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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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ABSTRACT

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 results in regards to female representation at a 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 entails 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 amount 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 the accession to the European Union in 2004 and the possibilities of greater gender equality in each state.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	5
1.1 CHALLENGES OF THE TRANSITION.....	5
1.2 EAST VS. WEST.....	9
CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY.....	15
2.1 THE CONCEPT OF HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY.....	15
2.2 METHODOLOGY.....	27
CHAPTER THREE: THE ESTONIAN CASE STUDY.....	30
3.1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND.....	30
3.2 ESTONIAN WOMEN UNDER SOVIET RULE.....	33
3.3 ESTONIAN WOMEN IN TRANSITION, 1989-2004.....	35
3.4 ESTONIAN WOMEN AFTER TRANSITION, 2004-2012.....	40
CHAPTER FOUR: THE POLISH CASE STUDY.....	49
4.1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	49
4.2 POLISH WOMEN UNDER COMMUNISM.....	51
4.3 POLISH WOMEN IN TRANSITION, 1989-2004.....	55
4.4 POLISH WOMEN AFTER TRANSITION, 2004-2012.....	63
CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS.....	68
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	74
APPENDIX	79

INTRODUCTION

Though women make up over half of the world's population, they only represent 21 percent of the world's parliamentarians.¹ This trend is no different in the post-communist states of Europe. The noticeable low proportion of women in the parliaments continues to be prevalent in the post-communist states, despite the past socialist ideology of gender equality. By looking at female politicians in national parliaments, one can gather the views and situation of women at the upper echelons of society, where change can come about from the top. 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.

With this, a more specific examination of the post-communist experience of two countries, Estonia and Poland, could yield interesting insights into the phenomenon of low numbers of women in government. The countries differ drastically in size, with Estonia having almost 1.3 million inhabitants and Poland possessing over 38 million, but both only have around twenty percent women making up their parliaments. 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.

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,

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

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, Estonia provides a very interesting and complicated backdrop for analysis of trends among female parliamentarians.

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% of its population as Roman Catholics and 75% of its inhabitants actually practicing the religion.³ The traditional gender roles associated with Catholicism are accepted throughout Polish society. Poland has been at the center of the abortion debate for its conservative views on the procedure, leaving many 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 states 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 representative bodies. The two countries provide a fruitful comparison in regards to the post-communist experience and the treatment of gender equality. Both Estonia and Poland experienced Soviet rule and have successfully transitioned to democracy and capitalism and joined the European Union, thus providing a solid foundation for statistical 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

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/>

³ CIA Factbook, Poland

continue to be grossly underrepresented in national bodies. The thesis adds to a vast array of literature that explores the conditions and challenges faced by women during the democratic transition in Central and Eastern Europe. The period after around 1999 leaves much to be desired in the literature on women in the post-communist states, notably Poland and Estonia. Though certain years/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.

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 a decade from 1989 to 2004, and the post-transition period, 2005-2013. 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 members of international organizations, thus, affecting the policies of gender equality. The period 1989-2004 is considered in this thesis as the transition period, noting the significance of the transition from communism to democracy and capitalism. The period of 1989-2004 also allowed for each country to hold at least four democratic elections for the parliament. Finally, the period from 2005 to the contemporary period, written 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.

It is argued that women in the cases of Estonia and Poland are continuously unequal in representative bodies because the hegemonic masculinity and the gender norms of the culture 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 the work is malleable, rather than a static concept, 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 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 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 the current female parliamentarians.

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, that of the challenges faced by women in the transition to capitalism and democracy and the divide between the East and West on the place of feminism in the post-communist situation. From there, the work will delve into theoretical models and methodological approaches. 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. The methodology used in this study will also be elaborated upon and conceptualized. 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 similar 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. Finally, some concluding remarks with recommendations for future study are developed.

CHAPTER 1

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 period and the post-transition period are 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.

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.⁴ Matland and Montgomery note further, "More

⁴ Richard E Matland and Kathleen A. Montgomery, eds. *Women's Access to Political Power in Post-Communist Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1.

than a decade after founding democratic elections in the 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).⁵ 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.⁶ 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.⁷

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 early 1990s.⁸ 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. The issues facing women under communism continued to

⁵ Ibid, 1.

⁶ Robert G. Moser, *Unexpected Outcomes: Electoral Systems, Political Parties, and Representation in Russia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001), 57.

⁷ 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).

⁸ Einhorn, 151.

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.⁹ 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.¹⁰

These ‘untainted-by-communism identities’ required a reversion to the past, in which traditional gender roles were practiced and enforced through cultural norms and values. The historiography of the situation of women during the transition period continuously points to the reversion to past values. These past values further subordinated and burdened women in those societies in transition, placing more responsibility on women to remain in the realm of 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.

⁹ Ibid, 150.

¹⁰Tanya Renne, ed. *Ana’s Land: Sisterhood in Eastern Europe* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997), 1.

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.”¹¹ 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.”¹² 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.

Einhorn noted, “the shift from opposition ‘anti-politics’ to democratic ‘normalization’... is marked by a tendency to oust women.”¹³ 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 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.¹⁴

¹¹ Einhorn,, 1.

¹² Ibid, 1.

¹³ Ibid,148.

¹⁴ 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).

Perhaps the most unique work to come out on the discourse of women in transition is Jacquette and Wolchik's comparison of Latin America and Eastern Europe. The comparison of Latin America and Eastern Europe 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.'¹⁵ 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."¹⁶ Jacquette and Wolchik's comparison, though seemingly unlikely, sought to demonstrate that the lack of democratic foundations and traditions 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."¹⁷ 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 subordinate women and overlook 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 women's situations throughout Central and Eastern Europe as well as the role of Western-style

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 3.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 4.

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 infighting on the academic level over abstract ideas rather than providing concrete aid in improving women’s situations in the transition to democracy.¹⁸ 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

¹⁸ 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).

women's 'emancipation', to be achieved through legislation and social policy."¹⁹ 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.²⁰ 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."²¹ 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.²² However, the idea of importing a 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.²³ 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 discussion for women who could potentially create a grassroots movement for women's issues. The academic in-fighting 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.

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.²⁴ Although there were a few women,

¹⁹ Einhorn, 18.

²⁰ Ibid, 168.

²¹ Renne, 2.

²² Laura Busheikin, "Is Sisterhood Really Global?: Western Feminism in Eastern Europe," in *Ana's Land*, 12-21.

²³ Ibid, 14-15.

²⁴ Explored further below, female politicians still deny being a 'feminist' despite their belief that equality is important among the genders.

mainly scholars and activists, who took on the term ‘feminist,’ the majority of women during the 1990s sought change through adhering to cultural norms and mores. Cultural feminism, as defined by Kristen Ghodsee, “often aims at meeting women’s special needs within the status quo.”²⁵ 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.”²⁶ 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 in the process of 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.²⁷ Many radical feminists, a very small minority within Central and Eastern Europe, advocate for complete change and even erasure of gender roles, but 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.”²⁸ 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 seen in the ideology of Western feminism is doing very little to change the views of men and

²⁵Kristen 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.

²⁶ Ibid, 728.

²⁷ Ibid, 728.

²⁸ Ibid, 728.

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 a sole reason for the drastic decline in women’s 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.”²⁹ 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

²⁹ Matland and Montgomery, 6.

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.

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 drop 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 historical 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.³⁰ 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.³¹

Connell wrote in his 1987 seminal piece, *Gender and Power*, "The large-scale structures of gender relations are constituted by practices."³² The large scale structure of gender relations in the post-communist states can be witnessed by 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 large scale structure of gender relations. Looking at the state for sources of inequality, Connell argued that "the state both institutionalizes hegemonic masculinity and expends great energy in controlling it."³³ Therefore, by analyzing the lack of female 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.

³⁰ 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).

³¹ Demtrakis Demetriou, "Connell's Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critique," *Theory and Society*, 20, 3 (June 2001) 339.

³² Connell (1987), 17.

³³ Ibid, 128.

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 view that often went unnoticed in feminist literature, such as the 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."³⁴ Demetriou offered a critique of Connell, but also pointed to the importance of examining gender relations.

Connell uses 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 relations in a particular social setting."³⁵ 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.³⁶ 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."³⁷ 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

³⁴ Ibid, 343.

³⁵ R.W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," *Gender and Society*, 19, 6 (Dec., 2005), 836.

³⁶ Demetriou, 345.

³⁷ Connell and Messerschmidt, 832.

through consent and not force (i.e., hegemony).”³⁸ 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.”³⁹ 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:

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.⁴⁰

The characteristics of hegemonic masculinity, based on a Western ideal, characterizes the male as heterosexual, competitive, powerful, aggressive, economically successful, and stoic.⁴¹ 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.⁴² 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.

³⁸ Justin Charlebois, *Gender and the Construction of Hegemonic and Oppositional Femininities* (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2011), 30.

³⁹ 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.

⁴⁰ Connell and Messerschmidt, 832.

⁴¹ *Encyclopedia of Gender and Society*, “Hegemonic Masculinity,” 412.

⁴² Connell (1987), 185.

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.

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.”⁴³ 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.⁴⁴ 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.⁴⁵

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

⁴³ Demetriou, 337.

⁴⁴ Demetriou writes of the example of homosexuality and its relation to hegemonic masculinity at length in his work.

⁴⁵ Connell and Messerschmidt, 844.

social or political movement, the “exemplary masculinities will have to adapt accordingly” to retain the hegemonic position.⁴⁶

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 accommodating the interests and desires of men.”⁴⁷ 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.⁴⁸

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.⁴⁹

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

⁴⁶ Demetriou, 342.

⁴⁷ Connell (1987), 183-184.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 185.

⁴⁹ Connell and Messerschmidt, 848.

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 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."⁵⁰ 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.⁵¹

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

⁵⁰ Ibid, 349

⁵¹ Schippers, 87.

with hegemonic femininity constructed to serve hegemonic masculinity, from which it is granted legitimacy.⁵²

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.”⁵³ 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.”⁵⁴ 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 that would normally allow for the domination and subordination of women. Pariah femininities are seen as

⁵²Karen 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.

⁵³ Schippers, 91.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 95.

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.⁵⁵ 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,’⁵⁶ 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.”⁵⁷ 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.”⁵⁸ 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 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

⁵⁵ Ibid, 95.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 96.

⁵⁷ Charlebois, 32.

⁵⁸ Schippers, 96.

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 an equal, 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.⁵⁹

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.’⁶⁰ The seemingly concrete gender regime of hegemonic masculinity in any given institution continues to determine gender relations, always coming out on top.

⁵⁹ Connell and Messerschmidt, 853.

⁶⁰ Connell (1987), 120.

Opposition to the gender regime that has subordinated women throughout the decades can be seen among 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.⁶¹ 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."⁶² 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 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

...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.⁶³

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 remained in the post-communist nations 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."⁶⁴

⁶¹ Demetriou, 349.

⁶² Ibid, 355.

⁶³ Connell and Messerschmidt, 853

⁶⁴ Ibid, 853

Connell supports the idea of a ‘politics of alliances’ that combines forces that would dismantle hegemonic masculinity.⁶⁵ 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. 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.”⁶⁶

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.”⁶⁷ 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, such as gender equality, into the post-communist states has adjusted the hegemonic power of masculinity to where gender inequality has

⁶⁵ Demetriou, 342-343

⁶⁶ Connell (1987), 111.

⁶⁷ Connell and Messerschmidt, 849-850

become part of public discourse. In addition to norms and values, and 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.

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, providing additional 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 upper echelons of the societies. By looking at two separate countries, the effects and presence of hegemonic masculinity appears more prominent instead of a single analytical examination of a post-communist state.

A study 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 on one another, resulting in a thorough and comprehensive theoretical framework for analysis. From the theoretical framework, 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. 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 demographic information in order to understand the scope of the population surveyed in respects to categorical assumptions and gender stereotypes present in the cultures. Additionally, each respondent was asked to identify their political party in each respective country's national parliament. The 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 to 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 asked on the understanding that the political realm is monopolized and characterized as a masculine occupation, and the respondents were asked to weigh in on what led them into politics. 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 the negative connotations associated with the term, the survey sought to gauge contemporary attitudes, although from minimal proportion of women in the overall population. Moreover, the respondents were asked if they believed female leaders 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. The 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.

Therefore, based on research of the above-mentioned materials, this thesis seeks to answer the following questions: Why was there a sharp drop in female representatives at the transition from communism to democracy in Estonia and Poland? What are some trends that can be identified? Why do women continue to occupy much less than half of all the seats in the respective representative bodies?

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 few women parliamentarians in the 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: 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.⁶⁸ 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.⁶⁹ 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 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.”⁷⁰ 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.

Jaago notes that two important changes occurred for Estonia in the early 20th century, “there was a move towards the development of a modern society and Estonia

⁶⁸ 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.

⁶⁹ Ibid, xi-xii.

⁷⁰ Ibid, xi.

achieved independence as a state in 1918.”⁷¹ 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 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 1918.⁷² Estonian women gained the right to vote before their counterparts in many Western countries, including the United States and the United Kingdom.⁷³ Despite gaining the right to vote, women in interwar Estonia did not possess equal representation with their male counterparts in the institutions of government.⁷⁴

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.”⁷⁵ The separation of gender roles and the lack of concern for gender equality through the segregated peasant roles of which O’Connor writes, 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 20th centuries, is much more relevant to modern Estonia, instead of the emphasis on a prevalent peasant culture. There is still a

⁷¹ Tiiu Jaago, “What Actually Happened in Estonian Political History- Stories of the 20th Century Events from the Viewpoint of Popular Narrated History,” *Elore*, 13 (January, 2006), 3.

⁷² O’Connor, 71.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 71.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 71.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 71.

segregation of labor within Estonia, with women confined to social welfare positions and men in more powerful political positions, that is reflected in contemporary society.

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.⁷⁶ 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, Estonia had prevalent traditional roles present in its culture 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 the 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."⁷⁷ 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, while men have exerted their hegemony through the public realm, through nationalist discourse or community leadership.

Though Estonia has experienced numerous changes since the days of its first independent republic, 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. By examining Estonian women under Soviet rule, an understanding of women's experiences and subordination can be developed. A look at women in politics during the transition and Estonia's reestablishment is also warranted in order to

⁷⁶ Ibid, 55.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 70.

fully understand the situation of Estonian women in politics today and prospects for the future.

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 left behind 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."⁷⁸ 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 the upper echelons of power 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 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."⁷⁹ 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 upper echelons of Soviet power, women did grace the ranks of party leadership, though they were put into stereotypical roles, such

⁷⁸ 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.

⁷⁹ Gail Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society: Equality, Development, and Social Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 200.

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."⁸⁰ Perhaps even more interesting is that women in Estonia possessed higher education than their male comrades, yet were virtually absent from the decision-making body of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic.⁸¹ Despite the higher education levels of Estonian women than men, and 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."⁸²

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 lack of women in the republic and union soviets was quite alarming considering the egalitarian 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."⁸³ 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 or participation in it. The underrepresentation of women, regardless of their education, is a conundrum that exists to this day in the *Riigikogu*, leaving one to question the cultural foundations of the gender relations in Estonia and their persistence through the years, as well as the continuation of the hegemony of masculine qualities in terms of a state's leadership.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 220.

⁸¹ Ibid, 141.

⁸² Ibid, 221.

⁸³ 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.

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.⁸⁴

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.”⁸⁵ The break was certainly felt in Estonia, but often with a reversion to the traditional gender roles and the reemergence of 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 Estonia 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

⁸⁴ 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.

⁸⁵ 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.

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.”⁸⁶ 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.”⁸⁷ Estonia sought the acceptance and aid of its newly supportive Western neighbors, which allowed Estonia 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.

Estonian transition began in 1990, and was met with many difficulties.⁸⁸ 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.”⁸⁹ 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.⁹⁰ Despite the liberal approaches taken by the Estonian government, the reforms influenced women’s situation more than they did 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.”⁹¹ 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

⁸⁶ 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.

⁸⁷ Lauristin, 31.

⁸⁸ 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.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 286.

⁹⁰ O’Connor, 31.

⁹¹ O’Connor, 72.

throughout the decade.⁹² Women also made significantly less in terms of wages and salaries than Estonian men, a phenomenon that continues to this day.⁹³

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 more pronounced with the collapse of communism.⁹⁴ 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 conservative beliefs to prevail as specifically Estonian and going against the Soviet policies, preventing gender equality and women from exercising real political power. Raili Marling write in her discourse analysis of Estonian print media, "...Estonia had a back-lash against feminism before it developed a viable feminism."⁹⁵ 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

⁹² Ruth Alas and Tõnu Kaarelson, "Gender Equality in Post-Socialist Country: Case of Estonia," *Problems and Perspectives in Management*, 6, 2 (2008), 15.

⁹³ *Ibid*, 15.

⁹⁴ Laas, 106.

⁹⁵ 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.

in the society, but possibly, also other social concerns.”⁹⁶ Feminism, therefore, was used as a distraction rather than a solution, as Marling notes.

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.⁹⁷ The weak middle class, the contradictory nature of Soviet ideology, 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 out of echelons of power in the newly democratic state of Estonia. These forces culminated in the success of a hegemonic masculinity, preventing the realization of greater gender equality at the time of transition.

Additionally, the 1990s witnessed a decline in the public’s trust in the *Riigikogu* as well as a decline in the overall interest in politics. Inglehart’s World Values Survey, which was conducted in Estonia in 1990, 1996, and 1999, provides valuable information on how Estonians viewed politics and how much confidence they had in the functions and abilities of the *Riigikogu*. Estonian interest in politics declined throughout the decade, with 32.9 percent respondents identifying politics as rather important in life in 1990 and only 18.2 percent responding in a similar fashion in 1999.⁹⁸ In regards to the confidence held in the Estonian *Riigikogu*, in 1996 40.6 percent of respondents expressed quite a lot of confidence in the *Riigikogu* compared to just three years later, where only 24.1 percent of respondents expressed quite a lot of confidence in the national parliament.⁹⁹

The increasingly low trust and confidence in the newly democratic political institutions is further complicated by the inequality witnessed within the political institutions throughout the transition period. 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 went from around 30 percent in

⁹⁶ Ibid, 8.

⁹⁷ O’Connor, 70.

⁹⁸ World Values Survey 1981-2008 Official Aggregate v.20090901, 2009. World Values Survey Association (www.worldvaluessurvey.org). Furthermore, those who considered politics not at all important increase from 12.9% in 1990 to 25.2% in 1999. WVS, 1990, 1999.

⁹⁹ World Values Survey, 1996 and 1999.

the late 1980s to around 12 percent in the first free parliamentary elections that occurred in 1992.¹⁰⁰ The percentage of women in the *Riigikogu* remained around 12 percent, experiencing no fluctuation in the two elections that took place between 1992 and 1995.¹⁰¹ The disappearance of gender quotas for the representative bodies as well as 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.

Moreover, in the elections for president, only one woman, Lagle Parek, the first Minister of the Interior, was a candidate. Parek received four percent of the national vote in September 1992, failing to continue on, where Lennart Mari prevailed in the second round.¹⁰² Estonia has yet to seriously consider a woman for this ceremonial, though important post in the Estonian government.¹⁰³ Furthermore, a woman never held the more powerful position of Prime Minister or post of county governor during the transition period, and still has not held either position.¹⁰⁴ The World Values Survey results from 1996 indicated that 28.7 percent agreed strongly and 40.5 percent agreed that men make better political leaders than women do.¹⁰⁵ These views were certainly reflected in the low numbers of women in leadership positions in the Estonian government at the time.

Despite the small number of women in the *Riigikogu* during transition, O'Connor optimistically and somewhat foolhardily writes, "Although conditions remain far from ideal—women, for example, are underrepresented at the top of party lists—women in the Baltic countries have never had greater opportunities to participate in public life."¹⁰⁶ 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*. Furthermore, such low interest in politics and

¹⁰⁰ "Inter-Parliamentary Union- 'Estonia-Riigikogu- Election Archives,'" last modified 2013, http://www.ipu.org/parline/reports/2105_E.htm

¹⁰¹ 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.

¹⁰² Vabariigi Valimiskomisjon, "President of the Republic of Estonia Elections," <http://www.vvk.ee/past-elections/president-of-state-elections/>

¹⁰³ O'Connor, 74.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 74.

¹⁰⁵ WVS, 1996.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 73-74.

confidence in the *Riigikogu* in the 1990s left for much to be desired. Only in the latter half of the 1990s and early 2000s did public acknowledgment and a discourse on the inherent gender inequality develop about the gender inequality present in the institutions of power in Estonia.

More recently, women have faced 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 power. 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 of 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 remained around 22 percent, but the number of women in ministerial positions continues to fluctuate.

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.¹⁰⁷ 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.

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. Furthermore, though low confidence in the *Riigikogu* was prevalent throughout the transition period,

¹⁰⁷ “Inter Parliamentary Union-Estonia-Riigikogu-Election Archives”

from 2004 onward, the Estonian public began to gain trust in the institution. In addition to greater trust, the proportion of female representatives in the *Riigikogu* remained around 18 percent in the 2003 elections and boosted to almost 24 percent in the 2007 elections.¹⁰⁸

The relative stabilization and increase of the percentage of women in the *Riigikogu* noted above cannot be ascribed to 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 8 percent.¹⁰⁹ Overall, the average percentage of women in the government of Estonia from 1999-2004 was 22 percent.¹¹⁰ 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.

Moreover, according to the Eurobarometer, a tool created by the European Commission to analyze the public opinion of EU member states, 41 percent of Estonians surveyed in October 2004 tended to trust the national parliament, with 51 percent tending not to trust the institution.¹¹¹ This denotes an increase in trust in the political institution among Estonians compared to the transition period. The public trust in the national parliament reached an apex in May 2007, where 60 percent of Estonians polled expressed that they tended to place trust in the national parliament, where only 34 percent noted that they did not trust the institution.¹¹² However, as the post-transition period progressed, Estonians declined in their views of the *Riigikogu* and the trust they placed in the institution, with results from November 2011 indicating only 29 percent of respondents tending to trust the parliament and 65 percent noting they did not.¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ 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

¹⁰⁹ European Commission-Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, "Report on Equality between Women and Men 2010," (European Union, 2010), 41.

¹¹⁰ 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.

¹¹¹ European Commission, Eurobarometer Interactive Search System, "Trust in Institutions by National Parliament-Poland and Estonia-10/2004-11/2011."

¹¹² Ibid

¹¹³ Ibid

Despite the rise in the number of female parliamentary representatives and the rising trust in the parliament in the post-transition period, 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 Estonian society is somewhat or significantly better than the position of women.”¹¹⁴ 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.”¹¹⁵ In fact, Estonia possesses the highest gender wage gap, a staggering difference of about 30 percent, in the European Union.¹¹⁶ Järviste 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.¹¹⁷ 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 the action was begun to reduce the alarming pay gap in the country.¹¹⁸

Interestingly, however, Järviste notes that ‘gender equality is not a ‘female thing’; it concerns men as well and is necessary for the entire society.’¹¹⁹ Therefore, the policy analysis focused on both angles of gender inequality, calling for a comprehensive reexamination of the issue in Estonia. Järviste also notes survey questions 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 conservative proportion to Estonia’s overall society.¹²⁰ The large Russian minority in Estonia will 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.

¹¹⁴ 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

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹¹⁶ 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/>

¹¹⁷ Järviste, 2.

¹¹⁸ European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), “Gender Equality Index: Estonia,” <http://eige.europa.eu/content/gender-equality-index#/country/EE>

¹¹⁹ Järviste, 2.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

A 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 in the Riigikogu.¹²¹ 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.¹²² 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.¹²³

The respondents were spread out among the 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 Keskerakond*). 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.

Only five 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.”¹²⁴ 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.

¹²¹ This result is very different from Poland, in which all the women who responded were married.

¹²² Järviste, 20.

¹²³ Of the thirteen that responded, all of them possessed a higher education, going along with previous research and statistics.

¹²⁴ Laas, 106.

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.¹²⁵

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."¹²⁶ 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 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."¹²⁷ 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

¹²⁵ Ibid, 104.

¹²⁶ Ibid, 106.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 104.

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."¹²⁸ 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 equality 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 in active roles in various areas of social life, including among decision-makers."¹²⁹ 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.¹³⁰ 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."¹³¹ 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

¹²⁸ Laas, 106.

¹²⁹ Järviste, 4.

¹³⁰ Alas and Kaarelson, 18.

¹³¹ Järviste, 2.

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.¹³²

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, and most interesting, "Women themselves are not interested in [having] a position with responsibilities."¹³³ 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.¹³⁴ 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. 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 gender quotas, and such resistance can be seen among the political elite, as well as in the public opinion among women's organizations themselves.¹³⁵

¹³² Laas, 107.

¹³³ 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

¹³⁴ Ibid, 7.

¹³⁵ CEDAW, 18.

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 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 2004.¹³⁶ 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.¹³⁷ The law prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender and encourages gender equality to be promoted in public places.

Moreover, 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.¹³⁸

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 the accession to the EU in 2004 as well as the adoption of the necessary laws, came the ability to send representatives to the European Parliament. As of 2012, three of the six members of Estonia's delegation to the EP are women, Siiri Oviir, Kristiina Ojula, and Vilja Savisaar-Toomast.¹³⁹ 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

¹³⁶ Ibid, 7.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 7.

¹³⁸ Anu Laas, "To Suspect or Respect? Quota Discourse in Estonia," 106.

¹³⁹ "European Parliament, MEPs" <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/search.html>

compared to those discussed in the Riigikogu, thus the receptivity to women in this position.

Gender equality in Estonia is on its way to being incorporated into public discourse through government initiatives with partial credit going 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 and political representation in the coming decades.

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.’¹⁴⁰

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.¹⁴¹ 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. Poland’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.

¹⁴⁰ Małgorzata Fuszara, “Women’s Share of Power,” *Polish Women in the 90s*, 2000, 1. <http://free.ngo.pl/temida/power.htm>

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 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.”¹⁴² This model woman was supposed to bring up children while “maintaining the national language, culture, and religious faith.”¹⁴³ 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, 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.”¹⁴⁴ The Catholic Church is what has enabled Poles to preserve 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.”¹⁴⁵ The permanence of the Church in Polish society suggests a permanence of the ideas about women and men in Poland, and leaves the hope for achieving greater gender equality somewhat blocked by a religious wall.

¹⁴² 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.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 253.

¹⁴⁴ A.Kemp Welch, *Poland Under Communism: A Cold War History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 44.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 45.

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 retaining Polish cultural values, namely the values associated with the Catholic Church. By retaining 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.¹⁴⁶

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

¹⁴⁶ Elzbieta H. Oleksy, "American Feminism and Pedagogy: The Case of Poland," *American Studies International*, 38, 3 (October 2000), 37.

face with the introduction of capitalism and democracy. The socialist system “promoted gender equality in education, labor, leisure, family, and public life.”¹⁴⁷ 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 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 confined gender roles within the 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 difference in employment policies reinforced a gender hierarchy that the communists, paradoxically, sought to obliterate through instituting political and legal equality of the sexes.”¹⁴⁸

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.”¹⁴⁹ 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 usurped 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

¹⁴⁷ 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.

¹⁴⁸ Małgorzata Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 49-50.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 204-205.

well.”¹⁵⁰ An example of this reversion of gender norms can be witnessed with the drastic drop in the number of female representatives emerging from to the first elections of a democratic 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.’¹⁵¹ 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 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.¹⁵²

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 17 percent of women in the *Sejm* in the period 1952-1956.¹⁵³ 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 second term, 1956-1961, where women only accounted for four percent of the deputies.¹⁵⁴ For the rest of the 1960s and 1970s, women made up an average of around 14 percent of deputies in the *Sejm*.¹⁵⁵ The 1980s saw a rise of women in parliament,

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 230.

¹⁵¹ 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.

¹⁵² Ibid, 213.

¹⁵³ Fuszara, “Women’s Share of Power,” 2.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 2.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 2.

averaging around 21 percent of the deputies, yet the transition to democracy led to a sharp drop in women's representation.¹⁵⁶

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 [PSPR]. 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.¹⁵⁷

Fuszara and Zielińska argue that although Polish women, and men, possessed representation in the *Sejm*, they did not hold any power. Siemienska 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."¹⁵⁸ However, despite the lack of the "best and the brightest" women, the symbolism 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."¹⁵⁹ 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 1986.¹⁶⁰ This office was "to ensure the equal

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 2.

¹⁵⁷ Małgorzata Fuszara and Eleonora Zielińska, "Women and the Law in Poland: Towards Active Citizenship," in Jasmina Lukić, Joanna Regulska, and Darija Završček, eds., *Women and Citizenship in Central and Eastern Europe* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), 39.

¹⁵⁸ Siemienska, 218.

¹⁵⁹ Fuszara and Zielińska, 40.

¹⁶⁰ 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.

status of women and men in government, political, economic, social and cultural arenas.”¹⁶¹

With the end of communism in Poland at the hands of Solidarity and the Church, 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.”¹⁶² Shana Penn, in her seminal work on women’s involvement in Solidarity, notes, “But the Solidarity men consistently overlooked the movement’s heroines, who, for their part, did not challenge the subordinate position they were allotted.”¹⁶³ 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 acknowledgement for Solidarity’s success. Moreover, as Oleksy writes, “The achievement of these women has been erased from collective memory.”¹⁶⁴ 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 no different in for Polish citizens and oftentimes could not be supported by a single income, but women’s participation in the labor force was particularly

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 250.

¹⁶² Oleksy, 41.

¹⁶³ Shana Penn, *Solidarity’s Secret: The Women Who Defeated Communism in Poland* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2005), 2.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 42.

jeopardized.¹⁶⁵ 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 returning 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 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 possible for many women to find employment at all, despite their high levels of university education.¹⁶⁶

Poland is a relative success story in the transition to democracy and free markets from an authoritarian government and command economy because it “sought to embrace neoliberalism quickly and thoroughly.”¹⁶⁷ However, the development of capitalism and democracy in Poland brought about a reversion to traditional gender roles that were seen 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.¹⁶⁸ 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

¹⁶⁵ Bystydzienski 239

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 240-241.

¹⁶⁷ Katja M. Guenther, “The Possibilities and Pitfalls of NGO Feminism: Insights from Postsocialist Eastern Europe.” *Signs* 36 (Summer 2011), 867.

¹⁶⁸ 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.

suiting the women who had been subject to the double burden during socialist times of participation in the labor force and maintaining an ideal communist household.

In addition to the double burden for women Polish citizens, like Estonians noted above, during the transition period also expressed decreasing confidence in the *Sejm*. In 1990, Inglehart's World Values Survey noted that 18.9 percent of Poles surveyed held a great deal of confidence in the parliament, compared to the 7.8 percent recorded in 1999.¹⁶⁹ The loss of confidence in the institution of a country's representative body does not bode well for the body being a garden for the fostering of gender equality within a state during the time of transition.

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."¹⁷⁰ 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 'into the Office of Undersecretary of State for Women and Family with new responsibilities for family, children and youth."¹⁷¹ 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.¹⁷²

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."¹⁷³ As Nowakowska, writing in

¹⁶⁹ WVS, Poland 1990,1999,2005

¹⁷⁰ Plomien, 250.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 250.

¹⁷² OBOP (Ośrodek Badania Opinii Publicznej). *Problemy kobiet, model rodziny i polityka rodzinna*. Warsaw, (1995).

¹⁷³ Ibid, 250.

the mid-1990s, noted, “The Catholic Church and closely cooperating right-wing parties have created a very unfavorable political climate for women’s rights. They propagate traditional, patriarchal models of the family, with a man at its head.”¹⁷⁴ 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.”¹⁷⁵ Therefore, women were not encouraged to seek public office or attempt to obtain equality in the institutions of power. 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.”¹⁷⁶

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.¹⁷⁷ Women fared somewhat better in the 1993 elections, winning 60 seats, raising their presence in the *Sejm* to 13 percent.¹⁷⁸ 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.”¹⁷⁹ 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.¹⁸⁰

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.

¹⁷⁴ Nowakowska, 29.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 29.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 26.

¹⁷⁷ “Inter-Parliamentary Union- ‘Poland-Sejm- Election Archives,’” last modified 2013, http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/2255_arc.htm

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Einhorn, 169.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, 169.

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 the upper echelons of 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.”¹⁸¹ Popowicz was eventually dismissed, but 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.¹⁸²

Another example of a woman that reached high levels 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.”¹⁸³ Suchocka was not an advocate for women’s issues, and though she was in a prime position to promote a platform for gender equality, she looked to pass a ban on abortion in Poland through the Polish parliament. Suchocka, as Einhorn described her, “seem[ed] both to epitomize and to laud the traditional view of women’s qualities currently espoused by so many political ideologues in East Central Europe.”¹⁸⁴

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.¹⁸⁵ Hanna Suchocka, though the Prime Minister of Poland, characterized the qualities that

¹⁸¹ Nowakowska, 31.

¹⁸² Einhorn, 155.

¹⁸³ Ibid, 156.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 156.

¹⁸⁵ Guenther, 871.

are found in Connell's emphasized femininity and Schippers' hegemonic femininity rather than characterizing a figure determined to create change in Poland's rigid gender stereotypes at the time of transition. Though she was in the minority when appointed, she was appointed 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.¹⁸⁶ 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."¹⁸⁷ Although women in politics exist in Poland, they do not thoroughly advocate for women's rights, but are more conservative-oriented and side with traditional Catholic values.¹⁸⁸ If women cannot be confident that women in the political realm will advocate their rights, then the apathy of women in the political realm will continue in 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 settled 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 such a 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."¹⁸⁹ 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.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 871.

¹⁸⁷ Monika Platek, "Hostages of Destiny: Gender Issues in Today's Poland," *Feminist Review*, Post-Communism: Women's Lives in Transition, 76 (2004), 10.

¹⁸⁸ Guenther, 871.

¹⁸⁹ Titkow, 255.

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.”¹⁹⁰ 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 ‘institutionalizing mechanism for the advancement of women and facilitating women’s involvement in power and decision-making.’¹⁹¹ Of course, these policies did not last long, but the fact that they were developed, showed progress for the liberals in Poland by providing a voice for women.

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.”¹⁹² The backwards step by the conservative government in women’s issues was once again addressed by the new government in 2001, which was again from the left side of the political spectrum.¹⁹³ 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.”¹⁹⁴ 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.’¹⁹⁵

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

¹⁹⁰ Plomien, 251.

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 251.

¹⁹² Ibid, 251.

¹⁹³ Ibid, 251.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, 251.

¹⁹⁵ 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>

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.¹⁹⁶ The number of females in ministerial positions rose from 7 percent in 1995 to about 25 percent in 2005.¹⁹⁷

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.¹⁹⁸ The following election years, however, appeared as great victories for women in Poland. A leap of seven percent was seen with the 2001 elections, allowing for 93 women to join the ranks of parliamentarians.¹⁹⁹ Interestingly, ‘of those women that were elected to parliament, 61.3 percent were new to politics.’²⁰⁰ A further public opinion survey was conducted in 2002 asking, “What is it like to be a Woman in Poland?” The survey noted that nearly half, 47 percent, of Polish citizens believed that it was better to be a man in Poland than a woman, indicating the continued subordination of women in Polish society, despite increased numbers of female representatives in the *Sejm*.²⁰¹

Renata Siemienka has devoted much of her research to this pivotal election year 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.”²⁰² The new law reduced the number of districts, which in turn, increased the constituencies. The reduction of districts as Siemienka explains, ‘gave an 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.’²⁰³ Siemienka expands on the larger parties, by noting their adoption of gender quotas:

¹⁹⁶ Plomien, 264.

¹⁹⁷ European Commission-Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, “Report on Equality between Women and Men 2010,” (European Union, 2010), 41.

¹⁹⁸ “Inter Parliamentary Union- Poland-*Sejm*-Election Archives”

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid*

²⁰⁰ 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.

²⁰¹ OBOP (Ośrodek Badania Opinii Publicznej). *Być Kobieta?*. Warsaw, (2002).

²⁰² Siemienka, “Women and Women’s Issues,” 51.

²⁰³ *Ibid*, 52.

[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.²⁰⁴

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.²⁰⁵ 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.’²⁰⁶ Siemienska 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.’²⁰⁷ Although the greater number of women in parliament ‘reflected changes in attitudes toward women in politics,’²⁰⁸ 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.

4.4 Polish Women After Transition, 2004-2012

The ground-breaking election of 2001 was continued with the success of women in the following 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.²⁰⁹ The rising numbers of female politicians in Poland can be counted as a success in some ways in regards to gender

²⁰⁴ Ibid, 52-53.

²⁰⁵ Ibid, 53.

²⁰⁶ Fuszara and Zielińska, 40.

²⁰⁷ Siemienska, “Women and Women’s Issues,” 53.

²⁰⁸ Ibid, 52.

²⁰⁹ “Inter Parliamentary Union-Poland-Sejm-Election Archives”

equality, yet the road to 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.

Unlike Estonia, the trust in the Polish *Sejm* among Polish participants in the Eurobarometer surveys from 2004-2012 did not improve in the post-transition period. In October 2004, only eight percent of those Poles surveyed tended to trust the national parliament, with an alarming 87 percent indicating that they did not trust the institution.²¹⁰ Furthermore, in May 2011 an increase in trust was noted with 25 percent of the respondents indicating that they tended to trust the institution of the national parliament, whereas 68 percent noted that they did not.²¹¹ Though trust in the Polish national parliament rose in the post transition period, the increase in trust has been a slow process.

The results of the 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 amount 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 (*Soldarna Polska*). The length of time that the female parliamentarians had been in parliament varied much more than in Estonia, with a variety of terms in office recorded.²¹² The majority of women polled said they had not always wanted to be in politics but

²¹⁰ 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

²¹¹ Ibid

²¹² Three women held their seats for one term or less, six women for 2-3 terms, and seven women for 4 or more terms.

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, the equality in education can be seen across the board in Poland, as a great many women in Poland hold university degrees.²¹³ 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.²¹⁴ Therefore, the reversion to traditional gender roles cannot be blamed on the ignorance of Polish women or inequality in education, but rather the role of cultural norms and values.

Furthermore, the use of gender quotas has been enacted recently in Poland, creating more potential for women to be representatives. Despite the turbulent past with gender quotas, the majority of the survey respondents approve of gender quotas, with only five disapproving of them. Interestingly, “In January 2011, an electoral gender quota system was adopted for parliamentary and local elections, as well as for the elections to the European Parliament. Candidate lists should include at least 35 percent of the representatives of one gender.”²¹⁵ 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.²¹⁶

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 a women’s party on the political scene shows great strides in Poland’s attempt at gender equality²¹⁷. 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.”²¹⁸ Additionally, in 2011, “the government comprise[d] 19 Ministers, including 5 women, who [were] the head of the following ministries: Labor

²¹³ Bystydzienski, 240-241.

²¹⁴ Of the 16 respondents, all said they possessed higher education.

²¹⁵ Ibid, 7.

²¹⁶ <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/regions.htm>

²¹⁷ Ibid, 7.

²¹⁸ Ibid, 7.

and Social Policy, National Education, Science and Higher Education, Health, and Regional Development.”²¹⁹ 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.

Despite the gender quotas and all-female political parties, the majority of female parliamentarians that responded found being in politics 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.

With 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.²²⁰ Moreover, Poland has agreed to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEWDAW) as well as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.²²¹ 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.

Through international pressure, Poland has begun to embrace initiatives that attempt to tackle the issues of gender inequality. The election of Anna Grodzka to the

²¹⁹ Szelewa, 7.

²²⁰ Szelewa, 5.

²²¹ Ibid, 5.

Sejm in 2011 as the first transgender representative is certainly an example, though a sole example, of the changing views within Polish society. 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.

CHAPTER 5

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

The empirical data collected from this study suggests that despite changes in regimes and governments as well as legislation and directives, women have continued to be subordinated and unequally represented in the national governments of Estonia and Poland. Both Poland and Estonia have experienced a rise in the proportion of female representatives in each respective parliament throughout the transition and post-transition periods. Discrimination among the genders, however, continues in both countries, as well as Europe as a whole. A 2012 Eurobarometer survey²²² conducted throughout twenty-seven EU member states indicated that 31 percent of the respondents believed gender discrimination to be widespread, while 54 percent believed it to be rare, and six percent believed gender discrimination in the EU to be non-existent. When looking at the national level, Estonians appeared to share the general attitude of their fellow member states' opinion with 30 percent of Estonians surveyed believing that gender discrimination was widespread, while 58 percent of those surveyed believed it to be rare, and 7 percent believed it to be non-existent. Poland, however, tells of more traditionalist views, with 21 percent of Poles believing gender discrimination to be widespread, 57 percent believing it to be rare, and 15 percent believing it to be non-existent. The numbers are telling in that although gender inequality persists in Poland and Estonia, the surveys indicate that the majority of citizens do not find it to be a pressing issue.

The continuation of few females in the upper echelons of power indicates the continued presence of hegemonic masculinity in addition to hegemonic femininity in Estonia and Poland, as well as the region as a whole. In this sense, comparison with the West does little to explain the phenomenon of low numbers of women in parliament, as

²²² Special Eurobarometer 393, "Discrimination in the EU in 2012" conducted by TNS, http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_393_en.pdf

many western countries, with the Nordic countries as outliers, possess just as many, if not lower numbers of women in their parliaments. Despite the implementation of gender equality policies at a national level, hegemonic masculinity continues to possess a hold over gender relations at a local level in the post-communist nations manifested in the continual unequal ratio between men and women in the upper echelons of society.

Following Schippers' argument mentioned above, a hegemonic femininity is prevalent in both countries, with women encouraged to remain in traditional, domestic roles rather than possessing more public and powerful roles that their male counterparts have. As shown, more so in the Polish case, women such as Hanna Suchocka publically exhibited notions of a hegemonic, or emphasized femininity by encouraging the passage of the abortion bill that would limit women's reproductive rights. In Estonia, noticeable labor segregation can arguably be attributed to the prevailing notion that women belong in certain service sectors of the economy, with the realm of politics being excluded from the list of acceptable positions for women.

Though both nations possess a communist past, they diverge in the significance of the role of organized religion and the make-up of the government. A hegemonic masculinity, though coming from different roots and sources, is prevalent in both societies, preventing true gender equality in the upper echelons of power, as well as the rest of society. The increase in 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.

Both countries also possessed a markedly low level of confidence in the parliaments during the transition period, indicating that though the parliament is a representative body, change in the prevalent views on gender and the division of society according to sex must take place elsewhere in the respective societies. Though Estonians have developed a tendency to trust the *Riigikogu*, Poles continue to possess low levels of trust in the *Sejm*, noting an area of improvement in regards to the nation's institutions. An international representative body, the European Parliament, however, provides an interesting experimental ground of a supranational notion of masculinity and femininity among the nations of Europe.

Additionally, both countries have adopted EU legislation to enhance gender equality in the newer member states, as seen in Estonia with the Gender Equality Act of 2004 and in Poland with Article 33 in the 1997 Constitution. 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.”²²³ The accession to the EU provides new foundations from which policies and notions of gender equality can be built and expanded. Though women have made more progress in Poland in terms of representation, both countries have made significant progress in the framework towards gender equality.

When one examines the trends of women in the upper echelons of Estonian society, one finds that despite the various ideologies, from communism to democracy, women are still viewed as foreign to the realm of politics and are seemingly unable to make great strides in increasing their representation. Thus the cultural foundations of Estonian society must be examined in terms of the historical gender relations, rather than examining the various ideologies that Estonians 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.

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. 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 presence of hegemonic femininity can be felt in the lack of support for women’s issues seen in recent years by some female parliamentarians of Poland.

Although the two countries both possess a distinct hegemonic masculinity in each society, the root of the inequality is placed in different places in the society. 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 role that

²²³ Connell (1987), 286.

Catholicism plays in Polish culture and society is noticeably missing in Estonian culture and society. The roots that religion has in Poland are a markedly different when studying the workings of hegemonic masculinity in Poland.

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.

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.

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 an analysis of Estonia and Poland. By using Connell's 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 reached. 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 countries has improved. However, following Connell's argument, it will take the changing of the concept of hegemonic masculinity, which is no easy feat, in each society for the subordination of women to cease and a fostering notion of gender equality to become prevalent in public discourse.

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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.