

Dr Ewa Majewska

Project: Early Solidarność and the Black Protest in theories of counterpublics and subaltern.

DESCRIPTION FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC

In his article published in 2007 Claus Offe argues, that all the revolutions bring important shifts in science, the intellectual input of such events are fundamental not solely for the social life, but also for theory. According to Offe this has always happened, except the revolution of 1989, which did not cause such a revolution in science.

This research discusses the early „Solidarność” movement (1980-81) and the #BlackProtest (2016-) as mobilizations of great intellectual impact, inspiring the contemporary debates concerning the public sphere and counterpublics, which seem to have reached an impasse. Crisis or even failure of the public sphere are fundamental element of discussions led in Poland and abroad. Most of these exclamations however do not account for those groups and subjectivities, which are fundamental for the possibilities of contemporary revival of the public sphere theory and practice, for the making of the public debate, practicing of contestation and resistance, and social change, namely: women and popular classes. The classic theory of the public sphere requires a transformation, this project argues for an inclusion of the structural mechanisms of marginalisation and dissimulation of the political agency of women and the workers. The subaltern subjects are always captured in the process of political exclusion and political mobilisation, in which they gain and lose visibility, sometimes simultaneously. This project allows capturing their political agency without erasing these contradictions.

This project enters a debate with the authors of classical theories of the public sphere (Habermas, 2008; Kluge i Negt, 1988; Fraser, 1990), leading to a discussion of the public sphere in semi-peripheries. Mechanisms of only partial, limited visibility of the political agency of women, popular classes and other subaltern will be discussed in this project (Spivak, 1999; Derrida, 1995; Ranciere, 2004). In line with the poststructural theories of subversion and resistance, inspired by postcolonial studies, archive materials and data concerning the early „Solidarność” and #BlackProtest will be collected. They will include: media, printed and audiovisual materials produced by mainstream media and by the opposition; memoirs and other private accounts of the participants of these mobilizations and historical and sociological analysis, so that both mobilisations can be discussed as examples of semi-peripheral subaltern counterpublics.

This research leads to an analysis of intersectional mechanisms of exclusion of different social groups from historical and sociological coding of political transformations. Until now the research has been conducted about the exclusion of women from „Solidarność” (Penn, 2006; Kondratowicz, 2002; Dzido, 2014 i 2016) and the exclusion of popular classes (Sowa, 2015; Marzec, 2016). Here these exclusions will be discussed as elements of a larger project of the making of the hegemonic version of the autonomous Subject of the West, which always presupposes the exclusion of all its „others” (Spivak, 1999). The mechanisms of coding and shifts in the discourse of political philosophy, sociology and cultural studies always assume the „universality” of this hegemonic subject, while this project aims at a demonstration of its particularity and at a more inclusive understanding of the public sphere as a site, where visibility or hegemony do not constitute the necessary conditions of political agency. Countless masses of subjects representing subalternity also constitute elements of history, even if they are constantly excluded from it. The participation of these „common” subjects effectively modifies the understanding of political agency, in which from heroic and masculine, autonomous subject styled types of political agency are abandoned in favour of non-heroic mobilizations of the weak and excluded, such as depicted in Havel's essay „power of the powerless”, constituting in this project the main attribute of both: the early „Solidarność” and #BlackProtest.

This project aims at ways of revival for the research and practice of the public sphere. Combining the focus on political opposition, projects of massive political and social mobilisations of the recent Polish history, it strengthens the regional self-understanding and agency. It accounts for the possibility of taking inspiration in one's own country, currently perceived mainly as contradicting the social equality and democratic political ideals.