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# TIME AND SPACE IN THE POSTFEMINIST DISCOURSE OF THE LATE 20<sup>TH</sup> – EARLY 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

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## INTRODUCTION

Postfeminism as a reaction to the contradictions and downsides of feminism – namely its second and third waves – sprang in the 1990s [Hall 2003; Banet-Weiser 2020] in a variety of cultural, political and academic contexts. It is spread by the mass media, finds its way to postmodern rhetoric, and influences neoliberal art. Its temporal aspect manifests itself through the prefix *post* – the period that follows feminism and stems from it [Gill 2007]. The “death” of feminism and the feminist “identity crisis” are commonly believed to have been caused by the feminist movement decline 1980s – 1990s; loss of interest in feminism and the emerging anti-feminist disposition of women belonging to various social groups – e.g. young non-European housewives; as well as women’s unwillingness to declare themselves as feminists notwithstanding their claim for equal pay, economic independence etc.

Academic writings define postfeminist discourse as a shift in the understanding and construction of identity and gender categories setting it alongside other discourses marked with the same prefix. As an indicator of a ‘post-traditional’ era, postfeminism is characterized by major shifts in social relations and functions as well as stereotypical gender roles. Postfeminism is regarded as a complex and dynamic analytical category, a network of relationships, conceptual links and interdependencies within or between various social, cultural, academic and political environments, “a fundamentally mediated and commodified discourse and set of material practices” [Dosekun 2015, p. 961].

## OBJECTIVES

In our research we strive to provide a theoretical insight into postfeminist interpretation of gender issues with reference to the concepts of time and space as defined therein. Tracing the main manifestations of time and space in postfeminist practices, verbal art and performances, we aim to demonstrate the influence of gender identity on the way we perceive time and space and the impact thereof on family and community relations, distribution of power and economic performance. By evaluating the function of female family members as bearers of historical memory and postmemory, we determine their role in transmitting the community knowledge and experience to the younger generation.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The present study is based on the current research in gender anthropology and social studies as well as ethnographic and psychological findings. Special consideration is given to the works of an American anthropologists Judith Shapiro, Kath Weston and Marianne Hirsch.

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## METHODOLOGY

The methodology of the current research includes such theoretical methods as analytical reading, comparative study, generalization and discourse analysis.

## RESULTS

As early as in 1981, ten years before the “official” beginning of the post-feminist era, an American anthropologist Judith Shapiro in her article *Anthropology and the Study of Gender* highlights such theoretical issues as gender aspect of symbolic anthropology, gender as a determinant of social hierarchy and the role of gender studies in the sociology of knowledge. In her research Judith Shapiro juxtaposes “masculine” and “feminine” domains as sets of symbols, describing women as possessing supernatural powers and thus locating them in the otherworldly space, as opposed to the material world inhabited by men. Furthermore, she distinguishes between the domestic (private) and public domains depending on their position in the social hierarchy: private space is primarily reserved for women’s social functions, while men commonly give preference to the public space [Shapiro 1981]. In the beginning the said two domains are closely intertwined, thus hindering their demarcation. The differences and distinctions between symbolic domains (public and private, masculine and feminine, domestic and commercial) are highly relative. The need to protect their own symbolic space from intruders forces communicators to gather into communities, with the relations among the respective community members determining the degree of its openness, the ability to adopt new members and practices as well as its localization criteria. The traditionally high estimate of social qualities typical of a certain class (males) gives competitive advantage to the masculine symbolic domain, while the feminine space is opposed to the masculine one and therefore deprived of economic value [Bruni 2005].

The division of space into domestic (private) and public domains characterizes centralized communities of all types – from a single household to large stratified empires, or “civilizations”, which dominated the world for centuries. Men appropriate public space, which manifests itself through political, economic and other “external” social institutions. Private (“domestic”) space is assigned to women – however, it is also divided into “men’s” and “women’s” sections. Postfeminists see this symbolic gendered separation of spaces (separate school education for boys and girls, different sections for men and for women in church, “female” train carriages etc.) as stemming from the traditional social segregation ideology, public regulation of marriage as well as a recognition of men’s power over women. Transition from one “defining” space into another breaks the symbolic gender order, erasing the boundaries between typically “male” and “female” social roles [Bruni 2005].

The gendered use of time and space also serves to transmit social knowledge and values to the younger generation. In traditional communities older women pass their knowledge and values on to young girls mainly within domestic space, while young boys spend more time in the public space and are educated not only by adults but by their peers as well. Schools, churches and other public institutions serve as conducive environments for learning and mastering gender roles and standards. The media space (primarily electronic mass media and social Internet-platforms (Instagram, Facebook etc.)), which visualizes and materializes postfeminist discourse, is also responsible for gendered socialization. Of great importance for the visualization and distribution of postfeminist ideas in digital media space today is the quantitative measurability of views, “likes”, followers etc., as well as the applicability of such space as a platform for discussing a vast number

of gender issues (gender discrimination, home violence etc.) and providing mutual support (e.g. the well-known *#metoo* hashtag) [Banet-Weiser 2020]. Ethnographic research into postfeminist Internet-space arouses issues of creating a woman-friendly virtual environment as well as providing a clear definition of “virtual safety” itself as a concept and its components [Gajjala 2002].

Numerous anthropological and social studies of the late 20<sup>th</sup> – early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries have discussed time and space as social and economic resources and their gendered exploitation in the framework of social roles, behaviours and relations within a particular community. The binary nature of symbolic gendered space, which encompasses both masculine and feminine qualities of market participants, turns it into a commodity, while continuously changing practices and spaces form the essence of entrepreneurial business [Bruni 2005]. The ambivalence of gendered business communication rests upon multiple processes: binary presence (transmission between symbolic spaces with opposite gender connotations), strengthening borders (protecting different symbolic spaces), gender commodification (using a symbolic gender space as the foundations on which to (re-)establish market relations) etc. Thus, the social space of self-employed females lies at the intersection of domestic and public domains as they have to combine their traditional biological and social roles with business [Bruni 2005].

Studies of typically male and female activities as well as the amount of time spent on each of them serve to explain gendered access to tangible and non-tangible assets, offering ways out of the situation. Researchers pay special attention to comparative analysis of gendered time allocation in different communities, social groups, regions and nations, with the most urgent issues being traditions, political institutions and culture as prerequisites for gendered time allocation; localization of informants and their attitude to time; age, marital status and wellbeing as factors that predetermine the temporal framework of daily activities; as well as the temporal structure of everyday life in town and in the country [Rubiano 2019].

Postfeminist discourse presents space as a kind of environment, which explicitly reveals particular gender roles as a structural determinant of any space regardless of its purpose (working space, living space, social communications etc.). Masculine and feminine symbolic domains constitute a production resource, the efficiency of which predetermines the outcome of daily practices (e.g. field allocation for “masculine” and “feminine” crops in agriculture, or gender-specific rituals) [Bruni 2005]. Besides, current research lays emphasis on negative gender connotations (picturing women as minor and weaker, less willing to compete and achieve, as compared to men) in social media space, namely in commercials advertising consumer goods for women. A demarcation line drawn between gendered domains, where traditional masculinity and femininity progress independently, without any attempt to establish any relations or links between them, provides men with dominance and superiority over women in every sphere, except for those traditionally “feminine” and “prohibitive” for males [Bruni 2005].

The postfeminist approach to spatio-temporal arrangement of the environment and the related “space–time feasibility” [Kwan, p. 210] concept proposed by researchers stresses the issue of gender inequality, which includes, above all, limited space-time accessibility of the local infrastructure facilities for the community females. The so called “intersectional analytical framework” [Hofmann 2021, p. 52] employs geopolitical, or geostrategic, positioning to reveal the complexity of the hierarchy that localizes individuals and communities within a certain space given the permanent fluctuations in its geopolitical value – the opposing, often contradictory strategies and practices that set the economic value and power of certain localities working to the benefit of certain communities. Spaces are divided into separate domains with different utilization strategies, thus increasing their economic capacity and value. The present-day academic and empirical

research [Hofmann 2021] demonstrates the complex distribution and redistribution of individual and community powers depending on their gender status/structure, reviews the traditional attitudes to gender issues and proposes a situational approach to the hierarchy of gender. Scholars [Bardazzi 2020] tend to put the cases of violence and gender discrimination in a reclaimed and self-organized spatial framework down to unfair distribution of power and functional dissymmetry within the respective social space. The postfeminist approach to power and its functions in different contexts and planes, both actual and symbolic, draws academic interest to the various spatial and temporal aspects of gender-power correlation, which manifests itself through ethnographic, anthropological and folkloristic research into art, science, politics etc. Parliamentary sessions and classrooms, households and production facilities construct a spatial framework that brings to light gender stereotypes and hierarchy, gendered values and powers. The distinction between “masculine” and “feminine” domains entails masculinization of certain types of space, regarded as dangerous or unsuitable for women, who, in return, strive to create their own alternative spaces of self-expression [Bruni 2005].

As follows from the above, gender marks a so called “differentiation axis”, alongside with age, class, race, ethnos etc., thus emphasising the importance of the “single-axis” and multidimensional space structures. Within the “single-axis” structure postfeminist researchers [Bardazzi 2020] define certain group identity categories as “pressure engines”, where the privileged community members facilitate social inequality through their experience in imposing pressure and restoring justice. The multidimensional paradigm, in its turn, presents a new analytical structure based on a variety of factors and relations as constituents of identity and experience.

The postfeminist era saw a great variety of ethnographic research projects that study the race and gender impact on the man-space relations. Thus, the “The Body and the City” ethnographic project held in the city of Newark, New Jersey, USA, in 2009 – 2011 demonstrated the suitability of urban space for African-American females with regard to safety, mobility, ownership and belonging as well as numerous other factors by performing a comparative analysis of two locations – Detroit and Newark – as performance environments for young African-American females. Researchers [Cox 2014] interpret urban street space as a specific context for creating collective memory, performers’ experiencing and recreating public space as well as constructing the daily activities of African-American girls and women.

A perfect urban space presents a beneficial environment for learning, self-expression and communication within the local community through verbal and performative group activities. Unlike a family space, which serves to “vertically” transmit knowledge to younger generations, urban space as a framework for onset and development of cultural relations (due to a common religion, education etc.) facilitates informal “horizontal” experience sharing on a “peer-to-peer” basis. This mainly concerns small urban spaces (schools, shops, playgrounds, streets etc.) as sites of daily communication, choice and activities governed by regular practices and discussed in detail by community members. Therefore, no research into daily practices of a certain community is possible without a thorough study of its environment as a framework for any activities and relations arising therein. Namely, postfeminist discourse studies look into female religious practices and informal discussions that take place against the background of a certain small space (public, semi-public or private) [Bardazzi 2020], when women of the same religion give advice to one another, share and re-evaluate their own experience, passing on their knowledge and thus giving rise to local folk practices. Besides, we cannot but mention the formational influence of space on the local culture. Local domains as backgrounds for communication between females belonging to the same community credit the respective communication participants with a unique set of common traits at the same time shaping their views on proper and improper behaviours and reactions. It often

happens that the specific features of the local environment force the community to adjust its traditional practices, without prejudice to their essence. On the other hand, numerous factors, including the development of certain practices in the course of time to shape personal and professional identities of the actors, or habitual behaviours that shift traditional practices to the realm of subconscious, depriving them of their original sense and meanings, make it impossible to work out a single approach to the study of gendered practices [Bruni 2005].

In her research “Gender in Real Time: Power and Transience in a Visual Age” [Weston 2002] an American anthropologist Kath Weston discusses the relation between the past, the present and the future with reference to female family members, the ways they look alike and act alike due to both heredity and gender influences. Wondering, what could be the starting point for such a study, how our past experience predetermines our present and how our present choices predetermine the future, what would the modern world look like should the history have taken another route, Kath Weston emphasizes the need for a well-grounded theoretical methodology of temporal analysis combined with vast empirical evidence. [Weston 2002]. The dynamics of the symbolic gendered hierarchy typical of a certain culture, its spatio-temporal flexibility [Bruni 2005], as well as the flexibility of less specific practices depending on the social setting, requires a clear set of techniques for temporal analysis, discovery of artefacts and events with their subsequent logical sequencing.

This logical definition and arrangement of objects and events from the past stems from the so called “historical memory”, which encompasses the tools used to create historical concepts, attitudes thereto as well as the processes that evidence the past. People feel the need for their past and regard its requirements as one of the gender constructs, created and manifested through gender connotation present in any communicative situation and preceding it. Today’s situations are put down to the past experiences, including the conventional attitudes to “masculinity” and “femininity”. Historical memory, as Kath Weston states, denotes a temporal aspect of gender identity and gendered behaviours. Therefore, the versatility of gender differentiation rests upon the numerous approaches to time definition and measurement. Temporal juxtapositions manifested through clothes, work and education, treatment of the elders etc. arise as the timeline is divided into clear historical periods. Gender constructs undergo numerous transformations in the course of time, with the positive or negative attitudes to gendered experiences from the past preconditioning the current trends in gender construction [Weston 2002].

Elderly females as a living image of the past as perceived by their younger counterparts illustrate the unity of time and gender identity. Traditional family – primarily, women’s – roles recreate and re-establish the lost relations, thus turning gender identity into a major constituent element of historical memory, which prevents natural obliteration and misrepresentation of facts. A family represents a space to pass down the lore of previous generations, while a person becomes a unit of “postmemory” [Hirsch 2008] – a second-generation memory based not on immediate recollections, but on imaginary reconstruction of events that took place long before the birth of the narrator. Postmemory differs from ordinary memory due to not only the temporal and spatial distance between the events and the narrative, but also the critical attitude to the past experience from the modern point of view. An American scholar Marianne Hirsch specifically states that postmemory is neither a movement, nor a technique or an idea, but a consequence of traumatizing memories, a framework for passing traumatizing knowledge and experiences from generation to generation.

## CONCLUSIONS

The comparative analysis of postfeminist research in anthropology, sociology and other areas of study demonstrates that postfeminist discourse of the late 20<sup>th</sup> – early 21<sup>st</sup> century employs the concepts of time and space to create a matrix of gendered social and economic relations. Symbolic anthropology sets a hierarchy of spaces dividing them into public (primary, masculine) and “private” (secondary, domestic, feminine) ones. Still, spatio-temporal unity formed by the unclear distinction between the “private” and “public” domains allows women to combine their gender identity and conventional gender roles with economic activity. Notwithstanding a significant number of institutional, historical and cultural factors that impose restrictions on domains accessible to females, the inherent qualities of the latter help them develop efficient economic strategies and find their own ways to success.

Historical memory as a temporal aspect of gender identity and postmemory, which embodies the past through the present values and attitudes, illustrate the indispensable link between the flow of time and gender identity. Various forms of “travels in time” juxtapose different generations in narratives on gendered relations within the family and / or the community to disclose alternative spaces and set new spatio-temporal connections. Touching upon the life experience of previous generations not only unites the past and the present within the historical memory matrix, but also facilitates tracing the symbiotic relationship between time and power, with the older community members (primarily females) serving as the bearers of historical memory and time impact.

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