
by

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I did not think I could write this dissertation. For a long time, while preparing for oral exams and later while writing the prospectus and even researching in Poland, I thought I would not be able write it (and would waste my committee’s time, about which I felt very guilty). It seemed simply too difficult and I did not believe that I could achieve it. However, thanks to my committee and their unwavering support and belief in my project, to my own surprise, I did end up finishing my dissertation. Prof. Ewa Plonowska Ziarek and Prof. Michael Rembis’ guidance, feedback, and close reading of my work pushed me to refine and strengthen my argument and think about disability, literature, and Polish socialism more critically. Prof. Rembis asked questions which challenged my understanding of disability and, ultimately, shaped my approach to disability and disability studies. Prof. Ziarek taught me to be suspicious about my own preconceptions about Polish culture and not to be afraid to discuss and use theory in my work. She made me realize that writing a dissertation consists of nothing else but sitting in the library every day, typing, and revising. I am very grateful to both of them for the meetings and conversations we have had over the years; they were critical to my articulation of the specificity of disability in the Polish socialist context. I am extremely grateful to Prof. Cindy Wu who offered support throughout the process of writing the dissertation and going on the job market. While sitting in the library and grappling with writing I often thought of the advice she once gave me: “to own your ideas.” I hope I learned to do this. I want to thank my external reader, Prof. Malgorzata Fidelis, who generously agreed to be a part of this project. Her insightful comments helped me bring more nuance my argument, write with attention to detail and specificity, and articulate historical complexities of the socialist period. Moreover, thanks to her I became excited about studying 19th century Polish history. I am very lucky that Prof. Eunjung Kim was willing to read parts of this dissertation and encouraged me to pay more attention to the intricacies of literary
representations of disability. I would also like to express my gratitude to Prof. Eliza Szybowicz, thanks to whom I discovered my enthusiasm for reading young adult literature and who immensely helped me with research. I also need to thank Prof. Krystyna Mazur from the University of Warsaw who encouraged me to apply to a doctoral program at the University at Buffalo and who offered me support and advice over the years. Thanks to her I experienced one of the greatest adventures in my life.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1. Overcoming Disability and Healing the Nation</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2. ‘Only Women Become Mothers:’ Representations of the Mother of a Disabled Child</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3. Bodies in Motion: Disability, Work, and Masculinity</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4. No Turning Point: Disability, Gender, and the 1989 Political Transformation</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epilogue. No Future: Disability in Young Adult Literature and Disability Memoirs in Post-1989 Poland</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
My dissertation, *A Sound Body in a Socialist Nation: Family, Work, and Disability in Polish Young Adult Literature and Disability Memoirs, 1954-1991*, analyzes literary representations of disability in Polish socialist-era literature in order to rethink the importance of family, work, and rehabilitation not only in the lives of Polish citizens, but also in the history of Polish nationalism. My inquiry is centered on two genres: young adult literature (YAL), which functions as a site of propaganda dissemination and a tool to shape the minds of young citizens. I also study disability memoirs that contest the fantasy of a “good life” under state socialism and complicate state narratives presented by YAL writers.

Through a comparative analysis of memoirs and young adult fiction, my dissertation foregrounds the often-forgotten experience of living with socialism and navigating its political terrain as a person with a disability. The study of disability life writing brings up the question of self-representation under state socialism in Poland and recovers the voices of disabled people whose memoirs have not yet been researched either in Europe, including Poland, or in the U.S. While disability operates in YAL as a metaphor for a wounded nation, disability memoirs offer more nuanced imagery that allows readers to recognize socialist citizenship as embodied and grounded in one’s participation in a dominant “rehabilitative regime,” which I understand as a duty to rehabilitate (in order to become a productive member of society after transforming into an able-bodied person) for disabled subjects. Therefore, disability, despite socialist slogans of equality, results in an uneven distribution of citizenship rights and restricts one’s national belonging.
INTRODUCTION

Socialists believed in their ability to transform individuals. The 20th century socialist states across Eastern Europe represented ongoing transformative projects whose goals were to refashion both individual and social bodies. “A Sound Body in a Socialist Nation: Family, Work, and Disability in Polish Young Adult Literature and Disability Memoirs, 1954-1991,” tells one such story of remaking a population from the perspective of disability. What did it mean to be a disabled person in socialist Poland? To answer this question, my dissertation explores the relationship between the disabled subject and the Polish socialist state in young adult literature (YAL) and disability memoirs published between 1954 and 1991. At the same time, the dissertation contextualizes the literary images of disability within Polish history and the broader socialist discourse on health, labor, and gender roles. It analyzes metaphorical uses of disability in YAL in the 1950s and 1960s and contrasts this with the emergence of disability memoirs in the late 1960s to explore disabled subjects’ citizenship under state socialism and the failed promise of socialism providing a good life to its disabled citizens.

The comparative analysis of YAL and disability memoirs reveals the socialist belief in the possibility of transforming a disabled body into an able citizen. Socialism was founded on the radical idea that every body could be changed (if the individual truly wanted it) and thus disability emerged in post-World War II Poland as a site upon which larger ideologies could coalesce and the material benefits of a modern socialist state could be made manifest.

Disability in the socialist Polish context does not map onto the Western models of disability:

1To date, surprisingly little has been written on disability in Poland or in any other socialist country. Sarah D. Phillips wrote on disability in Ukraine, Claire L. Shaw published on deafness in the USSR, but there are no other comprehensive studies on disability in the remaining countries of the former Eastern bloc. So far, disability studies programs are rare in Eastern Europe too. This is a first project, both in North America and Europe, including Poland, that engages with representations of disability in Polish socialist-era literature.
Having an able body becomes a question of will and commitment to rehabilitation, which point to the political and relational character of disability in Polish socialist-era literature. At the same time, disability memoirs testify to the frequent failures of rehabilitation. Disability resists the socialist desire to refashion its citizens. Thus, this dissertation shows how the state reconciles and negotiates its dreams of a future society of citizen-workers with the impossible project of changing its disabled citizens’ bodies.

“A Sound Body in a Socialist Nation” is a literary and cultural analysis of the failed socialist promise to bring healing and the good life to the Polish population told through the prism of disability. It focuses on the centrality of representations of both literally and metaphorically overcoming disability. It argues that competing, contested, and changing narratives of overcoming and rehabilitation are central to post-war Polish discourse on building the socialist nation and provides us with a new lens through which we can think of the history of Polish socialism. Attention to literary images of disability reveals the main promise of Polish socialism: to heal the individual and the collective body after the catastrophe of World War II. Healing is intimately connected here with transforming and “cultivating” a healthy population.

My goal in “A Sound Body in a Socialist Nation” is to emphasize the convergence of nationalist and socialist ideologies in post-war Poland, as well as identify actors and practices that enforced a “rehabilitative regime” – a disabled person’s duty to rehabilitate. In the next two sections I show the connection between “a sound body” and a socialist nation, and discuss literary understandings of family, work, and disability, but first I explain the choice of

2 In the early 1970s the British Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) formulated the social model of disability. According to the social model, disability does not reside in a body, but in an environment, which fails to accommodate an impaired body. Disability, in other words, is culturally constructed. The social model of disability contradicts the medical model of disability, which understands disability as a condition that requires a medical intervention and a “fix.”
YAL and disability memoirs as the two genres I analyze and the time period my dissertation covers.

The comparative analysis of disability memoirs and YAL enables me to reconstruct the official state discourse on disability and juxtapose it with experiences of living under socialism with a disability. In the 1950s and 1960s, YAL depicts the triumphs of regaining able-bodiedness coupled with the triumphs of the socialist good life. In the 1970s and 1980s, it shows how work becomes symbolic rehabilitation. Disabled subjects do not have to exercise every day, but instead they are expected to work and sustain themselves. The ability to work replaces the earlier imperative to regain able body. Life writing by people with disabilities offers more nuanced images of both individual rehabilitation and national rebuilding. It discusses the impossibility to overcome disability and points to the shortcomings of the post-war national reconstruction. At the same time, disabled citizens differ in their opinions about the country and rehabilitation. Disability memoirs do not form a monolithic corpus of writing.

Both genres present competing narratives about the post-war situation and the simultaneous reading of the two allows me to demonstrate that YAL, in particular novels published in the 1950s and 1960s, participate in the creation and maintenance of socialist national discourse. The focus on this genre shows what kind of literary images the socialist state, which controlled the publishing houses and funded many of the writers, supported in educating and entertaining its citizens-to-be. Disability memoirs, on the other hand, which started to be published in the late 1960s, either refuse to evaluate the socialist government or constitute dissident writing.

My dissertation follows Julie Passanante Elman’s understanding of YAL as “edutainment” (4).
In order fully to capture the ways in which literary works by YA writers used disability and the ways in which disability was experienced by people with disabilities it is necessary to read both types of texts together. Simultaneous attention to YAL and disability memoirs allows me to analyze overcoming disability both as a metaphor and as a lived experience. First, attention to metaphorical uses and abuses of overcoming disability reveals socialist Poland as a state invested in “ablenationalism” (Mitchell, Snyder 113). Second, ignoring disability memoirs would silence a large part of the Polish population. Third, the incorporation of disability memoirs shows the purely rhetorical employment of disability in literature for young people representing the dominant state narrative. Moreover, limiting the analysis to YAL would “distance us from the reality of impairment” (Schalk, “Metaphorically Speaking: Ableist Metaphors in Feminist Writing”). Disability memoirs, in other words, complicate the state narrative of successful rehabilitation, while YAL facilitates the reconstruction of that narrative in the first place.

While YAL and disability memoirs serve as my primary sources, I contextualize them by using historical and sociological documents and relying on secondary literature on the history of Poland and Eastern Europe under state socialism. As much as literary images of disability reflect societal attitudes towards disability, they also shape them. The theoretical and historical texts I bring into the analysis of disability enable me to capture the complex and shifting meanings of disability and the relation between literature and the official state narrative on the notions of nation, health, and population. In other words, they help me ask to what extent and how did literature function as a site of resistance towards the regime, as its site of propaganda, and, very often, as both. I agree with Eun jung Kim that “complex

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4Mitchell and Snyder define “ablenationalism” as “a conflation of nation and able-ism,” that has emerged in the late eighteenth-century (113). The term “ablenationalism” emphasizes that able-bodiedness is a dominant norm that determines the value and inclusion of people who are not able-bodied into a national community.
understandings of power dynamics can be revealed when literary and visual representations are read along and within the social and political contexts identified by examining multiple archives, including newspapers, official documents, [and] policy statements” (25).

My dissertation follows chronologically almost the entire history of the Polish People’s Republic. However, I do not start in 1945, the year in which the war ended, nor in 1948, when the one-party dictatorship was established, but in 1954. It is the year when Hanna Mortkowicz-Olczakowa published a YA novel, Krzak Jasminu (Jasmine Shrub). Krzak Jasminu (Jasmine Shrub) is the first novel I found in my research that offers images of disability and connects individual overcoming of disability with the national overcoming of the disastrous consequences of WWII. Even though state socialism ended officially in 1989, my dissertation ends in 1991, with the publication of, Cierpieniem pisane: pamietniki kobiet niepelnosprawnych (Written through Suffering: Disabled Women’s Memoirs). These memoirs offer the unique perspective of disabled women on both the experience of living in socialist Poland and the nascent Polish capitalism. They allow me to discuss the meanings and consequences of the end of state socialism for disabled people in Poland.

A Sound Body in a Socialist Nation

In socialist Poland “a sound body” is free of disability and sickness. It is fit and ready to work. A sound body is a result of socialist biopolitics, which cultivates a healthy, educated, literate, and productive population. According to literary representations, Polish biopolitics does not depend on the segregation of disabled and “unfit” subjects, but instead tries to “correct” them either by rehabilitating or reeducating them. David L. Hoffman writes that the Soviet government wanted to create “educated, cultured citizens who would transcend selfish, petty-bourgeois instincts and contribute willingly to a harmonious social order” (1). The
Polish socialist state shared these goals. Participating in the rehabilitative regime signaled that a disabled subject wanted to contribute to the social good and join the working people.

“A sound body” in my title refers both to the individual and the collective body and emphasizes the belonging of the individual to the collective. The belonging, however, is conditional—it depends on the titular “soundness.” Disability memoirs published in the 1970s and 1980s prove that disabled subjects who do not overcome disability are granted second-class citizenship and experience societal exclusion. While they usually do not live in state institutions and some of them work alongside able-bodied people, disabled people have a deep sense of not being treated equally and not belonging to society. My dissertation shows then that in order to belong a disabled subject has to rehabilitate; disability, in other words, disqualifies one from the collective. However, able-bodiedness is crucial not only because it promises a national identification for individual members of the collective, but it also guarantees the success of the post-war reconstruction of Poland. In YA novels overcoming disability parallels the rebuilding of the country. Polish socialist biopolitics, as exemplified by the 1952 Polish Constitution, which says “work shall be the right, the duty, and a matter of honor for every citizen” (22), is interested in the biological capacities of its citizens. Given the labor shortage and population losses during the war, the rational governmentality chooses to rehabilitate disabled subjects instead of excluding them or letting them die, and thereby losing their potential productivity. Overcoming disability is a biopolitical practice that symbolizes the post-war rebuilding and its condition of possibility.

To have a sound body one needs to be both able-bodied and Polish. My dissertation reveals the violence of achieving soundness by becoming both able-bodied and Polish. The literature I analyze shows that one can adopt a Polish identity only by abandoning one’s roots, by changing one’s name and living with a Polish family, which I argue is a form of violence enacted upon disabled people. Rehabilitation is also violent, because it often produces
physical pain and one has no choice but to rehabilitate. I identify this lack of alternative as inherently violent. Both literature and historical events, such as the governmental anti-Semitic campaign in 1968, which forced more than 20,000 Polish Jews to leave the country, reveal that socialist Poland is a country that desires ethnic homogeneity. While some races can be rehabilitated and “polonized,” as the novel Spotkanie nad morzem (A Meeting by the Sea) proves, Jewishness cannot be overcome. As a result, soundness is contingent on violence, and as Polish socialist history shows not everyone can achieve “a sound body.” By thinking of the 1968 events in the context of the universalist socialist belief in individuals’ capacities to transform and its neutral position towards the concept of race, Polish socialism reveals its departure from (Soviet) socialist ideology.

The Polish socialist nation relies on violence in order to construct an ethnically homogenous and able-bodied country. However, the idea of a socialist nation itself remains in conflict with socialist ideology that is interested in transcending national boundaries and privileges the category of “class.” Andrzej Walicki argues that the history of post-1956 Poland is a history of “departing from the socialist ideals” (9). He says that “the communist identity of the Polish People’s Republic was present only during the Stalinist period, later it got diffused” (11). YAL, which lends itself to both literary and historical analysis, provides an example of the imbrications of socialist and nationalist ideologies in Poland and shows how nationalist discourse coexists with and sometimes replaces broader socialist ideologies and

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5 The government started a campaign as a response to the political and economic crisis and internal conflicts within the Party.
6 Socialism adopts a neutral stance towards race and, as David L. Hoffman writes in Cultivating the Masses, a different race or ethnicity does not constitute a justification for exclusion or persecution in the Soviet state—working against the Soviet government and not choosing to become Soviet does. Hoffman writes: “Soviet nationality policy actively encouraged the recruitment of national minority elites into the Communist Party, the development of national minority cultures, and even the ethnographic delineation of national differences. Party leaders believed that fostering national minority identities and cultures would disarm nationalist separatism and help propel ethnic groups along an evolutionary timelines toward socialism” (296). However, later the Soviet government started to repress these national minorities who “given the chance had not become Soviet and instead harbored other allegiances” (297).
policies. The most obvious proof is that the writers analyzed here put an emphasis on the category of the “nation” instead of the “state” and in their narratives the state apparatus, most notably the Party, gets erased. While the writers do not overlook socialist achievements, such as the rebuilding of Warsaw that features prominently in Krystyna Siesicka’s novels, they do not emphasize them and they do not discuss Polish People’s Republic’s relation with the USSR. The only novel I discuss that openly praises the socialist government and does not refer to the category of the nation is Hanna Mortkowicz-Olczakowa’s *Krzak Jasminu* (*Jasmine Shrub*), a socialist-realist novel from 1954. All the other YA works my dissertation analyzes establish a relationship between a disabled protagonist and the Polish nation, not necessarily the socialist state.

**Family, Work, and Disability**

Although the word “disability” appears late in my dissertation title, I explain it here first, because it functions as both my main subject of inquiry and analytical category that allows me to discuss family and work. Following my primary field of study, disability studies, I understand disability as a mode of difference and a political category. I do not think of disability as a condition that requires an obligatory medical intervention (but rather accommodation) and I adopt a critical position towards practices of rehabilitation as represented in the literature I read in this dissertation. Since disability constitutes a mode of difference, overcoming disability establishes a way of achieving sameness. It is important to note that my dissertation engages almost exclusively with representations of physical and sensory disabilities. It was not my choice when I planned the research, but a result of it: I found very few texts, both YAL and disability memoirs, that focus on developmental, intellectual, or cognitive disabilities. Three YA novels that depict intellectually disabled protagonists appear only in the 1980s. I did not find disability memoirs written by authors...
who do not have either physical or sensory disabilities; perhaps, the publishing houses were
not interested in or had no submissions from people who identified as mentally, intellectually,
or cognitively disabled. I think that the lack of representations of mental, cognitive, and
intellectual disabilities in literature is related to the fact that they cannot be overcome, e.g. a
person with Down syndrome cannot not have Down syndrome one day even if she
rehabilitates every day or an autistic person cannot “cure” herself from autism. While the
body resists rehabilitation practices too, the literature attests that the body is seen as more
malleable than the mind. Since my dissertation suggests that the significance of literary
images of rehabilitation extends beyond literature and points to its relation with the broader
socialist discourse on rebuilding and healing the nation, the absence of mental, intellectual,
and cognitive disabilities that do not fit the images of desired population in the socialist-era
literature is not a surprise.

A thread that runs through my dissertation is the topic of family. Family, whether in
the context of citizenship, overcoming disability, or work concerns me in all four chapters.
The choice of family as an organizing scheme stems from the analysis of YAL and disability
memoirs, which shows that disability is experienced primarily in and through family.
Moreover, family under socialism becomes one of the most powerful tools of normalization
and enforcing able-bodiedness, Polishness, and heterosexuality. Disability enables me to
recognize family as a political institution that constitutes the main site of rehabilitation,
reproduction of national identity and socialist values, and which replaces other forms of
communal life and relationality in socialist Poland. In other words, family connects and
belongs to the private and the public (and complicates the distinction between the two), and as
my dissertation shows disability under state socialism is both a national and familial
concern. Family then establishes the main site of tension and negotiation between collective
and state interests and individual and familial interests.
Taking into account literary representations of disability and family, my dissertation shows that citizenship in socialist Poland is, most often, forged through family relations. In other words, citizenship can materialize only through family. Home is a place of molding a socialist citizen out of a “defective” and non-Polish child. Engaging in meaningful ways with the role of the family, especially the mother, in rehabilitating disabled citizens, and thereby rehabilitating the state and the nation under state socialism in Poland allows me to reframe dominant Western understandings of disability as both a medical and social matter. In Poland, there is no stark divide between the "medical" and the "social" precisely because rehabilitation occurs within the family and is linked to the broader goal of building state socialism. Polish authors, who offer “non-medical” (as we might think of them in the global West) solutions to disability, merge purely physiological, biological, and individual understandings of disability with political and relational ones.

As many scholars note, disability both in the Western world and behind the Iron Curtain refers to one’s inability to labor. Attention to disability and labor allows me then to redraw the political maps and show that ideas related to health, body, and labor travelled through the border between the Eastern-bloc countries and the Western world. Both Polish YAL and memoirs by people with disabilities manifest that work is a moral obligation for everyone; Padraic Kenney in *Rebuilding Poland: Workers and Communists, 1945-1950* writes that the socialist authorities “were eager to combine productivity with morality and political consciousness” (286). That is why, the socialist state does not offer a right not to work and people defined as able-bodied but reluctant to work could have been legally persecuted. In the state fantasy a new socialist man is a fit, rational, and ready to work individual: a hero of labor, an iconic steel worker, a stakhanovite.

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7 However, not in the case of the authors of disability memoirs *Cierpieniem pisane* (Written through Suffering), which I analyze in chapter four.
If the rule is to work, then those who do not work constitute an exception to the norm. People with disabilities are: 1. those who cannot perform any labor and require assistance, or those who can perform some labor but in a specially designed workplace, 2. those who cannot perform any labor, and 3. those who can perform either the labor they performed before acquiring a disability or a different type of labor that requires fewer qualifications and thus comes with lower remuneration (Zych-Chabelska 13). In other words, disability is included in the norm as an exception to it, for if the law says that there are three groups of disabled people and one of them cannot be expected to perform work then this is the law that suspends the rule that everyone in the socialist state works. The law, in a way, suspends itself here. Disability marks the limits of the law and the limits of its enforceability.

But disabled people are integrated into the world of labor not only as an exception to the law. YAL and disability memoirs offer many images of disabled people’s work and communities of disabled workers. YAL presents disabled workers who want to participate in the shared goal of building socialism and those for whom work becomes an important source of self-conceptualization and personal satisfaction. The collection of disability memoirs show that disabled people have no choice but to work (even if they would prefer not to), because disability benefits are too low and thus they have to work to survive. Moreover, my dissertation proposes to think of the practice of overcoming disability as a form of work. In socialist Poland, everyone has a moral obligation to work and I claim that overcoming disability is cast as a moral obligation for people with disabilities. Additionally, YA writers as well as authors of disability memoirs present many descriptions of overcoming—of the [8]

The USSR and Soviet Ukraine adopted similar definitions (Phillips 51). In Disability and Mobile Citizenship in Postsocialist Ukraine Phillips discusses three groups into which disabled people were divided in the USSR. All three refer to one’s capacity to work: “Group I includes those considered unable to work and deemed to require constant nursing care, group II includes those not perceived to require constant nursing care who have lost some capability to work but may work in special conditions, group III includes those considered partially disabled who have lost some work capacity but may engage in part-time or casual work” (51).
physical labor of rehabilitation. I argue then that physical exercises performed every day constitute labor that involves at least two people: a disabled person and a person who helps them rehabilitate. This way, overcoming disability becomes a proper form of work for disabled people and ensures that, ultimately, everyone works in the Polish socialist state.

**Chapter Overview:**

In the first chapter, “Overcoming Disability and Healing the Nation,” I compare Polish YAL and disability memoirs to show that post-war national healing is at the center of the state-sponsored YAL and its literary representations rely on the category of disability. I argue that overcoming disability by a child or a teenager becomes a metaphor for the post-war process of reconstructing the nation. Many authors therefore take up the theme of “overcoming disability” by presenting tales of successful rehabilitation and discuss it as both a patriotic and moral duty for the disabled child. The disabled subject’s citizenship becomes contingent on participating in the rehabilitative regime. Disability memoirs, however, testify to the failures of both national reconstruction and individual rehabilitation. Because of the refusal of disability memoirists to present socialist life as a “good life,” I understand their writings as dissident documents. In this chapter, I also offer a more reparative reading of both overcoming and rehabilitation by exposing the ways in which the physical labor of rehabilitation initiates intimate relations between people. The state politics of compulsory rehabilitation results in the production of intimacy.

Chapter 2, “‘Only Women Become Mothers:’ Representations of the Mother of a Disabled Child” pays special attention to the literary constructions of the mother. Literature instructs that it is the mother who is and should be the main manager of her child’s

9 The quote comes from Malgorzata Fidelis’s article: “Are You a Modern Girl? Consumer Culture and Young Women in 1960s Poland,” (179).
rehabilitation process. She, not a doctor, is the key to her child’s overcoming disability. In this chapter, I examine the ways in which authors of YAL and disability memoirs describe the experiences of mothers of children with disabilities under state socialism in Poland. I ask how in Polish literature disability reconfigures motherhood as a political institution under state socialism and argue that a child’s disability permits women to become politically disobedient subjects. Disability allows women who are responsible for their children’s overcoming to make demands upon the state and criticize it for a lack of sufficient accommodations and resources required during the rehabilitation process.

Whereas many scholars have discussed the contradictions of disability, work, and citizenship, and therefore the exclusion of disabled subjects from society based on their assumed anti-productivity,¹⁰ in chapter 3, “Bodies in Motion: Disability, Work, and Masculinity,” I argue that Polish YAL and disability memoirs link disability and work. In other words, I explore how Polish literature makes the coupling of productivity and disability possible. At the same time, I highlight the ways in which the relationship between disability and work is a gendered one. Literature shows how the workplace becomes a site of exercising masculinity, whereas femininity is exercised at home, revealing the failure of the Stalinist project to emancipate women in the workplace. The male protagonists of YAL and male authors of disability memoirs conceptualize themselves as workers. Work becomes both a means of survival and self-realization, but it also functions as symbolic rehabilitation, and thus the analysis of YAL and disability memoirs shows how the meanings of work and rehabilitation change over time. Attending to literary images of male disabled bodies at work, this chapter elucidates the complex ways in which work and productivity are articulated under late state socialism in Poland.

¹⁰ See: Hirschmann, Nancy J., and Beth Linker, editors. Civil Disabilities: Citizenship, Membership, and Belonging; Sarah F. Rose, No Right to Be Idle: The Invention of Disability, 1840s-1930s.
Chapter 4, “No Turning Point: Disability, Gender, and the 1989 Political Transformation” analyzes the collection of disability memoirs, Pisane cierpieniem: Pamietniki kobiet niepelnosprawnych (Written Through Suffering: Disabled Women’s Memoirs) published in 1991. Pisane cierpieniem (Written Through Suffering) consists of short memoirs sent as a response to a memoir competition organized around the theme, “I am a Disabled Woman,” in 1990. Published two years after the first democratic elections, which took place in Poland in June 1989, this book shows that contrary to the mainstream narrative in Poland, Western Europe, and the US, 1989 did not bring a revolution or any dramatic change for disabled women. Women’s memoirs included in the collection question the teleological narrative of linear progression from state socialism to democracy and capitalism and point to the uneven distribution of newly acquired rights. By engaging with domesticity and focusing on the topics of violence and poverty, the collection reveals the ongoing forms of exclusion experienced by disabled women. Pisane cierpieniem (Written Through Suffering) shows that the year 1989 marks the foreclosure of a democratic promise of equality for the majority of disabled women whose memoirs were published. Disabled women did not experience a transformation, but rather a continued form of stasis.

By scrutinizing representations of disability in Polish socialist-era YAL and disability memoirs, this dissertation traces the history of a socialist nation and its relationship to disability community. Socialist ideology relies on the idea of human changeability and the literary images of disability, in particular images of “failed” rehabilitation, pose a challenge to this ideology. At the same time, socialism contests the gender, class, and racial orders. My dissertation shows that unlike gender, class, and race, Polish socialism refuses to recognize disability as an identity that could be integrated with socialism and views it as a condition that needs to be “fixed.” However, both disability memoirs and YAL attest to disabled people’s agency and show them negotiating and undermining various ideological principles as well as
employing them to their own ends. As a result, attention to disability affords a recognition the
tensions and paradoxes within Polish socialism.
CHAPTER 1

Overcoming Disability and Healing the Nation

Drawing upon young adult literature (YAL) and disability memoirs, this chapter is concerned with the processes of healing both of the devastated by World War II Poland and its citizens’ disabled bodies. Disabled bodies and the ruined nation remain in an intimate relationship, for I argue that the YA writers whose works I examine—Krystyna Siesicka, Irena Krzywicka, Jadwiga Ruth-Charlewska, Jadwiga Korczakowska, Hanna Mortkowicz-Olczakowa—establish a parallel between individuals overcoming disability and the nation rebuilding itself after the war. Moreover, the two parallel processes of overcoming involve violence. Disabled subjects are often coerced into rehabilitation and the national overcoming of the catastrophe of World War II directs violence towards those who remain outside the nation’s imaginary boundaries—for example, ethnic minorities.

State socialism in Poland was not interested in the isolation or punishment of its disabled subjects, but in rehabilitating them and transforming them into able-bodied citizens. I call this unrelenting pressure to overcome disability a “violent inclusion”—one is only included into a socialist society by participating in the regime of rehabilitation. Rehabilitation thus becomes a mode of both enabling and restrictive governance, for as Eunjung Kim states “to cure is to properly govern the body” (3). At the same time the reconstruction of the nation and the rehabilitation of disabled bodies initiate forging intimate relationships between the state and its citizens and between citizens themselves, as both YAL and disability memoirs attest. Therefore, different uses, functions, and meanings of disability overcoming in YAL and disability memoirs as well as violence and intimacy constitutive of the process are at the center of this chapter.

The dire economic situation and social problems of the post-war period enabled the YA writers to develop the motif of “overcoming.” By overcoming disability, the YA authors
understand the arduous process of rehabilitation that usually takes place at home or in the countryside. Sometimes rehabilitation refers to a medical surgery and most often ends with the achievement of able-bodiedness. Disability life writing authors point to the hospital and home as sites of rehabilitation and more often than YA writers discuss the impossibility of transforming into an able-bodied person. To a certain extent, socialist discourse of overcoming disability, understood as a question of will, corresponds with the American narrative—“a favorite version of American ‘pull-yourself-up-by-the-bootstraps’ myth, emphasizing individual achievement over adversity” (Sandahl 584).\(^\text{11}\) However, what distinguishes the Polish example, in particular the one in YAL, from American and Western accounts of disability is that individual rehabilitation remains correlated with the state’s interests and points to a collective victory. Overcoming disability is a biopolitical practice that relies on self-discipline. Although disability is de-individualized as it becomes a symbol of national rebirth, the individual—as my analysis shows—has to internalize collective values and act on herself to achieve an able body.

While YAL connects the self and national-enhancement, disability memoirs do not establish a similar relationship. Life writing by people with disabilities does not form a monolithic corpus of writing and presents a more nuanced imagery of disability overcoming than YAL. Disabled writers describe both the efforts to rehabilitate and the subsequent failures to regain able-bodiedness. Because of the inability to transform they are granted second-class citizenship and thus feel excluded from society. Many of them live outside the

\(^{11}\) Simi Linton claims that in the North American context a phrase “overcoming a disability” is “used most often to describe someone with a disability who seems competent and successful in some way, in a sentence something like “She has overcome her disability and is a great success” (17). Julie Avril Minich argues that the popularity of the phrase stems from “its occlusion of injustice; it assuages nondisabled audiences that society is equitable, that anyone with the right outlook is capable of success” (157). Minich points to the crucial characteristic of the phrase: it signals a personal victory over a private and medical matter and thus participates in the concealment of structural injustice and discrimination against people with disabilities.
state institutions and their visits to hospitals are only temporary, but they are not included into a national community.

Both the authors of YAL and disability memoirs write about the nation and the rebirth of the country after the war. Even though disability memoirs do not connect overcoming disability with the post-war reconstruction, the two genres position the nation as a central and dominating value shared by both the ruling body and the people. Usually in the texts, in particular in YAL, population is replaced with nation, which is also presented as the central concern (instead of i.e. class)—a fact that might seem surprising in a socialist state. Tomasz Zukowski, a Polish historian, claims that in the 1960s in Poland, the nation becomes the dominant political concept that is used as a justification of the socialist takeover at the end of the war, eliminating other tools of describing and understanding reality (37). For example, the notion of class conflict or socialist solidarity that transcends national borders disappears from political discourse, as well as revolutionary language (15). The only manner of imagining the population of Poland is through the nation (19). This way, nation remains a collective subject (synonymous with everyone who lives in Poland) and a result of biopolitical practices among which I count overcoming disability.

From this perspective, the 1950s and 1960s YAL by privileging the nation and using disability overcoming as a symbol of the (violent) national reconstruction participates in the creation and maintenance of socialist national discourse. The fusion of Polish socialism and nationalism results in a biopolitical project that engineers both the triumphant able body and the deep attachment to the past suffering of the nation. And it is physical and sensory disability in YAL and the motif of overcoming that reflects and responds to this central contradiction created by the coalescence of nationalism and socialism. Not coincidentally, Tomasz Zukowski and another Polish historian, Marcin Zaremba, characterize the 1960s as
the peak of nationalist discourse under state socialism in Poland. My analysis of YAL shows that the 1960s appears to be when nationalist socialist discourse that employed disability and used literature for young people as a site of its propagation flourished.

An examination of the development of the overcoming motif is, at the same time, a story of the shifts and transformations within the genres of Polish YAL and disability memoirs. It is also a story of the genre of socialist realism, the political role of literature in the nascent socialist country, and the relationship between the state and the writers. The literary texts, in particular YAL, portrayed the rebuilding of the country, but they also operated as a tool of rebuilding. A comparative and diachronic study reveals that the approach towards “overcoming” in YAL and disability memoirs as a literary motif was not unanimous and monolithic, but vulnerable to change and historical circumstances. The “Gierek era” that starts in the 1970s witnesses the loss of interest in overcoming as a metaphor of the national rebirth. Undoubtedly, though, “overcoming” remained an important element of both disability memoirs and YAL. I use these two, vastly different in aesthetic and thematic terms, bodies of literature to argue that overcoming provided a framework for writing about the post-war period and that its goal was to remake and heal both the nation and the bodies while remaining an inherently violent process. Overcoming disability becomes, in other words, a process of violent inclusion of disabled subjects into a socialist society.

**Socialist Nation and the Disabled Body**

The violence of World War II constituted the post-war nation. It was responsible for the new population make up and the trauma experienced by those who survived. The exact

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12 See: Marcin Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm: nacjonalistyczna legitymizacja władzy komunistycznej w Polsce;* Tomasz Żukowski “Dispute over the Millennium: Church contra political government.”
number of casualties is unknown, but the historians estimate it to be around 5 million people, including 3 million Polish Jews. Katherine Lebow describes the destruction of the country and industry: “Approximately 35 percent of national agricultural wealth had been destroyed, along with 32 percent of assets in industry, 30 percent in housing and office stock, and 60 percent in schools and scientific institutions” (Unfinished Utopia 22). The socialist leadership promises the reconstruction of the country, healing and re-establishment of the bonds with and between the remaining citizenry. The memories of the war cannot be easily forgotten, and YAL repeatedly returns to the war; however, the authors do not offer a lot of details about particular battles or war developments. The only event mentioned consistently in YAL is the Warsaw uprising against the Wehrmacht that broke out on August 1, 1944 and ended on October 3 the same year.

The YAL authors present the Warsaw uprising as one of the most important events during the war, the moment that shaped many of their protagonists, a moment that changed and ruined the city and its population. Yet everything a reader can conclude about it relates to a protagonist’s individual experiences of observation or participation in the uprising, for the writers do not discuss the political details, reasons and consequences of the uprising. In other words, the uprising emerges as an occurrence that was experienced mainly on an individual-affective level.

Perhaps the individualization of the Warsaw uprising enables writers to establish a parallel between an individual overcoming disability and the city overcoming demographic, economic, social and architectural disaster in the post-war period. Krystyna Siesicka, one of the most popular YAL writers whose works remain in print until today, makes salient

13 This does not imply the uprising was not a topic of a public discussion, but is a result of YAL genre that focuses predominantly on introspection and emotions. After 1956 the Warsaw Uprising was regularly discussed and commemorated in the public realm. This happened to a more limited extent than today, but the Warsaw Uprising was a topic of a public discussion.
comparisons between a disabled protagonist and the wounded city in her two novels, *Fotoplastykon (Kaiserpanorama)* and *Beethoven i dziny (Beethoven and Jeans)* published in 1969 and 1968 respectively. Apart from the theme of the war, what links the two texts is the presentation of a disabled body as a body deprived of corporeal experiences. Here, a disabled body is not reducible to a somatic body. In *Beethoven i dziny (Beethoven and Jeans)*, Piotr is blind, and in *Fotoplastykon (Kaiserpanorama)* the main protagonist, Jana, cannot walk, yet their disabilities do not provoke any bodily reactions or sensations—no matter if that would be pain or pleasure. It seems that the bodies are acutely separated from any kind of corporeal experiences. The absence of the somatic body emphasizes the discursive nature of a disabled body and points to its main-metaphorical function. It also adds to the obfuscation of violence of inclusion.

Disability as a metaphor allows the articulation of the Warsaw uprising as a lived experience, for the only suffering bodies, the only bodies that experience pain and other corporeal sensations, are those of soldiers and civilians fighting in the war and participating in the uprising. The erasure of the disabled body as a somatic body is not unique for Siesicka. Jerzy Szczygiel’s novel *Jak trudno kochac* (How Difficult It Is to Love) and Jadwiga Korczakowska’s novel, *Spotkanie nad morzem* (A Meeting By the Sea), participate in the creation of a disabled body as one without sensory faculties. In *Curative Violence*, Eunjung Kim writes about disabled bodies representing the national body in crisis: “The metaphorical use of disability as a vehicle to represent the violence in national history in effect ties the meaning of disability to the condition of victimization and, in the process, obscures actual violence against disabled bodies within the nation” (32). In Polish YAL, the employment of

14 However, in two novels I analyze further – *Dziewczynka spoza szyby* (A Girl Behind a Window) and *Wichura i trzciny* (A Whirlwind and Canes) disabled bodies experience pain. While representations of disability in YAL are undoubtedly similar, they are not identical.
disability as a metaphor of national condition results in both the erasure of the somatic disabled body and the invisibility of the pressure to rehabilitate—the need for rehabilitation is never questioned and self-evident. Siesicka’s novels also locate the hurting body in wartime, whereas disabled bodies that do not experience pain nor any other sensations characterize the post-war period.

Published in 1969 Fotoplastykon (Kaiserpanorama) tells a story of an eighteen-year old Jana who, after an accident which is never described, cannot walk and does not leave home. Fotoplastykon (Kaiserpanorama) is a collection of short vignettes about the daily life of a “typical” socialist family. The vignettes are highly didactic and each forms a separate lesson about values, behavior, and moral conduct in the socialist country. Jana lives with her parents, both busy professionals, and two younger siblings. Her uncle Tomasz is a frequent visitor as well as friends of the parents and the siblings. The parents hire a maid who cleans and cooks and takes care of the children when they are away. Fotoplastykon (Kaiserpanorama) works well as a representative of the 1960s Polish YAL and its emphasis on the extended family that includes few biological relatives but plenty of neighbors, maids, adoptive children, and friends. World War II explains the lack of grandparents and other relatives and also determines other elements of the plot. Jana’s family, as well as her teachers and friends, often discuss the war and the national values, such as respect for the elders and willingness to die for the country. The memory of those who died fighting is preserved and, most crucially, the discussion of the people who participated in the Warsaw Uprising precedes the triumphal moment of Jana’s overcoming of disability.

In the last section of Fotoplastykon (Kaiserpanorama), before the scene in which Jana gets up and starts walking, her brother Jasiek delivers a passionate speech about people taking part in the 1944 uprising: “Do you think that they wanted to die in the streets? Do you think this is what they wanted, that they could not wait to die, that they were impatiently waiting in
line who is going to be the next one?” (184). The sequence of these two scenes—one in which Jasiek talks about dying fighters and the next one in which Jana starts walking again—miraculously since it seems that she did not rehabilitate and thus overcoming disability is here somewhat sudden and unexpected (perhaps, it is more a cure than overcoming)—cannot be a coincidental one. It represents the nation literally standing up on its feet after the war. Jana’s overcoming transforms into a symbol of collective triumph and confirms the arrival of a new (female) body, one which does not suffer and does not die but instead wins over its adversities. It seems that a new country and a new socialist regime require a healthy body that can regenerate itself. The sudden overcoming obscures the violence that underlies the inclusion processes. Jana has to become able-bodied, for there is no place for disabled women in a socialist society.

However, it is crucial to note that the book was published in 1969, a year after the student rebellion and an anti-Semitic campaign. The state’s response was to use nationalist and antisemitic discourse, which stressed national unity and wartime heroism rather than socialist slogans. Thus, the events of 1968 might be an immediate context for this scene. It is also important that a person standing up is an eighteen-year old woman: while it represents the nation raising up after the war and the national unity in the wake of the students’ unrest in 1968, it shows a woman entering adulthood ready to take on the responsibilities that womanhood involves.

State socialism requires disabled bodies to transform into able-bodied ones. The overcoming in this context parallels the socialist repair of a country violated during the war. Individual effort reflects the collective one; the individual body mirrors the national body. Jana’s disability turns into a symbol of national rebirth under socialism and thus becomes de-individualized. In the novel, she rarely discusses her disability and does not adopt disability as identity, for as a symbol of the national condition Jana cannot identify as a disabled person.
but has to overcome disability. Moreover, the chronological arrangement of the two scenes, Jasiek discussing the 1944 uprising and dying civilians and Jana who starts walking right after the speech, implies that there is a continuation between the two, an inevitable trajectory that does not present alternatives. Overcoming disability, in other words, serves national meanings and legitimizes socialism.

Jana’s miraculous overcoming of disability constitutes the climax of the novel and functions as a final illustration of socialism’s achievements. Yet Jana’s disability is not the main topic of the novel; the main topic is the good life under socialism during the years of growing unrest across socialist states in the region. Obviously, conflicts and recent events are absent in Siesicka’s novel, which suggests that the March 1968 students’ rebellion serves as a text’s proper historical context. Siesicka shows that there is no contradiction between Polish traditional values and socialist values. Jana and her siblings discuss the question of religion and whether it is possible to be a good socialist citizen and a Catholic. Though Siesicka does not leave her reader doubting, it is equally possible to be a good socialist citizen and an atheist. What counts are the values, which in socialist society are shared by everyone: the willingness to help others, selflessness, and the preservation of memory of those who died fighting during the war. By not refraining from the questions of religion in both a socialist and deeply Catholic society, but emphasizing the ideals that people share and that can be described as socialist, Catholic, and “authentically Polish,” Siesicka’s novels play a unifying role and emphasize close bonds between the citizens. The socialist aftermath of the war divided the country, and from this perspective, YAL can be seen as participating in the project of the construction of the unity. A united country, though, is fantasy; in her 1969 novel, Siesicka does not mention, to name just a few, the open conflict between the state and the Church in 1966 about the role of the Church in the 1000th anniversary of the existence of Poland, the students demonstrations in 1968 I mentioned above or the expulsion of the Jewish
population in 1968 from Poland. In her writing, the nation remains a unanimous collective subject that is ethnically homogenous and able-bodied and whose territory corresponds with the ethnic borders. Her vision, strategically, coincides with 1967 Władysław Gomułka’s infamous statement on citizenship: “We believe that a Polish citizen should identify with one country only – Polish People’s Republic” (24).

What helps Siesicka to rhetorically construct the united nation is the erasure of the state apparatus—the Party. Instead, she focuses solely on the category of the nation, which turns out to be a more “flexible” concept. By evacuating the recent historical events, stressing the good life under socialism and the importance of able-bodiedness Fotoplastykon (Kaiserpanorama) might be seen as complicit in the maintenance of propaganda; however, the disappearance of the state apparatus proves that the novel does not fit neatly into parameters of official discourse either. It is particularly significant given Krystyna Siesicka’s presumed involvement with the secret Security Service (in Polish “Sluzba Bezpieczenstwa,” SB) from 1974 until 1989 (Geborska 209). In 1973, right before the beginning of her cooperation with SB, she received the Prime Minister’s Lifetime Achievement Award. Although awarded by the state, her text appears to go beyond traditional dichotomies such as official versus informal and dissident versus state-sanctioned. It integrates the state-authorized narrative with values held by the people who might not agree with the ruling government. Therefore, I want to suggest that Fotoplastykon (Kaiserpanorama) can be approached as a literary as well as a historical document, whose analysis affords an opportunity to recognize the ways in which literature negotiates and reconciles tension between different sets of values.

A few years after the publication of Fotoplastykon (Kaiserpanorama), Stefan Nowak, a Polish sociologist, published the results of a survey in which young people were asked: “What would you die for.” The answer was: the nation (128). In the article “System wartosci społeczeństwa polskiego” (“Polish Society and Its Values System”), Nowak comments that
“the nation is not identified with the state here. (…) The state is seen only as an organizing system and does not constitute a value in itself” (140). To a certain extent, it seems that Siesicka’s novel by separating the nation and the state and privileging the former preceded the results of the survey and Nowak’s comments. One of the chapters in *Fotoplastykon* (*Kaiserpanorama*) tells a story of a girl declaring at school that she feels that she owes something to those who fought for the country and she would do the same if the situation requires (113). Nation then operates as source of affection and unity, whereas the Party and the state are virtually absent, for they do not represent a similar symbolic power. In *Rebuilding Poland*, Padraic Kenney states: “one of the central questions in the social history of communist Poland [is]: did Poles consider the regime to be foreign?” (8). The consistent erasure of the Party from the YAL and the almost exclusive focus on the nation, Polish traditions, and history might imply that it does. At the same time, *Fotoplastykon* (*Kaiserpanorama*) points to socialism as a system that is not necessarily in conflict with national values and thus it is not “foreign,” but rather polonized.

Siesicka’s 1968 novel *Beethoven i dzinsy* (*Beethoven and Jeans*) similarly reconciles national and socialist values. *Beethoven i dzinsy* (*Beethoven and Jeans*) tells a story of a high school girl, Misia, falling in love with a blind boy. Her mother, Joanna, is appalled by the idea of her daughter marrying a disabled person. She fears that Misia will have to take care of him instead of going to a university and pursuing a career in law. She simply sees him as a burden. However, Misia tries to organize Piotr’s eye surgery and it seems that her efforts might end successfully. In one of the most dramatic scenes in the novel, Joanna thinks of her daughter’s blind boyfriend—Piotr. His blindness provokes Joanna’s rage and fear, but it also reminds her of destroyed during the uprising in 1944 Warsaw. She thinks about Piotr and Misia’s plan to marry him, asks herself whether she would have married her husband if he had been disabled and concludes that during the war, blindness was nothing when compared to ubiquitous death.
Then, unexpectedly, she connects Piotr’s blindness with the uprising: “those streets, those naked stumps covered by snow, alive or dead, healthy or blind. There are no questions here. I can live with this city, even if it chokes itself with its own bricks forever. As long as I live here I can give up everything I have” (84). In other words, these images are not so much bodies—they are the city’s agony, which evokes solidarity. Joanna’s memories betray her affective relation to the past and what she is mourning is the pre-war city, which ceased to exist. The violence of the war is responsible for the destruction of her intimate relationship with the city she longs for. In this context, disability loses its individual dimension—Piotr functions in the novel merely as a trigger of the story and he is absent for most of it—and becomes a symbolic vehicle for the destruction of Warsaw. The streets are anthropomorphized; she refers to them as “alive or dead, healthy or blind.” Consequently, the promise of Piotr regaining his sight in the end of the novel (he has an eye surgery) serves as a synecdoche of a rebuilt city and nation after the war and thus the book ultimately adopts a triumphant tone. Crucially, the novel reconciles what seems unreconcilable: the longing for a pre-war city with a reminder that its reconstruction is a socialist endeavor. The good life under socialism does not cancel Joanna’s mourning for the city she has lost nor does the lost past downplay socialist achievements. *Beethoven i dzinsy*, similar to *Fotoplastykon (Kaiserpanorama)*, offers a way out of the rigid dichotomy of state-sanctioned versus dissident narrative. What it does not do is contest the imperative to rehabilitate. Disabled teenaged bodies transform into able bodies at the cusp of reaching adulthood and full citizenship rights. They join the socialist nation as able-bodied citizens.

**The Biopolitics of Overcoming Disability**

Violent inclusion is a crucial element in the construction of united Poland, which is at the center of Siesicka’s novels. In her texts disability overcoming takes a form of sudden cure
and medical surgery. Her desire to highlight unity propels her to downplay violence.

Important figures in the making of the post-war nation are young people, for the emphasis on the child overcoming disability reminds that its figure is bound to notions of futurity. An adult disabled body lacks the capability to arrest a socialist future, for as Dora Vargha notes in “Polio and Disability in Cold War Hungary:” “Children were extensively used as symbols of the communist and democratic futures and as innocent victims of the respective other political system throughout the Cold War” (372). In the Eastern Bloc, including Poland, a child stands for a free, socialist future in contrast to adults who do not hold a similar symbolic power.

Malgorzata Fidelis adds that in the early 1950s, “The people’s state knows only one term—the child—and therefore cares enough to provide a happy development for every child” (Women, Communism, and Industrialization 193). Marta Brodala writes about the mandatory hygiene and physical education classes in the primary schools in socialist Poland (24). It becomes clear that not only the construction of new factories, apartment buildings, shipyards and coal mines occupied the government. The government was also concerned with the construction of the healthy body of a child. A child’s body is a material object that can be shaped and crafted—in other words, submitted to the state’s biopolitical plan.

A body can be refashioned and so does subjectivity. The control of school libraries and replacement of the ideologically “wrong” books with “correct” ones participated in the shaping of socialist subjectivity of young citizens in the early years of socialist Poland (Heska-Kwasniewicz, Taluc 9-10). In 1947 Boleslaw Bierut\(^\text{15}\) announced the changes in the cultural politics: “(…) in the sphere of cultural creativity there should be introduced the same

\(^{15}\)Boleslaw Bierut was the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the PUWP (1948-1956), the Prime Minister (1952-1954), and the President of Poland (1947-1952). The fact that he served as the prime minister, president, and the first secretary symbolized the fusion of the Party and the state (Porter-Szücs 232). He died in 1956. He spent the war years in the USSR and accepted Soviet citizenship (Porter-Szücs 207). Brian Porter-Szücs writes that “Bierut’s objective was nothing less than the total transformation of Poland from a mostly rural, impoverished, war-torn country into one that was prosperous, industrial, equitable, and modern” (215).
relationship between the singular person and the society as in the field of production of material goods. (...) Hence, in the area of cultural creativity elements of planning and control by the society are indispensable” (Chamera-Nowak 219). Social, political, literary, and art life becomes subjected to central planning. In 1951 Jakub Berman, a Party official responsible for the cultural and propaganda politics in the early 1950s, said that “Today one [writer] has to say: I need to write as if without my book socialism could not win” (Tomasik 10). In Berman’s words, a book constitutes a form of weapon indispensable to a political victory. A writer, in this context, becomes an activist. Adopting socialist realism by Polish writers, a genre whose aim was to discuss contemporary issues, in particular the topic of labor, and emphasize the heroism of building socialism, was supposed to help socialism “win” in Poland. It was a dominant, politically sanctioned, literary genre in the years 1949-1955 and *Krzak Jasminu (Jasmine Shrub)* by Hanna Mortkowicz-Olczakowa I discuss in this section serves as its example.

Overcoming disability and building the socialist nation are the main topics of Mortkowicz-Olczakowa’s text, but her book itself contributed to the effort of building socialism. Moreover, thinking of overcoming disability as a mode of violent inclusion into society and thus elimination of disability advances an alternative understanding of the biopolitical erasure of unwanted populations at the center of Michel Foucault’s *Society Must Be Defended*. Following Foucault, I interpret the state insistence on overcoming disability as a mode of “the improvement of the species or race” (256). However, although Foucault’s focus on race applies to Polish YAL, the Western context that Foucault’s text provides does not neatly map onto the Polish representation of disability overcoming in YAL. Polish biopolitics as represented in literature links the individual triumph over disability with a post-war reconstruction. It does not rely on isolating disabled subjects in state institutions. The novels escape the Western understandings of disability as a social or medical matter.
Disabled bodies under state socialism in Poland are not isolated, but included through rehabilitation and institutionalization. Literature does not present any other alternative: all YAL disabled protagonists attempt to overcome and never consider not rehabilitating. The pressure to rehabilitate—not leaving a choice—constitutes a form of violence. The socialist imperative to rehabilitate is inherently an ableist one. Disabled protagonists are made to live, preferably as transformed, able-bodied subjects, and the state does not let them die. On the one hand, socialism promised a “just” system, a reverse of the capitalist exploitation that the war stopped, and which YAL writers such as Halina Mortkowicz-Olczakowa describe in their texts. On the other hand, disabled bodies represent an unfulfilled promise of productivity. It is enough to transform them into able bodies to extract their labor in the service of building the nation.

Hanna Mortkowicz-Olczakowa’s socialist realist novel *Krzak jasminu* (*Jasmine Shrub*) published in 1954 narrates a poor family whose living conditions improve radically after 1945. They live near Krakow and participate in building a socialist city, Nowa Huta. In the early 1950s the state organized for writers three-month-stays at factories, agricultural farms, building sites across the country in order to provide them with necessary knowledge to depict faithfully life and labor in a new country (Wojtczak 233). Mortkowicz-Olczakowa follows the rules of socialist realism and offers many details about Nowa Huta, but I do not know whether she herself participated in this program. In her text the new system offers jobs, new apartments, free health care, and education to the Traczyk family—all the things they lacked before the introduction of socialism. One of the Traczyk sisters, Kazia, constantly falls

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16 Disability memoirs, similarly to YAL, do not offer many images of the state institutions for disabled subjects. While there were, obviously, hospitals and institutions for people with disabilities, the reading of disability memoirs shows that usually the families attempted to take care of a disabled family member on their own. Only when it failed or became too difficult, a disabled person went to an institution, oftentimes temporarily. Disability memoirs do not provide grounds to claim that the state expected disabled population to be live in the institutions. It rather employed the “functional model” and tried to rehabilitate disabled people in order to gain additional labor force.
ill (her illness has started before the war), and doctors cannot find the cause of her weakness and tiredness. However, now she has a chance to go to the sanatorium in the mountains of Zakopane, to seek treatment. This is one of the very few texts that make a long-term segregation necessary to overcome unnamed illness. Kazia complains to the doctor there: “I can’t do anything. Everyone says I’m useless. Even my sister, my neighbors, and my mom… No one likes me… Now, you’ll have a purpose—the doctor smiles. Everyone is useful. We just need to find you something. Now in Poland we make sure that no life is wasted, that everyone is useful” (137-8). This fragment betrays Mortkowicz-Olczakowa as an advocate of a socialist system and encapsulates the socialist promise of inclusion—“everyone is useful,” invulnerability—“no life is wasted,” and breaking with the pre-war past—emphasis on “now.” Usefulness refers to productivity here, very much like in the Soviet Ukraine where “all citizens, including the disabled, were viewed as a potential labor force” (Phillips 53).

Ultimately, Kazia recovers and decides to go to nursing school. The novel offers many descriptions of building Nowa Huta (the father of the family is one of the workers there) and content workers who stay after hours in pursuit of a shared goal. Attention to labor reminds readers that Krzak Jasminu (Jasmine Shrub) belongs to the genre of socialist realism. The story of the emerging city and the parallel story of Kazia’s recovery strengthen an analogy between the individual overcoming her illness and the country overcoming both the war disaster and the pathologies of the pre-war capitalist system. Mortkowicz-Olczakowa describes the pre-war exploitation of the poor by the nobility and the injustices of capitalism:

it was bad before the war. You are not able to imagine the hunger we suffered, it was worst than it is today [and she says this during the war]. Even the farmers’ children rarely ate eggs or butter. Why? Because all we saved, collected, or grew we had to give it back, sell it, to pay back the loans and interests. And the prices of wheat, butter, and eggs were low and the debt kept rising and rising (22).

The oftentimes violent elimination of social classes and the establishment of one monolithic working class is an erasure of difference most commonly associated with socialist
systems across Eastern Europe. Mortkowicz-Olczakowa’s novel depicts the process of nationalization of land and expropriation of its prior owners that ended with bloodshed. However, the examination of other YAL shows that in socialist Poland this erasure is only one among many and that the processes of population homogenization are intrinsically violent. The 1968 expulsion of Polish Jews can serve as yet another illustration of an attempt to create a normative, undifferentiated Polishness. The expulsion underscores the fact that Polish Jews were seen by the Party as non includeable. Jewishness, in contrast to disability (which appears to be a more “flexible” condition), cannot be erased. The sheer will of power cannot overcome race. Therefore, the events of 1968 exemplify a creation of a “family-nation” that excludes all who are “racially impure.” The attempt to “polonize” the remaining minority groups, which I analyze in the following section, is another one. Consequently, the rehabilitation regimes are similarly violent—they are often painful and involve coercion.

Overcoming disability or “improvement of the species or race” (Foucault 256) constitutes a way of achieving sameness. From this perspective, disabled teen protagonists are radically different, and the narrative crux of the majority of YAL is to include them through the return to a state of sameness or indistinguishability.  

The Sound Body in the Sound Land

The Polish teenagers who are the protagonists of the 1950s and 1960s YAL overcome the consequences of polio or seek treatment for blindness to achieve sameness.

17 The sociological study Sytuacja ludzi niepełnosprawnych i stan rehabilitacji w PRL (The Situation of Disabled People and the Quality of Rehabilitation in Polish People’s Republic), published by the Polish Academy of Sciences, includes a short analysis of the Polish Constitution, which shows that rehabilitation was not only a right of a disabled Polish citizen, but also an obligation (82). In order to fulfill its duties towards the nation, i.e. participate in the project of building a communist country, a disabled citizen should rehabilitate. The analysis observes that rejecting rehabilitation does not provoke a legal action against a disabled individual; however, the wording of the sentence implies that many did discuss and possibly wanted to implement such a law (82).
Passanante Elman states that American protagonists of the 1980s sick-teen lit overcome illness to achieve “personal growth” (17), but what is at stake in Polish YAL is not one’s full potential, but the socialist nation’s full potential. In 1952, Boleslaw Bierut, a Party leader, calls on the nation to transform Poland into

a highly industrialized country, a country made of iron, concrete and steel, a country of machines and electrification, a country of highly developed machinery in industry as well as in agriculture, a country that makes use of its hidden and barely used, but unquestionably rich and great natural resources, a country that is culturally and economically unified, a country of great metallurgy and great chemistry, a country of shipping and international sea ports (27-28).

In this passage Bierut reveals a socialist fantasy of the good life to be a fantasy of modernity and rapid development; and a socialist modernity requires healthy, able-bodied, and Polish citizenry. The transformation of the country is contingent on the transformation of the bodies of its citizens. YAL instructs that the individual and the nation are intimately linked; and the transformation of the former signals the transformation of the latter. One’s full potential results in the nation’s full potential. The YAL authors Jadwiga Ruth Charlewska, Jadwiga Korczakowska, and Irena Krzywicka deliver narratives of war, healing, and transformation.

Similarly to Krystyna Siesicka, Jadwiga Ruth Charlewska, Jadwiga Korczakowska, and Irena Krzywicka were prominent writers in socialist Poland. Jadwiga Korczakowska was the recipient of state awards in 1976 and 1977.\footnote{In 1976 Jadwiga Korczakowska received the Minister of Culture and Art Award and in 1977 the Prime Minister’s Award (Geborska 196).} Even though the state recognized their works, which were published in high numbers,\footnote{For example, Krystyna Siesicka’s works were published in 100 000 copies and many times republished (Geborska 209).} they did not belong to the literary establishment. Mieczysław Wojtczak in his impressive history of the relationship between the authors and the socialist state, fails to discuss YAL writers and their position vis-a-vis the

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\end{footnotesize}
The YAL writers did not occupy important positions in the Association of Polish Writers (Zwiazek Literatow Polskich, ZLP) nor did they participate in literary discussions published in magazines. Perhaps, to authors writing for adult audiences YAL and its creators did not seem worthy of engagement. The overwhelming majority of YAL writers were women while men dominated ZLP and its managerial positions. Some authors, especially those active in dissident circles, might have thought of women publishing for young readers and receiving state awards as “collaborators.” Yet I argue that their writing negotiates state and dissident values by undermining the state apparatus and privileging the category of the nation.

Jadwiga Ruth Charlewska’s novel Dziewczynka spoza szyby (The Girl Behind the Window) from 1964 seamlessly links the notions of the recovering nation and child’s rehabilitation. Elzunia, a 10-year-old girl had polio as a child and as a result she cannot walk. She does not attend school; the teachers visit her at home, where she spends time with the maid. Her parents are busy working to build the socialist country. Elzunia is spoiled and unhappy; her parents, though loving, ignore her, and she has no friends. She spends her days observing from the window neighborhood children playing in the streets. During the summer, her mother takes her to the countryside where she stays with an aunt. The aunt has another guest, a writer whose wife and child died during World War II. Mr. Andrzej, as Elzunia addresses him, tells the girl that she is lazy and spoiled and should try to help her family and overcome disability (72). Initially, Elzunia does not want to accept Mr. Andrzej’s opinion; however, as time progresses she decides to “be stronger” and attempts to walk on her own. Mr. Andrzej tells her “encouraging” stories about brave Soviet soldiers who did not have legs.

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20 See: Mieczyslaw Wojtczak, Wieksza i mniejsza litera: literatura i polityka w pierwszym cwierczwieczu PRL.
or were blind yet fought in the war and about the American President Roosevelt who had polio, but managed to achieve great things (73). The pain that accompanies rehabilitation makes the process noble and allows for comparisons with the President and the soldiers.

From the perspective of a postwar Polish citizenry still living with the painful memories of German occupation during World War II, the refusal to rehabilitate would be synonymous with betraying the country and thus the imperative to overcome disability equals a military command. To be a good citizen, Elzunia needs to rehabilitate. Mr. Andrzej’s stories convince her, and even though rehabilitation is painful and time-consuming the little girl does not change her mind. She says: “I will be strong too. If they could have done it, it means that it is possible. I am not the only one who suffers. Other people suffer too” (73). Charlewska’s novel, similar to the American sick-teen lit from the 1980s analyzed by Elman in Chronic Youth, illustrates that “rehabilitation became attached to citizenship” (14). In other words, a disabled person who does not rehabilitate does not deserve the status of a citizen. However, the Polish “rehabilitative citizenship” (Elman 14) is affectively charged thanks to the identification with the suffering of the people who fought and died during the war. Moreover, the examination of Polish socialist YAL shows that “rehabilitative citizenship” cuts across the division between capitalist and communist societies. Thus, conversely to what Elman states it is not “attached to the notions of liberal individualism” (14). Polish authors present rehabilitation as both a patriotic and moral duty for the disabled subject.

Overcoming disability secures citizenship, but it is offered only to those who identify as Poles. Published in 1962 Jadwiga Korczakowska’s novel Spotkanie nad morzem (A Meeting by the Sea) concerns a blind Kashubian girl who is adopted by a Polish woman and assumes Polish identity. Kashubians form a small ethnic group in the northern part of Poland, where they have lived since the 12th century (Dolowy 7). After the end of the war some of the Kashubians were forced to migrate to Germany as many thought of them as Germans, yet the
overwhelming majority was allowed to remain in Poland (Dolowy 46). However, the decision to stay was also a decision to abandon Kashubian identity and become Polish. Nicole Dolowy, a Polish ethnographer, writes about the state politics that required Kashubians to stop using their own language and deny their Kashubian identity (64). Since most YAL protagonists are without a doubt Polish, what makes Spotkanie nad morzem (A Meeting by the Sea) especially interesting is that the main protagonist is blind and a representative of a different ethnic group. And for this very reason, the story becomes about both overcoming disability and non-Polish identity; in fact, the process of attaining able-bodiedness is contingent on choosing a Polish identity. Violence of rehabilitation becomes connected with the violence of being forced to abandon one’s roots.

In order to regain sight, a Kashubian girl needs to abandon her grandparents, change her name from the foreign sounding “Elza” to Polish “Elzbietka,” and be adopted by a Polish lady. Ada, her new mother, finds a doctor who will conduct an eye surgery for a ten-year-old. Polishness emerges here as the sole guarantor of able-bodiedness and health; however, the national identification does not suffice, for only within a Polish family, even one that is not nuclear, can a normative growth and entrance into adulthood take a proper form. Thus, family operates as a site of the materialization and cultivation of Polishness and able-bodiedness. In contrast, belonging to an ethnic minority seals one’s fate and signals both disability and the past, for the old age of the grandparents foretells the slow ending of the Kashubian minority in Poland. Not surprisingly, Ada’s vigor and young age announces the inseparable coupling of Polishness and an able-bodied future. As a consequence, YAL, and in particular Spotkanie nad morzem (A Meeting by the Sea), by focusing exclusively on Polish characters participates in maintaining the fantasy of “racial purity” in socialist Poland, a

21In Of Grammatology Jacques Derrida writes that the first violence is the violence of naming (112).
multicultural country before World War II, and in this way becomes complicit in connecting compulsory able-bodiedness with compulsory Polishness.

Both writers, Charlewska and Korczakowska, privilege home and nature as sites of disability overcoming. In many of the YA novels nature sits for the Recovered Territories—former German land that Poland gained after the war. Władysław Gomułka, the Party leader, said in one of his speeches that regaining these territories was “the biggest victory that the Polish nation won all through the thousand years’ history of its state” (13) and the Polish Constitution from 1952 states that “the Regained Territories were permanently restored to Poland” (15). For in the aftermath of the war Poland lost a lot of territory in the East, but gained in the West. The regained land is claimed to be where the Polish nation started in the 10th century. This way the overcoming of a non-Polish identity is paralleled with the polonizing of foreign territories, and Polishness itself becomes linked with resettlement.

Elżbieta, Charlewska’s protagonist, experiences an “able-bodied epiphany” at her aunt’s home in the countryside during the summer; and the forming of a new family that initiates Elza’s rehabilitation takes place at Ada’s home by the sea. Socialist Poland is a modern country that guarantees free and high-quality health care, as portrayed in YAL, yet overcoming disability as my chapter shows does not occur in hospitals, and the medical establishment does not facilitate the process. Overcoming disability does not depend on medical development or breakthroughs in medicine; it has little to do with medical “tricks” and doctors’ skills. Even if the doctor conducts a surgery, as in Spotkanie nad morzem (A Meeting by the Sea), and the restoration of sight depends whether the doctor will be successful, what is crucial is the patient’s will: does she truly desire to recover? Is she committed to rehabilitation and overcoming? As a result, the return to able-bodiedness is not enforced by physical violence organized by the state, but is predicated upon self-enhancement and self-discipline. Overcoming emerges as a self-disciplinary practice rooted in the socialist
belief in one’s capacity to self-transform that might be facilitated by doctors and family members, yet an individual herself manages the disappearance of disability.

In opposition to the hospital, home is supposed to shape a socialist citizen, and overcoming disability is a way to mold an exemplary citizen out of a “defective” one. A hospital might serve as a site of surgical intervention or life-saving procedures, but if rehabilitation is “a self-making project involving perpetual self-discipline and self-surveillance” (Elman 14), as Julie Passanante Elman understands it, then it has nothing to do with forming future citizens of the socialist state. Home is a place of exercising and attaining “rehabilitative citizenship” (Elman 14). Equally important to the home as a site of overcoming disability is nature. In other words, a disabled body can be restored to soundness only when surrounded by a loving family or Polish nature. There is an underlying belief that the sea air or forest air has calming and soothing effects on disabled bodies and, more importantly, “disabled” character or morals, for the “healing” of the body also suggests healing of the “soul,” as *Dziewczynka spoza szyby (The Girl Behind the Window)* attests. Elzunia’s lack of interest in rehabilitation in the beginning of the novel reflects her flawed child morality and thus exemplifies Robert McRuer’s observation that “there is no material separation between disability and serious flaws in character” (23). However, the restoration to able-bodiedness and the envisioned entrance into adulthood promises a renewed morality. Overcoming disability improves her character and the nation.

The emphasis on seaside or countryside as a site of disability overcoming suggests that nature is the proper “doctor” of a disabled body. The closeness with the woods and the sea heals; the intimacy with the Polish (regained) land is a necessary first step towards “recovering.” In both *Spotkanie nad morzem (A Meeting by the Sea)* and *Dziewczynka spoza szyby (The Girl Behind the Window)* the action takes place in a newly recovered, previously German land. In this context the return to the “historical” borders suggests healing of both the
nation and bodies. Consequently, having access to land creates Polish citizens and fortifies the Polish state. It is clear then that the representation of disability in Polish YAL does not fit easily or neatly into Western ways of understanding the social model of disability or the medical model of disability. By insisting on overcoming disability through establishing a relationship with nature in the Recovered Territories or spending time at home, the authors offer partially “non-medical” (as we might think of them in the global West) solutions to disability and thus merge purely physiological, biological, and individual understandings of disability with political and relational ones. In other words, disability is conceived here first and foremost relationally as it refers both to home and the land.

The language of overcoming disability corresponds with the sites of overcoming and thus it does not rely on medical jargon. The language of overcoming employs two contradictory languages: the maternal language of love and care that masks the rehabilitative imperative and the discourse of heroism and war that posits overcoming as a recovery from the war. Published in 1959 Irena Krzywicka’s *Wichura i trzciny (The Whirlwind and Canes)* illustrates the intertwining of these two modes of “motivating” a disabled person to rehabilitate. Grzegorz, a teenage boy, had a car accident and as a result he cannot walk. He lives with his mom in Warsaw and stays with her at home where he rehabilitates every day. Perhaps ironically, it is the doctor visiting the mother and her disabled son from time to time at their home who adopts the military language towards Grzegorz’s rehabilitation. When the disabled teenager complains about the painful physical exercises and describes them as “torture,” the doctor responds: “A torture? I know. But how did you want to get better? Brother, you should squeeze your teeth; bombarded people during the war suffered more” (65). The doctor admits here that rehabilitation is a painful process and provides violence of World War II as a point of reference. In other words, both disability and rehabilitation cannot escape the specter of the war. He compares him to other patients and explains that the biggest
enemy is not the disease or the medical condition, but the patient’s laziness: “There are patients who think that disability relieves them from their duties. I know this sort of people, I do. They nested in their disease. Are you aware that this is the biggest danger awaiting patients such as yourself? They do not want to make an effort. And they will never walk again” (118). The language he uses resembles the words Mr. Andrzej from Dziewczynka spoza szyby (The Girl Behind the Window) used to convince Elzbietka about the necessity to overcome. He also referred to World War II and compared her to the Soviet soldiers. The two men become allies of the state rather than disabled people.

In Wichura i trzciny (The Whirlwind and Canes) the doctor makes a direct connection between rehabilitation, fighting, and suffering during the war, while the mother assumes a tone of consolation and understanding. When Grzegorz is tired she wants to stop exercising and calls the exercises “violence” (78). At the same time, she encourages him to rehabilitate, as eventually there is a reward for his efforts: he will be able to walk again and a big love awaits him. The two languages motivate Grzegorz to rehabilitate, yet none relies on medical jargon, for as literature instructs, it is primarily militaristic language, and not medical, that represents and participates in forming a larger discourse of citizenship in post-war Poland. Moreover, the abandonment of medical language relates to the choice of home as the site of overcoming disability.

The privileging of home as a proper rehabilitation location might suggest a privatization of disability and distrust towards public institutions such as a hospital or sanatorium. However, thinking of home as a main site of overcoming shows that disability in YAL extends beyond a medical condition and that home functions as the space of forming future citizens of a socialist country. From this perspective, home seems to be a better place of surveillance and discipline. In Wichura i trzciny (Whirlwind and Canes) Grzegorz’s mother decides to bring him home after his initial stay at the hospital. The woman with whom
Grzegorz and his mother share an apartment—the action takes place in 1950s Warsaw when lots of families shared apartments with strangers due to housing shortages—discourages her from bringing Grzegorz home and advises her to find him a state run sanatorium or home for disabled people. The mother refuses, for “at a sanatorium they can keep him alive, but he needs more. He needs to be able to live independently. I need to do everything, and…more than everything” (23). Home is revealed here as a site of doing “everything and more.” As a result of a successful rehabilitation, her son is able to finish high school; Krzywicka clearly associates the process of rehabilitation with the process of growing up. The moment of regaining able-bodiedness overlaps with a moment of turning 18 and acquiring citizenship rights and obligations. Therefore, home combines overcoming disability and civic education. At the same time, the significance of home can be explained by its importance in Polish tradition and history in general, for since the 19th century Polish literature imagined home as a site of preservation of nationalism. This way, YAL writers employ the same motifs as 19th century authors and thus locate themselves within a larger body of Polish literature. Consequently, the literature produced during the socialist period, does not radically break with the pre-socialist literary tradition. In this way, socialism becomes adapted to Polish cultural specificity, and YA novels that employ national symbols and themes are one of the adaptive tools.

The one place that cannot be adapted as the site of overcoming disability is the village.22 As announced by Boleslaw Bierut, cities, shipyards, and steel mills were where

22 The village is not a part of the Recovered Territories. In Rebuilding Poland Padraic Kenney notes that “the Recovered Territories were essential to Poland’s future, both symbolically and economically. More advanced than the lost eastern lands, they allowed Poland to improve its industrial capability and standard of living” (136). When I write “the village” I mean a village that is located in the land that belonged to Poland before the war and is usually a space of poverty in contrast to former German lands.
Polish socialist modernity was born. Modernity is thus intimately connected with industrialization and the Recovered Territories, and Polish YAL authors use Warsaw or Krakow, quickly developing and growing cities, as the most popular setting of their novels. The protagonists’ parents usually work as managers at factories, doctors, artists and therefore become, in a way, producers of modernity. At the same time, YAL tends to depict the village as the opposite of the cities and the former German lands: it is anti-modern, degenerated, and out of time. Michal Boni in the article “Funkcje zycia domowo-rodzinnego w doktrynie komunistow polskich (1945-1950)” (“Functions of Family Life in the Doctrine of Polish Communists (1945-1950),” claims: “A village home with old superstitious parents and the unquestioned set of authorities, characterized by the refusal of modernity and poverty became [during the communist time] an anti-model” (97). The village fails at modernity and socialism and instead reasserts traditional values.

The village as the site of (impossible) disability overcoming appears in YAL in late 1960s for the first time. The writers, Krystyna Boglar in her 1989 novel *Kieszen pelna elfow* (*Elves in the Pocket*), Maria Jozefacka in *Dziewczyna nie ludzie* (*A Girl, Not People*) published in 1979, and Anna Kamienska in 1968 *Rozalka Olaboga* (*Rozalka*) depict the countryside as a poor and dirty place, which has nothing to offer and where nothing happens. Youth, understandably, yearn to leave. The people who live in villages lack education and

23 Following David L. Hoffman and his *Cultivating the Masses*, I think of the Polish socialist state’s desire to refashion the population while industrializing the country as a modernist attempt. This refashioning often relied on scientific norms and is a result of “the rationalist ethos of social intervention [which] first arose in nineteenth-century Europe” (2). Polish post-war state shared many characteristics with Western model of modernity (emphasis on industrialization, science, rationality, health), but it rejected parliamentary democracy and industrial capitalism (Hoffman 2).

24 In the article “Are You a Modern Girl? Consumer Culture and Young Women in 1960s Poland” Malgorzata Fidelis provides statistics about the migration from the rural areas to the cities: “Although the most powerful wave of migration from villages to cities took place during the intense industrialization of the Six-Year Plan (1950-1955), the process continued in the following decade. Each year an average of 100,000 people migrated from rural areas to cities to take up jobs in industry and services. More than 40 percent of these migrants were young people going to school or starting work. At the close of the 1960s, the urban population finally surpassed the rural one by 52 to 48 percent” (174).
hold beliefs and opinions that are no longer respected in a socialist country. A village represents the past and waits to be transformed. And because of its anti-modern character, it does not serve as a site of overcoming of disability. I did not come across a single novel in which a disabled protagonist would rehabilitate successfully in her home in a countryside. But, surprisingly, it is the village where readers encounter mentally disabled protagonists. In *Kieszen pelna elfow (Elves in the Pocket)*, the wife and husband try to put their mentally disabled daughter in a state run institution, so they do not have to take her with them to Australia where they will work at a circus. In *Rozalka Olaboga (Rozalka)*, a blind and mentally disabled girl lives in a pigsty, and in *Dziewczyna nie ludzie (A Girl, Not People)* the mentally disabled boy, the youngest in the family, is denied food, because his aunt believes it is better to give food to a “normal child” (61), as she puts it. All of these protagonists exemplify Giorgio Agamben’s “bare life” (Agamben 4). Neither the state nor the families are much interested in the life of a mentally disabled child. In fact, they both abandon her. From the point of view of the state and the family, this life is almost useless, for it does not contribute in normative ways to the development of the country and well-being of the family. On the contrary, a mentally disabled protagonist represents the burden and costs families do not want to pay. It is a life that remains unprotected and outside the bounds of citizenship. The village is a place of exposure to violence that remains unrestricted by the state. The city, on the other hand, is where the violence in relation to disabled subjects is regulated by the state, family, and the medical establishment. In other words, while the city is concerned with the violent inclusion of physically disabled protagonists, the village is preoccupied with exclusion and elimination of mentally disabled characters. Mental disability cannot be unmade and that is why the city cannot contain it either: it cannot be overcome and the city represents the successes of socialist modernization, not its failures. Mental disability contradicts modernity, for it resists productivity and overcoming; it does not fit the dominant
discourse of an unstoppable progress. The Polish socialist biopolitics cannot contain mentally or intellectually disabled protagonists in any other way than to just abandon them in the village. The emergence of literary images of mental disability in the final decades of socialism suggests both the crisis of the socialist project of modernity and the breakdown of the previous ways of representing disability in Polish YAL.

The sociological research on disability conducted during the socialist period complicates the representation of the village in YAL. While the data might be incomplete and the research on life of disabled people in villages might not have been the priority, for a big bulk of the major sociological research that I use here, *The Situation of Disabled People and the Quality of Rehabilitation in Polish People’s Republic*, focus on work and access to rehabilitation, the information that disabled people who live in the countryside have jobs more often than disabled people who live in the cities (49) seems surprising given the unequivocally negative image of the village in YAL. If performing labor formed one way of gaining a membership in a community, then disabled people who lived in the villages might have actually experienced inclusion in contrast to their peers living in the cities. However, disability memoirs tend to confirm the damaging image of villages and countryside. In *Białe niebo (White Heaven)*, Eugenia Siemaszkiewicz recalls many stories about disabled children coming from little towns and villages who once dropped at the sanatorium by their parents never saw them (12, 75). Usually, Siemaszkiewicz writes, parents were ashamed of their children’s disabilities and thought of them as “socially unacceptable” (75). Irena Kowalczyk’s memoir *Poza granicą skargi (Beyond the Possibility of Grievance)* testifies to her own

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25Only 24% of disabled men who live in the cities have jobs, while 46% of disabled men who live in the countryside. Among disabled women these numbers are: 11.8% have jobs in the cities, and 29.8% in the countryside. The research was conducted in the late 1970s.
parents being embarrassed by her disability. In these cases instead of families, the state takes care of disabled children and teenagers.

**Failures of Disability Overcoming**

The appearance of mentally disabled characters in YAL in the 1970s and 1980s coincides with the emergence of disability memoirs published since the late 1960s. Both introduce new sites of disability absent in the narratives of the previous decades: a village and an institution; and both testify to the socialist shortcomings: a failure to accommodate mental disability and a failure to overcome disability. Disability memoirs constitute narratives of failed overcoming. Are the appearances of mental disability and disability memoirs correlated? Taken together, they speak to the crisis of the disability metaphor and signal a larger shift in the nation building project. The examination of YA texts from the 1970s onwards shows that disability to a lesser degree than previously operates as a synecdoche for the post-war reconstruction. Since the war is thirty years in the past, the synecdoche, probably, became redundant. The tumultuous historical moment of the late 1960s and early 1970s: the student demonstrations and the workers strikes, must have impacted the changes within the YAL genre and allowed the articulation of disabled writers experiences and their disillusionment with the socialist system. From this perspective, it seems that disability writers as much as other societal groups—students and workers—might have voiced their frustrations and disappointments in ways that were accessible to them.

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26 In 1968 Poland faced student rebellion and an anti-Semitic campaign started by the government that resulted in around 20,000 Polish Jews leaving the country. In December 1970 the First Secretary, Wladyslaw Gomulka, decided to raise the prices of basic products, which started protests in factories across the country. In response, Gomulka sent police to break up the core strikes at the shipyards in the north of Poland. Riots ensued and a total of 41 people were killed during the military pacification campaign. Gomulka was forced to resign and Edward Gierek replaced him.
For disability memoirs testify not only to the failures of individual overcoming, but also to the malfunctioning of services provided to people with disabilities by the state. Depictions of deplorable conditions of hospitals and sanatoriums, discussions of the lack of basic medicine and equipment and the insufficient number of medical personnel, the impossibility of participating in social life, and testimonies of home or hospital imprisonment betray the dominant state narrative of progress and care. As a result, disability memoirs challenge a culture of successful rehabilitation maintained by YAL. Consequently, disability writing presents the socialist good life as unattainable by some of its citizens and unmasks the modernizing process as unfinished and possibly failing. That is why, I think of disability memoirs as dissident documents. At the same time, it is important to note that these texts do not belong to an officially recognized body of dissident writing in Poland; probably because they do not feature voices of workers and intelligentsia jailed in prisons in the 1970s and 1980s for fighting for the “free” country and opposing the state. And yet, their writings document the many ways in which the state on a daily basis betrayed its disabled population.

The memoirs written by people with disabilities emphasize that the body cannot be submitted to the political will of the state and, in fact, remains independent from the dominant biopolitical narrative. At the same time, they offer diverse images of rehabilitation and daily life at different institutions and discuss the pain that rehabilitation produces. The autobiographies by Irena Kowalczyk, Elzbieta Lubinska, Stanislaw Podlaski, Eugenia Siemaszkiewicz, Jadwiga Stanczakowa, Maria Dziegiełwska and others declare bodily independence. In all of these texts, the disabled body resists rehabilitation and medicalization and cannot regain lost able-bodiedness. The disabled body imagined and desired by the state that triumphantly overcomes disability and disease in YAL turns out to be nothing more than a fantasy. As I have suggested, maybe the historical moment of the early 1970s enabled the boldness of disability writers in declaring bodily independence and naming the state failures.
as well as publishers’ will to publish the memoirs. Or, perhaps, disability was seen as inconsequential and insignificant and thus the state allowed the publication of disability life writing. The authors of disability memoirs were not members of ZLP and they were not recipients of state awards for literary achievements. Though authors, they were not recognized as such neither by the state nor the literary establishment. This lack of recognition might have afforded the authors the liberty to write openly about their experiences, but it also impeded their belonging to the literary world. Therefore, disabled authors experience a double exclusion: from the national community and the literary community.

Disability discloses the limits of socialism in Poland. In *Slepak (The Blind One)* from 1982, Jadwiga Stanczakowa describes the process of losing sight that could not be stopped nor slowed down regardless of having been operated on several times. Here, inevitability defines blindness. In his autobiography *Przezwyciezyc siebie (To Overcome Oneself)* from 1984, Stanisław Podlaski shares his story of failed rehabilitation: “Pharmacological treatment did not bring the expected results. (…) Moreover, I experienced horrible knee contractures that could not be treated in any way. The physical exercises were useless. I had muscle pains which intensified every time atmospheric pressure went down. I was losing strength every day” (87). Podlaski does not shy away from providing details about his body or the surgeries and procedures he went through. This is especially important since the big bulk of YAL erased disabled body as affective, corporeal and physical. Disability memoirs reclaim the disabled body as somatic.

Although disabled writers are not recognized as dissidents in Poland, their writing deserves this status not only because it refuses to participate in maintaining the fantasy of the good life, but also because it depicts the uneven distribution of citizenship rights. Irena Kowalczyk’s dramatic memoir *Poza granica skargi. Dzienniki (Beyond the Possibility of*
"Grievance: Diaries" published in 1974 openly accuses the system of transforming disabled people into bare life:

The father is afraid that I will be stuck at home again. He cannot be as naïve as to believe that this surgery will help...But if people like I do exist then why don’t they open institutions in which we could learn and receive proper treatment? The father always thought of himself as an important Party member. Why doesn’t he make demands, doesn’t call upon the authorities? I know the answer, actually: what really matters are the class issues, (...), industrialization matters. And child’s impairment is a shameful thing, a thing that cannot be discussed at a Party meeting. Give a lethal shot – no, they cannot do it, they don’t have a legal act that would allow it, and so what is left is dying out in a hovel, because they don’t want me at home, or staying at a home for the elderly. Can there be anything worse than that? I know that there aren’t many children like me, but it doesn’t explain why (...) our existence is silenced, and there is no rescue for us. (21)

In this fragment, Kowalczyk, a young woman who experienced polio as a child which left her impaired and who finds no support among her family members, plainly states that the state does not offer adequate care or education to disabled people and concerns itself instead with questions of class and industrial development. In doing so, the state abandons disabled people. In a different passage, Kowalczyk defines herself as a person who is neither dead nor alive, because she does not enjoy equal rights: “I cannot be counted among the living, because I do not have equal rights. I am not dead either, for even if I cannot move by myself, I keep breathing” (118). Having a healthy and robust body does not determine whether one is alive or not; it is being granted equal rights and, in consequence, being recognized as a citizen which does. Disfranchisement, the topic of the entire book, results in producing a subject who is in a liminal state “between living and dying” (118). And because of this, Kowalczyk’s account understands disability as a political matter that requires both medical and political response.

Irena Kowalczyk’s Poza granica skargi (Beyond the Possibility of Grievance) introduces the discourse of rights as a dominant lens through which she writes about her life. Yet this is a highly unusual manner of framing one’s experience among both disability
autobiographers and YAL novelists. The discourse of rights is almost absent in Polish writing about disability. That is why, it is worth asking how Kowalczyk’s political consciousness was raised. How did she arrive at the discourse of rights? It seems that stating that her knowledge comes from her embodiment does not suffice. While her father was the Party member and thus she was exposed to the political slogans about the fight for justice and inequality under pre-war capitalism, I think that her political awareness is both a result of her own interactions with the state as well as the state’s education on the topic of the Nazi crimes during the war, which employed the discourse of rights violated by the German regime. Her comparison of the nuns running the poorhouse, in which she lives with the Nazi soldiers serves as a particularly salient example: “the only thing worse than this place of suffering and abandonment—both by God and people—is the German [she meant “concentration camp”] camp. Only that death came there sooner”\(^\text{27}\) (90). At the same time she is the only one among disability writers who relies on the discourse of rights while discussing her own experience of living with disability under state socialism.

In the socialist context, the discourse of rights would suggest the lack thereof and this way would potentially pose a threat to the system. As the official narrative instructs, what socialism brought after the war were rights and the promise of their invulnerability. Accordingly, Kowalczyk’s text reveals the fragility of rights and, moreover, exposes the state and the nuns who run the poorhouse as their main violator. Moreover, the discourse of rights does not position disability as the prime enemy that needs to be fought against, but rather the absence of accommodations. As a consequence, it could make the experience of disability—understood usually as an individual condition to overcome in socialist Poland—not entirely legible to the reader. Conversely, the discourse of heroism employed by many of the disability

\(^{27}\) She also adds: “[nuns’] brutality made me think of Germans’ behavior [during the war]” (97).
life writing authors allows to avoid the discussion of socialism’s shortcomings, for it understands disability as the sole adversary that needs to be overcome.

In Maria Dziegielewska’s *Losowi na przekor (Against the Fate)* published in 1972, a friend of the main protagonist who has trouble walking tells her about his time during World War II: “as a teenager I fought as a partisan. I ended up hiding in the woods with my companions. As they say, we fought for the common cause. But ultimately each of us was alone and had to struggle with himself. These were different battles. I understand you. There are battles people fight together and battles people fight on their own” (11-12). Implicitly, the battle of overcoming of disability is a fight one has to perform on her own. Moreover, the author makes a parallel between the practice of overcoming and waging a war. Stanislaw Podlaski compares the patients with whom he shares a room in a hospital to “heroes:” “They were heroes. Heroes that no one knows, that no one writes about. They are unknown to people who live outside the hospital walls” (45). Podlaski imagines his hospital cohort, as well as himself, as a hero, and not a citizen. One reason for that stems from the fact that rights discourse has never developed in Poland; there is neither citizenship nor rights language he could rely on. Before the socialist period, Poland existed as an independent state for twenty-one years and before that was partitioned into three parts by Prussia, Russia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire for one hundred twenty-three years. The language available to authors is one of insurrection and emancipation echoed in the repeated recourses to the discourse of heroism when discussing overcoming disability. Furthermore, the discourse of heroism offers access to a rich martyrological imagery inherent to Polish culture. Therefore, relying on discourse of heroism enables both disability life writers and YAL writers to continue literary traditions present in Poland since the 19th century, which might partially account for its allure. This way, literature produced during socialism establishes a continuation of Polish literature. I similarly understand a consistent emphasis of YAL authors on the theme of home, which I
discussed in the earlier section, for both operate as tools of integrating or adapting socialism into Polish tradition. In other words, I claim that literature functioned, among other things, as a means of nationalizing—“polonizing”—socialism. That is why, the discourse of rights is a foreign one to Polish literature and, more importantly, national sensibility. Instead, the discourse of heroism allows writers to make sense of their experiences with disability.

Disability memoirs, to a lesser degree than YA novels, do not form a monolithic corpus of writing. Considered together, they offer complex and nuanced images of socialism and attitudes toward people with disabilities. The nearly “gothic” representation of the poorhouse in which Irena Kowalczyk spent a big part of her life is neither singular nor dominant in Polish disability writing. Stanislaw Podlaski’s *Przezwyciężyc siebie (To Overcome Oneself)* and Eugenia Siemaszkiewicz’s *Białe niebo (White Heaven)* provide different portrayals of state institutions for people with disabilities.28 Podlaski acknowledges the lack of equipment and the fact that he waited two years for a special wheelchair (92), yet he also describes the exercises he performs with the help of the personnel (94) and the conversation he had with a doctor to whom he could complain: “I told her about my difficult financial and medical situation. She understood” (87). Obviously, Kowalczyk did not find similar empathy in the institution in which she lived. In the further chapters, Podlaski

28 The differences in institutions for people with disabilities signal not only the unevenly distributed compassion and resources for specific hospitals and sanatoriums, but, perhaps more importantly, class distinctions. Irena Kowalczyk lives in a poorhouse because her family cannot and does not want to help her get to a “better” institution. They lack both money and interest to do that. Podlaski and Siemaszkiewicz, in opposition to Kowalczyk who was born in the village where her family remained, come from big cities and have resources that enable them to be directed to institutions that offer a higher quality care and access to medical equipment and medication. As a result, disability memoirs reveal that in contrast to political slogans health care was not a universal right in socialist Poland and access to it depended on personal connections and financial resources. The absence of informal or formal organizing and disability rights movement strengthened the lack of equality in dealings with the health care system. Therefore, the examination of Kowalczyk’s, Siemaszkiewicz’s and Podlaski’s hospital memoirs disrupts one of the main fantasies of the socialist state: that of the abolition of social classes. Instead, it shows that the hierarchy of classes was an inherent part of socialism in Poland, in particular its health care system.
describes how the sanatorium became his home (159). In *Biale niebo (White Heaven)*, Eugenia Siemaszkiewicz mentions the “small pleasures” she and other patients get to have in a hospital: “we drink tea or coffee in the afternoons, have little chats, and then a bit of rehabilitation” (150). At some point, she confesses that she “feels safe” there (185), which suggests that a titular “white heaven” is not a place outside the institution, but, maybe the institution itself. For what the hospital provides is the community of both patients and personnel that is the source of safety for Siemaszkiewicz, which the outer world fails to offer.

**Healing and Intimacy**

Eugenia Siemaszkiewicz claims that the institution is not only a “white heaven,” but also a site of intimacy. While I argue that overcoming disability constitutes a biopolitical practice which aims to homogenize the Polish population, I am also interested in approaching disability overcoming reparatively. I look at both accounts of people with disabilities and YAL and find moments when writers, sometimes probably unintentionally, expose the physical labor of rehabilitation as an initiation of intimate relations between people. What characterizes this intimacy is that in most of the texts it “bypasses the [heterosexual] couple” (Berlant 5) and refers to collectivities, families, and the nation. That is why I am concerned here with intimacy’s and pleasure’s multiple intersecting permutations.

Disability memoirs as well as YAL understand rehabilitation as a collective experience and situate a person with disability and her caregiver as relational and affective subjects. Eugenia Siemaszkiewicz in *Biale niebo (White Heaven)* describes the situations in which the patients are naked together and says that being a witness to someone else’s naked and disabled body as well as letting others see her “mutilated” and naked body brings relief (93). An act of exposure that does not result in sexual contact, but accompanies washing or other practices centered upon the disabled body seems to help build an intimate community
among the patients. Their solidarity and closeness rests on the collective recognition of shared vulnerability. Nakedness does not constitute a spectacle here, and Siemaszkiewicz does not associate being naked with a humiliating or hurtful experience. At the same time, the intimacy she describes is not limited to two people—it includes the community of patients staying at the hospital. This way, she reveals intimacy as a collective and, to a certain extent, a public experience.

Therefore, an institution for people with disabilities—a hospital or a sanatorium—can be thought of not only as isolating and alienating, but also as an institution of intimacy (Berlant 3). Hospital as an institution of intimacy requires one to rethink both the institution’s function—and acknowledge that it has more uses than just a medical one (and disciplining)—and the boundary between the public and the private, for here it is the public that becomes associated with the intimate sphere of one’s life. In “Sex in Public” Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner note that “community is imagined through scenes of intimacy, coupling, and kinship” (318). However, the recognition of a hospital as a place of collective intimacy shows that community might be equally imagined through scenes of multitude and strangers. In consequence, I think that it is possible to think of scenes of collective intimacy Siemaszkiewicz recalls as queer intimacy, and of the hospital as queer counterpublics, for the intimacy here “bear no necessary relation to domestic space, to kinship, to the couple form, to property” (Berlant, Warner 322).

However, intimacy is not limited here to the scenes of multitude, and Siemaszkiewicz tells a story of a twenty something year old female patient, Majka, who fell in love with her physiotherapist. Bolek reciprocates the feeling and prepared a special rehabilitation plan for her: “from the beginning he took care of Maja. During their first meeting he looked at her stumps carefully, and then took extended notes. Next, he devised a special rehabilitation program and closely monitored whether she followed it. As his charge Maja makes very fast
progress” (229). It seems that these sorts of relationships were neither banned nor controlled by the hospital staff and while some part of exercising happened in common rooms, patients and their caregivers, as Irena Kowalczyk additionally attests (280, 334), could meet up in private spaces, too. If something interrupts the romance it is, most often, the decision of one of the parties to end it—interventions from the outside do not happen often. Siemaszkiewicz recollects also a story about a female nurse who was involved in sexual relations with several of her male patients and charged them for sex. When one of the doctors found what was happening, Jozia, the nurse, was transferred to an all-female department (230, 231). Since Siemaszkiewicz’s recollection about the nurse does not have precedence in the literature I read, it cannot serve as grounds for forming a general conclusion about gender power relations present at institutions for people with disabilities, or the normalizing and humanizing narrative of love. However, it does point to the unequal distribution of surveillance and permission as to what kind of relationships can form between a patient and her caregiver.

Disability memoirs attest that the patients are erotically and romantically involved with one another and that they actively seek pleasure and intimacy. Irena Kowalczyk writes extensively about her relationship with a fellow patient, Marian. They watched movies together and he would squeeze her hand: “he took my hand and squeezed hard, and held on to it for a while. I think this hand holding had so many meanings—appreciation, trust, looking for help. After some time I took back my hand. Obviously, everything happened in silence, without a single flinch, without a single look at him” (75, 76). Possibly, Lauren Berlant would call this scene an example of “minor intimacies” (5). Minor intimacies, according to Berlant, are not recognized as normative ways of expressing attachment and feelings, are not a part of a bigger narrative, and often do not have a climax. Yet Polish disability memoirs do not lack “the glances, gestures, encounters, collaborations, or fantasies that have no canon” (Berlant 5). Berlant does not mention disability in her Introduction to Intimacy (which I quote here),
but perhaps inclusion of disability memoirs and, in general, disability experience in the
discussion of minor intimacies would help confirm their commonness. It is important to
legitimize them as a valid way of experiencing closeness with people, for minor intimacies,
including those depicted by Kowalczyk and Siemaszkiewicz, resist the notion that “only one
plot counts as “life” (first comes love, then…” (Berlant 6) and instead offer multiplying and
inclusive understandings of pleasure and intimacy.

Irena Kowalczyk’s memoir shows that minor and temporary intimacies are composed
of both small and grand gestures. When thinking about love and romance, Kowalczyk
comments that: “how to nourish a friendship or love, if everything in our lives is horrible and
we are paralyzed by fear?” (77). Yet she does not stop in seeking out affection and
pleasures—describes kissing with another patient, Franek (277, 278, 279). Even though she
did not have any feelings for him, she liked kissing him, because he was good at it (280).
Minor intimacies between disabled people, as literature shows, can be disgusting to able-
bodied people and “offend their aesthetic tastes” (Lubinska 90), which I discuss in the further
part. Does it suffice to promise a political potential? I argue that kissing reveals here the
political property of pleasure and (minor) intimacy experienced by people with disabilities
and significantly redraws or, in fact, blurs the distinctions between private and public
spaces—it is the public realm that promises affinity and affection and bodily touch. From this
perspective, it might be possible to conceive of kissing, holding hands, and touching as
political activities that oppose societal norms. Since many of them were clandestine, are these
moments of seeking out pleasures moments of micro rebellions as well? I do not want to
transform intimate acts into acts of resistance, for neither Kowalczyk nor Siemaszkiewicz
state this. Holding hands is clearly not an adopted tactic to fight ableist society, yet it does
manifest disagreement and might offer revisionary potential. Descriptions of pleasure permit
one to recognize disabled people as not merely passive recipients of rehabilitation, but as
active and affective agents who were capable of adding a different meaning to the practice of overcoming of disability.

The longest and most engaged affair for Kowalczyk is the one with her massage therapist. The first time he treats her they are both silent, and she does not try to talk to him (334), although she notes that he is gentle and good at his work. Kowalczyk adds that she could sense that he was tense during the massage (334). The second time they are alone, because the girl with whom she shares a room went to visit her family. Again, Kowalczyk does not look at him and does not talk to him, but, as she writes in the memoir, “there was a tension between us and I knew that we would break it today” (334). After the session, he sits next to her and holds her hand. He says that many of the patients went home, so he has some free time, she asks him not to look at her. He does not listen to her and she covers his eyes. In response, he kisses her. Kowalczyk comments: “No one has ever kissed me this way. I was amazed, and when he looked at me afterwards, he whispered: You are so beautiful, the most beautiful” (334). The description of their first two meetings merits attention, because massage—which is simply an element of her rehabilitation—becomes, for them, very quickly erotically charged. This example shows that possibly other routinely performed activities that were supposed to rehabilitate a patient could be additionally recognized as practices that served as sources of erotic or sexual pleasure for both a disabled person and her caregiver. Thinking of massage or other rehabilitative practices as practices that might entail sexual joy questions the normative understandings of sex and eroticism.

The relationship continues for a while. The massager keeps visiting her, and Kowalczyk confesses that one time he kissed her “feverishly and was so skilled at it. I enjoyed it, I felt that I am just a woman. I experienced desire” (334). The dominant experience of her life—that of being a disabled person—disappears and is replaced by the exclusive identification as a woman during this short moment. The fragment though points to
Kowalczyk’s difficulty of uniting both identities. In other words, it is almost impossible for her to identify as both a woman and a disabled person; only a relationship with a man who desires her allows her to recognize herself as a woman. Yet this realization comes at the expense of her identification as a disabled person. As a result, it seems that these are two separate identities in competition.

Women with disabilities, as the memoirs illustrate, mourn the impossibility of fulfilling their roles as wives and mothers. Disability does not open up possibilities of redefining gender roles and questioning the societal order in which impairment excludes a woman from forming a family. In her autobiography Salamandra (Salamander), Elzbieta Anna Lubinska writes “How could I want to be an object of love, me, a cripple deformed by an illness? People with physical disabilities are not very different from lepers. They disgust able-bodied people, offend their aesthetic tastes” (90). Kowalczyk decides not to reveal her thoughts about love to anyone, for she says that people would think of her as pathetic and ridiculous (62). Maria Dziegielewska in Losowi na przekor (Against the Fate) confesses that she cannot accept the fact that she will not be able to marry and that she constantly misses having someone in her life (7). Malgorzata Fidelis notes: “Polish socialist women still saw female identity as primarily maternal and familial” (Women, Communism, and Industrialization 44) and female disabled authors as much as non-disabled women remain invested in the vision of the future that includes a husband and children.29 Even though

29 What ultimately ends Kowalczyk’s relationship with the therapist it is the inconceivability of the normative future ahead of them, the impossibility of moving beyond what they already have together, and her fear that he pities her: “[they are meeting after the Christmas break] we behaved as if nothing happened between us. I even smiled few times, so he does not pity me” (341). His pity, as I interpret this fragment, would refigure their relationship and annul the equality of the partners. Yet the fear remains unspoken—she does not decide to talk with him about it. Similarly, they never discuss what will happen when she leaves the sanatorium. However, he says: “I liked you a lot. What did you do to me? How did you mesmerize me? I think it’s your voice. I often think of you” (341). His words deny the suspicion that he pities her and remind that he is attracted to her. Kowalczyk does not expose her feelings openly and leaves his words unanswered. The relationship ends yet Kowalczyk does not tell exactly how. She simply comments: “Even though there are lots of pompous words
disabled women are not interested in disrupting identity categories nor challenging their non-
intersectional character. Their writings politicize disability and question the dominant
understanding of rehabilitation. These texts point to rehabilitation’s liberatory potential, by
promising pleasure, and blur the distinction between private and public spaces. That is why
their revisionary work should be recognized.

In contrast to disability memoirs, YAL does not present intimacy as a part of lived
experience of people with disabilities and shies away from discussing intimacy in a context
even loosely suggesting a sexual or erotic contact between the teenage protagonists.
Moreover, while disability life writing unhooks intimacy from the coupledom and the fantasy
of romantic love, in YAL it is difficult to separate the images of the good life from the
privileging of heterosexual conduct and commitment to the nation. For YAL depicts the
heterosexual romance as an award for the physical effort of overcoming disability as
discussed by Irena Krzywicka in *Wichura i trzciny* (*Whirlwind and Canes*). Jasbir K. Puar
notes that: “[i]ntimacy in its liberal fantasy form is historically the province of
heteronormativity” (164), but the examination of Polish socialist YAL expands the
understanding of intimacy, for it remains “the province of heteronormativity” under socialism
as much as under liberalism. In YAL intimacy that is accessible to a person with disability is
one with a parent who rehabilitates him/her and with the nation. However, a disabled subject
does not only experience intimacy as a result of rehabilitation, but also facilitates establishing
intimate relations between other, able-bodied people. In Krystyna Siesicka’s YA novel

58

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what I have with him is ordinary and banal. I will leave without being hurt, I will not miss him” (343) and adds
bitterly that he was “bored and married anyway” (343).
Beethoven i dżinsy (Beethoven and Jeans), Piotr, a disabled protagonist mediates the relationship between a mother and her daughter and helps them to reconnect. Disability participates in the creation and maintenance of family intimacy even if the disabled protagonist is not a member of the family.

Even though the imperative to overcome disability is a moral duty for a Polish citizen, the nation’s “full potential” seems to be not enough of an incentive for a disabled subject to undertake rehabilitation. The promise of a heterosexual romance as an award for the successful overcoming intimates a conflict with the national values that are supposed to guide a disabled Grzegorz in the process of rehabilitation in Irena Krzywicka’s novel (which is exemplary of the whole genre). If overcoming disability is a process of achieving sameness then sameness is a precondition for experiencing intimacy with the nation; however, the emphasis on a romance and introduction of a female protagonist who falls in love with Grzegorz reminds that experiencing national intimacy might not be enough. In opposition to disability memoirs, intimacy in YAL operates on two levels: the national and familial thus erasing the possibility of sharing intimacy with different collectivities. However, the heterosexual romance as a preface to marriage becomes about reproducing the nation as a sociality. And since the nation is imagined as an ethnically homogenous family then the simultaneous attention to the national and familial/couple intimacy resolves the problem between the desire to achieve personal happiness and contribute to the nation’s progress.

In Fotoplastykon (Kaiserpanorama) Krystyna Sieszicka comments on the national intimacy as well. Joan Tronto in the article “Beyond the Gender Difference to a Theory of Care” asks: “what are the appropriate boundaries of caring?” (660), and it is clear that in Sieszicka’s novel the boundaries of caring overlap with the boundaries of the nation. Fotoplastykon (Kaiserpanorama) serves as a particularly instructive example, for it demonstrates that one is always bound by the equally important moral obligations towards
both a nation and another individual/family member. One cannot be moral solely towards her friends or family; this choice simply does not meet the criteria of a moral character. The caring relationship one establishes with one’s family is, in fact, reflected in a caring relationship one has with the nation. At the same time, *Fotoplastykon* (*Kaiserpanorama*) insists on the minimalization of differences between Polish citizens, as I discussed in the earlier section of this chapter. There is no difference between a Catholic and an atheist, for all share the same national values and preserve the memory of those who fought during the war. In other words, Siesicka constructs the national intimacy through the erasure of difference. Due to the choice of home as the setting of the plot and family members as the main protagonists (among them disabled Jana) whose discussions focus on the country’s (brave) past and the nation it is difficult to separate the national narrative of intimacy from the narrative of domesticity and privacy. Disability is needed here only in order to explain why the plot never leaves the house and, even more importantly, establish a parallel with a rebuilding of the country—the affectively charged images of the disabled body are crucial to the evocation of a suffering during the war body of the Polish population.

In *Beethoven i dżinsy* (*Beethoven and Jeans*) Krystyna Siesicka presents a different understanding of intimacy, but her treatment of disability does not change. Intimacy refers to the relationship between a mother and her child; however, it is not a relation of a mother and her disabled child. Piotr, the disabled and, unlike Grzegorz, absent protagonist—he appears only in the end of the novel right before his eyes surgery and otherwise he is only talked about by different characters—facilitates intimacy between his girlfriend, Misia, and her mother, Joanna. Joanna does not accept Misia’s choice and is afraid that a relationship with a blind man would ruin her daughter’s life. At some point in the novel while talking to her husband Joanna recollects that she herself did not understand her own mother and that “Misia does not understand me. Motherhood is something that cannot be understood, it is the greatest, the
greatest love in the world and yet it is hell, too” (85). The proper topic of the novel then is motherhood and a difficult relation between a teenage daughter that wants to decide about her own life and her worried and controlling mother. The disabled protagonist’s role is to help reconnect them, which in Beethoven and Jeans happens almost literally. Piotr arrives in Warsaw (he lives in different city, which explains his absence in the novel) for a surgery and directly from the train station goes to a hospital. A few days later he has the operation. Joanna is openly unhappy about the situation, but Misia does not care about her mother’s lack of acceptance and leaves for the hospital. At the hospital Misia gets overwhelmed and calls her mother and asks her to come and accompany her. Joanna is ecstatic about the call and in the taxi her thoughts take the form of an internal monologue directed to Misia:

Listen, don’t worry, I’m on my way, only a moment and I’ll be there with you, and you’ll be with me. Exactly like back then when your baby tooth didn’t want to go, you have my hand and squeeze it, put your nails in it, and do what you want with it, it’s yours, wait, just a second, and I’ll be there. And I thought that you would never, that you closed off from me forever, so many things separate us, and yet you built a bridge between us, I’m on the bridge, and I’ll be always on it waiting for your call. (143)

In her dramatic monologue Joanna almost forgets about Piotr and the reason why Misia is in the hospital. She storms into the hospital and sees Misia who immediately clings to her. The novel resolves the conflict between the mother and the daughter yet leaves the question of Piotr’s surgery open. The triumphant tone that accompanies the reunion between the two women might imply the success of the operation. Yet the fact that Piotr’s story gets neglected in the very end of the novel reminds that the primary drama driving the story is the conflict between Joanna and Misia and Piotr functions solely as both the trigger and the facilitator. His role is to help maintain and consolidate family intimacy, even though he is not a member of that family. That explains why he is almost absent in the novel—he is, in fact, redundant to the story after the introduction of the problem. At the same time, the narrative depends upon him and thus Krystyna Siesicka’s novel confirms David Mitchell’s and Sharon
Snyder’s thesis about the prosthetic role of disability in Western literature. Piotr triggers the conflict between a mother and a daughter and Siesicka is much more interested in analyzing the complexities of Asia’s and Misia's characters than focusing on Piotr. Disability, in other words, sets the story in motion and facilitates its resolution, but is not meaningfully a part of the story.

Both genres—disability memoirs and YAL—reveal that rehabilitation involves not only violence, but also intimacy. However, in disability accounts intimacy remains unhooked from the family, and introduces the notion of queer intimacy, and thus “challenging the boundaries of legitimate and illegitimate intimacy, diversifying and to some extent democratizing modalities of intimacy” (Puar 163). YAL, on the other hand, insists on connecting the images of the good familial life, the heterosexual relationship, and love for the nation. The different approach stems from a different goal: YAL is interested in showing the family and marriage as a mode of reproducing the nation as a form of sociality. In other words, YAL is, to a certain extent, a part and a tool of creating the national discourse. Disability memoirs enjoy a different status: they form a corpus of dissident writing and do not participate in the production of a fantasy of the good life under state socialism in Poland. As a result, they do not connect the individual project of overcoming disability with the national one.

Conclusion

In Reading Embodied Citizenship, Emily Russell analyzes the images of disabled and extraordinary bodies in relation to the state and citizenship in American literature and states that “the encounter between an anomalous physical body and the body politic require narrative strategies that can make sense of the unfamiliar” (3). What is unfamiliar, according to Russell, is the encounter itself, which explains the “call upon narrative to make these
encounters legible” (3). Polish YAL that I discuss in this chapter is less interested in making the encounters between the body politic and the individual body legible than it is invested in using a disabled body to explain the new body politic that emerged after 1945. The disabled body and the discourse of overcoming make the new system legible to the reader, for I argue that the function of disabled body in YAL is to help answer why the socialist government took over in late 1940s and the need for it in the first place. In other words, YA narratives rely on disability to make a political claim about the necessity of the introduction of socialism in Poland: to heal the nation after the catastrophe of the war and pre-war capitalist exploitation. I suggest though that the processes of both national and individual healing are predicated on violence, in fact they constitute a process I call “violent inclusion,” even if they involve and/or result in intimacy. Conversely, disability memoirs do not perform a similar explicative role, and instead they might be seen as adding to the system’s illegibility by portraying its many failures. The fact that they rather obscure than make apparent the purposefulness of socialism emphasizes their dissident character. From this perspective, it does not come as a surprise that they started to be published only in late 1960s. Nevertheless, overcoming disability as an individual experience and as a metaphor of the national reconstruction present in these two genres point that healing with its many effects and affects was one of the main concerns of post-war Polish literature.
CHAPTER 2

‘Only Women Become Mothers:’\textsuperscript{30} Representations of the Mother of a Disabled Child

Able-bodiedness was the goal, rehabilitation was the method. Both young adult literature (YAL) and disability memoirs instruct that it is the mother who is and should be the main manager of her child’s rehabilitation process. She, not a doctor, is the key to her child’s overcoming disability. In this chapter, I ask how in literature disability reconfigures motherhood as a political institution under state socialism in Poland. Moreover, I examine the ways in which authors describe the experiences of mothers of children with disabilities in order to uncover violence that historically has shaped the relationship between a mother and her child in Poland.

The institutionalization of people and children with physical disabilities was not very common in Poland, so it was the mother who had to guide her child to a “productive” life within the space of the home. My analysis shows that what might be thought of as a benevolent practice and expression of motherly love and commitment—rehabilitation—masks “curative violence” (Kim 13) perpetrated in the name of love and sacrifice for a child. From this perspective, the literary texts I analyze in this chapter reveal home as a space of authorized and invisible violence.

Recently scholars have increasingly focused on women’s social and political positions and experiences under state socialisms in Eastern Europe, including Poland, and almost all of them pay attention to motherhood and women’s obligation to have children.\textsuperscript{31} Despite various attempts to contest and unfix the gender hierarchy under socialism, and despite Stalinist

\textsuperscript{30} The quote comes from Malgorzata Fidelis’s article: “Are You a Modern Girl? Consumer Culture and Young Women in 1960s Poland,” (179).


64
promises to bring emancipation to women in Poland and other countries in the region, the socialist state did not separate motherhood from the notion of womanhood. Many historians and cultural critics attest motherhood remained a defining and, equally important, expected condition for women behind the Iron Curtain. I think of motherhood in relation to disability, a category of difference that unlike gender and class was not questioned by the socialist system in Poland and has so far escaped the purview of scholars interested in socialist Poland.

Polish scholars predominantly view motherhood as part of post-war natalist discourses (Stanczak-Wislicz 1). On the one hand, massive losses in population due to World War II were responsible for an unrelenting pressure on women to have children during the whole period of state socialism in Poland. On the other hand, Stalinism failed to question and overturn the traditional notion that women’s primary role was the familial one. At the same time, since the 19th century motherhood has remained a main institution in Poland that secures women’s entry into the public realm and hence cannot be viewed simply as a private experience. The literature discussed in this chapter shows how in Polish culture motherhood operated as a primary tool of women’s participation in public matters.

The texts I analyze in this chapter were published in the 1970s and 1980s. Yet three of them describe not only life in the last two decades of the socialist system in Poland, but also during the 1950s and 1960s. In other words, they depict times when the socialist system was both in its “revolutionary” phase before 1956 and on the cusp of its “postrevolutionary” phase. Attention to motherhood in these texts reveals that there is no clear cut boundary between the state intervening into all aspects of life before 1956 and leaving the private

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\(^{32}\)In *Unfinished Utopia*, Katherine Lebow writes that “Nazi’s genocidal war of destruction on Polish soil (…) caused the highest per capita losses in Europe: 22.2 percent of the pre-war population was dead” (22).
sphere to women afterwards, consequently creating private-public divide.\textsuperscript{33} Motherhood was both a private and a political institution, and as such it destabilized the division between the public and the private. Anna Zarnowska in the article “Family and Public Life: Barriers and Interpenetration – Women in Poland at the Turn of the Century” discusses mothers’ role in strengthening national identity in the young generation in the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century in Poland (during the times of partition). She says that the work they did, organizing and teaching clandestine Polish language and history classes, was a part of the struggle for independence and concludes: “These two spheres of women’s activity, the private and the public, were frequently intertwined” (476). By focusing on disability, rehabilitation, and motherhood my chapter emphasizes a similar intertwining of the public and the private and thus shows that in Polish culture the division of these two spheres was not very rigid. Most importantly, the works discussed in this chapter indicate that access to the socialist public realm was gendered, pointing toward the unequal distribution of power in Poland. Motherhood facilitates a woman’s entry into public life (although it is not the only condition under which a woman can be an active member of the public life, it does legitimize her) whereas fatherhood for men does not bear similar consequence or significance. In other words, a man does not have to be a father to speak in public.

Attending to two disability memoirs, Syn! Będzie szczesliwa (Son! She will be happy!) by Eugenia Chajecka and Los w rekach twoich by Anna Domanska (Your Destiny is in Your Hands), and two YA novels, Jak trudno kochac (How Difficult It Is to Love) and Wstega Pawilonu, that center disability and a relationship between a mother and her disabled children

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{33}In “The Gender of Resistance in Communist Poland,” Padraic Kenney writes that “[w]hile revolutionary communist regimes generally seek to intervene in all aspects of life and to remake the social (through laws on household relations, the revision of customs, and the like), postrevolutionary regimes withdraw from this activism, leaving the private or social sphere alone—and in women’s hands” (402). Kenney’s comment is indicative of binary thinking about private-political divide under socialist systems and women’s roles.
\end{footnotesize}
allows me to question the specificity of these experiences. This is particularly important since none of the most recent scholarship I mention above pays attention to mothers whose children were disabled. Was their experience different from those of mothers whose children were nondisabled? What sort of demands and expectations were imposed upon them? If motherhood signals the future of the nation, what does it mean to be a mother of a disabled child in a state that envisions an able-bodied utopia? In this context, I argue that according to literary texts motherhood is not only understood in “biological categories,” but also in terms of the mother’s commitment to her child overcoming disability. Motherhood entails seeking treatment (oftentimes painful) that ultimately guarantees a mother access to the public sphere. The familial—private—relationship extends beyond the realm of the domestic and ensures a female “domestic citizenship” (Das, Addlakha 511). I understand citizenship broadly in my chapter: I think of it as a mode of belonging to the nation and being recognized as a member who has a right and stakes in making claims and demands directed to the authorities and society. The two disability memoirs I read in this chapter, along with two YA novels, demonstrate how this mode of belonging is gendered and connected with (dis)ability status.

Socialist Poland emerged after World War II as a state shaped by both the USSR and its understanding of a workers’ state and its own long-standing national myths and movements, thereby retaining a specifically Polish character. In *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization*, Stephen Kotkin argues that in the USSR “[s]talinism signified the

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34 I do not translate the title of this book, because it is a specific name of a medal described by a Polish poet, Adam Mickiewicz, and English does not have an equivalent.

35 The presentation of the Polish Mother figure opens this chapter. The Polish Mother, an ideal embodiment that still shapes the concept of motherhood in Poland, has its roots in the 19th century. As a prototype, she serves as a reminder that only as a mother can a woman partake in communal and national matters. Studying literature and the motif of the Polish Mother uncovers how the period of state socialism as a political formation was influenced by two 19th century movements: Romanticism and Positivism. Polish Romanticism starts around 1820 and lasts until 1864. As much as it is a literary and artistic period it is also a political movement invested in the ideals of freedom and emancipation from the foreign rule. Positivism follows Romanticism and ends at the turn of the 20th century. Positivists, unlike Romanticists, adopt a more pragmatic perspective: while in the long run independence is their goal, they decide to focus on education and work—rebuilding Poland—instead of organizing another uprising.
advent of a specifically socialist civilization” (2) and considers socialism as a new civilization that invented new ways of behavior, new kinds of institutions, and distinct sets of values and beliefs. However, attending to the figure of the Polish Mother in Polish literature during the socialist period reveals that in Poland socialism did not result in similar, revolutionary changes and remained a political formation shaped by Polish history and culture at least as much as by Soviet culture. The building of a hospital named after the Polish Mother in the 1980s in Lodz is but one prominent marker of Polish socialism’s commitment to Polish history and myths, which symbolically linked the notions of motherhood and health of the nation.36

The Polish Mother

The Polish Mother is a legacy of Polish statelessness, which started in 1772 when Poland became partitioned among Austria, Prussia, and Russia and lost independence for 123 years. The second partition came in 1793, and the third in 1795.37 Uprisings—in 1794, 1830, 1846, and 1863—followed the partitions, and “although they had failed disastrously, the uprisings had created an enduring mythology of Poland as the ‘Christ of nations ‘and glorified the idea of self-sacrifice on behalf of the fatherland” (Lebow, Unfinished Utopia 17). Malgorzata Fidelis writes that the Polish Mother “refers to the patriotic, Catholic, and domestic upbringing of gentry girls, which was central to nineteenth-century Polish national ideology” (“Participation in the Creative Work of the Nation” 112). According to Brian Porter-Szücs, the Polish Mother was “a variation on familiar 19th century bourgeois norms of femininity” and “In Poland as in France or Britain, this ideal of femininity was narrowly

36 It was opened in 1988.
37 Only Russia and Prussia participated in this partition in 1793. Poland regained independence in 1918. 1918 is also a year when Polish women gained the right to vote.
limited to those wealthy enough to sustain a family on just a man’s income” (9). What distinguished the Polish gentry woman from the Western elite feminine norm was her devotion to the restoration of the nation.

The literature of Polish Romanticism offers few images of women sacrificing their lives for the freedom of the country, and when it does women do not have names, do not have biographies, do not have moral dilemmas; instead, they die quietly (Walczewska 46). Katherine R. Jolluck adds that “Some women stepped out of traditional roles and served the nation like men—as armed insurgents—for which they suffered confinements early in the nineteenth century (…). Since the ideology of womanhood had no place for them, they were also marginalized and largely forgotten” (90). In 1830, Adam Mickiewicz, one of the most important poets of Polish Romanticism, wrote a poem that sealed the fate of Polish women: “To a Polish Mother.” The Polish Mother has a son, but instead of protecting him from the fight she encourages him to participate even though the struggle is doomed:

O Polish mother, ill must be his part!

Before the Mother of Our Sorrows kneel,
Gaze on the sword that cleaves her living heart—
Such is the craven blow thy breast shall feel!

Though peoples, powers, and schisms a truce declare,
And though the whole wide world in peace may bloom,
In battle—without glory—he must share;
In martyrdom—with an eternal tomb.

Soon bid him seek a solitary cave
And ponder there—on rushes lay his head,
Breathe the foul vapors of a hidden grave,
And with the envenomed serpent share his bed.

His young arms load with chains, his body frail
Full soon have harnessed to a barrow, so
Before the headsman’s axe he shall not pale,
Nor at the swinging halter crimson now.
And for the vanquished man as monument
    The gallows tree will rear its sullen height;
For glory—but a woman’s tears, soon spent,
    And fellow patriots’ whispered words by night. (237-238)

Slawomira Walczewska, a Polish literary critic and gender studies scholar, notes that while
dying the son resembles Christ and his mother—Mary (Walczewska 56). At the same time,
her dying son is able-bodied; his able-bodiedness is never questioned, always transparent. The
poem itself marks a focal point for an understanding of motherhood in Poland for two
reasons: it associates motherhood with sacrificial suffering and instructs that the mother’s
main role is to rear future patriots willing to fight for the independence of the country.
Perhaps more than the protector of her child, she is the protector of the nation and secures its
future by sacrificing her son’s life. This is the very moment which marks the beginning of
representations of women’s sacrificial violence towards their sons. Nation, in other words,
determines the relationship between a mother and her son as inherently violent. The socialist-
era literature I examine in this chapter advances the understanding of violence that binds a
mother and a disabled child and thus the specter of violence continues to be present in a
mother-child relationship.

The Polish Mother carries the burden of reproducing the nation both biologically and
symbolically and hence becomes the representative of the entire collectivity. At the same
time, the Polish Mother belongs to a specific subset of the population: the gentry and the
intelligentsia. The desire to establish as independent country was thus a classed desire;
peasants who lived in the lands of the former Polish-Lithuanian Republic oftentimes refused
to take part in this fight (Porter-Szücs 9). But her nameless status in the poem, for
Mickiewicz’s protagonist does not have a name, makes it easier to posit it her as a figure of a
universal longing for independent Poland. Motherhood, for gentry and intelligentsia women,
became inseparable from the struggle for freedom and this way offered a place for women in a national cause.\textsuperscript{38}

The Polish Mother is a political device that helps determine women’s roles in Polish society. The Positivists, the generation after the Romanticists, thought that “spilling Poland’s (...) blood in armed struggling was self-defeating” (Lebow, \textit{Unfinished Utopia} 17) and called for “the organic work” that would strengthen the nation by education and cultivation of Polish traditions and values. They hoped Poland would regain independence in the future, but at the moment declared their commitment to pragmatism and work. While the ideal of the patriotic and Catholic mother was present in their literary works and magazines for women (Gasiorowska 262, Fidelis, “Participation in the Creative Work of the Nation” 113), some writers and journalists started to challenge it. Malgorzata Fidelis writes that “The idealistic model of \textit{Matka Polka} ran counter to post-1864 reality. Once their economically comfortable family lives had been shattered, many noble women became visible in various areas of the public sphere” (“Participation in the Creative Work” 113). Women, in other words, sought work and pursued higher education. In the 1840s and 1850s “Entuzjastki” (“Enthusiasts”) the first all female group focused on improving women’s status, in particular in regards to education, worked in Warsaw (Fuszara 144). Women’s disobedience was directed both against the imperial powers and patriarchy. Maria Dulebianka, a Polish feminist and social activist, declared: “We the women, when we demand equal rights, we demand thereby the right to participate in the fight for the nation’s rights, we demand to be allowed to participate

\textsuperscript{38} In \textit{Exile and Identity} Katherine R. Jolluck writes about Polish women’s role under partitions: “A woman was expected to act for the nation predominantly through others: by raising male heroes and loyal citizens, passing on cultural traditions, and taking care of the home—the brick of society, but clearly its smallest unit, the one most removed from public activity, power, and celebrity. To an extent that men were not, the Polish woman was urged to sublimate her own desires and interests to the family and in that way serve the higher good. The dominant ideology stipulated sacrifice and devotion to others as the way to her own self-fulfillment; any other contributions she might make to the nation were downplayed. Though this indirect service to the nation was glorified and women were depicted as the partners of men in the great work of the nation, men were given the leading, active, and powerful roles in that work” (94).
in the reconstruction of the nation’s edifice” (Fuszara 147). The fight for the national independence was, to a certain extent, intertwined with the fight for political rights for women.

Engagement with the public sphere did not entail abandoning the household. Instead, the national cause was intimately linked with family life, for women remained the main organizers of family life and bore the responsibility to teach their children Polish language, tradition, and raise them in Catholic religion. Writers advocating for women’s emancipation, Maria Konopnicka and Eliza Orzeszkowa, “sought to reassure the public that emancipation would not weaken women’s commitment to the family” (Fidelis, “Participation in the Creative Work of the Nation” 122). As a result, the positivist women negotiated the ideal of the Polish Mother with the changing political circumstances and women’s desire for emancipation. During the period of socialism, the authorities and political dissidents used the figure of the Polish Mother to legitimize the actions undertaken by both parties. Katarzyna Stanczak-Wislicz points out correctly that the Polish Mother withstood shifting political landscape and became a symbol of values widely shared by the nation (2). But her perseverance implies, additionally, that violence she represents continued throughout the socialist period.

The Polish Mother under Socialism

Women’s emancipation in Stalinist Poland was both a result of the ideological project of communism as well as a question of additional labor force, which was desperately needed after the war’s destruction. Emancipation was identified with paid work, but there was also an effort to assure equal rights for a woman within the family and society (even if mostly on paper). Equal rights made women available for “productive”—that is, non-domestic—work. In other words, post-war Poland could not afford to keep their female citizens at home. Many
women who before the war did not have to work for wages had to begin doing so. Oftentimes they were the only breadwinners in their families. At the same time, the state did not question that women were responsible for the domestic realm (Stanczak-Wislicz, Perkowski 317). The end of the Six-Year-Plan (1950-1955) marked the end of the era of the “work heroines:” women started to be represented as mothers, wives, consumers and sexual objects in public discourse and not anymore as “women on tractors.” The jobs that required physical strength and the ones considered more “dangerous” became inaccessible to women during the thaw:39 “with the liberalization in communist doctrine following the thaw (…), state policies toward women began to lose their “formal egalitarian” content” (Hauser, Heyns, Mansbridge 259). The decision barring women from specific jobs in different branches of industry (i.e., in mining) sparked a lot of anger and frustration among women, yet their protests did not change the situation (Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization* 219, 222). The authorities decided to protect male workers’ priorities and “respect” labor tradition (Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization* 205-206). Women’s rights, bound up with the family and motherhood since the 19th century, were also embedded in family life under socialism. The partially instrumental treatment of “equal rights” in the beginning of the period only made it easier to take them away when women’s labor was no longer (desperately) needed.

What the state demanded of women—incessantly—were children. The main function of the household in the early years of socialism was biological reproduction, yet the pressure on women to bear children did not lessen in the following decades (Stanczak-Wislicz, Perkowski 319). Changes in family law, the creation of kindergartens offering children free meals, and accommodations for single mothers were supposed to help women make decisions to have children. The nation had to rebuild itself and the essential device as well as the

39 Polish thaw or Polish October refers to the change of politics in the second half of 1956. It marks the end of Stalinist period in Polish history and temporary political and cultural liberalization.
symbol of post-war reconstruction were women. The mother’s duty was to bear healthy, nondisabled children. Magdalena Gawin in *Rasa i nowoczesnosc: historia polskiego ruchu eugenicznego* (*Race and Modernity: The History of Polish Eugenic Movement*) brings out the eugenic underpinnings of Polish state socialism and notes that eugenic ideas endured despite the end of The Polish Eugenic Society in the early 1950s, and official state condemnation of eugenic practices in Western Europe, especially during World War II (300, 304). Eunjung Kim writes: “the desire for disability’s absence is not natural or constant; rather, that desire is constructed and reinforced in cultural representations interacting with the material, social (…) conditions” (44). Following Kim, I think that as much as Chajecka’s and Domanska’s commitment to help their children become able-bodied might be the result of traditional Polish understanding of what it means to be a “good mother” as well as individual choices it is also a result of intense pronatalist discourse in postwar Poland that is at least partially rooted in eugenic ideas about civic fitness. The violent desire for “a future without disability” (Kafer 33) that permeates both texts and plays out on and through individual bodies of the two sons is then culturally and politically constructed.

Both the socialist authorities and the opposition relied on pronatalist and nationalist discourses centered upon rebuilding and protecting the Polish state and Polish families and the key protagonists in these discourses were women and their bodies. Despite many changes that the socialist system underwent the focus on women and their reproductive capacities never went away. In its early years, the League for Women provided a venue for some political activity for women; however, the League quickly lost its significance (Hauser, Heyns, Mansbridge 260) and focused on helping women manage their domestic life
instead. Very few women held political offices, and the Party was dominated by men. In 1956, the state passed a law legalizing abortion “for medical and socioeconomic reasons and for pregnancies of up to fourteen weeks” (Mishtal 137). However, Malgorzata Fidelis notes that despite the seemingly progressive law abortion was accessible predominantly to women who already had many children and lived in poverty until 1960 (Women, Communism, and Industrialization 191). The Solidarity movement in the 1980s linked pronatalism to the discussion of the protection of family with the political opposition towards the state authorities. In 1982, Wojciech Jaruzelski, the First Secretary of the Party from 1981 to 1989, declared it was high time to build a monument of the Polish Mother and announced the construction of the hospital named after her in Lodz (Stanczak-Wislicz 25). In fact, both—the leaders of the trade union and the leaders of the state—were deeply conservative and understood women’s role in traditional terms. After the 1989 collapse of socialism in Poland, the main representatives of Solidarity became the leaders of the state and in 1993 introduced an anti-abortion law. As a result, women did not play major political roles during the period of state socialism in the Party. Their role in the Solidarity movement, though meaningful (Penn 5, Walczewska 89), was downplayed in the early 1990s both by the leaders of the trade union and women themselves. One of the few political organizations that offered them access to the public realm during state socialism—Women’s League—was quite insignificant. Moreover, the capacity to control reproduction via the right to abortion was only partially true. While the Stalinist period might have temporarily destabilized the family life and norms

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40 See: Basia A. Nowak “Where Do You Think I Learned How to Style My Own Hair: Gender and Everyday Lives of Women Activists in Poland’s League of Women.”
41 Anna Titkow writes that “in 1986 only 11 percent of the members of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party (PUWP) were women; of the members of the Consultative Board of President Jaruzelski 5 percent were women. At the Round Table in 1989, among sixty participants there was only one woman” (254).
42 Abortion became more widely available afterwards. Many women used it as a form of contraception.
in Poland it did not introduce a long-standing changes and the socialist system remained very much entrenched in traditional gender roles despite significant changes in the legal status of women and mass female employment.

**Maternal Speech**

In the disability memoirs and YA novels I analyze in this chapter, fathers are absent. Eugenia Chajecka’s husband left for the United States in the beginning of the war and never returned. She had to raise their two children on her own. She does not condemn him openly in the text nor express anger with him, but states clearly that she herself is happy with the choices she made (157). The husband of Anna Domanska did not leave; however, she is the one who takes care of their deaf son and manages his rehabilitation. In many YA novels I discuss in this dissertation (*The Jasmine Shrub, The Whirlwind and Canes, Beethoven and Jeans, A Meeting by the Sea*), the husbands and fathers are almost always symbolically, if not physically, absent.

The (absent) socialist male is a work hero. He fought for the freedom of his country and now rebuilds it. However, he is also tired, for the reconstruction is not easy. Katarzyna Stanczak-Wislicz and Piotr Perkowski note that:

…men in 1950s were exhausted and returned home late. Up until the end of 1950s there was not much discussion about it. Right after the end of the war and in the midst of the Six Years Plan demanding free time would not have been welcomed; on the reverse it was expected that men would stay at work after official hours and try to break efficiency records. (342)

He is a tired work hero, and he is, Joanna Goven adds, “politically subordinate, with an “equal” as a wife” (17). Under Stalinism he cannot become a patriarch, and the only venue where he can apply his skills and strength is work (Goven10, 17). And as disability memoirs
written by mothers attest, a child’s rehabilitation similarly did not provide an additional site where he could employ his skills or prove his masculinity and fatherhood. However, I claim that disability memoirs written by mothers demonstrate that a child’s disability reconfigures the dominant model of femininity promoted by the state as analyzed by Goven and other scholars of the region. It allows women who are responsible for their children overcoming disability to make demands upon a state and criticize it for a lack of sufficient accommodations and resources required during the rehabilitation process. A child’s disability makes it easier for them to become disobedient subjects with political demands in a state that attempts to make everyone “politically subordinate” (Goven 17). What makes their voice heard and, more importantly legible, is motherhood. They can enter the public realm only as mothers of disabled sons advocating for better healthcare and access to rehabilitation and education.

Women’s presence and speaking up in the public realm demonstrates an unstable boundary between the private and the public. During the socialist era, already in 1945, women went on strikes—usually to demand higher wages and food for their children, but also to protest against “new communist methods of work” (Fidelis, Women, Communism, and Industrialization 69-70) at factories. In 1945, they demanded in Lodz that “their children be assured sufficient food to grow up properly” (Kenney, Rebuilding Poland 88). What is important is that they went on strikes not only as factory workers, but also as mothers and mothers who run households. Motherhood coupled with a child’s disability legitimized entering the public domain as well—publishing disability memoirs by a mother is one of the means to do so. Again, the Polish Mother becomes a main vehicle that enables women to

43 I have not found a single memoir written by a father of a disabled child.
participate in a political domain and reminds that their citizenship and the ensuing right to express frustration or disagreement is embedded in a family or, more specifically, a relationship they have with their children. This time, though, she does not sacrifice her son’s life, but wants to return him to able-bodiedness. Rehabilitation, however, can be violent, too.

Eugenia Chajecka’s son spent three years (in and out) in a state-run institution for disabled children. Even though in the beginning she was skeptical about it: “The first impression was not good. The sanatorium was located in a two-story old building that was not adapted to the needs of disabled children” (38), upon meeting the main doctor and director she changed her mind: “I knew my son would be in good hands. I felt he would receive good care here and that this ‘angel of goodness’ [this is how she refers to the doctor] would do everything to restore Andrzej to his lost health and strength” (39). However, the descriptions of rehabilitation itself—exercises and treatments—depict pain and suffering. Chajecka writes: “This treatment was incredibly painful, and thus the room was full of screaming and crying. The physiotherapists did not care and kept working despite screaming and crying” (41). She mentions that other treatments were “not very pleasant” either (41). Chajecka depicts the institution as both a place of long-lasting suffering and community of disabled children. However, few years later the doctor she liked left and the institution changed for worse, because the new director cared more about himself than his patients (but Chajecka does not provide many details).45

45Chajecka in her 240-pages long narrative devotes around 10 pages to the description of a state-run institution for disabled children. Domanska, as I discuss in the further part of this chapter, has even fewer pages of a description of an institution for deaf children. They both decided to rehabilitate their children mostly at home, even though in their descriptions they do not criticize institutions and emphasize their good sides. At the same time, it is interesting that Polish disability memoirs, in general, lack depictions of state-run institutions for disabled children; most of the institutions that disabled people describe are those for adults. As a result, the silence surrounding the institutions for disabled children raises questions about the conditions of life in such places.
Does the attempt to rehabilitate a disabled child make her an ally of the state that desires an able-bodied population? Obviously, historically, the Polish Mother has been an ally of a (politically nonexistent) nation. However, is her commitment to child’s rehabilitation enough to make her an agent of the state during the state socialism? Is the fact of overlapping interests enough here? Rather, it seems that the socialist Polish Mother of a disabled child resorts to “curative violence” (Kim 13) in attempts to recover his able-bodiedness. The socialist Polish Mother of a disabled child criticizes the state and is complicit with the ableist ideology enforced by the state, while the socialist father, as confirmed by the literature, does not participate in their children’s rehabilitation and cannot use their child’s disability as grounds for resistance or critique of the system. This does not mean that men did not protest nor criticize the state; however, their child’s well being or disability did not serve as a motive to do so. More importantly, it reveals that access to power within the Polish socialist system was gendered. Additionally, the absence of a husband and a father might have facilitated a woman’s capacity to enter the public realm. In other words, a woman’s participation in public matters did not threaten a male figure.

A certain sanctification of motherhood, that ultimately enables mothers of disabled children to claim a public voice (because they are above reproach), can be seen in the absence of mothers’ sexuality. Culture presents the Polish Mother as a widow whose husband died during one of the uprisings. Scholars point to the similarity between the Polish Mother and Mary, the mother of Jesus. Katherine R. Jolluck writes: “Patriarchal society merged with the Catholic worldview to produce an idealized symbol of women, Matka Polka, the holy mother of Poland. This model was built on the cult of Mary, the mother of Jesus” (90).46

Consequently, the comparison with Mary allows to construct the Polish Mother as sexually “pure” or devoid of sexual desires. Eugenia Chajecka and Anna Domanska follow a similar pattern and do not discuss sexuality, which permits them to emulate the cultural ideal of the Polish Mother.

Eugenia Chajecka briefly mentions her husband leaving for the United States and never discusses any other men in her life. Although she does provide many details concerning her life a reader does not know whether she was romantically and/or sexually involved with anyone after her husband’s departure. Anna Domanska was married, yet she does not reveal anything about her marriage and in the text privileges the relationship with a son. Both Domanska and Chajecka are mothers of the sons and the myth of the Polish Mother shows her as a mother of a son. In other words, the relationship between a mother and a daughter is almost absent in Polish culture. Chajecka is, in fact, a mother to a daughter and a son, but her text focuses almost exclusively on her relationship with a younger child—Andrzej. While the culture privileges relationship between a mother and a son, it seems that in order to partake of a myth of the Polish Mother Chajecka and Domanska need to erase both a male figure and other women’s roles such as wife or worker. These multiple erasures are the key to establishing one dominant identity: that of a good mother. The absence of men or the attempt to remove them from the narrative, the way Domanska does it, and the silence surrounding their remaining occupations and interests imply that a mother of a disabled child commits fully to her child and has only one goal: her son’s overcoming of disability.

Both the absence of male figures and no mention of close female friends complicate the possibilities of experiencing sexual or erotic pleasures for a mother. Sexual pleasure, though, would indicate that her son’s well-being is not the only thing that occupies her.

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47 Obviously, there was a possibility of auto eroticism/pleasure, but this is not mentioned at all.
Additionally, a happy mother and/or a sexually fulfilled mother in Polish culture has no voice; in other words, Chajecka and Domanska “have purchased the right to speak through pain” (Bruzelius 216). Historically, the suffering of the Polish Mother cannot be separated from the Polish martyrology and thus mother’s suffering is interconnected with the national suffering. Here, the mother’s pain is a result of child’s disability and difficulties with recovering his able-bodiedness. Chajecka and Domanska published their memoirs not because of the happiness they experienced, but because of sorrow and suffering emphasized most by their children’s disabilities (even though in the end of the books they both assert they are happy and their children brought them happiness and joy). The death of their parents right after World War II, hunger, problems with housing, poverty and other difficult situations added to the hardships they had to endure. The mother can speak publicly but only when her speech concerns pain and difficulty. Her citizenship is constituted by pain of losing a child or having a suffering child who is subjected to the regime of rehabilitation. As a result, pain is a constitutive element of a woman’s citizenship. Margaret Bruzelius argues that “maternal speech exists only because it can be validated by maternal suffering: only the woman of sorrow, bound in a uniquely painful relation with her offspring, may give tongue” (217), and disability memoirs written by the mothers testify to that. But if a woman purchases a right to speak only through suffering and when “bound in a uniquely painful relation with her offspring” then a woman who is not a mother remains excluded from the national community and deprived of a possibility to speak. Polish socialism, in this regard, seems to privilege suffering mothers despite the pledge to secure happiness of its citizens and women’s emancipation from social and familial roles.
Maternal Impressions

*Syn! Bedzie szczesliwa (Son! She will be happy)* was published in 1988 and *Los w rekach twoich (Your Destiny is in Your Hands)* in 1973. Both open with descriptions of giving birth. Chajecka recounts that the first words she heard from a doctor when waking up after the labor were: “Son, she will be happy” (14). The first line in Domanska’s memoir is “He was born with a silver spoon in his mouth; he will be very happy” (5). The striking resemblance between both beginnings indicates the closeness of the two projects. By starting the narratives with descriptions of a happy event of giving birth the authors signal that this is not only when their sons’ lives started, but when their own lives started anew. The very brief mention of the lives they had before the birth of their children imply that the baby boys overshadow everything that happened earlier. Moreover, by providing the “origin story” they remind readers that they did not produce their children’s disability. They gave birth to healthy, able-bodied children. And that is why, the birth is presented in both accounts as a happy event—it refers to the time without disability. The present is filled with the nostalgia for the lost nondisabled bodies whereas the future remains uncertain and is tainted by the prospect of disability that stubbornly might not go away—despite the attempts to rehabilitate both sons. Nevertheless, rehabilitation is a practice directed towards the future; it is performed with future in mind. Shortly, it implies that future will arrive and that it can be experienced without disability. For the only desirable future is the one unmarked by disability (Kafer 2).

These two narratives are stories of women trying to help their sons overcome disabilities, not the stories of two boys and then men who want to regain able-bodiedness, and that is why I argue that the “proper” protagonists of the two disability memoirs are in fact mothers, and not their disabled children. Furthermore, these are narratives that focus on rehabilitation—a corporeal practice that oftentimes requires bodily contact—which might be seen as continuation of giving birth to able-bodied children. If women are responsible for
securing the future of the nation, and if women under state socialism in Poland were pressured to have children, then the rehabilitation regimes they put their sons through might suggest that the labor of giving birth is incomplete. Or that the function of rehabilitation is to fix the partial “failure” of reproduction. Rehabilitation might also symbolize rebirth in this context. Consequently, the continuing rehabilitation prolongs the sons’ dependence on the mothers. It is important that images of disabled children dependent on their mothers usually feature the boys, and not the girls, suggesting that dependence itself is gendered here.

Both memoirs bring to the fore the state’s longstanding preoccupation with reproduction and able-bodiedness. Mothers’ bodies, though, are not the sources of their sons’ disabilities; conversely, mothers do what they can to recover their children’s able-bodiedness. Therefore, only women are capable of reproducing, and only mothers can rehabilitate their children -- undo disability -- and the two are in a close relation. What the two women could not prevent was the exploding bomb during World War II that left Domanska’s three-year-old son deaf and Chajecka’s son contracting polio at the summer camp when he was thirteen. The authors assure that the two boys were extremely healthy and grew fast before acquiring disabilities and thus their disabilities are not mothers’ fault. Chajecka provides many details concerning her son’s successes in sports before contracting polio (Chajecka 20), which contrast with the further descriptions of his disability and thus is supposed to emphasize the “unfairness” of disability. In other words, “maternal impressions” (Adams 186) do not mark their children’s bodies, war crimes and the outbreak of disease left their sons disabled.

The disability memoirs by Chajecka and Domanska reveal, moreover, that women with disabled children carried a triple burden – they performed work both inside and outside the home, as well as the rehabilitative work necessary to remake their disabled children to fit Polish citizens and their own ideals of children (which, perhaps, to a certain extent are triggered by the nation’s expectations). Katarzyna Wislicz-Stanczak and Piotr Perkowski
comment that “Polish People’s Republic was unanimous that women were overburdened by work—both at home and outside” (321) and that the popular press began to characterize women’s situation as a “double burden” of work inside and outside the home (321). The labor of rehabilitation is a third, unpaid, type of work performed mainly by women. In Chajecka’s memoir, a community of women from different generations perform the labor necessary to care for the disabled Andrzej. Chajecka lives with her mom, a maid who has lived with them for most of her life, and an able-bodied daughter, all of whom work to rehabilitate Andrzej. Although Andrzej spends some time at various hospitals and sanatoriums both in Poland and Western Germany, it is these women who divide the care work at home. Rehabilitation becomes a part of their “domestic” (and unpaid) work; however, Chajecka never seems to think about it in these terms. Rehabilitation is care work, but it is more than that: it is a practice that relies on repetition and is grounded both in medicine and in ideological beliefs. Rehabilitation shapes bodies, and in Chajecka’s and Domanska’s texts it is managed and experienced predominantly domestically and seems to be interwoven with other house-related activities and duties. The author conceives rehabilitating Andrzej as a family duty, and the official state discourse strengthened this understanding of rehabilitation by not turning it into a public responsibility. In Disability, Gender & State Policy Nilika Mehrotra writes about disability in India, but parts of her analysis can be applied to socialist Poland. She says: “Disability in these contexts is not to be found in the individual body but the whole family is implicated in the process” (43), and Chajecka’s writing reflects Mehrotra’s observation about the familialization of disability. At the same time, while a community of women manages Andrzej’s disability, controlling and assigning meaning to disability comes from the larger discourse on the body, fitness, and health. Chajecka oftentimes repeats that

48 It is unclear whether the maid received any money for her work; Chajecka never discusses this.
Andrzej’s disability is a “cruel destiny” (36, 54); that polio is a “cruel disease” (46) and that “cruel illness deprives children of their normal life” (39). She also confesses that “I could not accept the fact that he would remain paralyzed and require other people’s help and care” (70).

The statements about “cruelty” of disability contrast with the nostalgic descriptions of Andrzej’s love for sport before acquiring a disease. Similarly, Anna Domanska in her memoir recalls that when her son was nine-months old and started to learn to walk (before the bomb explosion) she often heard strangers commenting on his looks and behavior: “It is such a brave boy! A little scout [in Polish – “zuch”]! A great boy” (6). Rehabilitation and rehabilitation as work then belongs and connects the public and the private in socialist Poland.

For men, work functioned as a site of proving and expressing both masculinity and heroism. In Unfinished Utopia: Nowa Huta, Stalinism, and Polish Society, 1949-56, Katherine Lebow writes about “labor heroes” in Poland, and both her and Malgorzata Fidelis agree that for women becoming “labor heroes” was more difficult, especially after the state limited women’s possibilities of work in certain branches of industry (Lebow 123; Women, Communism, and Industrialization 216-230). Domanska ends her memoirs by discussing her public role as a mother of a deaf son: she writes about the public meetings she is invited to and lectures on Michal’s rehabilitation that she delivers. She mentions that various magazines took an interest in her and Michal’s story and wrote about them. She becomes a public persona. Perhaps, managing her son’s rehabilitation, though not an equivalent of heroism of labor for it is not recognized as such by the authorities, could provide some sort of visibility and acknowledgment for women for whom work at home, in the office or other places could not guarantee a similar appreciation.

49 In Polish: “Ale z dziejne chłopaczysko! Zuch! Wspanialy chlopak” (6).
In the Name of Love

Eugenia Chajecka in her memoir Syn! Będzie szczęśliwa (Son! She will be Happy) openly criticizes the state for lacking adequate accommodations for her disabled son. She details numerous problems with acquiring an apartment that would accommodate Andrzej, corruption of city clerks who did not want to issue a permission to change apartments, difficulties with getting the Ministry’s permission to buy a typewriter and a special wheelchair for him, troubles receiving passports they needed in order to go to a hospital in Western Germany, lack of medicine and medical equipment in Polish hospitals and sanatoriums. Her narrative meticulously depicts the state’s failings, and perhaps it is not a coincidence that it was published in 1988, a year before the collapse of state socialism. However, the fact that it was published at all signals that the state supported Main Office of Control of Press, Publications and Shows did not mind its publication. Perhaps, disability was deemed insignificant enough to allow the publication of a text that criticizes the state. Nevertheless, it is clear that a mother had a right to speak on behalf of a disabled child and occupy critical positions toward the state if she defended the child. Chajecka’s disability memoirs do not function as a critique of the state in general, as she never extends her criticisms beyond disability issues. Disability offered, then, a specific way of discussing the state critically without making a larger claim about it.

Anna Domanska is not as generous in her critical commentary on the state as Eugenia Chajecka. She focuses mainly on one aspect of her son’s life: education, or rather the problems of its accessibility to a deaf child. She also puts an emphasis on the family relations and the familial practices of solving problems without seeking the state’s involvement. In most of her narrative, the state is almost absent as if the question of disability was solely a mother’s and family’s matter—and thus sometimes it reads as if the location and the political
situation of Poland at the time did not bear any relevance to her and her son’s experiences. She renders the state dismissible, which, politically, is not a neutral gesture.

Domanska recalls visiting doctors and their advice that she wait until he was seven and maybe he would start hearing again. Suffice to say, they did not offer any rehabilitation plans, and she was the one who sought help on her own terms. When she finds a school with dormitories for deaf children, she decides to keep her son at home, and it seems like no one pressures her to choose otherwise. Ultimately, she devises for him a special rehabilitation plan and teaches him to read lips and speak. She is, perhaps without knowing, an “oralist.” By ceaselessly correcting his pronunciation she is the one, in opposition to the medical establishment, which is not interested in finding “a cure” for Michal, who pathologizes his difference and wants it erased as much as possible. She describes hours, days, months and years of arduous training, and sends him to school for non-deaf children. She is proud when she says that people who meet him for the first time think he is a foreigner because of his accent (194). Consequently, the mother trains him to be one of the “able disabled” (Mitchell, Snyder 118), and he manages to pass as an able-bodied person, for despite his mother’s hopes he does not regain hearing.⁵⁰

Both reading lips and sport allow Michal to pass as an able-bodied person. As a child Michal starts skiing and later joins the athletic team in his town. Soon he competes on national and international level with other deaf athletes. Michael Rembis argues that modern disabled sport “offers an excellent opportunity to enrich our understanding of passing” (114) and adds that excelling in sport for disabled people allows them to “enter the ranks of the

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⁵⁰ In *Keywords for Disability Studies* Ellen Samuels writes about passing and she states that “In historical and colloquial usage, “passing” was originally understood as a form of imposture in which members of a marginalized group presented themselves as members of dominant group” (135). All the examples she provides are grounded in American culture and history; looking at the practice of passing in Polish disability memoirs might de-center or possibly reformulate the Western understanding of the concept discussed by Samuels.
‘normal’” (116). Sport, in other words, becomes here a means of normalization of a disabled subject. Michal is “normal” in every way except his inability to hear, which, ultimately, does not affect him. Sport, consequently, enables him to “transcend impairment” (Rembis 116) and grants him a first-class citizenship. Success in sport similarly to reading lips contributes to the symbolic erasure of his disability.

Anna Domanska, analogously to American oralists, opposed “the use of sign language in any form for any purpose” (Baynton 4) and believes that Michal needs to learn to speak and read lips. Oralism appeared in the U.S. in the late-19th century and reigned until the 1970s (Baynton 5). The American historian, Douglas Baynton explains that “opponents of sign language believed that its use discouraged the learning of oral communication skills; hearing parents, eager to believe their deaf children could learn to function like hearing people, supported its prescription” (6). Domanska correspondingly believed that the use of Polish Sign Language (PSL) would delay her son’s development and decrease his chances of receiving a “good” education. During the conversation with a headmaster of a school where she wants to send her son, she says that she will not put Michal in a school for deaf children because: “[c]hildren taught in special schools, who live among other deaf children, use the sign language, which is a simplified method of communication that lacks many expressions and structures and thus does not require as much effort as the spoken language does” (84). Domanska, not surprisingly, does not know PSL, and it is unclear how she arrived at her conclusions, yet the fact that Michal uses the spoken language enables her to say to him:

51 Since 1962 disabled sport develops very quickly in socialist Poland and is viewed as one of the main ways of rehabilitation. Sport clubs, as they are called, were a part of workshops for disabled people. In the 1980s there were around 400 such sport clubs and they hired more than 400 instructors who were graduates of physical education and rehabilitation programs at the universities. Since the 1970s disabled sport becomes increasingly professionalized and Polish disabled athletes start competing in national and international competitions. Michał Domanski, the son of Anna Domanska, seems to have been among the first generation of disabled athletes in socialist Poland. To read more about sport and disability in socialist Poland see: Henryk Waszczukowski, “Ruch spółdzielczości inwalidów i jego znaczenie dla rozwoju rehabilitacji osób niepełnosprawnych w Polsce.”
“You live a full, normal life, you do not feel worse than other people who can hear. It is possible to state that you are truly rehabilitated” (181). In other words, the sign language obstructs a chance of living a full life and poses an obstacle to rehabilitation, whereas the oral method is almost synonymous with overcoming deafness.

What is important, though, is that while trying to convince Michal’s professors in the school of medicine that he can be a successful doctor she gives examples of deaf doctors practicing in the United Kingdom and California who also speak and read lips. Oralism then appears to be a transnational phenomenon unrestricted by the Iron Curtain. Equally important, socialism in Poland did not reconfigure the dominant cultural construction of deafness that conceives it as a transparent and biological fact. While state socialism attempted to unfix the gender and class orders, disability remained an uncontested category of difference that had to be ameliorated not through denaturalization and reconceptualization, but through the erasure of rehabilitation.

Although Domanska in her memoirs does not address the state explicitly, she nevertheless challenges it by providing the help she believes her son needs on her own. As a result, she presents the state and its services as superfluous—she can do without them and is confident that what she does is, in fact, better. This way, she discredits socialism with its promise of a good life by refusing its assistance. The mother replaces the state here and holds power; she knows better and exercises her will uninterrupted. She never asks the son if he wants to learn to read lips, she never considers teaching him PSL, and she assumes that reading lips and teaching him to speak are the best options. She does not explain in the text

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52 In 1971, a hearing teacher, Wiktor Bugla, working at a school for deaf children in Poland published a book *Gdy Mowa jest Zlotem (When Speaking is Everything)* that discusses his experiences of teaching deaf and hard of hearing children. He holds the same beliefs as Domanska about oralism and manualism and records his attempts at teaching deaf children speak “clearly” and read people’s lips. He repeatedly says that the sign language is “simplistic” and does not allow speakers to convey as much as the oral language does.
why she makes the assumption that the PSL is not an adequate means of communication; and it is hard to understand where her assumptions come from. She mentions herself that her father, Michal’s grandfather, found a Braille alphabet for him, but is unclear what happened to the idea of teaching him Braille. She consults her husband sporadically about their son, and at some point he tells her that she herself should make a decision if she wants to send Michal to a school for Deaf children (46). She decides against it, even though in her description of the school she says: “I saw big and small children. All of them seem smart and curious; just like my son; they did not seem to be sad or missing home. They were happy and lively like every normal child” (47). She describes friendly interactions with the headmaster and the teachers and it seems that they all truly care for the children they teach. Despite this, she does not want to send Michal there: “I imagined home without Michal…So empty! He is so small! He comes to me with everything, he looks at me with trustful eyes” (49). In other words, she does not suggest that the institution is the site of violence. She wants to keep him, because she cannot bear the idea of being separated from him (given that he is still a toddler it is not surprising).

It is the mother who exercises violence towards her son and forces him to use the oral method, which possibly affected his life in ways that might be difficult to uncover. Domanska describes meticulously the way in which she taught Michal to speak, but her narrative does not include his voice. Hence, a reader does not know how he felt and what he went through while trying—for many years—to learn reading lips. Perhaps, using the PSL would save him time and difficulties and, maybe even more importantly, would provide him a chance to establish bonds with a community and allow to form a disability identity. The inclusion into able-bodied community does not come easily as Domanska’s descriptions of university where Michal studies suggests, but it also results in his complete isolation from both deaf and disability community. While it is clear that there was no disability rights movement under
socialism in Poland and the state did not encourage the forming of a separate disability community, there was a Society for the Deaf established in 1946 in Warsaw and the schools for deaf children that, perhaps, would give him a chance to meet other deaf people and provide with an additional—except the familial one—sense of belonging. In Curative Violence, Eunjung Kim explains that one of the ways in which curative violence operates is “denying a place for disability and illness as different ways of living and the physical and material violence against people with disabilities that are justified in the name of cure” (14), which Domanska’s text demonstrates. At the same time Domanska does not conceive of her actions as violent; she sees it as love. Violence of rehabilitation and isolation from disability community is made invisible here and perpetrated in the name of love and care. Maternal impressions might not mark disabled bodies, but maternal domination or a relationship with a mother does.

On the last page of her memoir, Domanska recalls a conversation with her, now adult, son. He tells her “You kept saying that failures and pain are necessary. They allow one to enjoy more the happy moments. I know now, mother, that you were right. You kept repeating it so many times and I didn’t believe, but now I do!” (227). She is glad with his words and adds in her commentary—thinking of all the years of rehabilitation and efforts of putting him through a school for hearing children—“one cannot go back from the path once chosen. And one needs to have enough strength. It is worth it!” (227). The book ends with the exclamation “It is worth it!”—does she refer to the violence of rehabilitation?

Domanska’s writing bear witness to an ambivalence: on the one hand, she might have internalized some of the eugenic ideals and social investments in able-bodiedness and productivity or her own beliefs map neatly onto the state’s beliefs; on the other, she rejects the state’s services. It might seem, then, that the state did approve of inconsistencies and even resentment “within certain well-defined but not inviolate limits” (Kotkin 228). This way, the
ableist ideology was enforced not only through state propaganda but also by the actions and writings of its citizens.

Ultimately, though, Domanska’s project of separating herself and her son from the state fails as a result of deep disappointment with the higher education system (her son could not continue studying medicine even though he was a good student and she intervened many times on his behalf with the school authorities). The ending of the book discusses her transformation into a disability activist, which results in maintaining a closer and consistent contact with the state. She starts working for an association of deaf people and writes about deaf population issues in Poland. It is crucial to note that Domanska, as a disability activist, is engaged primarily with the medical model of disability and, as mentioned earlier, promotes oralism in her work. Advocacy here, similar to the advocacy efforts examined by Anne McGuire in *War on Autism: On the Cultural Logic of Normative Violence*, “materializes as that which—at all costs—must protect, preserve, and/or recover” (168) able-bodiedness. The goal of Domanska and other advocates that work with her is to normalize and rehabilitate deaf subjects through oralism.

What differentiates these two narratives is that Chajecka insists that the state recognizes disability as a matter of public policy and intervention, and she might have wanted to use her memoirs as yet another form to remind her readers of that; whereas Domanska attempts to familialize disability as much as possible and separate it from the state. The act of separation is a gesture of dismissal of the state. At the same time, it seems that the state does not intervene in Domanska’s case. A reading of Domanska’s text reveals that living under socialism with a disability, at least for the mother of a disabled child, might not have always consisted of constant negotiation of the political terrain and avoidance of political pressures. Moreover, Domanska’s memoir testifies that socialism and state politics did not permeate every aspect of one’s life and that disability, as an analytical category, did not participate in
constructing a monolithic representation or understanding of Polish socialism. As already suggested, perhaps disability was too insignificant or inconsequential to impact the state in this way or maybe it was too subversive and thus could not be contained by the state. But reading Chajecka’s and Domanska’s memoirs together show that different ways of engaging and disengaging with the state as well as writing about it was a possibility. Consequently, attention to disability, similarly to gender, exposes multifarious experiences of living under socialism with a disability.

Narrative Power

Although both authors employ different strategies of discussing disability and acting on behalf of their disabled sons, their narratives depict the processes of forming political subjects—mothers who critique the state and demand changes in ways it caters to the disabled population. The two sons do not advocate for themselves, but are advocated for. Andrzej and Michal support their mothers in their endeavors, and it appears that they agree with the methods the two women use. Or the two authors present their sons as agreeing with but not particularly involved in the matters of rehabilitation and advocacy. Andrzej and Michal seem to retain more control over their own bodies than many disabled people living in institutions who are made into “a docile body and a governed and governing subject” (Sullivan 41), yet the mothers manage the rehabilitation processes and, what is equally important, the texts. The mothers wrote and published the memoirs, and it is unknown whether the sons participated in the process of writing and/or revising the books. At the same time, the narrative strategies used by Chajecka and Domanska question the very definition of advocacy and self-advocacy and, perhaps more importantly, the singularity and subjectivity of the subject.

Eugenia Chajecka in her memoirs uses the pronoun “we” often. When her son decides to study law, she says “we chose law” (97), when he finds a job she says “we found job”
(167), when Andrzej manages to pass a difficult exam she writes “the exam was an important event for us” (144), when he has some difficulties, but manages to find a solution she phrases it as “life helped us find the solution” (138), and when Andrzej’s advisor at the university suggests he does PhD work she writes “we did not take him seriously” (131), etc. The usage of the pronoun “we” is so frequent that a reader forgets about it; in other words, “we” becomes transparent and even naturalized, for it refers to a mother-son relationship. It does not mean that Chajecka never uses the pronoun “I” or “he” when she describes her son, but to a very large extent her narrative depends on “we.” “We” helps her, undeniably, to present herself and her son as a unit. Her son’s polio, and his dependency on her allows Chajecka to create and use “we.” In other words, the difference disability entails facilitates a unity and intimacy. “We,” however, reveals much more than just that—it challenges the notion of a singular and autonomous subject—both disabled and able-bodied. It serves as a reminder that in socialist Poland the kinship model works probably best to analyze disability, for disability, or at least the literary images of disability, is embedded in a family and experienced through family. Anne McGuire writes that “the disabled body (…) becomes a relation: an embodiment that is not singular but multiple” (17-18), and the memoirs written by Chajecka and Domanska provoke a similar conclusion—that disability is constituted relationally and domestically.

Anna Domanska relies on a different narrative strategy, comparably disquieting, to question the autonomy of her disabled son. In her memoir, she oftentimes describes events in which her son took part and where she herself was not present, e.g. athletic contests. Even though she was not there, she uses phrases such as “He was so tense, his thoughts went silent” (164), “He felt lonely. The pain in his leg was sharp. Can he run tomorrow, overcome the pain (…)? He has to stop despairing, he has to stop to think about this, he needs to think about something nice and safe…about home” (173). In other words, the narrative enables a reader to
conclude that Domanska claims she had access to her son’s thoughts and emotions at particular moments when he was not around and, sometimes, in a different country. Her technique might be called “imaginary identification.”

One explanation for this technique is that he told her what he thought and experienced and she transcribed it into the text; however, why did she not introduce a phrase that would make that clear? Even if these statements are exaggerated, she does claim she understands her son better than anyone else and that they taught themselves to guess their moods and feelings just by looking at each other (37). She adds that when he was still a little boy he apprehended everything she said even if he did not know particular words: “he did not know all the words I used, he could not read lips that well yet, but he always understood what I meant, for I spoke only to him” (37). That might explain why, she uses the phrases I quote above—to emphasize a oneness of mother and son. At the same time, in these descriptions of Michal’s thoughts and experiences she assumes a role of an omniscient narrator and writes about him using the third person singular. In other words, her memoir adopts a different genre in these descriptions: that of a literary fiction and thus Michal becomes a fictional protagonist. Ultimately, “imaginary identification” that results in the change of the literary genres implies the negation of her son’s identity and subjectivity. Crucially, it negates her autonomy, too. Similarly, the use of the pronoun “we” in Chajecka’s text points to the erasure of individuation for the mother and the child.

However, in both memoirs there are moments when the sons’ voices are directly inserted. Nearing the end of her text Chajecka inserts the postcards and letters fragments Andrzej sent her when he was abroad in Germany where he received a fellowship to study law for a few months. In one of the letters (postcards?) he writes: “I was invited to give a speech and write an article about Polish criminal law. I am very happy about it. It is a big honor and only some fellows are asked to do this. I am afraid about giving a speech in
German; particularly, about Q&As. But I have to try. Luckily, I brought some materials that I can use. Besides, they have all the Polish law journals and academic books here. There is so little time, though. The time flies…” (223). In Domanska’s book, a reader encounters several pages from Michal’s diary in which he writes about the beginning of a school year at the university, meeting new colleagues and professors: “I went to the inauguration of the academic year. There were students in front of the Academy’s gate as well as on the sidewalk and on the steps to St. Anna’s Church. Everyone is very young and excited. They talked and observed what was going on in the street. The cars approached bringing professor who all looked very serious” (193-4). In these few pages, Michal does more reporting than reflecting, yet it is obvious that he wrote about his own life too, even if it was the mother who published the proper memoir. What is important is that the inclusion of the sons’ writings disrupts the singularity of the authorial voice and the presumed unity between mothers and their children. But the sudden and brief appearance of the sons’ writings reminds that, ultimately, these two narratives are testaments to the marginalization of disabled voices. From this perspective, Los w rekach twoich (Your Destiny is in Your Hands) and Syn! Bedzie szczesliwa (Son! She will be happy!) constitute anti-disability memoirs, for they negate identities and subjectivities of disabled subjects by the use of the pronoun “we” in Chajecka’s text and Domanska’s “imaginary identification” technique.

The inclusion of the postcards and diary fragments might have been intended as a tool of legitimating mothers’ texts and attempts to introduce the voices of their sons. But the attempts fail—the postcards and diary fragments are short and, obviously, contextualized by the mothers. What this gesture of illusionary “inclusion” reveals though is that even when a subaltern disabled subject is allowed to speak his speech does not matter, for it is used solely as a proof of the mother’s words and remains managed by her. The reason why the short writings by Michal and Andrzej are included in the books is to corroborate the mother’s
representations of their sons’ lives. In other words, the mothers deny the autonomy of their sons which is exhibited, probably inadvertently, by these two, seemingly innocent, techniques of using the pronoun “we” and “imaginary identification.” Ultimately, the two memoirs testify to different forms of violence perpetrated in the name of love: while Domanska’s insistence on teaching her son the oral method exemplifies an ableist violence that has material effects on Michal’s life, the negation of his voice and Andrzej’s voice in Chajecka’s book represents symbolic and discursive violence. Disabled subjects are made to live and rehabilitate but the texts render their voices superfluous. The narrative power belongs to the mothers.

**Representations of the Figure of the Mother in YAL**

While the two disability memoirs written by mothers suggest that disabled subjectivity is both relational and deeply imbricated with gender and generational identities, the YA novels I read in this chapter are interested not in relational, but singular subjects and advocate for able-bodiedness as a way to achieve independence from a mother. The YA authors of *Jak trudno kochac* (*How Difficult It Is to Love*) and *Wstega Pawilonu*, Jerzy Szczygiel and Zofia Chadzynska respectively, understand the relationality that disability entails as suffocating and preventing a disabled protagonist from maturing. Disability, in other words, becomes synonymous with weakness, childhood and lack of autonomy. Both Szczygiel and Chadzynska present the mothers of disabled protagonists as inflicting and maintaining their children’s disabilities in order to make them co-dependent. As a result, disability changes its definition here: it is not only a noun, but also a verb; it is something that is being done to children by their mothers and thus can be undone by the children if they decide to stop performing it and resist their mothers.
I chose these two YA novels because they add new images of motherly violence towards disabled children and thus advance understanding of “complicated social scripts of violence” (Kim 124). The authors represent the mothers as power-hungry, possessive women who single-handedly run the households. Moreover, Szczygiel suggests (simplistically) that the mother in his novel has an Oedipal complex, and his text tells a socialist version of battle of sexes story that ends with the masculine triumph. The mother in Chadzynska’s text symbolically castrated her husband, the father of a disabled daughter. These portrayals are, obviously, almost caricature-like, but I claim that they are hardly a result of coincidence. Quite the opposite, they enable the writers to criticize a project of women’s emancipation started during the Stalinist period. Szczygiel published his novel in 1976, and Chadzynska in 1978, which coincides with the backlash against the second wave of feminism in the 1970s in the United States. I do not argue that these two YA novels constitute a Polish version of this American phenomenon, but notice that there might be a certain analogy between the two, and that the Stalinist attempt to bring emancipation to women at the work place, even if failed, resonated after its end in Polish literature. The disability of the two teenagers in these books is represented a result of mothers’ selfishness and desire to dominate their children, which the authors connect with the political project of bringing emancipation to women in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Similar to Domanska’s and Chajecka’s narratives, the two YA novels also address the absence of the fathers. In Chadzynska’s Wstęga Pawilonu the father is present, but he is dominated by his wife and has no say in family matters. Additionally, he is domesticated and effeminate: he works at home, seems like he never leaves it, and lives in a room separated from the rest of the apartment. In Jak trudno kochac (How Difficult It Is to Love) the return of the father who left his family during World War II helps the disabled son to achieve independence, which Szczygiel connects with the restoration of a heteronormative, patriarchal
family. The presence and regaining of power by the father-patriarch seems to remediate, according to Szczygiel, the deplorable results of women’s emancipation and ends, symbolically, the whole project of emancipation and its violent effects on men.

Of Mother Made

Karol, the protagonist of Jak trudno kochac (How Difficult It Is to Love), was fourteen when the Warsaw uprising broke out. While carrying band aids to a temporary hospital, he is shot by a bullet and as a result became blind. The war is an important element in the story, but ultimately just an episode: the action takes place five years after the end of the war and depicts Karol’s life in the early 1950s. He is an adult now, but he did not finish school, did not get a job, and does not have any friends. He spends most of his days at home waiting for his mother to return from work and prepare him dinner. In the evenings they go for walks together. Unlike the majority of Polish young adult writers during state socialism who discuss disability in their works, Szczygiel does not introduce the theme of overcoming disability: his protagonist is ostentatiously disabled and does not do anything to regain able-bodiedness. He is the very contradiction of “able disabled” (Mitchell, Snyder 118). His mother seems similarly uninterested in Karol’s rehabilitation. I think that it is, partially, the source of Karol’s disability, the Warsaw uprising, which explains the absence of disability overcoming in the novel. Disability in the bulk of YAL speaks to individual’s laziness and spoiled character and thus the labor of overcoming disability points, as I discuss in chapter one, to one’s improvement of morals and commitment to national values. However, Karol’s blindness already testifies to his heroism and loyalty to the city and, by extension, the country.

While Szczygiel challenges the notion of compulsory able-bodiedness, he enforces compulsory productivity, which in this case is tied to gendered understandings of masculinity. He critically discusses Karol’s way of spending his days—doing nothing—and compares him
to another blind character in the book, Logan. Karol met Logan in an institution for blind children right after the war. In opposition to Logan, Karol’s mother pulled him out from there and decided he would live at home. Logan stayed in the institution, learned Braille, and works at a factory run by blind people. The comparison between the two figures suggests that disability more than an individual limitation of a body is a social matter that signals passivity and lack of masculinity. Even if the moment of running with the band aids during the uprising testifies to Karol’s masculinity, the present does not confirm it anymore. Masculinity, in other words, is an unfinished project and requires continual confirmation and performance. However, the only way to motivate Karol to leave the apartment and start an independent life that involves work is to deprive the mother of her power.

Both the absence of the father, who did not return home after the war, and employment ensure the mother’s domination over Karol. She singlehandedly manages the household and never asks Karol for advice. Since he does not work, she is the only provider and the rhythm of her work day marks the rhythm of his days. Before she leaves for work she makes him breakfast and prepares lunch; during the break at work she calls and checks on him. He does not leave the apartment while she is not there—they go for walks together and eat dinner when she is back. Szczygiel adopts a critical tone when he writes about her and presents her motherly care as a desire to control the son: “She wanted to know what he is doing, how he is feeling, and what he is thinking. She tried to guess his mood from the tone of his voice” (6-7).

In the beginning of the novel, Karol asks if Logan, who left the institution for blind children and teenagers and looked for employment, can stay with them for a few days. The mother replies: “I cannot get used to this idea (…). When we returned to Warsaw after the uprising it

53 This is one of the very few times when literature mentions, very briefly, the state run institution for disabled children. As I discuss it in the part on disability memoirs, there are almost no literary images of state institutions for children with disabilities in socialist Poland.
was always just the two of us. It has been already five years. But if that is what you want…” (28-29). Karol foresaw mother’s unwillingness to host Logan and says: “Do not get mad at me – he asked. Logan’s living with us will not affect my feelings for you. But I will have a new companion for a while. You must have noticed that he is different from me; he is brave” (29). The mother surrenders, and Logan moves in, yet her desire to control Karol does not fade. Karol’s mother never insists on his rehabilitation and regaining sight, because able-bodiedness could “steal” her son from her. Disability, identified by Szczygiel as lack of productivity and dependency on a woman, binds Karol with his mother. Crucially, disability remains in the novel a gendered experience and refers to men relying on able-bodied women to direct their lives. Able-bodiedness, on the other hand, allows women to work and thus control men. It is only the moment of mother’s retirement, and hence the weakening of her social position, coupled with the father’s return that results in her losing domination over Karol. Consequently, as much as Jak trudno kochac (How Difficult It Is to Love) offers an alternative understanding of overcoming disability that is grounded not in physical rehabilitation or surgery, but in achieving independence and autonomy, it also tells a story of women relinquishing control. In other words, it reveals the overcoming of male weakness and passivity that equal here disability as contingent on mother losing domination over her son.

The story of Karol’s ex-wife, Hanka, confirms that a man can truly become a “man” not only by escaping mother’s domination, but, additionally, by subjecting a woman to his will.

54 Karol’s disability seems to function almost exclusively discursively. Jak trudno kochac (How Difficult It is to Love) lacks descriptions of people’s looks, which reminds of Karol’s blindness, but it is the single literary strategy in the novel which reveals blindness not only as a metaphor, but also lived experience. In other words, it is unclear whether Karol does not see anything, if he sees some light or shapes, or just “blackness.” However, Szczygiel makes an exception, an exception that is important also in the context of the remaining corpus of YAL that considers disability: Karol’s body experiences sexual desire and is desired as well. Usually, YAL writers shy away from discussing a disabled person’s sexuality and present an intimate relationship as an award for the labor of overcoming. Since Szczygiel questions compulsory able-bodiedness, intimacy and desire do not function as rewards, but parts of a disabled person’s life.
Karol meets Hanka through Logan; as it turns out Logan is involved in illegal business with her in which they sell foreign currency. She takes Karol on a day trip to a forest outside Warsaw, they have sex, and she becomes pregnant. The mother is, unsurprisingly, appalled, but Karol marries Hanka and moves in with her. They have a son, and Karol is a stay-at-home dad, while Hanka supports the household. It is clear that Hanka is a younger version of Karol’s mother: similarly, she attempts to control him, does not want him to graduate from high school and start studying at a university. Luckily, this is the moment when the father returns and helps Karol leave Hanka. Joanna Goven claims that under socialism a man could express his masculinity “only in production: the application of physical strength and skill to the building of socialism” (17), but in Jak trudno kochac (How Difficult It Is to Love) Szczygiel reclaims home as a space that grants men power and allows them to forget about their political subordination (by subordinating women). After divorcing Hanka Karol with his son move back with Karol’s mother, but she no longer has a final say in the household. Later the mother reconciles with her estranged husband who also moves in with them.

Women’s emancipation contradicts the emancipation of disabled men in Jak trudno kochac (How Difficult It Is to Love). The categories of female gender and male disability are in competition here, and both are defined through passivity. The difference is that women’s passivity is desired, but men’s passivity unwelcome. From this perspective, Karol and his mother, and Karol and his wife are competitors. The end of the novel marks the forming of new couples that participate in strengthening the gender binary and announce the return to patriarchal “normalcy.” Karol’s mother reunites with her estranged husband who regains control over the household. Karol studies law at the university and falls in love with a much younger repatriate from Ukraine. Consequently, only a relationship with a much younger and naïve woman preserves the hegemonic model of masculinity praised by Szczygiel. The heteronormative order in which the men, the father and the son, possess power in
relationships with women is restored. Karol’s blindness does not contradict his masculinity. What he needs to overcome is passivity and mother’s domination, but not blindness. Masculine disability, in other words, does not pose a threat to a socialist state; both the mother and the state—albeit for different reasons—do not expect him to rehabilitate/get an eye surgery. The role of Karol’s blindness is to emphasize his vulnerability and the status of his mother’s victim, but as a bodily condition it does not need repairing or changing. The ending of the book reconciles masculinity, power, and disability. As long as the mother does not dominate Karol and he manages to establish a relationship with a much younger woman who does not control his life his blindness functions as a bodily fact with no further social meanings. For what truly threatens the socialist system is women’s emancipation that makes men disabled—symbolically castrates them.

The restoration of the heteronormative order does not end with Karol and his father establishing new relationships. Logan, in a surprising twist, marries Karol’s ex-wife Hanka, and that is how he describes their marriage: “I ended all of her illegal businesses. (…) I found her a job at the same place where I work. (…) We go to work together, we return home together. I had to do it this way. She asked me herself to keep her on a short leash” (127). The short leash represents here a patriarchal system that the woman herself begs to re-establish. In other words, Szczygiel claims that patriarchy is good for both genders and that women need masculine control for their own sake. Additionally, able-bodiedness is not a prerequisite for a man’s ability to dominate a woman. Logan’s blindness, similarly to Karol’s, is independent from his masculinity and does not incapacitate him. What is then innovative in this highly misogynist novel is the separation of disability from the discourse of capacities. Capacity is gendered here, but not connected with the dis/ability status. It is Hanka who in the beginning stops Karol from studying at the university and then the professors who make it harder for him to continue the studies, but Szczygiel never suggests that it is blindness that makes him
unfit to study law. The reasons are purely social: the woman’s will to control a man and social prejudices. That is why, disability does not undermine Karol’s and Logan’s masculinity and masculinity itself is the only thing that makes a man capable of controlling a woman. Needless to say, Szczygiel is invested in the essentialized understanding of gender.

There is no direct evidence in the novel, but I would risk stating that de-stalinization policies introduced after 1956 at a workplace influenced forging new relationships at home and rearranging male-female relations that find illustration in Szczygiel’s book. The emphasis Szczygiel puts on women’s employment, and a correlation between mother’s retirement and her loss of power at home suggests that women’s financial independence threatens the patriarchal order shaken by Stalinist ideas. Therefore, the book, published in 1976, remains an open—and rare among YAL in Poland—critique of the Stalinist project of women’s emancipation. What is interesting about it is the vastly different image of a Polish mother it presents—a woman who wants her son to remain being disabled and passive, identification of disability with passivity and, at the same time, challenging the notion of compulsory able-bodiedness.

Zofia Chadzynska’s novel Wstega Pawilonu published in 1978, two years after Jak trudno kochac (How Difficult It Is to Love), continues Szczygiel’s thinking of a mother’s role in making a child’s disability. The book tells the story of a high school student, fifteen-year-old Anna. In the first few pages, Anna reveals that “there is nothing my mother likes about me, she never approves of anything I do; one cannot live like that” (29), and the conflict with the mother constitutes the narrative crux of the text. Anna has a younger sister that the mother adores. The sisters care for each other, but Anna is jealous of mother’s tender feelings towards the younger daughter and often says that the mother’s differential treatment is unfair. Chadzynska spends a lot of time describing the tensions and hurt feelings between Anna and her mother and it is clear that as an author she is on Anna’s side. She oftentimes uses a critical
tone and vocabulary when describing the mother: “friends rarely call Anna. The way her mother picks up the phone discourages them from calling” (41) or “the situation at home was better when the mother was not there. They [Anna and her father] could not be themselves around her. The father was scared and busy, felt even more insecure than Anna” (70-71). The father seems to love Anna, but he has no say in family matters and is afraid of his wife. The mother works outside the home, and she also manages the family affairs; the father works at home—renovates old paintings—but is dominated by his wife and seems almost absent. The fact that he lives and works in a secluded part of the apartment emphasizes his isolation and lack of importance within the family.

Anna stutters and thinks of it as disability; what is more important is that her stuttering is a result of her mother’s attempts to teach Anna to write with her right hand. Anna used to write with her left hand, but her mother found this unacceptable and forced her to use her right hand. Ultimately, Anna learned to do it, but started stuttering as a response to the mother’s expectations: it turned out to be a “remedy that harms” (Kim 14). Chadzynska writes: “the mother made her [created Anna’s stuttering] this way. What was wrong with the fact that she was born left-handed? But the mother said ‘She will not write with a left hand. The whole world writes with their right hand, so she has to learn doing this too. I do not want other people to laugh at her’” (42). The mother assumes that if Anna does not learn to write with her right hand she will be excluded and laughed at and thus the only way to avoid this is to “rehabilitate” her instead of i.e., trying to change the social perception of “lefties.” In other words, the mother believes that “normative functioning is the precondition of social inclusion” (Kim 2). Unlike writing with a left hand, stuttering does not bother Anna’s mother and she does not think of helping her daughter “unlearn” doing this. However, Chadzynska

55 In Polish original the mother does not say “she will not write with her left hand,” but uses a word “mańkut” that has no English equivalent and which is an offensive term used to describe people writing with a left hand.
implies that Anna’s stuttering signals the deeper trauma that she experienced at home. The mother in Wstega Pawilonu not only maintains her daughter’s disability, but is also a source of it. Consequently, the novel presents the overcoming of disability and ceasing to stutter as both synonymous with and contingent on gaining independence. Healing after the trauma is possible only when Anna finds a shelter and people outside the family home willing to help her.

Home in Chadzynska’s novel, in contrast to many other YA novels, is a place of the production and sustenance of disability. It is not a place of forming a socialist citizen, but a space of violence that the mother inflicts upon both her daughter and the symbolically castrated husband who is unable to defend his daughter. The shaping of a citizen takes place in alternative spaces, most notably, doctors’ offices where Anna, when not supervised by her mother, realizes the urgency to rehabilitate. The person who helps Anna is a single and childless sixty-year-old doctor. Chadzynska depicts her as a bit funny and clumsy, but the tone she adopts when she describes her differs from the one she employs when discussing Anna’s mother. Anna met the childless doctor years ago while on vacation with her mother and sister; the father did not join them, which recalls his exclusion from the family. The doctor becomes Anna’s friend, and they often meet or talk on the phone. It is she Anna talks to when she wants to see a speech pathologist, and the doctor finds one for her. The figure of the doctor who, obviously, functions as a good mother enables Chadzynska to criticize a particular kind of mother—one busy with her career, privileges one daughter over another, subjecting her husband to her will—without making a larger critical claim on the “mother” and motherhood. What becomes the focal point of the critique is women’s emancipation identified here with having a career at a work place outside the home and submitting family to her will. In other words, a mother represented in this case by the doctor is still essential to a child’s overcoming disability. Chadzynska does not offer alternative methods of overcoming,
and she does not challenge the need to overcome in the first place. However, she criticizes a certain model of womanhood and motherhood.

The identification of a single doctor with a good mother supports the notion according to which a woman in order to be happy needs to be a mother, even if an adoptive one. Her text, similar to Irena Krzywicka’s *Wichura i trzciny* (*The Whirlwind and Canes*), where a single forty-year-old Sabina becomes an adoptive mother to her niece and undergoes a laudable moral transformation triggered by the adoption, cannot imagine a woman who does not perform the role of mother, even if an adoptive one and even if later in life. A woman, ultimately, always becomes a mother, and a state of childlessness is only a temporary one. The symbolic and literal adoption in both texts serves as a way of rehabilitating two childless women, for the state of childlessness disables them. Adoption of two outcast teenagers demonstrates them and “disproves the assumption that they are inherently inferior” (Kim 53). As a result, *Wstega Pawilonu* is a conservative text that reminds women of their “proper” commitments and devotions and teaches them how to be good mothers by contrasting two mother figures. From this perspective, a child’s disability, Anna’s stuttering, is an effect of bad mothering.

The aim of Anna’s mother’s efforts to teach Anna to write with her right hand indicates the mother’s desire to return the daughter to the norm. This return, though, is predicated upon violence—the attempt to teach Anna to write “properly” is violent and ends with replacing one “deviancy” with a different one. Often overcoming disability, as I explain in chapter one, can be understood as a process of homogenization, which produces and relies on intimacy and interdependence between people. Yet, as the texts analyzed here show, the intimate relations forged around disability are frequently enmeshed in violence. The very acts of making a homogenous population, whether that refers to overcoming disability or purging Poland of people representing different ethnicities is a process that relies on force and domination; they
are simply violent. Anna’s mother forcing her to write with her right hand serves as an example of an intimate familial relation that aims to return one to the state of sameness and is contingent on violence. That is why in Chadzynska’s novel violence reveals itself to be an imminent element of a relation between a stuttering daughter and her mother.

Anna’s biological mother believes that teaching her daughter to write with her right hand is an act of love. Rehabilitation, in other words, is a sign of love that according to her contradicts violence; however, the book presents the process and its effects (stuttering and Anna’s trauma) as violent. For teaching Anna to write with her right hand constitutes an example of “curative violence” (Kim 13). Eunjung Kim writes that cure “is always a multifaceted negotiation, often enabling and disabling at the same time” (7), and Chadzynska’s text clearly illustrates this paradoxical operation of cure which both erases and creates new disabilities. Violence, in other words, seems to be indispensable to “curing” a disabled subject. The mother thinks that it is keeping the status quo—a child’s disability—that assumes violence. In effect, disability justifies and even requires the use of violence. It is an example of authorized violence. At the same time the book does not dispute the need for a cure; it just advocates for different methods. When Anna decides to stop stuttering and discusses it with her “adoptive mother” she sends Anna to doctors and therapists who apply “modern” and “scientific” methods of overcoming disability, which are undeniably presented as good and non-harmful. Disability then needs to be overcome, the only dilemma refers to “how,” not “why.”

A relationship that motivates Anna to overcome stuttering, and one that is not grounded in violence, is her bonding with a disabled boy she meets coincidentally at a hospital where she volunteers. The female single doctor that symbolically adopts her finds her a speech pathologist and supports Anna in her endeavors, but it is falling in love with a teenage boy who cannot walk that drives Anna to start rehabilitation and ultimately enforces the
connection between cure and heterosexuality. Anna’s story parallels the story of Melvin (Jack Nicholson), a protagonist of the American movie *As Good As It Gets* analyzed by Robert McRuer in *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*, whose “able-bodied status is achieved in direct proportion to his increasing awareness of, and need for, (heterosexual) romance” (24). In other words, Melvin is interested in overcoming his OCD only when he meets an able-bodied waitress (Helen Hunt) with whom he falls in love. Anna similarly undergoes a transformation upon meeting a cheerful yet disabled Janek, whose affection helps Anna overcome the trauma inflicted upon her by her mother. In this case, it is not the home, but the hospital and the heteronormative relationship formed within it that becomes the site of Anna’s able-bodied epiphany. As a result, *Wstęga Pawilonu*, like the U.S. film *As Good As It Gets*, participates in enforcing the cultural norm of compulsory able-bodiedness that is contingent on compulsory heterosexuality.

*Jak trudno kochac* (*How Difficult It Is to Love*) and *Wstęga Pawilonu*, YA novels published in the second half of 1970s, remind readers that the Stalinist project of women’s emancipation through the work place resonated in Polish YA literature at least twenty years after its completion and failure. Moreover, both novels oppose the mother’s suffocating or insufficient love with a heterosexual romance that becomes a tool of healing the trauma of motherly violence. A romance, with the right person, can heal and help overcome disability, while a mother only serves to perpetuate and in some cases complicate disability. Motherly love is synonymous with violence that takes up different forms: domination in *Jak trudno kochac* (*How Difficult It Is to Love*) or submission to the painful process of rehabilitation that produces more disability and trauma in *Wstęga Pawilonu*. Equally important, the two books enable a reconceptualization of the notion of intimacy, which in the case of the relationship between mother and disabled child cannot be separated from violence. Consequently, disability understood as a weakness and lack of independence or stuttering is a product of
intimacy and dependency on the mother and only by disengaging with her can Anna and Karol overcome disability. The critical tone that accompanies the descriptions of the two mothers reminds readers that by harming the children—sustaining their disabilities—they harm the nation. These two novels from the 1970s call for the emancipation from the familial context of their disabled protagonists. The state emancipated the women in the early 1950s, but they end up working in its disadvantage by producing or sustaining their children’s disabilities. As a result, women’s labor, whether inside the home or outside the home becomes suspect and ultimately disabling.

**Conclusion**

Reading together the two disability memoirs, *Syn! Będzie szczesliwa* (*Son! She will be happy!*!) and *Los w rekach twoich* (*Your Destiny is in Your Hands*), and YA novels, *Jak trudno kochac* (*How Difficult It Is to Love*) and *Wstega Pawilonu*, unmasks the crucial role of mothers in the processes of both overcoming and sustaining their children’s disabilities, which points to the relational and domestic nature of disability. Both overcoming and maintaining disability is contingent on the relationship with a mother, and even if the mother works to the detriment of her child, as these two YA novels argue, it is only through other relationships—with a single female doctor and a boy in *Wstega Pawilonu* and a father and a male friend in *Jak trudno kochac* (*How Difficult It Is to Love*) that the teenage protagonists can rehabilitate.

Crucially, the all four texts demonstrate that a disabled child cannot escape mother’s violence. Therefore, home, a private space, is revealed here as a site of loving and “curative violence” (Kim 13). The public institutions such as hospitals, in particular in *Wstega Pawilonu*, contradict home and offer refuge to a disabled subject. The socialist discourse is the discourse of modernity and progress and the writings I analyze in this chapter prove that
socialist modernity is reconcilable with violence and to a certain extent rests on privatized violence. For the analysis of the mother figure allows to recognize her as the main repository of violence directed towards her child and thus shows that power and domination in the Polish socialist state did not circulate in solely one direction, but was, in fact, multidirectional. Thinking of violence in the mother-disabled child relationship discloses violence that has been already central to the relationship of the Polish Mother and her son who is heading off to war.

The literary mother-child relationship, at least since the 19th century and the birth of the Polish Mother myth, is structured by the violence perpetrated in the name of the nation and, in the texts I read in this chapter, love. The socialist Polish Mother does not send her child to a war, but is expected to work with the state on creating an able-bodied population and thereby ensure its future. Similarly, the future of the nation organized the relationship of the 19th century Polish Mother with her son. Back then the mother sacrificed her child’s life, in the socialist period she attempts to make her/him live as an able-bodied citizen. Ultimately, securing the nation’s future in both cases requires violence directed towards children, even though the mother herself is a victim, too. What enables this violence is its invisibility, for as Jasbir K. Puar reminds—albeit in a different context—“[v]iolence (…) is often most easily perpetrated in the spaces and places where its possibility is unequivocally denounced” (24). What obfuscates the violent nature of a relationship between a mother and her disabled child in the post-war period is Polish history and “national myth of innocent suffering” (Ziarek 313). The 19th century partitions, the myth of the suffering and sacrificial Polish Mother, the destruction of the country during World War II, but also the understanding of rehabilitation as a sign of love, and, finally, the larger insignificance of disability proven by the publication of texts that openly criticized the state make violence directed towards a disabled child indiscernible. It is violence that is made invisible in the name of love.
CHAPTER 3

Bodies in Motion: Disability, Work, and Masculinity

Socialist Poland ensured that everyone had a right to work as proclaimed in the Constitution: “Citizens of the Polish People’s Republic shall have the right to work: that is, the right to employment paid in accordance with the quantity and quality of work done” (36). Article 19 of the 1952 Polish Constitution states that “work shall be the right, the duty, and a matter of honor for every citizen (…)” (22). Yet there were exceptions. Some citizens were in fact allowed (or some might say forced) not to work. Legal definitions of disability reveal how Polish law suspended itself in certain situations. Disability in socialist Poland was understood as the “partial or complete inability to perform labor due to the permanent or temporary malfunctioning of the organism” (Zych-Chabelska 12). Polish socialist law divided disabled people into three groups: 1. those who cannot perform any labor and require assistance, or those who can perform some labor but in a specially designed workplace, 2. those who cannot perform any labor, 3. those who can perform either the labor they performed before acquiring a disability or a different one that requires fewer qualifications and thus comes with lower remuneration (Zych-Chabelska 13).56 The definition of disability and the division of disabled people into three groups indicate that health and one’s dis/ability status is integrated into the service of the state and thus becomes both a political and administrative matter.

56The USSR and Soviet Ukraine adopted similar definitions (Phillips 51). In Disability and Mobile Citizenship in Postsocialist Ukraine Phillips discusses three groups into which disabled people were divided in the USSR. All three refer to one’s capacity to work: “Group I includes those considered unable to work and deemed to require constant nursing care, group II includes those not perceived to require constant nursing care who have lost some capability to work but may work in special conditions, group III includes those considered partially disabled who have lost some work capacity but may engage in part-time or casual work” (51).
If the compulsion is to work, then those who do not work constitute an exception to the norm. Phrased another way, disability presents the state with a dilemma. The three categories of disability illuminate the mode in which the socialist state attempts to include the exception into the norm. Disability is included in the norm only as an exception to it. Labor determines one’s relevance to and belonging within a national community. It constitutes the first and foremost duty of a socialist citizen, especially in the first decades of state socialism. Writing about Soviet Ukraine, Sarah Phillips notes that, “the citizen’s social utility was measured in terms of potential role in production, and level of disability was assessed according to a scale of labor potential. (...) the Soviet state employed a functional model of disability, based on a person’s perceived “usefulness for society”(50). Soviet understanding of disability did not differ much from the Polish one.

In this chapter, I analyze four texts—Biale niebo (White Heaven), Jak trudno kochac (How Difficult It Is to Love), Spotkania (The Meetings), and Pamietniki inwalidow wojennych (The War Invalids Memoirs)—that take up the questions of productivity, work, and identity and their interconnections with disability and masculinity in the late 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. While I focus on work and its relation with disability I pay attention to the category of “productivity” as well, because it enables me to analyze a broader spectrum of activities and practices that do not fit neatly the understanding of “work,” and yet they show disabled subjects as active participants in the socialist regime of productivity.

I argue that attending to the questions of productivity and work in relation to disability demonstrates the paradoxes and transformations of state socialism in Poland. First, it shows

57 In her essay Programs for the Disabled in the USSR, Madison writes that the Soviet administrators did not know what to do with people claiming to be disabled but who could not prove it: “what is to be done with patients who insist that they are disabled, yet who lack certification that their injury was work incurred or that they were wounded at the front?” (Madison 173).
58 See: Giorgio Agamben, Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life.
that while citizens were made to work, disabled subjects were oftentimes discouraged from work constituting an exception to the norm and revealing a crack within the state ideology of labor. Second, it manifests a changing meaning of work under late socialism: from the duty inscribed into the Constitution to the means of self-realization and self-conceptualization that become divorced from the ideology of labor. In other words, the desire to achieve financial independence and individual success replace the collective pursuit of shared goals in late socialist literature. Additionally, the analysis of literary images of productivity and disability allows me to show that the relationship between work and disability under state socialism is gendered and equivocal and thus escapes monolithic conceptualizations as well as extends beyond discussions—however complex—of citizenship.

Whereas American scholars have discussed the contradictions of disability, work, and citizenship, and therefore the exclusion of disabled subjects from society based on their assumed anti-productivity, I argue the opposite: Polish YA novels and disability memoirs link disability and work and show how disabled subjects conceptualize themselves as workers. In other words, while I recognize the apparent contradiction that the Constitution and legal definition of disability both exclude disabled people from the possibility of work (categories 1 and 2 of disability), and at the same time expect them to work (“work is a right, duty, and a matter of honor for every citizen (…)”), I explore how Polish literature, in contrast to legal documents, makes the coupling of productivity and disability possible. What is more, I claim that disability enforces productivity regime in the late 1960s, 1970s and 1980s Polish YAL and disability memoirs. This contradiction is reconciled in the 1967 disability memoir through rehabilitation, which becomes the accepted form of work for disabled people, and in YAL published in the 1970s and 1980s through the commitment to the notions of financial

59 See: Civil Disabilities: Citizenship, Membership, and Belonging, edited by Nancy J. Hirschmann and Beth Linker; Sarah F. Rose, No Right to Be Idle: The Invention of Disability, 1840s-1930s.
independence and self-sufficiency. In other words, I demonstrate how the authors of literature published in the 1970s and 1980s, Jerzy Szczygiel, Klementyna Solonowicz-Olbrychska, and the war veterans who wrote their war memoirs divorce the productivity regime from the duty to rehabilitate, which I call “rehabilitative regime.” Moreover, the works by Szczygiel, Solonowicz-Olbrychska and the war veterans’ memoirs reveal the healing and normalizing power of work. Work becomes here a “cure [that] is imagined beyond the medical realm” (Kim 10). Work, in other words, enables a self-transformation.

In Eugenia Siemaszkiewicz’s Biale niebo (White Heaven), a disability memoir published in 1967 that tells a story of young woman who after a dangerous accident spends few years rehabilitating at an institution for disabled people, rehabilitation itself operates as a form of labor that disabled people are required to perform. The literary images of rehabilitation show the violence of rehabilitation as work under state socialism in Poland, as there is no corresponding right not to work. This way, state socialism ensures that all its citizens are productive. Furthermore, forcing disabled people to rehabilitate, and thereby understanding rehabilitation as work, enables the state to include disabled subjects into the national community.

The two young adult novels, Jak trudno kochac (How Difficult It Is to Love) and Spotkania (The Meetings) published in 1976 and 1986 respectively, explore the relationship between identity, the desire to be productive, and disability. Jak trudno kochac (How Difficult It Is to Love) by Jerzy Szczygieł tells a story of a young blind man who after living many years “unproductively” with his mother, decides to study and work. Klementyna Solonowicz-Olbrychska’s novel Spotkania (The Meetings) also focuses on a blind male teenager who leaves his hometown to live with other blind students at a residential school where he plans a future profession. The two works are concerned with the processes of becoming disabled in contrast to the bulk of YAL that narrates the transformation of disabled characters into able-
bodied characters. Crucially, it is productivity, the promise of future work and feeling “useful” that participates in the formation of disability identity. Since work enables the emergence of disability identity, disability is not cast as an incapacity to work, and work is not understood as a contradiction to disability. Conversely, work is what renders disability as identity possible and, ultimately, makes them happy.

Self-identification as disabled subjects complicates the protagonists’ relationship to the national community. While the 1960s literature, in particular Spotkanie nad morzem (A Meeting by the Sea) by Jadwiga Korczakowska, did not allow for the articulation of disability as identity and demanded that a disabled subject identifies herself as primarily Polish, the 1970s and 1980s YAL starts to ask questions about the possibilities of belonging to both disabled and national community. Jerzy Szczygiel’s blind protagonists, Karol and Logan, seem to understand themselves as both blind and Polish; however, the tension between the two—represented by the dilemma whether to work in the workshop run by blind men or work in a place that employs both disabled and non-disabled people—is visible in the novel. Klementyna Solonowicz-Olbrychska’s main protagonist, Pawel, does not seem to share Karol’s and Logan’s dilemma and distances himself from the national community. His first allegiance is to other blind people and he makes a clear division between “them” and “us.” At the same time, the process of affirmation of his unique blind identity reminds of the assertion of deaf Soviet identity, which was similarly “tempered by the desire to confirm that identity to be fundamentally socialist in its qualities” (Shaw 124): shaped by the socialist values of productivity and collectivism. Ultimately, the erasure or reconciliation of the tension between belonging to both communities proves impossible. In both novels, the disabled protagonists are male, and thus disability as identity enabled by work is intimately tied with manhood and, consequently, the question about disabled subject’s position towards Polish citizenship is limited to male characters. The novels show how the workplace becomes a site of exercising
masculinity, whereas femininity is exercised at home revealing, once again, the failure of the Stalinist project to emancipate women in a workplace.

While young adult novels, *Jak trudno kochac* (*How Difficult It Is to Love*) and *Spotkania* (*The Meetings*) narrate stories of becoming disabled and accepting disability as identity through work, World War II veterans’ memoirs, *Pamietniki inwalidow wojennych* (*The War Invalids Memoirs*), although seemingly telling a similar story, do not present disability as identity. Most of the veterans whose memoirs I analyze participated in the labor force after the war, but they do not discuss it. In a country that rapidly attempts to rebuild itself after the war, which is obsessed with Stakhanovites and promotes the images of working class people, the veterans who made the ultimate sacrifice of their bodies to the nation do not have to discuss work. At the same time, by focusing on the warfare their narratives serve a public function: exhortation to future sacrifices for the nation. However, one of the memoirs I focus on in particular describes the difficulties finding employment as a disabled veteran in a post-war Poland and thus exemplifies the paradox I discussed above: the expectation that disabled people work and the attempt to exclude them from the world of work. Additionally, Bronislaw Kruczko’s narrative points to the emergence of a new man—disabled subject that yearns to be productive thus flashing out the appeal of the socialist narrative of work, which makes his narrative similar to YAL by Jerzy Szczygiel and Klementyna Solonowicz-Olbrychska.

**Rehabilitation as Work**

Eugenia Siemaszkiewicz’s 1967 memoir *Biale niebo* (*White Heaven*) connects the understanding of work and rehabilitation (unlike other works I analyze in this chapter). Here rehabilitative regime accompanies productivity regime and only later texts—from the 1970s onwards—illustrate the gradual separation of the two. Siemaszkiewicz’s book encourages
thinking of rehabilitation as both work and the measurement of normality. \(^{60}\) In other words, rehabilitative practices and physical exercises that this disability memoir depicts constitute a form of work for disabled subjects. Thinking of the compulsory practice of rehabilitation as work confirms that ultimately everyone works in socialist Poland. While the socialist state ensures that everyone has a right to work (it is both an obligation and a measure of dignity), but refuses to grant a right \(\textit{not}\) to work, a similar statement can be made about rehabilitation: the Constitution guarantees a right to rehabilitate, \(^{61}\) but not a right \(\textit{not}\) to rehabilitate. An analysis of the Polish Constitution shows that rehabilitation is not only a right, but a civic duty for a disabled person. \(^{62}\) The state, on the other hand, guarantees access to health care and rehabilitation. Article 60 of 1952 Polish Constitution reads: “The citizens of the Polish People’s Republic have a right to health care and state help when sick or unable to work.” In other words, the state offers a non-negotiable contract: it promises access to health care and rehabilitation (as discussed in the article 60 c) in exchange for efforts to rehabilitate.

\textit{Biale niebo} (White Heaven) portrays the institution for people with disabilities as a moral community of labor. Here, everyone works and calls rehabilitation “work:” “I am a bit late today for the rehabilitation exercises. A corpulent and motherly Mrs. Aldona is a bit annoyed, but soon happily brings me weights she attaches to my legs. I can lift ten pounds

\[^{60}\text{In her book Deaf in the USSR Claire L. Shaw writes about a normalizing function of work for disabled subjects too: “Labor therefore represented the opportunity not just of emancipation, but of self-transformation. In an echo of the utopian rhetoric of the time, deaf people were considered able to overcome their disability, in effect to become “normal” by learning labor skills” (36).}\]

\[^{61}\text{Article 70 of the 1952 Constitution says: “1. Citizens of the Polish People’s Republic shall have the right to health protection and to aid in the event of sickness or disability to work. 2. This right shall be put into effect on an increasing scale through – (1) the development of social insurance to cover sickness, old age and disability to work, and of various forms of social assistance; (2) the development of State-organized protection of health and the raising of health standards of the population, free medical service for all working people and their families, a steady improvement of safety conditions, protection and hygiene of work, extensive prevention and treatment of diseases, and care for the disabled; (3) the development of hospitals, sanatoria, out-patient clinics, medical aid centers, and sanitation facilities” (37).}\]

\[^{62}\text{The sociological study Sytuacja ludzi niepełnosprawnych i stan rehabilitacji w PRL (The Situation of Disabled People and the Quality of Rehabilitation in Polish People’s Republic), published by the Polish Academy of Sciences in 1984, includes a short analysis of the Polish Constitution, which shows that rehabilitation was not only a right of a disabled Polish citizen, but also an obligation (82).}\]
with my left leg, and twelve with the right one. It is a result of a few months of work” (33). This short quote illustrates that disabled people themselves call rehabilitation “work.”

Siemaszkiewicz recalls a brief conversation with a doctor who comments on her “rehabilitation progress”: “I hope the progress will continue—says doctor Fitmark—you have great results” and the author comments: “I work a few hours per day in order to achieve these results” (33). Further, Siemaszkiewicz offers a very detailed description of all the exercises and practices she performs every day. Ostensibly, both doctors and patients agree that rehabilitation constitutes work. There are three interconnected reasons as to why they conceptualize rehabilitation as work. First, this almost unanimous agreement to think of rehabilitation as work might be a result of lack of other ways of imagining and discussing rehabilitation. Second, it might also point to the fact that the main goal of rehabilitation is to bring one back to work. Third, work might be in the socialist state an all encompassing value.

It seems plausible that the socialist emphasis on work and the importance of work in the state propaganda, official speeches, and national celebrations informs the way Siemaszkiewicz and others around her understand rehabilitation. Katherine Lebow writes: “Stalinism’s productivist rhetoric and mobilizing practices helped to shape new ways of talking, thinking, and acting about work and citizenship by Poland’s new working class as it came into being after World War II” (Unfinished Utopia 76).

But I claim that the impact of Stalinist and socialist rhetoric of labor and compulsory productivity does not culminate in how work and citizenship are conceptualized—it extends beyond these two realms. Biale niebo (White Heaven) exemplifies the ways in which the rhetoric of labor shapes the understanding of rehabilitation. The official discourse on disability reflected in the memoir: the pressure to rehabilitate, the mobilizing language used to
encourage people with disabilities to overcome disability,\textsuperscript{63} and the emphasis on productivity of disabled people stems, at least partially, from the official discourse on labor. Thus, the rhetoric of labor becomes one of the main socialist paradigms that participates in determining the meaning of other social practices. At the same time, thinking of rehabilitation as labor allows me to broaden the understanding of work. Most importantly, it frees it from the associations with wage-labor; however, rehabilitation promises a wage-labor for successfully transformed disabled subjects. In other words, rehabilitation cannot escape the specter of work: one works by taking part in the rehabilitative regime, and in hope of being able to join the system of productive and financially remunerated labor.

The prevalent use of the word “work” in relation to rehabilitation is the most overt example of the relation between the two. If rehabilitation is work, then is the sanatorium or hospital a workplace for disabled subjects? Depending on the decade and a particular place, worksites were usually run by the state and served as means of controlling, disciplining, and mobilizing the population. But a hospital or sanatorium did not operate as sites of propaganda dissemination in the same way as a factory—disability memoirs, including Siemaszkiewicz’s, present a vastly different image of an institution for disabled people. The authors do not mention Party meetings or propaganda infiltration when they describe their time at various institutions. Nor are there comments about the celebration of national holidays. The official discourse on labor is important to the understanding of rehabilitation, but disabled people were not the primary targets of Party mobilization.\textsuperscript{64}

Even though Eugenia Siemaszkiewicz focuses predominantly on the connection of work and rehabilitation and the overlap between the two, her text introduces a morally coded

\textsuperscript{63}I discuss this in detail in chapter 1.
\textsuperscript{64}In Jak trudno kochac (\textit{How Difficult It Is to Love}) Jerzy Szczyciel does not make any comments about the Party’s presence in the brush workshop run by blind people, which would serve as another example that the Party was not primarily interested in targeting disabled population.
understanding of productivity as well that is already present in the 1952 Constitution. The Party is absent in the institution she describes, but patients themselves struggle against social vices. One of them is “laziness.” Siemaszkiewicz writes: “A fifty-something year old, energetic, kind scientist lives on the second floor. He wears a cast after a serious accident, but every day, very regularly, he takes walks in the hospital park. He says that he fights “hospital laziness” and eagerly encourages others to follow him” (69). Taking walks—mobility—contradicts laziness. Consequently, immobility suggests laziness and “doing nothing,” whereas movement becomes associated with productivity. In other words, movement and productivity heal and, most importantly, speak to one’s morals. While Polish hospitals offer medical equipment and technological devices, organizing and controlling body movements constitutes one of the main methods of rehabilitation.

The images of working people—Stakhanovites, women on tractors—during the Stalinist period remain one of the most iconic representations of life under state socialism in Eastern Europe. Katarzyna Witwicka’s 1974 young adult short story Buraki na swiateczna cwikle (Beetroots for the Easter Salad) about a disabled teenager includes a drawing showing supposedly disabled teenagers during rehabilitation. A black-and-white drawing presents four figures: a person who is in charge of the rehabilitation, and three young people standing in front of him exercising. Everyone looks fit and healthy in the picture; only the plot betrays the exercising figures as in need of rehabilitation. They stand barefoot on the floor wearing gymnastics outfits. The body of the person who is in charge of the process brings to mind sculptures from the era of socialist realism: it is strong and fit with visibly emphasized muscles. I describe the image because it reminds that state socialism as mandated in the 1952 Constitution is interested in organizing and controlling the movement of its citizens’ able and disabled bodies. Work functions as one tool of doing it, rehabilitation as another one. At the
same time, not moving, not working and not rehabilitating is coded as morally suspect. The fact that the person who is in charge of the rehabilitation process on the drawing from *Buraki na swiateczna cwikle (Beetroots for the Easter Salad)* is included on the picture indicates that the movement remains orchestrated and under control.

In her examination of Romanian state socialism, *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next*, Katherine Verdery argues that “the Romanian Party leadership gradually expropriated Romanians of much of their control over time” (40). She adds that “the Romanian state seized time” (40) from its citizens and explains that “there are a number of means through which time can be seized—rituals, calendars, decrees (such as curfews), workday, schedules” (40). My focus on work and rehabilitation in Polish disability memoirs and YAL written under socialism shows that as much as the seizure of citizens’ time the state is interested in orchestrating their movement. The example that combines the desire to control time, bodies and movement under Eastern European socialisms is “the immobilization of bodies in food lines” (Verdery 46). But the literary works I analyze here do not present images of standing in the queues or other moments of stillness; on the contrary, they emphasize movement and the overcoming of immobility, for disability becomes associated with not moving and thus not being productive. The images of children who had polio and use wheelchairs, teenagers who had accidents and cannot walk, Karol from *Jak trudno kochac (How Difficult It Is to Love)* who is blind and spends his days laying on the couch—these are all images of immobility that remain morally charged and are due to change. The stories of disability overcoming and rehabilitation are stories of mobilizing bodies, of making them move anew for the sake of the nation.

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65 The propaganda images did not offer ample representations of people performing intellectual labor.
66 Work exemplifies the most noble and valuable form of movement. The state encourages some forms of movement, such as work, rehabilitation, sport, parades on the days of national holidays, translocation to the
Movement both as work and rehabilitation is carefully planned and supervised. Eugenia Siemaszkiewicz’s memoir, *Biale niebo* (*White Heaven*), offers many descriptions of people exercising: “next to me Brygidka exercises: she is serious and meticulous. She has been fighting for the strength and fitness of her legs and hands for twenty years now” (35). Rehabilitation consists of repetitive movements, which are supposed to fill one’s time—one’s life in this case. The doctor tells the author that, “even during the leisure time you should exercise. You need to work for your results all the time” (204). This short comment corresponds with Verdery’s recognition of seizing time under socialism. Rehabilitation is a mode of taking one’s time away and thus becomes both a way of controlling time and movement. Movement as rehabilitation is a duty, as Siemaszkiewicz remarks: “for half a year now, since my cast has been removed, it has been my duty that I cannot fail to fulfill, to use all these modern devices that will allow me to walk without the crutches” (33). Similarly to work then rehabilitation is a duty and Siemaszkiewicz compares rehabilitating to working: “It is sufficient to look at those tense and vigilant faces, to notice how they focus, sometimes calmly, sometimes ecstatically, to understand that their hard work equals the work of a lumberjack and a porter” (34-35). To be able-bodied is to be subordinate within the system of productive labor under state socialism, but to be disabled is to express desire to participate in it.

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Recovered Territories, migration to the cities, and prohibits other kinds, such as travelling or moving abroad, especially in the earlier decades of socialism, or protesting, even though this kind of movement was harder to stop by the 1980s. Furthermore, the alleged abolishment of social classes and the establishment of one working class arrests the possibility of mobility between social classes and, symbolically, immobilizes people by not allowing them to change their status.
Disability as Identity

Jerzy Szczygiel’s 1976 YA novel Jak trudno kochac (How Difficult It Is to Love) marks a big shift in the representation of disability, productivity, and socialism in Polish literature. While Biale niebo (White Heaven) identifies rehabilitation as work, Jak trudno kochac (How Difficult It Is to Love) published nine years after Siemaszkiewicz’s memoir, argues that a disabled man does not need to rehabilitate in order to work and thus the book does not include a single image of rehabilitation or eye surgery (for the disability the novel features is blindness). The fusion of rehabilitative and productive regimes present in Biale niebo (White Heaven) Szczygiel replaces with productive regime alone. Disability does not contradict one’s willingness and capacity to work; conversely, the two complement each other in Szczygiel’s text. The novel praises resourcefulness, reliance on one’s skills instead of state’s benefits, drive to study, and financial independence. For Szczygiel’s protagonist work promises emancipation from dependence on his family, in particular the mother, but also opens up avenues for identification with both blind community and national community. The novel attempts to reconcile the tension between being a disabled subject and belonging to the national community. However, Szczygiel does not find an easy answer to the double allegiance and instead portrays his protagonists distancing themselves from, negotiating, and, ultimately, engaging with the national community.

Szczygiel’s protagonists work for a while in a workshop for blind men they organized themselves—it was not a state’s run workplace. In other words, Szczygiel describes and applauds a form of a collective initiative that was not inaugurated by the state. Nevertheless, the workshop remains a patriarchal organization, for the only images of working people are the images of disabled men. Everyone who works in the brush factory started by disabled people is male. The novel discourages women from taking up jobs by depicting female
working protagonists as corrupted and spoiled. Productivity then is gendered here and tied with masculinity.

Karol, the main protagonist of the novel, is a blind adult who lives with his mother. He does not work, and she provides for him. Her lack of interest in the possibility of him regaining sight stems from her fear of losing control over Karol. In other words, his disability enables her to dominate him, while able-bodiedness would allow him to emancipate himself. Eventually, through the encouragement of his male friend and father, Karol “overcomes” disability by achieving independence and escaping his mother’s control. Disability overcoming becomes synonymous here with independence, which brings him happiness. Although he does not regain his sight, he does regain his autonomy. Disability in the novel is a metaphor of passivity, lack of self-reliance and lack of emancipation. Only work brings liberation from the mother and wife’s control. This way, the writer challenges compulsory able-bodiedness, but enforces productivity. At the same time, the novel shows that there are not enough jobs for disabled people; thus, Szczygiel’s approach towards the state and its labor politics remains ambiguous.

*Jak trudno kochac* (How Difficult It Is to Love) argues that disability does not oppose productivity; on the contrary, disabled men can become emblems of productivity. Logan, Karol’s blind friend, represents an ideal disabled worker. In the beginning, he is engaged in illegal businesses, which Szczygiel condemns; however, the author also makes a point to convey that the main reason Logan was interested in selling illegally foreign currency is lack of opportunities of other means of support for disabled citizens. Logan says: “for me this business was not an entertainment. I saved more than seventy thousands zloty. I would never receive that much money from the institutions that care for disabled people. And I looked for other jobs” (50-51). Ultimately, Logan quits selling foreign currency and begins organizing a brush workshop for blind men. This is how he describes it: “we have lots of requests for
brushes. We sell them wholesale. The blind work from dawn to night, several hours per day.

We feel so good in each other’s company that people want to spend nights there and keep working” (84). The blind male worker is a perfect worker: he does not want to stop working, and he has to be forced to go home to sleep. While Logan praises their productivity and the close bonds between blind men, and depicts the workshop as a space of homosociality, he ultimately criticizes the state for failing to support disabled men in their quest to work. By not accommodating their desire to work, the state seems to be undermining their masculinity, for masculinity is contingent on productivity here. Logan complains that he cannot find enough materials to make the brushes (84), and, more importantly, discusses the clerks’ unwillingness to help him with bureaucracy and paperwork required to start and run the workshop (85). He comments that the state administration would prefer to give blind people monthly pensions and put them in the state institutions instead of supporting their workshop (85). The narrative then exposes the contradiction that drives the analysis in this chapter: the expectation expressed in legal documents that disabled people are required to work and the simultaneous desire to exclude them from the world of work. State socialism, in other words, fails disabled men in their quest to be productive and thus they need to organize the factory themselves.

Although the blind male workers Logan describes remind of the figures of the przodownicy pracy, they also depart from the model of an ideal socialist worker. For the space they built, the workshop, has little to do with the socialist factory. Logan says: “I am sure that there are more interesting and better paid jobs for blind people. So far, we have enough resources for the living expenses. We live as if we were a part of a commune” (86). If the “regular” workplaces, in particular factories, are spaces of propaganda and control as

67 “Przodownicy pracy” were labor heroes—Polish equivalents of the Soviet Stakhanovites.
scholars argue, then the brush workshop constitutes a different kind of space. Logan calls it a “commune,” which might represent socialism in its authentic form. It is a space built by and for blind people: a space that is separate from the socialist world of work and propaganda even if it is shaped by the socialist ideals of labor. The workshop remains separate because, as Logan explains, the state administration is uninterested in it. Work is what enables the community of blind men to separate themselves from the socialist state by following the rules of the state. As a result, the workshop represents socialism without a state.

Moreover, the workshop, primarily a site of performing labor, is also a space of intimacy and homosocial bonding. Logan describes the joy that comes from working together and the unwillingness to finish working in the evenings. The description is striking since the novel discusses the early 1950s, the Stalinist period of heightened propaganda and the use of work as a tool of control and engineering of socialist identity. The text reveals the cracks within the presumed socialist authoritarian regime and understands a space of subjection—a worksite—as a space of relative independence within a commune. Consequently, it envisions an alternative to the national community. The nation is no longer the only source of belonging and identification; the workshop becomes a space of establishing close and authentic bonds between men. The male workers live together in the dorms located not far from the workshop, showing the interconnection of work and life outside the factory. Work in Jak trudno kochac (How Difficult It Is to Love) becomes a means of gaining both financial and communal freedom without undermining the socialist state per se.

In Unfinished Utopia, Katherine Lebow states that “[i]n the Stalinist worldview, work (as distinguished from toil) was conceived both as a collective effort in pursuit of shared goals and as a vehicle for personal transformation. In both senses, work was understood as a key to

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realizing and unlocking the essence of socialism” (93). Szczygiel’s novel shares this understanding of work by demonstrating how the brush factory unites blind men and facilitates their personal transformation. Work becomes a collective pursuit for blind men, but their goal is to contribute to building socialism as well as to create a separate community, make a living, and learn a craft that will allow them to be independent in the future. In his book examining work in Stalinist Poland, Padraic Kenney claims that labor tied the individual to the state (Rebuilding Poland 318). In contrast, Jak trudno kochac (How Difficult It Is to Love) claims that work and, in particular factory work, is what enables emancipation of a blind male worker community from the state: they work in a workshop they started and organized independently from the state and despite the state’s attempts to hinder their efforts. Literature, in other words, re-imagines the workplace and its relation to disability and community.

However, Jak trudno kochac (How Difficult It Is to Love) does not merely constitute a literary contestation of state socialism or a fantasy of a “good life” in a homosocial commune. Despite the described attempts to establish an alternative relationship of work and disability, Logan ultimately quits the workshop, moves to Warsaw, and marries Karol’s ex-wife, Hanka, which might suggest that a disabled subject has to remain, first and foremost, a socialist citizen and his disability identity has to come second. Moreover, he starts working in an institution where disabled workers are the minority. Szczygiel casts the commune episode as a temporary utopia, and Logan reinserts himself (partially through marriage) into a Stalinist society. The separation from the state or the partial allegiance to the state cannot be a permanent choice. But the sociological research conducted in the late 1970s presents how the majority of disabled people labored in workshops specifically designed and run by them. Workplaces hiring able-bodied people did not offer accommodations for disabled people and lacked jobs for them (Wrochno-Stanke 61). The interviews with disabled people conducted in
Warsaw in 1978 and 1979, two and three years after the publication of Szczygiel’s novel, indicate that the majority of disabled people preferred to work together with able-bodied workers, but the lack of jobs and accommodations made this impossible.

Most importantly, though, the vast majority of disabled people, despite their willingness and ability to work, were unemployed due to the general lack of jobs they could perform. By the end of the 1970s, there were 220,405 people who belonged to the third group of disabled persons who were of working age. From this perspective, Jak trudno kochac (How Difficult It Is to Love) reflects and responds to the work crisis experienced by disabled people and offers different images of workplaces hiring disabled people. Additionally, by depicting Karol’s further problems at Warsaw University and troubles finding a job, the novel openly refers to the unemployment of educated disabled men.

The emancipation of a worker from the state takes place because a worker is disabled. In other words, a disabled worker, even one who does not want to sleep and wants to keep working, does not represent a new socialist man. Lebow cites a letter fragment from a worker who had an accident at a workplace and became disabled as a result. According to his letter, after the accident he has additional troubles receiving an apartment he was promised (Unfinished Utopia 92-93). Disability, probably, makes him disposable in the eyes of his former employer who provides his workers with apartments. Lebow also mentions a popular rhyme that the Nowa Huta workers coined that reflects well the widespread attitude towards disability: “The poor steelworker/Achieved the norm/And broke his legs” (Unfinished Utopia 93). There are few ways to read this short rhyme: disability is cast as a result of achieving the expected norm at work— it is work then that produces disabilities. The figure of the przodownik pracy, a worker who always meets the planned norms, is intimately linked with

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69See: Sytuacja ludzi niepełnosprawnych i stan rehabilitacji w PRL.
the figure of a disabled worker: one is the reverse of the other. Disability haunts the przodownik pracy and is clearly unwelcome as the adjective “poor” emphasizes. The “poor steelworker” remains unnamed opening up the possibility of becoming disabled to everyone. Moreover, the rhyme ends quite abruptly, and the phrase “And broke his legs” presupposes no cure and no future for a disabled worker within a state system of organized labor. However, within a blind community a disabled worker—Jak trudno kochac (How Difficult It Is to Love) proves— might find a job and remain productive as long as he is willing to work and participate in the communal life.

Disabled workers do not fit the propagandistic images of a healthy nation absorbed by work and sport. When writing about disability and socialism, the Polish sociologist Antonina Ostrowska points out that: “in our society health, strength, and fitness are one of the most valuable human characteristics” (18). In this context, there is simply no room for a disabled worker to become a Stakhanovite; a disabled male body cannot represent the new socialist body. To put it simply, a disabled body contradicts the socialist body. Although male disabled workers remain excluded from the symbolic representation of socialist citizenry, work triggers for them the same identity transformation processes as for non-disabled workers.

In her book on the construction of a socialist city, Nowa Huta, Lebow comments that “Nowa Huta was therefore most often portrayed in propaganda and recruitment materials as a pedagogical project--both in the practical sense (as a kind of giant vocational school offering training for all) and also, more abstractly, as a site of personal formation and transformation” (Unfinished Utopia 54). The building of the city parallels the building of the socialist identity. A similar process is a topic of Jak trudno kochac (How Difficult It Is to Love): work in the brush workshop facilitates the emergence of a male disabled worker identity. Moreover, the visit to the workshop triggers the emergence of Karol’s disability identity and generates his interest in disability issues. On the way to the factory he
accidentally meets an 18 or 19 year old repatriate from Ukraine (since it is far from the city center it is difficult to get there and a young woman helps him find the way). Maryla tells Karol that in the future he should work with disabled people. He does not give her a definite answer and seems resistant to the idea, but the book leaves it open. In other words, this is not an institution for disabled people or a hospital where disability identity is born, but a workplace. But it is more than work itself; it is about working with other disabled men, sharing a goal, and living in a homosocial community that facilitates the transformation of disability into identity in *Jak trudno kochac* (*How Difficult It Is to Love*). Work allows for an emergence of disability identity that, ultimately, competes with the national identity and is imagined as a collective, but exclusively male, endeavor.

Male disability as identity forms separately from the able-bodied community. When Logan moves to Warsaw and marries Hanka his interest in issues of disability fades. He is busy organizing a marital life and participating in an able-bodied community. Identity of a disabled worker is intimately tied with an alternative form of community and manhood. That is why, it might seem that belonging to a larger community—the national one—prevails and both Karol and Logan end up living and working in Warsaw outside the blind commune. And these are able-bodied women, for there are no disabled women in this novel, who are tasked with the disruption of the same-sex bonding and are responsible for the weakening of disability as identity.

However, as I mentioned above, in the end of the novel Szczygiel introduces a new female protagonist. Maryła repeats a few times that Karol should work on disability issues after graduation from law school. Disability emerges here as a political and identity matter that should be handled by a disabled lawyer. This way, Szczygiel complicates the relationship between disability identity and socialist society. Before the appearance of Maryła it seems that the novel argues that there is no place for disability as identity in socialist Poland and that
disability identity can be formed only when surrounded by other disabled workers and in isolation from able-bodied people. Maryla’s insistence on Karol working on disability issues reveals that the 1970s differ a lot from literature from the previous decades which did not articulate disability as a politicized identity. In *Deaf in the USSR: Marginality, Community, and Soviet Identity, 1917-1991*, Claire L. Shaw writes that during the Khrushchev era it was possible to think of deafness “as a marker of identity that could coexist with sovietness, given the right circumstances and opportunities” (128). It seems that by introducing the idea that Karol might work in the future as a lawyer on disability issues Szczygiel attempts to highlight a similar possibility: coexistence of blindness and Polish socialism.

While the homosocial communal space of a brush factory constitutes a unique place in Polish young adult socialist literature, homosociality itself is not foreign to socialism, at least to its Soviet version. In *How the Soviet Man Was Unmade*, Lilya Kaganovsky discusses 1930s Soviet novels and movies, which similarly to *Jak trudno kochac* (*How Difficult It Is to Love*) are interested in male communities and male friendship. At the same time, homosociality is presented as a threat to a heteronormative society, so the theme of homosexuality as danger connects various socialist realist and socialist works that span over the period of 40 years. Importantly, these are women who are “at once disruptive, repressive, and domesticating” (Kaganovsky 106) and protect the status quo. The figures of the mother and Hanka, Karol’s ex-wife, confirm the pattern described by Kaganovsky. However, Maryla, Karol’s new love interest, suggests that socialist novels might attempt to break with this model and nuance female protagonists. It is important that Maryla is not threatened by Karol leaving for the factory: he wants to stay in Warsaw and work there. She encourages him to work on disability issues, but does not advise him to join the workshop—the specter of homosexuality does not threaten her. This way, Szczygiel reconciles both disability as identity and the heterosexual plot and belonging to disability and the national communities.
Logan’s story, on the other hand, shows that the reconcilement of disability identity and heterosexual romance is not always possible. But it is worth noting that *Jak trudno kochac (How Difficult It Is to Love)* is one of the very few YA novels in which marriage does not function as an award for a disabled person overcoming their disability. In both cases, Karol and Logan’s, marriage serves first and foremost as a tool of enforcing normalization. It allows both men to reassert their masculinity and domination over women. Additionally, work and a relationship with a much younger, able-bodied woman facilitates Karol’s symbolic transformation into an able-bodied man. Marriage in this configuration exemplifies a metaphorical healing process and returns blind men to a safe space of a heterosexual family.

However, it is not exclusively a wife’s role to defuse the threat of homosexuality. In the beginning of the novel, Karol asks his mother if Logan can move in with them. The mother is reluctant, but finally agrees.70 In other words, Szczygiel introduces the topic of male companionship early in the novel, and it is the mother who controls the relations between the two men. She is the one preventing male friendship from transgressing into a homosexual relationship. At the same time, Szczygiel, analogously to Soviet writers and filmmakers as discussed by Kaganovsky, establishes a link between homosociality and misogyny. All the female portrayals in his narrative teeter over the edge of ridicule and seem misogynist. Kaganovsky writes that in order “[t]o sustain homosociality, the (...) friends must also be misogynists” (105). Therefore, homosociality is possible only at the expense of female characters and need to be in opposition to the relations with women. And while Szczygiel presents Karol and Logan’s friendship as loyal and a source of joy and learning, relationships with women “are fraught with anxiety, misrecognition, and mistrust” (Kaganovsky 68). Karol’s mother and his ex-wife ban him from working and attempt to control him. It is his

70 I analyze this moment in detail in chapter 2.
friendship with Logan and Logan’s encouragement to start a new life that liberates Karol. In contrast to men, women do not establish any relationships between themselves; Karol’s mother and his wife dislike each other, and the novel does not offer many other images of female relations. \(^7\) Despite the introduction of Maryla, the other two main female characters—the mother and Karol’s ex and Logan’s wife—perform merely an auxiliary function: suppressing homosexual desire and bringing men back to socialist society.

While *Jak trudno kochac* (*How Difficult It Is to Love*) offers images of working disabled men in both an able-bodied environment and the brush factory run by blind people, it is not interested in discussing female labor. Or, to put it differently, it casts female labor as dangerous to both men and women themselves. It is work that enables Karol’s mother and his ex-wife, Hanka, to control him. Work is what diverts women from their primary duties: taking care of the household. Literally, it is Hanka’s illegal business that propels her to leave her young son alone at home and who, by accident, starts a fire that nearly kills him. In other words, Hanka’s work is a threat to her son’s life. And only Karol’s new, considerably younger fiancée who is undecided as to what she should study at the university (and thus will not join the workforce any time soon) and puts a lot of energy into convincing Karol that as a lawyer he should work on disability issues does not pose any threat to Karol’s identity and his child’s life. That she recognizes his belonging to a disability community and encourages his engagement with it lessens the threat. Both his mother and his ex-wife ignored his disability identity. Malgorzata Fidelis writes that Stalinist ideology, the one that *Jak trudno kochac* (*How Difficult It Is to Love*) attacks by criticizing and caricaturing women’s emancipation at a workplace, “offered women a set of multiple, yet limited identities: women could be workers, workers, workers, workers...”

\(^7\) Karol’s new fiancée seems to have a good and loving relationship with her mother, but Szczygiel offers little information about it. There are only few sentences that describe it, that is why it does not change, in general, the depiction of female relationships in the text.
mothers, wives, consumers, household managers, labor heroines, and political activists” (Women, Communism, and Industrialization 62). But this is exactly what Szczygiel is not interested in exploring: the intersectionality of (limited) identities. The only positive female character—Maryla—is too young to work, and the mother is presented more favorably when she retires. In his vision women can be mothers, wives, and family members, but not members of society as workers. Their investment in marriage and bringing back disabled men to society encompasses their familial destiny. Disabled men, on the other hand, are husbands, fathers, and workers.

Jak trudno kochac (How Difficult It Is to Love) argues that though female economic dependence is desired, the (dis)abled male wage laborers required. In the article “A Genealogy of Dependency: Tracing a Keyword of the U.S. Welfare State” Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon say that during the Fordist era in the United States “(...) certain dependencies became shameful while others were deemed natural and proper” (315), which illustrates the dynamics in Szczygiel’s novel as well. Such a clear division between female dependence and male independence generated by wage labor speaks to the patriarchal nature of state socialism and denies the possibility of interdependence in this text. Marriage is not a relationship rooted in the interdependence of the two partners; it relies on the strict division of responsibilities of a man and a woman and female dependencies. By connecting disability with lack of autonomy and weakness and associating able-bodiedness with productivity and patriarchy, interdependence becomes rejected. Since Szczygiel does not understand disability as rooted in the body or mind, but as male dependence, it is enough for a man to regain domination over women to overcome disability. Conversely, interdependence would weaken the gender roles and allow the recognition of mutual dependencies. But Szczygiel’s novel is invested in male independence and female submission imagined through work, leaving no room for interdependence.
Compulsory Independence

Klementyna Solonowicz-Olbrychska’s 1986 novel Spotkania (The Meetings) advances Szczygiel’s understanding of disability identity rooted in an alternative community comprised of disabled people and shows work divorced from larger ideological socialist meanings and reduced to a question of individual survival and self-reliance. However, since the book ends with the main protagonist, Pawel, happily staying in the institution for blind students and does not depict his re-integration with society, it seems that the negotiation between the two identities—Polish and blind—is absent here. In opposition to Jak trudno kochac (How Difficult It Is to Love), in Spotkania (The Meetings) disability identity prevails. At the same time, Solonowicz-Olbrychska’s gender politics differ from Szczygiel’s: although the main protagonist is a male blind teenager he moves in to a co-ed residential school where both blind girls and boys live together, go to school, and learn a trade. Because the main protagonist is a teenager who attends school the book does not offer images of him working; instead, it discusses his need and desire to be productive and the role the residential school plays in making his productive future come true. The desire to be productive, analogously to work in Szczygiel’s text, enables the formation of the main protagonist’s disability identity. The school teaches Pawel that he can be productive (in the undetermined future) while blind and through labor become equal with others (Shaw 36).

According to Polish YAL, in particular Jak trudno kochac (How Difficult It Is to Love) and Spotkania (The Meetings), one has to become disabled.\(^\text{72}\) Having an impaired body or being blind does not mean that one identifies as a disabled person. Oftentimes counterpoised

\(^{72}\)What differs Jak trudno kochac (How Difficult It Is to Love) from Spotkania (The Meetings) is that Szczygiel novel depicts the processes of both becoming disabled and next becoming able-bodied while Spotkania(The Meetings) focuses solely on the emergence of disabled identity.
to an impaired body, disability is a choice, a mode of identification and understanding of one’s location in the world. The process of becoming disabled and choosing disability as identity sits then at the center of these two texts. Additionally, what connects the books is that both main protagonists, Karol in Szczygiel’s text and Pawel in Solonowicz-Olbrzychska’s narrative, are blind. The protagonists’ blindness enables the two writers to avoid discussing a male dismembered body.

Despite some similarities between Soviet socialist and Polish socialist presentation of male relationships, there are also important differences rooted in distinct nationalist politics. Lilya Kaganovsky argues that Soviet socialist realist novels and movies eagerly portray the “Stalinist hero as maimed, blinded, crippled, but nevertheless stubbornly alive Soviet subject” (156). She states that a Soviet socialist realist novel examines the male mutilated and/or disabled body (4). However, Polish socialist literature depicts male disabled bodies as bodies that can be rehabilitated and unbroken. The country has to be made whole again after the catastrophe of World War II and so do the bodies. From this perspective, blindness allows the writers to enforce the fantasy of a “whole” male body, a body that is not mutilated or requires an apparent prosthesis. Polish citizens are not only alive, but are also fit and healthy. I do not claim that blindness requires no devices or that blindness does not leave the body unmarked or in pain, but in these two narratives it does not. In contrast to other disabilities or impairments, blindness permits the authors to present male bodies as unmaimed, which ultimately participates in constructing an image of a fit and unbroken male body ready for work. Blindness, in other words, does not undermine masculinity.

*Spotkania (The Meetings)* was first published in 1986, and the action takes place sometime after the martial law was lifted in 1983. In Polish literature and film, the 1980s are

73 In Polish socialist YAL the protagonists do not choose impairment; it is always a result of an illness, an accident, or World War II.
generally portrayed as a troubled decade that brought social isolation. The 1980s start with the Solidarity protests and the subsequent arrests of the opposition leaders, before bringing about the dismantlement of the state in 1989. It becomes easier to obtain a passport and leave the country. And while Szczygiel’s novel conveys hope that the socialist system might be improved and as a whole does not disappoint, Solonowicz-Olbrychska does not concern herself much with the future of socialism. That one of the minor Jewish protagonists, Mosiek, decides to leave Poland and emigrates with his family to the United States in search of a “better” life serves as a sufficient commentary. At the same time, the author’s lack of interest in the socialist future concludes with a lack of imperative to rehabilitate, even if only symbolically, her blind protagonist. Instead, it shows the necessity of taking care of oneself and that the state that does not organize nor intervene in its citizens’ lives—especially if they are ethnically “foreign”—and allows them to go abroad should they wish so.

Spotkania (The Meetings) tells the story of a teenager, Pawel, who lives on the outskirts of a small village not far from Warsaw. As much as Solonowicz-Olbrychska is interested in Pawel, she also provides many descriptions of the village and its inhabitants. She shows that despite its proximity to Warsaw, the village does not enjoy the modernization the socialist system promised. In other words, Spotkania (The Meetings) unmasks the main socialist promise as unfulfilled. What Solonowicz-Olbrychska emphasizes is work: each of her characters work, and she spends a lot of time describing different jobs, remuneration, and, general ways of surviving in Poland in the 1980s. In particular, she pays attention to different female protagonists who in opposition to Szczygiel’s novel work and for whom work is a necessity. Work does not bring joy, does not constitute a collective endeavor, and does not have any meaning except the economic one. In Spotkania (The Meetings) woman’s work outside the household is no longer a matter of political discussion or contention; it is a matter of survival. She similarly understands work for Pawel—the blind teenager; however for him
productivity coupled with living in a community of blind teenagers become a vehicle of disability identity.

Pawel loses his sight quickly, but he hides it from his parents, teachers, and peers. He is ashamed of it and isolates himself from the community. Anka, a popular girl from the same village, is attracted to him and tries to become his friend. Pawel gradually opens up to her, and soon they become a couple. Anka is aware that Pawel has lost his sight and convinces his parents that he should learn Braille language and go to a school for blind students because he cannot keep up with his peers in a school for sighted students. Pawel opposes the idea and believes he will regain his sight, but finally his mother and Anka persuade him to move and attend a school for blind students. He refuses to learn Braille in the beginning, but soon becomes a part of a community and finds his place in the residential school. He starts to make plans for the future, wants to find a job, and defines himself as “disabled.” He comes to accept his blindness and recognizes the opportunities that await him even if blind. In the end, he tells Anka that they need to break up because they both belong to different worlds. Anka does not protest; she agrees with him and starts dating a sighted boy. Pawel stays at the school for blind students and seems to be content.

Pawel adopts disability identity and does not return to society. He does not marry an able-bodied woman; in fact, he refuses to be in a relationship with her. A heterosexual relationship with an able-bodied person is no longer a reward for the efforts of overcoming disability or a way of bringing disabled subjects back into society. It neither heals nor operates as a metaphorical rehabilitation. Marriage in Spotkania (The Meetings) loses its social functions and as an individual project it does not, as Solonowicz-Olbrzychska’s protagonists claim, benefit a disabled person and an able-bodied person. Marriage does not help bridge the differences that disability is believed to symbolize.
Pawel embraces disability and thereby separates himself from society and, consequently, national community. Choosing disability, in this context, means choosing isolation. It is probably not coincidental that a book openly discussing separation from the state was published in the late 1980s. The state does not aim to include its disabled citizens through rehabilitation. When Anka visits Pawel at the institution where he lives, they decide that they cannot be in a romantic relationship; his blindness separates them. But Solonowicz-Olbrychska does not present the ending as a drama or as a tragedy. She casts it as a logical decision, a decision that almost does not require commentary. The 1980s state socialism that the novel describes might not force one to rehabilitate, but it clearly does not offer any inclusion or accommodation. Additionally, it understands disability as an irreconcilable difference. At the same time, Solonowicz-Olbrychska attempts to destigmatize blindness. Pawel’s father says that his son’s blindness is a result of “too much studying” (85). But Solonowicz-Olbrychska remains critical towards the father’s stance and shows that blindness is neither punishment for transgressing class boundaries nor does it result from reading books.

In other words, her project is invested in dispelling myths about disability. She presents the school and the dorms where Pawel moves in as a friendly place run by helpful and compassionate people. Nevertheless, by failing to imagine a relationship between an able-bodied woman and a blind man, she ultimately casts blindness as a minoritarian condition that cannot be accommodated nor understood by able-bodied people. Disability as identity requires separation. And it is a residential school located in the forest, far from Pawel’s village and from any other city, where his identity of a blind person can materialize.

Community of blind people is essential to the emergence of disability as identity. Karol, Szczygieł’s protagonist, becomes disabled after visiting the brush factory managed by blind people. Pawel embraces disability as identity when he moves in with other blind teenagers. What is more, he is proud of being blind. He talks with Anka and describes the
abilities that blind people have and sighted people lack: “When you have a clean table fingers do not stick. You can smell the dust with your nose. You can recognize whether you are approached by an old person or a young one by listening to their steps. Nose, ears, fingers, I swear you do not have them the same as we do!” (228). This might be the first time when Polish socialist YAL articulates disability as both an identity and a source of pride. Blindness emerges here as a legitimate and alternative form of being, which does not require state’s intervention. Blind people do not form an “entitlement community” (Shaw 150).

Collectivity enables an emergence of an individual disability identity, highlighting the relationality of disability as identity. Pawel does not accept blindness when he lives with his parents, similarly to Karol who could not come to terms with his disability when he lived with his mother and Hanka, his ex-wife. Only the company of other disabled people coupled with the promise of work and a chance of becoming productive makes disability as identity possible. The analysis of these two books reveals that disability identity is rooted in a collectively shared experience. In this sense, disability as identity (and as a competition to a national identity) is a communal and political project, which gets articulated for the first time in the late 1970s.

Jak trudno kochac (How Difficult It Is to Love) and Spotkania (The Meetings) illustrate that disability is connected with (at least temporary) separation from able-bodied society and building alternative communities made of disabled people. At the same time, YAL from the 1950s and 1960s depicts the national goals behind work – rebuilding of the country after WWII, and here a similar relationship between the nation and work is absent. Solonowicz-Olbrzychska emphasizes individual struggles and successes and does not correlate them with the national process of rebirth. Moreover, Spotkania (The Meetings) offers a positive image of a residential school for blind teenagers and the YAL published in previous decades lacked representations of institutions almost completely. It was home that was tasked
with leading a disabled child into a “productive” life and enforcement of socialist values, while the residential school in Solonowicz-Olbrzychska’s narrative promotes an alternative form of community that was foreign to the authors of the earlier texts that focused on disability.

Therefore, what enables the separation from society are the residential schools for disabled people and work sites. Home fails as a community that makes disability as identity possible. It is a space occupied by a mother who manages the process of rehabilitation. Home enforces socialist identity and thus becomes the state’s tool—it shapes future citizens. Perhaps paradoxically, these state institutions such as residential schools and work sites make it possible for disabled people to form their own communities and identities. “Private” spaces are spaces of compulsory able-bodiedness and the enforcement of socialist ideology, whereas “public spaces” are spaces of identity transformation and intimacy.

But identity transformation is not necessarily a smooth process. After arriving to school, Pawel is upset and attempts to separate himself from his colleagues. He oftentimes emphasizes that he can still see a little bit. Because of his limited sight, he considers himself superior to other students and perceives himself to be a part of the able-bodied world. The fact that he cannot stop the process of losing his sight makes him angry. For the question of blindness is a matter of belonging and leaving the world he has known for a new one. A breakthrough moment comes when Anka visits Pawel and refers to blind people as “them” (228). Her comment annoys him, and he corrects her, saying that blind people are not “them,” but “us” (228). And then he adds “I am with them” (228). But even before determining his belonging, Pawel has begun learning to be blind, for disability is also a matter of education. The identity confession or coming out only confirms the emergence of the new identity.

Pawel learns to navigate spaces as a blind person. Friends in the dorms instruct him to leave his things in a certain order and show him how to walk using a cane. He learns Braille
and says that, “Braille enabled me to participate in classes. It did not impoverish my life. It opened up new possibilities and let me be independent” (213). He envisions his future and thinks of potential professions for himself. He is hopeful he can become productive. Becoming blind or accepting blindness enables him, in fact, to imagine his future. Before, when he attempted to hide his ensuing blindness and isolated himself from his family and community back at home, there was no future for him. He could not imagine it. Disability and life in a residential school produce the possibility of an (independent) future for a blind subject. Disability is no longer a condition of dependence or interdependence; it brings a promise of independence.

The novel is clear that the institutionally imagined future for a blind subject forecloses the possibility of interdependence. Pawel says that what he learns at school allows him to “live without evoking mercy in others and without able-bodied people doing him favors. He will be like a sighted person among other sighted people” (213), and he emphasizes that Braille is a key to his independence (213). His colleagues state that after they graduate from school they will continue education at a university or start working at different places in hopes of achieving self-sufficiency (211). The school for blind students teaches them not to be dependent. Dependence, and here Spotkania (The Meetings) departs from Jak trudno kochac (How Difficult It Is to Love), is unwanted by both male and female blind students. It is a universally despised condition, and work is the key to becoming independent. In the article “A Genealogy of (post-)Soviet Dependency: Disabling Productivity,” Cassandra Hartblay analyzes Gordon’s and Fraser’s text on dependency in American history and uses it to look at the Soviet Union. Hartblay writes: “Gordon and Fraser observe that as a result of the imposition of liberal independence on the political self, the economic self is implicated so that "the worker tends to become the universal social subject: everyone is expected to 'work' and to be 'self-supporting!'" (135). The analysis of Spotkania (The Meetings) reveals a similarity
between the two projects and shows that to be a self-supporting individual in Poland of the
1980s was a duty. Before Pawel chooses to attend the school for blind students, his parents
are worried that he will not find a job, and they consider his future to be grim. Their anxiety
reminds that in 1986, it would have been difficult to imagine the state as a guarantor of a safe
future for a disabled subject. Disabled subject has to take care of himself.

The emphasis on productivity and Pawel’s plans to learn a trade remind that a blind
subject can become an ideal socialist citizen. But, as Claire L. Shaw observes, “the creation of
special conditions and unique places for them to achieve this transformation also created a
Soviet community apart” (156). In other words, even if Pawel chooses his identity as a blind
subject as his primary one, the novel cannot escape the tension between celebration of
blindness as a “distinct social and cultural experience” (Shaw 145) and showing how it is
shaped by the larger socialist values of work and collectivism. Blind community, as a result,
is intimately “intertwined with broader social and cultural trends that fostered a Soviet social
worldview” (Shaw 145). Perhaps, the very act of articulation of blind identity and pride was
made possible by the socialist discourse of emancipation and freedom.

Work as Warfare

In 1971, the Ministry of National Defense published memoirs by World War II
disabled veterans entitled *Pamietniki inwalidow wojennych (The War Invalids Memoirs)*. The
memoirs were written in response to a war memoirs competition announced by the
Association of War Invalids. The ministry chose to publish eighteen of them in one
collection: seventeen by men and one by a woman. I write about these war narratives because
in some important ways they depart both from disability memoir *Biale niebo (White Heaven)*
and the state discourse on labor. Neither these are documents testifying to the emergence of
disability as identity the way YAL discussed in this chapter does; veterans, while impaired, do
not adopt disability identity. At the same time, they portray a disabled worker experience as a gendered experience, which connects it with Jak trudno kochac (How Difficult It Is to Love). Disability in the war veterans’ memoirs is hardly speakable, which might seem surprising since the competition was initiated by the Association of War Invalids. But the veterans, clearly, do not want to write about impairment and spend relatively little time discussing their post-war life as disabled citizens. However, the editor of the volume, Henryk Gaworski, makes significant statements about work in his introduction to the collection and similarly to other texts I discuss couples work and disability:

[writes about veterans’s life after the war] They had to take care of their financial situation. But that was not the most important thing. The stakes were higher: it was about proving to both the world and oneself the need for one’s existence, the sense of it. It was about proving to both the world and oneself that one had the right to live. And there was only one source of this confirmation: work. (7)

Despite these melodramatic words and the extraordinary significance Gaworski places on work, the collection does not reflect them. The veterans avoid discussing both disability and work. Instead they focus on warfare and one of them describes it as a “big adventure” (24). The erasure of disability results in the lack of discussion about men’s dismembered bodies and thus allows the maintenance of the fantasy of a complete male body, which corresponds with the narrative choices by Jerzy Szczygiel and Klementyna Solonowicz-Olbrychska. This strategy reminds of Susan Schweik’s words that “(…) in the figure of the war veteran, manhood and impairment coexisted in uneasy conjunction” (149). The evacuation of disability allows writers and Polish society to silence this “uneasy conjunction.” Moreover, it suggests that it is not a workplace, as Joanna Goven argues in “Gender and Modernism in a Stalinist State,” when discussing masculinity, gender, and Stalinist Hungary, but war that operates as a main site of exercising Polish masculinity. The lack of narratives by women unmasks warfare as an exclusively male enterprise.
Pamietniki invalidow wojennych (The War Invalids Memoirs) relies on the category of disability to emphasize the suffering and courage of Polish soldiers and, in extension, the nation. The male experience of war, sacrifice, and disability becomes a supposedly universal experience that represents the ordeal the entire nation went through. In 1965, Wladyslaw Gomulka, the First Secretary of the Polish Workers’s Party, said in a speech commemorating the 20th anniversary of the end of the war: “Contrary to what was proclaimed by the Potsdam Agreement, German militarism has been reborn in the German Federal Republic and is flourishing there as in its best Nazi times” (Twenty Years After the War 19). The goal of the speech is to both remind citizens of the past and address future threats. From this perspective, the veterans’ memoirs act as yet another reminder of the danger looming over the Western border and thus constitute a document of the past efforts and an exhortation to further sacrifices. Therefore, the memoirs are both deeply personal (when discussing the pre-war life and the pain and suffering brought by the war) and serve public functions. The memoirs support the system here and remain educational texts with propagandistic undertone. Both the publisher, the Ministry of National Defense, and the organizer of the competition, the War Invalids Association, did not think of them as purely private documents, but rather tools of self and collective formation.74 The goal is to depict the ultimate sacrifice to the nation be that the body fighting in the war or the body working for the development of the nation.

There is an obvious disconnection between the introduction to the collection and the memoirs themselves. Henryk Gaworski focuses on the loss the veterans acquired during the war—a loss of work possibilities due to their impairment: “They had to give up what became an inseparable part of their psyche; what in general constitutes the main element of one’s life—they had to give up work. Of course, not work itself, but work they chose, the one they

74 See: Jochen Hellbeck, Revolution On My Mind: Writing a Diary Under Stalin (45).
loved and were used to” (5-6). Interestingly, some of the authors were teenagers or kids before the war, so they did not have an occasion to choose a profession before the beginning of the war. In the narrative “Moja droga zyciowa” (“My Life Journey”), Tadeusz Mazur says that “at the age of twenty I became an invalid without a profession and any future perspectives” (115). Similarly, Tadeusz Fudala states: “After ten years in the army, at the age of twenty-eight and with no profession (when was I supposed to get one?) I had to start a new life” (336). In the introduction, however, Gaworski claims that “work for each and every author in the collection was an internal necessity, a moral command as much as fighting the enemy during the war was an internal necessity and moral command” (7). Gaworski here establishes a continuation: work continues the heroism of fighting in the war. At the same time, the memoirs themselves do not confirm his last statement. While the imperative to participate in the war seems to be obvious when reading the texts, the authors do not discuss much their commitment to work. Yes, they do mention it, but it does not take nearly as much space nor fervor when describing it.

However, there is one memoir in the collection that instead of focusing on the warfare addresses the question of disability employment right after the war and in the early 1950s. It is Bronislaw Kruczko’s memoir “…In order to insurrect – work.” Kruczko became blind during one of the battles against the Nazi army in the early 1940s, but he does not spend a lot of time describing the war and his involvement in it. Nevertheless, his narrative contests Gaworski’s introduction as well. Even though Kruczko writes about work situation for disabled people during the Stalinist period, he, similarly to Jerzy Szczygiel’s Jak trudno kochac (How Difficult It Is to Love) that takes place in the early 1950s too, discusses lack of job opportunities for disabled people despite their eagerness to join the workforce. A disabled man enforces productivity regime, while he has trouble participating in it. Kruczko’s narrative
illustrates the paradox I brought up above: the state’s expectation that disabled people work and the simultaneous attempt to exclude them from the world of work.

After the accident Kruczko was taken to several hospitals and institutions for disabled people where he lived until the end of the war. He met other war veterans and together they participated in different trade courses that would provide them with jobs in the future. They learned how to make baskets and brushes, and took Braille classes. Additionally, one of the staff members taught him to use a typewriter, because he anticipated that “it would be useful for me later in life and at work” (172). The institution in which he lives in 1946 offers classes in bookbinding and knitting. Besides, for those who are interested the institution opens classes in playing violin, piano, and solo singing (173). Kruczko writes that he is “busy all the time” (173). The organization of classes at the institution for disabled people reminds of the fusion of rehabilitative and productive regimes in post-war Poland. However, the everyday experience contradicts the lofty promises of the state to provide everyone with a job. Despite learning many things and participating in classes, Kruczko admits that he feared for his future (176).

He left the institution and with other colleagues started a knitting workshop that hired blind people. He describes the problems related to starting a new workshop and the effort they put into it. Kruczko writes about lack of resources, lack of help and support from the state, and the poverty he lived in at the time (176-177). His narrative shares many characteristics with Logan’s descriptions from Jak trudno kochac (How Difficult It Is to Love) concerning problems with running a workshop. Moreover, Kruczko writes that after few years of finally starting and working at the workshop he had to find a new job: “I stand next to the machine wearing a cap and a uniform, and move the warhead left and right since few years. I do everything mechanically and I have no problems with it, but this work does not bring me happiness anymore; it rather tires me” (178). This fragment points to his dissatisfaction with
the mechanical and unchallenging work and, consequently, emphasizes the importance of self-realization Kruczko sought out in work. Thus, he decides to study law at the University of Poznan, and similarly to Karol, the protagonist of *Jak trudno kochac* (*How Difficult It Is to Love*), encounters many problems when applying. University questions his abilities and usefulness as a future lawyer: “Blind and a lawyer? And what after he graduates? Isn’t it a waste of a spot and money?” (179). Despite the promises that everyone is useful in a post-war Poland, disabled people have trouble finding an employment that fits their interests, education, and financial needs.

The similarities between Kruczko and Szczygiel’s texts indicate that both understand work as a desired and important way of self-realization for a disabled man. To take it further, such conceptualization of work in one’s life might, in fact, attest to the emergence of a socialist disabled subject who as much as an able-bodied subject imagines himself primarily as a worker and remains invested in the crucial importance of productivity in one’s life. That these two texts representing two different genres take up the same questions of disability, utility, and work and portray similar problems speak to commonality of the problems in the early 1950s, but also to Stalinist ideology’s success in propagating the images of labor. Even if on an everyday level the state fails or hinders to couple disability and work, on the level of beliefs and ideology the coupling cannot be undone.

**Conclusion**

Attending to disabled bodies at work in late Polish socialist literature allows one to notice that disability participates in the productivity regime and that disabled subjects, whether the protagonists of YAL or disability memoirs, conceptualize themselves as workers. Work becomes both a means of survival and self-realization. The analysis of the fours texts, *Biale niebo* (*White Heaven*), *Jak trudno kochac* (*How Difficult It Is to Love*), *Spotkania* (*The
Meetings), and Pamietniki inwalidow wojennych (The War Invalids Memoirs), indicates that the meaning of work is vulnerable to change and it is not attached to the nation-building project nor pursuit of collective happiness or spirit in the late 1970s and 1980s. Nevertheless, work provides disabled subjects with a tool for an identity formation.

The desired disabled subject—whether in YAL or the war veterans’ memoirs—is not the one who rehabilitates or attempts to organize a surgery that would help bring his sight back, but one who despite disability is able financially to support himself and does not count on the help of the state, family or friends. He is a subject who does not pose a financial burden on limited state resources. In other words, literature reconciles disability through economic independence. While in Bronislaw Kruczko’s memoir work is still both a part of the larger socialist project and a way of achieving independence, in Spotkania (The Meetings) and, to a lesser degree, in Jak trudno kochac (How Difficult It Is to Love) work becomes divorced from its earlier ideological meanings and operates primarily as a way of supporting an individual, not building a nation. The changing definition of labor enables the change in the state’s approach towards disability and rehabilitation; and it seems that the ability to self-support functions as sufficient rehabilitation.

If the goal of YA novels in general is to shape the minds of young readers, then the cultural work these writings do is to emphasize the importance of financial autonomy, self-reliance, and individual efforts in finding and keeping a job. Moreover, Spotkania (The Meetings) and Jak trudno kochac (How Difficult It Is to Love) discuss the emergence of disability as identity and envision it as an alternative to the national identification. Spotkania (The Meetings) does not reveal any conflict between belonging to a blind community and the nation. Despite the fact that the nation is not an important actor in the novel, Solonowicz-Olbrychska shows that a blind community separate from the society is shaped by the socialist values and that socialism enabled the emergence of the blind community by creating
opportunities, worksites and schools for disabled subjects. If Szczygiel’s protagonist, Logan, leaving the blind commune and marrying an able-bodied woman in Warsaw betrays the tension between the two competing communities: a workshop of blind men that is separated from the state and society, a similar tension is absent in Spotkania (The Meetings). A disabled subject does not need to choose, for there is no conflict.

At the same time, Polish late state socialism remains patriarchal, in particular in Jerzy Szczygiel’s novel. His novel promotes images of men working outside the home and women taking care of the household. However, Klementyna Solonowicz-Olbrychska offers an alternative: in her text both men and women work and her background female protagonists are praised for not counting on men economically. On the one hand this might be seen as progress—female labor is rendered important. On the other hand, Solonowicz-Olbrychska depicts a society in which people cannot count on each other and thus self-reliance is, at least partially, a result of the social isolation of the 1980s and the economic and political crisis. Women and disabled people work here because they cannot afford to hope that anyone, including the state, will help them if they need it.

The first sentence of the Polish 1952 Constitution states: “The Polish People’s Republic is a republic of the working people” (15), and the focus on disability both confirms and broadens the understanding of labor articulated in the Constitution. The reading of Biale niebo (White Heaven) allows the reformulation of work and reveals its connections with rehabilitation. And, most importantly, this disability memoir reveals that the official discourse of work influenced the conceptualization of other social and medical practices such as rehabilitation. From this perspective, the announcement “The Polish People’s Republic is a republic of the working people” (15) has, in fact, much larger implications: it allows one to recognize state socialism in Poland as a regime of productivity. The example that Siemaszkiewcz, the author of Biale niebo (White Heaven) provides, of the patient fighting
laziness by taking daily walks around the hospital points to the imperative to be productive internalized by disabled citizens. Rehabilitation then constitutes a part of the regime of productivity.

Bronislaw Kruczko’s memoir speaks to the expectation that disabled people work and the simultaneous failures of accommodating disabled subjects at work. Sarah Phillips writes that in the USSR “emphasis was placed on ‘restoring’ veterans’ lost labor capacity in order to return them to the workforce. They were offered housing and vocational training in shelters, schools, workshops, and “homes for invalids” (50), and while Kruczko’s diary testifies that socialist Poland does the same, he also points to the difficulties establishing workshops and finding employment. Perhaps, the reason why the other authors in the collection are not particularly interested in writing about work is that the “restoration” process is not as successful as the official discourse presents it. At the same time, socialist Poland succeeds in transforming a disabled veteran into a disabled worker for whom work becomes an important source of satisfaction and self-actualization. This way, the memoir documents both the collective and individual transformation and serves as an educational tool. It reminds that work becomes a major element in a socialist citizen’s, whether disabled or not, self-conceptualization.
CHAPTER 4

No Turning Point: Disability, Gender, and the 1989 Political Transformation

In a famous clip, part of a public TV news broadcasted on October 28, 1989, Joanna Szczepkowska, a Polish actress, announced smilingly: “Ladies and gentlemen, on June 4, 1989, communism in Poland ended.” June 4, 1989, the day of the “first”\(^\text{75}\) democratic elections held after 45 years of state socialism, marks the beginning of democratic order in Poland. Szczepkowska could not hide her smile and enthusiasm for the political change. The statement marked an ostensibly clear move from the “communist” past to a democratic future and revealed Szczepkowska’s belief in the linear progression from state socialism to capitalism.\(^\text{76}\) Although the 1989 elections and the change of the political system were for masses of people, undoubtedly, a time of joy and hope, many scholars attest that the capitalist reforms left a lot of people disappointed. Additionally, many analysts of the Polish political and economical transformation do not agree with a theory of progression from state socialism to capitalism. In *Poland’s New Economy*, Jane Hardy writes critically about the fact that “Neoliberal accounts of the restructuring of the Polish economy have characterized transformation as a linear process from a planned communist economy to a capitalist market economy” (40). In her 1997 article “Tu, Tam – Pomieszanie,” a Polish sociologist, Anna Sosnowska criticized the widely adopted after 1989—among sociologists and mainstream media in Poland—understanding of Polish capitalism as both an imitation of Western liberal capitalism and an inevitable historical trajectory (61). Despite these analyses, in 2009 two

\(^{75}\) The elections were not entirely free because Solidarity had been allowed (in the Round Table agreement) “to run candidates in 161 seats—35 percent of the total—in the lower house (the Sejm), and for all 100 seats in the new upper house, the Senate” (Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution* 258).

\(^{76}\) The belief in a linear progression of state socialism to capitalism might be seen as a reverse of a Marxist belief that socialism is the next stage following (developed) capitalism.
Polish sociologists, Anna Sliz and Marek Szczepanski, argued that 1989 brought “revolutionary changes” and constituted a clear break from state socialism (77).

The 1989 transformation is still a contested topic among Polish (and international) scholars, politicians, journalists, and the public. The right-wing politicians claim that the 1989 transformation did not “decommunize” the country and thus the social and political problems in today’s Poland are rooted in an “unfinished” transformation; the left is deeply disappointed with the transformation, because of the economical and social stratifications it created; and only the liberal parties—whose views are at the same time representative of many segments of Polish society today—think of the 1989 events as triumph. Using, Cierpieniem pisane: Pamietniki kobiet niepelnosprawnych (Written through Suffering: Disabled Women’s Memoirs), a collection of memoirs written by disabled women published in 1991, this chapter offers an alternative way of conceptualizing the 1989 political transformation and challenges both the caesura established by the actress and the dominant among the political parties and society understandings of the transformation. Disabled women’s writing resists the official interpretations of the transformation, whether the critical and revisionist or laudatory ones, and shows that for disabled women the political change simply did not matter. Therefore, I argue that instead of a revolution the 1989 political and economic transformation constituted an impasse or, to follow Lauren Berlant, “crisis ordinariness” (10) for disabled subjects.

77 Monika Baer, a Polish anthropologist, writes that the belief in the clear progression from one political system to another produced a division between those who adapted to a new system and thus “triumphed” and those who are “civilizationally backward” and thus “lost” (35-6). She criticizes the term “transformation” – noting the lack of it and prefers the term “postsocialism,” which reminds of existing continuities with the previous system (41). Tomasz Zukowski, a Polish historian, analyzes Polish journalistic accounts of state socialism and notices that “There is no recognition of continuation of the two systems and thus the relationship between the present and the past gets erased. The question of “continuation” does not spark any interest, because it does not fit the collective fantasy. What is important, even historians give up to the pressure of the public discourse and emphasize the differences between the two systems. The scholarship on the Polish People’s Republic abounds with books on Stalinism, which enables to highlight the biggest differences between democracy and state socialism” (197).
In 1990, Lublin’s Maria Curie Sklodowska University organized a memoir competition entitled “I am a Disabled Woman.” This was done in conjunction with a Polish NGO, the “Society for the Struggle with Impairment” (Towarzystwo do Walki z Kalectwem). More than 300 women from around the country responded and, in 1991, twenty-one short memoirs were published anonymously in an edited volume. It seems that most authors come from lower or lower middle class and there is no a single account written by a woman who would belong to an upper class. The authors’ ages range from early twenties to around mid-sixties. 113 women whose memoirs met the competition criteria are married (156 out of 300 met the criteria). No one has self-identified as a lesbian or a queer person. Maria Chodkowska, the editor of the collection, writes that “all the women who got married wanted to have children” (10); however, she did not say how many of them did. Most of them worked outside home for at least some time in their lives. At the time of the memoirs submission most of the authors lived off the state benefits that were extremely low (Kobieta niepełnosprawna 21).

It is important to note that the competition was organized just a year after the first democratic elections and that the collection was published two years later. As such, in their life writing, many of the women allude to the recent changes in Poland. Contrary to Szczepkowska’s words, the memoirs do not testify to the end of state socialism. Disabled women’s life writing shows that 1989 did not bring a revolution, or any dramatic change, in their lives. Instead, it brought the continuation of exclusion and poverty they suffered throughout their lives. Despite the ideological differences, the dominant narrative in Polish

78 While—from a disability studies perspective this name is problematic—it is important to remember that this was the first organization dealing with disability issues and was established in Poland right after World War II in 1946. Perhaps the experience of World War II with its military rhetoric and the history of resistance struggle as well as the present in pre- and post-war Polish society eugenic ideas informed the choice of the name.

79 That is why, my analysis in this chapter cannot be extended to disabled women coming from middle or upper classes.
media and in academic discourse, both in 1989 and today, presents “A contrast between the morality of democracy as against the immorality of communism” (Gal and Kligman 29). However, disabled women’s life writing contests this division and shows that both systems adopt the immoral treatment of disabled women.

By engaging with domesticity, and focusing on the topics of violence and poverty, Cierpieniem pisane (Written through Suffering) reveals the ongoing disfranchisement and exclusion of disabled women from society. In the majority of the memoirs, 1989 brings a foreclosure of the democratic promise of equality for disabled women. That is why, I claim that disabled women living in Poland at the time of the fall of state socialism did not experience a transformation, but rather stasis or “a crisis ordinariness.” In Cruel Optimism, Berlant challenges trauma theory, which, as she writes “conventionally focuses on exceptional shock and data loss in the memory” (10), and instead shows how trauma and crisis do not constitute exceptions and, what is more, are not divorced from the ordinary. Although her study focuses on Western neoliberal democracies, her thesis that crisis is a dominant mode of experiencing everyday life in the contemporary world accurately describes the situation Polish disabled women lived through in 1989 and in the early 1990s.

Moreover, my understanding of 1989 as “crisis ordinariness” is inspired by the work of gender studies scholars, in particular Lynne Haney, Susan Gal, and Gail Kligman, who published on the importance of gender as an analytic category of the 1989 events in Eastern Europe. In The Politics of Gender After Socialism Gal and Kligman note that “gender is a crucial feature of the postsocialist transformations” (14). Lynne Haney in Inventing the Needy: Gender and the Politics of Welfare in Hungary notes that “Political sociologists of Eastern Europe, or ‘transitologists’ as they often call themselves, tend to adhere to a bifurcated model that breaks the region’s history into the clearly demarcated periods of ‘state socialism’ and ‘welfare capitalism’”(5) and admits that she adopts a different approach: “I
resist grand narratives of systemic transition, preferring instead to study the dynamics of change within a particular social arena” (6). Despite their attention to gender and women’s experiences in Eastern Europe during the times of “transition,” Haney, Kligman, Gal do not think about disability as a category of analysis or the intersection of gender and disability and thus the ways in which disabled women survived the systemic change. I argue that the political and economic changes in Poland in 1989 and the early 1990s were neither gender- nor disability-neutral and that disability, as much as gender, was an element of the processes of transformation. Attending simultaneously to disability and gender reveals that the transformation was not experienced by disabled women victoriously and that it hardly mattered to those women who participated in the memoirs competition. As a result, this chapter demonstrates that the systemic change in Poland did not encompass the entirety of its population and that disabled women were excluded from it.

As much as I pay attention to the depiction of the systemic transformation in disabled women’s memoirs, I am interested in analyzing the ways in which they construct their subjectivities as well. The question I pose – what is at stake in writing about oneself? – and my interest in the language of the self, proves that autobiographical writing has a power to counter dehumanization and a sense of abandonment. As a consequence, writing about the self, which here is intimately linked with a desire to experience a better future, can be a political act. At the same time, the analysis of the memoirs suggests that the 1989 transformation did not produce a new form of subjectivity for disabled women in Poland; a political transformation, in other words, failed to be transformative on an individual level. At the same time, the memoirs testify to disabled women’s embodied subjectivities and point to

80 Gal and Kligman, in The Politics of Gender After Socialism, note that transition itself is not an accurate metaphor describing the processes that took place in Eastern Europe in 1989: “‘Transition’ is now widely recognized as an inadequate metaphor with which to summarize the social change happening in East Central Europe. Theories of ‘transformation’ reject teleology and recognize continuities with the past” (110).
pain and suffering as a source of knowledge. Their writing, as the title of the collection announces, arises from suffering. It is suffering that propels them to write and suffering remains its main topic. Pain, in other words, emerges as an epistemological category and structures the authors’ relationship with the world.

The title of the collection (chosen, as I assume, by the editor, Maria Chodkowska) highlights the crucial role of suffering in composing the texts. It is important to note that the title, *Pisane cierpieniem (Written through Suffering)*, rearticulates a discourse of Polish martyrology that centers one’s sacrificial suffering for the nation. In Polish culture suffering for the nation offers redemption and is closely linked with the religious rhetoric of self-sacrifice. However, the authors demonstrate that it is the nation that inflicts violence and suffering upon disabled women. Their writing refuses the redemptive role of pain. Thus, the highly politicized language of suffering that in Polish culture refers to one’s public role as an insurgent or fighter for freedom here becomes appropriated by disabled women who use it to stress the political and social character of individual suffering.

*Cierpieniem pisane (Written through Suffering)* belongs to the corpus of writing known as “social memoir,” a popular genre in interwar and post-war Poland. In the 1920s and 1930s, as well as after 1945, there was a tradition of organizing memoir competitions among various social groups, such as peasants, miners, and the unemployed. The competitions constituted one of the ways of learning about a newly re-established nation (and, after 1945, a newly established socialist society). It is equally important to note that they provided a venue for people from marginalized groups to share their life stories. Consequently, it is possible to think of the social memoir as a genre that democratizes writing and allows people representing various social groups to claim a voice and authority. Additionally, Katherine Lebow, who analyzes Polish interwar memoirs, defines the genre of social memoir as a “form of grievance and complaint” (Lebow, “Autobiography as Complaint”). In the article
“Autobiography as Complaint: Polish Social Memoir between the World Wars” she coined the phrase “I complain, therefore I am.” While the disabled women’s memoirs I analyze here are also social memoir and, to a certain extent, constitute documents of complaint, the phrase I use differs from Lebow’s. It is: “I desire, therefore I am.” Although disabled women’s memoirs depict violence and suffering, they predominantly testify to the desire to experience a “better” future. Disabled women are desiring subjects and thus their writing speaks to their will to persevere. Their desire is not connected with a desire for an end of state socialism though and thus does not map onto political dissidents’ ambition to reform or overthrow a socialist government in the late 1980s. Their writing bears witness to a more utopian vision of a just future and goes beyond any particular political system.

The desiring disabled subject is critical to understanding the transition from state socialism to capitalism in Poland. In the following sections I will analyze the workings of “crisis ordinariness” in pre- and post-1989 Poland, attend to disabled women’s subjectivities, and show how disability as a category of analysis provides an alternative conceptualization of the 1989 events. Disability allows us to recognize the 1989 as a form of impasse or a continuation of exclusion of disabled women from society rather than a revolution or a break from state socialism. Violence, desire for justice and a better future, and the refusal of redemptive suffering are intimately linked in Pisane cierpieniem (Written through Suffering).

“Some Bodies Have to Push Harder Than Other Bodies to Proceed”81

The tension between hope for a better future and depictions of daily suffering, humiliations, and lack of prospects for improving their lives characterizes Cierpieniem pisane (Written through Suffering). The topics of the collection include stories of acquiring disability

81 The quote comes from Sara Ahmed’s Willful Subjects (20).
(most of the authors acquired disabilities at some point in their lives), poverty, difficulties accessing education and health care services, hunger, abuse suffered from their parents and spouses, and societal indifference to their pain. There are also stories of motherhood, work, and religious experiences. The editor of the collection, Maria Chodkowska, writes (in the only essay I found that analyzes the collection) that more than 300 women from around the country responded to the call for papers (*Kobieta niepełnosprawna* 16). Only half of the memoirs met the competition criteria, though. The remaining memoirs were comprised of “words of support” for the competition or “requests for help,” or the authors did not provide their names, which was “one of the competition requirements” (*Kobieta niepełnosprawna* 16). What should be emphasized that the collection is comprised of memoirs written by women with physical and sensory disabilities, as opposed to other types of disability.\^2 While the topics of depression or anxiety occur in a few memoirs, no one identifies as a mentally disabled person and thus the issues of mental, intellectual, or developmental disabilities do not appear in these writings.

Most of the memoirs begin with a short account of the narrator’s childhood and description of the moment when they acquired their disability. Most of the authors were born after World War II, but there are some who discuss the war and the pre-war period. While many historical, sociological, and literary texts present the war, the Stalinist period, or martial law as catastrophic, disabled women themselves do not follow a similar writing strategy. There is only one reference to the martial law in the entire collection. The author writes about it in the context of her problems with continuing education as a disabled teenage girl: “I graduated from primary school in 1981. It was a time when people were busy with other things, they did not concern themselves with one girl’s education” (23). In their writings,

\^2 In my research, I did not find answers as to how the memoirs that did meet the criteria for inclusion in the collection were assessed, or who was on the jury making decisions.
catastrophes – whether a war, Stalinism, poverty, violence, or social and familial exclusion – become embedded in the ordinary. One of the authors writes: “for us, the impaired, there has always been a crisis in Poland” (94). Another woman comments: “we have a crisis in Poland now, but I remember an even bigger crisis we had when I was a child” (111). While they do recognize the ongoing crises, disabled women manage their lives in the face of everyday catastrophes. In these stories, trauma is a part of everyday life.

The memoirs adopt a confessional tone. They do not focus on historical events the authors witnessed, even though they are mentioned in passing—as with the example of the martial law I provided above—or form a backdrop for their life stories. In other words, these are not testimonies to the times they lived in; the authors do not aspire to adopt the role of the witness. These are, rather, confessions, though very brief and short ones. Disabled women are not professional writers and their writing resembles reporting. At the same time, the tone of the majority of these memoirs is bitter. The phrase “I have not achieved anything in life; I only experienced helplessness and tried to survive” (65) is representative of the collection. The same author adds that “I was destined to live long and experience hardship all this time” (68). Disabled women identify their lives with struggling for survival.

Despite living in an officially classless society that promised to redistribute the resources evenly, disabled women call attention to the abject poverty they experience. Survival living as a disabled woman in a socialist state is not easy. The state provides some services that benefit some disabled women. One of the author says that “my achievements, education, and social position were enabled by—so criticized today—state benefits and programs. Otherwise, I would not have been able to afford it financially, I was too poor” (44). Yet for most authors state benefits are not enough and they must find other ways to survive. On rare occasions, those struggles for survival lead to the formation of friendships and a sense of community. Most of the authors worked for some time before receiving disability benefits,
and the majority of them held poorly-remunerated, oftentimes custodial, jobs. One woman worked at a workshop for disabled people and writes about this experience very fondly: “I have started working at the workshop for blind people and it makes me very happy. The workshop offers me vacations, trips, health care, and only now—nearing the end of my life—I have started to live. I feel that I am needed now (…) and I am not lonely anymore. (…) Better later than never” (110). This fragment is important, because it underlines the advantages of working in the company of other disabled people. Work, here, is not only a necessity, but also a source of joy and relations with others. However, this is the only person among the authors of the collection who is employed at the workshop for disabled people, which indicates how scarce these jobs were and continued to be during the time of writing the memoirs for disabled people. For most of the women, work is both a physical and psychological burden and doctors advise some of them to give up their jobs; but for most writers not working is not an option. It is a financial necessity (103). They continue working, despite frequently facing hostile work environments and health problems, because disability benefits are rare and not sufficient to live on.

Disabled women who have an MA diploma struggle finding jobs that fit their education. The author that praised state benefits confesses that “Neither good grades nor the acquired skills helped me to find a job” (42). She graduated from the Department of History at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan and, additionally, has a graduate degree in pedagogy. Despite her qualifications, diplomas, and prestige that comes with it—few people at the time had MA—she could not find a job. No one states this to her directly, but it is clear that no one wanted to hire her because she is blind. She wanted to work at a school for disabled students that she herself attended in the past, but “my teachers who encouraged me to continue my education did not want to work with me now” (42). Her memoir reveals a recurring paradox: while citizens were expected to work under state socialism, disabled
people—despite their educational background—were, in fact, discouraged from taking jobs. This unwillingness to provide disabled subjects with jobs exclude them from society and bar from socialist citizenship that—for able bodied people—is grounded in work. Disability, in other words, becomes an exception to the norm and reveals fractures within socialist ideology.

While some women remained under or unemployed, other women experienced long and grueling hours working both inside and outside the home. Disabled women who hold slightly higher-ranked jobs are expected to work more than their able-bodied colleagues. One of the women, an accountant in a big company, reminisces that: “It turned out that with the passage of time they [the company; other employees] wanted to check how much work I can do. I became a robot who still gets more and more work to do. I felt hurt and all this work did not result in a raise” (92). Many of these women carry a double burden: they work both inside and outside the home (which was a norm for all women, but for disabled women the hardship was incomparable). They take care of the children and husbands and, sometimes, elderly parents. One of the women writes: “As a wife and mother I had to take care of the household, most importantly buy food. The last decade it was a difficult task for everyone [referring to the economic crisis in the 1980s]” (116). Cierpieniem pisane (Written through Suffering) indicates that disabled women, despite the pain they experienced, had to work. As a result, disability, here, does not contradict productivity; on the contrary, disability requires that women work. The state does not offer sufficient programs and benefits and disabled women, who oftentimes have no one to rely on and whose families (in particular their children) are dependent on them, are forced to work. Disabled women do not form an “entitlement community” (Shaw 150); they form a working community. American scholars, Beth Linker, Nancy Hirshmann, and Emily K. Abel argue that citizenship is grounded in one’s work and productivity (1, 85). The example of Cierpieniem pisane (Written through Suffering) shows
that looking at citizenship and its relationship with work and productivity through a disability lens complicates common understandings of what it means to be a citizen. Polish disabled women work and want to belong to a working community and yet their participation in the labor force does not guarantee their belonging to society nor their citizenship rights. The 1952 Polish Constitution (revised in 1976) says that “work shall be the right, the duty, and a matter of honor for every citizen” (22), but the socialist promise that work makes a citizen remains unfulfilled in relation to disabled subjects. Disabled women are stripped of their citizenship rights, as I discuss later in this chapter. They work and remain excluded from society. Linker and Hirshmann, state that “Citizenship is a matter of entitlement, obligation, and belonging” (10). The collection of Polish disabled women’s memoirs adds that it is a matter of embodiment and gender too.

What brings happiness to the authors in the collection is, in most cases, motherhood, but even that is fraught with heartache and pain. The disabled women authors desire to have children. Maria Chodkowska, in her summary of the memoirs, notes that only 43 out of 156 women (the ones whose memoirs met the competition criteria) did not start their own families (10). Most of the women had at least one child. Motherhood, however, came with many worries, some of which came before their children were even born. Prospective mothers worried that the children would inherit their disabilities (in case of congenital disabilities). One of the mothers writes: “I could not sleep in the hospital. I lay awake all nights, reflected upon things and prayed. (…) I asked God that my child is normal. Sometimes I even made demands to God that my child must be normal” (77). A blind woman says that “Against doctors’ advice I had a baby. What is a family without children? Thanks to God, I gave birth to a healthy son that did not inherit my blindness. There was a risk, but I am happy I took it” (103). Another blind woman decided against having children, because “I was afraid of putting this burden [blindness] on my children” (35). There are important things about these passages:
disabled women unequivocally identify womanhood with motherhood—even those who do not have children. They perceive a woman’s destiny to be motherhood and to them, a family without children is not a real family. This might point to Polish socialism’s investment in a traditional understanding of family and feminine roles. These feelings are so strong that some disabled women—sometimes against their doctors’ and family’s recommendations—decide to have children. A decision to have children is, then, an act of will; of exerting one’s agency. As a result, it seems that to have children is an expected life trajectory for an able-bodied woman under state socialism while, for a disabled woman, it is a matter of exercising her agency. However, it might also appear striking that disabled women clearly do not want to have disabled children and seem invested in narrow understandings of “normality.” On the one hand, it suggests the internalization of eugenic and ableist values upheld during the period of state socialism, on the other it is an expression of the (perhaps unfounded) desire that nondisabled children would have a "better life." Many of the writers appear to identify disability with hurt and consequently they cannot divorce the experience of being a disabled woman from unhappiness and hardship.

As a consequence, the collection does not offer descriptions of disability pride; disability does not translate into a movement or group solidarity. The memoirs do not depict a group identification, even though it seems that, individually, the authors identify as disabled women. Most women do not know other disabled people and they do not seem interested in getting to know them (however, a sense of solidarity or group identification could, potentially, provide them with some relief). With the possible exception of sheltered workshops, disabled women rarely have a chance to forge relations with other disabled women. Most of them remain isolated from the common sites where disability relationships and communities have been known to form. The authors live, and have lived, outside of institutions and their hospital visits are only temporary. To a certain extent, they cannot afford to spend longer periods of
time at the hospital or sanatorium: parents need them at home, where they help with household tasks, with rearing siblings, and, later in life, taking care of their own children and husbands. Disability, except in the experiences of two blind women who happily discuss joining local associations for blind people, is a solitary experience interwoven with shame and the difficulty of surviving. However, it does not cancel the ability to desire a different future.

Disability does not prohibit the authors of Cierpieniem pisane (Written through Suffering) from performing household duties and care work. Disability, in other words, does not redefine domesticity. Domesticity resists the subversive potential of disability and instead it is disability that becomes integrated into already existing patterns of homemaking. Disabled women rear and raise children, take care of their husbands and elderly parents, oftentimes work both inside and outside home. Work might take them more time and produce physical pain, they sometimes have trouble taking care of children; nevertheless, they usually perform all of these duties with very little help from outside. The dominant models of both womanhood and homemaking do not change because of disability. On the contrary, it is homemaking and taking care of their parents and families that shapes the authors’ experience of disability. It is clear though that the relationship between disability and domesticity is mediated by class here and that disabled women who represent middle and upper class might experience domesticity differently.

The authors of the memoirs identify both as women and as disabled persons. One of the woman embraces openly her “sick” identity: “I was born sick, which provided me with a deeper understanding of life… I would not be able to learn how to be healthy now. What would I be like if I were not sick?” (25). It is a very important, but also isolated, analysis of...

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83 In the North American context Michael Rembis writes that disability offers new ways of envisioning home, care, and family (“Introduction” 4).
84 Since the collection does not include a single account of a disabled woman that comes from a middle or upper class it is unclear how the relationship between disability and domesticity would look like in this case.
disability. It posits disability as a thing that is learned. Without fully explaining what she means, the author also says that health can be performed, though she admits that she would not be able to learn healthiness (and all it consists of) at this point in her life. Disability is also a way of approaching life; a unique location in the world that brings suffering, but also “a deeper understanding” of the world. This interpretation of sickness and disability cannot be divorced from the Christian approach that recognizes suffering as an experience determined by God that elevates a person. Her statement “every suffering makes sense” (21) clearly follows a Christian rhetoric. In other words, religion and its language of suffering informs the author’s view of her own situation.

Although some of the authors are happily married and mothers, which remains one of their few sources of happiness, being a disabled woman is, in many cases, inseparable from injury and hurt. Their bodies—female and disabled—are “doubly devalued and doubly shameful” (Lindgren 147). If something good happens to the authors, it happens despite their disability, not because of it. Suffering is oftentimes a result of social exclusion. As one author recounts, “I spent a month at the summer camp with children who can see (…). I do not have good memories from that summer, even though they included me in making the camp journal. I felt that I was a worse, disabled, unwanted participant. I was the other” (38). The writer adds that the organizers did not attempt to include her into other activities (38). The feelings of exclusion experienced during childhood continue into adulthood. One of the writers recounts how passengers on the bus would not let her take a seat, even though she has chronic pain and problems walking and standing (116). In a memoir titled “Wierze, ze dobroc wyzwala dobroc” (“I Believe that Goodness Generates Goodness”), the author writes about the humiliation and pain she suffered at the hands of doctors and the medical establishment, and in “Chcialabym wychowac dzieci na porzadnych ludzi” (“I Would Like to Raise My Children to Become Good People”), a young mother of three writes how, because of a rare
neurological condition, she could not speak for some time and people treated her back then as if she was constantly drunk (84). Her neighbors started to gossip that her husband cheated on her while she was in a hospital, which was not true, but it delayed her recovery and the ability to speak (85). Her neighbors knew that she is sick, but “so far no one has offered help” (87). The author of “Wszystko osiągnęłam dzieki pomocy Matki Bożej” (“I Achieved Everything Thanks to the Help I Received from Saint Mary”)—the title draws on religious motifs and, perhaps unintentionally, establishes a parallel with the suffering mother of Jesus—writes that at school her colleagues threw stones at her because she limped (53). Cierpieniem pisane (Written through Suffering) attests to the continuing social isolation of disabled women.

As much as it is connected with disability and gender, the feeling of exclusion is related to class as well. Most of the women come from the lower class and live in poverty. Since many of the memoirs refer to the socialist past, it is obvious then that the collection refuses the socialist propaganda of the good life and presents living conditions in Poland, both in the countryside and the cities, as deplorable. The writers admit to not having enough money to buy shoes, clothes, food, and tickets for public transportation (29, 34, 86, 87, 98, 103); to having trouble accessing health care (27, 29, 86); to not being able to find employment (42); and to living in overcrowded apartments and houses (52, 57). One of the authors reminisces that her family did not have electricity at home and was not able to afford food, including basic products, and thus never had dinners (53). That same author writes that she felt good only when alone (53). The experience of living as a disabled woman is intimately interwoven with poverty.

Pain is a topic that recurs in complex ways in many memoirs. The authors discuss the impossibility of its alleviation: “I cannot sleep at night. The pills do not help much; I will start using a wheelchair soon. I cannot afford to have a surgery” (56). This short fragment highlights the ways in which social conditions and lack of access to medical services
exacerbate pain. Another woman, in the conclusion of her memoir, writes: “I feel like every other normal human being, no one ever looks at my legs [she has a motor disability, which is not apparent to most people who do not know her]. Even though the pain sometimes makes me cry, I do not show it around other people” (21). The pain, then, emerges as a constant element of her life that can neither be alleviated nor explained to other people. The young mother of three, the author of “Chciałabym wychować dzieci na porządnych ludzi” (“I Would Like to raise My Children to Become Good People”), confesses that “I felt worse and worse, I had horrible headaches, I could not sleep at night; the moment I lay down I started to suffocate (…). My only wish was to fall in the street and have an ambulance take me to the hospital to receive doctors’ help” (84). The memoirs challenge the understanding of pain as a universal experience; conversely, pain functions as both an individualizing and isolating feeling. Pain is a result of disability or sickness, but clearly exacerbated by societal indifference. One of the writers who suffers from chronic fatigue says that: “No one understands that one can experience exhaustion as a result of dressing up or washing” (98). Pain, though, is also a product of scarce resources and the lack of surgical options or better surgical equipment. One of the women who needed prostheses for her legs (she fell under a train as a child and lost both legs and one hand in the accident) reminisces about how she suffered from wearing poorly made and badly adjusted prosthetics in post-war Poland (92). She writes “Doctors who worked before the war started to retire and there were not new experts who could replace them” (92). Historical circumstances—the lack of doctors in the early 1950s and the lack of high-quality materials needed for the production of prosthetics—is responsible for her pain. Pain emerges as a complex experience produced by societal, historical, and material circumstances; disability itself; and the relationship between a body
and the world. Despite its prevalence, pain lacks a uniting force and isolates the authors of the memoirs from society. The tension between the commonality and specificity of pain and the impossibility of recognizing individual experience as an example of a universal experience characterizes Cierpieniem pisane (Written through Suffering).

But the titular “suffering” refers not only to the social exclusion and pain the authors endure. It also refers to the extraordinary violence meted out upon disabled bodies, often by the people closest to them. To a certain extent, the collection is made up of images of violence – of parents who beat and abused their disabled daughters in order to punish them for having a disability or husbands who raped, tormented, and beat their disabled wives. Images of intervention and help do not follow depictions of brutality. Disabled women are exposed to violence that, in most cases, remains unpunished and is barely noticed by those around them. Consequently, disabled women’s bodies become texts bearing the violent stamp of cultural expectations they do not meet. They are violated because parents had expected an able-bodied boy or because a husband is ashamed of his wife’s deafness. These forms of violence are rooted in heteropatriarchal, ableist understandings of fit, attractive, and useful bodies.

What is striking here is the social acceptance of familial violence, which testifies to the abandonment of disabled women by the state and seems to be sanctioned by the church. Their lives, in other words, might constitute an example of “bare life” (Agamben 7)—life that remains unprotected, outside the realm of law and national community. It seems that both disability and gender make these women’s lives unworthy of protection. To take it further, violence against disabled women is state-sanctioned violence: the memoirs rarely depict images of help and in the few instances where women brought charges against their husbands, 

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85 In his historical study of Polish society between 1944 and 1947 titled The Great Fear: Poland 1944-1947. People’s Reaction to Crisis Polish historian Marcin Zaremba, notes that fear in the late 1940s, even though experienced commonly, separated people and contributed to the atrophy of societal bonds (127-130).
they were acquitted or given very short sentences (72). As a result, state violence and abandonment reinforce domestic abuse. Both the state and the family have a “right to maim” (Puar 108) disabled girls and women.

The lack of respect for disabled women’s bodily integrity indicates a denial of their corporeal self-possession and thus raises a question concerning their citizenship. If, according to the socialist discourse the individual health and bodily condition reflects the collective health, what is the citizenship status of the authors of Cierpieniem pisane (Written through Suffering)? The socialist understanding of citizenship is not very different from the liberal one, which recognizes it as grounded in one’s ownership of one’s body, in which case the issue of disabled women’s citizenship becomes even more acute. Additionally, if citizenship structures one’s relationship to the state and secures access to state benefits, what can be said about disabled women who feel abandoned by the state and the family and who have trouble accessing health care and financial assistance? Obviously, this violence and the stripping of citizenship did not originate with the political transformation of 1989, but analysis of the memoirs reveals that the shift from state socialism to capitalism did not secure citizenship rights for disabled women. Rather it perpetuated the “crisis ordinariness.” It shows that women’s citizenship is not grounded in the domestic nor is it based in one’s participation in the labor force. The political transformation of 1989 supports and maintains both women’s belonging to the domestic sphere and their social exclusion, and hence does not establish a break from state socialism. At the same time, the narrative of “change” or “dramatic rupture” that dominated Polish public discourse in the 1990s helps conceal the ongoing violence towards disabled women.

86 “The right to maim” is both a title and an expression Jasbir K. Puar uses in her most recent book The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability (2017). It refers to violence and disability inflicted by the state of Israel on the Palestinian populations. I use it in my chapter, because it accurately describes the situation I analyze, however, I am aware that originally it functions in a vastly different context.
Given the pain and violence the authors of the collection describe and endure, *Cierpieniem pisane* (Written through Suffering) forms a document written against the state and society that allow for this suffering. The memoirs constitute a collective voice against violence, poverty, and indifference. While the family and the state seem to work together to refuse disabled women’s agency and rights, the memoirs offer a tool of reclaiming one’s authority over one’s life and thus acquire a political dimension. This life writing reinforces that “some bodies have to push harder than other bodies just to proceed” (Ahmed 20). Even though the authors protest against the injustices they live through and thus refuse redemptive suffering present in Polish culture; and even though a decision to narrate their selves exemplifies disobedience, they do not fit the image of a Western “feminist queer crip” subject (Kafer 1). Disabled women clearly articulate their desire to bear and rear children, link womanhood with motherhood, and seem to understand sexuality and family in normative terms. They want to get married and remain, in the overwhelming majority, devout Catholics, which I write about below. In short, they share the state’s and their family’s traditional understandings of women’s roles in society. As a consequence, Polish disabled women’s writing is directed against the oppressive society that devalues their bodies, but it does not map onto queer or feminist projects imagining women outside the familial and religious domains either. Their desires, in other words, alienate them from the world.

**Desiring Subjects**

It is perhaps the title of the competition “I am a Disabled Woman” that prompted two authors to open their memoirs by using the exact same phrase (88, 113) and thus claim allegiance to disability identity. Under socialism Poland lacked identity politics (since the only accessible identity – at least in the public discourse – was that of a Polish worker), but it seems that in both pre- and post-war Poland social memoir competitions were a driving force
behind particular identity formations or articulations, in particular the memoirs written by peasants in the 1930s (Lebow, “The Conscience of the Skin” 303). This would suggest that some group identities could have formed in response to state-sanctioned writing competitions. Apart from enabling an identity or sense of belonging, social or disability memoir is a democratizing genre that allows people from diverse social, class, and cultural backgrounds to share their life experiences. In *Signifying Bodies*, Thomas Couser notes that: “To members of marginalized groups, autobiography may be the most accessible of literary genres (...) it seems to require only that one have a life—or at least, one considered worth narrating—and sufficient narrative skill to tell one’s own story” (31). However, the accessibility of autobiography is only apparent (Couser 31), for the process of writing itself poses difficulties, at least for some, and can be physically exhausting. One of the women writes: “I doubt if I wrote the things I wanted in a clear manner. Perhaps, my sentences are too long and there might be errors. I am sorry, but I have no patience to consult the dictionary. I wrote all of this myself, because despite my disabled hands, I can still do it” (82). Another one comments shortly: “It took me all summer to write this knowing that I am able to do this only because there is a long deadline” (67). The author of “Niepokoja mnie zachowania ludzi wobec siebie” (“The Way People React to Each Other Scares Me”) writes:

I have no idea how I found the courage to participate in this competition. Maybe because I am expected to write, because I would never share these things orally. I apologize for the errors, ugly hand writing, but I write it myself. I hardly see anything, but I write it all by myself. I would never tell my family I participated in this competition. I write it when I am at home alone, I have been working on this for two months already. (112)

What reappears in these fragments is the assertion that women write their memoirs themselves—no one assists them in the process, which might imply that writing is an activity that allows disabled women to reclaim their independence and agency. But writing about being a disabled woman might also be an embarrassing activity, as can be seen through one of
the women who would never tell her family about doing it (112). Equally striking are the confessions of how much time it takes them to write and, thus, their memoirs unmask writing as a practice that requires physical strength and patience. Perhaps their gender determines the apologies (addressed to whom? readers? competition organizers?) for the errors and handwriting. Attending to sections where authors touch upon the writing process reveals that writing is neither a gender-neutral nor disability-neutral activity.

The analysis of these fragments implies that disability is not only a topic of the memoirs, but is, importantly, a mode of their production. Disability determines a rhythm and pace of writing. A seemingly innocuous and cryptic phrase: “I write it when I am at home alone, I have been working on this for two months already” (112) reveals that gender might be a mode of production too. The phrase forces a reader to ask: does it take her a long time to write because of disability and the physical or emotional difficulties she struggles with while writing, because, as a disabled person, she spends most of her time at home surrounded by family members or is it because, as a woman, she spends most of her time at home taking care of others and thus is rarely alone? Although finding a definite answer is impossible, this close reading shows that not only are the memoirs concerned with disability and gender, but also that disability and gender are responsible for the way in which the writing itself is produced.

The overwhelming feeling of abandonment present in many memoirs explains why the women—despite the difficulties posed by the writing process—decide to participate in the competition. The author of “Kazde cierpienie ma svoj sens” (“Every Suffering Makes Sense”) writes that she is glad that she can send her memoir and thus feel “needed” (19). She views the competition itself as an attempt to bring disabled women relief: “I saw the competition ad in the journal Przyjaciolka [Girlfriend]. I was very happy that you want to console disabled women” (19). To her, the invitation to share her life story is a consolation—that she interprets the competition this way reminds readers of the loneliness experienced by
disabled women and society’s lack of interest in their lives. Another woman confesses that “I am sorry that my writing is boring. I do not write this in hope of winning an award. It just provided me with some relief” (99). However, another writer reports that “I opened my soul and wrote about everything that pains me hoping that would bring me relief, but there was no relief (...) I have doubts if anyone would be interested in reading my life’s story; maybe only people who experience similar problems” (67). What motivates them to open their private lives to public scrutiny is a desire to share and complain about their life experiences and to find both understanding and relief. Some of the authors write that they have no one to talk to and, thus, the memoir competition serves a mostly therapeutic function. The number of submissions—over 300—gives some sense of the loneliness and exclusion they experience. The competition provides them with a chance to express their main complaint—society’s indifference to their suffering— and establishes a call for justice.

That the memoirs constitute a call for justice indicates that these are testimonies of disabled women’s will. They desire justice and seek alternative venues in which they might experience it. Their life writing extends beyond “documents of complaint” (Lebow, “Autobiography as Complaint”) and expresses their agency. Although they live in a perpetual crisis, they want to experience a better life. One of the women writes: “No matter what I will have to do, the transitory period nor any other circumstances will not stop me. (...) One day I will write books” (25). The author identifies the 1989 transition as the main obstacle to the realization of her dreams, and yet she makes it clear that she will not let the historical moment interfere with her plans. Another woman states: “I would like to have a mental strength. Despite the general powerlessness I want to keep doing things” (100). Even though this writer does not specify her life goals, she protests against the powerlessness she experiences and she is clear that she wants to overcome it. The author of “Najgorszy jest tlum” (“The Crowd is the Worst”) writes “I believe that one day we, disabled people, will be integrated with able-
bodied society” (119), which points to her identification and solidarity with society. To express hope for a different future is to disagree with a current state of affairs. None of the women who submitted her memoir wants “crisis ordinariness” to last; their writing expresses a desire for a different future and an end of their suffering.

Therefore, disabled women, the authors of *Cierpieniem pisane (Written through Suffering)*, are Sara Ahmed’s “willful subjects” (12). Ahmed writes that willfulness “involves persistence in the face of having been brought down, where simply to ‘keep going’ or ‘to keep coming up’ is to be stubborn and obstinate. Mere persistence can be an act of disobedience” (2). Disabled women’s persistence in the face of “crisis ordinariness” and the extraordinary violence they experience on a daily basis constitutes an act of disobedience and, ultimately, separates them from “bare life” (Agamben 7). Their will to live, an ability to imagine an alternative future, and writing texts that seek justice testify that the authors of *Cierpieniem pisane (Written through Suffering)* are not “bare life”—they are desiring subjects.

As a result, *Cierpieniem pisane (Written through Suffering)* links hope and disability. What is at stake in this project is a vision of a future that does not become a mere repetition of the present, a non-ableist and non-patriarchal future, which echoes Alison Kafer’s *Feminist Queer Crip*. In her introduction Kafer announces that “My future is written on my body” (1) and the authors of *Cierpieniem pisane (Written through Suffering)* could be very well the authors of this statement too. To an ableist society their disabled bodies signal all the things they cannot, should not, and probably will not do. But the collection is written against this very idea that the future is already written on the body. Disabled women make demands and want the environment and society to be changed. The transformation of society will enable a different future for disabled women. In other words, the future of a disabled subject is not written on the individual body, it is written on the collective body. And that is why disabled women make demands. The author of “Przelamac dzielacy nasmur” (“To Break the Wall that
Separates Us‖) wants able-bodied people to recognize that “a very thin line separates disabled people and able-bodied people” (126) and hopes they can recognize this fact before “they experience pain and sickness” (126). Both her memoir and its title form an address to society and the state. She wants the state to create conditions in which disabled people can work, because disabled people’s employment “benefits the state and society” (126). Another woman wants Polish architects to notice that, apart from healthy people, there are many disabled people in society who “live trapped in their apartments, because architects and urban planners forget about their needs. If building special buildings for disabled people is too expensive it would be a good idea to construct one or two apartments in every building that is accessible to disabled people” (119). By making demands and addressing able-bodied people, the authors believe that writing not only serves a therapeutic function, but also a performative one—that it can introduce a change in the world. Following Ahmed, their will or desire constitute “the capacity or the potential to enact a ‘no’” (10). But it is more than saying “no”—their texts envision an alternative. By offering particular solutions—asking the state to focus more on organizing workshops for disabled people and pleading to architects to take disabled people’s needs into consideration—they attempt to determine their own future. Writing becomes a tool of self-expression, as well as something that allows them to claim a measured level authority over their lives.

Writing allows self-expression, but it is not a tool of self-transformation or repression. In light of the loneliness they experience, writing opens up an avenue for sharing their life stories and for constituting themselves as autobiographical subjects. Disabled

87 In the 2000s, Soviet and Russian studies looked closely at the life writing of Soviet citizens in the 1920s and 1930s and, following Jochen Hellbeck, scholars concluded that the 1917 revolution generated a new Soviet consciousness and new Soviet subjectivities. In the article “Speaking Out: Languages of Affirmation and Dissent in Stalinist Russia,” Hellbeck concludes that Stalinist subjects “appear as selves in crisis, longing to overcome their painful separation from the collective body of Soviet people” (96). However, the kind of class standing that prohibits certain Soviet subjects from belonging within a Soviet collectivity neither determines Polish disabled women’s position in society nor participates in the formation of their subjectivity.
women do not become “enterprising selves” (Dunn 22), even though, as Elizabeth Dunn writes in Privatizing Poland: Baby Food, Big Business, and the Remaking of Labor, “In Eastern Europe, transforming persons into choosers and risk-bearers soon became the project at the heart of the post-socialist transition” (22). Disabled women’s memoirs do not witness transformative projects and do not become sites of constructing capitalist, enterprising, and risk-bearing selves. Instead, memoirs constitute sites of alternative justice and envision a better future that does not fit either the socialist or the capitalist projects.

The authors of Cierpieniem pisane (Written through Suffering) desire to belong to a differently envisioned national community. These are not “selves in crisis,” but bodies in pain that are not allowed to enter an able-bodied community. They want to belong, but they also want the national community to transform and make room for disabled women. In other words, these are texts that imagine a transformation of the collectivity, not the transformation of the self. They do not want to become able-bodied—at least there are no traces of that in the memoirs—but, rather, they want Polish society to accommodate them. Their embodied subjectivities serve as a primary source of knowledge and enable them to offer a vision of an alternative community: a community that is open to non-normative bodies and that acknowledges the pain and exclusion suffered by disabled women.88

Disabled women expect compassion from able-bodied people and their writings establish a call for a more just future directed to a society-at-large, but for now they invoke God as the main figure of authority and a potential force behind the improvement of their lives. The image of Pope John Paul II blessing (or talking to?) a disabled woman is on the cover of the collection and he is the only person connected with the Church that the authors of

88 All the memoirs are written by women with physical and sensory disabilities, and thus there is no mention of nonnormative minds in the collection.
the memoirs discuss. However, they mostly focus on God and invoke him in the last paragraphs of the entries. The recurring comments about God and religion, almost absent in other disability memoirs published in the 1970s and 1980s, point to deeply-rooted Polish Catholicism and the changes in publishing laws. In some cases, mentioning God helps writers to accept their life: “Only God gives life and (...) every suffering is beautiful and makes sense” (21). The author of the memoir “To ze urodzilam sie chora dalo mi glebsze spojrzenie na zycie” (“The Fact that I Was Born Ill Gave Me a Deeper Understanding of Life”) interprets the injustices she suffers as a challenge given to her by God: “Our happiness depends on how we approach the problems we encounter: as a wall that stops us, or an exam given to us by God that we need to pass as good as possible” (24). Another person comments that God is the only reason why disabled people do not commit suicide (44). In a similar vein, a different author writes that faith in God helped her survive (51). The appeals to God or invocations of God confirm that the state (or the Church) is not a viable addressee of women’s complaints. Only one person says that “the state should protect the most marginalized groups” (88), but she adds that “today an invalid has no chance to live in dignity” (95).

A more just future equals a more accessible future. Accessibility here becomes synonymous with both inclusion in society and acquiring citizenship rights. The authors want to live in a more just society that provides them with employment and accepts their non-normative bodies. They want their reproductive rights to be respected and they do not want to experience violence. Moreover, they seek both economic and social justice. They are not apologists for socialism, but they do not applaud capitalism either. Crucially, they wrote their

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89 On the cover a disabled woman is standing next to her wheelchair talking to (or being blessed by?) the Pope.
90 Perhaps, writing openly about one’s faith in God became permissible only after the 1989 systemic transformation. While the authors of disability memoirs published in the 1970s and 1980s mention the Church as the institution that has some interest in disabled population, and some of them write about their religious experiences and faith, their confessions are usually short and they do not spend much time writing about it.
memoirs in 1990 and 1991, at the same time that political leaders, activists, American and European policy makers, and World Bank officials were engineering a capitalist future for Poland. The two visions diverged.

**Revolution and Impasse**

On June 4, 1989, after forty-five years of socialist rule, the first “free” elections took place in Poland. Not a single author of *Cierpieniem pisane (Written through Suffering)* mentions if she cast a vote. Similarly, no one mentions the Round Table discussions, which started in February 1989 (and were broadcasted on TV) during which representatives of the government and the opposition agreed on organizing the elections for June. A reader of the collection does not know if the authors were members of the Party or the Solidarity trade union and what they thought about the ongoing changes in Eastern Europe. The victorious tone present in many historical narratives is absent here. Instead, disabled women confess that “it is difficult to write letters [to friends] now when there is no work, no enthusiasm, only impatience and anxiety” (43) or that “the only thing I want is to work the way I used to. Is it too much to ask for? In competition with able-bodied women disabled women have no chance to get a job” (47). Another woman writes that “right now my family has no prospects of improving their housing conditions” (75). The shift from state socialism to capitalism becomes synonymous with a heightened state of anxiety and precarity due to rising unemployment and worsening housing situations. Judging from the texts, the shift does not entail a major transformation of state structures. The authors do not use the names “socialism,” “communism,” or “capitalism,” nor—as I mentioned above—do they name political leaders and activists. The refusal to mention the events, and the people responsible

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for them, might suggest that, for these disabled women, the political change simply did not matter. A deep sense of abandonment by the state – which started long before 1989 and survived the democratic elections – explains why disabled women do not mention transformation directly and hence disrupt the rigid historical dichotomy that relies on the juxtaposition of state socialism and capitalism. The authors do not connect their own lives and experiences with the political events taking place in the country. They feel abandoned by the state and placed outside the national community. Their lives are not objects of political interest and their bodies are sites of state-sanctioned violence.

Since the memoirs do not pay direct attention to the political transformation, they do not make a clear distinction between the socialist period and newly-established capitalism. In some of the writings, there appears a division between “then” and “now,” but both are characterized by violence, poverty, and difficult living conditions. The author of a memoir titled “Praca i przebywanie wsiad ludzi sa dla mnie wszystkim” (“Working and Being with Other People is Everything to Me”) mentions transformation under the name of “the era of unemployment” (123). The political change is synonymous, here, with unemployment, which recurs as a topic in other memoirs as well. Rising unemployment, coupled with price increases (Ash 38) and their gradual societal normalization, contrasted strikingly with the communist commitment to the entry of women into the labor force (Gal and Kligman 75). Gal and Kligman, in *The Politics of Gender After Socialism*, write that “full employment through the centralized control of production (and reproduction) and state provision for basic social benefits for all citizens formed the backbone of the socialist modernization strategy” (75). After 1989, as the memoirs attest, full employment stopped being a priority. A Polish sociologist, Pawel Spiewak, in his article on the Polish transformation, writes that “The liberals [who dominated the economic and financial institutions after 1989] did not offer a
new solution to financial problems, but were focused on imitating the Western solutions and believed that it was best to immediately introduce Poland to the free market ideology” (631).

The authors do not mention new economic solutions at all. However, the fact that they write that they cannot expect to buy an apartment any time soon and are uncertain if they will ever be able to is a result of the financial reforms and new forms of apartment distribution.

The author of “Milosc Najblizszych i Gleboka Wiara Dodaja Mi Sił” (“My Family’s Love and Faith Give Me Strength”) writes that she would like to own an apartment when she is old, but she is afraid she will not have enough money (59). Another woman shares her sentiment and writes: “In the past I had dreams. My hopes to receive an apartment are gone now, because I will never be able to afford it” (34). A woman whose husband beats her cannot leave him, because she has nowhere to go: her children will not help her and she has no friends who can take her in (139-140). She is already retired and thus has no prospects of buying an apartment.

An economic crisis, lack of affordable apartments, and the absence of social services in the wake of political transformation force her to live with a husband who abuses her. The events of 1989 only intensify the “crisis ordinariness” she experiences.

While most authors seem to be disillusioned with the current situation, two women notice that the systemic transformation propelled some public figures to discuss disability issues more often than before (however, they do not identify who talks about disabled people more often: politicians? Journalists? Representatives of trade unions?). One of them writes “under a new governmentality they talk more about us” (116) and the other one adds: “There is so much talk about helping disabled people now” (29). However, apart from these vague statements they do not explain what exactly is said and what kind of policies are planned. To a certain extent, the general statements made by politicians that the two women include in their memoirs emphasize the gap between lived reality and unfulfilled promises made to the
disabled population by politicians. There is only one author who openly praises the socialist state and writes nostalgically about free tickets to the theatre, opera, and other cultural institutions she enjoyed in the past (44). She also writes about the free education she received and for which she is grateful (44), even though it did not make it easier for her to find a job (42). But, for the majority of the writers, there is no qualitative difference between before and after the shift and thus, in their writings, they merge the two periods. Instead of a “historical transformation that affects every aspect of social, political, and economical life” (Baer 44), disabled women’s life writing depicts a continuation of various forms of exclusion, oppression, and poverty. Needless to say, this way of reporting, or rather silencing, the 1989 political transformation challenges the mainstream Polish narrative that divides Polish history into the “socialist” and “post-socialist” period. Here, there is no caesura between the “socialist” and “post-socialist” periods, but only a continuing crisis marked by different states of anxiety. These writings remind us that “The sometimes subtle and hidden continuities with socialism are as powerful as the dramatic ruptures” (Gal and Kligman 4), and thus they force us to think of alternative conceptualizations of the events of 1989 in Poland.

Even though the memoir competition ad did not ask for references to the political and financial change, Cierpieniem pisane (Written through Suffering) considers the processes of the post-socialist transformation from both gendered and disabled perspectives. These memoirs highlight a lack of linear progression from state socialism to capitalism and hence break the normative temporality of change. They emphasize the continuities with socialism, such as societal exclusion and lack of access to medical and social services, revealing that even a political rupture cannot end a” crisis ordinariness” experienced by disabled women. Crisis can be identified here with impasse, which constitutes a stretched-out presence.

92 The context suggests that these are politicians who discuss disability issues more often, but it is not entirely clear. It could be journalists or some other public figures.


_Cruel Optimism_, Berlant defines impasse as “a formal term for encountering the duration of the present” (199) and notices that during an impasse “one keeps moving, but one moves paradoxically, in the _same space_” (199). Impasse suspends events—here, it does not allow disabled women to experience the 1989 systemic transformation and it suspends the linear movement of time. Thinking of disabled women’s lives during the time of post-socialist transformation as a form of impasse opposes a narrative of revolution—a radical and immediate change. It shows different and overlapping temporalities occurring in Poland and reminds us that not all populations participated evenly in the ongoing changes.

### Conclusion

_Cierpieniem pisane_ (_Written through Suffering_) goes against the dominant and victorious narrative of the 1989 transformation. Twenty-one disabled women challenge the mainstream analysis, which, in the words of a popular Polish sociologist and an applauder of the 1989 events, Pawel Sztompka, “constituted a major break in historical continuity, a complete and radical change at all levels of social life, for great masses of people” (36). Disabled women’s writings force one to recognize continuities with socialism, rather than radical ruptures, and offer alternative ways—perhaps ones that fit people’s experiences more accurately—of conceptualizing the mainstream narrative about Polish transformation that has been told since 1989. Equally important, the employment of disability and gender as analytical tools allows one to ask whose perspectives are represented in the dominant historical accounts of political change. Additionally, what the analysis of the collection makes clear is that political and economic transformation did not entail a transformation of the national community itself. While the political institutions and financial structures and institutions changed, the processes of discrimination and exclusion did not.
Disabled women, the authors of *Cierpieniem pisane* (Written through Suffering), are, however, desiring subjects who, despite the conditions they endure, attempt to imagine an accessible, non-ableist, and non-patriarchal future. That is why their writings have a political dimension. By focusing on the precarious ordinariness the writers continue to experience, the memoirs contest boundaries between political and domestic spheres and present the family as a site of state-sanctioned violence. They also understand the domestic sphere as a primary context for women’s lives. Disability does not threaten or redefine domesticity, but becomes integrated into it. The authors inscribe pain into politics, but they also inscribe themselves into a symbolic order from which they have been excluded. Moreover, reading *Cierpieniem pisane* (Written through Suffering) in the context of political transformation propels us to ask whose voices, in addition to disabled women’s, might also be lost in the dominant narrative of the transformation as a revolution and immediate change. Most importantly, disabled women’s life writing shows that transformation and its gains were not distributed evenly across the population and that democratic rights were not universal. At the same time, the construction of the autobiographical subject is an act of agency that enables the authors to counteract abandonment and dehumanization.
EPILOGUE

No Future: Disability in Young Adult Literature and Disability Memoirs in Post-1989 Poland

Disability in YAL published under state socialism conflicts with national belonging. Rehabilitation and successfully overcoming disability, which are at the center of the 1950s and 1960s novels for young adults, reconcile disabled subjects’ belonging within a national socialist body and secure their citizenship. In the 1970s and 1980s, YAL opens up new possibilities of joining a national collective: participation in the labor regime replaces the imperative to rehabilitate and functions as a symbolic rehabilitation. Even if the rules of joining a national body become more flexible and a disabled subject does not have to overcome her disability—it is enough if she proves herself “productive”—the question of belonging and a tension between belonging to a national body and a disabled community remain the crux of socialist YAL. However, post-1989 YAL does not concern itself with the relationship between the nation and its disabled citizen. The nation disappears from these texts; so does WWII, a common topic in socialist YAL. Disability is no longer conceptualized in political and relational-national terms but instead gains a new understanding: a medical one. Moreover, the authors do not mention the events of 1989, a capitalist transformation, or pre-1989 Poland (in contrast to socialist YAL that oftentimes refers to pre-1945 Poland). The socialist past is erased.

What has not changed in the representations of disability is its embeddedness in the familial context. Disability affects the entire family, but more importantly, it threatens it. The most popular YA novels published in the past twenty-nine years posit disability as a family’s enemy; as a “force” that destroys family bonds and thus needs to “disappear.” “Disappearing” usually takes the form of a cure or death. The protagonists of two popular novels—*Poczwarka (The Pupa)* by Dorota Terakowska and *Wyspa mojej siostry (My Sister’s Island)* by Katarzyna
Ryrych that I discuss in detail below—two girls with Down syndrome die at a young age.\footnote{During my research I found only one YA novel published under state socialism that has a protagonist with Down syndrome – *Stopniowanie nieregularne* by Maria Borowa (1985). While the ways in which the author describes Ania, the girl with Down syndrome, remain highly problematic and emphasize that the girl disgusts other people, she does not die in the end of the novel. None of the disabled protagonists in YAL published during the socialist period died.}

Both authors present death as a liberation for the families and the girls. According to Terakowska and Ryrych, death constitutes a happy end for disabled subjects. I argue though that the death of these two protagonists suggests the inability of post-1989 YAL to imagine a future for disabled subjects and reminds one of capitalist Poland’s failure to create space for diversity. YAL envisages capitalist Poland as able-bodied and thus these two novels become sites of expressing a desire for disability’s absence.\footnote{Capitalist Poland operates differently than Western neoliberal states whose disability politics in *Disabilitz Biopolitics* David Mitchell defined as “neoliberal inclusionism” (2). Mitchell writes that “inclusionism requires that disability be tolerated as long as it does not demand an excessive degree of change from relatively inflexible institutions, environments, and norms of belonging” (14). Intellectual disability in post-1989 Poland proves to be intolerable; it simply cannot be included—it has to disappear.} The question of not belonging to a family replaces the socialist question of not belonging to a nation.

Disability memoirs, similar to those published under state socialism, offer more diverse representations of disability than YAL. While stories of rehabilitation and seeking cure are at the center of some texts, e.g. *Olowek (A Pencil)* by Katarzyna Rosicka, Laura Jurga writes a story of living with disability. In the last pages of her memoir, *Moje Pory Roku (My Seasons)* she articulates a demand for disability rights. At the same time, Jurga argues against intersectional approaches to disability and while she demands rights for disabled citizens she denies them to LGBTQA subjects. Anna Sobolewska’s popular memoir *Cela: odpowiedz na zespół Downa (Cela: A Response to Down Syndrome)* complicates YAL’s understanding of disability as a threat to family life and shows that a daughter with Down syndrome does not mean the end of a family’s happiness. Thinking about her memoir and
Ryrych and Terakowska’s novels together reveals contradictory discourses on disability—in particular intellectual disability—in contemporary Poland.

Disability memoirs also participate in presenting disability as a family’s enemy, in particular *Olowek* (*A Pencil*). In Rosicka’s account disability weakens the family bonds and turns people against each other. Family members do not perform the role of doctors or physical therapists—in contrast to both the YAL and disability memoirs’ depictions of disabled subjects and their families’ relations during the socialist period—they are barely willing to help a disabled person with basic tasks. Perhaps the crucial difference is that in both pre-and post-1989 YAL and the bulk of disability memoirs, disabled protagonists are children and teenagers whose mothers help them overcome disability or simply take care of them (as in the case of *Poczwarka*), while *Olowek* (*A Pencil*) tells the story of a disabled mother whose teenaged and adult children refuse to perform the role of caregivers. In other words, disability and the politics of care operate differently when it is the mother who stops being a caretaker and requires help herself. Additionally, what distinguishes disability memoirs from YAL and memoirs published before 1989 is the emergence of religion as one of the main topics. The authors, in particular Rosicka, discuss in their texts God, Catholicism and praying. It is the language of religion and Catholic spirituality that the authors employ to frame their experiences of living with disability. Religion replaces the socialist-producer paradigm, but possibly in the absence of her children’s concern for her well-being, faith in God substitutes, to a certain extent, for Rosicka’s desire for her family’s love and care.

**Family, Violence, and Disability in YAL**

Post-1989 YAL almost unanimously presents disability as a threat to the family. Disability destroys family bonds, puts enormous pressure—social and financial—on family members, and jeopardizes relationships. Disability both metaphorically and literally is
synonymous with violence. Dorota Terakowska and Katarzyna Ryrych show how girls with Down syndrome physically threaten other people and how their lives destroy their parents’ relationships. Barbara Ciwoniuk’s 2011 Igor (Igor) is one of a few texts that discusses violence that a disabled child experiences instead of showing a disabled child inflicting violence upon others. While disability becomes the family’s enemy, the ways in which family itself is presented after 1989 has changed too. One of the most striking features is that families are often headed by a single parent. In Igor (Igor), Ten Gruby (The Fat One), and O Stephenie Hawkingu, czarnej dziurze i myszach podpodłogowych (On Stephen Hawking, Black Holes, and Mice Who Live Under the Floor) mothers raise disabled children on their own. Husbands either left them and do not contact the children or died. In Wyspa mojej siostry (My Sister’s Island) a single father is responsible for his two daughters. Disability then is associated with families that are “broken” and lack one of the parents. There are few novels that show a family made up of two parents who have a child with disability. Disability, in other words, cancels the possibility of having a normative family. Or it seems that the authors cannot imagine a family that has a disabled child and stays together. As a result, there is no place for disability within the space of the normative family: the two are in conflict. If Eunjung Kim is right when she writes in the South-Korean context that “family has been the most prominent site constructed to enforce normality” (232), then the Polish post-1989 example reveals that if family cannot enforce normality, or in other words cannot erase or cure disability, then disability destroys the family. Thus, family, disability, and violence are inseparable.

The methods of curing and rehabilitating a disabled child have changed too. The mothers are no longer managers of their child’s overcoming of disability. Poland's natural landscape does not heal a disabled body and work cannot function as a metaphorical rehabilitation. YAL attests to the emergence of new ways of curing, including medicine and
breakthroughs in genetic research, which are the most prominent. The parents of a blind girl in *Kto to widział* (*Who Has Seen It*) by Irena Landau do not teach their daughter the Braille alphabet in hopes that soon a new cure would appear and their daughter would start to see. In Katarzyna Ryrych’s *O Stephenie Hawingu, czarnej dziurze i myszach podpodłogowych* (*On Stephen Hawking, Black Holes, and Mice Who Live Under the Floor*) a disabled teenager himself organizes a surgery in London that is supposed to help him regain the ability to walk. In *Poczwarka* (*The Pupa*) and *Wyspa mojej siostry* (*My Sister’s Island*), able-bodied protagonists cannot stop dreaming of a genetic solution that would prevent the births of children with Down syndrome. The discourse of medicine and genetic research represents a modernity brought by capitalism and emphasizes the eradication of disabilities through “preventative measures.” It also constitutes one of the major differences from YAL published under state socialism. Capitalist Poland relies on a much more medicalized and individual understanding of disability than its socialist predecessor, which aligns with American representations of disability in the 1980s sick-teen lit discussed by Julie Passanante Elman in *Chronic Youth*. Post-1989 YAL shows that while disability in the 1970s and 1980s could be rehabilitated symbolically through labor and productivity, this is no longer an option in capitalist Poland. Disability needs to disappear literally and for good. Perhaps, the transfer of medical understandings of disability – absent in the literature of previous decades – is one of the signs of capitalist transformation and announces the end of state socialism.

Published in 2001, *Poczwarka* (*The Pupa*) by Dorota Terakowska cannot reconcile a tension between the author’s crude critique of Polish capitalism with its emphasis on material success that destroys interpersonal relationships and an inability to imagine a future for a girl with Down syndrome. The book takes place in the late 1990s in Krakow and Adam and Ewa

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95 In 2014 there was a third edition of the book and so far it has been translated into three languages: German, Lithuanian, and Vietnamese.
(the biblical names are not coincidental) are thirty-something-year-old, successful, rich owners of a big house in the suburbs who want to have a child (they waited to have a child until they accumulated enough resources to secure its future). When a daughter with Down syndrome is born their lives and dreams are shattered:

Adam dreamed about a child. Gaining knowledge, work, and making money made sense only because of a child he wanted to inherit everything he had. A quickly developing company, accumulated capital, buying stock, a house with a garden – it was all for a child. (...) But not this child. (123)

The couple does not divorce, but they stop communicating with each other and live separately in the same house. The wife quits her job and takes care of their child, the husband spends his days at work running a successful company and being ashamed and disgusted by his daughter. He decides not to divorce his wife simply for the fear of social perception: he has a high position and is afraid of what people would think if he left his wife who raises their disabled daughter. Though legally still married, their daughter’s birth has destroyed their relationship.

Disability in this novel has one clear function: it offers a way to criticize Polish capitalism. By showing the impossibilities of finding accommodations for Mysia, a protagonist with Down syndrome, and the deep disappointment the couple experiences when their child is born, Terakowska attempts to show that being rich and successful cannot secure one’s happiness and that achieving a “perfect” life with a “perfect” child is an illusion. And yet, the ending undermines a lesson Terakowska wanted to teach her readers: at the age of nine Mysia suddenly dies (she wanted to die, so her death is presented as a fulfillment of her wish), her parents start to accept disability (at the moment when they do not have to anymore, since the child dies) and are no longer ashamed of their daughter (again, they stop being embarrassed of her right before she dies). Thus, as a reward for this laudable transformation they reunite and have a new, able-bodied child. Once Mysia taught them to live and helped them understand that material possessions cannot guarantee happiness and there is no such
thing as a perfect genetic make-up, she becomes redundant and unnecessary. This redundancy points to Terakowska’s failure of imagining a future for a family with a disabled child. Although the author criticizes capitalism she is unable to think of an alternative or of a more accommodating version of capitalism. Her book sends a message that there is simply no room for intellectual disability in contemporary Poland and that a marriage with a disabled child cannot be happy. Disability shatters people’s dreams and disrupts a normative trajectory of life and thus cannot be reconciled with family life. The only solution that brings life back on its tracks is the disappearance of a disabled subject. But Terakowska lacks honesty when discussing Mysia’s death: instead of presenting it as her parents’ wish and a systemic inability to provide educational opportunities for her, she constructs an internal monologue, in which Mysia talks with the biblical Adam and Eve and the serpent and in which she tells the serpent that she would join them in the garden (that sits for heaven in her monologue):

There, I am locked up at home, because mom is afraid of taking me to the park, supermarket, and even to the street.(…) There, children do not want to play with me and look at me as if they were afraid of me or disgusted by me. (…) Here I can dance. Yes, I will stay with you [she says it to the serpent and thus confirms a wish to die and go to heaven]. (292-3)

Mysia “talks” in her internal monologue, but the outside world does not understand her speech made up mostly by different syllables. Her mother is often confused by what Mysia says and her words are completely incomprehensible to other people, which ultimately suggests her incompatibility with the world. The communication barrier recalls her “otherworldly” status and the impossibility of integrating her with family and society. In her internal monologue (that runs parallel to a third-person narrative that focuses on the mother and father) she talks with biblical Adam and Ewa and dreams of a place in which she would fit in and be understood. That place is heaven and the only way to get there is a premature, sudden death. I claim that by introducing Mysia’s internal monologue Terakowska absolves a reader from a feeling of guilt when experiencing a satisfaction when a “normal”
life gets restored in the end of the novel and the wife and husband reunite and have an able-bodied child. But showing that a disabled child desires to die is a manipulation. What gets glossed over is that Mysia’s wish to die is motivated by the fact that her mother does not understand her, her father rejects her, people around her are disgusted by her, and that she herself does not know how to continue living in such a hostile world. Family exclusion and systemic oppression make her want to die. And yet, Terakowska shows death as a happy ending for both her and her parents. Mysia goes to heaven, in which she meets other disabled children and is finally able to express herself, sing and dance happily with other children:

God’s gifts [that is how the authors refers to disabled children] danced and felt joy that they spent a brief moment on earth and experienced true feelings: love, hatred, acceptance, rejection, isolation or loneliness. (...) Butterflies hidden in the pupa of their bodies fluttered invisible to other people wings. (316)

While Mysia is in heaven dancing with other disabled children who like her wanted to die, her parents are released from the duty of taking care of her. As a result, the failure to accommodate a disabled child and her death are turned into a triumph.

Katarzyna Ryrych, the author of Wyspa mojej siostry (My Sister’s Island) published in 2011, seems to agree with Dorota Terakowska that the place most suited for young girls with Down syndrome is heaven. In her widely acclaimed novel that received many awards, Pippi, a protagonist with Down syndrome, dies suddenly and seemingly without a reason in her early twenties. Pippi and her younger able-bodied sisters are raised by a single father. Their mother died when the girls were little and the father did not remarry: the woman he dated and wanted to be with broke up with him, because she did not want to raise Pippi. Pippi, similarly to Mysia, Terakowska’s protagonist, does not speak and is not able to articulate her wishes in a manner that would be understandable to the people around her. Her inability to communicate with her family members allows them to project their fears and fantasies on her and speak for her. Pippi is presented as a mute, dangerous, fat figure who—for reasons that are never contested in the novel, but rather rendered self-evident—is excluded from the children’s
community in the neighborhood and does not attend school. Her sister compares her—in what was supposed to be a loving comparison but ended up only additionally dehumanizing Pippi—to a monkey (16). Pippi loves to cook though, and at some point, her sister imagines that in the future they could run a restaurant together. When the sister—who is also a narrator of the book—grows up she realizes that Pippi cannot work at a restaurant:

> When I heard that Pippi checks the pots in the kitchen and wants them to be always at their proper place I asked myself how many pots we would need in our restaurant and if they could always be put back on the same spot. At this moment the idea of a restaurant started to fade away and I realized that when I think of the future I do not see my sister there. (53-4)

That Pippi likes her pots always in the same place in the kitchen functions as a reminder that there is simply no future for her. That, coupled with her inability to speak and the danger she presents to other children in the neighborhood (she never hurt anyone, but somehow represents danger), serves as sufficient reason to foreclose the possibility of a future for her.

However, the disappearance of a disabled subject enables a future for able-bodied members of the family. When Pippi is in her late teens her father takes her to a state-run institution for disabled people. Ryrych depicts the institution as a nice place where Pippi finds friends (106). She is no longer lonely. In the meantime, her father reunites with his former girlfriend, the sister grows up and the family, as the sister says, stopped talking and visiting Pippi: “We have not talked about Pippi for such a long time that it seemed as if she disappeared or was never here in the first place” (109). Then the sister gets a driver’s license and visits her sister on her own. She recognizes that Pippi is like “a lonely island” (114, 115). What turned Pippi into “a lonely island” is Down syndrome, not her treatment by the people around her. The book argues that it is disability that separated her from her family and the

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96 Additionally, it is important that future is imagined only in relation to work. The lack of jobs for Pippi equals no future for her, which might suggest an impossibility to project a future that would not entail working in a capitalist system.
world. That is why the sister decides to study medicine at the university. She confesses: “I decided to look for an answer to the question I kept asking ‘WHY.’ [capitalized in the original] I think that many people tried to do it before, and similarly to them I hope that I will be the first one to discover the cause [of Down syndrome] and I will make the lonely islands disappear” (115). Her aspiration is to find out what causes a genetic modification of the twenty-first chromosome and get rid of it.

A neo-eugenic idea to eliminate disability and disabled people permeates the novel. Pippi’s family not only wants her to disappear, but the sister wants to cure humanity by preventing the birth of all children with Down syndrome. Instead of asking why Pippi is lonely and what kind of accommodations both the family and society could provide, she muses how to get rid of the twenty-first chromosome. For Ryrych this desire is noble. While searching for a medical solution, the sister imagines her disabled sister in heaven: “Where are you Pippi in your blue dress? I believe that you sail the warm seas, the bed becomes a ship and all the pirates escape to their islands and hide their gold” (11). Heaven is imagined here to be a sea-playground: even though Pippi died when she was in her early twenties she is still presented as an eternal child. She is not a citizen, not an adult and the fact that her family uses a nickname “Pippi” in order to refer to her and not her actual name (which the reader never learns) is supposed to solve the problem of never granting her any rights and not recognizing her as a citizen.

In 2001 and 2011, Terakowska and Ryrych published their tales of disabled girls happily dying.97 In 2002, a year after Terakowska released Poczwarka (The Pupa) and nine years before Ryrych sent her protagonist on a quest to make Down syndrome disappear, Anna Sobolewska, a professor of Polish literature working at the Polish Academy of Sciences,

97 Obviously, these sorts of stories would have been unimaginable if the dying children were able-bodied.
published a memoir *Cela: odpowiedź na zespół Downa* (*Cela: A Response to Down Syndrome*). It is a disability memoir, which discusses family life with a daughter who has Down syndrome. The daughter does not die and life with her is not a string of unhappiness. The only moment when death appears in the book is when the doctors, immediately after Cela was born, tell Sobolewska that her daughter might die prematurely (9). She is quick to correct them and adds that “sicknesses and malfunctions that people associate with Down syndrome are not as often as people think” (9). She also makes sure to say in the first few pages of the book that “living with a child with a genetic defect [she does not use the language of the disability rights movement] poses some problems, but it is mostly a source of happiness, not despair” (7). In other words, her account contradicts the fictional visions of raising a child with Down syndrome. What is more, the book is written against ableist assumptions that life with an intellectually disabled child is a burden. While literary fiction establishes a site of expressing eugenic desires masked as “a sensitive and beautiful story about trying to learn about the world of a person with Down syndrome”—as the blurb on the *Wyspa mojej siostry* (*My Sister’s Island*) cover announces—Sobolewska’s memoir offers “resistance” (even though she herself does not use this word) as a theoretical framework through which a reader can understand disability.

Sobolewska’s text resists and criticizes the desire for disability’s absence and focuses on disability accommodations and inclusion. Her memoir, perhaps in a romanticized way, reveals disability as a site of contesting capitalism. She writes:

Cela does not need to collect things in order to become someone. Instead of asking her parents for expensive toys she creates them in her imagination. That is why, despite her impairment that makes her dependent on other people, she is free and lives her life according to her own ‘existential project.’ (…) I realized that Cela is not pressured to follow social fashions and is not limited by social norms and conventions, and, paradoxically, we [her family] are not either. Cela made us non-conformists. Thanks to her we experience freedom. (250)
Disability, in the words of the mother, frees Cela from a desire to accumulate goods and allows her to live her life according to the rules she creates. Her outsider position and disregard for social norms liberate her parents, too. Disability then is in conflict with capitalist values and enables resistance. Sobolewska writes that Cela’s biggest life goal is to live with her best friend. In the end of the book Sobolewska includes Cela’s short papers, in which she mentions the names of all her close friends and clearly articulates a wish to live with one of them (and with cats), which proves that what she is interested in is disability community and artistic expression—she repeats a few times that she wants to be a painter in the future (266, 267).

Cela has a vision of her own future: a future that consists of meeting and living with friends and creating art. Her vision of a future does not involve becoming more integrated with the able-bodied world—all of her friends are disabled—and is divorced from the idea of remunerated labor. Disability does not become included in a capitalist system here - Sobolewska, perhaps unintentionally, points out that disability offers subversive potential to capitalist demands. However, she also writes that Cela does not accept her own disability: “She has started describing herself as ‘retarded,’ even though no one uses this word anymore. She repeats she does not want to be a ‘half-child’” (266). Cela, probably because of ableist social attitudes, thinks of herself as a ‘half-child.’ Her father, a journalist, in an article about her (reprinted in the book) adds that “She wants to overcome an obstacle, go beyond the impairment, at least symbolically [Cela often pretends to be either a lion or a boy; Sobolewska says that she associates being a lion or a boy with strength and courage that allow her, symbolically, to overcome Down syndrome]. She looks for a way out of a trap. I accompany her in her searchings” (246). On the one hand, Sobolewska presents disability as a site of contesting capitalism, and on the other hand Cela rebels against disability itself. However, Cela’s protest against Down syndrome is in fact a protest against ableist norms that
make disability undesirable, that present adult people with Down syndrome as ‘half-children,’
and that result in social exclusion. As a result, in this memoir disability is a condition that
produces resistance to social norms and a political and economic system, but that is also in
conflict with itself.

**Rights, Loss, and Religion in Disability Memoirs**

Disability memoirs published under state socialism offer more diverse representations
of disability than contemporary novels for young adults. In contrast to YAL, disability
memoirs often testify to the failures of overcoming disability and think of rehabilitation as a
source of intimacy with another person rather than a mode of transforming a disabled person
into an able-bodied citizen. The understanding of rehabilitation as a way of establishing a
close relationship with another person disappears in post-1989 disability memoirs. In general,
sexuality and intimacy are no longer discussed. The authors do not write about dating,
marriages, and desires for sexual contact. In *Olowek (A Pencil)*, which I analyze in the next
section, Katarzyna Rosicka writes about sexuality, but it refers to her pre-disability life.
Disability is understood in the capitalist context as a loss, including a loss of sexual life,
which differentiates it from disability memoirs published under state socialism that attest to
the hardships of living under socialism with disability, but hardly ever position disability as a
loss. Some of the post-1989 memoirs fit what Thomas Couser terms “the rhetoric of
nostalgia” (38). In these texts, the authors orient themselves toward the past and reminisce
about the life they had before disability or illness. Katarzyna Rosicka’s *Olowek (A Pencil)*,
published in 2011, tells the story of the author’s experiences of living with amyotrophic
lateral sclerosis and exemplifies a Polish version of “the rhetoric of nostalgia.”

Katarzyna Rosicka was a successful owner of a modeling agency, a divorcée, and a
mother of three when she received an amyotrophic lateral sclerosis diagnosis in her forties.
She says that bit by bit disability takes away her job, money, lover, societal respect and position, and, finally, control over her own body. On one of the first few pages she provides a calendar of loss: “5.12.2002 I crossed the street by myself for the last time; 1.1.2003 I drove the car by myself for the last time; 5.3.2003 I had sex for the last time; 11.29.2003 I talked on the phone for the last time; 3.15.2005 I ate by myself for the last time and I lost the last bits of freedom‖ (11). Ultimately, because of disability, she loses herself: “I looked at the photos of myself taken few years ago and I thought ‘that is me.’ But it was not me” (212). Rosicka identifies disability exclusively with loss. Conversely, though, to what Couser writes—that “the rhetoric of loss” does not concern itself with “issues of accessibility” (39)—Rosicka discusses the conditions in the state-run institutions for disabled people, the wait time for the computer equipment that allows her to write by herself (around two years), and the rehabilitation services (210). She points to the exclusion disabled people suffer in society and says that there is no improvement of the conditions in which disabled people live, thanks to “our dear state” (210). However, she does not offer a further analysis of the state and its relationship to disabled people. She does not write about the lack of rights and second-class citizenship status of people with disabilities. Instead, she writes about God and her own conversion. In other words, she approaches her own illness and the losses she experiences through a religious framework.

The titular “pencil” has a religious meaning. In the end of the text, Rosicka confesses that she wants to be “a pencil in God’s hands” (298). Only by converting to Catholicism does she start to understand and accept her illness. Thanks to illness, she becomes a better person. On the one hand, disability is identified with loss, and on the other it helps her to transform into a more sensitive, accepting, and humble person who refuses material goods and recognizes the shallowness of her pre-illness life. Her text links “the rhetoric of nostalgia” with “the rhetoric of spiritual compensation” (Couser 36). In Signifying Bodies, Couser writes
that “spiritual compensation” allows the author to “find a comic plot in her life” (37). In Rosicka’s account the religious life compensates both for the disability rights she is denied and the absence of her family’s help and love, since the people closest to her do not seem to care about her. Her newly found religion allows Rosicka to orient herself toward the future, which here becomes synonymous with life after death. At the same time, the focus on God and life after death is what, I argue, stops her from articulating a demand for disability rights. In other words, the text indicates that it is religion and the focus on the afterlife that cancels the possibility of demanding disability rights and improving the quality of life for disabled people. She is concerned with material conditions in which disabled people live in Poland (89, 122), but with the progression of the narrative she becomes more and more focused on her spiritual life. The belief in afterlife erases the problem of the lack of a good future for disabled subjects in contemporary Poland.

In 2014’s Moje pory roku (My Seasons) Laura Jurga clearly demands disability rights. Born in the 1970s with a motor disability unidentified in the text, her memoir makes a parallel between overcoming disability and fighting the socialist system in the 1980s. This is one of the very few texts that openly references a socialist past and establishes a relationship between disability and a socialist system—the book argues that both have detrimental effects on individual and collective bodies and thus need to be overcome. While the struggle against socialism ends in 1989 (however, this moment is glossed over by the author), the struggle against disability and disability oppression continue. In the 1990s, Jurga studies special education at the university and works on disability issues (she does not fully disclose her professional occupation). The efforts to live “normally” and independently replace the desire to overcome disability and rehabilitative practices. Coupled with the imperative to become self-sufficient is the demand for disability rights and the recognition that they are violated on a daily basis:
As a person with disability I would like people to stop reassuring me that I have the same rights as they do. The reassuring is not enough, because disability rights are violated every day in the streets, at school, or at work. Our rights are violated, because of “our safety” or “everyone’s safety,” but these are only excuses. (…) Of course, there have been some positive changes in the past twenty years, but the exclusion and lack of acceptance are still ongoing. (239-240)

On the one hand, Jurga criticizes society and the state for lacking sensitivity and not recognizing disabled people as citizens, but on the other she suggests that disabled people and their allies have influence on disabled people’s situation:

we, the experts, caregivers, and people with disabilities, can decide how we talk about our limitations and this way shape our reality. It is difficult to change the stereotypes, which depict disabled people as sad, fearful, and suffering if this is how we ourselves discuss disability. And this is not a truthful representation of disabled life, because in everyone’s life, despite the difficulties, there is joy. (240)

The last pages of her memoir constitute a call for action and a demand for rights and social justice rather than a more traditional life narrative. By mentioning in one sentence “experts, caregivers, and people with disabilities” she envisions a coalition that could, potentially, start a disability rights movement in Poland, one that is for now nonexistent. On the same page she writes: “Perhaps, it is high time to start protesting and demanding our rights. The unemployed, homeless, and all who are excluded” (240). It is clear then that what she wants is a social justice movement that would unite all who are excluded in Polish society.

Yet, there are groups that Jurga does not want to align with: LGBTQA groups, for example. She says: “For me, it is unacceptable to ally with NGOs that work on the LGBTQA issues. It is difficult not to mention that for some years now there is a mandatory political correctness when it comes to issues of sexuality in our country” (241). It is unclear why her vision of a future coalition excludes LGBTQA groups. She adds that: “For years sexual preferences and intimate life was a personal matter. (…) Many people will say that I am prudish, but it is not – it is rather decency that should apply to everyone. Gay people do not have to inform their employers about their sexual preferences. As a person with a visible
disability I have no choice [she means that she has to inform her employer about her disability]” (242). This fragment pits disabled people against LGBTQA people and establishes a false parallel, according to which sexual preference is an invisible marker of identity while disability is a visible one. She forgets that many among LGBTQA people are disabled and not every disability is visible, and most importantly, that these two identity categories often intersect; they are not mutually exclusive. As a result, one of the first clearly articulated desires for social justice that encompasses different groups is based on exclusion in the post-1989 Polish disability memoirs. The lack of solidarity and the absence of recognition of intersecting identities and interests result in the lack of rights for disabled people and other excluded groups in contemporary Poland and for the foreseeable future.

Both post-1989 YAL and disability memoirs wrestle with different aspects of the lack of a future for disabled subjects in Poland. Whether it is the question of absent rights, societal unwillingness to accept and include disabled subjects into a national community, or the failure to imagine a future for intellectually disabled people, the post-1989 literature testifies to the inability of finding space for disabled people in capitalist Poland. All these texts, albeit in different ways, remind one of an unfulfilled 1989 democratic promise of equality for all citizens.
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206


211


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