"They look better on the breasts": Advertisement, sexuality, and the bra business in postsocialist Poland

Marta CHMIELEWSKA
PhD Student in History
European University Institute (IT)
marta.chmielewska@eui.eu

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Abstract

This article examines the 1990s transition from socialism to capitalism in Poland through the lens of the changing market of underwear. Based on oral history interviews, archival research of bra production companies, as well as an analysis of contemporary press reports, I examine how the integration of the Polish economy into the global capitalist system post 1989 influenced its sexual culture. This article shows how the end of the public sector's monopoly on the production of underwear and the rise of the private sector introduced new form of bras that were codified as sexual by the media and manufacturers themselves. These new types of products mimicked Western European brands, distancing themselves from the socialist era underwear, and incorporated new technology designed to model and discipline female bodies. Through a deep analysis of a 1996 article on the bra business from *The Electoral Gazette* [Gazeta Wyborcza], the biggest daily newspaper in Poland, I show how the liberal media were ambivalent to such changes and portrayed it as differences between generations of women in the face of calls for stricter censorship from conservative politicians and the Catholic Church.

Keywords: Postsocialism, underwear, 1990s, small business, sexuality

Résumé

Cet article examine la transition du socialisme au capitalisme durant les années 1990 en Pologne à travers le prisme de l'évolution du marché des sous-vêtements. Sur base d'entretiens, de documents d'archives des fabricants de soutiens-gorges, ainsi que d'une analyse de la presse contemporaine, j'examine comment l'intégration de l'économie polonaise dans le système capitaliste mondial après 1989 a influencé sa culture sexuelle. Cet article montre comment la fin du monopole du secteur public sur la production de sous-vêtements et l'essor du secteur privé ont facilité l'arrivée de nouvelles formes de soutiens-gorges sur le marché polonais qui ont été sexualisés par les médias et les fabricants eux-mêmes. Ces nouveaux produits imitaient les marques d'Europe occidentale, se distançant ainsi des sous-vêtements de l'ère socialiste, et apportaient une nouvelle technologie conçue pour modeler et discipliner les corps féminins. Grâce à l'analyse approfondie d'un article paru en 1996 sur le commerce des soutiens-gorges dans la *Gazette électorale* [Gazeta Wyborcza], – le plus grand quotidien de Pologne – je démontre l'ambivalence des médias libéraux face à ces changements les dépeignant comme un choc générationnel entre les femmes, alors que de nombreux politiciens conservateurs et l'Église catholique appelaient à une censure plus stricte.

Mots-clés : post-socialisme, sous-vêtements, les années 1990, petites entreprises, sexualité

Introduction

Głowno, a small town located 40 kilometers north-east of Łódź, Polish third biggest city, has been specializing in underwear production for over 70 years now. Since 1949, it housed a workers' cooperative started by a group of 26 local workers that organized garment production. In the early 1950s, the cooperative became integrated into the nationalized economy and the five-year centralized economic plan of the socialist state. It then took the name of Włada Bytomska, a pre-second World War labor activist and a celebrated communist hero and started specializing in underwear production. By the late 1950s, it operated as a factory, in a building funded by the Work Cooperative Union branch located in Łódź. Early on, it produced a limited choice of underwear, only two types of bras and two types of garter belts. Most of its products were for the domestic market, but a significant amount was exported to Soviet Russia. Between the 1960s and the late 1980s, the cooperative hired over two thousand employers, mainly women, who produced millions of bras per year. The cooperative's reputation for producing bras meant that it became a knowledge hub for other bra-producing cooperatives in Poland. Since the 1970s, it has also subcontracted production for a West German and Austrian brand Felina, which modernized its labor organization, and machinery, and introduced a wider array of goods produced.

The end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s brought changes in the local lingerie industry. In 1990, the cooperative signed a deal with a German brand Triumph International, that became its major force for modernization and changes in the machinery and labor organization. At the same time, already since the late 1980s, many cooperative workers and other local people opened their own small private workshops producing underwear. In Poland, from December 1988 the laws governing the opening of new private businesses were liberalized and the state supported the growth of the private sector as a response to the deindustrialization of the public factories, which caused inflation, employment, and poverty. With time, over the 1990s, bra production went from being monopolized by the cooperatives in Poland to being dominated by the private sector. The high demand for underwear in the 1990s from both domestic markets, as well as post-soviet clients and brands located in the European Union member states, meant that the town organized itself around underwear production. As Amanda Cormier, *The New York Times* journalist, quotes one of the major local company owners, Marzena Pudłowska about Głowno in the 1990s: "Almost every second house did something in lingerie" (Cormier 2019). While it is an exaggerated figure of speech, the specialist underwear magazine *Fashionable Underwear* [Modna Bielizna] reported in 1999 that 190 private sewing rooms were operating in the town, with an average of 10 employees each (Hołowicz 1999).

As Elisabeth Dunn argued (2004), the 1990s in postsocialist states were not only a question of changing political institutions or property regimes, but rather a reorganization of power relations that were much broader than that. Since 1989, the economic transition known as the "shock therapy" was also not an implementation of any capitalism, but of post-Fordist, flexible neoliberalism, that promoted new subjectivity of workers and citizens. In mainstream discourse as well as in workspaces, discussion over what socialism was and what capitalism should be took place. As Dunn exemplified with her analysis of the marketing campaign of "Frugo", the first new product launched after the privatization of state socialist food processing factory Alima by American company Gerber, advertisement played a big role in these processes. Ads of "Frugo" reproduced a binary image of socialism and capitalism, one being static, inflexible, backward, and another modern, individualistic, dynamic. Socialism was presented as an antithesis of capitalism. Such narratives were used to legitimatize the growing inequalities and disempower the working class.

At the same time as the new forms of economy were becoming more and more popular, gender practices and norms were being discussed. As Agnieszka Kościańska argues, in the 1990s gender and sexuality became a central social question for the new postsocialist state, provoking numerous debates and decisions (Kościańska 2021). In the 1993 ruling, the parliament and the president decided to limit access to abortion which had been legal and free since 1956. Despite the mass movement of women's organized resistance, the politicians voted that abortion would only be permitted in cases where the pregnancy was the result of rape, if it endangered women's health or if the fetus was deformed. Simultaneously, in the 1990s politicians voted against state support for free contraception and free IVF treatment, and the sex correction procedure for trans people became harder to access. In such legislative background, the public visual culture has also been changing, and it centered around representation on womanhood. With the abolition of censorship, opening to the Western content, and fall of state monopolies in many areas, images of women in underwear became widespread in postsocialist states (Ibroscheva 2013; 2020).

With the fall of the socialist regime in 1989 and the introduction of harsh neoliberal politics and changes in the gender order, underwear production changed drastically. Analyzing and understanding such changes in the 1990s bra market offer insight into the local interpretations of gender order and economic conditions as experienced by small entrepreneurs in the early capitalistic era. With the rise of small businesses as a new form of labor organization and garment production, how did the underwear industry change? How were the changes within the economy of underwear connected with the changes in gender norms and representation of women? What reactions did

their new product caused? How were the changes narrated and understood? Based on oral history interviews with current and past workers of the bra business, including seamstresses, managers, traders, business owners, as well as archival research into the cooperative history, and press reports of the 1990s, this article seeks to use the lingerie industry as a lens through which to examine changing sexual norms and economic practices in the postsocialist Poland.

1. Imitating the West: Triumph International in Głowno

In 1990, the Głowno cooperative signed a subcontracting deal with German brand "Triumph", which changed the co-op's machinery, labor organization, and products. Triumph invested a lot of money, which consequently led to more modern machinery, higher standards of production, and a wider variety of designs. In General assemblies from 1989, when Triumph first approached Głowno, the German company was portrayed as one of the best producers in the world.[1] Many co-op workers praised the high quality of the goods produced for Triumph during the interviews I have conducted. One of the CEOs of the company describes Triumph as the "BMW of bras" and compares their previous production to Toyota, to show that even if it was not bad, the new ones were just on a different level, in a different class of products.[2] Similarly, one administrative co-op worker quoted in the article for *Gazet Wyborcza* commented upon how the small businesses' products were not as good as theirs:

> *Ale oni nie szyją takich staników jak my. My szyjemy wyrafinowaną klasykę dla Nimieckiego Triumpha. Takie staniki, że oko leci* ["But they can't make bras like ours. We sew sophisticated classics for the German Triumph. Such bras, you cannot believe"] (Matys and Nowak 1996).

Two other small business owners I interviewed said that Triumph became an inspiration for them as well as they still aspire to produce goods similar to Triumph.[3] Triumph presence in the town brought it closed but kept it as an impossible norm to aspire to. Catching up with Triumph seemed possible since many of the seamstresses had experience sewing for Triumph at the cooperative that they later brought to their private sector employment. More than that, it was easy to copy the template designs of Triumph bras that were made available to some of the co-op workers. Based on these designs, seamstresses could recreate the same style of bra. Despite this, Triumph's designs were not that easy to copy in small sewing rooms of family businesses for many reasons.

1 PROTOKÓŁ z Nadzwyczajnego Zebrania Przedstawicieli Członków Spółdzielni Pracy im. Włady Bytomskiej w Głownie [MINUTES of the Extraordinary Meeting of the Representatives of the Members of the Władysław Bytomski Work Cooperative in Głowno], 19.10.1989, nr B-50, 6/34, Archiwum GSP, Głowno.

2 Interview with the CEO, 29 December 2021, Głowno.

3 Interview with Elżbieta, 7 September 2021, Głowno, and interview with Mirosław, 17 December 2012, Głowno

Triumph's management organized the Głowno co-op work force into groups of nineteen seamstresses, each producing a specialized element of a bra on a particular type of modern machine. This level of precision and complexity, combined with specialized machinery, meant that Triumph's bras were impossible to copy. Additionally, big companies' economies of scale as well as global networks of distribution meant that Triumph were able to dictate prices. The character of the local market and the type of consumption in Poland dictated the price limits of locally produced bras.

Part of the reputation of Triumph in the town, I believe, comes from before 1990 when the brand became produced in Głowno. During state socialism, it was one of the brands known and available to the consumers, but at a certain price. Western European brands like that were only purchased at hard currency stores in big cities, such as Pewex in Warsaw (Boćkowska 2017). Polish products were always in competition with foreign goods and Western European products had, and still do, hold a special status due to their unavailability and higher prices. Before 1989, the bra market in Western Europe was far more diverse than in the socialist world, with companies such as German "Triumph", British "Gossard" and "Marks & Spencer", French "Chantelle", American "Playtex" and "Vassarette", producing a variety of models using a wide range of textiles, colors, and patterns. Meanwhile, behind the Iron Curtain, as historian Ol'ga Gurova argues, the designs of socialist underwear, just as in the garment industry more generally, were embedded in the ideological Cold War (Gurova 2008). Gurova shows that in Soviet Russia, especially in the 1950s and the 1960s, the media stigmatized Western fashion as being embedded in class distinction while promoting socialist products as being in service of the unification of society (Gurova 2009). The discourse of competition with America and bourgeois western capitalist lifestyles of extravagance and individualism meant that the importance of "modesty" was emphasized. The 1970s brought significant changes in consumer cultures across Europe, also in Eastern European socialist states (Fehérváry 2009). However, bright colors or see-through materials were still not produced locally. The interviews done by Margarits Karamihova about the use of underwear in socialist Bulgaria exemplify how foreign underwear was at the same time desired and stigmatized (Karamihova 2020). Responders of Karamihova argue that the use of underwear produced not in the socialist states was heavily sexualized and shamed in media but also in everyday life.

2. The rise of small businesses and new products

At the same time as the cooperative in Głowno was signing its deal with Triumph International, the number of small businesses producing underwear began to rise in the town. By the 1990s, Poland had become a state with the biggest new private sector in the region with the sector employing more people and comprising more of the country's GDP than in Czechoslovakia, Russia, Hungary, or the GDR (Jackson, Klich, and Poznanska 2005). Głowno was a part of these changes. Comparable to other industries, clothing production was an industry that was easy to enter as it required small primary investments. By the 1990s, the reorganized textile and clothing sector in Eastern Europe was dualistic, with a few very large firms alongside a very fragmented private sector (Corado, Benacek, and Caban 1995). The economists Corado, Banacek and Caban argue that these new companies were more efficient, as they estimated that labor productivity in small clothing and textile firms was around twice the average labor productivity of all firms in clothing and textiles in 1992. They also show that the number of big companies with more than two hundred workers began to fall in 1989, while the number of smaller companies with up to two hundred workers was growing drastically in the clothing sector. Big companies had small economies of scale and struggled with the large costs of management and administration, and lack of distribution structures. In Poland, the number of firms with fewer than forty-nine employees increased substantially between 1989 and 1992. The number of micro-companies is also likely to have increased during this same period, but it is harder to determine since they were often not officially registered, sometimes operated on the black market to avoid taxation, and often fluctuated between active and non-active years.

The new social strata of business owners were a diverse group of people that attracted the attention of both media and academia. Through qualitative research, many academics created typologies of the new business owners in postsocialist states, dividing them between generations, class positions, approaches to the products they make (Bartkowski 2013; Skąpska 2002; Gardawski 2001; 2013). As Magdalena Szcześniak argued, media created a type of successful entrepreneur that was based on ideas about imagined Western European middle-class masculinity and lifestyle (Szcześniak 2016). At the same time as lists that numbered the richest Poles in each year were becoming more and more popular, the distance between business owners' representations and lived reality was growing. A successful company was shown to be the one that created the biggest profit, employed the most workers and produced the biggest growth. On the ground however, many business owners also cared about the long-term perspective, while keeping the scale of their production low. What was

most important for them was that the source of family income to not be defeated by changing economic and political situation, competition, or inflation.

While the lingerie business owners in Głowno were of different class backgrounds, gender, age, and produced working-class or higher end goods for different target client groups, both domestically and abroad, the majority of the underwear workshop was a micro company that employed less than 10 workers and existed in precarity. They did not create a brand and they were often fluctuating between active and non-active years then they would stop producing. Small companies that dominated the market did not have to advertise, as their clients found their products by looking at the name tags of the bras sold in the bazaars. The main outlets for small businesses like the sewing rooms in Głowno were the bazaars that became widespread in 1990s Poland. Across Eastern Europe, bazaars played an important role in local, regional, and national economies, mediating between the incoming capitalist market and the fading socialist system (Wallace and Endre 1999). According to the sociologists Sik and Wallace, the markets of Central and Eastern Europe became almost a substitute for, rather than a supplement to, the normal retail sector, which was failing to adapt to free-market conditions in the 1990s (Wallace and Sik 1999). Eastern-European open-air bazaars were interconnected in a supply chain and formed a continuum ranging from small street trade practices to big mall-like structures where goods were exchanged many times with middle people mediating between producer and the consumer. The biggest hubs of the Eastern European cross-border bazaar economy network included the Jozsefvarosi V Market (or "Chinese market") in Budapest, Ptak in Tuszyn in Central Poland, Bazar Europa at 10th Anniversary Stadium in Warsaw, and the Seventh Kilometre (Tolchok) Market in Odesa.

Given the intimate and delicate nature of underwear, and the fact that a little over thirty years has elapsed since the 1990s, the bras produced during this decade are not yet old enough to be shown in fashion museum or young enough to be sold as vintage fashion in flea markets or online stores. During the 1990s, small private workshop owners did not create archives or catalogue their products, so it is hard to say what were goods produced by the majority of the entrepreneurs in Głowno. It is a shame especially since everyday cheap bras were probably the most popular in the scale of the country. A representative survey ordered by the Polish Chamber of Lingerie (Polska Izba Bielizny) in 2000 showed that 42% of women in Poland wear the cheapest possible bras and only one-fourth of women can afford a bra for more than 35 PLN (which is around 20 PLN today, roughly 4.20 EUR) ("Pokaz Bielizny Francuskiej" 2000). One type of the underwear that was and still is available at such markets was a so-call "traditional" bra, produced also by the cooperative in Głowno during the socialist state era. This type of bra has remained popular in postsocialist

Poland, especially since it is much cheaper than more modern designs. While there are multiple versions of the traditional bra, it is different from underwire, push-up or cleavage enhancing bras, since it has no underwire, no padding, no satin finishes, and a fuller cup.

A separate group of companies stands out among the number of workshops in Głowno operating in the 1990s by creating a brand with a name, a logo and advertisement. Only the biggest companies could and needed to advertise their products in magazines which in the case of Głowno means only five private companies: Alles, Krzyś, later named Krisline, Kama, Exclusive, and Gor-Mex. While all of them were to some extent family companies where more than one person from a family worked, they operated in a separate place from their home. They were also producing higher-end goods which are reproduced in magazine adverts from that period. Magazine *Modna Bielizna* was founded in the 1990s in Łódź as a specialized space for the lingerie industry. Its pages provide a display of advertisement of both international and domestic brands of the era, also from Głowno. Ads in *Modna Bielizna* show an abundance of choice of products, a wide selection of goods other than just bras and pants, such as garter belts or full-body suits. One of the main discussed topics in the articles, but also in the ads, is the availability of products in many colors other than black, white or nude, such as red, blue, gray, orange, green, or yellow, and in a variety of materials. The most popular image used in many adverts is of a model wearing a set of black or white lacy paired bra and pants, both high cut, with see-through elements, and made out of new materials such as elastane, nylon, and polyester (**Figures 1 & 2**).

However, such adverts are not a neutral source representing the material reality of the era. Big companies typically opted to advertise their most luxurious styles of bras as opposed to every-day bras. Companies photographed models in modern designs, new and colorful fabrics, and more revealing styles of underwear to build their brand image. More than representing a brand, adverts were creating a profitable, attractive image of it. The 1990s' adverts in *Modna Bielizna*, presented a very limited view of what women could look like. The models in lingerie ads were young, tall, thin, and canonically beautiful, without any skin blemishes, cellulite, stretch marks, or body hair, with one exception where a company placed advertisements that showed a thin line of the model's pubic hair through see-through pants. Most lingerie models in adverts wore push-up bras and other shapewear, such as modeling pants and corsets, which were completely new products. Modeling silicone or cotton pads became a popular semi-product of underwear production alongside lace, strap buckles, and plastic hooks. The correcting and disciplining of the female body created the look of a flat stomach and full breasts while hiding any bodily "imperfections".

Figure 1. **Three pictures of advertisement from one of the lingerie companies based in Głowno -** Source: *Modna Bielizna* 1996-1999.

Figure 2. **Two pictures of advertisement from one of the lingerie companies based in Głowno -** Source: *Modna Bielizna* 1996-1999.

3. Women in underwear: Advertisement in postsocialism

The advertisements of Głowno companies in *Modna Bielizna* were part of wider changes of the visual culture in postsocialist states in the 1990s. With the fall of the socialist states and the introduction of capitalism, the advertisement sector in Poland grew exponentially, thanks in part to the fact that the practices surrounding advertising went largely unregulated. As the anthropologist Łukasz Zaremba argues, the growth of the advertisement sector was something that was considered progressive and beneficial to society (Zaremba 2018). For many observers, it seemed to prove that capitalism had a place in Poland just like in Western Europe. The growth of the advertising sector resulted in a rise in the number of images of women in lingerie in the public sphere. In the 1990s, Polish companies bought into the Western idea that images of sexualized women in underwear could help increase the public's desire to consume. In Poland, as elsewhere, sexualized images were and continue to be omnipresent in advertisement of various goods including but not limited to food and drinks, construction materials (in Poland, somehow, especially roof tiles), books and newspapers, clothing, and fishing and hunting products.

While the age-old adage that "sex sells" had found new grounds in postsocialist states, feminist scholars question the claim that there was no sexual images in the socialist states and argue that sexual culture also became more liberated in Eastern Europe before 1989, albeit on a different trajectory from Western Europe (Ghodsee 2018; Kościańska 2021; Lišková 2018; McLellan 2011). Historians looking at postsocialist erotic images often use 1989 as the starting date of their research thereby reproducing the idea that under socialism, and without the free market, erotic images were not readily available. As historian Anna Dobrowolska has shown, in the 1980s especially, sexualized images were also present in many forms, and not only through the consumption of Western European or American images in the black market (Dobrowolska 2022). Dobrowolska locates and analyses sexual images including the yearly popular erotic art exhibition "Venus", magazines for men, the backpages of the popular newspapers, and the first sexualized advertisements that promoted a wide range of socialist products in the form of calendars, other small objects, and images printed in the press.

While it is not in the scope of this article to debate the question of the sexual revolution in the socialist states nor the changes between sexual culture caused by 1989 transition, I argue for two substantial differences. First that after 1989, sexual images were more widespread in the public sphere and present in a range of forms, from sexualized images of women in ads to soft porn on TV to hardcore porn available in magazines. The anthropologist Iwona Kurz uses the term "over-and-in-visible"

[nad-nie-widoczne] to describe how sexualized pictures of women in advertisements became so profoundly present in the Polish public sphere during the 1990s that they became transparent (Kurz 2017). The second big difference, and more significant for this article, is that while socialist erotic images almost always portrayed naked women, in the 1990s women in sexualized images were dressed in lingerie. While the sexualization of advertisement can be observed over time as geographic location, the 1990s became well-known for those mechanisms in the Western Europe and the US. Most famously, it was used in the so called "bra wars" between rivaling brands that patented the push-up bra technology "Wonderbra". While first push-up bra was produced and licensed in Canada in the 1950, bras with additional padding gained popularity in the UK and US during the early 1990s and became one of the defining trends of the decade.

The sexualized advertisement in post 1989 Poland became so widespread that it caused controversy. In the late 1990s, councilmen of Warsaw discussed a ban for the use of women in underwear in public, also in advertisement. This led to an unrest among the underwear producers, who would be unable to advertise their products on models. In 1999, the PR agency TBWA Warszawa started a billboard campaign aiming at criticizing the ban. The campaign consisted of three images, each presenting women wearing underwear on their heads and faces. A picture of a woman with a lace bra around her eyes was accompanied by a tag line: "They look better on the breasts. Support legitimate nudity in ads" ("*Lepiej na pupie*" 1999) (**Figure 3**). Two other ads presented women with an underwear ("They look better on the bottom") and with tights ("They look better on the legs") on their faces. The association of underwear producers based in Łódź centered around "Modna Bielizna" magazine reported that it shows the absurdity of the ban and the freedom of media (**Figure 4**).

The discussion about censorship was part of the bigger debate about the dangers of capitalism centered around indecent images in public spaces. Since 1996, political parties and Catholic organizations protested the ready availability of pornographic images and called for the criminalization of all types of pornography, even where the actors were consenting adults. They argued that pornography was dangerous for adults, married couples, and children. As Ewa Strusińska shows, the media reported on both sides of the argument by printing stories questioning the role of pornography in Western Europe (Stusińska 2021). The question of the legality of pornography was eventually discussed in 1998 in the parliament, and a bill that made any form of pornography illegal was voted for by the majority of MPs. This, however, was vetoed in 2000 by President Aleksander Kwaśniewski, who argued that it made illegal porn harder to control. After four years of public debates, pornography was ruled legal, but it had already become highly controversial.

Figure 3. “They look better on the bottom”
Source: *Kampanie Społeczne* (blog), 20 July 1999.

Figure 4. Campaign “They look better on the breasts”
Source: *Kampanie Społeczne* (blog), 20 July 1999.

4. The *Electoral Gazette* [Gazeta Wyborcza]: Mainstem narratives about sexualities in transition

In 1996, a press report on the bra industry “Balconette on the Polish market” [Bardotka na Polenmarket”] by Michał Matys and Włodzimierz Nowak was published in the liberal newspaper *The Electoral Gazette* [Gazeta Wyborcza] –Poland’s biggest national daily– as part of a series of reports on early capitalistic practices in the country (Matys and Nowak 1996). The article, one of the only contemporary press reports on early capitalistic practices to focus specifically upon the bra industry, is a valuable source for understanding how the liberal media narrated the economic and social changes of the 1990s. In the report, Matys and Nowak take the readers first to the production center of Głowno, which they call the “Polish capital of bras” [Polska stolica biustonoszy], before going to the bazaars where the bras were sold to show how Poland became enmeshed in global capitalistic forces. The way they use gender, sexuality, age, and nationality as topics in the article is as much a description, as a symptom of the cultural changes of the 1990s.

In their article, Matys and Nowak highlighted changing trends in bra production and consumption by introducing two female protagonists, younger Agata from Głowno, and older Mrs. Teresa from Łęknica. Agata used to be a teacher in a local school, now she runs a small underwear workshop with her family and is responsible for selling the products at the biggest bazaar in the region, in Tuszyn. Agata is direct in talking about her products. At one point, she explains that winter is not a good season for selling bras: "A bra for winter can be any kind. A woman hides it under a sweater. In spring she buys a new one. Such, that she can show it under a see-through blouse". She also explains that she was thinking of specializing in underwear which could be sold in the sex shops that were beginning to open. The authors explain in detail that she was thinking of producing "a see-through bra made of lace alone and panties with a string between the buttocks. She is also considering a satin bodysuit, meaning a bra and panties in one piece". A juxtaposition to Agata is Mrs. Teresa, tradeswomen from Łęknica, who is shy and does not want to talk about sexuality. When asked if she wears the bras, she is selling herself, she replies: "They're not for walking, but for undressing", and then "She blushes slightly". In their report, Matys and Nowak present the bra as being for the heterosexual sexual encounter, designed to be seen and admired by men. Although the report was based on their research into a field dominated by female workers and consumers, Matys and Nowak's description of sexual culture devoted a large focus to the role of men's expectations and pleasure. In a tone that scandalizes the everyday experiences of the 1990s, the two journalists make an argument that for younger women sexuality had become less of a taboo.

Matys and Nowak describe the bras mode in Głowno and sold in Tuszyn and Warsaw by focusing on who buys what at the bazaars. Their description suggests that trends and preferences for bras were determined by nationality. For domestic Polish clients, they describe a "tulip model", with the cup's edges finished with serrations designed to look like tulips, as the most fitting option. Agata from Głowno is quoted as describing a tulip bra as "A seemingly normal bra, but kind of sexy. Neither too modest, nor too skimpy. Just right for a Polish woman". Agata's products are contrasted with the German client who asked for an unusual bra: "The trader demanded that such a bra with padding must be trimmed with artificial teddy bears and fringes. He claimed that this was what German women liked". The other nationality mentioned in the article are Russians, the biggest national group of clients in Poland who prefer "simple, unsophisticated bras". Russians are not presented as one group though but divided into rich clients who buy Polish products with English nametags and sell them on as Italian goods or poor clients who take the cheapest available products and can be easily scammed. The authors emphasized sexuality culture as something that is being changed during the 1990, but they also place it in a context of wider geopolitical

perspective. Their narrative is that Poland was very different from the progressive capitalistic Western Europe which had a sexual revolution during the 1960s that had brought about widespread pre-marital sex, sex work, accessible pornography, gay liberation movements, and youth nightlife clubs and festivals (Keinz 2011). Western Germany was seen to be at the epicenter of the sexual revolution with the first gay bars, strip clubs, and sex shops, not present in socialist states (Heineman 2011).

Matys and Nowak sexualized reading of early capitalistic trading is added to when they write about the music played in bazaars. One of the most popular songs at the time, "Dotted panties" [Majteczki w kropeczki] by Bayer Full from 1995, with the chorus "Dotted panties, oh ho, ho, ho, little bra, little button, oh ho, ho, ho" [Majteczki w kropeczki, o ho, ho, ho, staniczek, guziczek, o ho, ho, ho], was playing when they were taking the bus from Łęknica to Warszawa. It is one of the classic examples of Disco Polo, a Polish variant of international disco music with simple melodies and eroticized lyrics created in the late 1980s. It gained popularity as it was played on marketplaces, where the Disco Polo hits became the soundtrack to shopping. Known initially as "sidewalk music" or "backyard music", it was played on marketplaces by vendors selling cassettes on the streets (Borys 2019). It was a working-class phenomenon, heavily judged by the intelligentsia for its simplicity and lack of nuance when discussing sexuality.

The article "Balconette on the Polish market" [Bardotka na Polenmarket] represents a wider phenomenon of ways of narrating 1989 in Poland in mainstream press, particularly in *The Electoral Gazette* [Gazeta Wyborcza], which was established based on the Round Table agreements as the press organ of the Solidarity Civic Committee during the election campaign before the 1989 parliamentary elections. Since the beginning until today, its editor in chief is the Solidarność politician turned journalist Adam Michnik. The cooperation with the union was broken already in 1990 and Wyborcza continued as an independent newspaper, with clear support of the liberal anti-communist opposition bloc. Its stance towards the economic transition was ambivalent, with many examples of both supporting and criticizing the neoliberal turn in public policies. Wyborcza's reportage department published extensively on the topic of capitalism where it portrayed 1990s Poland as chaotic, unfair, and absurd, with a clear critique of early capitalism as a time of growing inequalities and changing class stratification (Lipiński and Matys 2018). Written in a scandalous style, many articles published by the newspaper exoticized the changing reality and underlined the abrupt discontinuity between pre- and post-1989 Poland.

Conclusion

During the 1990s, underwear's new styles, new meaning, new function, and new place in the public sphere were under negotiation. In the 1990s, the market was a sphere in which different objects representing the old and the new systems competed. In postsocialist Poland, the bra market became more integrated into global capitalism which resulted in stricter hierarchies of bras, ranging from postsocialist models, through cheap bazaar ones, to expensive big local and international brands. Such hierarchies created in the 1990s were largely based on the geopolitical economic reality experienced by local actors. The end of the century until the early 2000s was a unique historical moment when the Central European clothing sector was so competitive it dominated the European market, but it did not last long. Already in the early 2000s, Middle Eastern countries and Asian producers were beginning to dominate the sector due to changing border regimes that caused the costs of production in Poland and other postsocialist countries to rise. Small producers began to be pushed out of the underwear market as their production costs became too high relative to the bigger specialized companies with major capital and bigger investments.

Was the sexualization of advertisement of underwear in postsocialist Poland, also by small business owners from Głowno, just a process of imitating the West? Paradoxically, five years after the presidential veto on censoring all pornographic images, one of the biggest underwear transnational companies decided for self-censoring their ads in response to an event connected to Catholic culture. At the end of March 2005, a PR specialist at Triumph International, a Swiss-German underwear company, announced the start of their big advertisement campaign. Models from the new 'Flower Curves' line were to be presented on large posters with dimensions reaching over a thousand metres squared. The largest of the billboards was planned to be unveiled on a seventeen-floor high building in the centre of the post-industrial city of Katowice. The company intended to extend the campaign to all major cities in Poland: Kraków, Poznań, Szczecin, Gdańsk, Wrocław, Łódź. On Monday 4th April, the day after the campaign was officially launched in Katowice, it was suddenly suspended. The company issued a statement: "I would like to inform you that in connection with the tragic event of the death of the Pope, John Paul II, Triumph International has suspended the media campaign that has already begun" ("Triumph International - Wiosenna Kolekcja w Wielkim Formacie" 2005). The change of plans was not entirely unexpected. The nation's reverence for John Paul II had previously resulted in the sanitization of public space in Poland when in 2002, during his last pilgrimage to his home country, outdoor media campaigns were discussing censoring so as not to present so-called indecent images in large scale format.

When business owners in Głowno supported the sexualization of images in public spaces through their advertisement, it was a way of positioning themselves as modern and progressive. They responded to the bigger power relations implicated in mainstream media and international brands. Competing discourses developed around sex during the 1990s were presented: private or public, reproductive or pleasurable, monogamous or not. Women, their bodies, and their sexuality, as seen through the masculine gaze, were at the center of such debates. In the late 1990s, at the heart of the fight about female sexuality laid the issue of censoring, what to show and what not to. In the postsocialist era, both progressive and conservative sides drew upon anti-communist beliefs to justify their stance. The legacies of socialism had to be forgotten and replaced. In terms of sexuality and women's rights, even the 1990s feminist movement was novel, detached from local history, despite sharing goals of free accessible abortion, equality in employment, household, education, and politics with the socialist women's movement (Grabowska 2018). Matys and Nowak's article paints a portrait of a world populated by women who straddled the socialist and postsocialist divide. Older women, like Mrs. Teresa, did not wear lacy bras and blushed when talking about them, even though they sold them every day. Young women, like Agata, were thinking of starting a business producing underwear for sex shops. This comparison suggests that postsocialist Poland is progressing, liberalizing, and becoming more like the West. The socialist women were unfit for the contemporary world.

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