

Piotr Stańczyk and Sylwester Zielka Talk with Prof. Ewa Graczyk About Search for an Enemy, Gender, and Education of Teachers

Piotr Stańczyk: We have met today to talk about the notions of “gender” and “gender ideology”. I first heard about the notion of gender when I was a university student, i.e. not so long ago.

Ewa Graczyk: So we are not yet talking about the “gender ideology”?

P.S.: No, I want us to focus on the notion of gender. Those must have been classes conducted by the former PhD, now Professor, Lucyna Kopciwicz, for the fourth and subsequently the fifth year students of philosophy. And at that time I could not imagine that the notion of gender might be used widely, and even less that it might be used by bishops, priests, or the media connected with the Catholic Church. Can you please explain how might this have happened?

E.G.: I think that it was a political decision. Certain groups and circles, not only Polish but also European ones, have been looking for ways to convince people to adopt the very traditional vision of the society and Church. They have been looking for a way involving the use of a very difficult, incomprehensible category to make it a smokescreen hiding certain processes and defending certain phenomena characteristic for a very conservative, rigid way of the understanding of the world. We can say that in the cluster “gender ideology”, “gender” is a word which is meaningless, which is not explained and which becomes a sort of a mask for the ways of thinking in which people might safely use misogyny and homophobic slogans: the ways of thinking which perceive the family as something as rigid as a product of nature. And this phrase was selected as one which is difficult and incomprehensible, as a type of mask under which certain beliefs are smuggled – beliefs which, when expressed directly, are hardly defensible for many people, since today a vast majority of society supports women’s empowerment, and neither is the entire society homophobic, it is divided in this issue. And we can explain rationally that a family is something which is historically changeable, that the vision of the nuclear family in which we live, was also changing in the history of Christianity. It has been changing not only in the history of Christian Europe, but all over the world, so if only we could speak about it in rational terms, showing the changeability, historicity of the notion of family, many people could turn to our side. However, when we use the notion of gender, when the term is unintelligible, tabooed, irrational, and if we add to it the atmosphere of fear, the climate to which the Freudian theory with its notion of “the uncanny” (Freud 1997) fits excellently, this overpowers rational thinking. And I think that it is all about this, about not thinking rationally but giving in to phobias, fears, and anxiety – and because there are many of them in our Polish society, this operation is successful. It is not a coincidence: the appearance of the problem of paedophilia in

the Polish Church followed by the eruption of the “gender scandal”. I cannot see it as accidental. Especially that this action was arranged by a few West-European journalists and what father Oko is saying is taken from their various texts.

Sylwester Zielka: We also need to say that these circles refer to scientific analyses and research, such as those carried out by Gabriele Kuby (2015), a female sociologist. Anyway, what other problems – since you are saying that the category of gender is not of much importance here as purposefully unclear and aimed at raising concern – what other problems apart from paedophilia does this mass attack try to cover?

E.G.: I am not a Catholic, I do not belong to the Church, which means that I sort of deal with other people’s business. But since the Church deals with my business, then I can deal with theirs too. I think that generally speaking, the Church really needs a debate: an internal and an external one. During the conference we attended together¹, I talked about the problems the Church still has to solve, about the problems of the East-European Church. The 19th century is still our legacy – the 19th century which was the age of the alliance of the throne and altar in the most brutal way. And the 19th century with its black pedagogy, with teaching Christians servilism, is something that is still continued. And then the very bad traditions of the Polish Church dating to the interwar period – the most famous anti-Semites were unfortunately priests, such as the famous father Stanisław Trzeciak, or the future saint Maksymilian Kolbe. And then there is the wartime attitude of the Church for which the Church has not been made accountable yet at all. And, subsequently, the defence of the Church against the communists made the Church set still, the Church failed to develop in its internal discussion. And all this is still present – and I dread to think how much work it all needs and will need, as the time of the Church’s internal settlement of accounts will come finally, be it when the war archives of the Church are opened; it may be a beginning of thinking about the Church’s decision, its actions, the actions of the particular priests, parishes, and the relation of resistance and collaboration. I dread to think, but it is permanently put off – and I think that when you put something off, things are getting worse. Therefore, I see this gender-related scandal in purely political categories.

P.S.: If these are political categories, then they must involve the issues of power, reaching for power, the maintenance of power, and control. It is very difficult for me to agree with the thesis that the notion of gender is irrelevant. Many things have happened in Poland in recent years – here, a very good category is the notion of moral panic surrounding the category of gender, but after all there has also been moral panic related to designer drugs, which did not seem to interest the Church at all, or the issues related to the limitation of freedom on the Internet to do with ACTA (which, by the way, was one of the largest social movements after 1989) – that failed to mobilise the Church. However, it was the category of gender which mobilized the Church – why?

E.G.: Again, this is about perceptions, or, to put it in another way, because the category of gender is, after all, related to what I referred to during the already mentioned conference as a “semiotic stain”, i.e. a notion which has an intention-

¹ Conference *Sexuality – masculinity – education. Moral panic 2013/2014 reconstructions*, 15–16.10.2014.

ally unclear scope. And this unclear scope is connected with bodyliness, sexuality, and family, i.e. all the most important questions of the contemporary humanities, which talk about them as categories which are constructed – changeable and historical – while the traditional, conservative Church wants to see it in essential, substantive, and unchangeable terms. In this sense, the choice of the category is not accidental, because it associates the entire sphere of corporeality, sexuality, and family – in the sense that the family changes, and in the sense that social relations are changeable and historic. Still, the Church does not have to be so, these issues just need to be worked through by the Church, but the Church perceives it in unchangeable, ahistorical, essential categories. Therefore, the attack on the notion of gender is indirectly an attack on the entire tendency concerning social change.

PS.: Going further in this direction: don't then – at least in a sense – supporters of the gender theory attack the Church?

E.G.: In a sense, yes, they do, they attack the conservative Church, the one which is “ahistorical”, which is an institution that does not want to cooperate with the world in the aspect of its change. This left-wing, modernist change which is also related to moral change, wants to enforce changes on the Church. And therefore aspects of a certain conflict are obvious, but the thing is how the Church copes with conflict – and it copes with it in such a way that this attack on gender formulates the discussion as a fight of the Good with Evil, Satan with Angels, Divine forces with the forces of Hell. We are just a step before it and it is dangerous, since when this is judged in this way – that they are on the light side of the force, and we on the side of Darth Vader – then what can we talk about? There is no conversation here, we need to be destroyed and that is it.

S.Z.: Then why do you think people who are not conservatives fail to activate in the Church, why have conservatives in the Church took the dominating position?

E.G.: I do not know why, I do not follow the Church's problems so closely, but it seems to me that non-conservatives are a small minority and that the conservative tradition is very strong – it seems that during the times of the Polish People's Republic, National Democratic forces managed to survive in the Church, and they are now contributing to a return to the interwar state of things. And this is terrifying.

PS.: And we cannot see any real danger in terms of our national identity?

E.G.: Because there are no national minorities.

PS.: “Fortunately” there are sexual minorities and there is gender...

E.G.: I see it as a desperate need of an enemy. During the interwar period that role was played by Jews and other religious minorities – but Jews above all. And now we are beginning to fit the place designed for the enemy, which is dangerous, as we know what the end of it was. Fortunately, the environment is entirely different.

PS.: It is easy to call the things taking place around the “gender ideology” as moral panic. And this moral panic, as the notion was coined², was initially used to describe hunts for social “devils” and “witches”. Isn't it too large a coincidence:

² The notion of “moral panic” was introduced to the social sciences by British sociologist Stanley Cohen (1972), who carried out research into media reactions to conflicts of youth subcultures; the reactions significantly contributed to the negative social reception of these groups

gender, feminism, women, women with scientific degrees, women who mean a lot in social life – all of a sudden become the object of attack.

E.G.: In a sense, it makes sense – various historians of feminism, researchers focusing on the history of feminism, reconstructed such a continuity from witches through suffragettes to second-wave feminism. We may say that initially witches, hysterical women (who expressed their rebellion through symptoms, as they did not yet have the language allowing the expression of resistance), suffragettes – and today “we” – are ideal candidates for new embodiments of evil. Fortunately, as I have already said, our environment is very different now and it is very difficult to set fire to these stakes. I am not sure though whether it is altogether impossible.

P.S.: In the context of the smear campaign aimed at feminism and gender I would like to ask a question to which I know the answer, but I would like to hear it from you: what good has gender theory done? Because we are dealing with a certain scholarly strategy, interpretative strategy, whose name is now dragged through the mud and mire, while perhaps people have managed to achieve something good owing to it?

S.Z.: And I would like to ask whether the gender environment has actually gained anything owing to this culture war, this moral panic?

E.G.: Let me start with the second question, it will be easier. I think that a large share of media, environments which used to think that we exaggerate, that everything really went in a good direction, now – and they are in part supporters of the Civic Platform, liberal circles – have become aware that when left alone in Polish conditions, without a certain amount of support from the left liberal wing, the environment of social and cultural change will not be able to cope, that the situation may go towards the proverbial stakes and witch-hunts. In short, they have noticed that the conservative Church exaggerates, that bishops exaggerate. I can feel it for example in the tone of the TVN programmes. What is new is a tone of laughing at some statements – and probably father Oko has become the most characteristic figure for this tone. And it is after all something good, because when we laugh at somebody, we do not treat them seriously. And I think that we have counted our forces, and the ones who previously said “I am for it and even against it” [Lech Wałęsa’s famous saying], have finally become aware that they need to make a choice. And a large share have chosen our side and accepted that women are different than men, but equal with them in terms of their value, and that homosexuals can live the way they want to. I have a feeling that the ones who tried to be somewhere in the middle in this dispute became aware that after all there is no middle here. And this without any doubt is a profit, but at the same time there is a loss which consists in the fact that we are not aware of the fact that there is religion in schools and that hundreds of thousands of children remain under the power of a catechist for a dozen or so years of their lives.

P.S.: I am smiling because after all school catechesis brings about many unintended positive effects for democratisation – these are the only classes at school during which students can have heated, serious debates with the teacher (Bagrowicz 2000).

E.G.: This however depends on the classes. I feel that it is different in various environments, various classes, and social groups.

PS.: It is also a gender issue. As results from research into the “parameters of religiosity”, it comes as a great concern that boys from environments which take a higher place in the social structure, and as a consequence also achieve better results at school, are more often sharp polemicists in relation to catechists than girl students from environments taking a lower place in the social structure; it is the question of both class and gender.

E.G.: Possibly so, as girls are still taught to be obedient. At the moment I have many groups in the second year of Polish studies and I can see this fear in their eyes that appears when I use the words “gender” or “homosexuality”, and it is much more intense than it used to be. It is probably so because we have students who are not the best achievers. Polish studies are not a top course.

PS.: Let us go back to my question concerning the positive effects of the gender theory.

E.G.: There are lots of such effects, but above all it is the awareness that – firstly – gender theory has been adapted by all the sciences: exact sciences, biological sciences, the humanities, and the social sciences. And it brings about various effects: although I do not know much about biology, I listened with great interest to a lecture by the biochemist Maria Pawłowska during the Congress of Women of Pomerania, and it turns out that the category of gender is extremely complex also in the exact sciences, i.e. our bodies are marked by a dozen or so gender determinants and they are rarely clear-cut. If we look at all the determinants, they can be inconsistent, and if I am basically a woman, some of these determinants can be male. The introduction of the category of gender made it possible to differentiate many things, which is also important in medicine, be it for the testing of medicines, largely solely on men, which was a methodological error since female bodies react to some medicines in a different way than male bodies. And there are concrete studies which show how much research on for example heart diseases in women is delayed in relation to heart diseases in men, that there are for instance symptoms of a heart attack that are entirely different in women than in men. Therefore, the differentiation into men and women, as well as seeing all this in its entire complexity, turned out to be a very significant scholarly move. Also the use of the scholarly tool with reference to the categories of rule and power, for example studying the lifestyle of various environments or families using the category, makes it possible to better manage space, towns/cities, and daily life. For the sake of an example, let us consider the location of bus stops: if in traditional families there is one car, then typically it is the man who uses it – we may not like it, but this is the way it is – which means that the bus schedule must be adjusted to women’s lifestyle. If we fight for women to be able to go out at night, then we must provide adequate lighting in streets, and parks, and make sure certain places are safe, because, as we know it, women are afraid of being mugged. And in Sweden, which is constantly an example we should follow, sensitisation to gender-related issues has led to night bus drivers being obliged to stop their bus in front of a woman passenger’s house and watch her safely enter her home. Not a taxi, but a city bus. And these are the details that we should focus on; it is women who should be asked what issues are important for them. From the point of view of gender, the construction of the gi-

gantic stadium for the EURO football championship is simply a scandal, if we take into account the sport promotion among boys and girls. In Poland, this inequality is completely invisible, whereas in literature studies the category of gender as a tool used for research in women's studies makes it possible to see the androcentricity, phallogentricity of the language of convention offered by the author, designed for men, and targeted at men; the language which disregards women's achievements. Not so long ago we organised a conference on the presence or absence of women in the literary canon³. And this is a problem of all literatures.

S.Z.: Therefore, I must ask, how is the male and heterosexual standard realised in the canon – after all, we do have women in the canon, we have Maria Kononicka, Eliza Orzeszkowa – isn't it female language?

E.G.: It is, but generally – to use a category discussed by the famous feminist researcher Nancy K. Miller (2009) – this female signature, female sign, a sign of femininity, a sign of feminine subjectivity, is under-read. And this causes, as a participant in our conference observed, something interesting: women-writers found in the canon die in it exactly because their gender signature is under-read, disregarded – they are read not as women, and that is why their works seem to be boring. Notice that for instance Orzeszkowa's works are given as examples of the most boring items on the lists of books to be read at school.

P.S.: I was dealing with boredom a little at school and I feel that whatever school touches, becomes boring.

E.G.: However, very seriously-minded people would mention Orzeszkowa as a prime example of the boring.

S.Z.: Why then is the female voice absent from the canon?

P.S.: There are no women in Władysław Tatarkiewicz's *Historia filozofii* [History of Philosophy], either. And why not work on the issue of women's literature, women authors, and female interpretation, so that there is more of them at school?

E.G.: We do work on it, the point is that there are so many ways of defence against changes. As usual, one of the aspects we are talking about is the fight for power. A sign of the high male status is the fact that men have political power, but the hierarchy of values is another important question. In the sphere of meanings and values, it is the man who is vested with the full power of creation. Women do it much worse, they are not admitted to the status of creators, and there are many ways in which they can be disregarded. Some people say for example that there are good and simply poor texts and that talking about men and women here makes no sense. It is just that it turns out that the good texts are solely men's texts, and those written by women are for some reason not good. These are the relations of power and it is difficult to break this magic circle. One of the feminist researchers said that the canon is based on male-centric values, which is why they are present in the canon. The canon is androcentric, which in turn reproduces androcentric culture.

S.Z.: So Jane Austen, who, as I see it, praises male values, is present in the canon – though not the Polish one obviously – since she adopted a male point of view.

³ A reference to the international Scientific Conference *Why There are No Great Female Writers Here and Other Questions Concerning the CANON*, Gdansk 12–13.12.2014.

E.G.: We might discuss that, there are various opinions on this, everything depends on how we read – for example, there is a famous interpretation by the feminist researchers Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert *The Madwoman in the Attic* (2000), and they also analyse Jane Austin, and in their interpretation she represents a female point of view.

S.Z.: Let us then call it a difference of interpretation. However, I would like to turn your attention to something else: because some time ago I was dealing with the canon, I came to a conclusion that one of the processes making an androcentric perception of the canon possible is allowing that the power to decide about the canon be transferred from applicable regulations to teachers. In other words, those who were taught androcentric literature will continue to reproduce it.

P.S.: So you are a supporter of an ever greater intervention of the state into the canon.

S.Z.: I am not sure whether I would call it greater, but surely one that would promote equality.

E.G.: Or simply discussing – after all nobody wants to remove [Boleslaw Prus's] *The Doll* from the curriculum, although this text is full of misogynist and anti-Semitic content, but we need to read it in such a way as to show it. To read and teach critical reading. Here I must boast a little – one of my graduates, my former student, teaches at school and she says that when she starts teaching her pupils in the primary school, she always asks them “who talks in the text?”, “who is the narrator?”. And she said that after a couple of years one of the girls asked “why are these always boys who talk?”. The girl noticed that by herself.

S.Z.: Therefore, the lyric subject referred to all the time in textbooks, is also marked by gender.

E.G.: Of course it is.

S.Z.: Only that this gender is imperceptible.

E.G.: That is true, obviously.

S.Z.: When looking closely and critically at the protagonists from the school list of obligatory books, we know today that many of them are not clear-cut. Nevertheless, they are interpreted at school as very non-ambiguous, clear-cut, very often reflecting the masculine point of view. Let us for example look at Emilia Plater: she fought for her homeland, died for it – which is a cultural domain of men, but on the other hand, she was a woman, and the reader basically does not know how to treat her; and yes, confusion could be an excellent moment for discussion. At the same time, we hear from the teacher exactly how we should treat her, what we should think about her. I think therefore that it is largely the question of interpretation and the teacher's attitude.

E.G.: That is why it is so important how the teachers of both sexes are educated: because if they have the eye and the ear for it, then they may create such an interesting, non-clear-cut conversation. The school must use literature for ethical conversation, and at the same time must not treat literature as a simple catechism lesson: this literature is on the side of the good, and that on the side of the evil. The whole complexity should be shown and the gender-related issues we are talking about can be included in the conversation, too. Can we not, from today's perspec-

tive, see it in a different way, notice what questions and doubts come to our minds? Just as is the case with for example Judym and his relationship with Joasia – here, we can have different points of view on the relation between the public and the private, and they are different than the ones masochistically offered by Żeromski.

PS.: I also have a question concerning the way the notion of gender influences the daily life in the academic space. I have a feeling that despite everything, researchers who are close to feminism, for whom the notion of gender is important, do not have such an easy life in the academic space. You mentioned students who react with a sort of fear, and I have a feeling that some people in the academic space react allergically to the notion of gender. This is about “scientificity” because, after all, it is “ideology” – what do you think about it?

E.G.: A lot depends on the atmosphere prevailing in a given faculty, in a given environment, but I do not want to say that things are fine in my faculty – it is the other way round. I have a feeling that what we generally have here is a sort of a permissive absence of the category: “oh, they are dealing with these..., but it is not about us, we have our science». It often happens when I attend a defence of the habilitation degree at a sitting of the Faculty Board, then when I listen to some employees, I must cover my ears, because I simply... cannot be always on duty, and defend the category of gender in the company of two or three people. For example, I see that some issues should definitely take gender-related questions into account – I am not saying this is the only perspective, but it should be one of the categories considered during an analysis of a problem – but it is not, and everyone seems to think that this is ok, and that there is nothing wrong about it, and that the text is great. And from a certain point of view, I can also consider the text as good, but I still feel an absence of something there. At the same time, 95% of researchers do not feel it at all, while the difference between us and the research in the majority of Western countries is that there, the ratio is say 50:50. Still, 50% believe that gender is a category which cannot be omitted, that the minority discourse, consisting in thinking according to the classical trinity of gender, race, and class, is justified – be it that the voice does not drop from the sky, that we speak from a concrete position, and that the texts we read are texts which originate from a concrete gender, race and class context with all its historical complexity. It is much easier to think in abstract and universal terms, because we then enter the entire ocean of complications in a different way.

S.Z.: So thinking in the categories of difference is more difficult.

E.G.: Much more difficult, because everything becomes more complex, you need to follow differences, relations of power, search for it. Texts cease to be safe, because they exist in the field of power. Actions of social forces, inequalities, and what we say ceases to be innocent since we are on a certain side.

S.Z.: With such a degree of complexity or interpretations and the complexity of the world as such, school could cease to be a place in which indoctrination takes place, and could become a place of liberation, but how to achieve it?

PS.: If we want to achieve the liberalisation of something by someone, then we too are dealing with indoctrination. But let us return to the beginning of our conversation – there is moral panic around the “ideology of gender», where gender is

the incomprehensible part, and ideology the negative part of the phrase. From the point of view of Karl Mannheim's concept (1992), the ideology of gender is simply an ideology, and it would be difficult to argue with it. The concept of gender is not entirely rational.

E.G.: But this assumes that we see a single ideology of gender, but once we adopt a positive or a neutral notion of ideology, we shall see ideology among other concepts. And the ideology of gender has the right to be present among other ideologies and can present its arguments, defend them, engage in a dispute with others. Only, the problem is that the ideological nature of other standpoints is imperceptible and they present "naked truth", and it is assumed that the word ideology is used only in relation to gender, which is immediately associated with something evil, something blatantly political, most often communism.

P.S.: In the Polish language the phrase "Roman Catholic ideology" would just not sound right.

E.G.: Only we are ideological, all other people are innocent and there are no relations of power.

S.Z.: As I see it, we have come a full hermeneutic circle – we started from the ideology of gender and we have returned to it.

P.S.: The postulate of non-ideological science and academic space is the main problem of feminist researchers, and the postulate of non-ideological school is greatly ideological.

E.G.: That is why school and teacher preparation are so important: school with open people. We must begin with saying it openly that we hold such and such beliefs, but only for you to find your own beliefs and go towards your own way, which does not have to be the same as mine – what is more, it should not be my own, but your own.

S.Z.: This is related to a whole lot of other problems – be it that we do not have the right to judge somebody's beliefs, but only the ways in which they are justified.

E.G.: We can, however, show consequences of these beliefs and then – not directly, but still – we can do it. Because if we see clearly, which results from a given belief – that gender is given, biological, and natural, and usually such people also believe that women are worse than men, that they are wives and mothers because they have the maternal instinct, and as a result they have to look after children, while men have to be in the public field, as this is so natural – then we must show how these beliefs operate, and if we show their social effects, the results to which they lead, then we may ask our interlocutor: do you want to adopt it? Do you know what it leads to? This means that there is evaluation, but it is not done in a "hammer home" way.

P.S.: I have recalled what I owe to gender – for instance the fact that I no longer have to open jars without prying their lids open. What I mean is that men are also the beneficiaries of feminism.

E.G.: They can also cry or tell their wives that they are unable to win the bread for the entire family. And that they cannot adopt the role of a sole provider.

S.Z.: One of the threads of playful quarrels with my wife is that in the case of divorce she will take the child and no court will decide to give the child to me. We

obviously joke, but we know Polish statistics. This socially prevalent way of thinking is, in my opinion, a certain trap for both women and men; it is the absence of thinking in gender terms, it is based on the category of the maternal instinct that you mentioned, which pushes women into the role of unreflective child minders, the thinking that children are what they should get.

E.G.: It is an example of the discrimination against men, because family courts belong to women. And in many situations women are not good caregivers for their children – just as the public issues are not masculine, so the family-related ones are not feminine.

S.Z.: Let us then conclude that the introduction of this category to our daily functioning will help us better understand the multi-layered nature of our relations with the world, and ourselves, and maybe even change something in this world. Thank you very much for talking to us.

Literature

- Bagrowicz J., 2000, *Edukacja religijna współczesnej młodzieży. Źródła i cele* [Religious Education of the Contemporary Youth. Sources and Aims], Wydawnictwo UMK, Toruń.
- Cohen S., 1972, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, MacGibbon and Kee, London.
- Freud Z., 1997, *Niesamowite* [The Uncanny], [in:] Z. Freud, *Pisma psychologiczne* [Psychological Writings], vol. 3, KR, Warszawa.
- Gilbert S., Gubar S., 2000, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, Yale University Press, Yale.
- Kuby G., 2015, *The Global Sexual Revolution: Destruction of Freedom in the Name of Freedom*, Angelico Press, Kettering.
- Mannheim K., 2000, *Ideology and Utopia*, [in:] *Collected Works of Karl Mannheim*, vol. III, Routledge, Oxon – New York.
- Miller N. K., 1986, *Arachnologies. The Woman, the Text, and the Critic*, [in:] N. K. Miller (ed.), *The Poetics of Gender*, Columbia University Press, New York.

English translation: Anna Moroz-Darska

Tłumaczenie sfinansowano ze środków Ministerstwa Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego na podstawie umowy nr 661/P-DUN/2018 z dnia 13 lipca 2018 roku w ramach realizacji zadania 1 – stworzenie anglojęzycznych wersji wydawanych publikacji w 2018 roku.

The translation was financed with funds made available by the Ministry of Finance and Higher Education under contract No. 661/P-DUN/2018 of 13 July 2018 as a part of the execution of task 1: the creation of English-language versions of the issued publications in 2018.