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MAKING UP FOR THE LOSSES OF WAR

REPRODUCTION POLITICS IN POST-WAR POLAND*

> "Dearly beloved in Christ, our Families are facing a new danger! We have not yet managed to calculate the losses inflicted upon us by the war, we still do not know exactly how many millions of our compatriots gave their lives during the war so others might live in freedom, and yet, new warnings are required against an enemy threatening our family and Christian morals. This time it is the enemy lurking within the four walls of our homes, creeping quietly like a thief to the sources of new life […] the enemy of love and sacrifice, the enemy of natural law, divine and human law, the enemy of the family, Nation and God!"[1]

This passage from the homily issued to Catholics by the Polish Episcopate in 1952, at the height of Stalinism, could be the motto of considerations regarding the Polish population policies of the first post-war decade. Despite the fact that the Catholic Church had, in that time, lost its political role, this dramatic appeal of the bishops reflects a broadered. apprehension of the nation-state (that was not motivated exclusively by faith), of the nation's people as its main strength, and finally, of abortion as a moral, religious, economic and national hazard. The concept of the numerical strength of the national community and (related directly to it) the need to replace the casualties from World War II had become an axiom of public discourse in post-war Poland, particularly during the reconstruction (1945-1948) and Stalinist (1949-1955) periods. Furthermore, as evidenced by the above quote, this could not be attributed solely to the ruling Communist party, although in this case, the concept of *replacing the lost human lives*

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[1] 'List pasterski Episkopatu Polski w obronie życia nienarodzonych 2.12.1952' ['Pastoral Letter of Polish Episcopacy defending Life of the Unborn, 2.12.1952'], in *Listy pasterskie Episkopatu Polski 1945-1974* [*Pastoral Letters of Polish Episcopacy 1945-1974*] (Paris: Éditions du Dialogue, 1975), 117-24. Thereafter *Listy pasterskie*.

was further strengthened by the commitment to the expansion of the economy based largely on the mobilization of the society.

In this article, I focus primarily on the expectations towards women as potential mothers, the socio-political contexts of pro-natalist policy and its assumed consequences. Such a perspective will, in my opinion, enrich the two unequivocal pictures of the situation of women in the forties and fifties, and underscore the important dimension of the perception of the war experiences in the post-war Poland.

Poland of the 1940s and 1950s, like the rest of the Eastern bloc under communist rule, had undergone a political redefinition of the gender order under which the model of masculinity had not been disputed, but new tasks were assigned to women:

> "Now, an ideal socialist woman in Poland, as in other people's democracies, was to fulfill the following three significant roles: that of a worker, that of a mother taking care of her family and home, and that of a social and political activist."[2]

Which was, however, more important for the policy-makers of the time – the professional activation of women or population growth? Was it possible to effectively encourage both of these trends? What was the policy of promoting the traditional social roles of women made up of and what role did the fight against abortion play in this process? Finally, what impact would it have on the individual choices of women?

The question of the importance of the traditional model of womanhood in the post-war, Stalinist project, especially the practical aspect of this policy, has not yet been satisfactorily answered. It is noteworthy that our knowledge about the experiences of Polish women of that time has deepened considerably thanks to the recent publications of Małgorzata Fidelis, Dariusz Jarosz and Katherine Lebow.[3] However, these authors' interests were focused predominantly on the working-class environment. In the new one, the sources inevitably lead us toward experiences of work and self-reliance. It is in turn difficult to search the historiography for reflections on the scope and effectiveness of centrally directed pro-natalist activities (not exclusively in the context of the assessment of the coherence of the policy

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[2] Dobrochna Kałwa, 'Between Emancipation and Tradition. The Situation of Women and the Gender Order in Poland after 1945', in Sabine Hering, ed., *Social Care under State Socialism (1945-1989). Ambitions, Ambiguities, and Mismanagement* (Opladen, Framington Hills: Barbara Budrich Publishers, 2009), 178. Thereafter Kałwa, 'Emancipation'.

[3] Małgorzata Fidelis, *Women, Communism and Industralization in Postwar Poland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Thereafter Fidelis, *Industrialization*. Dariusz Jarosz, *Polacy a stalinizm 1948-1956* [*Poles and Stalinism 1948-1956*] (Warszawa: Instytut Historii PAN, 2000).

regarding women as such). Therefore, I would like to point out some characteristics of Stalinist bio-politics on the basis of tactics used in dealing with abortion.

Opening Balance: National sense of loss

The symbolic dimension of the loss of lives suffered by Poland during World War II is one of the most important components of the collective memory of Poles.[4] Modern analysis of the number of casualties, however, verifies the data, which for years was an axiom of the Polish historiography as well as one of the foundations of the social perception of the tragic consequences of war. Historians admit, however, that (using the bishops' words quoted at the beginning) it is impossible to determine "how many millions of our compatriots gave their lives during the war so others might live in freedom".[5]

We will probably never know how many citizens of the Second Polish Republic died during World War II due to the war and the occupation. Estimates of losses are extremely difficult due to the fact that Poland's territory was shifted westwards in 1945. On the one hand, Poland lost half of its territory in the east to the USSR, i.e. the Soviet Republics of Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine. The population losses suffered by the inhabitants of these territories were not taken into account when estimating their levels at the end of the war. In turn, the Big Three decided to compensate Poland with lands in eastern Germany. When we add to that the phenomenon of mass (forced or voluntary) migration of thousands of wanted and unwanted, tolerated and not-tolerated people, it becomes understandable that it was only from around 1950 that the data on the post-war Polish population become reliable. And so, while on 1. January 1939 the population in Polish lands amounted to 35.100.000 people, in 1950 it had decreased by around

[4] It is also an important component of historical policy, which played a significant role in the nationalist legitimization of the Communist rule in Poland. On the nationalist context of the ideology of power of this time see: Marcin Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizm, nacjonalizm. Nacjonalistyczna legitymizacja władzy komunistycznej w Polsce* [*Communism, Legitimism, Nationalism. Nationalist Legitimation of Communist Power in Poland*] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Trio, 2001).

[5] Similarly common is the phenomenon of heroization of death during wartime, application of meanings characteristic of death *on the battlefield*, *conscious* death, resulting from the risks undertaken for patriotic reasons *for our freedom and yours*.

10 million.[6] These numbers – and they are only estimates – can only be a starting point for approximations of the losses.

Without a doubt, the duration of the war on Polish territory meant that population losses were the highest among all the countries affected by World War II. In 1947 they were estimated at just over 6 million people. The calculation, however, excluded the representatives of minorities - mainly Ukrainians, Belarusians and Germans. Therefore, the number of 6 million victims included Poles (2.6 million) and Jews (3.4 million), with 644.000 listed as the victims of war and over 5 million as victims of the German terror. The effects of Soviet actions were, quite understandably, not taken into account at all. Subsequent studies gave slightly lower numbers. Recent textbooks estimate the number of victims at 2.35-2.9 million Polish citizens of Jewish heritage and 2 million ethnic Poles, with 90 % of the losses resulting from German actions.[7]

Regardless of whether 4.5 or 6 million is the correct number, the more important factor than the objective data is the subjective sense of social loss. And it was huge.[8] Detailed, empirically verifiable numbers did not play an essential role. The number began to serve as a metaphor. Jacek Leociak, recalls the metaphor of the number in the context of the Holocaust and the *topos* of "six million victims of the Holocaust", which has become synonymous with unimaginable and infinite loss. Six million represents in this case, all the Jews lost, a murdered nation. Like Auschwitz, the "six million number" is the main representative of the Holocaust in the collec-

[6] Waldemar Grabowski, 'Raport. Straty ludzkie poniesione przez Polskę w latach 1939-1945' [*Report. Human Losses by Poland between 1939-1945*], in Wojciech Materski and Tomasz Szarota, eds., *Polska 1939-1945. Straty osobowe i ofiary represji pod dwiema okupacjami* [*Poland 1939-1945. Human Losses and Victims of Repressions under two Occupations*] (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu 2009), 13-38; Krzysztof Latuch, 'Straty demograficzne Polski w latach 1939-1945 (z prac nad weryfikacją oficjalnych szacunków)' ['Polands Demographic Losses between 1939-1945 (based on the verification of official estimations)'], in Wojciech Materski and Tomasz Szarota, eds., *Polska 1939-1945. Straty osobowe i ofiary represji pod dwiema okupacjami* [*Poland 1939-1945. Human Losses and Victims of Repressions under two Occupations*] (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu 2009), 39-50.

[7] Czesław Brzoza and Andrzej L. Sowa, *Historia Polski 1918- 1945* [*History of Poland 1918-1945*] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2006), 695-7. Thereafter Brzoza and Sowa, *Historia Polski*.

[8] This was also due to the fact that more than every third person with a higher education (37 %) had been killed during the war, and almost every third secondary school graduate, see. Brzoza and Sowa, *Historia Polski*, 697.

tive consciousness.[9] The rhetorical dimension of the metaphor of a *large number of victims* played a huge role (still needing analytical description) in the political debate on the future of the nation in post-war Poland, and hence, in the gradual process of separating an individual from the real experience of wartime sacrifice.

Wartime losses in Poland are particularly important in the context of the particular situation of the Polish society in the inter-war period. In the 1870-1920 period, when Western Europe experienced the so-called *demographic transition*, i.e. a sharp decline in births, the Polish lands were outside the range of this transformation. Respectively, in the inter-war period, from 1926 to 1930 the population growth in France was at 1.4 per 1.000 inhabitants; in Germany – at 6.6; and in Poland – a poorly urbanized country with underdeveloped industry – it stood at 15.5. The number of citizens of the Second Republic grew from 27 million in 1921 to 35 million in 1938, and the high fertility rate was primarily a result of the stability of social structures in the Second Republic.[10] It is difficult to find any purposeful and permanent pro-natalist actions in the politics of that time.[11] However, the *fertility cult* supported by certain right-wing activists was

[9] Jacek Leociak, 'Liczba ofiar jako metafora w dyskursie publicznym o Zagładzie' ['The Number of Victims as a Metaphor in Public Debates about the Holocaust'], in Wojciech Materski and Tomasz Szarota, eds., *Polska 1939-1945. Straty osobowe i ofiary represji pod dwiema okupacjami* [*Poland 1939-1945. Human Losses and Victims of Repressions under two Occupations*] (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu 2009), 51-61.

[10] Magdalena Gawin, 'Planowanie rodziny – hasła i rzeczywistość' ['Family Planning – Slogans and Reality'], in Anna Żarnowska and Andrzej Szwarc, eds., *Równe prawa i nierówne szanse. Kobiety w Polsce międzywojennej* [*Equal Rights and Unequal Opportunities. Women in interwar Poland*] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo DiG, 2000), 222-3. Thereafter Gawin, 'Planowanie'.

[11] Legal regulations on motherhood at that time resulted primarily from the Convention of the International Labour Organisation, signed by Poland, which introduced significant differences in the legal position of women, depending on the workplace and occupation. Legislation of the Second Republic forbade the employment of women in conditions harmful and dangerous to health, morals and decency. Female worker had the right to refrain from work for 6 weeks prior to birth, and, after giving birth, she was required to abstain from work for 6 weeks. For 8 months the mother received a benefit equal to 100% of her salary, and for another four - 60% of salary. In 1933, the entitlements of (insured) pregnant women and mothers were extended by the law on insurance, and included, among others, a benefit for nursing mothers in kind (milk) or cash, see. more broadly: Michał Pietrzak, 'Sytuacja prawna kobiet w Drugiej Rzeczpospolitej' ['Legal Situation of Women in the Second Polish Republic'], in Anna Żarnowska and Andrzej Szwarc, eds., *Równe prawa i nierówne szanse. Kobiety w Polsce międzywojennej* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo DiG 2000), 87-89.

already present, and birth control proponents were accused of undertaking actions aimed at weakening the *vigor of the nation*.[12]

Given such a high population growth, it is not surprising that population losses suffered as a result of World War II, being the first such severe experience of *demographic decline,* could lead to social and political effects similar to those that took place in Western European countries during the period before World War II. Bio-politics conducted by the Western European countries at the time (but also in the second half of the nineteenth century) were focused primarily on strengthening nations through an increase in the number of citizens and thus on achieving a victory in the alleged Darwinian struggle of nations for survival. These actions intensified due to the effects of World War I. The fear of depopulation and/or loss in "the breeding race" resulted in pressure being applied on the family and attempts being made to control women's attitudes towards maternity.[13]

Demographic and socio-political transformation and the position of women

An important consequence of the losses suffered during World War II was a shift in the gender balance. The number of women greatly outweighed the number of men, which was particularly pronounced in cities, where in 1945 there were on average 128 women per 100 men.[14] As a result many women, whose husbands or potential candidates for life partners did not return from the camps, or died at the fronts or stayed (voluntarily or under compulsion) outside of the new borders of the state, had to fend for themselves. The women's self-reliance practiced during the war proved to be useful also in peacetime.[15] However, women were less prepared than men

[12] Gawin, 'Planowanie', 229.

[13] David L. Hoffmann, 'Mothers in the Motherland: Stalinist Pronatalism in Its Pan-european Context', *Journal of Social History*, 34, 1 (2000), 35. Thereafter Hoffmann, 'Mothers'.

[14] This number decreased gradually in the second half of the forties (1946 – 122, 1947 – 118, 1949 – 115, 1950 – 118), see Dariusz Jarosz, 'Stalinizm', in Krzysztof Persak and Paweł Machcewicz, eds., *PRL od lipca '44 do grudnia '70* [*PRL from July 44 to December 70*] (Warszawa: Muzeum Historii Polski, 1977).

[15] Małgorzata Fidelis, 'Czy nowy matriarchat? Kobiety bez mężczyzn w Polsce po drugiej wojnie światowej' ['A new Matriarchy? Women without Men in Poland after World War II'], in Anna Żarnowska and Andrzej Szwarc, eds., *Kobieta i rewolucja obyczajowa* [*Women and the Revolution of Conventions*] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo DiG, 2006), 267. Thereafter Fidelis, 'Matriarchat'. It should be noted that the image of a Polish woman as a witness and direct victim of war did not become engrained in the general consciousness.

to survive in a difficult post-war labor market due to poorer education and weaker qualifications and, if they had children, they also had to balance paid work with caring for them. Politicians in many European countries had to face this situation, but the number of victims undoubtedly affected the size of this phenomenon in Poland. When looking closely at statistical estimates, it appears that immediately after the war, four million women between the age of 20 and 49, i.e. nearly half of the women in the so-called reproductive age had to fend for themselves.[16] This situation, according to some commentators of that time, should have led to the inevitable transformation of the situation of women in Poland. However, with the gradual equalization of the demographic divide between the genders, the pressure on women to return to traditional social roles, including in areas of public life, was getting stronger and, according to Małgorzata Fidelis, proved decisive in preventing the 'revolution', which, immediately after the war, seemed very probable and, in a sense, obvious.

In the Western European countries, gradually separated from Central and Eastern Europe by the Iron Curtain, the patterns of femininity began to go back into their old familiar tracks, However, the spirit of socialist modernization in Poland and in other Eastern Bloc countries necessitated changes leading to gender equality, although its scope, source, and real consequences for the individuals themselves remain controversial. I will only mention the most important elements of this transformation.

The new family law adopted on 25. September 1945 and entered into force in early 1946 was considered the main achievement of the post-war era. It underwent many amendments (e. g. in 1950 and 1964), but from 1945 it defined marriage in Poland as a secular agreement of two equal people, and therefore this act is rightly regarded as the basis for the moral revolution in the People's Republic. The law guaranteed equal rights to and duties of both spouses; the legal age for marriage was set at 18 for both men and women; and finally, in case of a breakdown of the marriage, both spouses had the right to apply for divorce.[17] Even though the introduction of the Code resulted from the fact that the lands of the Second Republic were governed by five different legal codes (a legacy of the partitions of Poland), and the act itself was based on a pre-war draft of the left-wing parties, which, due to opposition from the right wing of the Parliament did not become law in 1929, its implementation in the new political context

Despite the fact that one-quarter of forced labourers sent to Germany were women, the most common image of Polish woman is that of a mother and wife waiting at home for the return of her husband-soldier.

[16] Fidelis, 'Matriarchat', 270.

[17] 'Prawo małżeńskie, 25.09.1946', *Dziennik Ustaw*, 48 (1945), 270.

was seen, even by its pre-war supporters, as part of the takeover of power by the communists. Article 66 of the Constitution of 1952 was an equally important regulation (though more so in a propaganda context) as it emphasized equality before the law regardless of gender, including the equal right to work and pay. The constitution also guaranteed special rights for mothers, which in turn confirmed the concepts of emancipation and protectionism of the inter-war period.[18]

The six-year plan implemented in the first half of the fifties included a large-scale project of *productivization*, i.e. an action aimed at encouraging women to pursue careers in all sectors, including in the occupations traditionally reserved for men. Previous research of this phenomenon, which is essential for assessing the emancipatory role of Stalinism, has led to opposing conclusions. On the one hand, historians emphasize the extremely unfavorable circumstances associated with the work undertaken by the women of that era (discrimination in the workplace, low wages, unemployment, disappointment with the living conditions in the new location), in sharp contrast with the propaganda image of the female worker. Małgorzata Fidelis, in turn, highlights the advantages of the new situation, including the professional and social mobilization of young women or better wages in positions previously unavailable to women such as in mining.[19] These conclusions, however, only seem to be in conflict. They actually demonstrate diversity of experience, which depends on the studied environment in the unstable reality of forced industrialization of the country.

Fertility Policy: The dimensions of the Polish pro-natalist policy

It should be emphasized that the Polish pro-natalist policy in the forties and the first half of the fifties had developed under the specific conditions of a constant baby boom, which very clearly indicates that the post-war reconstruction of the social fabric (and not the inhibition of the negative downward trend from the demographic point of view) was its principal objective. As it later turned out, the fifties were the biggest baby boom in the history of the Polish People's Republic.[20] The observers of that time considered it to be further evidence of a particular strength of the nation:

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[18] Kałwa, 'Emancipation', 175-6.

[19] See Fidelis, *Industrialization,* 5.

[20] In 1946, the number of births was 622,500 , in 1950 – 763,100, and in 1955 it reached a record level of 793,800 thousand. In the fifties there were 29-31 newborns per 1.000 population, see Izydor Sobczak, 'Niże i wyże demograficzne w Polsce w latach 1946-1998' ['Population Decline and Boom Periods in Poland between 1946-1998'], *Studia Gdańskie. Wizje i rzeczywistość*, 1 (2002), 133-7. Thereafter Sobczak, 'Niże'.

> "The strength and power of our nation lies in biological resistance, in the self-defense of the nation in the face of annihilation, as evidenced by the large number of pregnant women. We must not weaken it; on the contrary, we should do everything to intensify it."[21]

The baby boom was caused by a number of factors, but above all, by the demographic factor typical of the post-war period, i.e. by a compensation trend, which involved a very large increase in the number of marriages. Demographers agree, however, that the poorly measurable non-demographic factors played a major role as well, including macro-economic ones, such as urbanization, mass migration from overpopulated rural areas, but also better educational opportunities and protection of mothers and children.[22] They point out, however, that the assessment of the impact of these factors on the actual increase or decrease in the number of births is – especially in case of a strong demographic factor – impossible.

Measures supporting fertility were not a part of a social campaign comparable, for example, with actions aimed at *productivization of women* or collectivization of agriculture. The pro-natalist policy consisted of scattered decisions in several areas, primarily as part of the development of the new social policy,[23] policies aimed at raising the level of health care, and, finally, the transformation of criminal law. All these elements simultaneously co-created a discourse on the socio-political role of women.

Propaganda dimension

According to Małgorzata Hajdo, who has examined the major titles of the women's press (in the period being studied here) in terms of promoted models of femininity, she has determined that motherhood in its ideological dimension gave way to the role of worker and social activist. At the same time, the sources cited in the text indicate that, although the public tasks were listed in the first place, to "achieve harmonious fullness of life [a

[21] Zbigniew Tabeński, 'Zagadnienie przyrostu naturalnego ludności w świetle obecnego kodeksu karnego' ['The Issue of Population Growth in the eye of the current Penal Code'], *W służbie zdrowia*, 3 (1948), 61.

[22] Sobczak, 'Niże', 135.

[23] More on social policy transformation, see Barbara Klich-Kluczewska, 'Social Policy and Social Practice in People's Republic of Poland', in Sabine Hering, ed., *Social Care under State Socialism (1945-1989). Ambitions, Ambiguities, and Mismanagement* (Opladen, Framington Hills: Barbara Budrich Publishers, 2009), 161-74.

woman] must balance all these [public and private] responsibilities".[24] Motherhood is a kind of natural duty, which should be carried out by every married woman, with the help of her husband (the father) and public agencies: nurseries, kindergartens, schools and youth organizations. Just like in the Soviet Union, the conflict between a woman's professional duties and her role as a wife and mother was not anticipated.

The main purpose of marriage was to have children, and the primary role of women as mothers was to give birth as many times as possible. The Crosses of Merit handed out by the highest dignitaries to mothers of at least ten children can be seen as part of the propaganda efforts promoting large families.[25] They resembled the medals awarded to mothers with many children in the Soviet Union (Medal of Motherhood, Order of Maternal Glory, the title of Mother-Heroine), the Third Reich (Cross of Honor of the German Mother) or those in pre-war France. They had a special significance in the second half of the forties when the re-population of the Western and Northern lands was proposed. Inevitably, the medals were mostly awarded to rural women. Women such as Julia Sowińska – a farmer and mother of eleven children who also worked as the secretary of the Women's League Club in Pilica, or Magdalena Szymanowska, who gave birth to twenty children (of whom eight died in infancy). They were portrayed as model mothers.[26]

While one should fully agree with the opinion that the propaganda in favor of productivisation of women dominated the public debate of the Stalinist period, it should not be forgotten that the pro-natalist policy of that time was supported in the public forum by a strong negative propaganda in the form of extremely ideologized criticism of the neo-Malthusian movement.[27]

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[24] Małgorzata Hajdo, 'Wizerunek kobiety jako matki, pracownika i działaczki społecznej prezentowany na łamach prasy kobiecej w latach 1948-1956' ['The Image of Women as Mothers, Workers and Social Activists in Womens Press between 1948-1956'], *Dzieje Najnowsze*, 3 (2006), 57-60.

[25] Ibid.; On the interpretation of images of women in newspapers of the Stalinist era, see also Katarzyna Stańczak-Wiślicz, 'Uroda traktorzystki' ['The Charm of Female Tractor Drivers'], *LiteRacje*, 2012 [to be published].

[26] Dariusz Jarosz, 'Wzory osobowe i modele awansu społecznego kobiety wiejskiej w Polsce w prasie periodycznej w lat 1944-1955' ['Personal Examples and Models of Social Advancement of Rural Women in Poland in Press Periodicals between 1944-1955'], in Anna Żarnowska and Andrzej Szwarc, eds., *Kobieta i edukacja na ziemiach polskich w XIX i XX wieku* [*Woman and education: In the Polish lands in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries*], vol. 1 (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo DiG, 1992), 185.

[27] These propaganda efforts require a separate study.

Social dimension

As in other countries, the pro-natalist policy in Stalinist Poland was accompanied by various incentives in the form of financial benefits (maternity, childbirth, family) or holidays. However, most of them were available only to people entitled to social insurance, which back then covered only a small part of the rural population. The right to receive such benefits in rural areas was generally limited to employees of state farms or cooperatives. However, it is worth paying attention to some fundamental changes in social policy on the protection of mothers and children, which from 1952 onwards was a right guaranteed by the Constitution.

Extending the period of eligibility for the childbirth benefit from 8 to 12 weeks was one of the first changes introduced after World War II. The system of family cash benefits introduced in 1947, aimed, in turn, to partially compensate for the expenses related to raising the children and to close the wealth gap that resulted from the number of children in the family. The benefit increased from the second child in the family onwards. A special benefit for non-working mothers was also introduced.

The number of people who were entitled to a full range of benefits (i.e. people insured under the contract of employment) increased significantly in the Stalinist period, which was a period of increased migratory flows from rural areas to towns and cities in search of work. The overall number of those insured, including women, increased to 56 %. Interestingly, a mother-worker was in a slightly worse position than a mother-clerk or teacher. White-collar workers were entitled to full remuneration in the event of sickness or maternity leave, whereas blue-collar workers in the same situation received only 75 % of their salaries. Such a differentiation of benefits was maintained until the seventies. Families were also entitled to a benefit, which at the beginning of the Stalinist era (in the case of families with two children) amounted to 21.7 % of the average wage, in the case of three children 34.9 %. In 1955 it fell to 17.2 % and 23.5 % respectively.[28] Furthermore, young children of working mothers were, at least theoretically, entitled to a place in a nursery. In practice, however, these facilities could only accept between 10 and 12 % of eligible children, and practically only in the cities. Moreover, these institutions often did not meet, both in terms of equipment and personnel, the expected standards. It quickly became clear that the state could in no way live up to the social promises regarding care offered to mothers, and that the promoted model of mar-

[28] Danuta Graniewska, *Formy i metody pomocy rodzinie pracowniczej* [*Forms and Methods of Labour Families Welfare*] (Warszawa: Instytut Pracy i Spraw Socjalnych, 1980), 7-16.

riage based on partnership, in which both parents play equal roles in raising children, was too distant from the traditional model of a Polish family.

Medical dimension

The Polish experts of that time considered maternal and infant mortality and the availability of abortion to be the main threats to the constanta continuing increase in the number of births.

Despite the lack of reliable statistical data on this issue, maternal mortality in childbirth was estimated in the late forties at about 4 to 5 women per thousand births (the number also included deaths caused by artificial abortions). Death occurred primarily as a result of a puerperal fever or a gestosis. Comparing this data with that of Western European countries, where maternal mortality rate usually did not exceed 3 per 1.000 live births, or the neighboring Czechoslovakia, where it hovered around 2, resulted in legitimate concerns about the quality of prenatal care in Poland.[29]

The data on maternal mortality in the rural areas was unavailable, but it was expected to be much higher than in the examined, large urban centers, hence the development of gynecological and obstetric care in rural areas was of particular interest. It also had an important modernization dimension and was part of a broader campaign carried out in the rural areas from the late forties to combat charlatans, superstition and, so-called, 'grandmas'.[30] Moreover, it proves that it was the traditional peasant family with many children that was expected to bring about the biological regeneration of the nation.

Marcin Kacprzak, one of the influential figures of the Polish movement for the development of medical care, speaking to the gynecologists and obstetricians at a convention in 1948, pointed to the need to base maternity care on three pillars: midwife, obstetrician and independent institute or hospital maternity ward, and the main role was assigned to midwife:

> "If […] at this time we had to move, for tactical reasons, one [pillar] to the fore, it would be the midwife. If we take into account what is at our disposal

[29] Marcin Kacprzak, 'Opieka nad macierzyństwem w Polsce' ['Motherhood Care in Poland'], *Zdrowie publiczne,* 7-8 (1948), 39-40. Thereafter Kacprzak, 'Opieka'.

[30] Ewelina Szpak, 'Pojęcie zdrowia, choroby i cielesności w wiejskim postrzeganiu świata po 1945 r., czyli o zmianach mentalności na wsi polskiej' ['Concepts of Health, Disease and Corporeality in Rural Perceptions of the Woorld after 1945, that is about Changes of Mentality in the Polish Countryside'], *Roczniki Antropologii Historii*, 1, 1 (2012) [to be published].

> and the interests of broad sections of the society, it is the most pressing issue today. As far as midwifery care is concerned we are in a bad condition. We do not have enough midwives, they are poorly deployed, as they are present in big cities only, they are poorly qualified, and their social skills, in the narrow sense, as well as willingness and ability to become a part of the Health Service, are insufficient."[31]

Kacprzak stressed that discussion about reducing the role of the midwife, which took place, among other places, in the United States was out of the question. Elaborating on the issue, he referred to the concerns of physicians, gynecologists and obstetricians regarding the domination of midwives, whom they considered insufficiently prepared to work with pregnant women.[32]

He blamed the high maternal, infant mortality and mortality of children under the age of one on activities of the above-mentioned 'grandmas', i.e. residents of rural areas who offered help in childbirth. The objective of the 6-year plan was to 'catch up in this regard'; and a large number of trained specialists were sent to the front of the campaign against charlatanry, symbolized by the 'grandma'. According to the experts, the specialists were to provide assistance to the young and helpless rural mothers:

> "We have to think about these rural mothers, afraid of everything that relates to their babies, passive in their helplessness, blindly believing in superstitious practices and various counsels harmful to their babies that were offered to them by their older mothers, aunts or neighbors."[33]

The process of introducing midwives to rural communities started in 1949 with a program of organizing communal maternity units, which meant that the main objective of midwives was the eradication, wherever possible, of the practice of home births.[34] It was not a conflict-free process. As the court files indicate, the competition between *grandmas* and midwives

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[31] Kacprzak, 'Opieka', 43-44.

[32] The *Położna* (Midwife) magazine, which promoted the modern, that is, well trained and socially committed specialist, focused in a special series dealing with this issue on emphasizing the limits of her competence.

[33] Interview with Stanisława Kicka, instructor of the Regional Maternity and Child Health Care Consultation Centre in Poznań, *Położna*, 1, 1 (1951), 5-8.

[34] Circular No. 68 of the Office of the State Council on the establishment of centers of obstetric assistance and maternity and child health care centres was issued on 14 October 1949. Maternity units were promoted as the optimal solution, which should completely supplant home births. Hospital maternity wards (in complicated cases) were to be the only alternative to births in maternity units.

sometimes ended up in courts, and accusations of illegal abortions were important tools in the fight with the 'old order'.[35]

It is worth noting that the midwives were expected to do much more than provide care for the pregnant women. A midwife in rural areas was not in competition with physicians (as usually there were not any), and was the only person considered a medical professional in the area, so was expected to become a living advertisement. She was to carry the torch of medical learning to the 'common people'. Thus, three trends converged in the communal maternity unit: improvement of health care in rural areas, which was practically synonymous with the medicalization of life, change people's mentality, and finally, promotion of fertility by prevention of maternal mortality in childbirth and improvement of newborn care.

Policy towards abortion as part of the pro-natalist policy

Authorities in countries conducting pro-natalist policies usually attributed special importance to the reduction in the number of abortions carried out in the country. In the Third Reich, the policy of gradual tightening anti-abortion legislation resulted, during World War II, in people who performed the procedure being sentenced to death. Penalties for abortion existed in Italy and, since 1923, in France. The United Kingdom had banned the procedure during the inter-war period.[36] Legal and penal control seemed to be relatively simple to implement and did not require special funding. While the tightening of anti-abortion laws in twentieth-century Europe was usually associated with limiting the availability of contraceptives, in post-war Poland the issue of combating contraception was practically non-existent due to unavailability of contraceptives in the market and relatively low awareness of the need to use them.[37]

The limited scope of public debate on abortion in the 1945-1956 period (although, as for the 1945-1949 period, it cannot be said that it was non-existent) made me reach directly to the judicial sources of the time, although due to a number of court records missing (only 'typical records'

[35] Archiwum Państwowe w Kielcach, 348/ II Sąd Powiatowy Kielce 212 (IV Kp 160/53).

[36] Hoffmann, 'Mothers', 39.

[37] In the inter-war period contraceptives were known and used practically only by the urban intelligentsia, see more Katarzyna Sierakowska, *Rodzice, dzieci, dziadkowie. Wielkomiejska rodzina inteligencka w Polsce 1918-1939* [*Parents, Children, Grandparents. Urban Intelligentsia Families in Poland 1918-1939*] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo DiG 2003).

were kept), the available documentation is relatively limited.[38] The Krakow district court records from the 1945-1950 period include only nine cases processed under Articles 231-234 of the Penal Code, i. e. carrying out 'illegal abortion'. I also managed to find similar cases handled by the District Court in Kielce (five cases from 1946 to 1948) and one case handled by the Poviat Court in Kielce in 1953.

According to the Penal Code of 1932, a woman who underwent an abortion faced up to three years in prison; a person helping with or performing the procedure faced up to five years, and if the woman died – ten years. The legal policy of the forties and the first half of the fifties was therefore a continuation of the pre-war policy, while simultaneously from 1948 up to 1956 was in line with the strict pro-natalist policy of a Stalinist state.[39]

Enforcing law

It is estimated that experience of illegal abortion was shared in 1950-1955 (the Stalinist era), by 300.000 women and around 80.000 women were hospitalized in a serious condition and there diagnosed to have had a miscarriage earlier.[40]

The political pressure to eliminate the underground abortions at the beginning of the Stalinist era was reflected in the court verdicts of 1949. Krakow court records show that between 1945 and 1948 most cases resulted in acquittals or, more often, discontinuation of the proceedings.[41]

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[38] A quantitative analysis at this stage of research is further complicated by the lack of court registries, which may have not been transferred, for practical reasons, to state archives and remain in court archives.

[39] *Kodeks karny z komentarzem* [*Penal Code with Legal Commentary*] (Lwów, 1932), 327-32.

[40] They were usually placed there as a result of improperly performed procedure or due to infection. Midwives and nurses would typically use a rubber catheter to inject a solution of soap or possibly iodine into the uterus, and administer quinine or drugs inducing uterine contractions. The so-called "grandmas" mainly used the soap and iodine solution, sharp instruments, kneading the abdomen so as to produce haemorrhage or opening the uterus with a "glass wire" and letting air in, as was the case with one of the accused in the discussed case, Helena Wolińska, *Przerywanie ciąży w świetle prawa karnego* [*Abortion in the eyes of the law*] (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1962), 111-2.

[41] E.g. in case No: APKr, SOKr 29/1989/0/5105 the sentence reads: *"Although the accused admitted her guilt, the trial did not provide evidence that she indeed was pregnant and allowed an abortion. [...] Summary of the testimony of both accused [...] raises the suspicion that the self-incrimination of Janina was perhaps aimed at forcing the accused to marry her."* In case No. 29/1989/0/4523 in turn, both the pregnant woman and the midwife

The case in 1949 against a young inhabitant of one of the villages near the town of Bochnia, located twenty kilometers outside of Krakow, can be interpreted as a clear sign of a turn in relation to suspects prosecuted under Articles 231-234 and of a tightening of the policy towards abortion.

The nineteenth year old girl named Maria was brought before the court as a result of a denunciation. District Militia Station in Bochnia employed, judging from the preserved material, responsible and efficient officers, including an inquiring sergeant who had a sort of female intelligence 'on the ground'. They worked quickly and efficiently. The militiamen worked late into the night. That same day, late in the evening (at 10 and 12 pm) they managed to interrogate further two people and track down more women. The militiamen attempted to detain the suspected women as soon as possible so that they could not communicate with each other and agree on the testimony. The full indictment against seven suspects was ready by the end of May; they were tried jointly.

All but one accused were sentenced. The appeal was rejected. The pleas for clemency were also turned down by the court. The President did not exercise the right of pardon, despite letters signed by numerous residents of the convicted midwife's home community who had painfully felt the absence of the only midwife in the area. The most severe sentences were given to two women who were proven to have carried out illegal procedures (18 months in prison). The women who underwent the procedure were given six months jail sentences suspended for 4 years. A severe sentence was handed out to Maria's "fiancé", who turned out to be a married man with two kids. He was sentenced for 'inducement' to four months in prison and he served it in full. The verdict contained a symptomatic sentence:

> "The accused [...] is a qualified midwife, and thus, by virtue of her profession [is] appointed to ensure the proper and rapid level of natural increase of population decimated by the war and the occupation, and she abused her profession to the detriment of public interest."[42]

A similar sentence can be found in documents issued a month earlier in relation to the case of Wacław J., tried for inducing an abortion:

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were found guilty, but automatically pardoned (3 and 10 months in prison) under the amnesty law of 2 August 1945. Case No. APKr, SOKr 29/1989/0/4615 was dismissed due to a lack of connection between the death of a woman and possible termination of pregnancy (Archiwum Państwowe w Krakowie, hereafter abbreviated APKr, Sąd Okręgowy w Krakowie [SOKr]).

[42] APKr, SOKr, 29/1989/0/5367, *Sentencja wyroku z dnia 21 września 1949 roku.*

> "[…] [M]oreover, the harmful effect that the act intended by the accused has in relation to the State's population policy, which act during the post-war loosening of morals and the frequent occurrence of these crimes should meet a particularly harsh repression."[43]

The methods of investigation, the haste and determination of police services, the relatively severe final judgments and their reasoning clearly show the politicization of the process. The termination of pregnancy became a matter of great importance in 1949. Although the abortion trials were not publicized as they took place, for example in the case of show trails of 1952-1953 in Hungary, they were intended to have a strong local response.[44] According to the sentences termination of pregnancy directly affected the population policy of the state and the Polish public interest, so that the accused should be treated as political 'saboteurs'. Judicial sentences of 1949 also provide a clear diagnosis of the role of midwives, as guardians of intense population growth. A midwife, who decided to perform an abortion (regardless of its methods), crossed the barricades of civilization, staying on the side of 'ignorance and quackery', which were to be eliminated. The midwife carrying out the procedure was a double 'traitoress' – of the political ideals as well as of modern medicine.

The court records prove that the authorities in the first place enforced the law of 1932 in accordance with centralized Stalinization policy of the country in line with the directives of the USSR. A similar situation took place in the other eastern bloc countries making up for the population losses from the war.

The tightening of the penal code was the next step. Unfortunately, the ways of implementing the policy in Poland are relatively unclear, and mechanisms governing the policy on the fertility of women only become transparent in the Ministry of Justice's documents concerning a subsequent amendment to the abortion law (1955-56). Despite the absence of many key documents, we know that the work on the amendment to Art. 231-234 began in 1949. Stanisław Chrempiński, who at the time reported the legal status and direction of changes in a specialist legal journal, justifying the need for a tightening of the law under which Maria had been convicted, directly referred to a Soviet regulation of 1936 "on abortion ban, on increasing financial support for midwives, on the introduction of state aid for large families, on extending the network of maternity clinics, nurseries and children's shelters, on increasing criminal liability for failure to pay child

[43] APKr, SOKr 29/1989/5570, *Sentencja wyroku z 3 sierpnia 1949.*

[44] See Andrea Petö, 'Women's Rights in Stalinist Hungary. The Abortion Trials 1952-1953', *Hungarian Studies Review*, 29, 1-2 (2002), 49-75.

support and on amendments to the divorce law".[45] This law – says the author –

> "provides more far-reaching restrictions and criminal penalties for abortion than the Polish Penal Code. If the development of post-war Soviet legal thought ruled against the death penalty even for the gravest crimes, it can be expected that taking a life of a child in the mother's womb will be completely ruled out."[46]

The new legislation was to exclude the possibility of termination of pregnancy to save the mother's life, as "respect for life in the womb requires both from the mother, and from her relatives a lot of resolve and sometimes heroism".[47] The medical term foetus was to be replaced by unborn baby. Demography was the primary justification for this new approach to the problem of abortion.

> "A socialist society condemns the Malthusian slogans, does not allow the breakdown of morals in families and individuals, and by putting man first, takes care of the child, does not allow the spreading of the cult of sexualization, which slowly but steadily undermines Western societies with America at the forefront",

the Supreme Court Prosecutor wrote a few months later in response to – as he himself stressed – trials against doctors performing abortions which had been multiplying in a frightening way. His article meant to familiarize judges and prosecutors with the problem in the face of insufficient or unavailable literature.[48] One can surmise that it was to give a clear and unambiguous interpretation of the law in response to the current needs of the courts.

The work on the amendment, and furthermore, on the new penal code, dragged on. Although the ministry had been collecting material regarding this issue, the proposed amendment tightening the criminal law never saw the light of day.[49] But the modification of the law on practicing doctors was issued in the late 1950. Since then the doctors' committee evaluated the

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[45] Stanisław Chrępiński, 'Uwagi w sprawie nowelizacji art. 231-234 k.k.' ['Remarks regarding the Amendment of art. 231-234'], *Demokratyczny Przegląd Prawniczy*, 4 (1949), 46-7. Thereafter Chrępiński, 'Uwagi'.

[46] Chrępiński, 'Uwagi', 46-47.

[47] Chrępiński, 'Uwagi', 48.

[48] Tadeusz Cyprian, 'Odpowiedzialność lekarza za spędzenie płodu' [' Doctor's (Criminal) Responsibility for Termination of Pregnancy'], *Demokratyczny Przegląd Prawniczy*, 8-9 (1949), 50-51.

[49] Archiwum Akt Nowych [hereafter abbreviated AAN] Warszawa, Ministerstwo Sprawiedliwości [MS] 285, 1827 *Kodeks karny. Część szczególna. Spędzenie płodu*.

"threat to life" and the prosecutor confirmed that the pregnancy resulted from crime.[50]

The satisfaction of Catholic groups with the proposed legal changes was openly demonstrated in 1949 by a journalist of *Tygodnik Powszechny*, a Catholic socio-cultural magazine, which enjoyed a significant intellectual independence in post-war Poland. The weekly emphasized that this issue should not solely and exclusively belong to the private initiative of citizens, but is closely connected with the functions of the state. And if the Catholic Church should take responsibility for the morality of society, then it is the responsibility of the state to modify legislation.[51]

The bishops openly urged people to stop "criminal dealings", "criminal behaviour", "suicidal practices", "killing their own children", "murder of the unborn" under the penalty of deprivation of rights acquired in the Church, which could only be restored to those repenting their sins to the Diocesan Bishop or to a priest authorized by him. However, the dominant argument which was meant to appeal to the faithful, was, just like in the legal policy of the state, the power of large numbers:

> "[…] [E]ven before the war there were articles stating that the number of newborn children had sharply decreased […] hundreds of thousands of citizens, future workers and defenders of the borders have died […] today unborn children of the Nation are dying, and talented ones among them, perhaps geniuses, masters of spirit, perhaps future teachers, doctors, benefactors and builders of the reborn homeland are put to death."[52]

The pastoral letters were probably the only open public statements on abortion of that time. Despite the political importance, the issue of abortion was no longer part of a wider public debate. A few articles on medical or legal matters quoted above are the exceptions. The abortion issue showed up again back in the newspapers and radio only in connection with the amnesty in the USSR in the November of 1955. In the discussion, a reference was made to the inter-war campaign fought by Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński in parts of his "The Women's Hell". Finally, the liberalization of the law took place on April 27, 1956.

The anti-abortion actions would become a symbol of the reproduction policy of Stalinist Poland in the name of rebuilding the nation after World

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[50] 'Ustawa z dnia 28 października 1950 o zawodzie lekarza', *Dziennik Ustaw*, 50 (1950), article 16.

[51] Jakub Zdrój, 'Krok na przód' ['Step forwards'], *Tygodnik Powszechny,* 3 July 1949, 3.

[52] 'List pasterski Episkopatu Polski w obronie życia nienarodzonych 2.12.1952' ['Pastoral Letter of Polish Episcopacy defending Life of the Unborn, 2.12.1952'], in *Listy pasterskie,* 117-24.

War II, as the liberalization of the law of 1956 is widely regarded as the symbolic end of an era of Stalinist pro-natalist policy in Poland.

Conclusion

The analysis of the social discourse: the promotion of large families, the development of mother and child care in rural areas, and the policy of elimination of underground abortion market, indicates that the authorities may have consciously paid special attention to peasant women. The traditionally large village families were seen an opportunity to quickly increase the size of the Polish population.

Taking this into account, the answer to the question why the abortion trials did not take place in Nowa Huta – the symbol of Stalinist industrialization (the knowledge about the abortions committed in the city was quite common), but rather in the country side, seems to be obvious.

Despite official assurances about the possibility of reconciling the role of mothers and workers on a large-scale, the authorities must have been aware that in the contemporary social realities, being a worker and having a large family at the same time was quite impossible. Therefore, the only way to reconcile the idea of productivization of women and achieving the highest number of births was to reduce operations to a group which promised the best, that is, to rural women. Of course, the theme requires further detailed research, but already at this stage we can conclude that the state reproduction policy was diverse, and the expectations of women differed and depended on their class affiliation.

It is worth emphasizing that women were not just passive objects of social policy of the time. The midwife is particularly noteworthy as a very important and still under-appreciated element of the modernization processes of Stalinist days at the micro level.

Appendix

Testimony of Maria of Bochnia

On February 21st of 1949, Sergeant Jan Cholewa of the investigation department of militia in Bochnia, received information about a crime committed within his territory. "*By way of confidential information provided by a trusted person*" he learned that one of the residents of his district – nineteen-year-old Maria of one of the villages around Bochnia – had

committed an abortion.[53] On the same day, Maria provided extensive testimony on this issue at the militia station in Bochnia:[54]

> I do not recall the exact date. What I do know is that it was summer of 1948, and I, while being pregnant in the first month or even first half of the second, did not want my mother to find out as she would make a scene about it so while visiting my friend Anna Baran of Bochnia I admitted to her that I was pregnant and was already in the second month. She, after hearing me out, told me there was a woman in Bochnia who can expel a foetus, so she advised me to visit this woman who will do it for 3.000 zlotys. I, being afraid of my mother finding out about this, went to this woman whose name I later found out was Komenda of Bochnia […] and started talking to her asking her advice told her I thought I was pregnant and also asked her to examine me. The aforementioned woman told me she would make me not pregnant, meaning she would get rid /terminate/ of the pregnancy I was to come the next day because her husband was there and she was afraid of him because she would get five years in prison for this sort of thing. The aforementioned woman told me this whole business would cost 3.000 zlotys. Not having this amount on me I gave her 2.400 and I was to give her the rest later on. The next day I came to the aforementioned woman, I found her at the house to terminate the pregnancy, I mean to carry out the procedure. The aforementioned woman kicked the children who were there out of the house so there was only two of us left, she took some instruments out of the closet such as: two bottles, one with spirit, and the other one with some kind on fluid, something that looked like a syringe for injections, and other instruments, which I cannot identify. The woman told me to lie down on the ottoman, undress, and she washed her hands with spirit and took an instrument that looked like a syringe, put it into my vagina, then took a second instrument which she put in the middle of the previous instrument and pushed it into my vagina, asking if it hurt me. I kept telling her I was in pain and she was scared and then blood burst out and I felt weak, but she told me to go home and have a bath in hot water. After leaving the aforementioned woman I went towards home but was already very weak and barely made it home. When at home I did not come out clean to my mother but followed the aforementioned woman's advice i.e. I had a bath in hot water, and then took one aspirin and went to bed. Lying in bed I got a big pain, at night, curdled blood poured out of my vagina and I felt big pain in the back. The next day I got worse and my mother and brother- in-law were about to take me to the hospital in Bochnia, but I asked them not to because I did not want to betray the woman that got rid of the foetus / pregnancy /. I spent the next days lying at home, was very weak

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[53] Confidential information and denunciations were, statistically speaking, an inferior source of information about illegal procedures. According to lawyers' estimates, 98% of proceedings were initiated by notifications received from hospitals, see Leszek Bogunia, *Przerywanie ciąży. Problemy prawnokarne i kryminologiczne* [*Abortion. Issues in Penal Law and Criminology*] (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1980), 14.

[54] Original spelling retained.

because of a draft, 7 days with a high fever, even unconscious. After one week I started to recover and after two weeks I started to slowly walk. During severe pains, seeing that my health was deteriorating I confessed to my mother what I have done and explained to her the entire course of the incident but asked her not to tell anyone because this woman would face a big punishment for getting rid of this. Once I recovered I went to town and met with the aforementioned woman on a street who immediately began to question me and also started shouting at me that my brother-in-law at the time of my illness was at her house and shouted at her about what she had done to me. [...] I can not add anything on the subject. The interrogation protocol was thus completed and read before signing.

Interrogator: Sergeant Jan Cholewa, recorded by: Sergeant Stefan Kowalik.

Additional testimony: I state that the name of the man who made me pregnant is Stanisław Mieczko of […], when I told him I was pregnant, he told me not to worry and suggested expelling the foetus, and gave me two thousand zlotys to sort this issue out. I agreed to do this and with his consent went to the aforementioned woman through Anna Baran from Bochnia.[55]

[55] APKr, SOKr, 29/1989/0/5367, Akta w sprawie karnej art. 27 w zw. z art.. 232 kk i art. 231 i 232, *Protokół przesłuchania podejrzanego*, 21.02.1949. Original spelling retained.