



School of History

M03351

**Doing and Practicing Transnational and Global
History**

Academic Year 2021-2022

Student's Matriculation Number: **190020974**

Tutor: **Dr Bernhard Struck and Dr Milinda Banjeree**

Type of Assignment: **Project Proposal**

Title: **"The West's Other": The Transnational Movement of Polish Women 1980-2015**

Date Due: **4 March 2022**

Date of Submission: **3 March 2022**

Word Count: **698**

Project Title: “The West’s Other”: The Transnational Movement of Polish Women 1980-2015
 Wordcount: 698

“Immigrant” and “refugee” carry gendered associations: a single man traveling to obtain work is usually associated with an immigrant, while a refugee is usually associated with a mother and her children. This simple example illustrates the complexity of studying transnational women’s migration independently as women are often examined in relation to family and caretaking while migrating men are examined in relation to the work they seek.¹ I hope to explore this dilemma in my examination of Polish women’s migration.

Existing scholarship on postwar Polish women, migration, identity, and labor, focuses mostly on the transition period and comparisons between women’s experiences in communist and post-communist Poland.² The gendered dimension of seasonal migration, care work, and sex work undertaken by Eastern European women has also been examined.³ Rather than only focusing on the transition period or the “old” and “new” Poland, I hope to newly compare three periods of Polish history in which the country and its people experienced immense societal change: Pre-martial law and *Solidarność* times (1980), after the fall of the Berlin Wall and 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). To do so, my research questions will be: What were the various motivations and mechanisms behind each period of migration for Polish women? Poland underwent institutional, cultural, and employment transformations, and “During the communist period, the most general characteristic of women's identity formation was its collectivist bias... The "new woman" is first and foremost portrayed as an individual.”⁴ With this in mind, how did changing perceptions of masculinity, femininity, and selfhood during the transition from a communist state to a market economy society affect the migration of Polish women? How did each period of women's migration affect transnational movement into Poland? How did class affect a women’s motivations, experiences of migration, and new life? Finally, how did women connect with their Polish identity, personally and collectively in Polish

¹ Linda Guerry and Françoise Thébaud, ‘Editorial’, *Clio: Women, Gender, History* (2020), pp. 19-34.

² See Anna Reading, *Polish Women, Solidarity and Feminism* (London, 1992), Malgorzata Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland* (Cambridge, 2010), and Mira Marody and Anna Giza-Poleszczuk, ‘Changing images of identity in Poland’, in Susan Gal and Gail Kligman (eds.), *Reproducing Gender* (Princeton, 2000), pp. 151-175.

³ Helma Lutz, ‘Care, Gender and Migration: Towards a Theory of Transnational Domestic Work Migration in Europe’, *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 19:3, pp. 349-364.

⁴ Marody, ‘Changing images of identity in Poland’, p. 167.

communities, in their new location? I hope these questions which combine transnational history, gender history, labor history, sociology, ethnography, and migration studies will illuminate a larger case study about the relationship between transnational movement and the connection historical actors hold to national identity in the context of communist and post-communist European states. My research goal is to intricately analyze how Polish women's identities led them to migrate and how migration impacted their identities.

While I am not fluent in Polish, I plan to utilize translated primary sources from the Center of Migration Research at the University of Warsaw and the Polish National Archives. I will also utilize statistics to gauge the scale and intentions of women's migration in each period from the European Commission's Knowledge Center on Migration and Demography and the International Labor Organization's 'Women in Economic Activity: A Global Statistical Survey (1950-2000).' Still, a major aspect of this research will be balancing the statistics with humanizing primary sources such as personal accounts. To examine the role of class in migration more deeply, I will also employ social reproduction theory.⁵ A possible avenue for engaging in personal primary material is examining the digitized editions of *The Polish Women's Voice* (1902-2007) from the Women and Leadership Archives at Loyola University Chicago. Containing all editions from the three periods I want to focus on, this publication has articles about the political situation back in Poland, spotlights of Polish-American women's achievements, reports on successful community events such as the Polish *wigilia* celebrations, and new members lists. I could work backward from this publication by examining if Polish women migrants read *Glos Polek* or attended such community events. This would help answer how, if at all, migrated Polish women collectively engaged with their national identity in their new location.

⁵ Tithi Bhattacharya (ed.), *Social Reproduction Theory* (London, 2017).

Bibliography

- Bhattacharya, Tithi (ed.), *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentring Oppression* (London, 2017).
- Fidelis, Malgorzata, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland* (Cambridge, 2010).
- Guerry, Linda, and Thébaud, Françoise, 'Editorial: Women, Gender and Migration', *Clio: Women, Gender, History* (2020), pp. 19-34.
- Lutz, Helma, 'Care, Gender and Migration: Towards a Theory of Transnational Domestic Work Migration in Europe', *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 19:3, pp. 349-364.
- Marody, Mira, and Giza-Poleszczuk, Anna, 'Changing images of identity in Poland: from the self-sacrificing to the self-investing woman?', in Susan Gal and Gail Kligman (eds.), *Reproducing Gender* (Princeton, 2000), pp. 151-175.
- Reading, Anna, *Polish Women, Solidarity and Feminism* (London, 1992).