruetsia Vvesti v Uchrezhdeniah Obrazovania Vitebskoy Oblasti (It Is Planned to Introduce a Course on Marriage and Family in the Vitebsk Region Educational Institutions)*. In: Belta. September 27, 2012. Available at: [http://www.belta.by/ru/all\\_news/regions/Kurs-o-brake-i-semye-planiruetsja-vvesti-v-uchrezhdenijax-obrazovani-ja-Vitebskoj-oblasti\\_i\\_610092.html](http://www.belta.by/ru/all_news/regions/Kurs-o-brake-i-semye-planiruetsja-vvesti-v-uchrezhdenijax-obrazovani-ja-Vitebskoj-oblasti_i_610092.html)

<sup>24</sup> *Deti i Molodezh Respubliki Belarus (Children and Youth of the Republic of Belarus)*. Minsk, 2012. P. 62, 65.

<sup>25</sup> *Detskie Posobia. Online Konferentsia (Children's Benefits. Online Conference)*. In: Belta. August 30, 2012. Available at: [http://www.belta.by/ru/conference/i\\_272.html](http://www.belta.by/ru/conference/i_272.html)

<sup>26</sup> *Deti i Molodezh Respubliki Belarus (Children and Youth of the Republic of Belarus)*. Minsk, 2012. P. 65, 71.

<sup>27</sup> *Statisticheskij Ezhehodnik Respubliki Belarus (Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Belarus)*, 2011. Minsk, 2011. P. 79.

<sup>28</sup> *Zdorovye Naselenia Respubliki Belarus (Health of the Population of the Republic of Belarus)*. Minsk, 2011. P. 99.

women's reproductive rights are basically aimed at deprive women of their subjectivity and the right to their bodies. This approach is implemented by both the legal documents and the moral rhetoric. The state primarily uses the restrictive and prohibitive measures rather than the methods and forms of prevention, education etc. Correspondingly the question of present interest is making the issues related to the reproductive rights the topic for public debates, analysis and monitoring of their implementation, campaigns to lobby changes to severe limitations or resistance to the strengthening conservative rhetoric and influence of certain groups, in particular, the religious groups. There are still no concepts regarding incorporation of sexual education in the system of education.

# Reproductive and sexual rights of different groups of Russian population

**Olga Isupova**

Senior researcher, Institute of demography  
of Higher School of Economics  
Russia, Moscow  
oisupova@hse.ru

The International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994 introduced new concept of population policy. Documents, regulating the sphere of reproductive rights, were elaborated and accepted by the participants as stating key points for development in this area.

A consensus was reached on a key issue which was formerly caused clashes of opposite opinions – the issue of development and population growth being interconnected. Since then, a direction of policy in the area of reproduction has changed. Previously, the accent was put on controlling population growth in developing countries; at this time, respect for human rights (in terms of every person having a possibility to have a free choice in reproductive matters) became more important.

A 20-years Program of Actions was established, all participants agreed to conform to this program.

This program presupposed facilitating gender equality, struggling with violence against women, guaranteeing woman's right to independently decide upon the matters of her own reproduction.

A concept of reproductive rights was elaborated, including:

- Right to safe and satisfying sexuality, free from violence, coercion, fear to be infected with sexually transmitted diseases, and fear of unplanned pregnancy;
- Right to independently choose number and time of birth of one's children;
- Right to access to information, necessary to make such decisions;
- Access to safe, efficient, affordable and culturally acceptable means and methods of family planning, as well as to all other methods of birth regulation, which are legally allowed;
- Access to related healthcare services;
- Gender equality, and
- Protection from violence.

Protection of reproductive health afterwards includes not only curing diseases but also education, awareness raising, consulting, prevention, improving the situation of women, prevention of violence, etc.

Family planning presupposes that individuals and couples can achieve desired number of birth within desired time interval. In order to facilitate this, contraception and infertility treatment are used.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Definitions and indicators in family planning, maternal & child health and reproductive health. European Regional Office, World Health Organization, Revised March 1999 & January 2001.



According to UNFPA, every birth should be safe, and every pregnancy should be desirable... birth of children is the matter of choice and not of accident.

But there are groups of people whose reproductive and sexual rights are specifically vulnerable.

These include:

- LGBT people,
- Infertile women and men,
- Disabled people,
- In modern world, parents of large families, since they have become a minority,
- Single parents, including single fathers, and
- Migrants.

In Russia, currently rights of all these groups seem to be questioned.

LGBT people suffer from the consequences of the law, forbidding homosexual propaganda, which is now ratified by State Duma on Federal level, and have to confront the possibility that their children could be taken away from their families (this possibility is discussed by Parliament deputies). However, as yet, many reproductive clinics still offer artificial insemination services to lesbians, but it is extremely difficult and expensive for gay men to become parents through usage of surrogate motherhood. In clinics, everything depends on personal attitudes of the doctor, which might be affected by changing social climate, becoming unfavorable to LGBT parenting.

The infertile now have access to at least one state financed attempt of in-vitro fertilization, but quality of this medical service, when it is free, is low. Geographically, those living in remote, especially rural, areas, face constraints in terms of access to services. IVF and other methods of assisted reproductive technologies are reimbursed only for couple and women who are childless, and not for those who already have children but cannot achieve desired family size without doctors' help. Recently, Parliament deputies started to discuss possible prohibition of surrogate motherhood, which makes social climate less favorable for the infertile using all the other reproductive technologies as well.

The disabled, single parents, and parents of large families face possibility of children being removed from families on the basis that parents are unable to provide for them. Often, this is a reaction of administration to their request of social benefits they legally have rights to.

Migrants often do not have any access to free healthcare at all. Accordingly, if they have no money to have commercial abortion, or even birth, they are in a really difficult situation. Recently a woman from Uzbekistan was rejected admission to a hospital in Vladivostok on the ground that she had no registration (residence permit). She started to deliver a baby on a hospital premises, and was accepted there only after police intervention. Abortions are widely spread among migrants who lead difficult lifestyles and cannot afford many children. Their access to contraception, as well as, especially, information about contraceptive measures, is extremely limited.

People, especially women, who are aged 40+, or are younger than 20, often face discrimination concerning their rights to have children. This is not widely appropriate socially, and often is considered egoistic or unwise behavior.

### **Demand for fertility clinics**

Number of people addressing these clinics is currently growing. Some experts believe that this might be caused by the fact that fertility now is higher, and not by the fact that infertility is on the rise. And fertility increase might be caused by current measures of family policy, such as "maternity capital", as well as by

favorable age structure (large numbers of women in their reproductive ages), and not by growth of ideal family size. The latter is still about 2 children per family and does not grow.

The other reason for increasing demand for reproductive services might concern “fertility ageing”, or birth postponement. It is a biological fact that ability to conceive a child becomes lower. Finally, the last reason consists in growing trust to infertility treatment services, since reproductive technologies are known to be reasonably efficient, therefore more and more infertile people decide to try them and not just to accept their own infertility as a “fate”.

According to international research, not all infertile people ask doctors’ help. In developed countries, only 56% of couple having difficulties conceiving a child, address doctors, and only 22% finally succeed in having a baby.

In Russia, 1,8 times more individuals come to fertility clinics in order to become parents in 2011 as compared to 1990. Both absolute numbers and relative indicators of patients numbers in each 100000 women aged 18-49 лет, grow.

In opinion of Oleg Philippov, who was deputy director of Department of Child Healthcare and Birth Medical Assistance at the Ministry of Health and Social Development, numbers of people seeking fertility treatment has grown due to introduction of policy of “Maternity capital”. Many couples have decided to have a second child and found themselves biologically unable to (from the interview to Novaya gazeta on 6th of April 2012).

From demography, the trajectory of natural fertility decline at older reproductive ages is well known. Some populations, having good health and sufficient nutrition, and not affected by wars or epidemics, who also did not practice any birth control, are usually taken as a standard of the upper possible limit of natural human fertility. In them, marital fertility was gradually diminishing with mothers’ age growing as follows:

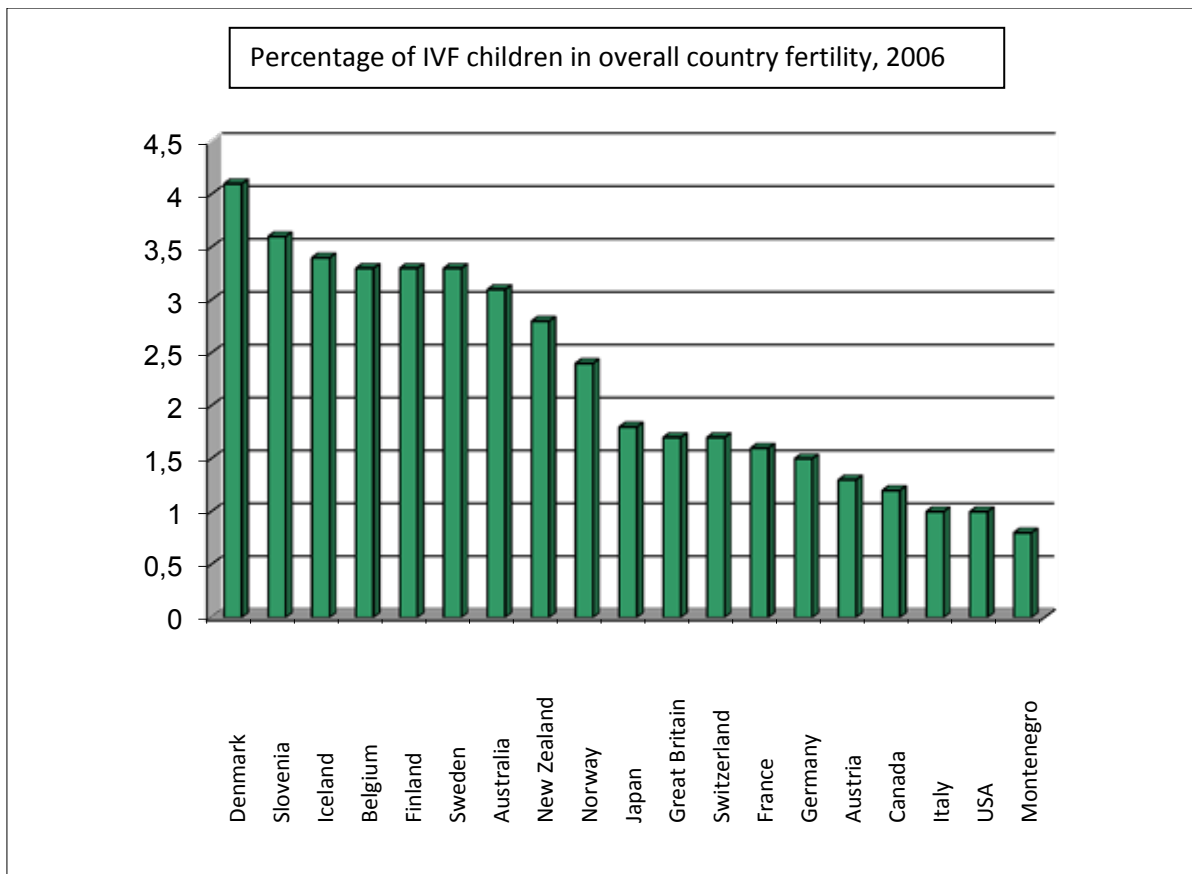
Comparing to fertility of 20-24 years women, figures for those aged 25-29 was 6% lower; 30-34 years olds had 14% fewer children; those aged 35-39 gave birth 31% less often; from the age of 40, fertility fell drastically (Menken Jane, James Trussell, Ulla Larsen. Age and Infertility // Science, New Series, Vol. 233, No. 4771 (Sep. 26, 1986), pp. 1389-1394).

According to Russian GGS (Generation and Gender Survey, 2007), women desire to have children combined with inability to give birth, is maximal at the age 35-39 (3% of the sample), while at older age, though women inability to give birth (according to self-evaluation), raises drastically, their reproductive desire falls: only 1,9% of 40-49 olds want to have children while believe they cannot do so.

#### **Reproductive rights of infertile men and women would be better met if:**

- \* Larger number of IVF attempts would be reimbursed, and not only for childless people but for all who needs this treatment,
- \* There will be more fertility clinics and doctors, who specialize in human reproduction,
- \* These clinics would be evenly distributed throughout territory of Russia, and
- \* Cultural norms and prejudices concerning reproductive technologies in general population and medical professionals would diminish.

Wide availability of IVF might facilitate the process of accessing them earlier in life when their efficiency is also higher. Number of children, born as a result of assisted reproduction usage, is higher in the countries where average patient age is lower. This coincides with the countries where IVF is especially generously reimbursed by the state and with the highest number of clinics per million of population.



### Other aspects of reproductive rights

Availability and accessibility of contraception means and sexual education in Russia is diminishing, centers for family planning are closed or reformed into fertility clinics. It ought to be noted that significant part of cases of infertility might be due to insufficient sexual education and lack of access to high quality medical services in early age.

Large families are symbolically encouraged by the state but informally not highly valued, therefore they face problem of poverty, which concerns children.

The majority of mothers work since their earnings are essential for families. However, school expects mothers to be intensely involved in their children education. Thus motherhood becomes increasingly difficult to be combined with job, and especially with career. Intense, rather than efficient ("good enough") mothering becomes normative. At the same time, consumerist standards require high parental expense on children needs and desires. All this leads to growing tension in the sphere of parenting, which results in conflicts and diminishing reproductive intentions.

Especially active as conservative ideologists are deputies Elena Misulina and Evgeny Milonov. Elena accuse her opponents of being members of "pedophile lobbi", irrespectively of what they actually She suggests introduction of various restrictions in the matter of abortions:

- \* Forbidding women to have an abortion without husband consent (and underage women – without parents' consent);
- \* Having abortions only if there was rape or medical reason for it (list of medical reasons becomes more and more restricted each year);
- \* She advocates banning free abortions, so that there will be possibility to have them only in the commercial sector;

\* Limiting or forbidding to sell pharmaceutical medications which make self-made at-home abortion possible;

In July 2013 she introduced a project of a law which presupposes fining doctors, making abortions to women without giving them a week pause between addressing a clinic and actual operation (so called “week of silence”). Fine for doctors, in her opinion, should be 1 million rubles, while these women themselves should be fined from 3 to 5 thousand rubles.

When a law, banning adoption of Russian children by Americans was discussed, she was initially against it, but then drastically changed her mind.

In June 2013, she introduced a project of “Concept of State Family policy for a period until 2025th year”. This concept presupposes rising divorce tax, illegitimate children birth is denounced, homosexuality is condemned, the family ideal is depicted as three-generational family living together and 3+ children being ideal family size for all responsible citizens. Increased role of Orthodox Church in family matters is advocated, and minimal alimony size is suggested which should not depend in former spouse income. Age of sexual consent, in her view, should rise from 16 to 18 years. She also suggested taking children out of homosexual families. Finally, she advocates elimination of sexual education for children. Recently she (as well as Milonov) suggested prohibition of surrogate motherhood, comparing it to “nuclear bomb”.

Milonov was main activist, lobbying law on ban on homosexual propaganda among the underage. It was accepted first in St-Petersburg, and now it is a federal law. Basis for this ban he found in the idea that “not only the minorities rights should be protected, but heterosexual majority rights as well”.

This law presupposes fines for “guilty” persons, fines are higher for administrators and especially for private companies. The lowest fines are presupposed for individuals. The law names homosexual relations “unnatural” and “perverted”. Milonov is an advocate of ban on sexual education in schools, as well. He is an initiator of a legislative idea of allotting every embryo with human rights.

A recent replic by “famous” parliamentary Milonov at the magazine snob.ru (<http://www.snob.ru/profile/25239/blog/66267>)

“Woman is not a container for a semen”

- On the occasion of Russian pop-stars Pugacheva and Galkin using reproductive technologies and surrogate mother to have twins:

*“The give the signal to society: if you want to feel yourselves modern, advanced – do the same thing!*

*Why they could not take a child from an orphanage, would they love him less? I would suggest them a special prayer helping to start loving an adopted child.*

*They say that in adoption genes of other people would manifest themselves, genes that will be foreign to you. But we have no rights to practice eugenics, no right to speak about genes. T*

*There is no justification for surrogate motherhood. I do not know even one argument in favor of it, but the most important is that I do not search for such an argument.*

*A woman becomes a disposable container where you could put your semen and wait until it becomes a child.*

*A Savior said not to blame prostitutes and to hope that they would change their mind. The same is with surrogates. Prostitutes sell their bodies, and surrogates sell their children.*

*And homosexuals are pioneers of surrogates’ service usage: Elton John and the other gay activists. They cannot have children, but this way they receive imitation of fatherhood.*

*The principle of surrogate motherhood is immoral, and, until the majority believes in that, we have a chance to be saved from degradation”.*

- Answers to him in the comments to the blog:

- Many people stress that a woman is a vessel for semen anyway, in a “natural” conception as well;
- Some express liberal attitude that “my body is my own business”.

But Milonov wants to forbid surrogate motherhood for gays in the light of overall antigay movement generated by him.

- Moral panics are mainly related to decomposition of motherhood, not of fatherhood.
- Since they question:
  - Desire of some women to be kept by men because they are mothers, and motherhood is so intense and impossible to divide into parts;
  - Desire of some men to see women as made for motherhood and by motherhood and unable to do anything else, since motherhood is such a big thing;
  - Some men desire to claim that maternal work is of low quality and of low cost and deserve no remuneration, that women actually are kept by them because of pity and not because this is a valuable job. Now, the price is known.

On the whole, conservatism is rising in Russia, and it has definite accent of state and church being involved (several Orthodox priests recently also publicly denounced surrogate motherhood and continue to condemn abortion, and Misulina suggested to incorporate Orthodox Christianity in Constitution as state religion).

Meanwhile, family policy organs are becoming increasingly used as a means for pressure on opposition and even on two active mothers of many children, if they “ask too much” – for example, why social benefits due to them, are not paid.

*“Just now a commission from social policy organs came to my house. The reason was my letter to Russian president asking about what kind of support large families should have in our country within the frame of the program of large families’ support. The first thing they have told me was – pack you middle son things, we are taking him in the orphanage, if you think you are so poor that you need benefits and financial support. And this is not funny, this is horrible. The ultimate breakdown, my dears! Taking a child in the orphanage from a family – this is their large families support, in Russian Federation. ... Caty Shatrova”*

To summarize: we see that the language of help and support in the area of family, sex and reproduction changes to the language of threat, even when it concerns the large families, who are symbolically chosen to represent the ideal of this new “family order”. Society becomes polarized, so that “true believers” in Orthodox Christianity are becoming put in a position, not always welcomed by them, of enemies of the rest of the society. Cessation of “maternity capital” policy after 2016 is discussed. So the overall spirit now is – compelling people to do what is considered necessary from the state point of view, and not rewarding them for such behavior.

This might lead to social explosion since such ideals and such order contradict to life practices of the majority of population.

Gender roles, required by contemporary life and market situation, are virtually incompatible with the order, symbolically and legally forced upon people. Even being a conformist, it is impossible to conform to all requirements, since they are so opposite. On the whole, all this should be named not a new version of “gender order”, but “gender disorder”.

# Assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs) and the nationalistic discourse in contemporary Poland

**Elżbieta Korolczuk**

Sociologist, Södertörn University and Gender  
Studies at University of Warsaw, feminist activist,  
member of “Women’s 8th of March Alliance”.  
Poland, Warsaw  
bekorol@gmail.com

## Introduction

The debate on technologically enabled reproduction is a sphere where contradictory discourses concerning family, the body and citizenship intersect and interact. Perhaps, it is even more evident in the (post) transitional context of Poland, where already in the beginning of the 1990’s heated debates on issues such as abortion have become an important part of the process of contestation and legitimization of political authority. Susan Gal and Gail Kligman, the authors of *The Politics of Gender after Socialism*, claim that “the discursive and practical effects of debates about reproduction provide one of the keys to understanding how politics is being reshaped in East Central Europe” (2000: 15). These debates and new legislation, including the ban on abortion which was introduced in Poland in 1993 (Zielińska 2000), have contributed to the emergence of new kinds of political actors and subjectivities, and have resulted in re-defining the contours of citizenship (Holc 2004). As of today, along with abortion, the views on assisted conception have become one of the most important political cleavages in the country.

This text aims to shed light on the ways the current debate on assisted reproduction is interconnected with discourses on and practices of belonging in the post-socialist context of Poland. I examine the public debate concerning infertility and in vitro fertilization (IVF)<sup>1</sup>, focusing mostly on the rhetoric strategies of one of the main social actors<sup>2</sup> – the representatives of the Catholic Church. The present analysis is based on the examination of different types of texts, which appeared between the years 2007-2013, including media releases (articles in leading Polish newspapers such as “Gazeta Wyborcza” and “Rzeczpospolita”; weeklies, such as “Polityka”, “Wprost”, “Newsweek” and “Uważam rze”, and on-line portals, e.g. onet.pl and wp.pl), open letters made public by the Catholic Church representatives since 2009 (e.g. the open letter written by the Poland’s conference of Catholic bishops in 2010), as well as interviews conducted with the Church representatives (e.g. with bishops Tadeusz Pieronek, Józef Michalik and Henryk Hosier), and articles published on Catholic portals such as Adonai, Opoka and others. Critical discourse analysis methods has been employed (van Dijk 1997, Fairclough 1995) in order to re-construct the way subject position is framed in these texts.

## Assisted reproduction in contemporary Poland

IVF (in vitro fertilization) and other methods of assisted reproduction are not illegal in Poland, and people can undergo treatment in one of over 40 clinics (both private and public), but there are no regula-

---

<sup>1</sup> This analysis is based on the outcomes of the research project “‘We are no second-rate quality citizens’. Negotiating ‘biological’ citizenship in social mobilizations around infertility issues and access to in vitro in Poland.” My research has been supported by the Swedish Research Council (grant 421-2010-1706) and the Foundation for Baltic and East European Studies (1555/42/2011).

<sup>2</sup> By “main social actors” I mean groups and institutions whose representatives get more media attention than others, and whose voices seem to have the biggest influence on the discourses and practices of ART in the country (see also Just 2008, Radkowska-Walkowicz 2012).



tions concerning this particular field. As of today, no country-specific legislation has been implemented, and the authorities have not ratified the European Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine from 1997 (Kulawik 2011). Thus, patients have to pay full price, which usually exceeds at least 6 times the monthly income per capita. In the face of the demographic crisis the ruling party Civic Platform (*Platforma Obywatelska*) decided to opt for a temporary measure, a regulation issued by the Minister of Health, and on the 1st of June 2013 the government introduced a three-year plan of state-funded IVF treatments for infertile people. It is about to cover partly the costs for 15.000 heterosexual couples (married or not) in total.<sup>3</sup> The state would pay the clinics – mostly private ones – for conducting the procedure, and control the effectiveness of treatment, while the patients would pay for drugs and any additional services.

The lack of regulations stems mostly from the opposition towards ARTs expressed by the Catholic Church, and conservative politicians (Just 2008, Gozdecka 2012). Thus, in the present text I will focus on how the representatives of the Catholic Church construct public discourses on infertility and IVF. Such an analysis is crucial because:

the doctrine of the Catholic Church may have a real impact on prospective parents' negotiations, social attitudes towards IVF technique/practice but also on the legal arrangements concerning those issues. Therefore, it may indirectly influence the conditions of the 'parental becoming' for all who opt for technological assistance in conception. (Just 2008: 19)

In the present analysis I conceive of the church as "a semi-political organization", which has a significant impact on the processes of democratic deliberation (Gozdecka 2012:2). It needs to be stressed, however that there are other important aspects of the local context which influence the current state of affairs, such as the limited policy-making capacity of the state – the "politics of non-decision" – which makes it very difficult to decide on potentially controversial issues (Kulawik 2009)<sup>4</sup>, or the neoliberal reforms in health care, which undermine the legitimacy of women's health needs and their reproductive autonomy (Mishtal 2010).

Previous studies on ARTs in Poland demonstrate that the current debate on assisted reproduction takes place in the shadow of the ongoing "abortion war" (Just 2008, Kulawik 2011, Gozdecka 2012, Radkowska-Walkowicz 2013). This regards the main social actors who take part in it, as well as the types of arguments used, and imagery evoked in discussions. Controversies over abortion led to establishing a hegemonic paradigm of "public morals", which obstructs any attempts to debate bioethical dilemmas in legal terms rather than emotional, religious and value-laden (Kulawik 2011: 59), and this discourse is dominant also in the debate on ARTs. It needs to be noted however, that the waste majority of Polish population shares the opinion that in vitro should be widely available, also to non-married heterosexual couples, and that the state should cover the costs<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, social activism coalescing around infertility and IVF quite successfully challenges the negative opinions on ARTs propagated by the Church.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Total number of 23 Polish clinics have been chosen to provide state-funded procedures, and a governmental body will be established to monitor the clinics participating in the program. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/10/22/us-poland-fertility-idUSBRE89L1BJ20121022> Similar programs were introduced also at the local level in some Polish cities, e.g. in Częstochowa.

<sup>4</sup> According to Teresa Kulawik, one of characteristic elements of the Polish system is a large number of "veto points" which means that a decision made at the level of the parliament may be blocked on the next level, e.g. by the president or the Constitutional Court (oral communication, June 2013).

<sup>5</sup> An opinion poll conducted by the Public Opinion Research Center in September 2012 [http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2012/K\\_121\\_12.PDF](http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2012/K_121_12.PDF) showed that 79 percent of Poles think IVF should be legal and available to married couples, and 60 percent think that it should be available for co-habiting couples. Significantly, although the level of support differs between the believers and non-believers, even the Catholics who go to the church once a week and know that the Catholic doctrine forbids IVF are generally of the opinion that it should be allowed in Poland (71 percent). 43 percent of Poles thinks that the procedure should be fully covered by the state analogous to any other medical procedure, and 58 percent is of the opinion that surplus embryos should be created, as it makes IVF more effective.

<sup>6</sup> For a more detailed analysis of social activism around IVF in Poland see, e.g. Korolczuk 2013.

## The Church's anti-IVF campaign – ART as a threat to the Polish nation

The representatives of the Catholic Church started an anti-IVF campaign in the media, in churches and in face-to-face interactions<sup>7</sup> already in 2007, right after Minister of Health Ewa Kopacz made public governmental plans to regulate ARTs. As could be expected, most opponents<sup>8</sup> of assisted reproduction employed emotionally charged language of moral indignation and condemnation. The Catholic doctrine strongly opposes any medical procedures involving gametes (human egg and sperm) in general, especially creating and manipulating human embryo. The church claims that an embryo is a human being who should be treated with respect, and conception should always take place in the woman's body during an intercourse (see also Gozdecka 2012, Just 2008). But my analysis of the rhetoric of the Polish Catholic Church shows that it is rooted in a nationalistic discourse, as much as in the religious one.

The first open letter to politicians and the public issued by the Council of the Episcopate in 2007 has set the tone for the debate describing IVF as "sophisticated abortion", prospective parent's motivations as "wickedness", and claiming that ARTs are immoral, harmful to individual people, and the whole society<sup>9</sup>. Methods of assisted conception were presented as an element of the "civilization of death"<sup>10</sup> which endangers not only the Catholic values in Poland, but presents a threat to whole Western civilization. Such views have been expressed in sermons, in consecutive open letters and position statements issued by the Polish Episcopate, in hundreds of articles and testimonials published in Catholic newspapers and blogosphere, and by individual bishops and priests appearing in the mainstream media (see also Radkowska-Walkowicz 2012, Gozdecka 2012).

In these utterances words such as "ova", "sperm" or "embryo" are always replaced by "human life in the pre-natal phase"<sup>11</sup>, "conceived children", or simply "children", while the cryopreservation of the spare embryos is referred to as "killing", or putting "children into the gas chambers". The representatives of the church stress that since more embryos are produced than can be implanted, every IVF procedure involves a "Holocaust of conceived children" or "children at embryonic stage"<sup>12</sup>.

Importantly, Polish Catholic Church not only criticizes methods of assisted reproduction, but also infertile people who decide to undergo such procedures, and stigmatize children born after IVF propagating the view that they are physically weaker, more prone to certain diseases, and very often suffer from a range of psychical abnormalities<sup>13</sup>. The utterance of the archbishop Tadeusz Pieronek can serve as an example

<sup>7</sup> IVF and ART in general have become one of the favorite subjects of Sunday sermons, and Polish media reported on priests who denied baptism to children born after IVF or absolution to parents who decided to undergo the procedure, see <http://www.wprost.pl/ar/200806/Dzieci-bez-Kosciola/>

<sup>8</sup> The conservative politicians representing not only oppositional right-wing parties such as Law and Justice (PiS) and later also United Poland (SP), but also the ruling Civic Platform (PO) quickly joined in, strongly opposing any regulations that would facilitate access to ART.

<sup>9</sup> [http://episkopat.pl/0.1.mod\\_search.html](http://episkopat.pl/0.1.mod_search.html)

<sup>10</sup> "Civilization of death" or "culture of death" are expressions used by the late pope John Paul II in encyclical "Veritatis Splendor" and "Evangelium Vitae", to describe culture where abortion, euthanasia, contraception or methods of assisted conception are available (see also Just 2008).

<sup>11</sup> [http://episkopat.pl/dokumenty/pozostale/5194.1>About\\_Bioethical\\_Challenges\\_Facing\\_Catholics.html](http://episkopat.pl/dokumenty/pozostale/5194.1>About_Bioethical_Challenges_Facing_Catholics.html)

<sup>12</sup> [http://czestochowa.gazeta.pl/czestochowa/1,48725,12716390,Niechlubne\\_pierwszenstwo\\_mocny\\_glos\\_arcybiskupa.html](http://czestochowa.gazeta.pl/czestochowa/1,48725,12716390,Niechlubne_pierwszenstwo_mocny_glos_arcybiskupa.html) Claims that IVF equals abortion, and both are comparable to Holocaust is not a Polish specialty, e.g. in 2010 Argentinean Archbishop Hector Aguer of La Plata criticized in vitro fertilization claiming that "we could call this a new holocaust that is part of the holocaust of abortion." <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/in-vitro-part-of-the-holocaust-of-abortion-says-argentinean-archbishop/>

<sup>13</sup> Most texts presents the same set of "data", see e.g. text by Marcin Stanowiec on the Catholic portal Zbawieni <http://zbawieni.blox.pl/2008/01/IN-VITRO-O-TYM-SIE-NIE-MOWI.html> and a text by an anonymous Internet at <http://www.prawdziwe-oblicze.pl/in-vitro-wszyscy-mowia-o-dobrodziejstwie-nikt-nie-szacuje-zagrozenia/> Magdalena Radkowska-Walkowicz also gives examples of diseases and syndroms which are presented in the Catholic media as resulting from IVF, such as "Prader-Willie syndrome, Angelman's syndrome, Russel-Silver syndrome, Beckwith-Wiedemann syndrome." (2013: 33). In June 2013 Polish Bishops Conference issued a special announcement protesting against "tendentious claims indicating that there are no negative genetic consequences for children born with the help of ART". [http://episkopat.pl/dokumenty/pozostale/5208.1,Komunikat\\_Zespolu\\_Ekspertow\\_ds\\_Bioetycznych\\_Konferencji\\_Episkopatu\\_Polski\\_w\\_sprawie\\_manipulacji\\_informacjami\\_naukowymi\\_dotyczacyymi\\_procedury\\_in\\_vitro.html](http://episkopat.pl/dokumenty/pozostale/5208.1,Komunikat_Zespolu_Ekspertow_ds_Bioetycznych_Konferencji_Episkopatu_Polski_w_sprawie_manipulacji_informacjami_naukowymi_dotyczacyymi_procedury_in_vitro.html)

of this line of reasoning. In a widely commented interview<sup>14</sup> he compared IVF procedure to a murder, and children born through IVF to Frankensteinian creations, explaining that such an analogy is justified as in both cases a new life is created in artificial and unethical manner. He claimed that using methods of assisted conception reflects parents' consumptionism as they prefer to "buy" children at the clinic, instead of accepting infertility as a biological fact, or God's decision. Thus, in Pieronek's view, it is not surprising that children born after IVF, which have been "produced" or "manufactured" to fulfill their parents egoistic wishes, supposedly differ from "normal" ones. Defying God's laws must result in a range of psychological and emotional problems (see also Radkowska-Walkowicz 2012).

In the interviews that followed, Pieronek stressed that the church does not condemn children born with the help of IVF, but attempts at saving them.<sup>15</sup> He insisted however, that children born through in vitro are often physically and emotionally deficient. This view is also propagated by the Catholic media. Moreover, it is often stressed that children suffer when they find out how they have been conceived because they feel guilty. Different versions of the following description can be found in the Catholic blogosphere:

Therapists all over the world more and more often observe that children born after IVF suffer from so called survivor syndrome, which is characteristic to people who escaped death (e.g. in a catastrophe or a massacre where most of his/her companions died). These children ask themselves "why did I survive and do I live at the expense of others?" (a comparable syndrome has been observed in families where an abortion or even an attempt at doing abortion took place).<sup>16</sup>

In such utterances the children born after IVF are presented as both helpless victims and possibly dangerous "monsters", bearing the stigma of their parents' sin, morally confused, and unable to feel the same as "normal" human beings. Polish anthropologist, Magdalena Radkowska-Walkowicz (2012), who analyzed the debate on IVF in Poland, demonstrates that for the opponents of assisted reproduction, attributing monstrosity to the children conceived with the "helping hand" of technology (Franklin 1997), has become one of the main rhetorical strategies. She observes that there are different dimensions of monstrosity:

physical (possible bodily deformity), psychological (survivor syndrome, identity crisis), social (loneliness, uncertain place in family relations), and ethical (a life burdened with the deaths of many embryos). (2012: 35)

According to Radkowska-Walkowicz, through such a rhetoric it becomes possible to present the method itself, and in fact any technological interventions in the body, as unnatural, grotesque and dangerous, because "monstrosity spills over onto everyone who participates in this blasphemous ... act" (2013: 32). Of course, the representatives of the church and Catholic journalists often stress that they do not intend to discriminate against the infertile or children born with the help of IVF – they just reveal "a hidden truth" on assisted reproduction, show "the ugly facts" that most doctors, journalists and commentators allegedly try to hide.<sup>17</sup>

I would argue that such a strategy is an attempt at reversing the process of normalization of ART, and new kinship configurations, not only within the medical setting, but also in the society at large (see Thompson 2001, de Jong and Tkach 2009). The fear of the monster looming in the dark is stirred up to counteract the emotional power of the stories of "miracle babies", and the media coverage featuring heterosexual, middle-class infertile couples achieving fulfillment and happiness thanks to medical interventions.

In Poland – as well as elsewhere in the countries where Catholicism is an important part of social life – the discourse of "value of life" is supposed to be a corrective to the increased pluralization and fragmenta-

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Archbishop Pieronek <http://wiadomosci.onet.pl/wiadomosci/pierwowzorem-in-vitro-jest-frankenstein,1,3492964,wiadomosc.html>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.rp.pl/artykul/1014256.html?print=tak&p=0>

<sup>16</sup> See for example <http://poznajmy-prawde.blog.onet.pl/2010/06/18/cala-prawda-o-in-vitro/> and <http://www.prawdziwe-oblicze.pl/in-vitro-wszyscy-mowia-o-dobrodziejstwie-nikt-nie-szacuje-zagrozenia/>

<sup>17</sup> Such phrases are used, e.g. in the text entitled "The truth about IVF" at <http://poznajmy-prawde.blog.onet.pl/2010/06/18/cala-prawda-o-in-vitro/> and <http://www.prawdziwe-oblicze.pl/in-vitro-wszyscy-mowia-o-dobrodziejstwie-nikt-nie-szacuje-zagrozenia/>

tion of family arrangements, and reproductive choices. The Polish case demonstrates however that the religiously grounded opposition against assisted conception relies heavily on the idea of “biovalue” (Rose and Novas 2005: 29-30), understood as the body, health and vitality of people that translate into the well-being of the collective, rather than on the Catholic ethics. In that sense, both people who happen to suffer from infertility and their children fall into the same category of citizens, whose value is contested not only due to the fact that are involved in taking risky moral choices, but because of certain features of, and possible risks associated with their bodies. And what is at stake is the body of the nation – the Polish nation, the Catholic nation, which may be “polluted” by unethical technological interventions. In order to protect the healthy body of the nation, the infertile members of the community should sacrifice their reproductive needs and desires. Theoretically, for the opponents of IVF the life and fate of embryos is of the highest value, but in practice that means that in the name of the collective good it would be best if the “conceived IVF children” did not come into existence at all.

There is a striking analogy between the rhetoric strategies used in anti-IVF campaign and the anti-Semitic discourse propagated by the extreme right-wing circles, supported by of the Catholic Church in Poland. Just like Jews (or homosexuals), the children born after IVF are dangerous because they represent the genetic Other, weakening the body of the Polish nation, and endangering its well being and survival. They are dangerous precisely because their otherness may be concealed, which makes it difficult to set them apart from “genuine”, “healthy” Poles. The greatest fear echoing in anti-Semitic propaganda is that Jews may easily blend in and corrupt the nation from inside, without even being detected. Such fear resonates also in the publications concerning ARTs, where modern reproduction technologies are presented as tools altering children’s genes and bodies in subtle and imperceptible ways, which may be difficult to identify once the child is born (see also Radkowska-Walkowicz 2012). This explains why it is so important to stress that such children are not only *genetically*, but also *visibly* different from “normal” children, just as Jews are *visibly* different from Poles, e.g. they have longer noses or differently shaped ears. The lists of deformities, which according to Catholic media “IVF children” are supposed to suffer from, includes a range of physical abnormalities that makes them different at a first glance, such as:

obesity, short height, great height, deformed organs, drooling, trembling of the limbs, chewing movements, limited speech, dangling tongue, wide and protruding forehead, eyes improperly set and sticking out, asymmetric body, and much more. (Walkowska-Radkowicz 2013: 33, see also Dolińska 2009)

This strategy is probably most vividly expressed in the utterance of the member of the Episcopal Expert Team on Bioethics, Franciszek Longchamps de Bérrier, who went on record, claiming that morphological differences between “normal” and “test-tube” children are often so obvious that:

There are doctors who can tell that a child has been conceived through IVF just by the look at her/his face. It is possible because their faces are marked by a furrow, typical to specific syndrome of genetic diseases.<sup>18</sup>

This example demonstrates that although campaign against in vitro fertilization initiated and led by the Catholic Church is said to be motivated by the respect to human uniqueness and bodily integrity, in reality it is based largely on devaluing the children born after IVF. The anti-IVF campaign is fuelled by moral indignation and constructed with the use of scientific discourse, but the very idea of ARTs as a concealed danger which needs to be exposed and fought by all means, is rooted in the nationalistic discourse and imagery (Yuval-Davis 1998, Graff 2009). Thus, the Catholic Church’s opposition against IVF stems not only from ethical and moral arguments. It also expresses a deep fear that the healthy body of the nation will be polluted by genetically alien “others”.

<sup>18</sup> This opinion has been expressed in an interview published on the February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2013 in a conservative weekly “Uważam rze”, where de Bérrier argues that children born after IVF have “genetic syndromes much more often than children conceived naturally”: [http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,114871,13444933,Dzieci\\_z\\_in\\_vitro\\_maja\\_bruzdy\\_na\\_twarzy\\_Nasz\\_Bocian\\_.html](http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,114871,13444933,Dzieci_z_in_vitro_maja_bruzdy_na_twarzy_Nasz_Bocian_.html)

His utterance has instigated a wave of critique, so de Bérrier explained that he meant children with Wiedemann’s syndrome, and in another interview apologized “to all who felt offended by the way I formulated my opinion”.

According to Nira Yuval Davis, “the myth of common origin or shared blood/genes tends to construct the most exclusionary/homogeneous visions of ‘the nation’” (1998: 21), but as the analysis of the Hungarian context done by Eva-Maria Knoll demonstrates, it works differently in different contexts. While in Hungary the nationalist discourse may allow for the inclusion of a loosely defined group of “Hungarians leaving abroad” (2012: 270) among the recipients of state-covered health services, in the case of Poland it results in restricting citizens’ reproductive choices. As in the case of abortion, the needs and desires of individual people, and especially women, are to be subordinated to the good of motherland (Gil and Kligman 2000), as the religious discourse intertwined with the nationalistic sentiments is a powerful tool for disciplining the public.

In this respect, somehow analogously to the “gender talk” analyzed by Agnieszka Graff in the Polish media during EU accession (2009), the debate on assisted reproduction becomes a debate on possible and desirable forms of belonging. Therefore, the discourse on IVF propagated by the Church may be interpreted as another case of “displaced nationalism” (Graff 2009) – a narrative of the imaginary collective, which envisions the possibility of reestablishing the “natural” order of things not only in terms of gender roles, but also reproductive arrangements, and family configurations. Since the collective is imagined as a homogenous nation rather than a pluralist society, the citizens are easily denied their rights, not only in the field of reproduction but also in terms of democratic deliberation over moral choices.

### Conclusions

The Catholic discourse on IVF relies heavily on patriarchal assumptions concerning gender. The opponents of the methods of assisted conception most often use gender-neutral language as they tend to condemn not “women” or “men”, but rather “parents” or “couples” who consider using or have used in vitro. The rights of an embryo to life and undisturbed development effectively overshadow the desires and needs of women who may carry them, and men who want to become fathers through IVF. Such rhetoric strategy helps to obscure the fact that the people, who actually undergo most medical procedures are women, and if the propositions concerning banning ART in Poland or at least restricting the access to it are to be accepted the women would pay the price. Analogously to the debates on abortion, the potential and existing conflict between the rights of a woman and the rights of an embryo is obscured. As embryos achieve the status of children / human beings whose rights have to be recognized by the society and the state, the women lose part of their civil rights and possibility to decide on their health. Again, the emergence of new citizenship subjectivity requires sacrifice from certain groups – not surprisingly women – whose voices are being silenced and marginalized within the public sphere.

Moreover, the Catholic Church does not address the question of class, especially the fact that if ART are to be banned in Poland, they would remain available to people who can afford cross-border reproductive care. The wealthy would travel abroad, just like is the case of abortion today. Erasing economics from the equation, allows the right-wing groups to focus on the fate of the “unborn” citizens, and to avoid the discussion concerning the health and well-being of the “postnatal” subjects (Holc 2004). Clearly, in the Polish context democratic consolidation is based not on the idea of individual rights and freedoms secured by the neutral state, but on the notion of “common good”, the interests of symbolic community, be it the nation or “unborn children” (Funk 2004).

### Bibliography:

- Dolińska, B. (2009), „Uczciwość i wiarygodność nauki – odpowiedzialność za słowa w walce o dopuszczalność in vitro”. *Nauka*, No. 4, pp 87-101.
- Fairclough, N. (1995), *Critical Discourse Analysis. The critical study of language*. Longman: London and New York.
- Franklin, Sarah (1997), *Embodied Progress. A Cultural Account of Assisted Reproduction*, Routledge: London and New York.
- Gozdecka, Dorota S. (2012), “The Polish Catholic Church and the Regulation of IVF in Poland: Polarised Political Discourses and the Battle over ‘Proper’ Reproduction”, *Feminist Law*, Vol 2, No 1, pp 1-40.
- Graff, A. (2009) “Gender and Nation, Here and Now: Reflections on the Gendered and Sexualized As-

- pects of Contemporary Polish Nationalism." in *Intimate Citizenships: Gender, Sexualities, Politics*, Elżbieta H. Oleksy, ed. London: Routledge Series in Gender and Society, 133-146.
- de Jong, W. and Tkach, O. (2012), *Making Bodies, Persons and Families. Normalizing Reproductive Technologies in Russia, Switzerland and Germany* W., Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag.
- Just, E. M. (2008), *New Reproductive Assemblages: Understanding, Managing and Using Human In Vitro Fertilization (IVF)*. Utrecht: Proefschrift Universiteit.
- Knecht, M., Klotz, M. and Beck, S. eds. (2012) *Reproductive Technologies as Global Form. Ethnographies of Knowledge, Practices, and Transnational Encounters*, Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag.
- Knoll, E.-M. (2012), "Reproducing Hungarians: Reflections on Fuzzy Boundaries in Reproductive Border Crossing" in Knecht, M., Klotz, M. and Beck, S. (2012) *Reproductive Technologies as Global Form. Ethnographies of Knowledge, Practices, and Transnational Encounters*, Campus Verlag.
- Korolczuk, Elżbieta (2013), "'You are a winner, if you fight.' boundary work in on-line social activism around new reproductive technologies in Poland". *Culture Unbound: Journal of Current Cultural Research*.
- Kulawik, T. (2011), "The Politics of Human Embryo Research in Poland" in: *Exploring Central and Eastern Europe's Biotechnological Landscape: Transitioning the Life Sciences* Robbins, P. and Huzai, F. eds. Springer.
- Mishtal, Joanna (2010), Neoliberal reforms and privatization of reproductive health services in post-socialist Poland, *Reproductive Health Matters*, 18 (36), 56-66.
- Radkowska-Walkowicz, Magdalena (2012), "The creation of "monsters": the discourse of opposition to in vitro fertilization in Poland", *Reproductive Health Matters*, Vol 20, No. 40: 30-37.
- Thompson, Charis (2001), "Strategic Naturalizing: Kinship in an Infertility Clinic," in eds. S. Franklin and S. McKinnon, *New Directions in Kinship Study: A Core Concept Revisited*, Durham & London: Duke University Press.
- Van Dijk, T. (1997) *Discourse as Social Interaction*. London, Thousand Oaks, and Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Yuval-Davis, N. (1998), *Gender and Nation*. London: Sage.
- Zielińska, E. (2000) "Between ideology, politics, and common sense: the discourse of reproductive rights in Poland", In S. Gal and G. Kligman, eds., *Reproducing Gender*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 23-57.



## GENDER AND EDUCATION/GENDER EDUCATION



# Feminist pedagogical experience: talking about gender in the third sector in Belarus

**Elena Minchenya**

Gender researcher, lecturer, Centre for Gender Studies, European Humanities University (Vilnius, Lithuania)  
Belarus, Minsk  
minchenia@gmail.com

My presentation is an attempt to comprehend my work as a tutor and trainer in a number of projects on gender education for the Belarusian NGO activists. To be more precise, I am going to discuss my participation in the following projects:

- “Developing Gender Sensitivity in Belarus (Minsk, Vitebsk and Hrodny regions)” – a joint project of the Belarusian Human Rights House (Vilnius), Center for Gender Studies (European Humanities University), Regional NGO “Legal Initiative”, International Center for Gender Initiatives “Adliga: Women for Full Citizenship”, NGO “Center *The Third Sector*” and Belorussian Association of Journalists. The project was implemented in 2011-2012.
- A project on informal gender education in Belarusian regions initiated by the participants and tutors of the previous projects and supported by the Kyiv office of the Heinrich Böll Foundation. The project was implemented in summer 2013.
- Summer school “Outside the Classroom: Living the Gender Discourses” – a joint project of the Litpro, Center for Gender Studies (European Humanities University) and Belarusian Human Rights House (Vilnius), August 2013.

The following is the plan of my presentation: first I would like to briefly describe the context by answering the question why these projects were important and which ideas were their basis. Then I will identify what I believe to be the key points of the implementation of those projects from the viewpoint of feminist pedagogy having briefly described what I understand as feminist pedagogy and which tradition I use.

## **Why have these projects appear?**

I would like to begin with personal reasons (but we all remember that personal is political). These project met my need and a need of my friends and colleagues in some activism and in more visible presence in Belarusian context. After the EHU was shut down in Minsk (Belarus) and moved to Lithuania, the Center for Gender Studies shared the same fate. Our activities and physical presence in Belarus became rather fragmented. What I saw as equally important is overcoming the gap between the gender theory in the academia and its implementation in the practical activities of non-governmental organizations and initiatives.

Besides, analysis of the activities of the gender programs and projects in the third sector in Belarus demonstrates a number of problems that have not yet been solved. First of all, I mean heteronormativity and lack of critical attitude towards the reproduction of gender differences. What is related to the gender issues is generally understood in a simplistic manner. Issues of sexuality and diversity of gender identities is still a zone of silence in the public debates in Belarus (in the women’s NGOs, too). Besides, the gender issues always find themselves as secondary in regards to the political issues, or to what is called the ‘struggle against the regime’.

## Reflecting the experience and feminist pedagogy

First of all, it is necessary to mention that there is no unified feminist pedagogy; rather, there are different approaches to factual implementation of the feminist ideas in the space of educational cooperation. Berenice Malka Fisher suggests to classify the feminist pedagogy by the goal pursued by the teacher. She identifies 4 such goals: equality, care, collective opposition and deconstruction. I will briefly characterize each approach. *Feminist pedagogy based on the idea of equality* is based to a large extent on the liberal idea of equal treatment of men and women and equal development of their potential. As a rule the weakness of such approach is its failure to take into consideration multiplicity of the systems of discrimination. What is at the heart of the *feminist pedagogy of care* is attention to the relations developing in the audience or educational cooperation. Often the point at issue is that assimilation of the gender topics requires creation of a specific safe environment since many of the questions raised within the feminist and gender theories appeal to traumatic personal experience. What is problematic in this approach is repression (failure to recognize) of the conflicts in the social relations based on inequality. *Feminist pedagogy oriented at collection oppression* pays particular attention to the issues of power and how different constellations of inequalities participate in the educational process. What is important here is analysis, reflection on individual experience of living through inequality and struggle for justice. This direction is inspired to a large extent by the feminist awareness-raising groups. The serious question posed by this movement is whether it is really possible in the group including various social inequalities to have a common understanding of injustice and to collectively oppose inequality. And the last tendency, *feminist pedagogy as deconstruction*, is based on the poststructuralism (Foucault, Derrida), it sometimes employs the critical potential of the queer theory. The essence of this approach is attention to the practices of exclusions underlying any category, such as 'man', 'woman', 'gay/lesbian/heterosexual'. What is important here is to identify the power mechanism in any practice of naming and creating the identity. This approach is based on learning to critically act to indicate that there is no stable identity preceding social interaction; rather, the question is continuous reshaping and articulation of certain positions. However, it is necessary to keep in mind that such deconstructive practices are often painful for the participants. It is necessary to remember that the approaches might intersect in the specific action.

Now I would like to turn to my experience of work in informal gender education taking a look at them from the perspective of the ideas described above. As for multiplicity of inequalities, for us it was important to take into consideration, and introduce, our contribution in overruling the regional inequality in Belarus in access to resources and possibilities, including gender and feminist knowledge, in both projects. It is clear that Minsk surpasses other cities in Belarus in a number of events and access to literature. In our first project we worked with a group of women activists representing various NGOs and living in different cities of Belarus. Thanks to that, we succeeded in creating a small network of active women competent in the gender issues. In the second project we have attempted at using this network and to rely on it to organize workshops in the regions.

As for idea of care and creation and support of horizontal relations, I agree with Elizabeth Ellsworth that a majority of principles of feminist (or critical) pedagogy are abstract, questions/difficulties arise when we begin thinking on implementing them in our work. It seems to me that implementation of our first project is a good example here. Both of our products (video *Dress* and a resource package *Gender LikBez*) were created not by the professionals but by the participants though some of them were not involved in gender issues prior to our projects, they did not know how to film, some never wrote any texts at all. What typically happens in the project activities is that the experts write the books and the professional produce films whereas we worked with our participants teaching not only the feminist and gender theory to them but also teaching them some practical skills, such as teaching them to film and to edit, to take interviews, to collect data and to write creatively. Virtually everything in our products, not only texts and video, but also page proof and book design, graphic design of the gender sensitivity test, photos used in the book, was created by our participants.

However, what is important for me personally is experience of deconstruction in feminist pedagogy. I know firsthand how painful such experiences are. And I would transform this question into a different

one: how does one work with power in the class? I would like to round up my presentation by identifying a number of problems and difficulties:

1. If feminist pedagogy is value of the dialogue and personal experience then collisions between the personal experience of the training/workshop participants reproducing the gender normativities and feminist position of knowledge/criticism are practically unavoidable.
2. Feminist gender training as deprivation of comfort of normativity. For me, teaching the gender or feminist theory is teaching the position that no one of us is 'normal'. As a rule the audience responds with clear discomfort – aggression, denial. What then?

# Gender and education / gender education in Armenia

**Nonna Artushyan**

Co-founder and trustee, Society Without Violence  
NGO  
Armenia, Yerevan  
n.arutshyan@swv.am

## **Patriarchal system and its “Values”**

Armenia is a deeply rooted patriarchal country over many centuries. And this patriarchal system and “values” are inherited from generation to generation. Because of this situation we have gender-based stereotypical mentality practically in all spheres of the life.

According to “Keep me away from your stereotypes” sociological survey taken by Society Without Violence NGO in 2011, 43.7% of women are of the opinion that it is themselves that provoke men to raise a hand onto them. Another shocking fact that brings the same survey is that 36.9% of women think that a woman cannot be a good leader. Moreover, 42.3% of women agreed that women achieve success in business only through sex. 53.4% of women share the view “if the woman is busy with her career she must have problems in her private life” and young people aged 18-26 are more inclined towards that judgment.

For the better results and overall change of the system of values in the society, we have to start with education. Unfortunately today authorities do not pay enough attention on gender education and consequently we have educators in the society who are one of the main sources of spread of gender-based stereotypes. The media, especially TV which is a powerful tool of public opinion and attitude formation, widely promotes gender based violence and gender based stereotypes.

The 80% of Armenian population watches Armenian soap operas. SWV made a research of “Hard Living” soap opera which was the first in a rating of TV shows. The research revealed that 60% of the soap opera scenes contain violence against women, crying and despondency. Out of researched 10 main women characters all were being subjected to violence, nobody was working and nobody making or taking part in the decisions concerning themselves or their families. To be more specific and precise, the video containing the scenes and statistical data will be shown during the conference.

## **Lack of Gender education in schools and Universities**

Today Armenian students’ awareness on gender issues is still at the lowest level. They do not receive any information on women’s rights and gender equality in schools or universities. In Social Science textbooks where gender component should have been integrated according to number of documents signed by the government and adopted by the Ministry of Education and Science, there is no word about gender or gender equality. The term ‘gender’ is not even mentioned. There is a part in the Social Science textbooks dedicated to CEDAW, but pupils should understand why this convention has been ratified, and why the implementation of this convention is so important. Because of absence of information, young girls remain in a passive role, deprived of reliable information on their rights and sources of empowerment. And this lack of awareness leads to insecurity, discrimination, unhealthy relationships, and potential violence. The teachers and professors themselves are deeply stereotyped and sometimes impose their stereotypical approaches on the students.

## **What have been done so far...**

### **→ Obligations of the government of Armenia in the frames of Gender policy Concept**

Taking into account the current situation, Society without Violence made and continues making steps toward changing the Armenian reality. Particularly, the organization currently implements a project called “Promotion of Gender Studies Integration into the Curriculum of High School Programs in Armenia” the aim of which is to integrate gender component into Social Science textbooks material. The organization made an analysis of the textbook materials, revealed the gaps and developed a Recommendation Package based on number of round tables with school teachers, Ministry and Municipality members and other relevant stakeholders. The Recommendation Package on integration of gender studies into the curriculum of Social Science subject will be submitted to the Ministry of Education and Science in spring 2013 and taking into consideration the obligations of the government of Armenia toward its international treaties, conventions as well as national documents, we do stay positive about the future possible changes in the education system in this regard.

At the same time, taking into account the fact, that school teachers themselves are very stereotypical and are not ready to teach gender issues in the schools, Society Without Violence is going to systematically organize trainings for them on gender issues and the methods of gender component integration and delivery during their classes. The organization is going also to monitor the implementation of the National Action Plan 2011-2015 to combat Gender Based Violence, a very important document adopted by the government of Armenia in the frames of Gender policy Concept in 2011. Particularly, we are going to support the government (and monitor at the same time) to integrate gender component into the teachers professional development courses. This means that gender module will become a must in the Social Science teachers formation courses. The integration is anticipated in the frames of the National Action Plan, so our role will be to support, monitor and publicize the activities of the government in this regard and report to international community if the activities are not properly fulfilled.

## **Risks**

However, there is one thing that raises a huge concern among women’s rights organizations and activists. There are direct threats of attack on Society Without Violence NGO especially for its huge advocacy work on gender education integration into Armenian school curriculum. The threats are also toward other partner women’s rights organizations and groups.

The threats and attacks are a result of so-called “gender equality law hysteria in Armenia”. Hence, on May 20, 2013 the parliament of Armenia has adopted N57 law entitled “Ensuring equal rights and opportunities for men and women” as a result of its international obligations particularly against CEDAW recommendations. Following the adoption of the new law, a heated debate started around the concept of “gender” and “gender equality”. An enormous wave of hatred came over women’s rights organizations working on gender issues.

The extremists spreading hate speeches, threats and attempting to attack SWV and other organizations are very organized and have a well-defined strategy. After the adoption of the law they have created “Pan-Armenian parents committee”, a group of sexist, homophobic and transphobic people with more than 10 000 followers on Facebook. It is important to notice that such groups exist in number of CIS countries. The group constantly organizes meetings to develop new ways of targeting and harming women’s rights organizations.

Extremist groups disseminate misinformation on social networks sites. Particularly, they create videos which totally misprint the values and activities of women organizations. In order to spread hate and fear in society, these groups manipulate the wording of the law and associating “gender equality” with propaganda of same-sex relationships, sex change, pedophilia, incest and bestiality. Women’s rights defenders are called “traitors of the nation”, “destroyers of families” and a “threat to Armenian values” and promoters of sexual abuse towards children and minors. The groups are also given floor on TV programs where they

publicly accuse women's rights organizations for anti-Armenian activity, spread false information about European values, the work done by the organization and unfortunately there is no mechanism to accuse the TV channels for such actions.

In the face of this hysteria, Parliament members who adopted the law on gender equality announced that they take back the law and make necessary changes in the law – remove the term gender from the whole law. The governmental officials not only refuse to protect women's rights defenders but also themselves provoke the situation and express stereotypical viewpoints about the law and women's rights NGOs in Armenia. We already contacted the state official representatives, held number of official meetings with the decision makers but they confirm the fact that they are going to remove the term „gender“ from the gender equality law since „it is inappropriate term for Armenian society“. The „real need“ of such law is widely discussed now and we afraid that it will have negative consequences such as cancellation of the law as already expressed by several politicians.

All these actions are increasing the hate towards women's rights organizations in society, threatening their freedom of assembly. The extremist movements are very pro-Russian (mainly publishing articles in Russian language and providing evidences from Russian sources) are also part of the present geopolitical situation in Armenia.

However, despite all the challenges, we continue our work aimed at increasing awareness of people on gender issues and fighting for gender equality and against gender based violence. We hope that targeting primarily the education field, we will finally make people understand that gender equality is not a bad thing coming from Western countries to destroy Armenian healthy families. They will realize that equality is indispensable for having a true democracy and a society where there will be no more violence against women.

# In between cultural traditions and reactionary threats: is gender education possible in Ukraine?

**Oleg Marushchenko**

Expert of Kroma Gender Center, editor of gender  
“Ya” journal, professor at the philosophy  
department of Kharkiv National Medical University  
Ukraine, Kharkiv  
oleg.maruschenko@gmail.com

Is there any sense in the isolated gendered innovations (for instance, in the isolated themed school classes carried out four times a year)? Or will only a large-scale complex reform be able to really assert a model of gendered (or gender sensitive, non-sexist) education? The questions are rather rhetorical.

It is quite apparent that the educational system is in need of profound deconstruction of its patriarchal traditions while such tasks as shaping the skills of non-sexist teaching in the pedagogical community, gendered expert assessment of the schoolbooks and curricula seem to be apparent but do not exhaust the essence of the process.

Such reform was never initiated in Ukrainian education. Even the progressive gendered transformations undertaken in the late 2000s were hardly revolutionary. A number of indisputably important, even fundamental steps have been taken then, for instance, the Law of Ukraine “On Ensuring Equal Rights And Opportunities of Women and Men” and the State Program of ensuring gender equality in Ukrainian society for 2006-2010 have been adopted and the relevant ministry has initiated an order “On implementation of the gender equality principles in education” and has even approved use of the schoolbook *We Are Different, We Are Equal. Fundamentals of Gender Equality*, edited by E. Semikolenova, in the 9-12 grades of the comprehensive school. That was also the time when the NGOs became more active while the UN Development Program has organized a cascade of mini-trainings for several thousands of teachers.

However, a number of criticisms were voiced against those innovations, primarily due to their openly ‘mainstream’ nature, factual reduction of gender to sex with all ‘restrictive outcome’ deriving from that (for instance, Gender Information and Analytical Center KROMA published a special issue criticizing the State Program and making the recommendations to the development of its ‘successor’). The UNDP, however large its project was, was more concerned with the coverage of the target teaching community and paid less attention to the quality and methodology of the training process. As a result, individual four-hour trainings were no more than introductory sessions.

Nevertheless, what clearly was there were the tendency and political will to carry out gendered reform of education. As well as faith that through the methodological discussions it is possible to find the alternative, not ‘mainstream’, scenarios for the reforms.

The critical 2010 when illusion dissolved fast marked the beginning of “backlash” in gender transformations. Change of the political elites resulted in rolling up of the state democratic strategies chosen earlier. At the same time anti-gender sentiments efficiently warmed up by the extreme right and religious organizations have been mounting in the society. At first, the gender community clearly has underestimated the danger. Only after this environment had give a rise to a wide range of movements and unions involved in open and often aggressive anti-gender propaganda that it had become clear: well-planned ideological opposition to the gender innovations has been launched.



One of the prime examples is the All-Ukrainian Parent Movement, a union of the non-governmental organizations and private persons with its educational activities, “Parents’ Readings”, forums, brochures and newspapers promoting the so-called ‘traditional family values’ and supporting the related upbringing system. What is particularly well-known is the book *Unembellished Gender (Gender bez Prikras)* with the following subtitle speaking for itself: *Through Gender Policy to Dictatorship of Homosexuality (Cherez Gender nuyu Politiku k Diktature Homoseksualisma)*. This movement allegedly produced yet another odious book for teachers and parents, *Gender ‘Education’, or How They Will Make Homosexuals from Your Children (Gender noye ‘Vospitanie’ ili Kak iz Vashih Detey Budut Delat Homoseksualistov)*, published in Ukrainian with no identification data. Big numbers of both books were sent out to the state departments for education, schools and preschool institutions in the country.

To briefly characterize their content, they are an ‘explosive mixture’ of distorted facts, references to non-existing data, numbers game and quotations wrenched out of their context. The goal is to spread moral panic: “*Your children are in danger! The question is scurvy propaganda of homosexuality in the Ukrainian society. Everything is happening secretly and is mostly taking root through the gender policy, sexual education, anti-discrimination laws, juvenile laws, laws on ‘the rights of children and women’, propaganda of tolerance and under the pretence of struggle against AIDS, children trafficking and contrived family violence*”. ‘Know-how’ of one the brochures are the submission letters, for instance, to the directors of the educational institutions, with the requirements to prohibit attendance of such ‘maiming’ classes as related to ‘gender’, ‘homosexuality’, ‘HIV/AIDS prevention’, to name just a few, by a child. Such form letter can be easily pulled out the brochure, signed by a parent and submitted to the educational institution.

Judging by the Internet forums which provide an opportunity to track responses of the parents and teachers, anti-gender propaganda has not passed unnoticed. At the same time, we probably should not perceive it as the main factor of slippage of the gender reforms in Ukrainian education since the innovations offered were not widely supported among those who should be implementing them, or teachers, even prior to that. We should not be surprised by that since the teachers are the same ‘rivets’ in the ‘mechanism’ of the gender regime as the ‘average citizens’. Moreover, their perception is additionally burdened by the essence of the educational system of which they are a part. French sociologist P. Bourdieu compared the institute of education to a ‘rusty device’ capable of burying any new practices. Traditions of the Ukrainian education system are a proof of this image since the state represented in the vertical of the regulatory bodies is the only legitimate initiator of the innovations and imposes them from top to bottom in accordance with the applicable legislation. Any more or less significant and at the same time controversial novelties are met by a majority of teachers at dagger point, are implemented formally, especially if they have their own ‘opinion’ (which is probably the case when it comes to the gender issues). When ‘the vertical’ is silent, the affiliated structure is in ‘lovely dormancy’. And probably it is them unable to implement the full-scale gender reform.

Another question is whether it makes sense at all to integrate such a critical component as gender theory in such conservative mechanism, primarily fine-tuned to hidden reproduction of the patriarchal gender regime and to function of disciplining and control through its educational process? Or should we look for the alternative approaches to gender awareness-raising in other areas of the educational field?

For over 10 years GIAC *Krona* has been actively developing such alternative gender education trying to use all the potential of informal education. I would like to tell about two major projects that we have recently implemented together with the Heinrich Böll Foundation in Ukraine.

Beginning with 2010, we have organized and carried out 5 gender schools for teachers working in pre-schools and general education schools. The following were the specific characteristics of these training programs:

- Participation was voluntary.
- The gender competence and sensitivity training system we have developed included three following stages: the *basic* (in 3 years, 39 persons have successfully completed it) – *advanced* (11 per-

sons) – *expert* (7 persons) stages. We focused not on a number of participants but on steeping in the subject.

- Each school lasted for 3-4 days and as a rule was conducted ‘outside’ (organized not in the educational institutions but outside the city), in a different environment and informally.
- Social-constructionist approach was selected as our methodological and ideological framework. This made our work much more difficult due to unavoidable large-scale deconstruction of the world-view of our audience.
- We worked no less than 10 hours a day and that was a training indeed (not a workshop or the lectures), very active and diverse in its content.

The second project (launched in 2011) is the only distant online school in Ukraine and in the neighboring countries for journalists and students studying at the Departments or Schools of Journalism. As of today we have already carried out three *basic* level schools (approximately 60 persons have successfully completed them) and one *advanced* level school (10 persons).

To take part in the training it is necessary to have access to Internet and to register at the special web-site based on *Moodle*, a popular international distant learning platform. Here for one and a half to two months our students study the texts of the modules (there are 5 modules at the *basic* level and 6 at the *advanced* level), graphic, video- and audio files, complete the creative tasks and communicate with the team of tutors via skype. The distant form makes it possible to study on-the-job (the required study time is only 4-5 hours weekly under a flexible schedule) and the week cycles when students work with one module and do not have access to the next one make it possible to adapt to the ‘revolutionary’ topic and to understand the materials better.

Both awareness-raising projects proved their high efficiency. For instance, some graduates of the journalistic online-schools have produced a number of articles on the gender issues (published in the *Ya (I)* magazine, too) while their articles covering other issues have become more gender correct (we are trying to follow up on that). There are numerous examples demonstrating that the teachers who took our trainings succeeded in non-sexist teaching methods, changed the habitual approach to the educational events and even have successfully initiated creating a completely different ‘poster space’ of the schools.

Besides, in October 2013 we have completed a new book on gender education in kindergartens and schools. With the expert support provided by *KRONA*, this project has been carried out by the teachers who have completed all levels of our gender schools.

Referring to the accumulated experience we believe that it is informal space that is ideal today for the development of gender education and its potential is huge. Not least because the training is voluntary and is organized in a different, non-sexist, environment, radically different from what dominates in the formal educational institutions.

Naturally, *KRONA*’s activities were noticed by the anti-gender movement. Besides the ‘standard’ accusation, in November 2012 an attempt was made to obstruct international conference *Gender Revolutions*, the site of the organization was attacked four times and the last attack has wiped it out completely.

We have restored the site, updated it and made it stronger. *KRONA* itself is becoming stronger. That means that the new revolutionary projects on gender education are yet ahead of us!

# Between gender studies and „gender ideology“. Gender education in post 1989 Poland

**Magdalena Grabowska**

Sociologist, Institute for Ethnology and Cultural  
Anthropology, Warsaw University  
Poland, Warsaw  
magdagrabowska@yahoo.com

## **Abstract**

This paper aims at assessing the status and the potential of gender education in Poland by looking at its three aspects: 1.) Ambivalent and contradictory effects of the state-socialist legacies on the perception of gender roles and education to „gender“, particularly the discrepancy between „promised“ gender equality and enforcement of the traditional gender roles by the socialist state 2.) The development of various academic and non-academic women and gender studies programs post 1989, particularly its attachment to “western” style feminist theory and pedagogy, and 3.) Recent attacks on the „gender ideology“ initiated by right wing politicians and Catholic Church. In particular I will focus on instances of the debate on „gender ideology“; the debate about „gender“ that accompanied Polish ratification of Council of Europe *Convention* on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence and the media discussion on the presence of “gender ideology” in the early education.

## **Introduction**

Gender education can mean various things. It can refer to the accessibility of educational institutions to girls and boys, women and men. We can ask how many girls, as opposed to boys are sent to schools? How many women and men graduate high school? How many go to the university and earned higher degree? How many at the end achieve the highest positions in the educational systems, become professors and recognized academic? We can also ask how girls and boys are treated in educational system? Are they encouraged to the same activities? Does gender division exist in the teachers’ ideas on what professions girls and boys should be educated to? For instance, are boys encouraged to study mathematics, while girls to study humanities? Are women socialised to traditional gender roles that focus on carrying for children and elderly while men to work professionally outside the home? And finally we can ask what is the “gender” content of the educational programs? Do they include knowledge on gender: gender stereotypes, gender discrimination, gender rights and emancipation? How much of the educational activities are focused on “gender” issues? In this paper I will touch upon all of these aspects of gender education in various context in Poland since 1945 to present.

When talking about gender education it is particularly important to be aware how political the issue is. It is significant, I think that the three aspects of the gender education that I wish to discuss in this paper— ambivalent and contradictory impact of the state-socialist legacies on the perception of gender roles and education to „gender“, the development of various academic and non-academic women and gender studies programs post 1989, and recent attacks on the „gender ideology“ initiated by right wing politicians and Catholic Church— are all related to some important political transformation, or a historical milestone: the introduction of the state socialism in post-war Poland, systemic transformation of the 1989 and the re-emergence of the religious fundamentalism and conservatism in European Union’s Poland.

## Between “woman on a tractor” and a “good housewife”: Socialism and „gender” education in post-war Poland

Poland has a fairly good historical record when it comes to women and education. The year 1894 is considered the year when women were allowed to enter the higher education in Polish universities (Perkowska 1995), we even know the names of the first students at the Jagiellonian University which was the first that admitted women: Stanisława Dowgiałło, Janina Kosmowska i Jadwiga Sikorska. In 1902/1903 first women became Ph.D at the Jagiellonian University, since 1897 women could begin their studies at the Philosophy department and since 1900 they could study medicine. First woman, Helena Willman-Grabowska, became an academic teacher in 1927, in 1929 she became a University Professor. The number of women in higher education increased fast at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: in 1915 women constituted 9% of the students at Warsaw University, the number that increased to 20% in 1918, to 35% in 1923/24 and 35% in 1933. And then there was a Second World War.

During the post-war time two issues; to rebuild the country demolished by the war and to improve the country's demographic situation have become the most pressing to the Polish state. The newly formed government encouraged everybody, including women to engage in the workforce. Women were supported in male professions and educated towards them, including work in coalmines and factories. During the immediate post-war period efforts of the newly formed state and women's organizations were devoted to providing an equal access to education for people from all classes and fight the illiteracy, which raised dramatically during the war. Fighting women's illiteracy and incorporating women into various levels of educational system have become priorities of the socialist state. One of the women who was the member of communist party Department on Women in post war Poland describes situation as follows: *The situation was tragic, very bad. Women didn't know how to read and write. And they didn't have any resources or skills. We had to organize schools in the first place and then the women's cooperatives to teach them how to generate income* (Grabowska 2013)<sup>1</sup>. In addition the special policies have been introduced to assure the social promotion of the people of lower classes, women and men in education (Fidelis 2010). These efforts proved to be, at least partially successful; already in 1950 the 67 out of 100 girls attended primary school in Poland <sup>2</sup>.

While during the immediate post-war period women were encouraged to enter the labour market as critical mass and take upon traditionally male professions, including coal-miner, (Fidelis 2010), the period of the thaw, starting after the death of Stalin in 1953 has altered the educational paths for women. During that period the party leadership and the media have started to promote an ideal of the “New Women” one that supposed to combine the professional work with traditional gender roles. In the 1950s several reforms were introduced to help women juggle participation in the labour force, and fulfilling family tasks, including the reform of early education (introduction of the network of daycares and kindergartens), the maternity law and the abortion law (in 1956). In the new model of the socialist education women were, on one hand, encouraged to learn towards the professional career, while at the same they were taught to fulfil their traditional gender roles as housewives and mothers<sup>3</sup>. As one of the women who grew up in the 1960s Poland remembers: *The fact that I was a girl didn't matter in school. There were no separate career ideas for boys and girls. I could be a doctor, I could be a cosmonaut, I didn't feel the difference* (Grabowska 2013). At the same time several institutions were established to help women manage the double burden of professional career and traditional house responsibility. In 1959 the Committee for Household was funded to provide education for women in the areas household management, budgeting, and new technologies. Anna, who worked at the Committee for 30 years, describes it as follows: *We had administrative, training and economic demission. We conducted research on the organization of the household:*

<sup>1</sup> All quotations come from interviews with women— members of the communist parties and women's organizations before 1989 in Poland and Georgia— that I conducted between 2010-2013. During that period I was a Marie Curie International Re-Integration Fellow. The interviews were conducted thanks to the support of the National Science Centre in Poland.

<sup>2</sup> Document 22, Report of the Secretary-General to the CSW on the United Nations Educational and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) study of educational opportunities for women. E/CN.6/146, May 1950 Countries in which the percentage of difference in favour of boys is less than 10:

<sup>3</sup> Certainly during the state socialism the term “gender” was not in use.

*furnishing, budgeting, economics in general. We also did research on household supplies. Back then many new kitchen supplies were introduced, and we had scientific literature, from Germany and France, and we looked it up. The new supplies: our research department tested washing machines, kitchen robots and refrigerators. They evaluated them and published their manual. And the training department organized workshops where we taught women how to use these supplies. We organized yearly workshop for trainers who then worked with the local league of Polish Women units locally. Indeed for some women this kind of „gender” education proved to be very valuable. For one of them skills learned in the League of Polish Women’s workshops became handy after the transformation: I was in generally really bad in housekeeping activities, but all I have learned became useful, even afterwards. As I was qualified I went to the early retirement and when the transformation came it turned out, my pension was really low. And since I’m single I started to have troubles, so I put the skills I learned at the League to use. I saw jeans and made pizza. And it was all very useful what I have learned in the League, for free. I can sew and cook and I can do all that now as I work at the pizza restaurant.*

State socialism is often criticized for offering only partial emancipation of women, yet its successes in the area of women’s rights, including educational advance, are not debatable. Illiteracy has been erased and the women have become a majority of university students throughout the country. State socialism in some ways thus provided the resources (educated women, certain mindsets) for the introduction of the gender studies in Poland after 1989. At the same time, while holding on into the existing gender roles, and providing special educational programs that encourage women to remain “at home” it sealed the traditional gender contract to which many contemporary critics of the gender education tap while critiquing the contemporary development in gender studies and gender practices in Poland.

### **Polish transformation and introduction of “gender studies”**

It is, of course just a scholarly myth that the gender studies have been introduced to Poland only after the fall of state socialism in 1989. In fact the educational activities, both in formal and informal settings as well as transnational exchange between Polish feminists and the west have been developing since the early 1980s. In 1983 Renata Siemieńska opened the first feminist sociology seminar at the Institute of Sociology at Warsaw University. 1984 the first informal consciousness raising group stemming from Siemieńska’s seminar started to meet in Warsaw and Kraków, leading to two the organization of the two feminist events in the following years: 1986 Women’s Cinema Festival that featured 60 movies directed by women from around the world, and the first March Feminist Session that was organized in Krakow at the Jagiellonian University in 1987. These activities later lead to the establishment of the first two Polish feminists organizations: Polish Feminist Association in Warsaw and EFKa foundation in Kraków.

The institutionalization of gender studies progressed in the 1990s, with the Research Centre for Women that has been established at Łódź University 1992, and the interdisciplinary seminar “Women’s Studies” being organized at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań in 1993. Established in 1996 the Gender Studies at the Institute of Applied Social Sciences at the University of Warsaw offered the country’s first interdisciplinary postgraduate courses dedicated to gender issues in culture and was lead Prof. Bożena Chołuj and Prof. Małgorzata Fuszara. In 1997 the conference “100 years of Women at Polish Universities” has been organized in Kraków. Graduate School for Social Research established in 1992 by Prof. Stefan Amsterdamski at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences offered the first graduate and Ph.D courses in women and gender studies, including legendary seminar taught by Prof. Maria Janion’s, which for years included topics such as identity politics, as well as sociology seminars held jointly by Prof. Małgorzata Fuszara and Prof. Anna Titkow. These gender studies programs have predominantly focused on the introduction of the western feminist theories into Poland and translating and transplanting the western model of gender education into the “east”. The history of western women’s movements, particularly US 2<sup>nd</sup> wave feminism, has become a point of reference in evaluating the Eastern European progress in the area of gender equality. Local genealogies, including that of state socialism were often left out of gender studies classes and syllabi, while the post war period remained represented as a “gap” in the history of Polish women’s movement (Grabowska 2012).

At the end of 1990s and beginning of 2000s more gender studies post-graduate programs and gender studies paths within the MA programs have been established at Wrocław University, Jagiellonian University, Institute of Literary Studies at Polish Academy of Science. These programs like the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences directed by Dr. Monika Rudaś-Grodzka offer a range of focus areas including” sociology, anthropology, visual studies, men’s studies, political science, law, economics, and social policy, and literature. The internal diversity and interdisciplinarity of Polish gender studies has resulted in multiple new theories, which— although under the umbrella of gender studies—gain increasing autonomy: apart from women’s studies, men’s studies and gay/lesbian studies have developed as well queer studies, involved in the study of sexual difference, desire, deconstruction of sexual norms, and polyamory.

Gender studies programs in Poland today are offered in the form of tuition-based postgraduate studies (lasting from two to four semesters), organized mostly in the faculties of social sciences and/ or humanities at major universities<sup>4</sup>. Only a few private schools have set up one- or two-level gender studies specialization courses as part of cultural studies. Some humanities and social sciences departments at public universities and private higher education offer courses dedicated to gender issues, equality between women and men, and the formation and functioning of stereotypes based on gender, race, class, and other differences. No PhD program in the area exists.

A close collaboration between an initially small academic community and social organizations, bridging the gap between formal and informal feminist pedagogy, feminist theory and feminist practice is characteristic to Poland. This collaboration resulted in spreading gender education into informal, non-academic settings, and opening up to various audiences. In 1997 OSKa: Information Women Centre and Gender Studies in Warsaw collaborated on the organization of the 1<sup>st</sup> Feminist Summer School. The School has become a venue for the exchange of ideas and arguments between activist and scholars from Poland and from abroad for four editions. In 2000 the informal group Sisterhood Street has organized first Feminist Summer Camp, featuring the “gender studies” classes and workshops in the informal, holiday setting. The Feminist camp is organized almost every year since<sup>5</sup>. The most recent instance of the nongovernmental organization’s engagement in the gender studies is Feminist Academy. This initiative organized by Feminoteka Foundation since 2012<sup>6</sup> brings together scholars and activists to talk about current issues related to gender.

Another important stream of the gender education in Poland are workshops and antidiscrimination educational activities. One example of the gender education in the form of workshop is Wen-Do, a feminist self -defence course that combines the elements of the physical defence and the feminist consciousness raising<sup>7</sup>. In 2001, 16 Wen-Do trainers were educated by the German instructors and since then they organize courses for women and girls around Poland. Another organization which activities go beyond conducting gender workshops is Association for the Antidiscrimination Education (Towarzystwo Edukacji Antydyskriminacyjnej-TEA). The Association that was established in 2009 defines its mission as *developing and disseminating ant discriminatory education, so very person c—creates the world free from discrimination and violence*<sup>8</sup>. The organization works with the representatives of the public administration, employers, educators, police, media, business and NGOs to improve standards of gender education in Poland. Apart from the workshops, during the recent years, TEA conducted the holistic screening of the Polish educational system at the elementary to postgraduate level, from the perspective of the antidiscriminatory practices (including the monitoring of the textbooks, and vocational trainings for teachers) and published a well received report on this study “The Great Invisible” <sup>9</sup>. On top of it TEA organizes training academy for the antidiscrimination educators in Poland and monitors the Coalition for Antidiscrimination Education that brings together various public and social entities. Most recently the Association has collaborated with

<sup>4</sup> Agnieszka Mrozik “Gender studies in Poland: prospects, limitations, challenges”

<sup>5</sup> <http://siostrzana.org/>

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.feminoteka.pl/viewpage.php?page\\_id=25](http://www.feminoteka.pl/viewpage.php?page_id=25)

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.wendo.org.pl/readarticle.php?article\\_id=1](http://www.wendo.org.pl/readarticle.php?article_id=1)

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.tea.org.pl/pl/SiteContent?item=projekt>

<sup>9</sup> [http://tea.org.pl/pl/SiteContent?subitem=wielka\\_nieobecna](http://tea.org.pl/pl/SiteContent?subitem=wielka_nieobecna)

the Art University in Poznań and Polish-Japanese School of Computer techniques in Warsaw, in organizing the art exhibit of the works related to discrimination in education<sup>10</sup>.

### **“Gender ideology”? A backlash against the gender education**

From the very beginning gender education in Poland, as influenced by psychoanalysis, poststructuralist, Marxism, and postcolonial studies has become a subject of the harsh attacks from the neoconservative and ultra Catholic forces. In 2000 philosopher Agnieszka Kołakowska published an article in which she called feminist pedagogy a “new type of terrorism” and accused gender studies as being a politically correct “pseudo science”, which aims at indoctrinating new generations of Polish humanists<sup>11</sup>. More recently however the attacks have been directed towards another level of education. While the gender studies at the university level seem fairly well established, the opponents of gender education turn into the early education, particularly in primary schools and kindergartens, express their discontent towards the presence of “gender” content in textbooks and class materials. These recent attacks echo the broader discussion on the presence of the category of “gender” in the Polish public while the critiques travel from high level of politics to the Catholic and neoconservative media at the local and national level. They focus on the lower level of education for a reason. Since 1990 when religion has been introduced into Polish schools ago, early education has been a safe and unquestioned sphere of the popularization of Catholicism among children.

It all started, perhaps on April 2012 when, then Polish Minister of Justice, Jarosław Gowin, criticized the Council of Europe’s convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence and claimed that the convention is an expression of feminist ideology and thus threatens traditional family values<sup>12</sup>. In the convention “gender” is defined as “the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for women and men”. According to then minister Gowin such definition is “not coherent”, he claimed he cannot agree to obeying the idea to educate about “non-stereotyped gender roles” as such education would undermine the Christian concept of dignity, which is fundamental to the Polish constitution. Moreover, he argued promoting the “non-stereotyped gender roles” could be in conflict with the promotion of family values and maternity, to which the authorities are obliged under article 18 of the constitution. An open attack of the minister on “gender” has become a starting point for the ongoing campaign against what in the eyes of some conservative politicians and the representatives of the Catholic Church is a “gender ideology”. According to its critiques “gender ideology” is a threat to the traditional family and gender roles, and the “younger daughter” of Marxism that aims at sexualisation, and possibly demoralization of young children.

In mid 2013 the conservative and mainstream media have been preoccupied with the discussion about the textbook “Equality Kindergarten” co-authored by Joanna Piotrowska, Ewa Rutkowska and Anna Dzierzgowska. The textbook focuses on “teaching the respect for the other people choices” and proposes the number of workshops’ scenarios and education plans for how to approach the issues related to gender in the early education. According to some critics the textbook is a threat for the traditional Polish values and serves as a massive attack of the homosexual and feminist lobby on the Polish family. In one of the statements, the representative of the Polish ultraconservative party Law and Justice argued: *This seems like a coordinated action. The content that serves the family as such and the traditional Polish and Catholic values—which are cherished for centuries—are removed from the textbooks. At the*

<sup>10</sup> [http://tea.org.pl/pl/SiteContent?subitem=dyskryminacja\\_a\\_educacja](http://tea.org.pl/pl/SiteContent?subitem=dyskryminacja_a_educacja)

<sup>11</sup> See, eg.: A. Kołakowska, „Barykady politycznej poprawności” [Barricades of Political Correctness], *Rzeczpospolita*, 29.01.2000

See: B. Chołuj, „Różnica między women’s studies I gender studies? W: Katedra 7/200

<sup>12</sup> In response to the Minister’s statement, the government’s plenipotentiary for equal treatment – Agnieszka Kozłowska-Rajewicz – [ensured](#) in an interview for the Polish radio, TOK FM that Poland will sign the convention and said that she believes that Minister Gowin’s statement was a misunderstanding. She also said that she sent an official letter to the Minister, asking him to confirm his position and asking him for a meeting to discuss the convention. She also stressed that the content of the convention is not contradictory to the Polish constitution. On the contrary – ensuring greater equality would positively affect women’s dignity. “Equality and justice are things we should fight for and they are not threatening for Christian values, such as marriage and family” – she argued.

same time more and more space is taken by the theories that question the family as a standard model of upbringing.<sup>13</sup> According to the critics the textbook aims not only to destroying family as such but also at challenges “natural” gender behaviours. As one of the recommendation in the book calls for unisex toy corners, with dolls and cars for both: boys and girls, the Catholic psychologist panics: *It an absurd she says, and continues: If we leave only the blocks in the playing corner, sooner or later boys will start building cars or through them at each other, while girls will build animals and kiss and hug them. The gender differences are impossible to change and they shouldn't be*<sup>14</sup>. Another critic, Dariusz Oko, a Catholic priest argued in the media: *They assume that our gender identity does not derive from nature but from culture, it could be said that it is our imagination or even fantasy. As such it is entirely flexible and can be shaped during the education process, most likely according to the gender ideology. Here it starts the whole avalanche because if even such a natural thing as gender can be socially shaped, can be matter of social contract, then everything can. It opens up the whole area for social engineering that was even beyond what the communist though about*<sup>15</sup>.

In the conservative and Catholic narrative thus the gender education is nothings less then ideology, which is a “younger sister” of Marxism. Leszek Woroniecki, Catholic priest argues that “gender” is a form o Marxism that focuses on sexualisation of children. For Woronicki gender is *a very dangerous ideology-theory of sex that negates the nature, and proposes the production of sex by the society. This negation that the sex of the person is a gift, which they bring at the moment of being born as a man or a woman, is the result of nature, the internal and external, genetic and psychological feature*<sup>16</sup>. Another Catholic priests, Dariusz Oko in the recent interview argued: *We cannot talk about gender philosophy but rather of gender ideology. Philosophy is a radical search for truth and good, while ideology is a tool of uncompromising struggle for one's own interest with no respect for truth and good.(...) In this sense gender is a classic example of ideology, it is a tool in uncompromising struggle for the benefits of the atheist gender and homolobby.*<sup>17</sup>

Gender ideology has, according to its critiques three origins. First there are *fighting gays, who want to promote their evidently troubled lifestyle as the best*. The Catholic journalist fears that this is a signal that the activities of the homosexual lobby begin to bring effects, as the Ministry of Education is not hiring the reviewers of the school textbooks from the pool recommended by the LGBT organizations<sup>18</sup>. Second there are *fanatic feminists (often lesbians) who by the slogan of women emancipation want to free them from motherhood, children marriage family and men (...)* After the class struggle we now have sex struggle. But hatred and desire for revenge are never good advisors, for example the 2nd World War was in some respect the result of the German's need to take revenge. More broadly Oko argues *gender ideology is supported by all of the GOD's enemies, and the enemies of the religion (...). The meaningful force being is constituted by the group of richest American billionaires, who (...) invest gigantic money in contraception, abortion and development and dissemination of gender ideology.*

According to Oko for gender ideologists: *gays, feminists and atheists the school is the most important battle-ground now. After the failure of the idea o legalize homorelationships, the struggle focuses on school. The proponents of gender want to introduce compulsory sexual education, which would be designed by the people who are the most sexually distorted- genders. In these textbooks the words such as „mother”, „father”, „marriage” “faithfulness”s are banned (...)* According to genderists *sex has to be practiced already in diapers*. There is an institutional and systemic support behind such organized expansion of gender ideology. Oko summarizes it as follows: *We have associations and organizations for education against gender discrimination, gender studies at the renowned universities, the gender trainers advertise their workshops in schools and so on. Behind this institutions there are international organizations, UN, European intuitions or state institutions.*

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.bibula.com/?p=68186>

<sup>14</sup> <http://gosc.pl/doc/1572145.Genderowe-przedszkole>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.niedziela.pl/artykul/106423/nd/Gender---ideologia-totalitarna>

<sup>16</sup> [http://m.wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,117915,14711688,Kosciol\\_na\\_wojnie\\_z\\_gender\\_To\\_mlodsza\\_corka\\_marksizmu.html?utm\\_source=m.gazeta.pl&utm\\_medium=testbox&utm\\_campaign=maintopic](http://m.wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,117915,14711688,Kosciol_na_wojnie_z_gender_To_mlodsza_corka_marksizmu.html?utm_source=m.gazeta.pl&utm_medium=testbox&utm_campaign=maintopic)

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.niedziela.pl/artykul/106423/nd/Gender---ideologia-totalitarna>

<sup>18</sup> <http://pl.soc.dzieci.narkive.com/WnDN9OHw/przedszkole-zrobi-ci-dziecko-na-t-czowo>



To fight this system parents and teachers have to watch closely what is thought to their children and to protect their children against the gender ideology. Dariusz Oko argues: *We have to defend them with all our strengths, because they are our most precocious treasure and the biggest responsibility. People who are sexually or ideologically disturbed should not be near the schools. (...) Nobody has a right to invade the holiness of the family. That is why we have to participate in marches write letters to the ministry of education and defence and other members of government (...) We have to control what is going on in school watch closely the courses that*<sup>19</sup>.

The most recent instance of the Catholic Church's attack on "gender ideology" seemed to cross the boundary of ridiculous, when the archbishop Józef Michalik attempted to blame "gender" ideology for paedophilia amongst Catholic priests. In his October 6<sup>th</sup> speech Michalik suggested that sexual education leads to the weakening of the traditional family and ultimately is responsible for the paedophilia. He stated: *We could avoid a lot of molestation if the relationship between parents would be healthy. We hear often that this inappropriate attitude or behaviour beginning when the child is looking for love. It is searching, it clings. It gets lost and it sucks another person in.*<sup>20</sup> And he continued: *Today we receive instructions from the international organizations, that we have to inform, and introduce children into sexuality in kindergartens. It is horrible think, we have to help a child and the family to be stronger to find an easy way out.*<sup>21</sup> The statement of archbishop cause and outcry of the human rights, women and children rights organizations. They have also met an objection from the public opinion and mainstream media. Michalik had to apologize for his words, which however did not stop him and other representatives of the Church to continue expressing their views on "gender ideology"

## Conclusions

The recent heated debate on the "gender ideology" can have contradictory effects on the "gender education" in Poland. On one hand it can lead to revealing the immensely radical and conservative character of the Catholic Church. By allowing its leaders, and participants to express ideas and opinions that are unacceptable for majority of Poles, the Church, one can say, will shoot its own foot. Eventually, many hope, after the series of such revelation public opinion will realize that the ultraconservative and radical views are not an exception but a norm in the Catholic Church. This, accompanied by the introduction of the EU recommended standards of education, may lead to removing the religious classes from Polish schools and marginalization of Church in public sphere. On the other hand however the 23 years of the Catholic education in schools and the unquestioned, even but state- socialism attachment to the conservative "family" values, and gender roles, might become a fertile ground for seeding fear of "gender ideology" consisting of teaching about untraditional gender and family roles, even amongst otherwise "progressive" Poles.

There are a number of local and transnational forces that need to be taken into account in the discussion about gender education in Poland. First we need to remember about historical legacies of 19<sup>th</sup> Century and state socialism. In particular it is important to point out to the ambivalent effects of the state socialism on women's education. While on one hand it supported women's education into non-traditional gender roles, it at the same time solidified these roles by maintaining traditional gender division in the private sphere. The gender education that emerged in Poland during in the 1989 period, often did not take into account specific context of Polish "gender history" including the history of gender education. While gender studies programs of the 1990s focused on translating and transplanting the western models of feminisms and gender studies, it only recently have transformed into more contextualized educational settings.

While the higher education has been a locus of the previous efforts and discussions about gender education, in most recent months these debates turned into early education. The presence of gender education in early education, while proved to be non-existent by various studies in Poland, remains a subject of the

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.niedziela.pl/artykul/106423/nd/Gender---ideologia-totalitarna>

<sup>20</sup> <http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,114871,14742181.html?v=1&obxx=14742181&order=najstarsze&page=8>

<sup>21</sup> [http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,14742202,Abp\\_Michalik\\_o\\_pedofilii\\_Gdy\\_dziecko\\_szuka\\_milosci\\_.html#ixzz2hgAGmGry](http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,14742202,Abp_Michalik_o_pedofilii_Gdy_dziecko_szuka_milosci_.html#ixzz2hgAGmGry)

attacks of the Catholic Church. The traditional family remains the focus of these debates, which often lead into the clashing of the very traditional, fundamentalist ideas of the representatives of the Catholic Church, and the more settled approach of the public opinion and mainstream media<sup>22</sup>.

**Work cited:**

Małgorzata Fidelis *Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland*, Cambridge University Press, 2010

Agnieszka Mrozik "Gender studies in Poland: prospects, limitations, challenges", <http://genderstudies.pl/index.php/page/37/>

Urszula Perkowska, *Studia i kursy zawodowe na Uniwersytecie Jagiellońskim w latach. 1868/69-1938/39*, Instytut Historii UJ, Kraków 1995

---

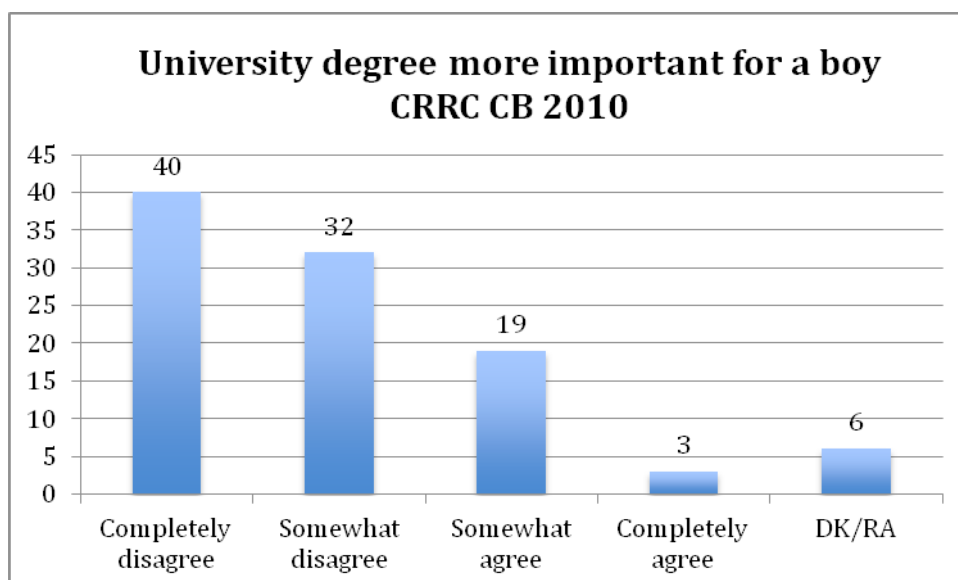
<sup>22</sup> <http://www.wprost.pl/ar/420426/Zseksualizowane-dzieci/>

# Gender roles in education in Georgia

**Maia Barkaia**

**Gender researcher**  
**Georgia, Tbilisi**  
**sakind.maya@gmail.com**

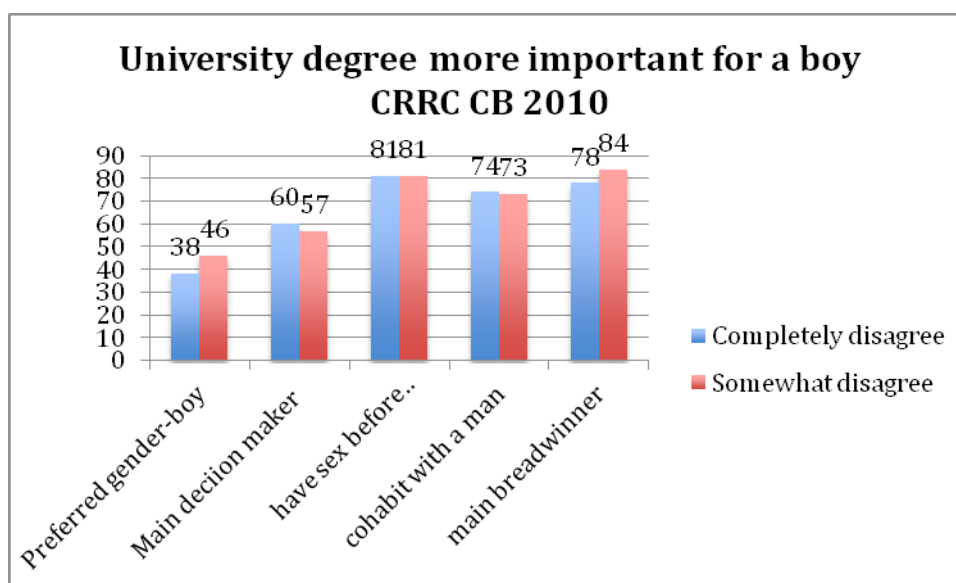
In recent years debate on issues related to gender has been extensive in Georgia, covering topics ranging from the decriminalization of homosexuality to the introduction of Gender Equality law in 2010. This paper, first and foremost, explores Georgian population's attitudes towards education of girls and boys and reveals its relatively unbiased attitudes. Secondly, it highlights the pertinent issue of school drop-outs, which is not a well-researched area in Georgia. Finally, the paper focuses on the gender-biased content of the school text-books, which produce and re-produce gender inequality among students. The CRRC CB 2010 survey data, exploring gender attitudes, depicts that despite the vast number of reforms Georgian population appears to be gender biased and holds conservative positions. Gender attitudes are captured in the set of questions, which reflect attitudes towards gender hierarchies in education, employment and family.



The view that 'university degree is more important for a boy' receives disagreement of 72 percent of the respondents in Georgia, however 23 percent of the respondents agree with the statement. Generally, less education and being from rural settlement are associated with more gender inequitable beliefs. For instance, over half of those who agree with the gender-biased statement about education are with secondary or lower educational attainment (57% & 49%)<sup>1</sup> and live in a rural settlement (61% & 58 %). Similarly, majority of them hold gender inequitable views about the sex of the child and prefer a boy (61% & 58%).

<sup>1</sup> From those who somewhat agree with the statement 57% are with secondary or lower education attainment; and from those who completely agree with the statement 49% are with secondary or lower education attainment.

It should be mentioned that when it comes to education some gender variations can be noticed. The opinion that it is more important for boys to hold university degree is more popular among men. 28 % of men share this view, compare to 16 % of women.



It should be mentioned that the fact that one does not hold gender-biased attitude towards education does not really imply he/she is gender sensitive. There is a tendency that the same respondents who appear in one case gender-unbiased, in another case reveal gender inequitable attitude. For instance, nearly four-in-ten respondents who disagree with the statement that 'university degree is more important for a boy' state that 'a boy' is a preferred gender of the child (38% & 46%), do not approve women to have sex before marriage (81% & 81%), do not approve women to cohabit with a man without a marriage (74% & 73%), think that man should be the main breadwinner in the family (78% & 84%).

### School drop out

Another significant factor of gender discrimination in Education is the girls' disappearance from the high school education. According to a report by the Georgian Public Defender, child marriage can be tantamount to the deprivation of education. The report states that between 2011 and January 2013, 7,367 girls left school early. The Centre of Children's Rights of the Public Defender of Georgia organized a campaign to raise awareness about children's rights in the KvemoKartli region of Georgia in 2013. During this project, several school teachers were interviewed who revealed that girls dropped out of their education because of child marriage. On the other hand, a Georgian delegation at the meeting with the Committee on the Rights of Children stated that 'they had not heard reports of any cases in which a student had dropped out because of lack of money'.<sup>2</sup> These accounts indicate a high possibility that child marriage is the reason why girls leave their education. This is against existing laws and conventions that Georgia has acceded. Article 1198 of the Georgian Civil Code states that parents are responsible for their child's physical and mental growth, protection and support with respect to their child's interests, development of the child's personality, and promotion of her/his psychological and physical well-being.<sup>3</sup>

### Text-books

Those who have access to education are provided with the textbooks that promote gender bias and inequality. The content analysis of school textbooks such as History and Civic Education revealed the extent to which they can be gender-blind.<sup>4</sup> The researchers applied both quantitative and qualitative methods. Firstly, they examined the number of male and female representations. Secondly, the textbooks

<sup>2</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child. 48<sup>th</sup> Session. Available at: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/crcs48.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Georgian Civil Code. Article 1198.

<sup>4</sup> Khomeriki, I., Javakhishvili, M. & Abramishvili, T. (2012) *Gender Equality Issues in Education*. Tbilisi.

were analyzed qualitatively and explored what qualities are attached to men and women, occupation and gender roles, and whether materials in the textbook have been analyzed through the gender lens.

The findings revealed that illustrations depicting men are 10 times more than those with women. Illustrations with only men are depicted consist of 77%, whereas illustrations with only women comprise of 7%, and 16% of illustrations depicts both of the sexes. From pre historic times till the contemporary history only 80 women are mentioned. Men are depicted as kings, soldiers, decision-makers or rebels, who make history, while 'passive', insignificant roles are assigned to women. This is a history of men. His-story full of wars and state actors. In 8<sup>th</sup> grade history textbook it seems that there were no women participating in the historical process. There are lots of gaps in the text and the ways in which authors describe male and female activities. For instance, one of the texts states 'men were making necessary things for house, while women were busy in stitching cloths.' This clearly indicates that men's activities were 'necessary', in such a way suggesting that men's work is more important than women's.

This paper examines the role of education with regard to gender and the ways in which education is gendered in Georgia. Education is a vehicle of socialization and has a crucial role in re/producing gender roles. First and foremost, I investigated the hypothesis that better-educated individuals hold more egalitarian gender attitudes using CRRC (2010-2012) data. Secondly, the paper depicted the ways education is gendered by demonstrating the case of school drop outs. Finally, it revealed the gender insensitive content of the school textbooks. These are the triggering factors that may reinforce student's identities as masculine and feminine. Education being an important mechanism of influence on shaping gender roles has to be given a great significance by policy makers.

## COOPERATION BETWEEN LGBT AND NON-LGBT ORGANIZATIONS



# **Pink triangle: LGBT as a symbolic figure of modern russian politics**

**Olga Burmakova**

PhD student of Gender program European  
University in Saint-Petersburg, feminist activist.  
sv.ollga@gmail.com  
Russia, St. Petersburg

## **Introduction**

The last couple of years brought some significant changes to the Russian discourse on LGBT. A time period I cover in my discussion of these changes is quite short but it is marked by many influential events, from the passing of the law against “gay propaganda” to the very visible participation of LGBT activists in the universalizing political movement. The pink triangle I mention in the title made its reappearance as a symbol for LGBT, now reclaimed by them as both the stigma and the defiance of it. My main focus here is the ways LGBT is put again and again as something that defines Russia in relation to its own national image, in relation to some imaginary “West”, and how the political forces use LGBT, tis “pink triangle”, as some kind of a wedge between themselves and those they want to be seen as separate from. I argue that the symbolism of LGBT in modern Russian politics is strongly related to the variety of national and spatial relations which various forces build in their rhetoric.

The events which created the strong wave of discourse on LGBT are so entangled with each other it is difficult to understand which of them prompted others or were quite separate from them. The period of change I discuss here can be traced as far back as 2006 when the law against the “propaganda of homosexuality” was introduced in the region of Ryazan. But the peak of the change happened during the winter of 2011-2012 when on the one hand, the introduction of the same law in Saint-Petersburg became the subject of very public debate. On the other hand, the White Ribbon movement, the wave of protests against the corruption and unfairness in the governmental and presidential election, featured a very visible and proud group of LGBT activists. Both events became interconnected, with the later addition of Pussy Riot arrest which I will not discuss today but which gives certain flavor to this mix.

Before I continue, I have to say that while the abbreviature LGBT is used often in politics, only the issues of homosexuality are discussed. Therefore, I will use them as interchangeable in my presentation although it is, in itself, quite problematic.

## **The White Ribbon Movement: Claim to National Belonging**

I start with the exploration of the visibility of LGBT within the oppositional movement and the discourses about it. The movement “For Honest Election”, also White movement, protest movement, started in December 2011 after the supposedly falsified elections for State Duma (lower house of Parliament) in December 2011 and continued as reaction to the Presidential election in 2012. It included very diverse political and social movements, organizations and figures in a wide specter, which were united by the feeling of exclusion from power and disagreement with the current regime. It is mostly concentrated (or visibly represented) in Moscow and Saint Petersburg, but also in other region centers. It used different methods of protests such as rallies and demonstrations, “walks”, flashmobs and strategies of the Occupy movement. The oppositional movement claimed to represent the citizens of Russia who were failed by the government. It presented itself as “the civil society” that channeled the voice and will of the people, as



opposed to the government which usurps the power and is discursively excluded from “the people”. One of the most popular slogans of the opposition was based on the play of words which can be translated as “You can’t even imagine us” or “You don’t even represent us”<sup>1</sup>, where “you” is the government and “we” are the people.

LGBT activists have been visible in the movement since the first protests, appearing with the slogans that clearly identified them as queer or gay, and with the rainbow flags and symbols. During the organized protests they joined forces with the feminist activists, appearing under the rainbow flags, purple flags of feminism, and slogans protesting against the gender and sexual discrimination. Nevertheless, women’s issues and reproductive rights failed to take such a central place in the debate while LGBT rights became one of the hottest topics and rapidly gained unprecedented visibility. Before the protests started, LGBT activism and feminist activism attracted more or less the same amount of attention, though LGBT activism gained more scandalous attention every spring because of the topic of Pride. Several months before the protests started, feminists fought against the law limiting access to abortion and tried to attract attention of media and opposition to the issue without much success. Unfortunately, search for the reasons of this disbalance in the public’s attention goes beyond the scope of my presentation, although it can make an important point for the wider discussion at this workshop.

Since the beginning of the protests, there have been debates of whether specific social/political groups should be visible within the movement as specific, or whether they should all get rid of the group symbolic and present themselves as individual citizens united by the common interests of political legitimacy of the government. While most of the political groups and social movements which joined the opposition were allowed to represent their specificity, there were two groups whose visibility and specificity was debated: LGBT and, ironically, nationalists. But while for the nationalists, it was their political views that made their visibility in the “united” movement questionable, a significant part of the discussion around LGBT was centered on the public/private divide, the classic “sexuality should be left in the privacy of your own bedroom” argument. Even some of the gay activists expressed in the first months the opinion that their visibility shouldn’t be politicized. Nevertheless, the rainbow flags and LGBT-related slogans stayed visible, and the conflict came to the point when the LGBT and the nationalists stood side by side during the demonstration.

As the debate about the place of LGBT in the Russian society isn’t new, it seems that the activists have anticipated it, or reacted to it since the very beginning of the protests. At the first series of the protests individual LGBT activists used the slogan “Gays and lesbians against crooks and thieves”. While it is not overtly including then in Russian society, it does so implicitly, as the part “...against crooks and thieves” was used by everyone in the movement at that point, only the identity in the beginning changed (for example, “teachers against crooks and thieves”). There were also examples of overt inclusion of LGBT into “the people”, such as this slogan, also during the first wave of protests: “The voices of seven millions of gays and lesbians are stolen, too”. This slogan both asserts the citizenship of gays and lesbians by reminding others that they are among the voters, and claims the unity with the others by saying “too”.

This claim to the national belonging through the opposition brings up some nested spatial relations. The national belonging of the opposition itself is ambiguous. For all its use of seemingly universal values and slogans, to my knowledge, the movement has never visibly claimed to represent non-Slavic and Muslim citizens of Russian Federation, and its critique of the government policies, while covering many subjects, never touches the issue of racial/ethnic discrimination or problems of migrant workers. This can be explained by the fact that racial/ethnic discrimination is in general rarely discussed outside of the issue of migrant workers, and migrant workers aren’t voters, so the movement does not represent them; but this approach also makes invisible a significant part of Russian citizens who still belong to ethnic and religious minority. Their invisibility in the movement shows how this political community (the protesters and “the people” they aim to represent) is implicitly imagined as national in an ethnic/cultural sense, in addition to the shared democratic interests.

---

<sup>1</sup> “Вы нас даже не представляете”.



On the one hand, the movement employs the “universal” values of democracy, human rights etc., reproducing the idea of national unity where membership is understood more in the terms of “adherence to common traditions of political participation”<sup>2</sup>. Picking up at this tendency or just continuing the long-standing tradition of claiming their rights on the basis of human rights in general, LGBT activists repeatedly used the slogan shared between them and the feminists: “While there is discrimination there will be no democracy”. In the rhetoric around LGBT rights, a phrase by Russian sexologist Igor Kon is often quoted: “Homophobia is a litmus test of Russian democracy”. The right to have Gay Pride marches was also often tied in the debates by the pro-gay side not to the visibility of gay people, but to the freedom of assembly, a basic democratic freedom. In this way, the social acceptance of homosexuality and the democratic progress are connected through the democratic principles. The set of slogans used in the protests clearly positioned LGBT as part of “us”, “the people”, those who have been hurt by the corrupted government and now were represented by the protests movement.

The movement places itself into the paradigm of democracy, universal human rights, and civic rights and freedoms which are seen by many outside of the movement and often presented even inside the movement as imported, western inventions. The movement is seen by many people, and also often presented by the state officials as privileged westernized people who attempt to insert themselves as the new leaders for the “real Russians” while being the “foreign agents,” consciously or not. Thus, a significant part of the opposition between the protesters and the government is built around the question of who is able to represent the will and the interests of “the people”. LGBT become the symbolic wedge in this debate: their presence makes the already “western” movement even more westernized. They represent a spatial dichotomy is between Russia and “the West”. While this connection might make some of the protesters to revise their views on LGBT and become more tolerant, it makes others want to push the rainbow flags out of the movement; and from the outside, it creates a sore spot where the movement can be kicked. This is a problem which continues in a way even now: although the protests movement has been practically dispersed, and its participants returned to their separate views, there is still a very visible discussion on the relationship between tolerance to LGBT and democratic values.

### **Government: Political Homophobia**

The Russian government demonstrated for a long time political heterosexism, meaning privileging of heterosexual relationships and basically ignoring homosexual ones. But in the last few years it switched to political homophobia, expressing openly negative views on homosexuality and producing legislation which stigmatizes homosexuality and fosters hateful climate in the society.

The first example of such legislation was the law against propaganda of homosexuality in the region of Ryazan, passed in 2006. The law was contested by the activists, and the Constitutional Court of Russian Federation confirmed in January 2011 that Ryazan law does not contradict the Constitution, as information about homosexuality “can harm health, moral and spiritual development [of minors], including the formation of incorrect understanding of equal social value of traditional and non-traditional marriage relationship”. This decision made it possible for the copies of this law to appear; and so, in 2011 Archangelsk passed a similar law more or less quietly while Saint-Petersburg’s proposition by Valery Milonov cause a debate which got interconnected rhetorically and politically with the participation of LGBT in the protests movement and later with the Pussy Riot case. Since then the law has passed in several regions as well as on a federal level.

There were also other laws and legal initiatives which are connected to this one and add to the homophobia of the state. The law against international adoption of children from Russia by same-sex married couples as well as single parents from countries which have same-sex marriage passed in June of 2013. The proposition to take away parental rights from parents who “allow non-traditional sexual relationships” is currently called back, but only on technical reasons, not because it is considered unethical and unacceptable.

---

<sup>2</sup> Calhoun, C. (1997). “State, Nation, and Legitimacy”. In Nationalism (pp. 66-85). Buckingham: Open University Press.

The explanations of these laws and the rhetoric of the state officials make clear the discourse the government takes on the issue. There are several points in it. First of all, it juxtaposes homosexuality and children. Children are, of course, asexual and pure; they don't have their own sexuality but only the future one, normal, heterosexual, but it can be corrupted by propaganda. Children become the protected object in this rhetoric, protected as future "perfect citizens" who they are supposed to become without the corruption by the homosexual propaganda. While the state does not prosecute adult homosexuals for their "anti-social behavior", it attempts to protect children from it, as from drug and alcohol addiction. Homosexuality is, therefore, implied to be a "bad thing". Also there is, of course, a second level, a classic level of sex panic where homosexuality is connected to pedophilia.

It seems that the state is not concerned that much with the homosexuals who are single and/or not in "factual marriage" relationship; it is the intrusion of the homosexuals into the sphere of "correct" citizenship – one that is defined by heterosexual marriage with children. Thus, these law should be analyzed together with the whole field of gender politics in Russian legislation and policies of current years: limitation of the rights to abortion, maternal capital, "Day of Love, Family and Faithfulness", to name just a few. This wide field of discourses and policies seems to achieve several goals: produce a national image of Russia as a nation-state based on "traditional family values"; create an illusion of the state's support of the families and children; and create mechanisms which give the state a very tangible power over personal lives of its subjects through the control, first and foremost, over the family and children. The family is not just "the unit of the society"; the family and parenthood as a personally valuable human connection becomes a tool of discipline and possibly punishment. By only allowing certain families and not others, the state creates a possibility to punish "wrong" kinds of behavior, "wrong" identities, and "wrong" citizens.

An acceptable sexual citizen of Russian Federation is married to a person of opposite sex and reproducing in the name of the prosperity of the state. The homosexual is presented discursively as an opposition to it – a willful opposition, an individual who chooses an "anti-social" way of existing and attempts to recruit others into it. The homosexual is, therefore, a scarecrow as well as a tool in the politics of the Russian state. The figure of a homosexual in relation to children allows the state to intrude into the activity of the organizations and into the privacy of personal and family life.

There is another angle, the one in which the pink triangle wedge appears again between Russia and "the West". This time, it is not a political issue of rights and freedoms as much as an issue of values and morals. "The West" appears to be quite tolerant to same-sex relationships, homosexuality in children, gay parenthood. By presenting homosexuality as something children have to be protected from, the state positions Russia as the keeper of the "true" values and "the West" as the space where children are open to the mysterious, sexual dangers of gayness.

It plays into the specifics of modern Russian spatiality which is consistently employed by the government and other actors. Russia is usually situated in the discourses as placed between two "Others": "the West" and "the East". "The East" is rarely called so, but usually presented by "the migrants", who are depicted as dangerous to the adult population: they kill and steal and rape, they take away work places; they intrude into "our culture" with their unacceptable customs. "The migrants" usually are presented as the Other whose danger comes from its animalistic, primitive nature; we as Russians are more intelligent, more refined, more cultural and therefore better than them.

The West as the Other is a different story. Russia has very complicated love-hate relationship with the West with a long history inherited from the USSR and the Russian Empire. After the wave of love in the 1990s, the current tendency at least in the governmental discourses is to pick and choose whatever is useful for the political and economic gains (of the government, not the country). While free market and western investments are supposedly useful, the ideas (and ideals) of equality, tolerance, human rights are not. By presenting homosexuals as the threat to the children – a threat which is tolerated and even encouraged in the West – the government's discourse drives a wedge between "the Russians" and the ideology of human rights and equality, as the latter is tied with the unacceptable sexualization, corruption and possibly even abuse of children.

For further analysis, both academic and political, it would be useful to look into the concepts of national belonging and compare positioning of LGBT and migrants/non-Slavic citizens of Russia; they are both “the new Jews” of Russian nationalism which is fueled both by the state and by the opposition. There are certain tendencies of the construction of Russia as a nation state, and national belonging of its citizens, their rights and freedoms, that have to be taken into account in the practice of political activism for gay rights. There is clearly a connection between homophobia, both state and social, and nationalism; while this connection is, again, not unique to Russia, it has to be taken into account in the strategies of activism, as well as the ideology of “pure childhood” and “family values” which is, in fact, also interconnected with the ideas of Russia as a nation.

# Mainstreaming LBT issues in women's rights agenda in Georgia: reality and challenges

**Lily Mamulashvili**

**Student of Psychology department in Tbilisi State University, queer feminist and LGBTQ activist, research assistant at WISG Georgia, Tbilisi  
leeloomamulashvili@yahoo.com**

After the collapse of Soviet Union, since 1990s, the traditionalist discourse with ethno nationalism has especially strengthened in Georgia. This discourse, with its most negative manifestations, implies the birth of a large wave of xenophobic attitudes. These factors have been reinforcing the role of women in our culture, as of group who have unique ability of reproduction. Reproduction includes also the symbolic understanding of notion— woman should pass on traditions and customs to the next generation, which oppresses her even more. It's not surprising that the patriarchal culture experienced the rise and has been deeply rooted through the awareness of society and everyday practices. In period of the Soviet Union, the legal equality between women and men with only goal of keeping gender balance of course wasn't enough to change society's attitudes towards the idea of gender equality. Today we face the fact that country's legislation is absolutely separated from the cultural context. This implies that very often, laws which exist formally, are inconsistent with society's attitudes and values. In fact, people aren't given a chance to benefit from law. The increasing influence of Georgian Orthodox church on public opinion, aggravates situation. In patriarchal society, where sharp gender asymmetry exists, any kind of gender non-conformation may become the basis of violence and discrimination. The clear example for this is the violent raid of the demonstration on may the 17<sup>th</sup>, on day of international day against homophobia and transphobia. LGBT activists were met by thousands of protesters, members of Georgian Orthodox church, led by church priests and xenophobic groups.

The law on gender equality, the existence of which is of course a step forward for the country, is quite inflexible. There's no written down mechanism for execution of law, so it's mostly of a declarative character. Even though some degree of progress can be observed in attitudes towards women's reproductive and sexual rights, policy of church is becoming more aggressive towards women's sexual role, towards to abortion. The representatives of Georgian orthodox church, not only appeal, but also try to take control on women's fundamental rights by interfering in legislation too. The most alarming fact is that the influence of church on politicians is increasing. Also, the position of church about minor role of women in the family, opposes prevention of domestic violence.

In addition, Georgia's legislation doesn't consider the definition of hate speech. As media-studies confirm, hate speech is widely used towards L(G)BT people, which remains one of the important problems. While talking about rights of minorities, it can be said that mostly only ethnical and religious minorities are considered as minority groups.

Considering all of these, it is very important to create strong alliance, which will oppose the wave of xenophobic, homophobic, patriarchal attitudes. In spite of this, majority of women's organizations ignore involving LBT issues in their agenda. L(G)BT rights are completely out of human rights' context in Georgia. LBT rights are slipped out of gender equality law, which doesn't consider the LBT needs. The gaps on level of legislation are putting LGBT people in unequal conditions. Also, in the law on gender equality a man and a woman are strictly marked off in terms of the biological understanding of sex, which excludes the acknowledgement of gender as a social construct notion. Mainstreaming LBT issues into the broader

women's rights agenda is one of the main priorities of Women's Initiatives Supporting Group. The qualitative research which was conducted by WISG, in spring of 2013, aims to identify potential strategic partners for future collaboration in projects and activities on LBT issues.

The qualitative research, which was conducted by Women's Initiatives Supporting Group, considered LGBT issues, international organizations working on LGBT issues, research institutions and funds agendas. The participants of the study included 24 women's organizations, 4 international, 2 LGBT and three research institutions, working on issues of women's rights, gender, sexual and reproductive health and rights. The study also included two funds operating in Georgia. The aim of the study was to display potential strategic partners from the organizations mentioned above, for the realization of projects and activities concerning LBT issues by WISG. Potential collaboration may include three levels: services of the organization, from which the representative of LBT group might benefit; research activity, which could include the LBT component and advocating/liberation, which could consider the LBT issues. The participants of the study included individuals within the management of projects or leadership of women's rights organizations, research organizations and funds, mostly.

The study mentioned above was conducted by using an open structured questionnaire. The field works were conducted from March 1<sup>st</sup> to April 10<sup>th</sup>. Each interview lasted for approximately 30-40 minutes and was recorded by means of an audio-recorder. The report of the research was made on the basis of the detailed decoding and transcription of the records. The guide for interviewing the representatives of the organizations included three blocks: the **first block** included questions about the time of functioning of the organization, its aims, partner governmental and non-governmental organizations and target groups. The **second block** considered all services of the organization and their consumers, and the **third block** included questions about the research activity and lobbying.

Interviews with representatives of funds were conducted by means of a different interview guide. The guide, composed for funds included two blocks: the **first block** coincided with the organizations' questionnaire, and the second one was mainly focused on the fund's vision in connection with gender issues in Georgia on the one hand, and on activities realized, financed or encouraged by the fund, as well as its priorities – on the other. The second block included questions, which considered the vision of the funding towards LBT issues and their collaboration/work on this issue.

Research shows, that the LGBT and women's rights organizations conduct their work in following directions: physical and mental health, reproductive and sexual rights, family violence, protection of human rights, informing society about gender and women's issues, rehabilitation of victims of violence and torture, educational activity. Most of the organizations provide services and/or they have referral services. Most organizations provide the service of psychological, psychiatric, medical and law consultations – straight, phone or online consultations (the type of consultation is determined by the profile of organization). They also have educational services, together with services oriented on raising awareness: trainings, seminars, an informative booklet publishing, creation of lecture courses, discussions. Two organizations named their service as offering a court representation. Several organizations can offer social help and guarantee social worker service, three organizations provide beneficiaries with contraceptives, and one of them include the testing of AIDS and sexually transmitted infections. Two organizations named their service as offering free teaching of English language, and one organization named its service as art therapy. One organization has a crisis center for children with deviant behavior in Gori and the social enterprise of wooden toys for young probationers, which is located in Gori as well. Three organizations provide shelters.

Despite the diversity of services and the fact that the interviewed organizations have given services to LBT women, none of them has services adjusted to this particular group at this stage (several organizations are working with a broader profile LGBT group, correspondingly their services are adjusted completely on LGBT groups and not particularly on LBT women). It can be concluded that not being familiar with these issues is not a condition, which makes it so that LBT groups are not included in the agenda of these organizations. As far as most organizations don't have services adjusted specifically on LBT needs, most respondents said that he/she will give service to LBT women if she at the same time belongs to any of their

target groups. Only four organizations named the LGBT group as their direct target group. From these, one organization is occupied with making films on social topics and has already made two documentaries on LBT/LGBT issues.

Most of the interviewed respondents characterized their employees as professional, qualified and experienced, open towards other people, knowledgeable of human's rights and sensitive towards LBT issues – all of these, in their opinion, determine the strength of an organization.

Most organizations consider raising the awareness in the society as one of the most important strategies in terms of working towards improving conditions for LBT women in Georgia. Several factors were also named as the conditions for improving the situation: increasing the visibility of the issue and generally including LBT women in civil activity, direct strengthening of the group, studying their needs.

Mostly all respondents say that they are interested in LBT women's issues and they express a desire and possibility of collaboration and working on this issue in future.

The interviewed organizations are involved in research activity, although most of them are not studying specifically LBT women's issues. Several organizations were identified as an exception:

"Identoba" conducted a student conference in January of this year, where 20 small studies on LGBT issues were presented, majority of them covered LGBT community issues, and some of them were specifically concentrated on the LBT group. "Identoba" has also conducted a research exploring issues of coming out and group visibility. In future the organization is planning to continue conducting researches on more specific, problems in field of education, on women's issues, on conditions of LGBT people in regions, on bullying in schools etc. "Hera XXI", which includes LBT women among its target groups, conducted the study of LBT group's needs, during which the emphasis was placed on lesbian women. The organization "Human rights priority" conducts small-scale researches oriented on legal analysis of specific cases. "Tanadgoma" conducts studies on transgender, MSM community and HIV/AIDS, the study included our neighboring countries in South Caucasus and of course partially covered the LGBT group. "Women's Information Center" used the information taken from the "WISG's" studies about LGBT groups in their shadow report for CEDAW Committee, although this organization does not independently conduct studies in this direction. In addition, the organization "Studio mobile – Accent on Movement" conducts studies, which serve as the basis for documentary films they make.

The participants of the study included three research organizations: "Center for social sciences", "Caucasus research resources center" and "Institute of policy studies". Their priorities include the development of academic and applied social sciences in Georgia, Georgian researchers' integration into the international academic network, implementation of professional and ethical standards in social sciences and support of evidence-based research and teaching; also implementation of modern conferences and practice of social politics in Georgia, and collecting useful information for drawing out the politics.

The research organizations do not have studies that cover LBT issues. In their opinion, this is mainly caused by the invisibility of this group, as well as the lack of society's interest towards LGBT issues. In order to improve conditions of LBT women, respondents see it necessary to study the present situation of this group in first place. Representatives of organizations also noted that the level of awareness of society towards this issue has to increase. Research institutions are not interested in working specifically on LBT issues at this stage, but they do not exclude the possibility of conducting studies in this direction in future. Representatives of all three organizations noted that their organization is ready for collaboration.

Within the frames of the study conducted by "Women's Initiative Supporting Group", two Georgian funds – "Women's fund in Georgia" and "Taso Foundation" were interviewed. The representative of "Women's fund in Georgia" mentioned that at the moment, the biggest attention is given to gender equality and domestic violence (in terms of women's rights), although, in her opinion, it doesn't mean that this issue has been studied thoroughly. In this regard, the attention is paid only to physical violence, and there are no studies which would explore sexual and psychological violence. The least attention is given to feminism.

The patriarchal society, as well as non-government organizations – are less sensitive towards this subject. In opinion of representatives of fund “Taso”, generally issues connected with gender equality are given less attention in Georgia, although the least accent is placed on economic development of women.

As for the LBT issues, representatives of both funds said that they had been informed about this issues by the organization working specifically with LGBT communities: they regularly receive the results of researches conducted by “WISG”, they look through new studies on websites of LGBT organizations or have a firsthand contact with LGBT community.

Representatives of both funds think that they are interested in working on LBT issues. “Women’s fund in Georgia” financed all applications received on projects related to overcoming violence against LBT women. The representative of Taso Foundation notes that they have written out the strategic plan up to 2014, which does not include LBT women’s issues. Because of this, the fund might not be able to support a project of this kind, but their solidarity is expressed through participation in street manifestation, awareness and a desire for collaboration.

In future, in connection with improving general women’s rights conditions, the representative of Taso Foundation believes, it is necessary to overcome poverty and to increase awareness of society. The representative of “Women’s fund in Georgia” noted that awareness in women’s non-government organization has to increase.

Within the frames of the study four international organizations were interviewed: “UNWOMEN”, “UNFPA”, “Heinrich Boil Fund South Caucasus Bureau” and “Kvinna till kvinna”.

The representatives of interviewed international organization mentioned that they supported moving the LBT community issues ahead, fight with discrimination, reproductive health rights and gender issues’ integration in corresponding state politics and programs, action plans.

All representatives of international organizations noted that currently the best studied subject in relation with gender equality and women’s issues is the domestic violence.

Also, in respondents’ opinion, the following issues have been appropriately studied: increasing the political authority of women, rights of minorities (on the level of activism), reinforcement of women’s role in conflict management and peace building in our country, reproductive health and rights, empowerment of rural women, creating politics (although the civil society doesn’t participate in this latter one).

In respondents’ opinion, less attention is given to issues such as: LBT issues, issues of women of ethnical minorities and in general, changing the attitude of society towards gender equality.

As for working on LGBT issues, “Heinrich Boil Fund South Caucasus Bureau” supports the realization of studies connected with LGBT issues. This organization was one of the firsts to make this issue subject of a public discussion; it often hosts discussions about homophobia and hate speech. „UNFPA“ doesn’t announce grant programs, but it works towards consolidation of partnership. For „Kvinna till kvinna“ LBT issues are important, as far as LBT represents an especially vulnerable group of women. At this stage, Kvinna till Kvinna does provide financing for projects aimed at LBT women.

For „UN Women“, LBT issues do not represent the main priority at this stage, their support would be expressed with their encouragement on IDAHO on may the 17<sup>th</sup>, in case of organizing a street meeting. Representatives of the organization were willing to join the demonstration.

From the study conducted by Women’s Initiatives Supporting Group we can conclude that for most of the interviewed organizations, funds and research institutions, working on women’s rights, gender and reproductive health and rights, LBT issues are less priority at this stage. Most organizations don’t have services that would be adjusted specifically to LBT women’s needs. Although, the vast majority of these organizations is ready to help LBT women in case the latter intersect any of their target groups. Most organizations (besides the few exceptions), are not able to consider the specifics of LBT women, or their representatives



do not think that it's necessary to consider the specifics of LBT women during the working process. It can be concluded that not knowing these issues doesn't condition the exclusion of the specifics of LBT women. Most organizations are also not occupied with researching the LBT issues, though they are interested in this issue and are ready for collaboration. Most representatives of organization consider increasing the visibility, raising society's awareness, conducting researches etc., as prerequisite for improving conditions of LBT women.

As for the research organizations, they have not conducted any studies in this field and at this stage, they're not interested in working specifically on LBT issues. In order to improve conditions for LBT women, they see it necessary to increase society's awareness towards this group, to conduct researches, which will study the current conditions of LBT women in country and to increase the visibility of subject. Organizations are ready for collaboration and in future they might cover the LBT issues.

We can conclude, that compared with women's rights organizations, funds and international organizations prioritize LBT issues more, since readiness for partnership can be already seen in their case.