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**ROCZNIK  
HISTORII PRASY POLSKIEJ**

## Obywatelka transformacji. Obraz kobiety na łamach polskiej prasy dla kobiet (1989–1992)

## **The woman citizen of Poland's transforma- tion period: The image of women in Polish women's press (1989–1992)**

Wydział Politologii i Dziennikarstwa  
Uniwersytet Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej  
Plac Litewski 3  
PL 20-080 Lublin  
e-mail: [anna.szwed-walczak@umcs.pl](mailto:anna.szwed-walczak@umcs.pl)  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9878-1401>

**Anna  
SZWED-WALCZAK**

### SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:

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Polish women's press in 1989–1992, Poland's political  
and economic transformation, representations  
of women, women's attitudes and motivation, the  
woman citizen

### ABSTRAKT

Celem badań była rekonstrukcja medialnego obrazu kobiety jako obywatelki w polskiej prasie dla kobiet w latach 1989–1992. Przedmiotem badań były czasopisma, które osiągały we wskazanym okresie największy nakład (powyżej 500 tys. egzemplarzy). Wśród nich znalazły się: tygodnik „Przyjaciółka”, tygodnik „Kobieta i Życie”. Badanie objęło 208 numerów każdego ze wskazanych tygodników (przebadano wszystkie numery, które ukazały się w określonej cezurze badawczej). W badaniach posłużono się analizą treści oraz zawartości, aczkolwiek podjęto również próbę analizy ukrytego znaczenia zamieszczanych w prasie dla kobiet komunikatów. W tym celu zbadano toposy dominujące w analizowanych tekstach, które ukazywały stosunek kobiet do zmian ustrojowych i ich roli w państwie, a także prezentowały bariery realizacji zadań kobiet w przestrzeni publicznej.

### ABSTRACT

This article presents the results of a study aimed at reconstructing the image of the woman citizen promoted in the women's magazines in 1989–1992, the first phase of the great transformation following the collapse of Poland's socialist system. Within the scope of the study were high-circulation magazines (over 500,000 copies), including the two leading weeklies “Przyjaciółka” and “Kobieta i Życie”. A total of 208 issues of every magazine published in that time span were analyzed. The methods used included content and textual analysis, complemented by the examination of some recurrent topoi treated as indicators of some inexplicit (hidden) meanings, i.e. the attitudes of women to the process of reform, their role in the agenda for change, and the barriers they came up against in the public sphere.

## Streszczenie

Przemiany ustrojowe w Polsce, zainicjowane w 1989 r. były uważnie śledzone i opisywane w polskiej prasie, w tym również w prasie dla kobiet, która podejmowała tematykę społeczno-polityczną. Na łamach tygodników „Przyjaciółka” oraz „Kobieta i Życie” poza zainteresowaniem bieżącą polityką wskazywano na szanse i zagrożenia dla kobiet, wynikające z reform politycznych i gospodarczych. W artykule zaprezentowano wynik badań nad medialnym obrazem kobiety jako obywatelki w polskiej prasie dla kobiet w latach 1989–1992. W ramach realizacji celu badawczego sformułowano 4 hipotezy badawcze: 1) Transformacja ustrojowa w polskiej prasie dla kobiet była ukazana jako szansa na zmianę ich pozycji społecznej i politycznej; 2) Polska prasa dla kobiet konfrontowała obraz obywatela z obrazem obywatelki; 3) Polska prasa dla kobiet prezentowała wzorce kobiety-obywatelki, 4) Tytuły, skierowane do czytelniczek z miast i wsi różniły się w definicji wzorca obywatelki. Badania pozwoliły na potwierdzenie pierwszej, trzeciej i czwartej hipotezy. Z kolei druga hipoteza nie została w pełni zweryfikowana, bowiem redakcja tygodnika „Przyjaciółka” (w odróżnieniu od redakcji pisma „Kobieta i Życie”) nie różnicowała szans kobiet i mężczyzn w dostępie do przestrzeni publicznej.

Badania tygodników „Kobieta i Życie” oraz „Przyjaciółka” w okresie transformacji ustrojowej pozwoliły na stwierdzenie, że medialny obraz kobiety w Polsce w latach 1989–1992 był kompilacją toposów: tradycji, tożsamości, religii, rodziny, polityki. Był też wynikiem aktywności kobiet w historii Polski, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem zaborów oraz walk narodowowyzwoleńczych. Wielozadaniowość kobiet w okresie PRL, mimo prawnego zagwarantowania równouprawnienia nie przełożyła się na wzrost liczby kobiet w sferze publicznej czy decyzyjność w sektorze gospodarczym. Na medialny obraz kobiety w Polsce w latach 1989–1992 rzutowały więc: historia, tradycja, religia, ale też transformacja ustrojowa, bowiem ukazywano drastyczny wzrost bezrobocia wśród kobiet, feminizację biedy, próby ograniczania praw kobiet do decydowania o macierzyństwie.

## Introduction

In the second half of the 1980s the Polish People's Republic underwent many political changes which sparked hope in the society for the state's reforms in terms of political rights and economic system. It manifested itself, for instance, in the amnesty of political prisoners in 1986 or the invitation of the delegates of the Advisory Council headed by Wojciech Jaruzelski, a leader of the Council of State. There also began a debate on the legalisation of "Solidarność" [Solidarity]<sup>1</sup>. Nevertheless, more realistic and specific actions were taken only in 1989<sup>2</sup> when the Round Table Talks started (from 6 February to 5 April), which in turn gave rise to political changes and led to the election<sup>3</sup> in June 1989. The result of the election enabled the democratic opposition to participate in the governing of Poland.

The system transformation in the East Central Europe concurred with the Third Wave of Democratization characterised by the growing use of peace agreements<sup>4</sup>. In Poland it took the form of top-down changes controlled by political elites<sup>5</sup>. A female citizen of the transformation period was, therefore, both an observer and a participant of the changes in the country and East Central Europe, but also she had certain

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<sup>1</sup> A. Małkiewicz, *Wybory czerwcowe 1989*, Warszawa 1994, p. 11–13; A. Szwed-Walczak, *Obraz wyborów kontraktowych w Polsce na łamach prasy dla kobiet*, „Czasopismo Naukowe Instytutu Studiów Kobietych” 2009, no. 1, p. 153–154.

<sup>2</sup> According to the researchers' arrangements, the suggestion to hold a conversation between the authorities and the "Solidarity" opposition appeared during Czesław Kiszczak and Lech Wałęsa's talk in August 1988. Wałęsa demanded it as a necessary condition to end the strikes, Z. Woźniak, *Pokłosie Okrągłego Stołu. Przeszłość dla przyszłości*, „Ruch Prawniczy, Ekonomiczny i Socjologiczny” 2009, no. 2, p. 349.

<sup>3</sup> The election (4<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> June 1989) was the result of the agreement between the coalition-government party and the democratic-solidarity opposition. They guaranteed 65% (299) mandates to the Polish Parliament for Polish United Worker's Party and its coalition members, 35% (161) for non-partisan members. It was a free Parliament election, A. Friszke, *Rok 1989: polska droga do wolności*, Warszawa 2009, p. 55–56.

<sup>4</sup> Timothy Garton Ash named the changes in Poland and in Hungary as a "refolusion" since the name connects the term "reform" and "revolution". However, in Poland the reform started with strikes in 1988, and in Hungary with the Hungarian Socialist Labour Party congress, T. Ash, *Rewolucja 1989 widziana w Warszawie, Budapeszcie, Berlinie i Pradze*, Londyn 1990, p. 9–10.

<sup>5</sup> K. Trembicka, „Okrągły Stół” jako forma porozumienia w Europie Środkowowschodniej w latach 1989–1990, „Polityka i Społeczeństwo” 2005, no. 2, p. 137–139.

expectations concerning the future system. In the Polish Language Dictionary the term *female citizen* means a female form of a male term citizen, “a female member of society in a given country who has certain rights and obligations prescribed by the law and constitution” (Polish Language Dictionary). But, was it actually a way in which female editors and readers of the women’s press defined their position in the Republic of Poland<sup>6</sup>?

The purpose of the research was to reconstruct the media image of a woman as a citizen in Polish press in the years 1989–1992. By using the term “women’s press” I mean the press which was totally financed by the Polish capital, initially under control of the state, and later integrated in the biggest press corporation in East Central Europe at that time — Robotnicza Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza „Prasa – Książka – Ruch” [hereinafter referred to as the Workers’ Publishing Cooperative “Press–Book–Movement”] mainly aimed at women and exploring socio-political themes. The object of the study was the magazines with the highest circulation in a given period (over 500 thousand copies) among which we could find a weekly “Best Friend”, another weekly “Woman and Life” and “Sezam. Kwartalnik Przyjaciółki” [“Sesame. Best Friend’s quarterly”]. During the analysis the last one was rejected due to its guidebook character which the publishing house used as a supplement for “Best Friend” and its annual “Kalendarza Przyjaciółki” [“Best Friend’s Calendar”]. Moreover, the number of the articles associated with the study object was not sufficient since the aspect of women’s social and political activity was mainly discussed in “Best Friend”<sup>7</sup>. In 1989 both “Best Friend” and “Woman and Life” had an already well-established position on the press market and they targeted certain groups of readers: “Best Friend”<sup>8</sup> was aimed at women living in the countryside and in small towns, whereas “Woman and Life” predominantly at women living in cities who were socially and professionally active.

The media image of the world is built for a certain group of readers, therefore, it is not objectified but adjusted to the target in terms of: 1) presented content; 2) the way of conveying information<sup>9</sup>. According to Bogusław Skowronek, an expert on media, “media do not reflect the reality since ontologically it is beyond truth and

<sup>6</sup> The amendment of December 1989 introduced the changes in the name of the country from the People’s Republic of Poland to the Republic of Poland, the Act of 29<sup>th</sup> December 1989 — the Change of Constitution of the People’s Republic of Poland, Dz. U. 1989 no. 75, Item 444.

<sup>7</sup> It should be mentioned that in 1989 there were 16 of them, Z. Sokół, *Transformacja czasopism kobiecych w Polsce w latach (1989–1997)*, „Rocznik Historii Prasy Polskiej” 1998, t. 1, z. 1–2, p. 193–201.

<sup>8</sup> In this period “Best Friend” had the biggest number of readers, R. Filas, *Zmiany w czytelnictwie prasy w Polsce 1989–1992 na tle przemian oferty prasowej*, [in:] *Transformacja prasy polskiej (1989–1992)*, ed. A. Słomkowska, Warszawa 1992, p. 36.

<sup>9</sup> B. Sobczak, *Medialne obrazy świata z perspektywy retorycznej (na przykładzie recepcji medialnej śmierci pochówku Czesława Miłosza)*, „Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne: Seria Językoznawcza” 2011, t. 18, z. 2, p. 36.

falsehood. But certainly, media can cognitively (mentally) modify the shape of the reality by offering multiplicity of meanings”<sup>10</sup>. So, media show the world through the adopted criteria and the key criterion is that of a recipient, which confirms Marshall McLuhan’s thesis (1964) — the medium is the message<sup>11</sup>. Taking into account the women’s press it should be emphasised that the content concerning the issue of “citizenship” is presented through the prism of a particular vision and diagnosis of the women’s role in a social and political life in Poland. This problem accounts for one of the worldviews close to women’s beliefs. In the research of the media image of the world, people use the textual analysis, the hidden meaning analysis and the content analysis<sup>12</sup>. This research employs the textual and content analysis, nevertheless, there were also attempts to analyse the hidden meaning of the statements in the women press. For this purpose I explored the dominant toposes appearing in the analysed texts as they presented women’s attitude towards the political changes, their role in the country and the barriers women encountered when it came to performing certain activities in the public. Researchers claim that the current toposes are “cultural translators”. “As the carriers of information they can be recognised as a matrix of meanings for the socio-cultural space or «semantic Arche» for a newly-created space”<sup>13</sup>. The research included 208 issues of the weekly “Woman and Life” and 208 issues of the weekly “Best Friend” (all issues published between 1989–1992). The content of these magazines aimed at broadly understood socio-political sphere was divided into the following categories: articles which showed the social, economic, and political diagnosis of Poland between 1989–1992, and the ones which affected women’s lives mainly by interfering in their social and political life at the same time changing their position. The research included also the articles with an educational dimension, concerning truths, freedoms and civic duties that contributed to creating conscious civic attitudes. In this period the weeklies “Woman and Life” and “Best Friend” had respectively 271 and 252 articles which met the above mentioned criteria.

There were 4 hypotheses suggested as part of the research: 1) system transformation in Polish women’s press was shown as an opportunity for a change in women’s political and social position; 2) Polish press juxtaposed the image of a female citizen with the male one; 3) Polish women’s press presented a role model of a female citizen; 4) headlines aimed at female readers from a city and a village differed in the definition of a role model of a female citizen.

<sup>10</sup> B. Skowronek, *Mediolingwistyka: teoria — metodologia — idea*, „Postscriptum Polonistyczne” 2014, 2/14, p. 18.

<sup>11</sup> M. McLuhan, *Zrozumieć media. Przedłużenie człowieka*, Warszawa 2004, p. 39–40.

<sup>12</sup> G. Ptaszek, *Jak badać medialny obraz świata?* [in:] *Współczesne media. Medialny obraz świata, t. 1: Zagadnienia teoretyczne*, ed. I. Hofman, D. Kępa-Figura, Lublin 2015, p. 17.

<sup>13</sup> M. Murat, *Topos wędrówki i wędrówka przez toposy*, [in:] *Toposy (w) filozofii. Filozofia i jej miejsce w doświadczeniu kulturowym*, ed. M. Woźniczka, M. Perek, Częstochowa 2018, p. 313.

The time frame adopted for the research includes the period from 1 January 1989 to 3 December 1992. The initial point is marked by media discussion on the significance of the talks between the authority of the Polish People's Republic and the democratic opposition before the Round Table Talks. The final point concurs with the first stage of the system transformation — the year of adopting the so-called Small Constitution<sup>14</sup> by the Parliament of the first term on 17 October 1992. The research time frame also overlaps with the Polish press market transformation (which resulted from political changes) and in *sensu largo* it is connected with legal conditions. Jerzy Jarowiecki noticed that over 12 acts concerning media were accepted at that time<sup>15</sup>. On 22 March 1990 Workers' Publishing Cooperative — "Press-Book-Traffic" was closed down by virtue of law, on 11 April *the Act on Censorship of Publication and Performances, revoking the censorship authority and changing of this act — The Press Law* was repealed, on 27 April 1990 *the Act on the Organisation and Activities of a Cooperative*<sup>16</sup> was amended, which directly contributed to dissolving the state press monopoly in the form of the State-Owned Enterprise for Press Releases and Workers' Publishing Cooperative — "Press-Book-Traffic. Formally, the world censorship system which had been gradually developed after World War II was abolished. These provisions were formulated in the Round Table's "Report on the Sub-unit's Work on Mass Media"<sup>17</sup>. The reforms of the press market contributed not only to the freedom of speech and publishing pluralism, but they also caused destabilisation of the magazines hitherto subsidized and supported by the state, including the women's press in question. The press had to find its place in difficult economic conditions of the state and face more and more frequently appearing competition from foreign corporations. This situation gave rise to a rapid increase in prices of the magazines<sup>18</sup>. Closing down of the "Press-Book-Traffic" company resulted in proprietary changes in the Polish press market starting from April 1990. Additionally, there was a growth in the number of magazines and other magazines were bought out by foreign companies or individual

<sup>14</sup> The constitutional act of 17 October 1997 about the mutual relationship between the Legislature and the Executive Power in the Republic of Poland as well as the local and regional authorities Dz. U. [Journal of Laws] 1992 no. 84, Item 426.

<sup>15</sup> J. Jarowiecki, *Przekształcenia prasy polskiej w latach 1989–1995*, [in:] *Transformacja mediów 1989–1995*, ed. A. Słomkowska, Warszawa 1996, p. 43.

<sup>16</sup> *The Act of 22 March 1990 on closing down Workers' Publishing Cooperative "Press-Book-Traffic"* Dz.U. 1990 no. 21, Item 125; *The Act of 11 April 1990 on Censorship of Publications and Performance, revoking the censorship authority, an changing of the act — the Press Law*, Dz. U. 1990, no. 29, Item 173; *The Act of 27 April 1990 on the Changes in Organisation and Activities of Cooperatives*, Dz.U. 1990, no. 29, Item 175.

<sup>17</sup> A. Słomkowska, *Zmiany w mediach w roku poprzedzającym zniesienie cenzury*, [in:] *Transformacja mediów 1989–1995...*, p. 26; K. Pokorna-Ignatowicz, *Robotnicza Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza „Prasa-Książka-Ruch” w polskim systemie medialnym*, Kraków 2016, p. 108–111.

<sup>18</sup> In January 1989, one copy of the weekly "Woman and Life" cost 70 zł, "Best Friend" 40 zł, and in December 1992 it was respectively 6700 zł and 5000 zł.

publishers<sup>19</sup>. These changes affected also women's press. In 1992 the first German press corporation H. Bauer's "Tina" magazine appeared on the Polish press market, which was much different from the typical Polish magazines for women. Its goal was to present entertainment and lifestyle issues at the cost of social and political problems which were avoided in its content. The structure of the magazine, the layout and threads on pages, highlighted headlines, variety of font, and excess of photos were previously unknown to the Polish press market.

It is worth mentioning that the chosen research time period also corresponds to the two stages of media periodization in Poland after 1989. According to Ryszard Filas's typology, the first stage took place from May 1989 until mid-1991 and was characterised by a rapid emergence of new publishers on the Polish press market and changes concerning the existing titles. The second stage (from mid-1991 until the end of 1992) was called "an illusory stability"<sup>20</sup>. Therefore, it can be claimed that the choice of the research time frame was justified by the significance of the events in Poland at that time (such as the beginning of the Round Table Talks, enacting a provisional constitution which was the main key to the research), legal conditions (such as initiating and consistently implementing the changes in the press law during the Round Table Talks), and the first stage of proprietary changes in the Polish press market, including the emergence of a copy of the German women's magazine "Tina" in 1992.

### Polish woman during the political changes

The research covered the press concerning social, economic, and political actions which were undertaken by women. It is worth pointing out that the number of articles on this topic was not constant in the researched period (see Chart 1).

The prevalence of such articles is noticeable on the threshold of the process of the political transformation in 1989, which resulted from the significance of the events as well as the sought-for chance to change women's position in Poland. Therefore, the political events which were mainly associated with the Round Table Talks and then the contract election were reconstructed in the periodicals. However, the proceedings of meetings, politicians' reluctance to include women in the discussion on political changes, and the appearing suggestions for changes of *the Act of 27 April 1956 on the Abortion Conditions* (Dz. U. 1956, no. 12, Item 61) made both editors and female readers (who made it clear in the letters sent to the editorial office) vastly disappointed.

<sup>19</sup> J. Jarowiecki, *Przekształcenia prasy...*, p. 44–45.

<sup>20</sup> R. Filas, *Dwadzieścia lat przemian polskich mediów (1989–2009) w ujęciu periodycznym*, „Zeszyty Prasoznawcze” 2010, no. 3–4, p. 30.

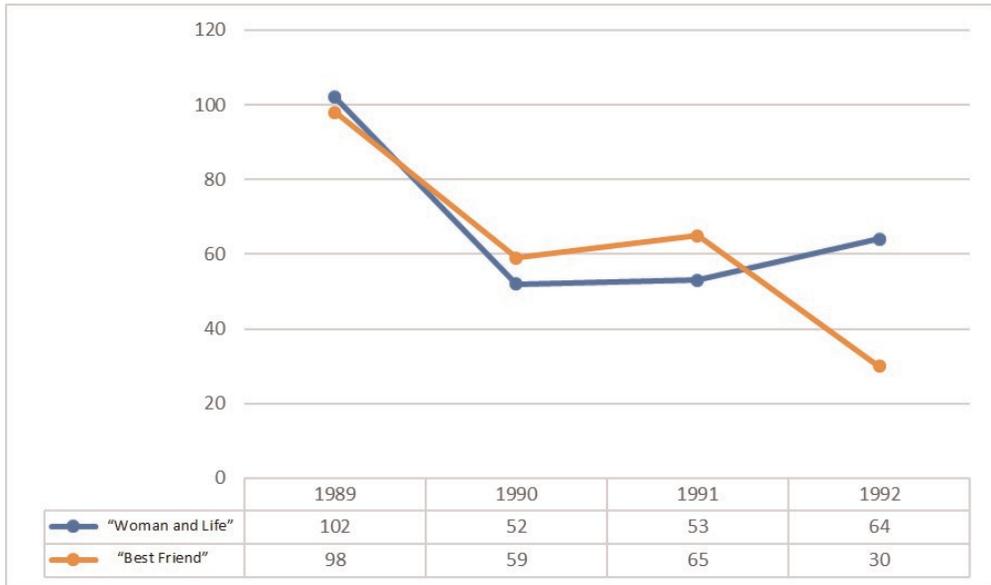


Chart 1

The number of socio-political articles in "Woman and Life" and "Best Friend" between 1989–1992

Source: Based on author's own research

Despite the fact that the first direct and free election was held in 1990, a clear decrease in the interest in socio-political themes could be observed in the press at that time. A year later, there was a small increase in the number of such articles, whose level was maintained in "Woman and Life", however, in "Best Friend" there was a dramatic decrease in the articles on this topic in 1992.

In the reflection on the political changes in the women's press we can notice some toposes whose role was to diagnose women's situation in Poland, the areas in which they dominated, and their potential forms of activation and actions. Mirosław Murat indicates that these toposes are communication codes in a given culture. Therefore, they can be considered as binders, a certain axiological regulator which aids in giving a clear order to a semantic chaos. Among the basic toposes used for reference purposes, the researcher distinguished the topos of: tradition, religion, politics, science and technology, identity, family<sup>21</sup>. Therefore, referring to the concept of topos, it can be noticed that the message on the topic of the women's situation during the system transformations included a majority of the toposes mentioned above. It is also visible that in the women's press the topos of tradition, religion, politics, identity, and family formed an inseparable conglomerate which conditioned the women's life in Poland.

<sup>21</sup> M. Murat, *Topos wędrówki...*, p. 315–316.

Toposes were used to explain a woman's social and political position. The women's press emphasised the strong influence of the Catholic Church on the society as well as its significant role in shaping the national identity according to the "Polish-Catholic" motto. What people also noticed was the effect of customs and religion on the traditional share of responsibilities<sup>22</sup>. Toposes determined a longstanding Polish traditional family model with the exalted model of the Polish Mother, shaped by the literature and arts, who was perceived as a home guardian and a warrior for "the Polish cause", ready to sacrifice herself for her family.

Anna Titkow noticed that the Polish woman's identity is the effect of the historical conditions which impinged on shaping the model of femininity. The researcher refers to the model of chivalry according to which a Polish woman was held in high esteem, appreciated for her organisational skills and at times she also managed a considerable fortune. Despite the fact that women as a group did not have rights and they obeyed men, "the noble women were equal to men", which was "inconsistent with the subservience and equality rule". Poland's partitions was the next factor which shaped women's identity. At that time women were required to guard national identity, maintain the traditions (language, culture, and faith), and, if necessary, replace her husband (dead or arrested one) who committed himself to the national cause. Consequently, it led to the merging of the idea of family and nation creating the idealised model of "the Polish Mother". It strengthened the traditional role of a woman who served the nation by working for her family as well as taking care of people wounded in the fight for independence, doing philanthropic work and taking part in the independence movement (this idea concerned women from different social classes). Titkow claimed that "it was that hard period of losing independence that created the behavioural and attitudinal genotype (which functions until today) of a woman as a person who can cope with the most complex challenges posed by the social reality. A woman who combines her aspirations with the needs of a community, who devotes herself in the name of Motherland and Family, and who does not expect any other gratification but the symbolic one, and then in spite of this and thanks to this, she receives a high prestige and position in the family and society"<sup>23</sup>. In the Second Polish Republic Polish women successfully fought for equal political and educational rights, however, the development of the idea of emancipation was disturbed by the German attack on Poland in 1939 and the onset of World War II. Again, after 1945 women started to be included in the labour market, which was a repetition of the previously existing scenario<sup>24</sup>. This body of experience passed down the generations shaped the model of a Polish woman which was not under-

<sup>22</sup> A. Szymańska, *Ozdobnik*, „Woman and Life” [hereinafter referred to as “W&L”] 13 XII 1989, no. 48, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> A. Titkow, *Tożsamość polskich kobiet: ciągłość, zmiana, konteksty*, Warszawa 2007, p. 52.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 48–54, 59–63.

standable for the western world, and only partly consistent with “the European standards”<sup>25</sup>. What was promoted was, on the one hand, women’s emancipation and on the other one, the necessity to fall in line with the community. In this way the prevalent archetypes were that of the “Polish Mother” who was responsible for the continuance of the national identity and children’s patriotic education, the one who fought for the independence, as well as the model of “a socio-realist heroine” established in the People’s Republic of Poland. “A common element of these two images was the women’s subservience to the interest of social structures in return for symbolic gratification, prestige, and the possibility to perform roles which had been previously inaccessible for women”<sup>26</sup>.

Therefore, a Polish woman was not only a mother and a wife, but also an icon of the civic virtues — a medium of national values and tradition, a warrior for “the Polish cause”. However, this elevation did not contribute to the increase in women’s participation in politics or economy. It explicitly placed the Polish woman in the sphere of family and home activity. The system transformation was, therefore, seen as a chance to change Polish woman’s social position. In “Woman and Life” it was indicated that in 1984 Poland was the first country in the world where women accounted for 55,5% of all female students who earned on average 70% of a man’s salary. Woman “stopped being only a childminder and a home cook, she assumed a role of a co-breadwinner”<sup>27</sup>. Women’s press began to write about women by introducing “a new quality” in defining their social position and their role in the state. Magdalena Boronowska noticed “a process of a systematic expansion in the field of woman’s activity”<sup>28</sup>.

In order to properly reconstruct the women’s press editors’ interest in civic participation and the areas in which woman could attain her ambitions, the results of the magazines’ content analysis should be presented with regards to the categorisation of the articles’ topics (see Table no. 1).

Women’s issues were considered in the context of six categories: social aspects, labour law, economy, education, politics, and health. Some of these categories clearly prevailed over others, for example in “Woman and Life” the dominant categories were politics and economy, while the health topic was frequently mentioned in 1990 and the social issue was regularly discussed in 1990 and 1992. In “Best Friend”

<sup>25</sup> M. Pawlus, *Tożsamość polskich kobiet — pomiędzy tradycją a nowoczesnością*, [in:] *Waleczny duch kobiety. Społeczno-ekonomiczne aspekty ról kobiecych*, red. K. Lendzion, O. Kotowska-Wójcik, Warszawa 2015, p. 26, 34.

<sup>26</sup> M. Frąckowiak-Sochańska, *Superwomen — córki „Matek Polek”*. *Co zyskują i co tracą współczesne Polki realizujące wzorzec superwomen?* [in:] *Ona w XXI wieku — interdyscyplinarny obraz kobiety*, ed. M. Baranowska-Szczepańska, Poznań 2011, p. 285.

<sup>27</sup> A. Metelska, *Nasza Równieżnica*, „W&L” 6 II 1991, no. 6, p. 2–3.

<sup>28</sup> M. Boronowska, *Nowe szanse ale czy nowoczesny sposób funkcjonowania współczesnej kobiety?*, [in:] *Ona w XXI wieku — interdyscyplinarny...*, p. 137.

Table 1

The frequency of appearance of particular press material's categories in the women's press between 1989–1992

Magazine's title	Categories of press articles					
	Social issues	Labour law	Economy	Education	Politics	Health
<b>1989</b>						
“Woman and Life”	4,91%	1,96%	<b>24,51%</b>	2,94%	<b>61,76%</b>	3,92%
“Best Friend”	13,26%	6,12%	<b>21,43%</b>	4,08%	<b>45,93%</b>	9,18%
<b>1990</b>						
“Woman and Life”	15,38%	0%	<b>19,24%</b>	3,85%	<b>48,07%</b>	13,46%
“Best Friend”	<b>22,03%</b>	6,78%	13,56%	3,39%	<b>52,54%</b>	1,7%
<b>1991</b>						
“Woman and Life”	7,55%	0%	<b>20,75%</b>	9,43%	<b>56,60%</b>	5,67%
“Best Friend”	18,46%	0%	<b>29,24%</b>	4,61%	<b>44,61%</b>	3,08%
<b>1992</b>						
“Woman and Life”	12,5%	0%	<b>17,20%</b>	3,12%	<b>67,18%</b>	0%
“Best Friend”	<b>46,66%</b>	6,67%	6,67%	6,67%	<b>23,33%</b>	10%

Source: Based on author's own research

politics predominated in the materials selected between 1989–1991. More and more often, the social issues, which had been also touched upon in detail in 1990, were discussed in 1992. Economic problems were also in the centre of attention. The frequency of the issues tackled depended on the reforms introduced in the state and their consequences. Therefore, how was the situation of women diagnosed during the systemic transformation?

Politics prevailed in both periodicals. In 1989 many political issues were reported, such as system transformations, the process and consequences of the Round Table Talks, the situation of the Polish United Worker's Party, the growing support for the citizen's committees (an organised democratic opposition), and the course of the electoral campaign before the contract election. The female readers were also informed about the voting rules and the electoral law.

In “Woman and Life” this category appeared mainly in the articles associated with gender equality (65,07%, in “Best Friend” this issue accounted for 35,5% of this category, and more publishing space was dedicated to the presentation of the system transformation issues). In January 1989 it was pointed out that: “The women in power can be hardly found in socialist countries. In Poland their situation is very unique — we have an army which consists of educated women, but this army is not

fully used, it is blocked at a higher or lower level, or it is even withdrawing from the battle”<sup>29</sup>. The increase in women’s participation in the public life was sought for in the political transformation. However, some doubts as to a natural course of these changes, resulted from the women’s underrepresentation during the inauguration of the Round Table Talks<sup>30</sup>. Historians’ findings show that the ratio of men to women was 7:1 among the representatives of the “Solidarity” opposition during the Round Table Talks<sup>31</sup>.

The periodical “Woman and Life” strongly objected to having the voice of women overlooked during debates on women’s issues. It even created a column “About us without us” which presented the statements of women representing science, arts, culture, and those socially and politically active who met at the competitive “women’s table”. The protest was raised by the editorial office once the position of the Government Plenipotentiary for women’s issues was not filled in after the contract elections<sup>32</sup>. In 1992 the office appointed “the shadow cabinet” with women as the heads of the ministries<sup>33</sup>.

“Woman and Life” indicated inequality between salaries for men and women, the absence of women in power and in managerial positions (the “promotion barriers” column), and discussed the reason why women did not get involved in the public life. At the same time it presented the careers of women who “broke down the glass ceiling” in politics, economy, culture, social life and included some examples of their actions<sup>34</sup>. Both periodicals emphasized women’s readiness to join the political life and presented female figures who were worth voting on during the election (the “Who if not us” “They will not Let you down” columns in “Woman and Life”, “We Support” — in “Best Friend”).

The draft bill which was aimed to penalise abortion regardless of the reason was a highly important topic for a discussion initiated in 1989. In the periodicals women were encouraged to join in the debate on the bill and to send letters which were later presented in special columns *People write letters* (in “Woman and Life”) and *Your letters and From our Mailing Box* (in “Best Friend”). Editors presented a cross-section of opinions, yet underlining that they neither approved of nor promoted abortion, but only questioned the idea of the bill which undermined women’s citi-

<sup>29</sup> Danuta, *Na ławce rezerwowych*, „W&L” 4 I 1989, no. 1, p. 5.

<sup>30</sup> *O nas bez nas (1)*, oprac. K. Kaszuba, „W&L” 29 III 1989, no. 13, p. 4–5; *O nas bez nas (2)*, oprac. K. Kaszuba, „W&L” 5 IV 1989, no. 14, p. 2. Anna Przeclawska was the only woman invited to the inauguration.

<sup>31</sup> Z. Woźniak, *Pokłosie Okrągłego Stołu...*, p. 352–354.

<sup>32</sup> A. Szymańska, *Ozdobnik...*, p. 3.

<sup>33</sup> See e.g.: *Wierzymy w kobiety. Czy demokracja jest rodzaju męskiego? Uparcie wołamy — NIE!*, „W&L” 15 VI 1992, no. 16: 3.

<sup>34</sup> Danuta, *Na ławce rezerwowych*, „W&L” 4 I 1989, no. 1, p. 5; K. G. M., „Kury” *biurowe i naukowe*, „W&L” 5 VII 1989, no. 27, p. 2–3; M. Teresińska, *Polski schemat*, „W&L” 6 IX 1989, no. 34, p.2; Matka Bartka, *Mamo, szuj kaptcie!*, „W&L” 8 XI 1989, no. 43, p. 5–6.

zens' rights and freedoms<sup>35</sup>. Between 1990 and 1992 this topic took over the whole category of politics in "Woman and Life"<sup>36</sup>. Discussing the draft of the unborn child protection bill, it was indicated that this draft is in breach of the women's right to decide about their lives. In "Best Friend" this issue was mainly touched upon in the column called "Very Hot Topic" in 1991.

In "Woman and Life" there were two writing directions in the area of economy. Firstly, women were motivated to take up professional activity, to engage themselves more considerably in professional work and to create entrepreneurial attitudes in order to have their own input in the development of the national economy<sup>37</sup>. The periodical presented the stories of women who achieved professional success and this is how the women's economic lobby was initiated. Secondly, the poor economic conditions were pointed out, namely the lack of goods, the deregulated market, low quality of products (there was a competition held for female readers to choose the best and the worst product of the year), the collapse of enterprises and growing unemployment<sup>38</sup>. "Best Friend" made people aware of the critical state of the market and the growing social tensions leading to strikes<sup>39</sup>. Both "Best Friend" and "Woman and Life" deliberated on the necessity of the economic reform<sup>40</sup>, as well as the support of the Polish production. In the "Get to Know What you Have" column, "Best Friend" encouraged its readers to buy Polish products.

In "Woman and Life" and „Best Friend” social topics taken up by the editors concerned mainly a systemic support for families and a proper regulation of retirement issues. It is worth mentioning that the weekly "Best Friend" would raise this

<sup>35</sup> R. Pragier, *Kobieta, prawo i życie*, „Best Friend” [hereinafter referred to as „BF”] 12 VII 1990, no. 28, p. 6.

<sup>36</sup> E.g. I. Wiczorkowska-Bednarek, *Prosto z Sejmu: Gdy dwoje mówi to samo*, „W&L” 14 III 1990, no. 11, p. 11; A. Frankowska, *Powrót do szaleństwa*, „W&L” 6 VI 1990, no. 23, p. 2; eadem, *Brzemienne paragrafy*, „W&L” 8 VIII 1990, no. 32, p. 4–5; E. Wierzbicka, *Więcej niż dwie strony*, „W&L” 20 II 1990, no. 8, p. 5; Z. Zubczewska, *...A natura wie swoje*, „W&L” 22 V 1991, no. 21, p. 2; I. Konarska, *Ciemności kryją kodeks*, „W&L” 29 I 1992, no. 5, p. 2–3; eadem, *Życie poczęte chronić mają paragrafy. Na nic więcej nas nie stać. Czy to etyczne?*, „W&L” 27 V 1992, no. 22, p. 2; eadem, *Niemoralna*, „W&L” 29 VII 1992, no. 31, p. 2; I. Kołodziej, *Bez nas*, „W&L” 12 II 1992, no. 7, p. 7.

<sup>37</sup> L. Śnieg-Czaplewska, *Wzgardzony zgrzebny len*, „W&L” 21 VI 1989, no. 25, p. 2–3; G. Wróblewska, *Którędy do kapitalizmu?*, „W&L” 16 I 1991, no. 3, p. 4; M. Mankiewicz, *Ja, właścicielka dziurki od klucza*, „W&L” 20 II 1991, no. 8, p. 2.

<sup>38</sup> e.g. N. Iwaszkiewicz, *Figa z makiem*, „W&L” 28 VI 1989, no. 26, p. 4; A. Orlicka, *Zasypane cukrem?*, „W&L” 5 VII 1989, no. 27, p. 3.

<sup>39</sup> E. Łuszczuk, *Łaty na dziurawej kieszeni*, „BF” 13 VII 1989, no. 28, p. 4; W. Piątek, *Nie będzie lekko*, „BF” 26 X 1989, no. 43, p. 4; R. Pragier, *Krajobraz ze strajkiem*, „BF” 4 VII 1991, no. 27, p. 3.

<sup>40</sup> e.g. W. Bielski, *Po żniwach: O chlebie i butelce mleka*, „W&L” 6 IX 1989, no. 34, p. 3; K. Kaszuba, *Jak nam się żyje*, „W&L” 16 V 1990, no. 20, p. 4–5; A. Zarzecki, *Wszystko jest towarem*, „BF” 9 II 1989, no. 6, p. 3; R. Pragier, *Trudne słowo — nie tylko słowo*, „BF” 30 III 1989, no. 13, p. 4.

question much more frequently (see Table no. 1), which resulted from its target readers' group — small town and village inhabitants who were more subject to the problem of company shut downs, work loss and unemployment. The editorial team of "Best Friend" presented its solutions to subsequent ministries as to the maintenance, housing and retirement problems<sup>41</sup>. It also joined in an organization offering help for the poorest ones and acted as its agent informing about the places with cheap meals<sup>42</sup>. The weekly's team postulated the importance of ensuring accommodation to families and a minimum level of existence during the old age. They claimed that special care should be exercised over single mothers bringing up their children. Against increasing economic crisis the issue of food vouchers and other forms of help for the most destitute ones was of high relevance as well.

Both weeklies took up the issue of legal regulations concerning women's professional activity. It was noted that Polish women lacked legal protection in their workplaces, they were employed in positions which were damaging to their health. This topic was predominantly prevalent in "Best Friend" (1989–1990, 1992), see: Table no. 1. The idea of establishing supported employment jobs, respecting the working time, counteracting pay discrimination and harsh working conditions in women's jobs were regarded as priority issues<sup>43</sup>.

Both magazines emphasized the aspect of education for women, see Table no. 1. Particular attention was attached to an appropriate level of sexual education in Poland. Its introduction would have decreased the number of abortions and unwanted motherhood<sup>44</sup>. A critical attitude was also assumed towards the level of Polish school system, both to its content-related level (which resulted from low remuneration for teachers and the reduction of extracurricular activities) as well as its organization (overcrowded classrooms, inadequate conditions of their premises)<sup>45</sup>. Magazines observed the improvement of school system at the time of the increase in non-public schools and the emergence of innovative programmes to be implemented in public schools<sup>46</sup>.

<sup>41</sup> See e.g. E. Banasiuk, *Propozycje dla rządu*, „BF” 5 I 1989, no. 1, p. 4.

<sup>42</sup> e.g. H. Wygoda, *S.O.S. w imieniu najsłabszych*, „BF” 24 VIII 1989, no. 34; M. Machińska, *SOS w imieniu najsłabszych: Pomóżmy pomocy społecznej*, „BF” 28 IX 1989, no. 39, p. 2–3; K. Kurczab-Redlich, *SOS w imieniu najsłabszych: Jak trafić do właściwych drzwi?*, „BF” 12 X 1989, no. 41, p. 2–3.

<sup>43</sup> See: M. Machińska, *Oddziały pracy chronionej*, „BF” 12 I 1989, no. 2, p. 3; H. Wygoda, *Czas pracy*, „BF” 12 I 1989, no. 2, p. 4.

<sup>44</sup> Z. Zubczewska, *Mąż uważa, czyli antykoncepcja po polsku*, „W&L” 26 IV 1989, no. 17, p. 2–3; eadem, *Antykoncepcja po polsku*, „W&L” 23 V 1990, no. 21, p. 5; A. Czernska, *Jak dobrze, że jesteście*, „BF” 9 II 1989, no. 6, p. 3.

<sup>45</sup> E. Stasz, *Koniec szkoły?: Cichy układ*, „W&L” 14 VIII 1991, no. 33, p. 3; J. Orzechowski, *Koniec szkoły: Lekcje na stołówce*, „W&L” 28 VIII 1991, no. 35, p. 2.

<sup>46</sup> Z. Zubczewska, *Kropła słodczy...*, „W&L” 29 VIII 1990, no. 35, p. 4; E. Szczurowska, *Szkoły społeczne: czysty zysk*, „BF” 26 IV 1990, no. 17, p. 5; eadem, *Co zrobić z tą wolnością*, „BF” 30 VIII 1990, no. 35, p. 4–5.

Another women's issue was the health care service, a female-dominated sector suffering from low pay<sup>47</sup> and a lack of appreciation in the workplace, especially in the case of nurses. A list of problems also included an insufficient financial support for hospitals from the state's budget and an inadequate supply of medications, needles and syringes in hospitals and pharmacies<sup>48</sup>. On the other hand, female readers were encouraged to get involved in fundraising campaigns in order to purchase medical equipment, thus providing aid to the state<sup>49</sup>.

In the discussed weeklies the image of a woman in Poland during the transformation period manifested itself through a reference to a few aspects. Firstly, it was the impact of systemic changes on a woman's life. In 1989 there appeared a chance of changing women's position in Poland. Women were expected to share the power and receive institution support in order to overcome the barriers of occupational advancement. However, due to the exclusion of women from a public debate concerning the state's reform made them carry out bottom-up activities establishing informal organizations and mutually promoting their female candidates for deputies and senators. In this respect the weekly "Woman and Life" was at the forefront. A woman during the transformation period was also discriminated in terms of her right to decide about herself. Readers and editors emphasized that fact on several occasions in the context of the project on the protection of unborn child. The image of a woman evolved, from a political activist in 1989, a citizen tormented by men, to a defender of her own rights and freedoms in the years 1991 and 1992.

Secondly, it was stressed that a woman fell victim to the economic crisis in many ways. "Best Friend" pointed to the feminization of poverty in Poland<sup>50</sup>. It was a woman who took responsibility for household supplies. The lack of food, clothing, industrial products aroused her frustration and required her to be more active at home, for instance, preparing meals or sewing clothes. A working woman was employed in many jobs then. Unfortunately, it was women who were dismissed in the first place — the younger ones due to parental duties, the older ones because of their lower productivity. Hence, it was deemed essential to implement social policy in the state in terms of ensuring maintenance support and financial support for single mothers. Another type of woman's discrimination during the systemic changes referred to her career progression and salary. On the whole, the woman's voice did not matter. She was a victim of savings in the educational sector and health care service.

<sup>47</sup> G. Musiałek, *Gorączka*, „W&L” 22 III 1989, no. 12, p. 4–5; eadem, *Podział*, „W&L” 5 IV 1989, no. 14, p. 4.

<sup>48</sup> G. Wróblewska, *Uklucie*, „W&L” 18 I 1989, no. 3, p.3; M. Machińska, *A może komisowa apteka?*, „BF” 4 V 1989, no. 18, p. 5; eadem, *Do apteki z grubszym portfelem...*, „BF” 30 III 1989, no. 13, p. 7; eadem, *Pacjenci płaczą i placą!*, „BF” 16 I 1992, no. 3, p. 4–5.

<sup>49</sup> A. Metelska, *Spektroskop znaczy zdrowie*, „W&L” 25 X 1989, no. 41, p. 13.

<sup>50</sup> Rozmowa R. Pragier z doc. Danutą Markowską: *Dziś o tym, czy w Polsce potrzebna jest partia kobiet*, „BF” 29 III 1990, no. 13, p. 2.

Yet, it was a woman who was responsible for taking care of and bringing up children. The decrease in the number of kindergartens truly worked against her professional activity which she often had to abandon.

Thirdly, a woman in the times of transformations in Poland, was equal to a man only in a formal sense as her rights were guaranteed by the constitution, yet the reality projected in the women's press showed a clear gap between her legal status and a practice of life. Despite the regulations concerning women's labour, pregnant women would still work in conditions which were not in line with prescribed norms, sheltered employment was abolished, women returning to their jobs after maternity leave were given a notice and their remuneration was significantly lower than that of men in similar positions.

### A female citizen or an observer?

As it was indicated, the topic of equality in the women's press was quite prevalent in the discussed periodicals, see: Chart no. 2. It was definitely dominant in the weekly "Woman and Life" which was aimed at women active in social and professional life, city dwellers. "Best Friend" paid a lot of attention to arousing women's interest in political and transformational issues. Women were urged to participate in elections, follow political programmes or changes in law. "Woman and Life", in turn, inspired female citizens to act for the sake of "female affairs" such as voting for women in elections, presenting their standpoints in political cases. A growing interest in the issue of gender equality was observed before the contract election in 1989 and before the first free parliamentary election in 1991 when women put forward their own candidates to the Sejm and the Senate. This gave rise to alarming voices that "fully democratic elections were bound to change the attitude of the parties striving for power towards their voters — women"<sup>51</sup>. In 1990 the number of articles dedicated to this topic fell as a result of lethargy following the "contract" election during which women received an insignificant number of seats in the Parliament.<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, the rise in such articles in "Woman and Life" in 1992 was related to the establishment of a cross-party "Women's Parliamentary Group" in the Sejm under the leadership of Barbara Labuda. This group embodied the editors' endeavours to institutionalize women's joint actions in cases directly referring to them.

<sup>51</sup> A. Szymańska, *Ozdobnik...*, p. 3.

<sup>52</sup> A total of 200 women were running for the "contract" elections to the Sejm and Senate. They received 68 seats, 62 in the Sejm and 2 in the Senate. The editor in chief of „Woman and Life” pointed out that in the Sejm of the 10<sup>th</sup> term there were twice fewer women as in the previous terms, A. Szymańska-Kwiatkowska, *Czas nagli*, „W&L” 12 VII 1989, no. 28, p. 2–3.

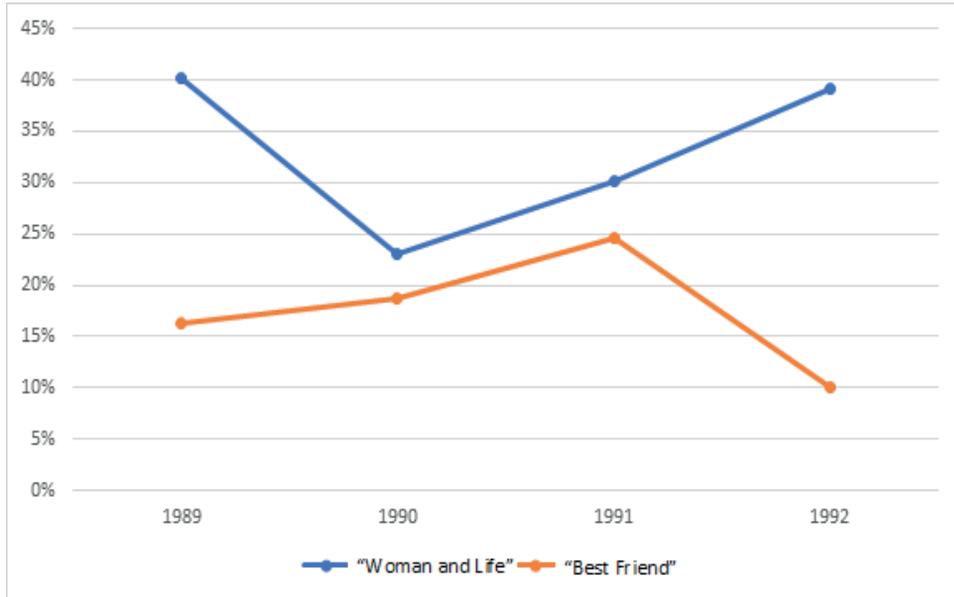


Chart 2

The share of articles on equality in the Polish women's press between 1989–1992

Source: Based on author's own research

What was equality for the editors of women's press? In "Woman and Life" they defined equality as equal opportunities for both women and men in a public and private sphere. It was observed that women in Poland did not pursue management positions as, first of all, they were not given such a possibility, secondly, they lacked motivation. This resulted from a feeling of being overwhelmed with household chores (because of the lack of household appliances and semi-products) as well as professional duties. The reason for the absence of motivation was the abuse of the concept of "women's equality" as a propaganda tool in 1945 when women were recruited as labour force in exchange for equal rights. This also coincided with the shortage of men who did not return to the country from either the military front line, or captivity or due to their convalescence they were unable to perform any work. At that time certain female role models such as a tractor driver, a bricklayer, an office clerk or a teacher were promoted by the state which postulated "liberation through work", "carefully hiding the fact that the underlying assumption of the right to employment presumed that taking up professional activity should depend on a free choice, a desire of self-fulfilment in the public domain, not on necessity and obligation"<sup>53</sup>. A woman's professional activity depreciated her position as a person "bringing a family together and building a family life". Unfortunately, in return a woman

<sup>53</sup> B. Limanowska, *Dlaczego ogórek nie śpiewa?*, „W&L” 15 III 1989, p. 2–3.

failed to receive a possibility to exert an influence on a social and political life or to equal her earnings with men, nor did she cherish much hope for promotion. Consequently, after 40 years of legally guaranteed equality, Polish women experienced a feeling of illusion<sup>54</sup>. Hence, it was emphasized that women “being theoretically on an equal footing with men pursuant to the constitution, the International Labour Organization Convention and the code of labour, belonged to the discriminated majority of citizens in our country”<sup>55</sup>. A saying that “a woman should be twice as effective as a man in order to get half as far as him” was widely repeated<sup>56</sup>.

The Round Table Talks proved that issues regarding women were being discussed without their participation, even though women were professionally active and educated at that time<sup>57</sup>. It was also noted that men were entitled to be or not to be promoted, whereas women were not given a chance of developing their career<sup>58</sup>. With regards to men “Woman and Life” voiced women’s opinion in such a way: “We are not taking away their life, professional, political as well as social opportunities. We expect the same from them on a reciprocal basis ...”<sup>59</sup>. The editorial staff of “Woman and Life” also made a decision to grant the anti-award “the Horn” for “the most anti-female performance and statement”. The first prize was awarded to the head of the Cabinet Office, Wojciech Włodarczyk, for a dismissal of Anna Popowicz, the government plenipotentiary for family, women and youth (he also dismissed 9 other women and 1 man) and for dismantling this office<sup>60</sup>.

While conducting an assessment of a woman’s situation during the political transformation, it was noticed that women were pushed from one extreme to the other. Socialism offered them employment and the right to have a legal abortion (only in the case of a threat to the mother’s life or health, foetal abnormality, a rape or a difficult life situation) capitalism, on the other hand, deprived them of work and sentenced them to “vegetation and forced maternity”<sup>61</sup>.

Women’s discrimination was believed to have resulted from legislation and their political and professional activity. One form of legal discrimination was a bill concerning the protection of the unborn child in which abortion was penalized. In the women’s press this situation was viewed as “a return to obscurantism”<sup>62</sup>. It was

<sup>54</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>55</sup> A. Metelska, *Nasza Rówieśnica*, „W&L” 6 II 1991, no. 6, p. 2–3.

<sup>56</sup> *Wierzmy w kobietę. Czy demokracja jest rodzaju męskiego? Uparcie wołamy — NIE!*, „W&L” 15 IV 1992, no. 16, p. 3.

<sup>57</sup> *O nas bez nas* (1), oprac. K. Kaszuba, „W&L” 29 III 1989, no. 13, p. 4–5; L. Błaszczuk, *Odpoczynek wojownika*, „W&L” 20 V 1992, no. 21, p. 2.

<sup>58</sup> *O nas bez nas* (2), oprac. K. Kaszuba, „W&L” 5 IV 1989, no. 14.

<sup>59</sup> *Czy demokracja jest rodzaju męskiego?*, „W&L” 1 IV 1992, no. 14, p. 8–9.

<sup>60</sup> I. Konarska, *Durna Blondynka*, „W&L” 29 IV 1992, no. 18, p. 4.

<sup>61</sup> Ibidem, p. 2.

<sup>62</sup> Ludzie listy piszą: *Nie wracajmy do "Ciemnogrodu" Ostrzegam; Wspierajmy się*, „W&L” 4 I 1989, no. 1, p. 10–11.

emphasized that the bill would impinge on human rights and impede Poland's integration with Europe<sup>63</sup>. At the same time the opinions were circulating that the authors of the bill were not interested in the health and life of women<sup>64</sup>. Furthermore, the right to keep the public informed about the proceedings related to the bill was restricted, which was clearly manifested in a ban on entering the debate of the Senate's Board by the representatives of female organizations and press. Women's protests against the bill were regarded as "a struggle for dignity and responsibility", "the right to enjoy conscious pregnancy"<sup>65</sup>. It was viewed with regret that "so far men had decided on all the issues related to women and family". The editors of "Woman and Life" encouraged their readers to send their opinions on this subject to the address of the Sejm<sup>66</sup>. The weekly "Best Friend" also made references to this bill regarding the protection of the unborn child pointing to the fact that failure to take into account social and personal conditions affecting a decision of aborting pregnancy would lead to breaches of law and would give rise to growing "abortion underground". The journal advocated sexual education in the field of contraceptives commenting that "this medical procedure" should be treated as a last resort<sup>67</sup>. It published the declaration made by women's organizations<sup>68</sup> concerning the bill, in which they stated that "in view of all these draft bills pregnancy turns a woman from a legitimate citizens into a creature with limited rights, the carrier of a foetus with a purely biological function. Consequently, a woman loses her human rights for the benefit of the foetus's guarantor which is a nation, the Church, the state"<sup>69</sup>. The women writing for the journal called for a referendum on abortion<sup>70</sup>, however to their

<sup>63</sup> I. Konarska, *Paragrafy i sumienie*, „W&L” 19 VIII 1992, no. 34, p. 4–5.

<sup>64</sup> Eadem, *Życie poczęte chronić mają paragrafy. Na nic więcej nas nie stać. Czy to etyczne?*, „W&L” 27 V 1992, no. 22, p. 2.

<sup>65</sup> A. Frankowska, *Powrót do szaleństwa*, „W&L” 6 VI 1990, no. 23, p. 2; I. Konarska, *Ciemności kryją kodeks*, „W&L” 29 I 1992, no. 5, p. 2.

<sup>66</sup> E. Wierzbicka, *Więcej niż dwie strony...*, p. 5.

<sup>67</sup> R. Pragier, *Kobieta, prawo i życie*, „BF” 12 VII 1990, no. 28, p. 6.

<sup>68</sup> It was signed by: Polish Feminist Association (Clubs: Warszawa, Łódź, Kraków), Women's Club — Poznań, Pro Femina Association — Warszawa, Women's Self-Defence Movement — Bydgoszcz, Woman's Dignity Association — Toruń. It is worth mentioning that only during the political transformation (together with the establishment of the third sector) there appeared the first organizations accentuating the necessity to counteract women's discrimination. The growth of associations dealing with women's problems at the end of the 80s and 90s of the 20th century (i.e. Pro Femina Association, Neutrum Association, Federation for Women and Family Planning) resulted from the complications in women's issues in that period such as women's unemployment, limitation of their rights with regards to legal abortion, but also from external factors — the lack of institutional support or subsidies from international organizations, M. Grabowska, *Zerwana genealogia. Działalność społeczna i polityczna kobiet po 1945 roku a współczesny polski ruch kobiecy*, Warszawa 2018, p. 30–32.

<sup>69</sup> *Oświadczenie w sprawie projektu ustawy o ochronie prawnej dziecka poczętego*, „BF” 25 X 1990, no. 43, p. 5.

<sup>70</sup> I. Konarska, *Durna Blondynka*, „W&L” 29 IV 1992, no. 18, p. 2.

deep disappointment they learnt about the refusal of President Lech Wałęsa to their postulate and about the lack of support from Hanna Suchocka. In “Best Friend” it was emphasized: „A vision of a woman who chooses her own way of life is at risk”<sup>71</sup>.

Another sign of discrimination was noticeable in the recruitment of elites, which consisted in placing women’s surnames in the least attractive places on party tickets in elections or in constituencies where a given party would have the least chances of being voted for. Alina Tepli remarked that “women were respected, liked and admired, but to a certain, safe extent which would not affect the domains restricted to and dominated by men”<sup>72</sup>. It was claimed that “Poland was the only country in Europe in which a share of women in the parliament had been decreasing for 10 years and their presence in top positions of power was so marginal that it would be rather difficult to talk about their significant influence on the shape of political decisions”<sup>73</sup>. “Best Friend’s” editor wrote: “It is clearly seen that we, women, will also create bottom-up democracy starting from those very few who got together because of the common purpose. Using the word “democracy” I mean such a system of power in which various groups speak their own voice about their own interest”<sup>74</sup>.

It was also indicated that there were no women in ministries where decisions were made on “household, family, health, education and environmental protection” even though they dealt professionally with these issues and had relevant competences and qualifications<sup>75</sup>. The editor of “Woman and Life” commented that the fight for the presence of women in top positions of power was necessary as it might calm down emotions, contribute to the change of a political language, soften manners and a style of country’s governance”<sup>76</sup>. Consequently, women’s interest in politics was stimulated and promoted. As it was previously mentioned, such an action was intensively conducted on pages of “Best Friend”, see Chart no. 3

However, the interest in this issue got diminished from 1991 — after the parliamentary election. The trend was reverse in “Woman and Life” where after the parliamentary election in 1991 there was a rise in such articles. In 1992 the editorial staff of “Woman and Life” appointed an alternative “female cabinet” where women having ministerial posts joined in charity actions e.g. raising funds for poor children’s holiday<sup>77</sup>.

<sup>71</sup> Rozmowa R. Pragier z doc. Danutą Markowską: *Dziś o tym, czy w Polsce potrzebna jest partia kobiet*, „BF” 29 III 1990, no. 13, p. 2.

<sup>72</sup> A. Tepli, *Nie czuję się przegrana*, „W&L” 12 VII 1989, no. 28, p. 2.

<sup>73</sup> A. Szymańska, *Ozdobnik...*, p. 3.

<sup>74</sup> (Prag.), *Raczkuje kobiece lobby*, „BF” 29 XI 1990, no. 48, p. 5.

<sup>75</sup> L. Błaszczuk, *Odpoczynek wojownika*, „W&L” 20 V 1992, no. 21, p. 2.

<sup>76</sup> N. Iwaszkiewicz, *Czy demokracja jest rodzaju męskiego? Na szczęście — NIE!: Premiera pani premier*, „W&L” 29 VIII 1992, no. 31, p. 12.

<sup>77</sup> *Czy demokracja jest rodzaju męskiego: Gabinet nadal... do wzięcia*, „W&L” 24 VI 1992, no. 26, p. 6.

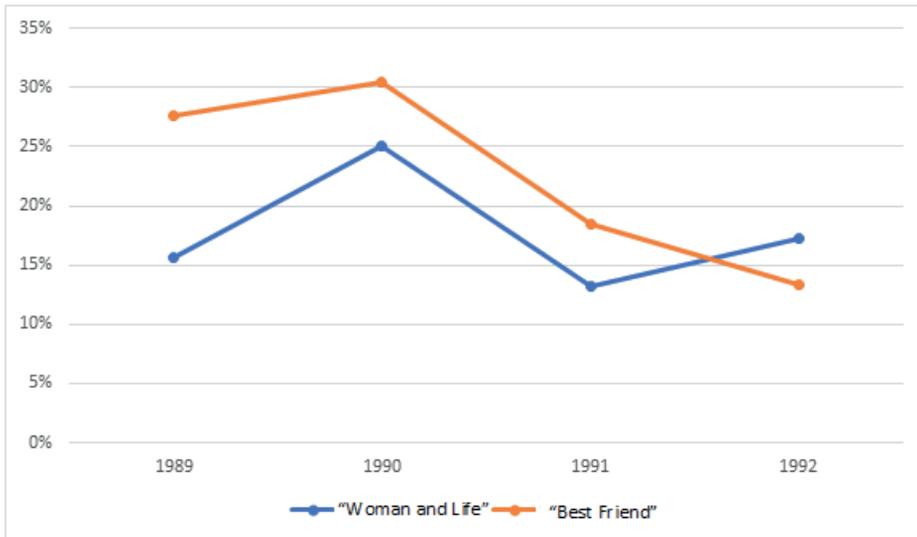


Chart 3

Frequency of topics concerning the principles of democratic state under the rule of law, elections and politicians

Source: Based on author's own research

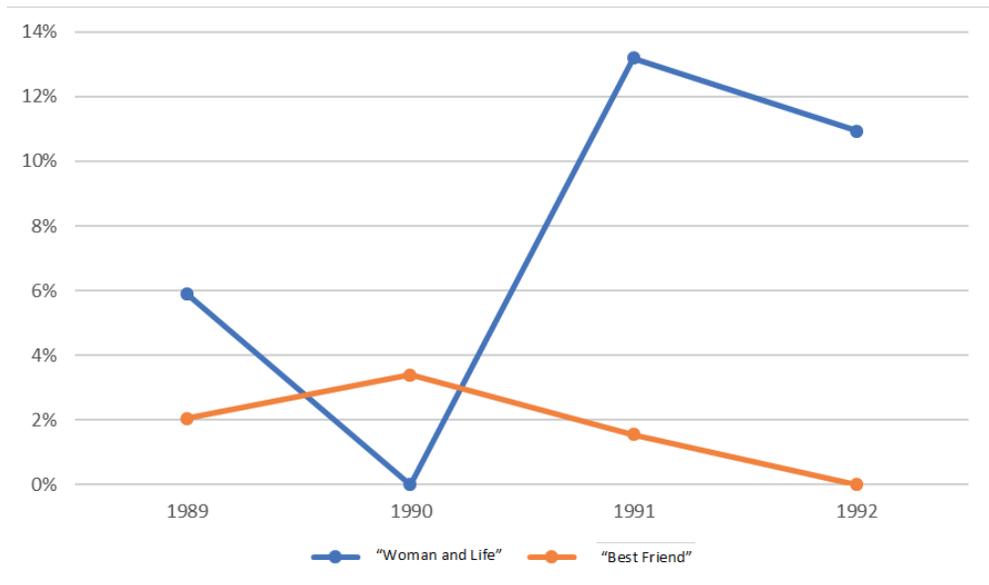


Chart 4

Frequency of the topic concerning civic activity of women in the women's press between 1989–1992

Source: Based on author's own research

A chance for women to break the deadlock and make equal rights for both men and women real was noticed in the promotion of proper patterns of women's activity, see Chart on. 4. This type of subject matter was much more frequent in "Woman and Life" than in "Best Friend".

The priority was to develop in Polish women a habit of organizing themselves in groups. Women's press promoted cooperation between women in different fields: economic, social, cultural and political one. Women employed in the sector of light industry, education and health care<sup>78</sup> were encouraged to create a lobby and to fight for their employment rights and fair working conditions<sup>79</sup>. The magazine proudly published a feature dedicated to a trip of Polish women to Southampton to hold a meeting with Federation of Business and Professional Women<sup>80</sup>. "Best Friend" advocated women's entrepreneurship, praising, for instance, the idea of setting up nursing agencies<sup>81</sup>. It can be observed thus, that editors of "Woman and Life" attached greater importance to the promotion of women's activity as a group of interest, whereas the editorial office of "Best Friend" focused on a possibility of self-fulfilment.

"Woman and Life" hosted some social initiatives among which the most distinguished ones were the soroptimist club and the Association of Christian Women and Girls<sup>82</sup>. "Best Friend" advocated self-help by promoting such organizations as the Catholic Association of Single Mothers or the Group of Women Supporting Breast-feeding, which assisted young mothers in issues related to feeding and taking care of a baby<sup>83</sup>.

As an example of cultural cooperation the magazines pointed out to an international theatrical group of women "but not those radical feminists who were popular in the West". "They did not publish their manifestos but only manifested their feminine point of view on the stage. Their goal was to save the femininity not to destroy it [...]"<sup>84</sup>. Thus, a distance towards feminism, characteristic of the women's press at that time, was demonstrated.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>78</sup> In the researched period women dominated in the indicated sectors.

<sup>79</sup> B. Limanowska, *Dlaczego ogórek nie śpiewa?...*, p. 2; *O nas bez nas* (2), oprac. K. Kaszuba, „W&L” 5 IV 1989, no. 14, p. 2–3.

<sup>80</sup> H. Kowalik, *Miękki kobiecy uścisk*, „W&L” 12 VIII 1992, no. 33, p. 2.

<sup>81</sup> M. Machińska, *Do apteki z grubszym portfelem...*, „BF” 30 III 1989, no. 13, p. 5.

<sup>82</sup> A. Brzozowska, *Sorores Optimaе*, „W&L” 30 I 1991, no. 5, p. 3–4 Rozmowa I. Konarskiej z Kingą Stawikowską, „W&L” 5 II 1992, no. 6, p. 23.

<sup>83</sup> Rozmowa E. Szczurowskiej z Martą Jenner: *Godność samotnych matek*, „BF” 13 IX 1990, no. 37, p. 4–5; A. Czerska, *Jak dobrze, że jesteście*, „BF” 9 II 1989, no. 6, p. 7.

<sup>84</sup> B. Henkel, *Daleko sięgają gałęzie*, „W&L” 25 I 1989, no. 4, p. 15.

<sup>85</sup> At the same time in "Woman and Life" it was observed that feminism in Poland was construed only pejoratively, Rozmowa T. Gałaczyńskiej z Ewą Osiatyńską: *Wernisaż dusz*, „W&L” 11 I 1989, no. 2, p. 17.

Margaret Thatcher's political career was considered a model to follow. Another woman whose professional profile was viewed as exemplary was the first Muslim Prime Minister of Pakistan. "Woman and Life" presented short biographies of Polish women who in the journal's opinion should stand for elections to the Sejm and the Senate. Female readers were encouraged to vote for the women in the 1989 elections but also in 1991. On the other hand, the activity of the Polish Women's League<sup>86</sup> was judged critically as "once having attempted to liberate all women, imposing a style of a donkey jacket and felt boots on them, it did not arouse trust as a result, dealing with everything at once from political discussions to cooking recipes, having no real impact on anything."<sup>87</sup> The journal "Best Friend" observed the necessity to organize women around a particular issue e.g. work<sup>88</sup>. It also informed about an emerging union of women who would represent all women in their dialogue with authorities. During the first meeting of the organization, it was postulated to hold a referendum on abortion and introduce a sexual education programme on TV. What was also considered important was forcing candidates to the Sejm and the Senate to take a stance towards the women's issues<sup>89</sup>.

The Polish women's press between 1989–1992 would also offer some action scenarios which, if implemented, could make gender equality real in Poland. To begin with, a change of mentality in society was perceived as a prerequisite, not only with regards to women, but also their families and most importantly, their husbands. The idea of partnership in a marriage was prevalently emphasized<sup>90</sup>. There was a protest against presenting stereotypical images in school course books where "the mother is cooking soup, the dad is reading a newspaper, the son is learning English and the grandma is ironing underwear"<sup>91</sup>. Secondly, in order to create equal opportunities between men and women, some conditions would have to be provided, namely the care of children, greater infrastructure of crèches, kindergartens, school day care rooms and canteens. Thirdly, what required a change was the attitude of Polish society towards feminist movements and people's lack of belief in women's agency in public life<sup>92</sup>. The fourth postulate was to stop treating maternity as a woman's private matter but view it in the same way as military service for men i.e. not an obstacle in professional career<sup>93</sup>. Finally, both women and men should be equally

<sup>86</sup> Newly established women's organizations also viewed the activity of the Polish Women's League critically. They accused them of supporting the communist regime and displaying passive attitude towards solving women's problems, M. Grabowska, *Zerwana genealogia...*, p. 169–170.

<sup>87</sup> B. Limanowska, *Dlaczego ogórek nie śpiewa?...*, p. 3.

<sup>88</sup> Rozmowa R. Pragier z doc. Danutą Markowską: *Dziś o tym, czy w Polsce potrzebna jest partia kobiet*, „BF” 29 III 1990, no. 13, p. 2.

<sup>89</sup> (Prag.), *Raczkuje kobiece lobby*, „BF” 29 XI 1990, no. 48, p. 5.

<sup>90</sup> Danuta, *Na ławce rezerwowych*, „W&L” 4 I 1989, no. 1, p. 5.

<sup>91</sup> Z. Zubczewska, *Wymyślony świat*, „W&L” 7 II 1990, no. 6, p. 3–4.

<sup>92</sup> B. Limanowska, *Dlaczego ogórek nie śpiewa?...*, p. 2.

<sup>93</sup> K. G. M., „Kury” *biurowe i naukowe*, „W&L” 5 VII 1989, no. 27, p. 2–3.

entitled to sick leave and family allowance<sup>94</sup>. These demands were published in the weekly “Woman and Life”.

As a result, the image of a woman emerging from the 1989–1992 women’s press in Poland was that of a person who aspired to participate in social and political activities. She was aware of her limitations preventing her from reaching self-fulfilment in the area of public life. Yet, this image varied distinctly in both magazines. In “Woman and Life” a woman was “a warrior” striving for her rights, understanding the need to create a feminist lobby. She made loud protests against discrimination based on gender, the predominance of men in politics and in managerial positions. She would call for women’s participation in taking crucial decisions for the development of the country, particularly in terms of economy, education, health care and social welfare policy. In addition, she was willing to do grassroots work in order to raise civic awareness in other women. The journal manifested this attitude by promoting social, cultural, economic and political activity of women. “Best Friend”, on the other hand, presented a woman who was slowly getting accustomed to political changes, postponing a fight for making gender equality real for a later, more peaceful time, after implementing reforms necessary for the improvement of an economic situation in the country. She was aware of gender inequality and its consequences in the form of salary differences, layoffs, underrepresentation of women in politics. She was also against strikes. She sacrificed herself, all for the sake of the state and society. She was an observer who was biding her time to manifest her readiness to participate in a public life.

### Recapitulation

The research conducted on the weeklies “Woman and Life” and “Best Friend” in the period of political transformation allowed for a reconstruction of a woman’s media image in Poland in the years 1989–1992. It was a compilation of toposes such as tradition, identity, religion, family and politics. Each of them conditioned a woman’s position in the society and in the state. It also resulted from women’s activity in the history of Poland including partitions and national independence struggles during which women served as guardians of national identity by joining in the underground activity and, when necessary, replacing men at work. Multitasking of women during the times of Polish People’s Republic, in spite of legally guaranteed equal rights, did not lead to the rise in women in the public sphere nor did it guarantee their participation in the process of decision-making in the economic sector.

<sup>94</sup> A. Szymańska, *Ozdobnik...*, p. 3.

Hence, the hope for real gender equality arose at the doorstep of changes in political system. The hypothesis stating that both editorial offices had viewed systemic transformation as an opportunity to change a social and political position of women was verified. Yet, the weekly "Woman and Life" postulated immediate action towards it. Therefore, the emphasis in published articles was placed on the issue of gender equality and greater participation of women in public life. The journal "Best Friend" was focused on issues related to civic education (it clarified aspects such as political changes, their consequences to citizens, election rules and it informed about new changes in law) as well as economy pointing to the fact that women bore the gravest consequences of economic crises. Consequently, great importance was attached to various forms of self-help. The media image of a woman in Poland between 1989–1992 was affected by history, tradition, religion but also political transformations as issues such as the rise in unemployment among women, feminization of poverty, attempts to restrict women's rights to decide about their maternity were regularly exposed and criticised.

The journal "Woman and Life" confronted the image of a female citizen with the image of a male citizen implying that women were being eliminated from the public space and treated as second-class citizens, in spite of having higher education they would be rarely promoted, they earned less than men and were not allowed to hold important positions in the state. It is worth bringing up that the hypothesis was not entirely upheld as in "Best Friend" opportunities for men and women were not differentiated. However, both editorial offices expressed their opposition towards the draft bill concerning the protection of the unborn child which dominated the discourse on gender equality in "Woman and Life".

The research allowed us to verify the third and the fourth hypothesis, the Polish women's press presented the models of a women-citizen but these were not convergent in both periodicals. In "Woman and Life" a woman-citizen was aware of her rights and duties. She fought for her self-fulfilment and aspired to hold social and political roles. She objected to discrimination based on sex. She also participated in campaigns aimed at making women aware of the importance of their vote and the necessity to take care of their own interest. Finally, she demanded loyalty to the "women's cause". It can be noted that the magazine "Woman and Life" built a model of "an aspiring female citizen". In the weekly "Best Friend" it was claimed that a woman should show interest in political affairs, keep track of legislative issues, put forward suggestions as to changes in law, however, she ought to refrain from any activity when it came to fighting for equal rights until an economic situation improved in the country. Hence, in "Best Friend" a woman was an observer preparing herself for political activity and biding her time to stand up to her rights.

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