

MEN AND MASCULINITIES AS UNDEREXPLORED SUBJECT IN THE POST-SOVIET CONTEXT

TETYANA BUREYCHAK

Abstract: The paper discusses emergence of men's studies in the post-Soviet context with a larger focus on Ukraine. It presents an overview of teaching and publications within the field and highlights some of the peculiarities of the context, which challenge its development.

Keywords: Men and Masculinity, Gender Studies, Ukraine.

МУЖЧЫНЫ І МУЖЧЫНСКАСЦЬ ЯК МАЛАДАСЛЕДАВАНЫ ПРАДМЕТ У ПОСТСАВЕЦКІМ КАНТЭКСЦЕ

Анатацыя: Артыкул абмяркоўвае з'яўленне даследаванняў мужчыны ў постсавецкім кантэксце з асаблівай увагай да Украіны. У ім робіцца агляд акадэмічных курсаў і публікацыяў у гэтым даследчым полі, а таксама паказваюцца асаблівасці кантэксту, які абцяжарвае яго развіццё.

Ключавыя словы: мужчыны і мужчынскасць, гендэрныя даследаванні, Украіна.

Academic interest in analysis of men and masculinities from gender perspective is quite recent not only for the post-Soviet countries, but also within Western contexts, i.e. North America, Western Europe and Australia. Although men and masculinities have been extensively studied within social sciences and humanities for a long period, most of the time the term men was applied as a universal category to stand for humanity in general. Explicit research focus on men as gendered subjects dates back only to the late 1970s. The initial interest in men and masculinities is related to the second wave of feminism, as well as to other rather mixed factors, such as gay liberation movements, the spreading of both pro-feminist and antifeminist men's rights organizations, the growing public concerns with the changing roles of men, and debates on crisis of masculinity. Despite an extensive development of academic interest in gender issues in the post-Soviet context in the last two decades, it primarily focuses on women, femininities, and sometimes sexualities. Masculinities, meanwhile, remain on the fringe of academic discussion to date. This paper discusses underproblematization of men and masculinities in the post-Soviet context with a larger focus on Ukraine.

Gender studies in the post-Soviet context originated from women's studies. Despite the broadening of the scope of discussed problems and diversifying the research agenda of humanities and social sciences by adding gender perspective in recent time, the focus on women remains dominant in gender studies in Ukraine. An explicit interest in men and masculinities by gender studies scholars on the post-Soviet space has emerged predominantly in Russia in the early 2000s. In contrast to Western history of men's studies, this interest was to a much smaller degree connected with grass-root activism and men's pro- or anti-feminist organizations. The interest has been developing mostly within academia and as a part of gender/women studies. The first academic books and volumes on men and masculinities from gender perspective were published in the beginning of 2000s. Some of the most significant of them are the volume "About Manhood" (2002) edited by Serguei Oushakine and books by Igor Kon (2003; 2009a; 2009b). These publications represent important resources, which are well-known and accessible for the gender studies scholars in the post-Soviet space. Despite the peculiarities of the Ukrainian context, similarities of the post-Soviet gender processes in Russia and Ukraine make these publications important and relevant resources for the Ukrainian scholars, who widely address them in their teaching and publications.

Analysis of publications on men and masculinities in Ukraine gives a good picture of the content and accents in the research in this field. Most of these publications have been published since the second half of 2000s, which evidences a novelty of the interest to this area. Some of the most commonly

discussed issues include nationalism and masculinity (Bureychak, 2011), dominant social roles of Ukrainian men (Janey et al., 2009), homeless men (Riabchuk, 2008), men and sport (Martsenyuk and Shvets, 2011), men as clients of social work (Strelnyk, 2009), etc.¹ Although these publications reflect a wide range of issues and methodological approaches, they have not yet formed a sufficient basis for identifying men and masculinities studies as a settled and autonomous research field in Ukraine. The lack of commitment and research consolidation (e.g. putting together volumes, organizing conferences and other academic events) also complicate further development of the field.

Men and masculinities as an academic subject is still marginally represented in Ukrainian academia. Although many gender studies courses, which are taught at Ukrainian universities, often include a topic on men and masculinities, teaching of men and masculinities studies as a separate discipline is still uncommon. Only two universities have offered such courses. A course “Masculinity and Men’s Studies” has been taught at the Department of Sociology, National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy by Tamara Martsenyuk since 2009. A course “Masculinities” and later “Sociology of Masculinity” was taught at the Department of History and Theory of Sociology, I. Franko National University of Lviv from 2006 till 2012. Although teaching of these courses have not faced any substantial problems, the fact that there are no similar courses indicates low interest in this area or challenges in its fulfilment, insufficient institutional support and lack of experts in this field.

The analysis of the development of research interest in issues of men and masculinities evidences that this direction of studies has not yet been recognized as a legitimate and strategic block in the post-Soviet gender studies. Despite some attempts to “add men” into gender analysis, so far it has primarily been done as an attempt to balance the gender perspective and to demonstrate that gender is not only about women. Critical analysis and deconstructing of men’s privileges, which could intellectually and politically invigorate post-Soviet gender studies, has not yet taken place. The pro-feminist men and masculinities studies in Ukraine are emerging under rather problematic anti-feminist ideological conditions. This combined with limited local academic resources and difficulties of access to international scholarship in this field further marginalize this area of studies and make it challenging to develop.

¹ The limited size of this article does not allow to include a comprehensive overview of the publications on this issue.

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