

Bringing the Second World In: Conservative Revolution(s), Socialist Legacies, and Transnational Silences in the Trajectories of Polish Feminism

How does one begin to examine the impact of the Eastern European peaceful revolutions on women? In the midst of the recent twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Iron Curtain, women made a tremendous effort to incorporate gendered aspects of the transformation in the celebrations.¹ Activists, politicians, and feminist scholars managed to overcome the enduring tendency in the 1990s to see post-state-socialist transitions as processes with no visible gender component. They also deconstructed misconceptions that suggested that women's contributions to social change were marginal, providing a distorted representation of post-transformation gender power dynamics. After a period of defeatism and self-doubt, Eastern European feminisms are now emerging as diverse and multidimensional sites of political dialogue locally and globally.²

¹ One example of women from various backgrounds getting together to emphasize gendered aspects of postsocialist transformations was the *Polski Kongres Kobiet* (Polish Women's Congress). This event took place on June 20–21, 2009, and brought together three thousand women from around the country.

² In this essay, which focuses on the case of Poland, I propose to use the terms Eastern European, second world, and post-state-socialist interchangeably with reference to the feminisms emerging in locations that are characterized by (former) membership in the Soviet Bloc (Said 1978; Naples 2002). I choose to use the concept of post-state socialism rather than postcommunism with the intention of reminding the reader that communism was never fully achieved and to consciously blur the distinction between postcommunist states and Western social democracies. Although I agree with Larry Wolff that the concept of Eastern Europe is in fact a creation of philosophical discourses produced within Western Europe's Enlightenment (Wolff 1994), for the purposes of this essay, I choose to continue using the term "Eastern Europe" to refer to the postsocialist states. Similarly, since I do not have space here to develop a fuller discussion of the terminology, I wish to direct readers to recent developments in the politics of naming, particularly to the concept of "former Eastern Europe" introduced by Marina Gržinić (2009). Finally, I am aware of the controversies surrounding the use of the term "region" in reference to post-state-socialist space. While the concept of Eastern Europe most commonly refers to the central, eastern, and southern

Yet within these new narratives of excitement and hope, the women in post-state-socialist locations are still overwhelmingly codified as a homogenous group sharing universal conditions of life under state socialism, as well as the experience of social transformation. Consider, for instance, the fact that existing scholarship on women's activism in Eastern Europe utilizes the concept of gender equality almost exclusively with reference to the post-state-socialist period, arguing that the transformation from state socialism to democracy left a lot to be desired (Corrin 1999; Einhorn and Sever 2003; Cerwonka 2008). These approaches routinely leave the extent of women's individual and collective agency during the period of state socialism unexamined, often suggesting that under the previous regimes women lacked the ability to act on their own behalf (Watson 1993a, 1993c; Gal and Kligman 2000; Einhorn and Sever 2003).

In this essay, which has its origins in my ethnographic research among women's movement activists in Poland, I wish to argue that in order to address the difference represented by post-state-socialist feminisms, particularly Polish feminisms, and to excavate the contextualized genealogies of feminisms under and after state socialism, one must engage simultaneously with at least three unfinished gender revolutions: the conservative revolution of the 1990s that aimed at reestablishing the patriarchal gender structure after the fall of state socialism, the self-limiting revolution of the Solidarity movement of the 1980s, and the unfinished revolution of state-socialist gender equality that claimed to emancipate women after the Second World War.³ In my view, neither the conservative peaceful revolution nor Solidarity's self-limiting revolution nor the incomplete project of state-socialist gender equality can singularly account for the particular trajectories of post-state-socialist feminisms. I believe that it is precisely within the nexus of these three transformations that one should look for the particular, yet fragmented and often contradictory genealogies of Polish feminisms.

I propose to begin this essay by discussing the conservative revolution, which is the most recent. Although such an approach challenges the logic of chronology, it will allow us to see how the trajectories of Polish feminisms unfolded. The scattered narratives of post-state-socialist feminisms

European states, the location of Russia within the region remains debatable, as does the shared cultural, political, and religious heritage of the countries included.

³ Between 2005 and 2008, in Gdansk, Krakow, Poznan, and Warsaw, I conducted semi-structured interviews with thirty-five Polish feminist leaders who varied in age, sexual orientation, cultural (ethnic) identity, and profession for my doctoral dissertation project, "Polish Feminism between East and West" (Grabowska 2009). I conducted all interviews in Polish and transcribed and translated them, and I have all transcripts on file.

that focus around these three transformations often intersect, contesting the chronological approach to history and thus representing instances of what Michel Foucault calls the “history of the present” (Foucault 1977, 30–31). Following Foucault, I view the past as explanatory but not as fully determining the way things are in the present. In this context, one cannot speak of a single, particular, or definite story or path that determines one’s identity and personal feminist trajectory; following the idea of genealogy requires abandoning the urge to look for pure origins, a linear or causal continuity.

In bringing together the unexpected and sometimes random combinations of elements that are to be found in personal trajectories and in disclosing the reality of feminism in the context of transforming Eastern European locations, I believe one must also pay attention to another aspect of current gender transformations that is rarely considered a part of the post-state-socialist period. The transformation of women’s activism brought by transnationalism is almost uniformly neglected in the scholarship on Eastern European gender mobilizations and thus can be seen as an instance of a missed revolution (see Popa 2009). Clearly, the examination of the transformations after state socialism cannot be separated from discussions of global political shifts; the fall of the Iron Curtain was, after all, a transnational effort. In this essay, I wish to argue that at a time when transnational feminism is framed primarily as a dialogue between women from the global North and the global South, reconstructing specific genealogies of feminist struggles within the space of Eastern Europe requires deconstructing the homogenous representation of second-world women vis-à-vis the West. Hence, examining the politics of location in studies of post-state socialism emerges as a crucial task.

Transnational feminisms can provide a fruitful framework for examining the complex intersections of global forces and local legacies in the production of feminist subjectivities. Bringing the second world into the transnational and postcolonial feminist debates will allow us to challenge the existing hierarchical, binary frameworks perpetuated by transnational feminist scholarship, to recognize the second world as a site of global struggles, and to pose the question of the implications of the ambivalent postcolonial status of some Eastern European locations for transnational feminist theory and practice. In the sections that follow, I will examine three cases of social revolutions and argue that their intrinsically unfinished character indicates that complex global and local forces are at work within formerly state-socialist spaces. While claiming the second world as an indispensable component of the ongoing formulation and reformulation of global gender theory, throughout this essay I trace similarities between

the experiences of second-world women and those of the third world in an attempt to probe the possibility of inscribing the experience of the second world within a postcolonial framework and establishing transnational solidarities between Eastern Europe and the South.

Conservative revolution(s): Women's mobilizations within the transformation from state socialism

American historian Shana Penn traveled to Poland in 1990 as one of the “political tourists” who journeyed to post-state-socialist countries to conduct pioneer research and “discover” the society previously hidden behind the Iron Curtain (Penn 2003, 20). As a student at the University of California at Berkeley, where Czesław Miłosz, the Polish poet who had settled in California, taught, Penn was interested in what the transformation occurring in a world that “significantly differed from American social patterns” could tell her about her own country, and how the faraway post-state-socialist reality was “a mirror that also reflected a malady of our American society” (Penn 2003, 14).⁴ Her first trip to the region was devoted to gathering material for an article on women’s leadership in Central and Eastern Europe—particularly Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary—but Penn ultimately settled on a project focusing on the phenomenon of Solidarity women, women who, between 1980 and 1989, were members of the Solidarity labor union.⁵ When she interviewed twelve of the women active in Solidarity’s leadership, Penn came to an unexpected conclusion: she argued that during the period of martial law (from 1981 to 1985), when male Solidarity leaders were being imprisoned, women were in fact leading the Polish underground (Penn 1994). In spite of their undeniable role in overthrowing the regime, Penn learned, only one of Solidarity’s women leaders sought recognition after the union’s ultimate victory. Moreover, only one of them approved of Penn’s women-centered feminist analysis; most were annoyed and even angered by the suggestion that gender had played a crucial role in their experience (Penn 1994). Were they lacking gender consciousness, Penn wondered, or were the Solidarity women the brainpower behind an effort to keep the gendered

⁴ All translations from the Polish are my own.

⁵ The Solidarity labor union was sanctioned between August 1980 and December 1981, at which point Polish authorities instituted martial law. Women were largely responsible for the organization of the underground Solidarity activity between 1981 and 1985, after which martial law was lifted.

aspect of Solidarity's success a national secret in order to generate broader support among Poles?

In 1999, Agnieszka Graff, a young U.S.-educated Polish feminist, revisited Penn's argument while connecting it to her own experience of Poland in the 1970s and 1980s, which included a Catholic upbringing and involvement in Solidarity, in order to examine the symbolic narrative about women's fate in the newly restored Polish democracy and to expose the incompleteness of the Eastern European transformations. In her article "Patriarchat po seksmisji" (Patriarchy after "sex mission"; 1999), Graff argued that one of the consequences of people's alienation from oppressive state-socialism was a destabilization of the traditional gender dynamic; by devaluing the public sphere (e.g., by criminalizing any form of social and political organizing outside of the Communist Party), state socialism brought politics into private homes, triggering a domestication of the male leadership as well as increased activity of women within underground structures (Graff 1999). The transition to democracy called for returning politics to its "normal" space outside the home; it simultaneously necessitated the elimination of women from that space (Graff 1999). Following Peggy Watson, Graff identifies the exclusion of women from politics, including the erasure of their role in overturning the previous regime and the reestablishment of the sharp distinction between private and public, as a key feature of Eastern Europe's "silent" gender revolution (Watson 1993b, 471; Graff 1999). Both authors argue that when measured in terms of outcomes in the area of gender equality, the changes brought about by the 1989 transformations have not been truly revolutionary for women—they are indeed unfinished revolutions. The increasing influence of the Catholic Church on Polish public space and the 1993 ban on abortion intersected with negotiations over what values the new Polish democracy would represent while also stigmatizing feminism as a foreign ideology or a communist legacy. The process of putting politics and women in the "right" place (outside politics), a maneuver that Teresa Kulawik (2005) later identified as a "purification of the Polish nation," was executed promptly after the fall of state socialism and according to many observers was accompanied by little to no resistance from women themselves (Watson 1993b).

Why didn't women protest? Why is there no feminism after communism? Graff, Penn, Watson, and many other Polish and Western scholars asked these questions throughout the 1990s (Snitow 1993; Watson 1993a, 1993b, 1993c; Goldfarb 1997). The answer seemed deceptively simple, and the standard list of reasons consisted of the inability of state socialism to act as a counterforce to traditional patriarchal family structures, the

cancellation of social security provisions after the transition, the decrease in the number of women in Eastern European parliaments in the 1990s, the growth of nationalism and religious fundamentalism after socialism, the lack of political consciousness among women as a result of forty years of imposed socialist gender equality politics, and the exclusion of women from leadership positions in opposition movements and therefore from the benefits of the Eastern European transformations.⁶

At the end of the 1990s, the condition of the Polish women's movement was much more complex than Western scholars, and some domestic scholars, wanted to acknowledge. In individual conversations, feminists active in both formal and informal feminist groups point to the transformation of Polish public space that took place in the 1990s as a moment when the trajectories of feminism, anticlericalism, and alterglobalization came together in mobilizations against the newly emerging regime, one that was simultaneously neoliberal, patriarchal, and radically Catholic. Nongovernmental organizations and informal groups mushroomed vigorously in Poland after 1989, ranging from feminist organizations, such as the Women's Rights Center in Warsaw and eFKa (Fundacja Kobiecej; Women's foundation) in Krakow, to the health-focused Amazons' Clubs and local branches of post-state-socialist and prewar organizations such as the League of Polish Women and Rural Women's Circles (Regulska and Grabowska 2007). Several academic gender studies units were established across the country between 1996 and 1999, including in Warsaw, Lodz, and Poznan. A number of women's organizations worked with women politicians to create a coalition of women members of parliament (the Parliamentary Women's Caucus) that would connect the civil society sector with formal politics. When I interviewed the director of the reproductive health coalition in 2004, she identified the expansion of the Catholic Church into the public sphere after 1989 as a formative feminist experience: "In the 1980s I was a member of Solidarity, but not very active. At that point I was mainly preoccupied with procreation. But at the end of the eighties, and in the 1990s, my feminist consciousness started to rise. It was the reaction and resistance to the expansion of the Church and its aim to limit women's rights to decide. The first instance was obligatory religion in schools. Then there was abortion." In March and May of 1989, this woman, along with several thousand other women and men, demonstrated against the restrictive abortion law in front of the Parliament building in Warsaw (similar protests took place in Krakow, Lodz, Poznan, Bydgoszcz, and Wroclaw). Later, she became a member

⁶ See Snitow (1993), Watson (1993a, 1993c), Goldfarb (1997), and Regulska (1998).

of the Civic Committee for the Referendum on Legal Abortion, which consisted of Solidarity activists, feminists, and politicians; in 1993, the group collected more than ten thousand signatures supporting women's reproductive freedom. All these instances seem to demonstrate that the unfinished conservative revolution of the 1990s had an ambivalent impact on women's lives: while on one hand new, conservative regimes aimed at limiting women's basic rights, on the other they became an impulse for vibrant and diverse feminist mobilizations.

Yet for researchers of post-state-socialist space at the end of the 1990s, these mobilizations didn't register as feminism. Many scholars persistently framed the Eastern European transformations as conservative or apolitical, as a form of catching up, or as self-limiting revolutions that should be seen as bringing nothing new to our understanding of radical social change. The most popular approaches represented the post-1989 transformations as opportunities for the societies formerly behind the Iron Curtain to catch up with the rest of the Western world in its march toward modernity. Post-state-socialist societies were represented as simply aiming to restore a sense of normality after the short-term failed experiment of state socialism (Jedlicki 1999; Arato 2000; Charkiewicz 2004). A desire to become part of the West has been presented as a historically legitimized necessity. In her groundbreaking work conceptualizing Poland as an instance of postcolonial space, Clare Cavanagh (2004) points out that as early as 1760, Polish advocates of the Enlightenment declared that the West was the model to be followed by the backward and declining Polish Republic. Quoting Joseph Conrad's 1916 "Note on the Polish Problem," Cavanagh writes that Poland, partitioned among Russia, Prussia, and Austria-Hungary, was perceived as a nation "torn between . . . barbarous, alien 'Russian Slavonism' . . . and the civilized empires of the rational, civilized West" (Cavanagh 2004, 86). Conrad argued that Poles "are Western, with an absolute comprehension of all Western modes of thought" (Conrad [1911] 2001, 416). Accordingly, Poland should only regain its independence with the help "of her Western friends"—it should be adopted by the West.

The concept of a return, or catching up with the West, may have been quite problematic from the point of view of social reality (e.g., compared to Western Europe, almost all socialist states were more "advanced" in terms of women's employment rates and social security), but it resonated with a lot of people, among them some feminists. It complemented the argument that the post-state-socialist gender revolution was unfinished, and it fit with a desire expressed by some feminists to establish a social movement that would resemble second-wave liberal feminism in the

United States. In 1997, one feminist scholar, when asked to reflect on the condition of the women's movement in Poland, wrote, "We are still searching for the Polish Betty Friedan" (Rosner 1997, 41). Years later, a younger feminist scholar declared in an interview: "My feminism is a liberal feminism. I mean it is a feminism of equality rather than difference. I'm closer to Betty Friedan." This convergence approach represents Polish feminism as equivalent to its Western counterpart yet at the same time portrays it as significantly behind the Western social movement, in terms of both the scale of women's mobilizations and their achievements (e.g., failure to protect the right to legal abortions; Rosner 1997; Graff 1999).

The fact that this supposedly normal feminist trajectory emerged from specific geopolitical, cultural, and historical locations characteristic of Western societies, and is thus largely irrelevant to the lived experiences of women in Poland, did not prevent feminists in the West from seeing the prospect of catching up with the West as natural and desirable (Hauser, Heyns, and Mansbridge 1993). While stressing the orthogonal character of Eastern European political patterns and recognizing the need for different feminisms in post-state-socialist space, many scholars simultaneously assumed the West as the only logical point of reference for "provincial" Eastern European feminisms (Matynia 2003; Funk 2004). The authors of "Feminism in the Interstices of Politics and Culture: Poland in Transition," for instance, claimed that in Eastern Europe, "the political language has to be created in the world of unsettled meaning" and predicted that feminisms emerging from interstices of post-state socialism "will draw from their own soil and air . . . differ[ing] from, while sharing some traits with, American and Western European feminisms" (Hauser, Heyns, and Mansbridge 1993, 257). In such a perspective, while Eastern European gender revolutions were recognized as unique and based in local trajectories, they will remain unfinished until the new post-state-socialist democracies meet the Western standards of gender equality and women's mobilization, until they are spelled out in the terms of and conceptualized in reference to these standards.

These approaches repeatedly discounted the impact of local legacies on the trajectory of Polish feminism and were therefore often criticized by grassroots women activists. In an interview with me, a feminist activist from Krakow remembered that while "for many women [feminism] was about importing stuff from the West, the United States, I had a gut feeling that it is not, that there was always something here—a tradition of women's emancipatory thinking." She and many other women expressed the need to move away from Western feminist frames and to reestablish the local genealogies of Polish feminisms. Many turned to Solidarity, a

workers' movement that managed to incorporate intellectuals and create connectivity between the seemingly distant struggles of various groups of people, including feminists. These women pointed out that in their experience, Solidarity played a crucial yet not always obvious role in linking feminism and politics, both by creating a space for the formation of feminist subjectivities in the mid-1980s and by implementing the principle of self-limitation in regard to women's rights in the 1990s. The idea of rerooting feminism in local narratives of inequality also brought up a need to revisit yet another period of unfinished social revolution, the era of state socialism, to which Solidarity was both a daughter and political response. In the following sections, I will address the period of the Second Solidarity as an instance of unfinished revolution, one that affected feminist subjectivities in complex ways. I will then turn to the period of state socialism and try to delineate the complex relations between Solidarity, socialism, and European imperialisms and their role in shaping second-world feminism's status within postcolonial and transnational frameworks.

Self-limiting revolution: Solidarity's flight from women

While the term "self-limiting revolution," found in the title of Jadwiga Staniszkis's famous book (Staniszkis 1984), is still widely used in reference to Solidarity's political philosophy during the 1980s, the question of how this paradigm translates into the trajectory of feminism before, during, and after Poland's peaceful transformation remains open. The idea of self-limitation, based on a nonconfrontational method of approaching the authorities, represented revolution without blood, barricades, and violence through regaining the dignity of the people and the initiation of radical social change through a self-conscious coalition between the working class and intellectuals (Michnik 1985; see also Arato 2000). The model of revolution without revolution consisted of two political strategies: first, the revitalization of civil society through strengthening the political consciousness of various social classes in preparation for future negotiations over their rights and freedoms; and second, a "new evolutionism" (Arato 2000, 48) that emphasized reform and compromise with the ruling powers. Although both of these strategies proved to be successful in achieving Solidarity's ultimate goal of a bloodless revolution, they had an ambivalent effect on women. On the one hand, Solidarity, and particularly the so-called Second Solidarity of the years 1985–89, was inclusive of women, both as members and as feminists. On the other hand, the paradigm of self-limitation, in a way that did not directly correspond to Staniszkis's original understanding, worked against women directly after the revolu-

tion was over, as the union's male leaders' emphasis on compromise and reform overrode the commitment to social change.

In the case of feminism, at first, Second Solidarity's ability to stimulate diverse social groups served as an important element in women's re-emerging political consciousness.⁷ One interviewee, a literary critic and feminist activist, spiritedly argued: "My experience of the mass movement concentrates around the national, patriotic, and independent-state narrative. I think that Solidarity had a major impact on the perception of Polish feminism in the beginning." As in many other locations around the world, particularly postcolonial countries where anti-imperialist struggles seek broader solidarity among various groups of people, in the mid-1980s, Polish women managed to negotiate autonomous and partnership-based relations with Solidarity's male leaders (Heng 1997). As the cofounder of the Polish Feminist Association stated in our interview: "Solidarity gave us a framework in which we could do something beyond the strict control of the state. Solidarity opened the space, and we could enter that space with our feminism. Feminism wasn't terrifying to people, like it started to be later in the 1990s. It had no connotations, good or bad. It wasn't ridiculed. Back then feminism was a part of emerging civil society, whose units didn't jeopardize each other." At the same time that they were a part of the broader political movement, women conceptualized distinct gender identities. In the words of the critic and activist: "Most of all we were discovering ourselves as women. Not as a human beings, or as democratic opposition activists, but as persons with a full appreciation of our own gender together. We were trying the possibility of looking at our own and women's lives through feminist lenses. And in the group it was easier to do. It was really some kind of consciousness-raising. The

⁷ In the 1990s, Penn (1994), Kristi Long (1996), and others initiated a quest to reclaim women's place in Solidarity during the period of martial law, between 1981 and 1983. Penn demonstrated that women such as Barbara Labuda (in Wrocław) and Ewa Kulik (in Warsaw) took over leadership positions in the movement during martial law, were in charge of men in hiding, and manipulated the sexist and ageist prejudices of the regime's police and union leaders, all in order to successfully fight for their cause. For instance, they manipulated the stereotype of *Matka Polka*, homemaker and Polish grandmother, using real or fake pregnancies, grocery bags, and canes as covers for carrying illegal publications (Penn 1994, 2003; Long 1996). Although these accounts leave no doubt that there were women who "defeated communism" by using their gendered experiences as inspiration for strategies, ideas, and political choices, early efforts to inscribe the Solidarity women's experiences into the genealogy of feminism failed to obtain legitimization from Solidarity women themselves, partly because these efforts attempted to apply Western discourses to the experience of Solidarity.

texts came much later. At first we just sat and talked. . . . This, I think, was our main strength.”

While the paths of Solidarity and feminism crossed in the 1980s, they separated after 1989 when the patriotic “festival of freedom” suddenly ended with the urgent necessity to compromise with the Catholic Church. As in other geopolitical locations, where the struggle for autonomy is coupled with growing nationalism and often religious fundamentalism (Tohidi 1991), in Poland, women’s issues became subject to ideological manipulation after the fall of the regime, and feminists were cast as the enemies of the newly emerging independent state (Heng 1997). Directly following Solidarity’s victory in 1990, Marian Krzaklewski, then head of Solidarity, asked Małgorzata Tarasiewicz, founding member of Peace and Freedom, an oppositional youth organization, to organize the Solidarity women’s section. Tarasiewicz complied, and the women’s section generated two demands: the right to legal abortion and quotas for women in union leadership positions, both of which were in opposition to the Church’s stands on women (Walczevska 2006, 28). After a period of struggle, Solidarity’s leadership rejected both demands, Tarasiewicz was forced to quit, the unit’s members were denied access to office space, and the section was ultimately dismantled (Walczevska 2006, 30). This process of denying women’s participation in Solidarity’s political victory, represented most fully by the limitation of access to legal abortion, served as a sign of both Solidarity’s commitment to the presence of religion in the public sphere and the movement’s flight from its former dedication to building a broad social coalition.

The fundamental effect of Solidarity’s abandonment of the commitment to broader social justice and its eager recognition of Catholicism as a crucial partner in politics on feminist subjectivities become clearer if we look more deeply at the gendered aspects of political Catholicism in Poland. In her book *Niesamowita Słowiańszczyzna* (Uncanny Slavdom), Maria Janion (2006) suggests that the expansion of Catholicism in Poland should not be understood as an outpouring of religiosity into public space but rather as a resurfacing of the secular symbolic structure of “political religion” or “political Catholicism” (Janion 2006, 276). Janion argues that within the Polish imaginary, as in many postcolonial countries, asexual representations of women—as dead bodies and/or saints—serve as crucial elements in producing and protecting the nationalist narrative, which is based on a male homosocial bond. In Poland, this particular role is played by the figure of *Matka Polka* (Mother Pole), often portrayed as interchangeable with the Holy Mother Mary, sometimes also referred to as the “Queen of Poland” (Janion 2006, 270). During the process of the

transformation after state socialism, the restitution of the national doctrine required the elimination of real women from political life, restraining their sexuality and leading to the purification of the nation through the revival of pure Catholic-nationalist identities.

It was partially in reaction to the masculinist policies and the expansion of the Catholic Church into the public sphere in Poland (Watson 1993c), as well as Solidarity's abandonment of the peaceful revolution's ideals, that feminists appropriated identity politics based in liberalism. In order to resist emerging nationalism and religious fundamentalism, many activists, including those formerly devoted to Solidarity's social justice ideals, turned to seemingly secular and liberal identities in hopes of resisting political Catholicism. For many activists, the strategy of identification with the West, used mostly by women representing the urban Polish intelligentsia, was a form of strategic essentialism, a necessary response to the consequences of Solidarity's unfinished revolution rather than a simple desire to transplant Western-style feminism into Eastern European space.

This commitment to secularism and liberalism worked as a double-edged sword: while it helped to articulate feminist goals, it also alienated many feminist activists from many women, particularly working-class women, who experienced the devastating effects of neoliberal state policies that the Polish government adopted in the 1990s. After several protests initiated by these groups in the early 2000s, particularly by supermarket employees and nurses, many Polish feminists began to move away from liberalism, which in turn led to the reevaluation of yet another indigenous feminist legacy: socialism. As one young scholar admitted in an interview, "At first I thought liberalism was awesome. Liberalism is freedom, freedom from discrimination. Everybody can do various identities, there are rights for all, and so on. I think there was an assumption—and feminists had that assumption, too—that before 1989, knowledge was ideological because of censorship. And after 1989, there was freedom. . . . Then, thanks to feminism, we realized that there is no freedom. I think that opened the road to leftist thinking in Poland." Since the early 2000s, feminists have been reconsidering socialism both by reevaluating the unfinished project of state-socialist equality and by revisiting a tradition of antiracist politics, embedded most powerfully in the struggle against anti-Semitism.

Unfinished revolution: State socialism and women's agency

As long as state socialism was taken for granted as a detrimental gap in the development of a Western-style liberal identity for Poland and Polish feminism, its effects on current gender regimes and the complex experi-

ences of feminism remained unexamined. The director of the large reproductive health coalition concurred with the opinions of many of my interviewees when she held state socialism responsible for a disruption of the “natural development, and continuity of women’s movement” and for a current “situation in which we have hardly any movement at all.” But a closer look reveals that state socialism’s effects on feminism were much more complex. In the words of one feminist scholar:

I was brought up by the opposition movement in the axiomatic belief that the free market guarantees freedom of speech, so I’m repulsed by socialism. On the other hand I know that socialism emancipated women. You can argue that from the feminist perspective it did a lot to double [women’s] workload and to encourage public redistribution [of goods and social services]. However, it also emancipated [women] mentally. It is good that socialism was defeated by the economic transformation, but it was bad that the transformation meant deemanicipation. I would be for something like that: [a system in which] transformation is still going on, [where] there is no socialism but there is a welfare state—this is what I call social-liberalism.

Although activists and theorists in Poland agree that in many ways the socialist state emancipated women—providing them with certain social security services, including day care, the right to terminate pregnancy, health care, and maternity leave, as well as possibilities for full- and part-time employment (Titkow 1999; Fuszara 2000)—they also emphasize the lack of de facto gender equality and the inability of the socialist state to challenge traditional gender roles (Watson 1993a; Fuszara 2000). The socialist gender revolution was incomplete, largely because the regime’s commitment to equality was quite limited. The provisions offered by the socialist state were superficial, and the system overburdened women rather than emancipating them because their traditional roles as mothers (most powerfully embodied in the image of *Matka Polka*) and wives were never challenged (Walczewska 1996). Some scholars claim that the damage caused by state socialism was in fact far greater than the advantages it provided. They find the state-socialist deployment of gender difference to be an ideological tool, empty propaganda responsible for the erosion of the sense of a solidarity between women, for the rise of the Catholic Church, and ultimately for the failure of pro-choice activism in the 1990s (Bator 1999).

Within such an approach, state-socialist organizations such as the

League of Polish Women are widely regarded as operating without popular legitimization, thereby contributing to the depoliticization of feminism under state socialism (Walczevska 1996). Yet some scholars are now tuning into the voices of women who were engaged in the production and reproduction of the state-socialist project of women's emancipation (Nowak 2009; Fidelis 2010). They argue that at the personal level, the period of state socialism had a more complex impact on women's lives, representing an opportunity for self-education and indeed becoming an impetus for establishing women's activist communities (Nowak 2009). Women were not only victims; they were also creators and implementers of state-socialist equality policies. Their new roles as workers not only allowed women to formulate their interests and ideas but led to greater economic and sexual autonomy, particularly among working-class women (Fidelis 2010).

Within the debate over state socialism, it is crucial to point out that the system was not fully foreign to Poland, that it was entirely imposed by the Soviet Union. There are a number of instances of local political traditions overriding the politics of the socialist state. In the trajectory of Polish feminism, one such moment, the student riots of March 1968, comes up as particularly important because it allows links to be drawn between the struggle against sexism and the struggle against anti-Semitism.⁸ One younger feminist scholar I interviewed summed up these connections as follows: "Anti-Semitism is a key here. It is responsible for the fact that Polish feminists are very differently positioned in their own culture than feminists from, say, Trinidad. We still are outside the tradition; we cannot connect to the Polish tradition of Catholicism. The generation of 1968 is not Polish patriotic mainstream; we are not wholesome Polish blondes." Bożena Umińska, a feminist poet and activist who grew up in a Jewish-socialist family, describes her early childhood environment as one in which Polish religiosity, Catholicism, anti-Semitism, and patriarchy were

⁸ In March 1968, Warsaw University students were protesting the expulsion of the two young communists, Jacek Kuron and Karol Modzelewski. As the student riots escalated out of control, Modzelewski, Kuron, and others were suddenly accused of making demands and representing interests inspired by foreign, imperialist forces. Shortly after, their Jewish origins became the subject of fierce persecution from the Communist Party. The party employed anti-Semitic rhetoric both to divert the public's attention from students' claims and to cleanse the party of "unwanted elements" (*niepозdanych elementow*). Representatives of the "real Polish working class" were driven to Warsaw to defeat the student riots. Eventually, the March events led to the biggest anti-Semitic campaign since 1945, including the expulsion of Jewish students and faculty from institutions of higher education and the emigration of some thirteen thousand Jews from the country.

perceived as remains of the old system, over which state socialism was a significant improvement (Walczevska 2006, 127).⁹ This life was turned around by the events of March 1968 when she, like other Jews, was identified as an outsider of the nationalist community and simultaneously was disillusioned about the state-socialist commitment to equality. Umińska recalls:

I found myself studying psychology at Warsaw University. By complete accident, uninformed about what was going on, I found myself at the students' demonstration, which ended up with police beating us up. . . . I remember I saw so-called workers, "aktyw," which probably was just police dressed up in grey raincoats. I ran away into the "Psychology" building. . . . When "aktyw" showed up at the door, I, roaring like an animal, threw a chair at them. And that was a first moment of sobering up. . . . I was scared to death so I ran and hid in the women's bathroom. . . . It had a window overlooking the backyard. I remember it was March 8, Women's Day, and there was snow in the backyard. I remember I had that feeling that I'm at the window, watching a movie or something. In the movie two dudes in grey coats are beating up a girl that is lying in the snow. This was the scene that was beyond my eyes, beyond my emotional capacity. (in Walczevska 2006, 128–29)

It is not simply the experiences of gender and ethnicity that intersect in this experience; the narrative refers at once to Polish nationalism, Catholicism, anti-Semitism, and sexism, depicting layers of social acceptance and exclusion. It situates women such as Umińska at the margins of Polish identity and, simultaneously, at the core of it, since "others" such as Jews, feminists, and, more currently, sexual minorities function as an essential opposite through which "true" Polishness is defined. The local legacy of ethnocentrism was not the only one affecting the formation of gender and cultural identities under state socialism. In her book *Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland*, Małgorzata Fidelis (2010) locates socialist Poland's project of gender equality at the inter-

⁹ In his book *Fear*, Jan Gross (2006) vividly describes how much of the postwar history of both Jews and anti-Semitism in Poland circulates around the stereotype of Judeo-Communism (*Zydo-Komuna*), a slur that powerfully illustrates how Jews were positioned in the national anticommunist discourse. After the war, Gross argues, Jews had two choices: they could either leave the country (as many did) or pick a position within the spectrum of the postwar Polish politics, to become outsiders or part of the communist regime. Hiding, or becoming invisible, by, for instance, changing one's name (as Umińska's parents did), was one of the strategies for erasing difference, becoming un-Jewish.

section of nationalism and imperialism. She argues that the legacy of interwar socialist leadership (committed to women's domestic identities rather than their Bolshevik-like radicalism), the unique role of the Catholic Church in Polish culture, and the memory of the nineteenth-century Russian occupation all played decisive roles in shaping the understanding of gender equality in socialist Poland. Illuminating how internal European imperialism and colonialism intersected with the local legacies of Solidarity and socialism in the formation of feminist subjectivities in Poland now emerges as a crucial task for understanding the specificity of Eastern European or second-world locations. In the final section of this essay, I examine the possibility of utilizing transnational and postcolonial frameworks in second-world locations. Post-state-socialist feminisms are rarely considered part of transnational feminist theory or practice, partly because of their specific trajectory outside international women's organizing. Does the fact that, from the post-state-socialist perspective, transnationalism is often considered a missed revolution hinder the possibility of utilizing a postcolonial framework with reference to Eastern Europe? Or can adding the second world's difference into established frameworks based on the South-North axis lead to significant reformulations of postcolonial theories and, possibly, to new transnational alliances?

A missed revolution: Transnational feminisms, postcoloniality, and the invisible second world

Russia and its descendant, the Soviet Union, as well as the Austro-Hungarian and Prussian empires, can surely be considered examples of internal European imperialism. It also goes without saying that in the case of Poland, the experiences of war and of the postwar geopolitical order are themselves experiences of colonization, as Poles watched their country divided between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in 1939 and then incorporated into the Soviet empire's sphere of influence after the Yalta conference in 1945. Cavanagh points out that since the Soviet Union was not dismantled until 1989, some colonies within Europe achieved their independence forty years after India and twenty-seven years after Algeria (Cavanagh 2004). Yet the relationship between the first and the third worlds continues to be a central point of postcolonial inquiry while the second world remains largely absent from anti-imperialist discourses (Said 1978; Mohanty 2003). The ambiguity of the second world's position is also evident within transnational feminisms; subaltern Eastern European feminisms are emerging within a dubious geopolitical and theoretical space

that is constitutively outside transnational gender theories that center East-West and South-North dynamics.

One can attempt to explain the absence of the post-state-socialist location from transnational feminist theory and practice using Eastern European feminism's late arrival to international women's activism. Within the narrative of Eastern European women's mobilizations, the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women, which took place in Beijing in 1995, is often recognized as the venue that presented post-state-socialist feminists with their first opportunity to enter the global feminist forum. The introduction of Eastern European feminisms to global women's activism was, however, bittersweet. First of all, among Eastern European feminists, the feeling that they had already "missed the boat" of transnational feminism was overwhelming. In an interview, an activist and coauthor of the "Statement from the Non-region" (Nowicka 1995) gave her account of the transnational dynamics present in Beijing: "The [project of] international feminism has been in the works since [the UN's Third World Conference on Women in] Nairobi in 1984, and it was well established and there was no interest in our region, there was no responsibility, no feeling that they owe us something in the global sense. . . . Since the South-North paradigm was already defined, it was extremely hard for the transitioning countries to enter that space."¹⁰ She continued: "I had experience with the third-world women, who were very intellectual, and it was easier for them to build their identity based upon the North-South dichotomy. . . . I think that the Western guilt toward the South has played a crucial role here. The feeling that Americans had was that they are responsible for the third-world countries' situation, as a society, and it is their responsibility to support them. Because of that there were more initiatives to support third-world women's movements, the relationship was more intense, there were a lot more resources."

In the transnational debate, the terms "the West," "the third world," "South," and "North" certainly meant more than simply geographical locations; these concepts represented experiences and power relations, and their geographical designators remained, to some extent, undefined.¹¹ Though UN conferences became a platform for developing transnational dialogue on the complex meanings of the politics of location and for

¹⁰ UN documents indicate that the delegations from socialist countries had been active participants in the UN activities on women before Beijing. So far there has been little research examining the impact and extent of the agency that these participants had within the United Nations (Popa 2009).

¹¹ See Desai (2002), Naples (2002), Chang (2004), and Hawkesworth (2006).

connecting the U.S. debate around the intersection of gender and race with the struggles of the women representing the global South, they also created a paradigm within which “third-world women” became a substitute for “women of color” (Chang 2004). Part of the second world’s inadequacy lay in its inability or refusal to formulate its regional identity in those terms. The “Statement from the Non-region,” the only text documenting the experience of second-world women in Beijing, reads, in part, “Our group of countries is a Non-Region because there is no recognizable political or geographic definition for the region composed of countries in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. We are bound by the common problems associated with the transition to democracy. In this difficult and uneven transition, the most serious problem is the consistent and drastic decline in the status of women” (Nowicka 1995).

Post-state-socialist feminists found it difficult to identify with the struggles of third-world women. Transnational solidarities were primarily represented as having the potential to impede the production of the monolithic category “third-world women,” a discursive production that Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003) identifies as an example of structural domination perpetrated within Western feminist scholarship (itself an instance of colonization). But transnational solidarities could have also served as tools for dismantling the homogenous representations of the second world. Similarly, for second-world women, whose distinct genealogies made them “unfit” within the UN process, a reconceptualized notion of globalization based on transnational solidarity could have potentially become a language to communicate their difference and gain recognition of second-world women as historically situated, “real material subjects of their collective histories” (Mohanty 2003, 19). Finally, because transnational feminist conceptions of solidarity called for delineating the differences and commonalities of feminist struggles, the delineation of common genealogies of nationalism and imperialism could have served as a stepping stone for establishing transnational solidarities between the second and third worlds (Jayawardena 1986; Heng 1997; Desai 2002). Yet in Beijing, many Eastern Europeans effectively downplayed any potential connections between the experience of third-world women and their own. As one activist admitted in our interview:

Our own attitude has been important too—the fact that women from our region had a very distinct feeling of their own particularity, and they are proud of being different. . . . I don’t want to say it has been a feeling of superiority, but we had our advantages, some

problems, even in relationship to the Western countries. We didn't have, for instance, problems with property rights. So we had some kind of feelings of superiority, which translated into being dismissive. Although we all know these successes are very superficial, we had advantages. And it was our difference from the West and from the developing countries, the fact that we do not have certain problems such as education, illiteracy.

This inability to connect to the experiences of third-world women hindered the ability to conceptualize the experience of the second world in terms of postcoloniality, even though, as we've seen above, one can point to instances of Western scholarship "discursively colonizing the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women" (Mohanty 1988, 62) in the second world. What might a postcolonial feminist framework look like if it included the subjugated knowledges, multiple and fragmented genealogies, and power hierarchies produced within the silenced, subaltern second world (Spivak 1988)?

Certainly there would be significant theoretical consequences to bringing the second world into transnational and postcolonial feminist studies. Historically, the major narratives of postcolonial feminisms have traced the rise of the capitalist empires of nineteenth-century Europe (mostly Great Britain and France) and followed the thread through to their twentieth-century heir, the United States. In Poland, postcolonial anxieties are mostly directed toward Russia and its heir, the Soviet Union. In her work, Janion (2006) characterizes Poland as a "postcolonial" nation that "at the same time—which happens often—feels superiority over its colonizer—Russia" (34). Janion states that "we have been identifying ourselves as Europe, struggling with Asian barbarism. As true Latin Catholics and Mediterranean Europeans we are not able to identify with Slavs, because this would make us closer to the 'inferiority' of Russia" (34).

Along with some historians in Germany and Poland, Janion aims to challenge the silence around the colonial legacies of the second world, and she makes the case for recognizing Eastern European countries such as Poland as particular instances of colonialism within Europe (Ureña 2003; Cavanagh 2004; Janion 2006). But if Russia and the Soviet Union are to be considered instances of imperialism, not only will the direction of colonization have to be redefined, but so will the conception of ideology have to be reframed (not only liberal capitalism but also Marxism represents a colonizing force) along with fundamental categories of postcolonial discourse. Moreover, the Polish experience of colonization in Europe, as with many other countries in the region, is far more compli-

cated than, and not reducible to, Russian westward expansion. The status of Eastern Europe within East-West, South-North dynamics is hard to capture because in this region, colonization processes have never been characterized by one-way trajectories. The region has been a subject of interest for both Eastern and Western imperial powers. Indeed, one of the most prominent features of the political geography and the history of the region is its traveling status—between the east and west, and the north and south of Europe. Eastern colonization goes back as far as the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a majority of the central Eastern European nations were also colonized by the western empires of Prussia and Austria-Hungary. Between 1772 and 1793, for instance, Poland was partitioned three times; it disappeared from the map of Europe for almost two hundred years and existed merely in the realm of narrative, fantasy, or, to borrow Edward Said’s term, “imaginative geography” (Said 1978, 54).

In the context of postcolonial feminist studies, authors such as Kumari Jayawardena (1986) and Geraldine Heng (1997) have pointed to the ambivalent relationships between anti-imperialist and feminist movements. They argue that third-world feminism “is haunted by its historical origins” (Heng 1997, 30), as it often materialized in conjunction with nationalist movements and anti-imperialist or anticolonial struggles against Western European empires.¹² The case of Eastern European feminisms is similar, and this is certainly true for Polish feminisms. This applies not only to women in the near past who, as we have seen, participated in Solidarity’s antiauthoritarian struggle against Soviet hegemony. The anti-imperialist engagements of their mothers and grandmothers played a crucial role in the personal and collective trajectories of both female Solidarity activists and feminists in Poland. One member of the opposition movement traced her social genealogy to the resistance to nineteenth-century Russian imperialism and claimed: “My grandmother was brought up in the cult of national uprising against the Tsar, and she was immensely patriotic” (Kontratowicz 2001, 46). Another activist shared a similar story: “I was born in Siberia. Soviets displaced my pregnant mother and my father’s mother

¹² The introduction of structural adjustment programs in the 1980s by first-world-based neoliberal institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund represented a neocolonial effort to reinstate the West’s dominance. They prescribed policies that disproportionately affected women—cuts to social programs and public health care and privatization of state enterprises—in indebted third-world countries as preconditions for loans; see Desai (2002) and Chang (2004).

in 1941. My grandmother died in displacement” (Kondratowicz 2001, 290).

Yet Poland’s colonial status might emerge as something more complex than a struggle against European and Asian empires. Many authors point to the fact that throughout history Poland has itself colonized various parts of neighboring territories, such as Lithuania and Ukraine; hence, it holds a double positionality as both colonized and a colonizer of Europe. Janion (2006) argues: “As a postcolonial country we are not real Europeans, since as Slavs, we are inferior, we are stigmatized by the Russian-Slavic ‘bad blood.’ We have been at the same time the colonized and the colonizer for the Slavic ‘brotherland.’ Until this day we feel superior toward it but at the same time relate to its ‘inferiority’” (32).

An attempt to include the second world in postcolonial theorizing will also have to address the broader question of how far our theoretical boundaries can be stretched. Can we claim that throughout European history there have been instances of European empires with European colonies? The overseas aspect crucial for colonial dynamics is missing here, and the lands taken away from countries within the European continent have actually never been called colonies, since that term is reserved for overseas protectorates. While the Western European empires used to represent parts of partitioned Poland as properties, provinces, Eastern borderlands, or Eastern frontiers, in Russian terminology the name “Kingdom of Poland” prevailed over the idea of the Polish protectorate. Finally, as much as any discussion of the workings of the European empires will benefit from an analysis of the experiences of the second-world countries, these experiences will also introduce a major categorical challenge. Most importantly, one could argue that race, a crucial category in postcolonial discourses, is significantly absent in Eastern European narratives of colonialism.

Some scholars are already pointing to the complex intersectionalities of gender and race discourses within intra-European colonialisms. In her work, Lenny A. Ureña (2003) explores a “turn to colonial studies” in German historiography and connects it to the racial construction of border subjects located at the eastern Prussian frontiers from the early twentieth century to the Nazi era (Ureña 2003).¹³ Ureña’s approach complements

¹³ This colonial turn not only represents a major methodological shift in the way recent literature evaluates imperial Germany but also brings back important debates about continuities and ruptures between this period and Nazi Germany. These new analyses tend to locate the origins of the Final Solution in pseudoscientific ideas about social engineering and population policies that were advanced during the imperial era.

recent studies on the connection between nineteenth-century German imperial politics overseas and Nazism (Olusoga and Erichsen 2010), linking Germany's race politics in the third world and racial discourses at home, that is, with reference to its European properties. Ureña's work shows that early twentieth-century German health discourses represented Slavs as a weaker race that occupied the Eastern borderlands, a primitive and chaotic wild space. The introduction of *Rassenhygiene* was a response to "uncontrolled reproduction" and the potential Polonization of Germany and was framed in terms of racialized discourses of gender and sexuality. On one hand, the uninhibited reproduction of the Slavs was juxtaposed with the reproductive laziness of German women; on the other, *Rassenhygiene* is a response to the uncontrolled blending of Polish blood into German culture, a result of mixed marriages. Within these discourses, German men were represented as victims of a national movement that used Polish women to seduce and emasculate the empire (Ureña 2003).

While in German discourse, Polish women mostly appeared as racialized seducers, Russian colonial discourses represented them as epitomizing the most rotten, decadent, and inflated features of the Polish nation. Janion quotes the report of Alexander Koszelow, who was sent by Alexander II to the Kingdom of Poland in 1886 to assess the prospects of defeating the Polish national spirit, only to find Poland to be a carefree, phony, dependent, and malicious nation: "In Polish women these faults are even more developed than in men. It is easy thus to explain why women in Poland dominated the men" (Janion 2006, 5). Both German and Russian narratives identify Polishness as femininity mediated through race in a fashion similar to the way Western European colonizers and proponents of slavery appropriated gender and racial discourses regarding colonized women.

There are certainly more commonalities between the circumstances of second- and third-world women, including the complex trajectories of feminisms within anti-imperialist movements, uneasy relations with nationalisms and religious fundamentalisms, the experience of racism, the continuing struggles to negotiate a feminist relationship with local narratives of motherland, and a transnational positionality vis-à-vis the West. Given their relatively short presence within transnational space, second-world feminisms are particularly vulnerable to practices of misrepresentation and silencing. Yet the hesitance to address the absence of the second world might also be conceptualized as directing us toward a far more fundamental flaw within current transnational engagements, a flaw that needs to be addressed in detail since it raises issues that go beyond the simple question of exclusion. As long as we operate within a binary con-

ceptualization of transnationality, as a relationship between global North and global South, it is impossible to overcome the enduring relation of mutual ignorance existing between the third and the second worlds.

Conclusions

Transnational feminisms that challenge the understanding of globalization as a one-way process help to dismantle limiting feminist theoretical frameworks based on clear boundaries and dichotomies, and they provide an opportunity to create countergeographies and counterhistories of globalization (Sassen 2000; Desai 2002). While aiming to acknowledge “many narratives of globalization” (Hawkesworth 2006, 3), transnationalism helps conceptualize globalization as consisting of multidimensional processes located at various scales, engaging a variety of actors in multiple and often unexpected ways (Sandoval 2000). In this essay, I have used the examples of three unfinished transformations in order to open up the question of how we can locate second-world feminisms within the complex workings of local and global hegemonies and counterhegemonies, as well as transnational feminisms and postcolonial studies. My aim has been to delineate Eastern European feminisms’ scattered and fragmented engagements with multilayered global forces (such as Western liberal feminism and Soviet imperialism) and their complex struggles with local legacies (particularly those of nationalism, religious fundamentalism, and social emancipation movements) as instances of globalization from above and from below. These examples, I hope, help us to overcome an enduring tendency to represent post-state-socialist feminisms as nonexistent, weak, or demobilized. In contextualizing Eastern European feminisms, I have turned to three social revolutions, using their unfinished character as a way to go beyond the conceptualization of social movements as finished and complete projects. Recognizing the workings of “scattered hegemonies” (Grewal and Kaplan 1994) within globalization processes, I have tried to illuminate the complex intersections of locally based solidarities, regional legacies of colonization, and transnational connectivities.

It is similarly with a reference to the absence of second-world feminisms within the space of transnational feminisms, and the failure of second-world feminisms to enter this space, that I have made a case for the relevance of the postcolonial framework to Eastern European locations. Transnationalism changed the terms of supranational feminist dialogue, challenging essentialist notions about women’s identities, destabilizing the paradigm of global sisterhood (Naples 2002; Mohanty 2003), foregrounding the politics of coalition and the centrality of difference and

diversity (Mohanty 2003), and recognizing the local subjectivities, complex genealogies, multiple sources of oppression, and multiple loyalties of various groups of women (Desai 2002). The recognition of the hybridity of the second world within a transnational feminist framework would help us create more connectivities between the experiences of second- and third-world women and thus alter and go beyond the paradigm in which post-state-socialist women's writings and struggles arise solely in the context of and in response to Western feminisms.

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