

Gender studies in Poland: balance of two decades

V. International Gender Workshop

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Outline of presentation

- Institutional problems of gender studies in Poland.
- Academic affiliation vs. political aspirations.
- Methodological debates – what is missed?
- Anti-gender campaign of 2013-2015: landscape after battle.

Commodity in short supply

First gender studies in Poland were established in 1996 at the Institute of Applied Social Sciences of the University of Warsaw.

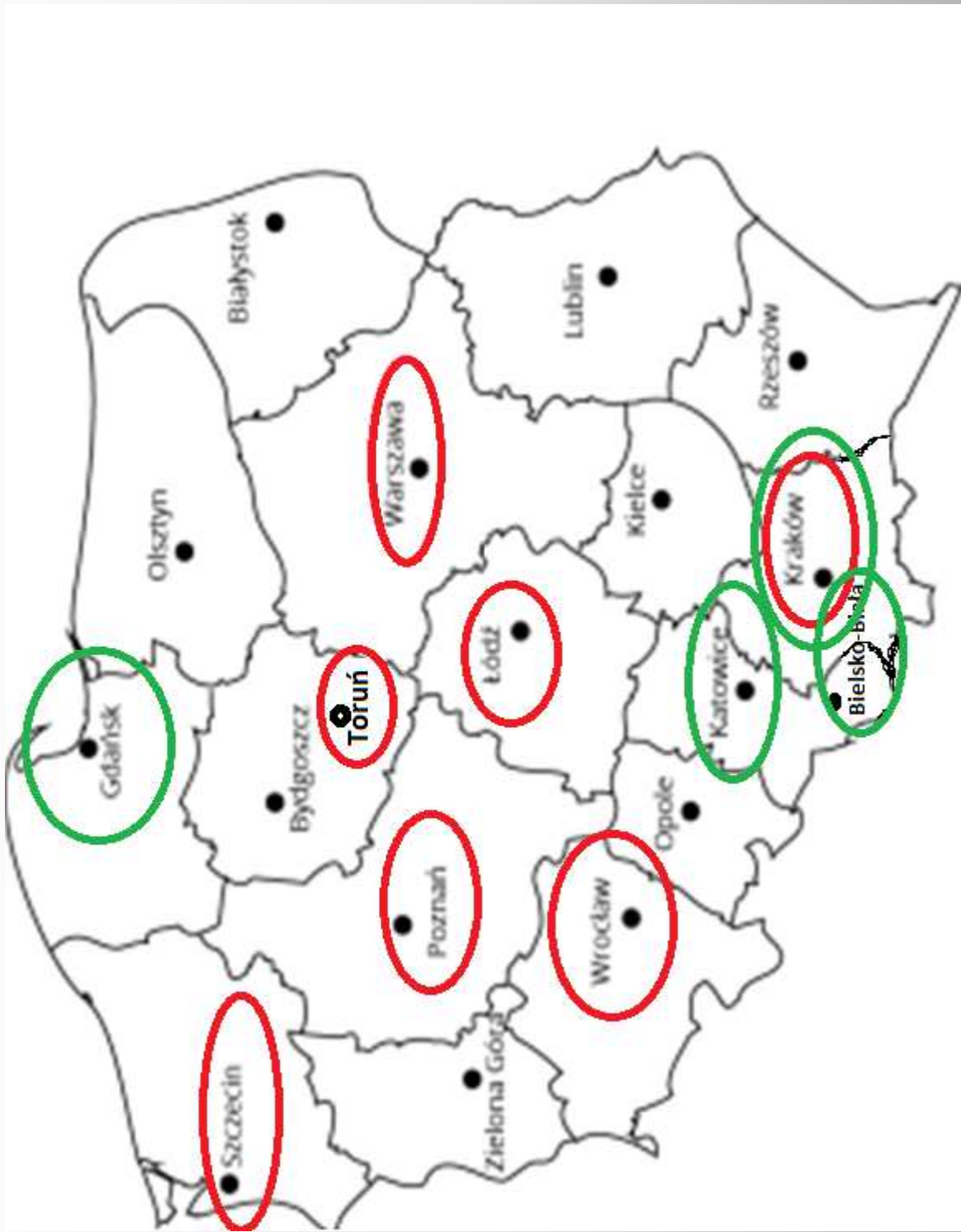


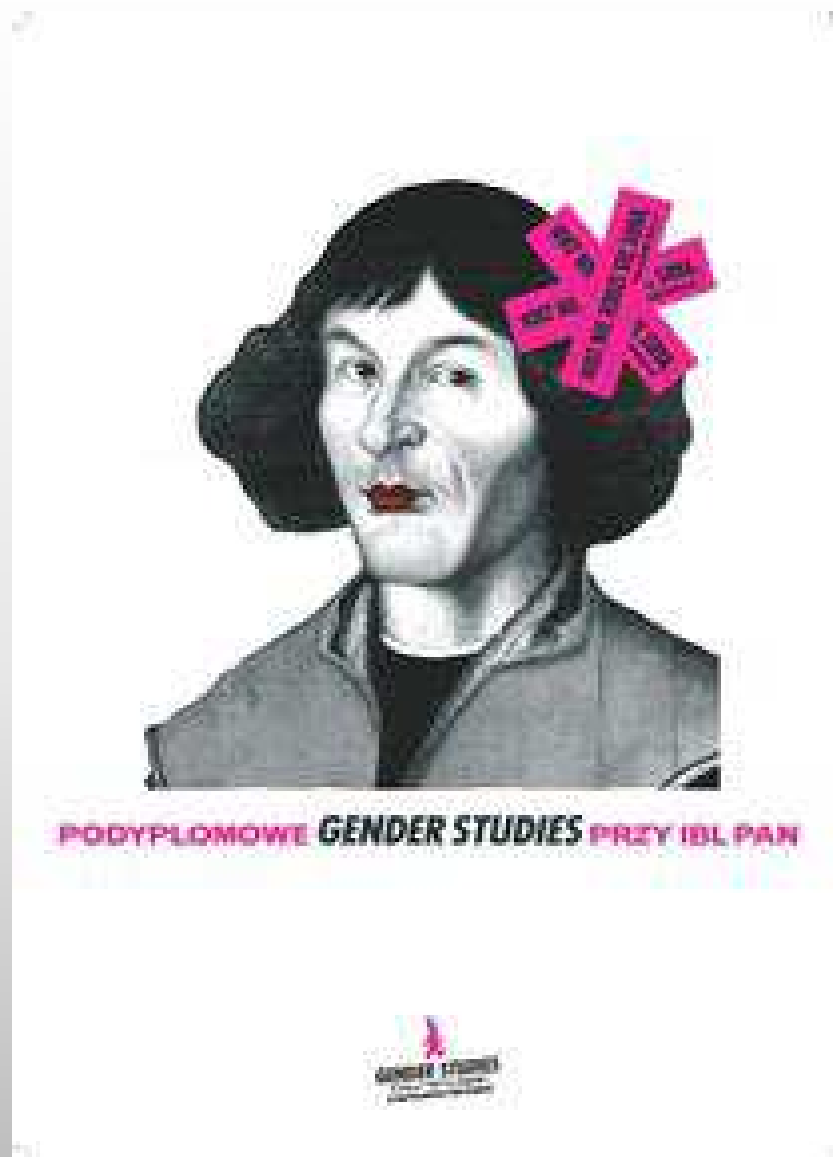
Gender studies run at present

- **Warsaw** – University of Warsaw, Polish Academy of Sciences
- **Poznan** – Adam Mickiewicz University
- **Lodz** – University of Lodz
- **Torun** – Nicolaus Copernicus University
- **Cracow** – Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski Cracow University
- **Szczecin** – University of Szczecin
- **Wroclaw** – University of Wroclaw

Gender studies used to be run

- **Cracow** – Jagiellonian University
- **Katowice** – University of Silesia
- **Bielsko-Biala** – University of Bielsko-Biala
- **Gdansk** – University of Gdansk





Genderstudies.pl

Organizational structure

- Tuition-based postgraduate studies (lasting from two to four semesters).
- Organized mostly in the faculties of social sciences and/ or humanities at major universities.
- Courses dedicated to gender issues are available as electives for senior students.
- Few private schools set up one- or two-level gender studies specialization courses as part of cultural studies.
- Interdisciplinary gender studies research groups run on the (in)formal basis.

Organizational problems

- Cautious approach of university authorities to the idea of organizing faculties, institutes or even smaller units of gender studies.
- Set of stereotypes – marginalization of gender courses at public universities.
- Interdisciplinary nature of gender studies as an argument for maintaining the organizational *status quo*.
- Gender studies are not listed as a discipline in the national science registry – GS faculties or departments cannot be established.

Funding

- (High!) fees paid by students.
- Funds from European Union (research and/or institutional grants).

Financial problems

- Fees make gender studies a luxury good that few can afford.
- EU grants are allotted after carrying out complex bureaucratic procedures and adjusting gender studies programmes to the institutions' educational offer.
- Gender studies as an attractive component of the educational offer of many schools, which often sell the language of human rights dressed in business rhetoric.
- Short-term research grants allotted by state institutions do not allow to build long-term scientific strategies and teams of researchers; they can also be denied or reduced because of political reasons.

Traps of the discourse

- Accusations of ideological approach – a successful weapon against gender studies in Poland.
- Objectification and neutralization of gender studies as a survival strategy:

adjustment of gender studies programmes to the donors' requirements – towards gender mainstreaming,

➤ evolution of the discipline – cutting itself off from feminist roots:

- ❑ from women's studies to gender studies,
- ❑ gender studies locked in the ivory tower of Academy,
- ❑ increasing professionalization of gender discourse in Poland,
- ❑ deepening gap and weakening cooperation between academic feminists and social activists.

**Practice of criticism – criticism of
the practice**

- Catching up with the West – (un)critical absorption of Western theories in the field of women's, men's, gender, gay and lesbian, queer studies.
- Poor relations with Polish researchers working abroad – no discussion on the methodology of gender studies.
- „Politics of location” – intersection of gender, sexuality, nation, religion in Polish context – a way to break the impasse?
- From gender as a category of cultural analysis to gender as a category of materialist analysis – limitations and challenges.

The big absent: People's Republic of Poland

- Midwives of transformation – rejection of People's Republic of Poland as part of feminist (identity) politics since 1989.
- Feminist analyses of state socialism – „Eastern” (re)definition of emancipation, agency, subjectivity, equality – a way to end „Western” discursive hegemony?
- Feminist analyses of state socialism – the way to overcome political hegemony of the Polish right?

How to overcome the backlash?

- **First Academic Feminist Congress** (Slubice, November 2009) – back to the roots.
- **Second Academic Feminist Congress** (Cracow, September 2011) – praise the minimum gained.
- **Polish Association of Gender Studies** (Warsaw, December 2015) – between giving up on gender and looking for new allies.

Thank you for your attention!

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