

Paulina Bunio-Mroczek
Małgorzata Potoczna
Wielisława Warzywoda-Kruszyńska

Poverty and Social Exclusion

**During and After
Poland's Transition
to Capitalism**

Four Generations of Women
in a Post-Industrial City
Tell Their Life Stories

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Paulina Bunio-Mroczek, Małgorzata Potoczna, Wielisława Warzywoda-Kruszyńska
– University of Łódź, Faculty of Economics and Sociology
Department of Applied Sociology and Social Work, 90-255 Łódź, POW Street no. 3/5
e-mails: paulinabunio@uni.lodz.pl; matmalmar@poczta.onet.pl; zsoul@uni.lodz.pl

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Introduction

The overall objective of this book is to provide knowledge about transmission of poverty as a multidimensional phenomenon in the time of Poland's transition to capitalism before the country joined the European Union. There is a huge shortage of publications concerning poverty in the post-socialist period of the Central and Eastern Europe, and we believe that the book will fill the gap. We focus on the experience of women that goes beyond 'feminisation of poverty' traditionally perceived in monetary terms, and search for numerous contributing factors. Therefore the book is also about changes in the social structure, industrial relations, welfare regime and family structures and relations, as well as about the women's capabilities to cope with disadvantages.

It is unique in the sense that it puts subjective experience and efforts of the women suffering from scarcity in the frame of macrostructural processes which are beyond their reach. The book describes family histories of the women who in the previous social system (socialism) belonged to a leading group in the female labour force whereas their daughters, granddaughters, and great-granddaughters need support provided by social assistance, both during and following the system transformation period, since they are unable to earn a living. Therefore the book describes the intra- and inter- generational transmission of poverty as a multidimensional phenomenon documented in family life stories of the women living in disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods and belonging mostly to the same extended families.

As noted by Robert Miller (2007), qualitative research allows to learn about a family's life history and thus better understand the mechanism of the intra- and intergenerational transmission of poverty. Biographical research based on accounts of several family members has, according to him, following advantages:

1. It provides an insight into the subjective construction of meanings by interviewees. *What is crucial is that the analyst can reach an*

understanding of how the interviewee has come to give the responses that he or she does give; both at the surface level of tailoring their responses within the context of the interview and at the more deep level of the actual interpretations of their present and past situations that they have themselves (Miller 2007: 3).

2. It enables the construction of a comprehensive picture of the family, especially when life stories are told by representatives of different generations within the same family.
3. The holistic approach transcends barriers of space and time taking into account events and people previously and presently related to the interviewees.
4. It provides access to information about at least two generations preceding the interviewee, hence one can follow the transfer of resources not only from parents to children but also from grandparents to grandchildren, between siblings, etc.
5. It enables reconstruction of the 'history' of a creation of new households by family members taking into account favourable circumstances and those which impede their formation such as easy or difficult access to housing, work or emotional relations with family members, etc.
6. It reveals differences in perception and assessment of the same events and processes by representatives of different generations from the same family.

We applied in the book the life-course perspective, defined by Giele and Elder (1998) as follows: *The key building block elements of the new life-course paradigm are events combined in event histories or trajectories that are then compared across persons or groups by noting differences in timing, duration, and rates of change. [...] No longer are the principal questions ones of comparing static qualities such as how many and which people are poor; rather, the new dynamic questions focus on both individual characteristics and system properties* (1998: 2).

The above approach is based on five principles (Giele, Elder 1998; Elder, Johnson, Crosnoe 2004; Verd, Lopez 2011; Shanahan, Mortimer, Krikpatrick Johnson 2016) which are addressed in analyses presented in this monograph:

- 1) time and place – people are embedded in the historical and cultural context affecting their experiences and framing their life-course;
- 2) linked lives – interactions with other influence actions of individuals and give rise to shared experiences;
- 3) human agency – people make decisions and act taking into account socio-cultural context;

- 4) timing – people in different age are affected differently by the same events and therefore their consequences are not the same;
- 5) life-span development – to understand individual's course of life the long-time perspective has to be applied.

The life-course perspective is mostly applied by quantitatively oriented scholars, but the qualitative studies have increasingly contributed to the approach. In this book we applied a qualitative method (case study), which enabled us to locate actions undertaken by people in the interrelation with external factors even if they did not reflect them (Munck 2004) and in the interrelation with other people.

We followed so-called realistic approach sharing Daniel Bertaux (1997) and Peter Thompson (2004) point of view that the story is a means to access 'objective' reality beyond narrator. Such approach seems to be the most fruitful when individuals are confronted with unexpected and long-lasting challenges leading to destabilisation of the 'usual' life-course

Therefore, in the family life stories one can trace how the main structural factors like industrial relations, family structure and welfare system constituted the frame for decisions taken by the narrators concerning their private and vocational life. Family structures and relations, labour market and welfare system have undergone changes in the analysed time span and differently affected generations under study. They constituted socio-economic-cultural context impacting on decisions and actions of women participating in the research. The oldest generation experienced the quasi-feudal relations before the Second World War, forced labour in German agriculture farms and factories during the WWII, and two system transformations: from capitalism toward socialism and vice versa. Their daughters lived as children and adult persons in the socialist society enjoying secure industrial relations (including extended parental leave available for female workers on their request) and later on had to accommodate to capitalist order. The generation of their granddaughters born mostly in the 1970s attended grammar school still during socialism but grew up under conditions of capitalism and experienced the transformation as mediated by fears and hopes of their parents and when adult as welfare dependency. The youngest generation born during transformation does not know other political and economic order than that produced by neoliberal capitalism.

After the year 1989, the system transformation caused changes in value system establishing the private ownership as fundamental and the most protected one. Market economy replaced command economy, what altogether with reorientation of international economic relations after collapse of the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance covering socialist countries, led to deindustrialization and massive unemployment. The

collapse of industrial working class as an influential social segment produced new social divisions. The private possession of means of production, mass media, and a real estate created Haves versus Non-Haves and ability to adjust to new economic requirements (with access to work as an important criterion) generated Winners versus Losers.

Therefore the book contains evidence of the process of de-proletarianization, which is reflected in the women's life stories. It shows the loss of self-esteem and personal dignity by the representatives of the working class, which used to be labelled as the 'leading class' in the state socialism. The reader will also observe destandarization of employment, referred to as work flexibility, which led to unpredictability of income and transformation of workers' districts into poverty enclaves.

At the local level, these changes fostered growing economic and social inequalities that translated into spatial segregation. According to Alain Bertaut (2004: 5), development of socialist cities at time of the system transformation was imposed by following circumstances:

- 1) location of the residential estates of the high-density panel housing on the outskirts,
- 2) location of industrial land near city centres,
- 3) lacking space in the city centre for retail and services,
- 4) poorly maintained infrastructure in the centre with the high residential density,
- 5) problems with the renovation of houses mostly in the inner-city caused by property rights problems and land tenure.

All above mentioned circumstances operated in the town of Łódź in the 1990s and contributed to the spatial and social segregation forming pockets of poverty (enclaves of poverty) defined as areas where members of households provided with means-tested social assistance benefits constituted at least 30 per cent of population living there. 12 among 17 revealed enclaves of poverty were located in the city centre (Fig.1).

According to Warzywoda-Kruszyńska and Golczyńska-Grondas (2010: 31), three overlapping processes contributed to impoverishment of thousands of Łódź inhabitants in the 1990s, pushing many of them to social and municipal housing in the devastated tenement houses in the city centre:

1. Deindustrialization – closing down of factories led to mass and chronic unemployment.
2. Commodification – increase in rent and commercialization of social services produced arrears and in many cases resulted in eviction.
3. Deinstitutionalization of family – increase in the number of one-person households and single-parent families as well as decrease in the number of marriages contributed to a lower income level.

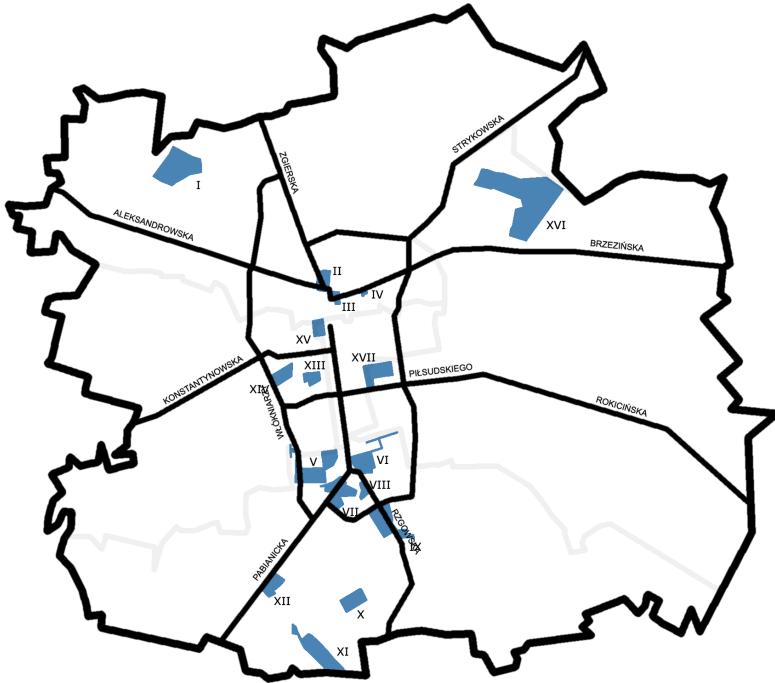


Figure 1. Location of enclaves of poverty in the city of Łódź

Source: Grotowska-Leder J. (1998: 64); the map producer: I. Jażdżewska

The processes were accompanied by severe shortages in the municipal budget and the lack of flats available from the municipal administration, that is the structure responsible for providing low standard shelters to evicted persons¹, and to others, if that was ordered by the court. Two other groups were also eligible for such shelters. They included young adults leaving residential care and foster families, and ex-prisoners without permanent residence.

Apart from the administratively run inflow of low-income individuals and families to the inner-city, where tenement houses were not renovated during the entire post-WWII period and therefore they were in a very bad condition, spontaneous processes also occurred. They included out-flow of better-off residents and inflow of those with low income who decided to move into the houses to pay lower rent to avoid eviction. All

1 Pregnant women, families with children, disabled persons and pensioners are protected against eviction 'to nowhere'. Because it is a lack of free social or municipal flats, municipality pays rent to tenant houses owners, what produces huge burden on municipal budget.

these factors contributed to a relatively high concentration of poor people in the centre of the city. The disadvantaged areas that formed at that time still exist. Poverty is a shocking feature characterising these localities. Ten years after the existence of the inner-city poverty pockets in Łódź was confirmed, these places continue to be impoverished neighbourhoods (ibidem p.40).

In the literature, there are different explanations of disadvantage persistence in some locations, emphasising the persistence of unemployment (Kain 1968; Wilson 1987; Johnson 2006) and insecurity resulting from low pay – no pay (Shildrick, McDonald, Webster, Garthwaite 2012), weakness of networks (Buck 2001; Buck, Gordon 2004) and disorder, which discourages better-off people to settle down there. Though all these circumstances applied to Łódź, the explanation by Wacquant (2008) seems to be the most adequate. He claims that neo-liberal capitalism produced *neighbourhoods of relegation* to keep control over individuals excluded from the labour market and forced to exist outside the mainstream of society. In the stories presented in the book there is evidence that people manifest strong feelings of being redundant and relegated.

Living in poverty and social disadvantage produces different consequences depending on age. It is particularly devastating if experienced in childhood (Shonkoff, Philips (eds.) 2000; Shonkoff 2011; Yaqub 2002; Chase-Lansdale, Kiernan, Friedman (eds.) 2004; Lareau 2011; Daly, Leonard 2008; TARKY 2010; de Neubourg, Bradshaw, Chzhen, Main, Martorano, Menchini 2012; Sharkey, Tirado-Strayer, Papachristos, Raver 2012). Poverty in childhood translates frequently into poverty in adulthood and transmits to the subsequent generation. Karen Moore (2004) emphasises that intergenerational transmission of poverty should be studied in close connection with intra-generational poverty/prosperity. She focuses on what is transmitted from parents to children, (external) factors that affect this process and the ways in which they affect it. What is actually transmitted from one generation to another are different types of capital (material, human, environmental, socio-cultural and socio-political). The prosperity of individuals from the next generation depends on whether, and in what form, they received capital from their ancestors and whether they have accrued capital themselves. The transfer of different types of capital and therefore transmission of poverty/prosperity takes place under certain structural and cultural conditions. Some concern the level of family e.g. composition of the household, style of raising children, sex of children, while others operate at the level of local community and neighbourhood e.g. accessibility of social services or at a macro level i.e. at the level of society e.g. legal norms which regulate inheritance rules and access to capital.

However, transmission of poverty across generations is not a deterministic process. Individual's agency, frequently referred to as resistance, and external intervention may change such course of life. We can observe it in the life stories of the oldest generation. On the other hand, better-off childhood may transfer into scarcity in adulthood, as documented in the life histories of younger generation. Poverty drivers include unemployment of the parents, family disruption, moving in the pocket of poverty and meeting peers and adults who disrespect social norms and behaviours, etc.

The specific objectives of the book to realize by means of analysing family life histories of women belonging to four subsequent generations was getting better understanding of:

- 1) formative biographical events impacting women's entrenchment in poverty, its persistence and possible overcoming,
- 2) biographical experiences formative for each generation of women,
- 3) typical ways of experiencing biographical events by women from each generation,
- 4) socio-economic and historical processes underlying the course of subjective women's experiences,
- 5) patterns of experiencing poverty identified in all generations,
- 6) drivers and maintainers of poverty transmission across generations.

To achieve these objectives we considered empirical data from two studies carried out by a team of sociologists working for the University of Łódź:

1. 'Forms of Poverty and Social Threats and their Spatial Distribution in Łódź'² (1996–1999), and
2. 'Teenage parenthood as exposure to poverty and social exclusion' – the module in the research project 'WZLOT – Strengthening Opportunities and Weakening the Intergenerational Transmission of Poverty among Inhabitants of Łódź Voivodeship'³ (2008–2010).

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- 2 PBZ nr 018 08 was financed by the Scientific Research Committee (KBN). Results of the project were published in a series of books and articles, for example Warzywoda-Kruszyńska W. (eds.) (1998) *Życ i pracować w enklawach biedy*. Łódź; Warzywoda-Kruszyńska W. (eds.) (1999) *(Życ) Na marginesie wielkiego miasta*. Łódź; Golczyńska-Grondas A. (2004) *Mężczyźni z enklaw biedy: rekonstrukcja pełnionych ról społecznych*. Łódź; Potoczna M., Warzywoda-Kruszyńska W. (2009) *Kobiety z łódzkich enklaw biedy. Bieda w cyklu życia i międzypokoleniowym przekazie*. Łódź. Wydawnictwo UŁ.
 - 3 UDA-POKL.07.02.01-10-033/08-00). Results of the project are available at: www.wzlot.uni.lodz.pl.