Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland

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Introduction

Krystyna W. was twenty-two and the mother of two small children when she came to the "Ziemowit" coal mine near her hometown of Pszczyna to ask for work. It was 1952, the peak of rapid postwar industrialization in Poland, and she had heard from her female friends that the Silesian coal mines were hiring women for underground work. Krystyna had worked before at a variety of construction sites, but the work was hard and the wages low. When her husband was injured and could not work, she began looking for a stable job with a good salary to support her family. Although the communist press at the time encouraged women to enter jobs traditionally dominated by men, becoming a female coal miner was not an easy task. When Krystyna checked in with the Employment Office at the "Ziemowit" coal mine, she was told that there were no more vacancies underground. But she did not give up. Krystyna went straight to the office of the mine's director. She recalled: "The director's secretary asked me what I wanted, and I said I needed to talk to the director regarding a personal matter. I was admitted immediately." Krystyna presented her plea: she wanted to work underground. After a short conversation about Krystyna's family situation, the director handed her a handwritten note and sent her back to the Employment Office. The next day, Krystyna was hired as an underground coal miner assisting in the transportation of coal to the surface. "The director had an eye on me," Krystyna recalled. "Later on, whenever he came underground, he would not talk to any other woman but always would stop by me and ask how I was, how my children were, and if my husband was recovering."

Krystyna worked in the mines for two years. Her work was fully mechanized and well paid. As an underground coal miner, she received media attention, bonuses, and even a new apartment for her family. She

left her job reluctantly in late 1954 after she became pregnant with her third child, because pregnant women were not allowed to work underground. A little more than a year later, when Krystyna came back to the mine after her maternity leave, she learned that she could not go back to her underground job. The work was now deemed too dangerous and inappropriate for women. Instead, she was given a job in the sorting house on the surface. She soon found her wages significantly reduced and the new work conditions harsh and physically demanding. After a few months, Krystyna left the "Ziemowit" mine to look for a job elsewhere.[1]

Krystyna's story illustrates the experiences of many female industrial workers in post-1945 Poland, a time when state policies toward employment and gender equality constantly shifted. In the early 1950s, in the wake of rapid, stalinist industrialization, women were encouraged to enter jobs traditionally performed by men.[2] But by 1956, such jobs were depicted as contradictory to women's nature. The female reproductive capacity, communist leaders argued, made women unfit for jobs traditionally performed by men. What was the source of these ideas? Why was it important to designate jobs according to gender characteristics in a Marxist state that endorsed equality and socioeconomic conditions rather than biological traits as the primary determinants of individual and collective identities? And perhaps more importantly, why was gender difference more significant at certain political moments than others?

This book addresses these questions by examining the experiences of women in textile and coal mining communities in the context of postwar reconstruction and socialist state building in Poland. Women's industrial labor was central to the communist effort to build a new society free of inequalities. Yet gender difference remained a primary way of demarcating and understanding social hierarchies in postwar Poland. Ideas of

[1] Krystyna W., interview by author, tape recording, Tychy, 22 November 2002.

[2] Following Padraic Kenney, I use the term "stalinism" in lowercase "in an effort to separate the system from its founder." Padraic Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland: Workers and Communists, 1945–1950* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997), 3. Throughout this book, I use the word "communism" rather than "socialism" to denote the Marxist-Leninist model of socialism first implemented in revolutionary Russia. Although the communist stage of the Marxist theoretical model was never achieved by any society, it is important to differentiate the Soviet-style systems from other brands of socialism.

biological difference and reproduction actually became central to the official concept of equality. Indeed, party-state actors aimed to detect and define male and female "natural" qualities that would correspond to their predispositions to perform a particular task in production. In so doing, they periodically reconfigured the terms of gender segregation, but rarely questioned the very concept of sex-typing of jobs or natural gender qualities.

Such reconfiguration of gender hierarchies was not purely an economic or ideological scheme imposed from above. Rather, rearranging gender hierarchies served to articulate and execute political power at specific junctures of postwar Polish history, often in response to pressures from below. Political ruptures such as the end of the Second World War, the imposition of stalinism on Poland, and eventually the reform movement and de-stalinization all generated intense public debates about female and male roles and resulted in renegotiation of the place of women at the workplace and in the communist polity. In this sense, the understanding of gender difference was not tangential to the making of a communist system but rather served as a foundation for the formulation of Polish postwar social and political order. Not only state institutions participated in this process but local communities and individuals as well.

As Krystyna's story demonstrates, gender politics was hotly contested during the transition from stalinism to poststalinism in the mid-1950s. After Stalin's death in March 1953, Polish communists found that one of the most effective ways to garner support for reforms of the system and establish legitimacy of the poststalinist regime was to deploy images of sexual disorder and violation of natural gender roles symbolized by working women. Thus gender politics was a powerful instrument in negotiating the political and national legitimacy of communist regimes. The notions of liberalization and what became known as "Socialism with a Human Face," periodically endorsed in Eastern Europe by some party leaders as well as intellectuals and workers, were not gender neutral but often signaled a renewed commitment to reinventing precommunist cultural traditions and boosting men's superiority over women.[3] The

[3] On anti-feminist trends within the Hungarian dissident movement, see Joanna Goven, "Gender Politics in Hungary: Autonomy and Anti-Feminism," in *Gender Politics and Post-Communism: Reflections from Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*, ed. Nanette Funk and Magda Mueller (New York: Routledge, 1993), 224–40.

key role that gender difference played in the interaction between state and society indicated that the cultural was political in fundamental ways: the viability of the communist system depended, to a large degree, on the regime's successful enforcement of gender boundaries in many spheres of social, economic, and political life.

This book is more than an analysis of Polish party-state's approach to women's work. I seek to restore agency to women, who have often been depicted in popular and scholarly literature as passive objects of party-state policies.[4] In examining how female workers experienced and made sense of state policies, I ask how they subjectively understood socially and culturally articulated meanings of womanhood. For example, I look at female migration from the countryside to the factory as a powerful vehicle of identity transformation. Young women often took this opportunity to establish their personal autonomy while breaking free from the confinements of traditional peasant communities and the state's model of a disciplined labor force. Older female workers at the same time frequently turned their inferior status on the shop floor into a tool of power. They used the state-endorsed roles of women as producers and consumers to stage strikes and identify glaring contradictions in the communist promise of equality and social justice.

In broadly humanistic terms, this book seeks to understand how leaders and ordinary people understood equal rights as well as how they perceived and responded to the novelty of an active state's campaign to promote women in the social hierarchy. How, if at all, did Poles reconcile new models of "gender equality" with their own precommunist experiences and beliefs? And what exactly were these notions of "gender equality?" I use the term to denote commitment to equal rights and equal access to political, social, and economic power for women

[4] See, for example, essays on women and communism in Sharon L. Wolchik and Alfred G. Meyer, eds., *Women, State, and Party in Eastern Europe* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1985); and Tova Yedlin, ed., *Women in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* (New York: Praeger, 1980). The view of women as primarily victims of communist policies dominates the Polish-language historical literature. See, for example, Dariusz Jarosz, *Polacy a stalinizm, 1948–1956* (Warsaw: Instytut Historii PAN, 2000), 116–44. Notable exceptions are works on women in the Solidarity movement. See, for example, Shana Penn, *Solidarity's Secret: The Women Who Defeated Communism in Poland* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2005); and Padraic Kenney, "The Gender of Resistance in Communist Poland," *The American Historical Review* 104 (April 1999): 399–425.

and men. But this commitment can come in different shapes and forms. Communist ideas were in many ways different from what we understand as equal rights in American and European democracies of the twenty-first century. While sharing many of the same ideas, the communist concept was shaped by an illiberal political and social context. The present-day notion of equality, in contrast, is the outcome of the powerful social and political movements of the 1960s and 1970s aimed at inclusion and civil society as a way to perfect the liberal-democratic order. Nevertheless, in both cases, the concept of equal rights was rooted in the ideas of the Enlightenment, and there are lessons to be learned from the communist experience. Indeed, as Americans and Europeans today promote civic values along with diversity in race and gender, it is critical to examine the first such experiments, however different in their execution and intent. Ultimately, my analysis seeks to illuminate profound tensions that are central to any egalitarian projects pursued by state and nonstate actors in all political contexts.[5]

POLISH TRADITION AND SOVIET REVOLUTION

Scholars have demonstrated the fundamental role that gender hierarchies played in modern European societies. In the words of prominent social historians Laura L. Frader and Sonya O. Rose, "gender has been a central dimension of the social practices and power relations that have had profound consequences for people's lives."[6] Because female and male roles are so deeply embedded in all social life, they can provide a window into the interaction between a new political order and existing national and local conditions. How then did an alien system imposed from above affect local social structures? Sheer coercion and repression were not sufficient to create a communist system in Poland. Rather, the

[5] Historian Joan Scott has explored tensions in feminist politics in the context of a liberal-democratic system in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France. Many of her findings, especially the issue of unresolved dilemmas of sexual sameness and difference, can be applied to communist societies. She argues that "the apparent need to choose sameness *or* difference (which can never be satisfied by either alternative) is symptomatic of the difficulty that sexual difference poses for singular conceptions of the individual." See Joan Wallach Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Men* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 174.

[6] Laura L. Frader and Sonya O. Rose, "Introduction: Gender and the Reconstruction of European Working-Class History," in *Gender and Class in Modern Europe*, ed. Laura L. Frader and Sonya O. Rose (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996), 3.

imposition of radically new norms involved constant negotiations between the state and society.

Polish communism differed from the Soviet model in significant ways. One obvious difference was that in Eastern Europe, except for Yugoslavia and Albania, communist governments did not come to power as native forces but as foreign impositions. Thus their national legitimacy was limited. In order to consolidate power, Eastern European leaders adjusted the system to fit different national and local conditions. Even the imposition of Soviet-style stalinism in the late 1940s failed to create the homogeneity of social and political life envisioned by Moscow. As John Connelly has argued, "behind a façade of uniformity separate national traditions continued through the stalinist period in much of the 'northern tier' of East Central Europe, creating different contexts for politics and for societal experience."[7] These different contexts had profound consequences for gender relations and workplace experiences as well.

The case of Poland was in some ways unique. Poland's distinct social and cultural structures combined with its history of Russian imperial domination made that country especially unreceptive toward the communist revolution inspired by its eastern neighbor. Soviet control was more than a political challenge for Poles: it constituted an existential threat to the values of Western culture that Poland stood for. In 1953, Czesław Miłosz gave voice to this concern when he reflected on the incompatibility of the Russian brand of communism with European traditions: "Their [European] population is more intelligent; most of their land is under cultivation; their system of communication and their industry are more highly developed. Measures based on absolute cruelty are unnecessary and even pointless since there exists a greater degree of social discipline."[8] Such attitudes were strengthened among many Poles during the Second World War. The Soviets were hardly a friend of the Poles. First, the Soviet state joined Nazi Germany in the partition of Poland in September 1939. For nearly two years, the Soviets brutalized the population of eastern Poland in an effort ostensibly to

[7] John Connelly, *Captive University: The Sovietization of East German, Czech and Polish Higher Education, 1945–1956* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 2.

[8] Czesław Miłosz, *The Captive Mind* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 62. The book was first published in 1953.

eradicate class inequalities and establish communism. The mitigation of such policies occurred only after the German invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941. But the destiny of millions of Poles had been sealed. The Soviets deported hundreds of thousands of Poles to the Soviet interior and massacred Polish educated elites – most famously in the execution of thousands of officers in 1940 in the Katyń forest.[9] Although the Soviets blamed the crime on the Germans, few Poles doubted the real identity of the perpetrators. Then, in August 1944, at a time when Poles were supposedly aligned with the Soviets, Stalin deliberately remained passive during the Warsaw Uprising – leaving a lasting imprint on the Polish national psyche. As Warsaw Poles made a last-ditch effort to overthrow the Nazis – fully expecting the Red Army to assist them – the Soviet leader halted his troops on the Vistula River, allowing the Germans to decimate the Home Army, the noncommunist resistance, and then raze the city to the ground.[10] Compounding the trauma at the war's end, the Red Army again encroached on Polish territory, destroying property, killing, and raping. Eventually the Red Army occupied all of Poland and assisted Polish communists and socialists in setting up a new government in Warsaw.

While it is clear why ordinary Poles detested the Soviets, this resentment was not limited to general society. Polish communists also had reasons to distrust their Soviet comrades. Unlike the interwar Czechoslovak or Bulgarian communist parties, the Polish communist party was historically miniscule and politically insignificant. Stalin inflicted great damage to the Polish communist movement when he purged its leaders and disbanded the Communist Party of Poland (*Komunistyczna Partia Polski*, or KPP) in 1938. Most leaders were executed, and others died in prisons and labor camps.[11] Those who survived (many of them, like Władysław Gomułka, serving sentences in

[9] Estimates of the total number of people deported by the Soviets from eastern Poland range from 315,000 to 980,000. See Katherine R. Jolluck, *Exile and Identity: Polish Women in the Soviet Union during World War II* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002), 13. On the Katyń Forest massacre, see Anna M. Cienciala, Natalia S. Lebedeva, and Wojciech Materski, eds., *Katyń: A Crime without Punishment* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2007).

[10] Norman Davies, *Rising'44: The Battle for Warsaw* (New York: Viking, 2003), esp. 274–75.

[11] Marian Kamil Dziewanowski, *The Communist Party of Poland: An Outline of History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), 149–54.

Polish prisons at the time) did not easily forget the purge, which cast a long shadow on postwar Polish–Soviet relations. Many Polish communists welcomed every opportunity to limit their dependence on the Soviet leadership. Even during stalinism, Polish communists were less eager than their counterparts elsewhere in Eastern Europe to imitate the Soviet terror machine. They refused to have an internal party purge with show trials and executions, and they dragged their feet in implementing the collectivization of agriculture.[12]

The question of gender equality posed dilemmas for Polish communists from the beginning of their rule. At the onset of the postwar era, Polish communists did not develop any precise vision of what gender equality under communism was supposed to look like, refusing to accept the Soviet models *in toto*. Relying on Marx and Lenin did not solve the problem since these founding fathers of communism, while recognizing the oppression of women, were concerned primarily about class. They believed that gender equality would follow the destruction of the bourgeois order and the reign of class equality.

Furthermore, Polish communists never seemed inspired by some Bolshevik thinkers, most notably Alexandra Kollontai, who had advanced the idea of socialization of household labor as a necessary component of gender equality. This meant that individual women would not be responsible for work within the household. Instead, state communal institutions would bear that responsibility and transform domestic chores into another kind of paid labor. Socialization of domestic labor was a basic theoretical tenet of gender equality in revolutionary Russia along with a free union in place of traditional marriage and the withering away of the family.[13] Postwar Polish leaders, however, never bought into such ideas and instead constructed their own models of gender equality through trial and error, often on the shop floor. In so doing, at least in the initial postwar phase, they tended to draw not on Bolshevik ideas but on interwar Polish socialist traditions

[12] For a comparative history of Eastern European communist regimes, see, for example, Joseph Rothschild and Nancy Meriwether Wingfield, *Return to Diversity: A Political History of East Central Europe since World War II*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); and Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Soviet Bloc: Unity and Conflict*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967).

[13] Wendy Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917–1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 1–58.

that emphasized the significance of the family and working women's domestic identities.

A brief comparison of Soviet and Polish social practices once again underscores the diversity of communist systems and their approaches to gender ideologies.[14] In the early 1920s, Bolshevik leaders implemented liberal family legislation, which included legal abortion and easy divorce. One decade later, Stalin reversed this legislation by outlawing abortion and putting restrictions on the right to divorce. In addition, he disbanded the Women's Section of the communist party (*Zhenotdel*).[15] But in postwar Poland, Stalin did not have to reverse a liberal abortion law, as he did in the Soviet Union in 1936, because abortion was illegal in interwar Poland. For Eastern European societies, stalinism was therefore associated primarily with rapid social and political changes that included the reconfiguration of traditional class and gender hierarchies and creating new activist roles for women. As such, it could best be described as a reaction against the interwar conservative structures and not against the socially progressive legislation of the first years of Leninism as was the case in the Soviet Union. Eastern European stalinism was a force that brought radical social changes rather than a conservative backlash.[16]

The differences between the Soviet and Polish systems deepened in October 1956, when Moscow accepted Władysław Gomułka as the

[14] The historiography on Soviet women is uneven, as it focuses heavily on the 1920s and 1930s and has rarely dealt with gender issues after the Second World War. For recent works, see Elena Shulman, *Stalinism on the Frontier of Empire: Women and State Formation in the Soviet Far East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Wendy Goldman, *Women at the Gates: Gender and Industry in Stalin's Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); and Elizabeth A. Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997). A notable exception dealing with the postwar period is Melanie Ilič, Susan E. Reid, and Lynne Attwood, eds., *Women in the Khrushchev Era* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

[15] Mary Buckley, *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1989), 18–138.

[16] Elena Shulman has recently challenged the paradigm of Stalin's "Great Retreat" in the realm of Soviet gender policies. In her study of women's settlement in the Soviet Far East, she cautions against a narrow interpretation of women's roles during stalinism as being primarily defined by the anti-abortion legislation and an official celebration of motherhood. She suggests that the industrial drive and martial culture of the Stalin era provided women with new opportunities to practice a nontraditional womanhood by engaging in revolutionary campaigns from increasing productivity to empire-building. Shulman, *Stalinism on the Frontier of Empire*, 12–23.

new Polish leader and officially legitimized separate national paths to communism throughout the Eastern Bloc. Gomułka envisioned the "Polish Road to Socialism" as a gradual process of social and political change compatible with Polish "national peculiarities," including strong attachments to national sovereignty and Catholic traditions.[17] Most scholars see the Polish Road to Socialism in narrow political terms, as the process leading to the removal of stalinists from party-state posts and weakening the Soviet influence on domestic policies. But cultivating national peculiarities extended beyond the strictly political sphere into matters of everyday life. Gomułka acknowledged the distinct Polish "sensitivity toward the issue of national sovereignty," but had no plans to detach Poland from the Soviet camp or pursue an independent ideological course.[18] His was an idea of "domestic autonomy without external ideological ambitions."[19] In this context, it made sense to cultivate Polishness in less confrontational ways: at homes, workplaces, schools, and churches. Family and gender relations became safe social spaces in which Poles could assert what they perceived as their cultural differences from the Soviets.

WOMEN AND COMMUNISM

Traditionally, historians have not integrated topics of politics and gender into the study of Eastern Europe. The dominant historical accounts of the communist system in Poland assumed politics to be limited to the workings of governmental institutions. This book is part of a growing trend to incorporate workers, women, social protest, and the media into discussions of Polish political life to redefine the totalitarian nature of stalinism and communism by emphasizing the agency of local actors.[20] Earlier investigations into questions of gender have

[17] Brzezinski, *The Soviet Bloc*, 361.

[18] The quote comes from Gomułka's speech at the Ninth Plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) in May 1957. See Władysław Gomułka, *O naszej partii* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1968), 271.

[19] Brzezinski, *The Soviet Bloc*, 361.

[20] See, for example, Kenney, "The Gender of Resistance"; Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland*; and Katherine Anne Lebow, "Nowa Huta, 1949–1957: Stalinism and the Transformation of Everyday Life in Poland's 'First Socialist City'" (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 2002). Polish historians of communism, while examining such topics as everyday life, workers' strikes, and communist organizations, have paid little

been undertaken primarily by sociologists, anthropologists, and political scientists. While these studies offer a wealth of statistical data and policy analyses they do not always connect these issues to the broader historical narrative.[21]

By integrating gender into a complex narrative of politics, ideology, and work, I complicate several ingrained notions in the existing scholarly literature on women and communism. The first one has to do with the allegedly natural opposition between a production-oriented regime and family-oriented women. This approach assumes the existence of an unchangeable "female consciousness," resistant to historical forces.[22] In contrast, I argue that women's agency was diverse and their solidarity fragmented. Women were not only recipients but also creators and negotiators of communist messages. Female and male workers adjusted to political circumstances and often formulated their demands within the framework of the dominant political discourse. This is best illustrated in women's protests against state-sponsored removal of women

attention to women and gender. Only recently did several scholars include women in their analyses of workers' experiences. See, for example, Małgorzata Mazurek, *Socjalistyczny zakład pracy. Porównanie fabrycznej codzienności w PRL i NRD u progu lat sześćdziesiątych* (Warsaw: TRIO, 2005); Błażej Brzostek, *Robotnicy Warszawy: Konflikty codzienne, 1950–1954* (Warsaw: TRIO, 2002); and Jarosz, *Polacy a stalinizm*.

[21] See, for example, Wolchik and Meyer, *Women, State, and Party*; Barbara Wolfe Jancar, *Women under Communism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); and Hilda Scott, *Does Socialism Liberate Women? Experiences from Eastern Europe* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974). Numerous sociological studies on women have appeared in Poland since the early 1960s. See, for example, Renata Siemieńska, *Płeć, Zawód, Polityka. Kobiety w życiu publicznym w Polsce* (Warsaw: Uniwersytet Warszawski, 1990); Magdalena Sokołowska, *Kobieta współczesna. Z badań socjologów, lekarzy, ekonomistów, pedagogów i psychologów* (Warsaw: Instytut Filozofii i Socjologii PAN, 1966); and Jerzy Piotrowski, *Praca zawodowa kobiety a rodzina* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1963). Few historical works exist on women and gender in other Eastern European countries, except for East Germany. This scholarship, however, is grounded in social history and rarely uses gender as an analytical category. See, for example, Leonore Ansorg and Renate Hürtgen, "The Myth of Female Emancipation: Contradictions in Women's Lives," in *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR*, ed. Konrad Jarausch (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 163–76; Gunilla-Friederike Budde, ed., *Frauen Arbeiten: Weibliche Erwerbstätigkeit in Ost- und Westdeutschland nach 1945* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997); and Ina Merkel, *... und Du, Frau an der Werkbank: Die DDR in den 50-er Jahren* (Berlin: Elefanten Press, 1990).

[22] For arguments supporting the "female consciousness" in the communist context, see, for example, Donna Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007), esp. 7.

from male-dominated occupations during de-stalinization. When faced with the threat of losing a lucrative job, women clung to state arguments about equality.

Furthermore, I seek to redefine the notion of the double burden of work inside and outside the household as a social phenomenon specific to women's experiences under communism.[23] Rather than incorporating the double burden into my analysis as a sociological category, I suggest historicizing it. I examine how the concept of the double burden functioned within the communist state and how it helped perpetuate a subordinate role of women. The official recognition of the difficulty of combining productive and reproductive roles of women had a strong impact on how the communist regime justified and institutionalized gender discrimination.

Although concerned with work and workers, this study is not a conventional work of labor history that aims solely at recreating a narrative of working conditions or a demographic profile of Polish workers. Rather, I use labor as a window into the building of the communist society in the specific historical context of postwar Poland. I prefer to use voices of historical actors over statistical and institutional data to understand what the relationship between gender, work, and politics meant for individuals at the time.

ARGUMENTS AND SOURCES

In order to analyze the dynamic interplay of industry and ideology, this book examines three industrial centers in Poland with diverse historical roots and traditions: Żyrardów, Zambrów, and Katowice (see Figure 1). These three towns had different historical experiences, which enable a particularly nuanced comparative analysis in the chapters that follow. Prior to 1918, textile factories in Żyrardów belonged to the Russian Empire, while coal mines concentrated around Katowice,

[23] The issue of the double burden prominently figures in sociological and anthropological studies on women in Eastern Europe. See, for example, Barbara Łobodzińska, ed., *Family, Women, and Employment in Central-Eastern Europe* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1995); Barbara Einhorn, *Cinderella Goes to Market: Citizenship, Gender and Women's Movements in East-Central Europe* (London: Verso, 1993); and Chris Corrin, ed., *Superwomen and the Double Burden: Women's Experience of Change in Central and Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union* (London: Scarlet Press, 1992).

the chief urban center of Upper Silesia, were part of Germany.[24] Unlike these established centers, Zambrów had been an inconsequential trading town in Russian Poland that played no role in industrial development until 1954. Thus, while Żyrardów and Katowice boasted a long working-class tradition, the Zambrów cotton factory was a new enterprise designed by Polish communists to bring industrialization and modernization to the agricultural region of eastern Poland. Recruited from local villages in the early 1950s, female textile workers who worked in Zambrów differed from the Żyrardów women in that they had no connections to the interwar working-class culture. The transition from village to city shaped their identities.

The significance of these centers to postwar industrialization also informs their use in this book. Exemplifying the two main branches of industry, heavy and light, textile production and coal mining occupied a special place in communist ideology. Coal mining was considered the most important of all industries in the country. The coal miner, understood as male, was the epitome of the worker, and by extension the model proletarian. Official Polish rhetoric often depicted coal mining and textile manufacturing as complementary fields: coal was needed to support textile production, while textiles ensured the supply of clothes for miners and their families.[25] This image of complementarity and interdependence was reinforced by a strong gender component: spinning and weaving involved patient and repetitive "women's work," while coal mining was considered masculine, adventurous, and heroic.

Documents from the Polish United Workers' Party (*Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza*, or PZPR), official trade unions, state ministries, and the secret police comprise the bulk of the evidence for this book. I was one of the first to look at the records of Women's Sections of the communist and socialist parties and trade unions. Because female workers left almost no written testimonies, for personal experiences I relied on oral interviews in conjunction with letters to the

[24] To mark the death of Stalin in 1953, Katowice's name was changed to Stalinogród [Stalin City]. In 1956, the name was changed again to Katowice. For the sake of clarity, I use the name Katowice throughout my work except when citing archival documents. The Katowice area is also known as the Upper Silesian Industrial Area (*Górnośląski Okręg Przemysłowy* or GOP).

[25] See, for example, M.M., "Górnicy Śląska – włókniarzom Łodzi: my wam węgiel – wy nam płótno i sukno," *Górnik* 3, 20 November 1945, 15.

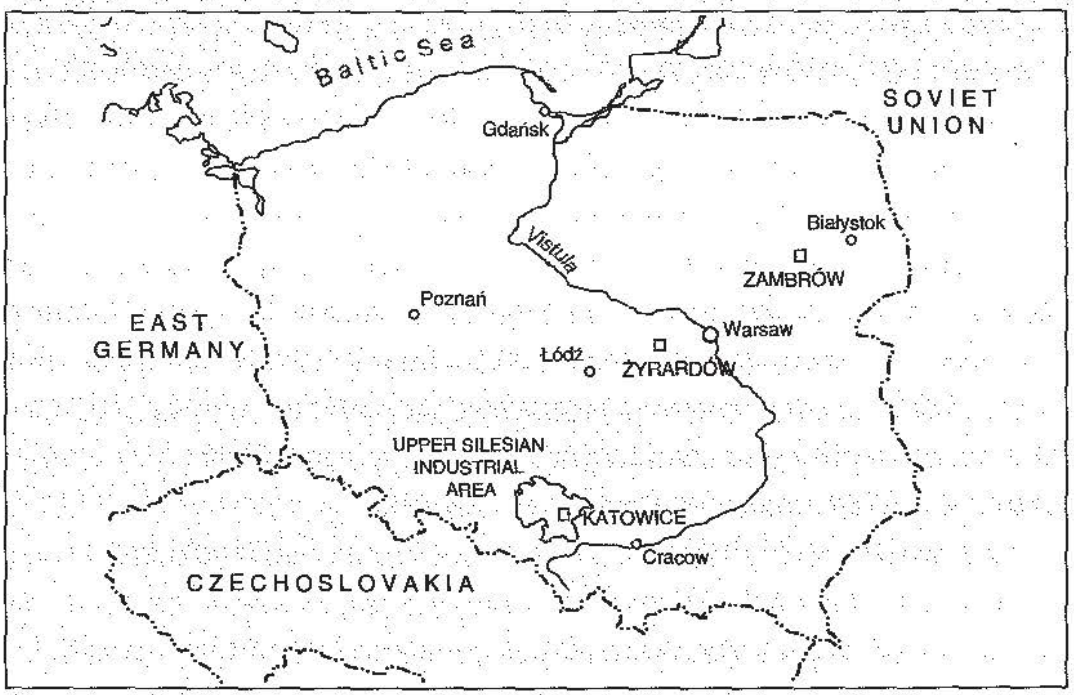

FIGURE 1. Map of Poland, 1945–1989. Industrial centers discussed in this book are marked with white squares.

press and state institutions, memoirs, and statements recorded in party documents. Most women I interviewed remembered their work experiences in the 1940s and 1950s fondly, but they also spoke of hardships.[26] Their memories were affected by the economic difficulties and high unemployment rates in postcommunist Poland. Women often contrasted their experiences of hard but rewarding labor with those of their daughters and granddaughters, who encountered problems finding work in postcommunist Poland. They also expressed anger at the fact that the factories and mines in which they had worked had either been shut down or significantly restructured as a result of the market reforms in the early 1990s.

[26] I conducted a total of nineteen interviews with eighteen women and one man. They all worked in the industrial centers discussed in this book in the 1940s and 1950s. I taped only a small portion of these interviews since the interviewees were more open and relaxed when the tape recorder was switched off. I used a conversational style and asked general questions to let the interviewees talk as freely as possible. For further discussion of the methodology used in these interviews, see Malgorzata Fidelis, "Recovering Women's Voices in Communist Poland," in *Contesting Archives: Historians Develop Methodologies for Finding Women in the Sources*, ed. Nupur Chaudhuri, Sherry J. Katz, and Mary Elizabeth Perry (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 107–24.

The main part of the book covers the formative years of communist Poland, which I divide into four chronological segments: the transitional period dominated by a coalition government of communist, socialist, and agrarian parties (1945–1948); the stalinist period (1948–1955); the period of de-stalinization (1955–1957); and the initial phase of poststalinism (1957–1960). The closing date of 1960 also marks the end of the Five Year Plan (1956–1960) that was influenced by ideas of de-stalinization. In the case of both the stalinist and de-stalinization periods, I recognize the gradual transitions from one period to another, thus placing the beginning and the end of stalinism a little later than most historians.[27] My reason for this is fairly straightforward: although limited economic reforms took place in Poland after the death of Stalin in 1953, the reform movement and the public debates condemning stalinist practices did not accelerate until 1955.

Chapter 1 focuses on debates about gender equality among intellectuals, party activists, and Catholic Church authorities immediately after the Second World War. During the war, women had transgressed traditional gender boundaries as they became heads of families, workers, and soldiers. This transgression sparked discussion of female identity in the postwar period. The Catholic Church, a powerful institution historically connected to the Polish national identity, guarded the traditional

[27] Here I draw on the ideas of Padraic Kenney, who places the beginning of stalinism as late as 1949/1950. Kenney defines stalinism as the "vision of a participatory yet conflict-free society" and argues that full-fledged stalinism did not emerge in Poland until the system of repression was established in 1949. See Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland*, esp. 4 and 337. According to the classic work by Zbigniew Brzezinski, stalinism, the period of "total conformity" with the Soviet model, began in 1947 with the creation of the Cominform, which ended the period of diversity in political systems of Eastern European countries. Brzezinski traces the end of stalinism to the death of Stalin in March 1953. For him, the period between 1953 and 1956 belongs to a distinct phase of de-stalinization, a gradual return to diversity and elasticity in domestic policies within the Soviet Bloc. See Brzezinski, *The Soviet Bloc*, esp. 62, 91, and 155. For Polish historian Andrzej Paczkowski, the events of 1948 marked the beginning of stalinism in Eastern Europe. They included the Tito–Stalin split, the Prague coup, and the absorption of socialist parties by communist parties throughout the Eastern Bloc. According to Paczkowski, de-stalinization between 1953 and 1956, while reforming some of the stalinist policies and institutions, still sustained the stalinist system. See Andrzej Paczkowski, "Poland, the 'Enemy Nation,'" in *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*, ed. Stéphane Courtois et al., trans. Jonathan Murphy and Mark Kramer (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 363–93, esp. 380–84. Most Polish historians use a similar periodization. See Jarosz, *Polacy a stalinizm*, 6.

image of women as mothers from challenges by new social and political ideologies. But the support for motherhood was embraced by many postwar actors. Some left-wing intellectuals promoted the ideas of "new matriarchy," which emphasized maternal qualities along with active roles for women in economic and political life. They believed that women should enter the public world as nurturers of the family and nation, who would build a peaceful and moral postwar order. The postwar government dominated by two major parties – the communist-oriented Polish Workers' Party (*Polska Partia Robotnicza*, or PPR) and the Polish Socialist Party (*Polska Partia Socjalistyczna*, or PPS) – wanted to bring women to the level of equality and political activism of male citizens. The two parties formed their own Women's Sections. While they shared in the struggle for gender equality, the Sections expressed diverse views on the meaning and implementation of equal rights. Gender politics under communism was not a given but a matter of interpretation and dispute even within dominant similarly minded political forces.

I discuss the responses of female workers to postwar economic and political changes in Chapter 2. In particular, I look at a linen industry center of Żyrardów near Warsaw, a place with a well-established labor movement and working-class culture dating back to the second half of the nineteenth century. I argue that female workers, while adhering to interwar working-class values centered on the family, were at the same time affected by the powerful state rhetoric of social justice. They acquired new powers as socialist subjects and often used them to challenge and modify factory policies that they viewed as harmful to workers and their families. This development culminated in a series of powerful strikes at the height of stalinism in the summer of 1951 to protest meat and coal shortages. The strikes eventually resulted in improving food and fuel supplies in Żyrardów and lowering production targets for workers nationwide. During the strikes, working women exploited their new identity as socialist workers as well as the traditional notion of female honor and gender difference. Ironically, the stalinist state, which aimed at total control of individuals and social groups, proved powerless vis-à-vis women who used a mixture of old and new ideas about womanhood to expose contradictions in the communist project and gain concessions.

Chapter 3 shifts the focus from the established female textile proletariat in Żyrardów – a community with strong roots in interwar working-class culture – to the young female workers in the newly

built cotton factory in Zambrów. Young female migrants in Zambrów found the socialist factory to be a source of new opportunities, including economic independence and sexual autonomy. Being as eager to work as to put on makeup, attend dance parties, and pick up boys on the street, these young women blended rural and urban values in ways that did not always comply with the state image of the disciplined labor force. Factory officials eventually became preoccupied with women's alleged sexual excesses. Their anxieties about uncontrollable sexuality indicated strong attachments to the traditional gender order based on women's reproductive identity.

No one posed a more powerful challenge to traditional assumptions about male and female roles than women who entered men's jobs in heavy industry. Chapter 4 discusses another state experiment aimed at rearranging gender hierarchies on the shop floor by encouraging women to pursue skilled jobs long dominated by men. Gender segregation was not abolished during the stalinist period, but it took on a different shape. While most women were expected to work in traditional women's jobs, the party-state encouraged some women to take up typical men's jobs, improve their wages, and become celebrated labor heroines. Here I focus on female coal miners in Upper Silesia, who were allowed to perform select jobs underground. For many women employed in heavy manual labor on the surface, mechanized and better-paid underground work was an opportunity for social advancement. This policy, however, generated strong reactions from local communities, thus exposing traditional gender ideology as fundamental to the social order on all levels, from individual families to local and professional communities.

The period after Stalin's death exposed a widespread ambivalence about incorporating women into the industrial workforce on an equal basis with men. In Chapter 5, I analyze press discussions about alleged sexual promiscuity of young working women. During de-stalinization, party officials and journalists often blamed the shortcomings of the stalinist system, including the alleged crisis of moral values, on working women. At the time, Zambrow emerged as a place of female immorality and gender imbalance caused by employing large numbers of young single women in the town's cotton factory. The outburst of press reports on working women's supposed sexual excesses pointed to the use of gender and sexuality as vehicles

for de-stalinization. The focus on female sexuality and reproduction in public debates naturalized women's identity as mothers rather than economic producers. Uncontrollable female sexuality became a metaphor for an unnatural stalinist system that corrupted both socialism and Polish national identity. Through discussions of marriage and abortion, reform-minded party officials and intellectuals reinforced maternal identity for women and sexual difference as an inherent part of a healthy socialist system free of stalinist distortions.

Chapter 6 continues the discussion of gender as a vehicle of de-stalinization by examining the backlash against working women. After 1955, the party-state, assisted by many segments of society, removed women from most of their new occupations, including underground work. The new poststalinist definition of "equality" included an emphasis on sexual difference and distinct feminine qualities that "naturally" relegated women to domestic responsibilities and inferior jobs on the shop floor. I examine the tension between female workers and female party activists that occurred as a result of these policies. The official press now associated women's work outside the household with excessive burdens placed on mothers rather than with liberation. This image and the gender-segregated workplace were reinforced in the Five-Year Plan (1956–1960) by promoting part-time and home-based work for women. Many women working in "new occupations" (and sometimes their male managers) wrote protest letters to party officials and the press. These letters initiated public discussions of gender discrimination that persisted through the early 1960s but did little to change the subordinate position of women in the workplace.

The book ends with an interpretative conclusion and an epilogue. The conclusion discusses the main implications of the book's arguments for our understanding of women and communism in Eastern Europe more broadly. The epilogue analyzes the experiences of female workers from the 1960s through the 2000s. At that time, the gender segregation of jobs became more pronounced, leading to a decrease in the number of industrial jobs held by women. The idea of equal rights and opportunities for advancement were no longer in the forefront of public discussion. The state's emphasis on the traditional role of women, however, backfired during the workers' upheavals of the 1970s and 1980s. The female-dominated language centered on consumer needs

and maternal duties was instrumental in the success of the Solidarity movement in undermining and eventually dismantling the communist system.

Examining female workers' experiences and the use of gender in state policies sheds new light on the social and ideological dimensions not only of communism but also postcommunism. After the collapse of the communist system in Eastern Europe in 1989, the new political elites – anticommunist, right-wing, and Catholic – embarked on a powerful campaign to reassert the essentialist difference between the sexes by undermining reproductive rights, discouraging women from employment, and assigning women to the domestic sphere. These developments, however, are not as dissimilar from the communist policies as they may seem. Communist leaders, in Poland and elsewhere in Europe, did not discard the Western-liberal division of society into male producers and female reproducers but rather reshaped and adapted it to their version of modern social mobilization. The notion of sexual difference as fixed and located in the physical body remained central to the postwar workplace, where a woman's place continued to be defined by perceptions of her biological function.