

*The Changing Identity of the “West’s Other:” Understanding Polish Women’s Migration,  
1980-2015*

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Introduction

Poland today is considered a country of Central Europe, rather than Eastern Europe. Warsaw is a western metropolis, thus a Polish woman largely engages in the lifestyle of a western woman. Prawo i Sprawiedliwość’s 2020 legislation that banned nearly all abortion rights, however, taints the country’s reputation regarding women’s rights. Hundreds of thousands of Polish women migrated abroad under communism, during the transition period, and into the 2010s as the country’s economy recovered from communist times. Viewing the history of migration as inherently part of transnational history, this paper is concerned with Polish women’s migration and identity.

I seek to intricately analyze how Polish women’s experiences of selfhood led them to migrate and, mostly, how migration impacted their identities, including how women viewed themselves in relation to Polish nationality or Polish characteristics. Institutional, cultural, and employment transformations from communist to post-communist Poland encouraged women to view themselves more as independent individuals than previously family-oriented individuals.<sup>1</sup> I examine how such perceptions of femininity and selfhood affected the migration experiences of Polish women, in Poland and abroad. Critics of the term “identity” like Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper in ‘Beyond “Identity”’ believe the term has been used in academic discourse “to mean too much, too little or nothing at all.”<sup>2</sup> To combat such all-encompassing connotations of the term, I strategically utilize terms like self-understanding in addition to identity in my

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<sup>1</sup> Mira Marody and Anna Giza-Poleszczuk, ‘Changing images of identity in Poland’, in Susan Gal and Gail Kligman (eds.), *Reproducing Gender* (Princeton, 2000), p. 167.

<sup>2</sup> Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, ‘Beyond “Identity”’, *Theory and Society* 29:1 (2000), p. 1.

analysis of selfhood. Self-understanding implies fluid and ever-changing perceptions, rather than a stable consciousness.

With this in mind, I ask: what were the various motivations and mechanisms behind the migration of Polish women? How did class affect women's motivations and experiences of migration and what were other variables that affected women's experiences of migration and new life? Finally, how did women connect with their Polish identity and Polish people, personally and collectively in or outside Polish communities, in their new locations? Within my focus on class, I analyze sources concerned with the experiences of migrant women who engage in traditionally feminine labour such as domestic work and care work abroad. To evaluate changes in Polish society, I answer these questions in relation to three periods of migration: *Solidarność* times and before, during, and after martial law (1980-1983), after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the beginning of Poland's transition into a market economy (1989-95), and post-EU membership and the building of what we know as today's Poland (2004-2015) rather than adhering to the constraining view of Poland and Polish life is experienced as either communist or post-communist.

To adequately evaluate relevant migration patterns, we must first reflect on the living conditions in Poland during each of these periods. In 1980, *Solidarność*, a trade union led by Lech Wałęsa, sparked national resistance against the communist government which ultimately resulted in Wojciech Jaruzelski's installation of martial law from 13 December 1981 to 22 July 1983. Under communism, passports were kept at police stations, and passport authorities punished those who had traveled abroad and breached any part of their travel agreement.<sup>3</sup> Kathy Burrell's article 'War, Cold War, and New World Order' includes a testimony from a Polish

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<sup>3</sup> Krystyna Iglicka, 'Mechanisms of Migration from Poland,' *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 26:1 (2000), p. 63.

woman, Maja, who migrated from Poland in 1984 at 24 years old: “some of the people who left in early 80s, they were not allowed to go back... ‘if you come back we will arrest you.’”<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, leaving Poland during communism meant women prepared to leave life in Poland behind forever. Recreational migration was permitted shortly after the fall, and the transitioning economy produced immense levels of unemployment. Impacting most Poles in urban areas in the 1990s, women had more difficulty finding jobs and usually searched for work longer than men.<sup>5</sup> Into the 2000s, Poland’s economy was aided by European Union membership. This outline of life, work, and travel conditions during each period grounds my approach to the study of Polish women’s migration.

This paper contributes to a less binary and more holistic historical study of migration and gender. I look beyond migration as a permanent decision for the migrant, beyond productive versus reproductive work, and beyond ideas of “old and new” Poland that appear even in the most pivotal works on Polish migration. I carefully searched for transnational primary sources related to Polish migrant experiences and analyzed personal accounts, statistics, and newspaper accounts from the United States, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom to provide a transnational case study that investigates Polish migrants’ labour and life experiences. This paper additionally works toward a larger goal within historical interpretation: understanding the relationship between transnational movements and the connections historical actors hold to national identity.

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<sup>4</sup> Kathy Burrell, ‘War, Cold War, and New World Order: political boundaries and Polish migration to Britain, *History in Focus*, University of London, Autumn 2006,

<<https://archives.history.ac.uk/history-in-focus/Migration/articles/burrell.html>> [accessed 20 March 2022].

<sup>5</sup> Ewa Kępińska, ‘Gender Differentiation in Seasonal Migration’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 39:4 (2013), p. 548.

## Historiography and State of the Field

Complex historical studies of women migrants contain roots in sociology. Linda Guerry's editorial in *Clio* outlines how gendered histories of migration have intersected with the history of families. Previously characterizing the family as a support system or trap for mothers to escape from, migration historiography in the 2010s newly examined: "the impact of migration on femininity and masculinity, and on socio-sexual roles, and the notion of gender reordering brought about by migration."<sup>6</sup> I engage with similar sociological questions related to selfhood in a Polish historical context. Also concerned with multi-dimensions of migration and women's lives, Tithi Bhattacharya's collection of essays *Social Reproduction Theory* constructed a framework to formally study "who then produces the worker"<sup>7</sup> in 2017. Women's oppression in productive and reproductive labour, care work, and unpaid work is studied by various scholars in global sociological and historical case studies. Nancy Fraser's essay 'Crisis of Care' coins the term "global care chains": the historical phenomenon in which women entering productive work in the Global North require another woman, who is usually a migrant from the Global South, to in turn take on the working woman's socially reproductive work as a form of labour.<sup>8</sup> *Social Reproduction Theory* provides valuable terminology and theory from which a crucial new base for the study of women's labour history can be constructed.

The turn of the century marked a pivotal turn in the historiography of Polish women. Anna Reading's book *Polish Women, Solidarity, and Feminism* (1992) was the beginning of a re-evaluation of Polish women under communism. Reading sought more written histories that broke out of previous perceptions regarding Polish women:

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<sup>6</sup> Linda Guerry, 'Editorial', *Clio: Women, Gender, History*, 51 (2020), p. 29.

<sup>7</sup> Tithi Bhattacharya (ed.), *Social Reproduction Theory* (London, 2017), p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Nancy Fraser, 'Crisis of Care?', in Tithi Bhattacharya (ed.), *Social Reproduction Theory* (London, 2017), p. 34.

For the Eastern bloc was constructed as the West's negative other and Polish women themselves were portrayed as the negative others of women in the West and of Polish men... They have been satellites in terms of the East/West divide, plus the satellites of men.<sup>9</sup>

This "Re-Introduction" seeks to deconstruct masculinity and femininity to understand patriarchy in Poland and how Polish women became seen as "the other:" silenced, passive, and fetishized. Reading's intriguing characterization of Polish women as "the West's negative other" inspired my essay title.

Krystyna Iglicka's 'Mechanisms of Migration from Poland Before and During the Transition Period' (1999) was sponsored by the Population Activities Unit in the Economic Commission for Europe of the United Nations. This survey provides grounding statistics on four decades of migration from Poland, a task that has not been repeated for decades following the 90s. Iglicka disclaims that: "the available data on migration from and to Poland is far from satisfactory."<sup>10</sup> The survey demographically answers who is leaving Poland, why, and how such Poles are doing so. This includes evaluating variables such as gender, education, and place of residence in Poland. The data concludes that from 1981 until 1997: "international migration still seems to be a way of accumulating goods and money."<sup>11</sup> In conjunction with my research questions, I will evaluate how primary sources reveal the continuation or deterioration of trends observed in this extremely influential study up to twenty years after its publication.

Mira Marody and Anna Giza-Poleszczuk's chapter 'Changing Images of Identity in Poland' (2000) analyzes Polish women's magazines in 1974 and 1994, under communism and during the transition period. Using these years as case studies, the scholars examine evolutions in identity including how women were expected to look and act as wives and mothers. They argue

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<sup>9</sup>Anna Reading, *Polish Women, Solidarity and Feminism* (London, 1992), pp. 16-17.

<sup>10</sup> Iglicka, 'Mechanisms of Migration', p. 62.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

that the transition from communism to post-communism shifted women from collectivist selfhood to individual, aspirational selfhood. The ideal mother under communism was: “the heroine who takes care of her family does not have time to take care of her own appearance.”<sup>12</sup> While in the new consumer society: “Instead of sacrificing themselves to serve the needs of family and society or to ‘manage’ men, women should now subordinate themselves to male desires and standards of beauty.”<sup>13</sup> Such a focus on selfhood and gender in a Polish context inspired my research. We will return to claims on changing selfhood as related to the changing economic situation in Poland in my primary source analysis.

Helma Lutz and Eva Palenga-Möllenbeck’s ‘Care, Gender and Migration’ (2011) explored care work dynamics in Germany in the context of Poland joining the European Union. Lutz and Palenga-Möllenbeck argue how care work has evolved into “an unprotected semi-legal second labour market with precarious working and living conditions.” Additionally, they probe how ideals of femininity relate to care work: “the conviction that women are inherently better qualified to do care work, as they have ‘innate’ social and emotional competencies.” The article also addresses the transnational dimension of women in productive work who must sacrifice reproductive work: “female Polish migrants in Germany and Ukrainian migrants in Poland are increasingly filling a care gap.”<sup>14</sup> In this intersection of care work and migration, the applicability of Nancy Fraser’s term “global care chains” in a Polish context appears.

### Primary Source Analysis

For primary source material, I utilize one report on Polish women’s equality in 1983 and one personal account from Poland during martial law to ground comprehension of Polish

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<sup>12</sup> Marody, ‘Changing images of identity’, p. 157.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170.

<sup>14</sup> Lutz, ‘Care, Gender and Migration’, p. 357.

women's selfhood under communism. Then, I employ news sources to evaluate migration developments in the transition economy and beyond: one newspaper from 1991, another from 2005, and a video report from 2015. These case studies provide insight into the different motivations for migration, the various kinds and mechanisms of migration, and Polish self-understanding at home and abroad.

The International Labor Organization's report *Women in Economic Activity: A Global Statistical Survey* portrays Eastern European women as virtually equal to men in statistics on 1983 socialist economies. For Poland, 1983 is the year martial law ends. At this time, according to the survey, 50.8% of all students in higher educational establishments were women. Women also comprised 57.7% of students in Polish specialized secondary establishments.<sup>15</sup> We can conceptualize these statistics with Iglicka's 'Mechanisms of Migration.' Iglicka concludes that from 1981 to 1985, 65,462 Polish women compared to 54,686 Polish men migrated from Poland.<sup>16</sup> She also explains, "the 1980s were characterised overall by emigration of the youngest cohorts."<sup>17</sup> Assuming that women went straight into higher education after secondary education, the report demonstrates how Polish women were equally if not more educated than men at a relatively young age. Comparing ILO's statistics with Iglicka's, it appears that Polish women were gaining education *before* leaving communist Poland. Some Polish women may not have sought employment in Poland before leaving as suggested by the migration of very young Polish people (aged sixteen to twenty-four years old) in the 80s. Additionally, with migration under communism implying that one must prepare to leave forever, some Polish migrants seemed to intend to live their adult lives abroad.

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<sup>15</sup> International Labor Organization and the Training Institute for the Advancement of Women, *Women in Economic Activity* (Santo Domingo, 1985), pp. 145-146.

<sup>16</sup> Iglicka, 'Mechanisms of Migration', p. 66.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.



While high rates of educated women within a country are usually viewed as progressive, it is important to stray from equating women's education, or so-called relatively equal status in education and employment, with an equal agency to migrate as compared to Polish men. A mother's struggle to migrate for a better life is portrayed in a testimonial from the January 1982 edition of *Głos Polek*. Published by the Polish Women's Alliance of America and entitled "Learning about Poland,"<sup>18</sup> the testimonial begins with the child exclaiming, "buy me a new toy!" The mother replies that she is struggling with money, bread prices have gone up, and gas and oil will soon become more expensive. The child explains: "Magda has a toy room." The mother retorts: "Magda's dad works abroad." The child asks: "so its good abroad and bad in Poland?" The mother affirms: "Yes, it's worse in Poland than abroad." The child then asks: "So why don't we go abroad if Poland is so bad?" Financial stability is therefore seen by Polish women as achieved by working abroad. Migration, for this mother, functions not to fulfill individualist aspirations, but to ease worry about oil and bread. The importance of the working father, who allows for Magda's toy room with his earnings and is absent from the struggling mother's dialogue, reinforces the historical significance of patriarchy within communist Poland. A Polish man's ability to provide appears easier than a woman's. The double burden of Polish women who worry about their children and money in a country that is "bad," exhibits how the economic fragility of communist Poland negatively affected women and, in turn, how migration was used as a solution to this hardship. Additionally, the mother's condition provides insight into why Poles emigrated after finishing their education. Such testimonies published in the West also exhibit Cold War tensions. While this mother's account may be exaggerated because of these tensions, her situation illustrates the reasons behind lenient migration policies in the United

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<sup>18</sup> The following quotations are rough translations of Polish Women's Alliance of America, 'Dziecko '81 Uczy Sie Myslec O Polsce', *Głos Polek*, Chicago, Thursday, 21 January 1982, p. 7.

States for Polish people at this time. The Refugee Act of 1980 enabled all Polish refugees to obtain state and federal support for "language and job training, as well as housing allowance and food stamps."<sup>19</sup> The desire to be abroad, and the various possibilities to provide for one's family abroad pictured in this testimony, continue after the fall of communism.

In 1991, as migration became more freely available, Polish citizens migrated to earn more money and support their families back home, although this entailed working in "unskilled" jobs. William Montalbano's *The Los Angeles Times* article from October 1, 1991, entitled 'A Global Pursuit of Happiness' examines trends of mass migration and focuses on migrants moving to countries with more "developed" economies. The article begins, "Geneva - A woman gynecologist from Romania sells bananas in a downtown supermarket here. Polish engineers pick grapes in Swiss alpine vineyards, earning in five weeks what it would take five months to make at home."<sup>20</sup> While "Polish engineers" does not specify the Polish citizens' gender, their situation demonstrates how severely the previously Soviet satellite countries suffered from the collapse of the Soviet Union. As unskilled work paid more than highly qualified jobs back home, high rates of higher education in Poland did not help migrants gain jobs in Poland or abroad. Migration appears to be a logical way to support oneself and one's family. The Romanian gynecologist's situation exhibits how, for women, such migration motivations and patterns were not necessarily trends that were specific to Poland. Disproving stereotypes of women migrating to gain liberating education in the West, such a source signifies how once free travel became available, women migrants moved to combat the effects of mass unemployment in Poland during the transition period.

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<sup>19</sup> Geraldine Balut Coleman, 'Educating Polish Immigrants Chicago Style', *Polish American Studies*, 61:1 (2004): p. 28.

<sup>20</sup> William D. Montalbano, 'A Global Pursuit of Happiness', *The Los Angeles Times*, Los Angeles, 1 October 1991, p. 1, <<https://www.proquest.com/docview/1639680890/F6EAC00171EC4251PO/7?accountid=8312>> [accessed 20 March 2022].

As Poland stabilized its European Union membership in 2005, Polish women migrants still searched for unskilled work abroad to support themselves. Nancy Bernstein's *New York Times* article from 2005, "Invisible to Most, Immigrant Women Line Up for Day Labor" spotlights the largely forgotten experiences of women migrants in America by speaking with women in line for a New York City cleaning job. Bernstein records: "They don't want babushkas," complained Zofia, a 50-year-old mother of five, as a young Hasidic man led Justyne, a 24-year-old Polish student, to his S.U.V."<sup>21</sup> This self-understanding of "babushka" is reminiscent of "the Eastern bloc" ideals during communist times. The older Polish woman is less desirable for cleaning work because of her Slavic-like femininity, rather than American-like femininity. More than fifteen years after the fall, this encounter proves age as an additional category that impacted Polish women migrants' experiences abroad. A Polish student who is beginning her adult life in her new location is likely to gain work because she appears and acts more similar to familiar ideals of American femininity than a Polish woman who looks older as this connects her femininity to communist Poland. Attachment to Polish selfhood from communist times could, then, negatively impact the migration experiences of Polish women.

Nancy Bernstein's article also demonstrates Polish women's dedication to sending or bringing money earned abroad back to Poland in 2005. The reporter explains:

other women lack papers, or shuttle on temporary work visas between their struggling families in rural Poland and spartan, overpriced rooms in Brooklyn. And in summer, just when demand declines because of employer vacations, they now face growing numbers of young Polish women working illegally on tourist visas while living rent-free with Brooklyn relatives.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Nina Bernstein, 'Invisible to Most, Immigrant Women Line Up for Day Labor', *The New York Times*, New York City, 15 August 2005, p. 1, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2005/08/15/nyregion/invisible-to-most-immigrant-women-line-up-for-day-labor.html>> [accessed 20 March 2022].

<sup>22</sup> Bernstein, 'Invisible to Most,' p. 1.

The diversity of migrant experiences pictured in this quotation displays how migration was not a straightforward nor one-dimensional experience for Polish women. Shuttleing, temporary work visas, and tourist visas, instead illustrate how working almost any job for even short amounts of time in the United States was viewed as a viable strategy to properly support oneself and one's family back in Poland more than fifteen years after the fall. This suggests a continuation of what Iglicka observed in the 90s: “[international migration] becomes a way of life for some specific segments of society... Persons who were unable to adapt to the market economy.”<sup>23</sup> The young Polish women working within and around the employment cycles display a way of life that allows them “to vanish from official view to work where they can,”<sup>24</sup> as explained in the 1991 *Los Angeles Times* article. Thus, in temporary migration around 2005, Poland was the home base for these women. Migration was a tool rather than the end goal. This is similar to how migration in the 90s was: “a way of accumulating goods and money.”<sup>25</sup> The mention of “rural Poland” highlights the class divide between women migrants working abroad and women earning money in Poland. In all, strategically earning money abroad to bring home to those still struggling in Poland's growing economy appears to be the main purpose of short-term migration. This suggests a continuation of the trends Iglicka observed in ‘Mechanisms of Migration.’

A PBS NewsHour video from 2015 focused on Britain's first strike by migrants includes interviews with both Polish women and employers of Polish people living in Britain. In “Why Polish Migrants decided to strike in the UK”, Geoff Adam-Spink explains why he only hires Polish women to be his care assistants: “the people who will always turn up, who will make sure everything is done thoroughly are Polish people.”<sup>26</sup> He also declares that when his current carer,

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<sup>23</sup> Iglicka, ‘Mechanisms of Migration’, p. 72.

<sup>24</sup> Montalbano, ‘A Global Pursuit’, p. 7.

<sup>25</sup> Iglicka, ‘Mechanisms of Migration’, p. 72.

<sup>26</sup> PBS NewsHour, ‘Why Polish migrants decided to strike in the UK’, *YouTube*, 21 August 2015, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JK28tlwIaxc>> [accessed 15 April 2022], min. 1:44.

Ania Jarzebiak, leaves her job, he will: “advertise for a replacement in a Polish speaking newspaper...To ensure he gets a Pole.”<sup>27</sup> The advertisement in a Polish newspaper demonstrates cultural networks, rather than familial networks seen in Bernstein’s article, that connect Polish people with jobs in Britain. The formation of a Polish workers’ strike also exemplifies coordinated action built upon collective experiences of being Polish workers in Britain. The different personal, familial, and community connections formed in different locations for Polish migrants may relate to trends of migration in different historical periods. While the wave of Polish migrants who moved to the United States in the 80s, in part because of the Refugee Act, died down after 1996,<sup>28</sup> PBS narrates that 11% of six million foreign workers living in Britain in 2015 are Poles.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, the more Polish migrants working in new locations led to more complex migrant networks and less self-contained family ties that enabled work abroad.

Spink’s valuing of Polish women care workers and, more generally, Polish selfhood, echoes sentiments that Helma Lutz reports in her evaluation of Polish care workers in Germany. Lutz found German employers, “ascribe certain characteristics such as warmheartedness and a hands-on attitude towards life to their eastern ‘pearls’... the life experience and personal commitment of older female migrants is much appreciated.”<sup>30</sup> Such praise for Polish women’s work ethic is reminiscent of the selfless, hardworking Polish mother under communism image depicted in ‘Changing Identity.’ The relationship between age and femininity and how these variables affect the migrant woman’s ability to work depends on different historical and work contexts. Ania’s exceptionalism as a care worker is related to her Polishness in her British employer’s eyes. Thinking back to Zofia’s self-understanding of “babushka,” Polish selfhood

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<sup>27</sup> PBS NewsHour, ‘Why Polish migrants’, min. 1:08.

<sup>28</sup> Coleman, ‘Educating Polish Immigrants’, p. 28.

<sup>29</sup> PBS NewsHour, ‘Why Polish migrants’, min. 6:48.

<sup>30</sup> Lutz, ‘Care, Gender and Migration’, p. 357.

that contains such communist imagery is celebrated in Britain unlike ten years earlier in the United States when Zofia was denied cleaning work because of her Polish selfhood.

Similar to other women migrant accounts, Ania Jarzebiak had material motivations to leave Poland. She says to the camera:

I left Poland because I was struggling with my bills. I couldn't earn that much money to pay for rent and so on.... life in Britain is much better. When you have a job, you can afford almost anything.<sup>31</sup>

Despite that Ania does not specify when she left Poland, her emphasis on bills, rent, and food implies another case of migration as a means for Polish women to provide basic needs for themselves and their families in 2015 like in the 80s and 90s. The benefits of “having a job” in Britain rather than in Poland demonstrate a personal account of how employment issues plagued women’s experiences in Poland. Joanna, who works in a Polish dentist office in England, explained how she wants the strikes to be perceived: “We want to live here normally. We want to have a nice life. We want to be friends with them. We don’t want to be immigrants.”<sup>32</sup> Not wanting to be an “immigrant” highlights Joanna’s discontent with feeling foreign in her new location. Her Polish identity in 2015 is one of otherness: a strictly Polish selfhood, rather than a hybrid and assimilated identity, makes her distant from her British counterparts and discredits her contributions to British society. She seeks to live like those who grew up in her new location, therefore a “nice life” is for her a British life, not a strictly Polish one.

## Conclusion

Despite that Poland changed drastically from 1981 to 2015, consistency appears in the motivations behind women’s migration: to provide for themselves, their families abroad, and

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<sup>31</sup> PBS NewsHour, ‘Why Polish migrants’, min. 0:40.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, min. 2:18.

their families at home in Poland. Such motivations also highlight a continuation in reasons for migration observed in Iglicka's influential 'Mechanisms of Migration' in 1999.

Self-understanding of Polishness seems to be one of otherness. To gain work that allowed women to evade Polish employment challenges, Polish women must have either broken out of Polishness or maintained Polishness for domestic and care work jobs in the United States and the United Kingdom across time periods. Years after the fall of communism, migrant women settling in new locations were still characterized by communist ideals of selfhood: the hardworking or "Eastern bloc" Polish woman. Related to femininity, age appears as an additional variable that affected available work for Polish women migrants. In the 80s, Polish women acquired higher education equally to their male counterparts, but statistics suggest that Polish women may have migrated for a stable life without trying to gain employment in communist Poland first.

Migrants' education in Poland did not advance the migrant's class standing in their new location as migrants usually engaged in "unskilled" labour abroad. The short-term, long-term, and frequent migrants and various migration strategies portray how gaining money abroad remained attractive to Polish women under communism, during the transition, and after Poland joined the European Union. The various familial and community Polish migrant networks signal how migration patterns and labour needs abroad impacted the extent to which Polish women connected with other Polish women back in Poland and Polish communities in their new location.

There is much more to explore. Another dimension of women's migration that deserves more attention is the role that the Polish language plays in the migrants' new, or changed, lives and how such a connection to their "home" language has evolved personally or in migrant communities over time. A transnational account of Eastern and Central European women's

migration in these periods would be another useful exercise to break stereotypes, generalizations, and fetishizations of a uniform “Eastern Europeanness.” Comparing statistics from the International Labour Organization to relevant migration sources, including oral history accounts, would enable more personalized histories that showcase Eastern European women’s uniqueness as transnational historical actors. This exercise would also spotlight the commonalities between women migrants’ experiences of migration, femininity, and selfhood and how this history is vibrantly alive as migrants tell their stories today.



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