Malgorzata Fidelis, Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland

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munist Catholicism and Polish nationalism, *The Crosses of Auschwitz*.

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GREGOR THUM. *Uprooted: How Breslau Became Wrocław during the Century of Expulsions*. Translated by TOM LAMPERT et al. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2011. Pp. xl, 508. Cloth $75.00, paper $35.00.

City monographs are a strange genre of history writing. They are nearly always labors of love, even more than are biographies, as one would be unlikely to devote years to and in a place one loathed. While there may be some social, cultural, or economic focus, a rigorous research design would surely require some comparison with other cities. Eschewing this, the historian stakes a great deal on the power of place. As a city's biography is fixed on the page, its author must convey the spirit of the book's subject to those who have not walked the same streets.

In the case of Wrocław (prior to 1945 the German city of Breslau), Gregor Thum and this reviewer share a deep fascination with his subject: caveat lector. But *Uprooted* should be of interest not only to our select club. This English translation follows German (2003) and Polish (2007) editions. The titles of those versions emphasized the city itself (*Die fremde Stadt*/*Obce miasto*). But for more distant readers, Thum has wisely chosen a title that highlights the people: those torn from their German homes in Breslau by the collapse of the German war effort, and those trying to make the pile of rubble that was left into a Polish Wrocław.

Breslau/Wrocław was hardly the only city destroyed by the war. But the significance of this case lies precisely in the question of a city's spirit, as suggested above. For in its first postwar decades Wrocław had no spirit, or none that could be admitted. What was German was rejected; the Polish version had shallow roots at best. Without a plausible *genius loci* guiding the story, Thum has a very difficult task before him: it is nearly as impossible to tell as the story that the first Polish settlers in 1945 tried to tell about their newly Polish home.

Uprooted is a study of that impossible story, and of how Breslau grew into Wrocław despite the ham-handed machinations of Polish communist leaders. The book is divided into three parts. The four chapters of part one document the takeover, settlement, and reconstruction of the city. Hundreds of thousands of Germans were expelled, and nearly as many Poles came to settle, or just to loot the ruins left behind. Meanwhile, mostly well-meaning Polish administrators tried to make sense of the alien streetscape, one that, even if whole sections had not been reduced to rubble and yawning facades, would still look unlike any Polish city. Thum evokes well the "pioneer" spirit of the first settlers and the helplessness of Wrocław's leaders as they tried to build institutions while fending off looters, Soviet soldiers, and their bosses in Warsaw. This social and political history has been told before, but no one has assembled its parts together as well as Thum, making this book an essential handbook for anyone trying to understand the topography of this great Central European city.

Part two, with six chapters, is the heart of the book. Thum considers the "impermanence syndrome" experienced by settlers who felt powerfully the effect of the dotted line with which West Germans (and even *National Geographic*) marked Poland's Western border for decades. Given these deep uncertainties, one can hardly be surprised at the eager adaptation of myths about Wrocław's Polish past, and the determination to erase German traces from every wall and every gravestone. It would be easy to mark this as the desperation of an illegitimate government and a deluded society; Thum instead situates it within the needs of a time and a place, and skillfully narrates the peculiar twists those myths took. For example, he notes that most of the Baroque churches (for which Breslau was renowned) were rebuilt after 1945 with Gothic interiors because the ornate decorations had been destroyed, but that in any case the Gothic was deemed to be more Polish and ideologically acceptable. As an older style, it evoked the time of Polish control of Lower Silesia. This combination of expediency and ideology, for Thum, marks the entire postwar history of memory in Central Europe, exemplified in Wrocław.

In the final chapter, Thum shows how a new, invigorated Wrocław has emerged in the postcommunist era, building new bridges to a reimagined multicultural past. Here too it would be easy to poke holes in the tourist-friendly pastiche. But Thum recognizes that Wrocław's choices, again, are both conscious and historically determined. A touch of the saccharine creeps in now and then, as he recounts the city's emergence as the emblem of Poland's confident, youthful, forward-looking image. At the same time, *Uprooted* offers gentle cautions against those who would celebrate too much the Wrocław that is, at the cost of the Breslau that was. Thum has written a compelling contribution to our understanding of the culture and politics of communist Poland.

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MALGORZATA FIDELIS. *Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland*. New York: Cambridge University Press. 2010. Pp. xiv, 280. $90.00.

What kind of general conclusion can be drawn about women and industrialization if a retired Polish miner, Józef R. from Katowice, tells a history graduate student in an interview that he cannot recall any women working in the mines during the industrialization of Poland under communism (p. 163)? This is the first question that should be asked when analyzing Malgorzata Fidelis's pioneering and long-awaited book on women, communism, and industrialization in Poland. How can we connect individual experiences and social processes in

the complex transformation of Polish society brought about by industrialization? The book is based on a wide variety of sources such as the files of the women's section of the communist party and the trade unions. Fidelis also conducted nineteen interviews, recognizing the need for a different perspective on the past than that offered by party documents and newspapers. However, she considers these interviews to be "truth" rather than performances, and so we never find out how the various changing frames of collective memory influence the process of recalling past events, such as when Józef R. unexpectedly encountered a female miner in the darkness of the mine.

Nonetheless, this volume is a pioneering work operating at the intersection of two fields of inquiry. The first field is gender history, whereby women are regarded as a social group and the author aims to "restore agency to women" during this complex historical period (p. 4). The second field concerns the history of industrialization in communist Poland and how it was experienced by different groups of women. Some remarkable works have already been published on these topics, thanks to flourishing historical research outside Poland, but Fidelis's study is an outstanding attempt to connect the two fields of investigation to most Poles' hostility toward the leftist political project.

Scholarly interest in the communist-dominated countries of Central Europe has been informed by a framework established by sociologists and political scientists of the postcommunist transition who sought to identify winners and losers and to distinguish between those who had resisted and those who had complied with communism. Fidelis also works within this framework, pointing out that many women actually benefited from the Stalinist emancipation policy and should not be perceived purely as victims. The complex strategies of compliance and survival, sometimes narrated as upward mobility, are masterfully presented here.

The book consists of three well-selected case studies that cover three different historical experiences. It looks at three regions—Zyrardow, Zambrow, and Katowice—and two different industries, mining and textiles. Fidelis's analysis focuses on women's participation in these industries during the communist era. She also analyzes how the definition of women's work has changed over time. Interestingly, left-wing intellectuals in Poland—similar to their Hungarian, Czech, and Slovak counterparts—have tended to be more supportive of the traditional woman's role as nurturer than of the idea of expanding economic citizenship.

The inclusion of women into heavy industry fundamentally challenged gender relations, stirring resistance to attempts to modify patriarchal norms in Poland. From 1953 onward, women working in heavy industry were defined in the public discourse as "non-Polish." The same process happened in other Central European countries, where resistance to the Soviet type of emancipation and to communist efforts to transform these countries into producers of iron and steel led to strikes and ultimately to revolutions, as in Hungary. With the state actively promoting women's employment, the terms double and triple burden were coined. As aptly described in the book, although paid employment granted women some agency, it also posed an additional psychological and emotional burden. Poland's communist transformation soon lost momentum, and there was a turn toward valuing women as mothers. As in other parts of Central Europe, women were driven from well-paid jobs in heavy industry both by economic necessity and as a result of new attempts by politics to regain control over women. This book reminds us of the consequences of using a national scope of analysis when analyzing a transnational phenomenon and of the difficulties of negotiating women's subject position amid the shifting frames of public memory. Fidelis gives a nuanced understanding of Poland's turn to the right in 1989 and the strength of anticommunist and pro-Catholic sentiments. In doing so, she explains why "gendered labor history" could not be written in Poland. So the fact that Józef R. mentioned that he could not recall women working in the mines should be the subject of study; maybe his forgetting was a form of resistance and agency.

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Paulina Bren. *The Greengrocer and His TV: The Culture of Communism after the 1968 Prague Spring*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press. 2010. Pp. xiii, 250. Cloth $65.00, paper $24.95.

Paulina Bren's book is a groundbreaking cultural analysis of everyday life under communism in Czechoslovakia after 1968. It is a compact, cohesive, and entertaining account of domestic TV soap operas' role as mediator between a firm but concerned regime and an obedient but wary population. Based on communist party and TV archives, communist newspapers, and secondary literature, Bren's study offers a new narrative of "normalized" (post-1968) Czechoslovakia after Prague Spring's "socialism with a human face" was irreversibly crushed by the Warsaw Pact invasion. She challenges the political tale of dissent and repression that is commonplace in the historiography despite its evident discrepancy with everyday life in all its banality. She rejects the victimization complex prompted by the armed intervention and instead casts post-1968 history along new lines. Bren introduces ordinary people as fully legitimate social actors, redefines Czech politics as an interaction between regime elites and the people (TV viewers), and questions the very essence of socialist rule.

The book's strength lies in Bren's subtle reinterpretation of the absence of events, which she does by centering her reflection on the social compliance that characterized 1970s Czechoslovakia. She proceeds chronologically and thematically, but also empirically, beginning with an analysis of the intellectual context of Prague Spring (chapter one) and then turning to the political purge, at all levels, of those who did not ap-