### Przegląd Badań Edukacyjnych Educational Studies Review

ISSN 1895-4308 nr 42 (2023), s. 9-26



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# Underrepresented and Excluded from the Public Sphere: Women of Solidarity in Polish History Textbooks

http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/PBE.2023.013

#### **Abstract**

The paper aims to analyze the Solidarity movement's textbook narratives, focusing on women's representation in the history textbooks used in upper-secondary schools between 1991–2018. Quantitative methods were used to measure different categories of historical figures (men/women) in terms of their frequency and textual space. To explore the values and ideologies embedded in the textbook narratives of Solidarity, the study was guided by the qualitative approach and the critical discourse analysis of both verbal and visual texts. Women consequently remain outside the historical narrative of Solidarity as a marginalized group. Stereotypical images and underrepresentation of women in history textbooks provide a distorted version of social reality, acknowledging that political and social activism belongs to the public sphere occupied by men. Moreover, it reproduces the view that women do not belong to the public sphere and cannot be leaders because they are positioned in the private sphere. From the perspective of citizenship education, such a strand reproduces or/and reinforces social inequalities.

**Keywords:** women, history school textbooks, solidarity movement, public and private spheres.

The literature review shows that history education at the school level plays a vital role not only in knowledge transmission but also in the national building process, developing national identity and informed citizenry (Kymlicka, 2002; Janmaat, 2007; Zajda, 2007; 2009; Chia, 2012; Trošt, 2019; Keynes, 2020). History textbooks are perceived then as a powerful cultural, ideological, political, and socialization tool. From this perspective, history textbooks also socialize gender roles. The growing evidence suggests that women remain consequently outside the history textbooks' narratives or they are portrayed in stereotypical female roles, usually inside homes, which belong to the private sphere (Szymczak, 2011; Chmura-Rutkowska, Głowacka-Sobiech & Skórzyńska, 2015; Michalski & Napierała, 2016; Williams & Bennett, 2016; Bagdasarova & Marchenko, 2017; Hildebrant-Wypych, 2017; Durrani et al., 2022).

Stereotypical images and underrepresentation of women in history text-books provide a distorted version of social reality, acknowledging that political and social activism belongs to the public sphere occupied by men. Moreover, it reproduces the view that women do not belong to the public sphere and cannot be leaders because they are positioned in the private sphere. From the perspective of citizenship education, such a strand reproduces or/and reinforces social inequalities.

In Polish history, one of the examples of female activism was the Solidarity movement. As a protoplast of civic society (Krzemiński, 2013), Solidarity gained almost 9 million members in the first year of activism, half of whom were women (Ash, 1983; Taras, 1995; Penn, 2005). It was not only the man-workers but also the women-workers movement.

The study is a part of the project concerning the issues of Solidarity narratives in history textbooks. The paper aims to analyze the Solidarity movement's textbook narratives, focusing on women's representation in the history textbooks used in upper-secondary schools between 1991–2018.

## History textbooks as a tool in gender socialization in the public and private sphere

The division into two spheres, public and private, within the traditional approach to citizens as white, male, and heterosexual has resulted in the marginalization of women in the first sphere and also depreciated the private one from citizenship discourse (Lister, 1997; Cremin, 2012). M. Arnot (2005) suggests that to achieve equal status in citizenship for men and women, the separation between the male public and women's private spheres has to be removed.

The public sphere is the realm of politics, public institutions, job market, while the private refers to home and family. The first is visible and loud, while the second is hidden and quiet. From the historical perspective, the public sphere belonged to adult males while private to women and children. Arendt's (2000) and Habermas's (2008) works significantly develop the modern understanding of the public and private spheres. Unlike Arendt, Habermas recognized the importance of feminist work in noticing the exclusion of women from the public sphere and elevating the private sphere to a position equal to the public. In other words, female values were recognized as an essential part of citizenship, which can also be reflected in intimate citizenship (Bernard-Powers, 2008; Plummer, 2003). However, Habermas (2008) suggests that although the patriarchy has crumbled in the private sphere, in the public one, it still plays an essential role. A similar standpoint can be found in the United Nations Discussion Paper (2021), suggesting that equality between these two spheres was not achieved. However, women's roles have diversified more than men's roles.

In Western societies, gender equity has been achieved, which has resulted in increasing female activism in many walks of life belonging to both spheres (Cremin, 2012). That is an example of the Solidarity movement in Poland. A vast women's movement elevated or even equalized the private and public spheres. The August Agreements included maternity leaves, decreasing the retirement age for women, and widened access to kindergartens (Majewska, 2014), which may be treated as female activism and breaking private and pub-

lic boundaries. The available historiographic data emphasize the contribution of women and their symbolic roles as mothers, workers, wives, consumers, and forces of resistance in communist Poland (Reading, 1992; Kenney, 1999; Penn, 2005; Dzido, 2016). Women played a vital role during martial law, transforming themselves into professional oppositionists. While many male Solidarity leaders were arrested and detained, women took responsibility for leadership. One of its female leaders, Helena Łuczywo, was not only the editor of the workers' newspaper *Robotnik*, but also ran – from 1980 to 1981 – the Solidarity Press Agency, the first uncensored national news service for journalists in Poland. Using the regime's gender-biased understanding of the opposition as being male, women's engagement as opposition players was a clever tactic. Women were not, in fact targeted as a group for investigation by the communist regime, secret police, or military, while they organized their underground actions and kept the Solidarity ethos alive (Penn, 2005).

Although from the sociological and feminist perspective, the division above cannot any longer be legitimized; our study of school textbooks reveals that the narrative division between the visible public/male and invisible private/female spheres in the Solidarity discourse continues. The explanation of the persistent nature of Solidarity as a solely male domain can also be found in the area of cultural linguistics: the idea that languages provide insight into cultural priorities as a result of the complex interplay between its grammatical, semantic, and social features. In the case of the Polish language as a grammatical gender language, grammatical structures determine how the textbook reader thinks, learns, and experiences reality (Whorf, 1956). The influence of grammatical gender on cognitive processes, especially the semantic processing of nouns, results in transferring male attributes onto the Solidarity movement. The absence of feminine grammatical gender markers (nouns, verbs, pronouns) in the textbook narratives deprives the history of Solidarity (although Solidarność in Polish is a feminine noun itself) of its female voice. As *Polonia*, our motherland, Solidarity becomes an object of concern, care, and struggle of powerful men, a realm of male protagonists' activism.

We argue that historical narratives and understanding are strongly associated with power and knowledge (Foucault, 1980). Textbook content,

discourses, narratives, and language reinforce and reproduce the power of the dominant group (Bourdieu, 1986; Green, 1986) also in the sphere of gender relations. History education produces the type of civic identity necessary to reproduce the dominant culture and sustain political stability. One of the key representations of the aforementioned trend is textbook gender dynamics. The inclusion of men – especially in military and power contexts that belong to the public sphere – acknowledges their dominant and privileged roles while excluding women or portraying them mostly in the private sphere, i.e., traditional feminine and domestic environments – 'silences' their role as historical subjects. Since women in the movement hardly ever hold positions of power at the higher level of the union, a female outlook in the history of Solidarity is still unrecognized, mainly due to women's implicit secondary roles – as mere assistants, and not leaders.

Since the late seventies, researchers have studied the representation of women in history school textbooks, as well as students' perceptions of gender (O'Kelly, 1983; Osler, 1994). From this perspective, textbook representations of gender roles (Earles, 2017) has had an impact on the perception of social order and relationships, in particular suitable behaviours for boys and girls (Stupica & Cassidy, 2014; Su, 2007), consistent with the classical studies of gender schema theory (Martin & Halverson, 1981). As suggested by a UNESCO (2020) report, school textbooks can produce false perceptions of gender equality. It is worth noting that textbooks are official school documents that undermined women's role and still positioned them in the private sphere (Bernard-Powers, 2008; Michalski & Napierała, 2016). If a private sphere is quiet and hidden, it is obvious that women stuck there remain unseen and unheard.

### Methodology

For this study, we used both quantitative methods and qualitative analysis of the selected history textbooks, published between 1991 and 2018 for general upper-secondary education schools. Quantitative methods in textbook research are used to measure aspects of the text in terms of frequency and space. The authors of the textbooks emphasise selected topics, events, or figures and

make them significant to the readers. Some historical figures or groups are included while others are excluded or marginalised, thus the textbooks will convey a message about what is seen as important and what is not (Pingel, 2010). Thus, we set out to answer the questions: what figures are mentioned? Are women mentioned?

To explore the values and ideologies embedded in the textbook narratives of Solidarity, the study was guided by qualitative approaches and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Using CDA as a multidisciplinary approach to discourse (Wodak, 2007), the objective was to analyse how textbook language used in Solidarity narratives functions as a form of social practice that enacts power and reproduces dominance. In the critical investigation of the Solidarity discourse, the historical context is intrinsically linked to extralinguistic factors: culture, society, and ideology (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). The textbooks were perceived as intentional spaces for ideas represented through language. Hence, we also posed the following questions: What language was used to demonstrate dominance, power struggle, and inequality between male and female figures? What specific vocabulary, metaphors, and parallels were used to describe women? How is female activism portrayed in the context of private/public sphere division?

Sample, selection, and representativeness. Due to the structural reforms of the educational system of 1999 and 2017 and associated changes to the national curriculum, the content of textbooks in general-secondary education schools seems to be least susceptible to change. The most recent Polish history, including the history of Solidarity, is covered in the last year of general upper-secondary education. We analysed 22 textbooks in total, all of them were approved for use by the Ministry of Education as being compliant with the national curriculum. Our study cannot claim generalizability to all textbooks over the selected time. However, the textbooks were chosen to provide a diverse sample. There are at least two strategies that can be employed in defining a textbook sample. The first relies on the market data of publishing houses, and the second, on teachers' preference for textbook use. For most of the textbooks, we could not employ these strategies due to a lack of archival market data and the limitations in accessing information from teachers on their past textbook

choices. Hence, we chose a sample with diverse house publishers from different years. We analyzed that part of the material which covered the period from the August strikes of 1980 to the elections of June 1989.

Research Procedure. The first stage of the analysis employed a quantitative strategy. Each mention of every historical figure (including their visual images) was recorded as female or male. Then the number of each person's mentions was calculated. This procedure enabled us to define the number and percentage of women figures appeared in the textbooks. In the second stage, guided by a qualitative approach, the first level of the analysis was inductive, focused on the search for patterns emerging in the process of textual analysis in order to uncover the main themes. At this point, each reference to Solidarity was noted with the aim to treat the texts as areas of discursive struggle marked by traces of different discourses and ideologies (Wodak, 2001). The second level of analysis was deductive coding to both reduce the initial data and abstract them. The notions of ideology, hierarchy, power, and gender are all seen as crucial for an interpretation of the text. Attention was paid to the main levels of discourse (the form, i.e., grammar, syntax, semantics, pragmatics), as well as style and elements of rhetoric. Other semiotic dimensions (pictures, layout, text-image ratio) were also taken into account. As indicated by Wooffitt (2005) our analysis was also based on the emancipatory principle of CDA: unmasking the discursive disadvantage of powerless groups (i.e., women). During CDA analyses and Derrida's 'close reading' text, we were searching for regularities in the analyzed texts as well as some kind of patterning in the aforementioned categories. Thus, illustrative quotations were collected and used to enhance the leading narratives. Selected textbook fragments included in our findings exemplify the main discursive representations of Solidarity women, based on the use of specific language (repeated words, phrasing, drawing on particular sources, etc.) or visual imaginary. The data were gathered not only from verbal but also from visual texts, such as pictures, illustrations, or photographs. Including other semiotic modes than a language was related to the significant theme in CDA: the idea of images conveying ideologies. Inspired by the views of Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) that the production of meaning through visual texts stems from the ability of any semiotic system to project a particular social relation between the producer, the viewer, and the object represented, we focused on the visual articulations of social meanings, as well as the special organisation of images. The analysis of visual images also revealed ideological meanings and the legitimization of power, dominance, and subordination. Such characteristics as the size and the position of an image, the layout, the representations of bodies (e.g., age, gender), key places or people, reflect certain ideological choices and signify particular socio-political purposes of the textbook authors. The result of the adopted procedure was a table containing quantitative data with both the counted names (percentage) and qualitative data referring to the main themes.

### Results

The most striking data obtained in our study indicate the absence of women in the analysed school textbooks. The underrepresentation of women in history textbooks has been well documented. Generally – as we mentioned earlier – women are portrayed in stereotypical female roles, remaining in the private sphere, inside homes. Our data suggest that in most textbooks, the number of names mentioned in each textbook is one or two, which gives about 1–4% frequency to all the names appearing in analysed textbooks.

Such a small number of women in the analyzed textbooks allow us to present all mentioned names (the number of total mentions is in the brackets). Anna Walentynowicz (14), Danuta Wałęsa (3), Zofia Romaszewska (2), Ewa Kubisiewicz (1) Barbara Sadowska (1) Staniszkis (1). Strikingly, 7 out of 22 textbooks do not mention a single female name, marginalizing the historically proven presence of women in the Solidarity civic movement completely. Secondly, it is difficult to indicate one particular woman's name, which appeared most often, while it may suggest that the names were chosen accidentally. However, two female figures stand out – Anna Walentynowicz and Danuta Wałęsa.

Walentynowicz – the "Mother of the Polish Independence," as announced by the Time magazine and choose her as one of 100 women of the 20<sup>th</sup> cen-

tury – is usually situated next to Wałęsa as one of two people whose dismissal from the shipyard initiated the August 1980 strikes. An example of such a narrative is the passage from the early 1994 textbook: "On August 14, the work of the Gdańsk Shipyard was stopped, where demands were made to reinstate Anna Walentynowicz and Wałęsa, dismissed for trade union activities" (Radziwiłł & Roszkowski, 1994, p. 288). In earlier textbooks, the role of Walentynowicz is merely mentioned. It always is the context of the August 1980 strike at the Gdańsk Shipyard, e.g., "A wage increase and the demand for the reinstatement of Anna Walentynowicz, dismissed for her activity in Free Trade Unions, were raised" (Tusiewicz, 199, p. 289). Ten years later, we can still read this most common narrative, where Walentynowicz only appears as the only woman in the context of "male workers' strikes": "In Gdańsk, male workers (robotnicy) demanded, inter alia, the reinstatement of Anna Walentynowicz and Lech Wałęsa dismissed for union activities" (Przybyliński, 2009, p. 242). Whereas Wałęsa reappears many times in the textbook narrative as an independent political actor, Walentynowicz – if she appears at all – is mentioned only in the above-mentioned context. The influence of grammatical gender on the semantic processing of nouns plays a crucial role here, exposing the reader to masculine nouns only (strajki robotników, masowe wystąpienia robotników, where the noun 'robotnik' is masculine). The analyzed history textbook excerpts on Solidarity do not include a single reference to female workers, including a feminine noun - robotnice.

In textbooks published after 2010, there is a visible shift in narrative pattern. Apart from the still clearly 'uneven' representation of Walentynowicz compared to other heroes of the Solidarity movement, her textbook narrative visibly strengthens. Comparing six 2012 textbooks shows that Walentynowicz's role as a Solidarity heroine is "forgotten" in two textbooks. The other two 2012 textbooks refer to her dissident activities in the conventional and over-simplistic manner outlined above. The last two 2012 textbooks, however (Nowa Era and Operon), change their narrative completely. In the 2012 Nowa Era textbook Walentynowicz no longer appears **next to** Wałęsa; her agency and activity as a union activist are referred to in a separate passage (Roszak & Kłaczkow, 2012, p. 332). In the same textbook, her appreciation as a political

figure also occurs on a visual level. The opening of chapter VII "The Fall of Communism" is illustrated with a full-page photograph of Anna Walentynowicz. The visual semiotics of the image is powerful: a petite figure standing in the center of the frame, wearing a patterned dress, a bun, and a purse slung over her shoulder. She is holding a huge megaphone to her mouth with both hands, shouting to the crowd of people around her. With large, white-and-red flags waving on the left side of the frame and Wałęsa standing next to her with a serious expression on his face, the image communicates a clear message: this woman was at the center of events as a trade unionist and female activist fighting for the nation's freedom (Roszak & Kłaczkow, 2012, p. 323). The 2012 Operon textbook also presents Walentynowicz as first, before Wałęsa. Her portrait photograph and the caption below, indicating her commitment to defending workers' rights already in the early 70s, appear at the beginning of the chapter "The Birth of 'Solidarity" (Ustrzycki, 2012, p. 331). The textbook also features a textbox with a student task, a written assignment entitled: "Recognition of Anna Walentynowicz's merits in free Poland after 1989." The presumption that as a historical figure Walentynowicz was not properly appreciated was included in the questions addressed to the students: "Do you think the authorities of sovereign Poland properly appreciate the action of that figure" (Ustrzycki, 2012, p. 331). The presented example is the only one of the analyzed textbooks that verbally indicates the issue of undervaluation of the historical role of Walentynowicz in the public discourse. It indirectly indicates the need for appreciation of the importance of this one particular woman in the Solidarity movement.

In later textbooks, the narrative marking Walentynowicz's presence as an independent political actress was continued: "The impulse to the strike action at the Gdańsk Shipyard was the dismissal of Anna Walentynowicz from work on the crane" (Kłaczkow & Zielińska, 2015, p. 217). Moreover, there appeared a new argumentative element in Walentynowicz's biography (captioned on almost half of the page): a reference to her conflict with Wałęsa. "From the beginning of 1980. She disagreed with Wałęsa's too-conciliatory policy towards communists, which led to informal agreements between the Polish United Worker's Party and part of the Solidarity team in 'Magdalenka'" (Kłaczkow

& Zielińska, 2015, p. 218). This clear indication of the ideological division in Solidarity movement may also function as an implicit explanation of her "cancellation" from being recognized as an important figure of the Solidarity movement after 1989. This symbolic division between Walentynowicz and Wałęsa appeared when reading two images in another 2015 textbook. Two same-size photos constituted two semiotic resources deployed on two sides of the description of the "August 1980" events. Both figures were depicted with their right hand raised. However, Walentynowicz raises her hand holding a cross, and Wałęsa raises his hand clenched into a fist. Considering posture and gesture as key visual signifiers, her stereotypical femininity (pious and modest) was contrasted with his - typically masculine attitude (boldness and strength). In the captions of both photos Walentynowicz's dedication and collective opposition activity ("the co-founder of the Free Trade Unions and Solidarity"; "died in the plane crash in Smolensk") was juxtaposed with Wałęsa's leadership and self-standing ("the strike leader and gifted speaker") (Ustrzycki, 2015, pp. 240-241).

Danuta Wałęsa appears in the textbooks as a Wałęsa's wife, and if her name has been mentioned – usually once – it is when she and her son were receiving the Nobel Prize on behalf of Lech Wałęsa. There is also an interesting case of Zofia Romaszewska. Together with her husband Zbigniew Romaszewski they founded Radio "Solidarność" in 1982. In the 1999 textbook (Tusiewicz), they are both mentioned (Zofia Romaszewska and Zbigniew Romaszewski), whereas in the 2012 textbook (Brzozowski), they are mentioned as a married couple (Romaszewscy) and in the second 2012 textbook (Kozłowska & Unger) only the name of the male figure - Romaszewski - is mentioned. In the same line, the figure of the poet Barbara Sadowska is portrayed. Despite her merits as an oppositionist, she is mentioned only once and only as the mother of the murdered teenage poet, Grzegorz Przemyk (Kozłowska & Unger, 2012). These examples show that women's role in the Solidarity movement was a behindthe-scenes role, and they remained outside the public sphere. Similarly to the archetypal Polish Mothers they have no public life of their own, but serve the public lives of the men: their sons and husbands. No textbook focuses on the transformation of the Polish Mother ethos into a more liberal and equal one.

Among women positioned outside the above mentioned right wing female role model (women invisible and mute in public sphere, confined to their homes and families) is Ewa Kubisiewicz. A single reference in one textbook depicts her as a person that received the longest imprisonment sentence during the period of martial law. In the textbook published in 2018 there is a reference to Jadwiga Staniszkis, listed among the experts of Solidarity. Her appearance in this particular textbook may be explained not only in relation to her expertise, but also in political terms, positioning her as a female supporter of the political party in power (Law and Justice). However, we are unwilling to make such simplistic connections, since our study on the textbook choice of Solidarity figures does not reveal the straightforward political motivation behind it. There was no correlation in analyzed textbook narratives between the date of publishing a textbook and the changes in the frequency of mentioning of the particular Solidarity people.

In only two textbooks, the absence of individual women in the descriptive text is supplemented with a description of women's collective experience. However, again there is no reference to Polish women's political activism, already recognized in the scholarly discourse on the role of women in the Solidarity movement (Penn, 2005). In both cases, the reference to women as a 'collective entity' is reduced to their food-acquiring and household-managing roles. In the 1994 textbook, there appears one significant sentence: "Particularly poor supplies in Łódź caused protests by desperate women, who bore the main burden of queuing for food, clothing and hygiene products" (Radziwiłł & Roszkowski, 1994, p. 300). In the 1999 textbook, there is no verbal text, and the word 'women' does not appear in the Solidarity movement narrative. Instead, there is a clear visual message: a huge, half-page photograph depicting a marching crowd of women, with the front row of them holding a banner with the inscription: "What to give to eat to our children - food rationing cards? (*Co damy jeść dziecku – kartki?*). The description of the image is scarce: "Hunger March - Łódź, 30.07.1981" (Tusiewicz, 1999, p. 307). In both cases, verbally and visually, women's power was reduced to the private sphere of "feeding" the family and undertaking household responsibilities. Both textbooks refer to the social myth of the Polish Mother as a pattern of women's participation, not only in the Polish national community but also in its emerging civil society. On these two rare occasions, women of the Solidarity period are represented stereotypically, as a homogenous group of "gastronomic mothers" (Walczewska, 1999, p. 165), emerging into the public sphere only to tackle the difficulties of the "shortage economy" for the well-being of their families.

### **Conclusions**

Our study confirms that women consequently remain outside the historical narrative of Solidarity as a marginalized group. They are stuck in the private sphere in the history textbooks, despite the merits in public and private spheres during the Solidarity period of the 1980s. Even in later textbooks, the shift from the stereotypical presentation of Walentynowicz and her recognition as a primary Solidarity heroine is only partially successful. The disregard for the historically proven presence of women in the Solidarity movement contributes to the building of a distorted view of women's agency in society, not only in the past but also in the present. According to gender schema theory, students learn about the male-dominant public sphere and the female-dominant private sphere. While these artificial boundaries have been blurred in postmodern societies, they remain sharp in history textbooks. Because history education strongly relates to citizenship education, it directly affects the notion of citizenship and female activism. The dominant narratives of male-ordered democratic discourse in textbooks can be transformed successfully by referring to discipline and the current debate about female activism.

The invisibility of female outlook in the Solidarity textbook narratives can also be explained at the psycho- and sociolinguistic levels: in the complex relations between grammatical gender, cognitive processes, and culture. As indicated by Maciuszek, Polak and Świątkowska (2019), "contemporary empirical research in psycholinguistics provides evidence of the influence of grammatical gender on various cognitive processes, related to lexical and semantic levels of words, as well as mental representations of their referents." Grammatical gender in Solidarity narratives may affect students' judgment,

personifying such abstract idea as the Solidarity movement as a male phenomenon. Pervasive dominance of the male grammatical gender (*robotnicy* – male workers; *działacze* – male activists) affects the way Solidarity is described in history textbooks: as a masculine object with stereotypically masculine qualities (strength, courage, leadership, control). There is no narrative space given to an alternative: the feminine history of Solidarity. At the linguistic level, the generic use of the masculine in the textbook narratives on Solidarity sustains gender inequality and social hierarchy, once again reminding all students about men's dominance and women's subordination.

Simplifying history for students and selecting key narratives within a given historical event is intellectually appealing and politically useful. However, without diverse and often conflicting perspectives being recognized, students lack access to contrasting narratives and interpretations. Students' historical literacy should be based on openness to the marginalized groups' perspectives. Oversimplification of historical complexity often comes with a cost, e.g. the reproduction of socioeconomic inequalities and gender stereotypes. The perspective of marginalized groups clashes with a patriotic narrative.

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