

Queer(in)g Poland in the 21st Century: How was it at the Beginning of the Millennium? Introduction to this special Issue on Queer Culture and the LGBTQ+ Movement in Poland

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This publication is a product of *The Impacts of Gender Discourse on Polish Politics, Society and Culture*, the biggest international conference on Polish gender issues outside of Poland, organised by Ula Chowaniec, Ewa Mazierska and Richard Mole and held at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University College London, on 11-12 June 2018.¹ As can be seen from the group photo at the end of this introduction, the conference was very well attended, suggesting that gender studies, LGBTQ+ discourses and feminist movements in Poland are flourishing. It was also a year in which we celebrated 100 years of Polish women's suffrage (hence the #naukaniepodległa/independent education on the banner in the photo from the conference at the end of this introduction). Nevertheless, the actual papers revealed that the mood was not optimistic. The nationalist politics and rhetoric of the governing Law and Justice Party (PiS) has exerted a negative impact on openness towards queer culture and the acceptance of LGBTQ+ rights within Polish society. As we prepared this volume for publication, we followed the discourse surrounding the presidential election in Poland (28 June and 12 July 2020), in which homophobic discourse was employed to appeal to the more conservative section of the population. During the presidential campaign, the LGBTQ+ communities' language and rights were presented as a threat to a healthy Polish society. The most conspicuous sign of this hostile approach was the creation of public 'LGBT-free zones/strefy wolne od ideologii LGBT' in approximately 100 cities and towns in Poland.

The question of queer politics and culture in Poland has been the subject of numerous events at University College London in the last several years. During 2017 several events took place, which discussed gender and LGBTQ rights in a changing Europe and elaborated upon the impact of Brexit on the queer communities from Poland.² Among the invited guests and authors were Izabela Morska, one of the first openly lesbian authors in Poland, who spoke about her research and the situation for queer people in contemporary Europe; the photographer, Hanna Jarzabek, who presented her project portraying lesbian couples in Poland³ and; Maciej Duda, author of a monograph on the Polish War Against Gender (2016), which debates the controversies that surrounded the term gender in Poland. Moreover, London-based Polish-born queer artist, Katarzyna Perlak, presented projects that exposed the conservatism in Polish culture and tradition.⁴ UCL SSEES also organised events on historical and critical Polish queer research, among which was a popular discussion with Łukasz Szulc about his book *Transnational Homosexuals in Communist Poland: Cross-Borders Flows in Gay and Lesbian Magazines*, organized in late 2017.⁵ Hence, holding a large conference on Gender Impacts in 2018 seemed like a natural development following several years of activities and events.

All the above-mentioned events, the 2018 conference and this special issue, which focuses on queer issues in Poland from activist, historical and cultural perspectives, have debated the present, and possible future, importance of the LGBTQ+ communities and their respective ideologies. In particular, they ask the question: 'Which conditions need to be fulfilled for the queer association's slogan "love does not exclude"⁶ to become a reality?' To begin to answer this question, an overview of the history of sexual minorities living in Poland in critical.

Historically, no Polish government has ever introduced a law criminalising sexual minorities. The only such law on Polish territory dates back to the time when the country was part of the Russian Empire (1835), and the law was abolished in 1932 after Poland regained independence – albeit with a delay of fourteen years. During the communist

¹ Website of the conference: <https://impactsofgender.weebly.com> (accessed 15 July, 2020)

The conference was funded by the Noble Foundation Programme on Modern Poland (<http://pomp.com.pl/en/o-pomp/>). It was also supported by the UCL Grand Challenges (<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/grand-challenges/>).

For the details about the conference programme, see also: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ssees/events/2018/jun/sold-out-impacts-gender-discourse-polish-politics-society-culture-comparative> (accessed 15 July 2020)

² The events mainly took place during the 2017 UCL Festival of Culture (5-11 June), organised by UCL. The Polish sessions were organised by Dr Urszula Chowaniec (UCL SSEES) altogether with the qUCL network and the Institute of Advanced Studies at UCL with the support of the UCL Grand Challenges. The list of the events can be found here: <https://cudzoziemki.weebly.com/genderqueerthe-other-europe.html>.

³ Hanna Jarzabek's project: <http://www.hannajarzabek.com/lesbians-much-more-poland-hanna-jarzabek>.

⁴ Project can be found here: <http://katarzynaperlak.com/?p=2121>.

⁵ Overview of the seminar: <https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/ssees/2018/02/28/beyond-borders-sexuality-and-cold-war-on-lukasz-szulcs-book-transnational-homosexuals-in-communist-poland-cross-borders-flows-in-gay-and-lesbian-magazines/>

⁶ Miłość nie wyklucza/ Love Does Not Exclude: <https://mnw.org.pl/en/>

period same-sex relations remained legal but were presented by the regime as ‘a symptom of ‘Western depravity’ and inconsistent with ‘socialist morality’, with the Polish Civic Militia and Security Services often keeping tabs on gay men with a view to using their homosexuality ‘as a means of recruitment or blackmail’.⁷

Homosexuality, however, was regarded as an illness until as recently as 1991, when it was finally withdrawn from the medical register. Currently, Polish law forbids any discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in employment (*The Law of Work, Kodeks Pracy*, art. 11, point 3 and point 3a, 1974). Employers cannot stipulate within job adverts nor within the terms and conditions of employment as to the sexual orientation, ethnic origins, political orientation, religion or sex of employees in job adverts or in the terms and conditions of employment.⁸ Also, on the basis of the Polish Constitution of 1997, Polish law ensures, in principle, that all citizens of the Republic are equal and are protected from any type of discrimination (art. 32, 33). It should be remembered, however, that the draft constitution of 1995 made sexual orientation one of the protected categories but that version was withdrawn from the final draft due to pressure from by the Catholic Church.

Theoretically speaking, the LGBTQ+ community should enjoy full freedom without discrimination in their social, political and private lives. Yet, the actual situation for LGBTQ+ people in Poland is far from ideal. This has especially been the case since the strengthening of nationalist politics in the past decade, coupled with the rise of anti-gender attitudes (where gender has become a ‘bad’ word) and anti-LGBT rhetoric and action, of which the ‘LGBT-free zones’ are only the most obvious example.⁹ In response, Polish gay and lesbian rights activists have become noticeable (as Beata Bielska’s article argues in this volume) and, although LGBTQ+ rights have only been an open issue very recently, there have been debates about the attempts to deal with problems of social exclusion – not only of gays and lesbians but also women, ethnic minorities, old people and the disabled – since the 1990s. Therefore, there has been a constant struggle for queer emancipation in Poland for 30 years with no end in sight.

In particular, the accession of Poland to the European Union in 2004 triggered intense political debate about the place of sexual minorities in Polish society. Nationalist politicians presented the EU’s more liberal position towards LGBTQ+ rights as a threat to Polish values. They also used this issue, in the run-up to the 2005 parliamentary elections, to draw a boundary between the ‘decadent West’ and the ‘traditional East’, with attitudes towards sexuality in Poland becoming ‘a reference point for political self-definition and national pride’.¹⁰ While homosexuality was tolerated in private, there were various attempts to clamp down on manifestations of non-normative sexuality in the public sphere, with Pride marches a particular target (see below).

2005 was, therefore, a symbolic milestone, marking the beginning of greater awareness of gay and lesbian issues in Poland and renewed activity by activists to defend LGBTQ+ rights: this fight-back began with the Equality Parade on 11 June 2005, which contrasted unfavourably with the subsequent failures of the ‘Bill on the Equal Status of Men and Women’ (June 2005) and the ‘Bill on the Rights of Formal Registration for Couples of the Same Sex’ (July 2005) as well as the victory of the nationalist parties in the general election (autumn 2005) and the rise in homophobic propaganda, before ending the year on a more positive note with the marches for equality in November 2005 in Poznań, Kraków and other major Polish cities.

2005 was, thus, also an important year because it was the first time that gay and lesbian voices were heard by the general public and their demands to have their rights guaranteed by law entered into mainstream debates across Poland. Until then the issue of same-sex rights had been neutralised by the discourse of equal rights and liberal politics (as was the case during the presidency of Aleksander Kwasniewski and the centre-left party premiership). The events of 2005, as suggested in an article by Piotr Skuza on the Polish queer movement¹¹, could be called ‘The Polish Stonewall’.¹² As soon as gays and lesbians became more visible, Polish homophobia also reared its head in the form of hate speech and physical violence.

⁷ Tomasiak, K (2012) *Gejerci. Mniejszości Seksualne w PRL-u* (Warszawa: Krytyka Polityczna, p. 20.

⁸ “The Bill of Promotion in Employment and Institution on the Work Market”, “Ustawa o promocji w zatrudnieniu i instytucjach na rynku pracy” 2002, art. 36 and 38.

⁹ Recently published ‘map of hatred’: <https://atlasnienawisci.pl>; see also Joanna Podgórska, Uchwały anty-LGBT uderzają nie w ideologie, ale w żywych ludzi, „Polityka”: <https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/spoleczenstwo/1940618,1,uchwaly-anty-lgbt-uderzaja-nie-w-ideologie-ale-w-zywych-ludzi.read> (accessed 17.02.2020).

¹⁰ Graff, A. (2010) ‘Looking at pictures of gay men: political uses of homophobia in contemporary Poland’, *Public Culture*, vol. 22, no. 3, 583-603

¹¹ ‘Polski ruch queer w perspektywie polityki społecznej’ [‘The Polish queer movement from the perspective of social policy’]: <http://www.problempolitykispolecznej.pl/Polski-ruch-queer-w-perspektywie-polityki-spoecznej,123465,0,2.html> (accessed: 1.08.2020)

¹² An allusion to the event in the Stonewall Inn gay bar in New York in 1969. For the Polish reader the event and whole history of the gay movement was recalled by Jerzy Jaworki who translated many books and chapters on the LGBTQ+ movement, among them: Jerzy Jaworski,

Here we should focus, firstly, on how the Polish Stonewall became possible and trace the roots of the movement and, secondly, on the question of the prospects of achieving a lasting change, starting by challenging Polish patriarchy, heteronormativity and homophobia.

To list all the activities, organisations and happenings that preceded the events of 2005 is well beyond the scope of this introduction but we will focus on a few selected phenomena that made the consolidation of the movement in 2005 possible. If 2005 was a successful year for the LGBT movement, at least in terms of exposure, this can be attributed to the fact that one of the most important goals for its activists in their challenge to patriarchy and heteronormativity was to increase their visibility as well as society's interest in gender and sexual inequality. One of the most important annual events that contributed to the increase of visibility was *Manifa*, organised annually since 2000. In March of that year a group of young women in Warsaw organized a demonstration for women's rights. It was led by an organisation called the *Women's Agreement of March the 8th/ Porozumienie kobiet 8 marca*. The demonstration was called Manifa, from the Polish word for manifestation (*manifestacja*), and was meant to both expose and condemn the discrimination of Polish women, and the silencing of their voices throughout the centuries, and especially during state socialism, when, on the one hand, formal political equality was achieved, but, on the other, gender inequity was drastic and particularly visible during 'the special day' for women, International Women's Day, the 8th of March. Since 2000 a Manifa has been organised every year and it aims to expose the patriarchal discourse deeply embedded in mainstream Polish politics and society such as sexual education, attitudes to reproductive rights and sexual orientation.

Manifa sought to become an artistic expression of the need for tolerance, with people from all walks of life taking part in the event, displaying their solidarity over the issue of women's, gay and lesbian, trans-sexual and bisexual rights. Notable participants have been famous Polish writers and artists, and political activists, such as Izabella Jaruga-Nowacka, Izabela Filipiak and Anna Bojarska. Manifa, however, has never been seen as a serious demonstration by political elites. It has always been silenced by hegemonic language, as Pierre Bourdieu¹³ would argue, and is customarily treated as a joke, a kind of parody of the communist-era celebrations of International Women's Day.

Manifa has nevertheless revealed, through the medium of performance, masquerade and its own jokes, the patriarchal character of Polish politics: Manifa has played an important role in ensuring politicians remain aware that even though the issue of minorities, sexuality and women's bodies are largely silenced, they are present in the social memory. In addition, a government representative was eventually appointed who participated in these Manifas, albeit as a result of pressure from the European Union.

Another important factor that contributed to the presence of queer people and queer messages in the public sphere was the institution of the Plenipotentiary for the Equal Status of Women and Men (*Rzecznik do spraw równego statusu kobiet i mężczyzn*). This governmental position was created on 17 December 2001 and lasted until autumn 2005. The aim of this position was to create and enact anti-discriminatory policies. The first plenipotentiary was Izabela Jaruga Nowacka, and she was followed by Magdalena Środa in August 2004. The creation of this position was related to the process of joining the European Union, and it was meant to lead to the creation of the permanent position of Gender Equality Inspector (*Generalny Inspektor do Spraw Przeciwdziałania Dyskryminacji*).

The Plenipotentiary came under attack from various right-wing groups. The first attack was led by the League of Polish Women (*Liga Kobiet Polskich*), supported by a range of non-governmental organisations. On 13 April 2003, the League of Polish Families (*Liga Polskich Rodzin*) proposed a change to the position with regards to both its goals and its name. The new name was to be the Plenipotentiary for Family Matters (*Pełnomocnik Rządu do Spraw Rodziny*). On the 14th of December 2004 Prime Minister Marek Belka tried to abolish the post and incorporate it within the Ministry of Social Policy, but he changed his mind when Minister Środa publicly denounced the proposed change as a 'blow to the position and rights of women' ('cios w urząd i prawa kobiet') and threatened to resign from her post. The primary goal of the Plenipotentiary was to prepare the Bill for the Equal Status of Men and Women, against any form of discrimination: sex, race, ethnic, religious, opinion, age, and sexual orientation. On 18 June 2005, at the height of the homophobic atmosphere of that year, the Bill was rejected by the Sejm (Polish Lower Chamber of the Parliament, There were 212 votes in favor, 187 against, 1 abstention¹⁴).¹⁵

'Wprowadzenie'. In George Weinberg, *Ludzie zorientowani homoseksualnie w społeczeństwie*, przeł. Jerzy Jaworski, Wydawnictwo Softpress, Poznań 1991, Jerzy Jaworski, *Słowo wstępne* [w:] Richard Woods, *O miłości, która nie śmiała wymawiać swojego imienia*, przeł. Jerzy Jaworski, Dom Wydawniczy Rebis, Poznań 1993, Jerzy Jaworski, *Dodatek: Problemy związane z polskimi przekładami Biblii* [w:] Daniel A. Helminiak, *Co Biblia naprawdę mówi o homoseksualności*, przeł. Jerzy Jaworski Wydawnictwo „Uraeus”, Gdynia 2002.

¹³ See his: *Male Domination, Language and Symbolic Power*

¹⁴ See: <http://orka.sejm.gov.pl/proc4.nsf/opisy/1313.htm> (accessed December 2020).

¹⁵ It is worth quoting the words of Magdalena Środa [Comments on the Rejection of Equal Opportunities for Women and Men Act by the Polish Parliament (7/4/2005 8:10 AM)]: 'The Polish Parliament rejected the draft of Equal Opportunities for Women and Men Act. The

The post of Plenipotentiary for the Equal Status of Women and Men was complementary to the post of Plenipotentiary for Human Rights, a post held at this time by Andrzej Zoll¹⁶, a vocal opponent of feminism and LGBTQ+ rights. The activities of the Plenipotentiary for the Equal Status of Women and Men did, however, inspire various initiatives that ignited debates about women's discrimination, domestic violence, the anti-abortion law, etc.¹⁷ One of the most significant initiatives was the Action 'Let Them See Us'/'Niech Nas Zobaczą', organised in 2003 together with Stowarzyszenie 'Kampania Przeciw Homofobii' / the 'Campaign Against Homophobia' Association. It was a project led by Robert Biedroń, Adam Biskupiak and Marta Abramowicz, as part of a larger campaign against discrimination on behalf of homosexuals. Thirty photographs depicting people of the same sex holding hands were displayed in public spaces. The exhibitions sought to combat social fears and prejudices against homosexuals and bisexuals

The campaign generated considerable controversy, and numerous local mayors refused to give permission to display the posters. Nevertheless, these posters constituted a large step forward in the process of 'coming out', not in the individual sense, but in the sense of bringing the issue of homosexuality into the public domain. It was supported by the governmental body, the Plenipotentiary for the Equal Status of Women and Men, giving the campaign official legitimisation.

An important means of increasing the visibility of LGBTQ+ people were the 'Culture for Tolerance / 'Kultura dla Tolerancji' days, a festival, and the International Day Against Homophobia created in 2004, which was organised for the first time in 40 countries around the world on 17 May 2005 and is now celebrated every year as the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia. Unfortunately, even though the 2005 events may appear to be a very good beginning, these initiatives had to manage without the support of the Plenipotentiary for the Equal Status of Women and Men, as the post was abolished in November 2005 by the new government of Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz. Within his government responsibility for combatting discrimination was transferred to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and coordinated by undersecretary Joanna Kluzik-Rostkowska. She led a new Department for Women, Family and Anti-discrimination (Departament do spraw kobiet, rodziny i przeciwdziałania dyskryminacji), and she has made clear that, as the name of the department suggests, its focus is on family issues and the abuse of women rather than homophobic discrimination.¹⁸

Members of the Parliament, mainly the right-wing politicians, disgraced themselves. This is a disgrace for Poland. We are the only member of the European Union without the act that supports equal opportunities and counteracts discrimination...' (Written by Magdalena Środa, Polish Plenipotentiary for Gender Equality). *Contributed by Agnieszka Mrozik, National VAW Monitor for Poland.* For further references see: See also: http://www.geq.socjologia.uj.edu.pl/documents/32447484/80907944/WP2.2Warat_gender_equality_in_Poland.pdf (accessed 12.12.2019).

¹⁶ Andrzej Zoll was the Plenipotentiary until March 2006.

¹⁷ The Plenipotentiary co-operated with the following LGBTQ+ organisations: Kampania Przeciw Homofobii, Stowarzyszenie Lambda Warszawa, ILGCN Polska, Towarzystwo Młodych i Wolnych, "TOLERSEX", Amnesty International - Grupa LGBT, www.mojeprawa.info.

¹⁸ In the interview Joanna Kluzik -Rostkowska made the new priorities clear:

Do you intend to cooperate with homosexual organizations which help the victims of discrimination?

First of all, I would like to know that exact scale of the discrimination of sexual minorities. I recently asked the office of the Plenipotentiary to give me details – how many people reported any problems and what these problems concerned. It turns out that information on this matter is very small, even though the office is the perfect place for these reports. When there was a Gay Parade in Warsaw, I said that in fact Warsaw is probably the least homophobic city, because there are many clubs here. I also publicly declared that I will help anybody who reports having been a victim of homophobia and nobody came. I believe that this problem most likely concerns mainly small towns and villages.

Maybe people who have been touched with homophobia refuse to seek help because of their fear of further discrimination?

I would like to examine the real level of discrimination. The equality of all citizens and the prohibition of discrimination is stated in our Constitution, so surely there are reasons to do something, but first let's define the situation.

Reports on discrimination have been made by Lambda Warszawa and Kampania Przeciw Homofobii.

I have read these reports and they clearly state that most homosexual people do not feel discriminated. I don't believe that discrimination does not exist and if anybody feels touched by it, then I respect that. However too much attention is being paid to this problem, compared to for example abuse in the family. The difference is that victims of family abuse do not organize parades. That is the rule of democracy – he, who shouts louder, is heard. If you asked me if I am an advocate of gay parades, I would say no, because in my opinion these parades only involve both sides of the conflict and cannot help a person discriminated in a small town.

Are you a feminist?

If you asked me whether men and women are treated equally, of course I would say no, and facts make this quite clear. Women are better educated, and yet receive smaller pay. What differs me from feminists is that I am not an advocate of abortion for request. I am of this opinion not because I am a conservative, but because of my experiences. When I was about 19 or 20 years old, abortion was legal and many of my friends had an abortion in fear of telling their parents about their pregnancy. Later they went through a lot of pain. On the other hand, I know some women who despite of these same reasons contemplated abortion yet decided to give birth and their children are adolescents right now. What's more, today telling parents about one's pregnancy is not such a problem anymore. That is why I believe that abortion for request may bring a lot of pain. [the highline by U.CH.]

Equality Parade

On 11 June 2005 the Equality Parade (Parada Równości) took place in Warsaw. A few months beforehand, the Mayor of Warsaw, subsequently the President of Poland, Lech Kaczyński, decided to ban the march. Despite the ban, people decided to carry on with the parade. The ban had the additional effect of transforming the parade from one which focused solely on the rights of LGBTQ+ people into a march which was also about the basic democratic right to demonstrate. It is worth mentioning that the first parade had been organised in 1998 and was held again in 2001 with about 300 people taking part. Each year the number of participants grew and by 2004, having attracted several thousand participants, the parade had already become a topic of media discussion. The banning of the 2005 parade by Lech Kaczyński, however, made it socially visible, in the sense that it broke the silence around rights for gays and lesbians, which had been previously ignored by the media.

In 2005 approximately 2,500 people took part in the parade. Nevertheless, the ultra-nationalistic Group All-Polish Youth / Młodzież Wszechpolska tried to stop the demonstration with a small group of 40-50 radicals. They shouted “deviants” at the demonstrators, they threw eggs, bottles and stones and they lay across the streets in an attempt to stop the march. Finally, in a gesture that expressed their feeling of defeat, they decided to organize their own action: ‘The Parade of Normality’.

By analysing the media discourse which accompanied the parades, we notice that it was often dominated by talk of ‘democratic rights’ rather than the rights for LGBTQ+ specifically. The parade was even compared to the fight for freedom by the Solidarity Movement, which made the parade more of a general political statement (in the sense of being against the Kaczyńskis but not necessary with, and for, LGBTQ+ people).

In autumn 2005 Jarosław Kaczyński’s party won the parliamentary election with his party Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Peace and Justice), which was economically left-wing, but socially on the right: a mixture which has ensured its continuing political success. A month later his twin brother Lech Kaczyński became president. The political scene since then has been dominated by the right and central national parties of PiS, Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska PO), and the nationalistic Polish Family League (Liga Polskich Rodzin), and peasant Self-defence (Samoobrona).

Despite the nationalistic political mood, a series of LGBTQ+ parades were organised in Poznań, Kraków and Łódź, although the parade in Poznań was also banned. Nevertheless, upon reflection, the critical achievement of these parades was that they achieved their goal of prompting a debate about LGBT rights; uncovering hidden homophobia; and making people aware of the actual situation in Poland.

Happenings, Symbolic Activities and Publications

The first years of the millennium were also marked by artistic activity, which can also be seen as a symbolic change in societal consciousness. In July 2005, in Suwałki, as a protest against the growing homophobia in Poland (the failure of the Bill of Magdalena Środa, attacks on parades etc.) some women organised a marriage between two women. It was completely symbolic, because it did not have any legal consequences (homosexual couples have no right to get married in Poland), but it expressed the level of social frustration, and at the same time through the medium of parody it revealed the absurdness of Polish homophobia. The wedding ceremony was organised by The Informal Group The Sister Street / Grupa Nieformalna Ulica Siostrzana, and its purpose was to mock homophobia by parodying the wedding vow:

I, Magda, take you, Monika, to be my wife. I promise to:

- bring you coffee in bed once a week,
- love you even when you are tired,
- not leave you until the potential divorce,

And that we will live long and happily¹⁹

From: Stop Violence Against Women. A project by Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights: http://www.stopvaw.org/We_cannot_move_back_to_the_XIX_century_-_an_interview_with_Polish_Under-secretary_for_Women_and_Family_Matters.html (the link is currently unavailable, here from the private archives from 2005).

¹⁹ „Ja, Magda, biorę sobie Ciebie, Moniko, za żonę, i ślubuję Ci:

The parade in 2005 was the catalyst for a debate on homophobia in Poland. Many publications and initiatives that, up until that point, had not received any attention, became popular and widely read. Among the most important publications that need to be mentioned, and which contributed to the modern queer library in Poland are: the first Polish lesbian magazine, *First Fury / Furia Pierwsza*, published between 1997-2000, where the first lesbian-only, feminist articles and debates were published; sociological studies about homosexuality *The Parameters of Desire: Culture of the Queers and Homophobia/ Parametry pożądania: kultura odmieńców wobec homofobii*, edited by Tomasz Basiuk, Dominika Ferens and Tomasz Sikora, Universitas, in Krakow in 2006; Agata Engel-Bernatowicz and Aleksandra Kamińska's book: *Coming out. Revealing the Psycho-sexual orientation – invitation to dialogue / Coming out. Ujawnienie orientacji psychoseksualnej - zaproszenie do dialogu* (Warszawa 2005). Another important study was published in Kraków in 2005 and edited by Katarzyna Slany, Beata Kowalska and Marcin Śmietana: *Homosexuals. Interdisciplinary perspective/ Homoseksualizm - perspektywa interdyscyplinarna* as well as a book *Polish Homophobia / Homofobia po polsku* by Zbyszek Sypniewski and Błażej Warkocki (Warszawa 2004). In the literary scene the book on queers in the late communist Poland by Michał Witkowski *Lovetown/ Lubiewo* (Kraków 2005) was a revolutionary phenomenon in Polish literary discourse on queer identity.

In 2006 a group of queer theory scholars created the Internet-based academic journal *InterAlia*. Its editors - Tomek Basiuk, Dominika Ferens, Marzena Lizurej and Tomek Sikora - organized a series of annual conferences devoted to queer theory between 2000 and 2006. LGBT culture is also promoted by numerous festivals, for instance the Culture for Tolerance Festival in Krakow, the Queer Film Festival 'A million different loves!?' in Łódź, The Festival against the exclusion of Gays, Lesbians and Friends in Wrocław, Queer Fest in Torun, and the Festival of Rainbow Families in Warsaw.

However, the debate on LGBT rights had two sides. The parade, or rather, parades of 2005 also aroused homophobia in Poland (which, of course, had always been there but not expressed often in the public domain) leading to the emergence of openly-homophobic publications, organizations, and the aggressively-homophobic stance of the current government.

Opinion Polls

As a reaction to the visibility of homosexuality in Poland, on 1-4 July 2005, the Polish Centre for the Social Opinion Research (CBOS)²⁰ conducted an opinion poll on the level of acceptance of homosexuals in everyday life in Poland. Only 16 % of Poles declared that they actually know any homosexual person, and 83 % were convinced that there were no gays or lesbians in their circles. 72 % of Poles were against marriages between people of the same sex, whereas in 2001 only 69 % of Poles were opposed to such marriages. A significant majority of people were against the adoption of children by homosexual couples - 90 %, while 79 % of the respondents thought that lesbians and gays should not show their lifestyle publicly, and 74 % were against gay and lesbian demonstrations.

This opinion poll shows the general mood in Poland in 2005. It does not, however, necessarily mean that the level of homophobia is that high; rather, it likely reflects the level of ignorance on these issues, as shown by the claim by most respondents that they had no knowledge of . LGBTQ+ people. On the one hand, people fear what is alien to them, and on the other, homosexuals might behave in a homophobic manner in a homophobic country, in order to hide their own homosexuality. Finally, this homophobia was accompanied by strong nationalistic and Catholic propaganda, which presents the traditional family with children as the bedrock of the nation.

Lesbian visibility case

15 years later, when we look into LGBTQ+ politics, things seem to be considerably worse. For example, how visible are lesbians in the Polish public sphere? At the end of September 2018, one of the most important online platforms, a feminist foundation, FEMINOTEKA, initiated an online campaign to increase the visibility of lesbians in Polish public debates and life. The initiative was entitled: Lesbian Inspiration/Lesbijska Inspira²¹ - a Manifesto against the complete invisibility of lesbian issues, personalities and themes. The initiative was met with the repeated argument that it is the

-
- raz na tydzień przynoszenie kawy do łóżka,
 - i że Cię będę kochała nawet, jak będziesz niewyspana,
 - oraz że Cię nie opuszczę aż do ewentualnego rozwodu.

I będziemy żyć długo i szczęśliwie." From the website: <http://ul.siostrzana.free.ngo.pl/falrelacja2005.html> (currently unavailable)

²⁰ CBOS: http://www.cbos.pl/EN/CBOS_EN.HTM

²¹ <http://feminoteka.pl/lesbijska-inspira-manifest/>

responsibility of lesbians to do something about it rather than with any kind of show of solidarity from others in society. The first response to the Manifest was the creation of a butch character by the artist Beata Sosnowska (<http://feminoteka.pl/lesbijska-inspira-beata-sosnowska-superprocenta-2/>). In the few drawings the character both tells how she is present everywhere (as lesbians can be everywhere, both on the left and the right side of political arena), how she wants to do everything that other people do, and how often she is rejected - also by other lesbians. Nevertheless, she is determined to claim herself as being 100% human being (hence her name Stuprocenta, the feminine version of “sto procent”, 100 %).



The figure here says:

1. As a cartoon character I wanted to take part in this social action: 1 % (of tax) for one of the LGBT organisations, and you know what?
2. I almost ceased to exist, they did not want me because I conform to the stereotype of what a lesbian looks like....
3. Because I am big, with boobs, and wear a checked shirt! You... know, what I mean...
4. BUT I AM JUST LIKE THAT....
5. My name is Onehundredpercent and I am 100% real.

The manifesto and Beata Sosnowska cartoon were the result of a recent article (similar to a set of interviews/statements) with leading lesbian figures in Polish public life (though still invisible figures and known only by “wtajemniczonych” (the informed), such as other activists or academics working on LGBTQ+ issues or others engaged in social or scholarly debate about lesbians). In these interviews the authors openly pointed out the marginalisation of lesbians in both homophobic discourse and LGBTQ+ discourses. The titles of these interviews included this set of statements: “Why there are no lesbians? / Dlaczego nie ma lesbijek”, and for the online version: “Men, make some space for us”/ Faceci zróbcie miejsce...”²² already expose the main political argument: straight or gay, the world is still straight and masculine. The fact that Polish lesbians feel marginalised even within the LGBTQ community points to the problem with identity politics at large: its proneness to fragmentation, to what Freud described as the narcissism of small differences.

²² <http://replika-online.pl/faceci-zrobcie-miejsce/>

Queer Histories

The queer history of the PRL, Polish People's Republic (the Communist Poland), has been investigated fairly well. In Poland one of the key publications was Krzysztof Tomasiak's book *Gejere!* (a word play with the world gay and PRL), which provides a good overview of LGBTQ+ stories during communism. In English, there is a monograph *Transnational Homosexuals in Communist Poland* by Łukasz Szulc published in 2020. It includes a case study of queer publications in 1980s Poland and gives an overview of LGBTQ+ history in Central and Eastern Europe juxtaposed with various myths regarding the construction of the East and West blocks, or rather the myths of "eastern/ness" or "western/ness" as seen from the queer perspective. In both of the publications the police's anti-gay campaign of November 1985, under the code-name *Hiacynt* (Hyacinth, a reference to the lover of the God Apollo in Greek mythology), marked an important time in Polish gay history. It was an organized campaign aimed at collecting data about all men suspected of having relationships with other men, the so-called 'homosexual element'. As a result of this action, men were dragged to the police station from places of work, homes, universities, bars, and train stations, to be interrogated and forced to sign statements about their homosexuality. Now all the documentation is kept in the so-called "pink folders", a catalogue of about 11 thousand people in the National Memory Institute (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej). The official excuse for this campaign was that actions were taken in order to increase 'social security against the criminal element' and against the spread of the AIDS epidemic (which is of course a symbolic link towards homosexuality being perceived as an illness that breeds other illnesses). What is interesting here is that this milestone in Polish queer history is intertwined with the actual, though not formal, criminalisation of homosexuality in a country where officially homosexuality was de-criminalised since 1932. The fact that this semi-legal action was practically possible can be traced to the non-democratic nature of the state socialist system in Poland: the country's post-war situation, the strength of control of central government institutions, etc. Although based on human suffering, the fact that now we have a mine of information about male homosexuality in Communist Poland leads to the conclusion that the criminalization of homosexuality, paradoxically, makes historical research on non-heterosexual desires and relationships essentially possible. Despite the lack of any formal homophobic law, those with alternative gender and sexual identities were destined to lead often impossible-to-uncover "underground" lifestyles and to use subversive strategies of communications that were almost impossible to de-code.

This in turn leads us to the core of the invisibility of lesbians (as actual people), lesbian themes, motives and discussions under communist Poland and broadly communist Europe. It is not only a fact that the figure of a lesbian women is culturally still frightening, both for heterosexual women and men. It is also a lack of information that has made lesbian history particularly difficult to research; lesbian themes, unless depicted in literary text, poems (already more difficult to depict), art and diaries, are often forgotten, or left on the level of social gossip and unserious plot. Female homosexuality – because it has rarely been criminalized – has with regards to culture been treated as an unserious matter or a matter of whims. LGBTQ+ people's rights and movements, LGBTQ+ security and the right to a peaceful life is not a whimsical matter, especially in a country where some cities and counties claim to be "LGBTQ+ free". This is a matter of democratic rights and issues and by putting together a series of articles that both show the situation and celebrate the language and methodology of queer studies we show the impact of free and emancipatory thinking. The visibility of lesbians in the public sphere is the only exemplary issue that has been unsolved even during the best time for LGBTQ+ politics in post 1989 Poland. There are, however, many more issues to be uncovered and explored from gay history and LGBTQ cultures, and this process appears to be the best way to deal with the current homophobic backlash.

Articles in this collection

This issue is a collection of articles on activism, art and culture as a part of LGBTQ+ history in the most recent academic scholarship. Beata Bielska in **Outcomes of the Polish LGBT* Movement** presents the political goals and outcomes of the Polish LGBTQ movement, referring to civil unions, marriage equality, adoption, homophobic and transphobic hate crimes and the Gender Recognition Act. In his article **A Queer Construction of Identity in *The Memoir of Stefan Czarniecki* by Witold Gombrowicz** Błażej Warkocki takes us to a different area of research, to literature, and proposes a close reading, informed by queer theory, of Witold Gombrowicz's short story. Contemporary film and the representation of homosexuality and queer identity are at the heart of the Rafał Morusiewicz's article **Idiosyncratic Ambiguities of Queer Experience: Instances of Non-heteronormativity in Polish Cinema in the 2010s**. The article presents an intersectional study of manifestations of non-heteronormativity in contemporary Polish cinema of the early 2010s. Grzegorz Niziołek's **Gay Performance in Pre-Emancipation Times** offers a case study of the theatrical activity of Erwin Nowiaszak (from the end of the 1960s to the beginning of the 1980s) and suggests that theatre became the most important institution that enabled the formation of Polish male homosexual culture during that period. And in his article **Portraying Ali: Queer Eye on the Black Guy** Nicholas Boston takes us to the art-historical discourse and

examines a portrait belonging to a series titled “Ali (2015-2017)” by the contemporary Polish queer artist Karol Radziszewski. The portrait is a representation of August Agbola Browne (1895-1976), a Nigerian-born Polish citizen, the only known black insurgent in the Warsaw Uprising (Aug.1-Oct. 2, 1944), whose code name in the resistance movement was ‘Ali’.

These articles that remind us about gay culture and LGBTQ+ movements in Poland seem to be more important now than ever, when constitutional rights are threatened and anti-feminist, anti-gender and anti-gay statements are generally accepted by the public discourse. We hope to contribute with this publication to the ongoing academic protest against contemporary homophobia. And when thinking about the importance of talking, networking and publications, we are reminded of an anecdote regarding the National Organization of Women in the US. After the NOW’s riots during the governmental debate on the side-effects of the contraceptive pill in the early 1970s, the director of the FBI, J. Edgar Hoover, issued a directive to conduct an investigation and to gather sufficient material to determine any possible threat that NOW represented. The infiltrators or the informants wrote back, stating: ‘Oh, that’s nothing. They are just talking. They are not doing anything dangerous.’ But as one of the women who remembered the time and the NOW achieved said (in the 2015 Mary Dare film: *She is Beautiful When She is Angry*): ‘the irony is that they didn’t do anything dangerous by doing something dangerous because telling the truth and talking is very revolutionary.’

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The participants of the conference: The Impacts of Gender Discourse on Polish Politics, Society & Culture June 12, 2018.