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## THE FEMALE PRIVILEGE. ON CELEBRATING INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY IN STATE ENTERPRISES IN THE POLISH PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC

*The article discusses the subject of celebrating International Women's Day in the Polish People's Republic (1952-1989). The author aims at showing the importance of this day in the public space – specifically in state enterprises. The article mainly attempts to assess whether those celebrations were inspired by the communist authorities and used to achieve some short- and long-term social goals, or if they allowed to establish or re-establish some kind of trust for the party in power. Empirical data are used to illustrate the phenomenon.*

*The author points out that in the period of the Polish People's Republic, there existed a certain privilege of being a women. This was evidenced by the prestige that the authorities of the time assigned to the celebration of Women's Day and the fact that Men's Day was not celebrated, or at least was much more marginal.*

**Keywords:** *International Women's Day, female privilege, March 8.*

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Celebrating International Women's Day became very popular right after the Second World War and in the period of the Polish People's Republic. March 8th was proclaimed International Women's Day by the Council of the United Nations in 1975.<sup>1</sup> In the first post-war years, in the period of the power struggle, it was a good excuse for the Polish Workers' Party (PWP) to offer gifts to women. The day was used by the PWP as

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<sup>1</sup> Nowakowska-Wierzchoś Anna, *Kobieta w Polsce „ludowej”* [Women in „people's” Poland], [www.feminoteka.pl/muzeum/readarticle.php?article\\_id=57](http://www.feminoteka.pl/muzeum/readarticle.php?article_id=57) (access on August 14, 2015).

a tool to gain social support. At the same time, the goal was to persuade women that the state, with PWP in power, would help them. The authorities also tried to gain support among women by tackling unemployment in this particular group. All those actions were supposed to make Polish women trust PWP (transformed in 1948 into the Polish United Workers' Party) and the new political and economic system introduced in Poland. The authorities tried to gain women's support not only because they constituted the majority in the country but also because of their commitment to religion. Women were very devoted to the Catholic Church, and since they were also responsible for raising children, the situation constituted a threat to the authorities. However, despite all the efforts in this realm, the authorities were on the losing side, as persuading women to change their religious views turned out to be a rather difficult task.

The 1971 strike among female textile workers in Łódź brought about fear that remained present for quite some time. After this incident, First Secretary Edward Gierek was looking for a way to alleviate social tension by trying to influence the group that inspired the events, namely women. That is why the authorities decided to build support for the national and party authorities among women by celebrating their holiday. Official celebrations and mass meetings were organized during which small gifts were made to women and wishes were exchanged. The day was celebrated by women and men alike. Due to the importance of celebrations and their magnitude it is fair to say that this was a national holiday.

Women's Day was an opportunity for the authorities to demonstrate their achievements. For dignitaries back then, that included equality of rights for women, granting them political rights, emancipation actions etc.<sup>2</sup>

This article aims at demonstrating that promoting Women's Day to the rank of a national holiday was a form of privileging women in the way we understand it now – of granting them a special status. Because of the multitude of mass meetings held in enterprises and in public space, the day became a grotesque, which was enthusiastically noticed by parodists, especially in the 1980s.

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<sup>2</sup> Kopciewicz Lucyna, *W dniu ich święta. Przemoc symboliczna, media i podmiot kobiecy w świadomości grup pokoleniowych*, [On their day. Symbolic violence, media and the female subject in the minds of generations] Oficyna Wydawnicza, Impuls, Kraków 2011, p. 13.

## 2. WOMEN'S DAY – A NATIONAL HOLIDAY

As early as after the Second World War, the communist authorities were trying to draw women's support for the system, and in particular for the authorities themselves – primarily because women constituted a majority and could influence the election results. Therefore many actions were taken, including creating magazines or newspapers for women or restoring the pre-war ones, e.g. "Kobieta Dzisiejsza" (Modern Woman) or "Przyjaciółka" (Friend), and establishing the only women's organization operating in communist Poland, the Polish Women's League. On the other hand, nurseries and kindergartens were established in workplaces in order to boost employment among women. Those actions were supposed to demonstrate the authorities' engagement in solving the problems affecting women – not only housewives, but also employees with their double workload – professional and domestic. The "Modus" clothing company in Bydgoszcz exemplifies that. Since women comprised 90% of the staff, the company provided a kindergarten on premises. The kindergarten provided care to the employees' children.

The Stalinist period (until 1953) was the time when women were employed in the so-called "male" professions and the most important goal was achieving production targets. Therefore, enterprises had to increase employment, and if it was impossible to hire men, women took their positions. There were also enterprises which primarily hired women. Examples include the "Merinotex" yarn manufacturer in Toruń, the "Kobra" leather goods company, and the "Modus" clothing company in Bydgoszcz mentioned above. At that time, the number of female workers in the national economy also increased, and the press featured coverage on female "labor leaders". In the times of Stalinism, on Women's Day a lot was said about female workers and female competition in labor. Women entered the race for the title of "labor leaders" to express their gratitude for the privileges awarded them by socialist authorities and for the possibility to do professional work. At least that is how the authorities understood it. In exchange for increasing work efficiency, and in particular for achieving 120-200% of the targets, the authorities emphasized women's contribution to the struggle for maintaining patriotic values. In the late 1950s, during International Women's Day celebrations, party secretaries gave medals to the activists, and honored women who participated in this workplace competition. The next day, March 9, was often a follow-up of the holiday, and news-

papers prepared coverage on the celebrations. In the “*Życie Warszawy*” (Warsaw Life) magazine, it was pointed that women received many gifts from families and employers. The summary of the day was also included:

Women received many tokens of recognition and friendship from work comrades, friends and families. In the whole country, celebrations were organized from dusk till dawn by social organizations and enterprises. Medals, financial bonuses and gifts were the expression of the society’s warm feelings and its concern to make the hard lives of Polish women easier and better”<sup>3</sup>.

This way, communist authorities wanted to drag women away from the custody of the Catholic Church – by emancipating them. It is worth noting that before the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church saw the role of women at home and in the public sphere in a completely different way.

After 1956, more and more often the most basic and at the same time the most important role of women as wives and mothers was discussed, as well as their role as workers. The intensive development of heavy industry in the years 1950-1955 (the so-called 6-year plan), meant that after 1956, the problem of women’s unemployment started to arise. What is more important, women were in fact persuaded to quit their jobs to make room for men. In 1958, the so-called “job regulating” action was carried out. Thousands of women were let go, and the official explanation said they had to engage in a family life and men needed jobs vacated by them.<sup>4</sup> In communist Poland, the problem of unemployment did not officially exist; it has to be noted, however, that in industries generating jobs for women, the problem was visible.

In the early 1970s, Women’s Day celebrations became a lot more publicized, due to a text titled “To the Polish Women”, published in 1972 by First Secretary Edward Gierek and Prime Minister Piotr Jaroszewicz. The text included the following wishes: “Today, wishing you the very best, we would like to assure you that the Party and the government will protect you and do their best to make your professional work and home duties easier”.<sup>5</sup> Similar speeches were made regularly during Women’s Day celebrations, even though, as time went by, women began to understand that those were only words.

<sup>3</sup> Memches Filip, *Od ideologii do bojkotu kwiatowego* [From ideology to the flower boycott] <http://www.rp.pl/artykul/938011.html?print=tak&p=0> (access on September 1, 2015)

<sup>4</sup> Walczewska Sławomira, *Liga Kobiet – jedyna organizacja kobieca w PRL* [Women’s League – the only women’s organization in communist Poland] [http://www.efka.org.pl/index.php?action=p\\_art&ID=2](http://www.efka.org.pl/index.php?action=p_art&ID=2) (access on September 1, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> *Women’s Day in communist Poland: On March 8, comrade Gierek sends wishes* <http://slawno.naszemiasto.pl/tag/dzien-kobiet-w-prl-u.html>, (access on June 25, 2015).

The years 1971-1981 were a time when perception of women changed. March 8 became a holiday celebrated everywhere and by everyone. Even though not as important as July 22 (National Poland Rebirth Day) and May 1 (Labor Day), celebrations of this day were nonetheless planned with equal attention. At this time, communist propaganda tried to assure the Polish society that educational and professional opportunities for women were accomplishments of the socialist authorities. Celebrating Women's Day was supposed to show women that the state takes care of them, which should evoke a sense of gratitude. According to Natalia Jarska, Women's Day was "an opportunity to undertake production commitments and ostentatiously promote women in professional hierarchy".<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, after the events in Pomerania in 1970 and in Radom and Ursus in 1976, the authorities felt weak. Therefore, they had to find new ways of building social support.

During formal celebrations, the authorities highlighted their own achievements not only with regard to supporting female emancipation but also to positive changes in the consumption sector. This achievement was illustrated, for example, by the number of home appliances manufactured. In 1980, the communist daily newspaper, "Trybuna Ludu", titled one of its articles "Home appliances". Refrigerators, washing machines, sewing machines and TV sets were described. In the pictures, one could see women working by sewing machines. Underneath, there were figures concerning the volume of production and information on new brands of products. Improvements in quality and the increasing manufacturing efficiency in home appliances were asserted.<sup>7</sup> This was an attempt to persuade women that, owing to new technologies, it is easier to juggle work and home duties. The promotion of sewing machines was supposed to suggest that a woman can make clothes on her own. This was a way of avoiding any discussion on the shortage of products available on the market.

Women's Day in communist Poland is also associated with red carnations given to women. The association of carnations with Women's Day dates back to the 1960s, when women would meet the most important dignitaries in the country during party rallies.

Until 1956, scripts of the celebrations on both the national and local levels were prepared the day before Women's Day. People did their best

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<sup>6</sup> Jarska Natalia, *Genderowa rewolucja w PRL była ograniczona* [Gender revolution in the Polish People's Republic was limited], <http://histmag.org/Natalia-Jarska-genderowa-rewolucja-w-PRL-była-ograniczona-9173> (access on July 3, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> Zalejska Maryla, *Sprzet dla domu*, [Home appliances] Trybuna Ludu, no. 58/1980, p. 4.

to keep every single point of the agenda in order to control the ceremony, particularly when representatives of the Party were invited. After 1956, Women's Day celebrations became more natural and spontaneous. People prepared entertainment events for women. Naturally, official celebrations still ran according to the pre-written scripts. Archive materials include the agendas of International Women's Day celebrations, e.g. the 1986 agenda of the meeting between the executive authority members and the women of Włocławek province, prepared by the Social and Occupational Department of the District Committee of the Party. Apart from the date and the location of the meeting, the agenda included technical specifications – table arrangements, the key to selecting women participants (members of the Polish Women's League and of Country Women's Clubs, labor leaders from the enterprises in the region, teachers, health care and trade employees, members of the central authorities of the Party and managers of public administration), and the order of wishes made by the First Secretary of the District Committee of the Party.<sup>8</sup> A visit of the party secretary in enterprises that employed mostly women e.g. the tableware company in Włocławek, was an important element of the day's celebrations.

The 75th anniversary of establishing International Women's Day, in 1985, was also accompanied by grand celebrations. In the Włocławek district, celebrations included formal meetings on a district level between Women's League representatives and party authorities, and on a municipal level, in Ciechocinek, Lipno and Rypin, between women and municipal authorities.

Formal celebrations of International Women's Day were an opportunity to emphasize women's important role in society. In 1986, Wojciech Jaruzelski pointed out in his Women's Day speech:

If we think of our motherland, we wish to see it as a one big family [...] because it is within the family, in particular owing to the special role of women, that we serve Poland and work for its sake.<sup>9</sup>

This way, the authorities wanted to explain that even though women do unpaid work, the state appreciates their effort. Although socialist ideology created the notion of a "working mother" who worked at home as well as

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<sup>8</sup> The National Archive in Włocławek District Committee of the Polish United Worker's Party (the Party) Social and Professional Department, sign. 1428, s. A.

<sup>9</sup> Krzyżanowska Natalia, *Kobiety w (polskiej) sferze publicznej* [Women in (Polish) public space], Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2012, p. 174.

in the factory, the role played at home was of primary importance.<sup>10</sup> What is more, Jaruzelski pointed out that it was the socialist order that provided women with equal rights and opportunities to enjoy male privileges. During one of the meetings with women he said:

Socialism granted women equal rights, not only in theory, but also in practice. However, these rights are also a burden – we know it and we appreciate it.<sup>11</sup>

### 3. WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATIONS IN THE WORKPLACE

Women's Day became something to look forward to, particularly for women employed in state enterprises. One can quite safely say that celebrations in the workplace were an official, company ritual.

Social gatherings were organized during which men gave wishes and presents to women. Toasts were made to women and celebrations lasted until the evening. Women received gifts financed from the benefit fund, e.g. hosiery, flowers (usually carnations), but also coffee and chocolate – goods rarely seen in stores. The receipt of gifts had to be confirmed in writing. According to a memorandum published by “a certain institution” (as pointed out by the Polish Film Chronicle), “5 PLN can be spent per woman [...] Receipts are necessary to settle cash”. The Polish Film Chronicle mocked this with the following comment:

Dear ladies, please stand in line. The receipt of the carnation is compulsory, on pain of disciplinary sanctions.<sup>12</sup>

In 1974, the Polish Film Chronicle humorously portrayed celebrations of the day by the nation and enterprises. In many enterprises, in line to the memorandum mentioned above, gifts were presented by accountants, as long as they were men. In some places, employers also granted women awards or special financial bonuses. Portraits of female labor leaders were

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<sup>10</sup> Dunn Elizabeth, *Prywatyzując Polskę. O bobofrutach, wielkim biznesie i restrukturyzacji pracy* [Privatising Poland. On baby food, tycoons and labor restructuring], Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, Warszawa 2008, p. 161.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>12</sup> *Dzień Kobiet, czyli goździk, rajstopy i kieliszek czystej*, [Women's Day: a carnation, hosiery and a shot of vodka] <http://www.dziennikzachodni.pl/artykul/525869,dzien-kobiet-czyli-goździk-rajstopy-i-kieliszek-czystej-filmy,id,t.html> (access on September 1, 2015).

published in national, regional and industry press. These women were interviewed and showed in the media.

Women remember those celebrations in enterprises as something very pleasant and do not associate this holiday with any ideology. One of the employees recalls:

It was a really grand celebration, not like today. Everyone celebrated. Nobody said it was unnecessary, all women liked this day very much. Speeches and wishes were prepared in enterprises, there were grand formal meetings. Usually, working hours were shorter on that day. There was a buffet and sometimes a small gift.<sup>13</sup>

What mattered to women was that on that day they were appreciated – women and their role in everyday life were in the center of attention.

As Lucyna Kopciewicz points out, in communist Poland this was “a one-day carnival”. Women prepared for the day.

I used to dress up to work, with some more elegant make-up, a more elaborate hair-do [...].<sup>14</sup>

Women’s Day celebrations in enterprises were prepared even if March 8 was on an off-work day. In that case, women were invited to entertainment events and given presents.

In the intention of the party and state authorities, International Women’s Day celebrations organized in the 1970s and 1980s were supposed to be not only a privilege or a tradition, but also a gift, because they were a way to encourage men to help women in their home duties. Women’s Day was intended to promote partnership in the family.

#### 4. WOMEN’S DAY – IN PRIVATE

Women celebrated this day not only in the public space and in the workplace, but also at home. Women point out that on that day their husbands would give them a small gift, usually a flower, and prepare dinner for them. Many women associate this day with being excused from house-

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<sup>13</sup> Kopciewicz Lucyna, *W dniu ich święta. Przemoc symboliczna, media i podmiot kobiecy w świadomości grup pokoleniowych* [On their day. Symbolic violence, media and the female subject in the minds of generations], Kraków 2011, p. 148.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 151.



work. Men did house chores on March 8, so that women could feel appreciated also in their private life.<sup>15</sup>

On the one hand, men thought this was a nice day for women, on the other, they noticed its double-faced character.<sup>16</sup> This is illustrated well by the words of a man interviewed by Lucyna Kopciwicz. He said:

March 8 was celebrated in a very formal way. It had little to do with sincere intentions, it was more of an obligation – an obligatory flower, maybe a packet of coffee or some hosiery. It was almost a national holiday. Naturally, it was nice, but you could feel, in a way, forced to do it.<sup>17</sup>

Men claimed that Women's Day was an artificial recognition of women on a single day. Once it was over, everything went back to normal, and women got back to fulfilling their work and home duties.

## 5. WOMEN'S DAY IN THE PRESS AND MEDIA

Years before 1956, when Women's Day became a formally observed holiday, were the time of calling for increased production and work efficiency. The media and press called for increasing production targets, labor leaders were presented, and women were encouraged to compete at work. Even women workers themselves, in interviews published in popular magazines such as "Moda i życie" or "Przyjaciółka", encouraged all female workers to increase work efficiency and to increase production targets in order to fulfill the six-year plan as soon as possible. Women's magazines also presented profiles of workers who committed to increasing work "norms". One example was Teodozja Abramowicz, who said in an interview for "Moda i życie" in 1950:

'Of course I said that on March 8 I'd do it, I'll do the 200%. I am always saying that we have to roll up our sleeves [...]. The hands of Teodozja Abramowicz, a worker in the Fuchs factory, quickly and mechanically snatch candy from a massive pile and wrap it in colorful papers. She wraps around 70 kg of candy a day.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>16</sup> Ibidem, p. 161.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem, p. 162.

<sup>18</sup> Szymanowska Olga, *Wyścig pracy imienia 8 marca*, [March 8 Labor Race] <http://historia.newsweek.pl/wyscig-pracy-imienia-8-marca-newseek-pl,artykuly,281715,1,2.html> (access on September 1, 2015).

International Women's Day was the time when women made various obligations in the press, e.g. to increase the amount or quality of products, while farmers or rural activists made obligations to increase e.g. the number of trees planted. In 1950, women in rural areas made obligations in "Przyjaciółka" to develop their farms. E.g. Kunegunda Jemioła wrote in a letter to the editor:

I undertake to celebrate March 8 by delivering an additional piece of livestock, starting an impeccable garden and keeping poultry. I encourage all female farmers to compete on the agricultural front.<sup>19</sup>

It is hard to say now how sincere those declarations were and to what extent they were independent from the authorities. The ideology of labor leadership overshadowed the character of the day. This was yet another opportunity to remind people about the necessity to work for the socialist Poland.

"Kobieta i życie" in 1967 included an open letter to women where the author emphasized:

We are accustomed that on this March day (also referred to as "Women's Day") we receive flowers and small gifts, while newspapers and magazines are filled with news on the achievements and successes of modern women. We got used to it and we like it.<sup>20</sup>

Those words highlight two important issues which have already been mentioned. Firstly, on March 8 women did feel special, they did feel privileged. Secondly, the author points out that Women's Day celebrations were widely covered by the press. In fact, on that day every magazine published articles concerning women, and even ones telling men what gifts they should prepare for their ladies. Manipulating information was very visible and very tiring for many readers.

The front page header in a weekend edition of the March 1985 "Trybuna Ludu" issue was:

On International Women's Day we would like to cordially thank all Polish women for their patriotic actions and sacrifice.

This was an introduction to the description of a meeting between women's organizations and political authorities organized by the Polish Women's League. The evening meeting took place in the Royal Castle in Warsaw on March 7, on the eve of Women's Day. During this event, women's merits

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>20</sup> *Wszystkiego najlepszego* [All the best], *Kobieta i życie*, no. 10/1967, p. 3.

in their struggle for keeping the highest patriotic values and the 40th anniversary of defeating fascism were celebrated.<sup>21</sup> Of course this was another manipulation on the part of the authorities. Nothing was said about the problems women had to struggle with every day. In the Party activists' declarations, there was not a word about the shortage of products in the market, about queuing for everything and waiting for anything to appear in stores. Neither did the authorities present any plans that would help women overcome the difficulties they had to face every day with regards to product shortages.

An article from "Trybuna Ludu" on March 8, 1980 included an interesting statement:

Women's Day is now a welcomed guest in our lives. It is traditionally an occasion to express gratitude to women for fulfilling numerous and difficult tasks, to give them flowers and to reflect on the character of changes that occurred in the position of women.<sup>22</sup>

In the article, women's achievements were praised, but what it also important, the authorities praised themselves. Socialist Poland gave itself credit for granting various rights to women. Not only state accomplishments (which, it has to be noted, did allow common emancipation), but all steps that were undertaken by the state in order to make it easier for women to combine work and home duties, were demonstrated.<sup>23</sup> The authorities considered gifts, as well as grand declarations about the achievements of communist Poland (particularly concerning women's issues) made during Women's Day celebrations, as elements that comprised the privilege of being a woman. At the same time, women were plagued by entirely different problems, e.g. lack of products in the market or how to clothe and feed their families. This lack of understanding of the difficulties in everyday life on the part the authorities was evidence of the absurd nature of March 8.

The media presented Edward Gierek handing Polish female workers symbolic carnations with a declaration "All the best on tomorrow's holiday".<sup>24</sup> In the background, happy, smiling women were shown.

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<sup>21</sup> *W Międzynarodowym Dniu Kobiet* [On International Women's Day], Trybuna Ludu, no. 58/1985, p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> *Dzień Kobiet* [Women's Day], Trybuna Ludu, no. 58/1980, p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> Sękulska Wanda, *Przy święcie o dniu codziennym. Kobiety z „Róży”* [On a holiday - about everyday. Women from "Róża"] Trybuna Ludu, no. 58/1980, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> *Jak wyglądał Dzień Kobiet w PRL?*, [Women's Day in communist Poland], <http://www.kamienskie.info/jak-wygladal-dzien-kobiet-w-prl/> (access on June 25, 2015).

Additionally, many attractions were prepared for women, ranging from trips to the cinema, theater or opera, to specially organized shows and performances. However, women were the happiest about additional meat deliveries to shops on March 8. It is extraordinary that, as the Polish Film Chronicle shows, some shops provided chairs on that day, so that women could sit while queuing. The ridiculous nature of the privilege that was provided by the authorities shows how excessive government propaganda tried to conceal the reality of the day – a day as any other in the time of deficits.

Women's day was a great opportunity to demonstrate the position of women in the workplace. In 1980, "Trybuna Ludu" described working conditions in the Róża Luksemburg "Polam" electric lamp manufacturing plant, known in Warsaw as "Róża". Solutions which supported women who wanted to have children and the enterprise's efforts to support both the elderly (trips, holidays) and the young (discos and clubs) were described. However, the most important thing is that the press paid attention to the commitment of women to "Róża" – the so-called "workplace patriotism". A declaration by one of the workers published in "Trybuna Ludu" shows that this was not entirely sincere.

The call us a "broad-ocracy"? Well, I don't mind this "broad". But to speak so well of "Róża"! This is our workplace patriotism, they wanted to show it in the best light.<sup>25</sup>

Małgorzata Mazurek compared the reality of the Joseph Stalin plant in East Berlin and the enterprise described by "Trybuna Ludu", the Róża Luksemburg plant. The author described bad working conditions in "Róża".

The problem of catching up on lost time is related to the problem of overtime. In the materials on the Róża Luksemburg plant, overtime does not seem to be a way to earn more, but a tiring obligation forced upon workers by the production supervisors. These extensive working methods reveal the inefficiency of production, and concern mostly female workers.<sup>26</sup>

Naturally, just as it was described in 1980 in "Trybuna Ludu", the Róża Luksemburg plant had solutions supporting women, e.g. the privilege

<sup>25</sup> Sękulska Wanda, *Przy święcie...*, [On a holiday...], p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> Mazurek Małgorzata, *Socjalistyczny zakład pracy. Porównanie fabrycznej codzienności w PRL i NRD u progu lat sześćdziesiątych* [A socialist workplace. Comparing factory reality in communist Poland and East Germany in the late 1950s], Wydawnictwo TRIO, Warszawa 2005, p. 188.

of a 30-minute break for breast-feeding mothers. Women referred to it as a “dead privilege” because, in reality, most women employed there commuted, and these 30 minutes were not enough to go home, feed the baby and get back to work.<sup>27</sup> A comparison between “Trybuna Ludu” publications and Małgorzata Mazurek’s book shows that in communist Poland, on Women’s Day, not only the media but also the press beautified the image of the conditions women had to work in.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In communist Poland, there existed something that can be referred to as the female privilege. This was evidenced by the prestige of International Women’s Day and the fact that Men’s Day was not celebrated, or at least was much more marginalized. Owing to the special status assigned to this day, women felt privileged. At the same time, this was a period of intensive propaganda, which attempted to conceal the reality of everyday life. The privilege of March 8 was supposed to conceal problems that women and their families struggled with during the 1980s crisis. Gifts, national and municipal meetings, celebrations in enterprises or special attractions (e.g. airplane flights) were all elements of propaganda, which was supposed to increase support for the authorities among women. Unfortunately, the excessive number of events on that day became the object of mockery in the society. Women’s Day was associated with pointless speeches made for women every year.

It has to be noted that celebrations of Women’s Day at the state level underwent some changes, particularly with regard to the value assigned to the day. However, the way it was celebrated in the workplace did not change. Women still got gifts, cakes and coffee were prepared, there were regular festivities.

It has to be noted that women not only enjoyed the so-called female privilege, but also demanded that the authorities respect women’s rights. They demanded equal treatment of men and women and an abolition of the division of professions into “male” and “female” ones.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>28</sup> Mroziak Agnieszka, *Wywołać z milczenia. Historia kobiet w PRL-u-kobiety w historii PRL-u* [Stop the silence. The history of women in communist Poland – women in the his-

When the older generation of women recall this day, they struggle with the perception of this day as a communist celebration, as it has been referred to by the media. They are trying to show the day as an element of the female privilege, something that allows women to feel special, a token of appreciation for their work and the hardship put into fulfilling home obligations – just as it was before 1989.

After 1989, a change in the way of celebrating this day could be observed. Now it is observed more in private, rather than in public. Today's celebrations are not as formal as they were in communist Poland, because now this is not a "national holiday". At present, Women's Day is just another day. The tradition of giving small gifts or flowers is all that is left from the tradition which started in communist Poland.

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