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Nation, gender, pop culture. Nationalistic constructs of gender and sexuality in pop cultural attire

KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT

The paper is a short theoretical summary of relationships between the notions of nation, gender and sexuality in a nationalistic discourse. It is also an attempt at applying this knowledge for analyzing selected artifacts of pop culture. In the first part of the paper, theoretical and research findings on the constructs of gender and sexuality in a nationalistic discourse are presented. In the second part these findings are used for a discursive analysis of gender and sexuality constructs in selected songs / stage acts presented at the Eurovision Song Contest 2014 and a pastiche cover version of one of them.

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Introduction

Many researchers point out the significance of pop culture for the identify processes of adolescents and postulate that pop culture should be included among the pillars of identity formation processes in the case of young people, including education and socialisation (Melosik, 2013; Jakubowski, 2014; Jakubowski.pdf). Therefore, pop culture can be explored as an element of the discourse of education.

The term “discourse” has several different meanings. In this paper, I use it in two senses. When I speak about the discourse of education, I mean “a set of views expressed in a given field or discipline of knowledge (...) or a set of views voiced in a discussion regarding the given topics and issues”(Stasiuk, 2003, p. 33). When I refer to the nationalist discourse, I assume that a discourse can mean a set of

“propagated concepts and ideas” (Van Dijk, 2001, p. 10). Simultaneously, I wish to underline that the very use of “discourse” in this paper indicated the adoption of the social constructivism assumptions, i.e. that social communication as well as the transmission and interpretation of meanings construct the social reality. A discourse within the meaning of the “propagation of concepts and ideas” has an underlying drive for hegemony and the conquest of the symbolic space, but it is also vulnerable to deconstruction (Mouffe, 2008, 2015; Jaskułowski, 2012, p. 54).

The basic research strategy in a study on discourse is the extraction and interpretation of meanings that are attached to notions referred to reality by particular social agents in specific historical situations and contexts, often to establish a hegemony. Meaning is generated within social communication and it can also be cancelled, abolished and replaced with an alternative meaning within that communication. It does not follow, however, that it is absolute individualism (solipsism) or voluntarism in the sphere of signification. The point is, in fact, to accentuate the inter-subjective and communicational nature of reality in which we all live. A discourse of education is a set of ideas that function in relation to the formal and informal educational reality. It is internally diverse and intertwined with historical, ideological and political contexts. I define the nationalist discourse as one of the ways to conceptualize the social reality where the central category is a specifically construed community called nation. A nationalist discourse also includes affective (emotional) content expressed in the conviction that one form of social organization that is accidental from the perspective of a long history, i.e. nation, is the only and the best possible form.

The positive national sentiments of young Poles have been intense for years and cannot be easily related to any current political events that could be interpreted as a threat to the existence of the nation. It was already in 2005 that K. Koseła wrote the following summary of a study regarding patriotic attitudes among young people: „The zealous patriotism of young Poles is interesting, because it is difficult to show who inflames and fuels it. The weak relation with the family, school and peer group features suggests that young Poles get the national enthusiasm out of the air, i.e. basically from everywhere, which means they are immersed in a space which pushes nationalist content on them (...). There is no generation gap or any potential sources of generational conflict (...). As regards minors, their nationality is an obvious and non-problematic feature. (...) The higher personal importance of national identification than any other identifications results in the readiness to stand up for the nation, not for the regional or European community” (Koseła, 2005).

Adopting a long-term perspective, it seems odd that national divisions and reproduction of national identities are so high-spirited in the era of globalisation and the emergence of supranational communities and institutions. Contrary to the 1990s optimistic post-modern announcement of the end of history, liquid modernity, nomadic identity of contemporary societies and the gradual decline of the nation state, the nation-building processes have not been weakened (e.g. Scotland, Catalonia and Kurdistan) and national divisions are blooming. Perhaps one should look for root causes (among others) in the fact that pop culture, though generally conceived as contradictory or even contrary to national identifications (Melosik 2013), tends to include some nationalist content within its local manifestations.

The subject of this paper covers the constructs of gender and sexuality in a nationalist discourse and their manifestations in pop culture. A nationalist discourse construes gender and sexuality in a specific, unequal way. It forms a challenge to women emancipation movements and LGBTQ, since it contradicts the drive for breaking away from cultural heteronormativity, while this very drive is one of the conditions for the establishment of a more equal social order with respect to gender.

The first section of the paper presents theory and research regarding the constructs of gender and sexuality in a nationalist discourse. The second section uses the above findings for a discursive analysis of selected pop culture artefacts with respect to their constructs of community, gender and sexuality. In the final part, I interpret the results of the analysis in the context of the dominant socialising messages and the essential features of the educational discourse in Poland after 1989.

I. Construction of gender and sexuality in a nationalist discourse

The relations between nation and gender fit into the trend of intersectionality which is a relatively late addition to gender studies. When theories and research of women's studies and gender studies were emerging, the assumed point of reference was the universally existing system oppressing women (patriarchy) and the general categories of "man" and "woman" were used in analyses of the universal mechanisms of the gender difference. At the later stage of gender theory and research development, the very understanding of gender evolved and more advanced and sophisticated studies were published with respect to the relations between gender and many other factors such as social class, race and ethnicity. In general, gender is

no longer perceived as a feature of an individual/identity (depending on theoretical assumptions it can be an ascribed feature or a feature resulting from cultural norms), but as one of the social structures that is “embodied” as a structure of inequality in various spheres of social life. “Gender is a structure of social relations that focuses on the sphere of reproduction and a set of practices that transfer the bodily differences in the genital system to the sphere of social processes” (Connell, 2013, p. 31). In real life, diverse structures of inequality intertwine and reinforce each other and, “despite many reasons for which gender should be treated as a separate structure (...) if we want to comprehend human life, we must remember that gender relations always happen in a specific context and interact with other elements of the social life dynamics” (Connell, 2013, p. 150). Ethnicity or nationality can be such an element. “Interrelations between gender, ethnicity and contemporary nationalism are thoroughly studied in Nira Yuval-Davis’s *Gender and Nation* (1997). The importance of these issues has been growing since globalization became the focus of attention for politicians and the public opinion” (Connell, 2013, pp. 81–82).

The academic historiography, traditionally engaged in the national matters, hardly ever considered the gender category or perspective in its studies. The explanation might be, as suggested by M. Bobako, the revolutionary or revisionist potential of the gender category for all historical narratives. Of course, this potential results from the context of constructivist epistemology. The application of the gender category to history aims to reinterpret the historical narratives established in the academic historiography. Inevitably, these reinterpretations reveal the implicitly accepted value hierarchies and related domination systems which are embedded in the European culture and particular national traditions. Therefore, by definition, a history that includes the gender perspective is revisionist (Bobako, 2005, pp. 264–265).

The studies on how a nation or, to be precise, a nationalist discourse construes gender, femininity and masculinity, and how it generates gender inequalities are carried out mainly by researchers for whom the gender category comes first and foremost (see: J. Acker, 2009; J. Scott Wallach, 2011; F. Anthias, N. Yuval-Davis, 2009; M. Janion, 2006; A. Graff, 2008; A. Mrozik, 2012; W. Grzebalska, 2013).

I conceive a nationalist discourse as the speech (language) manifestation of all aspects related to nation, national identity, the idea of nation etc. The adjective “nationalist” has no value-generating connotations and it simply refers to one of the key projects of modernity dating back to the 19th century. A nationalist discourse is not equivalent to nationalism, Nazism or fascism, though these are extreme manifestations of a nationalist discourse. A nationalist discourse also cov-

ers a moderate attitude of approving one's nation, i.e. patriotism. A. Mroziak argues that nationalism is "a discourse that defines a community which defines itself as a nation" (Mroziak, 2012, p. 112). Similarly to other early modernity projects, e.g. liberalism or socialism, nationalism also postulates (promises) emancipation (liberation). However, this emancipation is not promised to an individual/citizen (liberalism) or to a subjugated social class (Marxism), but to a specifically construed community, i.e. the nation (Walzer 1999; Szacki, 2002). As expressed by the expert researchers of nationalist discourses (Anderson, 1997; Gellner, 1991; Hobsbawm, 2010), the concept of a nation is an abstract "imagined community" which, in the early modernity period, replaced communities based on social ties typical for the feudal society. The national community performed similar functions to family, clan or village communities, i.e. it ensured an emotional bond and acted as the platform for social identifications. Furthermore, the nationalist idea supported modernisation processes: industrialisation, urbanisation and general education. On the other hand, the contribution of nationalism/nationalist discourse to the history of the 20th century includes two world wars and the Holocaust, therefore even the moderate version of nationalism (i.e. patriotism) can be problematic. Today, dynamic global migrations and the establishment of supranational political communities (the EU) undermine the political usefulness of the nationalist ideas, but they also reveal their anachronistic and controversial potential in various aspects, including the gender order that is an integral part of the nationalist ideology.

A nationalist discourse puts the community above the individual. In consequence, the rights and obligations of an individual are derived from the rights and obligations towards the community (Zamojska, 2010, pp. 21–27). In extreme versions, the nation is conceived as a living organism and each individual behaviour or opinion is judged against their functionality within the national community. If the individual behaviour or opinion is contrary to the interest of the nation, it becomes treason. A nationalist discourse construes the nation as a natural and cultural community at the same time (Zamojska 2010, pp. 40–53). These incongruous perspectives are only seemingly irreconcilable. Usually, they are not formulated explicitly, so they co-exist within a discourse *in potentia*. A nation's coherence is justified on the basis of common cultural and/or biological features. Depending on circumstances, it is either biology or culture. J. G. Herder – one of the founding fathers of the nationalist discourse in its culture-focused version – saw the nation as a community unified by cultural attributes (language, religions, customs), but within popular imagination a nation functions in analogy to a family or a clan, i.e.g a group tied by kinship. Hence the romantic and legendary myths about the founding fathers of the Slavic peoples (Lech, Czech and Rus). Until recently many

European legal systems included the principle of citizenship/nationality based on kinship, i.e. the right of blood (*ius sanguinis*), which — contrary to another principle, i.e. the right of the soil (*ius soli*) — says that a person becomes a citizen of a (national) country if his/her parents (or at least one of the parents) are citizens of this country/members of the nation.

In a nationalist discourse, the nation is seen as being special and unique, which comes from the fostered sense of national pride, e.g. through comparisons with other nations in terms of politics, sport, science, culture etc. Studies by social psychologists show that construing a social identity in opposition to other groups is the most effective way to reinforce ties within the group and it consists in attributing positive features to one's own group and negative features to other groups (C.N. Macrae, Ch. Stangor, M. Hewston, 1999, p. 53). The consequences of this construction of one's own community include ethnocentrism, Eurocentrism and Orientalism (as defined by E.W. Said, 2005.) that are unavoidably accompanied by paternalism or a sense of superiority.

The assumptions governing this concept of a nation form the basis for specific constructs of gender and sexuality. A nationalist discourse usually blurs all differences within the national "we". Especially in the context of rivalry with the others, all internal divisions, be they social, regional, economic, class-related or gender-related, recede into the background. However, it does not follow that men and women in a nationalist discourse are equal. When looking closer, one can notice that a nationalist discourse assigns different tasks and roles to men and women in the project of maintaining the national community and ensuring its proper functioning. Men protect the territory and everything related to this territory, while the woman's role is focused mainly on reproduction in its biological and symbolic dimension, which results in a constant control over their bodies and sexuality. "The studies emphasise that the key word (...) is "reproduction", both biological and symbolic. The female body constitutes its sign, territory and borders. When giving birth, women multiply the "human resources" of the given community, so they decide about the nation's strength or weakness. (...) When looking after their children, women bring them up within the system of values that are significant for the community. In times of war and thralldom, the woman become a symbol of the national tragedy and suffering; when women take part in military activities, they stay in the background, caring for the wounded/dying/fighting men. Therefore, a national/nationalist discourse places the "mark of representation" on the female body and the woman, as "a symbolic bearer of the honour of the community", must carry the "burden of this representation". As a result, the woman's body (her fertility and sexuality) remains under strict control of the ethnic/national community,

which makes her a hostage of her own community” (Mrozik, 2012, pp. 111–112). Meanwhile, men’s sexuality is not controlled or restricted. Why? Because the male body does not bear the mark of national symbolism. The only requirement regarding male sexuality in a nationalist discourse is heterosexuality, which is evidently related to the reproductive potential.

Sexuality of foreign women and men in comparison with “our” men and women is always seen as inferior and usually construed as contrary to “our” norms, i.e. as deviant – it is seen as extravagant and its reproductive value is questioned by putting the label of homosexuality. Sexuality of foreign women is often treated outside its reproductive function, which results in the extreme objectification of foreign women and reducing their status exclusively to sexual objects, especially in times of war and military conflicts (e.g. rapes of German women by the soldiers of the Red Army during the Second World War or rapes of women during the conflict in former Yugoslavia). In extreme cases, eugenic practices are used to reduce or eliminate women’s reproductive potential (e.g. sterilisation of Romany women in former Czechoslovakia (Zamojski, 2009) or of indigenous women in the United States¹). Often women from groups deemed less civilised are perceived as manifesting nearly “animal” sexuality (Barczyk K., 2010). Another construct of foreign femininity is based on the false compassion for their inferior role in comparison with men in their communities that is expressed by e.g. the necessity to fully cover their bodies in the culture of Islam. This paternalist and colonial attitude is aptly and famously defined by G.C. Spivak: “White men are saving brown women from brown men” (quoted in: A. Loomba, 2011, p. 166).

II. Pop culture in a national setting

Pop culture is usually analysed at several levels: a) as a simplified version of the high culture adapted for the mass consumer; b) as an inauthentic and commercialised version of the alternative culture (e.g. counter-culture, hip hop, feminism) that flattens the revolutionary messages²; c) a version of culture that unifies the

¹ https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Przymusowa_sterylizacja – access: 17 March 2017.

² E.g.: E. Illouz writes that “feminism is no longer only a political movement, but it has become a culture code used in advertisements, TV series, films and romances”, although “the use of the feminist culture code often consists in empty declarations without any promotion of its moral strength and political demands, which often weakens its political incisiveness and turns it into an empty gesture” (Illouz, 2015, pp. 93-94).

identity of its consumers, especially young people (the idea of the “global teenager”; Melosik, 2013). The last concept will be essential for the purposes of this paper.

Considering the importance of pop culture to young people, its nationalist versions may contribute to maintaining or even increasing the popularity of nationalist attitudes, which contradicts the idea of the unifying and global nature of pop culture that has been dominating the mainstream reflection on pop culture as a social phenomenon (Czubaj, 2005). On the other hand, nationalist messages within pop culture may be simply one of the manifestations of the “banal nationalism”, the daily “waving of the national flag”, adopted and accepted as an obvious aspect of life within a nation state (Edensor, 2005; Billig 2008). To solve this dilemma, one must consider the situational and social context as well as the long-term perception of pop culture as a phenomenon that has its centre and peripheries, its dominants and niches. For the purposes of this paper, I must mention that many researchers and observers of pop culture in Poland point out the specific “patriotic intensification” of the local Polish pop culture. From the mainstream down to the niche genres (Czubaj, 2005; Bożek 2012), we have seen in recent years the growing interest in national themes with references to events and heroes of the older and more recent history of Poland as well as the emergence of a pop culture version of the national mythology. It is even more surprising to observe that the former periods of the youth culture, e.g. in the 1960s (rock) and later (punk), focused on universal themes of liberty, equality and anti-establishment, and in the 1990s (hip-hop) the leitmotiv was the local patriotism of “mates” (Zamojska, 2003). The current infusion of pop culture with nationalism is becoming problematic not only because of promoting hostile attitudes towards the others, but also for the reason of perpetuating the patriarchal gender system. Furthermore, as emphasised by K. Jaskułowski, “popular culture should be studied in the context of nationalism, since (...) its wide range gives it an enormous social significance” (Jaskułowski, 2006, p. 11).

E. Illouz argues that cultural artefacts (especially the most popular ones) can be treated as indicators or barometers of values generally accepted in societies and used to measure changes in a historical scale (Illouz, 2015, p. 4). Based on these assumptions, a local pop culture can be compared with other local pop cultures in order to gain knowledge about key trends with respect to values that dominate or are deemed dominant in particular societies. A perfect opportunity for such analyses is the Eurovision Song Contest³ – a peculiar type of overview of mainstream pop culture trends in particular countries.

³ Eurovision Song Contest (French: Concours Eurovision de la Chanson), popularly called Eurovision, is the annual pan-European music event organised since 1956. The participants are the

In the 2014 Eurovision Song Contest⁴, the winning song was *Rise like a phoenix* performed by the Austrian drag queen with the artistic pseudonym of Conchita Wurst. Poland was represented by the song entitled “We are Slavic” (performed partly in English). It was a mixture of rap and folk music with references to traditional instruments (accordion) and the melodies of Russian folk songs. The author was a hip hop producer using the artistic pseudonym Donatan and the song was performed by a female vocalist Cleo accompanied by a band of dancers and actresses. Both performances directly referred to gender and sexuality, though in extremely different ways. The context of the international contest and the engagement of viewers from all over Europe and some countries outside Europe to select the winner allows to see this TV show as a both aesthetic and social event as well as, considering the statements or institutional reactions of Russia or Belarus, a political phenomenon.⁵

Artistically considered, the winning song/performance was a bombastic pop festival hit, but it affected the audience in a surprising and unexpected way due to the stage image of the singer. Conchita Wurst (literally: shell-sausage/shell in a sausage; this pseudonym brings associations with male and female sex organs) received a very ambivalent response: some were shocked up to the point of disgust, others felt amazement and admiration in the face of absolute liberation. The confusion around this person – a man’s body in a dress, long hair and beard – was in fact related to the impossibility of immediate identification of this person’s gender (“a woman with a beard”, “a man in a dress”, “a homosexual”, “butch woman”⁶), which we usually do without thinking, intuitively. This situation revealed the deeply internalised binary system of gender in our culture. The inability of identification, description or classification of Conchita Wurst in general and not individual terms also discloses a cultural gap which points to the heteronormative rigour of our culture that is oppressive towards people who break away from these norms. Furthermore, we do not have any linguistic means (or they are not commonly used) (A.M. Kłonkowska, W. Dynarski, 2016) to describe people who are non-normative in terms of gender and sexuality.

representatives of public TV stations that belong to the European Broadcasting Union (EBU). http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Konkurs_Piosenki_Eurowizji – access: 13 March 2017.

⁴ The 59th Eurovision Song Contest was held on 6, 8 and 10 May 2014 in Copenhagen (https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Konkurs_Piosenki_Eurowizji_2014) – access: 13 March 2017.

⁵ <http://eurowizja.org/?p=5491> – access: 25 March 2017

⁶ All these attempts at naming are taken from comments by Internet users: <http://muzyka.onet.pl/newsy/eurowizja-2014-polscy-widzowie-ocenili-wystep-conchity-wurst-na-7-punktow-ju-ry-nie/p506w> – access: 12 March 2017.

While the winning performance of Conchita Wurst may be seen as a manifestation of the acceptance of or openness to a non-binary view of gender (i.e. the view of gender as a continuum of various combinations of the elements of identity and appearance as well as gender-related and sexual practices) by Europeans, the Polish performance in the contest could be interpreted as a step in a contrary direction. The song “We are Slavic”, in its form and content, could be an ideal example for the gender studies of a nationalist discourse. In its visual, textual and musical aspects⁷ as well as in the stage performance⁸ during the contest, the song referred to the concept of rivalry between the Slavs and the West, anachronistic in view of current political divisions, and used women’s beauty and sexual appeal to that end. The visualisation of the Slavic attractiveness consisted of the bodily markers of femininity, i.e. long legs, big breasts and round bottoms, made even more conspicuous by scanty clothing of the singer and the dancers. The lyrics of the song accentuates the “natural”, genetically transferred beauty and seduction competences (*We know how to move the things we got from mum in our genes/This is the hot blood/This is our Slavic sex*). This particularly Slavic *sex appeal* (though it would be deemed a heresy to use a non-Slavic word in this context) was made explicit in the provocative moves of the dancers and the choreography of the stage performance where the culminating point was a seated dancer leaning over a kneading-trough with spread legs. In the video version of the song, we see a woman who leans heavily while sweeping the floor in a cottage in front of an older man wrapped tightly in a sheepskin coat.

The text refers to the superiority of Slavic women in the sense presented above (*We have what no one else has, There are no better women than our Slavic girls*) and addresses foreign men with a special call (*We have all the best, whatever you want/They come here from all parts of the world/We have good vodka and good girls, Come and look for perfect wives here*).

The setting of the video is a perfectly stereotypical village: a thatched house, a yard, hens cackling in the background. The singer and the dancers wear stylised folk costumes (embroidery, large sleeves, multi-layered skirts, aprons, sheepskin. This return to the past in visual and musical terms can be read as the apotheosis of the folk tradition which is a treasure kept safe in the countryside and its lifestyle (*There are no undertones in the video/If you don’t believe, go to the countryside and see for yourself*). It is also the elevation of “folksiness” seen from the male perspective and expressed by simple countryside food (bread, cottage cheese) and

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rr1DSgjhRqE> access – 12 March 2017

⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q8J3GAg5zaI12> March 2017

the folksy stimulant, i.e. vodka (*Vodka is better than whisky or gin*), and folksy attractive women (*Our ladies have no hung-ups/Cause they have no reason to have them*). In this folksy setting filtered through the man's eye, women are exclusively sexual objects performing the usual chores at home (they knead dough or sweep the floor). Although the singer emphasises the male-female equality of the authors of the video (Cleo and Donatan) in the first part of the song, the lyrics and images throughout the video definitely tend towards the "male eye perspective". The song in its stage version is performed exclusively by women. Donatan is present only in the video version and he is the only one showing some contemporary attributes (a watch, a mobile phone, a T-shirt, a baseball cap).

The official video includes an introduction that suggests the interpretation: the song is supposed to be an ironic hyperbole of the stereotype of Slavic womanliness. However, the male perspective in the lyrics and images implies a fulfilment of a male erotic fantasy. I omit the incomprehensible idea of representing the Slavic women exclusively by women from Poland. The sexist punchline (*Come and look for perfect wives here*) and the etymological connection of Slavs and slaves⁹, though the title was translated as "We are Slavic", generate the associations with a female slave market.

One outstanding critical reaction after the contest was a parody of the song (a cover version) produced by the left-wing journal *Krytyka Polityczna*.¹⁰ The video features a girl with plaited blond hair, in a folk costume with beads. The setting is a stereotypical Polish landscape, a meadow, a field, a road with trees along it. The girl sings and dances in a seductive way. It resembles the original video in many respects apart from several details: the girl is short, her voice is different and the moves are less studied, which suggests a more authentic and engaged non-professional performance. In the last part of the video, the performer takes off the blond hairpiece with the plait and the corset, revealing short dark hair and a flat breast of a man. An important information added to the video is that the role of singer and dancer was played by Kim Lee, "the most popular Polish drag queen"¹¹, whose real name is Andy Nguyen, originally from Vietnam, living in Warsaw, a Polish citizen.¹² This short video is more than just a parody of "We are

⁹ <https://www.quora.com/Does-the-word-slave-come-from-the-name-of-the-Slavic-people> 12 March 2017

¹⁰ Kim Lee & Dżastina Dżary "My, Słowianie"/"We are Slavic" (a cover by *Krytyka Polityczna*, www.youtube.com/watch?v=zUu-4Ny68PI – access: 23 March 2017.

¹¹ <http://kobieta.wp.pl/wywiad-z-kim-lee-najpopularniejsza-polska-drag-queen-5982665738920577a23> March 2017.

¹² http://www.homopedia.pl/wiki/Kim_Lee – access: 23 March 2017.

Slavic". By giving the key role to a drag queen, it refers to the winning performance of Conchita Wurst in the Eurovision Contest, but it also alludes, at a deeper level, to the theoretical thesis by J. Butler who perceives drag queen performances as the subversive act that questions the naturalness of gender categories (Butler, 2008). One can observe here on the strategies of questioning the gender heteronormativity, i.e. gender bending. "Gender bending is a strategy of mixing cultural codes of gender, i.e. confusing the clear division between male and female in the aspects of appearance and lifestyle. It means going against the cognitive models of other people by a conscious avoidance of the social gender role, transgressing that role and failing to meet gender-related expectations. (...) Gender bending also includes turning one's body and sexuality into a constant performance as well as spontaneous or planned adoption of various identities" (Zawadzka, 2015, p. 354). In turn, the artistic strategy of subversion is "the art of intelligent resistance" (Cierniak, 2012). Subversion is a subtle manipulation of meanings that "consists in imitating and nearly identifying with the object of criticism, followed by a slight displacement of meanings. As such, this displacement is not always captured by the viewer. It is not direct and point-blank criticism, but it is full of ambiguities" (Dziamski 2001, p. 10). However, when the observer realises the possibility of ambiguity, the standard and customary ways of thinking become transcended, which allows to see things in a new way so as to spot anything that is non-obvious and out of the ordinary. The cover version of "We are Slavic" with the participation of the drag queen is constructed along these lines. For the most part of the song, the viewers are assured of the full correspondence of gender and nationality to their representation, but the final part questions the certainty of perception and complicates the obviousness of general categories such as gender or nation (national identity).

Conclusion

My aim was to interpret three pop culture artefacts within the constructivist framework of gender and nation, including the educational context. I was interested in the community and constructs of gender and sexuality encoded in these artefacts. I assumed that the nature of community determines specific constructs of gender and sexuality. The more a community is conceived as a collective and/or an organism (the rights and freedoms of the individual are derived from the rights and freedoms of the community), the more the gender system (gender relations) and the sexuality of men and women will be limited by their duties towards the community. The community, the gender system and sexuality become petrified

in forms that are treated, perceived and represented as natural and timeless. The structure of the community, the gender relations and the forms of sexuality are never problematized or negotiated (or deemed negotiable). They are accepted as evident and, one might say, perfectly “transparent”. On the other hand, individualistic communities/collectives/societies, where the starting point for political and social solutions is the individual along with personal freedoms, the gender system and the forms of sexuality are matters of free and individual decisions or they can at least be problematized and negotiated. These model descriptions refer to the construct of the national community in a nationalist discourse in the former case, and to the construct of a civil community in a liberal discourse in the latter case.

All the pop culture productions under analysis include references to communities, through they are very different communities. “We are Slavic” points back to the “mythical” and traditional village community with a conspicuously patriarchal construct of gender and sexuality and a vivid suggestion that this “historical” image is, for the most part, a contemporary image as well. The mythical Slavic culture mentioned in the lyrics serves to emphasise the continuity between the past (the origins of the Slavic people) and the present: the unchangeable, natural and essential core of “our” identity as opposed to the identity and lifestyle of the others. This “ourness” is represented by the country lifestyle, food, stimulants as well as women’s beauty and sexual potency. The reduction of the woman’s function to a sexual object can be seen in the offensive association of Slavic/Polish women with the global matrimonial market. The connection between (1) a specific gender system based on a rigorously binary model as well as male domination and subjugation of women and (2) a specific type of collective/social identity, or a presentation of this gender system as an essential feature of a given community based on its historical continuity and uniqueness, is in my opinion convergent with the constructs of nation and gender in a nationalist discourse. The anachronistic nature of such constructs is revealed in the context of the appeal by the authors of “We are Slavic” to treat the song as a joke. In fact, however, the song promotes and fosters traditional gender relations as proper (and probably necessary) for the maintenance of a given group or collective identity. The specific gender system is seen and approved as its core/essence.

On the other hand, the other two artefacts deconstruct the binary system of gender and heteronormativity through gender bending (Zawadzka, 2015, p. 354). Only following such a deconstruction would it be possible to construct a community where the gender identity and the collective identity are not imposed forms that individuals have to accept, but can be individually negotiated (with oneself and others). It can also be an ambiguous, liquid, incomplete or diverse identity; it

can be a hyphenated identity which is, according to M. Walzer, typical for immigrant communities (Walzer, 1999). The nature of community as well as gender and sexuality remain undefined and open to multiple and different definitions.

In reference to E. Illouz's thesis on cultural artefacts as barometers of values, I would like to conclude by posing a question: what do the above analyses say about the contemporary young generation of Poles and, indirectly, about the educational discourse in Poland?

The musical expression of the young generation since the times of counter-culture has always had conspicuous ideological connotations with the elements of a revolt against tradition that usually led to social transformations (Wertenstein-Żuławski, Pęczak, 1991). It can be said that the youthful rebellion considered in sociological categories brings in a new quality to debates on social structures (Zamojska, 1998, pp. 24–30). If we look at “We are Slavic” and its pastiche cover by the authors of *Krytyka Polityczna* as expressions of two radically different discourses on the (projected) community, gender and sexuality, and if we then consider the enormous divergence in popularity of these two artefacts¹³, we must conclude that the contemporary young Poles are mostly attached to the traditional and nationalist image of their own community and, in consequence, to the traditional and binary view of gender along with the gender inequality system that gives men the upper position.

The significance of the above statement should be considered in the context of shaping the social identity of young people and the distinctive features of the educational discourse in Poland after 1989. The educational discourse in the transformation period was dominated by neoliberal ideas with emphasis on competition and individual success in school and in life (Potulicka, Rutkowiak 2010). On the other hand, school curricula and handbooks, i.e. the basic channels of intergenerational communication after eliminating the left-wing ideology of the Communist era, have been conservative in character and refer to the romantic vision of the nation and the state rather than a vision of a civil community that highlights individual rights and minority rights. The dominant form of community provided to students in school as a social identity platform has been the nation, i.e. a community constructed through exclusion and based on the patriarchal gender system (Zamojska 2010; Popow 2015; Chmura-Rutkowska, Duda, Mazurek, Softysiak-Łuczak 2016). The internal school systems, e.g. the system of classes and lessons,

¹³ The number of views of these two songs on YouTube is very different. The official video of “We are Slavic” has around 62,038,107 views, while the version *Krytyka Polityczna* has nearly 50,000 views (as of March 2017).

the hierarchy of teacher versus students, no real influence by student boards on the school's operation, have remained unchanged.

Considering the above description of the youth's socialisation after 1989, one can arrive at a paradoxical conclusion that it was both effective and ineffective. The fact that young Poles identify with the construct of community, gender and sexuality based on the nationalist origin can be indicative of the inefficiency of the neoliberal pressure to socialise the young generation, escapism from the extremely individualistic rules of social life and a drive for constructing identities on the solid foundations of existing community models. Certainly, it is also a manifestation of the efficiency of the school education that is mostly focused on Poland and has a patriarchal character.

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