

SYMBOLIC MOTHERING GENEALOGICAL NARRATIVES AS A PERIPHERALIZATION PRACTICE

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David S. Meyer writes, that a popular storyline “is far more likely to affect what happens next; the stories people hear about the past influence how they view future possibilities and, most significantly, their prospective role in making it. Therefore Meyer calls on other social movement scholars to “separate the question of assessing influence from that of establishing a narrative of influence”.¹ The building of collective narrations serves social movements as well in the form of an instrument of history-politics aiming not only for the consolidation of a community, but as well as the legitimization and de-legitimization of power-relations. Scholars note that narratives might shape peoples’ dispositions and have a normative status, seeing as they bear authority.² Therefore narratives should also be examined as discursive practices, serving certain goals, such as the establishment of asymmetrical relations and their reification, in order to stabilize a field of action and one’s own positioning within. Furthermore, assuming that the production of knowledge and facts relates to power and authority, leads not only to the problem of the ability to practice successful history politics, but as well as the question of history politics itself and the goals it serves.

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¹ D.S. Meyer, *Claiming Credit. Stories of Movements Influences as Outcomes*, in H. Johnston, (Ed.) *Culture, Social Movements, and Protest*, Fahrgate–Burlington 2009, pp. 202.

² S. See Kapp, *Collective Memory and the Actual Past*, “Representations”, no. 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory (Spring, 1989), pp. 123.

This article takes up the problem of genealogical narratives and its function as a peripheralization practice. The aim is to reflect on the practices of marginalization and centralization which themselves take place within the feminist and gender-democratic movements and environments in post-state-socialist Poland. I focus not only on centralization and peripheralization practices applied throughout the selected genealogical narratives, but on some examples of the alternative accounts. Simultaneously the premise is that one specific genealogy of feminism in Poland does not exist and that knowledge about feminist movements, and the valuation of the importance of particular events is always situated.³ Perceiving history as situated might destabilize universal and exclusive center-peripheral constructions. Questioning such constructs, does mean a critical examination of relations constructed by particular asymmetrical perceptions is necessary. This article provides an exemplary analysis of mother-daughter narrations on the basis of selected events and disputes which took place in the 2000s mainly between feminist actors operating in big cities. The practices of asserting certain genealogical historical narratives are analyzed with a perspective on the fields of activism/political orientations. That means as well, that this article focus only on certain aspects and does not claim to treat the problem conclusively nor to provide a history of feminist history politics. The aim of this text is rather to open the floor for critical discussions about knowledge and history production within assumed margins, in order to keep a critical perspective, also in cases where history (such as for example the history of “Polish feminism” in comparison to the history of “American feminism” or the history of “Poland”) is produced by the “periphery” itself.

The problem of marginalization practices within emancipatory environments, such as the women’s rights and feminist movements, is a discussion which has been held within international activist and academic discourses for a long time now. Interventions, which did critique the universalizing of binary gender constructions and sexual orders, or critiqued the universalism of certain western white-middle class experiences, were conducted by various social movement initiatives, activists and academics.⁴

Feminist emancipatory initiatives, which oppose hegemonic social orders, have themselves often gone along with unitary notions of gender, the construc-

³ See as well Donna Haraway for her concept of situated knowledge: D. Haraway, *Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective*, “Feminist Studies”, Autumn 1988, Vol. 14, No. 3, pp. 575–599.

⁴ See for example Combahee River Collective Statement from 1978 (<http://historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/combrivercoll.html>) or publications of Bell Hooks, Audre Lorde, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Trinh Minh-ha, Maria Baader and others.

tion of universal femininity or other homogenizing identities. Universalism allows the legitimization of certain claims, seeing their relevance is higher, when the reasoning is collective instead of having the status of an individual problem. Which means in practice, that an “internal” feminist critique of certain universalisms from a marginalized perspective, for example “lesbians”, “Women of Color” or “Polish feminists”, creates its own generalizations and exclusions as well. According to Jean-François Lyotard grand narratives using modes of unification should be treated with skepticism, no matter if it’s an emancipatory or speculative one.⁵ Alternative narratives told from a peripheral perspective with an emancipatory purpose are challenged over and over again, due to a certain scheme of categorization and spatiality used, they all too often turn out to be marginalizing as well.

MOTHERING OWN MARGINS

For the case of feminisms in Poland, critical academic reflections on the generalization of feminist history-production are still missing. One reason for this might be, that historization in itself is also a process, which still goes on and there has not been any comprehensive history of feminism in post-state-socialist Poland written yet. Discussions have appeared so far rather in the form of struggles between parts of the feminist milieu, opposing certain “grand narratives”. Particularly interesting in the case of Polish feminism, is the use of family analogies such as the binary of the mother/adult and daughter/child metaphor to define inner-feminist relationships.

An example of a struggle caused by genealogical grand-narration of “Polish feminism”, was a dispute between a prominent media person, book author and academic feminist on the one side and an influential feminist and gender-expert from the NGO-sector on the other.⁶ The reason for starting an argument about a genealogy of “Polish feminism”, was an article published under the title “Lost between the Waves? The paradoxes of feminist chronology and activism in contemporary Poland” written by Agnieszka Graff for the academic “Journal of International Women’s Studies” in 2003 (republished in 2006 under the title

⁵ J.-F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, Theory and History of Literature*, Vol. 10, Minneapolis 1984, pp. 37.

⁶ None of the expressed thoughts, and also quotes of feminist actors I chose to aid in visualizing my arguments, should be treated either as ultimate or a general critique of the respected activists, as thoughts are always thoughts in progress. Therefore I see more sense in discussing the thought, instead of attaching it as a permanent characteristic to certain people. Because of this premise, when I quote authors of certain thoughts I decided to mention their names just once.

“Different chronology”).⁷ The article became one of the internationally best known academic publications defining feminist chronologies in Poland.

According to the author the article is directed to the American audience, and as such explains feminism in Poland and feminist activism through the lens of American narrations, describing the development of the feminist movement in a generational metaphor of three waves. The academic feminist involved was claiming that Polish feminism has a different chronology than feminism in the USA. She states that contemporary feminism in Poland had no second wave, preceding today’s feminism. In her view not only does feminism in Poland not fit into the waves-metaphor, but also that the resulting Polish backlash does not entertain “Western chronologies”.⁸ Still she decides to apply the pattern of the waves-metaphor to feminism in Poland and states that Polish feminism, which according to her started in the 90^s, has characteristics of both the second wave (premise of legal rights) and the third wave (culture as a main focus).⁹ The article can be also read as an attempt to create a narration, that resists the hegemony and universalization of “Western” chronologies.

Controversy around the article involved flared up mainly because of the applied time frame, placing the beginning of feminism in the 90^s (along with naming certain feminist actors as precursors). The author writes:

“No generation of feminist ‘mothers’ exist for self-proclaimed Third-Wavers to ‘rebel’ against, [...] no generation of the 1960^s and 1970^s preceded this feminist movement; rather, it is the generation of today’s young women that has introduced their own mothers to feminism”.¹⁰

A response to that article appeared in the Polish language in a feminist, non-academic magazine “Zadra” from Krakow, Poland.¹¹ Barbara Limanowska, a feminist activist since the 1980^s wrote:

“I’m not part of the generation of Agnieszka Graff. When she made her first steps in the mid 90^s I have been already been a feminist activist for 15 years. It’s

⁷ For the original text see A. Graff, (I): *A Different Chronology: Reflections on Feminism in Contemporary Poland*, in S. Gillis, G. Howie, R. Munford (Ed.), *Third Wave Feminism. A Critical Exploration*, London 2007, pp. 142–155. Polish translation: A. Graff: *Odmienność chronologia. Refleksje nad feminizmem we współczesnej Polsce*, „Zadra pismo feministyczne”, Kraków 2007, No. 2–4 (32–33), pp. 11–16.

⁸ A. Graff, *Odmienność chronologia...*, pp. 11–16. A. Graff, *A Different Chronology...*, pp. 142.

⁹ In general she argues that Polish feminism shares the goals of second waves feminism, but uses tactics (for example camps) and shares interests (for example in pop culture) of third wave feminism (see A. Graff, *Odmienność chronologia...*, pp. 11).

¹⁰ A. Graff, *A Different Chronology...*, pp. 143.

¹¹ “Zadra” is published by the NGO “Women Foundation eFKA” from Krakow, Poland. See the website “ <http://www.efka.org.pl>.

me about whom Agnieszka writes/or rather not writes – I’m that person she is rebelling against. I’m that person who does not exist. But to make it clear- I do not want to be anybody’s mother”.¹²

If the article “*Different chronology*” would not convey the suggestion, that there is one single “Polish feminism” developing within one time line the reaction towards it might not have been that intense. Questions that arose about issues such as the beginning of feminism in Poland, and the existence and role of different generations appeared to be a major part of the controversy. Even though both authors claim to be skeptical about the mother-daughter metaphor, it still appears in both their reasoning and is used in order to define both a before and an after. The metaphor enables not only the construction of a linear and genealogical view of feminism in Poland, but as certain actors are defined either as mothers or daughters, the metaphor also structures the relations of feminist actors in relation to each other.

As an example of a feminist environment, which was affected by “mothering” can serve informal anarchist-feminist initiatives in the 90^s and beginning of 2000^s, which placed themselves according to plan outside of power centers. A couple years earlier than the dispute described above, in 2001, in the same feminist magazine „*Zadra*”, Claudia Snochowska-Gonzales, a former anarchist-feminist activist, criticized the production of hierarchies within feminism based on methods of action. According to the described hierarchies, activism on the streets is perceived as emotional, and put in opposition to “rational” academic work.¹³ In response, the editors of the magazine „*Zadra*”, asked an anarchist-feminist group for an interview. Without informing the group, they titled the published interview “*Niegrzeczne dziewczynki*” (“*Naughty little girls*”)¹⁴. This title suggesting that the interviewed activists are children and their protest was not necessarily serious, and also positioned the anarchist feminist group in a top-down relation, not only in relation to the editors of the magazine, but as well as in relation to other feminist initiatives and actors presented in the magazine.

Another example for the rejuvenation of anarchist-feminist initiatives, was a meeting held in 2000 at a center of the NGO “Fundacja Ośrodek Informacji Środowisk Kobietych – Ośka” (Women Communities Information Center - Ośka) in Warsaw. At the meeting called “Futurology” in 2000 there were

¹² B. Limanowska, *Zgubione w metodologii*, „*Zadra pismo feministyczne*”, Kraków 2007, No. 2–4 (32–33), pp. 15.

¹³ C. Snochowska-Gonzalez, *Młode? Gniewne?*, „*Zadra*”, 2001, nr 1 (6), pp. 44.

¹⁴ Interview by Anna Nacher with Emancypunx: *Nowa jakość Emancypunx*, „*Zadra*”, 2001, nr 2 (7), pp. 15–17.

informal groups presented and called “new” ones.¹⁵ Among them was “Porozumienie Kobiet 8 Marca” (March 8th Coalition of Women), formed in 2000, but also other anarchist-feminist groups as well, which had already existed for a couple of years. Some of the anarchist-feminist groups presented were founded around 1994, while the Women Communities Information Center, which was presented as “new” was actually established in 1997.¹⁶ The popular practice of describing anarchist-feminists as young or as the fruits of liberal-feminist activism, is a way of defining an asymmetrical center-periphery relationships as well. The descriptions of anarchist-feminists by feminists from the NGO sector, academia or feminists working in the mainstream media reminds us of certain classical oppositions, which are used in other discourses about peripheries and centers, such as the oppositional characteristics of the core and the periphery (according to nineteenth century diffusionist thought) systematized by J.M. Blaut. Seeing as the characteristics not only show the binary of inventiveness and imitiveness, but also adulthood and childhood, they belong to basic center-core dichotomies and they are both present in the feminist genealogical narrations using the mother-daughter metaphor.

MULTIPLYING HISTORY

“That when we reject the single story, when we realize that there is never a single story about any place, we regain a kind of paradise”¹⁷ Chimamanda Adichie 2009

The relativity of history and the possibility of different historical narratives, even if they concern the same event, can be exemplified in the founding myth of the Warsaw March 8th demonstration “*Manifa*” and the making of the group “*Porozumienie Kobiet 8 Marca*” (March 8th Coalition of Women).

The information that is repeated all over, and which appears on recent websites and the representations of the organization, as well as in the media, academic

¹⁵ See Kalendarium Wydarzeń. Ośka informuje, Ośka, April 2000, Vol. V, No. 4 (41), pp. 27.

¹⁶ It should be mentioned, that a part of organizations and agents, which formed the Center, has been around since the first half of the 90’s and some actors have been active since the 80’s, such as Barbara Limanowska (already mentioned in the waves battle), who happened to be one of the directors of the center. Nevertheless – when we count the time-frame of the formal existence of an organization, then the Women Communities Information Center was “new” for the anarchist feminist groups. It is also interesting that the anarchist-feminist groups where presented as “new”, seeing as their street actions and demonstrations had been widely reported by mainstream press, only a couple of years before that meeting.

¹⁷ Chimamanda Adichie “The danger of a single story” http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story/transcript?language=de, access 2.12.2014.

publications or in sources such as Wikipedia, is that the group was formed after a police attack on a gynecological clinic in small Polish town Lubiąsk.¹⁸

Around four prominent, contemporary, media-represented feminists who are usually named as the “mothers” of the March 8th Coalition of Women and the “*Manifas*” (the March 8th demonstrations). Some of them have previously been press-representatives for the march, before achieving an almost permanent presence in the mainstream media. Similar as in the case of the debate about the waves-metaphor, also here are questions pertaining to who are mothers and who has the right to claim herself a mother, have been controversially debated between the circles which were involved in the March 8th Coalition of Women. Even a documentary was made about it, which was never shown in public because of the great controversy surrounding the topic.

In 2009 there was an article published in Poland’s biggest daily newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza* titled “My. Pierwsza manifa” (We. The first *Manifa*), written by two feminists (both public figures). One of the authors works in the television industry, the other was until now the main organizer and a “veteran” of *Manifa*-Demonstrations (the only one left who is still active, among all the people who formed the March 8th Coalition of Women). In describing the founding of *Manifa* it was written as follows in the press-article of a daily newspaper:

“We, in that time, a few women organizations, a few female students, a group of teenage anarchist feminists and a few veterans of the first protests against the abortion ban in the beginning of 90’s. The names of the organizations and names of people we forgot, we will write on a monument of (a) fallen feminist. [...] Whatever can be said, bad or good about *Manifa*, it can be said, that it was a rebirth of street activism of society, which completely died out in the 90’s”.¹⁹

The child-metaphor has been applied in that case, even though none of the participating anarchist-feminist were teenagers and their age was not much different from the age of the authors of that text. Some of the anarchist femi-

¹⁸ See for example <http://manifa.org/>, access 5.11.2014; <http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manifa>, E. Winnicka, *Polskie feministki od 1989 do dziś: Kobiety w rozpędzie*, polityka.pl, 17.09.2011, <http://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/spoleczenstwo/1519544,1,polskie-feministki-od-1989-do-dzis.read>, access 5.11.2014; K. Bratkowska, K. Szczuka, *My, pierwsza manifa*, „Gazeta Wyborcza świąteczna”, 7.03.2009, No. 56, pp. 20. <http://www.krytykapolityczna.pl/Opinie/Bratkowska-Szczuka-My-pierwsza-manifa/menu-id-197.html>, access 5.11.2014.

¹⁹ Original quote: „My” to było wówczas kilka organizacji kobiecych, trochę studentek, grupa nastoletnich anarchofeministek i kilka weteranek pierwszych protestów przeciw zakazowi aborcji z początku lat 90. Nazwy organizacji i nazwiska wypiszemy kiedyś na pomniku poległej feministki. [...] Cokolwiek złego i dobrego o manifie można powiedzieć, na pewno była ona odrodzeniem ulicznej aktywności społeczeństwa, zamarłej całkowicie w latach 90.” in: K. Bratkowska, K. Szczuka, *My, pierwsza manifa...*, pp. 20.

nists had also been taking part in protests against the abortion ban (whom the article in *Gazeta Wyborcza* only refers to as certain “veterans”) The positioning of some as mothers and the positioning of some as teenagers, suggests that there might be once again a genealogical dependency or at least that some initiatives can’t be taken seriously, seeing as they are not implemented by adults.

The “*Manifa*” is also a great example of multiple narrations. I myself did remember the cyclic March 8th demonstration in Warsaw, known later under the name of “*Manifa*”, as an initiative started by the anarchist-feminist group “*Wiedźma*” (Witch), based mainly in the eastern region of Poland, where some members originally came from to Warsaw and had the idea to organize an event in the framework of the “2000 World March of Women” (which was supposed to be held simultaneously all over the world). But due to the fact that throughout the years I was exposed, through hearing and reading, to the dominant popular narrative about the origins of “*Manifa*”, which was completely different from my own memories and experiences connected to the organization, I started to believe that these varied memories were made up by me.

Then, some years ago while searching through my private archive I found an announcement for that meeting in an old bulletin of the “*Ośrodek Informacji Środowisk Kobietych – Ośka*” (Women Communities Information Center – *Ośka*) entitled “*You have 2000 reasons, to join us!*”. The bulletin was a monthly release featuring announcements of feminist and women’s initiatives from all over the country. For a number of years the *Ośka Bulletin* was covering the activities of a large variety of organizations including such diverse groups such as the former state socialist “*Liga Kobiet Polskich*” (the League of Polish Women), *Koła Gospodyń Wiejskich* (Circles of Rural Women), feminist NGOs with actors from dissident backgrounds as members, academic initiatives and even anarchist-feminist activism.

The announcement for a meeting in order to organize an event for the 8th of March was a collaborative-initiative. It included the anarchist group “*Wiedźma*”, which I remembered, but also formal liberal feminist NGOs (established in the beginning of 90’s) such as “*Federacja na Rzecz Kobiet i Planowania Rodziny*” (the Federation for Women and Family Planning) and “*Centrum Praw Kobiet*” (Center for Women Rights).²⁰ At that point in time some “*Wiedźma*” members

²⁰ The World March of Women was initiated by Canadian women rights activists. According to the organizers such demonstrations happened in 161 „countries and territories” on October 2000. The march in Warsaw happened in March 2000. See for example: *A Brief History of World March of Women / Histoire brève de la Marche mondiale des femmes International Women’s Day – 8.03. 2012 / Journée internationale des femmes – 8.03. 2012* pp. 5–8, Québec http://www.dssu.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/a_brief_history_of_world_

started to work for NGOs, while also active with their anarchist groups at the same time.

As those groups made an open call, they created a situation, which enabled people, who were not members of any organization, to take part in the process of organizing (among them the mentioned authors of the “We. The first *Manifa*”). The meeting resulted in the establishment of a wide coalition of organizations and individuals called “Porozumienie Kobiet 8 Marca” (March 8th Coalition of Women). What made the coalition special was the way that feminist NGOs, academics, private individuals and anarchist-feminists living in Warsaw would all come together in an informal group and organize a common project, this was quite unusual. The strength of the event lay in the coming together of the experiences, the individual knowledge, the ideas and attitudes of the various participants that they brought to the platform that was created.

The collaboration and the actual preparation for the event brought groups and feminist circles, together which functioned and operated in different fields and had their own mode of feminist activism, in order to organize a common event. Professional NGOs, which had been formed by women’s rights activists in the beginning of the 90’s, provided infrastructure and finances and also shared their knowledge and experience concerning compliance with legal structures.²¹ The Women Communities Information Center OŚKA shared its infrastructure and well established press contacts (not only press contacts, but also a broad range of contacts with various women’s and feminist organizations and initiatives countrywide). Academic feminists, who were not attached to an organization, found an initiative they could participate in, without being an employee of a professional NGO and without turning into an anarchist-feminist or “street-feminist”. They shared their rhetorical skills and turned out not only to be excellent press-representatives, but also great entertainers. So called “street-feminists” shared their experiences with protestors in public spaces, and more succinctly their ideas for unconventional, visual and theatrical forms of protests.²²

Of course this is again a simplistic picture, and the division drawn between feminist initiatives might be simplistic as well (as we can see in the example of

march_of_women.pdf und World March of Women official website http://www.marchemon-diale.org/index_html/en, last access 7.02.2015.

²¹ Accordingly financed by the NGOs Ośka, Fundacja Centrum Promocji Kobiet, Federacja na Rzecz Kobiet i Planowania Rodziny see: Kalendarium Wydarzeń. Ośka informuje, Ośka, February 2000, Vol. V, No. 1 (38), pp. 16.

²² The term “street-feminism” was used amongst some feminist communities in the 90’s in order to distinguish non-academic, informal feminist activism engaging in public protests such as the campaigns against the abortion ban in the 90’s, the organizing of protests, demonstrations, and also street performances.

“Wiedźma” members), but what I want to mainly convey, is that it was an event, where different paths of activism crossed, knowledge and ideas were shared and new ideas developed. For some this “crossing” acquired a new and stable form that also lasted for a long time, while for others it was just for a few years or a single event. Of course the aim of this paper is not to define the right truth. I rather think both stories, have their “truths” and some more could be added and why can there not be different beginnings, depending on the perspective we include?

But what if we do not multiply the history by adding narrations, but turn the actual dominant narration and its center-periphery relation upside-down? The circumstances that I’m trained and working as an academic enables me to intervene in academic discourses. Such an intervention, when only having a background of activism in informal groups, would have complete different relevance. One way of intervening is the addition of narrations (like the ones about anarchist-feminist initiatives), another way could be the positioning of events and actors in singular time-lines of relevance: What if this article would put the genealogical narrative upside-down and argue, that the claimed margin has been actually influencing the proclaimed core and initiated the beginning?

The March 8th demonstration held in Warsaw in 2000 under the slogan “You have 2000 reasons, to join us!” (Sic!) and “*Manifa*” shared a lot of similarities with another demonstration known as “Take back the Night” organized by another anarchist-feminist group from Warsaw, which took place two years earlier. Similarities can also be found in the atypical format of the demonstration, which was more visual and theatrical in expression and included several stages with street events.²³ It followed in the exact same way as the feminist demonstration organized by anarchist-feminist and punk groups which was held in the Warsaw city center in 1998, and drew several hundred people and enjoyed great media coverage. Another similarity can be observed in the poster advertising for *Manifa*, which showed portraits of women holding tulip flowers between their teeth, just like anarchist-feminists did it at the March 8th performance in the streets of Warsaw in 1999. The anarchist-feminist activists, who had organized the demonstration in 1998, also took part in organizing the Warsaw version of

²³ For the title “You have 2000 reasons, to join us!” see: Kalendarium Wydarzeń. Ośka informuje, Ośka, April 2000, Vol. V, No. 4 (41), pp. 16. For information on the “Take back the night” demonstration against rape and violence against women see numerous press releases and TV news or for example: A. Synakiewicz, *Marsz przeciwko przemocy seksualnej “Odzyskać noc”*, published 10.12.2004, <http://pozytek.ngo.pl/wiadomosc/89663.html>, access 5.11.2014; Flyer by KDP/Emancypunx: *Kobiety zdobywają noc - ulotka 1998 – Emancypunx*, <http://www.emancypunx.com>, published 5.03.2011, access 5.11.2014.

the “2000 World March of Women” demonstration within the “March 8th Women’s Coalition”. For some *Manifa* was the crucial event, a “rebirth of street activism in society”, for others there has never been any break in street activism. Positioning the beginning simply in another spot redefines the narrative, but does not challenge the exclusionary and universalizing principle of the single narrative.

Since for many years the coalition was not a coalition any more in a strict sense as it turned into a separate organization. One of the “mothers of *Manifa*”, who is still organizing the event and dedicated her whole life to feminist protest-activism, said to me in an interview conducted in 2008, that it doesn’t count who initiated something, but who is actually really taking part in organizing something. That is an important point, seeing as it values action, and it also made me think about the remarks of Walter Benjamin’s essay „Über den Begriff der Geschichte”, saying that history is defined by the ones who are present in the present time.

POSITIONING WITHIN CENTER-PERIPHERAL CONSTRUCTS AND THE EFFECTS ON KNOWLEDGE

History-drawing has been criticized from various perspectives. Jenny Gunnarsson Payne, who analyzed Swedish cases of wave-narrations for example, calls to “break with traditional feminist chronologies, and resist reductive generational narratives of feminist movement history”, others try to change the perspective and tell the history from the “peripheries”.²⁴ From a non-white perspective Becky Thomson criticizes how the concept of second-wave feminism produces a normative time-line and (white) “hegemonic feminism”. In which variations are only seen according to political differences, such as liberal, socialist, radical or cultural feminism, while other differences, resulting from classism, racism etc. are not being recognized.²⁵ That is certainly an important point, but not to reflect political differences is also problematic, seeing as differences not only result from being positioned as a certain social group excluded or oppressed by practices of gender, sexual or racial categorization. Political differences, related viewpoints and modes of action might be a reason as well, due to which social groups are positioned at a distance from traditional power

²⁴ P. Gunnarsson, *Jenny: The logics of Sisterhood: Intra-feminist debates in Swedish feminist zines*, “European Journal of Women’s Studies”, May 2012, Vol. 19, No. 2, pp. 187–202.

²⁵ B. Thomson, *Multiracial feminism. Recasting the chronology of second wave feminism*, “Feminist Studies”, April 2000, Vol. 28, No. 2, Second Wave Feminism in the United States, x, pp. 336.

centers, the same as the positioning in certain spatialities, reproducing identitarian social hierarchies which might affect the ability of successful history-politics creation. Meyer, who has examined stories of influence and related claiming of credits through narrations within social movements, states together with Deborah Stone, that relative positions and the power of claimants according to established political institutions and a political mainstream “have a great deal to do with what stories get out, and how they are received”.²⁶

When I described the dispute over the waves-chronology and the beginning of feminism in Poland I was referring to one of the role players as an academic feminist and to the other, as an NGO feminist. That classification is again simplistic, as there might exist multiple identities constituting classifications, although in the above mentioned case the classification refers to the professional occupation of the debaters. Those occupations again place them in a social hierarchy with regards to the ability of knowledge-production and representative functions. “A different chronology” has been published in English, in a well known academic magazine and is frequently quoted. By contrast, the polemic answer which appeared in the NGO-magazine and in a Polish language version, is little known. The response of the NGO feminist towards the text of the article “A different chronology” was titled “Lost in methodology”²⁷. This provocative phrasing quite obviously alludes to the academic context in which the article appeared. The field of activism was a major issue of the conflict.

In order to legitimize her statement about feminism to be born in the mid 90’s, Graff referred to a prominent discussion, which was held within feminist circles and in a feminist periodical magazine, about whether the feminist movement in Poland was existent or not. She wrote: “Today such a debate would be unthinkable [...] feminism is far too visible in the mainstream media to contemplate its own non-existence”.²⁸ Limanowska answered, that this debate started in the 80’s and lasted more than 10 years, and that there must have been a feminist environment in order for such a debate to take place at all.²⁹

It might be taken into consideration, if this discussion mentioned by both actors, deliberating on whether feminism exists or not, can be interpreted similarly to the attempt to explain feminism in Poland through the American

²⁶ See D. Stone, *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making*, New York 1997: Norton, pp. 202 (quote after D.S. Meyer, *Claiming Credit. Stories of Movements Influences as Outcomes*, in H. Johnston, (Ed.) *Culture, Social Movements, and Protest*, Fahrgate-Burlington 2009, p. 207).

²⁷ B. Limanowska, *Zgubione w metodologii*, „Zadra pismo feministyczne”, 2007, No. 2–4 (32–33).

²⁸ A. Graff, “A Different Chronology...”, pp. 144.

²⁹ B. Limanowska, op.cit.

waves-metaphor. Dominant perceptions about feminism (for example that it flows in three waves or that it must possess certain elements, such as a large social movement, mass-demonstrations and so on) might affect one's own perceptions regarding what state of being must be achieved, in order for something to exist "for real". When certain discourses and characteristics are perceived as universal, then the liberation of the own perception from such schemes might be processes which require a long time.

But, there is another aspect emerging out of the debate as well, which brings us back again to differences according to positioning in fields of activism. The media aspect is highlighted in the polemic answer of the NGO-feminist, who writes that the third wave (to which she counts the academic feminist in question, who is definitely one of the most prominent feminists in Poland) is important especially in terms of its presence in the media. The dispute shows another dimension of the conflict as well, which does not only concern feminist chronologies. Both sides do mention the fields of activism of their counterparts in critical terms. The conflict can be seen as conflict emerging because of different positioning as well, and can be analyzed through the lens of a classification, which is based on defining the main field of activism. This field of activism can be placed within a larger social order, which again is defined by the distance between it and traditional spheres of power, such as state institutions, political parties, academia or mainstream media, and also the access to economic resources (for example the possibility to turn feminist activism into a profession, as it is the case with academic feminism, feminists working in media and so on). Academia, as well as mainstream media can be perceived as traditional spheres of power, above all focusing on the professional production of knowledge and involved in ongoing narrative practices. Not only access and presence in mainstream media, but participation in academic production circles as well, seem to have a major impact on successful history-politics.

When we define academic feminism, media-feminism, NGO-feminism and informal feminism as distinct forms of activity, involved in different recognition-seeking relations (academic feminists seek recognition in the academic field, media-feminists aim for media popularity, NGO's whose goal is influencing policy making, seek recognition from state institutions and international organizations and so on), then such categorizations also differentiate the fields of power, where the initiatives operate.

When, like in the cases discussed above, the role players and feminist circles operate in partly distinct areas and the role players are positioned in different social fields, then the periphery-center positioning might lead to a reproduction of general social hierarchies, such as the hierarchy between academics and non-academics, and also for example that between formalized NGO's and

informal groups. The examples show the complexity of marginalization practices, where the spatial positioning in a general social order, enabling more or less successful history politics, also plays a significant role. NGO feminists faced discursive marginalization and were placed in a hierarchy by academia and media-feminist, as well as informal street-anarchist activist groups by formal NGO's and liberal feminists. Peripheralization does not stop on the "periphery".

REFUSING THE CENTER

We could say that every center has its margin, and this margin is a center of another margin and so on. Therefore, a perspective processes of creating centers and margins could be perceived as nearly endless, until we reach the very bottom, where there is no one to be marginalized anymore. But when we follow such a view, then it turns out that the whole world is directed towards an ultimate center, when in actual fact there are multiple references and relationships. Within settings with a multiplicity of relations such a one-directional model of gravity appears to be more than simplistic. That's why it is important to examine the established relationships and its functions in center-peripheral constructs and ask the questions: whether the center is a center at all, or if maybe the center does need a margin in order to become a core?

Differences between various feminist initiatives and thoughts can be shown quite well by examining the attitude towards various power relations, which are defined as either oppressive or non-oppressive. Those differences result in different modes of operation as well. While some attempt institutionalization and integration into current social and political systems, others are dis-integrative, aiming for separation and autonomy.

An example of dis-integrative feminism can be perceived parts of the informal anarchist-feminist movement. Such initiatives developed in Poland in the 1990^s amongst anarchistic punk circles. Anarchist-feminists for example criticized top-down relations, as well as dominating or exploitative relations between all humans and not just in the male-female relationship. A programmatic disintegrative position of certain anarchist-feminist initiatives in the 90^s and 2000^s becomes visible through statements expressing independence from state institutions and academia, a critical stand against professionalization, institutionalization and commercialization. In the case of the mentioned anarchist-feminist initiatives, their publications, describing their own history appeared mainly in do-it-yourself underground publications, distributed in a so-called third circulation, positioned outside of mainstream media and academic production and distribution circles.³⁰

³⁰ Third circulation is name for a Poland wide distribution network which already existed

The programmatic refusal of institutionalization and integration also has an impact in the form of a lack of permanency.³¹

In her study about narratives in social movements Francesca Poletta points out, that while the achievement of political representation and institutional participation might be perceived as an indicator of success, the representatives are often criticized for co-optation.³² In the case of disintegrative feminism, such as anarchist-feminism, such a definition of a movement's success can not be applied, seeing as systemic integration, mediation and political representation instead of the practice of politics in the first person, are contrary to the movement's goals and therefore actually perceived by many activists in terms of co-optation.³³

When defining their margins, centers often assume that the margins wish to belong to the center. This might sometimes be the case, but often we might deal only with an assumed periphery, which actually does not seek recognition in this particular relation. In this case we can not talk about a margin in a strict sense, because the assumed margin is involved in different relations and directed toward different goals (which could mean a different imaginary center as well, in case we use such vocabulary).

in the 80's under state socialism. Third circulation is distinguished from the first circulation (state controlled) and the second circulation (dissident movements such as *Solidarność*). This distinction was described by Mirosław Pęczak (*Mały słownik...*, pp. 96). After the political system changed, the second circulation was legalized and commercial media developed. The third circulation remained underground, as it opposed not only the state-control of communication, but as well the commercialization of communication. In the 80's and 90's Internet was not used widely, that's why third circulation could develop its distribution networks and underground publishing exploded. Nowadays the new forms of communication also have an impact on knowledge production, affecting the power resulting from traditional spatialities of knowledge and their social importance.

³¹ I have written about the here mentioned differences between anarchist-feminism, as disintegrative autonomous feminism and integrative feminism, such as liberal feminism in the article „Integration or autonomy?” (see J. Ramme, *Integracja czy autonomia? (Kontr) kultura na przykładzie działalności anarchofeministycznej w Polsce*, „Stan Rzeczy”, 2 (7)/ 2014, pp. 119–149). Anarchist-feminist environments were related to the so called “alternative scene”, which parts were defining themselves as a “systemic” opposition and aiming at creating a parallel anarchist society. I call such positionings “programmatic”, because when we look besides declarations and aims, at the practices, we will see that, it is not possible to draw such a border. Individual biographies show as well that the fields of activism might cross, or that actors would change their field of activism and political orientations.

³² F. Poletta, *Contending Stories: Narratives in Social Movements*, “Qualitative Sociology”, 1998, Vol 21, No. 4, pp. 434.

³³ See as well J. Ramme, *Integracja czy autonomia?...*, (pp. 119–149). Please note, that I speak here about initiatives the 90's and 2000's and about time periods, when unlike today internet and social media did not play such a role yet.

A spatiality, which has been marginalized by being placed in a center-periphery construct, might even seek separation. In reference to Laclau and Mouffe's concept of hegemony, Tomasz Zarzycki wrote that in such a perspective the center defines the margin based on its own goals. According to Zarzycki, such peripheries are struggling for their autonomy. They are trying to avoid unification and domination by the center. Such peripheries do not struggle for a place in the center, but for sovereignty in the act of speaking about itself.³⁴

When social groups intentionally decide to position themselves as outsiders from the margin this constitutes a conscious choice. Such margins are a challenge for the center, as the existence of a margin, which chooses to step outside of universality, questions the legitimacy of the proclaimed center. Only by the act of refusing to integrate or an exit out of a presumed universality, the center becomes visible as such. Such a margin is not bound and becoming existent through relations directed towards the center, but is put in the center-periphery relation through discursive power. Such margins will proclaim their autonomy, while the center will proclaim the margin's belonging to it. No wonder, seeing as the universal, which became a center, prefers to have margins, which are attached and integrated, so that the universal can remain as such. Symbolic mothering is one of many ways to exercise power by defining others in a genealogical order and in a relation of dependency.

THOUGHTS IN PROGRESS INSTEAD OF A FINALIZING CONCLUSION

When history is not given, but (re)produced in historization discourses, then those discourses aiming to establish universal definitions (in this case for the feminist movement and in general, feminism in Poland), might become also a source of conflict among feminist communities.³⁵ Regarding the particular cases from the feminist movement in Poland I reflected on, there are important factors having an impact on the defining of centers and their peripheries, such as historization processes and recognition-relations.

Amongst feminist activists in Poland, when describing own activities much stress is put on defining the first initiative, the first circle of people, from where it all begun. Myths of beginning and the positioning within a mother-daughter spatiality, defining certain social-political environments and their actors as

³⁴ T. Zarzycki, *Peryferie. Nowe ujęcia symbolicznych zależności centro-peryferyjnych*, Warszawa 2009, pp. 115.

³⁵ Maines states, that narratives are not only potential sites of conflict and competition, but as well as cooperation and consensus (See D. Maines, *Narrative's moment and sociology's phenomena*, "The Sociological Quarterly" 34, 1993, pp.21, quote after R.D. Benford *Controlling narratives and narratives as control...*, pp. 55).

mothers or daughters, function as a peripheralization practice. It can also function as resistance towards peripheralization, seeing as the proclamation of another beginning can be perceived as an attempt to prevent the wipe-out or even a re-ordering of an existing center-peripheral construct.

Arthur Danto pointed out that narratives establish a temporal order and a “cause-effect relation”.³⁶ Symbolic mothering suggests as well that one of the parts is a result of the other which goes along with the establishment of asymmetrical relationships, with the attempts to stabilize a singular narrative order. The symbolic binding achieved through the adult-child/mother-daughter metaphor is also a way to claim a dependency. That dependency as a consequence might affect representation, seeing as a “child” which if it wants to represent itself or its own demands must first justify the right for a “separate” voice and proclaim a difference, legitimizing the need for another voice in case representative functions are already awarded.

According to David S. Meyer “dominant narratives about the trajectory of a movement, or of the origins of a policy, become part of the culture in which movements arise (or not), legitimizing certain kinds of claims, actors, and tactics, while undermining others.”³⁷

In case the movement’s narrative and its proclaimed beginning is bound to a particular individual narrative of a leader, the leader legitimizes its own positioning, within an informal (and possibly flexible) framework of the movement.³⁸ In her analysis of the generation-topos within the German feminist movement in the time frame of the 70’s until the late 90’s, Sabine Hark argues that one of the functions of the generation-concept is denial, seeing as describing conflicts solely

³⁶ A.C. Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of Knowledge*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1968, quote after J. Steadman Rice *Getting Our Histories Straight*: *Culture, Narrative, and Identity in the Self-Help Movement* in: J.E. Davis, (ed.): *Stories of Change: Narrative and Social Movements*, New York Albany 2002, pp. 81.

³⁷ D.S. Meyer, *Claiming Credit. Stories of Movements Influences as Outcomes*, in H. Johnston, (Ed.), *Culture, Social Movements, and Protest*, Ashgate, Farnham/Burlington 2009, pp. 212.

³⁸ For the distinction between 1. participant narratives (telling personal stories of movement-related experiences) and movement narratives (myths, legends and collectively constructed narrations, possible multiple endings and beginnings) see R. D Benford,.: *Controlling narratives and narratives as control in social movements*, in: J.E. Davis (ed.), *Stories of Change: Narrative and Social Movements*, New York Albany 2002, pp. 54. Robert D. Benford as well describes, that movement role players challenge a status quo story, by providing alternative stories, inserting themselves individually or collectively and propose an „alternative approach for what they see as an alternative set of conditions“ (R.D. Benford, *Controlling narratives and narratives as control...*, pp. 55). That was done actually in this paper and is related to the differentiation between collective and singular activism and the premise, that collective activism can hardly have a single story.

as “generational” conflicts hides that these were not only conflicts about power of defining meaning, but also material conflicts about territories and resources.³⁹

When compared with the examples of genealogical narrations related to feminism in Poland, not only defining power might play a major role, but also the positioning itself, as it has an effect on the legitimacy of representative functions and possible social gratification. Such a perspective, where a spectrum of feminist initiatives is proclaimed as a direct results of other initiatives, leads not only to the undervaluation of the work of feminist environments placed in such a genealogical dependency, but also under-valuates collective action. Within the genealogical narrative the particular participant-narrative becomes equal to the movement’s narrative, consequentially limiting a multiplicity of possible ends and beginnings.

Accordingly, in the initial narrations of Polish feminism, the history of “great men” seems to be followed by a history of “great women”. This reminds one quite clearly of traditional history writing, filling pages with stories of kings, generals and presidents, but leaving no place for collective social history and the history of social movements. So in the end feminist history also turns into a history of extraordinary leaders, instead of a history of empowerment and the agency of “regular” people, who acted collectively and provided resources towards a common goal.

There is no doubt there are great individuals sacrificing their lives for social change. On the other hand social change can only happen by means of multiple individual and collective actions. The representation of successful feminist history as a history resulting from the perspective of single role players, avoids the problem of legitimizing the representation of a collective. On the other hand it often results in an undervaluation of the meaning of collective action, which is the core for social change. Even more striking: genealogical metaphors undervalue the effect of historical contexts and structures of discrimination, which might lead to different initiatives emerging simultaneously in order to fight against a certain grievance, without even knowing about each other. This is what happened at the end of the 80’s and in the 90’s: the attempts of the church and later on the new democratic government, run by right wing leaders of “Solidarność” to ban abortion, raised social resistance. Hundreds of new initiatives were formed in order to stop the ban. They included not only new feminist initiatives, but also old women’s organizations such as the post-socialist League of Women, atheist organizations, post-state-socialist or dissident politicians, anarchist groups and so on. But again: feminist initiatives can be found earlier as well, for instance

³⁹ See: S. Hark, *Dissidente Partizipation. Eine Diskursgeschichte des Feminismus*, Suhrkamp 2005, pp. 289.

feminist initiatives by conceptual artists, who were not only organizing feminist events, but who were also part of international feminist networks.

Maybe instead of searching for mothers, as a reason for the appearance of feminist initiatives, these reasons could be found also in hegemonic patriarchal social orders and a specific social climate leading diverse people to similar action?

To think of possible alternative narratives doesn't mean to replace one grand narrative by another, as this would implicate that there can be only one history. Such a perception of history as singular and linear represents a conservative approach towards history itself, which is founded on marginalization and a search for absolute truth. An alternative narration is not something to be subtracted, but something what can be added to the already existing storytelling. That it is possible that even about one "common" event or "thing" a multiplicity of possible narrations can be provided. Those narrations might well shift a core event out of the "center", and yet from a different perspective it might just be one event among others, without having the status of a defining moment. Maybe it is time to abolish universal founding myths and meta-narrations and start to acknowledge diversity and multiplicity instead? But why should we bother about narrations in any way at all? As Marcel Stoetzler and Nira Yuval-Davis noticed, imaginations lie at the heart of all knowledge and imagination is linked to agency.⁴⁰ Definitions of the past affect the present, they prevent possible futures and the future defines the past, so that certain alternatives are not imaginable anymore. In a case where patterns function according to which the histories of social initiatives distanced from power are more likely to be affected by peripheralization, then these affect a political future.

⁴⁰ M. Stoetzler, Marcel, N. Yuval-Davis, *Standpoint theory, situated knowledge and the situated imagination*, "Feminist Theory", December 2002, Vol. 3, No. 3, pp. 321, 324.