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SOME REMARKS ABOUT THE WORKERS' MOTHERHOOD IN THE INDUSTRIAL CITY OF ŁÓDŹ IN THE 19TH-20TH CENTURIES

Abstract: Łódź, the so-called “Polish Manchester”, was the biggest textile center in the Eastern Europe, which developed in the 19th century and experienced all dramatic changes that happened in Poland during the long 20th century. As the vanguard of modernity, this industrial city was the place when all the pros and cons of the early capitalism appeared in much more dramatic way than elsewhere in Poland. In a result the problem such as workers motherhood and child labor became the real social phenomenon that forced many journalists, medical doctors, factory inspector and political activists to work against them. In this article, the way in which the workers motherhood and child labor was problematized in the discourse of Łódź is analyzed as the struggle with modernity. In author's opinion, the experience of living in the industrial cities cause that approach to such complicated social problems developed in places like Łódź is less ideological and more empathizing than nationwide one. The specific case of Łódź can be useful in refreshing the Polish debate about modernity.

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INTRODUCTION

During the industrial era, European public opinion was strongly concerned about the impact of labor work on female workers (Pinchbeck, 2004). Poland was not the only place where women's work in factories was considered as socially undesirable and immoral (Gawin, 2000; Bołdyrew, 2013; Jarska, 2021). Traditional, catholic pattern of family life, strengthened by the myth of “Matka Polka”, which obliged Polish women to sac-

rifice their own ambitions for the interest of the whole nation, was still an important factor in Polish debates about different labor issues. Anna Titkow, who tried to reconstruct the myth of “Matka Polka”, pointed out that “the pressure of the economic changes that took place in Poland in the second half of the XIX century”, expanded “the basic set of attributes of “Matka Polka”. In a result, genealogy of “Matka Polka” is formed not only by “family-heroic-patriotic-noble dimension, it is also formed by elements from the from the ethos of peasant and proletarian culture, including elements of fatalism and strong patriarchalism” (Titkow, 2012: 30-31). Even during the communism, women employment was often being questioned, even it was necessary in most of cases and the official propaganda promoted it as a part of the new, socialistic order (especially before 1956) (Stańczak-Wiślicz, 2015: 56-59) As Natalia Jarska argues

a significant shift in Polish men’s attitudes to a greater acceptance of women’s paid employment took place in the younger generation, born in the 1930s and 1940s and socialized after World War II, but that this was socially skewed, with attachment to the breadwinner family model persisting among working-class men (Jarska, 2021: 82).

The topic of women’s employment in industry was related to another of the great issues of modernity – child labour (Hindman, 2009). As Aneta Bołdyrew emphasized, at the turn of the 20th century, preparing a child for work was the primary goal of educational activities of working-class families. Many parents even sought to enroll their son or daughter in the factory. They did this not only for financial reasons, but also for fear of the morality of a young family member. In theory, under the Act of 1886, the work of children under the age of 12 was prohibited, and the possibility of working children aged 12-15 was limited to 8 hours. In practice, in 1897 4.8% of all workers and domestic servants in the Kingdom of Poland were under the age of 12, and 4.7% between 12 and 14 (Bołdyrew, 2008: 191-192). While the problem of the child labor in Poland was reduced in the interwar period, after the introduction of compulsory education, and almost disappeared in the mid-twentieth century, the problem of workers motherhood has remained relevant until the present day.

In this context, the case of Łódź is very interesting. In places, when women workforce was so historically embedded as it was in Łódź, problems like an early motherhood, abortion, lack of hygiene, infectious diseases, street children, child labor etc. undoubtedly were seen much more expressive way than in other big cities in the 20th century Poland. The

city flourished during the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries from a small town to the huge industrial center with over 600,000 inhabitants in 1939. Textile character of the city resulted in huge participation of women in the labor market. Between 1888 and 1900, the female employment rate in the Scheibler's factory was bigger than 50%. In 1885 children and adolescents consisted 5.6% of the staff of Poznański's factory. In fact, there were branches when almost exclusively women and children were employed (Sikorska-Kowalska, 2016: 50–52). Under this circumstances the lifestyle and position of women in the family life in Łódź was much more different than in mining of steelworks centers. Historian Anna Żarnowska noted:

at the end of the 19th century female workers made up 60% of the total in the lower age group (under 40) whereas in the upper age group (over 40) their share was only ¼. [...] In the Kingdom of that time, textile industry gave married women the best chance to work. This fact had to influence the formation of a working family pattern (Żarnowska, 1997: 56–57).

According to Janet Wolff paradigm of new ways of working and living emerged rather in industrial cities than great metropolises (Wolff, 2013). Observing a city that embodied the vagaries of early industrial capitalism, and uneasy about a way out of it, we can see how modernity was lived in such a place, in a city where modernity was not imagined, longed for and contested in advance, but where it certainly occurred, spurring on an uneasy attitude toward its various emanations (Zysiak *et al.*, 2018: 257–270). Following this approach, in this paper I intend to examine how the workers' motherhood and child labor were problematized in the discourse of Łódź and how the experience of living and working in Łódź in the late 19th and during the long 20th century, influenced on the personal approaches of different people who were taking part in debates on this topic.

MOTHER AND CHILDREN IN POLISH MANCHESTER

As I mentioned above, in the late 19th century at the turn of the 20th century living conditions of female workers in places like Łódź were very difficult (Fijałek and Indulski, 1990). Workers were engaged in the "fierce struggle for existence," the debilitating and dehumanized gainful labor. Especially the impact of women's employment on the condition of work-

ing-class children seemed to be dramatic. From the point of view of the bourgeois public, female workers were perceived as a demoralized social strata, standing at the low level of education and culture and prone to violating basic values. Journalists and some moralists believed that working in big factories led young woman into demoralization and extramarital relationships with bosses, while poverty and unemployment resulted in degeneracy and prostitution (Kopeć-Urbaniak, 2018). Of course, most of these problems were real. However, the attention of press had all symptoms of the moral panic (Thompson, 1998: 7-30), which was the obligatory manner of writing about female workers and their motherhood before the World War I. The apogee of this phenomena were so-called “manufacturers of angels.” Usually, they were simple, uneducated woman, who were paid to “take care” of the unwanted children by starving or just killing them, when it was necessary (Kurkowska, 1998). According to local press, the “manufacturing of angels” was the real plague in the industrial city, and – what was quite predictable – most of similar cases was commented by newspapers. However, sensational style of the most of these reports was sometimes used to create some serious social critique. In 1902 *Goniec Łódzki*, the progressive newspaper published in Łódź, published the long article about the problem of the “manufacturers of angels.” Alarming that up to 100 children a year were to be abandoned in Łódź, and only 3 out of the 15 found alive, some journalist asked:

who is guilty that the number of those “babysitters” increases here every day? [...] Probably not only those degenerative individuals who sit on the court bench. But it is common knowledge that the perpetrators have to be looked for quite often in exquisite salons and magnificent offices (‘Z tygodnia’, 1902).

From the reliable research of Władysław Schoenaich, conducted in Łódź at the beginning of the 20th century, we know that a frighteningly small percentage of children born in huge suburbia of Łódź, Bałuty and Chojny, we were able to survive their first birthdays (Schoenaich, 1914). The main reasons were the lack of hygiene and basic infrastructure like hospitals, sewer system and schools. If they managed to survive the period of infancy, the working-class children faced loneliness due to their constantly overworked parents, pushing her directly on the street pavement. Someone wrote in 1904: “emaciated, pale, sad, with hopeless, despairing eyesight – this is the child of Łódź. Let’s go to Bałuty, look into the low houses and you will see these poor birds, locked in cages, and craving for air and sun.

When parents go to work, they stay at home alone" ('Kronika', 1904). In local press discourse voices advocating for limiting the scale of the employment of women were mixed with more rational approaches to this issue. For instance, in 1899 some author argued:

if we notice that working in a factory often brings a very poor earnings for woman, always with negative impact on her moral and material situation, and, if we notice than paid work of female workers reduces the value of the work of male workers, we will come to the conclusion that female factory workers do not benefit themselves or their families. On the contrary, the damage caused by the absence of a woman in the family is invaluable and has a negative impact on the domestic life of the worker, and worse, on the fate of his offspring ('Robotnice i gospodynie', 1899).

Statements like this looks very naïve if compared with calls for creating some institutional framework, which could help to solve problem of street children. "In various European countries we can find eateries, reading rooms, summer camps, shelters, etc. set up especially for the poor children" – author of *Nowy Kurier Łódzki* pointed out in 1912. In an opinion of the daily, the society should take care of workers children who

come into the world with outstanding tendencies towards evil, children who do not know the Heart and Home properly, and who even do not know their mother, because she, absent from home during the day, after returning from work, just wants her not to be bothered and allowed to sleep. Mother goes to work in the morning, and returns weary in the evening. After she returns, sometimes she learns from her neighbors how the offspring spent their time and reduced the boredom (Niedzielska, 1912).

It is worth to underline that child labor in textile factories in Łódź was widespread since the 1890s. After the Factory Inspection was established, many publicized conflicts between inspectors and factory owners happened. The most famous of them was the case of Ilia Molosov, the factory inspector who committed suicide after being hounded by industrialists. The another inspector, Vladimir Sviatlovskij, resigned after the failed attempt to his life (Kozłowski, 2011, 74–75). Later, he published detailed results of his investigations, which were often quoted in the public discourse of the Kingdom of Poland. Under these circumstances, the problem of child labor became resonant in the press. Antoni Wiśniewski, a journalists from Łódź who cooperated with *Głos* magazine from Warsaw, published some shocking relations about the first investigations of the factory inspection in Łódź. He noted:

Recently I saw 13-year-old children in one of the factories in Łódź, working from 5 to 7 ½ in the evening, in Tomaszów, in the Boernstein factory, 12-year-old children worked 12 hours a day. So if this is happening now, although the inspectorate is still watching, what would happen if it was abolished? With no obstacle left, capitalism would celebrate solemnly orgies and, like a phantom, suck the blood of small children in the form of yarn, clothing, etc. (Wiśniewski, 1888).

Wiśniewski even discovered some organized cat-and-mouse play between the owners and inspectors:

in some factories, where there were two exits, a manipulation was devised in the case of an inspector's intrusion, namely: children were taught that when an inspector enters one door, they should leave the other, in others children were taught how to answer the inspector's questions about age, number of hours work, etc. ('Oporni', 1889).

What was significant, the topic of child labor was immediately linked to the problem of education. In 1898 some editor of *Goniec Łódzki* commented on the book about the Russian industry in a following way: "industry takes children out of school, which results in a low level of education in factory provinces. Perhaps the situation will change for the better if the planned compulsory schooling in Russia is introduced, but now the school is powerless in the fight against the factory." 'Szkoła i fabryka', 1898).

After the revolution of 1905 the system of universal compulsory education at the elementary level became an ideal that should have been pursued to cover everyone. In an article with the significant title "The Happiness of Mankind," journalist Jan Garlikowski argued: "only by providing knowledge equal to everyone, regardless of their condition and gender, can we approach the very far away ideal of general happiness" (Garlikowski, 1911). Zofia Garlicka (1874–1942), a young medical doctor who worked at Scheibler's factory, the biggest one in Łódź, argued that "the organism of the child, not yet developed and weak, is the least suitable for work. An industry that requires child labor is robbery. Overworking children is a disgrace to modern civilization, because it undermines the foundations on which future generations rest: it ruins health, stifles mental development, causes degeneration." It was almost obvious that it should be forbidden while the women's labor should be protected, especially during and after the pregnancy. For Garlicka, "industrialists' fears that the protection of women's labor would undermine industry proved to be in vain, and the best example of this is the fact that the same was feared that child labor would be reduced" ('Praca kobiet...' 1911).

The program of social reforms promoted by Łódź activists was quite coherent. Not only working-class children, but also adults should be taught to write and read. During the 1905 Revolution, a group of local citizens published the appeal for fighting illiteracy:

We demand and will demand – together with all progressive political parties – universal, compulsory, free state elementary education. But until the renewed social life – after the anarchy that is raging at present has been defeated – pours out into new forms and is organized on new principles [...] before it is possible to return to systematic social work – we consider ourselves a saint duty to fight illiteracy,

they declared ('Odezwa...' 1905). A whole system of evening schools that would enable the eradication of illiteracy among the working class in the future was desired. In addition to summoning the children of workers to learn, local press proposed to establish a whole range of institutions in the city that would improve their fate – maternity hospitals, nurseries and playgrounds (Zysiak *et al.*, 2018: 66–84).

MUNICIPAL DREAMS AND INTERWAR REALITY

Although it was a minimalist and reasonable program, in the reality of Tsarist Russia it was very difficult to introduce. Before the World War I, cities in the Kingdom of Poland were deprived from any form of the urban self-government. State administration was focused rather on police than solving social problems (Śmiechowski, 2014). Almost all institutions had to be established and run voluntary. Obviously, in big industrial cities like Łódź, philanthropy could not solve all important problems even if it had some undeniable achievements. As a consequence, an urban reform was commonly considered an urgent demand. During the 1905 Revolution, urban self-government was discussed by press and independent authors – mostly lawyers, medical doctors and journalists. This debate led to unanimous conclusions that the elected city councils, after being introduced in the Kingdom of Poland, should take on the burden of running schools for children and providing childbirth care for women and healthcare for the poorest groups of urban population (Śmiechowski, 2020 a, b). It was commonly believed that “self-government is necessary to defeat illiteracy, to cover the whole country with a network of primary schools. It is necessary for improving the state of health, for improving the means of communica-

tion, etc., and finally for producing a whole host of brave citizens serving to their country" (*'Praca społeczna'*, 1907).

Participants of the debate imagined city councils as a panacea for a whole range of accumulated problems, as a result of which they overestimated the ability of city authorities to influence the economic situation of the poorest social groups. While building a vision of self-government acting in opposition to a foreign state, they underestimated the importance of government intervention in the relationship between labor and capital. They remained helpless when business owners made it clear that they were not interested in easing social tensions. These limitations became visible in independent Poland, when, despite the very ambitious policy of local authorities, many of the problems that arose in the 19th century remained actual. Łódź became the first city in the independent Poland where compulsory education was introduced. It was possible due to socialists, who were dominating in the local politics in the interwar period (results of few elections were, however, cancelled by Sanacja's governments) (Wałdoch, 2018). Aleksy Rzewski (1885–1939), the first mayor of Łódź in independent Poland, was the best person to realize the program of "municipal socialism" (Piskała, 2018: 110–127). The son of workers himself, Rzewski had an ambition to become the savior of the textile city.

Sewage system, water supply, city gardens and parks, new tram lines, construction of cheap and hygienic houses for workers according to Western models, building of schools and city buildings – these are the most urgent tasks of the city economy, the fulfillment of which should employ thousands of unemployed –

socialists councillors declared in March 1919 (*'Deklaracja...'* 1919). Few years later most of these tasks became just mirrors. Rzewski complained: "the city of Łódź, which, in 1919 – devastated by the Muscovites, robbed by the Prussians and ruined by the war – presented a picture of misery and despair. It was the rule of self-government on ruins..." (Rzewski, 1931: 230). Despite of these difficulties, the number of school buildings and hospitals built between 1918 and 1939 in Łódź, was impressive. While in 1919, out of a total of about 70,000 school-aged children (7–14 years old) only half were covered by education in various types of schools, already in the school year 1920–1921 all children in Łódź had the opportunity to attend to public schools (Stolińska-Pobralaska, 2003: 100). Kasa Chorych of Łódź, the local public health insurance (after 1933 branch of the nation-

wide Ubezpieczalnia Społeczna) built very modern clinical hospital, two big clinics and sanatory, which were considered as the pioneered achievement in reality of the Interwar Poland and significantly improved the healthcare system of the city (Fijałek and Indulski, 1990: 332–347).

On the other hand, the interwar period was the time when working-class women were still facing exploitation, sexual abuse, poverty and fatal living conditions on the one hand and oppression from the conservative society from another (Sierakowska, 2013). As a result, in the 1930s, the common opinion about women's employment in textile factories was still rather unfavorable. During the Great Depression well-known reporter Józef Mackiewicz described Łódź as

the great city of poverty. The yards are terrible. [...] Between the garbage, the blind wall of a tenement house and the factory, opened or closed, there are huts stuck together, stuck together, "cavities" imitating a human dwelling. Kennels for dogs! Open cloaks with openings right in the ground, no walls and a roof in the yard, and next to a window in which children are brought up! Unheard of! Reduced female factory workers turn into "girls" and the male workers operate with an ax, which they carry in their pocket instead of a knife (Mackiewicz, 1937).

It is worth to underline that shortly after the independence socialist dominated government proposed many important changes in legal framework that influenced female workers. The most important of these was the eight-hour working day. Marshal Piłsudski with Prime Minister Jędrzej Moraczewski signed a decree on this matter on November 23, 1918. However, this is quite common opinion that the regulations on working time were the most frequently violated labor law norms of the Second Polish Republic. Entrepreneurs not only prolonged their working hours illegally, but, what is worse, they did not always pay the overtime remuneration. In 1924, the Act on the Protection of Women and Young Labor was passed. It prohibited the employment of people under the age of 15 and introduced numerous facilitations for female workers, e.g. the need to create separate cloakrooms and compulsory crèches in plants employing more than 100 females. These regulations clearly violated the interests of the Łódź industry and were also repeatedly violated (Organiściak, 2009; Godlewska-Bujok, 2015).

A very sad illustration of this problem was published by Halina Krahełska (1886–1945), who was the deputy chief factory inspector in the 1920s. Known of her radical attitude to the execution of labor law, she became the enemy number one of the industrial administration, like Molosov and

Sviatlovskij few decades earlier. Krahelska was, among many other of her studies, an author of the 1927 book about the labor law in textile industry of Łódź, prefaced by Ludwik Krzywicki. According to Krahelska, most of the social achievements introduced in the Second Polish Republic were disregarded or even canceled by the industry: "there is no eight-hour day of work in factories. Łódź canceled this eight-hour working day" (Krahelska, 1927: 14). In practice, the twenty-four hours were "divided into two parts, twelve hours each – from five, six, seven in the evening, to five, six, seven o'clock in the morning, usually without any break in those twelve hours." Krahelska had no doubt that women and children from working-class families were the biggest victims of this situation: "Adolescents aged 15 to 18 (especially girls) made up a significant proportion of the total number workers" – she argued, and added that "even such modest demands as separate devices lavatories, washrooms and cloakrooms for women were treated in Łódź as impossible. And what about nurseries for infants, which actually, at the great number of women working in factories, would be a burden for the budget of the textile company" (Krahelska, 1927: 32–33). It is worth adding here that Krahelska was not the only one factory inspector from the interwar period who was genuinely touched by the reality of female workers in Łódź during the Second Polish Republic. For Maria Przedborska, the way to express despair was poetry (Madejska, 2019). She also published some interviews with workers in local press. One sentence from these interviews was almost shocking: "if God had driven Eve out of paradise today, he would have cursed her: you will bear children as a spinner" (Przedborska, 1938). While the city government did what it could despite strong limitations, it turned out already in the Second Polish Republic that these efforts were insufficient in the face of the ineffectiveness of state policy. And this was characterized by a certain helplessness not only as a result of – as Krahelska wrote – "maximum profit fever" among factory owners, but also the dramatic economic condition of the industry in interwar Poland. And the price for the permanent crisis was always paid by the weakest – women and young workers.

The interwar period meant some important changes in the discourse devoted to female workers. The most important of these was the consideration of reproductive rights. The "manufacturers of angels" became less shocking. However, there voices calling for conscious motherhood, limiting the number of births and decriminalizing abortion emerged. In the early 1930s, when the project of the new Penal Code was proceeded, the passionate debate about the question of depenalization of abortion occurred.

What should be stressed here, people with close ties with Łódź played an important role at the time. Aleksander Mogilnicki (1875–1956), a prominent lawyer and former head of the Supreme Penal Court, shocked the conservative opinion after he declared himself in favor of the legalization of abortion during the first three months of pregnancy. Mogilnicki's liberal approach cannot be interpreted without the awareness that he spent most of his young years in the textile city. Moreover, he was a brother of Tadeusz (1879–1940), the Chief of St. Ann Mary Children Hospital in Łódź. Interviewed by Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński, Mogilnicki stressed that "this issue has three physiognomies: medical, legal and social. It is very difficult." In his opinion,

there are other ways to increase the population – even if someone deems it necessary – not the penal code. [...] It is an absurd – in the face of the personal feeling of every human being – to inflict the same punishment on a child-killer and on a woman who terminates her pregnancy in the first days (Boy-Żeleński, 1930: 55–56).

Finally, the new penal code was introduced in 1932. It allowed physicians to perform an abortion if a pregnancy resulted from a criminal offense or gravely threatened the health of the woman. As Andrzej Kulczycki pointed out, "this was a relatively liberal policy for the period, although physicians often denied services because of their personal values" (Kulczycki, 1995: 474). The question of the depenalization of abortion was not the only aspect of the debate on the penal code. It opened a room for discussion about the whole policy of birth control.

Doctor Henryk Kłuszyński¹ (1870–1933), a former manager of the *Kasa Chorych* (Health Insurance) of Łódź, was an author of the first Polish book about the birth control, published in 1932. For Kłuszyński, similarly as for Mogilnicki, social aspects of the birth control was more important than ideology.

Apart from the great "mortality" of children – he argued – excessive population growth brings disastrous economic, health and cultural consequences for the working families. While the needs are growing with the number of children, the resources necessary to support the family do not increase to the same extent (Kłuszyński, 1932: 39).

¹ Henryk Kłuszyński was husband of Dorota (1876–1952), née Pilcer, a socialist politician, activist and feminist. Kłuszyńska was a three-time member of Polish Senat in the interwar period (1925–1935) and Sejm after 1945. She was the first leader of the Children's Friends Society (*Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Dzieci*).

Kłuszyński described the poor existence of working-class family with a big number of children: "when the mother, in order to alleviate the poverty, takes up gainful employment, the children are left unattended and languish. If she is able to work for money, she must often quit her job as the family grows to look after her children, which worsens her material situation. It is the real vicious circle" (Kłuszyński, 1932: 39-40). Although Kłuszyński was aware of all negative aspects of the motherhood of textile workers, his personal attitude to the women question was very modern. For him, the situation when "professional work becomes the main part of a woman's occupation" was just the reality, which should not be limited or questioned. In his opinion "motherhood should give the mother the highest satisfaction, delight, and happiness of the fulfilled duty. But in today's economic conditions, motherhood creates a poisoned atmosphere in which silent and latent desires may arise for an accidental illness to take away an unwanted child and ease the plight of the family" (Kłuszyński, 1932: 35-36). Therefore, the prevention of pregnancy should be promoted and an abortion legalized to increase the standard of living and culture of the working class in places like Łódź. Kłuszyński's approach to reproductive rights were embedded in the reality of the textile industry, which still offered very hard and unhealthy work to female and underage workers.

"MATKA POLKA" SACRIFICED AND FIRED

As I mentioned above, Łódź can be considered as the vanguard of modernity in the context of Poland, where all dramatic changes caused by the 19th century industrial capitalism were seen in their all complexity. From this point of view, the social experience of the textile city could be regarded as the challenge with modernity and its new emanations. The dystopian image of the city of degenerated women, social disorder, plagues like "manufacturers of angels", underground abortions, street children and – last but not least – child labor co-occurred in the public discourse with some more progressive opinions. Social progress, intended by the most of commentators, was supposed to be the process of the development of care institutions, compulsory education and promotion of social hygiene. The state socialism, established in Central Europe after 1945 was the promise that all economic, hygienic and cultural needs of the working-class would be finally satisfied. It might seem that it was the great triumph of the prog-

ress (Zysiak, 2017). However, the history of Łódź in the second half of the 20th century was very far from the imagined paradise.

As Małgorzata Mazurek argued

in the economic system of Communist Poland, the place of the textile industry, which was part of so-called light industry, was clearly defined as supporting investments in the key sectors of heavy industrial production. [...] Postwar practices continued nineteenth-century forms of exploitation, [...] closely linked to the gender segregation of labor (Mazurek, 2010: 283).

Under these circumstances Łódź after the World War II was still the city dominated by the feminized, bad-paid and debilitating work in old and burdensome factories. Padraic Kenney, an author of the impressive book about labor relations in the 1940s Łódź and Wrocław, argued that “unlike women workers in many other cities, those in Łódź brought working-class experience into the postwar conflicts” (Kenney, 1997: 77). In Kenney’s opinion, “when making complaints or engaging in conflict, the most effective women chose to represent themselves as mothers responsible for the health and continuity of the nation. [...] With the strong community behind them, workers women raised difficult questions” (Kenney, 1997: 103). No surprisingly, the two biggest political events that occurred in Łódź after 1945 – mass strike from February 1971 and so-called “Hunger March” from July 31, 1981 were much more “social” than “political” events. The first of them addressed the terrible living and working conditions and low salaries of female workers, the second one – the enormous shortcomings in basic supplies (Lesiakowski, 2008; Olejnik, 2020).

The course for strengthening the “productivity” of female labor, so typical in the Stalinist epoch, was abandoned for more social-oriented approach (Stańczak-Wiślicz, 2015). In 1956 parliament legalized abortion in cases where the woman was experiencing “difficult living conditions.” Wanda Gościńska, a textile worker and the MP from Łódź strongly supported the new law on abortion. During the debate in parliament she accused catholic opponents of being against female workers (Baranowska and Fiktus, 2022). Łódź, among other industrial centers, became the city where the highest number of abortions were performed. The significant changes were seen also in local discourse. While during the Stalinist period the open discourse was almost impossible, the so-called thaw after 1956 enabled criticism. *Odgłosy*, the weekly magazine published in Łódź from 1958, became the most interesting forum to discuss the problems of the city. Journalist Zofia Tarnowska published a series of articles titled *The*

Women's Hell (Piekło kobiet). The reference to Boy was obvious, so no one could be surprised that abortion was the first point that she wanted to analyze. Tarnowska argued:

from July 1956 to the end of 1957 – 1,750 abortions were performed at the obstetrics and gynecology clinic of the Medical Academy in Łódź. A total of about 5,000 such procedures were performed in all clinics and hospitals in Łódź of this specialty. [...] 95.5% of procedures were performed with the so-called social indications, 4.5% of medical convictions, 175 women were refused treatment. [...] It turned out that 85% of the surveyed women decided to terminate their pregnancy due to social reasons: poor housing, material or personal conditions (Tarnowska, 1958a).

Tarnowska was herself shocked because of such a huge rate of abortions. She argued that some women and some men considered gynecology clinics as “state interruption rooms” (“państwowe przerywalnie”) or... dentist cabinets. In next articles Tarnowska openly criticized everyday problems that forced women to make abortions – bad living conditions, difficulties with reconciling of work and home duties, alcoholism, poor supply of goods etc. The most important were caused by patriarchal order, which caused that men did not understand problems of female workers: “the simplest way to help women would be, as some are proposing: lay them all out of work and send them home. Let them raise children and work in the kitchen” – she mocked (Tarnowska, 1958b). But there was no reason to laugh. “Łódź is the most women city among all others. [...] Thanks to its textile specificity, is the only city where women weigh more than men in production. And there are few problems in Poland that are so painful, burdensome and overwhelming for the observer as the issues of women from Łódź” (“Odgłosy”, 1960) – another author of *Odgłosy* argued in 1960.

Ironically, between 1955 and 1964 woman was the leader of the communist party in Łódź. Michalina Tatarkówna-Majkowska (1908–1986), a textile worker and feminist herself, was determined to solve most of the social problems of the city (Ossowski, 2017: 181–186). However, her attempts caused big conflict with the communist leader of Poland, Władysław Gomułka, who forced her to resign. In interview with *Odgłosy* she behaved rather as an opposition leader than the most prominent person in local government:

it is high time to put an end to the slogans and commitments of various authorities and institutions, especially before every March 8, which speak enthusiastically about making life easier for women outside of professional work. Less words, more concrete actions. I think that we should start organizing a broadly and reasonably

designed network of such service points as laundries, clothes dryers and mangles, sewing rooms and household equipment rentals. Workplaces and other institutions should organize two-shift crèches and kindergartens. Finally, the work and supply of the retail trade must be improved so that the daily queues in the shops disappear" (*'O mieście...'*, 1960).

Unfortunately the city was permanently underinvested. Shortly after the 1971 strike local organization of the communist party admitted that

the reduction of social benefits, e.g. in the form of increasing fees for kindergartens and nurseries, for holidays, hidden price increases, too little development of child care in summer camps has caused great anger. The underdevelopment of the industrial health service, often poor housing conditions, too slow pace of their improvement and still insufficient development of various types of services in the city should be added to this. Currently, 60,000 families are waiting for apartments. [...] Despite numerous visits by members of the government, their deputies and a number of responsible employees of ministries and their understanding of the city's needs expressed at meetings, matters did not move forward. As a result of constant "corrections" of investment funds, as a result of which light industry, building of new housing, municipal economy and other areas of socio-economic life in Łódź were postponed for further years (*'Ocena wydarzeń...'*, 2008: 110–111).

Despite the growing number of inhabitants, Łódź slowly began to differ from other industrial cities in Poland, not only in terms of the quality of life, but also in terms of earnings and the level of education of the population. Wojciech Górecki, who wrote an excellent reportages about the condition of Łódź during the transition, asked some significant question in one of his texts from 1994:

do you remember news in the television during the communism? Every second piece of information from Łódź was illustrated with a picture of a large production hall with rows of machines and textile workers leaning over them. [...] Reports from official visits, in turn, were full of warmth and cordiality, because the distinguished guests always asked the workers about the children and the house. Then Solidarność movement drew up various reports on the housing, social and health situation of Łódź female workers (it turned out that a textile woman with a home and children slept on average four hours a day) as well as analyzes by independent economists, which showed that the industrial monoculture is a tragedy for the city (Górecki, 2020: 39–40).

Experts were convinced that "a fundamental reconstruction of the city's industry structure through intensive development of the electromechanical industry was necessary" to achieve "better wages, higher qualifications, a lower degree of feminization" (Piotrowski, 1979: 313–314). Communist

authorities, aware of the situation, were planning to transform Łódź into the modern, socialist metropolis, but the passage of time was against them (Włodkowski, 1977: 97–130).

In 1983 the government decided to build the huge gynecologic and pediatric hospital in Łódź as the monument of “Matka Polka”. Polish communist leader Wojciech Jaruzelski announced that “it is a high time to erect the monument of “Matka Polka”. We need to pay attention to Polish mothers. They gave their motherhood to our motherland. They brought priceless values to the life of the whole nation” (Rogowska, 2018). The reason for choosing the city was mostly practical – Łódź is located in the heart of Central Poland. However, the ideological aspect of this project was very ambiguous. The hospital-monument was built in the city with an extraordinary number of the female workforce, where the number of legal abortions and miscarriages was believed to be biggest in Poland. In fact, women of Łódź in the 1980s were still very far from the stereotype of the “Matka Polka”. This was obvious for John Paul II, who declared during his speech at Uniontex textile factory in June 1987:

the Church’s social doctrine first of all demands that it be fully appreciated as work is all that a woman does at home, all that is a mother’s and educator’s activity. This is a great job. [...] The professional work of women must be treated everywhere and always with a clear reference to what results from the vocation of a woman as a wife and mother in the family.²

Unfortunately for the pope, it was clearly too late to “catholicize” female workers from Łódź.

The economic and political transition of Poland after 1989 was the most dramatic time in the whole history of the city, the time when the basement of the industrial development of the textile hub was being questioned. Paweł Smoleński, a journalist of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, tried to explain what caused the biggest social problem of Łódź, the very low birth rate and social practice of having only one child per family:

just look for a couple who work in one of the textile factories in Łódź. He knows how his wife works, and therefore he resents sometimes. She knows that her husband will not boil and wash anything. If she will not do it for him, the house will fall apart. When she was pregnant, she decided to hide her “ailment” in the factory. A pregnant woman is not allowed to work at night. If she had quit the night shift, she might have done

² John Paul’s II speech to female textile workers from “Uniontex” factory in Łódź, 1987-06-13 (‘Przemówienie...’, 1987).

her home duties better, but she could not earn enough money. She had to choose the money. She decided to carry only her third child to term when she realized that it became the either-or situation (Smoleński, 1990).

The newspaper alarmed that 426 employees of "Poltex" textile factory signed a protest letter against the draft anti-abortion law in November 1990. For the employees of this huge facility "an abortion was the only effective contraceptive" (Bikont, 1992). Probably the most overwhelming accent of the debate about abortion in Poland in the 1990s took place soon after the introduction of the anti-abortion law. In December 1993 Waclaw Dec (1931-1997), a professor of gynecology at Łódź Medical Academy declared in the main news program of the Polish Television: "if a woman comes to us with five children, her husband is an alcoholic, and a sixth child is on the way, then we terminate the pregnancy by writing a different title on the card, for example, a miscarriage."³ Another time the physician from Łódź became the advocate of the fighting for the reproductive rights of Polish women and its social aspects. However, while Kłuszyński promoted the birth control in the period when an abortion was forbidden in the most of European countries, Dec had to deal with the hypocritical biopolitics and the national-catholic fever in the 1990s Poland (Heinen and Portet, 2010). Few years later the city became "famous" because of the family living in the old tenement house in the city center. In their flat bodies of their four murdered children were found. The practice of "manufacturing of angels", returned to the 21st century Łódź.

CONCLUSION

The problem of textile workers motherhood was problematized in Łódź in the specific way. Issues connected with female paid work, unwanted children, bad living conditions, lack of hygiene and child labor were touchable even for the middle classes who created the story about the city. As the result Łódź's approach to the motherhood of workers was more compassionate and less ideological than in the nationwide discourse. However, even in Łódź workers' motherhood caused moral panic. Being the textile worker and mother was very difficult despite the social and political

³ This statement during the TV interview caused many serious problems for Dec (see: Malarewicz, 2015: 139-162).

change in the long 20th century. In different realities female textile workers were victims of the conservative ideology, economic oppression and poverty. Between 1988 and 2011 Łódź lost 125,4 thousands of inhabitants. The birth rate in the former textile city is still extremely low (Kryńska, 2015). It seems that the ideology and law are less effective in shaping society than the grounded experiences of living under the asynchronous modernity (Zysiak *et al.*, 2018).

The question that needs to be asked is to what extent the experience of Łódź could change the perception of the problem of worker motherhood and worker child labor at the Polish state level. Two trends appear striking in the texts discussed above. Although the Łódź experience remained extremely important for sensitive individuals who had the opportunity to get to know the city, their impact on national decision-makers remained limited. Most of the dramatic images of exploitation so typical of early capitalism that took place before World War II, and the memory of them was lost at the end of the 20th century, when the neoliberal version of capitalism was introduced. After former factory owners were rehabilitated, their workers became forgotten (Michlic, 2008). Similarly to the interwar period, the municipal government did not have enough power to overcome economic crisis. At the same time the topic of labor became uninteresting when the entire effort of individuals was to be focused on making careers (Zysiak, 2021), and the toxic mix of state and church meant that decisions on such delicate matters as reproductive rights were made over the heads of (former) workers (Heinen and Portet, 2010). Until recently, everything indicated that Łódź workers would be forever in the dustbin of history, and often literally in the dustbin after losing their indebted homes. Some sobering in the assessment of the Polish transformation, which has been visible last years, combined with the criticism of feudal labor relations in contemporary Poland, shows that remembering about “textile girls” and their children still can refresh the whole public debate on Polish modernity.

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