



Elisabeth Badinter. *The Conflict: Woman and Mother (Le Conflit: La Femme et la mère)*. Warsaw 2013: PWN. Pp. 216.

Elisabeth Badinter's book *The Conflict: Woman and Mother* addresses the subject of (re)building the role of women over the years and changes but also the shifts in the social meaning of femininity in the twenty-first century. The author refers to the previous years and the dominant discourse—biological essentialism (Czarnacka, 2014, pp. 121–122), which uniquely differentiates female and male roles in the society. Being aware of the changes that have taken place since the glory of this theoretical and thought perspective and the parallel social changes, she tries to synthetically present a number of current roles, tasks and requirements for women in the era of postmodernism, progressive emancipation and saturated with constant change—which often requires women demonstration of adaptive abilities—fluent modernity (Bauman, 2006, pp. 75–98; 2000, p. 133–153). All in the light of the ongoing and decisive ideological struggle.

The starting point for the considerations undertaken in this position is motherhood understood as a biological trait as well as the duty of women (in particular considering the inability of men to perform this function). While in the 60s of the last century, we were witnessing the preference of lifestyles' diversities in the first place, which involved a conscious decision to postpone or completely give up having children (when women "could give priority to personal ambitions, enjoy marrying or living together without a child, or to fulfill the desire for motherhood, combining them—or not—with professional activity" (p. IX) as far as in modern times we are dealing—what a paradox—with renewed concentration and return—in the name of those gaining social support for naturalistic tendencies—to the traditional model of femininity and women's fulfillment of social functions and tasks resulting from being a mother („as in the times of Jean Jacques Rousseau women are tried to be convinced to renew their contact with nature and return to the roots, and the pillar of this process is supposed to be a maternal instinct. However, unlike in the 18th century, women today have three options: to agree, refuse or negotiate—depending on whether they give priority to their personal interests or to the role of the mother") (p. XII).

The author of the book addresses a few selected themes related to the role of women and motherhood in the twenty-first century. It divided the book into three parts, titled: "Local Vision", "Offensive of Naturalism" and "Overloaded Barge". In the first place it refers to the so-called "ambivalence of motherhood". It evokes the perspective of understanding motherhood and its social role in the light of two concepts and perspectives: traditionally understood femininity (within

biological essence) (Bem, 2000, p. 9) and contemporary role and meaning of women (referring to social constructivism) (Urban, 2014, pp. 142–143). She refers to the traditional role of motherhood equated and resulting from the “natural instinct, religious duty and duty which helps to survive the species” (p. 5), as well as to the modern vision of motherhood, which is increasingly correlated with the universal—reigning in the era of consumption—the primacy of hedonism and pleasure. Recalling contemporary research results, she proves that the decision to have children is often motivated by the desire to enrich and raise the subjectively understood quality of life, or by referring to feelings and “instinct”, which are often placed above issues related to dedication and devotion (p. 7). The author refers to the hedonistic dilemmas of women that arise from the changes of contemporary times which are related to the growing individualism and primacy of personal development and oscillate between motherhood and freedom—all due to the expansion of the range of ways in which a woman can realize and embody her femininity as such and due to confirmation of her own worth as a woman (Melosik, 2012, p. 62–87). While freedom of choice is greater, the responsibility for these choices and the number of obligations arising from them also increase. In this context Elisabeth Badinter writes as follows: “in a culture where ‘I am above all’ has become a principle, motherhood is a challenge and even a contradiction” (p. 10). She refers to some chosen contemporary phenomena, which are visible in developed countries, such as: social inequalities, lower female fertility, late motherhood, growing women’s aspirations, greater participation of women in the labour market and diversification of their lifestyles.

Another context of considerations is related to the “offensive of naturalism” observed today. This is a kind of response to the uncertainty of contemporary reality, which is governed by the principles of the free market and the consequences of growing competitiveness or a series of disappointments that we experience in postmodernist times, such as lack of stable employment, certainty about obtaining adequate—in accordance with qualifications and skills—work or broadly understood status and socio-economic position. All these can raise women’s doubts whether it is worth giving up having children in a situation where the career is not a certain and long-term issue. Therefore, we have to once more appreciate the return of the role of the woman-mother as an equally valuable and corresponding to the times of the female role that is worth taking. The naturalistic approach is connected with the conviction about the importance and value of the existence of “maternal instinct”, the appreciation of what is natural and ecological, and the concern to restore the lost harmony between human and nature. Naturalists deny the ruinous “progressiveness” of modern times and women, interference in fertility, chemistry in food, contraceptives, chemical pollution, medicalization, “unnatural” and harmful consumer phenomena and others. Badinter draws attention to the renewed promotion of maternal instinct, long breastfeeding, the importance of bonds built between a mother and a child in the first years of life (bond theory) and the philosophy of care that is the ethics of women. The author analyzes these issues from three perspectives: ecology, human sciences (based on ethology) and feminism (essentialist) (pp. 35–128).

The last context of considerations refers to the growing number of duties falling on contemporary mothers. It includes considerations regarding the dispersed and multitasking vision of a contemporary woman, who has to meet many responsibilities simultaneously and with equally high efficiency (which the society requires), carry out a number of roles and tasks assigned to her or consciously (in the name of freedom) chosen by her. These difficulties and challenges may result from the diversity of women's desires including such phenomena, "types" of women and issues such as: woman-mother (called to motherhood), childlessness (both involuntary and self-chosen), deliberately postponing or delaying the decision to have a child or unwillingness to have a child. All analyzed in the light of social pressures and its strength, the weight of norms in a given culture, the phenomena of favouring and discriminating mothers, the interiorization of an ideal mother model or the emergence of new styles of life and the ability to reconstruct your own identity (p. 133–194; Melosik, 2013, p. 62–87).

Elisabeth Badinter's book undertakes a difficult and still controversial topic of maternity. However, she does it in an objective way—from the perspective of a researcher and an observer of contemporary reality—showing two contradictory ideologies and thus two parallel visions of reality in which the fact of having a child determines in a clearly defined way the fate of the woman. At the same time, she determines the possible paths of choice and, consequently, raises the everlasting dilemmas of women facing the choice of "having or not having a child". This decision, as it turns out, entails a number of social consequences. And all in the light of current norms and socio-cultural phenomena and in the name of the eternal struggle of discourses. The struggle of two conflicting ideologies that are in dispute to have the status of the dominant one. As well as two contradictory visions of the reality of women who, in the era of consumerism and liquid modernity (Bauman, 2006, p. 12–35) mix with each other and can often make you dizzy. Without a doubt, this book is worth reading in order to individually look at the topics and issues raised in it. Written by a woman, and seemingly it could seem mainly for women, in an accessible, but embedded in the scientific theory of narrative, the book will certainly become a source of new knowledge or will allow to organize everything that we are witnessing (taking into account the referred issue) in the course of everyday interaction with the socio-cultural world.

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