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**„Our contribution to the building of life”
The Women’s Movement in the centenary of women’s rights
(Sub-table No. 7)**

During the 6th Congress of Social Pedagogues which took place from 17 to 18 September 2018 at the Faculty of Educational Studies of the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, prof. Wiesław Theiss wondered in his speech dedicated to Helena Radlińska whether the tradition and heritage of social pedagogy are needed and visible. It so happened that out of nine teams (called sub-tables) discussing current social initiatives and movements in Poland, the seventh sub-table team was the only one to put the words of the author of social pedagogy, Helena Radlińska, in the title slogan. And this simple fact of reaching for her texts and drawing inspiration, is already an answer to the question asked by W. Theiss – a positive answer.

Our contribution to the building of life is the title of a paper delivered by Helena Radlińska at the General Meeting of the COKGW in Warsaw in 1937 and published in the magazine „Przodownica” (1937, p. 211–214), an illustrated biweekly paper for rural women (an organ of the Department of Housewives’ Associations of the Central Society of Agricultural Organizations and Associations, published between 1918 and 1939). „When it comes to our contribution to the building of a new life, we must first precisely agree upon what it means,” she said to the listeners. „We? Or we, the women?” And she explained or rather showed how differently one can comprehend the community described by the pronoun „we”: more narrowly or more broadly.

„We – this stands for the closest relatives – parents, siblings, children. But does ‘we’ also stand for those who live with us and feel the same way as we do – or just for a group of friends? Or for all those for whom the sun shines, all those on whom the wind blows? However, she made it more precise by saying: „Now we will be thinking and talking about a group comprised of organized housewives. In this sense, ‘we’ stands for me and you, sister, me and all of you, each of us individually and all of us, united by a common desire”. Radlińska’s words were received by women, rural residents. In addressing them, she took up issues that were both close and distant to them. The latter included citizenship, the exercise of full civil rights. She spoke and wrote about this subject; involvement in a broader dimension than just for household affairs, „peasant thatch”, was an idea which she popularized, among other things, through journalism. In „Poradnik dla Gospodyń Wiejskich” in 1921 she wrote about the resurrection of Poland, about the first generation of farmers in the free Republic of Poland: „Everyone in Poland is a citizen. All citizens have equal rights when they reach the age of 21, all vote in elections, all have equal duties when the Homeland calls for ministry” (1921, p. 85). She returned to the issue of women’s civil rights in the article *The role of woman in social life*, published in „Przodownica” in 1934. At the same time she noted a small interest of women in politics. „It is not political matters that draw women into the wider world, but rather profound changes in economic and social life (1934, p. 1–2), wrote Helena Radlińska.

The reference to Radlinska means not only using the heritage of social pedagogy to show its persistence, the topicality of the idea of education – self-education of adults („mutual enlightenment of women”) and the idea of increasing human forces, forces of „each of us” to act together for the common good. It is also a reminder of an important fact in the history of Poland, which is obtaining of voting rights by women (at the same time as they gained independence of the state). The date coincidence (referring to the year 2018) of: the 6th Congress of Social Pedagogues and the 100th anniversary of obtaining the status of citizens by Polish women obliged to outline the participation of women living today in shaping the reality, building the common good. This was the purpose of the sessions held at the seventh table („sub-table”). The group of participants in the debate consisted of fifteen people, in alphabetical order: Iwona Chmura-Rutkowska, Katarzyna Gajek, Elżbieta Górnikowska-Zwolak, Marta Grzeško-Nyczka, Barbara Jankowiak, Karolina Kmieciak-Jusięga, Agata Matysiak-Błaszczyk, Aneta Ostaszewska, Paulina Rosińska, Dorota Sipińska, Katarzyna Szumlewicz, Mirosława Ściupider-Młodkowska, Lidia Willan-Horla, Ewa Włodarczyk, Maciej Zychowicz. Certainly, the composition influenced the

reported topics, whether signaled or more widely elucidated, approximated as far as possible.

The Radlińska’s voice to women was recalled by prof. of the University of Silesia Elżbieta Górnikowska-Zwolak, PhD. She drew attention to the idea of social involvement (one of the most important ideas of social pedagogy) and the method of its implementation (popularization) by Helena Radlińska. When the latter spoke to the female listeners: „We, who want to consciously build new life, we want a transformation from which everyone will benefit”, not so much did she express the convictions of the listeners, but directed their thoughts to certain paths, awakened the will to act, persuaded and obligated them. „It is not worth bothering for ourselves only, because that would not give us happiness. By bothering for ourselves and others, for the general public, we do so in understanding that whoever sees more clearly and understands more, is more responsible and obliged to act”. This voice from the past was summoned at the sub-table to visualize the participants (in the vast majority female participants) the surprising topicality of Radlińska’s thoughts, but also to see the latest issues in the light of old ones. Helena Radlińska’s message addressed to women, the encouragement to feel like citizens and to get involved in public affairs, was an ordering thought and accompanied the moderators of the debate at sub-table no. 7: prof. Elżbieta Górnikowska-Zwolak and Agata Matysiak-Błaszczyk, PhD.

The discussion on the involvement of women in the life of contemporary Poland, on the actions taken by them, allowed us to see specific problems and formulate questions.

The first problem concerns the identification of the women’s movement, the definition of its character. Can or should it be called feminist? And is the participation of men provided for? The answer to the second question seems to be easier, men are desirable partners and companions of women in their struggle for women’s rights. And the fact that these rights are not only for women (taking into account the importance of their consequences), but also for families and society as a whole was emphasized by Maciej Zychowicz, MA, a PhD student at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. As for the first issue, we decided (without entering into a clarification of concepts) that different forms of the women’s movement are situated both in feminist and non-feminist identifiable currents. And there is no need (or possibility) to unify and create a monolithic women’s movement. What is symptomatic is the multitude, diversity, mosaicism of women’s movements, groups and communities. It was marked by the representation of those at the seventh sub-table.

The second problem concerns representativeness – who has the right to represent whom, or whether those who are leaders actually represent the so-called bottom masses. Iwona Chmura-Rutkowska, PhD from the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań drew attention to this issue, articulating a question she had faced herself: „Whether and when «a lady from the university» can represent regular women, refugee-women, migrants, poor or disabled women? The issue of representation was developed in the topic of leadership, group management, organization, and finally – managerial skills and effectiveness in acting. The topic was taken up by Katarzyna Gajek, PhD from the University of Łódź, referring to the experience of the Łódzkie Dziewuchy Dziewuchom social movement. She noted that in order to be effective in changing reality, it is necessary to organize the community well and make decisions quickly, and this requires the creation of narrower collectives, smaller managerial and leadership organisms. The result may be (and sometimes is) a feeling of exclusion, experienced by other women who are willing to act, from outside the group of leaders.

Another important issue can be raised in the form of a question: should the women's movement take on a political character; is political involvement necessary? The voice illustrating this issue were the statements of prof. Elżbieta Górnikowska-Zwolak and Iwona Chmura Rutkowska, PhD, referring to the event in which they both participated and whose significance for the women's movement is hard to overestimate. It is about the first Congress of Women in Warsaw in 2009, held under the slogan: „Women for Poland. Poland for Women”. Organized (by a small group of female leaders¹) for the celebrations of 20 years of transformation in Poland, it gathered several thousand women from all over the country and from different backgrounds. Since then, it has been held annually², and the initiating event became the beginning of the association under the name of the Congress of Women. Participants of one of its editions were asked to express their opinions on political involvement (transformation into a political movement or party group) and they expressed willingness to maintain their status as a social movement. Katarzyna Gajek, PhD from the University of Łódź pointed out that the effectiveness of action requires political involvement and this is important especially on a local

¹ On the initiative of prof. Magdalena Środa, President of KPP Lewiatan Henryka Bochniarz, wife of former President Jolanta Kwaśniewska, with the participation of a multitude of volunteers. The Congress was a response to an exhibition at the National Museum, presenting the “Solidarity” movement in a one-sided masculine way.

² The 10th Jubilee Congress of Women was held on 16–17 June 2018 in Łódź.

scale. To support her opinion, she referred to the initiative of the Łódzkie Dziewuchy Dziewuchom movement, which was successful thanks to the political involvement of the participants. The effect of free lunches for all children in primary schools in Łódź (from 2019) is spectacular and there is no doubt that it can serve as an example of good practice. The activities of women in local communities bring many changes, not only in the perception of the role and position of women in society, but above all they are a „catalyst” for initiatives in small homelands.

Ideas important for the women’s movement that were listed at the seventh sub-table are the following: dignity, subjectivity, freedom, equality, justice, solidarity, participation, women’s rights, reproductive rights, and the right to free speech. Aneta Ostaszewska, PhD from the University of Warsaw, speaking of „black protests”, quoted the slogans displayed by the participants of the marches: „We want choice instead of terror”, „I think, feel, decide”, „I am not for abortion, I am for choice”, „My uterus is not a chapel”, „The uterus gets up from the knees”, „First dignity, then fertility”, „Revolution is women”.

In this context, important issues such as socialization to silence and the inability to express authentic experiences, as mentioned by Ewa Włodarczyk, PhD from the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, were discussed. She and other panelists: Dorota Sipińska, PhD from Jan Amos Komeński State School of Higher Vocational Education in Leszno (an opinion left in writing and presented by Agata Matysiak-Błaszczyk, PhD), Mirosława Ściupider-Młodkowska, PhD from the Faculty of Pedagogy and Art in Kalisz, drew attention to the sphere of life, which is inseparable for a woman, namely: maternity. The debaters, referring to the literature of the subject, the research carried out, as well as personal reflections, outlined the issue of reconciling professional and maternity roles. They stressed that society, both in the past and today, places much higher the role attributed to women by biology and a strengthened tradition, expecting professionalism in this respect. Meanwhile, the reduction of professional activity or its suspension, due to the assumption of the role of a mother, resignation from previous professional development plans (taking up managerial positions), are reflected in the way of fulfilling the role of a mother, cause frustration. It is particularly painful when personal experiences are confronted with the „sweetened version of maternity” and its fairy-tale image presented in the media (the opinion of Ewa Włodarczyk, PhD). This conflict of roles, so characteristic of modern mothers, those among them who want to realize their potential in the area of professional work, as well as non-professional and social activity, entails huge psychological and emotional

costs. That is why the panelists protested against the spread of a one-sided, untrue version of maternity in the media. Ms Ściupider-Młodkowska, PhD, pointed out that education and socialization should strengthen the value of women without depriving them of their inner strength.

Another problem in this area, that was articulated at the seventh sub-table, was the problem of the constant threat of losing the rights that have already been won, and the need to conduct a permanent fight for their maintenance. Women's rights are the basis of democracy, while Polish women are still not treated as fully-fledged citizens of their country. They have no sense of security, even already established laws are broken or ignored. This issue of fundamental importance for women was raised by Iwona Chmura-Rutkowska, PhD, Agata Matysiak-Błaszczyk, PhD, Lidia Willan-Horla, PhD from the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Katarzyna Gajek, PhD.

Sisterhood and solidarity were mentioned in the discussion about the key ideas for the women's movement. An interesting thing is the distinction between these concepts (bell hooks choose solidarity, noted A. Ostaszewska), acceptance of one or both, treatment interchangeably or differently. How to understand sisterhood – as analogy with fraternity, as solidarity of women or the whole female genus? Or otherwise? The issue requires further reflection. In this context, however, it is worth recalling the slogan: *Solidarity – a great collective obligation for women*, the title of Maria Janion's lecture inaugurating the congress of women in June 2009. The discussion on the terms seems to cover both their meaning and a certain tradition, reflecting the need to build new concepts or persist with old ones or to refresh forgotten ones in order to give them a new life. Probably also subjective aesthetic feelings are important here.

An important issue is identification of the actors of social movements. In the case of the seventh sub-table, it is obvious that we are talking about actresses – women. However, this statement would be far too general and insufficient. One should pay attention to a phenomenon – in the case of women's movements, hidden, undisclosed potential forces are of great importance. They are not fully recognized. One could say that they are sleeping in women, and that women are not aware of their own strength. Female forces reveal themselves through a specific impulse, a positive or negative stimulus, and then women take action, become visible actresses of the movement. And this action can be surprising for observers, who are unprepared and not expecting, as well as for the women themselves. For them, however, it is of incomparable value, it allows them to see each other and hear their voices, it gives awareness and experience of community, union with others who think and feel alike, it liberates a sense of strength, subjectivity and causation.

An example of this impulse was the initiative to organize the congress of women in June 2009. It encountered favorable conditions and several thousand people from all over Poland, who did not know about their existence before, thanks to the decision to come to Warsaw became the actresses of the women’s movement. And the First Congress of Women began a decade of further „self-enlightenment” in various forms. Another impulse awakening the women’s movement, the movement of strong protests, was the initiative to sharpen the so-called anti-abortion law. Aneta Ostaszewska, PhD spoke about the „black protests” of women in Poland, on the events of 3 October 2016, 8 March 2017 and 23 March 2018 („Black Friday”), and the struggle for subjectivity.

In addition to the spectacular actions taken by recognized leaders, or those that emerge during the action (as in the 40-day protest of mothers of adult children with intellectual disabilities), there are initiatives undertaken in smaller communities (for their own benefit), the activities of associations and circles of non-associated persons, outside formal structures, providing support, expressing interest through social media. And finally, those that came to life thanks to these media, such as the Łódzkie Dziewuchy Dziewuchom movement (it grew out of Facebook, has 8.5 thousand „likes”, and was registered in February 2018).

Marta Grzeško-Nyczka, PhD, representing the Arena i Świat Foundation in Leszno, where she and her friend, Monika Kościelniak, PhD from the J.A. Komeński State School of Higher Vocational Education in Leszno talked about women’s social and business activity in the urban environment (Creative Education Arena, including classes for children aged 2 to 12 years; about various types of training, also for foreigners). The foundation’s activities in Leszno contribute to the activation of residents of all social age categories. The implementation of numerous projects in the local urban environment made it possible to identify and minimize some of the problems of the inhabitants of this environment, but most of all it activated the community of the region.

Karolina Kmiecik-Jusięga from the Ignatianum Academy in Kraków (who came to the Congress of Social Pedagogues in a beautiful folk costume) presented an example of women’s movement activists’ actions in a rural environment. Participant of our panel talked about the work of the Circle of Friends of Brzozówka, in the Zielonki commune, Małopolskie voivodeship. Interestingly, the circle was established by women who were not born there, but chose the village as their place of life. They decided to create a structure separate from the rural farmers’ wives’ association, they animate the environment, try to create a local community, organize harvest festivals, a competition for Easter palms, as well as educational activities – a school

for parents and educators. They have been in their environment for 10 years, but as K. Kmieciak-Jusięga admitted, attempts to enlarge the group bring poor results. On the other hand, as she said, it is the women who become housewives in their rural environments and take over power. Currently, there are more female than male village leaders in Poland.

Although the debater spoke of a different structure than the farmers' wives' association, it is worth emphasizing that there are currently about 750 000 women in farmers' wives' associations in Poland – they cultivate traditions, conveying cultural content between generations, and develop civil society. The fact that women belonging to these associations overturn the stereotype of a rural woman as the wife of a farmer is significant as well. Today, farmers' wives' circles are experiencing a renaissance, and the roles of rural and urban women are becoming similar to each other.

The actresses of women's movements live and work in various environments, including the most difficult ones, which few people are interested in. It would not be easy to find for them (active women) a common denominator, besides one thing – commitment to improve the living environment and the upbringing environment. Sometimes their actions are spontaneous, resulting from the need of the moment. Paulina Rosińska, MA, a Dominican nun from Broniszewice, Wielkopolskie voivodeship, talked about one such action – collecting money via the Internet in order to build a house for her wards: boys and men with intellectual disabilities. With their funny video uploaded on the Internet, the „penguin sisters” won the hearts of Internet users, attracted the interest of television and, as a result, collected PLN 7 million (for the construction and furnishing of a house for 56 wards aged from 3 to 65). The of St. Dominic's Sisters has set as its main goal to help the poorest and the most needy. Every day the sisters take care of the children who have been deprived of the warmth of family love. The mission of the sisters is to create a real home for handicapped boys where they can feel important, loved and needed. The sisters provide their wards with decent living conditions.

What actions are taken within the framework of the movements discussed at the congress? – that is another question that the seventh sub-table was trying to answer. Or maybe it would be more accurate to say: the answer was constructed from partial, fragmentary statements of the participants. Generally speaking, it is a multitude of actions undertaken with different audiences in mind, actions diverse in their content, organizational forms, duration, intensity („temperature”).

There are activities of local character, both intended for a longer period of time, as well as those of social campaign character, aimed at sensitizing

people to some problem, e.g. the actions of mothers from Poznań, drawing attention to the inconvenience of moving in the public space: „With a pram through Poznań”; „Move your chair, move the world”; the march of feminist mothers; the protest of mothers of disabled children (referred to by Ewa Włodarczyk). There are attempts to domesticate and to get accustomed to feminism, sometimes in a crazy form; Katarzyna Szumlewicz, PhD from the University of Warsaw talked about „Lolas the Reavers” („Lole Rozbójniczki”) prowling in Olsztyn. Activities are planned and organized in local governments, especially for the benefit of poor families and children (a signal from Łódź), as well as in individual institutions and assistance centers (e.g. Nursing Home in Broniszewice). Socio-cultural activities are carried out (e.g. in the Zielonki commune). A significant part of the activities undertaken by women concerns education, which was discussed by almost all participants of the panel. And the areas of education are diverse; there is education on women’s reproductive rights, prevention of violence, anti-discrimination, sexual education, education on LGBT rights, education on animal rights (Łódzkie Dziewuchy Dziewuchom). There are formal (establishment of associations) and informal activities, especially with the use of social media (Facebook).

As prof. Jerzy Modrzewski said during the congress: „The pedagogization of society is a grassroots process, it is undertaken by society itself, thanks to the forces of women”.

In the reflection on the women’s movement, or more broadly women’s actions, one could also draw attention to the intensity (the „temperature”) of actions, effectiveness (it is worth reminding here that the Congress of Women significantly contributed to the Parliament voting quotas on electoral lists, the postulate of the First Congress was turned into action), the intended direction of changes. So there would be radical movements, with revolutionary potential (feminist movement), moderate and conservative.

Behavioral attitudes and actions of women are part of the overall women’s movement. They should be mentioned all the more so as they are characteristic for the pedagogical environments: teachers, pedagogues, psychotherapists, directors (sometimes parents), those who, by virtue of their profession, have the opportunity to influence the development of girls and boys, women and men. These environments were discussed by Barbara Jankowiak, PhD, and Iwona Chmura-Rutkowska, PhD, both from Adam Mickiewicz University. The former, a pedagogue and psychotherapist, referring to her research on risky behaviors of young women, pointed out that these behaviors serve self-creation, are an expression of searching and building of an identity. Stereotypical perception of women by pedagogues and psychotherapists leads

to stigmatization of girls and condemnation of their actions, and as a matter of fact to inhibition of brave, self-creative behaviors. It is a sign of discord to the diversity of women, lack of courage and inhibition of others when they try to follow their own way of living. In turn I. Chmura-Rutkowska, co-author of the research project and the *Gender in textbooks* report, spoke about gender education and anti-discrimination education, as well as about the estrangement of educators and their burnout in view of the resistance of parents and the managements of schools to which education is offered. About frequent denial of discrimination in school and out-of-school environments, accusations of excessive involvement, oversensitivity and general exaggeration in the evaluation of facts. It is not those who discriminate, but those who defend the Strange who have to explain themselves, she stated.

The last of the discussed issues which were important in the debate, were the means and tools of action available to leaders, activists and supporters of the movements. At the seventh sub-table, „resources” facilitating activities such as the Constitution, other Acts, and especially international conventions were pointed out. Knowing them gives strength to those fighting for a change, and at the same time – as emphasized by I. Chmura-Rutkowska – these documents are still unknown and poorly popularized. Their contents, read in public during demonstrations, arouse lively responses. Knowledge and competences of women, including the ability to obtain EU funds, are specific tools of action. An unquestionable and invaluable resource are the personal qualities of active women, such as creativity, diligence, selflessness, but also determination and civil courage. It is very important to have the support of men, partners, husbands, friends, who are in solidarity with women. The tools used skillfully by the women’s movement are modern media, especially social media. As far as measures are concerned, it should be repeated that European Union funds provide significant support for educational activities aimed at transforming the educational environments. More broadly, Poland’s membership in the European Community (with a common European law) is an unquestionable asset for all those who wish to change in the name of the ideas and values mentioned earlier.

And if we wanted to mention what is missing, it would be, apart from the symbolic layer, which is also significant (e.g. lack of women’s personal models in public space, lack of language forms in the nomenclature of professions and functions), lack of compliance with the law (e.g. the Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, ratified by Poland in 1980), lack of financial resources for the activities of non-governmental organizations and the functioning of institutions and aid institutions for

women victims of violence, lack of sexual education, lack of media support and generally good atmosphere for the implementation of the principles of equality between women and men, justice and solidarity.

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To sum up, it should be stated that the participants of the seventh sub-table, referring to research and their own experiences, showed how the idea of social involvement embodies itself, what is the „contribution of women to the building of life”, what is the condition of the women’s movement in the centenary of obtaining electoral rights by Polish women. The participants of the debate proved the active presence of women in today’s Poland, a variety of activities of high intensity and in many communities. The discussion at the sub-table confirmed our conviction that it is justified to consider the participation of women in shaping the social life. And it is equally justified to work for consolidating in the social consciousness, including the consciousness of women themselves, the importance of their strength. „Let’s dare to be free, let’s get to know our strength” – these are the words of Maria Dulębianka from a hundred years ago. They were invoked in Poznań during the celebrations of the 100th anniversary of Poland regaining independence. Dulębianka’s appeal to women is an incentive that is still needed.

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