



universität
wien

MASTERARBEIT / MASTER'S THESIS

Titel der Masterarbeit / Title of the Master's Thesis

„Class Wars: Patriarchy strikes back. Backlash and
Neoliberal Transformation in the long '90s in Poland“

verfasst von / submitted by

lic. Aleksandra Fila

angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts (MA)

Wien, 2022 / Vienna 2022

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme code as it appears on
the student record sheet:

UA 066 808

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme as it appears on
the student record sheet:

Masterstudium Gender Studies

Betreut von / Supervisor:

Ass.-Prof. Emma Dowling, BA MRes MSc PhD

Table of Contents

<u>Introduction</u>	4
<u>Research question</u>	4
<u>Method and sources</u>	4
<u>Epistemological approach</u>	6
<u>Motivations</u>	10
<u>Categories and the Theoretical Background</u>	12
<u>Gender</u>	12
<u>Class</u>	15
<u>Intersections of Patriarchy and Capitalism</u>	18
<u>Periodisation</u>	20
<u>Content</u>	21
<u>1st Chapter: Hegemonial Narratives and Figures of Losers and Winners</u>	23
<u>1. Transitology and Neoliberal Depictions of Poland</u>	25
<u>2. Gender of Homo Sovieticus</u>	30
<u>3. Self-made men, or Homines Westernicis vs Matki Polki</u>	33
<u>4. Final notes</u>	38
<u>2nd Chapter: Knowledge Production: Spaces and Practices</u>	40
<u>1. Spaces of Feminist Knowledge Production before 1989</u>	41
<u>2. ... and after 1989</u>	44
<u>3. Who is the Working Class and Who Defines it?</u>	49
<u>3.1. The Boys Club?</u>	49
<u>3.2. Vernacular Turn in Transformation Studies?</u>	52
<u>4. Knowledge Production and Core-Periphery Dynamics</u>	53
<u>3rd Chapter: Neoliberal Turn: Declaration of Class War and Restructuration of Polish Economy</u>	56
<u>1. Shock Doctrine and Polish Shock Therapy</u>	56
<u>2. Dynamics of Enfranchisement and Dispossession</u>	60
<u>4th Chapter: Gendered Disposessions: Reproduction, Discipline and Housewifisation of Women's Labour</u>	65
<u>1. Disposessions of the long '90s and transformation of the sphere of reproduction</u>	65
<u>Capital Accumulation and Housewifisation of Women's Labour</u>	71
<u>3. Remaking the Body and Violence Against Women</u>	73
<u>4. Neoliberalism and Neoconservatism – a Happy Marriage?</u>	78
<u>5th Chapter: Patriarchy Strikes Back. On Backlash and Disintegration of the Working Class</u>	83
<u>1. The explanations of the origins of Backlash</u>	83

<u>1.1. Backlash as a Revenge</u>	86
<u>1.2. Backlash and Capital Accumulation</u>	89
<u>1.3. "Traditions". Backlash as a Matter of Polish Culture</u>	91
<u>1.4. Backlash as an Undemocratic Turn</u>	95
<u>2. Non-solidarity: Gender Divisions and Disintegration of the Working Class</u>	97
<u>3. Conclusions: The Triumph of the Capital</u>	103
<u>Conclusions: Neoliberal Hegemony and Witches of the 3rd Polish Republic</u>	105
<u>Bibliography:</u>	115
<u>Abstract:</u>	126
<u>Abstrakt (DE):</u>	127

Introduction

Socio-economic transformation after 1989' is a founding moment for the development of capitalism in Poland. What is less known is that not only poor working conditions, privatisation and commodification had their beginnings then, but also a conservative turn. The loss of reproductive rights, deepening of gender divisions, objectification and sexualisation of the female body, and housewifisation¹ and naturalisation of women's labour either began or gained momentum as capitalism was violently imposed on society. The processes that started in the 90' cast their long shadows and continue to define the lives of the Polish people nowadays – their historical origins are often forgotten or downplayed in mainstream discourses. In this context, I intend to look at them closely and examine their reciprocal, as I assume, relationships.

Research question

The following question guides my research: (1.) what was the relationship between the socio-economic transformation that happened in Poland after 1989' and the gender backlash that took place simultaneously? To find the answer, I will pose further, more specific questions. Firstly, I ask: (2.) how did feminist and/or transformation-critical scholars conceptualise this relation; which theories and concepts were informing their research? Then, (3.) what role does feminist historical materialist perspective play in already existing analyses; does it (and how does it) challenge the most common assumptions and interpretations? Finally, I intend to consider (4.) what feminist Marxist re-interpretation of the transformation processes could look like?

Method and sources

To answer my research questions, I conducted an integrative literature review. I analysed and reviewed a broad spectrum of texts written from feminist and anti-neoliberal perspectives. An integrative literature review resembles systemic or scope reviews but is less focused on comprehensive systematisation of the already existing research and more on the critical discussion of concepts and development of theory. It also gives bigger freedom and agency to the researcher – which is helpful as my aim is not to summarise existing literature on

¹ Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 2014), 112-144.

the topic but rather to point out the gaps in the theory and propose a new understanding of the subject. Liz Victor defines this method as a “*less prescribed, more iterative process which proceeds according to the researcher’s expertise and judgement*”².

According to Victor, this method entails a “*purposive sampling and appraisal of evidence*”³. Hence, I have decided not to review mainstream literature on transformation and backlash. Instead, my research is based on critical reading of already existing critical analyses of Polish transformation and backlash. I have decided to limit the chosen texts to those written either from feminist or/ and from anti-capitalist/ anti-neoliberal perspectives. I analyse academic literature (edited volumes⁴, monographs⁵) and non-fiction books⁶ – as well as popular science literature, which is located in-between⁷. I analyse both Polish and foreign authors, with the majority of texts written originally in Polish and a significant amount of texts written in English (with an overrepresentation of US-based authors) and translated into Polish.

I have decided to limit the scope of my material by choosing texts written and/ or translated into Polish not only to make my research more accessible for myself. I also wanted to provide an overview of the debates taking place in the country. By conducting extensive research on the literature written in Polish and writing my thesis in English, I aim to contribute to the academic exchange between local and foreign authors. Even though the hegemony of the English language in academia seems highly problematic, I planned to elevate the voices from the peripheries. Western scholars have long been on the first line of the theoretical debates about the region (I will deal with this in the second chapter⁸). Still, despite being under the strong influence of the western movements and academia, local authors have, in the end, developed increasingly critical and distinct voices about the reality they know throughout themselves.

² Ibid., 2.

³ Ibid.

⁴ E.g.: Piotr Żuk, ed., *Podziały klasowe i nierówności społeczne* (Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, 2010) or: Monika Frąckowiak-Sochańska, Sabina Królikowska, ed., *Kobiety w Polskiej Transformacji 1989-2009: Podsumowanie, Interpretacje, Prognozy* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2010)

⁵ E.g.: Michał Buchowski, *Czyściec: Antropologia neoliberalnego postsocjalizmu* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2017) or: Aleksandra Leyk, Joanna Wawrzyniak, *Cięcia. Mówiona historia transformacji* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2020)

⁶ E.g.: Katarzyna Duda, *Kiedyś tu było życie, teraz jest tylko bieda. O ofiarach polskiej transformacji* (Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy Książka i Prasa, 2019), or: Magdalena Okraska, *Ziemia Jałowa. Opowieść o Zagłębiu* (Warszawa: Trzecia Strona, 2018)

⁷ E.g.: Agnieszka Graff, *Świat bez Kobiet. Płeć w polskim życiu publicznym* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Marginesy, 2021), or: Olga Drenda, *Duchologia polska. Rzeczy i ludzie w latach transformacji* (Kraków: Karakter, 2016)

⁸ Pp: 53-54

My research is interdisciplinary, but the majority of the analysed authors come from the sociological and anthropological disciplinary fields. The scope of analysed texts encompasses publications from the last three decades – a few of the analysed books were written in the ‘90s, usually by foreign authors. Still, most texts stem from the last decade, as the critical discussion on Polish transformation recently gained prominence. I came across analysed books by actively following the debates on transformation and backlash taking place in the country and by reviewing the bibliography of already familiar books. As it will be evident during the lecture of this thesis, I pay much bigger attention to some texts and authors and barely mention the others. It is because only some of the analysed authors actively engage with the questions that are crucial from the perspective of my research, while others do this only occasionally – still, their contributions were also relevant, as they provided me with the analyses of the phenomena that are related to my subject and the data I can refer to.

A comprehensive analysis of the neoliberal transformation and backlash is still missing. This thesis examines the feminist and leftist voices and intends to point out their blind spots. The lack – or insufficiency – of intersectional approaches, combining both perspectives based on the assumption that capitalist and patriarchal relations of power are intrinsically intertwined, resulted, as I intend to demonstrate, in the general failure of the theoretical conceptualisation of the changes experienced by Polish society after 1989. There are a few honourable exceptions – texts that succeeded in grasping the analysed phenomena intersectionally – they are, however, merely the road signs for future scholarship, suggesting the areas of research or theoretical frameworks that should be developed further. The neoliberal and conservative turn has to be understood as inter-dependent and co-constitutive.

Epistemological approach

This thesis emerged from the conviction on the deep meaningfulness of historiography as understood by Walter Benjamin⁹. An engaged theorist, who unravels the events of the past, does it in an attempt to bring justice into an unjust world. A critical theory in itself does not transform the social structures. Still, it can demystify hegemonic discourses and get the lives of subordinated people out of their shadows - in order to make them the actual subjects of history. The harm that has been done to working-class women during the years of transformation needs to be told for ethical reasons. Furthermore, the increased exploitation, objectification and

⁹ Walter Benjamin, „O pojęciu historii” in idem, *Anioł historii. Eseje, szkice, fragmenty*, trans. Krystyna Krzemieniowa, ed. Hubert Orłowski, (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 1996), 421.

control they have experienced in the 90' should not be understood as something specific to that period but rather in terms of the historical continuum of oppression. The disastrous transformation processes are still present in our lives, and understanding their mechanisms and genealogy is crucial if we want to challenge them effectively.

In this thesis, I reconstruct the feminist and anti-neoliberal narratives about Polish transformation and backlash. These narratives come undoubtedly from privileged sites – highly educated authors, mainly scholars, produced them. Hence, I will ask questions about the relationship between the social positions of the analysed authors and the knowledge they produce. My considerations on knowledge production processes, shared primarily in the second chapter, are grounded in the standpoint theory¹⁰. It assumes that every knowledge comes from a particular place – it is affected both by the experiences and social positions of the subjects producing it – and by their political and emotional engagement¹¹. Donna Haraway framed it as a “situatedness¹²” of knowledge, pointing to its material and spatial embeddedness. Hence, while examining the contributions of the analysed authors, I will also take the material and institutional conditions of knowledge production into account¹³.

Some authors¹⁴ use their positions to amplify the silenced voices of the subjugated people, such as working-class women. However, while mediating their voices, they hold a position of power that could be potentially abused – I will deal with these risks in the second chapter¹⁵. My aim is to bring working-class women's experiences out of the shadow of history by examining the processes that shaped their experiences. At the same time, I am aware that this research might not accomplish the goal of making their voices heard. My methodology, which is analysing texts of academics, journalists and non-fiction authors, does not favour that – as the analysed authors either silence, ignore, or mediate (and, sometimes distort) voices of the groups subjected to subalternation. Hence, I hope that fellow scholars will continue the work of the critical examination of transformation and backlash from the feminist Marxist perspective

¹⁰ See for example Nancy C. M. Hartsock, (1983). “The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism.” in *Discovering Reality*, ed. Sandra Harding, Merrill B. Hintikka (Dordrecht, Springer, 1983), 283–310.

¹¹ See explication below

¹² Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective.” *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575–99.

¹³ See the second chapter, pp:

¹⁴ See, primarily: Kaczyńska Duda, *Ibid.*, also Elisabeth C. Dunn, *Privatizing Poland: Baby Food, Big Business, and the Remaking of Labor* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2004).

¹⁵ Pp: 52-53.

and, hopefully, complement research conducted here with oral history interviews and analysis of written sources (such as entireties to diaries or letters to the press).

I am also situated in the specific contexts that affect my perspective. I am a (cis) woman, an activist and a Polish migrant in Vienna. I have experienced precarious living situations, and sexism present both in everyday life and in the shape of policies in Poland. For a few years, I have also been affected by the marginalisation of an eastern European migrant living in Austria, manifesting in everyday life, bureaucratic arrangements, and political desubjectification (ranging from the lack of voting rights to phenomena such as ‘westsplaining’ in the activist scene). My approach to the subject of my research is quite emotionally involved. Even though in my close family, there have been no dramatic stories related to the changes that occurred in the ’90s (or at least none that I am aware of), and I barely remember that decade (I was born in 1994), every Polish person is somehow affected by the events that occurred back then. It is due to the continuity of the relationships of power established during that time and persisting nowadays. My activist engagement only exacerbates the sense of personal affectedness by the analysed phenomena. Still, this emotional approach doesn’t result only from personal feelings of being affected by transformation and backlash; it also comes from the empathy I feel towards the subjects of the history I am studying, particularly working-class women. I am inspired when I hear the stories - of emancipation on the one hand and the daily struggles on the other - that constituted the fabrics of their life before 1989’. On the other hand, I am heartbroken that the world they come from is gone. I am especially moved by their lost experiences of material stability¹⁶ and communality, which my generation barely knows. Being aware that another world was not only possible but that it did exist is saddening – because it faded away – and fascinating at the same time.

In the vein of the school of Black Feminist Epistemology, as described by Patricia Hill Collins¹⁷, I believe in the power of emotional engagement and its value for knowledge production. Hill Collins has demonstrated that the world of science is still dominated by the positivist traditions that rely on the requirement of the emotional objectivity and detachment and disengagement of the scholar from the subject (defined as object) of their research. She argues that such a paradigm favours knowledge production, which supports the interests of

¹⁶ Polish ’80s, defined by the economic and political crisis, certainly couldn’t be called a decade of stability. However’ comparing to the chaos of the ’90s, they are still being recalled as a “golden age” by many. E.g.: Duda, *Ibid.*, Leyk, Wawrzyniak, *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Patricia Hill Collins, “Black Feminist Epistemology” in ead. *Black Feminist Thought. Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*. Second Edition. (New York/London: Routledge, 2000), 251-271.

privileged social groups such as rich white men and strengthens and preserves the political status quo.

On the other hand, emotional engagement has always been a part of the emancipatory theory. As Walter Benjamin wrote: *“The class struggle, which is always present to a historian influenced by Marx, is a fight for the crude and material things without which no refined and spiritual things could exist. Nevertheless, it is not in the form of the spoils which fall to the victor that the latter make their presence felt in the class struggle. **They manifest themselves in this struggle as courage, humor, cunning, and fortitude.** They have retroactive force and will constantly call in question every victory, past and present, of the rulers.”*¹⁸

Suppression of the emotions in the political life is, as Chantal Mouffe has proved¹⁹, a disciplinary mechanism that not only negates the basic rules of democracy (understood as a system that organises political conflicts of the different interests groups investing the affects and emotions in the ongoing struggles), but also, in consequence, leads to fascisation of the society – by transferring suppressed emotions onto vicarious cases and, in the end, scapegoats. Mouffe had demonstrated that it is precisely what happened as neoliberalism achieved the status of global hegemony – when the world had to believe in “the end of the History²⁰” and accept the lack of alternative to neoliberal capitalism. In very similar terms, David Ost has explained a right-wing turn in Polish politics²¹ - he has focused his analysis on the class-based anger - felt by the broad parts of the polish society and suppressed by the liberal political and cultural elites.

Hence, although neoliberal academia tends to produce “objective”, emotionally disengaged knowledge that aims to legitimise the existing political system (I will write more about it in the first chapter), I would like to bring the emotions to the table. However, there is another trap of individualising neoliberal discourse, namely a trap of producing locally embedded knowledge that comes from a specific, emotionally involved perspective but resigns to particularity and gives up claims to any objectivity and truth. Critical analyses often fall into this trap – we²² tend to focus on individual perspectives and are so scared of employing a totalising approach that we sometimes miss the larger picture of the systemic contexts out of

¹⁸ Walter Benjamin, Ibid. (IV thesis)

¹⁹ Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics: thinking the world politically* (London: Verso Books, 2013)

²⁰ I obviously refer to the famous prophecy of Francis Fukuyama: Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?” *The National Interest*, no. 16 (1989): 3–18.

²¹ David Ost, *The Defeat of Solidarity. Anger and Politics in Postcommunist Europe* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2005)

²² Meaning gender, postcolonial and other critical scholars. I write “we” because, in spite of distancing myself from certain tendencies, I feel myself a part of this community.

sight²³. I believe this tendency also goes hand in hand with the neoliberalisation of academia, as it, in the end, makes the critical though toothless.

I touch on the problem of particularity in the context of emotions, as they are especially associated with individuals and their peculiar, distinct perspectives. However, as intimate as they might seem, emotions are embedded in and dependent on social structures²⁴ too. The phenomenon of ‘ostalgia’ can serve as a good example here. Observable in the design and the popular culture, it manifests the feelings of loss of the former reality; however, it is usually limited to the superficial elements of everyday life under state socialism, such as the brands of consumerist products²⁵. What I wrote above about the “lost worlds” of material stability and communality relates to the deeper feelings of melancholy that accompany the demolition of fundamentals of the previous life. However, the space for these feelings is denied, and the only way they can manifest themselves is through commercialised and infantilising ostalgia. I believe that these feelings – similarly to the feelings of anger, analysed by Ost - have to find an outlet and be recognised as valid - and then they have to be politicised. Ostalgia reifies the melancholy for the lost worlds, but we need to change the existing world, not freeze in the eternal grief and hopelessness. The stories set before 1989 are a source of both melancholy and inspiration for me. What happened in 90’, on the other hand, evokes feelings of compassion and outrage. The problematics I deal with in this thesis are often linked to violence in one way or another²⁶.

Motivations

While studying in the Gender Studies Master Programme at the University of Vienna, I visited various round lectures, besides attending classes that were part of my curriculum. The voices from the region of (Central) Eastern Europe were generally rarely audible – except in one lecture course, where they were quasi-ghettoised. The lecture covered the history of the transformation of the former Eastern Bloc countries. It provided a comprehensive overview of

²³ See, for example: the critique of the tendency within German critical whiteness studies to focus on individual perspectives and experiences of the privileged white Germans, while largely ignoring the discussion about structural racism: Ina Kerner, "Critical Whiteness Studies: Potentiale und Grenzen eines wissenschaftspolitischen Projekts" *Feministische Studien* 31, no. 2 (2013): 278-293.

²⁴ See work of Arlie Hochschild and Eva Illouz: e.g. Arlie R. Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), Eva Illouz, *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism*, (London: Polity Press, 2007)

²⁵ See the criticism of ostalgia by Agata Pyzik: Agata Pyzik, *Poor but Sexy: Culture Clashes in Europe East and West* (Winchester/ Washington: Zero Books, 2014), chapt. Post-politics of nostalgia

²⁶ See primarily the fourth chapter

the regional analyses of the transition processes, although the general approach could have included a more critical analysis. Still, there was one talk²⁷ that distinguished itself – and caused my outrage. A prominent German researcher and a former journalist representing a progressive German research institution has shared his insights on the history of the transformation of Soviet Russia. While doing so, he provided a counterexample to the failure of the Russian transformation – a Polish success story. I have, namely, heard that Balcerowicz’s plan worked brilliantly, saved the economy and “everyone in Poland loved it” (sic!). I know that the Russian neoliberal turn took undeniably a much more brutal shape²⁸ - still, it doesn’t justify oversimplifying and false narratives on the Polish case. Being in the audience, I realised how ridiculous my position as the listener to this was. Despite knowing an entirely different story than the lecturer told, I still didn’t dare to speak up when there was “a time for the questions” from the audience. The lecture was in German – a language that I’ve never learned to use with confidence. The audience consisted of predominantly German native speakers, and I didn’t have enough courage to confront the falsifying narratives imposed by western theorists on the East.

Whereas the mainstream interpretation of Polish transformation still proposes to see it as a “success story”, there is a need to engage in the production of counter-narratives. The knowledge, however truistically may it sound, is power. It can be disempowering when imposed by others occupying privileged positions of arrogance. But, it can also be empowering when reclaimed for emancipation.

The current crisis of reproductive rights in Poland, unique on the European scale, is rarely discussed in the context of socio-economic transformation. I am convinced that the Polish feminist movement, whom I consider myself a part of, needs to have such a discussion. I have been involved in abortion activism and various anti-capitalist initiatives. This involvement and critical examination of the connections between patriarchal and capitalist oppression have taught me that reproductive rights and anti-capitalist struggles should be intersectionally connected. Strong social movements, in turn, need to have at their disposition the knowledge produced for their reasons. It is my ambition to engage in the production of such knowledge, a knowledge interested in bringing justice to the oppressed subjects from the past – not only by

²⁷ This is not a call out, rather an auto-ethnographic side note, and an invitation to thinking about the discourse, hence I do not want to give publicly the name of the lecturer

²⁸ Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, 1st ed (New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt, 2007)., 218-182.

telling their stories but, primarily, by contributing to the elimination of the conditions of their subordination.

Categories and the Theoretical Background

Gender

My research seeks to combine theoretical and methodological frameworks of intersectionality and feminist historical materialism. My understanding of womanhood is constructivist and materialist at the same time – womanhood (similarly to manhood) is, for me, a product of not only patriarchal but also capitalist and imperial relations of power; it is embedded in the various social structures and shaped according to the needs of existing political economies. My notion of it corresponds to and is inspired by the one of Silvia Federici, for whom “‘*woman*’ (...) *signifies a particular form of exploitation and, therefore, a unique perspective from which to reconsider the history of capitalist relations*²⁹”. For Federici and other Marxist feminists, the context of the gendered division of labour under capitalism is crucial for understanding gender relations.

I intend to employ an understanding of gender as an interdependent category³⁰. Such a theoretical approach goes beyond the primary claim of the intersectional theory that there is no clear and separate identity, such as a woman or a white person, because our experiences and identities are irreducible to one single axis of power relations³¹. The approach that guides this research goes further. It rejects the vision of the power relations independent of each other and only meeting in the specific intersections – people’s experiences and identities. Rather, it directs us to think of power relations and categories they produce as themselves co-constituted by each other.

Implementation of such an approach in the context of research on Polish transformation and backlash means that I would like not only to question binary divisions between Polish

²⁹ Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch. Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, 2nd edit. (New York: Autonomedia, 2014), 13

³⁰ Katharina Walgenbach, “Gender Als Interdependente Kategorie” in Gabriele Dietze, Lann Hornscheidt, and Kerstin Palm. *Gender Als Interdependente Kategorie: Neue Perspektiven Auf Intersektionalität, Diversität Und Heterogenität*. 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Verlag Barbara Budrich, 2012).

³¹ For the classical approaches to intersectionality see Kimberle Crenshaw, „Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics”, *University of Chicago Legal Forum*: Vol. 1989: Iss. 1, Article 8; Combahee River Collective, *The Combahee River Collective Statement*, 1977, <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/combahee-river-collective-statement-1977/>

women and men and male vs female experience of the transformative, reactionary processes but also that I would like to consider how femininity/ femininities that emerged in the 90' were related to the changing class-relationships. As already said, I want to make the working-class women the actual subjects of the history of the transformation. However, I do not want to approach them as a given social group. Neither gender nor class relationships that “produce” social groups are stable – they are subjected to change and reconfiguration, particularly in the moments of historical breakthroughs, such as the Polish ‘90s. Hence, I intend to focus on the social, economic, cultural and political processes, specifically on how they regulate working-class women and – in the case of the ones I am going to analyse – how they intensify their exploitation and limit their agency.

Also, while tracing the discourses of womanhood and, sometimes, manhood, I will question what kind of womanhood is taken into account and how it is related to other categories. I will focus on these questions and ask who was “a woman” according to feminists writing about Polish transformation and backlash³². Analogously, I will also consider how the working class has been conceptualised – who, according to leftist thinkers, belonged to it and what kind of working-class experiences gained the most scholarly attention³³. I aim to focus on the intersections of class and gender – as I intend to demonstrate, these categories have played a crucial role in recent Polish history. Still, it does not mean that other categories - such as nationality, religion, sexuality, education, et cetera – are irrelevant.

In this thesis, I intend to discuss the very processes of the (re)construction of womanhood for the newly established global market. One could argue that mainstream conceptualisations of womanhood, reflected in the shape of the policies and mainstream discourse, have affected (nearly) all women. Even if so, then certainly not in the same way. Whereas the mainstream interpretations were focused primarily on the experiences of middle upper-class women, there is a need to put light on the hitherto obscured perspective of working-class women. The “women” is a generalising category that encompasses various, sometimes contrasting, contradictory life experiences. Still, it is a contested category, and I want to argue that in the existing political context, it should be reclaimed by the most subjugated women – rather than rejected as too generalising.

³² Pp: 43-49.

³³ Pp: 49-53.

Hence, I will not refrain from what I would like to call “strategic generalisations”. It is inspired by the concept of “strategic essentialism” introduced and popularised by postcolonial feminist theorist Gayatri Spivak³⁴. Spivak proposed that members of oppressed groups, despite the internal heterogeneity of specific groups, might still want to consolidate and resort to common collective identities to amplify their struggles. This increases their odds in the counter-hegemonic battles against other essentialist discourses that construct them as inferior, silence their voices and legitimise their subordination. Such an essentialisation must be “strategic”, meaning it is a tool of political struggle, not a premise upon which a movement’s theories and internal organisation should be organised. Why would I like to substitute “essentialism” with “generalisation”? Because “strategic generalisation”, as I would like to see it, does not rely on the assumption that there is an ontological essence of, e.g. womanhood. However, it presumes that experiences and commonalities imposed on women by the patriarchal relations of power provide the basis for a certain – even if limited – a sense of unity in the group. To fight these oppressive power relations, collective identities are needed. These should be internally inclusive and centred around the experiences of the marginalised, not privileged group members – in the case of my research: working-class women in Poland.

The “strategic generalisation” that guides my research makes sense not only politically but also epistemologically – as I tend to employ a feminist historical materialist perspective, focusing on the gendered division of labour. It always has been the working-class women who have been most burdened with the “women’s labour” – they are the ones made primarily responsible for the reproduction of labour and the daily life of the people and societies. If we agree that modern gendered divisions are derived from the gendered division of labour, their experience should be recognised as the women’s experience *par excellence*. This does not mean that divisions between women should be silenced. One must be cautious and conscious while employing strategic generalisations - nuances must also be considered.

Finally, I will see Polish patriarchy and capitalism as firmly interwoven – their interconnection is, in fact, the actual subject of my thesis. According to Leslie McCall³⁵, who has classified intersectional approaches into three distinct modes of analysis – anticategorical, intracategorical, and intercategorical; my approach is closest to the intercategorical one. The

³⁴ Elisabeth Eide, „Strategic Essentialism”, w *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Gender and Sexuality Studies*, ed. Angela Wong et al. (Singapore: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2016), 1–2, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118663219.wbegss554>.

³⁵ Leslie McCall, „The Complexity of Intersectionality”, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 30, Issue 3 (March 2005): 1771–1800, <https://doi.org/10.1086/426800>.

anticategorical approach is grounded in the poststructural and deconstructivist theoretical tradition and tends to reject rigid categorisations as inadequate and oppressive. The intracategorical approach also problematises the categories themselves, focusing on the differences within specific categories. The intreccategorical approach, on the other hand, is occupied with the power relations and their mutual interactions. It presumes that power relationships are grounded in the history of the material social relationships and proposes a strategy of analysing and confronting the systems of power such as patriarchy, capitalism and imperialism as a primary focus of intersectional feminism. Two other approaches, especially the anticategorical one, tend to see categorisation as the primary source of oppression. Consequently, they focus on deconstructing categories in the proposed scholarly – and activist – strategies. McCall argues – convincingly – that these are not particularly fruitful theoretical approaches, as first, the materiality that co-produces power relations should be confronted. The power relations are not simply given – and the categories we use affect them – but to deconstruct the categories discursively and call for their abolition without first abolishing the material conditions that produce them means focusing on the effects, not the causes of existing social order.

Silvia Federici rejects the anticategorical tendencies popular within feminist theory:

“the debates that have taken place among postmodern feminists concerning the need to dispose of “woman” as a category of analysis, and define feminism purely in oppositional terms, have been misguided. (...) if “femininity” has been constituted in capitalist society as a work-function masking the production of a workforce under the cover of a biological destiny, then “women’s history” is “class history”, and the question that has to be asked is whether the sexual division of labour that has produced that particular concept has been transcended. If the answer is a negative one (as it must be when we consider the present organization of reproductive labor), then “women” is a legitimate category of analysis, and the activities associated with “reproduction” remain a crucial ground of struggle for women³⁶.”

Class

Having explained my approach to gender, I want to clarify how I understand class, the second analytical category organising my research. Even though there are numerous theoretical perspectives on it, and today the social stratification theory seems to play the dominant role, I

³⁶ Federici, Ibid., 14

generally find the old differentiation proposed by Karl Marx – centred on the relationship to the means of production³⁷ - to be still particularly useful. Hence, I will often refer to the working class – meaning all those who do not own enough capital that would enable them not to have to work for others³⁸. Still, while choosing this approach, I’m adopting its revisited version.

As feminists in the ‘70s pointed out³⁹, Marx and his followers have been profoundly gender-blind. Their categorisation of class divisions has entirely missed out on realms of people and labour that lie beyond (or underneath) the world of wage labour. The work of women performed in their households has not been sold on the market – and as such, not recognised as work according to the Marxist orthodoxy. To similar conclusions came the decolonial thinkers⁴⁰, who unmasked the eurocentrism of the theory of labour focused merely on the wage labour. Both labours of enslaved people in the plantations and women's work in the households have provided the indispensable foundation upon which Western industrial capitalism could have been built and reproduced. Inspired by these theoretical contributions, I will employ a more inclusive and intersectional definition of the working class, which focuses on the dispossession of the means of subsistence, which subsumes the labour under capital. Consequently, it encompasses all the people deprived of access to the means of (re)production.

Such a way of defining class, based on the understanding of labour revisited by feminist and postcolonial thinkers, is especially needed in the face of neoliberal labour policies that lead to the expansion of informal and invisible labour sectors. Maria Mies has seen an analogy between the burdening of the housewives with the reproduction of the workforce and this phenomenon of increasing precarity of employment and externalisation of costs of labour by

³⁷ Justin Holt, “Class” in *The social thought of Karl Marx*. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2015), 89-120

³⁸ According to Marx, the working class are the people who sell their workforce on the market. There are, however, numerous people who occupy so lucrative positions, that, in spite of being employed by others and technically selling their labour-power, in practice belong to the bourgeoisie. They not only have enough means that they would not have to work anymore to provide for themselves – but they also represent the interests of the capital and capital owners – as they make their fortunes by managing the capital flows/ disciplining the labour. In the today’s world of corporate capitalism, this managerial class expanded, especially in the core countries of global capitalism.

³⁹ Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Selma James, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, 1971, <https://files.libcom.org/files/Dalla%20Costa%20and%20James%20-%20Women%20and%20the%20Subversion%20of%20the%20Community.pdf>

⁴⁰ First was actually Rosa Luxemburg, who pointed out the dependence of the capitalist economy on the labour of peasants and labourers in the colonies, was Rosa Luxemburg in 1913: Rosa Luxemburg, *Capital Accumulation*, [1913], trans. Agnes Schwarzschild (London: Routledge, 1951), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1913/accumulation-capital/accumulation.pdf>. For more recent, post-colonial and feminist critique of Marxism see: Nikita Dhawan, *Marxist Critique of Post-colonialism*, *Krisis* 2018, Issue 2, <https://archive.krisis.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Krisis-2018-2-Marxist-Critique-of-Post-colonialism.pdf>?, as well as Federici, *Ibid* and Mies, *Ibid*.

capital. She wrote in 1986, at the down of neoliberalisation of labour: “*What the experts call “flexibilization of labour”, some of us have called “housewifisation” of labour (Mies, 1981; v. Werlhof, 1984).*”⁴¹ Thus, the feminist critique of the division of labour between formal and informal sectors becomes potentially advantageous for understanding today’s situation of labour, in which the informal sector expands. As labour generally becomes more unstable, precarious, undervalued and deprived of access to more traditional means of organised resistance, it also requires new strategies for confronting the capital.

Studying the very process of the deprivation of the means of (re)production that enabled the implementation of neoliberal capitalism in Poland and conditioned the formation of the class society is part of my research. They are, as I believe, exemplary of what Marx called primitive accumulation and what many other theorists developed⁴² into the key concept explaining the possibility of the emergence and reproduction of the capitalist system. Focusing his research on capitalism's neoliberal manifestation, David Harvey developed a helpful concept of “accumulation by dispossession”. It explains how dispossession of the working class, the indigenous people, and the Global South from their resources – material ones, but also of the culture or knowledge – constituted a necessary element of the neoliberal turn.

Neoliberalism is understood here as a project of the reinstitution of the power of the elites over the rest of society⁴³. This reinstitution came down to the predatory acquisition of assets motivated by economic interests and revanchist sentiments⁴⁴. Such dispossessions are also a part of the history of Polish neoliberalism – and the post-socialist context is especially interesting here, bearing in mind the local elites' historical discontinuities and broken lineage. Integration of Harvey’s concept into my research further justifies my decision to focus on the working-class women; as I propose, they were the most dispossessed ones. Their workplaces have been privatised, and state-governed and communal support structures have been liquidated. Last but not least, they were dispossessed of the means of control of their bodies and reproductive functions – one could call it the ultimate dispossession⁴⁵.

⁴¹ Mies, *Ibid.*, 16

⁴² Rosa Luxemburg, *Ibid.*; Mies, *Ibid.*; Federici, *Ibid.*; David Harvey, „The «New» Imperialism: Accumulation by Dispossession”, in *Karl Marx*, ed. Bertell Ollman i Kevin B. Anderson, (London: Routledge, 2017), 213–37, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315251196-10>.

⁴³ I develop this thought further, in the context of neoliberalisation of Poland: 55-63.

⁴⁴ Pp: 85-91.

⁴⁵ See fourth chapter.

Nearly all Marxist analyses of the Polish transformation have been focused on the disappearing world of industrial production. While this is an undeniably crucial aspect of the neoliberal turn the country experienced, without considering reproduction and the changes it underwent, we lack the whole picture of what happened after 1989⁴⁶. Among the feminists, there is now an increased sensitivity to the problems of working-class women⁴⁷, and the ongoing care debates⁴⁸ are part of what one could call a “social turn⁴⁹” within the feminist movement, initially dominated by liberal tendencies⁵⁰. Still, the issue of reproduction is very rarely discussed in its relationship to production and the context of its role and place in the whole economic system.

Intersections of Patriarchy and Capitalism

As I have already suggested, I do not consider class and gender to be separate from each other. However, as Simone de Beauvoir proposed, is it true that women constitute a distinct class⁵¹? Such a conceptualisation is too simplifying as it disregards the class differences among women. It could be particularly misleading in the contemporary world – especially in Western liberal democracies - where a lot of formal “equality” has been achieved, translating into diminishing barriers for the privileged women and growing divisions between women⁵². Much more appealing is the understanding proposed by Silvia Federici, for whom gender is a “specification of class relations⁵³”. The housewives responsible for the reproduction of labour occupy indeed a distinct position from the wage labourers themselves. The modern patriarchal family plays here a regulatory role – the husband who is himself exploited relies on the work of a wife for his subsistence. According to Maria Mies, the subordinate position of a wife is a position of exploited labourer and a husband benefits from this exploitation. She considers the

⁴⁶ I link the changes that occurred in the production to the transformation of reproduction in the fourth chapter: 64-9.

⁴⁷ I write more about that in the fourth chapter: 48-49.

⁴⁸ See e.g.: Ewa Charkiewicz, ed. *Gender i ekonomia opieki* (Warszawa: Fundacja Tomka Byry Ekologia i Sztuka, 2009); see also pp 48-49, where I discuss new activist initiatives.

⁴⁹ See: Elżbieta Korolczuk, Julia Kubisa, Dorota Szelewa, ed., *Ruch Feministyczny w Polsce a Kwestia Socjalna*, #26 *Warszawskie Debaty o Polityce Społecznej*, <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/warschau/14094.pdf>

⁵⁰ I investigate this issue in the second chapter, in the part of feminist spaces of knowledge production, pp: 43-48.

⁵¹ Simone de Beauvoir, trans. Gabriela Mycielska, Maria Leńniewska, *Druga Płeć* (Warszawa: Czarna Owca, 2014).

⁵² On the issue of inequalities among women in the context of class and regional differences, with focus on Central Eastern Europe see: Anikó Gregor and Weronika Grzebalska, “Thoughts on the contested relationship between neoliberalism and feminism” in *Solidarity in Struggle: Feminist Perspectives on Neoliberalism in East-Central Europe*, ed. Eszter Kováts (Budapest: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2016), 12.

⁵³ Federici, *Ibid.*, 14.

“man-woman relationship (...) a part and parcel of the basic structural relations of production⁵⁴”. Mies even defines capitalism, where these dependencies became exceptionally sharp and exploitative, as *“the most recent and most universal manifestation of patriarchal civilisation⁵⁵”*.

Silvia Federici builds up her theory on the theorisation proposed by Mies, but she rejects the idea that working men in patriarchal capitalism are beneficiaries of the subordination of their wives. She, instead, emphasises that the working class as a whole is oppressed under capitalism, and its position deteriorates even more as it is subjected to disintegration and divisions based on gender categories. *“Sexual hierarchies, we found, are always at the service of a project of domination, that can sustain itself only by dividing, on a continuously renewed basis, those it intends to rule.⁵⁶”*, Federici wrote convincingly in *“Caliban and the Witch”*, that capitalism mastered the *divide et impera* ruling strategy⁵⁷. Federici demonstrated this as she studied the transition from feudal to capitalist social relationships, enabled by the decomposition of the peasant and working-class communities – disintegrated by the state-organised witch-hunting and internal patriarchal violence. As I will demonstrate, the time of Polish transformation, where unprecedented gender backlash occurred, can also serve as an illustrative example of the processes of such disintegration of the working class. Federici claims, and this is a crucial idea for my thesis, that the “enclosure of social relations”, of which subjugation of women has been an essential part, should, too, be understood as a form of primitive accumulation.

As thinkers such as Naomi Klein or David Harvey have proved⁵⁸, neoliberalism is very far from any democratic form of governance. Facing the popular resistance, its implementation often has to resort to militarised violence to ensure the continuation of its enforcement. While the introduction of neoliberal reforms in countries such as the UK or USA in the '80s was accompanied by the intensive ideological efforts, and its success generally depended on winning popular support, in the (semi)peripheries of global capitalism, in countries such as Chile or Argentina, direct force and sometimes most brutal violence was employed to secure the stability of the new regimes⁵⁹. Against this backdrop, Poland appears to be a peculiar

⁵⁴ Mies, *Ibid.*, 22.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵⁶ Federici, *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵⁷ For a more detailed explication of her argument see: pp: 87-88, 103.

⁵⁸ Klein, *Ibid.*; David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005)

⁵⁹ Klein, Harvey, *Ibid.*

example – a semi-peripheral country and a homeland to an unprecedentedly influential union movement, 'Solidarność' greeted the reforms seemingly with open arms⁶⁰. My ambition is to examine the nature of the Polish society's alleged 'consent' towards the transformation. My crucial argument is that only specific sections of the society were targeted as those whose consent was desired. Other members of the society were, on the other hand, approached with force – although it was not always direct. In particular, structural violence - economic violence or violence inherent to restrictive reproductive laws - also functioned as useful tools of the system that divided people into distinct categories and subordinated some of them to generate profit from their exploitation.

Periodisation

The authors of the analysed texts propose various periodisations of the transformation's temporalities. Jan Sowa, who analyses the political and economic reforms, claims, for example, that the transformation, which occurred within three years (1989-1992), was just the final – and most acute - phase of the processes initiated in 1982⁶¹. Olga Drenda, on the other hand, focusing on the design, popular culture and consumerist practices - and not on the political processes - identifies phenomena that were common to the late '80s and early '90. She depicts the transformation times as "hauntological times" and frames them between 1986 and 1994⁶². Many scholars, however, approach the year 1989 as a demarcation point and frame the transformation as everything that happened afterwards. Izabela Desperak, for instance, analyses very contemporary phenomena in her book about transformation and gender⁶³ – as if the transformation has never ended. Such a vision of never-ending transformation, as Leszek Koczanowicz argues, contributes to the sense of instability and abnormality of the Polish political situation – I will address this issue in the 1st chapter⁶⁴. Agreeing with Leszek Koczanowicz, I, still, see a point in defining the transformation times more broadly. Even though reforms were introduced at an astounding pace, their implementation took more time – as was the case with the privatisation of state assets – even if a large part of the industry was

⁶⁰ See fifth chapter, also: David Ost, *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Jan Sowa, *Ciesz się, późny wnuku! Kolonializm, Globalizacja i Demokracja Radykalna*, (Kraków: korporacja ha!art, 2008), 414; Jan Sowa, „Mitologie III RP” in *Podziały klasowe...* (op.cit.), 25.

⁶² Olga Drenda, *Ibid.*, 13-14.

⁶³ Izabela Desperak, *Płeć Zmiany. Zjawisko Transformacji w Polsce z Perspektywy Gender*, 2nd edit., (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2017)

⁶⁴ Pp: 26-27

privatised in the first years of the '90s⁶⁵, the reprivatisation of communal housing and other estates intensified in the '2000s⁶⁶ - and repercussions both waves of privatisations lasted even longer. At this place, I would like to introduce a concept of 'the long '90s', inspired and based on Eric Hobsbawm's concept of the 'long XIX century'. Such periodisation is focused on the processes that defined this decade – they began in the '80s, with the first wave of privatisation in 1986-1989⁶⁷ and opening to the West, and ended (or were reshaped) in the 2000', perhaps in 2004, with Poland's entry into EU. Still, I will sometimes cross the boundaries of proposed periodisation – mostly due to the fact that what happened after 2004 provided a crucial and changing context for the analysed knowledge production processes.

Content

In the first chapter, I analyse the mainstream narratives on Polish transformation and its subjects. I trace the processes of construction of consent to the reforms and examine the discursive strategies of subjectification and desubjectification. I deconstruct the transitional Imaginarium and consider how the figures of transformation “winners” and “losers” have been gendered. At this place, I also examine feminist efforts to enter the political mainstream – which came down to rejecting the state-socialist past and embracing the transitional capitalist future.

I deepen these reflections in the second chapter, where I examine the processes of knowledge production, focusing on the feminist and leftist spaces of knowledge production. Recognition of the conditions in which critical theory has been crafted is crucial to understanding why specific concepts gained prominence on the feminist and leftist scene – while others have been ignored. Analysed phenomena – material in nature - such as the decline of the vernacular and/ or emancipatory common spaces of knowledge production, westernisation of the academia and other institutions, gender-or class-exclusiveness of the new institutions and spaces have, for a long time, as I argue, precluded production of an intersectional theory of transformation, grounded in both feminism and Marxism.

In the third chapter, I briefly recapitulate on the neoliberal restructuration of the Polish economy. I use Naomi Klein's concept of “shock doctrine” to consider the undemocratic character of the design, development, legislation and implementation of the Sachs-Balcerowicz

⁶⁵ Leyk, Wawrzyniak, *Ibid.*, 35-36.

⁶⁶ See: Conclusions, pp: 108-110.

⁶⁷ Leyk, Wawrzyniak, *Ibid.*, 28-29

plan. I also employ David Harvey's concept of "accumulation by dispossession" to discuss reconfiguration of the class relationships and the predatory nature of the privatisations.

Then, in the fourth chapter, I investigate the gendered aspects and consequences of the accumulation by dispossession. First, I discuss the transformation of the sphere of reproduction and changes in the gendered division of labour. Later, I identify three gendered consequences of Polish neoliberal transformation: 1) the housewifisation of women's productive and reproductive labour, 2) the intensification of gender-based violence (here I focus primarily on the structural violence, manifesting particularly in abortion ban policy), and 3) the hegemony of neoconservatism, with the growing power of catholic church and traditional, normative family.

In the last – fifth - chapter, I discuss different approaches to the concept of backlash and consider how it can be best operationalised. In this chapter, I finally answer the question guiding my thesis: how was the Polish backlash of the long '90s related to the socio-economic transformation? I propose a multi-dimensional understanding of this relationship. Firstly, based on the findings from the fourth chapter (of correlation between austerity politics and intensification of the gendered division of labour), I argue that backlash was inherent to neoliberal restructuring. Secondly, I approach backlash as a consequence of neoliberalisation - also relying on the fourth chapter, primarily on the fragment on neoconservative turn as a result of privatisation. Finally, I explain it as a precondition to successful neoliberalisation – to support this claim, I analyse the processes of decay of the labour movement by focusing on the conservative turn within "Solidarity".

In the closing part of my thesis, having already recognised the crucial role of backlash in the transformation, I once again ask the question about the relationship between consent and violence in the implementation of the neoliberal reforms in Poland. I accuse transitional (and post-transitional) Poland and the neoliberal hegemony it has adopted for the subjugation of women and the construction of its own "witches". Then, I ask about the legacy of the 'long '90s' and point out continuities and the new openings in Polish politics today. After presenting the bleak and dishearting story of the oppression, injustice, violence against women and defeat of the working class, I conclude with the spark of optimism: by identifying the emancipatory and empowering potential present in the recent manifestations of feminist and intersectional resistance and solidarity.

1st Chapter: Hegemonial Narratives and Figures of Losers and Winners

As theorists such as Naomi Klein or David Harvey demonstrated⁶⁸, the worldwide implementation of neoliberal reforms was preceded by intensified efforts to win ideological hegemony. The alliance of business with neoliberal ideologues and often – as in the case of the US⁶⁹ – with neoconservative ones was formed and invested enormous resources to promote the vision of the new ideology that, on the one hand, would appeal to broader parts of the society, and on the other would be perceived as lacking alternatives. Neoliberal „long march through history⁷⁰” culminated in the '70s, when TV stations, Economics departments at universities, and national and international institutions like the Federal Reserve or World Bank, were step by step taken over by a small group of influential and resourceful people. At the same time, neoliberal think tanks, lobby groups and even a Nobel Prize in economics were founded to promote neoliberal discourse that was still controversial but was about to dominate the world very soon⁷¹. What happened in at that time was a classic example of a process of winning political power by a “war of position” - achieving cultural domination and overtaking the mass media and, in the end, democratic institutions described by Antonio Gramsci⁷². While tracing the genealogy of this neoliberal political hegemony, Noam Chomsky and S. Herman have coined the concept of ‘manufacturing the consent’ – to demonstrate how the ‘production’ of the societal agreement to the political changes by Mass Media conditioned the implementation of the neoliberal policies⁷³.

The neoliberal march to Poland, whose centrally planned economy was even more distant from the neoliberal ideal than the social-democratic arrangements of the post-war Western welfare states, resembled more of a sprint in its pace. What was being announced with brutal sincerity as a shock therapy⁷⁴ was accompanied by a rapid shift in dominating narratives, symbols and representations. Here, the implementation of neoliberalism as a hegemonic mode

⁶⁸ Klein, *Ibid.*, Harvey, *A Brief History...* (op.cit.).

⁶⁹ Harvey, *Ibid.*, 49-51.

⁷⁰ The concept of a “long march”, although not coined by Antonio Gramsci (as it is falsely attributed to him), is inspired by his concept of “war on positions” - Antonio Gramsci, trans. Quintin Hoare, Geoffrey Nowell Smith, *Selections from the Prison, Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers., 1971), 238.

⁷¹ Harvey, *Ibid.*, 39-63.

⁷² Gramsci, *Ibid.*

⁷³ Edward S. Herman, Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988)

⁷⁴ It was a term commonly used by Polish politicians. See more detailed analysis of how Klein’s concept of “shock doctrine” relates to Polish transformation: the third chapter, pp: 55-59.

of discourse seemed to be particularly challenging if we bear in mind the concomitant historical developments. During the 'Carnival of Solidarity' in 80'-81,' the independent union movement (with ten million members!) promoted a programme of workers' self-governance that some today describe as an anarcho-syndicalist.⁷⁵ After the martial state was introduced to suppress the union, it never regained its mass, grassroots and radical character. Still, in the second half of the 80' its dominating line was in support of social democratic solutions. A „third way” between capitalism and socialism was a widespread phrase. Everyone seemed to be aware that unregulated capitalism would be disastrous for the workers, who were the base of the movement. In such circumstances, 'manufacturing consent' to reforms grounded in free-market fundamentalism appeared barely possible.

The question of whether consent was ever actually achieved is debatable – some claim that not and even point out that the current turn to an 'illiberal state' is a repercussion of the fact that large sections of society never agreed to neoliberal reforms and felt excluded from processes of 'democratisation'⁷⁶. This issue is worth interrogating, and questions on the nature of (lack of) consent need to be asked. In this place, however, I want to take a closer look at the efforts being made to construct consent – trace the processes of production of the discourse and consider the ideological character of most popular tropes. Drawing on the Gramscian theoretical tradition, I approach the process of striving for ideological hegemony as crucial for the stability of the political systems and implementation of the policies realising the interests of the ruling class. As Gramsci has pointed out, the hegemony reflects the interest of the dominant class, but not as a simple manifestation of it - it is a result of a dynamic process of ideological struggles that entails the incorporation of some compromises – to include subordinated classes and secure their consent. Notably, according to the Gramscian understanding, the hegemony is not a purely ideological/ superstructural phenomenon – it is materially and institutionally embedded and, as such, present in everydayness. The discourse, in turn, 'organically' present in the people's everyday lives is experienced as a 'common sense' and is crucial to how we make sense of our experiences. I want to analyse the discourse because it affects our power to tell our stories and, eventually, call for a change while placing them within broader political narratives.

⁷⁵ Jan Sowa, *Inna Rzeczpospolita jest możliwa! Widma przeszłości, wizje przyszłości* (Warszawa, Wydawnictwo WAB, 2015), 171-180.

⁷⁶ See e.g.: Weronika Grzebalska and Andrea Pető, „The Gendered Modus Operandi of the Illiberal Transformation in Hungary and Poland”, *Women's Studies International Forum* 68 (May 2018): 164–72, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2017.12.001>.

Who controls the discourse matters – and as Marx has stated: „the thoughts of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling thoughts”⁷⁷. Even though the elites of the former system, gathered around the PZPR party⁷⁸, did not vanish after 1989, the '90s were the time of the rapid formation of the new establishment. In many cases, new political and intellectual elites, also those associated with big business, originated from the „Solidarity” movement. David Ost, in his prominent analysis of Polish transformation – entitled tellingly „The Defeat of Solidarity”⁷⁹ – demonstrates how the union leaders betrayed its base and made careers exploiting their positions within the Union against the interests of its ordinary members and the early „Solidarity” ideals. Politicians and business people relied on the alliance with academia and the formation of expert knowledge on the transformation processes that would legitimise their power. This knowledge, produced in academia, was being transmitted by the mass media, willingly joining the campaign of establishing the hegemony of the new system⁸⁰.

1. Transitology and Neoliberal Depictions of Poland

„Universities have been playing a causal role in the transformation, giving it discursive shape and overseeing the borders of what and how can be said and what is not allowed to be said.⁸¹”, claims Ewa Charkiewicz. During the times of transformation, specific disciplines, especially economic, political and social sciences and psychology,⁸² gained prominence. As Buchowski framed it, they constituted an „apparatus of legitimisation of the system of the power to ignore”. Transition studies, or transitology, were born and thrived within these disciplines to promote a new „scientific” approach to 'democratisation' processes within newly established knowledge-power dynamics. As Boris Buden, a philosopher from the former Yugoslavia demonstrates, transitology was a science OF implementing neoliberal capitalism in the East, not about it⁸³. Accordingly, in the scientific discourse – especially one produced in the West – ‘transition’ was a more common framing phrase⁸⁴ than ‘transformation’. The

⁷⁷Citation after Piotr Żuk, Wstęp. Przemilczana rzeczywistość – o problemach z dostrzeganiem nierówności społecznych w czasach realnego kapitalizmu in *Podziały klasowe...* (op.cit.), 9

⁷⁸The abbreviation for Polska Zjednoczona Patria Robotnicza [Polish United Workers Patry]

⁷⁹Ost, Ibid.

⁸⁰On press discourse see e.g. Adam Leszczyński, Paradoxs współczucia. Bieda I wykluczenie w oczach dziennikarzy in *Podziały klasowe...* (op.cit) 259-270

⁸¹Citation comes from Ewa Charkiewicz’ introduction to her seminar about Foucault, which was available online, but is no longer accessible, citation after Wojciech W. Nowak, Ibid., 121.

⁸² Michał Buchowski, Ibid., 12, 24-25.

⁸³ Boris Buden, trans. Michał Sutowski, *Strefa przejścia. O końcu postkomunizmu* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2012), 34-35.

⁸⁴ Buchowski, Ibid., 26.

concept owed its prominence to several reasons⁸⁵: it implied the transitional, temporal status of the societies undergoing what it denoted and an apparent teleology of the processes involved. Transition studies defined former Eastern-Bloc societies' goals and designed how to achieve them using 'the scientific method'. Furthermore, for transition scholars, the concept of 'transformation' was associated with a totalising approach – whereas 'transition' was, as they believed, constituted by numerous allegedly unconnected phenomena.

Let us stop at the point where the transitional nature of post-socialist societies is concerned – as this aspect played an important role in disciplining society and suppressing the critique of the reforms introduced after 1989. Unclear ontological status, the liminal state of post-socialist societies declared by transitologists, was used to justify extraordinary measures, which, as Leszek Koczanowicz puts it, were often far from being democratic. He wrote in 2009:

„We are still waiting for the real, „normal” politics. This leads to two serious consequences. Firstly, the assumption that Poland/Eastern Europe (?) is still in the transformation process justifies using extraordinary measures, violating or changing the procedures, which means moving on the edge of the democratic system. Secondly, awaiting utopian, „real” politics results in ongoing political life being treated as something defective, to what different than normal standards should be applied.”⁸⁶

In a similar vein, Giorgio Agamben puts forward a thesis on the state of exception as a permanent condition characterising post-communist politics. At the same time, he defines „the state of exception as a permanent structure of dislocation and legally-political dislocations⁸⁷”. In such a context of uncertain temporality and chaotic instability, technocratic governments and executive boards in the companies presented themselves as the only bodies capable of making the decisions. This entailed a denial of agency and any political power to the broad sections of society and precluded political disputes reflecting conflicting interests within the society. Buden writes that post-socialist politics ran “as if to every political question the right answers have already been given, as if it was all about their proper implementation, about the possibly faithful imitation of given patterns and humble listening to the words of a preceptor⁸⁸.” The elites were the ones to hold the knowledge on how to govern the others, represented as utterly unknowledgeable and incapable of achieving subjectivity in a democratic society.

⁸⁵ For detailed analysis of the role of transitology see Buchowski, Ibid., 26.

⁸⁶ Leszek Koczanowicz, „Co się z nami stało, czyli powstanie postpostkomunizmu” in Podziały klasowe... (op.cit.), 90-91.

⁸⁷ Giorgio Agamben, Homo Sacer, citation after Boris Buden, Ibid., 11-12.

⁸⁸ Buden, Ibid., 44.

The subjugated members of the society were represented by the figures, who all share a common trait – they are depicted as lacking the knowledge necessary to determine one's fate autonomously. As such, they are forced to rely upon the expertise of others, placed higher in the social hierarchies. In his critical analysis of the Western approaches to post-socialist Eastern societies, Boris Buden recognised – and deconstructed - two such figures. According to him, members of post-socialist societies were commonly depicted as children or as 'patients of history'. Both figures bring to mind someone who temporarily cannot take their life into their own hands – in the case of a child until they grow up and reach maturity and in the case of a patient until they recover from their sickness. Also, in both cases, the help of others – the parents and pedagogues or the doctors - that sometimes is indistinguishable from the discipline and control is assumed to be obvious and desired. Hence, the infantilising and pathologising discourse denying the agency and autonomy of the subjects is constructed as a rational and self-explanatory response to the 'immature' and 'unhealthy' condition of the subjects themselves.

One specific subtype of the trope of „post-socialist societies as children” is worth mentioning. As Agnieszka Mrozik demonstrates in her analysis of gendered representations of transformation in the literature, Polish feminist writers in the 90' were inclined to choose a young girl as a popular figure representing a country undergoing profound, transformative changes. “*Due to this spontaneity, potentiality, a hope for a change evoked by the figure of a little girl* – Mrozik writes – *female writers after 1989 fancied her as an allegory of Poland in the times of transformation.*⁸⁹” The figure of a girl, on the one hand, symbolised the progress and modernisation that Polish feminists wished for in Poland; on the other, a desire to reject rigid patriarchal order – to take a step back and contest the burden of women's socialisation to subordination. However, as Mrozik exposed, this turn to girlhood occurred merely on the level of representation. 'Little girl' was discursively reified, while real experiences of actually existing girls (especially in the context of global capitalism) remained primarily untackled⁹⁰. However, further problems could be identified if we consider the prominence of this figure. In my opinion, it reflects the general condition of the Polish feminist movement in the 90' and its relationship to the legacy of the former state socialist system. While youthful rebelliousness seems appealing at first glance, embracing girlhood by Polish feminists after 1989 had more to do with their diligence and enthusiasm about learning from and looking up to their older “sisters” from the

⁸⁹Agnieszka Mrozik, *Ibid.*, 229.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 234.

West⁹¹. Younger sisters from Poland were copying their strategies and theories while positioning themselves as inferior but willing to “catch up”. This coincided with what Mrozik described elsewhere in her book – namely, with writing off “the mothers” – women from the older generations – that was part of the rejection of the female genealogies and the emancipatory legacy of PPR⁹², which I am going to examine once again later⁹³.

New liberal elites, feminists included, were the keen imitators⁹⁴ of their western counterparts, leading the ‘patients’ and ‘children’ according to their enlightened directions. ‘Transition’ was believed to have a clear teleology. On the way to telos (becoming “normal”, “European”, capitalist and liberal democratic country), some sections of the society were assumed to play a crucial role, while others were cast aside. “Middle class” gained so much favour that it became a new fetish of various transitologists. As Przemysław Pluciński established⁹⁵, ‘middle class’ emerged as “the main concept organising (new) class analysis” and “rather than becoming a crucial theoretical category, it became a new ideological fetish”⁹⁶. While the working class was associated with the former system and deemed unproductive and ‘lagging behind’ the West, the middle class was meant to embody the new “normality”, Europeanisation and entrepreneurial mentality. If the transitology was a project of designing a perfect capitalist society, then, as Pluciński puts it, the middle class was its messiah⁹⁷. The privileging of a middle class in the discourse was accompanied by eradicating a materialist class-based analysis. Instead, what gained popularity was a social stratification theory, represented by renowned scholars such as Henryk Domański, where a class was no longer a derivative of material relationships of (re)production but depended merely on the factors such as one’s social position, education and income. As a result, cultural customs and consumption patterns were seen as deserving much more scholarly attention than abrupt changes occurring in the workplaces. As Pluciński rightfully states, the stratificational approach tends to “focus on the effects, not on the causes of social problems.”⁹⁸

⁹¹ On the examples of this „diligance” and phenomenon of “translocation” of Western feminism to Poland see Zofia Łapniewska, “First-world aspirations and feminism translocation: In search of economic and leftist alternatives” in *Solidarity in Struggle..* (op.cit.), 21-31.

⁹² Mrozik, *Ibid.*, 19-20.

⁹³ Pp: 41-42, 74.

⁹⁴ On the concept of imitation in the context of post-socialism see Ivan Krastev, Stephen Holmes, *The Light that Failed. A Reckoning* (London: Penguin Books, 2020)

⁹⁵ Przemysław Pluciński, „Dykurs klasowy polskiej socjologii postranformacyjnej” in *Podziały klasowe...* (op.cit.), 101-116.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 112.

While the children and patients were hoped to become a mature and healthy, westernised middle class that would eventually bring salvation to Poland, the poor and the working class were approached with disdain and doomed to be eternally stuck in the limbo of a former system. This sense of hopelessness, mental backwardness, and being frozen in the past and denied any agency in the present is perfectly embodied by a famous “homo sovieticus” figure. Coined by a Russian dissident sociologist and philosopher Aleksander Zinowiew, the term was later popularised by Polish priest and philosopher Józef Tischner, who used it to discuss the condition of Polish society during the transformation, claiming it “did not grow up to the democracy⁹⁹”. Wojciech Woźniak, in his analysis of anti-poor rhetorics typical for Polish transitology, demonstrates how this figure was entangled in the denigratory discourses on the “civilisatory incompetence¹⁰⁰” of Polish people. His citation from leading Polish sociologist, Piotr Sztompka, clearly illustrates the superiority syndrome of Polish elites, inevitably present when one speaks of “Homo Sovieticus syndrome”:

“The Homo Sovieticus syndrome does not equally define Polish people. There were intellectual, academic and oppositional elites – cosmopolitan and oriented to the West, that were able to resist this syndrome and, even under communism, adopted – in imagination, dreams and aspirations – standards and values of the “free world”. These elites became the bearers of a new mentality, spreading it among their supporters and imitators¹⁰¹.”

According to Michał Buchowski, who thoroughly deconstructed the figure of Homo Sovieticus, it evokes¹⁰² the traits such as barbarity, backwardness, apathy, obedience, powerlessness, but also, interestingly, reliance on social services, idleness, egalitarian sentiments, low standards of work ethics and low efficiency of work. This particular collection of traits, as I want to argue, was not coincidental. The systemic role of such figures as “Homo Sovieticus” was not only to provide a contra point to the self-satisfaction of the elites (self-proclaimed Homines Westernicis) but also to legitimise the economic subordination of broad parts of the society and their exploitation. “Homo Sovieticus”, as Buchowski critically demonstrated, is an orientalisising concept – it stigmatises subjugated social groups as ontologically distinct and, most importantly, mystifies the class difference as resulting from the sum of individuals’ features. If those individual features share any structural characteristics,

⁹⁹ Citation after Wojciech Woźniak, „Zwalczanie ubóstwa czy zwalczanie ubogich” in *Podziały klasowe...* (op.cit), 209; see also Buchowski, *Ibid.*, 211.

¹⁰⁰ Woźniak, *Ibid.*, 210.

¹⁰¹ Citation after Woźniak, *Ibid.*, 210.

¹⁰² Buchowski, *Ibid.*, 211-212.

then they are ascribed merely to the culture (although, in the worst cases, to the psycho-physical inferiority too – the social Darwinism at its worse also manifests itself here¹⁰³). Buchowski recognises the cultural determinism that comes to the fore whenever “Homo Sovieticus” is mentioned¹⁰⁴. Speaking more broadly, his diagnosis of the general tendency to culturalistic explanations and prioritising the role of traditions and mental habits as reifying the social reality and denying agency and subjectivity to the people is crucial to me. As I believe, this propensity, so prevalent in the mainstream discourse, of putting culture ahead of everything else, also permeated the critical theory and, as I intend to demonstrate, dominated the feminist and anti-neoliberal discourse on transformation.

2. Gender of Homo Sovieticus

At this place, however, I want to reflect on the gender entanglements of the stigmatising mainstream discourse. We already have established that girls were present among the children, who symbolised the alleged immaturity of Polish society. Interestingly, portraying women as childish or sick has generally had a long tradition in the modern patriarchal discourse, with Victorian discourse being the most striking example¹⁰⁵. The Association of femininity with these traits throughout modern history¹⁰⁶ played a similar systemic role to such a portrayal of Polish people in the 90'. It was needed to pathologise them and justify their subjugation, structural disempowerment and exploitation. Moreover, all of the analysed figures – except for the aspiring member of the middle class – share a common characteristic of having no control over their lives. This does not correspond to the notions of hegemonic masculinity, connecting manhood with the traits such as autonomy, strength, agency, and independence.

Does “Homo Sovieticus” have gender? Even though it seems that men were described as Homo Sovieticus similarly often as women, I would risk a thesis that it too was a feminised figure. This becomes more apparent when we place the figure in a broader context of the hegemonic narratives. The concept of “Homo Sovieticus” was an essential part of the neoliberal Imaginarium typical for the Polish transformation, where anything associated with state

¹⁰³ See e.g. analysis of Monika Bobako on racialisation of class divisions: Monika Bobako, “Konstruowanie odmienności klasowej jako urasowanie. Przypadek polski po 1989” in *Podziały klasowe...* (op.cit.), 165-180.

¹⁰⁴ Buchowski, *Ibid.*, 218.

¹⁰⁵ See e.g.: Mary Elizabeth Burke Auxier, “Exploring Child Worlds: Functions of Infantilization in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century British Literature” (PhD diss., UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA RIVERSIDE, 2012)

¹⁰⁶ See Susan Faludi’s analysis on the recurring backlash in the modern history of the US: Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2006), Chapter “Backlashes then and now”, 61-86.

socialism had to be stigmatised. As Ewa Charkiewicz or Agnieszka Graff point out, one of the common stigmatising narratives dealt with the “degeneration” of the former system exemplified by the distortion of the traditional patriarchal gender order¹⁰⁷. Agnieszka Graff, in “Patriarchy after Seksmission” - her famous essay from 1999, which ignited a first public debate on the role of the women in the “Solidarity” and, more generally, on the backlash of the ‘90s – has put forward a thesis that the Polish People’s Republic has been commonly perceived as a world turned upside down regarding gender. In this world, women allegedly gained too much power. Accordingly, Graff suggested that a dystopian futuristic world populated only by women¹⁰⁸, portrayed in “Seksmission”, a popular comedy from 1984, has become one of the most famous allegories of the former system. Graff even claims that “*Solidarity*” was, symbolically, an act of reinstitution of the patriarchal order, distorted by the totalitarian¹⁰⁹ system.”

Whereas Graff is focused more on the stigmatisation of feminism by its association with the former system, Ewa Charkiewicz has demonstrated how patriarchal discourse and demonisation of the emancipation of women served the condemnation of the state socialism and construction of market-based liberal democracy as the only possible “normality”. Charkiewicz, in her analysis of the pathologising discourse about Eastern Europe, specifically exposed how the concept of strong, hard-working soviet women who often transgress rigid gender boundaries and are deemed unfeminine was inscribed in the general condemnation and pathologisation of the state socialist system¹¹⁰. Charkiewicz proves that such pathologisation was useful for justifying the asymmetrical dependencies between the East and the West.

However, what I would like to call a “hyper-pathologisation” of poor Polish women was also a part of the discourse of local Polish elites, approaching the problem of poverty and those affected by it with contempt and detestation. Interestingly, motherhood is of central importance

¹⁰⁷ This strategy of discursive condemnation and rejection of the socialist policies as conflicted with patriarchal tradition wasn’t new. As Małgorzata Fidelis demonstrated, it was a vital element of the Polish Thaw and processes of destalinisation, which entailed invention of the “Polish way to socialism”, which included the state’s dispensation to patriarchal relationships in Polish families. See: Małgorzata Fidelis, trans. Maria Jaszczurowska, *Kobiety, komunizm i industrializacja w powojennej Polsce* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo WAB, 2015)

¹⁰⁸ Women in this movie have achieved complete independence – also in the sphere of reproductive technologies – which perhaps was a manifestation of the fears of too great women’s autonomy in a world where abortion, contraception and, on the other hand, in vitro techniques, were not only legal but also accessible and publicly funded; Juliusz Machulski, *Seksmission*, 1984

¹⁰⁹ Today, the assumption of totalitarian character of Polish state socialist regime is commonly rejected. See e.g.: Małgorzata Fidelis, „Gender, historia i komunizm” in *Kobiety w Polsce 1945-1989. Nowoczesność, równouprawnienie, komunizm*, by Katarzyna Stańczak Wiślicz, Piotr Perkowski, Małgorzata Fidelis, Barbara Klich-Kluczevska (Kraków: UNIVERITAS, 2020), 32-35

¹¹⁰ Ewa Charkiewicz, „Od Komunizmu do Neoliberalizmu. Technologie transformacji” in *Zniewolony umysł 2: neoliberalizm i jego krytyki*, ed. Jan Sowa, Ewa Majewska (Kraków: ha!art, 2006), 28-31.

to this discourse¹¹¹. Izabela Desperak, in her book, “Gender of Change”, analyses the “monsterisation” narratives about mothers portrayed in the mass media. Poor mothers, mothers from non-normative families, e.g. single-parenting mothers, have at the same time been denied state support, burdened with enormous caring responsibilities and stigmatised for not fitting into the perfect picture of a middle-class (hetero)normative family. Charkiewicz, in her article on “neoliberal racism in Poland”, analyses the contemptuous narratives about poor mothers as an example of the discourse of racialisation – poor people are, according to her, constructed as racially distinct and poor women as undeserving the right to motherhood. What is missing in the picture portrayed by Charkiewicz is the reflection on the devaluation of care and reproductive activities undertaken by women. It is easier to dehumanise them if their work is considered an emanation of some “natural” predispositions, not as a meaningful contribution to the well-being of their close ones and the entire society, performed against the odds in the neoliberal system that offers them no support.

Such representations of against-the-grain gender relationships as something typical of the reality of the Polish People’s Republic played a crucial role in the demonisation of women’s and workers’ emancipation – and prepared the ground for reactionary reforms in the 90’. Neoconservative and neoliberal elites proposed a vision of re-institution of the “natural” and traditional order, to which reconstruction of gender and class hierarchies was central. The imposition of patriarchal capitalism in Poland was accompanied and justified by the revanchist sentiments – shared by the upper classes and many men, also from the working class. The first ones portrayed themselves as the biggest victims of recent Polish history, and the latter believed that the PPR’s relatively progressive gender policies quasi-emasculated them. As Agnieszka Graff has put it: “The period of “komuna” is often depicted as a shameful intermission in the life of Polish society. This shame is deeply entangled with gender, as in our collective memory PPR is a time of humiliation, domestication and castration of Polish men.”¹¹²

Gendered entanglements of the discourse about the Polish People’s Republic also manifest themselves in the very conceptualisations of the state socialist and capitalist systems. While welfare state arrangements were commonly associated with overprotective motherhood, the neoliberal order embodied the rule of the strict and patriarchal father. In her groundbreaking inquiry into the Polish transformation of labour after 1989’, Elisabeth Dunn

¹¹¹ Ewa Charkiewicz, *Matki do sterylizacji. Neoliberalny rasizm w Polsce*, Nowa Krytyka, 2008, http://www.nowakrytyka.pl/pl/artykuly/Nk_on-line/?id=651/_Matki_do_sterylizacji__Neoliberalny_rasizm_w_Polsce__

¹¹² Agnieszka Graff, *Ibid.*, 32-33.

demonstrated that workers conceived their changing workplace situation in such terms. While facing unemployment and new disciplinary measures in their workplaces, the workers in the 90' recalled the former work relationships with nostalgia: they remembered the state-owned company as caring for their needs and approaching them holistically - as non-alienated human beings, not merely as producers of the excess value. To imagine their employers as their parents meant to accept hierarchical dependencies¹¹³. The nature of those hierarchies was, however, not the same. Whereas the workers felt they were rightfully rewarded for their work by the care (social infrastructure of the company) received from the state-owned company, they experienced the new post-Fordist mode of governance as inhumane and unjust. In Alima, where Dunn conducted her research - a huge company that underwent privatisation as one of the first ones during the transformation – the new board organised a party to celebrate that takeover. According to Dunn, it took a form of a wedding: a feminised state-owned Polish company was married to western capital and foreign investors.

The problematics outlined above definitely require further examination. At this place, however, let us return to the question of the gender of Homo Sovieticus. I would, namely, risk a thesis that these pathologising figures, especially “homo Sovieticus” served an emasculating function. Hegemonic masculinity, after all, became a luxury in transformation reality, not available to the common men, who, in the wake of mass unemployment and loss of social security, were indeed often losing control over their lives. The rapid rise in the rates of suicides and alcoholism among men¹¹⁴ is telling – one can be sure that stigmatising narratives denying them agency and masculinity at the same time only exacerbated the feelings of hopelessness. Gender backlash that accompanied a neoliberal turn is of crucial context here – if the femininity weren't denigrated so much, emasculation would probably not hurt that much either. How this association of femininity with the absence of masculine traits and, consequently, with inferiority affected women themselves is another story – and it should not be lost out of sight.

3. Self-made men, or Homines Westernicis vs Matki Polki

We have focused on the subjectivities deemed inferior and unfitting to the new system. Just as a discursive denigration of those who lost on the neoliberal reforms was necessary to justify their subjugation and exploitation, the ruling classes – the beneficiaries of the neoliberal

¹¹³ But on the other hand, Dunn demonstrates that it was often a strategy of resistance against the commodification of labour. See: Elisabeth Dunn, *Ibid.*, Chapter “Ideas of Kin and Home on the Shop Floor” 130-161.

¹¹⁴ Andrzej W. Nowak, *Ibid.*, 127; Katarzyna Duda, *Ibid.*, 49-54.

turn – also needed the narratives that would explain their rapid acquisition of capital and power. What Jan Sowa called “mythologies of the Third Polish Republic” was derived from the broad repertoire of neoliberal thought, established mainly by Anglo-Saxon theorists and politicians. Central myths on which Polish neoliberal ideology was founded were, as Sowa convincingly demonstrated: (1) a myth of increased social mobility, which role was to convince everyone that achieving individual success was only a matter of will and determination, (2) a myth of trickle-down economy – that social inequality and prosperity of the few are beneficial for everyone and (3) a myth of the superiority of the private property – deeming any other form of property – and consequently, socio-economic relationships other than capitalist – as invalid, pathological, inherently corrupt.

The primary goal of enumerated myths was to justify the domination of the upper classes above the rest of society. However, the prevalence of this new way of thinking also had other consequences and side effects. The privatisation of every sphere of life and individualisation of our being in the world might have been the most serious ones. This has been especially shocking and disturbing for the people raised in a system that praised -and in many spheres encouraged – collective and communal ways of working and living. Charity Scribner framed it as “*a loss of the historical form of socialisation, experience of social solidarity, that in the times of industrial modernism materialised itself in the working community.*”¹¹⁵

Boris Buden grasped the weightiness of this ‘transitional’ experience: “*together with the denial of communism, the social aspects of reality are denied – in this way, the loss of reality becomes specifically a loss of the society.*”¹¹⁶ Philosopher even claims, commenting on the neoliberal turn, that “*It was not the social infrastructure within the society, but the society itself that was liquidated [after the 1989]*”¹¹⁷. Neoliberalism inevitably leads to the disintegration of social bonds. However, it is noteworthy that the denial of the existence of the society, expressed so famously by Margaret Thatcher, was followed – and is generally accompanied in neoliberal discourse – by the appreciation of specific kinds of social relationships. Namely, those in the neoliberal system are still recognised as valid: (hetero)normative families. “*Who is society? There is no such thing! - Thatcher exclaimed and added - There are individual men and women, and there are families, and no government can do anything except through people*

¹¹⁵ Citation after Boris Buden, *Ibid.*, 140.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 60-61.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 142.

*and people look to themselves first.*¹¹⁸” In such a vision – and in the harsh reality shaped by neoliberal reforms – families become the “last resort” of social bonds, structures of support and solidarity. This provides a futile ground for the neoconservative ideologies. Under neoliberalism, families often are the only available way to experience community, and home is a space where the humanity and dignity of a person are still – at least up to a certain extent – preserved. There is no wonder that the traditional “family values” are central to the mainstream narratives. It leads to the situation where people become morally elevated and join the struggles “in defence” of the traditional families, allegedly threatened by social progress and emancipation of women and LGBTQ communities – as if the real enemies of everyday life of most of the families weren’t precarious employment policies and austerity measures.

Margaret Thatcher has found a keen follower and imitator in a prominent Polish politician Hanna Gronkiwicz-Waltz – a former president of the National Bank of Poland (1992-2001) and, later, a president of Warsaw (2006-2018). However, there has been a specifically Polish variation to the local model of neoliberal “Iron Lady”. As Agnieszka Graff demonstrated in her essay about the politician, her media persona was built on the discourses of “true womanhood” and caring motherhood. For Graff, the “*Iron Mum*” persona was full of internal contradictions. On the one hand, Gronkiwicz-Waltz presented herself as tough and stiff-necked professional; on the other, she tried to pose as the embodiment of motherly vocation, to which, as she believed, every woman was predestined, herself included. Graff speaks of an “*odd mixture of church ideology, stereotypes and thinking in the market categories*”¹¹⁹. Even if this appears to be inconsistent, I do not see contradictions in such a mixture. This odd picture seems concise if we consider the marriage between neoliberal and neoconservative ideologies and practices. Neoconservatism not only promotes a vision of the “natural” vocation of women to be mothers and to care for other members of their families – it does so in the context of “liquidation” of the society and infrastructures of care. Gronkiwicz-Waltz co-authored merciless policies and favoured strict financial discipline¹²⁰ – at the exact moment when she cut the structural support available to people in the former system; she wanted to provide them

¹¹⁸ Interview with journalist Douglas Keay, *Woman’s Own*, 23 September 1987, archived online by the Margaret Thatcher Foundation; <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106689>; For the detailed discussion of gendered aspects of Thatcher’s claim see, Emma Dowling, *The Care Crisis. What Caused It and How Can We End It?* (London: Verso, 2021), Introduction: “Individualism revisited”.

¹¹⁹ Agnieszka Graff, “Żelazna mama” in *Świat bez...* (op.cit.), 78.

¹²⁰ For the critique of Gronkiwicz-Waltz’s politics: Piotr Ikonowicz, *Zło z honorowym obywatelstwem Warszawy*, *Krytyka Polityczna*, 9 June 2022, <https://krytykapolityczna.pl/kraj/miasto/hanna-gronkiwicz-waltz-warszawa-honorowe-obywatelstwo-ikonowicz/>.

with the illusionary sense of being taken care of by a motherly figure of a political leader. This new political order translated into burdening masses of women with the care work they had to perform with their own hands. As this real work was obscured and devalued, the ideologies of motherhood and the exploitation of the stereotypes thrived.

The answer of the feminists to these phenomena has long been one-sided. Only one side of the coin has been seen and addressed – the one with the picture of Matka Polka (Polish Mother) on it – the number of analyses that are centred on this figure is meaningful. With the shrinking numbers representing the deterioration of the socio-economic reality, the obverse remained largely ignored. The ambition of Polish mainstream liberal feminism was to liberate women from the stereotypical expectations ascribed to the figure of Matka Polka. Grounded in the traditions of Polish national liberation struggles of the XIXth century¹²¹, this figure connotes motherhood – but also, more generally, femininity – with such traits as patriotism, willfulness to sacrifice oneself for the children and the country, resourcefulness, sometimes even heroism, and, also, quiet martyrology. Matka Polka has been evoked many times throughout Polish history and reshaped according to the changing contexts¹²². The recurring figure has obscured and instrumentalised real experiences of motherhood, usually for nationalist purposes. The ideologies of motherhood, thanks to which Matka Polka experienced her renaissance, that gained prominence in the 90 were not entirely new. Still, the rising deficits of care provided them with the new fuel. It translated into the desubjectification of Matka Polka – the work that has been seen as heroic sacrifice and the manifestation of creativity and resourcefulness has now been naturalised and denied agency, meaningfulness, subjectivity and creativity.

The feminists did generally not notice this context. Instead, many copied mainstream andro-centric discourses of individualisation and tried to make them more inclusive for women (at least those of their class). Agnieszka Mroziak has recognised such individualistic tendencies within the Polish feminist movement and discourse as its defining characteristic. According to her¹²³ collective identity of Polish feminists¹²⁴ has been founded on the rejection of the legacy

¹²¹ Anna Titkow, „Figura Matki Polki. Próba demotologizacji”, in *Pożegnanie z Matką Polką? Dyskursy, praktyki i reprezentacje macierzyństwa we współczesnej Polsce*, ed. Renata E. Hryciuk, Elżbieta Korolczuk (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2012)

¹²² For example, in the '80s „matka gastronomiczna” [gastronomical mother] came to the fore, see: Sławomira Walczewska, *Matka Gastronomiczna*, *Pełnym Głosem* 3 (1995), https://efka.org.pl/archiwum/index.php?action=p_art&ID=8

¹²³ See also: Łapniewska, *Ibid.*; Magdalena Grabowska, *Zerwana genealogia. Działalność społeczna i polityczna kobiet po 1945 r. a współczesny ruch kobiecy* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2018)

¹²⁴ By „Polish feminists” here I mean specifically the generation that came to the fore in the '90s and defined what feminism means for the future generations. Today, however, their power is decreasing as the younger

of the Polish People's Republic, specifically on the denial of the state-socialist roots of Polish feminism. *"This is how the story about PPR becomes a story about the roots of contemporary Polish feminism, or rather about the lack thereof – about the birth of self-made feminists and their individualistic ethos."* We have already discussed the myth of the takeover of power by women under the Polish People's Republic. To distance themselves from it and any associations with the former system, feminists invented a counter-myth. According to it, state socialism oppressed women and took away any agency from them¹²⁵; feminism, or the emancipation of women, on the other hand, never existed in Poland before 1989¹²⁶.

By condemning state socialism, feminists wanted to join the ranks of political and cultural elites dominated by men. They promoted the discourses of entrepreneurship, free choice and leaning in. They never pretended they were interested in the emancipation of the working-class women – all they cared about were the interests of women of their (upper-middle) class. When Agnieszka Graff argued against a thesis that being a mother poses an obstacle in professional life, she went as far in her class-based ignorance as to write: *"The fact of having children doesn't disturb any of my friends in their work – they can afford a babysitter"*¹²⁷. (Later, Graff's views have changed, and she even reflected on the class-blindness of Polish feminism in the 90': *"I barely touched the issues of poverty, economic inequalities, and their relationship to patriarchal culture."*; *"I wrote from the perspective of cosmopolitan intellectual, outraged by the scale of sexism in Poland, worried about the future of democracy, and fascinated by the American feminist theory."*¹²⁸, she admitted.) The privileged realities of leading feminists translated into strategies, discourses, theories and practices that were blind to the situation of working-class women¹²⁹. As I will reiterate in this thesis, the communal way of living and thinking, the commons, is crucial from the most subjugated perspective. Only privileged women can afford to embrace individualism. The "self-made feminists", as Mroziak called them, reproduced – and only slightly adjusted – the highly androcentric discourse that promotes the ideas of disembodiedness, individual success and competition and negates the structural context of infrastructures of care, communities, and of reproductive work done by

generations enter the feminist scene (new strategies and discourses are gaining prominence), and they too, underwent a political change. See: pp: 48-49

¹²⁵ For the example of such a discourse see: Desperak, *Ibid.*, 178.

¹²⁶ I will explore these discourses deeper in the fifth chapter.

¹²⁷ Graff, *Ibid.*, 207.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹²⁹ It also explains why in the 90' and early 2000' no large feminist movement/community has been established – the feminists preferred to belong to elitists club.

other people (primarily women), on which well-being, as well as the very existence of every individual, relies.

While declaring the non-existence of the society, the neoliberal patriarchs have designed specific enclosures where the needs of connecting with others, belonging to the community, and being approached as human beings, not as the workforce, could still, under particular conditions, be realised. The normative families and conservative, e.g. religious communities, played such a role. While they provided people with moral and sometimes material support, they were still highly oppressive institutions and spaces of exploitation – and the more desperate the people were, previously denied access to other structures of support and solidarity, the more ruthless the oppression could be. Polish feminists provided an extensive critique of the oppressive character of the patriarchal family and catholic church¹³⁰ - however, they appeared to be blind to the broader context that empowered these institutions and disempowered their weakest members. Instead, they proposed individualism, available only to the most privileged women. The fact that they formed elitist clubs, neither grass root-movement nor inclusive communities, led to their further marginalisation and the marginalisation of feminist language and theory.

In the mainstream discourse, individualism remained a masculinised trait – emblematic here is a figure of a “young wolf¹³¹” – a young, English-speaking man, making a career in no time, thanks to his brilliance, but also self-confidence and a spirit of competitiveness and entrepreneurialism. The counterpart of a young wolf, also coming from the world of animals, was... a domestic hen—a woman who became subjected to housewifisation and domestication. A fate of a hen connotes here repetitiveness, the lack of creativity and a mundane and meaningless life focused on reproduction. The fate of young wolves has been inevitably connected with the fate of domestic hens. The symbolic capital and the wealth acquired by the first ones necessarily required subjugation of the latter ones.

4. Final notes

I have briefly recapitulated the most prominent hegemonic narratives about Polish transformation in this chapter. Sketchy reconstruction of the mainstream discourses was

¹³⁰ See: e.g. Desperak, *Ibid.*, 163-164; Agnieszka Graff, „Efekt magmy, czyli o szczególnej roli Kościoła w Polsce”, in *Świat bez..* (op.cit), 285-299.

¹³¹ See Buchowski, *Ibid.*, 186; see also Dunn’s analysis of how transformation of labour has produced new kinds of subjectivities: Dunn, *Ibid.*, “From *Kierownik* to *Menadżer*: Menaging the Self”, 69-75; and *Slick Salesmen and Simple People*, 75-78.

necessary to outline the background in which more critical analyses evolved. At this place, however, I would like to notice that the mainstream discourses have already been very well-studied by feminist and leftist scholars. The discourse, symbolics, mythologies and figures of the neoliberal and neoconservative ideologies received so much scholarly attention that I believe one can speak of the privileged status of the discourse in the Polish feminist and critical thought of the last 30 years. This is by no means a phenomenon restricted to Poland. Rather, it reflects the general poststructural orientation of the critical theory globally – and the imitative character of the Polish academia resulting from its peripheral positioning.

2nd Chapter: Knowledge Production: Spaces and Practices

At first, feminist approaches to Polish socio-economic transformation have not been very distinct from the mainstream ones. The problematics already discussed in the former chapter – privileged positionality, individualistic orientation, sympathy and diligence towards the capitalist West and the rejection of and antipathy towards the state socialist past – have long defined the movement and its theory. In the last decade, however, there has been a visible shift in the narratives and practices of the movement. Certainly, when it comes to the democratisation of Polish feminism, Black Protests and Women's Strikes have played a crucial role¹³². Still, I would risk a thesis that already the crisis of 2008 marked a visible turning point regarding the increased sensitivity to social issues¹³³. Around that time (in 2009) neoliberal¹³⁴ Congress of Women was established, but, on the other hand, also other initiatives emerged. The movement of single-parenting mothers, or numerous Manifa collectives, organising militant 8th March demonstrations in large Polish cities managed to overcome the liberal hegemony within the movement and proposed opposing approaches to feminism. This “social turn” within feminism led to changing approaches to transformation and sensitisation to the problems such as poverty, unemployment, social inequalities, work and housing policies, and exploitation¹³⁵. Finally, the early liberal orientation of the Polish feminists is being now subjected to critical re-examination by the younger generations of theorists and activists¹³⁶ – and sometimes even by the very same feminists who used to embody these tendencies but changed the sides of the barricade, as in the already mentioned case of Agnieszka Graff.

¹³² See: e.g. Ewa Majewska, who claims that with those protest „feminism has been born in Poland”: Ewa Majewska, *Słaby opór i siła bezsilnych. #Czarnyprotest kobiet w Polsce 2016*, 10 November 2016, *Praktyka Teoretyczna*, <https://www.praktykateoretyczna.pl/artykuly/ewa-majewska-saby-opor-i-sia-bezsilnych-czarnyprotest-kobiet-w-polsce-2016/>

¹³³ After the crisis there was more space for the criticism of neoliberalism, even in the mainstream media.

¹³⁴ Ewa Charkiewicz, *O Kongresie Kobiet Polskich i neoliberalno-konserwatywnym zwrocie feminizmu w Polsce*, *Biblioteka Online Think Tanku Feministycznego*, 2009, <http://www.ekologiasztuka.pl/pdf/f0074charkiewicz2009.pdf>

¹³⁵ The text published by authors gathered around Feminist Think Tank are emblematic for this tendency: http://www.ekologiasztuka.pl/think.tank.feministyczny/articles.php?article_id=404 See also “Feminist daily”: <http://codziennikfeministyczny.pl/>

¹³⁶ See, e.g. the contributions from the publication *Solidarity in struggle...* (op.cit.).

1. Spaces of Feminist Knowledge Production before 1989

Before analysing the concepts and categories that were organising the movement's approach to transformation and backlash, let us consider the structural context of the (feminist) knowledge production; the spaces where the knowledge has been produced, its institutional anchoring and financing; and the processes of "authorisation" of knowledge. As Piotr Perkowski sums up the genealogy of Polish feminism of the '90:

"Feminism in Poland after 1989' did not come out from nowhere. Dispersed initiatives stimulated bottom-up organisational experience and intellectual development of young Polish women from privileged metropolitan backgrounds. These early, slowly progressing changes impacted the organisational and intellectual life of feminism in Poland after the transformation, being, at the same time, too ephemeral to influence the political mainstream of the times of transformation."

There were several academic initiatives where Polish "feminist theory" was forged before 1989 – seminars, discussion groups and publications etc.,¹³⁷ organised by scholars such as Anna Titkow and Teresa Hołówka or Renata Siemieńska. These initiatives were focused on adapting the western feminist theories to the Polish context – and they were animated by the scholars who were usually internationally networked and often acquired a degree or had scholarships at western universities. However, to assume that these were the only feminist spaces – and the only spaces of feminist knowledge production - in the Polish People's Republic might be misleading. Perkowski and other authors - Katarzyna Stańczak-Wiślicz, Małgorzata Fidelis and Barbara Klich-Kluczevska – of the volume "Women in Poland 1945-1989. Modernity, equality, communism"¹³⁸ demonstrate throughout the entire book, that the women in PPR did emancipate themselves – even if this process was non-linear, far from being complete and full of internal contradictions. As Perkowski writes:

"The recent scholarship on the women's history in communism is dominated by the belief that as much as there are different manifestations of XXth-century modernity, the feminism should not be reduced to the movement of white middle-class women from the capitalist countries. It is suggested that rather, its various, parallel and equivalent variants from non-European and Central-Eastern European variants should also be

¹³⁷ Piotr Perkowski, "Droga do władzy? Kobiety w Policymie" in *Kobiety w Polsce 1945-1989...* (op.cit.), 99; Shana Penn, trans. Maciej Antosiewicz, *Sekret "Solidarności". Kobiety, które pokonały komunizm w Polsce* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo WAB, 2014), 77

¹³⁸ Stańczak-Wiślicz, Perkowski, Fidelis, Klich-Kluczevska, *Kobiety w Polsce...* (op.cit.).

recognised. As scholars point out, the declaration of participation in the contestation is not indispensable - one does not need to call herself a "feminist" to raise the feminist postulates, to act for the emancipation and support women's equality.¹³⁹

In Poland, this new tendency to "reclaim" the history of "feminism" situated in the context of state socialism is most vibrantly visible in the work of sociologist Magdalena Grabowska. In her book "Broken genealogy. The social and political activism of women after 1945 and Polish contemporary women's movement.¹⁴⁰" she put the light on the obscured and downplayed experiences of political and social engagement of women in state socialist Poland and Georgia. At the same time, Grabowska criticises the falsifying narratives produced by feminists in the 90' on (lack of) women's political engagement during PPR, denying the agency to the many women, who were then not only politically involved, but also worked to advance the women's rights – on the nationwide (and sometimes international), as well as local level.

Whereas Grabowska focuses on the biographies of female political leaders, I would like to point out the role of the spaces of vernacular feminist knowledge production – as I believe their disappearance, or, perhaps, rather demolition, after 1989 played a crucial role in silencing the voices of working-class women. These spaces can be easily identified after the lecture of the already mentioned book "Women in Poland...", as they provided the basis for the authors' methodologies. I mean here above all two kinds of spaces¹⁴¹. Firstly, a women's press, where the problems of everyday women's lives were discussed. Taking into account the number of letters sent to the press by the readers, the press in PPR could be understood as an ersatz of an agora, a space of public discussion where also people lacking social and cultural capital raised their voices. Both reader's letters and the articles written by professionals were subjected to censorship – however, as Stańczak-Wiślicz et al. noticed¹⁴², the censorship apparatus approached the women's press more indulgently, and the censorship interventions were not very common. Stańczak-Wiślicz et al. evoked multiple examples of the articles that not only dealt with the specific problems of everyday life – like the difficulties of food provision – but also put them in the broader, socio-political perspective. Some of the evoked fragments bring to mind the early debates on care and reproductive work that took place within the western feminist movement of the 2nd wave regarding sensitivity and the language they use. To give an

¹³⁹ Perkowski, Ibid., 69.

¹⁴⁰ Grabowska, Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Although this issue requires further examination; what other kinds of spaces of emancipatory vernacular knowledge production could be identified?

¹⁴² Stańczak-Wiślicz et al., Ibid., 15.

example – taken from Stańczak Wiślicz’ and Perkowski’s article - Ruta Pragier, a journalist from the magazine “Przyjaciółka” (“A fiend¹⁴³”), defined women as “*the most working class*¹⁴⁴”, and provided the readers with the firm critique of the “*subjugation and exploitation of women in the households*¹⁴⁵”.

What happened to the very same magazine after 1989 tells a lot about the changing contexts of knowledge production and the transformation of knowledge itself. “Przyjaciółka” was originally a state-owned biweekly, published since 1948. During the times of PPR, the editions were reaching 3 mln of copies. After 89’ it was, as any other magazine, privatised and sold to the international media corporation controlled by Swiss capital, Edipresse¹⁴⁶. The shift in the political narrative that followed was spectacular. Beata Łaciak evokes numerous examples of articles from “Przyjaciółka” in her book “Wojna postu z karnawałem.”, an analysis of the transformation of customs after 1989. Łaciak identifies a trope of a vain woman, “*materialist, accusing her husband of lack of professional success*¹⁴⁷”, popularised in the popular culture and the press. The author of one of the articles from Przyjaciółka from 1991 condemns Polish women for their lack of compassion and understanding towards their husbands, who are tired and angry after work, and rebukes them: “*Stop frustrating yourselves and your husbands. Love them as they are.*¹⁴⁸” Nota bene, it is also worth mentioning that after 89’ the magazine’s edition diminished 6 times, to average 0,5 mln copies¹⁴⁹. Whereas before 89’ women’s press provided a space for semi-feminist critique of the status quo, after 89’ it was legitimising patriarchal social order, actively contributing to the general backlash¹⁵⁰.

The widespread trend of journalism shaped the second space of vernacular knowledge production available to women. The diaries competitions, so popular in Poland before 1989,¹⁵¹ not only motivated women, often from underprivileged social backgrounds, to write down their everyday-life experiences but also served as an “authorising” institution, elevating chosen

¹⁴³ In Polish this word is gendered and is translatable into (girl)friend.

¹⁴⁴ Originally: „Klasa najbardziej pracująca”, Katarzyna Stańczak-Wiślicz, Piotr Perkowski, „Nowoczesna gospodyni. Kobiety w gospodarstwie domowym” in Kobiety w Polsce... (op.cit.), 179.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Source: „Przyjaciółka” – entry to Wikipedia; <https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Przyjaci%C3%B3%C5%82ka>

¹⁴⁷ Beata Łaciak, *Obyczajowość polska czasu transformacji, czyli wojna postu z karnawałem* (Warszawa: Trio, 2007), 64.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Wikipedia, Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ See also Desperak’s detailed analysis of the depictions of women in mass media: Desperak, Ibid., 241-350.

¹⁵¹ In fact, they were also popular before 1939 – Polish sociologist Florian Znaniecki initiated this trend. See: Franciszek Jakubczak, *Zasoby pamiętników. Zasady i zakres ich użytkowania*, Ruch Prawniczy, Ekonomiczny i Socjologiczny, Iss. 2, 1989, 259-268.

voices of the competitors. After 1989 this trend disappeared¹⁵² – nobody was interested anymore in financing such undertakings. Moreover, the archives, containing the life stories of thousands of people, fell into destruction – as preserving them also required missing resources and political will. The transformation elites were clearly disinterested in the vernacular knowledge of the people. And, in this matter, the feminists of the long ‘90s were no different.

2. ... and after 1989

What were thus the spaces of feminist knowledge production in the ‘90s? Polish feminist economist Zofia Łapniewska, referring to the influential article of Kristen Ghodsee¹⁵³ on the westernisation of post-socialist feminisms, points out the role of international institutions – the same that were responsible for the imposition of neoliberal policies – in shaping them. She speaks of the ‘translocation’ of feminism from the capitalist West to Poland and other CEE countries:

“First-world aspirations of the CEE countries also included permitting freedom of speech, respecting human rights and building a democracy. These values were referred to by grant-making bodies and moneylenders such as the World Bank (Central and Eastern European Program (ECEP) established in 1989 (WB 1990)), International Monetary Fund (offering loans aimed at assisting integration of planned economies with capitalist ones (Stone 2002)), U.S. Agency for International Development (offering programs that promoted strong market economies as well as developing institutions that strengthen democracy (USAID 1999)), or European Funds (Poland and Hungary: Assistance for Restructuring their Economies and Technical Assistance for the Commonwealth of Independent States). I could venture a hypothesis that during the transformation, the funds that found their way into NGOs, including women’s organizations, were comparable to the “hearts & minds” strategy carried out by soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan (Polman 2011: 198-199). In the case of post-Soviet states, the role of “soldiers” was played by American advisors who implemented draconian prescriptions of the aforementioned Washington Consensus on the one hand and, on the other, were “fixing roofs and

¹⁵² On the carelessness in regard to diary archives after 1989 see: Dariusz Wierzchoś, *Zwyczajne życie zwykłych ludzi. Losy archiwum Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Pamiętnikarstwa*, 10 April 2008, Histmag; <https://histmag.org/Zwyczajne-zycie-zwyklych-ludzi.-Losy-archiwum-Towarzystwa-Przyjaciol-Pamietnikarstwa-1750>

¹⁵³ Kristen Ghodsee, “Feminism-by-Design: Emerging Capitalisms, Cultural Feminism, and Women’s Nongovernmental Organizations in Postsocialist Eastern Europe.” *Signs* 29, no. 3 (2004): 727–53. <https://doi.org/10.1086/380631>.

handing out candy”, meaning they were talking about democratisation and women’s rights. Were they truly the first to mention these aspects¹⁵⁴?”

While outlining the landscape of feminist spaces in Poland after 89’, Łapniewska (and also Weronika Grzebalska and Aniko Gregor¹⁵⁵) mention the problem of NGO-isation of Polish feminism as one of the movement’s – at least in its early days in the ‘90s – main features. Grzebalska and Aniko rightfully link the phenomenon of NGO-isation to the neoliberalisation of the movement:

“As argued by Kantola and Squires (2012), while ‘neoliberal feminism’ helps shape social values and norms, so-called ‘market feminism’ refers to the way gender equality is framed by increasingly market-oriented women’s NGOs as a tool for achieving efficiency, productivity, development – all very important for neoliberal markets. Neoliberal governmentality and cuts of state funding for NGOs significantly changed the context for the politics of state feminism, leading women’s NGOs to seek funding in market enterprises and private foundations, and forcing these organizations to adapt to market requirements (efficiency, productivity), and measure their impact with quantitative indicators.”¹⁵⁶

As I already mentioned, the liberal hegemony within Polish feminism has been contested – on a larger scale since 2008. Many spaces have been claimed by the grass-root, radical initiatives – in these spaces, intersectional, queer, anarchist, and Marxist feminist theory and praxis have been crafted. Still, when it comes to the availability of resources, the (neo)liberal initiatives continue to dominate the scene. The Congress of Women, founded in 2009 by a feminist intellectual, Magdalena Środa and a businesswoman and president of the association of employers ‘Leviatan’ (sic!), Henryka Bochniarz, is emblematic of this dominance. The idea of the Congress is to organise a yearly conference where women from the whole country gather to discuss “women’s issues”. The congress participants come from very privileged sites – they are politicians, scholars, well-paid professionals, and – especially overrepresented group – businesswomen. The “women’s issues”, in consequence, are defined narrowly and in line with the liberal feminist agenda. In one of the interviews, Henryka Bochniarz claimed that it was the realisation of how little is known about women’s role in the transformation process that led her

¹⁵⁴ Łapniewska, Ibid., 22.

¹⁵⁵ Grzebalska, Gregor, Ibid., 13.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 13.

and her friends to start organising this event¹⁵⁷. The social composition of the Congress, which, notably, became the most prominent institution producing the knowledge on women in the transformation, has, obviously, had an impact on the knowledge that was produced under its auspices.

One of the key postulates of Congress was implementing the gender quotas in the parliamentary election¹⁵⁸. One could argue that in the face of drastic gender disparities within parliamentary politics after 1989¹⁵⁹, every measure to support women's political representation was necessary. However, the political agenda of Congress assumed that quotas would bring a golden age to Polish women. Congress' intellectuals even came up with a concept of "parity democracy"¹⁶⁰, that claimed that the equality in the sphere of political representation would eventually translate into the general gender equality – entirely irrespectively of the other structural conditions.

The reduction of Congress agenda to the electoral policies goes hand in hand with the reductionist approach to gender generally. It falls into the old trap of liberal feminism – the reductionist assumption that a woman can "represent" every other woman. Setting this trap opens the space for potential abuses of one's power. Speaking "in the name of" every woman, while, let's say, exploiting other women as an employer means using the "women's cause" and feminist rhetorics for the advancement of one's privileges and against the actual interests of women. This problem manifests itself not only in the person of the co-founder of Congress, Henryka Bochniarz, invited speakers and the general social composition of the participants. It is also visible in the selections of subjects discussed during the yearly gatherings and in the practices of the internal organisation of the event.

In 2018 a scandal broke out when a union activist Maria Świetlik, exposed¹⁶¹ the outrageous working conditions of women employed by the organisers – specifically the security guards. While participating in the congress, she approached a female security guard and found out she was obliged to stand still, without a meal or toilet breaks, for sixteen hours. The Congress then

¹⁵⁷ Elżbieta Korolczuk, "Neoliberalism and feminist organizing: from "NGO-ization of resistance" to resistance against neoliberalism" in *Solidarity in struggle...* (op.cit.), 35.

¹⁵⁸ Desperak, *Ibid.*, 224-225.

¹⁵⁹ I write about it in the fifth chapter: 94-95.

¹⁶⁰ Desperak, *Ibid.*, 224-225.

¹⁶¹ Maria Świetlik, Na zapleczu Kongresu Kobiet. "Ochroniarka nie mogła usiąść, chociaż obok stało krzesło", 20 June 2018, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, <https://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/7,161770,23564498,swietlik-na-zapleczu-kongresu-kobiet-ochroniarka-nie-mogla.html>

issued a non-apology statement¹⁶², after which the security guards themselves spoke up¹⁶³. It turned out that they were not only denied the basic workers' rights but also fell victims to violent mobbing by the Congress organisers – who shouted at them and insulted them multiple times during the event. Certainly, the space built on exploitation, violence and exclusion cannot serve as terrain of emancipatory and inclusive knowledge production. The situatedness of knowledge should be framed in the possibly broad terms – and include the structural conditions in which knowledges emerge or are silenced, not merely the individuals' identities.

The case of the Congress of Women reveals the disastrous consequences of the dependency on the business and business-related initiatives for feminism. Feminists activists and intellectuals participate in the process of 'pink washing' – they legitimise the power of businesswomen and neoliberal (sometimes even conservative¹⁶⁴) politicians by participating in the joint undertakings. Some proponents of the congress, such as Agnieszka Graff or Izabela Desperak, represent leftist or "progressive" worldviews and are sensitive to social issues. Why do they then choose to promote such a dubious initiative? Arguably, the congress provides them with a huge platform to elevate their voice and reach a relatively large audience. I mean here not only 4,5 thousands of participants each year, but also a media presence and a chance to get financial support for their other undertakings – such as publishing a book. (The Congress of Women has (co)-financed the publication of many books; "Gender of change" by Izabela Desperak, a monograph on gender relations during the times of transformation frequently discussed in this thesis, is one of them.) In such a context, an odd mixture of liberalism and social sensitivity is nurtured – but the space shaped by the businesswomen, in the end, precludes drawing anti-systemic and anti-capitalist consequences from one's political/ scholarly work. It seems to me, then, that the financial and social capital feminists gain through their participation in the congress might play a decisive role. Their engagement with the congress, in my opinion, inevitably deradicalises their thought and activism – to criticise the neoliberal establishment would mean for them to cut off their access to resources.

¹⁶² Katarzyna Zuchowicz, "Wszyscy czuliśmy się tam jak niewolnicy". Co się działo na Kongresie Kobiet? Ochroniarki oskarżają, jest odpowiedź, 27 June 2018, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, <https://natemat.pl/242069,co-ochroniarki-zarzucaja-kongresowi-kobiet-dorota-warakomska-odpowiada>

¹⁶³ Iga Dzieciuchowicz, Ochroniarki kongresu kobiet: „organizatorka mówiła do nas „głaby”, „idiotki”. To na jej żądanie miałyśmy stać jak roboty przez 16 godzin”, 25 June 2018, *Codziennik Feministyczny*, <http://codziennikfeministyczny.pl/ochroniarki-kk-organizatorka-mowila-glaby-idiotki-na-zadanie-mialysmy-stac-jak-roboty-przez-16-godzin/>

¹⁶⁴ Charkiewicz, O kongresie... (op.cit.).

The dependency on the resources affects the processes of feminist knowledge production in nearly every other sphere. The academia, for example, has lost its “relative autonomy” as the grants became the primary source of research financing. The same applies to NGOs and even many grass-root initiatives. While some of them refuse to have any connection to the business and seek alternative funding sources, the West-East dependencies tend to reproduce themselves in the vector of the money flow. Applying for grants from abroad is often the only way to sustain organisational or scholarly activity. Still, a certain degree of control and potential censorship by the donor bodies must be dealt with.

DIYs spaces are probably the least dependent on external funding, but, having participated in such spaces, I know that money “from the Western comrades”, usually Germans, also plays a significant role in the daily life of the grass-root movements. While their support is meaningful, it affects the theory and praxis of the Polish activist collectives – the need to appeal to the western counterparts translates into the position of inferiority and willingness to learn shared by many Polish activists. They, or we, too, perceive ourselves as the children who need to grow up to our more experienced and resourceful older siblings. It often entails a lack of epistemological independence – we tend not only to copy the political strategies while ignoring the heritage of local and regional anarchist, socialist and feminist traditions. We also adapt the theories and knowledges produced in the West, often without reconsidering their applicability to our distinct contexts. Finally, internationalism – as much as the world needs it – when applied uncritically, as is often the case, makes us blind to the structural divisions and unequal positionalities.

Having considered the structural disadvantages faced by Polish feminism, I would like to notice that feminists have, against the odds, managed to create more and more inclusive and radical spaces informed by critical and counter-hegemonic perspectives. One example is the Social Congress of Women, founded in 2018 as a critical and community-engaged response to the hegemony of the Congress of Women. Social Congress of Women cooperates with the unions and tenants associations, connecting the feminist agenda with the everyday struggles faced by working-class women.

However, the massive mobilisation around the attempts and final introduction of a further-going abortion ban resulted in unprecedented democratisation of the movement. For the first time since 1989, women outside of the activist and urban intellectual bubbles organised themselves on a large scale to join a militant feminist struggle. While the ephemeral and one-couse character of that mobilisation is often brought up in the discussions about it, I would

argue that those unrests also entailed the creation of inclusive spaces of knowledge production. The streets, where the sudden outburst of the creativity of protesters could have been observed,¹⁶⁵ were such a space and, in the longer run, also the social media. The facebook groups¹⁶⁶, in particular, have become the spaces where thousands of women¹⁶⁷ and allies have gathered to participate in the discussions – they have become the spaces of mutual self-education, strategy crafting, political subjectification and radicalisation for many. The social turn, democratisation and broadening of the support base of Polish feminism give hope that a substantial turn in the processes of knowledge production should follow¹⁶⁸.

3. Who is the Working Class and Who Defines it?

3.1. The Boys Club?

As we have seen, until recently, women have been defined by the feminists as primarily belonging to the upper classes. The working class, on the other hand, in most of the anti-capitalist/ anti-neoliberal analyses, has been approached as predominantly male. As Zofia Łapniewska has pointed out, we “*need to acknowledge that thus far the person at the centre of left-wing discussions was a man.*”¹⁶⁹ Here, too, I would ascribe this general tendency to the specific ‘situatedness’ of the knowledge and rather an exclusionary character of spaces of knowledge production after ‘89. There were a few worth-mentioning moments when the problem of silencing the women’s voices on the Polish leftist political/ intellectual scene was brought up by the leftist feminists interested in shaping the better practices¹⁷⁰.

¹⁶⁵ See album documenting the creativity in DiY transparents: Michał Sosna, *Kobiety delikatne jak bomby. Transparenty Październikowych i Listopadowych Protestów 2020* (Imperium Ducha, 2020)

¹⁶⁶ For the discussion of the attempts to enclose and commodify one fb group “Dziewuchy dziewczuchom” see Ada T. Kosterkiewicz, *Jak zabić aktywizm w jednym prostym kroku, czyli jak dziewczuchy dziewczuchom*, <https://www.adakosterkiewicz.pl/2018/04/jak-zabic-aktywizm-w-jednym-prostym-kroku-czyli-jak-dziewuchy-dziewuchom/>

¹⁶⁷ In fact, the struggle for decriminalisation of abortion is led both by women and queer people.

¹⁶⁸ It is already observable in the published literature. A social turn in feminist historiography, for example, manifests itself in the work of Alicja Urbanik-Kopeć, dealing with the (industrial, household and sexual) labour of the XIXth century working-class women.

¹⁶⁹ Łapniewska, *Ibid.*, 28-29.

¹⁷⁰ Such first, and foundational moment was the closure of the women’s section of Solidarity in 1990, described by me on the pages: 99-100.

At first, these debates revolved around giving no credit to female co-authors¹⁷¹, citing no women¹⁷² and the construction of the self-image of the male authors as intellectual self-made men, influenced by other male authors and not relying on the care work done for them by others and enabling them their academic prominence¹⁷³. With the advent of the #metoo movement in Poland, the feminist voices of dissent within the movement became more audible, and the accusations they raised could no longer be ignored. In 2017, five young feminists published in “feminist daily” a ground-breaking call out against two quite prominent leftist journalists, accusing them of gender-based violence, including sexualised violence¹⁷⁴. Their statement, entitled “Paper Feminists”, was directed not only against those two men but also unmasked the practices prevalent on the entire leftist political scene, which enable aggressively misogynistic behaviours of certain privileged men, and, in consequence, is toxic and hostile to women. The article entailed a large debate, with different environments and intellectual circles taking either the side of the victims or, as it was unfortunately often the case, of the oppressors. Other call-outs followed¹⁷⁵, and even though they, in the end, did not result in the successful transformation of the Polish leftist scene, the problem, at least, couldn’t be any longer swept under the carpet.

How does it relate to knowledge production processes? In practice, violence against women excludes women from the spaces of knowledge production. They are denied resources, the support of the environment, access to institutions elevating their voices, and, finally, they are painfully reminded about the inferior role they play in the leftist intellectual scene. Women's sexual objectification and victimisation construct them as powerless and passive recipients of men's actions, not as agents capable of constructing the narrative and making a change. No

¹⁷¹ On the case of Sławomir Sierakowski, not giving any credits to Cveta Dimitrova, his ex-partner and “invisible” co-author of his texts: Ewa Majewska, Śnieg w lecie, czyli o niewolnictwie kobiet na polskiej lewicy w późnym kapitalizmie, 25 June 2014, <http://codziennikfeministyczny.pl/snieg-lecie-czyli-niewolnictwie-kobiet-na-polskiej-lewicy-poznym-kapitalizmie/>

¹⁷² See also Ewa Majewska’s critique of Jan Sowa’s disregard to women’s theoretical contributions: Ewa Majewska, Paradoxy sarmatyzmu, solidarność kobiet i polityka wielości, 16 June 2015, <http://majewska.codziennikfeministyczny.pl/tag/jan-sowa/>

¹⁷³ See both texts of Majewska cited above

¹⁷⁴ Sara Czyż, Dominika Dymińska, Patrycja Wieczorkiewicz, Agnieszka Ziółkowska and other, anonymised authors, Papierowi feminiści. O hipokryzji na lewicy i nowych twarzach polskiego #metoo, 27 November 2017, *Codziennik Feministyczny*, <http://codziennikfeministyczny.pl/papierowi-feminisci-nowe-twarze-polskiego-metoo/>

¹⁷⁵ Subsequent call-outs were accusing an entire spectrum of people and institutions - they were directed against academics, public figures and activists collectives. E.g.: Małgorzata Szymaniak, Pisał po nocach natrętne wiadomości o podtekście seksualnym, 18 June 2018, <http://codziennikfeministyczny.pl/pisal-po-nocach-natretne-wiadomosci-podtekście-seksualnym-malgorzata-szymaniak-ujawnia-przypadki-molestowania-kobiet-ze-strony-znanego-publicysty/>; Anonymous, To jest call out na skłot Przychodnia, 26 February 2019, <https://resiste.squat.net/?p=24396> a

wonder that in such circumstances, their perspective is silenced. The subjects, from which perspective the history, also the history of transformation, is written and being told, are, in turn, constructed as male.

When it comes to critical transformation studies, it too has been exclusionary and hostile against women. One of its main contributors and the editor of the volume I analyse in this thesis, “*Class divisions and social inequalities. Sociological reflections after the two decades of real existing capitalism in Poland*”, Piotr Żuk, perpetrated sexual violence against his female students. As a professor of sociology at the University of Wrocław, Żuk was expecting his students to meet with him “in private” in return for the positive grades; the students also accused him of rape and sexual harassment¹⁷⁶. While doing the research for my thesis, I wondered whether I should, perhaps, cancel Żuk and not give him any academic credits. In the end, I came to the conclusion it would be unfair to the other authors of the edited volume. Moreover, I couldn’t ignore one of the few sociological attempts, to sum up the transitional changes from a critical perspective. However, that a perpetrator of violence against women was standing behind this attempt is symptomatic – it reveals that a ‘critical perspective’ was, indeed, an exclusionary perspective of the ‘boys club’, in which women’s participation was prohibited by means of violence of the few and insensitivity to their experiences by the many. In Żuk’s book, among sixteen articles, only three were authored by women. Gender-based violence, misogyny and discriminatory practices have, as I propose, translated into the limitations of the theory produced in such a hostile setting: as androcentric practices and spaces nurture androcentric theory.

The dominance of men in the field has long been reflected in the lack of reflection on gender in most of the anti-capitalist/ anti-neoliberal analyses. If gender is considered, then very often in the footnotes – as in David Ost’s book¹⁷⁷ – or, just as a remark, that “women’s situation was the worst”¹⁷⁸. The interdependence between the transformation of gendered relationships of power and the socio-economic transformation of the ‘90s is rarely considered. In the last decade, however, more and more female authors have entered the field of critical transformation

¹⁷⁶ Although the court dismissed the charges of rape and harassment, Żuk was convicted of taking advantage of his position and forcing the student to private meetings: karko, Profesor, który chciał od studentek spotkań za wpis do indeksu, zwolniony z Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 24 September 2020, Gazeta Wyborcza, <https://wroclaw.wyborcza.pl/wroclaw/7,35771,26333564,profesor-ktory-chcial-od-studentek-spotkan-za-wpis-do-indeksu.html?disableRedirects=true>

¹⁷⁷ Ost, Ibid.,

¹⁷⁸ While we look at the early transformation analyses, the “Privatising Poland” of Elisabeth Dunn is certainly an honourable exception., Dunn, Ibid.

studies. Still, the remnants of androcentrism are observable. The most striking, perhaps, is Rafał Woś's book "*Cold, 30-year old*"¹⁷⁹, in which – both in the title, which has feminine gender in Polish, and throughout the book's pages – the transformation and the 3rd Polish Republic are anthropomorphised as a 30-year old woman – "egocentric", "deprived empathy", "pretentious and pretending", and: "cold". While I agree with most of Woś's criticism of Polish free-market reforms, such a depiction of a country is connected with the conceptualisation of the "nation" as a community of men, who all have some personal relationship to a feminised country, that should be caring for their needs. This discourse instrumentalises ideologies of motherhood and obscures the experiences and needs of the real existing women. Such a conceptualisation is related to the process of commoning the women that accompany the capitalist transformations, which I will explore in the 4th chapter¹⁸⁰.

3.2. Vernacular Turn in Transformation Studies?

The gender of the anti-neoliberal authors writing about transformation is not the only factor contributing to the specific 'situatedness' of knowledge that was produced. As already noted, all of the analysed authors are relatively privileged. The voices of the working-class victims of the transformation are either silent or highly mediated by well-educated authors. In the recent years, a turn to 'vernacular memory' on the transformation is observable: authors tend to give the voice to the 'ordinary people' so that they can study how they remember the everydayness of the transitional period, instead of studying merely the official historical discourses and commemorative practices. However, in deciding who is the 'ordinary' person and whose memory is representative of 'people's memory' lies the great power of the researcher, which hasn't been sufficiently problematised in the Polish scholarship on vernacular memory.

Emblematic here is the book "*Cuts. Oral history of the transformation*" by Aleksandra Leyk and Joanna Wawrzyniak¹⁸¹, which is a transcript of 27 narrative biographical interviews with the 'ordinary people', employed by the state companies subjected to the processes of privatisation by the foreign capital, on how they remember the time of transformation. The book is fascinating, but, in my opinion, it failed to reconstruct the picture of the 'people's memory' of transformation. The selection of the interviewees is, as I want to argue, the reason for that

¹⁷⁹ Rafał Woś, *Zimna Trzydziestoletnia. Nieautoryzowana biografia polskiego kapitalizmu* (Kraków: MANDO, 2019)

¹⁸⁰ Pp: 75-76

¹⁸¹ Leyk, Wawrzyniak, *Ibid.*

failure. As most of them occupied managerial positions, and many of them even became directors of the privatised companies, they certainly were not constituting any representative sample of the society and ‘ordinary people’. The authors admit, “*Our interviewees, are in the majority people, who managed not to fall out of the speeding train [of transformation]*”¹⁸². As compensation, Leyk and Wawrzyniak supplemented the book with two ‘additional’ interviews with working-class women employed as “unskilled workers” who experienced impoverishment after their workplace was liquidated. The problem is that the common experience of pauperisation due to the transformation is constructed as exceptional and uncommon. At the same time, the upwards social mobility and affluence gained due to restructuration processes as the common and ordinary experience. While the ‘people’s history’ is constructed as the history of the well-off managers and directors, hence, beneficiaries of the transformation, we deal with the hyper-silencing of the voices of the working class.

Thankfully, the counter-examples of the studies that actually listen to the voices of the transformation victims are also there. Probably the best attempt to reconstruct the ‘people’s history’ from the perspective of the working class has been the non-fiction book “Once there was life here, now there is only poverty. About the victims of Polish transformation”¹⁸³ by Katarzyna Duda. The author has travelled around the country and interviewed the workers from the cleaning and security industries in the most impoverished regions about their work experiences under state socialism and under capitalism – from the stories gathered by Duda arises a radically different picture of transformation than from the ones from Leyk’s and Wawrzyniak’s “Cuts” – we can see that for many it has been a disaster.

4. Knowledge Production and Core-Periphery Dynamics

Finally, the knowledge about Polish transformation is ‘situated’ literally – on the two poles of east-west divisions. The first prominent analyses of transformation processes, also the critical ones, have been produced by American scholars; the most noteworthy, while we speak of critical approach, are the contributions of David Ost and Elisabeth Dunn. They both managed to produce a nuanced and comprehensive theory grounded in the thorough research that spanned across many years and, in the case of Dunn, included the actual employment of the researcher in the privatised factory Alima. Not all American scholars approached their job with such personal involvement and scholarly sensitivity to local contexts.

¹⁸² Ibid., 51.

¹⁸³ Duda, Ibid.

Shana Penn, for instance, who studied stories of female members of “Solidarity”, represents a typical example of the ignorance resulting from the birds-eyed perspective accompanied by reproduction of stereotypes. Penn has conducted ahistorical scholarship, making unjustifiable claims on the ‘specificity of the Polish culture’, in spite of studying the transformative moment in Polish history¹⁸⁴.

In her pre-face to Penn’s book, Irena Grudzińska-Gross wrote, “*The biggest value of this book lies in that fact, that the author’s perspective remains unaffected by any of the [local] traditions.*”¹⁸⁵. This is the common narrative about the epistemic subject, which is objective and impartial, as she is not embedded. Such an approach is related also to the vision of Polish history as secondary and Polish experiences of modernisation as inferior – Polish scholars believe to be constrained by their historical and contexts see the position of an “outsider” as epistemically privileged – as only somebody from outside is supposed to be able to produce “true” knowledge. Polish intellectualls, citing their western counterparts much more willingly than their compatriots - as Paweł Buchowski pointed out¹⁸⁶, have long contributed to the (self)provincionalisation of Polish science. In his pre-face to the Polish edition of Dunn’s book, Ost has suggested that the fact that in the first two decades after 1989, it were American, and not Polish scholars, who had produced a critical theory of Polish transformation, resulted from the extreme marginalisation of the critical theory, especially Marxism in the Polish academia¹⁸⁷. The phenomenon of citing Western rather than Polish scholars is, as I think, related to this – the higher “authority” of the theory produced on the West in general could serve as a tool for ascribing bigger academic credibility to one’s research.

Here, too, however, the situation has been changing – more and more Polish authors, often from younger generations, engage in the critical transformation scholarship¹⁸⁸. However, the conservative turn in the Polish academia that resulted from the higher education policies introduced by the PiS government in the very recent years is, again, posing serious limitations to critical theory – conservative and catholic academic journals have gained the highest

¹⁸⁴ More on that on the pp: 93.

¹⁸⁵ Irena Grudzińska-Gross, “Przedmowa do wydania polskiego” in *Sekret...* (op.cit.), 19

¹⁸⁶ Buchowski, *Ibid.*, 32-33.

¹⁸⁷ David Ost, „Wstęp”, pre-face to Elisabeth Dunn, trans. Przemysław Sadura, *Prywatyzując Polskę. O bobofrutach, wielkim biznesie i restrukturyzacji pracy* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2017) 11-13.

¹⁸⁸ E.g. already mentioned *Solidarity in struggle* (op.cit)

recognition from the ministry of higher education,¹⁸⁹ and conferences on Marxist theory have been controlled and harassed by the police¹⁹⁰. Interestingly, this does not preclude the discourse critical of transformation – as the PiS government, although the party elites have been involved in the processes of transformation and have benefited from it,¹⁹¹ attempts to construct itself as the ‘avenger’ of the transformation victims, weaponising the anti-establishment sentiments prevalent in the society for the party’s political struggles¹⁹².

Hence, PiS has formed a sort of “alliance” with the more conservative part of the “left”, financing, for example, the magazine “The New Citizen” published by Remigiusz and Magdalena Okraska. Okraskas, depicting themselves as the true voices of ‘the people’, repaid by praising the PiS policies and aggressively attacking the party’s opponents. During electoral campaigns, Magdalena Okraska has published articles in which she openly agitates for the party and presents her choice to vote for it as the best choice for a ‘leftist person’. A more detailed explanation of this ‘alliance’ would require a separate article; what interests me the most here is, however, the construction of ‘the people’ as interested merely in the better material standards of living (here, indeed, PiS has some accomplishments) and constructions of the “women’s issues” as ideological and non-economical. Abortion policies, not to mention the aggressive homophobia, are approached, if they are approached at all, as unrelated to the economy and – this is crucial – magically not affecting the working class. Magdalena Okraska focuses, perhaps, the biggest attention among all analysed authors on the commons and communities. If she, however, would take into account the particular exclusion of women from the commons, and re-establishment of the exclusionary communities on the oppression of women and minorities, she would be much closer to understanding what actually happened in the ‘90s.

¹⁸⁹ On the most recent change see: Adam Leszczyński, Czarnek zmienia listę czasopism naukowych. Dodaje punkty swoim – na miesiąc przed oceną, 2 December 2021, oko.press, <https://oko.press/czarnek-zmienia-liste-czasopism-naukowych-dodaje-punkty-swoim-na-miesiac-przed-ocena/>

¹⁹⁰ See: Jan Woleński, Policja na konferencji o Marksie? To są praktyki totalitarne, 16 May 2018, Polityka, <https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kraj/1749016,1,policja-na-konferencji-o-marksie-to-sa-praktyki-totalitarne.read>

¹⁹¹ On the relationship between today’s enrichment of PiS political elite and the one from the ‘90s: Paweł Kalisz, Srebrna? Zaplecze finansowe PiS stworzone przez Kaczyńskiego warte jest fortunę, 28 January 2019, natemat.pl, <https://natemat.pl/262359,co-to-jest-spolka-srebrna-zaplecze-finansowe-pis-stworzyl-jaroslaw-kaczynski>

¹⁹² Etera Flieger interview with Tomasz Markiewka, PiS bardzo dobrze rozpoznał, że ludzie są wkurzeni, 6 July 2020, <https://publicystyka.ngo.pl/tomasz-markiewka-pis-bardzo-dobrze-rozpoznal-ze-ludzie-sa-wkurzeni-wywiad>

3rd Chapter: Neoliberal Turn: Declaration of Class War and Restructuration of Polish Economy

1. Shock Doctrine and Polish Shock Therapy

Halina Bortnowska, Polish philosopher and human rights activist, cited by Naomi Klein in her „Shock doctrine”, describes the frantic atmosphere of the transitional year of 1989 in the following way: “*you start witnessing these semi-psychotic reactions. You can no longer expect people to act in their own best interests when they're so disoriented they don't know — or no longer care — what those interests are.*”¹⁹³ Bortnowska’s words reflect well the pace of life during the fundamental breakthrough and the general political confusion accompanying the sudden change of the political and economic regimes. For Klein, such affective disorientation, in which one can no longer define and care for their interests, is a typical reaction to the effects of a “shock doctrine”. Canadian author understands “shock doctrine” as a political *modus operandi* of neoliberalism that aims to destabilise socio-political and socio-economical situations to such an extent that it enables the introduction of unpopular and harmful free-market reforms:

*“In normal circumstances, economic decisions are made based on the push and pull of competing interests—workers want jobs and raises, owners want low taxes and relaxed regulation, and politicians have to strike a balance between these competing forces. However, if an economic crisis hits and is severe enough (...) it blows everything else out of the water, and leaders are liberated to do whatever is necessary (or said to be necessary) in the name of responding to a national emergency. Crises are, in a way, democracy-free zones—gaps in politics as usual when the need for consent and consensus do not seem to apply.”*¹⁹⁴

As Klein demonstrated on the numerous, well-documented examples of neoliberal turns in countries of South America, then US and UK, and finally, post-socialist countries such as Poland, the conscious fabrication of political, economic or military crises by neoliberal economists and politicians was a common practice. Neoliberalism, one could say, thrives thanks to the disasters and psychological and political conditions they create. The Polish year of 1989 is exemplary for such abnormal conditions: the society, that had been exhausted after the decade

¹⁹³ Klein, *Ibid.*, 181.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 140.

of political upheavals and economic crisis resulting in a shortage economy¹⁹⁵ and inflation reaching 55% in October 1989¹⁹⁶, suddenly¹⁹⁷ experienced profound changes and has been bombarded with thousands of new stimuli. In such a context, it is easier to understand what led to the implementation of the “Balcerowicz plan”, proudly announced by its nominal (see below) author and a minister of finance in the first (semi)democratically¹⁹⁸ elected government as a “shock therapy” to the Polish economy¹⁹⁹.

The actual authors of “Balcerowicz plan” were the super-star of the world of economy, Jeffrey Sachs and his friend from the International Monetary Fund, David Lipton. Sachs has already had an experience of facilitating a neoliberal turn in Bolivia – in a slightly less brutal and dogmatic way than it was done by “Chicago boys” in Chile or Argentina²⁰⁰ - which Klein described as a *“coup d'état, one carried out by politicians and economists in business suits rather than soldiers in military uniforms”*²⁰¹. “Los Angeles Times”, cited by Klein, called Sachs *“Indiana Jones of Economics”*²⁰². This, in my opinion, perfectly recaps his position of a western adventure-seeker presented in the media as a hero - against the backdrop of nameless and deprived of agency local societies as in ‘Indiana Jones’ movies. It also reveals a general (neo)colonial character of American interventions in the economies of the “Second World” countries.

Sachs was called to the rescue by “Solidarity” as it saw in him its biggest hope for the renegotiation of the colossal debt for Poland at that time foreign debt of 40 mld dollars²⁰³. This debt resulted from the loans that the Polish government took from the western countries in the ‘70s²⁰⁴ and the dramatically rising interest rates after those countries adopted monetary policies to

¹⁹⁵ On the origins of the crisis of the ‘80s see: Sowa, *Ciesz się....* (op.cit.), 385-390.

¹⁹⁶ Source: “Plan Balcerowicza” in Wikipedia, https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plan_Balcerowicza

¹⁹⁷ On the process that led to transition and round table talks see: Karol Modzelewski, *Zajeżdżimy kobyłę historii. Wyznania poobijanego jeźdźcy* (Warszawa, Wydawnictwo Iskry, 2013)

¹⁹⁸ The elections of the 4th June of 1989 were, in fact, semi-democratic. During round table talks opposition leadership and party representatives agreed that PZPR party will occupy 65% of seats in the seym. This deal did not apply to the senate.

¹⁹⁹ Klein, *Ibid.*, 177.

²⁰⁰ See: chapters “States of Shock The Bloody Birth of The Counterrevolution” on Chile, “Cleaning The Slate Terror Does Its Work” on Argentina and “The New Doctor Shock Economic Warfare Replaces Dictatorship” on Bolivia in *Shock Doctrine...* (op.cit.)

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 154.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 177.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 175.

²⁰⁴ Sowa, *Ciesz się....* (op.cit.), 386-297.

extract the capital from the Global South and Global East²⁰⁵. In the fact that this led Poland to implement neoliberal “shock therapy”, we can see the irony of self-sustaining mechanisms of neo-colonial dependencies within global neoliberalism.

Klein bitterly describes the approach of international institutions, interested more in the consumption of the ‘spoils of war’ than in providing any support to the country’s collapsing economy:

“Now in the grips of Chicago School economists, the IMF and the U.S. Treasury saw Poland's problems through the prism of the shock doctrine. An economic meltdown and a heavy debt load, compounded by the disorientation of rapid regime change, meant that Poland was in the perfect weakened position to accept a radical shock therapy program. And the financial stakes were even higher than in Latin America: Eastern Europe was untouched by Western capitalism, with no consumer market to speak of. All of its most precious assets were still owned by the state — prime candidates for privatization. The potential for rapid profits for those who got in first was tremendous.”²⁰⁶

In such a context, George Soros, another celebrity in the world of economics, has arranged Sachs’s employment as an advisor to “Solidarity”²⁰⁷ – what mattered the most for “Solidarity” wasn’t, perhaps, Sachs’s experience and expertise but, instead, his authority and connections within the network of the most influential people in the international monetary institutions. Hired as a “Solidarity” advisor in the summer of 1989, Sachs invited David Lipton to the hotel “Bristol”. As an anecdote shared by Sachs himself says, they have drawn a 15-page plan of a restructuration of the Polish economy during a single night.²⁰⁸ Comparing the plan to plans introduced previously in Latin America, Klein describes it as a *“particularly radical version of a shock therapy”*²⁰⁹. Sachs’s plan was a one-to-one adaptation of the ‘Washington consensus’²¹⁰ premises. It proposed freeing international trade, sudden abolition of the price control and binding the Polish zloty to the US-American dollar. The restructuration of the state budget and strict financial discipline came down to the cuts to social expenditures and total liquidation of state subventions to the industry. Perhaps most crucial from the point of view of

²⁰⁵ On the transfer of assets from the peripheries to the core of global capitalism and on the foreign debt as a disciplinary political mechanism see David Harvey, *A Brief History...* (op.cit), 87-119; and on concept of ‘dictatorship of the debt’ in the context of imposed ‘structural adjustments’ see Klein, *Ibid.*, 159-168.

²⁰⁶ Klein, *Ibid.*, 176.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 177.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 177. There are also other variants of this anecdote, where Sachs wrote down the plan in a headquarter of “Wyborcza” redaction, see: Rafał Woś, *Zimna...* (op.cit), 13.

²⁰⁹ 216 check exact wording in English version

²¹⁰ On Washington consensus see: Klein, *Ibid.*, 164.

the interests of Western capital was the complete privatisation of vital state assets: factories, mines, and shipyards²¹¹. The reduction of Polish foreign debt was a tied transaction and a part of the plan. Indeed, the debt was reduced: in 1991 by 30% and in 1994 by a further 20%²¹². However, despite this, the continuously high interest rates resulted in the situation in which, in 1994, Poland was still owing 40 mld of US dollars to foreign banks²¹³.

Sachs's plan was first consulted with the "Solidarity" leaders, already alienated from the union's power base²¹⁴. Then, a small group of "experts", with Leszek Balcerowicz on the lead, had re-forged it into a package of 10 laws, which remained secret for everyone else until September 1989, when prime minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki gave a speech in front of the newly elected parliament. Mazowiecki, who was about to declare the direction of the chosen course of the reforms, has, unexpectedly, fainted. After an hour, when he returned to the parliament hall to continue his speech, he declared, "*The state of my health is the same as the state of the Polish economy.*"²¹⁵ Hence, "shock therapy" was prescribed.

As a "patient of history"²¹⁶, Polish society was denied the right to self-determination in the course of this medical procedure. To ensure the successful introduction of the Balcerowicz reform package, the government suspended the usual practices of the parliamentary process. The legislative process was shortened, and parliamentary debates, not to mention broader social consultations (other than with the "Solidarity" union, which back then constituted the same organism as an electoral committee "Solidarity" from which government originated), were precluded. As David Ost wrote, "*Because of the controversial nature of all these new legal reforms, the government did not want them subjected to long parliamentary discussion. Most of the union officials accepted this. And so the most striking thing about the public discussion of the Balcerowicz Plan is that there was not much of it.*"²¹⁷ The parliament voted on the reforms on the 27th and 28th of December 1989, and the plan came into life as soon as the 1st of June 1990. Both MPs and general society were, one could say, bombarded with the new laws – they weren't even granted time to clarify their opinion on it. In a chapter about Bolivia, Klein describes such circumstances of a "political shock" as purposefully disturbing, "*if dozens of*

²¹¹ Ibid, 177.

²¹² "Zadłużenie zagraniczne PRL", Wikipedia, https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zad%C5%82u%C5%BCenie_zagraniczne_PRL

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ More on that in the fifth chapter.

²¹⁵ Klein, Ibid., 180.

²¹⁶ See 1st Chapter: 27.

²¹⁷ David Ost, The Defeat... (op.cit.), 56.

*changes come from all directions at once, a feeling of futility sets in, and populations go limp.*²¹⁸

2. Dynamics of Enfranchisement and Dispossession

Balcerowicz-Sachs's plan had a catastrophic effect on the Polish economy. Repeating the data evoked by Rafał Woś: *"from 1990 to 1991 Polish GDP shrank by 15%. Only in 1990 did average salaries decrease by 25%, the pensions by 19% and net revenues from the agriculture (per worker) by 63%. In 1989 16% of society lived under the poverty line. Four years later, around 40%"*²¹⁹. Whereas Sachs has predicted "momentary dislocations,"²²⁰ what came instead was a long-lasting structural recession. In 2003, 59% of People in Poland lived under the poverty line,²²¹ and the unemployment rate reached 20%²²². Whereas it put the livelihoods of a vast part of society under tremendous pressure, and many people have experienced personal disasters, a small group of people clearly benefited from the changes. 'Long '90s' was also a decade of spectacular careers and huge fortunes – and the ones who made them wouldn't be so successful if not for the dispossession of the working class. The dispossessions, on the one hand, and the enfranchisements, on the other, resulted in a creation of a deeply divided society.

The "classless" nature of state socialist regimes has always been dubious. The nationalisation of the means of production²²³ has resulted in a situation in which they belonged to every citizen of PPR in theory, but, in practice, the companies' managements and members of the party used to exercise much more significant control over the means of production than the rest of the society - and the workers remained alienated. Such a state of things has been subjected to the powerful critique of the opposition, most famously perhaps in Karol Modzelewski and Jacek Kuroń's 'Open letter to the party', a manifesto of the young Marxist intellectuals from the year 1965, in which they accused the party of the renunciation of the premises upon which socialism should have been built²²⁴. Still, even though the praxis of state socialism was not concise with its theoretical fundamentals, the state was mediating the

²¹⁸ Klein, *Ibid.*, 148.

²¹⁹ Rafał Woś, *Ibid.*, 18,

²²⁰ Klein, *Ibid.*, 191.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 192.

²²² "Bezrobocie w Polsce", Wikipedia, https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bezrobocie_w_Polsce

²²³ Interestingly, in Poland, most of the land wasn't collectivised. For a discussion of the contexts of a "land reform" see: Andrzej Leder, *Prześlona rewolucja. Ćwiczenia z logiki historycznej* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2014)

²²⁴ Modzelewski, *Ibid.*

relationships of production and class divisions and, in a way, alleviating them. The “buffer” it provided disappeared suddenly with the implementation of Sachs-Balcerowicz’s plan.

Between 1990 and 2004, 7165 state-owned companies were privatised²²⁵. The most common way of commercialising the companies has been the creation of a sole proprietorship of the state treasury and then selling it to the investors. In terms of state treasury incomes from industry privatisations, less than half came from Polish investors²²⁶. As David Ost describes it, the former leaders of “Solidarity” were often the biggest beneficiaries of the enfranchisement. Unlike in the other post-socialist states, transformation in Poland did not entail the enfranchisement of the former party establishment, at least not on a mass scale. According to Ost, members of “Solidarity” were highly enthusiastic about the privatisations of their companies, even the ones who did not come to any possessions themselves – the only thing they were consequently defending was a certainty that the party establishment would not benefit from the ownership transformations²²⁷. The state has provided additional incentives for workers’ support of privatisation: the part of the “Balcerowicz plan” was the introduction of a tax on “over normative” salaries²²⁸, which exclusively affected workers of state-owned companies. It was a form of a maximum wage for the public sector. As it has always been, the neoliberal rule of deregulation and non-intervening of the state in the economy has been approached very selectively.

The state companies have been approached as economically ineffective and unproductive by definition. As Olga Drenda wrote, „*Multitude of state companies are not even granted a chance to catch a breath; in the context of massive and rapid privatisation, they shrink or disappear.*”²²⁹. As Magdalena Okraska has demonstrated, even well-prospering and modern companies were written off; a prominent example is a huge and technologically advanced steelwork Katowice, a flagship project of the entire eastern block in the 70’²³⁰. Such an approach to the public sector has been ideologically and materially motivated. What was perceived as a burden to a state’s budget was rapidly sold off, usually for bargain prices²³¹.

²²⁵ Janusz Kaliński, *Transformacja gospodarki polskiej w latach 1989–2004* (Warszawa: Szkoła Główna Handlowa w Warszawie, 2009), 57–57

²²⁶ „Przekształcenia własnościowe w Polsce po 1989 roku”, Wikipedia, https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Przekszta%C5%82cenia_w%C5%82asno%C5%9Bciowe_w_Polsce_po_1989_roku

²²⁷ David Ost, *Ibid.*, 152.

²²⁸ David Ost, *Ibid.* 54.

²²⁹ Olga Drenda, *Ibid.*, 101.

²³⁰ Magdalena Okraska, *Ibid.*, 105–115.

²³¹ „Przekształcenia własnościowe w Polsce po 1989 roku”, Wikipedia, https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Przekszta%C5%82cenia_w%C5%82asno%C5%9Bciowe_w_Polsce_po_1989_roku

Whereas 48% of the revenues from the privatisation came from the local investors, as much as 52% came from selling the state companies to the foreign capital²³². The most significant share fell to the German capital (24%), US-American (16%), French (13%), and Dutch (10%)²³³. The privatisation, thus, not only created class divisions on the national level but has also contributed to the ‘neo-colonisation’ of the country. As David Harvey argues, ‘geographically uneven development’²³⁴ is inherent to neoliberalism. Harvey points out that neoliberalism does not succeed in overcoming the countries’ internal crises of capital accumulation²³⁵. However, this is compensated by extracting the capital and dispossessing non-western parts of the world. Washington ‘consensus’, agreed upon by the World Bank and IMF in the very same year of 1989 and imposed on numerous countries from the Global South and Global East, has made that all too easy, as its primary requirements are the creation of capital markets, opening them to foreign capital and large-scaled privatisations²³⁶.

Interestingly, while Poland was expected to open its markets to the Western countries, it wasn’t a mutual deal: Western Europe sustained strict import limitations for Poland²³⁷. At this place, the nominal value of the aggregated Polish revenues from selling state companies to foreign investors is worth mentioning. In 2004 it was as low as 12,6 mld of US dollars²³⁸, which, let us calculate, was less than 1/3 of the foreign debt Poland still had to pay in 1994 after it was reduced thanks to Sachs interventions.

Polish ‘long ‘90s’ are illustrative of the processes of primitive accumulation. At the same time, consumerist markets have been created, and labour and its reproduction have been subsumed under the capital. Still, the sudden transfer of assets from the hands of the state to the private hands of foreign capitalists and the local comprador class is, as I believe, the most crucial part of the accumulation that occurred back then – and it is exemplary for what David Harvey has called ‘accumulation by dispossession’. Even though, as already suggested, the companies did not belong to the people, and workers did not fully control their workplaces, they felt entitled to gaining control over the means of production. As Jan Sowa argues, workers approached the PPR propaganda on their leading role in history with seriousness – this is why

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Harvey, *Ibid.*, 87-119.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Klein, *Ibid.*, 159-168.

²³⁷ Ost, *Ibid.*, 152 (Polish edition – trans. Hanna Jankowska (Warszawa: MUZA, 2017)) – he speaks of the state for 1991

²³⁸ „Przekształcenia własnościowe w Polsce po 1989 roku”, Wikipedia, https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Przekszta%C5%82cenia_w%C5%82asno%C5%9Bciowe_w_Polsce_po_1989_roku

“Solidarity” was born, to make the false promises of a socialist state come true²³⁹. The strong position of the worker’s unions in the ‘80s only supported the workers’ claim to be the actual owners of their workplaces. Thus, the privatisation of Polish industry truly dispossessed the workers. Besides, irrespectively of the structure of ownership of means of production before 89’, it was the workers, who have created the value – the country’s industry, that was later to be extracted for the bargain costs and capitalised on by the foreign and local elites.

The working communities have been disposed of the claims to the material ownership of their companies (a model of a cooperative economy, in which workers would be the actual owners of their workplaces, was in 1989 also on the table, next to the Sachs plan)²⁴⁰. Their dispossession, however, went further. As managerialism dominated the style of regulating the workforce, a turn brilliantly described by Elisabeth Dunn²⁴¹, the workers have also been dispossessed of their agency in the workplace and creativity ascribed in the former system to the industrial production²⁴². They have been reconstructed as individualised and competitive human beings. Hence they have been dispossessed of communal bonds and the sense of solidarity. As I will prove in the next chapter, these dispossessions, however, weren’t distributed equally, which had even worse consequences for the working class. Finally, with the liquidation of the companies, or their privatisation and cuts introduced by the new owners, many communities, especially in the smaller cities, were dispossessed of the various facilities of collective reproduction of everyday life. As Olga Drenda has framed it, “*A chain of little ends of the world could have been observed in the entire country*”²⁴³. The life of those communities used to revolve around local companies, providing inhabitants with the kindergartens, canteens, libraries, swimming pools etc.²⁴⁴.” Again, not everyone was affected by these dispossessions in the same way, as I will discuss soon.

The dispossessions and enfranchisement are two sides of the same coin of the neoliberal turn. The change in the structure of ownership relations after 1989 resulted in a tremendous increase in social inequalities in Poland. As Jan Sowa has demonstrated, after 15 years of transition, the income distribution in Poland has been most unequal among all post-socialist

²³⁹ Jan Sowa, *Inna Rzeczpospolita jest możliwa! Widma przeszłości, wizje przyszłości* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo WAB, 2015), 104-185.

²⁴⁰ Klein, *Ibid.*, 180.

²⁴¹ Dunn, *Ibid.*

²⁴² *Ibid.*

²⁴³ Drenda, *Ibid.*, 101.

²⁴⁴ Leyk, Wawrzyniak, Cięcia... (op.cit.); Duda, Kiedyś tu... (op.cit).

states, with the only exception of Baltic states²⁴⁵. As Tadeusz Kowalik, an economist, advisor to Solidarity in the '80s and relentless critic of free-market reform of the '90s, has pointed out, Polish transformation extinguished itself from the one experienced by other countries of the region as having particularly negative social consequences. Kowalik mentioned specifically: high and structural unemployment, the prevalence of poverty, massive inequalities, the lack of social housing, the pauperisation of the peasantry and the fall of agriculture, and the destruction of the welfare state²⁴⁶.

Kowalik also mentions an exceptionally high gender pay gap as a typically Polish consequence of the transformation. Let us examine the gendered implications of the shock doctrine and processes of accumulation by dispossession more closely. Most of the interpretations of Polish transformation very rarely take them into account. It is a final time to challenge such a state of things and consider how transformation affected women. It might not only tell us something about a specifically "female" experience of transformation, but it can also shift our perspective significantly and put us in a position from which we will see a fuller picture of what happened in the 'long '90s'. The reports on changing gender relationships during the years of transformation have already been produced²⁴⁷. We still need a reconceptualisation of historical processes and rethinking of concepts from the perspective of feminist political economy.

²⁴⁵ Sowa, *Ciesz się...* (op.cit.), 417.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 418.

²⁴⁷ Desperak, *Płeć zmiany..* (op.cit) Frąckowiak-Sochańska, Królikowska, ed. *Kobiety w polskiej transformacji...* (op.cit).

4th Chapter: Gendered Disposessions: Reproduction, Discipline and Housewifisation of Women's Labour

1. Disposessions of the long '90s and transformation of the sphere of reproduction

Accumulation by dispossession not only creates or deepens national and international class divisions. It also contributes to the deepening of other – intersecting – social divisions. It happens so because the restructuration of local economies it entails affects most badly the disadvantaged groups, who had always been most dependent on the structures of support – both communal and state-funded – that are being overtaken or destroyed in the course of neoliberalisation. Harvey points out the particular extent to which women are being dispossessed in the course of such restructuration processes and notices the extreme oppressiveness of the intersection of neoliberalism with patriarchal turn in post-socialist countries:

“Accumulation by dispossession typically undermines whatever powers women may have within household production/ marketing systems and within traditional social structures and relocates everything in male-dominated commodity and credit markets. (...) The loss of social protections in advanced capitalist countries has had particularly negative effects on lower-class women, and in many of the ex-communist countries of the Soviet bloc the loss of women's rights through neoliberalization has been nothing short of catastrophic.”²⁴⁸

Let us follow this trope and examine how specifically accumulation by dispossession affected Polish women. I would like to approach this question by focusing on the transformation of the sphere of reproduction, understood both broadly as a reproduction of labour, reproduction of daily life and reproduction of communities, and narrowly, as related to fertility.

Maria Mies approaches the Marxist analytical division between the spheres of production and reproduction with utmost criticism – she claims that it contributes to the devaluation of women's labour, which is ascribed to the sphere of 'reproduction'. The fact that the term and specifically prefix 're' suggest a secondary nature of the historically 'female activities' is highly misleading and unjust, as the creation of the new human life, sustaining the life and enabling the development of another person is, as Mies powerfully put it, the most

²⁴⁸ Harvey, *Ibid.*, 170.

productive work that can be done²⁴⁹. Agreeing with Mies when it comes to the value that should be ascribed to 'reproductive' labour, I am aware that the division of the spheres of production and reproduction has a structural nature - refusing to differentiate between the two spheres will not elevate the structures in which the division is embedded.

As both Mies and Silvia Federici demonstrated²⁵⁰, in the non-marketised subsistence economies, before they are subjected to processes of primitive accumulation and integrated within global capitalism, such a division does not exist – the 'production' and 'reproduction' occur in the same space and time and are performed by entire families/ communities, even if a certain gendered division of tasks is observable. The strict gendered division of labour and the differentiation between production and reproduction result from the subsumption of labour under the capital. This is why, while we live under capitalism, it is helpful to operate with the concepts such as reproduction. They allow us to understand how capitalism constructs the sphere of reproduction as inferior and secondary to production. Still, let us not take the gendered division of labour in its version typical for Western societies for granted. As I propose, the configuration of production and reproduction under state socialism was radically different from the one under capitalism. At least in Poland, it was the advent of wild capitalism and processes of primitive accumulation that have established a very evident division between them.

In the Polish People's Republic, two opposing tendencies of collectivisation and privatisation of reproduction competed with each other and coincided in time. The state strategy of dealing with reproduction varied according to the political economies of specific time periods. As Małgorzata Fidelis demonstrated, the most intensified efforts to collectivise reproduction were undertaken during the Stalinist era²⁵¹. The economic crisis of the '80s, on the other hand, reinforced the strategy of the privatisation of care – as the state lacked the resources to invest in the collective care facilities. Additionally, as Fidelis argues, each attempt to deepen the gendered division of labour was inspired by the capitalist arrangements typical for the West²⁵². The housewifisation of women's labour was portrayed as an element of the modernisation of the society, a part of the "Polish way to socialism" that was meant to guarantee a level of life comparable to the one enjoyed in the western capitalist societies.

²⁴⁹ Mies' proposition is to use the term "production of life" instead: Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and....* (op.cit.), 47-48.

²⁵⁰ Mies, *Ibid.*, Federici, *Ibid.*

²⁵¹ Małgorzata Fidelis, *Kobiety, komunizm....* (op.cit).

²⁵² Małgorzata Fidelis, „Równouprawnienie czy konserwatywna nowoczesność? Kobiety pracujące” in *Kobiety w Polsce...* (op.cit), 116.

Thus, the labour of women and its exploitation was seen as a key to the economic success of the country and the satisfaction of the needs of its citizens. However, and this is a crucial difference from the ‘housewifisation’ processes of the ‘long ‘90s’, the efforts of women were both materially and discursively recognised, supported and remunerated. “*In the ‘70s – Fidelis writes – it was attempted to establish a new model of woman as a mother-worker (in such order)*”²⁵³. It came down to a discursive turn to motherhood ideologies but also to introducing social benefits for mothers and material remuneration for their work. Fidelis critically examines the social reforms of the early ‘70s, blaming them for pronatalist motivations²⁵⁴. She is probably right that appreciation of a mother’s work wasn’t the primary motivation of the lawmakers. Still, those reforms were – in praxis - a form of recognition and positive valuation of their reproductive work. In the ‘long ‘90s’, the discourses that naturalised reproductive work were common, but instead of recognition and appreciation, the compulsion and humiliation went to the fore, as I will discuss later in this chapter.

The state that has declared itself as the embodiment of the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ has ostensibly prioritised the sphere of industrial production. Still, the reproduction was not only positively valued and discursively appreciated but also, up to a certain extent, structurally conflated with the production. The large companies, in particular, were combining the productive and reproductive functions. Those workplaces were providing the workers, their families, and entire local communities not only with the essential services such as canteens and kindergartens, worker hotels and healthcare facilities. They were also the local leisure and everyday creativity centres, providing opportunities for various free time activities: amateur theatre clubs, libraries, swimming pools, touristic clubs, cinemas, etc.

The researchers surprisingly rarely brought up this aspect of the reproduction of everyday life under PPR. However, as I have observed, it is central to the people’s memories of their life under PPR. The interviewees’ testimonies from Leyk and Wawrzyniak’s “Cuts” revolve around the loss of those commons. The interviewees from Katarzyna Duda’s “Once, there was life here, now there is only poverty” recall the fundamental role their workplaces played in their everyday lives: “*The workplace has been like a travel agency*”, “*The company was like a supermarket*”²⁵⁵. Magdalena Okraska, while discussing the transformation of the region of “Zagłębie Dąbrowskie”, which has been struck by the liquidation of the coal mine

²⁵³ Fidelis, *Ibid.*, 139.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 142.

²⁵⁵ Duda, *Ibid.*, 94, 95.

industry, makes a point that “*a mine was a heart of the local community, a mine was like a mother.*”²⁵⁶ While such uncritical reproduction of a language that romanticises feminisation of reproduction by Okraska, especially in the context of the highly patriarchal culture of Polish mining communities²⁵⁷, seems problematic, the very phenomenon of the workplaces providing structural support for the reproduction of labour and everyday life, has to be positively valued. One could, of course, argue that such a centralisation of every aspect of life around the company that has represented a state was entirely subordinating the workers and stopping people from political organisation and resistance. But it did not stop the striking workers in June 1956, in Poznań, in December 1971 in Pommerania, and June 1976 in Radom, nor did it stop solidarity strikes in the entire country in 1980 and 1981²⁵⁸. The history of people’s resistance during PPR is, in fact, richer than the one of the 3rd Polish Republic.

Even though women in the households still performed the bulk of the reproductive activities, they were not isolated in the privatised caring responsibilities. The household chores, particularly cooking and cleaning, were a domain mediated by the state and commoned to a certain degree. The myriad of formal and informal organisations (e.g., rural and urban circles of housewives, Institute of the Household, advisory points „Practical Lady”²⁵⁹) provided institutional support for the women, who, although housewified to a certain extent, were not as isolated and alienated as their Western counterparts. Thus, although the Polish state socialist regime sustained the gendered division of labour, I want to argue that one cannot uncritically apply the interpretative framework of a binary of public (production) – private (reproduction) to the Polish state-socialist context. However, such a binary emerged as a consequence of accumulation by dispossession after 1989.

Reproduction was hit by the reforms from several sides. The first stroke came from the side of austerity politics adopted by the neoliberal 3rd Polish Republic, which came down to the withdrawal of a state from its welfare responsibilities, resulting in the dramatic worsening of the quality and accessibility of public services in areas such as healthcare, childcare and education²⁶⁰. Governments were introducing cuts to the social transfers such as unemployment

²⁵⁶ Okraska, *Ibid.*, 58.

²⁵⁷ For the historical analysis of the origins of that see: Fidelis, *Komunizm...* (op.cit.).

²⁵⁸ For the overview and analysis of all of those strikes and protests see: Karol Modzelewski, *Zajeżdżimy Kobylę...* (op.cit.)

²⁵⁹ Piotr Perkowski, Katarzyna Stańczak-Wiślicz, „Nowoczesna gospodyni Kobiety w gospodarstwie domowym” in *Kobiety w Polsce...* (op.cit.), 165-214.

²⁶⁰ Desperak, *Ibid.*, 173-175, 182.

money and care allowances²⁶¹. By the end of the 'long 90s', in 2003, the alimony fund was liquidated as a part of another restructuring of the state budget, the "Hausner plan"²⁶². All of those changes resulted in the externalisation of reproduction costs on the shoulders of individuals, predominantly women. The privatisation of the state companies, discussed in the former chapter, has had a similar effect. Cutting off the companies' unprofitable, 'non-productive' parts (such as a kindergarten or holiday facilities in summer resorts) was a priority for the new company managers and owners. After all, all they cared for was a maximal reduction of the labour costs that would create conditions for intensified capital accumulation. This is how the enclosures of the production entailed the enclosures of reproduction.

The labour and everyday lives of the people had to reproduce themselves despite that. From now on, however, reproductive labour has been ascribed to the women isolated in their households, clearly confined to the private sphere, materially and discursively devalued and invisibilised. Not all women were affected equally. The commodification of care compensated for the cuts to welfare. The friends of Agnieszka Graff, who could "afford a babysitter"²⁶³, were in a different position than working-class women, for whom the marketisation of care services was a source of exploitation, not new freedoms. For them, enclosures in the sphere of reproduction meant impoverishment. They lost the material remuneration for their reproductive work, access to the state's and company's welfare, and communal support structures. To compensate for these losses, they had to face a larger workload at home²⁶⁴ – which, in consequence, worsened their chances in the labour market - one could call it a vicious cycle of impoverishment. The feminisation of poverty, *nota bene*, is a trait of Polish transformation recognised by many scholars²⁶⁵. One of them is Izabela Desperak, who demonstrated that the most vulnerable to impoverishment were the daughters of the women who have experienced the social advancement in the PPR but came from the poor environments themselves²⁶⁶.

²⁶¹ On cuts to unemployment benefits: Bartłomiej Dwornik, *Historia bezrobocia: pracę traciło nawet 9 tysięcy osób dziennie*, 13 January, 210, <https://praca.money.pl/wiadomosci/historia-bezrobocia-prace-tracilo-nawet-9-tysiecy-osob-dziennie-6270437445916289a.html>; on cuts to care and family allowances see: Tomasz Inglot, *Zasiłki rodzinne jako "odrzucone" dziedzictwo komunistycznego welfare state w Polsce (1947-2003)*, *Polityka Społeczna* 9/2010, https://www.ipiss.com.pl/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2013/02/ps_9-2010_t_inglot.pdf

²⁶² Desperak, *Ibid.*, 222.

²⁶³ Pp: 37.

²⁶⁴ The study on the budgets of time from 2004 proved, that women, in average, performed twice as much work in the household than men. Also their workload at home was, in average, larger than in the paid labour: Główny Urząd Statystyczny [Main Statistic Beaureu], *raport Kobiety w Polsce*, 2007, 211
file:///C:/Users/Ola/Downloads/Kobiety_w_Polsce.pdf

²⁶⁵ See also: Sowa, *Mitologie...* (op.cit.), 31.

²⁶⁶ Desperak, *Ibid.*, 186.

Citation from Eugenia Potulicka's article "Free educational market and threats to democracy" exemplifies the extent of the loss: *"In the '90s 5t. kindergartens were closed - as well as 256t. institutions of extracullicural education, 5t. daycare facilities and village clubs, 8t people's universities (uniwersytety ludowe). 140t. points of alcohol trade were open."*²⁶⁷ The caring and educational facilities were, at the same time, the institutions overtaking reproductive responsibilities and institutions allowing for upwards social mobility. The crisis of reproduction, thus, inevitably led to growing class inequalities. The upper classes found the solution for the care deficits on the market. On the other hand, the working class struggled to reproduce its daily life, while working-class women were particularly overworked and deprived of chances to better their situation. Simultaneous closures of educational and care facilities and the openings of alcohol shops are telling. Alcoholism was a common reaction of the working-class men to the crisis of the '90s - unable to deal with their sudden impoverishment and inability to "provide for the family"; they were susceptible to the addiction. As Andrzej W Nowak pointed out, it was another burden for working-class women, forced to "resocialise" their men and reproduce their labour-power so that they could still sell it on the market²⁶⁸.

The women from the smallest townships were the most affected by the enclosures in the sphere of reproduction. Nothing replaced their workplaces, common spaces and state-funded institutions deemed 'unprofitable' and liquidated after 1989. As Desperak pointed out, the loss in infrastructure in the Polish countryside was immense: *"In the villages, local centres of activities disappeared, which was the biggest loss for the older female inhabitants. Local schools and healthcare facilities were liquidated, and state employers vanished. In this way, country inhabitants lost access to the education, culture and healthcare."*²⁶⁹

Thus, the neoliberalisation of reproduction contributed to growing class and spatial differences between women. At the same time, the feminised reproductive labour was devalued – both materially and discursively. It has been presented as non-work; even 'Wysokie Obcasy', the only 'feminist' weekly published on a large scale in Poland, used expressions such as *"sitting at home with a child"*²⁷⁰. The processes of devaluation of reproduction were, in turn, detrimental to the entire working class. Silvia Federici's comment on the transformation of reproductive labour in the course of transition from late feudalism to capitalism is perfectly applicable to the context of the Polish neoliberal turn: *"The devaluation and feminisation of*

²⁶⁷ Citation after Andrzej W Nowak, *Neoliberalna akademia...* (op.cit), 126.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 127.

²⁶⁹ Desperak, *Ibid.*, 233.

²⁷⁰ Beata Łaciak, *Wojna postu...* (op.cit.), 70.

*reproductive labour was a disaster also for male workers, for the devaluation of reproductive labour inevitably devalued its product: labour-power.”*²⁷¹

Capital Accumulation and Housewifisation of Women's Labour

As a survey cited by Beata Łaciak demonstrated, at the beginning of the '90s, 54% of Polish people believed that the best model of the distribution of work within a family is equally sharing the amount of time spent on the work in the workplace and at home. At the end of the decade, only 38% would support such a claim²⁷² – most respondents believed it was a wife who should perform more work in the household. As the very name suggests, the 'housewifisation' of women's labour aims to cast women in the roles of dependent housewives. However, at stake is not only the externalisation and privatisation of reproduction – the transformation of the world of wage labour is also a part of this process.

As Maria Mies demonstrated, working-class women, particularly those from the peripheries of global capitalism, are not precisely relegated to the private sphere in the process of housewifisation. On the contrary, they are approached as an especially desirable workforce from the point of view of the accumulation of capital. The clue of housewifisation is a construction of working women, even those employed in the industry, as non-workers. This opens up new possibilities for gender-related exploitations: it allows for the devaluing of women's labour, paying them less and stripping them of any social security and labour rights. Finally, it creates internal divisions within the working class, a process I will discuss in the following chapter.

As Agnieszka Mroziak argues, the Polish manifestation of neoliberalism has operationalised the figure of “Matka Polka” to justify the exploitation of women, particularly in the care sector:

*“A work in low-paid jobs is a work of women, from whom, in the context of the crisis, it is expected to demonstrate resourcefulness, self-independence and generosity. Neoliberal discourse has successfully integrated the ethos of Matka Polka, burdening women with the child care, elderly and sick care (feminisation of the care sector)”*²⁷³.

Marta Trawińska, on the other hand, points out the link of the housewifisation of women's labour to the discourses naturalising women's work – in a similar vein to Federici and Mies.

²⁷¹ Federici, *Ibid.*, 75.

²⁷² Łaciak, *Ibid.*, 248-249

²⁷³ Mroziak, *Ibid.*, 139.

she speaks of the “mobilisation of “natural” resources of “femininity”²⁷⁴, rightfully suggesting that we have been dealing with the situation of “care extractivism”, where care is naturalised, approached as a resource rather than labour, and exploited by the capital.²⁷⁵

On another side of the coin of the housewifisation of women’s labour lies the masculinisation of the business. Desperak’s analysis of the job offers led her to conclude that *“a clear disproportion of the number of offers addressed to women and men is an expression of the recruiters and employers’ preference for male candidates. It also reveals certain masculinised career patterns, perhaps available to women, as long as they accept its requirements, such as lack of household duties and flexibility”*²⁷⁶. As Beata Łaciak’s analysis of the job market has proven, the employers expected childlessness from women and having a family from men.²⁷⁷ At first glance, it seems to cast doubts on the compatibility of housewifisation with market requirements. After we notice that during the ‘long ‘90s’ women’s unemployment wasn’t much higher than that of men²⁷⁸ and that the gender gap in the salaries grew²⁷⁹, we will understand that such unmeetable expectations of women and the general tendency to approach them as a secondary category of workers were operationalised by the employers, not in order not to employ women, but to exploit them more. The housewifisation was in line with the capital’s interests – it profiteered from creating a ‘sub-category’ of workers, deemed non-workers.

The ‘long ‘90s’ were a time when opposing understandings of labour were substantiated. According to the first one, work is a source of personal fulfilment and a possibility to make a career. Whereas such work has been masculinised and available primarily to men, the working class, particularly women, had to work for their own and dependent people’s survival. Their need to make a living was exploited not only by the reduced and impoverished public care sector and private care industry; women continued to be employed in the factories, in so-called “unskilled positions”, under highly disadvantageous conditions. The free production zones, in

²⁷⁴ Marta Trawińska, „Urodzone” do ofiarności, 38, citation after Agnieszka Mrozik, *Ibid.*, 138.

²⁷⁵ On construction of women and their labour as “natural resource” see: Federici, *Ibid.*, 97; for the explication of the concept of “care extractivism” see: Christa Wichterich, *Care Extractivism and the Reconfiguration of Social Reproduction in Post-Fordist Economies*, ICDD Working Papers, Paper No. 25 (April 2019)

²⁷⁶ Desperak, *Ibid.*, 291.

²⁷⁷ Łaciak, *Ibid.*, 155.

²⁷⁸ Activity rate in the labour market decreased by 9% among women and by 10% among men. Desperak, *Ibid.*, 179.

²⁷⁹ I was estimated that between 1988-1996 the pay gap increased by 15%: Małgorzata Ciesielska, „Wynagrodzenia kobiet i mężczyzn” in *Monitorowanie Równości kobiet i mężczyzn w miejscu pracy* (Warszawa: Gender Index, 2007), 55.

particular, favoured precarious employment of female workers, with irregular work hours typical for the just-in-time modes of production, junk contracts etc. Such a state of things is portrayed in the documentary “Strajk matek” [“Mothers’ strike”] produced by a group of feminists who supported the struggles of poor mothers from the city of Wałbrzych²⁸⁰.

Gendered mechanisms of disciplining the workforce belong to the repertoire of housewifisation. Employers usurped themselves the right to control every aspect of female employees’ lives. As Izabela Desperak’s study demonstrated, the practices such as forcing female employees to sign the declaration that they won’t get pregnant²⁸¹ and the fines for getting pregnant²⁸² were widespread in the ‘90s. I consider such practices to be the disciplinary tools aimed at breaking the spirit and a sense of self-dignity of the workers and the instruments of extraction of even more surplus value from female employees at the same time. Gendered mobbing was prevalent and did not stop there. Citing Beata Łaciak; “*by the end of ‘90s growing number of press articles on the need to be assertive in the relationship with a boss is observable.*”²⁸³ In their workplaces, women were dealing not only with exploitation but also with sexual harassment. The size of the problem has been tremendous, but the exact numbers are unknown since, as Łaciak demonstrated²⁸⁴, most of the victims did not report the crimes out of fear. The situation was the worst in the small and medium companies. The ‘90s were a time of male employers’ absolute and terrifying power over female employees.

3. Remaking the Body and Violence Against Women

While examining the processes of transition from late feudalism to early capitalism, Silvia Federici has demonstrated that the mass-scaled campaign of gender-based violence was crucial for establishing a gendered division of labour. Maria Mies, while examining the processes of housewifisation of the ‘80s, particularly in India, has demonstrated that violence against women still functions as the most effective tool of housewifisation. At this place, I would like to venture a thesis that violence against women in Poland was crucial for the processes of accumulation by dispossession that occurred in the Polish long ‘90s. The violence and victimisation of women were, as I propose, the ultimate tool of their disempowerment, subjugation and exploitation.

²⁸⁰ Małgorzata Maciejewska, *Strajk Matek*, 2010.

²⁸¹ Desperak, *Ibid.*, 179.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 87.

²⁸³ Łaciak, *Ibid.*, 163.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 170.

Women had to face the risks of violence in nearly every sphere. Already discussed, mobbing and sexual harassment in the workplaces were accompanied by domestic violence, rising against the backdrop of poverty and the rapidly growing problem of alcoholism in transitional Poland. Katarzyna Duda, focusing on the fate of children from the communities most hardly struck by transformation, suggested a link between privatisation and austerity politics, the growing problem with the alcoholism of the men, and the violence prevalent in the most disadvantaged families²⁸⁵. Izabela Desperak, on the other hand, points out the general social insensitivity to this growing social problem and the reluctance of the state to solve it. At this place, however, I would like to focus on the violence that came from the side of the state itself, namely on the abortion ban.

Abortion in Poland, available until twelve weeks of pregnancy and in other exceptional cases, was legalised in 1956 and made fully accessible in 1959²⁸⁶. Klich-Kluczevska and Perkowski indicate that there have been between 300 and 500 thousand abortions yearly during PPR²⁸⁷. The abortion ban, introduced in 1993, was, as Kinga Jelińska, abortion activist cited by Agnieszka Mroziak, pointed out, the first case of criminalisation of the formerly legalised abortion²⁸⁸. The new law allowed for abortions only in three exceptional cases: in the case of foetal abnormalities²⁸⁹, when the pregnancy occurred as a consequence of a criminal act and when it puts the life or health of a pregnant woman in danger. Due to these three exceptions, the ban was called, ironically, ‘a compromise’, which has been ridiculed by the Polish pro-choice movement as a ‘compromise’ between conservative politicians and the catholic church. It is worth mentioning that ban was resisted – a petition against it had over a million signatures, which the politicians completely ignored²⁹⁰. Although, since 1990, the ban was lobbied by “Solidarity” union leaders²⁹¹, there was no popular support for it. However, it did result in a shift in people’s opinions on abortion. As a study cited by Beata Łaciak showed, whereas in the

²⁸⁵ Duda, *Ibid.*, 49-54.

²⁸⁶ Between 1956 and 1959 the doctor’s commission had to agree for the person’s abortion, but in 1959 procedure was simplified and the decision belonged solely to the pregnant person. Formally, there was no “abortion on demand” law, as the law granted access to abortion for “social reasons”, but, in practice, it was accessible on demand. Source: Małgorzata Fidelis, *Kobiety, komunizm...* (op.cit.), 210-222.

²⁸⁷ Barbara Klich-Kluczevska, Piotr Perkowski, „Obiekty biopolityki? Zdrowie, reprodukcja i przemoc” in *Kobiety w Polsce...* (op.cit.), 375.

²⁸⁸ Mroziak, *Ibid.*, 157.

²⁸⁹ This particular premise was legal abortion was deemed unconstitutional on the 22nd of October 2020, introducing de facto total ban, which resulted in the mass scaled social protests. See: Conclusions.

²⁹⁰ Desperak, *Ibid.*, 168.

²⁹¹ I’m examining this more closely in the next chapter: 99-100.

‘91’ 22% of people supported total decriminalisation of abortion (meaning abortion availability without any restrictions – such a law exists only in Canada), in 2005, it was only 13%²⁹².

Some feminists, such as Agnieszka Graff, approached the ban as an element of Polish backlash and were not afraid to see it as a declaration of war against women by the new state²⁹³. The majority, however, was troubled by the fact that the ban was introduced in the context of new liberal democracy, which was believed to guarantee personal freedoms automatically. Bożena Umińska, cited by Graff, recalls even a peculiar state of denial: “*many believed that the project of a ban of abortion was a provocation of the communists, who wanted to discredit the Church and “Solidarity*”²⁹⁴”. Feminists, as discussed before, were generally enthusiastic about transformational changes. Hence, they saw the new policy as a betrayal from the side of the Polish political establishment. Still, it seems that they did not draw far enough consequences from such a betrayal and did not link it to the processes of neoliberalisation of Poland. At the same time, they also did not know how to approach the emancipatory legacy of PPR. As Agnieszka Mrozik summarised it, “*pro-choice activists, fighting for the right to safe and legal abortion, ignored in their argumentation a fact, that such a law did exist in PPR*”²⁹⁵”.

Polish abortion ban wasn’t designed as a demography boosting policy. The fertility rate rapidly decreased during the transformation. If decreasing availability of abortion affected it, then probably more by creating an atmosphere of fear around pregnancy and by repressing a woman’s sexuality than by stopping women from having abortions. The main reasoning behind supporting the ban by Polish transitional elites was, as I believe, to disempower women, torture them, and even kill them. The ban of 1993 had its victims, and while most of them will probably remain nameless, we know that it resulted in the death of Agata Lemczak. She passed in 2005 due to the doctors’ decision to not operate on her, as it would put the foetus in danger²⁹⁶. I propose to understand the women’s suffering, or being vulnerable to the suffering, and the general devaluation of women’s life as an element of ‘remaking the body’ to adjust it to the requirements of capital accumulation. Hence, I want to argue that the Polish abortion ban had

²⁹² Łaciak, Ibid., 347.

²⁹³ Graff, Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Citation after Graff, Ibid., 119.

²⁹⁵ Mrozik, Ibid., 157.

²⁹⁶ On death of Agata Lemczak: Federacja na rzecz Kobiet i Planowania Rodziny, „Błąd w sztuce lekarskiej? Agata” in *Piekło kobiet trwa...* (Warszawa, 2017), 41, https://federa.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Pieklo_kobiet_2007.pdf; There were also deaths after Tribunal’s decision: On death of Izabella and social protests afterwards: Katarzyna Kojzar, *Ku pamięci kobiety, która umarła tylko dlatego, że była w ciąży. W Polsce o godz. 19 zapłoną znicze*, 1 November 2021, oko.press, <https://oko.press/ku-pamieci-kobiety-ktora-umarla-tylko-dlatego-ze-byla-w-ciazy/>.

had a similar function to the late medieval torturing of women. Polish women were not only dispossessed from the control over their reproduction, but they were also, in a way, dispossessed from their bodies, and their bodies were made disposable. Such ‘disposable’ bodies are more accessible to discipline and control, and have less power to resist.

Whether the exact motivation of the lawmakers was pure sadism, following orders of the church or some plan to distance themselves from the legacy of PPR does not matter. What matters to me is the policy’s punitive function, the fact that its implementation was a form of violence against women, and its role in the context of transformation. As Silvia Federici framed it, writing about the effects of repressive reproductive policies introduced in the course of the transition to capitalism, “*by denying women control over their bodies, the state deprived them of the most fundamental condition for physical and psychological integrity and degraded maternity to the status of forced labour.*”²⁹⁷

The restrictive reproductive policies inevitably result in the devaluation of women’s reproductive labour. The naturalisation and desubjectification of motherhood are inherent to the abortion ban. To deny a woman the right to an autonomous decision about whether she wants to become a mother is to approach her maternity as a purely biological fact, a natural process that lies beyond her control. As Agnieszka Mrozik has framed it, “*A real woman, situated at the centre of the politics of the new rulers (..) functions thus not as a human (...) but as a “belly in the service of the nation”, “natural good” of the nation.*”²⁹⁸ Federici spoke of “commoning” of working-class women’s bodies, a process in which they are constructed as the natural resources at the disposition of the entire society, “*for once women’s activities were defined as non-work, women’s labour began to appear as a natural resource, available to all, no less than the air we breathe or the water we drink*”²⁹⁹. In the parliamentary debate preceding the voting on the abortion ban in 1993, the voices grounded in a similar understanding of women’s work and bodies were raised. Agnieszka Graff recalls that one of the MPs reacted to the slogan of the women protesting in front of the parliament, “my belly belongs to me”, by responding, “*Let’s collectivise those bellies!*”³⁰⁰.

Graff explains the anti-choice mobilisation of the Polish politicians as a concentration on the vicarious subject in the context of the general social and economic crisis:

²⁹⁷ Federici, Ibid., 92.

²⁹⁸ Mrozik, Ibid., 121.

²⁹⁹ Federici, Ibid., 97.

³⁰⁰ Graff, Ibid., 29.

„Nobody knew, what to do with the galloping inflation, nor how to reform the agriculture. But, in the meantime, women's fertility could have been “collectivised”. Power has to be exercised over somebody, and the rulers have to subordinate someone to rule over them. In democracy after the communism, this someone turned out to be women...”³⁰¹

In my opinion, the “collectivisation” of women’s bodies has to be seen in the context of the mass-scaled enclosures of the ‘90s. While everything else has been privatised, the sense of control over somebody else’s body and life was meant to illusively compensate for the loss of control over one own’s life and for the loss of the community. The new national community was re-established as oppressive and founded on the subordination of women. While the “family silver” of the country’s industry was sold out, the female bodies were reconstructed as a natural resource and a common good to symbolise the critical assets that the nation was still disposing and commanding. One could say that the lost commons, or rather their spectres, materialised in the oppressive laws, were, in a way, haunting the real existing women. There is a great irony that anti-choice social mobilisations proclaim themselves to be pro-‘life’, whereas, in neoliberal society, we deal with the fundamental devaluation of life. These mobilisations could be seen as phantom pains of the neoliberalised society.

Whereas female bodies were subjected to “collectivisation”, this was accompanied by the privatisation of the responsibility for the reproduction. Women were burdened with the “management” of their sexuality, which was even more difficult in the context of decreasing the availability of contraception³⁰². Thus, their sexuality was reconstructed as unfree and burdened with the risks of consequences. Finally, the policy of abortion ban resulted in the externalisation of the costs of reproductive medical services.

Ewa Majewska, in her article “*Political economy of the ban*”³⁰³ from 2016, applied a new³⁰⁴ interpretative framework to the criminalisation of abortion. For Majewska, it is primarily an instrument of deepening the class divisions among women. Whereas for middle and upper-class women, organisation of the procedures abroad or in the ‘abortion underground’ was

³⁰¹ Ibid., 29.

³⁰² According to raport „Contraception Atlas”, access to contraception in Poland is the worst in Europe: Agata Szczerbiak, Polska z najgorszym dostępem do antykoncepcji w Europie, 15 February 2019, Polityka, <https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/spoleczenstwo/1782538,1,polska-z-najgorszym-dostepem-do-antykoncepcji-w-europie.read>

³⁰³ Ewa Majewska, *Ekonomia polityczna zakazu. 15 lat ustawy antyaborcyjnej w Polsce*, in eadem, *Tramwaj wannyy uznaniem. Feminizm i solidarność po neoliberalizmie* (Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy Książka i Prasa, 2017), 255-264.

³⁰⁴ Although Agnieszka Graff and Kinga Dunin, too, suggested that there is a class dimension to the ban: Graff, *Ibid.*, 109.

economically accessible, working-class women were put in a drastically different situation. They were either ending up with debts, risking having an abortion in dubious, unsafe circumstances, or giving birth to unwanted children, which further deteriorated their material position. Many had to stay with their abusive partners as they were economically dependent on them. What is missing in Majewska's article is noticing that the ban is related to the neoliberal turn also on other levels: as it is a tool of devaluation of women's labour and the remaking of the female body, so that it is more vulnerable to exploitation. However, Majewska has rightfully pointed out that the ban leads to increased commodification of abortion. This intuition is expressed in the famous slogan "aborcja prawem, nie towarem" [Abortion rights, not commodification!] shouted at many feminist demonstrations of the last decade³⁰⁵.

4. Neoliberalism and Neoconservatism – a Happy Marriage?

In a famous article from 1979, US-American feminist economist Heidi Hartman has compared the relationships of feminist and Marxist theory to a relationship of a wife and a husband – formally equal, but in reality, as Hartman argued, feminist struggles have been subsumed under the broader umbrella of Marxist theory³⁰⁶. Setting aside the discussion of how this relationship looks like over 40 years later, I want to use this parallel to discuss the relationship between neoconservatism and neoliberalism. In this marriage, as I see it, neoconservatism is a 'trad wife', serving her family and husband. However, she is happy to do so because, as she believes, this is her true vocation. 'Tradwife' is a shortcut for 'traditional housewife' and a name of a lifestyle movement of (predominantly white supremacist) women, who praise their subordination to their husbands, the role of a servant, and aesthetics of the hyper-femininity typical for the decade of the '50s. This movement, not by accident, originated in the '80s in the US as a part of a broader turn to neoconservatism that accompanied the neoliberal turn³⁰⁷.

Neoconservatism promotes an idea of ultra-subordination of women and is related to Christian fundamentalism. As Agnieszka Kościńska argues, discussing its US-American and Polish manifestations³⁰⁸, what is specific about it and indicated by the prefix "neo" is its

³⁰⁵ I have been shouting it too.

³⁰⁶ Heidi I. Hartmann, "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union." *Capital & Class* 3, no. 2 (July 1979): 1–33.

³⁰⁷ Faludi exposes, how this trend was, in fact, invented by the marketing specialists: Susan Faludi, *Ibid.*, 102–108.

³⁰⁸ Agnieszka Kościńska, *Zobaczyć Łosia. Historia polskiej edukacji seksualnej* (Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2017), 303–323.

language, adjusted to the context of contemporary mass media and popular culture. Neo-conservatists promote the religiously-motivated ideals, but instead of referring, e.g. to the bible, they often resort to pseudo-scientific discourse to “objectify” their claims. This is especially evident in the case of the anti-choice discourse, which became crucial for the neo-conservative political agenda. As Kościańska demonstrates, Polish Catholic fundamentalists have adopted the discursive strategies designed by their Evangelical counterparts in the US and made the medicalisation of pregnancy and abortion the leitmotiv of their propaganda. Hence, instead of speaking of ‘sanctity of life’, they preferred to discuss the details of the physiology of the foetus. Such a discourse is an extreme example of biologisation and the naturalisation of pregnancy. As discussed above, it entails devaluation (and even a specific demystification, as it no longer is perceived as a spiritual occurrence) of labour of bearing the pregnancy and giving birth to a child.

The housewifisation of women and contributions to the devaluation of women’s labour is an excellent service of the neoconservatism to neoliberalism. As we already know, the neoliberal accumulation by dispossession relies on the dispossession of women of communal and state-funded structures of support and their intensified exploitation. However, the service of neoconservatism to neoliberalism does not stop there. ‘Traditional housewife’ not only reproduces the labour-power of her husband but also takes care of his emotional well-being and reproduction of the communal relationships. Because neoliberalism tends to dispossess people from the commons, they lose the common spaces where they can meet. Thus, families and churches become the only available spaces of non-marketised socialisation for many.

Gabriele Michalitsch puts forward a thesis that privatisation inevitably results in the traditionalisation of social relationships and strengthening of the role of the family:

“A family should compensate for the undermining of solidarity and social cohesion, cover the needs of intimacy, security and belonging, and, as an allegedly protected interior, constitute an enhanced counter-balance to the outer world, perceived as hostile, full of competition and conflicts.”³⁰⁹

The turn to prioritise family over any other form of social relationship is a result of the material situation, in which social relationships created by the neoliberal turn are truly unbearable, and people are dispossessed of resources (such as spaces or time) to develop better ones. Due to the

³⁰⁹ Gabriele Michalitsch, “Privatisiert – Geschlechterimplikationen neoliberaler Transformation” in *Genus oeconomicum : Ökonomie, Macht, Geschlechterverhältnisse*, ed. Meike Lemke (Konstanz : UVK Verl.-Ges., 2006), 127.

growing importance of the family, where relationships are more humane and people, at least most of them, still genuinely care about each other (while women tend to care more), the neoliberal system can still reproduce itself. Thus, retraditionalisation that is produced by neoliberalisation sustains neoliberalism. Without the “counterbalance”, it would become too unliveable. What is sacrificed in the process is the well-being of women – as they are burdened with an immense workload at home and faced with increasing risks of domestic violence.

Beata Łaciak, in her book about changing customs during the transformation, has identified the discursive trend of the growing importance of the family – the materials published in the press analysed by Łaciak give a picture of the family as a foundation of an individual’s life satisfaction³¹⁰. The surveys conducted in the ‘90s among the youth prove that such a discursive turn had found reflection in the people’s values. In 1999 *“More than a half of study participants (57%) claimed that family life is one of their most important goals in life. Since 1994 we have observed a stable increase in the percentage of young people expressing such a claim”*³¹¹.

In Poland, this “turn to the family” is exemplified by the emergence of a new political party, which had origins in the crypto-fascist political organisations³¹². “League of Polish families” came into being in 2001. It became a part of the governing coalition with “Self-defence” and “Law and Justice”, which will win hegemony on the Polish political scene 10 years later, during the 2005-2007 parliamentary cadence. “League of Polish families” leader became a minister of education and made the “protection of children” (foetuses included!) against progressives such as feminists and LGBTQ+ activists allegedly interested in the ‘destruction of Polish families’ primary focus of his political agenda. This government was famous for its sexism, queerphobia, and aggressive chauvinist nationalism. What is less remembered – or seen as unrelated - is that its finance minister Zyta Gilowska took the strictest neoliberal course in her reforms (such as tax law reform) since Leszek Balcerowicz left office³¹³.

During Polish transformation, the catholic church was another (alleged) “refugium” for non-profit oriented social relationships. Izabela Desperak explains the phenomenon of the power of the Polish catholic church by referring to Jose Casanova’s theory on the ‘de-

³¹⁰ Łaciak, Ibid., 104 – 105.

³¹¹ Ibid., 137.

³¹² For critique see: Graff., Ibid., 255-284.

³¹³ See: Woś, Ibid., 33-34.

privatisation' of the religion³¹⁴: while every other sphere of life is subjected to privatisation, religion becomes de-privatised, it enters the public sphere. Boris Buden, while discussing a more general turn of post-socialist societies to religion, also places it in the context of the neoliberal assault on the society as such: "*The politicisation of the religion does, thus, not belong to the phenomena that lead to the decay of the society, but constitutes a product of this decay. (...) Religion does not play any specific role in society. It plays a role of the society itself.*"³¹⁵ Sławomir Czapnik, in his article on its role in the Polish transformation, argues that the spaces created by the catholic church, although highly hierarchic and conservative, should be approached as a 'last resort' of the commons. For some, especially older people and people from rural communities, they are the only spaces where they can socialise in a larger group and realise their need for communality.³¹⁶

Czapnik argues that the church was the most influential actor in the Polish transformation - apart from the business and the state. It has not only won enormous political power, but it was also the biggest beneficiary of the accumulation by dispossession in terms of gained wealth. In 1989, Mazowiecki's government established a "Property Commission", whose role was to mediate in the process of reprivatisation of the state assets by the church – presented as a 'compensation' for the losses it experienced due to the seizure of its assets by the former regime³¹⁷. What the catholic church gained thanks to the commission's jurisdiction far exceeded what it ever lost in the XXth century. The commission granted the church 144 mln of PLN and 500 real estates (worth 5 mld PLN)³¹⁸. The Catholic church was granted 76 thousand hectares of land by the commission and a further 4 thousand by Polish Forestry³¹⁹, which made it the biggest landowner in Poland. Material gains of the church hierarchs did not stop there – since 1989, the state has continuously funded the church's various investments. In Poland, the concept of neoliberalisation as re-feudalisation takes on a very concrete meaning. Neoliberalism understood as a process of redistribution of wealth from the working class to the upper classes, has benefited the church hierarchs and the church as an institution like no other body.

³¹⁴ Desperak, Ibid., 354.

³¹⁵ Buden, Ibid., 127.

³¹⁶ Sławomir Czapnik, „Pan z wójtem i plebanem. Krótka rozprawa o klasowym wymiarze sojuszu między biznesem, państwem i Kościołem katolickim w Polsce po 1989 roku” in Podziały klasowe... (op.cit.), 73.

³¹⁷ Officially other churches were also meant to be compensated, but, in practice, they have received only marginal gains, and their inclusion in the process served rather as a legitimising factor. Ibid.

³¹⁸ „Komisja majątkowa”, Wikipedia, https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Komisja_maj%C4%85tkowa

³¹⁹ Findings of Office of Agricultural Estates [Agencja Nieruchomości Rolnych], source: Ibid.

Catholic church appeared to hold absolute power in the ‘long ‘90s’; it was dictating the laws to right-wing governments and keeping in check the leftist-centre ones. When Leszek Miller’s government (2001-2004) attempted to liberalise anti-abortion law, which coincided with the EU-accession referendum campaign, the church blackmailed the government by the possible withdrawal of its support for accession had the new abortion policy been further proceeded in the parliament. The plans to liberalise abortion law were dropped, and women’s interests were sacrificed once again, this time for the sake of Europeanisation³²⁰.

The church did not only materially and politically profiteer from the neoliberalisation – but it also gave its blessing to the free-market reform. Quite literally, as the bishops were blessing the openings of McDonald’s, mushrooming in the country³²¹. While not daring to criticise the privatisation and marketisation as such (after all, who dares to bite the hand that feeds?), catholic priests, alongside other neo-conservatists, willingly criticised its consequences, such as social anomy, individualisation, the commodification of social relationships and commercialisation of every sphere of life. However, they framed these phenomena as the “fall of morality” and approached them as the consequences of the emancipation of women and minorities. I consider it a perfect trick of neoliberalism and neoconservatism’s “happy” marriage. While the victims of neoliberalisation are blamed, its beneficiaries are not only freed from taking any responsibility, but they are also shamelessly pointing the victims – as alleged perpetrators - with their fingers.

³²⁰ It was pointed out in a “Letter of one Hundred Women” in which artists, scholars, politicians and activists criticised the conditions of Poland’s entry to EU. Porozumienie Kobiet 8 Marca, Fundacja OŚKA, List stu kobiet, 4 February 2002; <https://prod-cdn.atria.nl/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/01/20170606/LIST-STU-KOBIET.pdf>

³²¹ Desperak, *Ibid.*, 38.

5th Chapter: Patriarchy Strikes Back. On Backlash and Disintegration of the Working Class

“Another world was possible (...) urging us to question why it was not realised.”

Silvia Federici³²²

1. The explanations of the origins of Backlash

That Polish ‘long ‘90s’ were the times of the conservative backlash is undeniable – feminists generally agree on that, although the definitions of backlash, interpretations of its origins, and the very designation of the actual moment when it began are contested. The authors of the already mentioned volume “Women in Poland:1945-1989...”, for instance, situate the emergence of the backlash in the ‘80s³²³ – they link it to the economic crisis of that decade and the conservative turn within the opposition movement that originated both from the increasingly powerful position of the Catholic church and the ideologies of motherhood, promoted by the state already in the ‘70s. Piotr Perkowski characterises that decade in the following way:

„In the ‘80s, the party forfeited the moral issues, reproduction and equality politics to the Church. Within the ranks of the party members, too, liberal postulates have lost importance. The “conceived life” discourse came forth, firmly supported by the Church, and it preceded the victorious battle to limit abortion rights in democratic Poland.”³²⁴

Agnieszka Graff, who initiated the first public debate on the Polish backlash, has argued, in a similar vein, that the general conservative turn after 89’ resulted from the conservative tendencies within “Solidarity”. In her preface to the Polish edition of Susan Faludi’s ‘Backlash’, she has defined the Polish specification of a backlash, as a “counteraction, without action.”³²⁵. By framing it this way, Graff suggested – just as every other feminist in the ‘90s – that there had been no feminism in Poland before 89’. Hence, according to Graff, a patriarchal reaction in the country was incomparable to a patriarchal revanchist response of the US ‘80s to the empowerment women experienced there in the ‘70s. She claims that the situation is unparallel

³²² Federici, Ibid., 22.

³²³ Fidelis, Gender, historia... (op.cit.), 38.

³²⁴ Perkowski, Droga do.. (op.cit.), 85.

³²⁵ Agnieszka Graff, Backlash and Wisła – reakcja przed akcją? Pre-face to Polish edition of Susan Faludi, trans. Anna Dzierzgowska, Reakcja. Niewypowiedziana wojna przeciw kobietom (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Czarna Owca, 2013), 8-20.

because in Poland, unlike in the US, it wasn't the achievements of the feminist movement but of a "totalitarian"³²⁶ state that was rejected and backlashed in the '90s. Furthermore, Graff claims that the progressive accomplishments of that regime were illusionary, as they were limited to instrumentalising gender-equality discourse and promoting emancipatory values in the state propaganda.

An opposite approach to the backlash has been proposed by Katarzyna Szumlewicz, who, in her article 'Backlash in Polish', made an argument that although backlash in Poland wasn't a counteraction to the successes of the feminist movement, it was a response to the, broadly understood, social equality progress in Polish People's Republic³²⁷. Szumlewicz claims that the emergence of backlash in Poland might have resulted from globalisation processes and the establishment of new, free from censorship media. Globalisation, or rather, a transnationalisation, is an essential explanatory trope, as many elements of neoconservative ideology have been indeed translocated to Poland from the US. Still, it is necessary to notice that backlash wasn't simply 'imported' as a culturalist trend brought by the media to the distinct Polish context. The structural reasons and similarities between the situation in Poland in the '90s and the US in the '80s must be examined.

Graff later contradicts her claim on 'counteraction without action' when she admits that reducing Polish backlash to the discursive rejection of the emancipatory rhetorics typical of the PPR was wrong:

*"Today, I would go a step further – I wouldn't limit my interpretation to the claim that reaction constituted a response to the way Polish People's Republic was conceived, but I would point out the very real laws and amenities that Polish women enjoyed in the '70s and '80s, and which were taken away from us after the breakthrough of 1989. It applies to abortion rights, labour security, and the universal availability of nurseries and kindergartens. An anti-feminist and anti-women trait of transformation was part of the neoliberal changes in Poland during the era of Balcerowicz: all elements of welfare, caring state were discarded at once; hence, women's rights were disposed of too."*³²⁸

In the evolution of Graff's approach to the backlash, two understandings of backlash and its relation to neoliberal turn substantiate. The first one, dominant in the feminist theory, assumes backlash is a revanchist response to the progress achieved by women in terms of their rights

³²⁶ See footnote: on totalitarian approach: pp: 37.

³²⁷ Katarzyna Szumlewicz, Backlash po Polsku, citation after Desperak, Ibid., 100.

³²⁸ Graff, Backlash nad... (op.cit.), 12.

and social position. This understanding tends to analytically prioritise the sphere of discourse and laws, often neglecting the economy. The second one assumes the sameness of, or at least interdependence between conservative and neoliberal turn, recognising the importance of material, social relationships for the actual position of women. In my opinion, these approaches do not necessarily exclude each other, and I would like to combine them by considering the role neoliberal economy and ideology play in the backlash,

The conceptualisation of backlash as revenge belongs to the original definition of backlash, authored by Susan Faludi³²⁹. In 1991 Faludi, a feminist journalist, wrote a monumental and ground-breaking book, “Backlash: Undeclared War Against American Women³³⁰”, where she comprehensively analysed a patriarchal turn that defined the decade of the ‘80s. Faludi covered a broad spectrum of social, cultural, political and legal problems affecting the lives of American women detrimentally – ranging from changes in the fashion and gendered representations in the media and popular culture, through restructuring of the political institutions, policies and decreasing political power of women, to diminishing reproductive rights, violence against women and transformation of women’s labour. Faludi’s analysis is nuanced and sensitive to the problems of the most disadvantaged women – she keeps repeating that backlash has most severely struck black, working-class, single-parenting and poor women³³¹. Still, despite being aware of that, on the level of building political syntheses, she prioritises middle-class women’s experiences. In the preface to the edition of her book from 2006, she wrote:

*“Women's disillusionment comes from the half-gleaned truth that, while we have achieved economic gains, we have yet to find a way to turn those gains toward the larger and more meaningful goals of social change, responsible citizenship, the advancement of human creativity, the building of a mature and vital public world. We live within the confines of a social structure and according to cultural conventions that remain substantially intact from before the revolution.”*³³²

Firstly, it is unclear in whose name Faludi is speaking, when she says, “we have achieved economic gains”. After more than two decades of neoliberal hegemony, austerity politics, and, on the global scale, neo-colonisation³³³, the economic progress of “women”, in general,

³²⁹ Faludi, *Ibid.*, 58. (Polish edition)

³³⁰ *Ibid.*

³³¹ E.g. *Ibid.*, 598 (Polish edition)

³³² Faludi, *Backlash: Undeclared...* (op.cit.), XVI. (Original edition)

³³³ Joan C. Tronto, *Privatizing Neo-Colonialism: Migrant Domestic Care Workers, Partial Citizenship, and Responsibility: Global Complexities in Europeanization, Care and Gender: Global Complexities*, ed. H. M. Dahl; M. Keränen; A. Kovalainen. (Basingstoke, England : Palgrave Macmillan Limited, 2011).

seems doubtful³³⁴. Women as a group – with some exceptions – have lost more in the sphere of the economy³³⁵ than, for instance, in the realm of political representation³³⁶. Furthermore, while taking for granted the advancement of women's economic situation, she does not consider how the issues of democracy, citizenship and human rights are inseparable from class politics. Faludi's evoked statement is a typical exemplification of the tendency recognised and firmly criticised by Maria Mies to approach the patriarchy as belonging to the superstructure.

“The emphasis on women's education and culture in the liberal camp is based on the theory of society according to which all structural problems of inequality and exploitation are basically solved, and that women's oppression is a kind of “cultural lag” and ideological anachronism, which can be abolished by education and affirmative action and reform.”³³⁷

This tendency, manifesting itself, as Mies demonstrated, in the theoretical assumptions of both mainstream feminism and marxism³³⁸, “maintains a structural division between the economic base and ‘relative autonomy’ (Althusser) of the ideology³³⁹” and ascribes gender to the latter one. Mainstream feminists, as Mies puts it, have contributed to this understanding by focusing on the issues of socialisation, social roles, ideology and discourse and Marxists, on the other hand, by neglecting the role of gender in the processes of (re)production³⁴⁰.

1.1. Backlash as a Revenge

Is backlash thus a culturalist concept? It is often used this way, but it does not have to be – in particular, the understanding of backlash as revenge does not necessarily favour the culturalist approach. Backlash is often discussed as a reaction to men losing their sense of power that stems from living in a patriarchal culture. Faludi frames it this way:

³³⁴ See polemics between Shreya Atrey and Martha Nussbaum on the “progress achieved by women” and how intersectional approach and focus on most disadvantaged groups shifts the perspective and casts in doubt the triumphalist narratives of mainstream feminism: Shreya Atrey, “Women's Human Rights: From Progress to Transformation, An Intersectional Response to Martha Nussbaum”, *Human Rights Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (2018): 859-904.

³³⁵ See e.g. the collection of data on growing economic inequalities between women and men since '90s: Hélène Périvier, Réjane Sénac, *The New Spirit of Neoliberalism: Equality and Economic Prosperity*, 18 May 2020, <https://www.sciencespo.fr/research/cogito/home/the-new-spirit-of-neoliberalism-equality-and-economic-prosperity/?lang=en>

³³⁶ Strong female figures among the republicans, evoked by Faludi in her book, not to mention Margaret Thatcher, could serve as an example of the possibility to achieve a career by individual women at cost of the majority of women.

³³⁷ Mies, *Ibid.*, 20.

³³⁸ At least in the '80s, when she wrote “Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale”.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

*“anti-feminist backlash has been set off not by women's achievement of full equality but by the increased possibility that they might win it. It is a preemptive strike that stops women long before they reach the finish line. “A backlash may be an indication that women really have had an effect,” feminist psychologist Dr. Jean Baker Miller has written, “but backlashes occur when advances have been small, before changes are sufficient to help many people”. (...) It is almost as if the leaders of backlashes use **the fear of change** as a threat before the major change has occurred.”³⁴¹”*

In such a conceptualisation, the backlash is seen as a defence – in the form of a “*preemptive strike*” – of the privileges of the dominating social groups, who, confronted with the perspective of emancipation of the subordinated groups, fear that their power might decrease. It is worth noting that each reactionary turn throughout history has been motivated by similar reasons – and, in modern history, most of such reactions had something to do with the defence of capitalism. Such a vision of backlash is in accord with an understanding of neoliberalism proposed by David Harvey, according to whom it is “*a political project to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites*”³⁴². Harvey wrote on the sense of anxiety and danger widespread among Anglo-Saxon capitalist elites of the ‘70s - in the face of their decreasing economic power and rising political power of the socialists and the left³⁴³. Consequently, he saw a causative relationship between a conviction of the elites that their privileges were under threat and their motivation to support the neoliberal turn³⁴⁴.

Furthermore, the way Faludi understands backlash is, quite surprisingly, compatible with the understanding of the history typical for a theory of operaismo, which accentuates the agency of the subordinated groups – in the case of operaist thinkers, usually the working class – and proposes to reconsider the historical processes to see their generative role in shaping the social reality. The already discussed book of Silvia Federici, ‘Caliban and the Witch,’ originates from this theoretical tradition – together with other autonomist feminists, Federici has redefined the understanding of the working class and proposed to see the power of working-class women as a force actively shaping the history. Federici’s approach is as far as possible from the naïve affirmation of the “power of women”. The violence against women, as she proves, has had a

³⁴¹ Faludi, *Ibid.*, 11 (Original edition).

³⁴² Harvey, A Bried... (op.cit), 19.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, 15.

³⁴⁴ For analysis of the revanchist character of neoliberalism, particularly its spatial reorganisation of the power-relationships, see Neil Smith discussing gentrification as a global revanchist urbanist strategy: Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier. Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (London: Routledge, 1996).

formative effect on modern society. Still, as I suggested in the introduction regarding the suppression of the power of Polish working-class women in the long '90s, the reactions, as violent and terrifying as they are, are also a confirmation of the power of those the reaction aims to suppress. In the case of the subject of Federici's analysis, it was the power of the late-medieval revolting peasants' communities, particularly women. The witch-hunting and other forms of suppression of women during the transition to capitalism might, thus, be seen as the first manifestation of modern backlash. As Faludi wrote, backlashes have always appeared, when „ *women were believed to be on the verge of breakthrough*³⁴⁵“. The neoliberal turn and anti-women campaign of the '80s in the US were the response to the rising power of the social movements of the '70s. On the other hand, as I propose, agreeing with Katarzyna Szumlewiecz, Polish 'long '90s' were a revanchist response to the significant degree of emancipation that working-class people and women experienced during the times of the Polish People's Republic.

Recognition of the actors and beneficiaries of the anti-women and anti-feminist reactions is, at least at first glance, not as self-evident as in the case of the reactions directed primarily against the working class. As Susan Faludi wrote, "*The backlash is not a conspiracy, with a council dispatching agents from some central control room, nor are the people who serve its ends often aware of their role; some even consider themselves feminists. For the most part, its workings are encoded and internalised, diffuse and chameleonic.*"³⁴⁶ Yet, a backlash is not only an emotional response motivated by the feelings experienced by some that their privileged status is under threat, but it also secures the interests of the people in power. Finally, it is initiated and sometimes even designed in specific spaces and by particular groups of people – as dispersed and uncoordinated as their actions might be. Men are often defined as the actual actors of the backlash; they, as an undifferentiated social group, are usually accused of standing behind it and profiteering from it – the subtitle of the German edition of Faludi's book, "Men strike back"³⁴⁷ is emblematic here. Whereas undoubtedly many men, perhaps even the majority, end up joining the anti-feminist crusades in the times of the backlash, it is rather a specific section of this social group that truly benefits from the processes of backlash – and the question of interests is crucial if we want to point out those standing behind it.

³⁴⁵ Faludi, *Ibid.*, 11 (Original edition).

³⁴⁶ Faludi, *Ibid.*, 13.

³⁴⁷ Susan Faludi, trans. Sabine Hübner, *Backlash: Die Männer schlagen zurück* (Reineck: Rowohlt, 1995)

1.2. Backlash and Capital Accumulation

I consider the concept of backlash as introduced by Faludi to be theoretically fruitful – mainly because it highlights the role of emotions in social change, subjectification and political struggles, emphasising the fears of losing one’s privilege. However, it is missing one crucial aspect. It does not consider the relationship between the social conservative reaction and capital accumulation. Revanchist sentiments, not by accident, intensify when the capital seeks to establish new ways of accumulation in times of crisis. The backlash ignited by the suppression of the Paris commune of 1971 is a prominent example of this phenomenon. The brutal wave of repressions following the defeat of the communards was accompanied by the dehumanising narratives, tellingly revolving around the figure of “Petroleuse” – a woman setting Paris on fire³⁴⁸. Anti-women narratives, aiming to spark hatred and disgust against women, were not only a revanchist response to the sudden emancipation they had experienced during the 71 days of the Commune. They were also an instrumentalisation of patriarchal tropes and violence to “re-establish conditions of capital accumulation³⁴⁹” by the French elites³⁵⁰ - both by suppressing the resurgent women who played a vital role in the popular uprising and by dividing the lower classes.

What happened in the ‘80s in the US and in the ‘90s in Poland was similar in nature. American women of the ‘80s felt the victims of the crisis of capital accumulation of the ‘70s³⁵¹. The Reaganomics of the ‘80s consisted of many revanchist policies targeting the working class, particularly women³⁵². On the level of discourse, it was legitimised by the alliance with Christian fundamentalists, mostly evangelists. Anti-social rhetorics blaming the poor for worsening their situation was accompanied by a fierce attack on the minorities and women, ascribing them again to the domestic sphere and demonising any manifestations of their emancipation. During the presidency of Reagan, not only were the institutions promoting advancements in women’s rights liquidated or denied funding³⁵³, but the government, alongside the corporate and financial elites, actively supported conservative think tanks, promoting anti-

³⁴⁸ See: Maria Janon, *Bogini Wolności (Dlaczego rewolucja jest kobietą?)* in eadem, *Kobiety i duch inności* (Warszawa: Sic!, 2006), 34-36.

³⁴⁹ Harvey, *A Brief...* (op.cit.), 19.

³⁵⁰ On the analysis of political economy of popular revolts in XIX-century Paris see: David Harvey, *Paris, Capital of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2004).

³⁵¹ David Harvey, *A Brief...* (op.cit.).

³⁵² On gender specific welfare cuts see: Faludi, *Ibid.*, 8-9.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*,

choice postulates and neo-conservative values³⁵⁴. At this point, it becomes clear who is the actual actor of the backlash. That the working-class men allocate their frustrations resulting from their sudden impoverishment and lost power in the workplaces in the anti-women crusades is a machiavellian play of neoliberalism married to neoconservatism. American reaction, with backlash being its inseparable part, was a manifestation of the frustration of the economic elites described by Harvey and an attempt to revenge on the rising power of the people. At the same time, however, it was also a strategic move to govern the society effectively - by ruling and dividing – to ensure that the interests of the economic elites would now be secure. Backlash, in other words, was an indispensable instrument of class war declared by the corporate elites on American society.

Apart from the possible operationalisations of backlash as a tool deepening the social divisions and, thus, precluding solidary resistance to neoliberalism, the backlash is inherently inscribed in the neoliberal economy. Austerity politics and welfare cuts hit the women most badly – the neoliberal economy dispossesses them of the commons and the state-funded structures of support, which were available to many (although not to all) in the times of ‘embedded liberalism’ after 1945³⁵⁵. At first glance, this seems to be the most apparent correlation between backlash and neoliberalism: the cuts in state expenditures put the highest pressure on the sphere of reproduction. Women, still primarily responsible for this sphere, are paying the highest price – with working-class women, especially women of colour, poor women, and single-parenting women being disproportionately affected. However, this correlation has been largely missed out on by the feminist theory. Such ignorance of mainstream feminists towards the gendered effects of the neoliberal reforms has been powerfully criticised by Nancy Fraser, who went as far as to call feminism “the handmaiden of neoliberalism³⁵⁶”. Fraser has accused the feminists of pulling the baby out with the water in their critique of the paternalist nature of the welfare state. The feminists of the ‘70s, according to her, were so focused on the criticism of the welfare state arrangements, particularly on how they support the

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 241-268.

³⁵⁵ Harvey, A Brief... (op.cit.), 11.

³⁵⁶ Nancy Fraser, How Feminism Became Capitalism’s Handmaiden – and How to Reclaim It., 14 October 2013, Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/oct/14/feminism-capitalist-handmaiden-neoliberal>; See also: Nancy Fraser, Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History, New Left Review 56 (Mar/Apr 2009), <https://newleftreview.org/issues/ii56/articles/nancy-fraser-feminism-capitalism-and-the-cunning-of-history>

gender divisions (e.g. family wage or system of subsidies assuming that women are the primary caregivers), that they welcomed laissez-faire governmentality with the blessing³⁵⁷.

Even if those, who have criticised Fraser for exaggerating the role of feminists in the neoliberal turn or of an over-generalisation and ignoring the opposing voices of non-liberal strains of feminism³⁵⁸, were right, her contribution to the understanding of the relationship between neoliberalism and backlash is meaningful. She has recognised that anti-feminist revanchist sentiments are not indispensable for supporting neoliberal policies that have disastrous consequences for women. Irrespective of the anti- or pro-feminist motivations for their implementation, neoliberalism is structurally directed against women's interests, and backlash is inherent to neoliberal turn. At this place, however, I want to venture a thesis that the fact that welfare cuts, even if not inspired by a conservative turn in the discourse, necessarily entail such a turn, as women and other targeted social groups are disproportionately affected by the cuts. Even if the motivations for implementing neoliberal reforms aren't revanchist at first – although they usually are – the stigmatisation of those, who are being dispossessed, usually follows – as the dispossessions have to be discursively justified.

Drawing my understanding of backlash on Susan Faludi, Sylvia Federici, David Harvey and Nancy Fraser, I would like to consider what Polish 'long '90s' can teach us about backlash. Let us go back to the questions on what caused the backlash and when it started. Whereas authors of the volume "Women in Poland..." saw its origin in the processes that were prominent already in the 80' and Agnieszka Graff pointed out the particular role of the conservative tendencies within "Solidarity", most of the analysed authors face troubles in defining the provenance of the patriarchal reaction – or they even avoid asking this questions.

1.3. "Traditions". Backlash as a Matter of Polish Culture

Izabela Desperak's approach exemplifies how backlash has been theoretically confusing and uneasy to grasp for Polish feminists. In "Gender of change", her monography on gender and transformation, she asks whether "*gender inequalities, observable in our society result exclusively from the few dozen of years of lagging of democratisation process compering to the*

³⁵⁷ Fraser, *Feminism, Capitalism...* (op.cit.), Ibid.

³⁵⁸ For the critique of West-centricism and over-generalisation of Fraser's: Korolczuk, *From "NGO-isation..."* (op.cit.), 33.

countries of Western Europe – or, the lack of gender equality component results from direction of experienced socio-political transformation that was utterly different to democratisation³⁵⁹”?

The assumption that the Polish oppressive variant of patriarchy might result from “lagging of democratisation processes” is perhaps the most common³⁶⁰ explanatory trope among Polish feminists. This is problematic and misleading for several reasons. Firstly, it stems from a linear approach to history and assumes that there was only one modernity – represented by liberal democracy born in the West. Non-western parts of the world can only aspire to achieve a similar level of development, hoping that human rights will be granted with the advent of the capitalist economy³⁶¹. This idea manifests most strikingly in Zofia Rutkowska’s explanation of the Polish patriarchy - she wrote: *“perhaps out cultural immaturity does not allow us to responsibly imitate the available solutions, whose existence is not understandable for everyone, and mechanisms of functioning require the change of mentality.”*³⁶² This is a self-provincialising approach that sees the West as providing a universal pattern of social and political progress – the role of the West is to design it, and the East can only master in imitation. Our history is necessarily seen as secondary, and our struggles are deemed irrelevant if our only role is to repeat the processes initiated in the West. Blaming the lack of “liberal Western traditions³⁶³”, as another scholar analysing the gender transformations after 89’, Joanna Mishtal, also does, for the oppressiveness of Polish patriarchy, precludes any serious debate on the recent Polish history. The period of the Polish People’s Republic, in particular, is seen as a black hole, a gap in the processes of historical progress, which is believed to be linear in nature and assumed to be occurring only in the context of liberal democracy.

Blaming Polish “tradition” is an interesting element of this narrative on the “backwardness” of the Polish society as a reason for the harshness of patriarchal relations in Poland. Some scholars, such as Desperak or Łaciak, who analysed the changing customs of Polish society in the times of transformation, do this explicitly: *“Analyses of media narratives demonstrate that customs dealing with family and marital life has been, in the past fifteen years, a sphere where to opposing tendencies collided. On the one hand, the liberalisation typical for*

³⁵⁹ Desperak., Ibid., 25.

³⁶⁰ Joanna Mishtal, The Politics of Morality. The Church, the State, and Reproductive Rights in Postsocialist Poland, citation after Izabela Desperak, Ibid., 36.

³⁶¹ For the critique of conflation of human rights discourse with capitalist liberal democracy see: Gregor, Grzebalska, Thoughts on the... (op.cit.), 12-13.

³⁶² Zofia Rutkowska, “Pełnomocnicza ds. Kobiet”, czyli polityka państwa wobec kobiet na rynku pracy w Polsce i we Francji, in „Kobiety w polskiej transformacji... (op.cit.), 171.

³⁶³ Mishtal, Ibid., citation after Desperak, Ibid., 35.

*the countries of Western Europe is observable; on the other – strong traditionalism, often rooted in the religious norms and beliefs.*³⁶⁴”

Such an explanation of the patriarchal turn is also implicit in the other popular modes of description of Polish patriarchy. The figure of “Matka Polka³⁶⁵”, for example, is evoked in nearly every feminist text on the conservative turn in the ‘90s. It is undoubtedly an important figure, and the elites of the ‘90s have instrumentalised it. Still, the amount of attention put into drawing the line between the distinctively Polish tradition that stems from the XIXth century and the processes of patriarchal turn that coincided with the profound socio-economic transformation is telling. Moreover, the symbols and figures typical for the Polish nationalist Imaginarium are often approached ahistorically as if they belonged to a static cultural repertoire.

The problem of provincialisation of Polish history, ahistoricism and approaching Polish women as the victims of the local traditions culminates in the approach of Shana Penn, an American feminist who studied the history of women in the “Solidarity”. Penn’s book “Solidarity’s secret. The women who defeated communism in Poland” is very informative, but she shows great ignorance while attempting to draw synthetic explanations of the discussed processes. “*Becouse – she wrote – Polish culture is extremely patriarchal, women are strongly associated with private life, not with the political or public sphere, and are assumed to be apolitical.*”³⁶⁶ None of this is true, as even in the figure of “Matka Polka”, a politicised understanding of a private sphere is visible – not to mention the new model of a “mother-worker” successfully promoted in the times of the Polish People’s Republic, in which the private and public were seen as firmly interwoven³⁶⁷. Finally, as the authors of “Women in Poland...” demonstrated, the turn to the ideologies of motherhood in the Polish ‘70s was motivated by the opening to Western influences³⁶⁸.

If we approach Polish patriarchy as resulting from specifically Polish tradition, or the lack of traditions of Western liberal democracy, then we can’t really integrate a concept of a backlash or a “turn” into our explanations of the intensification of patriarchal relationships. A backlash is a reaction to something; a “turn” indicates a change of tremendous importance. If we want to grasp it, we inevitably have to consider the historical point of departure and the

³⁶⁴ Łaciak, *Ibid.*, 137.

³⁶⁵ See pp: 36.

³⁶⁶ Shana Penn, *Solidarity’s Secret. The women who defeated communism in Poland* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 182 (Original edition).

³⁶⁷ See pp: 68.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

novelty of what we are dealing with. Why has the oppressiveness of patriarchy intensified after 1989, if the primary cause of it were static “traditions”? Agnieszka Graff has powerfully put it, commenting on the hopes that in the course of democratisation, women will experience emancipation: “*Let’s finally stop deluding ourselves, that Polish patriarchy is situated in a stadium of democratic transitions. It is a young and energetic patriarchy.*”³⁶⁹

Even if a “conservative turn” relies on evoking the “traditions”, we have to be aware of the “inventiveness”³⁷⁰ of a large part of what is presented as “traditions”. In the context of the post-socialist Polish condition- bearing in mind the denial of the state-socialist past and the sentiments towards the 2nd Polish Republic (1918-1939), a lot of “traditions” had to be (re) invented after the 89’. Barbara Einhorn pointed out that the abortion ban in Poland was a symptom of a broader phenomenon typical for the early transformation, of burdening women with the responsibility to reproduce ‘national heritage’³⁷¹. The nationalist turn certainly intersected with a patriarchal turn. In her book, Agnieszka Mrozik demonstrated how the diary literature of Polish female authors contributed to the invention of the nationalist and patriarchal ‘heritage’³⁷².

The “traditions” are, as I believe, utterly unfruitful explanatory trope - also for another reason. They ascribe too much power to the culture, which is approached as a primary force shaping social relationships. Michał Buchowski has identified that explanations of transformation phenomena, which revolve around culture, are, reifying social reality: “*Mental habits from the past, encoded in the process of socialisation and enculturation, rooted in the minds and reproduced in numerous behaviours, rigidly define human reactions, irrespectively of the transforming structural frames.*”³⁷³ Buchowski convincingly argued that the epistemic prioritisation of the culture denies the agency to the subjects far more than the narratives that recognise the obstacles of the structural barriers and external conditions. It is because it locates the lack of agency within the subjects, blaming their mental state for the faced hardships. To cite Buchowski again, “*the cultural determinism, manifesting in the thesis on the power of*

³⁶⁹ Graff, Ibid., 30.

³⁷⁰ Eric Hobsbawm, Terence Ranger, ed., *The Invention of Tradition* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

³⁷¹ Barbara Einhorn, *Cindarella Goes to Market: Citizenship, Gender and Women’s Movement in East Central Europe*, citation after Desperak, Ibid., 99-100.

³⁷² Mrozik, Ibid., 279-352.

³⁷³ Buchowski, Ibid., 215.

*“postsocialist mentality and habits” cannot explain the historical process, fueled by the emerging, actual relations of power and domination.*³⁷⁴”

Finally, the distinctiveness of „Polish traditions” as an explanatory trope of Polish patriarchy disregards the trans-national character of both (neo)conservative and neoliberal turns. The influences of international institutions and global capital and the translocation of the political trends and narratives remain largely ignored if we approach the backlash as a Polish internal problem resulting from the local traditions.

1.4. Backlash as an Undemocratic Turn

The second part of Desperak’s question, whether *“the lack of gender equality component results from the direction of experienced socio-political transformation that was utterly different to democratisation?”* guides us into a more promising theoretical direction. Desperak, alongside other feminists³⁷⁵, claims that one cannot speak of democracy if “democratisation” doesn’t apply to large parts of society. The more popular narrative is one on “deficits” of democratisation processes - Desperak, however, seems to suggest that the exclusion of women from democracy casts the doubts on whether we were dealing with democratisation at all. Such an approach is valuable, especially as it indicates that the recent illiberal turn³⁷⁶ might, in fact, have been inscribed in the undemocratic character of the transformation from its very beginning.

To exemplify the extent to which women have been excluded from the democracy, Desperak is sharing the data on women's political representation in the Polish parliament. Whereas they constituted 20,2 % of the Polish People’s Republic’s parliament members from 1985-to 1989, their representation decreased by half after 1989. In the first parliamentary turn (1989-1991), there were 13% of them in the seym and 7(!)% in the senate. The respective numbers in 1991-1993 were 10% and 8%³⁷⁷. The representation of women reached the percentage from the ‘80s only in the ‘2000s, after gender quotas had been introduced into the Polish voting system. The data provided by Piotr Perkowski confirm that women were losing their representation in the ‘90s – not only in the parliaments but also in the high offices.

³⁷⁴ Ibid., 42-43.

³⁷⁵ E.g.: Małgorzata Fuszara, „Kobiety w Polityce w okresie transformacji”, in *Kobiety w polskiej* (op.cit.), 39-40

³⁷⁶ Grzebalska, Peto, Ibid.

³⁷⁷ Desperak, Ibid., 33.

Although the period of PPR was also changeable in that respect – with Stalinism, interestingly, casting the highest amount of women in the powerful positions³⁷⁸.

While we speak of decreasing women's political representation, women's general disinterment in parliamentary politics must also be noted. As Paulina Sekuła demonstrated, after 1989, lesser women's engagement in politics than that of men also manifested in the lower participation of women in the voting.³⁷⁹ Perkowski discussed women's lack of trust in the democratic institutions after 1989' and explained "women's 'disinterment' of politics" as resulting from the problematic condition of the '80s and '90s - specifically the lack of time and other resources necessary for the political engagement³⁸⁰. I would add to this explanation the general sense of having no impact on the political life, exacerbated by the sense of sacrificing women's (especially those from the working class) interests by nearly every political party that was likely to be experienced in the face of the reactionary reforms.

The feminists' criticism of (the deficits of) democratisation of Polish society has been commonly limited to the sphere of representative politics. As important as it has been for the introduction of the new policies, it was not the only sphere where a lack of democracy could have been observed. Feminist scholars have analysed patriarchal – hence, undemocratic – relationships of the Polish households. Still, they rarely put them in the context of the transformation. As suggested in the former chapter, it was a retreat of the state from its responsibility for the sphere of reproduction that burdened women with the higher workload and neoliberal discourse, married to neoconservatism, that naturalised and devalued their labour. Another example of the undemocratic direction of the changes was related to the shrinking possibilities of democratic participation after the liquidation of the various common spaces, where people used to spend their free time, and local communities reproduced themselves. As demonstrated in the former chapter, the catholic church has filled in the void, but, bearing in mind its highly hierarchical and patriarchal structure, what it offered instead was contradictory to the self-determination and democratic participation.

Yet, the space where the most spectacular regress in democratisation occurred was, as I believe, a workplace. The managerial turn and intensified work discipline constituted what one could call an authoritarian turn in the workplace³⁸¹. Again, patriarchal disciplinary measures

³⁷⁸ Perkowski, *Droga do...* (op.cit.).

³⁷⁹ Paulina Sekuła, „Zaangażowanie polityczne kobiet w Polsce po 1989 roku: dynamika zmian i uwarunkowania” in *Kobiety w polskiej transformacji...* (op.cit.), 70.

³⁸⁰ Perkowski, *Ibid.*, 97.

³⁸¹ For the critical analysis of Polish menagerism see: Dunn, *Ibid.*

appeared to be handy for the capitalists. As the examples evoked in the former chapter - of the usurpation of the right to control female employees' reproduction and sexual harassment in the workplace - show, women have been subjected to gender-specific mobbing. As Izabela Desperak demonstrated³⁸², the employers had higher expectations of female employees. They also exercised intensified control over them – for example, by imposing uncomfortable, often sexualising dress codes on them. In one case recalled by Desperak, the boss demanded that his secretary changes her hair colour according to the colour of the office walls³⁸³.

2. Non-solidarity: Gender Divisions and Disintegration of the Working Class

The undemocratic turn in the workplace has been exacerbated by the capitulation of the workers union in the face of free-market reform. In this place, the problematics of the origins of the backlash, the consent to neoliberalism and the ambiguous character of democratisation intersect. As American social and political scientist David Ost has pointed out in his book “The defeat of Solidarity”, the same workers union that had organised unprecedentedly massive general strikes of the Summer of 1980 and which challenged the hypocrisy of the “workers state” that was limiting subjectivity and agency of the workers, was one of the leading actors of both conservative and neoliberal turns within Polish society in the ‘90s. Ost’s diagnosis is, at first glance, in line with the one of Agnieszka Graff – as he too recognises the crucial role “Solidarity” had in setting the backlash in motion. However, and this is essential to our understanding of the origins of the backlash, they differently situate the exact moment when the backlash - first within the Solidarity - began. According to Graff, “Solidarity” was from the very beginning “a project to reinstitute the patriarchy” in Polish society. Ost, quite in contradiction, approaches it as an emancipatory project that went astray due to the betrayal of its leadership.

Ost explains the general turn to the right within Polish society in the ‘90s as a reaction to the arrogance of the liberal post-Solidarity establishment (mostly intellectuals, some of whom were active in “Solidarity”, others in KOR – ‘committee in defence of the workers’), that supported the neoliberal transformation and introduced anti-workers policies. As Ost argues, they have betrayed the world of labour by defending the interests of the capital and, simultaneously, launched a stigmatising campaign against anyone who contested the reforms. This resulted in

³⁸² Desperak., Ibid, 278.

³⁸³ Ibid., 182, 183.

the specific affective response of the working class people – ready to accept the chauvinist explanations tailored by the far-right:

*“The turn of a large part of Polish labour to the political right results from their economic anger being captured by parties proposing non-economic solutions. And these parties and tendencies were able to do so because the political liberals who led the country after 1989 consistently refused to organise workers. On the contrary, they presented labour as the chief threat to democracy and set out to reduce its power radically. With the former communists still unpopular in most labour circles, labour anger then gravitated to political illiberals, who spoke constantly of the economic issues confronting workers as a class, even as they proposed non-class-based answers to these problems.”*³⁸⁴

According to Ost, the first symptoms of the alienation of the “Solidarity” establishment from its base were visible in the second half of the ‘80s³⁸⁵. After the delegalisation of the union structures and suppression of the protest movement by the over one year-long martial law³⁸⁶ in 1981 – called *nomen omen*, “the war state” in Polish – “Solidarity” never managed to rebuild its former power. Furthermore, with the rising wave of the repressions and the movement’s descent into the underground, the union inevitably lost its democratical character³⁸⁷. During the following few years, its main areas of activism were publishing underground press and organising solidarity campaigns for the imprisoned activists.

Interestingly, as Shana Penn demonstrated in the example of the exclusively female redaction of the leading “Solidarity” newspaper, “Tygodnik Mazowsze” (“Mazowsze weekly”), it was during these times of underground activism when women from the union leadership held the most significant power³⁸⁸. In the “August of 1980”, when the country experienced an outburst of strikes, women played a crucial role too, but the male leadership preferred to cast them in the symbolic roles than to approach them as equals. It is rarely mentioned that the first and critical strike in the Gdańsk shipyard, which later inspired Poland-wide solidarity strikes,

³⁸⁴ Ost, *Ibid.*, 36. (Original edition)

³⁸⁵ Ost, in particular, points out to the change in the worldview of Adam Michnik, a future redactor of the biggest Polish daily, “Wyborcza”, see: Ost, *Ibid.*, 41 (Original edition).

³⁸⁶ War state was introduced on the 13th of December 1981 and suspended on the 31st of December 1982. It officially ended only on the 22nd of July 1983.

³⁸⁷ Ost, Also see Karol Modzelewski, one of the union leaders and a rare example of an intellectual who never renounced his consequently and radically leftist worldview: Modzelewski, *Zajeźdźmy...* (op.cit.)

³⁸⁸ Penn, *Ibid.*

was declared as a response to firing a charismatic workwoman, Anna Walentynowicz, an important figure for the community of Gdańsk workers³⁸⁹.

Then, after the first round of negotiations between Shipyard's directorate and representatives of the striking brigades, when Lech Wałęsa – a future leader of the entire “Solidarity”, Nobel prize winner and the first president of Poland after 89’ - agreed to the terms proposed from the side of the company, it was also women who secured the continuation of the struggles. Four strike participants – Anna Walentynowicz, Alina Pieńkowska, Henryka Krzywonos and Ewa Ossowska – independently from each other, decided to convince their fellow strikers not to leave the walls of the Shipyard. They have blocked the gates with their bodies and given fierce speeches. They pointed out that the entire country had joined their struggle and that accepting temporary privileges offered to Shipyard workers by the management would contradict the idea of solidarity.³⁹⁰ Hence, as we see, the solidarity – written with a small “s” was sustained by women – another example corroborating Federici's thesis on the role of women as the defendants of the commons. In this case, the commons manifested in the protest movement.

The discrepancy between the scope and intensity of women's grass-roots engagement in the movement and their representation in the leadership structures is striking. In September 1981, they, relying on the data gathered by Shana Penn³⁹¹, constituted more or less half of the 10 million members of “Solidarity”, but only 7,8 % of the delegates to the country-wide convention of the union and only one woman was part of the union's national commission. The invisibilisation of women's activism, which continued throughout the '80s and afterwards – as the underground female leaders never received recognition comparable with the glory enjoyed by the male leaders³⁹² - partially supports Agnieszka Graff's thesis on the Solidarity as a patriarchal project. However, the assumption of the intentionality of patriarchal relationships within the union cannot be sustained. Perkowski explains it: *“Solidarity” and other opposition structures were born in the dusk of communism when the communist project of gender equality was subjected to an intensified crisis. In such a perspective, the younger generation of “Solidarity” activists was the first to be exposed to the narrative on the crucial role of the family and the central roles of mothers and wives, at the cost of a lack of recognition of the importance of [women's] professional life.*³⁹³

³⁸⁹ Ibid., 58-86. (Polish edition)

³⁹⁰ Ibid., 86 (Polish edition).

³⁹¹ Ibid., 33 (Polish edition).

³⁹² Ibid.

³⁹³ Perkowski, Ibid., 91.

Thus, we can define the relationships of power within “Solidarity” in the ‘80s as “mildly sexist”, reflecting the power relations permeating the general society. Also, the alliance of “Solidarity” with the catholic church, as scholars such as Jan Sowa and Jacek Tintenbrunn demonstrated³⁹⁴, wasn’t built on the fundamentalist zeal of the union members. It was rather a strategical alliance, as the church was able to provide the union with resources, and through the person of the Polish pope, amplify “Solidarity” struggles on the international level. This alliance certainly affected the direction polish transformation took after 1989. Still, until the ‘common enemy’³⁹⁵ of a state socialist regime fell, the ideological power of the church was limited. Recognising the early symptoms of the backlash within “Solidarity” would require a deepened research, but the convention of 1990 marks undoubtedly a turning point regarding the conservative orientation of the union.

During the 2nd convention of “Solidarity”, a neoliberal package of governmental reforms was approved³⁹⁶. At the same time, the union’s relentless hostility towards women was openly declared. Convention voted in favour of the abortion ban. As David Ost, who was present at the convention, recalls, unionists invested more time and energy in declaring their support towards “conceived life” than they contributed to the discussions of labour policies. As Małgorzata Tarasiewicz, a back-then leader of the union’s women’s section, described it, “nobody took into account the voices of women, who constituted only 10% of the delegates to the convention.”³⁹⁷ Tarasiewicz recalls that the women’s commission loudly opposed the abortion ban – and, in the end, it led to its delegalisation and suppression of its former members by the union leaders. The delegates also voted in favour of the family wage policy – designed to be preferential to men³⁹⁸. Commenting on his experience of participation in the convention, Ost wrote in 2004, “*I did not yet know this was a sign of things to come.*”³⁹⁹

In the crucial years of neoliberal reforms, “Solidarity”, as Ost pointed out, resembled a conservative social movement more than a workers union. It has been toothless and entirely disinterested in defence of labour interests. The support of the policies that repress women’s

³⁹⁴ Sowa, Ciesz się... (op.cit), 399-401.

³⁹⁵ The union members, at least in the summer of 1980, did not intend to destroy state socialism, rather, as Modzelewski or Sowa suggest, they wanted to actualise the ideological premises on equality and self-determinatio of the working class, upon which state socialism should have been built. However, the martial state has changed the situation and the communist state became a primary “enemy” of underground “Solidarity”.

³⁹⁶ Ost, Ibid., 140 (Polish edition).

³⁹⁷ Citation after Desperak, Ibid., 165.

³⁹⁸ Ibid., 165.

³⁹⁹ Ost, Ibid., 62 (Original edition).

bodily autonomy on the one hand and put them in the role of the dependant housewives on the other, along with the exclusion of the female members opposing the conservative tendencies within the union, wasn't only coincidental with the support to neoliberal reforms at the very same time. In Ost's explanation, the affective intensification revolving around the abortion ban was, similarly to other nationalist and xenophobic emotional intensifications – Ost, *nota bene*, puts to them much greater attention than to anti-women backlash – portrayed as a vicarious emotional investment, directing the frustrations and anger of the working class away from the capitalists and politicians. I generally support this explanation – it sheds light on the crucial aspects of backlash, particularly the role of the revanchist emotions directed against certain social groups to sustain the stability of the capitalist system. The fact brought up by Ost that, *“In 1996, with strikes at their lowest since 1989, the union made the campaign against abortion the centre of its programme”*⁴⁰⁰ further confirms that there was a visible correlation between the mobilisation of workers for the anti-women cause and their demobilisation as labourers.

Still, I would go further than Ost: I can't entirely agree with the conclusion that conservative reaction, especially anti-women backlash, was just a scapegoating process, providing the society with vicarious subjects to focus attention upon. In my opinion, the contrary is true: backlash was central to the project of successful implementation of neoliberalism in Poland. During the breakthrough of 1989, Polish elites were aware that militant union, ennobled by its significant role in the recent Polish history, could pose a dangerous challenge to the flawless implementation of the reforms. *“We will not catch up to Europe if we build a strong trade union.”*⁴⁰¹, Lech Wałęsa said in September 1989, openly declaring the change of the sides of the barricade. Thanks to the changes within the biggest Polish union, the neoliberal politicians, Wałęsa included, barely had to deal with any barricades. The exclusion of women from the organised world of labour was crucial for achieving that. As we have seen, in the example of the four women blocking the gates of the Gdańsk Shipyard, the working-class women's sense of solidarity, their attachment to the commons and ability for spontaneous organisation, might, despite their small representation in the “Solidarity” leadership, have posed a significant obstacle for the process of suppression of the labour. By suppressing women in their ranks, “Solidarity” secured its own inability to resist the reforms and the lack of will and determination to fight.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., 85 (Original edition).

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., 37 (Original edition).

A case of Łódź evoked by Ost corroborates my thesis – although it leads Ost himself to a somehow absurd conclusion. Łódź is a large Polish city with the richest and most long-lasting proletarian traditions – it is famous for its textile industry, with a highly feminised workforce. It was a scene revolution of 1905 and numerous women’s strikes during the times of tsarist Russian occupation⁴⁰², 2nd Polish Republic and PPR⁴⁰³. In a footnote – and most of Ost’s commentaries on gender aspects of discussed problematics are situated in the footnotes... - he claims that in Łódź, unionists were more successful in resisting the effects of marketisation and privatisation of industry, such as the labour cuts because... in a feminised working environment they had to prove their masculinity (sic!)⁴⁰⁴. It is a great shame that Ost didn’t consider the possibility that the successfulness of the labour struggles in Łódź might have resulted, on the contrary, from the bigger militancy of the female workers and a more profound sense of solidarity in the industry dominated by women.

On another side of the coin of excluding women from the world of organised labour, a process of the emergence of the aristocracy of labour could have been observed. Ost, in his book, evokes numerous examples of the “Solidarity” leaders of the ‘80s, who have made spectacular careers in the ‘90s. Many of those who did not benefit from the enfranchisement directly, and remained in the union, could also be recognised as the beneficiaries of the changes. According to Ost, a visible split between the “skilled” and “unskilled” workers finally divided the world of Polish labour in the ‘90s. “Solidarity” unionists, if they in any way continued to care for the worker’s interests, have limited their attention to the more privileged section of the “skilled” labourers and approached the “unskilled” counterparts with disregard and hostility:

“Solidarity activists, who in the large factories were overwhelmingly male, typically combined such apparently irreconcilable positions: of ardently defending their own factories, welcoming market reform, and fearing the creation of strong unions. They defended their own factories because they believed that once these worksites got rid of their excess workers, they could be fully productive firms again. (...) The problem, they believed, was that their firms were not operating rationally. They thus wanted someone to take control and "rationalise" the firm, which meant getting rid of the excess "unskilled" workers, who they usually identified as women and peasant-workers. (...) And this was precisely what they were looking to private owners to do: to rationalise the labour process and reward qualified labour instead of all labour. Market

⁴⁰² See: Collective edition, *Rewolucja 1905. Przewodnik Krytyki Politycznej* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2009), for the analysis of women’s role: Alicja Urbanik-Kopeć, *Anioł w domu, mrówka w fabryce* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2018), 55-62.

⁴⁰³ See: Marta Madejska, *Aleja Włóknarek* (Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2018)

⁴⁰⁴ Ost, *Ibid.*, 223 (Original edition)

*reform, they thought, would (or at least should) harm only those workers with whom they emphatically believed they had nothing in common. It would allow them to become the labour aristocracy they felt they should be.*⁴⁰⁵”

“Solidarity”, thus, became an anti-thesis of solidarity. Ost explains the approval of the local “Solidarity” leaders to the Christian-fundamentalist course of the union not as resulting from their political views but from their awareness of growing material divisions within the working class and their conscious will to maintain their privileged status. Ost claims, again, that they wanted to direct the attention of the workers who were most victimised by the transformation onto vicarious subjects. This is a part of the truth – to see the whole picture, however, we have to notice that majority of those most victimised workers were at the same time the victims of the Christian-fundamentalist turn. They had to be constructed as inferior in order to make their ultra-subordination and hyper-exploitation justifiable; they had to be suppressed by the violent laws denying them bodily autonomy to deny them the power to resist.

3. Conclusions: The Triumph of the Capital

What happened in the Polish world of labour after 1989 is analogous to the campaign of late medieval artisans and guilds attempting to exclude women from their ranks, as described by Federici⁴⁰⁶. In both cases, the will of the minority of privileged male workers to achieve and then maintain the privileged position resulted in a total decomposition and disintegration of the working class. Even though backlash within the working class might appear uncoordinated and dispersed, the discussed processes are indispensable for the subsumption of labour under the requirements of the capitalist economy. The capital has vital interests in hoesewifisation of the women: construction of working-class women as non-workers and exclusion of women from the organised world of labour. At the same time, it is ready to make amends to the most privileged section of the proletariat, as, again, capitalism cannot reproduce itself without ruling and dividing.

Polish backlash and neoliberal turn have been conflated on many levels. As we have seen in the former chapter, women were the most dispossessed in the course of neoliberal processes of capital accumulation. The backlash was materially manifest in this dispossession. On the level of discourse, anti-women narratives had to follow – working-class women had to be constructed as inferior, and general social anger resulting from the rising impoverishment

⁴⁰⁵ Ost, *Ibid.*, 139.

⁴⁰⁶ Federici, *Ibid.*, 95.

and inequalities was invested in the anti-women campaigns. As I tried to demonstrate in this chapter, the subjugation of women enabled the smooth introduction of the neoliberal reforms. It disempowered the women and deprived them of the solidary structures of resistance. This, in the end, had catastrophic consequences for the entire working class. In other words, neoliberalism and backlash co-produced each others.

Conclusions: Neoliberal Hegemony and Witches of the 3rd Polish Republic

“They took away “roses” and sell fear and doubts instead.

(...) We have nothing left to lose but fear.⁴⁰⁷”

Andrzej W Nowak

For Antonio Gramsci, the stability of the systems of power relies on the interplay of consent and coercion⁴⁰⁸. The hegemony is achieved by the embeddedness of ideology in the social relationships and institutions by means of persuasions (with, as Gramsci proposes, civic society being its agent) and by the imposition of the policies by the state - forceful, when necessary. While the threat of the state's violent intervention is always there, liberal parliamentary democracies, as Gramsci has argued in the '30s, rely predominantly on persuasion – the ruling classes strive for the consent of the rest of the society, which allows for minimising the extent of coercion. As after-war Marxist theorists argued⁴⁰⁹ - in a highly generalising summary - the western societies have accepted the capitalist order, and working classes gave the green light to their own subordination due to the disempowering and pacifying impact that popular culture, mass media and participation in the consumerism had on them. As it turned out, for example, during the suppression of the '68 revolts, the element of violence was still indispensable. Still, despite that, one could agree that the “ideological apparatus⁴¹⁰” of the capitalist states was functioning, and the consent, although, as it always is, wasn't complete (and gender, as well as Race, played their role here)⁴¹¹, was obtained⁴¹². According to Gramsci, to achieve the hegemony, ruling classes must incorporate some class compromises - something that would appeal to the subordinated classes so that they too would consent to the system that subordinates them. Indeed, the social-democratic arrangements and the post-war compromise of capital and labour were a form of such settlement.

⁴⁰⁷ Andrzej W. Nowak, Bread and Fear, 26 December 2019, LeftEast, <https://lefteast.org/bread-and-fear/>

⁴⁰⁸ Gramsci, Ibid., 206-276.

⁴⁰⁹ See e.g.: Theodor W. Adorno, The Culture Industry. Selected Essays on Mass Culture, ed. J.M. Bernstein (London/ New York: Routledge, 1991) ; Guy Debord, trans. Ken Knabb, The Society of the Spectacle (Canberra: Hobgoblin Press, 2002); Luis Althusser, trans. Ben Brewster, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” in Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971).

⁴¹⁰ Althusser, Ibid.

⁴¹¹ The intersectional approach to class allows to see the nuances of the situation. Which sections of society did not consent and how did the system construct them as subalterns, so that it does not have to deal with their disagreement, but it can suppress them and ignore their opinion?

⁴¹² According to Gramsci, to achieve the hegemony, ruling classes have to incorporate some class compromises - elements that would appeal to the subordinated classes to get their consent to their subordination. Certainly, the social-democratic arrangements and post-war compromise of capital and labour

However, the situation turned upside down with the advent of the neoliberal turn. Neoliberalism was “tested” in the bloody laboratories of the southern American⁴¹³. However, also in liberal democracies, the element of coercion played a decisive role. The strikes in US and UK were suppressed by means of police violence and economic pressure⁴¹⁴. And, in the end, Margaret Thatcher had to declare war to keep her office⁴¹⁵. On the other hand, the power of Ronald Reagan and his crew, as Susan Faludi demonstrated, was related to the backlash and rising violence against women and minorities. Neoliberalism reconfigured the power relations – it still strived for consent (at least of the privileged section of the working class), but the scope and extent of the violence employed to suppress resistance and enforce its hegemony are remarkable.

Feminist researchers of gender-based violence have debunked the myth of the state’s monopoly on violence⁴¹⁶, on which many classical sociological theories, such as the Gramscian model of power – as exercised by the coercive state and persuasive civic society – are based. They have proved that the violence against women perpetrated in the families has been allowed by the state (criminal codes and juridical practice in many cases did not recognise violence against wives, including marital rapes, as a crime). As some pointed out⁴¹⁷ state’s dispensation of the violence against women in private is a cynical move of capitalism, which produces subordinated and exploitable groups and then ultimately divides them, so that male workers find an outlet for their frustrations and the working class as a whole, disintegrated by its internal violence is unable to unite and resist.

All in all, the deepening of gender divisions and the violence against women, exercised simultaneously by the state, by the market and in the private sphere are, as Sylvia Federici demonstrated in the context of transition from late-feudalism to early capitalism, a form of primitive accumulation – they are necessary conditions of subsumption of labour and its reproduction under capital. As I demonstrated in this thesis, these processes have given a shape to the Polish transition from state socialism to neoliberal capitalism. Why have they been so particularly pronounced in Poland? Although several other reasons are also worth examining, I

⁴¹³ See pp: 19.

⁴¹⁴ Klein, *Ibid.*, 163 – 176; 319 - 345.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 165-176.

⁴¹⁶ Birgid Sauer, “Der Staat als geschlechtsspezifisches Gewaltverhältnis. Eine (neo)marxistisch-feministische Perspektive” in *Feminismus und Marxismus*, ed. Alexandra Scheele, Stefanie Wöhl (Weinheim/ Basel: 2018), 202-217.

⁴¹⁷ Federici, *Ibid.*; bell hooks, trans. Ewa Majeska, *Teoria Feministyczna* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2013), 171 -188.

want to argue that the main reason was the unprecedented power of the workers' movement in the Polish '80s. Whereas in other countries of the eastern block, it was primarily the intellectuals who dissented, in Poland, the working class took the lead in the opposition. Polish workers believed in the promises of the socialist state and were free from cynicism in striving for a better world. The breakthrough of 1989 opened up, as they might have hoped, the possibility for their self-determination. What came instead was not only the lowering standards of everyday life but also decreasing opportunities for democratic participation – workers could vote in the parliamentary, presidential and local elections, but all governments, up to a lesser or greater extent, realised the same neoliberal politics, and, with the privatisations and managerial turn in the world of labour, they have lost their claims to self-determination at the workplace.

Did the workers peacefully agree to that? The answer is both yes and no. No – because there has been resistance, workers did strike, especially in the later phases of the reforms, when it became clear that the promises of bettering their situation after the temporary hardships explained as the side-effects of the 'shock therapy' had been false. The disillusionment with the promises of Balcerowicz-Sachs plan manifests itself in the numbers: whereas in 1990 and 1991, only 555 strikes were organised in the country, in 1992 and 1993, there were 14 thousand strikes⁴¹⁸. Still, yes is also a correct answer to whether the workers consented to the reforms. Union leaders and male "skilled" workers were corrupted by the vision of becoming the aristocracy of the working class and obtaining relative privileges. The strikes, even from the most turbulent years of 1992 and 1993, were dispersed and directed against very precisely defined and limited cause, e.g. liquidation of a specific company⁴¹⁹. Those atomised strikes, organised by a highly divided workforce, rarely succeeded. Also, the entirety of the neoliberal restructuring was seldomly questioned.

Implementing neoliberalism in Poland, as I have argued, would not be so easy had the working-class women not been excluded from the world of organised labour and had their productive and reproductive work not been naturalised, housewified and desubjectified. The backlash was, on the one hand, inherent to neoliberalisation and, on the other, its enabling factor. Susan Faludi has argued that backlashes are not centrally planned and come from various sites. The state, the church and the labour market have been the primary sites of Polish backlash. Although it served the interests of global capital, it was not a conspiracy of international institutions. As Maria Mies has demonstrated, international institutions have designed

⁴¹⁸ Leyk, Wawrzyniak, *Ibid.*, 38.

⁴¹⁹ See: Ost, *Ibid.*

reproductive policies for many countries of the Global South⁴²⁰. However, when it comes to Polish backlash, in particular the abortion ban, there has been more volatility to it. Although the country was dealing with the translocation of neo-conservative ideologies from the US, the main reason for their local success has been the hegemony of the catholic church, which resulted from the “strategic alliance” that “Solidarity” formed with it in the ‘80s. The capital, however, welcomed such a state of things with the blessing. The church, undergoing restructuration and adopting a business model itself, has played a similar role during Polish transformation as it⁴²¹ used to play in the late-medieval transition to capitalism with the institutionalised witch-hunting. Through its endorsement of the violence against women, it created conditions for the successful accumulation of capital.

Earlier in this thesis, I suggested that the ‘long ‘90s’ ended in 2004, with Poland’s entry into the EU. What was the legacy of that extended decade? And what has changed after 2004? Integration of the Polish economy with the stronger economies of Western European countries has helped to solve – or, perhaps, hide – some of its structural problems. The mass emigration of Polish workers has significantly reduced the structural unemployment, EU has also boosted the country’s economy with a significant amount of investments. On the other hand, Western Europe gained access to the workforce susceptible to exploitation – with highly desirable female care workers⁴²², and, at the same time, to poorly regulated Polish internal market so that Poland could become the cheap “assembly line of Europe”. As for the advancement in women’s rights, we have already seen that Poland’s ‘Europeanisation’ has been founded on the exclusion of women⁴²³.

The privatisation processes did not stop after 2004. The first and second decades of the new millennium were a time of brutal reprivatisation. This time, not necessarily the industry (which had already been sold off), but primarily the real estate has been subjected to privatisation – by the inheritors of the pre-war owners or businessmen buying or fabricating the ownership claims on a massive scale⁴²⁴. The courts, real estate agents, local authorities and criminal undertakings, occupied with the forceful execution of the new ownership relations,

⁴²⁰ Mies analyses the case of India and neo-Malthusian motivations of World Bank’s prescriptions for the country’s reproductive policies: Mies, *Ibid.* 121-123.

⁴²¹ Although, back then protestant churches were even more involved in these processes than the catholic church: Federici, *Ibid.*

⁴²² Renata E. Hryciuk, „O znikającej matce. Upolitycznione macierzyństwo w Ameryce Łacińskiej i w Polsce” in *Pożegnanie...* (op.cit), 267-288.

⁴²³ See pp: 81.

⁴²⁴ See: Beata Siemianko, *Reprywatyzując Polskę. Historia wielkiego przekrętu* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2017).

formed an alliance that has gentrified the city centres of Polish metropolises by overtaking the communal housing and making fortunes on the unlawful⁴²⁵ enclosures. Many inhabitants of the communal housing were forced to move out, blackmailed by the horrendous raises in rent prices, cutting off the gas, electricity and water, and, finally, direct physical violence. Still, there was powerful resistance to reprivatisation. This time it was organised primarily by women – the tenants who could not afford to buy off their communal houses when it was made possible in the ‘90s and, at the same time, were highly attached and caring for their neighbouring local communities. Multiple tenant associations were established, and the tenants, supported by the anarchist collectives, managed to block some of the evictions and win several court cases⁴²⁶.

Jolanta Brzeska⁴²⁷, a founder of the Warsaw Association of Tenants, was one of the tenant movement leaders. 64-year-old Warsaw inhabitant has dealt with the reprivatisation of her tenement house by Marek Mossakowski, ‘a collector of arts and houses’. Brzeska’s house, located in the city centre, was rebuilt by her father after the demolition of Warsaw in the aftermath of Warsaw’s uprising – and her family has occupied her flat since the end of WWII. On the 1st of March 2011, while her and Mossakowski’s case proceeded in the court, her body was found burned in the Kabacki Forest, one of the city’s parks. Although there was no indication supporting it, the police assumed it was a suicide. The involvement of Mossakowski in what was clearly a brutal murder, not a suicide, was not even interrogated - the police did not even question Mossakowski. Later, he sold Brzeska’s flat 1 mln of PLN.

Silvia Federici has proved that apart from dividing the society and breaking the women’s power to resist the transition to capitalism, the witch-hunts were motivated by concrete material incentives. In many cases, they were accompanied by the seizure of the victims’ assets and the enfranchisement of the perpetrators. Barbara Zdun, executed in Reszel in 1811, is believed to be the last woman burned on the stake in Polish lands⁴²⁸. However, with its long-lasting effects, Polish transformation, too, has produced its “witches” - and suppressed them with terrifying

⁴²⁵ Since the reportage of Iwona Szpala and Małgorzata Zubik from 2016, which exposed the criminal character of this alliance, some of the actors of reprivatisation, particularly from Warsaw, were convicted of criminal charges: Iwona Szpala, Małgorzata Zubik, Układ warszawski. Czy reprivatyzacja w stolicy zatrzęsie polską polityką?, 20 August 2016, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, <https://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/7,124059,20572140,uklad-warszawski-czy-reprivatyzacja-w-stolicy-zatrzesie-polska.html>

⁴²⁶ Beata Siemiańska, *Ibid.*

⁴²⁷ For the detailed telling of the story: Robert Nowak, Piotr Cieszewski, *Wszystkich nas nie spalicie*, (Warszawa: Trzecia Strona, 2016)

⁴²⁸ Although Zdun was not convicted for witchcraft. The last witchcraft case was in Poland was in Doruchów, in 1775: Jacek Wijaczka, *Barbara Zdun nie była czarownicą. Na stos zawiodła ją zazdrość i pragnienie miłości*, 16 September 2021, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, <https://wyborcza.pl/alehistoria/7,121681,27567018,barbara-zdun-nie-byla-czarownica.html>

violence. While Brzeska was literally burned, and the state covered that up in order not to have to deal with the accusation of its own participation in the shady practices of reprivatisation, the state has also murdered other women with the hands of the politicians voting against abortion accessibility and doctors refusing to save lives of the pregnant women.

Yes, reproductive policies are another field where the legacy of the ‘long ‘90s’ pertains. As it has already been discussed, the state decided to pay the ransom in women’s rights to the church for its approval of Poland’s entry into the EU. Since then, there have been multiple attempts from the side of catholic fundamentalist circles to limit the access to abortion even further – namely, to get rid of the three exceptions to the ban⁴²⁹. Yet, they have been faced with growing and growing resistance from society.

In 2016, when the organisation of Christian fundamentalist lawyers ‘Ordo Iuris’ prepared a bill on a total criminalisation of abortion, and the PiS government announced it was going to support it, there was a spontaneous and mass mobilisation of women, which culminated in the ‘Black Protests’ (wearing black became the symbol of belonging to the movement) and Women’s Strike on the 3rd of October 2016, when women left their workplaces and participated in the mass demonstrations in every bigger Polish city. It was one of the very few cases in which the PiS government, ruling continuously since 2015 and usually responding to the social protests with arrogance, stepped back from the proposed policy in reply to the faced resistance.

In 2020, PiS found a backdoor way to further-going criminalisation of abortion – it did it through the formally independent, but, in praxis, overtaken and controlled by the governing party, constitutional tribunal. On the 22nd of October, amid the covid-19 crisis and during the strict lockdown forbidding any gatherings in public, the tribunal has deemed the embriopathological premise for abortion unconstitutional. Even though protesting in public was related to risks of huge fines, the scale of the protests that followed was without precedence in Polish history – in fact, the autumn and winter of 2020 could be only compared to the ‘summer of Solidarity’ in 1980. What was most astounding in this large mobilisation was the scale it took in the Polish province, more often than not excluded from the active participation in the political life. Manifestations in large Polish cities were reaching tens and sometimes hundreds of thousands of participants, but in the smaller townships, the mobilisation was – relatively – even bigger; it seemed that nearly every young woman living there took to the streets. I, myself, was deeply moved when I saw how massive were the demonstrations in my hometown.

⁴²⁹ Desperak, *Ibid.*, 166-172.

It seems that in this powerful revolt, the long-lasting Polish transformation has really ended. It coincided with the rapid secularisation of the country. As violence against women promoted by the Polish catholic church became more evident, and as the scandals of paedophilia among priests broke out and shook the entire country⁴³⁰, it began to lose its power. How this secular and progressive turn, observable especially among younger generations, particularly younger women and queer people (the worldview of young men is, unfortunately, much more conservative⁴³¹), is related to the existing political economies? These social struggles, although set in the context of class hierarchies, rarely pronounce themselves as (elements of) class struggles. At the same time, the language of class struggle and vindication of justice for the transformation victims is, quite paradoxically, appropriated by the PiS politicians. They cynically play with the traumatic memories of transformation and give questionable consolations to the people.

Polish neoliberal hegemony has been founded on the neo-conservative fundamentals. As Andrzej W Nowak said: *“Since the Cold War, a conglomerate of reactionary right-wing churches and organisations has worked to win the battle for hegemony. We now have to cope with a crooked, fundamentalist free-marketeer anti-communist internationalism.”*⁴³² Can polish neoliberalism transmute into a secular version? In a longer perspective, it is, as I believe, impossible – for neoliberalism and neoconservatism are structurally married to each other. Still, let us go back to the consolation offered by the PiS government to the people.

On the one hand, what is uneasy to condemn from the leftist positions, these consolations manifested themselves in restoring the elements of the welfare state⁴³³. As already discussed, many on the left have taken this bait and believed in the “social face” of PiS. What they have not noticed is that PiS adopted a typically neoliberal model of welfare, which assumes the introduction of social transfers like children benefits (which are at the same time another attempt to boost the fertility and persuade women to their role as housewives, regardless of its

⁴³⁰ The documentary of Siekielscy brothers ‘Just don’t tell anyone’, which exposed the crimes was a moment of actual breakthrough – It has been seen by the 25mln people only on youtube: Tomasz Siekielski, Tylko nie mów nikomu, 2019,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BrUvQ3W3nV4&list=PLk89Lw2sa3Z5VrHV5r_AzOkv6BqaM-55N

⁴³¹ For the data supporting this claim and an analysis see: Daniel Flis, Prawda. Dziewczyny są bardziej lewicowe niż chłopcy. Potwierdził to czarny protest, 2016, oko.press, <https://oko.press/dziewczyny-sa-bardziej-lewicowe-niz-chlopcy-potwierdzil-czarny-protest/>

⁴³² Andrzej W. Nowak, Bread and... (op.cit)

⁴³³ Although still neoliberal – as PiS welfare relies on social transfers accompanied by the withdrawal of the state from its reproductive responsibilities

undoubtedly positive effects for the beneficiaries⁴³⁴) at the cost of the total withdrawal of the state from its welfare responsibilities. The collapse of the public education and public healthcare systems under the rule of PiS is unparalleled in recent Polish history. The workers employed in both sectors have firmly opposed the state's policies and organised numerous strikes, with the Poland-wide one-month-long teacher's strike in 2019 being the longer and the largest strike of the public sector workers in the last decades. The fact that both nurses and teachers are feminised working groups is not without relevance – PiS did not only not meet any of their demands, related to their working conditions and shockingly low remuneration. It also naturalised their work, presenting it as the feminine vocation and constructed them not as workers but, again, as natural resources of care for others – students and patients.

The other kind of consolation offered by the party, which has dominated the Polish political scene since 2015, is of affective nature. PiS, with its anti-establishment rhetorics, has mastered the art of accusations and pointing the transformation beneficiaries with the fingers, forgetting the role its politicians played in the '90s (and forgetting about their own enfranchisement⁴³⁵). It has also mastered the discussed neo-conservative strategy of accusing the scapegoats for the frustrations and problems faced by the materially excluded parts of society. It is, perhaps, the biggest challenge that Polish society faces nowadays – to not let PiS divide itself according to the lines of conservative identity politics. To avoid that, we must underline the intersectional interwovenness of the oppressions and accentuate their material dimensions. Also, we must be critical regarding the alliance with the capital and liberal politicians, trying to capitalise on the social movements and their anti-governmental mobilisations.

The presence of the younger generations and their social involvement suggests that a new balance of power is emerging and that the ideological project of PiS, in the long run, will fall. The intersectional alliances, like the one between squatters and the tenants or between the nurses and the feminists⁴³⁶, give hope that the false division between “ideological” and “material” causes and struggles will no longer be reproduced by the social movements. However, the new social and political circumstances should not stop us from considering how

⁴³⁴ For the comprehensive summary of the consequences of programme 500+ see: Jakub Szymczak, 4 lata z 500 plus. Wymysły, bzdury, manipulacje, 2020, oko.press, <https://oko.press/4-lata-z-500-plus-wymysly-bzdury-manipulacje/>

⁴³⁵ Pp. 54 (footnote 192).

⁴³⁶ See, for example, the work of Julia Kubisa. Julia Kubisa. Pielęgniarki. Protesty Pielęgniarek i Położnych w kontekście reform ochrony zdrowia. Raport Think Tanku Feministycznego nr 3. 2009, http://www.ekologiasztuka.pl/think.tank.feministyczny/articles.php?article_id=334

we are affected by the past. Women born or raised after 1989 must understand the recent history to know where the oppressive policies we still have to deal with today come from. This by no means is restricted to Poland – but, bearing in mind that many phenomena took exceptionally sharp shape there and then, they spread across the region and the world, popularising the critical reflection on what happened in this semi-peripheral country would, as I believe, benefit feminists across the globe.

Referring to the generational metonymy introduced by Agnieszka Mrozik, we – the granddaughters – have to question the authority of our fathers - and our mothers, who wrote off their mothers from the history and looked with optimism into the future of capitalist Poland. Because we cannot afford such optimism in the second decade of the XXI century (we know that history not only did not end but has continued to inflict harm on us), we must examine the past critically. It is also important to re-establish our genealogy by reconnecting with our grandmothers – the understanding of their experience of emancipation is crucial for us – so we can realise the extent of the loss and its historicity. Some work in this matter has already been done - the historical scholarship on women's experiences in the PPR is gaining prominence. What, perhaps, is even more promising, the initiatives such as the Social Congress of Women, which evolved from the grass-root movements such as the tenants' movement, are the practical realisation not only of the exchange of thought and experiences between the generations but also of a practice of the common struggle.

Suppose there is an uplifting element to the story of the persecution of “witches” in transitional and post-transitional Poland. In that case, it is undoubtedly the fact that, even though in the ‘long ‘90s’ it did successfully disintegrate the working class, women themselves, in the end, reclaimed their lost voices and, against the odds, engaged in the collective resistance. While the “Solidarity” fell into disgrace and slowly began to lose its power, other worker unions gained importance. Thankfully, they have been much more inclusive – and determined to fight for the workers' interests, not merely union leaders' interests. The most worth-mentioning example is Workers Initiative, an autonomous Poland-wide union, which has commissions in various sectors: from the industry to the cultural institutions. It is intersectionally engaged in multiple causes – the flags of Workers Initiative are present on the antifascist, pro-refugees, queer and feminist demonstrations. Secondly, women and queer people have responded to the repressive reproductive policies by showing ‘abortion solidarity’. Numerous collectives, both in Poland and abroad, have been established to make abortion as accessible as possible and to make the oppressive laws at least partially obsolete.

One of the protest songs of the black protests and women's strikes was a song by amateur "Witches' choir". A song titled "Your rule" is an accusation against the patriarchal power, which continues to suppress women. The song, however, deals not only with the issue of subjugation and violence – it is primarily about the power of the subjugated – found not in the traumatic experiences of oppression but in the solidary resistance to it. "*Million of us are standing here, and none of us is any longer having fear.*"⁴³⁷ While the neoliberal and neoconservative hegemony is shaking at its fundamentals, the real solidarity, defeated in the '90s, seems to be reborn today.

⁴³⁷ Chór Czarownic, Twoja Władza - see the song on youtube:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UCYH3O_e9DI

Bibliography:

- Adorno, Theodor W. *The Culture Industry. Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J.M. Bernstein. London/ New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Anonymous. *To jest call out na skłot Przychodnia*. 26 February 2019.
<https://resiste.squat.net/?p=24396> a
- Althusser, Luis. Trans. Ben Brewster. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses". In *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971.
- Atrey, Shreya. "Women's Human Rights: From Progress to Transformation, An Intersectional Response to Martha Nussbaum." *Human Rights Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (2018): 859-904.
- Benjamin, Walter. „O pojęciu historii.” in idem, *Anioł historii. Eseje, szkice, fragmenty*. trans. Krystyna Krzemieniowa, ed. Hubert Orłowski. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 1996.
- Bobako, Monika. „Konstruowanie odmienności klasowej jako urasowanie. Przypadek polski po 1989”. In *Podziały klasowe i nierówności społeczne. Refleksje socjologiczne po dwóch dekadach realnego kapitalizmu w Polsce*. Ed. Piotr Żuk. Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, 2010., 165-180.
- Buchowski, Michał. *Czyścić: Antropologia neoliberalnego postsocjalizmu*. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2017.
- Buden, Boris. Trans. Michał Sutowski. *Strefa przejścia. O końcu postkomunizmu*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2012., 34-35.
- Burke Auxier, Mary Elizabeth. "Exploring Child Worlds: Functions of Infantilization in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century British Literature". PhD diss. UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA RIVERSIDE, 2012.
- Charkiewicz, Ewa, ed.. *Gender i ekonomia opieki*. Warszawa: Fundacja Tomka Byry Ekologia i Sztuka, 2009.
- Charkiewicz, Ewa. „Matki do sterylizacji. Neoliberalny rasizm w Polsce”. Nowa Krytyka, 2008, http://www.nowakrytyka.pl/pl/artykuly/Nk_online/?id=651/_Matki_do_sterylizacji__Neoliberalny_rasizm_w_Polsce__
- Charkiewicz, Ewa. „Od Komunizmu do Neoliberalizmu. Technologie transformacji”. in *Zniewolony umysł 2: neoliberalizm i jego krytyki*, ed. Jan Sowa, Ewa Majewska. Kraków: ha!art, 2006.
- Charkiewicz, Ewa. „O Kongresie Kobiet Polskich i neoliberalno-konserwatywnym zwrocie feminizmu w Polsce”. Biblioteka Online Think Tanku Feministycznego, 2009.
<http://www.ekologiasztuka.pl/pdf/f0074charkiewicz2009.pdf>.
- Ciesielska, Małgorzata. „Wynagrodzenia kobiet i mężczyzn”. In: E. Lisowska (red.), *Gender Index. Monitorowanie równości kobiet i mężczyzn w miejscu pracy* (s. 55—66). Warszawa: EQUAL, 2007.

- Collective edition. *Rewolucja 1905. Przewodnik Krytyki Politycznej*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2009.
- Combahee River Collective, *The Combahee River Collective Statement*, 1977, <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/combahee-river-collective-statement-1977/>
- Crenshaw, Kimberle. „Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics”, *University of Chicago Legal Forum*: Vol. 1989: Iss. 1, Article 8.
- Czapnik, Sławomir. „Pan z wójtem i plebanem. Krótka rozprawa o klasowym wymiarze sojuszu między biznesem, państwem i Kościołem katolickim w Polsce po 1989 roku”. In *Podziały klasowe i nierówności społeczne. Refleksje socjologiczne po dwóch dekadach realnego kapitalizmu w Polsce*. Ed. Piotr Żuk. Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, 2010.
- Czyż, Sara, Dymińska, Dominika, Wieczorkiewicz, Patrycja, Ziółkowska, Agnieszka and other, anonymised authors. „Papierowi feminiści. O hipokryzji na lewicy i nowych twarzach polskiego #metoo”. 27 November 2017, *Codziennik Feministyczny*. <http://codziennikfeministyczny.pl/papierowi-feminisci-nowe-twarze-polskiego-metoo/>.
- Dalla Costa, Mariarosa, James, Selma. *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, 1971, <https://files.libcom.org/files/Dalla%20Costa%20and%20James%20-%20Women%20and%20the%20Subversion%20of%20the%20Community.pdf>
- de Beauvoir, Simone. trans. Gabriela Mycielska, Maria Leśniewska. *Druga Płeć*. Warszawa: Czarna Owca, 2014.
- Debord, Guy. Trans. Ken Knabb. *The Society of the Spectacle*. Canberra: Hobgoblin Press, 200.
- Desperak, Izabela. *Płeć Zmiany. Zjawisko Transformacji w Polsce z Perspektywy Gender*. 2nd edit. Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2017.
- Dhawan, Nikita. “Marxist Critique of Post-colonialism”. *Krisis* 2018, Issue 2, <https://archive.krisis.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Krisis-2018-2-Marxist-Critique-of-Post-colonialism.pdf?>.
- Dowling, Emma. *The Care Crisis. What Caused It and How Can We End It?*. London: Verso, 2021.
- Drenda, Olga. *Duchologia polska. Rzeczy i ludzie w latach transformacji*. Kraków: Karakter, 2016.
- Duda, Katarzyna. *Kiedyś tu było życie, teraz jest tylko bieda. O ofiarach polskiej transformacji*. Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy Książka i Prasa, 2019.
- Dunn, Elizabeth C. *Privatizing Poland: Baby Food, Big Business, and the Remaking of Labor*. Cornell University Press, 2004.

- Dwornik, Bartłomiej. „Historia bezrobocia: pracę traciło nawet 9 tysięcy osób dziennie”. 13 January, 210. <https://praca.money.pl/wiadomosci/historia-bezrobocia-prace-tracilo-nawet-9-tysiecy-osob-dziennie-6270437445916289a.html>
- Dzieciuchowicz, Iga. „Ochroniarki kongresu kobiet: „organizatorka mówiła do nas „głaby”, „idiotki”. To na jej żądanie miałyśmy stać jak roboty przez 16 godzin””. 25 June 2018, *Codzienik Feministyczny*, <http://codziennikfeministyczny.pl/ochroniarki-kk-organizatorka-mowila-glaby-idiotki-na-zadanie-mialysmy-stac-jak-roboty-przez-16-godzin/>.
- Eide, Elisabeth. „Strategic Essentialism”. In *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Gender and Sexuality Studies*, ed. Angela Wong, Maithree Wickramasinghe, renee hoogland, Nancy A Naples, 1–2. Singapore: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2016.
- Faludi, Susan. *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2006.
- Federacja na rzecz Kobiet i Planowania Rodziny, „Błąd w sztuce lekarskiej? Agata”. In *Piekło kobiet trwa...* Warszawa, 2017. https://federa.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Pieklo_kobiet_2007.pdf
- Federici, Silvia. *Caliban and the Witch. Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, 2nd edit. New York: Autonomedia, 2014.
- Fidelis, Małgorzata. Trans. Maria Jaszczurowska, *Kobiety, komunizm I industrializacja w powojennej Polsce*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo WAB, 2015.
- Fidelis, Małgorzata. „Równouprawnienie czy konserwatywna nowoczesność? Kobiety pracujące”. In eadam et al., *Kobiety w Polsce 1945-1989. Nowoczesność, równouprawnienie, komunizm*. Kraków: UNIVERITAS, 2020.
- Flieger, Estera. Interview with Tomasz Markiewka: „PiS bardzo dobrze rozpoznał, że ludzie są wkurzeni”. 6 July 2020, <https://publicystyka.ngo.pl/tomasz-markiewka-pis-bardzo-dobrze-rozpoznal-ze-ludzie-sa-wkurzeni-wywiad>
- Flis, Daniel. „Prawda. Dziewczyny są bardziej lewicowe niż chłopcy. Potwierdził to czarny protest”. 2016, oko.press, <https://oko.press/dziewczyny-sa-bardziej-lewicowe-niz-chlopcy-potwierdzil-czarny-protest/>
- Fraser, Nancy. “How Feminism Became Capitalism”’s Handmaiden – and How to Reclaim It”. 14 October 2013, *Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/oct/14/feminism-capitalist-handmaiden-neoliberal>
- Fraser, Nancy. Feminism, “Capitalism and the Cunning of History”. *New Left Review* 56 (Mar/Apr 2009), <https://newleftreview.org/issues/ii56/articles/nancy-fraser-feminism-capitalism-and-the-cunning-of-history>
- Frąckowiak-Sochańska, Monika, Królikowska, Sabina ed. *Kobiety w Polskiej Transformacji 1989-2009: Podsumowanie, Interpretacje, Prognozy*. Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2010.
- Fukuyama, Francis. “The End of History?” *The National Interest*, no. 16 (1989): 3–18.

- Fuszara, Małgorzata. „Kobiety w Polityce w okresie transformacji”. In *Kobiety w Polskiej Transformacji 1989-2009: Podsumowanie, Interpretacje, Prognozy*. Toruń: Wdawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2010.
- Ghodsee, Kristen. “Feminism-by-Design: Emerging Capitalisms, Cultural Feminism, and Women’s Nongovernmental Organizations in Postsocialist Eastern Europe.” *Signs* 29, no. 3 (2004): 727–53. <https://doi.org/10.1086/380631>.
- Główny Urząd Statystyczny, raport Kobiety w Polsce, 2007.
- Grabowska, Magdalena. *Zerwana genealogia. Działalność społeczna i polityczna kobiet po 1945 r. a współczesny ruch kobiecy*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2018.
- Graff, Agnieszka. *Świat bez Kobiet. Płeć w polskim życiu publicznym*. Warszawa: Wdawnictwo Marginesy, 2021.
- Graff, Agnieszka. „Backlash and Wisła – reakcja przed akcją?”. Pre-face to Polish edition of: Susan Faludi, trans. Anna Dzierzgowska, *Reakcja. Niewypowiedziana wojna przeciw kobietom*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Czarna Owca, 2013.
- Gramsci, Antonio. Trans. Quintin Hoare, Geoffrey Nowell Smith. *Selections from the Prison, Notebooks*. New York: International Publishers., 1971.
- Gregor, Anikó and Grzebalska, Weronika. “Thoughts on the contested relationship between neoliberalism and feminism.” In *Solidarity in Struggle: Feminist Perspectives on Neoliberalism in East-Central Europe*, ed. Eszter Kováts. Budapest: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2016.
- Grudzińska-Gross, Irena. “Przedmowa do wydania polskiego”. In Penn, Shana. Trans. Maciej Antosiewicz. *Sekret “Solidarności”. Kobiety, które pokonały komunizm w Polsce*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo WAB, 2014.
- Grzebalska, Weronika, Pető, Andrea. „The Gendered Modus Operandi of the Illiberal Transformation in Hungary and Poland”. *Women’s Studies International Forum* 68 (May 2018): 164–72. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2017.12.001>.
- Haraway, Donna. “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective.” *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575–99.
- Hartmann, Heidi I. “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union.” *Capital & Class* 3, no. 2 (July 1979): 1–33.
- Hartsock, Nancy C. M. “The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism.” In *Discovering Reality*, ed. Sandra Harding, Merrill B. Hintikka. Dordrecht, Springer, 1983. 283–310.
- Harvey, David. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Harvey, David. *Paris, Capital of Modernity*. London: Routledge, 2004.
- Harvey, David. „The «New» Imperialism: Accumulation by Dispossession”. In Karl Marx, by Kevin B. Anderson, 213–37. Ed. Bertell Ollman i Kevin B. Anderson, 1. Edition. Routledge, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315251196-10>.

- Herman, Edward S., Chomsky, Noam. *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1988.
- Hill Collins, Patricia. "Black Feminist Epistemology [1990]". In Craig J. Calhoun, ed., *Contemporary Sociological Theory*. Blackwell, 2007.
- Hobsbawm, Eric, Ranger, Terence, ed. *The Invention of Tradition*. London: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- Hochschild, Arlie R. *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983.
- Holt, Justin. 2015. "Class". *The social thought of Karl Marx*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
- hooks, bell. Trans. Ewa Majeska. *Teoria Feministyczna*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2013.
- Hryciuk, Renata E. „O znikającej matce. Upolitycznione macierzyństwo w Ameryce Łacińskiej i w Polsce”. In *Pożegnanie z Matką Polką? Dyskursy, praktyki i reprezentacje macierzyństwa we współczesnej Polsce*, ed. Renata E. Hryciuk, Elżbieta Korolczuk. Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2012., 267-288.
- Inglot, Tomasz. „Zasiłki rodzinne jako “odrzucone” dziedzictwo komunistycznego welfare state w Polsce (1947-2003)”. *Polityka Społeczna* 9/2010, https://www.ipiss.com.pl/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2013/02/ps_9-2010_t_inglot.pdf
- Ikonowicz, Piotr. „Zło z honorowym obywatelstwem Warszawy”. *Krytyka Polityczna*, 9 June 2022. <https://krytykapolityczna.pl/kraj/miasto/hanna-gronkiewicz-waltz-warszawa-honorowe-obywatelstwo-ikonowicz/>.
- Illouz, Eva. *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism*. London: Polity Press, 2007.
- Jakubczak, Franciszek. „Zasoby pamiątek. Zasady i zakres ich użytkowania”. *Ruch Prawniczy, Ekonomiczny i Socjologiczny*. Iss. 2, 1989. ,259-268.
- Janion, Maria. „Bogini Wolności (Dlaczego rewolucja jest kobietą?)”. In eadem, *Kobiety i duch inności*. Warszawa: Sic!, 2006.
- Kaliński, Janusz. *Transformacja gospodarki polskiej w latach 1989–2004*. Warszawa: Szkoła Główna Handlowa w Warszawie, 2009.
- Kalisz, Paweł. „Srebrna? Zaplecze finansowe PiS stworzone przez Kaczyńskiego warte jest fortunę”. 28 January 2019, [natemat.pl](https://natemat.pl/262359,co-to-jest-spolka-srebrna-zaplecze-finansowe-pis-stworzyl-jaroslaw-kaczynski), <https://natemat.pl/262359,co-to-jest-spolka-srebrna-zaplecze-finansowe-pis-stworzyl-jaroslaw-kaczynski>
- Karko. „Profesor, który chciał od studentek spotkań za wpis do indeksu, zwolniony z Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego”. 24 September 2020, *Gazeta Wyborcza*. <https://wroclaw.wyborcza.pl/wroclaw/7,35771,26333564,profesor-ktory-chcial-od-studentek-spotkan-za-wpis-do-indeksu.html?disableRedirects=true>
- Keay, Douglas. Interview with Margaret Thatcher. *Magazine Woman's Own*, 23 September 1987, archived online by the Margaret Thatcher Foundation; <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106689>

- Kerner, Ina. "Critical Whiteness Studies: Potentiale und Grenzen eines wissenspolitischen Projekts" *Feministische Studien* 31, no. 2 (2013): 278-293.
- Klein, Naomi. *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. 1st ed. New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt, 2007.
- Klich-Kluczevska, Barbara. Perkowski, Piotr. „Obiekty biopolityki? Zdrowie, reprodukcja i przemoc”. In eadem et al., *Kobiety w Polsce 1945-1989. Nowoczesność, równouprawnienie, komunizm*. Kraków: UNIVERITAS, 2020., 165-214.
- Koczanowicz, Leszek. „Co się z nami stało, czyli powstanie postpostkomunizmu.” In *Podziały klasowe i nierówności społeczne. Refleksje socjologiczne po dwóch dekadach realnego kapitalizmu w Polsce*. Ed. Piotr Żuk. Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, 2010., 90-91.
- Kojzar, Katarzyna. „Ku pamięci kobiety, która umarła tylko dlatego, że była w ciąży. W Polsce o godz. 19 zapłoną znicze”. 1 November 2021, oko.press, <https://oko.press/ku-pamieci-kobiety-ktora-umarla-tylko-dlatego-ze-byla-w-ciazy/>.
- Korolczuk, Elżbieta. “Neoliberalism and feminist organizing: from “NGO-ization of resistance” to resistance against neoliberalism”. In *Solidarity in Struggle: Feminist Perspectives on Neoliberalism in East-Central Europe*, ed. Eszter Kováts. Budapest: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2016.
- Kosterkiewicz, Ada T.. „Jak zabić aktywizm w jednym prostym kroku, czyli jak dziewczuchy dziewczuchom”. <https://www.adakosterkiewicz.pl/2018/04/jak-zabic-aktywizm-w-jednym-prostym-kroku-czyli-jak-dziewuchy-dziewuchom/>
- Kościńska, Agnieszka. *Zobaczyć Łosia. Historia polskiej edukacji seksualnej*. Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2017. 303-323.
- Krastev, Ivan, Holmes, Stephen. *The Light that Failed. A Reckoning*. London: Penguin Books, 2020.
- Kubisa, Julia. Pielęgniarki. „Protesty Pielęgniarek i Położnych w kontekście reform ochrony zdrowia”. Raport Think Tanku Feministycznego nr 3. 2009, http://www.ekologiasztuka.pl/think.tank.feministyczny/articles.php?article_id=334
- Leder, Andrzej. *Prześlona rewolucja. Ćwiczenia z logiki historycznej*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2014
- Leyk, Aleksandra, Wawrzyniak, Joanna. *Cięcia. Mówiona historia transformacji*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2020.
- Leszczyński, Adam. „Czarnek zmienia listę czasopism naukowych. Dodaje punkty swoim – na miesiąc przed oceną”. 2 December 2021, oko.press, <https://oko.press/czarnek-zmienia-liste-czasopism-naukowych-dodaje-punkty-swoim-na-miesiac-przed-ocena/>
- Leszczyński, Adam. „Paradoks współczucia. Bieda i wykluczenie w oczach dziennikarzy.” In *Podziały klasowe i nierówności społeczne. Refleksje socjologiczne po dwóch dekadach realnego kapitalizmu w Polsce*. Ed. Piotr Żuk. Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, 2010., 259-270,

- Luxemburg, Rosa. *Capital Accumulation*, [1913], trans. Agnes Schwarzschild. London: Routledge, 1951.
- Łaciak, Beata. *Obyczajowość polska czasu transformacji, czyli wojna postu z karnawalem*. Warszawa: Trio, 2007.
- Łapniewska, Zofia. "First-world aspirations and feminism translocation: In search of economic and leftist alternatives." In *Solidarity in Struggle: Feminist Perspectives on Neoliberalism in East-Central Europe*, ed. Eszter Kováts. Budapest: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2016., 21-31.
- Madejska, Marta. *Aleja Włókniarek*. Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2018.
- Majewska, Ewa. „Ekonomia polityczna zakazu. 15 lat ustawy antyaborcyjnej w Polsce”. In eadem, *Tramwaj zwany uznaniem. Feminizm i solidarność po neoliberalizmie*. Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy Książka i Prasa, 2017., 255-264.
- Majewska, Ewa. „Paradoksy sarmatyzmu, solidarność kobiet i polityka wielości”. 16 June 2015, <http://majewska.codziennikfeministyczny.pl/tag/jan-sowa/>
- Majewska, Ewa. „Słaby opór i siła bezsilnych. #Czarnyprotest kobiet w Polsce 2016”. 10 November 2016. Praktyka Teoretyczna. <https://www.praktykateoretyczna.pl/artykuly/ewa-majewska-saby-opor-i-sia-bezsilnych-czarnyprotest-kobiet-w-polsce-2016/>
- Majewska, Ewa. „Śnieg w lecie, czyli o niewolnictwie kobiet na polskiej lewicy w późnym kapitalizmie”. 25 June 2014, <http://codziennikfeministyczny.pl/snieg-lecie-czyli-niewolnictwie-kobiet-na-polskiej-lewicy-poznym-kapitalizmie/>.
- McCall, Leslie. „The Complexity of Intersectionality”. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 30, nr 3 (March 2005): 1771–1800. <https://doi.org/10.1086/426800>.
- Michalitsch, Gabriele. “Privatisiert – Geschlechterimplikationen neoliberaler Transformation”. In *Genus oeconomicum : Ökonomie, Macht, Geschlechterverhältnisse*, ed. Meike Lemke. Konstanz : UVK Verl.-Ges., 2006.
- Mies, Maria, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour*. London: Zed Books Ltd., 2014.
- Modzelewski, Karol. *Zajeżdżimy kobyłę historii. Wyznania poobijanego jeźdźca*. Warszawa, Wydawnictwo Iskry, 2013.
- Mrozik, Agnieszka. *Akuszerki transformacji Kobiety, literatura i władza w Polsce po 1989 roku*. Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2012.
- Nowak, Andrzej W.. „Bread and Fear”. 26 December 2019. LeftEast, <https://lefteast.org/bread-and-fear/>
- Nowak, Andrzej W.. „Neoliberalna akademika. Szkolnictwo wyższe a wytwarzanie i legitymizowanie podziałów klasowych w Polsce po 1989 roku.” In *Podziały klasowe i nierówności społeczne. Refleksje socjologiczne po dwóch dekadach realnego kapitalizmu w Polsce*. Ed. Piotr Żuk. Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, 2010. 117-131.

- Nowak, Robert, Cieszewski, Piotr. *Wszystkich nas nie spalicie*. Warszawa: Trzecia Strona, 2016.
- Okraska, Magdalena. *Ziemia Jałowa. Opowieść o Zagłębiu*. Warszawa: Trzecia Strona, 2018.
- Ost, David. *The Defeat of Solidarity. Anger and Politics in Postcommunist Europe*. New York: Cornell University Press, 2005.
- Ost, David. „Wstęp”. Pre-face to Elisabeth Dunn, trans. Przemysław Sadura, *Prywatyzując Polskę. O bobofrutach, wielkim biznesie i restrukturyzacji pracy*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2017.
- Penn, Shana. *Solidarity's Secret. The women who defeated communism in Poland*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005.
- Penn, Shana. Trans. Maciej Antosiewicz. *Sekret "Solidarności". Kobiety, które pokonały komunizm w Polsce*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo WAB, 2014
- Périvier, Hélène, Sénac, Réjane. “The New Spirit of Neoliberalism: Equality and Economic Prosperity”, 18 May 2020, <https://www.sciencespo.fr/research/cogito/home/the-new-spirit-of-neoliberalism-equality-and-economic-prosperity/?lang=en>
- Perkowski, Piotr. “Droga do władzy? Kobiety w Policyce”. In idem et al., *Kobiety w Polsce 1945-1989. Nowoczesność, równouprawnienie, komunizm*. Kraków: UNIVERITAS, 2020.
- Piotr Perkowski, Katarzyna Stańczak-Wiślicz, „Nowoczesna gospodyni Kobiety w gospodarstwie domowym”. In eadem et al., *Kobiety w Polsce 1945-1989. Nowoczesność, równouprawnienie, komunizm*. Kraków: UNIVERITAS, 2020., 165-214.
- Pluciński, Przemysław. „Dykurs klasowy polskiej socjologii postranformacyjnej”. In *Podziały klasowe i nierówności społeczne. Refleksje socjologiczne po dwóch dekadach realnego kapitalizmu w Polsce*. Ed. Piotr Żuk. Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, 2010., 101-116.
- Porozumienie Kobiet 8 Marca, Fundacja OśKA et al., „List stu kobiet”. 4 February 2002. <https://prod-cdn.atria.nl/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/01/20170606/LIST-STU-KOBIET.pdf>.
- Pyzik, Agata. *Poor but Sexy: Culture Clashes in Europe East and West*. Winchester/ Waschington: Zero Books, 2014.
- Rutkowska, Zofia. „Pełnomocnicza ds. Kobiet”, czyli polityka państwa wobec kobiet na rynku pracy w Polsce i we Francji”. In *Kobiety w Polskiej Transformacji 1989-2009: Podsumowanie, Interpretacje, Prognozy*. Toruń: Wudawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2010.
- Sauer, Birgid. “Der Staat als geschlechtsspezifisches Gewaltverhältnis. Eine (neo)marxistisch-feministische Perspektive”. In *Feminismus und Marxismus*, ed. Alexandra Scheele, Stefanie Wöhl. Weinheim/ Basel: 2018., 202-217.
- Sekuła, Paulina. „Zaangażowanie polityczne kobiet w Polsce po 1989 roku: dynamika zmian i uwarunkowania”. In *Kobiety w Polskiej Transformacji 1989-2009: Podsumowanie, Interpretacje, Prognozy*. Toruń: Wudawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2010.

- Siemianko, Beata. *Reprywatyzując Polskę. Historia wielkiego przekreślenia*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2017.
- Smith, Neil. *The New Urban Frontier. Gentrification and the Revanchist City*. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Socjalny Kongres Kobiet. „Kongres Kobiet – Socjalny czy Neoliberalny?”. 2 July 2018, <https://www.ozzip.pl/publicystyka/strategie-zwiazkowe/item/2393-kongres-kobiet-socjalny-czy-neoliberalny>
- Sosna, Michał. *Kobiety delikatne jak bomby. Transparenty Październikowych i Listopadowych Protestów 2020*. Imperium Ducha, 2020.
- Sowa, Jan. *Ciesz się, późny wnuku! Kolonializm, Globalizacja i Demokracja Radykalna*. Kraków: korporacja ha!art, 2008.
- Sowa, Jan. *Inna Rzeczpospolita jest możliwa! Widma przeszłości, wizje przyszłości*. Warszawa, Wydawnictwo WAB, 2015.
- Sowa, Jan. „Mitologie III RP”. In *Podziały klasowe i nierówności społeczne*. Ed. Piotr Żuk. Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, 2010.
- Stańczak Wiślicz, Katarzyna, Perkowski, Piotr, Fidelis, Małgorzata, Klich-Kluczevska, Barbara. *Kobiety w Polsce 1945-1989. Nowoczesność, równouprawnienie, komunizm*. Kraków: UNIVERITAS, 2020.
- Stańczak-Wiślicz, Katarzyna, Perkowski, Piotr. „Nowoczesna gospodyni. Kobiety w gospodarstwie domowym”. In eadem et al., *Kobiety w Polsce 1945-1989. Nowoczesność, równouprawnienie, komunizm*. Kraków: UNIVERITAS, 2020.
- Świetlik, Maria. Na zapleczu Kongresu Kobiet. "Ochroniarka nie mogła usiąść, chociaż obok stało krzesło". 20 June 2018, Gazeta Wyborcza, <https://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/7,161770,23564498,swietlik-na-zapleczu-kongresu-kobiet-ochroniarka-nie-mogla.html>.
- Szczerbiak, Agata. Polska z najgorszym dostępem do antykoncepcji w Europie. 15 February 2019, Polityka, <https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/spoleczenstwo/1782538,1,polska-z-najgorszym-dostepem-do-antykoncepcji-w-europie.read>
- Szpala, Iwona, Zubik, Małgorzata. Układ warszawski. Czy reprywatyzacja w stolicy zatrząsie polską polityką?. 20 August 2016. Gazeta Wyborcza, <https://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/7,124059,20572140,uklad-warszawski-czy-reprywatyzacja-w-stolicy-zatrzesie-polska.html>
- Szymaniak, Małgorzata. Pisał po nocach natrętne wiadomości o podtekście seksualnym, 18 June 2018. <http://codziennikfeministyczny.pl/pisal-po-nocach-natretne-wiadomosci-podtekście-seksualnym-malgorzata-szymaniak-ujawnia-przypadki-molestowania-kobiet-ze-strony-znanego-publicysty/>
- Szymczak, Jakub. 4 lata z 500 plus. Wymysły, bzdury, manipulacje. 2020, oko.press, <https://oko.press/4-lata-z-500-plus-wymysly-bzdury-manipulacje/>

- Titkow, Anna. „Figura Matki Polki. Próba demotologizacji”. In *Pożegnanie z Matką Polką? Dyskursy, praktyki i reprezentacje macierzyństwa we współczesnej Polsce*, ed. Renata E. Hryciuk, Elżbieta Korolczuk. Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2012.
- Tronto, Joan C.. “Privatizing Neo-Colonialism: Migrant Domestic Care Workers, Partial Citizenship, and Responsibility: Global Complexities in Europeanization, Care and Gender”. In *Global Complexities*, ed. H. M. Dahl; M. Keränen; A. Kovalainen. (Basingstoke, England : Palgrave Macmillan Limited, 2011).
- Urbanik-Kopeć, Alicja. *Anioł w domu, mrówka w fabryce*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2018.
- Victor, Liz. “Systematic reviewing”. Social research Update, Issue 54 (Summer 2008). <https://sru.soc.surrey.ac.uk/SRU54.pdf>
- Walczeńska, Sławomira. „Matka Gastronomiczna”. *Pełnym Głosem* 3 (1995). https://efka.org.pl/archiwum/index.php?action=p_art&ID=8
- Walgenbach, Katharina. “Gender als interdependente Kategorie”. In Gabriele Dietze, Lann Hornscheidt, and Kerstin Palm, ed. *Gender Als Interdependente Kategorie: Neue Perspektiven Auf Intersektionalität, Diversität Und Heterogenität*. 2nd ed. Stuttgart: Verlag Barbara Budrich, 2012.
- Wichterich, Christa. *Care Extractivism and the Reconfiguration of Social Reproduction in Post-Fordist Economies*. ICDD Working Papers, Paper No. 25 (April 2019)
- Wierchoś, Dariusz. „Zwyczajne życie zwykłych ludzi. Losy archiwum Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Pamiętnikarstwa”. 10 April 2008, Histmag; <https://histmag.org/Zwyczajne-zycie-zwyklych-ludzi.-Losy-archiwum-Towarzystwa-Przyjaciol-Pamietnikarstwa-1750>.
- Wijaczka, Jacek. „Barbara Zdunk nie była czarownicą. Na stos zawiodła ją zazdrość i pragnienie miłości”. 16 September 2021. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, <https://wyborcza.pl/alehistoria/7,121681,27567018,barbara-zdunk-nie-byla-czarownica.html>.
- Woleński, Jan. „Policja na konferencji o Marksie? To są praktyki totalitarne”. 16 May 2018, *Polityka*. <https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kraj/1749016,1,policja-na-konferencji-o-marksie-to-sa-praktyki-totalitarne.read>
- Woś, Rafał. *Zimna Trzydziestoletnia. Nieautoryzowana biografia polskiego kapitalizmu*. Kraków: MANDO, 2019.
- Woźniak, Wojciech. „Zwalczanie ubóstwa czy zwalczanie ubogich”. In *Podziały klasowe i nierówności społeczne*. Ed. Piotr Żuk. Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, 2010.
- Zuchowicz, Katarzyna. „Wszyscy czuliśmy się tam jak niewolnicy". Co się działo na Kongresie Kobiet? Ochroniarki oskarżają, jest odpowiedź”. 27 June 2018, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, <https://natemat.pl/242069,co-ochroniarki-zarzucaja-kongresowi-kobiet-dorota-warakomska-odpowiada>.
- Żuk, Piotr, ed., *Podziały klasowe i nierówności społeczne. Refleksje socjologiczne po dwóch dekadach realnego kapitalizmu w Polsce*. Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, 2010.

Wikipedia articles:

“Bezrobocie w Polsce”; https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bezrobocie_w_Polsce

„Komisja majątkowa”; https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Komisja_maj%C4%85tkowa

“Plan Balcerowicza”; https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plan_Balcerowicza

„Przekształcenia własnościowe w Polsce po 1989 roku”;

https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Przekszta%C5%82cenia_w%C5%82asno%C5%9Bciowe_w_Polsce_po_1989_roku

„Przyjaciółka”; <https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Przyjaci%C3%B3%C5%82ka>

“Zadłużenie zagraniczne PRL”;

https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zad%C5%82u%C5%BCenie_zagraniczne_PRL

Abstract:

In this thesis, I examine the relationship between Polish socio-economic neoliberal transformation and the backlash of the '90s. I analyse the theoretical explanations of neoliberal and (neo)conservative turns and their mutual interdependence as conceptualised by feminist and anti-neoliberal authors. I recognise the accomplishments of Polish critical theory: successful deconstruction of the neoliberal discourses and growing sensitivity to experiences of most marginalised social groups. However, I also identify theoretical gaps and shortcomings of the theory that, with some exceptions, failed to recognise and explain the inter-connections between Polish capitalism and patriarchy - I conclude that a comprehensive critical and intersectional analysis of Polish transformation is still missing.

Consequently, I propose my own interpretation of the correlation between analysed phenomena – I ground my research in the theories of feminist historical materialism, particularly inspired by the concepts developed by Maria Mies and Silvia Federici. I explore the processes of deepening the gendered division of labour and “housewifisation” of women’s reproductive and productive labour in the context of privatisations and austerity politics. I analyse the “enclosure” of the female body by the repressive reproductive policies as a strategy of “remaking” the body of the female workers related to neoliberal labour policies. Furthermore, I examine the “marriage” of neoliberalism to neoconservatism and explain the “re-traditionalisation” of Polish society as a consequence of enclosures of the commons. Finally, I analyse the decomposition and disintegration of the working class through the backlash within “Solidarity” and growing gender- and class-based divisions between workers.

Based on the example of the Polish '90s, I argue for the multi-dimensional understanding of the relationship between backlash and neoliberal turn. The backlash has been, at the same time, the pre-condition to the successful implementation of neoliberalism; it was inherent to introduced reforms and was also a (side-)effect of the socio-economic restructuring. I conclude with the diagnosis that structural violence against women was a crucial element of Polish transformation – and I point out the legacy of the Polish ‘long ‘90s’, manifesting itself most evidently in the ongoing crisis of reproductive rights. However, as a new wave of feminist solidarity and resistance is observable today, we can hope that neo-conservative and neoliberal hegemony has already begun to fall apart.

Abstrakt (DE):

In dieser Arbeit untersuche ich die Beziehung zwischen der polnischen sozioökonomischen neoliberalen Transformation und dem Backlash der 90er Jahre. Ich analysiere die theoretischen Erklärungen neoliberaler und (neo-)konservativer Wenden und ihre gegenseitige Abhängigkeit, wie sie von feministischen und anti-neoliberalen Autor*innen konzeptualisiert werden. Ich erkenne die Errungenschaften der polnischen kritischen Theorie an: erfolgreiche Dekonstruktion der neoliberalen Diskursen und wachsende Sensibilität für die Erfahrungen der meisten marginalisierten sozialen Gruppen. Ich identifiziere jedoch auch Mängel der Theorie, die es mit einigen Ausnahmen versäumt hat, die Verbindungen zwischen polnischem Kapitalismus und Patriarchat zu erkennen und zu erklären – ich schließe daraus, dass eine umfassende kritische und intersektionale Analyse der polnischen Transformation immer noch fehlt.

Folglich schlage ich meine eigene Interpretation der Korrelation zwischen analysierten Phänomenen vor – ich begründe meine Forschung in den Theorien des feministischen historischen Materialismus, insbesondere inspiriert von den Konzepten, die von Maria Mies und Silvia Federici entwickelt wurden. Ich untersuche die Prozesse der Vertiefung der geschlechtsspezifischen Arbeitsteilung und der „Hauswifisation“ der reproduktiven und produktiven Arbeit von Frauen im Kontext von Privatisierungen und Austeritätspolitik. Ich analysiere die „Enclosure“ des weiblichen Körpers durch die repressive reproduktive Politiken als eine Strategie der „Remaking the body“ der Arbeiterinnen im Zusammenhang mit der neoliberalen Arbeitspolitik. Darüber hinaus untersuche ich die „Ehe“ des Neoliberalismus mit dem Neokonservatismus und erkläre die „Retraditionalisierung“ der polnischen Gesellschaft als Folge der Enteignung der Gemeingüter. Schließlich analysiere ich den Zerfall und die Desintegration der Arbeiterklasse infolge von dem Backlash innerhalb der „Solidarność“ und wachsende geschlechts- und klassenbasierte Spaltungen zwischen den Arbeiter*innen.

Am Beispiel der polnischen 90er plädiere ich für ein mehrdimensionales Verständnis des Verhältnisses von Backlash und neoliberaler Wende. Backlash war gleichzeitig die Voraussetzung für die erfolgreiche Umsetzung des Neoliberalismus; er war den eingeleiteten Reformen inhärent und was auch ein (Neben-)Effekt der sozioökonomischen Umstrukturierung. Ich schließe mit der Diagnose, dass strukturelle Gewalt gegen Frauen ein entscheidendes Element der polnischen Transformation war – und ich weise auf das Erbe der polnischen „langen 90er“ hin, das sich am deutlichsten in der anhaltenden Krise der

reproduktiven Rechte manifestiert. Da jedoch heute eine neue Welle feministischer Solidarität und Widerstands zu beobachten ist, können wir hoffen, dass die neokonservative und neoliberale Hegemonie bereits zu zerfallen begonnen hat.