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The Effect of Hegemonic Masculinity in the Proportion of Women in Post-Communist Parliaments: A Case Study of Estonia and Poland

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**The Effect of Hegemonic Masculinity in the Proportion of Women in Post-Communist
Parliaments: A Case Study of Estonia and Poland**

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**Thesis Submitted
to the Eberly College of Arts and Sciences
at West Virginia University**

**in partial fulfillment for the degree of
Master of Arts in
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national parliaments**

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ABSTRACT

The Effect of Hegemonic Masculinity in the Proportion of Women in Post-Communist Parliaments: A Case Study of Estonia and Poland

Anne Moreland

The underrepresentation of women in national parliaments is a phenomenon that plagues much of the world, with the Baltic Sea Region being no exception. Two countries, Estonia and Poland, are chosen for comparative analysis in this paper, as they possess different cultures and histories, but have similar proportion of female representation at the national level. The comparison provides insight into the situation women face in politics in two post-communist states in Central and Eastern Europe. This paper will examine the trends in the proportion of female representatives in Poland and Estonia's national parliaments in the transition from communism to democracy and post-transition periods. The work seeks to conceptualize why women in Poland and Estonia continue to be grossly underrepresented in the upper echelons of power by employing R.W. Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity explicates the cultural force that both dominates and subordinates femininity as well as other masculinities, thus resulting in low proportions of women in the national parliaments of the new countries examined. Three time periods are developed for a fuller analysis of changes in the number of women seated in the upper echelons of power: the communist period, the transition period, 1989-2004, and the post-transition period, 2004-2012. The work notes the changes in gender equality policies in each country after accession to the European Union in 2004 and explores the possibilities of greater gender equality in each state.

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INTRODUCTION

Though women make up over half of the world's population, they only make-up 21 percent of the world's parliamentarians.¹ This reality is no different in the post-communist states of Europe. The noticeable low proportion of women in national parliaments continues to be prevalent in the post-communist states, despite the past socialist ideology of gender equality and transition to democracy. The number of women in a national parliament of a country can be used as a barometer of gender equality, namely the qualitative amount of equality or inequality witnessed in a country's power structure. By looking at the percentage of women in a national parliament throughout different periods of transition, one can see correlations form between the number of women in a parliament and the amount of gender equality legislation that is created.

Although the women at the top are an elite, they are elected representatives, and the trends among women engaged in politics make for an interesting study in the overall climate for gender equality in a country. Additionally, the percentage of women in national politics in any given country can show a shift in gender norms and gender roles, which can represent a change in a society overall. In examining such a microcosm as women's representation at a national level in a society, one is able to look at the bigger picture of gender equality with more clarity and greater insight. The focus on female parliamentarians at the national level is not intended to exclude the importance of women at a regional and local level, and the topic is certainly in need of further research, but extends beyond the scope and aim of this work.

With this, a more specific examination of the post-communist experiences of two countries, Estonia and Poland, could yield interesting insights into the phenomenon of low

¹ Inter-Parliamentary Union, last modified 2013, <http://www.ipu.org>

numbers of women in the national parliament. The countries differ drastically in size, with Estonia having almost 1.3 million inhabitants and Poland possessing over 38 million, but both of their parliaments contain relatively small percentage of women of around 20 percent. Both countries experienced a severe drop in female representatives at the time of transition in the early 1990s and both continued to have low numbers of women present in the national parliaments and governments. As is demonstrated in both case studies and expanded on in the thesis, the more women in parliament and a more international presence has shown an increase in public discourse on gender equality and an increase in policies that promote gender equality in all sectors of society.

Estonia, as a former part of the Soviet Union, provides an example of a small country that has made great strides in its transformation from a Soviet republic to one of the luminary Baltic States. The country is commonly cited as one of Europe's least religious countries, yet possesses traditional views on gender in its society, with women being assigned to the domestic sphere and men holding responsibility for the public sphere. The country also possesses the greatest pay gap among men and women in the European Union, with women making only 77 percent compared to the wages and salaries of their male counterparts.² Estonia also looks to its Nordic neighbors in many ways, from diplomacy to culture, but has not yet adopted the rigorous gender quotas and policies that the Nordic states have enforced in their countries. Although Estonia is a small country in the north-east of Europe, with its Soviet past and traditional cultural values, it provides a very interesting and complicated backdrop for analysis of trends among female parliamentarians.

² RT, "Women in Estonia Suffer From EU's Worst Gender Pay Gap," last modified July 26, 2010, <http://rt.com/news/estonia-gender-pay-gap/>

Poland, on the other hand, experienced domestic communist rule, under the influence of the Soviets, and has also made great progress to integrate with its near Western neighbors, particularly Germany. Poland can be seen as the stronghold of Catholicism in Europe, citing almost 90 percent of its population as Roman Catholics and 75 percent of its inhabitants actually practicing the religion.³ The traditional gender roles associated with Catholicism are accepted throughout the majority of Polish society. Poland has been at the center of the abortion debate for its conservative views on the procedure, leaving some to criticize Poland as hostile to women's concerns. Poland, after leaving behind communism, has emphasized its past traditions, leaving women in a difficult position in an increasingly modern society. As the largest post-communist state of the former Soviet bloc, Poland provides an interesting contrast to Estonia in an attempt to understand the position of women in the respective societies.

Despite possessing different cultures, languages, values, and histories, the two countries have experienced the same outcome in regards to the proportion of female representatives in the national representative bodies. The two countries provide a fruitful comparison in regards to the post-communist experience, the presence of a fervent nationalism, and the treatment of gender equality. Both Estonia and Poland experienced Soviet rule, have successfully transitioned to democracy and capitalism, and have joined the European Union, thus providing a solid foundation for comparison.

This thesis explores further explanations for low numbers of women in national parliaments than what is contained in the existing literature by examining the social foundations of gender and how the concept of hegemonic masculinity, theorized in R.W. Connell's 1987 seminal work, *Gender and Power*, can help explain why women continue to be grossly underrepresented in national bodies. The thesis adds to a vast array of literature that explores the

³ CIA Factbook, Poland

conditions and challenges faced by women during the democratic transition in Central and Eastern Europe. The period after and around 1999 leaves much to be desired in the literature on women in the post-communist states, notably Poland and Estonia. Though certain years and the corresponding elections have been explored, a comparison of two more recent members to the European Union and the effects of the gender equality policies and directives is warranted. Additionally the examination of the different types of females that rise to the leadership position within Estonian and Polish politics is warranted by delving into the profiles of a few female parliamentarians from each case study.

Three periods will be examined in each case study: the communist past, from the end of the Stalinist period, the transition to democracy, which, in this work, will span from 1989 to 2004, and the post-transition period, 2004-2012. The three periods develop a fuller picture of the percentage of women in national parliaments and the relation to the development of gender equality policies and overall public awareness. The period of the communist past is examined to provide background in order to better understand the situation women faced and their role in communist power structures in each case study. The period spanning from 1989-2004 is explored as the time before both states became full members of both NATO and the European Union, thus affecting their policies of gender equality. The period 1989-2004 is considered in this thesis as the transition period, from communist dictatorship to multiparty political systems and from centrally planned economies to free market economies. Additionally, during the period of 1989-2004 each country held at least four democratic elections for the parliament. Finally, the period from 2004 to the present period, described here as post-transition, shows the effects of accession to international bodies on the proportion of female representation in the national parliaments of Estonia and Poland.

The overall research question of this work is why are women, even after regime change and the development of democracy, significantly underrepresented in national parliaments and governments in the post-communists states? Furthermore, this study seeks to answer what explanations could be put forth to explore the inherent gender inequality in the upper echelons of power in these states? Additionally, have Estonia and Poland evolved in their gender equality policies from above, through legislation, and if so, what were the catalysts? The hypothesis of this thesis is that women in the cases of Estonia and Poland have been continuously unequal in representative bodies because the hegemonic masculinity and the gender norms of their cultures prevent equilibrium between the sexes of being established in the decision-making institutions of the state. Moreover, the concept of hegemonic masculinity, explored later in this work, describes a malleable rather than a static phenomenon, allowing for change in a society's view of gender, masculinity, and femininity and thus for more female representatives, as was witnessed throughout the 1990s and 2000s in both case studies.

The research method of this study consists of secondary source analysis, the use and analysis of data from surveys conducted through different time periods in each country (including Inglehart's World Values Survey), and analysis of governmental legislation on gender equality. Additionally, for more contemporary information and data, a survey was sent out to female parliamentarians electronically in the language of the respective country, gauging the views and beliefs of current female parliamentarians in regards to contemporary issues that face women in each country.

The work will begin with a review of the relevant literature that has been written on the topic of female representation in post-communist parliaments. The literature review explores two main themes found within the literature, namely the challenges faced by women in the transition

period and the divide between the East and West on the place of feminism in the post-communist societies. From there, the work will explore the theoretical models and methodological approaches used in the thesis. R.W. Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity will be explored, along with later academic discourse on the concept. The theoretical section employs the use of secondary literature that explores the notions of masculinity and femininity in a society, and how these concepts prevent women from gaining equality on all levels, and thus can be seen as a contributor to lower numbers of women in national parliaments in Estonia and Poland. The first case study, Estonia, will then be examined following the time periods set out above. The fluctuations of women in the *Riigikogu* will be analyzed in an attempt to show that the hegemonic masculinity present in Estonian society has prevented women from occupying more seats in the parliament. The second case study, Poland, will be examined in a parallel way with similar purposes. From the case studies, a comparative analysis will be developed in showing the presence and the effects of a hegemonic masculinity in each country in regards to female representatives in the national parliaments and the overall climate for increased gender equality in each country. Finally, some concluding remarks with recommendations for future study are developed.

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The underlying gender relations and the prevalence of hegemonic masculinity in the cultures of the post-communist states are acknowledged in the academic work and historiography that has been written on the transition and post-communist situations of Central and Eastern Europe. The exploration of women's challenges during the periods has been covered quite well by a number of authors, most of whom are women. The literature on the transition and the post-transition era is essential in understanding the situation that women faced in each of the respective time periods before an examination of the specific cases of Estonia and Poland can be explored. Two prevailing themes can be dissected from the literature, one that focuses on the challenges women faced after the transition and the emphasized divide between the East and the West in regards to the place of feminism in the post-communist states.

However, before the two themes of the literature can be expanded, a look at the Soviet and communist past and the common experiences of the women in the societies of Poland and Estonia much be briefly examined in order to contextualize the transition and post-transition literature. An exploration into the role of women in Soviet ideology is necessary to understand the position women faced during communism as well as at the transition, and the contradictory ideology they hoped to rid themselves of in the new government and society.

Soviet ideology encouraged women to participate not only in the workforce, but also in the political realm. The 1917 Russian Revolution saw the takeover of power by Lenin and the Bolsheviks and a complete reworking of Russian society based on the egalitarian communist

ideology. The Bolsheviks sought to create a communist utopia, looking for the participation of all citizens in society, including previously marginalized women. Lenin emphasized the need for the equality of women in Soviet society, noting, “In capitalist society the women’s position is marked by such inequality that her participation in politics is only an insignificant fraction of man’s participation.”⁴ Lenin attempted to improve the lot of women, theoretically, by contrasting the ideal Soviet society with the detested and unequal capitalist society of the West. Wendy Goldman highlights, “Capitalism, according to the Bolsheviks, would never be able to provide a systematic solution to the double burden women shouldered.”⁵ Despite the Bolsheviks’ hope for equality among all citizens, women continued to face the double burden of being caretakers of the domestic realm and active participants in the workforce in Soviet society, alongside their female counterparts living in capitalist societies. Barbara Einhorn points out the Marxist argument, stating, “The origin of patriarchal relations of domination and subordination was capitalism, therefore—so went the reasoning---the elimination of this root cause would automatically preclude gender inequalities in personal relations.”⁶ By eliminating capitalism, as Marxism implied, gender inequality would cease to allow for the cultivation of an equal society. This, of course, proved to be idealistic and unreflective of the reality.

Unfortunately for Soviet women, the reforms of the Bolsheviks towards the ‘woman question’ were lumped together with overall social reforms, rather than being given special attention.⁷ However, the Bolsheviks’ hope for a “socialization of household labor,” which would

⁴ Lenin quoted in Gail Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society: Equality, Development, and Social Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 203.

⁵ Wendy Goldman, *Women, the State, and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917-1936*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 3.

⁶ Barbara Einhorn, *Cinderella Goes to the Market: Citizenship, Gender, and Women’s Movements in East Central Europe* (New York: Verso, 1993), 19

⁷ Anastasia Posadskaya, “A Feminist Critique of Policy, Legislation and Social Consciousness in Post-socialist Russia,” in *Women in Russia: A New Era of Russian Feminism*, ed. Anastasia Posadskaya (New York: Verso, 1994), 166.

eliminate the domestic role of the woman, was never achieved, leaving women in charge of the realm of domesticity.⁸ Furthermore, although the Communist Party continued to include women in their social reforms, the implementation of Stalin's Constitution in 1936 proclaimed women as equal in practice, thus closing for discussion the question of women's equality and role in the workplace.⁹ Even though communist ideology sought to improve the lives of women by making them equal to their male comrades, that equality was symbolic rather than literal, leaving women to be further marginalized within society.

Gail Lapidus provided an eloquent look into the lives of women in her 1978 aptly titled work, *Women in Soviet Society*, by examining various aspects of life, previously overlooked, of the Soviet woman as well as the historical events that led to the double burden of women under a seemingly egalitarian system. The equality of men and women in the public and private realms, as foreseen by Lenin, led to the gradual inclusion of women into the political realm during the 1920s and 1930s in Russia. As Lapidus notes, "Full political participation for women depended on the political democratization that would accompany the transformation of economic relationships."¹⁰ Theoretically as more women were included into the industrial workforce in the Soviet Union, the greater the occurrence of political participation in elections and party life, and the closer they came to reaching the ideal equilibrium with their male comrades. This, of course, did not occur the way the Soviets envisioned, but rather, women continued to face a double burden despite the public discourse of perceived gender equality.

The landscape of Europe after World War II saw the acquisition of numerous territories by the Soviet Union, including Estonia. Estonia became one of the three Baltic republics to be acquired by the Red Army military success and Stalin's diplomatic achievements at the end of

⁸ Goldman, 6.

⁹ Posadskaya, 167.

¹⁰ Lapidus, 202-203.

the war. Stalin was also able to exert his influence over much of Central Europe, which included Poland. The communist ideology of gender equality extended to the Soviet bloc, but the domination of the Soviet Union was not greeted with enthusiasm in the majority of the countries. However, despite the gender quotas that called for a certain amount of representation in the committees and platitudes to the ideology of equality, women remained marginalized and subordinated by men. Therefore, when Estonia became a Soviet republic in 1940 and Poland became a restored state under the influence of Soviet style communism in 1945, the women of those states, though they were indoctrinated with the idea of gender equality, experienced the intensification of the double burden and rejection from any real equal political representation in national representative bodies and party central committees. These trends continued until the fall of the USSR for Estonia in 1991 and the end of communist rule in Poland in 1989.

1.1 Challenges of the Transition

In addition to the loss of social benefits and the increase in economic burdens, women lost a significant portion of their parliamentary seats after the elimination of the gender quotas guaranteed under communism. Women's representation in national parliaments at the time of transition fell from an average of about 30 percent in the latter years of communism to less than 10 percent, and as Richard Matland and Kathleen Montgomery highlight, some countries had below 5 percent of women in their national parliaments after the fall of communism.¹¹ Matland and Montgomery note further, "More than a decade after founding democratic elections in the

¹¹ Richard E Matland and Kathleen A. Montgomery, eds. *Women's Access to Political Power in Post-Communist Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1.

region, the mean level of female representation, at around 12 percent, remained slightly below the world average (14 percent) and well below the Western European mean (25 percent).”¹² The significant drop in women’s presence in parliaments as well as the unequal hardship faced by women during the transition was noted and examined by many scholars, leaving a vast literature on the topic.

A range of trying changes affecting women in the societies in transition was witnessed during the shaky regime change from communist to democratic governance in the early 1990s. The appearance of a free market economy brought about a drastic rise in unemployment, a phenomenon that had been virtually unknown in communist times. Women were particularly affected, comprising 70 percent of the unemployed throughout the 1990s.¹³ Continued high rates of domestic violence and economic discrimination prevented greater gender equality in newly democratic societies, and these trends were reinforced by the resurgence of traditional cultural norms and mores.¹⁴

Along with these trends, the double burden of women in society of being expected to provide for the family both domestically and economically prevented the growth of the political activism that would help to persuade the general public of the need for reform in the realm of women’s issues. “This comparison between past and present within East Central European countries reveals an absolute drop in female representation. On average, women held about one third of the seats in state socialist parliaments. By contrast they account for less than one in ten parliamentarians in most of the democratically elected parliaments,” according to a study of the

¹² Ibid, 1.

¹³ Robert G. Moser, *Unexpected Outcomes: Electoral Systems, Political Parties, and Representation in Russia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001), 57.

¹⁴ For a more detailed description of the problem of violence against women and economic discrimination in Post-communist Europe, see Janet Elise Johnson, *Gender Violence in Russia: the Politics of Feminist Intervention* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009) and Barbara Einhorn, *Cinderella Goes to the Market: Citizenship, Gender, and Women’s Movements in East Central Europe* (New York: Verso, 1993).

early 1990s.¹⁵ The arrival of capitalism, like communism, required women to be responsible for contributing to the household income as well as taking care of domestic responsibilities, hence the continuation of the double burden. The consolidation of the double burden under communism left a bitter taste in many women's mouths in regards to feminism and women's liberation, promoted more in communist propaganda than in practice. The issues facing women under communism continued to plague the paternalistic societies with the arrival of democracy, leaving women behind in governmental affairs and preventing the establishment of greater gender equality as a whole.

Facing economic hardship, experiencing discrimination in all facets of society, and losing many social welfare services that had been provided by the Soviet or communist government in many cases, women were in an undesirable situation throughout the post-communist sphere at the time of transition. Furthermore, the revamping of nationalist fervor in many countries led to the reappearance of traditional gender roles, although they arguably never disappeared but were disguised under communist ideology.¹⁶ Tanya Renne edited a collection of essays devoted to examining the "Sisterhood of Europe," and an extensive quotation from her introduction provides great insight into the discourse on the resurgence of nationalism, and subsequently, the subordination of women at the time of transition:

National customs and traditions were embraced with a rediscovered enthusiasm, and religion began to occupy a primary place in many people's lives. With these new pleasures and responsibilities, most countries harkened back to former "free" periods, periods before World War II, Nazi occupation, and Soviet "liberation." New conservative politicians sought to bring their countries back to "true," untainted-by-communism identities.¹⁷

¹⁵ Einhorn, 151.

¹⁶ Ibid, 150.

¹⁷ Tanya Renne, ed. *Ana's Land: Sisterhood in Eastern Europe* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997), 1.

These “untainted-by-communism identities” required a reversion to the past, in which traditional gender roles were promoted and enforced through cultural norms and values. The historiography of the situation on women during the transition period continuously points to the reversion to past values and the importance of nationalism. These past values further subordinated and burdened women in those societies in transition, placing more responsibility on women to remain in the realm of domesticity while the economic situation required their presence in the labor force. One place women were not responsible for with the revival of nationalism was the realm of politics and government, leaving this a traditionally male-dominated arena.

Barbara Einhorn, in her much cited *Cinderella goes to the Market*, written in 1993, argues that “the ambiguities in the situation of women both “before and after”: namely, that, despite clear improvements in the civil and political rights associated with democratic citizenship, in the short run at least women in East Central Europe stand to lose economic, social welfare, and reproductive rights.”¹⁸ Einhorn recognized the inequality experienced by women both before and after the transition, pointing to the lack of hope that accompanied the democratic transition for the women of East-Central Europe. Despite gaining an open area for public discourse, namely civil society, women lost their social benefits, such as daycare, and many of their reproductive rights, as seen with the outcome of the abortion debate in Poland in the early 1990s. Einhorn correctly noted, “Moreover, a newly dominant discourse threatens to subordinate women’s citizenships rights in many cases to the goals of nationalist projects.”¹⁹ The reversion to nationalist practices and ideas not only attempted to erase all aspects of communism, including many of its social benefits, but it also further subordinated women in post-communist society.

¹⁸ Einhorn, 1.

¹⁹ Ibid, 1.

Einhorn noted, “the shift from opposition “anti-politics” to democratic “normalization”... is marked by a tendency to oust women.”²⁰ The tumultuous transition to democracy continuously marginalized and even subordinated women, rather than including women in the decision-making processes of regime change. Einhorn further explored explanations as to why women’s citizenship was marginalized during the democratization process in Eastern and Central Europe, providing a foundation for further research. Following Einhorn, the appearance of essay collections from numerous authors, such as these produced by Gal and Kligman, Jacquette and Wolchik, and Funk and Mueller, appeared in an attempt to examine women’s situations throughout the former Soviet bloc by providing comparative approaches.²¹

Perhaps the most unique work to come out on the discourse on women in transition is Jacquette and Wolchik’s comparison of Latin America and Eastern Europe, which provided a very interesting analysis of democratic transition in two very different environments. The common denominator for comparison of the two regions was that both transitions left a ‘legacy of fragility.’²² They argued that “...the abruptness of the transitions in Central and Eastern Europe highlighted the lack of past democratic experience in much of the region and the destabilizing potential of right-wing nationalism.”²³ Jacquette and Wolchik’s comparison, though seemingly unlikely, sought to demonstrate that the lack of democratic foundations and traditions

²⁰ Ibid, 148.

²¹ Examples of analyses of women in late Soviet society as well as women in post-Soviet and post-communist society can be found in: Mary Buckley, *Post-Soviet Women: from the Baltic to Central Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), Susan Gal and Gail Kligman, *Reproducing Gender: Politics, Publics, and Everyday Life after Socialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), Kathleen Kuehnast and Carol Nechemias, eds., *Post Soviet Women Encountering Transition: Nation Building, Economic Survival, and Civic Activism* (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2004), and Nanette Funk and Magda Mueller, eds., *Gender Politics and Post-Communism: Reflections from Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

²² Jane S. Jaquette and Sharon L. Wolchik, eds., *Women and Democracy: Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 3.

²³ Ibid, 3.

in many of the countries allowed for the rise of right-wing nationalism and the reemergence of values that had been embraced before the arrival of communism and authoritarian regimes.

Importantly, Jacquette and Wolchik noted, “The struggles for democracy have also been struggles for identity, and in both regions, post-transition identities were built in part on rejection of the modes and policies of the prior regimes.”²⁴ This point is important especially for the republics that were part of the USSR, such as Estonia. The transition period was not only a transition to democracy but also a transition for national identities and cultural values to be shifted away from Soviet norms and toward traditional values. Unfortunately, both sets of norms and values subordinated women and overlooked them in the processes of government.

1.2 East Vs. West

The fall of communism sent a chaotic wave of change across the former Soviet bloc, with previously communist nations adopting democratic institutions and a free-market economy. A discourse developed at the time of transition among Western and Eastern female academics and writers, debating the causes for the decline in the situation of women throughout Central and Eastern Europe as well as the potential role of Western-style feminism in the newly democratic nations. The discourse among the authors cited a reversion to traditional values after the fall of communism as the cause of a severe drop in the proportion of women in national parliaments and often focused on the dichotomy of “East vs. West” in terms of feminist thought. The authors, at times, developed in-fighting on the academic level over abstract ideas rather than providing

²⁴ Ibid, 4.

concrete aid in improving women's situations in the transition to democracy.²⁵ The differing views of women's role in society between Western players and post-communist women are one of the root causes of the failure in developing a solid women's movement throughout the post-communist bloc. Views of women as part of the collective group under socialism differ greatly from the views of women as individualist actors under capitalism. Different histories, cultures, and values are important explanations for why the Western feminist movement has not taken off successfully in Central and Eastern European countries. This discourse continued throughout the 1990s until the number of elections in the countries increased and the number of women in parliaments gradually rose, which generated new criteria for analysis rather than a simple explanation for why Western feminism was not vigorously adopted in the post-communist states.

In addition to examining the rise in nationalist sentiments that marginalized women further from participation in political institutions, the literature about the transition examined a seemingly inherent conflicting dichotomy of Eastern vs. Western women and the implementation of feminism in the newly democratic nations. The literature often suggests that with the adoption of Western feminism, women's issues would be acknowledged and solved through the democratic processes, though Western feminism had also recently faced its own idiosyncrasies and gray areas in the Western democracies. At the same time, however, the literature points to the lack of interest of Eastern European women in the concept of feminism. Einhorn wrote, "Unlike the West, where any gains in equality of opportunity or the elimination of discrimination on grounds of sex have been the outcome of prolonged political struggle from below, governments in state socialist countries were officially committed to a policy of women's

²⁵ A prime example of this can be seen with the academic bickering between Funk and Drakulic, over Funk's supposedly elitist and unrealistic claims and ideas for a collection of essays regarding women in Central and Eastern Europe. The dispute is noted in Nanette Funk and Magda Mueller, eds., *Gender Politics and Post-Communism: Reflections from Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

“emancipation,” to be achieved through legislation and social policy.”²⁶ Women in Eastern Europe did not have to struggle for their emancipation in the latter part of the 20th century, but received it through the state and its policies, according to Einhorn.

Einhorn continued by writing of an “allergy” to feminism in Central and Eastern Europe.²⁷ Additionally, Tanya Renne noted at the time of transition, “Although independent feminism is relatively new to Eastern Europe, it is clearly unwelcome; many in these changing nations see it as a threat.”²⁸ The reluctance of Eastern women to take in Western-style feminism continues to the present, with “feminism” or “feminist” having negative and foreign connotations. Laura Busheikin attempted to uncover certain myths about feminism, but her account was written at a time when cooperation was still hopeful.²⁹ However, the idea of importing Western-style feminism into Eastern Europe was seemingly hopeless, given the region’s past experiences and nationalist propaganda against the evils of feminism. The tension between the two camps in academia came to a battle of words and ideas between Nanette Funk and Slavenka Drakulic.³⁰ Drakulic, a journalist, pointed out that Funk, a Western academic, did not understand the situation of women in Eastern Europe, but instead insisted on the use of feminism to solve all of Eastern Europe’s woes. This discourse of East vs. West was only occurring at the level of academia or among NGOs, providing no discourse or basis for women who could potentially create a grassroots movement for women’s issues. The academic infighting over Western-style feminism seemingly overlooked the past experiences and histories of the women as well as men under communism, leaving Western feminists with few ideas that seemed attractive to the citizens of Central and Eastern Europe.

²⁶ Einhorn, 18.

²⁷ Ibid, 168.

²⁸ Renne, 2.

²⁹ Laura Busheikin, “Is Sisterhood Really Global?: Western Feminism in Eastern Europe,” in *Ana’s Land*, 12-21.

³⁰ Ibid, 14-15.

The seemingly radical Western feminism carried negative connotations among Central and Eastern European women, leaving many to deny that they were “feminist,” even if they had feminist leanings and beliefs.³¹ Although there were a few women, mainly scholars and activists, who took on the term “feminist,” the majority of women during the 1990s, sought change while adhering to traditional cultural norms and mores. Cultural feminism, as defined by Kristen Ghodsee, “often aims at meeting women’s special needs within the status quo.”³² Instead of embracing and working with the cultural feminism seen within the post-communist states, “Western feminists and their local counterparts have ignored the complex historical legacies of socialism versus what has been called “bourgeois feminism” in the East.”³³ The different histories of Western countries like the United States and the post-communist states, for example, led to conflicts in semantics within not only the women’s movement in different post-communist countries, but also on a global level as well. It is through these complex legacies and rejection of Western ideals that the successes and failures of women’s movements in post-socialist Europe lie, making the movements intriguing cases for analysis of the progress of women in societies undergoing dramatic change after the fall of communism.

Ghodsee goes on to refer to this Western feminism as a type of “cultural feminism,” the idea that women and men are essentially different and therefore, women should all unite into a common sisterhood, that Western NGOs have used as an ideology, implementing it into the views of local women’s NGOs.³⁴ Many radical feminists, a very small minority within Central and Eastern Europe, advocate for complete change and even erasure of gender roles, but

³¹ Explored further below, female politicians still deny being a ‘feminist’ despite their belief that equality is important among the genders.

³²Kristen Ghodsee, “Feminism-by-Design: Emerging Capitalism, Cultural Feminism, and Women’s Nongovernmental Organizations in Postsocialist Eastern Europe,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 29 (2004), 728.

³³ Ibid, 728.

³⁴ Ibid, 728.

Ghodsee states that cultural feminism in Eastern and Central Europe “looks to find solutions for how the worst offenses of patriarchy can be mitigated, while never challenging the social or economic relations within which patriarchy thrives.”³⁵ The cultural feminism that the Western NGOs are importing reinforces the view that women are in fact different from men and should be treated as such, rather than as equal partners in society. Although Western feminism views itself as promoting the stance of women within countries in transition, they are in fact, promoting the separation of women from men. The separation resulting from the ideology of Western feminism is doing very little to change the views of men and women in regards to a necessary change in gender relations to address persisting inequalities.

Additionally, the problematic use of “feminism” in post-communist society carries with it a weight of negative connotations evoking fantastical images of women who scorn men, rather than women who are simply seeking equality with their male counterparts. But it is through the cultivation of an increased number of women representatives in national parliaments, a successful and flourishing women’s movement, and the work of women’s groups in political, domestic, and economic realms that the term “feminism” will eventually lead to positive connotations among citizens, both male and female. This is not to say that the term “feminist,” with its façade of Western hegemony, must be adopted into the discourse on gender equality, but perhaps if the term is revisited for its content rather than its associations, a fuller understanding of the necessity of greater gender equality in a democratic state might be realized.

The academic debate in the 1990s on why Western-style feminism was not being accepted in Eastern Europe perhaps missed the bigger picture of why there was inequality with the transition to democracy in the first place. The relative absence of feminism and a large following of feminists cannot be viewed as the sole reason for the drastic decline in women’s

³⁵ Ibid, 728.

position in post-communist societies. Richard Matland and Kathleen Montgomery write, “Communism usurped the language of feminist emancipation, but in praxis women were marginalized across economic, political, and social spheres. As a result, women found themselves at a structural disadvantage vis-à-vis men in competitive elections; and feminism was thoroughly discredited as an ideology and basis for political action.”³⁶ The rejection of feminism was historically founded, yet the debate continued among western and eastern academics, leading to the muddling of possible solutions to the problems women faced.

It is from the foundation of the literature that has been written on women in the post-communist transition and through the application of the concept of hegemonic masculinity that the case studies of Estonia and Poland will be examined. The exploration into the experiences of women in politics in Estonia and Poland will begin with a brief look into the situation of women under communism in the specific countries, an examination of the trends of the election of women into the representative democratic institutions, and a look into the cultural values and norms that promote or hinder the election of women, almost a quarter of a century after the fall of communism.

³⁶ Matland and Montgomery, 6.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 The Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity

Many explanations have been put forth in an attempt to understand the steep decline in female representatives in post-communist governments in the first years of transition, as well as the continuation of gender inequality in political institutions of power in contemporary post-communist states. An additional inquiry into why women failed to gain equality in representation under communism is also warranted in order to understand the contemporary situation more fully. The failure of the communist system to fully liberate women, placing women in a double burden of housework and employment left many women at a severe disadvantage to their male counterparts at the beginning of the transition in the early 1990s. These factors are often cited as leaving women apathetic towards politics and preventing them from running for office or becoming representatives in their governments. This apathy, as the argument follows, leaves women out of the upper echelons of power. This is a simplification of complicated arguments and research on women in post-communist societies, but a look into the cultural foundations of the gender inequality through both the communist and post-communist eras in these societies could prove fruitful for further analysis.

Although those arguments certainly have shed insight into the experiences of women during communism and the post-communist transition, perhaps the low levels of participation in political institutions of women can be explained in a different way by examining how women

and men are viewed within each society, what stereotypes are present, and what forces are at work that have caused inherent gender inequality. An intriguing concept that employs and analyzes the representation of men and women in a given society emerged in the 1980s with R.W. Connell's work on sex role theory. In his work, Connell denied the singularity and static nature of the male sex role and explored the concept of hegemonic masculinity and its effects on the workings of gender and sex in a society.³⁷ Sex role theory focused solely on the dichotomy of male and female, and their respective roles in society, leaving no room for the malleable nature of social roles. More recent research has found that sex role theory also failed to recognize the "existence of a multiplicity of femininities and masculinities" and placed anything that did not fit neatly into the dichotomy of male and female, such as transsexual, into a third category of 'deviance' rather than seeking to expand the views on gender relations.³⁸

As Connell wrote in his 1987 seminal piece, *Gender and Power*, "The large-scale structures of gender relations are constituted by practices."³⁹ The larger structure of gender relations in the post-communist states can be seen in the continuous election of a large proportion of men to the national representative bodies, as well as the continual and consistent appointment of men to top government positions. The practice of continually electing men to positions of power keeps women from occupying these positions, but furthermore from becoming equal with men in the larger structure of gender relations. Looking at the state as a source of inequality, Connell argued that "the state both institutionalizes hegemonic masculinity and expends great energy in controlling it."⁴⁰ Therefore, by analyzing the lack of female

³⁷ R.W. Connell's 1987 study that greatly influenced the conceptualization and understanding of masculinities in modern society, which was, *Gender and power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987).

³⁸ Demtrakis Demetriou, "Connell's Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critique," *Theory and Society*, 20, 3 (June 2001) 339.

³⁹ Connell (1987), 17.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 128.

representatives in political institutions which possess state power, one can begin to understand the social structure of a society by looking at the more micro-level social structure of an institution, such as a national representative body. Through looking at the relations and interactions between the sexes, one can begin to understand the foundation for the inequality seen in the upper echelons of power. Therefore, in addition to examining why women are under-represented in political institutions in Poland and Estonia, this thesis seeks to understand how inequality between the sexes has persisted despite ideological and governmental changes and whether the future holds hope for greater equality.

Connell's ideas on masculinity and the male sex role emerged out of work associated with second wave feminism that attempted to understand the sources of patriarchy and gender inequality in modern society. Hegemonic masculinity allows for an interesting perspective on problems identified in feminist literature, including the continuation of patriarchy and gender inequality in the post-modern era. Connell was able to contrast much of his work with the ideas of the emerging feminist literature, providing a perspective that often went unnoticed in that literature, such as his notion of present and multiple masculinities and a subordinated femininity. Demetrakis Demetriou, adding to Connell, explains, "Patriarchy is therefore not a simple question of men dominating women, as some feminists have assumed, but it is a complex structure of gender relations in which the interrelation between different forms of masculinity and femininity plays a central role."⁴¹ Demetriou offered a critique of Connell, but also pointed to the importance of examining gender relations.

Connell complicates the idea of masculinity by noting, "Masculinity is not a fixed entity embedded in the body or personality traits of individuals. Masculinities are configurations of practice that are accomplished in social action and, therefore, can differ according to the gender

⁴¹ Ibid, 343.

relations in a particular social setting.”⁴² Masculinity is not static in the sense of a physical being or concrete traits, but it evolves over time, embracing different characteristics that it may deem threatening to its hegemonic status. By basing his argument on Gramsci’s concept of hegemony, Connell found many basic similarities in class and gender relations, pointing to intricate power relations between the groups that lead to domination and subordination.⁴³ However, in Connell’s terms, “Hegemony did not mean violence, although it could be supported by force; it meant ascendancy achieved through culture, institutions, and persuasion.”⁴⁴ Hegemonic masculinity, though the idea entails a version of a male that is violent and aggressive, is not violent in and of itself, but is peaceably incorporated into a society by its people’s practices. Furthermore, as Justin Charlebois explains, “The complementary and hierarchical relationship between masculinity and femininity implies domination through consent and not force (i.e., hegemony).”⁴⁵ Therefore, masculinity retains its hegemonic power within a culture through the acceptance and consent of a people, rather than by overt force or explicit propaganda.

Connell’s study of hegemonic masculinity then looked “to how masculinity constructs dominance and remains in control.”⁴⁶ The retained dominance of a singular masculinity is reinforced by the continued performance of cultural norms and values that allow for the hegemonic masculinity to keep all other masculinities, as well as women and femininities, subordinate and marginalized. Connell and Messerschmidt write:

⁴² R.W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,” *Gender and Society*, 19, 6 (Dec., 2005), 836.

⁴³ Demetriou, 345.

⁴⁴ Connell and Messerschmidt., 832.

⁴⁵ Justin Charlebois, *Gender and the Construction of Hegemonic and Oppositional Femininities* (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2011), 30.

⁴⁶ Ami Lynch, “Hegemonic Masculinity,” in Jodi O’Brien, ed. *Encyclopedia of Gender and Society* (Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publishers, 2009), 411-413. Additionally, Justin Charlebois writes, “Masculine embodied social actions include demonstrating authority, control, independence, competitive individualism, aggressiveness, the capacity for violence, and permissive heterosexuality. Since difference is the cornerstone of masculinity and femininity, embodied social actions associated with femininity include compliance, dependence on others—particularly men—cooperative ability, passivity, and conservative sexuality.”; Charlebois, 21-22.

Hegemonic masculinity was not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men might enact it. But it was certainly normative. It embodied the currently most honored way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men.⁴⁷

The characteristics of hegemonic masculinity, based on a Western ideal, characterizes the male as heterosexual, competitive, powerful, aggressive, economically successful, and stoic.⁴⁸ It is the ideal of 'masculine' and being a 'man' that is continuously reinforced through norms and practices that allow this ideal to retain its hegemony. Hegemonic masculinity is very public and portrayed continuously in the media, allowing it to appear as if all men should possess the emphasized characteristics, when in reality the majority of men do not.⁴⁹ The masculine characteristics, therefore, often occupy the public realm in society, the realm that possesses the majority of overall power. The normative power of hegemonic masculinity allows gender inequality to continue to be institutionalized and continued throughout generations, as well as changes in regimes.

It was through the denial of the singularity of the male sex role found in sex role theory that Connell developed the idea of the existence of multiple masculinities in a culture, with one set of norms and ideas possessing hegemony over the other masculinities as well as enforcing the subordination of women and femininity. Furthermore, Demetriou examines two types of hegemonic masculinity; internal hegemonic masculinity and external hegemonic masculinity. Within the first type, hegemonic masculinity possesses control and power over the other, subordinate masculinities. A subordinate masculinity, in this sense, can be characterized as possessing distinctly feminine characteristics, like being nurturing or emotional, or can be seen in the characterization of homosexuality in males.

⁴⁷ Connell and Messerschmidt, 832.

⁴⁸ Encyclopedia of Gender and Society, "Hegemonic Masculinity," 412.

⁴⁹ Connell (1987), 185.

Demetriou expands on the internal hegemony by saying, “hegemonic masculinity is not a purely white or heterosexual configuration of practice but it is a hybrid bloc that unites practices from diverse masculinities in order to ensure the reproduction of patriarchy.”⁵⁰ For example, homosexuality does not conform to the inherent heterosexual nature of hegemonic masculinity, therefore, it is deemed undesirable and marginalized through cultural norms and discourse.⁵¹ Interestingly, the idea of masculinity in a culture can change from generation to generation, making the hegemony malleable. As Connell and Messerschmidt explain:

....hegemonic masculinity appropriates from other masculinities whatever appears to be pragmatically useful for continued domination. The result of this dialectic is not a unitary pattern of hegemonic masculinity but a ‘historic bloc’ involving a weaving together of multiple patterns, whose hybridity is the best possible strategy for external hegemony. A constant process of negotiation, translation, and reconfiguration occurs.⁵²

Despite the undesirable characteristics of the marginalized or subordinate masculinities, some characteristics that are deemed threatening are engulfed by the hegemonic masculinity to ensure the reproduction of patriarchy. Therefore, with the appearance of a new masculinity, whether it is through the appearance of a new ethnic group or a new social or political movement, the “exemplary masculinities will have to adapt accordingly” to retain the hegemonic position.⁵³

The subordination of women, or emphasized femininity, by men, or hegemonic masculinity, is the base for Demetriou’s idea of an external hegemonic masculinity. However, before examining Demetriou’s external hegemonic masculinity, Connell’s notion of emphasized femininity must first be considered. Describing the nature of emphasized femininity, Connell wrote, “It is the global subordination of women to men that provides an essential basis for differentiation. One form is defined around compliance with this subordination and is oriented to

⁵⁰ Demetriou, 337.

⁵¹ Demetriou writes of the example of homosexuality and its relation to hegemonic masculinity at length in his work.

⁵² Connell and Messerschmidt, 844.

⁵³ Demetriou, 342.

accommodating the interests and desires of men.”⁵⁴ The form that is compliant with the subordination and accommodating to the interests and desires of men is the ‘emphasized femininity.’ Though the emphasized femininity is subordinate to the hegemonic masculinity, Connell completes his view of gender relations by noting,

It does not imply that hegemonic masculinity means being particularly nasty to women. Women may feel as oppressed by non-hegemonic masculinities, may even find the hegemonic pattern more familiar and manageable. There is likely to be a kind of ‘fit’ between hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity.⁵⁵

Thus, masculinity and femininity, though not equal in a given society, provide a cap on the tension that is organically present in gender relations. Connell continues by noting in a later work:

...women are central in many of the processes constructing masculinities—as mothers; as schoolmates; as girlfriends, sexual partners, and wives; as workers in the gender division of labor; and so forth. The concept of emphasized femininity focuses on the compliance to patriarchy, and this is still highly relevant in contemporary mass culture.⁵⁶

It is this compliance to patriarchy by the virtue of emphasized femininity that prevents women from obtaining equality with their male counterparts and ending male hegemony in political institutions.

It is the emphasized femininity, lacking any sort of hegemony even within its own category, which is subordinated in Demetriou’s concept of external hegemonic masculinity rather than the other masculinities. This external form of hegemonic masculinity both subordinates the emphasized femininity as well as relies on its subordination and continual marginalization in order to exist. According to Demetriou, the concepts of masculinity and femininity are themselves built upon a foundation of domination and, therefore, produce gender

⁵⁴ Connell (1987), 183-184.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 185.

⁵⁶ Connell and Messerschmidt, 848.

inequality. It is this inequality that makes up gender relations and practices, and is subsequently and continuously reinforced throughout generations, despite the hybrid nature of masculinity. Accordingly, Demetriou succinctly writes, “Hybridization is thus a strategy for the reproduction of patriarchy.”⁵⁷ The ever-changing nature of hegemonic masculinity, through its internal and external nature, along with the role of women in constructing and supporting masculinities allow for the hegemonic status of masculinity in society.

Connell’s idea of an emphasized femininity, however, has come under criticism for its inability to address the multiplicity of femininities that exist, that like hegemonic masculinity, continually evolve. Mimi Schippers writes of multiple femininities that can co-exist in a culture, as well as the existence of a hegemonic femininity. Hegemonic femininity, however, evolves and changes to support the subordination and dominating features of hegemonic masculinity. Schippers expands on Connell’s implication that multiple femininities do exist, but notes that Connell focuses more on the multiple masculinities rather than on examining the supportive characteristics of the multiple femininities to the reproduction of patriarchy.⁵⁸

Pyke and Johnson, in their study of white femininity and Asian femininity, emphasize the relation between hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic femininity by noting:

We are not arguing that hegemonic femininity and masculinity are equivalent structures. They are not. Whereas hegemonic masculinity is a superstructure of domination, hegemonic femininity is confined to power relations among women. However, the two structures are interrelated with hegemonic femininity constructed to serve hegemonic masculinity, from which it is granted legitimacy.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Ibid, 349

⁵⁸ Schippers, 87.

⁵⁹ Karen D. Pyke and Denise L. Johnson, “Asian American Women and Racialized Femininities: ‘Doing’ Gender across Cultural Worlds,” *Gender and Society*, 17, 1 (February 2003), 50-51.

Pyke and Johnson point out some very necessary ideas in understanding the relationship between the two hegemonies. While hegemonic femininity holds power to dominate and subordinate other femininities, it is still subordinate and dominated by hegemonic masculinity.

Schippers supplements Pyke and Johnson as well as Connell by exploring subordinate femininities, which she calls pariah femininities, and hegemonic femininity. Schippers expands on hegemonic femininity from the characteristics of masculinity by noting, “To complement these characteristics in a way that subordinates femininity to masculinity, femininity includes physical vulnerability, an inability to use violence effectively, and compliance.”⁶⁰ The characteristics of femininity are antonyms to the characteristics of masculinity, but these antonyms imply a lesser value in the culture and society rather than a simple oppositional category. The hegemonic femininity does not exist to overpower or eventually take over hegemony from masculinity, but it exists to prevent the subordinate or marginalized forms of femininity from becoming a threat to the hegemonic masculinity. It is the enforcement of both hegemonic femininity and masculinity in the culture of a nation that perpetuates the quantitative inequality of women in governmental representation in post-communist states.

The characteristics of subordinate, or pariah, femininities that are stigmatized “include having sexual desire for other women, being promiscuous, ‘frigid’, or sexually inaccessible, and being aggressive.”⁶¹ These characteristics deviate from what is expected of the relationship between masculinity and femininity and threaten to assume characteristics of hegemonic masculinity, making it very important for these femininities to be contained by the hegemonic femininity. Schippers prefers the term ‘pariah femininities’ because these femininities are not necessarily inferior, but possess a threat to the relationship between masculinity and femininity

⁶⁰ Schippers, 91.

⁶¹ Ibid, 95.

that would normally allow for the domination and subordination of women. Pariah femininities are seen as not being vulnerable, able to use violence, and assertive in a way that is non-compliant to the subordination of women via hegemonic masculinity.

The characteristics taken on by pariah femininities, Schippers notes, are not seen as masculine qualities, but as both feminine and undesirable.⁶² The qualities, such as being assertive or attracted to women, usually associated with masculinity, are no longer seen as masculine when associated with pariah femininities, because associating females with masculine characteristics could threaten the hegemony of masculinity. These seemingly masculine qualities when enacted by the pariah femininities are ‘simultaneously stigmatized and feminized,’⁶³ removing the ability for them to become a threat to hegemonic masculinity. Justin Charlebois adds to Schippers by stating, “Significantly, pariah femininities threaten to dismantle the heterosexual matrix and remove hegemonic masculinity from its extolled position.”⁶⁴ Therefore, the job of hegemonic femininity, in a sense, is to contain the undesirable qualities that are present within Schippers’ term “pariah femininities.”

Schippers writes further, “It is cultural insurance for male dominance that anybody who enacts or embodies hegemonic characteristics that do not align with their gender category is stigmatized as problematic and feminine.”⁶⁵ It is this insistence on associating the feminine with undesired characteristics that perpetuates gender inequality in a culture. Even if the female exhibits characteristics of hegemonic femininity, she will not be able to exude characteristics associated with males in leadership positions for fear of those characteristics being stigmatized and seen as unnatural for a woman. Even women who do not possess the characteristics of

⁶² Ibid, 95.

⁶³ Ibid, 96.

⁶⁴ Charlebois, 32.

⁶⁵ Schippers, 96.

hegemonic femininity must face stigmatization for not following the norms of hegemonic femininity, but also for not adhering to the necessary hierarchy for ensuring peaceful or institutionalized gender relations and the subordination of hegemonic masculinity.

With this, it can be argued, that women in powerful positions, such as a parliamentarian or Minister in a government, must continuously possess the qualities of hegemonic femininity in order to be accepted culturally. However, even within the parliaments, the women who are present are continuously marginalized by their male counterparts, other women parliamentarians, as well as by the normative nature of their cultures. Women must embody masculine characteristics in order to enter into the realm of politics and be seen as equals, or they must continue with their emphasized femininity in order to create a balance. However, Schippers, points out that this is seemingly impossible for women to achieve, since women exuding masculine characteristics are never seen as masculine, but are degraded to being abnormal or feminine and women exuding feminine characteristics are resigned to subordination by masculinity. Thus, along with the presence of pariah femininities in institutions of power, marginalized masculinities and femininities may pose a threat to the structure of gender relations through certain characteristics they possess. Despite the ability of the subordinated masculinities and femininities to potentially topple the structure, it is the unique ability of hegemonic masculinity to incorporate those threatening characteristics into its own discourse, thus recreating hegemonic masculinity, and preventing it from being overtaken.

This, however, is not to say that hegemonic masculinity could not be overtaken or that the existing regime of gender relations could not be rattled. Demetriou and Connell focus on gender relations, highlighting the importance of the interaction between masculinity and femininity. Connell and Messerschmidt write:

Gender relations are always arenas of tension. A given pattern of hegemonic masculinity is hegemonic to the extent that it provides a solution to these tensions, tending to stabilize patriarchal power or reconstitute it in new conditions. A pattern of practice (i.e., a version of masculinity) that provided such a solution in past conditions but not in new conditions is open to challenge—is in fact certain to be challenged.⁶⁶

It is argued by Connell and Messerschmidt that hegemonic masculinity exists in order to provide a release for the tensions within gender relations. Connell uses the term ‘gender regime’ to explain the ‘the state of play in gender relations in a given institution.’⁶⁷ The seemingly concrete gender regime of hegemonic masculinity in any given institution continues to determine gender relations, always coming out on top.

Opposition to the gender regime that has subordinated women throughout the decades can be seen in various women’s movements. The women’s liberation movement in the United States called patriarchy into question through its demands for gender equality; yet, men still dominate institutionalized power.⁶⁸ It is with this failure of the women’s liberation movement that Demetriou notes “...the hegemonic bloc changes in a very *deceptive* and unrecognizable way. It changes through negotiation, appropriation, and translation, through the transformation of what appears counter-hegemonic and progressive into an instrument of backwardness and patriarchal reproduction.”⁶⁹ It seems as though the change and transformation of the hegemonic bloc associated with the subordination of women is never-ending, leaving women forever marginalized and excluded from equal participation in the public realm.

Despite the bleak outlook for a continuation of an unequal gender regime, Connell and Messerschmidt do offer solutions to the issues of gender inequality. Connell and Messerschmidt write of the contestation of hegemonic masculinity that

⁶⁶ Connell and Messerschmidt, 853.

⁶⁷ Connell (1987), 120.

⁶⁸ Demetriou, 349.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 355.

...occurs continuously, through the efforts of the women's movement (at the local, regional, and global levels), among generations in immigrant communities, between models of managerial masculinity, among rivals for political authority, among claimants for attention in the entertainment industry, and so on. The contestation is real, and gender theory does not predict which will prevail—the process is historically open. Accordingly, hegemony may fail. The concept of hegemonic masculinity does not rely on a theory of social reproduction.⁷⁰

The idea that the gender regime and hegemonic masculinity can be toppled, allowing for a new hegemonic power to take its place, is intriguing. Hegemonic masculinity is not required to be reproduced, but most certainly has retained its position in the post-communist states of Poland and Estonia, as well as elsewhere across the globe.

Furthermore, Connell and Messerschmidt write that the “conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity should explicitly acknowledge the possibility of democratizing gender relations, of abolishing power differentials, not just reproducing hierarchy.”⁷¹ Connell supports the idea of a ‘politics of alliances’ that combines forces that would dismantle hegemonic masculinity.⁷² Despite regime change in Central and Eastern Europe, hegemonic masculinity remained on top, reforming itself to envelop democratic ideals while retaining masculine tendencies that prevent gender equalization. Additionally, the transition from communism to democracy and capitalism and the nascent women's movement that appeared in Central and Eastern Europe did not usurp the old gender regime, but, in many cases, evolved the hegemonic bloc into one that embraced nationalist and traditionalist values, again leaving women outside of the realm of power and inside the walls of domesticity.

It is with the idea that hegemonic masculinity continually suppresses equalization in gender relations and reinforces the subordination of women in power structures, that the examination of trends in female representation in Poland and Estonia will be considered.

⁷⁰ Connell and Messerschmidt, 853

⁷¹ Ibid, 853

⁷² Demetriou, 342-343

Hegemonic masculinity can be viewed on a local, regional, and global level, according to Connell. Connell wrote, “It is possible for the local pattern to depart from the global pattern, even to contradict it. Such departures may provoke ‘policing’, i.e., attempts to establish the global pattern locally as a norm. They may also signify structural tension that leads to large-scale change in the longer run.”⁷³

Central and Eastern Europe constitutes a region that has gone through the transition from communism to democracy and capitalism in recent history, making the examination into the foundations of hegemonic masculinity and its role in gender relations intriguing at a regional level. Connell and Messerschmidt expand by saying, “... regional hegemonic masculinity shapes a society-wide sense of masculine reality and, therefore, operates in the cultural domain as on-hand material to be actualized, altered, or challenged through practice in a range of different local circumstances. A regional hegemonic masculinity, then, provides a cultural framework that may be materialized in daily practices and interactions.”⁷⁴ With the admission of Poland and Estonia to the European Union, a further regional, even global, set of norms, ideals, and concrete laws and directives were imported into the increasingly globalized societies. The influx of globalized norms, including gender equality, into the post-communist states has adjusted the hegemonic power of masculinity to where gender inequality has become part of public discourse. More importantly, the admission to the EU witnessed the adoption of directives and laws to aid in greater gender equality in both Poland and Estonia. The laws and directives help to enforce the idea of gender equality, and its importance for the future of the two countries within international organizations, and potentially reshape the concept of hegemonic masculinity at a regional level.

⁷³ Connell (1987), 111.

⁷⁴ Connell and Messerschmidt, 849-850

Despite the presence of different cultures in Poland and Estonia, a similar hegemonic masculinity reigns in each culture, preventing women from meaningfully obtaining power positions. Additionally, the identification of hegemonic femininity and oppositional femininities in the cultural and regional context will be important in examining the continuation of gender inequality in political institutions in both Poland and Estonia. The European Union also provides an additional gender regime to take into consideration in contemporary Estonia and Poland, carrying the potential for a shift in gender relations towards equality.

2.2 Methodology

This study was completed with an interdisciplinary purpose, relying on a variety of sources from both a historical and contemporary pool of work. A comparative case study of Estonia and Poland was chosen in order to analyze the effects of Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity on the proportion of female representatives in a national parliament in two post-communist states. The comparative case study allowed further analysis of hegemonic masculinity within different cultures and also allowed hegemonic masculinity to be better demonstrated in the political institutions of these two countries. By looking at two separate societies, the effects and presence of hegemonic masculinity appears more prominent than if only a single post-communist state were to be examined.

An overview of the historiography and history in regards to gender equality of each country was completed, as it is their past and culture that seemingly makes each country different, yet they continue to have similar results in regards to the proportion of female representatives at a national level. The work also relies on secondary source analysis in regards

to its theoretical framework, taking from scholars, whose work has built a developed literature, resulting in a thorough and comprehensive theoretical framework for analysis. From there, the study employs the use of statistical and historical references to build an argument to explain why there were and continue to be so few women in the representative bodies of Estonia and Poland.

In order to understand the appearance of women and the views of society of women in the upper echelons of power, this study makes extensive use of previous surveys that have been completed in the two countries, either by their governments or by outside NGOs. The analysis of governmental legislation and governmental programs is also employed in this work, such as the legislation on gender equality adopted in the 21st century in Poland and Estonia. The statistical analysis was completed by using online analysis tools through Inglehart's World Values Survey or by citing statistical data from published surveys and polls. Through the statistical data, a more complete picture is formed on the potential changes in attitudes and beliefs of not only women, but the whole society through transition and post-transition in the examined countries.

In an attempt to gather information on the contemporary mindset of female parliamentarians from Estonia and Poland, a standardized survey was sent electronically to each member, of which thirteen Estonian and seventeen Polish women responded. My survey was meant to discover the prevailing attitudes of current female parliamentarians in regards to issues brought up in the literature, such as the continuation of the double burden, expectations of women in each society, and the rejection of feminism. The current female members of the Polish *Sejm* and Senate and Estonian *Riigikogu* were chosen as respondents, as they are the population this thesis seeks to analyze. The survey was conducted through an online survey generator and consisted of thirteen questions. The first set of questions aimed at obtaining basic information, such as whether the parliamentarian was married, had children, and possessed higher education

beyond secondary school. The first set of questions sought information in regards to the women's adherence to the perceived gender roles in each country to determine whether the respondents fit the expected profile of a married woman with children in each country. Additionally, a question about political affiliation was asked to obtain information on the parliamentarian's identity and where the majority of female parliamentarians lie on the political spectrum, as the respondents were told that they could remain anonymous.

Furthermore, to explore what led the respondents into a career of politics, questions were asked as to how long one had been in politics, had one always wanted to be a politician, and what led one to choose the path of politics. These questions were posed in an attempt to determine whether there was a recurring trend in regards to a female parliamentarian's choice for her participation in politics. Additionally, the questions sought to obtain further information as to why the women chose politics, as it is a traditionally male occupied sector of society.

The remaining questions of the survey were created to gauge the importance and acceptance of gender equality within the parliaments of Estonia and Poland. The respondents were asked if they considered themselves a feminist, as much of the scholarly literature suggests negative connotations associated with the term in East-Central Europe. The survey sought to gauge contemporary attitudes towards feminism, although from a minimal proportion of women in the overall population. Moreover, the respondents were asked if they believed female politicians are accepted as leaders in their country, whether women's issues were heard by men in the legislative process, and if the respondent had found it difficult, as a woman, to be engaged in politics in their country. Optional answers were provided on a multiple choice scale, starting with a wholly positive and ending with a wholly negative response to the question, with variations situated between the two extremes.

This study wishes to show that although previous arguments of women's apathy and the weakness of women's movements have worked to explain specific aspects of the transition and post-transition periods, they do not account for the overall phenomenon of unequal participation of women in the parliament of post-communist states. By examining the different situations, beliefs, and legislation in a post-Soviet republic such as Estonia and a post-communist Central European state like Poland, the thesis attempts to develop a useful and meaningful comparison of the post-communist states, leading to the same result: relatively low numbers of female parliamentarians.

CHAPTER 3

THE ESTONIAN CASE STUDY

3.1 Historical Background

The Republic of Estonia, reestablished in 1991, is a state with a population of 1.3 million inhabitants that lies in the northeastern part of Europe.⁷⁵ The Estonians possess a distinct culture, language, and history within the context of Eastern Europe and its post-communist neighbors. Estonians often identify more with the Nordic and the Scandinavian countries, especially their Finnish neighbors to the north, with whom they share a related language.⁷⁶ However, Estonia shares much of its recent history with the former Soviet Union. Estonia experienced a tumultuous history laced with occupation and integration into great empires. The most recent, and perhaps most painful, imperial experience was the second Soviet “occupation” that Estonia endured from 1944-1991. Kevin O’Connor aptly describes the historical experience of Estonia and the other Baltic states, “In light of this seemingly unending series of catastrophes, it is a wonder that the three Baltic countries exist at all and that the cultures and traditions of their peoples have managed to survive at all.”⁷⁷ The endurance of the Baltic peoples throughout numerous occupations is venerable, and the success of Estonia throughout the transition to democracy and capitalism is admirable.

⁷⁵ Kevin O’Connor notes, “In 2004 Estonia’s population dropped to about 1.35 million, down significantly from the 1.573 million people counted in the last Soviet census, which was taken in 1989 when the Baltic countries were still republics of the USSR.” in Kevin O’Connor, *Culture and Customs of the Baltic States* (London: Greenwood Press, 2006), 4.

⁷⁶ Ibid, xi-xii.

⁷⁷ Ibid, xi.

The development of Estonian nationalism in the 19th century began “on the cultural level and later evol[ed] into a movement that sought political rights for Estonians.”⁷⁸ Helen Biin and Anneli Albi note, “The issues of female suffrage arose in the context of, and was deeply interconnected with, the nationalist movement and the fight for the country’s independence; the events that paved the way to universal suffrage traced back to the middle of the 19th century.”⁷⁹ The emergence of a nationalist movement allowed for women to express their want of suffrage and rights, but it placed Estonian women and their rights within the context of the greater notion of Estonian independence and nationalism and the role of women within it. Rather than independently occurring within Estonian society, the women’s movement was seen as a “by-product” of the Estonian national movement, therefore it came as no surprise that the women’s movement was overlooked by prevailing nationalistic attitudes in the early 20th century.⁸⁰

The women’s clubs that did develop after the Revolution of 1905 in the Russian Empire, mainly in the cities of Tallinn and Tartu, mainly discussed national issues in conversations, with the gaining of political rights and civil rights for all Estonians and not specifically women being a priority for the clubs at the time.⁸¹ Though these women who were engaged in women’s clubs and groups, they were not seeking radical feminist ideas or concepts, but were simply seeking Estonian independence from the Russian Empire. Biin and Albi note further, “After 1906, however, debates on women’s suffrage subsided and debates on women’s rights concentrated on other issues, such as women’s right to work and access to universities.”⁸² Despite this, opponents of women’s suffrage and political involvement at the time were cited as believing, “Allowing

⁷⁸ Helen Biin and Anneli Albi, “Suffrage and the Nation: Women’s Vote in Estonia,” in Blanca Rodriguez-Ruiz and Ruth Rubio-Marin, eds., *The Struggle for Female Suffrage in Europe: Voting to Become Citizens* (Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands, 2012) 113.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 113.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 113.

⁸¹ Ibid, 114.

⁸² Ibid, 117.

women to enter politics was seen as tantamount to a national tragedy, since raising children and taking care of the ‘national soul’ was perceived as women’s ultimate duty.”⁸³ Though women were fighting for overall Estonian independence, they were still viewed within the traditional roles of Estonian society, as caretakers of the nation rather than creators of it.

The February Revolution of 1917 in the Russian Empire had further influence in the political awakening of Estonian society, including women who sought political rights.⁸⁴ Within the increasingly politically conscious Estonian society, “politics became a topic of daily conversation and a passion for many women, raising hopes that women would finally be granted political rights despite the rather strong opposition of some leading male politicians.”⁸⁵ Women in the Russian Empire, still including Estonia in 1917, gained the right to vote in 1917 with the Autonomy Act of the Provisional Government, which granted universal suffrage to all inhabitants within the borders of the Russian Empire.⁸⁶

Biin and Albi noted,

“Women in Estonia had their first experience of voting and running for office during the local elections in March and June 1917, in which 13 women gained access to rural government councils. They were also allowed to vote and run in the elections of the Provisional Assembly of Estonia (*Maapäev*) in July 1917. One female candidate was elected to office; she was later followed by another female politician as an alternate member of the Provisional Assembly.”⁸⁷

Though these elections did not yield great results for women and they did not denote much in regards to posterity of the government, they were of great importance as they were the first elections that Estonian women could take part in and become representatives.

Estonia experienced its first period of independence during the inter-war years, gaining independence after the Great War ended in 1918. Freed from the Russian Empire and Soviet

⁸³Ibid, 114-115.

⁸⁴Ibid, 119.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 119.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 119.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 119.

Russia, Estonians created a state built on Western ideals, taking the Weimar Constitution as a model when creating the Estonian republic. Women under the first Estonian republic gained numerous rights without having to organize to demand these rights, including the right to vote in 1918.⁸⁸ Estonian women gained the right to vote before their counterparts in many Western countries, including the United States and the United Kingdom.⁸⁹ Despite gaining the right to vote, women in interwar Estonia did not possess equal representation with their male counterparts in the institutions of government.⁹⁰

Since Estonia became an independent country in the era of nationalism and conflicts between the Great Powers, gender issues were not the primary concern of the fledgling state, but were “subordinate to national and class concerns [and] no women’s movement of any consequence existed to advance the cause of gender equality.”⁹¹ The separation of gender roles and the lack of concern for gender equality though certainly not unique, provide a backdrop to the history of gender relations in modern-day Estonia. The lack of importance that has been given to gender equality in Estonian society, as with many countries, is a recurring theme in the small country’s history.

O’Connor points out that the position of women in Estonian history has been one of caring for the men and the rearing of children. Rather than possessing a firm interest in matters in the public realm, Estonian women were placed within the home in Estonian society. According to O’Connor, the view of women as caretakers that was prominent in peasant society laid a foundation for the gender relations that continue into 20th century Estonian society. This point in O’Connor’s argument, pointing to the role of women in Estonian society in the late 19th-early

⁸⁸ O’Connor, 71.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 71.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 71.

⁹¹ Ibid, 71.

20th centuries, is much more relevant to modern Estonia, instead of the emphasis on a prevalent peasant culture. There is still a segregation of labor within Estonia, with women confined to the service sector and men in the more powerful public sector, which is reflected in contemporary society, whereas a peasant society is no longer relevant.

Furthermore, the relative lack of religiosity in Estonia, as compared to Poland for example, has given Estonia the reputation of one of Europe's most secular countries.⁹² The weak state of organized religion in Estonia hindered the emergence of a religious foundation for gender relations and gender roles in Estonian society. As noted above, traditional roles prevail in Estonia without reference to Christianity to influence the view of women, in effect leaving the argument of the importance of religion for culturally determined gender relations invalid and unsupported in this particular case. Interestingly, however, as O'Connor notes, women in these traditional cultures of the Baltic states have been viewed favorably as goddesses, possessing respectability and honor. Women, therefore, in the traditional cultures, were "transmitters of Baltic cultures."⁹³ Therefore, though women were confined to domesticity, traditionally they were not viewed with disrespect. However, with the modernization of society, traditional gender relations prevented women from equally participating in public life.

This follows Connell's idea that though women are not mistreated, it does not necessarily mean that they are not subordinated within society. A hegemonic masculinity can be identified throughout Estonia's history. From the separation of gender roles in O'Connor's identified peasant culture to the importance of women in Estonian culture as imparting culture and values to future generations, a separate masculinity and femininity emerges. Historically in Estonian society, women have been confined to the private and seemingly less powerful sector of society,

⁹² Ibid, 55.

⁹³ Ibid, 70.

while men have exerted their hegemony within the public realm, through nationalist discourse or community leadership. Though Estonia has experienced numerous changes since the establishment of its first independent republic in 1918, the domination of men in the public and political realm and the reign of hegemonic masculinity, though certainly transformed since its conception, continue to this day.

3.2 Estonian Women under Soviet Rule

Estonia became a republic of the Soviet Union in 1940 as a result of another conflict between great powers. The results of the conflict led to the surrender of Estonia's independence in exchange for enforced Soviet rule, which was followed by the German invasion of 1941, but was restored in 1944. With Soviet rule, however, came Soviet ideology, including the contradictory ideas and practices on gender equality. As noted above, women were exposed to a double burden under communism, leaving little time and space for political activity. Helemäe and Saar point out, "Soviet norms and institutions rested on the premise that women, but not men, had dual roles; thus legislation favored a traditional division of gender roles; for example, childcare leaves were only available for mothers."⁹⁴ The continuation of the segregated gender roles prevented the placement of women in the upper echelons of power in the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic.

The absence of women in Soviet political institutions was noted by Gail Lapidus in her 1978 work *Women in Soviet Society*, and yet her statement still holds true, "Despite considerable efforts to integrate women more fully into political life and some success in drawing women into

⁹⁴ Jelena Helemäe and Ellu Saar, "Women's Employment in Estonia," in Hans-Peter Blossfeld and Heather Hofmeister, eds., *Globalization, Uncertainty and Women's Careers: An International Comparison* (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2006), 200.

political careers, in the Soviet Union, as elsewhere, women are largely absent from the upper reaches of power. In substantive rather than ceremonial roles, in the key hierarchies of political and coercive power, and at the apex of the system as a whole, politics remains a male affair.”⁹⁵ As Estonia was a part of the Soviet Union, few women, if any, ever participated in the upper ranks of the republic’s central committee.

Despite the lack of women in the higher institutions of Soviet power, women did grace the ranks of party leadership, though they were put into stereotypical roles, such as the head of the Party Central Women’s Department, which was reserved for a woman to head it. This position “accounted for one of the four women to hold a leadership position in Estonia between 1956 and 1973.”⁹⁶ Perhaps even more interesting is that women in Estonia possessed an average level of education higher than their male comrades, yet were virtually absent from the decision-making body of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic.⁹⁷ Despite the higher educational levels of Estonian women, often the highest in the Soviet Union, Gail Lapidus notes further, “Estonia and Lithuania, for example, have had only half as many women in positions of leadership at the republic level as Latvia, while the largest numbers of women are found in some of the Central Asian republics, where the promotion of women to high level positions within the Party and government has received great attention.”⁹⁸

Although women were present in the local soviets and as deputies to the Supreme Soviet with the help of gender quotas, they held little actual power. The argument could be made that no one held real power in the local soviets or the Supreme Soviet, but the unequal participation of women in the republic and union soviets was quite alarming, considering the egalitarian

⁹⁵ Gail Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society: Equality, Development, and Social Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 200.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 220.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 141.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 221.

promises of Soviet ideology. Anu Laas expands further on the quotas for women by saying, “Since Soviet-era quotas were further complicated by issues of class, patronage and manipulations of the Communist Party, their effectiveness as mechanisms of inclusion and equality was completely discredited.”⁹⁹ The inefficiency of the Soviet government, false promises of gender equality, and the seemingly useless nature of even having representatives in Soviet institutions left many women, as well as men, disillusioned and uninterested in the workings of government. The underrepresentation of women, regardless of their education, is a conundrum that exists to this day in the *Riigikogu*, leaving one to consider the cultural foundations of the gender relations in Estonia and their persistence through the years.

3.3 Estonian Women in Transition, 1989-2004

Piotr Sztompka made an eloquent observation on the importance of the year 1989, and therefore, it is fruitful to quote him at length:

The year 1989 was not only a political break from an autocratic, mono-party regime toward a parliamentary, multiparty system—the ultimate victory of democracy; nor was it an economic break from a socialist, planned, command economy, to a basically free, capitalist market—the second birth of capitalism. Neither was it the radical transformation of institutions, or the restitution of some earlier social order—‘the return’ to Europe, to the West, to ‘normality’ or whatever. Rather, it started the reconstruction of a new social order from a strange mixture of components of various origins. It was a major culture and civilizational break, a beginning of the reconstruction of the deepest cultural tissue as well as civilizational surface of society, the slow emergence of the new post-Communist culture and civilization.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Anu Laas, “To Suspect or Respect? Quota Discourse in Estonia,” in Julie Ballington and Francesca Binda, eds., *The Implementation of Quotas: European Experiences: Quota Report Series* (Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2005), 108.

¹⁰⁰ Piotr Sztompka (1996, 120) quoted in Marju Lauristin, “Contexts of Transition” in Marju Lauristin and Peeter Vihalemm, eds., *Return to the Western World: Cultural and Political Perspectives on the Estonian Post-Communist Transition* (Tartu, Estonia: Tartu University Press, 1997), 26.

The “reconstruction” that Sztompka describes was quite evident in Estonia during the transition. Sztompka argues that a new civilization emerged following the break with communism. Shirley A. Woods adds, “Unlike other Soviet republics, Estonia did have a pre-Soviet civic culture from which to draw experience of political pluralism.”¹⁰¹ The break was certainly felt in Estonia, but often with a renewed emphasis on the traditional gender roles and an increasingly male presence in the representative bodies and government that had characterized Estonian society throughout its pre-Soviet history.

The fall of communism following the heralded Singing Revolution in Estonia left the country to confront the implementation of a representative democracy and free markets without the aid of its eastern neighbor. The uniqueness of the Estonian case during the transition has been explained in the following terms: ‘In Estonia, the Soviet doctrine never reached the position of ideological hegemony...Double-think and double-behavior was widespread because of the occupation, and because of the strong ties to pre-World War II society and to the Western world at large.’¹⁰² Additionally, Marju Lauristin suggests that “*Westernization* (in the case of Central-European and Baltic countries it is really *re-Westernization*) is the most important systemic aspect in the transition process.”¹⁰³ Estonia sought the acceptance and aid of its newly supportive Western neighbors, which allowed the country to refer back to its first period of independence in the interwar years for inspiration. Nevertheless, the turn to the West was neither easy nor painless for the Estonians.

¹⁰¹ Shirley A. Woods, “Ethnicity and Nationalism in Contemporary Estonia,” in Christopher Williams and Thanasis D. Sfikas, eds. *Ethnicity and Nationalism in Russia, the CIS and the Baltic States* (Brookfield, USA: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1999), 276.

¹⁰² Peeter Vihalemm, Marju Lauristin, and Ivar Tallo, “Development of Political Culture in Estonia,” in Marju Lauristin and Peeter Vihalemm, eds., *Return to the Western World: Cultural and Political Perspectives on the Estonian Post-Communist Transition*, (Tartu, Estonia: Tartu University Press, 1997), 199.

¹⁰³ Lauristin, 31.

Estonian transition began in 1990, and was met with many difficulties.¹⁰⁴ However, despite the economic difficulties, “Estonia took a very liberal approach, with few barriers to labor market dislocations or new job creation, meager support of the unemployed, and no effective wage floor.”¹⁰⁵ The liberal approach for the Estonians met with ‘considerable success’ in the ‘politics of democracy,’ leaving Estonia as an admirable example of democratic transition after the early years.¹⁰⁶ Despite the liberal approaches taken by the Estonian government, the reforms affected the women’s situation more than their male counterparts. Although women are guaranteed equal rights in the Estonian constitution, “women have seen only marginal improvement in their situation; in some respects, the condition has actually worsened since the Soviet collapse.”¹⁰⁷ Much of the literature written on Estonia and its women deals with the labor force and economic position of women compared to their male counterparts. Women’s unemployment at the time of transition and throughout the 1990s exceeded that of men, with an average 38.3 percent of women and 24.7 percent of men facing unemployment throughout the decade.¹⁰⁸ Women also made significantly less in terms of wages and salaries than Estonian men, a phenomenon that continues to this day.¹⁰⁹

The liberal economic approach to the transition paid off for the Estonians in the long run, but the transition period saw the women’s movement focusing on problems concerning violence in the Soviet army until its evacuation, alternative education, reproductive health, home economics, and setting up a business, rather than the inherent gender inequality that became

¹⁰⁴ Peter F. Orazem and Milan Vodopivec, “Male-female Differences in Labor Market Outcomes During the Early Transition to Market: The Cases of Estonia and Slovenia,” *Journal of Population Economics* (2000) 13:283-303, 284.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 286.

¹⁰⁶ O’Connor, 31.

¹⁰⁷ O’Connor, 72.

¹⁰⁸ Ruth Alas and Tõnu Kaarelson, “Gender Equality in Post-Socialist Country: Case of Estonia,” *Problems and Perspectives in Management*, 6, 2 (2008), 15.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 15.

more pronounced with the collapse of communism.¹¹⁰ Although women's organizations and associations were able to voice their opinions and thoughts after Gorbachev's policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, the women's movement at the time of transition focused on helping women in traditional female roles, rather than attempting to embrace gender equality through female political activism, equal wages, and better female representation in the *Riigikogu*.

The legacy of unequal representation carried on into the reestablished Estonian state. The lack of a feminist agenda or focus on gender equality in Estonia at the time of the transition can be attributed to the lack of interest in feminism or in the type of gender equality that the Soviet Union and ideology supposedly represented. Although the goal of gender equality was present in Soviet propaganda, it was not enforced in practice, despite the use of gender quotas. If anything, the Soviet Union further promoted the continuation of rigid gender roles by allowing specifically Estonian conservative beliefs to prevail in contradiction to proclaimed Soviet policies, preventing gender equality and women from exercising real political power. Raili Marling writes in her discourse analysis of Estonian print media, "...Estonia had a back-lash against feminism before it developed a viable feminism."¹¹¹ Marling continues, "...the dominant discourse created a "spectre of feminism" it battled with and banished, for the sake of the "progress" of the nation, a context where feminism became a scapegoat for various social ills and a means for distracting attention from deep-seated gendered inequalities in the society, but possibly, also other social concerns."¹¹² Feminism, therefore, was used as a distraction rather than a solution, as Marling notes.

¹¹⁰ Laas, 106.

¹¹¹ Raili Marling, "The Intimidating Other: Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis of the Representation of Feminism in Estonian Print Media," *Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, 18, 1 (March 2010), 8.

¹¹² *Ibid*, 8.

Furthermore, the discussion and discourse on gender equality and feminism was often confined to academic halls and journals, rather than through promotion of public discourse generally accessible to all Estonians.¹¹³ The weak middle class, the contradictions between Soviet ideology and practice, the difficult economic transition, the absence of a public discussion of feminist solutions, and the return of nationalism and traditional norms left the women of Estonia out of political office and institutions in the newly democratic state of Estonia. Additionally, as seen with the first Republic of Estonia in 1918, nation and state building took precedence throughout the public discourse, which often left the continual disparity of the equality between genders in powerful positions on the periphery. These forces culminated in the success of a hegemonic masculinity, preventing the realization of greater gender equality at the time of transition.

The drastic decline in women in national parliaments at the time of transition led many to speculate about the true causes of gender inequality that existed in the post-communist countries, including Estonia. The number of women in representative bodies in Estonia experienced a drastic decline from around 30 percent in the late 1980s to around 12 percent in the first free parliamentary elections that occurred in 1992.¹¹⁴ The percentage of women in the *Riigikogu* remained around 12 percent, experiencing no fluctuation in the two elections that took place between 1992 and 1995.¹¹⁵ The disappearance of gender quotas for the representative bodies as well as rejection of the façade of gender equality triumphed by Soviet ideology led to bleak results and outlooks for women's representation, the addressing of women's issues at a national level, and the development of a successful women's movement in post-communist Estonia.

¹¹³ O'Connor, 70.

¹¹⁴ "Inter-Parliamentary Union- 'Estonia-Riigikogu- Election Archives,'" last modified 2013, http://www.ipu.org/parline/reports/2105_E.htm

¹¹⁵ Ibid- the amount of women elected to the Riigikogu remained at 12.87%, or 13 women in the 1995 elections, even with fewer political parties.

Moreover, in the elections for president, only one woman, Lagle Parek, the first Minister of the Interior, was a candidate in the first elections. Parek received four percent of the national vote in September 1992, failing to continue on to the second round, where Lennart Mari prevailed.¹¹⁶ Despite Parek's loss, she was an important politician at the time of transition in Estonia. Parek was a founding member of the Estonian National Independence Party in 1988 and was the Minister of the Interior in 1992-1993. She went on to continue her stay in the *Riigikogu* by becoming a part of the merged Pro Patria and Res Publica Union Party (*Isamaa ja Respublica Liit*), a right-leaning political party that currently holds seats in the *Riigikogu*. Despite Parek's presence in Estonian politics during the transition and post-transition, she interestingly converted to Catholicism and resides in a convent, away from politics and the public eye. Though Parek was an example of a strong and seemingly powerful woman in the Estonian government, she harbored conservative leanings and maintained her conservative ideals throughout the transition and post-transition periods.

Furthermore, Estonia has yet to seriously consider a woman for the president, a ceremonial, though important post in the Estonian government.¹¹⁷ The campaign of Siiri Oviir, a woman who had once occupied the position of mayor and Minister of Social Affairs¹¹⁸ in the government, for president of Estonia in was hopeful and seen as a "breath of fresh air on the local political scene."¹¹⁹ Although Oviir was seen as a hopeful in the presidential election in the 1996 elections, Raili Põldsaar noted in a 2002 article, "However, before the presidential race proper could even start, Oviir was ousted from the race by her own party which, without any

¹¹⁶ Vabariigi Valimiskomisjon, "President of the Republic of Estonia Elections," <http://www.vvk.ee/past-elections/president-of-state-elections/>

¹¹⁷ O'Connor, 74.

¹¹⁸ She served in this position from April-November 1995 and January 2002-April 2003. Additionally, in 1990-1992 she served under the label Minister of Social Care of Estonia.

¹¹⁹ 80

qualms, replaced her with a political lightweight whose chances at winning were significantly lesser.”¹²⁰ Põldsaar continues, “A woman who seemed poised to disprove the vision of Estonian politics as a male-dominated domain was still proved to be a figurine in a political game the aims of which are unclear.”¹²¹ Unable to pass the barrier to the presidential elections, Oviir continued on in politics by becoming an Estonian delegate in the European Parliament.

Moreover, a woman has never held the more powerful position of Prime Minister or post of county elder during the transition period, and still has not held either position.¹²² The World Values Survey results from 1996 indicated that 28.7 percent of those surveyed agreed strongly and 40.5 percent agreed that men make better political leaders than women do, indicating a lack of support for women in positions of power in Estonia.¹²³ These views were certainly reflected in the low numbers of women in leadership positions in the Estonian government at the time. Though women are able, and have been able since the Gorbachev era, to participate in public life, the progress necessary for the equality of women’s voices during the transition period was minimal, and women were continuously underrepresented in the *Riigikogu*. Only in the latter half of the 1990s and early 2000s did public acknowledgment and a discourse develop on the inherent gender inequality present in the institutions of power in Estonia.

More recently, women have had better representation than the dismally low percentages of women in the *Riigikogu* seen during the transition, but women still make up less than a quarter of representatives in the *Riigikogu* and even fewer women are seen at a ministerial level, let alone the presidency or Prime Minister. Despite the rise of Ene Ergma to president of the *Riigikogu* in 2003, women are still mostly absent from the upper echelons of governmental

¹²⁰ 80

¹²¹ 80

¹²² Ibid, 74.

¹²³ WVS, 1996.

power. Ene Ergma has proven to be an important politician in Estonia, occupying the position of the President of the Parliament from 2003-2006. Additionally, she was reelected to the position in 2007, and continues to occupy the post.¹²⁴ Ergma, like Lagle Parek mentioned above, belongs to the Pro Patria and Res Publica party, a party that is connected with liberal conservatism. Again, like Parek, Ergma ran for the office of president in the 2006 presidential elections, but like her female predecessors, she failed to pass the first round of voting.¹²⁵ Ergma can be seen as a persistent challenge to the notion of Estonian hegemonic masculinity, not by her voiced resistance to the prevailing hegemonic masculinity, but by her continual presence and election to the high post within the parliament.

Throughout the period from transition to today, women in the *Riigikogu*, and women as a whole in Estonia, have attained higher levels of education than their male counterparts, yet continue to comprise only a minority of the positions in the government and the *Riigikogu*. The transition period saw the stagnant level of women at 12 percent in the *Riigikogu*. Since then, the percent of women in the national parliament has risen and reached as high as 24 percent, but the number of women in ministerial positions continues to remain at low levels.

From 1995, when women made up only 12 percent of the 101 representatives in the Estonian *Riigikogu*, to the current make-up of the representative body, where women make up around 19 percent of the body, progress has been made.¹²⁶ An additional five females were elected to the *Riigikogu* in the 1999 elections, producing a 5 percent gain for women. That spike, however, has not been repeated in the elections since 1999, producing a percentage that hovers around 20 percent.

¹²⁴ “IRL-Ene Ergma,” <http://www.irl.ee/en/ene-ergma>

¹²⁵ Vabariigi Valimiskomisjon

¹²⁶ “Inter Parliamentary Union-Estonia-Riigikogu-Election Archives”

3.4 Estonian Women after Transition, 2004-2012

The transition period came to a fruitful end for Estonia in 2004 with its admission into the European Union and NATO, thus fully integrating the republic into the international community. The Republic of Estonia also passed a Gender Equality Act on April 7, 2004, which entered force in May of the same year. The Act was passed within weeks of Estonia's accession to the EU. Moreover, the proportion of female representatives in the *Riigikogu* remained around 18 percent in the 2003 elections and grew to almost 24 percent in the 2007 elections.¹²⁷

The relative stabilization and increase of the percentage of women in the *Riigikogu* noted above cannot be seen in the proportion of women in ministerial positions. In 2005 Estonia could boast of having women make up 15 percent of its senior minister positions, yet in 2009, the percentage had been lowered to only eight percent.¹²⁸ Overall, the average percentage of women parliamentarians and ministers in Estonia from 1999-2004 was 22 percent.¹²⁹ Although the percentage of women in the *Riigikogu* has risen, it is still below the levels seen under communism, as well as the European average of 25.76 percent as of 2012.¹³⁰

Despite the rise in the number of female parliamentary representatives, Liina Järviste, in her policy analysis of gender equality in Estonia, after reviewing the Gender Equality Monitoring survey conducted in 2009, writes “Nearly half of the people believe that the position of men in

¹²⁷ European Commission. Eurobarometer Interactive Search System. “Trust in Institutions by National Parliament-Poland and Estonia-10/2004-11/2011.”

http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/cf/showchart_column.cfm?keyID=2192&nationID=18,24,&startdate=2004.10&enddate=2012.11

¹²⁸ European Commission-Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, “Report on Equality between Women and Men 2010,” (European Union, 2010), 41.

¹²⁹ United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), “Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties under Article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women: Fourth Periodic Report of State Parties, Estonia,” (October 2005), 43.

¹³⁰ Index Mundi, “European Union- Proportion of Seats held by women in national parliaments”

<http://www.indexmundi.com/facts/european-union/proportion-of-seats-held-by-women-in-national-parliaments>

Estonian society is somewhat or significantly better than the position of women.”¹³¹ Järviste continues, “Gender inequality is quite common in Estonian society, despite the fact that equality is guaranteed by law. Evidence to that effect can be found in gender wage gap, higher level of poverty among women, and shorter lifespan of men.”¹³² In fact, Estonia possesses the highest gender wage gap, a staggering difference of about 30 percent, in the European Union.¹³³ Jaarviste emphasizes, however, that “the wage gap is not a result of different wages paid to women and men in equivalent positions in the same organization,” but is a result of a gendered labor force.¹³⁴ Women and men occupy separate sectors within the labor force, with women making much less than men in their respective occupations. The gender pay gap, however, was recognized as a problem by the Estonian government, and in September 2011 action was begun to reduce the alarming pay gap in the country.¹³⁵

Interestingly, however, Jaarviste notes that “gender equality is not a ‘female thing’; it concerns men as well and is necessary for the entire society.”¹³⁶ Therefore, the policy analysis focused on both angles of gender inequality, calling for a comprehensive reexamination of the issue in Estonia. Järviste also notes a difference in responses to survey questions when posed to other ethnic groups, mainly Russians, in Estonia. Their responses showed a more conservative view on gender equality than the ethnic Estonians, adding a significant factor in shaping Estonia’s overall results in the 2009 survey.¹³⁷ The large Russian minority in Estonia will

¹³¹ Liina Järviste, “Gender Equality and Inequality: Attitudes and Situation in Estonia in 2009,” Ministry of Social Affairs of Estonia, Social Policy Information and Analysis Department, Tallinn, 2010. 4

¹³² Ibid, 1.

¹³³ RT, “Women in Estonia Suffer From EU’s Worst Gender Pay Gap,” last modified July 26, 2010, <http://rt.com/news/estonia-gender-pay-gap/>

¹³⁴ Järviste, 2.

¹³⁵ European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), “Gender Equality Index: Estonia,” <http://eige.europa.eu/content/gender-equality-index#/country/EE>

¹³⁶ Järviste, 2.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 27.

certainly have to be involved in the public discourse on gender equality in order for that part of the population to accommodate the increasing notions of gender equality in Estonia.

My survey of thirteen of the twenty-two current female parliamentarians in the *Riigikogu* yielded a valuable insight into the thoughts of those women currently sitting in the unicameral legislative body of the Estonian government. Thirteen questions were posed and thirteen parliamentarians in the *Riigikogu* anonymously responded to the survey. Though seven respondents are married serving in the *Riigikogu*, there was a significant minority of five women who are not married.¹³⁸ Seven respondents indicated that they are married and ten of the women have children, implying that these women are responsible for both their household tasks and careers. The division of household tasks in an Estonian family, notably, has not changed to any degree, leaving women parliamentarians largely responsible for the housework.¹³⁹ Additionally, although these women are still responsible for the majority of household work, on average they still possess a higher level of education than their male counterparts in the parliament.¹⁴⁰

The respondents came from all four parties present in the *Riigikogu*: The Social Democratic Party (*Sotsiaaldemokraatlik Erakond*), Pro Patria and Res Publica Union Group (*Isamaa ja Res Publica Liit*), the Estonian Reform Party (*Eesti Reformierakond*), and the Estonian Centre Party (*Eesti Keskeraakond*). Additionally, seven of the respondents had been in the *Riigikogu* for four or more terms, suggesting the women had developed a reputation for effective service as legislators by continuously being reelected. Surprisingly, only one respondent entered the parliament as a new member in the last elections in 2011.

¹³⁸ This result is very different from Poland, in which all the women who responded were married.

¹³⁹ Järviste, 20.

¹⁴⁰ Of the thirteen that responded, all of them possessed a higher education, going along with previous research and statistics.

Only five of the women surveyed had always wanted to be in politics, with the majority noting that they had not planned to be politicians, but circumstances had allowed them to pursue that career track. Laas notes, “Women fear being labeled, being caught in the “media fire” or giving “wrong” answers in public debates.”¹⁴¹ The fear of exposure in the public realm can cause apprehension for women who may otherwise seek political office to promote change. Moreover, seven women responded that they have found being a woman in politics somewhat difficult, with four replying that they had not found it difficult.

Participation in politics in Estonia has not been generally popular in recent years. Anu Laas continues,

Participation in political parties is also low; in 2002, it did not exceed four percent of the total population. Survey data show that active participation in politics is still low, but interest in politics has slightly increased. According to Estonian data from the European Social Survey (2004, Round II) only 2.5 percent say that they are members of a political party, and 51 percent voted in last elections. In 2004, 36 percent said that they were interested or very interested in politics.¹⁴²

The lack of interest in politics shown by Estonians as a whole can contribute to the lack of female candidates and representatives. Helen Biin, in her work on the influence of political parties on women’s representation in the *Riigikogu*, found “that women are neither highly motivated nor confident enough to aspire for higher office. The lack of confidence and motivation among female politicians was repeatedly highlighted in interviews.”¹⁴³ The lack of confidence may be attributed to the lack of support for women’s political participation in public opinion, since the public realm is traditionally viewed as a masculine area of dominance.

Additionally, being put on the top or towards the top of the list makes a great difference in the outcome of an election for women. Laas notes, “According to surveys on participation in

¹⁴¹ Laas, 106.

¹⁴² Ibid, 104.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 106.

politics, the open list feature of the Estonian electoral system implies that only women who are among the first ten or 20 candidates on a list are likely to be elected.”¹⁴⁴ Therefore, it is imperative that women be placed on the upper part of the lists, which are often decided by men.

The idea of women as leaders in Estonia is also a contested area. The majority of the women representatives in the *Riigikogu* who were polled responded that they felt as though women are somewhat but not fully accepted as political leaders in Estonia. The lack of broad public acceptance of women as political leaders prevents more women from gaining seats in the *Riigikogu*. Moreover, when asked, the respondents to the survey answered that although women are present in the parliament women’s issues are only sometimes heard or not heard as often as they should be by the men in the government. This lack of support by men in addressing women’s issues, Laas point out, leads to the result that “even women who are highly respected tend not to speak out on women’s issues.”¹⁴⁵ The women who are present in the *Riigikogu* are seemingly limited in their attempts to enact change through present institutions and norms, resulting in little change or transformation in women’s issues or gender inequality.

Nine of the women surveyed believe that gender inequality is a problem in Estonia, with only two respondents believing it was a major problem in Estonia. Most noted that other areas such as the economy take precedence, while four replied that gender equality was not an issue in Estonia. This statistic among the female parliamentarians is reflected in Järviste’s policy analysis when she writes, “For instance, only 6 percent of Estonian residents believe that gender inequality is a serious social problem (Kaha 2009). There is a widespread belief that the past inequality has been abolished: women and men are equal before the law and women can be seen

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 104.

¹⁴⁵ Laas, 106.

in active roles in various areas of social life, incl[uding] among decision-makers.”¹⁴⁶ The popular belief that past inequality has been abolished does not aid in the development of gender equality throughout Estonia. Put simply, most Estonians are seemingly not interested in gender equality.¹⁴⁷ However, Järviste notes an improvement, stating, “The main conclusion is that the level of awareness of gender inequality and the need for equality is not high, but has increased somewhat in comparison to 2005. Women are more aware of gender inequality and have also had more experiences with inequality. In addition, women expressed greater support for equality.”¹⁴⁸ By gaining the support of women, though slowly and gradually, a glimmering hope of further awareness of gender inequality and the need for change exists in Estonia.

The negative connotations of feminism, despite the transition years and further integration with the West, continue in Estonia. When asked if they would consider themselves a feminist, nine of the polled parliamentarians responded in the negative, with only three noting that they would consider themselves one. Interestingly, a divergence with the anti-Soviet ideology which guided the transition appears when eleven of the respondents believe that gender quotas are a good idea, with eight responding that they fully approve the implementation of gender quotas. Women who are active at the national level and are active party members tend to be more supportive of the idea of reintroducing quotas than women who are active at the local level or those who are involved in women’s organizations.¹⁴⁹

However, overall, gender quotas are often opposed in Estonia despite the implementation of quotas throughout the EU. Opponents argue that quotas are an extreme measure, that there are not enough competent women to fulfill the quotas, quotas humiliate the women included in them,

¹⁴⁶ Järviste, 4.

¹⁴⁷ Alas and Kaarelson, 18.

¹⁴⁸ Järviste, 2.

¹⁴⁹ Laas, 107.

and most interesting, “Women themselves are not interested in [having] a position with responsibilities.”¹⁵⁰ To combat these arguments, the Estonian government has implemented a program, “Promotion of Gender Equality, 2011-2013,” in an attempt to promote gender mainstreaming in governmental policies and to promote overall gender equality in Estonia. Opinions such as those above, though they may be the minority opinion, will be difficult to combat.¹⁵¹ The arguments against gender quotas are quite interesting, as Estonia often identifies with the Nordic nations, where gender quotas are commonplace and have been successful in creating greater equality in governmental bodies, but Estonia continues to lack quotas for political representation.

An example of the continual downplay of the importance of women in higher positions within Estonian society and media is witnessed with Kadri Simson. An example of the scrutiny that can be witnessed in Estonian media in regards to female parliamentarians is seen with the relatively young and very attractive Kadri Simson. Simson is a currently a member of the *Riigikogu* and is the vice chairman of the Estonian Centre Party (*Eesti Keskerakond*). The Centre Party is headed by the much talked about political figure, Edgar Savisaar, who is often mentioned as the authoritarian leader of the party.¹⁵² Additionally, the Centre Party is quite popular among the ethnic Russian part of the Estonian population, allowing Simson to garner support from both ethnic parts of the population. Simson sits on the Foreign Affairs Committee in the *Riigikogu* and she is also the chair of the Estonian-US parliamentary group. Simson, a representative in the *Riigikogu* since 2007, has been a member of the Centre Party since 1995

¹⁵⁰ Anu Laas, “Wake Up Call to Estonian Business Elite,” presented at Women in Economic Decision Making, (Norway: May 10-11, 2012), 6. http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/exchange_of_good_practice_no/ee_comments_paper_no_2012_en.pdf

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 7.

¹⁵² Raili Põldsaar, “Women in Estonian Politics: Baltic and Global Perspective,” in M. Golubeva and D. Hanovs, *Women in Baltic Societies: Past and Present* (Riga: N.I.M.S. Publishing House, 2002), 80.

and has been labeled in the past as the Crown Princess of the Centre Party by *Postimees*, the widely circulated Estonian newspaper.¹⁵³ Though she is perceived this way, Simson appears as a modern woman, with an active blog where she writes on current events, and has a Twitter account where she tweets current headlines and includes her fellow politicians in the tweets. Unlike Ene Ergma and Lagle Parek, Simson represents the model of the new Estonian woman, young, attractive, and present in the media.

Her coverage in the media is somewhat sensational, with titles such as the Crown Princess of the Centre Party and speculations of a possible end to her marriage to the Estonian journalist, Priit Simson.¹⁵⁴ Additionally, articles are written in the tabloids titled, “Kadri Simson explains why she said no to having children.”¹⁵⁵ Such material shows that though the information is sensationalist; it is a topic of public discourse. Rather than Simson’s work as a parliamentarian and politician, Simson is often scrutinized for not conforming to the Estonian standards of a woman or reinforcing the hegemonic femininity, that of being a nurturing and caring mother.

Moreover, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), in a report on gender equality in Estonia from 2005, noted,

The reasons for the widespread inequality mostly lie in traditional gender roles and stereotypic belief that women and men have preconditions and skills that are inborn and not acquired. The gender-prejudiced environment favours the persistence of discriminating attitudes and primarily restricts women’s participating in social, economic and political life. It can be said that there is still resistance in society to improving the social representation of women through

¹⁵³ Hannes Rumm, “Crown Princess of the Centre Party,” *Postimees*, April 9, 2005, <http://www.postimees.ee/1469037/keskpartei-kroonprintsess>.

¹⁵⁴ “Kadri Simson and Priit getting a divorce?” *ELU24-Postimees*, January 3, 2014, <http://elu24.postimees.ee/2649748/sahinad-kadri-ja-priit-simson-hakkavad-lahutama>

¹⁵⁵ “Kadri Simson published the reason why she had no children,” *ELU24-Postimees*, November 29, 2012, <http://elu24.postimees.ee/1057600/kadri-simson-avaldas-pohjuse-miks-tal-lapsi-pole>

gender quotas, and such resistance can be seen among the political elite, as well as in the public opinion among women's organizations themselves.¹⁵⁶

Despite prevailing traditionalist views among many Estonians, the integration of Estonia into international organizations as well as its admission to the European Union has had a great impact on the country's gender equality policies. By adopting the *acquis* associated with admission to the European Union, Estonia had to adopt updated gender equality laws to reflect the European Union's goal of gender equality. Estonia did not adopt the Gender Equality Act, an act that had been debated for years, until 2004.¹⁵⁷ Under Article 2, the Act also created two new institutions, the Gender Equality Commissioner and the Gender Equality Council, to monitor compliance to the law.¹⁵⁸ The law prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender and encourages gender equality to be promoted in public places.

Furthermore, Anu Laas describes the changing views of women who had become involved in international NGOs and organizations, noting:

From 2001–2004, women's NGOs garnered more knowledge of equal opportunities and women's rights. The women's movement became more interested in politics than it had been in the 1990s. Women signed a shadow report presented to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). In autumn 2002, 60 Estonian women's NGOs signed a letter of support for the Gender Equality Bill.¹⁵⁹

The involvement of women's NGOs and a commitment to gender equality in the 2000s provides hope for Estonian women in achieving equality not only under the law, which has been guaranteed, but also within society.

With accession to the EU in 2004 as well as the adoption of the necessary laws, came the opportunity to send representatives to the European Parliament. As of 2012, three of the six

¹⁵⁶ CEDAW, 18.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 7.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 7.

¹⁵⁹ Anu Laas, "To Suspect or Respect? Quota Discourse in Estonia," 106.

members of Estonia's delegation to the EP are women, Siiri Oviir, Kristiina Ojuland, and Vilja Savisaar-Toomast.¹⁶⁰ Though Estonia only sends six representatives, it places Estonia among the more progressive states in the European Union in this sense. However, the equality represented in Estonia's European Parliamentary delegation may speak to the seemingly less pressing matters of the EU compared to those discussed in the *Riigikogu*; thus the receptivity to women in this position.

The career of Siiri Oviir is worth returning to and highlighting as it is quite notable in the Estonian case. She currently is a MEP in the European Parliament and serves on the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality.¹⁶¹ She is one of the few Estonian female parliamentarians to openly fight for women's rights and gender equality, and she possesses an impressive resume in regards to involvement in women's issues and public discourse on gender equality. Oviir was a refounding member of the Estonian Womens' Union from 1998-1996 and she has been the chairwoman of the Estonian Womens' Union since 1996. Additionally, she is a member of the Zonta International Womens' Club in Tallinn and has been a member of the Womens' Section in the Estonian Centre Party since 1991. She served as a member in the *Riigikogu* from 1992-2004, even occupying the position of the Deputy Speaker of the Estonian Parliament from 1999-2001.¹⁶²

Though Estonia certainly has women of note in the upper reaches of power within the state, the women do not possess extreme views or necessarily generate a lot of attention in the media in regards to gender equality, as will be seen in the Polish case study. Estonian politics

¹⁶⁰ "European Parliament, MEPs" <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/search.html>

¹⁶¹ "European Parliament-MEPS-Siiri Oviir," <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/members/public/geoSearch/view.do;jsessionid=392F26725871407ABEFD1B1AD20DBE46.node1?country=EE&partNumber=1&language=EN&id=26829>

¹⁶² Ibid

often rests in the center of the political spectrum, with very few extreme outliers.¹⁶³ The centrist leaning of the government is reflected in the women that occupy the *Riigikogu*, as although they challenge the concept of hegemonic masculinity, they make few waves in overhauling the concept. Despite the continued scrutiny of women in the public eye in Estonia as seen in the case of Kadri Simson, gender equality in Estonia is on its way to being incorporated into public discourse through government initiatives. Partial credit of these initiatives is attributed to the influence of international organizations, such as the EU, which has begun to affect gender relations in Estonia, allowing for more discussion and consideration. With the continuation of such discourse and interaction with international organizations, women in Estonia may begin to experience greater income equality, more serious representation in the media, and equal political representation in the coming decades.

¹⁶³ Rein Toomla, "Political Parties in Estonia," in Anatoly Kulik and Susanna Pshizova, eds., *Political Parties in Post-Soviet Space: Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, and the Baltics* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005), 152.

CHAPTER 4

THE POLISH CASE STUDY

4.1 Historical Background

Poland, a country situated in the heart of Europe, had an equally tumultuous history throughout the twentieth century. Poland has a population around 38 million and consists of about 98 percent ethnic Poles. The homogeneity of the Polish nation makes possible a unique analysis of Polish culture and norms in regards to gender inequality. Poland did not become a modern sovereign nation-state until 1918 with the end of World War I, but had thrived as a cultural nation for centuries. Women gained the right to vote, alongside men, in 1918, including ‘the right to choose and to be chosen.’¹⁶⁴

An active women’s movement was present before the independence of Poland was declared in 1918. The women’s movement, like in Estonia, eventually coincided and was superseded by the nationalist movement in Poland. The women of Poland, however, faced different circumstances throughout the development and maintenance of Polish nationalism throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, as Poland was partitioned among three empires, thus splitting up the Polish population. Early 20th century Poland experienced a great shift in the way women participated in society and the way it viewed its women. Poland witnessed quite an active women’s movement by the time emancipation had been granted. Adam Winiarz explored the women question in the Kingdom of Poland during the nineteenth century, and notes that there

¹⁶⁴ Małgorzata Fuszara, “Women’s Share of Power,” *Polish Women in the 90s*, 2000, 1.
<http://free.ngo.pl/temida/power.htm>

was a crisis “in the traditional upbringing of Polish women.”¹⁶⁵ Winiarz wrote that by the middle of the nineteenth century, “The roles of woman based on the family and the home, her total dependence on men, her education...no longer suited the aspirations or the social needs of women living in changing economic conditions.”¹⁶⁶ With this, Winiarz noted that a demand for reform in the upbringing of Polish women and their education rose within Polish society.¹⁶⁷

Winiarz goes on to explore the bibliography of the literature written in the nineteenth century Kingdom of Poland. He points to the important role of the “Enthusiasts,” those in Polish society who supported women’s emancipation, in the development of an emancipation movement in Poland.¹⁶⁸ The enthusiasts of the mid-nineteenth century led to the more organized emancipationists (*emancypantki*) towards the end of the nineteenth century resulted in 1907 the formation of the Union of Equal Rights for Polish Women.¹⁶⁹ In Russian Poland, Robert Blobaum points out, “...The first wave of Polish feminists were comprised of women from elite backgrounds, or at least from elites defined more in terms of education than of wealth, which was reflected in their concerns for access to higher education and professional employment.”¹⁷⁰ The women’s movement occurred among the elite women of Polish society, which “did not require the existence of a core group of affluent middle class women and allied male reformers, as had been the case particularly in Great Britain and the United States.”¹⁷¹

Both Blobaum and Winiarz point to the effect of the Revolution of 1905 in regards to the women’s movement, as was witnessed above in the Estonian case as well. An easing of political

¹⁶⁵ Adam Winiarz, “The Women Question in the Kingdom of Poland During the Nineteenth Century: A Bibliographical Essay,” in Rudolf Jaworski and Bianka Pietrow-Ennker, *Women in Polish Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 177.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 177.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 177.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 181.

¹⁶⁹ Robert Blobaum, “The “Woman Question” in Russian Poland, 1900-1914,” *Journal of Social History* (Summer 2002): 806.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 801.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 801-802.

repression from the Tsar saw women's organizations in Poland "immediately transformed into open organizations and associations."¹⁷² Blobaum expands on three waves of thought in regards to the "woman question" in Russian Poland, noting a liberal, nationalist, Roman Catholic, and feminist strand to the position of women in Polish society.¹⁷³ Of the different thoughts, Blobaum concludes, "The Polish nationalist movement, whose response to the "woman question" would ultimately prove the most influential as it came to dominate the larger political discourse on the Polish "nation," viewed women as bearers and nurturers of peculiarly Polish values and equated patriotic duties with those of motherhood and child-rearing."¹⁷⁴ Therefore, though women won the right to vote with Polish independence in 1918, the feminist movement of the early 20th century lost to the prevailing nationalist discourse of the day, which placed women in the *Matka Polka* (Polish Mother) role rather than one of greater equality.

The interwar period saw the restoration of an independent Poland under Józef Piłsudski, who led a government that is much celebrated in Poland today. Before the Second World War, women possessed dismally low percentages in the *Sejm* and *Senat*, possessing two percent and five percent of the seats respectively.¹⁷⁵ World War II devastated Poland, stripping it of its statehood in 1939 by the Germans and Soviets, before it became the firing ground for both the Nazis and Soviets. The country's experience in the Second World War left many disheartened and embittered in Polish society. The influence of Soviet-style communism spread to Poland after the war, leading to the establishment of the People's Republic of Poland, which lasted until 1989. The twists and turns of the Polish story line after 1989 have led to a democratic state that has been at the forefront of the post-communist transition in Central and Eastern Europe.

¹⁷² Winiarz, 195.

¹⁷³ Blobaum, 806.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 808.

¹⁷⁵ Fuszara, 2.

Although the percentages of women in the *Sejm* increased after World War II, traditionalist notions of the role of woman in Polish society remained. Anna Titkow notes that the late reincarnation of statehood, following over a century of division and foreign rule, “created the model of the heroic Polish woman coping with all sorts of burdens.”¹⁷⁶ This model woman was supposed to bring up children while “maintaining the national language, culture, and religious faith.”¹⁷⁷ The role of the Catholic Church is monumental in Polish culture, placing the fundamentals of Church teaching at the foundation of Polish society. These values admired in Polish women, combined in the idealized image of the *Matka Polka*, for almost all of its history continued during communist times and made the role of women in Poland strikingly different than that of the role of the Western woman, who had not faced years of strife and national persecution. The tumultuous history of the partitions, independence, and then communist rule under Soviet domination strengthened the adherence to traditions in Polish Catholic culture, since stability has been fleeting in the modern period.

The role of the Catholic Church has been pivotal in Polish history and culture. A. Kemp-Welch, in his history of Poland under communism, writes, “As always in Polish history, the Church served as a repository of national ideals and as a sanctuary in times of trouble.”¹⁷⁸ The Catholic Church is what has enabled Poles to sustain and construct their national identity, especially during the onslaught of war, Soviet communism, and the painful transition to democracy and capitalism. Most notable is the idea that “the Church would never compromise its ethical principles with any materialistic ideology.”¹⁷⁹ The permanence of the Church in Polish

¹⁷⁶ Anna Titkow, “Political Change in Poland: Cause, Modifier, or Barrier to Gender Equality?” in Nanette Funk and Magda Miller, eds., *Gender Politics and Post Communism* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 253.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 253.

¹⁷⁸ A.Kemp Welch, *Poland Under Communism: A Cold War History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 44.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 45.

society suggests a permanence in the ideas about women and men in Polish culture, and leaves the hope for achieving greater gender equality somewhat blocked by a religious wall.

4.2 Polish Women under Communist Rule

With the installation of a Soviet-style system after World War II, Poland once again faced foreign domination and isolation behind the Iron Curtain. The ideology of communism allowed for women potentially to be seen as equals among men, but Polish women were still required to be strong and persevere in nurturing Polish cultural values, namely the values associated with the Catholic Church. By virtue of its Catholicism, Poland was able to create its own form of communism, distinct yet still connected to the Soviets. Women, under communism, as noted above, enjoyed relative equality with their male comrades on paper. The ideology of communism provided that all workers and citizens were equal and worked for the common good of society, even if society was lacking in the many material advances seen under capitalism. This supposed gender equality was rooted in the ideology of communism, but would take up a defensive position against the values and traditions of the Catholic Church innate in Polish society.

Elzbieta Oleksy highlights:

Formally, in the period of roughly forty years after the Second World War, Polish women enjoyed rights that Western women might have envied. In agreement with the Marxist doctrine that women's emancipation entails their integration into the labor market, the Polish Constitution of 1952 gave women full civil and political rights, as well as access to most trades and professions, many of them formerly in the male preserve. The state legalized abortion and divorce and declared (though never fully realized this promise) to provide free child care facilities.¹⁸⁰

¹⁸⁰ Elzbieta H. Oleksy, "American Feminism and Pedagogy: The Case of Poland," *American Studies International*, 38, 3 (October 2000), 37.

The Polish Constitution of 1952 provided women with many rights, including the right of employment in traditional male-dominated professions, as well as rights to divorce and abortion. With admission into male trades and professions, the opportunity came for greater gender equality through the labor force and the potential for women to hold equal positions of power in the communist government. However, this was simply not the outcome of the Polish Constitution of 1952.

Although the lives of most women under communism were not luxurious, they did not face dramatic and outright gender inequality under communism as they were to face with the introduction of capitalism and democracy. The socialist system “promoted gender equality in education, labor, leisure, family, and public life.”¹⁸¹ Equality in leisure time, although it was promoted in the ideology, could hardly be seen during communist times. Not only did Polish women have to work in the labor force in building socialism alongside their male comrades, but they also had to be in charge of the household.

Małgorzata Fidelis has written an excellent study on the experience of women in postwar Poland, emphasizing the situation of women under communism and the industrialization of the postwar period. Fidelis examines the shift in the government policy on women from promoting their participation in the labor force to shifting and placing them in gender-defined occupations, all within two decades. The drastic change in policy led Fidelis to write, “Women were to enter en masse into jobs traditionally performed by men, but those jobs were now redesigned as exclusively or primarily female jobs. Through the policy of “regendering from above,” the socialist workplace offered a peculiar kind of gender equality, in which the boundary between men’s and women’s work “was redrawn, but not erased. Thus the persistent reassertion of sexual

¹⁸¹ Jill M. Bystydzienski “Negotiating the New Market: Women, Families, Women’s Organizations and the Economic Transition of Poland.” *Journal of Family and Economic Issues*, 26 (Summer 2005), 240.

difference in employment policies reinforced a gender hierarchy that the communists, paradoxically, sought to obliterate through instituting political and legal equality of the sexes.”¹⁸²

Fidelis continues, “Although Soviet leaders were just as eager as their Polish counterparts to demote female workers, Poles continued to believe that women in the new occupations represented a Soviet imposition on Polish national culture. For them, strengthening gender hierarchies was also a way to reassert national identities and set themselves apart from the Soviets.”¹⁸³ Fidelis interestingly argues that the reversion to prewar gender stereotypes at the end of the communist era was a result of Poles reasserting their nationality and culture, which had been challenged by communism. Thus, gender equality was something associated with communism and separate spheres for men and women were Polish, and important to retain. Fidelis notes, “A woman performing a man’s job was a threat not only to proper femininity but to Polishness as well.”¹⁸⁴ An example of this reversion of gender norms can be witnessed with the drastic drop in the number of female representatives emerging from the first elections in post-communist Poland.

The first years of communist Poland saw attempts at extensive industrialization, requiring the recruitment of women into the labor force and the “tendency to break through traditional attitudes against professional work for women and their participation in social and political life.”¹⁸⁵ Following the Stalinist era, a change in policy towards women’s roles in Polish society became prevalent in the second decade of communist rule. Władysław Adamski writes:

A reorientation of policy regarding women occurred in the years from 1955 to 1957: greater attention was not being given to the family than to professional

¹⁸² Małgorzata Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 49-50.

¹⁸³ Ibid, 204-205.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 230.

¹⁸⁵ Władysław Adamski, “Women in Contemporary Poland: Their Social and Occupational Position and Attitudes Toward Work,” in Tova Yedlin, ed., *Women in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* (New York: Praeger Publishing, 1980), 213.

work for women. In the 1960s, the trend was to equalize the two approaches to the role of women in society. A new element of social policy appeared to continue the approach adopted in the first years of extensive industrialization, while emphasizing the role of the woman as mother, wife, and housekeeper.¹⁸⁶

The change in policy towards women was reflected in the number of women represented in the *Sejm*. Małgorzata Fuszara, in her examination of women in the Polish parliament in the communist period, cites a figure of 17 percent of women in the *Sejm* for the period 1952-1956.¹⁸⁷

The rise in female representatives correlates with the more egalitarian approach towards women's roles in society and government in general in the first decade of communist rule. Interestingly, however, a dramatic decline was noted in the following period, 1956-1961, where women only accounted for four percent of the deputies.¹⁸⁸ For the rest of the 1960s and 1970s, women made up an average of around 14 percent of deputies in the *Sejm*.¹⁸⁹ The 1980s saw a rise in the proportion of women in parliament, averaging around 21 percent of the deputies, yet the transition to democracy again led to a sharp drop in women's representation.¹⁹⁰

Małgorzata Fuszara and Eleonora Zielińska warn of false impressions in their analysis of women's representation during the communist period, by stating:

Any attempt to evaluate women's impact on the law during that period is futile, since citizens had no real influence on the legislative process because all decisions were made by the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party [PZPR]. Since the representation of women in that body was purely symbolic, it is highly probable that any decisions made were in fact undertaken by men. After the collapse of Communism, the gender distribution of power did not change considerably.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 213.

¹⁸⁷ Fuszara, "Women's Share of Power," 2.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 2.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 2.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, 2.

¹⁹¹ Małgorzata Fuszara and Eleonora Zielińska, "Women and the Law in Poland: Towards Active Citizenship," in Jasmina Lukić, Joanna Regulska, and Darija Zaviršek, eds., *Women and Citizenship in Central and Eastern Europe* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), 39.

Fuszara and Zielińska argue that although Polish women, and men, possessed representation in the *Sejm*, they did not hold any power. Siemieniska goes on to note, “The presence of female faces was thus ensured, but these women did not represent the best and brightest of Polish society.”¹⁹² However, despite the lack of the “best and the brightest” women, the symbolic pressure of women in any institution of power was important for retaining and promoting a female presence in the public realm, even if it was largely a façade under the communist regime. Moreover, very few women held positions in the government itself, and “the few that were only played a symbolic role to “prove” that there was not discrimination.”¹⁹³ The “symbolic role” played by these women was an important step in allowing the public to see women in politics, despite the seemingly useless nature of the governmental positions that they held. Ania Plomien notes, however, that the communist government did attempt to enact the policy of gender equality through institutionalization with the creation of the Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Women’s Affairs in 1986.¹⁹⁴ This office was “to ensure the equal status of women and men in government, political, economic, social and cultural arenas.”¹⁹⁵

With the end of communism in Poland, the transition to democracy and capitalism began in full force in 1989, and women’s role in the transition was as marginalized as it had been in the seemingly powerless positions they held in the communist government. It must be highlighted, however, that though women were involved in Solidarity, and “the movement relied heavily on women’s involvement, it did not address women’s concerns.”¹⁹⁶ Shana Penn, in her seminal work on women’s involvement in Solidarity, notes, “But the Solidarity men consistently

¹⁹² Siemieniska, 218.

¹⁹³ Fuszara and Zielińska, 40.

¹⁹⁴ Ania Plomien, “Women and the Labor Market in Poland: From Socialism to Capitalism,” in Hans-Peter Blossfeld and Heather Hofmeister, eds., *Globalization, Uncertainty and Women’s Careers: An International Comparison* (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2006), 250.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 250.

¹⁹⁶ Olesky, 41.

overlooked the movement's heroines, who, for their part, did not challenge the subordinate position they were allotted."¹⁹⁷ Penn's work examines the work of the women that kept the underground newspapers alive during martial law in Poland. Interestingly, the majority of the women did not claim their role as leaders of democracy in Poland, but rather, stood aside as the public faces of Solidarity, all men, took the credit for Solidarity's success. Moreover, as Oleksy writes, "The achievement of these women has been erased from collective memory."¹⁹⁸ The avoidance of women's issues by Solidarity and its new government undermined the emergence of a women's movement and support for women during the transition, leaving those women who had helped take down communism in Poland disheartened and left out.

4.3 Polish Women in Transition, 1989-2004

The class distinctions that plague capitalism were not seen to such an extent under socialism. The shaky economy and newly implemented free market led to the loss of many jobs that had been guaranteed under communism. This new economic reality was difficult and painful for Polish families who could not be supported by a single income. It was especially difficult when women's participation in the labor force was particularly jeopardized in the transition.¹⁹⁹ Male hegemony in politics, industry, and other traditionally masculine sectors reappeared, leaving many women unemployed and floundering to support their families.

This exclusion and inequality of women in the workforce led to one of the contradictions in the return to traditional gender roles in Poland. Although some women were seemingly happy to return to the sphere of domesticity, others were forced to seek employment in order to support

¹⁹⁷ Shana Penn, *Solidarity's Secret: The Women Who Defeated Communism in Poland* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2005), 2.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, 42.

¹⁹⁹ Bystydzienski 239

their families while the economy stabilized. However, with the rise of the Catholic influence in Polish political culture and society, women were once again viewed as inferior to men in the public realm. This led to inequality in wages, labor, and job availability along with little say in the political or economic transition. These prejudices made it impossible for many women to find employment at all, despite their high levels of university education.²⁰⁰

Poland is a relative success story in the transition from an authoritarian government and command economy to democracy and free markets because it “sought to embrace neoliberalism quickly and thoroughly.”²⁰¹ However, the development of capitalism and democracy in Poland brought about a reversion to traditional gender roles that were prevalent before the communist era. Although the first Polish post-communist government and its successors were quick to adopt democratic principles, their adoption of gender equality or recognition of women’s issues as a concern for society has been slow. The importance of women in Polish society did not go unnoticed in Poland, but continuation of the exclusion of women from the political realm remains problematic.

The immense amount of pressure on women during communist times to work in both realms placed a great burden on women, making the arrival of capitalism and democracy and a return to the traditional gender roles welcomed by many women.²⁰² Based on the Catholic Church’s values and norms, women were to return to the domestic realm to raise families and take care of their husbands, whereas men were to remain as breadwinners for their growing Catholic families. This traditional dichotomy suited the women who had been subject to the

²⁰⁰ Ibid, 240-241.

²⁰¹ Katja M. Guenther, “The Possibilities and Pitfalls of NGO Feminism: Insights from Postsocialist Eastern Europe.” *Signs* 36 (Summer 2011), 867.

²⁰² Urszula Nowakowska noted that opinion surveys showed that more 60% of women would have liked to leave the workforce and return home; “The New Right and Fundamentalism,” in Tanya Renne, ed. *Ana’s Land: Sisterhood in Eastern Europe* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997), 29.

double burden during socialist times of participation in the labor force and maintaining an ideal communist household.

Plomien notes, “In contrast to the previous era, the state’s dedication to equal opportunities (even if mostly superficial) and women’s professional activation was not sustained through the transition period.”²⁰³ The superficial attempts at gender equality were eradicated with the transition. Even the institutionalization of gender equality in 1986 with the Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Women’s Affairs was undermined by converting the office in 1991 “into the Office of Undersecretary of State for Women and Family with new responsibilities for family, children and youth.”²⁰⁴ The inclusion of family and youth into the Office of Women’s Affairs further placed women in the stereotypical role of wife and mother, rather than focusing exclusively on the important women’s issues that were present with the transition, such as unemployment and poverty. Furthermore, a survey conducted in 1995 by the Center for Public Opinion Research (*Ośrodek Badania Opinii Publicznej*) noted that a majority of Poles felt that women were worse off in their professional and social lives than their male counterparts, with only 23 percent believing women and men were equal in this area.²⁰⁵

Both Urszula Nowakowska and Ania Plomien point to the rise of the political right and cultural conservatives at the time of transition in Poland, which affected the position of women in society. Plomien writes, “The right-leaning government went as far as advising women to return to their households and take up their motherly and wifely duties in order to make jobs available for men.”²⁰⁶ As Nowakowska, writing in the mid-1990s, noted, “The Catholic Church and closely cooperating right-wing parties have created a very unfavorable political climate for

²⁰³ Plomien, 250.

²⁰⁴ Ibid, 250.

²⁰⁵ OBOP (Ośrodek Badania Opinii Publicznej). *Problemy kobiet, model rodziny i polityka rodzinna*. Warsaw, (1995).

²⁰⁶ Ibid, 250.

women's rights. They propagate traditional, patriarchal models of the family, with a man at its head."²⁰⁷ The rise of the right-wing and the power of the Church showed itself during the transition, filling the void that Marxist ideology had once occupied. The Church in Poland, at the time of transition and since its completion, has promoted "women's role as wife and mother and as the only morally correct one."²⁰⁸ Therefore, women were not encouraged to seek public office or attempt to obtain equality in political institutions. Nowakowska concluded, "Instead of building a pluralistic society, we have just replaced quasi-religious Marxist ideology with the only one right doctrine, namely, that of the Catholic Church."²⁰⁹

The rise of the right as well as the Church's increasing political role in the early 1990s was reflected in the dramatic drop in women's representation in the Sejm and Senate. Women made up only 9.56 percent, or 44 seats, of the 460 member Sejm after the 1991 elections.²¹⁰ Women fared somewhat better in the 1993 elections, winning 60 seats, raising their presence in the *Sejm* to 13 percent.²¹¹ Although women faced low levels of representation, "a positive initiative to overcome such prejudice was taken up by a cross-party group of women politicians."²¹² Barbara Einhorn describes the initiative by female parliamentarians:

Defying resistance from male politicians, they set up in spring 1991 the first ever Parliamentary Club of Women Deputies under the chair of Barbara Labuda. Forty of the total 62 women deputies in the Sejm and seven female senators joined. They saw the function of this Women's Caucus as monitoring women's interests in relation to legislative changes under consideration by the Polish Sejm.²¹³

²⁰⁷ Nowakowska, 29.

²⁰⁸ Ibid, 29.

²⁰⁹ Ibid, 26.

²¹⁰ "Inter-Parliamentary Union- 'Poland-Sejm- Election Archives,'" last modified 2013, http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/2255_arc.htm

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Einhorn, 169.

²¹³ Ibid, 169.

The cooperation among women in the *Sejm* and *Senat* provided hope for advancing women's issues in Poland as well as promoting the presence of women in parliament. The club also sought to delegitimize the stereotypes of women held by male parliamentarians.

Moreover, the appointment of Anna Popowicz was an example of a woman promoted to a ministerial position in the post-communist Polish government. Nowakowska wrote, "When, for example, Walesa appointed a minister of women's affairs, the bishops appealed for a minister who was Catholic, married, at least forty years old, and with two or more children. They got what they wanted, but they overlooked the fact that Miss Popowicz did not support a ban on abortion."²¹⁴ Popowicz, showing a public challenge to the prevalent hegemonic masculinity represented in Walesa, was eventually dismissed. Despite her dismissal, her appointment and the creation of the Under-Secretary of State for Women and Family Affairs was often cited as Poland's attempt at becoming European in the eyes of Western media.²¹⁵

Another example of a woman who reached a high level in the Polish post-communist government was Hanna Suchocka. Her appointment as Prime Minister in 1992, at first glance, appeared as a victory for women's representation in post-communist Poland. The abortion debate at the time of transition caused much controversy in Poland, especially among right-wing conservatives who sought to ban abortion entirely. Therefore, "Hanna Suchocka was elected to the post as a compromise candidate, not because she is a constitutional lawyer, nor because of her term as Poland's representative on the council of Europe, but precisely, it seems, because of her uncompromising stance in opposition to abortion."²¹⁶ Suchocka was not an advocate for women's issues, but was seeking to continue to traits associated with the hegemonic femininity expected of a Polish woman. Suchocka, as Einhorn described her, "seem[ed] both to epitomize

²¹⁴ Nowakowska, 31.

²¹⁵ Einhorn, 155.

²¹⁶ Ibid, 156.

and to laud the traditional view of women's qualities currently espoused by so many political ideologues in East Central Europe."²¹⁷ Though she was in a prime position to promote a platform for gender equality, she looked to pass a legislative ban on abortion in Poland through the Polish parliament, restricting the physical freedom of Polish women in regards to their bodies.

Female politicians, like the former Prime Minister of Poland, Hanna Suchocka, have not wholeheartedly emphasized or advocated for women's rights in the political realm, so many women are not convinced or influenced to vote for these women.²¹⁸ Hanna Suchocka, though the Prime Minister of Poland, characterized the qualities that are found in Connell's emphasized femininity and Schippers' hegemonic femininity rather than characterizing a figure determined to challenge Poland's rigid gender stereotypes at the time of transition. Though she was part of a small minority of female politicians, she reached high office because of her conservative views that would allow for the continuation of subordinating women in Polish society from the top to the bottom.

Katja Guenther goes on to explain why the women's movement has not been successful in Poland by noting that there has been little encouragement for the public inclusion of feminist goals in national politics.²¹⁹ Furthermore, Monika Platek writes, "Contrary to popular belief, one women Prime Minister, one woman Chair of the National Bank or one woman Minister will not change the social situation or image of women. Women who hold high office do not become supporters of women's rights just because they themselves are women. In fact, they often act to the contrary."²²⁰ If ordinary women cannot be confident that women operating in the political realm will be advocates for their rights, then the political apathy of women will continue in

²¹⁷ Ibid, 156.

²¹⁸ Guenther, 871.

²¹⁹ Ibid, 871.

²²⁰ Monika Platek, "Hostages of Destiny: Gender Issues in Today's Poland," *Feminist Review*, Post-Communism: Women's Lives in Transition, 76 (2004), 10.

Poland. The drop of female representatives in parliament in addition to the lack of effective females in top positions during the transition period left a bleak foundation for the involvement of women in politics in Poland.

The turbulent transition for Polish women had certainly stabilized by the beginning of the 21st century as compared with the early to mid 1990s. The contradictions and further burdens brought on by capitalism should not be viewed in a uniformly negative light, however. Only time can tell if these burdens are to lessen and Titkow provided an optimistic outlook on the future of gender equality in Poland in stating, “The political and economic transformation going on in Poland, however negative it may appear for women, should be seen as only a factor modifying the process of achieving gender equality.”²²¹ Titkow’s hope for gender equality has made some progress in Poland, but today’s Polish woman continues to face a difficult time in regards to gender equality on a governmental level.

The governments during the second half of the period of transition, particularly from 1993 to 1997, came from the left side of the political spectrum, and “were more involved in promoting equal opportunities, especially after the 1995 Women’s Conference in Beijing.”²²² Furthermore, a National Action Plan for Women was embraced, which sought to fight poverty among women, provide access to education and medical care, fight violence against women, and create an “institutionalizing mechanism for the advancement of women and facilitating women’s involvement in power and decision-making.”²²³ Of course, these policies did not last long, but the fact that they were developed showed that progress was possible in providing a voice for women.

²²¹ Titkow, 255.

²²² Plomien, 251.

²²³ Ibid, 251.

The return of a conservative government in 1997, however, “questioned the need to introduce an equal status bill, to investigate pay and gender equity in the labor market or to introduce a political quota system.”²²⁴ The step backwards by the conservative government on women’s issues was once again addressed by the new government in 2001, which again came from the left side of the political spectrum.²²⁵ This pattern leads Plomien to observe “that the process of crafting a new gender contract is one characterized by progress and retreat, depending on the political orientation of the administration in power.”²²⁶ Gender equality, however, is addressed in the 1997 Polish Constitution,

Article 33 of the Constitution states that ‘men and women shall have equal rights (...) regarding education, employment and promotion, and shall have the right to equal compensation for work of similar value, to social security, to hold office, and to receive public honors and decorations.’²²⁷

The 1997 Constitution ensured gender equality in all aspects of life in Poland, but a long battle still lay ahead for a better framework of gender equality in order for women to be truly equal in Polish society. Furthermore, the role of the Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment, which was created in response to EU discussions for accession, through its years of transformation and changes in its title, is now responsible for what is in its namesake, equal treatment throughout Poland.²²⁸

The percentage of female representatives in the *Sejm* and *Senat* remained quite low throughout the transition period, and the 1997 elections did not provide women with any progress, with only 13 percent of the *Sejm* consisting of female parliamentarians.²²⁹ The following election years, however, appeared as great victories for women in Poland. A leap of

²²⁴ Ibid, 251.

²²⁵ Ibid, 251.

²²⁶ Ibid, 251.

²²⁷ Dorota Szelewa for European Parliament, “The Policy on Gender Equality in Poland,” May 2011,5.

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/document/activities/cont/201107/20110725ATT24649/20110725ATT24649EN.pdf>

²²⁸ Plomien, 264.

²²⁹ “Inter Parliamentary Union- Poland-Sejm-Election Archives”

seven percent was seen with the 2001 elections, allowing for 93 women to join the ranks of parliamentarians.²³⁰ Interestingly, ‘of those women that were elected to parliament, 61.3 percent were new to politics.’²³¹ Furthermore, the number of females in ministerial positions rose from 7 percent in 1995 to about 25 percent in 2005.²³²

A further public opinion survey was conducted in 2002 asking, “What is it like to be a Woman in Poland?” The survey noted that 48 percent of male and 46 percent of female respondents believed that it was better to be a man in Poland than a woman, whereas as only 12 percent of female respondents and 6 percent of male respondents believed that it was better to be a female in Poland.²³³ The survey continues by asking the respondents whether women and men with the same qualifications have the same opportunities, to which, 65 percent of the female respondents and 58 percent of the male respondents answered that women have fewer opportunities than men in regards to career opportunities.²³⁴ These results indicate the continuation of the subordination of women in Polish society, despite increased numbers of female representatives in the *Sejm*.

Renata Siemienka has devoted much of her research to the pivotal election year of 2001 that saw a substantial increase in women in the Polish parliament. Siemienka notes, “The 2001 parliamentary elections were a turning point for women in Parliament, due in part to the implementation of the new electoral law.”²³⁵ The new law reduced the number of districts, which in turn, increased the constituencies. The reduction of districts as Siemienka explains, “gave an

²³⁰ Ibid

²³¹ Siemienka, “Women and Women’s Issues in the Polish Parliament: Progress or Regress?” in Nida Gelazis, ed. *Women in East European politics : Conference Proceedings from the meeting held in Washington, DC, April 23, 2004* (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, East European Studies, 2005), 52.

²³² European Commission-Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, “Report on Equality between Women and Men 2010,” (European Union, 2010), 41.

²³³ OBOP (Ośrodek Badania Opinii Publicznej). *Być Kobieta?*. Warsaw, (2002), 5.

²³⁴ Ibid, 6.

²³⁵ Siemienka, “Women and Women’s Issues,” 51.

advantage to larger parties, which needed to fill their party lists with more candidates and were therefore inclined to add more women to them. As a result of these changes, substantially more women were elected to both the Sejm and the Senate.”²³⁶ Siemieniska expands on the larger parties, by noting their adoption of gender quotas:

[the]Coalition of Democratic Left Alliance-Labor Union as well as the liberal-center Freedom Union, accepted the rule that neither of the sexes should be represented by less than 30 percent of all candidates, and lists presented for individual constituencies should comply with this condition. Moreover, even right-wing parties, such as the League of Polish Families, were influenced by these changes.²³⁷

Despite the adoption of gender quotas by individual parties, no national quota was enforced and the selection of candidates was still made entirely by men.²³⁸ Fuszara and Zielińska, writing in 2006, added that since the fall of communism, “few political parties took women’s questions into consideration. Many parties did not address women’s issues at all, and some did only in the context of the family and women’s roles within the family.”²³⁹ Siemieniska notes in her study that, “The problem of the equal status of women and men, women’s political participation and other women’s issues were rarely included in party programs for the 2001 electoral campaign.”²⁴⁰ Although the greater number of women in parliament “reflected changes in attitudes toward women in politics,”²⁴¹ the lack of acknowledgment of women’s issues by the political parties and leaders showed little hope for a true change in gender equality in Poland with the 2001 elections.

²³⁶ Ibid, 52.

²³⁷ Ibid, 52-53.

²³⁸ Ibid, 53.

²³⁹ Fuszara and Zielińska, 40.

²⁴⁰ Siemieniska, “Women and Women’s Issues,” 53.

²⁴¹ Ibid, 52.

4.4 Polish Women After Transition, 2004-2012

The ground-breaking election of 2001 was followed by the success of women in the subsequent elections of 2005, 2007, and 2011. The election years of 2005 and 2007 saw the retention by women of around 20 percent of the seats in the Polish parliament, whereas the year 2011 saw further growth in female representatives, with women making up almost 24 percent of parliamentarians.²⁴² The rising numbers of female politicians in Poland can be counted as a partial success in regards to gender equality, yet the road to full equality is still bumpy and filled with contradictions and road blocks for Polish women. However, given the continual rise in female representation, perhaps the phenomenon of women occupying important positions within institutions of power no longer appears as atypical.

The results of my survey conducted for the Polish case study are skewed in favor of the Civic Platform (*Platforma Obywatelska*), as the majority of the seventeen respondents belonged to that party. However, the percentage of women belonging to the Civic Platform are a majority of women serving in the *Sejm* and *Senat*, which therefore accurately reflects the make-up of women in the two houses. Cooperation of female parliamentarians in completing the survey was much harder to come by, despite a much larger number of women in the Polish *Sejm* and *Senat* than was seen with the Estonian *Riigikogu*. However, much more research has been conducted on Poland and its post-communist situation than Estonia, making the survey supplemental to previous research. Only one female parliamentarian from Law and Justice (*Prawo I Sprawiedliwość*) responded, as well as one member from Palikot's Movement (*Ruch Palikota*), The Democratic Left Alliance (*Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej*), and United Poland (*Solidarna Polska*). The length of time that the female parliamentarians had been in parliament varied much

²⁴² "Inter Parliamentary Union-Poland-Sejm-Election Archives"

more than in Estonia, with a variety of terms in office recorded.²⁴³ The majority of women polled said they had not always wanted to be in politics but responded with “I used to think about it, and circumstances allowed for it” or “It just kind of happened to where I joined a career in politics,” when asked how they came by the career choice of being a politician.

Although progress in legislation and representation for women has fluctuated since the transition, equality in education can be seen across the board in Poland, as a great many women in Poland hold university degrees.²⁴⁴ This can be viewed as a relic of communist times, but remains in Poland to this day. Polish women continue to possess more higher education than their male counterparts. Of those women in the *Sejm* and *Senat* surveyed for this thesis, all of the women held a degree from institutions of higher education.²⁴⁵ Therefore, the reversion to traditional gender roles cannot be attributed to the ignorance of Polish women or inequality in education, but rather the role of cultural norms and values.

Interestingly, the restoration of gender quotas was enacted in January 2011 in Poland, creating more potential for women to be representatives.²⁴⁶ The quotas were placed on electoral lists for both the *Sejm* and the European Parliament and called for no less than 35 percent of a gender on a candidate list.²⁴⁷ Despite the turbulent past with gender quotas, the majority of the survey respondents approve of gender quotas, with only five disapproving of them. The quota for the candidate list did not overflow into the parliamentary seats in 2012, as only eleven of the fifty Polish representatives to the European Parliament are women.²⁴⁸

²⁴³ Three women held their seats for one term or less, six women for 2-3 terms, and seven women for 4 or more terms.

²⁴⁴ Bystydziński, 240-241.

²⁴⁵ Of the 17 respondents, all said they possessed higher education.

²⁴⁶ “Quota Project- Poland” Last updated 06-04-2013
www.quotaproject.org/uid/countryview.cjm?ul=en&country=179

²⁴⁷ Ibid

²⁴⁸ “Women in Regional Parliamentary Assemblies,” <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/regions.htm>

Despite the gender quotas and the presence of an all-female political party, the majority of female parliamentarians who responded to my survey found being in politics was somewhat difficult for them as a woman. Five respondents noted that they felt women are fully accepted as political leaders in their country, whereas seven felt that they were somewhat accepted, and four responded that women were not really accepted as political leaders in Poland. Furthermore, the majority of women felt women's issues were somewhat or not really heard by men in politics, with three responding that they felt as though women's issues were always heard. The improvement in female representation in Poland after the 2001 elections provides hope for women in Poland, yet, the percentage still lies below a quarter of all representatives. With further integration with international norms and a curbing of Church influence, perhaps women in Poland will be able to reach achieve greater equality in Polish institutions of power and governance.

Even more intriguing was the formation of the "Women's Party" in the 2007 elections. Unfortunately the Women's Party was not able to reach the five percent threshold, but the presence of such a party on the political scene shows great strides in Poland's attempt at gender equality²⁴⁹. The Women's Party subsequently joined ranks with the SLD, a party that "has declared that it would retain a 40 percent gender quota on its candidate lists."²⁵⁰ Additionally, in 2011, "the government comprise[d] 19 Ministers, including 5 women, who [were] the head of the following ministries: Labor and Social Policy, National Education, Science and Higher Education, Health, and Regional Development."²⁵¹ Over the past four years, women have made up around a quarter of the positions in the government, representing significant improvement, though still unequal, in women's representation in the upper echelons of power in Poland.

²⁴⁹ Ibid, 7.

²⁵⁰ Ibid, 7.

²⁵¹ Szelewa, 7.

Today in Poland, examples of hegemonic femininity and hegemonic masculinity, as well as the subordination of other masculinities and femininities can be spotted across the political spectrum. Beata Kempa, currently a member of the *Sejm* and the former Secretary of State in the Ministry of Justice from May 2006 to November 2007, is an interesting example of the characteristics that culminate to form the Polish form of hegemonic femininity, to follow Schippers' terminology. Kempa, after losing the election for the deputy marshal of the *Sejm* seat in 2011 to Wanda Nowicka, gave a speech where she said, "I'm all for the cross and for Christian values. I'm all for religion in schools and the traditional model of a Polish family. And today we have the opportunity to bring an end to the discussion of whether the cross from the mother of Blessed Father Jerzy Popieluszko is supposed to hang at this point or not. Decide."²⁵² Kempa is also an active supporter of the "Stop Gender" campaign, aimed at enforcing a traditional notion of family and gender roles in Polish society.

Additionally, Kempa was formerly a member of the Law and Justice (*PiS*) party, but was part of a parliamentary faction of fifteen members that broke away in November 2011 and formed the United Poland political party (*Solidarna Polksa*). Kempa was one of two females that broke off with United Poland. The United Poland party is a party that is supportive of the notion that men and women have certain roles in Polish society and are actively working towards the maintenance of the traditional family model. Kempa is currently the vice president of the right-wing party that is pro-family at its center, thus, reinforcing the role of the woman as belonging in the realm of domesticity in Poland, despite her presence in the national politics. Kempa's continual public reinforcements of maintaining the traditional gender roles and norms, while also putting down any notion of a new form of femininity or masculinity appearing in Polish society,

²⁵² "Nowicka Deputy Speaker after Extra Time. Kempa Eliminated (*Nowicka wicemarszałkiem po dogrywce. Kempa odpadła.*)" *TVN 24*, November 8, 2011, <http://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-z-kraju,3/nowicka-wicemarszalkiem-po-dogrywce-kempa-odpadla,190016.html>

allows her to be described as an archetype of hegemonic femininity in Poland. Rather than fighting for greater gender equality in politics, she advocates the continuation of the archetype of the Polish woman as the *Matka Polka*.

Furthermore, Kempa notes, “I belong to a generation of Poles shaped by the ideals of the democratic opposition and the teaching of John Paul II.” Though Kempa’s belief that family is important is often no point of contestation for many Poles, but her rigid views on retaining the traditional gender roles in Poland prevents any real gender equality to emerge even within her own party. Though Kempa certainly is not the only female politician in Poland that embraces such conservative values, she is certainly the most public and well-recognized female figurehead for hegemonic femininity.

On the other side of the Polish political spectrum, Anna Grodzka made headlines throughout the world when she was elected to the Polish *Sejm* in the elections of 2011 as the first transgender member of parliament.²⁵³ She is a deputy from the Palikot Movement (*Ruch Palikota*) and was elected alongside Poland’s only openly homosexual male deputy in the Sejm, Robert Biedroń. Though Grodzka has not been the first transgender parliamentarian in the world,²⁵⁴ she is the only one currently presiding in a parliament. Grodzka has been very public with her intent while in the public eye and wrote in a piece for *The Guardian* stating, “I put this down to the unsettling challenge transgender people can represent to norms of masculinity and femininity, which many hold dear. The fear and discomfort we can engender sometimes results in mockery and contempt from those with power, including some well-known media

²⁵³ Monika Scislowka and Vanessa Gera, “Anna Grodzka, Transgender Woman, and Robert Bierdron, Gay Man, Make Debut in New Polish Parliament,” *Huffinton Post*, November 8, 2011, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/11/08/anna-grodzkatransgender-w_n_1081636.html

²⁵⁴ This title goes to Georgina Beyer of New Zealand.

commentators.”²⁵⁵ She has been a herald for change in Poland in regards to how the population views its gender roles and norms, forcing many to reassess how functional the traditional gender norms and roles really are in describing the citizens of a more modern Poland.

Grodzka is certainly an interesting example in regards to both hegemonic masculinity as well as exhibiting characteristics of pariah femininity. Her election in an overwhelmingly Catholic country with a strong conservative voice may simply be an outlier among traditional gender roles, but it may also be a sign of change and modernization of the reigning hegemonic masculinity. Not only does Grodzka upset the traditional notion of femininity, but she also upsets and questions the role of masculinity in modern Polish society. Grodzka represents the transgender challenge to hegemonic masculinity, but she additionally represents a challenge to hegemonic femininity by exhibiting characteristics of a strong feminine presence on the national level. Grodzka is an important key in the unpacking of gender norms in Polish society, as she has the audience of an international community of transgendered persons and the conservative right.

In addition to challenging current gender norms and roles, Grodzka has been a target for the right-wing media in Poland. Grodzka has faced media outbursts from Beata Kempa and others in regards to Grodzka’s sexuality and appearance. Kempa and Grodzka represent such extremes, that the Polish tabloid-newspaper *Fakt* enjoys writing a piece which put the two against each other quite publically and unabashedly naming the article, “Kempa vs. Grodzka.”²⁵⁶ The metaphorical battle between the two notions of femininity is quite apparent in Poland and indicates a public battle of sorts in regards to the current state of the Polish gender regime. Both parties are seeking to adjust how gender is viewed in Poland, but are at opposite ends of the

²⁵⁵ Anna Grodzka, “As the World’s Only Transgender MP, I want to Ensure that Our Voices are Heard,” *The Guardian*, May 17, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/may/17/transgender-mp-voices-heard>

²⁵⁶ “The Struggle for Gender in the Sejm: Mayhem in the Parliament of Gender! Kempa vs. Grodzka,” *Fakt*, January 19, 2014, <http://www.fakt.pl/kempa-nie-chce-grodzkiej-w-swoim-zespole-do-walki-z-gender.artykuly.439774,1.html>

proposed changes, with Kempa seeking to keep the matronly woman and Grodzka seeking to reform the overall notion of gender and who is included in the concept. are seeking to end the ‘ideology of gender,’ yet for completely different reasons.

Though Kempa and Grodzka represent a visible application and contestation of hegemonic masculinity and femininity in Poland, other female parliamentarians in Poland are certainly worth mentioning in regards to challenging the prevailing hegemonic masculinity in Polish culture and politics. Ewa Kopacz, like Anna Grodzka, has also made some waves in regards to challenging traditional notions of women and Catholic beliefs in Polish society. Kopacz was elected as the speaker of the Polish *Sejm* in 2011 and has held the position ever since, being the first and only woman to occupy the position. She is also the vice-chairwoman of the Civic Platform (*Platforma Obywatelska*), currently the largest political party in the *Sejm*. Kopacz also created waves in 2008 in Poland while she was the Health Minister through allowing a 14 year-old Polish girl to be granted an abortion.²⁵⁷ Pro-Life activists called for Kopacz’s excommunication, as she is a practicing Catholic. Despite what she does in her occupation, she still has to answer to the conservative voice and criticism within Poland. Regardless of the uproar over Kopacz’s seemingly liberal approach to abortion, she has retained popularity in regards to being a parliamentary deputy and the speaker of the male-dominated *Sejm*.

A more consistent example of somewhat of a pariah femininity can be found in Krystyna Łybacka, a politician from the SLD, Democratic Left Alliance. Łybacka is an example of a long-standing and well-respected female politician, as she was one of the few females elected in the first free elections in post-communist Poland. Łybacka was also a former member of the

²⁵⁷“The Minister Does not Feel Guilty about Abortion,” *Wiadomosci*, June 23, 2008, <http://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl/wydarzenia/artykuly/129694,minister-nie-czuje-sie-winna-aborcji.html>

communist party and served in the Polish Sejm. In addition to serving several terms in the Sejm, Łybacka was also a former vice-chair of the national executive committee of the SLD and the party's parliamentary delegation.²⁵⁸ Furthermore, Łybacka, an avid social democrat, focusing on education, also occupied the position of the Minister of National Education and Sport from 2001-2004. Her impressive resume suggests that the presence of a pariah femininity that challenges the male presence within national politics in Poland.

With the presence of such strong women, even if they go along with current expectations of hegemonic masculinity like Kempa, the representation of women appears to be on the upswing. Additionally, Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004, the prospects for better legal implementation of gender equality improved a great deal. Joining the EU and adopting the *acquis communautaire* certainly strengthened Poland's framework for gender equality.²⁵⁹ Moreover, Poland has agreed to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) as well as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.²⁶⁰ Twelve respondents to the survey believe that gender inequality is an issue in Poland, with only two believing that it is a top issue. With its entrance into the EU, Poland appears to have embraced the legislative necessities in creating a framework for gender equality through the increase of female representatives in parliament and in government as well as adopting directives and laws that combat gender inequality.

These changes can be witnessed with the development of the Women's Congress (*Kongres Kobiet*) has swept the scene in regards to opening up a discourse on women's issues and the gender inequality persistent in Polish society. Formed in 2009, the organization describes itself as "a movement that brings together women from all over Poland, irrespective of their

²⁵⁸ "Krystyna Łybacka," <http://www.lybacka.pl/en/index.php>

²⁵⁹ Szelewa, 5.

²⁶⁰ Ibid, 5.

views, origin, class, profession, and membership in parties, organizations, and background. It does not represent any political party, nor does it associate itself with any specific interests or programs.”²⁶¹ The Congress has held five sessions, with the first two sessions focusing on various issues, including “introducing gender parity in electoral lists, appointing an independent plenipotentiary for equal treatment, issuing an annual parliamentary report about the situation of women” to name a few.²⁶² The Women’s Congress helped the changes to the electoral laws of January 2011 in regards to more gender equality on the candidate lists enter the parliament. The fifth session occurred in June 2013 and had around 8,500 attendees from all over Poland and the world who participated under the slogan “Partnership, Diversity, Solidarity.”²⁶³ The Women’s Congress is a remarkable and encouraging outpouring of support for change in Polish society in regards to gender roles and what can be done to change the inequality.

Through international pressure, Poland has begun to embrace initiatives that attempt to tackle the issues of gender inequality. Though the Catholic Church still holds firm roots in Polish society, the infiltration of international gender norms and a more open discourse on gender equality has opened up the processes for change and evolution in the Central European country. Moreover, with the election of more women that go against the standard norms of hegemonic masculinity and the traditional gender norms, such as Grodzka and Kopacz, perhaps a greater public discourse and debate will be developed in Poland with the end result being further gender equality.

²⁶¹ “The Congress of Women,” http://www.kongreskobiet.pl/en-EN/text/about_us/social_movement

²⁶² Ibid

²⁶³ Ibid

CHAPTER 5

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

Though both Estonia and Poland possess a recurring trend of hegemonic masculinity in their societies, there are continuities and ruptures within the comparison of the two post-communist states. In both cases the double burden of women is inherent in the basic structure of gender relations, in which women are required to be present and contribute to both the realm of domesticity and to the workforce. Though the roles may appear to be equally as important in regards to the livelihood of the nation, the reality entails the continual hegemony of masculinity over the subordinated femininity, thus leaving women largely out of state power and decision-making. Additionally, in both countries, nationalism played a major role in the development of gender relations, where men are the creators of the nation and women are simply the caretakers. The rhetoric of nationalism in regards to women's role in society is used as justification of the subsequent gender roles that were developed in each country.

Furthermore, both cases saw a rise in the percentage of female parliamentarians with the accession to the European Union in 2004. The European Union, as a whole, has experienced an increase in the numbers of female representatives in the national parliaments. With the expansion of the EU also came an increase in gender equality since 1990, where women only made up 15.88 percent of parliamentarians in national parliaments.²⁶⁴ As of 2012, women made up 25.76 percent of national parliamentarians in the European Union, leaving

²⁶⁴ Index mundi

Poland and Estonia not too far behind the average in the region.²⁶⁵ As Connell noted in his 1987 work, “For the ultimate goal of the transformation of gender relations there are two logical candidates. One is the abolition of gender and the other its reconstitution on new bases.”²⁶⁶ The accession to the EU provides new foundations from which policies and notions of gender equality can be built and expanded. Furthermore, both countries adopted gender equality legislation before joining the EU. Though it is important to note that both Estonia and Poland were required to adopt such legislation in order to join the EU and it is somewhat doubtful that the two countries would have independently adopted such legislation at the time had it not been part of the *acquis*. Despite this, women have made more progress in Poland in terms of representation, but both countries have made significant progress in the framework towards gender equality.

Though both states possess a communist past, they diverge in the significance of the role of organized religion among the population. As for Poland, the role of the Church and the rise of conservative forces are often cited for the continued subordination of women in power and politics. In this sense, the importance of organized religion in regards to cultural transmission of what is deemed masculine and feminine in Poland should not be overlooked. The Church has played a hand in enforcing the rigid gender roles throughout Polish history, by emphasizing the importance of the *Matka Polka* and her important contributions to the Polish nation through child-rearing. Though the Catholic Church is important in the culture of Poles, it is also reinforced by the underlying notion that in the dichotomy of gender relations, masculinity holds sway over femininity, as well as other masculinities, in Polish society. The examples of Anna Grodzka and Beata Kempa summarize the debate on the importance and significance of gender

²⁶⁵ Ibid

²⁶⁶ Connell (1987), 286.

in the 21st century in Poland. The significant role of the Church, a habitual patriarchal institution, and its connection to Polish nationalism has provided hegemonic masculinity with an avenue to power and towards the subordination of women, offered to the Poles as for the greater good.

The closeness of the Church and the state in Polish history and politics drastically differs from the Estonians. An interesting factor emerges when one observes the lack of religiosity in Estonia, yet the persistence of rigid gender roles is somewhat of a misnomer in the small country. Though it identifies with its northern neighbors, Estonia has great strides to make in regards to gender equality. Though the country has programs aimed at decreasing the gender inequality seen throughout the public and private sectors of society, the influence of a patriarchal party system and lack of a rigid public discourse on equality will continue to leave Estonia with less than equal results in regards to equality in its national parliament.

A hegemonic masculinity, though coming from different roots and sources, is prevalent in both societies, preventing true gender equality in politics, as well as the rest of society. The increase in the percentage of women in parliaments in both Poland and Estonia since the fall of communism can be attributed to the influx of international norms, directives, and laws that have been placed upon these societies, such as the EU's policies on gender equality, thus, forcing hegemonic masculinity to reformat itself to allow for the influx of the norms.

There is not such a religious factor or variable in Estonia, resulting in less extremism and more centrism, which prevents any change at all and also allows for less focus on the gender roles in the society...resulting in the maintenance of the status quo.

While the Estonian female parliamentarians discussed above appear to be relatively soft spoken in regards to gender equality, their presence in the *Riigikogu* is a challenge to the prevailing Estonian hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity appears in Estonia mainly

through the rigid stereotypes that are enforced through the media, as was noted with Kadri Simson. Though Simson and her female colleagues are well-educated public figures, they are still held to the same standards that all Estonian women are held to, that of beauty and subordination. Hegemonic femininity, though not overly present among the Estonian female parliamentarians, is quite clear within Estonian society. The continual supremacy of hegemonic masculinity in the power of the state in Estonia prevents politics as becoming an arena for gender equality. When one examines the trends of women in Estonian political institutions, one finds that despite the various ideologies, from communism to neo-liberalism, women are still viewed as poorly qualified for national politics and are seemingly unable to make great strides in increasing their representation. Thus the cultural foundations of gender relations in Estonian society must be examined, rather than the various ideologies that Estonians have endured over the twentieth century. Hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic femininity are quite present in Estonian society in regards to representation in the national legislative body, with hegemonic masculinity controlling the forces of power in society, and hegemonic femininity supporting the subordination of women in institutions of power through continued allowance and acceptance of the gender roles.

Though the two countries may differ in the appearance and cause of the unequal gender relations, the results are similar in regards to overall gender equality and the percentage of female representation at a national level. The unequal gender relations that have been prevalent for much of Estonia and Poland's existence should certainly not be viewed as permanent, however. With the arrival of new norms and mores regarding gender equality, hegemonic masculinity could begin to incorporate notions of equality, thus giving away some of its hegemony in order to establish peace within gender relations, which, as Connell notes, are

always an area of tension. After completing the comparative case study it becomes apparent that a cultural force is present in each society, though formed from different roots, that prevents the equal representation of women and men in the national parliaments in the post-communist states examined above. The explanation put forth in this thesis as to why this underrepresentation continues, despite regime change and an influx of international norms and directives, is the presence of a hegemonic masculinity that exists and subordinates women and their ability to obtain equal power in the public realm. Finally, through the catalyst of accession to the European Union and adopting gender equality legislation and programs, both Poland and Estonia have evolved in positive and productive ways in regards to their gender equality practices since the democratic transition of the 1990s.

This thesis has attempted to uncover an explanation as to why women continue to hold low percentages in the national parliaments of post-communist states, with a focus on Estonia and Poland. The work used the low numbers of women in parliament as an indicator of the level of gender equality in each society. By using Connell and others' concept of hegemonic masculinity, this thesis explained that in the current regime of gender relations, gender equality has not been and will not be realized. It is only through a complete reworking of the idea of gender or the incorporation of femininity into power-sharing with the masculine ideals that equilibrium will be realized. An in-depth look at the past two decades has provided insight into the evolution of gender relations on a national and international level in Estonia and Poland. With the upcoming election years, the outlook for women in terms of equality and representation in both counties has improved. However, following Connell's argument, it will take the changing of the rule of hegemonic masculinity, which is no easy feat, for the subordination of women to

cease in each society and for a fostering notion of gender equality to become prevalent in public discourse.

Unfortunately, the reworking of gender relations requires time and the problem of gender inequality cannot be remedied overnight. However, through persistent discourse on gender equality and an increase in the number of women's voices being heard, change can occur in all societies. Estonia has made inroads in opening a discourse on gender equality through government programs, and Poland has enacted gender quotas in hopes of increasing female representation at a national level. Through the normalization of women appearing in the upper echelons of power, a greater voice for women can be developed, potentially questioning the gender regime that has been in place for centuries in Estonia and Poland. The future holds the key for gender equality in not only Poland and Estonia, but the region as a whole.

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APPENDIX 1

Below is a copy of the survey sent to the current female parliamentarians in the Estonian *Riigikogu* and Polish *Sejm* and *Senat*. The surveys were sent out in Estonian and Polish and the respondents answered anonymously.

Married: Yes or No

Children: Yes or No

Higher Education: Yes or No

Political Party (Choose One):

Estonia

Social Democratic Party

Pro Patria and Res Publica Union Group

Estonian Reform Party

Estonian Centre Party

Poland

Civic Platform

Law and Justice

Palikot's Movement

The Democratic Left Alliance

Polish People's Party

United Poland

How long have you been in politics? (both local and national)

- a. 1 term or less
- b. 2-3 terms
- c. 4 or more terms

Have you always wanted to be in politics?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Indifferent

What led you to pursue a career in politics?

- a. I have always wanted to be in politics.
- b. I used to think about it, and circumstances allowed for it.
- c. It just kind of happened to where I joined a career in politics.
- d. Other

Have you found being in politics difficult as a woman?

- a. Yes
- b. Somewhat difficult
- c. No, not difficult

Do you feel that women are fully accepted as political leaders in your country?

- a. Yes, fully accepted
- b. Somewhat accepted

- c. Not really accepted
- d. No, not accepted at all

Women make up less than a quarter of the upper level government in Estonia/Poland. Do you feel as though women's issues are heard by men?

- a. Yes, they are always heard.
- b. Somewhat heard.
- c. Not really heard.
- d. Not heard at all.

Would you consider yourself a feminist?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. No opinion

Do you approve of gender quotas in politics?

- a. Yes, I fully approve
- b. Somewhat approve
- c. Somewhat disapprove
- d. No, I do not approve

Do you believe that gender equality is a very important issue currently in Estonia/Poland?

- a. Yes, it is a top issue.
- b. It is somewhat an issue, but other issues such as the economy are more important.
- c. It is not really an important issue.
- d. It is not an issue at all.