# Deconstructing "Nowoczesna Gospodyni": The Home Efficiency Movement, Gender Roles, and Material Culture in Late State Socialist Poland

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This article deconstructs the politics of the home efficiency movement organization Komitet do spraw Gospodarstwa Domowego (hereafter the KGD), or the Home Economics Committee, in late state socialist Poland. We seek to address the broader issue of how a quasi-non-governmental organization (NGO) could carve out a niche as an influential expert group by operating in symbiosis with the state apparatus. We argue that the KGD positioned itself as an expert group between the communist state apparatus and society as an intermediary actor that supported the state to carry out its social policy of improving the standard of living. The KGD exercised its authority through its power/knowledge as an expert group that produced and shared scientific, technological, and social expertise. The organization acted through the promotion of a normative model of consumption and relevant social and gender roles consistent with the governmental policy of social and material modernization, particularly in the "backward" countryside. As we will demonstrate, such a strategy aimed to redefine the selfhood of women living in rural areas and to create a "modern self," a new consumption-based subjectivity. Such an objective resonated with the ideological framework of the Polish Communist Party's social and economic policies toward consumption.

The KGD, which operated within the broader structure of Liga Kobiet (hereafter the LK), or The League of Women, and virtually all KGD activists and the subjects of its educational campaigns, were women. One of the key strategies of the KGD was to resolve the emerging problem of women's dual role as housewives and workers and to facilitate the modernization of Polish households. The KGD emphasized the need for the social modernization of

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the Polish countryside by promoting the normative gender role of a rational "nowoczesna gospodyni" (modern rural housewife) that efficiently carries the burden of chores in the household and on the farm.[1] The KGD aimed to reshape the lives of rural housewives from being "irrational" and "backward" to that of the "nowoczesna gospodyni" by providing rural women with the knowledge of how to organize a "modern" consumption regime in their households. The organization presented itself as an actor that helped to facilitate access to home technologies such as electric ovens, automatic washing machines, vacuum cleaners, and food processors, and the knowledge necessary to efficiently include them in the rural household economy.[2]

Historians of consumption perceive the home efficiency movements that emerged in western Europe and the US during the early twentieth century as examples of how NGOs can play a significant role as an intermediary actor in shaping consumer cultures by carving out a niche for themselves between manufacturers, consumers, and governmental institutions.[3] Most of these works focus on the pre-World War II era; we will also refer to recent work by Danielle Dreilinger, who discusses the politics of gender and the cultural significance of the home economics movement in the post-war United States.[4] The home efficiency movements had contributed to shifts in consumer culture in several ways, such as the introduction of new designs like the The Frankfurt Kitchen, improved safety and standardized information for household products, education of consumers on making informed choices while purchasing and using new products, and promoted models of consumption relevant to women's emancipation.

This article highlights similarities and differences between the politics of the KGD, an organization that operated within the framework of emerging state socialist-style consumer culture, and the home efficiency movement in American post-war consumer culture. We discuss how such an organization, which claimed to be an NGO, collaborated with other expert groups, local governmental agencies, home appliance manufacturers, and trade organizations within the framework of the cultural logic of state socialism. This organization was capable of enrolling other social actors into collective action under the slogan of the modernization of households.[5] We will refer to the KGD as a "quasi-NGO," and it is important to explain what the "quasi" prefix

1. In Polish "gospodyni" refers to a housewife and a farmer's wife at the same time.

2. For the outline of the concept of household economy as a socio-economic structure that plays a significant role in consumer cultures, see: Richard R. Wilk, ed., *The Household Economy: Reconsidering the Domestic Mode Of Production* (Boulder, CO., 1989; New edition Abingdon, Eng., 2019); Jan De Vries, *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Behavior and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present* (Cambridge, Eng., 2008).

3. For the discussion on the history and agenda of the home efficiency movement, see: Janice Williams Rutherford, *Selling Mrs. Consumer: Christine Frederick and The Rise Of Household Efficiency* (Athens, GA, 2003); Sarah Stage and Virginia B. Vincenti, eds., *Rethinking Home Economics: Women and the History of a Profession* (Ithaca, 1997); Megan J. Elias, *Stir it Up: Home Economics in American Culture* (Philadelphia, 2008).

4. Danielle Dreilinger, *The Secret History of Home Economics: How Trailblazing Women Harnessed the Power of Home and Changed the Way We Live* (New York, 2021), 172–272.

5. The KGD and its role in public debates on technology and modernity in state socialist Poland will be discussed in an upcoming book: Patryk Wasiak, *Technological*

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means. In a seminal article on the shaping of the consumer protection movement in Poland in the early 1980s, Małgorzata Mazurek and Matthew Hilton discuss the case of Federacja Konsumentów (The Federation of Consumers, hereafter FK), an organization that was an instance of civil society because it fiercely represented the interests of consumers and openly questioned several elements of state policy towards consumption.[6] The KGD should not be considered as a civil society initiative since it did not encourage any social activism and self–organization among consumers. The KGD did not represent consumers as active subjects but rather attempted to shape their practices of consumption and their lifestyles according to a body of normative principles. The organization represented the interests of the state by sharing the same political agenda of fighting against backwardness and contributing to a more "modern" rational social behavior. In Polish popular jargon, such "quasi-NGOs" from the state-socialist era are derogatorily referred to as "transmission belts" that helped the state to carry out its policies.[7] Our paper deconstructs the repertoire of such a "transmission belt" and reflects upon its position in the power structures of late state socialism.

To understand the KGD's attempts to build the social role of the "nowoczesna gospodyni," it is necessary to explain some of the specific features of the Polish countryside under state socialism. Poland was the only country in the eastern bloc that did not undergo extensive collectivization of agriculture, whereby the state took over private farms and formed them into state-owned farms. Indeed, most of the agricultural areas were redistributed to peasants, and state-owned farms constituted only some 15 percent of such areas. As a social stratum, private farmers were problematic for the communist authorities due to their perceived backwardness because they lacked political engagement and class consciousness. Moreover, the cultural logic of a centrally planned economy favored the collective system of both industrial and agricultural production. The state introduced several reforms that aimed to stimulate the engagement of this social stratum in the communist project by helping them to run their farms more efficiently, and by them joining the strata of "farmer-worker" (*Chłopo-robotnik*) through their employment in the industrial sector. Thus, as the male farmers became occupied with their factory jobs, females had to take on more of the responsibilities of running the home and farm. This trend, referred to as the "feminization of farming," had the most impact in the 1960s and 70s. The KGD built its position by articulating the lack of preparedness of rural housewives for this new state as an acute social and economic problem.

*Innovation, Modernity, and Electric Goods in Late State Socialist Poland* (Lexington Books, forthcoming).

6. Malgorzata Mazurek and Matthew Hilton, "Consumerism, Solidarity and Communism: Consumer Protection and the Consumer Movement in Poland," *Journal of Contemporary History* 42, no. 2 (April 2007): 315–43.

7. The transmission belt term was originally used by Lenin to discuss the role of trade unions in helping the Communist Party in building the communist project. Vladimir Il′ich Lenin, "The Role and Functions of Trade Unions under the New Economic Policy," *Lenin's Collected Works*, 2nd ed., 45 vols. (Moscow, 1965), 33:188–96.

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Our source base includes archival documents of the KGD, a content analysis of its monthly periodical *Gospodarstwo Domowe* (Household), and several other relevant popular and expert publications. First, we outline how this case study is grounded in the recent literature on consumer culture of the eastern bloc. Then, we discuss the organizational structure of the KGD and the organization's core strategies in exercising power as an expert group and forming coalitions with other social actors. We then investigate how the KGD's key policies are relevant to the modernization of the Polish countryside through the interconnected policies of promoting the "nowoczesna gospodyni," and facilitating access to home appliances and the know-how necessary for their efficient use.

## The Politics of Modernization, Consumption, and Gender in State Socialism

Several authors have recently investigated the history of consumer cultures in the eastern bloc.[8] This research has predominantly focused on the production of consumer goods, the role of policymakers, and the experiences of consumers. Yet, little attention has been paid to the process of mediating consumption and investigating how such mediations include shaping and renegotiating consumers' subjectivities, and how they are were embedded into the power relations of state socialism. In recent years, consumer culture studies, design history, and the history of technology have undergone an extensive shift to the "production-consumption-mediation paradigm."[9] This paradigm focuses on social actors that play the role of cultural intermediaries in consumer cultures, who mediate the design of products, the access to goods in retail trade, and share knowledge that accompanies the practices of consumption.

In her paper summarizing the effect this research paradigm has had on design history, Grace Lees-Maffei notes how this shift has contributed to scholarship:

> Mediation offers a third stream which brings together issues of production and consumption, not through the examination of designers' intentions or actual consumption practices, but rather through the analysis of the cultural and social significance of designed objects, spaces and processes to reveal shared ideas and ideals. . . . first, the mediation emphasis continues the consumption turn within design history by exploring the role of channels such

8. Paulina Bren and Mary Neuburger, eds., *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe* (Oxford, 2012); Cristofer Scarboro, Diana Mincyte, and Zsuzsa Gille, eds., *The Socialist Good Life: Desire, Development, and Standards of Living in Eastern Europe* (Bloomington, 2020).

9. For the most important studies that elaborate on the concept of "mediations," see: Grace Lees-Maffei, "The Production-Consumption-Mediation Paradigm," *Journal of Design History* 22, no. 4 (December 2009), 351–76; Grace Lees-Maffei and Rebecca Houze, eds., *The Design History Reader* (Oxford, 2010), 427–66 (Section 11); Ruth Oldenziel, Adri Albert de la Bruhèze, and Onno de Wit, "Europe's Mediation Junction: Technology and Consumer Society in the 20th Century," *History and Technology* 21, no. 1 (March 2005): 107–39.

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> as television, magazines, corporate literature, advice literature, and so on in mediating between producers and consumers, forming consumption practices and ideas about design.[10]

Historians of consumption discuss the role of the aforementioned examples of mediating channels. Here we can bring instances of work that investigate the role of popular magazines in the median consumption-related imagery of masculinity and femininity.[11]

Sharon Zukin and Jennifer Smith Maguire in their review of the recent research of the history of consumption grasp the shaping of "consumption spaces": "New technologies, ideologies, and delivery systems create consumption spaces in an institutional framework shaped by key social groups, while individual men and women experience consumption as a project of forming, and expressing identity."[12] Later, we will see how the KGD took part in shaping such a framework through mediating channels. Recent works on consumption in the eastern bloc note the role of new consumption-related identities, while cultural historians discuss the cultural logic of the "socialist subjectivity," as in the case of "the Soviet self" by Choi Chatterjee and Karen Petrone.[13] Surprisingly, there is little interaction between both fields, however. Paulina Bren and Mary Neuburger note that their edited volume aims to shed more light on the "the forms, meanings, and myriad paths of consumption in postwar Eastern Europe. It is here that socialist citizens, just like their Western counterparts, learned to be consumers."[14] There is still much to be done in researching what historical actors facilitated learning how to be a consumer as an active agent that forms his or her identity through consumption. Moreover, recent studies pay attention to the identities of consumers from the emerging state socialist urban middle class, who eagerly embraced their new apartments, cars, and urban department stores. This approach corresponds with the still dominant trend in American histories of postwar consumer culture that focus on the middle-class suburbs, while topics such as consumption in rural areas and among ethnic minorities are still rather overlooked in academia.

10. Lees-Maffei, "The Production-Consumption-Mediation Paradigm," 366.

11. Tom Pendergast, *Creating the Modern Man: American Magazines and Consumer Culture, 1900–1950* (Columbia, MO, 2000); Adrian Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford, 2004); Janice Winship, *Inside Women's Magazines* (London, 1987). Similarly, a classical volume, *The Sex of Things*, includes studies that highlight how not only producers but also intermediary actors (retailers, the mass media, and expert groups) have an impact on the formation of gender-based consumer practices and identities: see Victoria De Grazia and Ellen Furlough, eds., *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective* (Berkeley, 1996).

12. Sharon Zukin and Jennifer Smith Maguire, "Consumers and Consumption," *Annual Review of Sociology*, 30 (January 2004): 173.

13. Choi Chatterjee and Karen Petrone bring a concise definition of subjectivity as a formation of the reflexive self which is "an active agent that scrutinizes both itself and the world it inhabits and thus plays a dynamic role in creating its own narratives of itself." Choi Chatterjee and Karen Petrone, "Models of Selfhood and Subjectivity: The Soviet Case in Historical Perspective," *Slavic Review* 67, no. 4 (Winter 2008): 967.

14. Paulina Bren and Mary Neuburger, "Introduction," in Bren and Neuburger, *Communism Unwrapped*, 7.

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In our paper, we will refer to the concept of "consumption regime" that corresponds to the aforementioned notion of mediation. Martin Hand and Elizabeth Shove, in their study of the politics of kitchen design representation in women's magazines, offer an investigation of such a mediation channel.[15] They argue that *Good Housekeeping* and *Ideal Home* magazines mediated home technologies by imposing normatively valued "regimes" as orchestrating concepts that structure the content of magazines dedicated to the appropriation of home technologies into household economies. "The very idea of appropriation supposes some preexisting 'regime,' this being a rule-set or grammar that is embedded in practices, products, and procedures and in ways of defining and handling problems. . . . Few commentators doubt the relevance of orchestrating principles like those embedded in ideologies of domesticity."[16] The figure of "nowoczesna gospodyni" was such a consumption-based regime because the KGD build a rule-set that dictated the course of rural household modernization through material artifacts, practices, products, and procedures.

Dreilinger discussed how in the post-war United States the home efficiency movement used the power of science to educate consumers, promote healthy eating habits, improve the economic situation of low-income families, and support the idea of the professionalization of housework.[17] She emphasized the role of female home economists as agents of modernization in multiple domains: from new kitchen technologies to family models and women's emancipation. At the same time, she pointed out how political shifts and social processes, like second-wave feminism and the emancipation of the non-white population, affected household economies. We will demonstrate that the home efficiency movement in state-socialist Poland had a similar agenda focused on modernization and rationalization.

The most relevant collection of essays that highlight the role of intermediary actors in household technologies in post-war Europe is *Cold War Kitchen*, which includes Karin Zachmann's work on the short-lived Central Working Group on Household Technology, an advisory body for the East German Ministry for General Engineering.[18] This group represented interest groups that took part in drafting the central program for the development of domestic technologies.[19] Our study instead focuses on an expert group that operated on a much more decentralized level that had inimal impact on the design of new technologies, but played a role in shaping the practices of consumption through educational campaigns.

15. Martin Hand and Elizabeth Shove, "Orchestrating Concepts: Kitchen Dynamics and Regime Change in *Good Housekeeping* and *Ideal Home*, 1922–2002," *Home Cultures* 1, no. 3 (November 2004) 235–56.

16. Hand and Shove, "Orchestrating Concepts," 237.

17. Dreilinger, *The Secret History of Home Economics*, 172–239.

18. Karin Zachmann, "Managing Choice: Constructing the Socialist Consumption Junction in the German Democratic Republic," in Ruth Oldenziel and Karin Zachmann, eds., *Cold War Kitchen: Americanization, Technology, and European Users* (Cambridge, Mass., 2009), 259–84.

19. Zachmann, "Managing Choice," 260.

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In their paper on the concept of a "mediation junction," Ruth Oldenziel and colleagues note that in the eastern bloc in the post-Stalinist era, "the state tried to directly manage the gap between production and consumption. Instead of working through civil society, the government incorporated the mediations within the state apparatus."[20] Indeed, in state-socialist Poland governmental institutions addressed the need to both expand the production of consumer products and to perceive citizens as consumers. This agenda was introduced to the state apparatus in the mid-1960s under the slogan "polityka konsumpcji" (the policy for consumption), and it was widely used in central planning documents and political communications.[21]

Beginning from the post-Stalinist thaw and a shift towards "moderate consumption," the communist authorities introduced a policy that Susan Reid refers to as a "symbiosis of gender and consumption" that paid more attention to building a gendered policy in search of legitimacy.[22] As she notes, this policy was based on offering different prospects to both genders: "Offering to men the political promise of socialist democracy and self-government, to women it held out the prospect of better opportunities for consumption and comfort."[23] Consumption was perceived as a "feminine issue": regardless of women's emancipation as a communist project, it was still taken for granted that women were "natural" homemakers that were responsible for the family's well-being.[24] This marked a departure from the Stalinist concept of women as workers, engaged in building socialism.[25]

In Poland from the early 1960s, economists, who acknowledged the importance of individual households, recognized that it was women who made the decisions about everyday consumption.[26] Therefore, their education towards consumption became a politically charged issue. As we will show, in state socialism the mediation of consumption was only possible through symbiosis with social actors from within the state apparatus. Hence, we refer to the KGD as a "quasi-NGO." By building its organizational identity as an agent of

20. Oldenziel, Bruhèze, and de Wit, "Europe's Mediation Junction," 122.

21. For an instance of a detailed presentation of the objectives of such a policy, see: Edward Wiszniewski, *Polityka konsumpcji w Polsce* (Warsaw, 1979). Natalya Chernyshova offers a comprehensive study of the role of the state apparatus in shaping consumption in a single country: Natalya Chernyshova, *Soviet Consumer Culture in the Brezhnev Era* (New York, 2013).

22. Susan E. Reid, "Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and the De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev," *Slavic Review* 61, no. 2 (Summer, 2002): 213.

23. Reid, "Cold War in the Kitchen," 220.

24. Christine Varga-Harris, "Homemaking and the Aesthetics and Moral Perimeters of the Soviet Home during the Khrushchev Era," *Journal of Social History* 41, no. 3 (Spring 2008), 568.

25. For a discussion on such a new gender role, see: Małgorzata Fidelis, "Are You a Modern Girl?: Consumer Culture and Young Women in 1960s Poland," in Shana Penn and Jill Massino, eds., *Gender Politics and Everyday Life in State Socialist Eastern and Central Europe* (New York, 2009), 172.

26. Archiwum Akt Nowych w Warszawie (AAN), Telewizja Polska S.A. Wycinki prasowe (TP), sygn. 20/140, Stanisław Albinowski, "Kobieta—homo oeconomicus," *Życie Warszawy*, November 12, 1960, 3.

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modernity it was able to step into power relations with other institutions from the state apparatus since social, economic, and technological modernization was one of the key objectives of policy-makers.

Our paper contributes to further understanding of how the consumption-related "modern self" was embedded in a set of normative principles structured upon the binary dichotomies of desired/undesired, socialist/petit-bourgeoisie, and modern/backward.[27] The issue of modernity and backwardness in eastern Europe has been recently addressed in the edited volume *The Socialist Good Life*.[28] As Neuburger notes, eastern Europe seems to be stuck in a state of perpetual and incomplete transition, or "backwardness."[29] In *Modernity and Consumer Culture*, Don Slater notes how the experience of modernity is a central element of consumer cultures beginning in the late nineteenth century:

> consumer culture is bound up with the *idea* of modernity, of modern experience and of modern social subjects. In so far as 'the modern' constitutes itself around a sense of the world experienced by a social actor who is deemed individually free and rational, within a world no longer governed by tradition but rather by flux, and a world produced through rational organization and scientific know-how, then the figure of the consumer and the experience of consumerism is both exemplary of the new world and integral to its making.[30]

These remarks offer a key to understanding the KGD's agenda of facilitating the provisions of "modern" household appliances that are necessary material elements of the "modern experience." The organization also shaped the "nowoczesna gospodyni," an identity as a free and rational social subject situated in a specific consumption regime, by removing her from the "irrational" world of rural traditions. Modernity was strongly linked to the notion of efficiency, which was a key principle used in social control to organize society

27. Here we can refer to Victor Buchli's study in which he investigates how the concept of "design" became used in a campaign of removing the remains of petit-bourgeois culture in the Khrushchev era USSR. Victor Buchli, "Khrushchev, Modernism, and the Fight against *'Petit-bourgeois'* Consciousness in the Soviet Home," *Journal of Design History* 10, no. 2 (1997), 161–76. Similarly, Christine Varga-Harris explores the use of normatively valued aesthetic principles and moral perimeters as a set of values on how to define home design in the same era. Varga-Harris, "Homemaking," 568. Returning to Poland, Brian Porter-Szűcs notes that: "Underpinning virtually all the debates and discussions of economic policy in the PRL was a desire to assess what people *required*—not only for sustenance but also for personal satisfaction and fulfillment." Brian Porter-Szűcs, "Conceptualizing Consumption in the Polish People's Republic," in Cristofer Scarboro, Diana Mincytė, and Zsuzsa Gille, eds., *The Socialist Good Life: Desire, Development, and Standards of Living in Eastern Europe* (Bloomington, 2020), 90.

28. Scarboro, Mincyte, and Gille, eds., *The Socialist Good Life*. For a discussion on the concept of socialist modernity, see: Małgorzata Fidelis, "Pleasures and Perils of Socialist Modernity: New Scholarship on Post-War Eastern Europe," *Contemporary European History* 26, no. 3 (August 2017), 533–44; Kimberly Elman Zarecor, *Manufacturing a Socialist Modernity: Housing in Czechoslovakia, 1945–1960* (Pittsburgh, 2011).

29. Mary Neuburger, "Pleasure, Restraint, Backwardness, and Civilization in Eastern Europe," in Scarboro, Mincyte, and Gille, eds., *The Socialist Good Life*, 25–51.

30. Don Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity* (Cambridge, Eng., 1997), 9.

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for the pursuit of the communist project.[31] Below, we will discuss how the KGD organized training on the efficient performance of women.

## The KGD as an Expert Group

This section explores the position of the KGD as a quasi-NGO that carved out a niche by collaborating with several governmental institutions, manufacturers of home appliances, and other organizations. It is important to see the KGD in the context of social activism and women's mass organizations under state- socialism and expert culture that co-produced socialist modernity in Poland from the 1960s. The KGD was a section of the LK, the only mass women's organization in state-socialist Poland.[32] Such organizations, referred to officially as "organizacje społeczne" (social organizations), were embedded in state apparatus power relations. The League was, to some extent, capable of exercising agency.[33] Here, we focus on the KGD, one of the League's committees whose emergence resulted from the official shift towards the policy of "moderate consumption" during the post-Stalinist thaw.[34]

31. For a discussion on the cultural history of "efficiency" as a term, see: Jennifer Karns Alexander, *The Mantra of Efficiency: From Waterwheel to Social Control* (Baltimore, 2008). Porter-Szűcs notes the role of efficiency in his work on the policy debates concerning consumption in Poland. He argues that the policy-makers and economists insisted that not only the production sector had to be efficient in terms of the production quotas and the proper allocation of the available resources, but also "the object of efficiency maximization shifted from the firm to 'society.'" Porter-Szűcs, "Conceptualizing Consumption in the Polish People's Republic," 91. For a discussion on efficiency in the context of the notion of competitiveness in state socialism, see: Katalin Miklóssy and Melanie Ilič, eds., *Competition in Socialist Society* (London, 2014).

32. The League of Women (Liga Kobiet), formerly the Social-Civic League of Women (SOLK), created in 1949 as a result of the unification process under Stalinism. In the mid-1980s it had approximately 600,000 members.

33. The issues of autonomy, agency, and the position of women's organizations under state socialism have been extensively discussed among scholars. The debate was held on the pages of *Aspasia* journal (a polemic between Mihaela Miroiu, "Communism Was a State Patriarchy, Not State Feminism," 197–201, and Kassimira Daskalova, "How Should We Name the 'Women-Friendly' Actions of State Socialism?" 214–19, in "Is 'Communist Feminism' a Contradiction in Terminus," a forum in *Aspasia* 1, no. 1 [March 2007]: 197–246). See also: Nanette Funk, "A Very Tangled Knot: Official State Socialist Women's Organizations, Women's Agency and Feminism in Eastern European State Socialism," in "The New Europe: 25 Years after the Fall of the Wall," ed. Barbara Einhorn and Kornelia Slavova, special issue, *European Journal of Women's Studies* 21, no. 4 (November 2014): 344–60; Kristen Ghodsee, "Rethinking State Socialist Mass Women's Organizations: The Committee of the Bulgarian Women's Movement and the United Nations Decade for Women 1975–1985," in "Human Rights, Global Conferences, and the Making of Postwar Transnational Feminisms," ed. Jean H. Quataert and Benita Roth, special issue, *Journal of Women's History* 24, no. 4 (Winter 2012): 49–73; Zsófia Lóránd, "New Yugoslav Feminism During Socialism Between 'Mainstreaming' and 'Disengagement': The Possibilities of Resistance, Critical Opposition and Dissent," *The Hungarian Historical Review* 5, no. 4 (2016): 854–81. See also: Mary Buckley, *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union* (Ann Arbor, 1989). Linda Racioppi and Katherine O'Sullivan See offer a concise overview of women's activism in the Soviet Union: Linda Racioppi and Katherine O'Sullivan See, *Women's Activism in Contemporary Russia*, (Philadelphia, 1997), 1–42, 72–126.

34. For a discussion on this shift, see Porter-Szűcs, "Conceptualizing Consumption in the Polish People's Republic."

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The KGD, established in 1957, had broad autonomy within the LK and become an exponent of women's consumption-related interests. It was declared to be a scientific unit that conducted research and collaborated with academic institutions. The main tasks of the KGD were the dissemination of knowledge about modern methods of housekeeping, testing new home-related products, and education about rational consumption.[35] The authorities allowed the organization to carry out its educational campaigns because its objectives corresponded with the government's social policy, and the authorities allocated to it the role of agent of the communist project of social modernization.[36] The Committee officially declared a strong attachment to the so-called "wartości socjalistyczne" (socialist values) and regularly supported the party's social policies in its public communications.[37] It published a monthly magazine, *Gospodarstwo Domowe*, organized regular conventions of household instructors, and lastly, collaborated with numerous administrative institutions and trade organizations, both on the domestic and international levels. The organization claimed that its objectives and repertoire were strongly influenced by western home efficiency movements and cooperated with home economics organizations both within the eastern bloc and beyond the Iron Curtain, including Sweden, West Germany, and France.[38]

Except for East Germany and Czechoslovakia, other states in the region were primarily agrarian. Under state socialism, they experienced rapid urbanization and industrialization, processes identified as key components of modernization. Yet despite significant achievements in industrial and social development, as Neuburger notes, it was not enough to erase the acute sense of backwardness: "the state or idea of backwardness has certainly haunted the region as a subject of scholarly study and debate and,

35. Maria Jaszczukowa, [untitled], *Gospodarstwo Domowe*, no. 1 (1958): 2.

36. Here it worth noting that in the Soviet Union a similar women's organization, *zhenskie sovety* (women's councils), had more limited agency. Linda Racioppi and Katherine O'Sullivan See note "the goals of these councils were not generated by their members, however, but by the party or government organization with which they were associated." Racioppi and O'Sullivan See, "Organizing Women before and after the Fall: Women's Politics in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Russia," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 20, no. 4 (1995): 821. See also: Genia Browning, "The Zhensovety Revisited," in Mary Buckley, ed., *Perestroika and Soviet Women* (Cambridge, Eng., 1992), 97–117. See also Racioppi and O'Sullivan See, "Women's Activism," 108–12.

37. In 1971, in line with the new ruling elite of the First Secretary Edward Gierek (1970–1980) of the Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, or PZPR (the Polish United Workers' Party), with new policies on consumption and the program of the VI PZPR Convention in 1971, the KGD advocated the rapid modernization of Polish households. It used the same vocabulary as the official communiqué of the PZPR. For instance: "Progress and rationalization in household management are now becoming an indispensable condition for the dynamic growth of the economy as a whole and for the implementation of the program to improve the living standards of all citizens." Teresa Pałaszewska-Reindl, "O dalszy postęp i racjonalizację w gospodarstwie domowym," *Gospodarstwo Domowe*, no. 6 (1971): 1.

38. AAN, Liga Kobiet, temp. ref. no. 13/53, npag, Tłumaczenia zagranicznych materiałów na temat gospodarstwa domowego.

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perhaps more importantly, as a specter for local actors to lament, embrace, or directly confront."[39]

The KGD built its identity as an organization capable of directly confronting the backwardness in the specific historical and cultural setting of the Polish countryside. State socialist modernity was defined through industrialization and urbanization.[40] Rural areas and rural dwellers represented a major target for the communist authorities as a subject for reforms that would incorporate this "backward" world into the communist project.[41] Therefore, governmental institutions, as well as numerous quasi-NGOs, became engaged in the process of the modernization of everyday life in the countryside. The KGD addressed rural women as a social group that was particularly susceptible to backwardness and irrationality. First of all, it is necessary to explain why state socialism identified women as "traditional" and "backward" by nature.[42] The belief in the backwardness of rural women resulted from the attitude of distrust toward peasants, which marked the politics of the communist authorities of east European states influenced by Marxist- Leninist ideology.[43] Therefore, creating a "modern self" for this social strata became one of the key agendas of both women's and rural organizations.

The KGD demonstrated its authority as a group of female professionals, primarily industrial designers, economic researchers, and dieticians, which worked at universities and state research institutes. Since it was a section of the LK, its members were exclusively women. Male experts contributed to *Gospodarstwo Domowe* but it was women who shaped the Committee's agenda. As an expert group, the Committee produced reports and analyses concerning households, housework, the home appliance market, and consumption practices. This form of authority gained importance in the 1970s, in line with the shift towards expert-based economic and social policies.

The KGD experts supported the idea of the professionalization of homemaking, which was related to ideas of modernity on both sides of the Iron Curtain. In Poland, like in other countries of the eastern bloc, the post-Stalinist Thaw brought a shift towards "moderate consumption," and consequently, the individual household became an object of the socialist modernization policy.[44] The birth of mass consumption in western Europe in the 1950s was followed by national modernization projects, including

39. Neuburger, "Pleasure, Restraint, Backwardness, and Civilization in Eastern Europe."

40. See: Fidelis, "Pleasures and Perils"; Zarecor, *Manufacturing a Socialist Modernity*.

41. Sorin Radu, "Countryside and Communism in Eastern Europe: Perceptions, Attitudes, Propaganda—Problems, Interpretations and Perspectives," in Sorin Radu and Cosmin Budeancă, eds., *Countryside and Communism in Eastern Europe: Perceptions, Attitudes, Propaganda* (Zürich, 2016), 17.

42. Małgorzata Fidelis shows that just after 1945, women in Poland were accused of clericalism, political indifference, and having a strong attachment to the traditional ways of life. Even in the 1960s, they were the subject of modernization policies in terms of changing their practices of consumption and lifestyle. Małgorzata Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland* (Cambridge, Eng., 2010); Fidelis, "Are You a Modern Girl?"

43. Radu, "Countryside and Communism in Eastern Europe," 19.

44. Reid, "Cold War in the Kitchen."

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home modernization based on access to modern appliances, rationalization of housework, and training programs dedicated to housewives.[45] In the United States, home economists argued that caring for the home is a way to build the modern world.[46]

The ideology of the KGD reflected the tensions between the social modernization project and the traditional gender order well established in Polish society. It also depended on the political shifts and changing public discourses about women, family, and the household. Therefore, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, it provided courses on cooking and sewing, while during the 1970s it was characterized by western-like modernization and a focus on consumption: it paid more attention to the aesthetics of everyday life and organized presentations on fashion, makeup, and home furnishing.

Both in the eastern bloc and the west, housework was identified as a woman's task and women became the subject of modernization efforts performed by home efficiency organizations. The main difference was that in socialist countries women were expected to have paid jobs. Thus, the KGD did not turn domestic tasks into an array of careers like American and French home economists did.[47] The Committee endorsed women's role as homemakers, incorporated it into the model of modern socialist citizens, but emphasized their workforce participation. The role model for Polish women was a working mother and wife. Although the KGD from its beginning advocated women's consumption interests and supported the idea of gender equality, it did not articulate feminist demands. The second-wave feminism of the 1960s that challenged and changed the home efficiency movement in the US did not affect its Polish counterpart.[48] There was no grass-roots women's movement in Poland, and the LK argued that state socialism have already liberated Polish women and for that reason, they did not need feminism.[49]

The KGD was not the only institution that supported the project of household modernization. From the 1960s, the Common Food Producers' Cooperative "Społem" (Powszechna Spółdzielnia Spożywców, or PSS) managed the "Praktyczna Pani" (Practical Lady) centers in cities that provided services such as tailoring, hairdressing, and leisure activities for children. Similarly, the profiled "Nowoczesna Gospodyni" centers, which collaborated with the local Circles of Rural Housewives and Communal Cooperatives "Peasant Self-Help" (Gminna Spółdzielnia "Samopomoc Chłopska") functioned in rural areas. Both "Practical Lady" centers and "Modern Housewife Centers" welcomed cooperation with the KGD and undertook several collaborative initiatives, such

45. Rebecca J. Pulju, *Women and Mass Consumer Society in Postwar France* (Cambridge, Eng., 2011), 67; Luisa Tasca, "The 'Average Housewife' in Postwar Italy," *Journal of Women's History* 16, no. 2 (2004): 107.

46. Dreilinger, *The Secret History of Home Economics*, 189–202.

47. See: Dreilinger, *The Secret History of Home Economics*; Pulju, *Women and Mass Consumer Society in Postwar France,* 63–68.

48. Dreilinger, *The Secret History of Home Economics*, 240–55.

49. T. Kuczyńska, "Ty i Ja," *Kobieta oszukana*, no. 6 (1965): 13–15. For more on the relation between women's organizations under state socialism and feminism, see: Barbara Nowak, "Serving Women and the State: the League of Women in Communist Poland" (PhD diss., The Ohio State University 2004); Zsófia Lóránd, *The Feminist Challenge to the Socialist State in Yugoslavia* (London, 2018).

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as courses on housework and nutrition. Similarly, the KGD organized training courses for household instructors and managers of the "Modern Housewife Centers" in rural areas. All the above-mentioned organizations offered training in so-called "women's areas of interest." Therefore, it was women who became "natural" experts. Referring to Dreilinger's concept of home economics as a "back door for women to enter science," the KGD offered them an opportunity to participate in modern expert culture and to produce scientific discourses.[50]

The KGD actively carried out its civilizing mission through regular educational campaigns co-organized by governmental institutions and trade organizations. But its power as an organization was limited in terms of influencing the policies of other actors from the state apparatus. The organization regularly appealed to producers to increase the production quota of some goods or to improve quality and safety. But differently from the organization discussed by Zachmann, it was not capable of exercising its agency in decision-making processes within the state apparatus. The KGD, among other "societal organizations," existed in a niche between state and society. Actors operating in such a space had some level of agency in organizing campaigns for limited, positively valued social or economic change that did not contradict corresponding governmental policies. Yet, there was a clear limit, that such organizations were not allowed to promote political subjectivities. Differently from the FK, the KGD neither presented consumption as a political issue nor asked the consumers to initiate any self-organization efforts.[51]

## Shaping "Nowoczesna gospodyni"

The mobilization of women in communist states was based on emancipatory slogans.[52] From the late 1960s, the Polish media identified the "feminization of farming" as a side-effect of rapid post-war industrialization.[53] Women were expected to perform a double role as efficient farmers, mothers and housewives, and to be socially and politically active. According to the KGD narrative, the reason why the rural housewife was overworked and exhausted was due to her lack of "rational" organizational skills, and thus the solution was to replace the "backward" rural housewife with a rational, modern one.

50. Dreilinger, *The Secret History of Home Economics*, 1–23.

51. Differently than the KGD, the FK openly expressed, as Zsuzsa Gille and Diana Mincytė note, the "relationship between desire and politics, that is, political subjectivity" and "the consumption–political consciousness relationship," Zsuzsa Gille and Diana Mincytė, "The Prosumerist Resonance Machine: Rethinking Political Subjectivity and Consumer Desire in State Socialism," in Scarboro, Mincyte, and Gille, eds., *The Socialist Good Life*, 220.

52. Libora Oates-Indruchová points to a change in its imagery from the revolutionary image of a female tractor driver, which was popular under Stalinism, to the traditional imagery of womanhood after 1956. Libora Oates- Indruchová, "The Beauty and the Loser: Cultural Representations of Gender in Late State Socialism," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 37, no. 2 (2012): 359.

53. See for example: (AAN), Telewizja Polska S.A. Wycinki prasowe (TP), sygn.20/140, Józef Czapnik, "W spódnicy—i za pługiem (Feminizacja zawodu rolnika)," *Dziennik Ludowy*, August 29, 1968, 2; Bogdan Dydenko, "Feminizacja zawodu (Wiek XX na wsi)," *Słowo Powszechne*, August 24, 1967, 4.

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"Nowoczesna gospodyni" was a "consumption regime" that included effective household management, motherhood, political engagement, and participation in the modern leisure and beauty culture. This role model was linked to the idea of a rural housewife (*gospodyni*), which traditionally was applied to well-off married women whose prestige was based on property ownership and individual resourcefulness. However, being a "modern housewife" was no longer associated with material status. It instead proposed a new identity for housewives on individual farms as well as for women working in state-owned farms (Państwowe Gospodarstwa Rolne, or PGRs).[54]

Despite the recognition of differences in income levels, the KGD in its public campaigns did not mention anything about the issues of deprivation and poverty, since such issues were taboo in state socialist Poland. Since abundance for all was among the primary objectives of socialist economists and policy-makers, economic inequalities resulting from the inefficiency of the centrally planned economy were silenced.[55] In official discourse economic inequality was identified with western capitalism, and especially with the United States.[56] Domestic poverty was a sensitive political issue and the KGD avoided it due to the limits of the intermediary space in which it operated.

According to the KGD, the only reason why housewives had any trouble in maintaining functional households was their presumed backwardness and the shortage of consumer goods in the retail trade. This issue could be openly acknowledged in public space. In contrast, the home efficiency movement in the US openly acknowledged and addressed the issue of poverty, particularly in Black and other ethnic communities, and included teaching coping strategies in its repertoire.[57] Although KGD experts developed courses and workshops aimed at helping low-income rural families or single mothers, like western and American home efficiency organizations did, they did not define it in terms of fighting poverty.[58] Instead, they talked about "backwardness." For instance, they identified low hygiene standards in homes with no indoor bathrooms, as well as poor eating behaviors that resulted in the malnutrition of rural children as a result of backwardness.[59] It was individuals, specifically women, who were to blame for low living standards, not the inefficient economic system and the lack of social security in the countryside.

54. PGR (Państwowe Gospodarstwa Rolne, or State Farm) was the main Polish organizational form of collective, state-owned farming, similar to the Soviet sovhoz. This organizational structure was established in 1949 and shut down in 1991. For a discussion on the gender role of a female state-owned farm worker, or kolkhoznitsa, see: Ivan Simić, "Building Socialism in the Countryside: The Impact of Collectivization on Yugoslav Gender Relations," *Journal of Social History* 51, no. 4 (June 2018): 1023–44.

55. David R. Henderson, Robert M. McNab, and Tamás Rózsás, "The Hidden Inequality in Socialism," *The Independent Review* 9, no. 3 (Winter 2005): 390.

56. Neuburger, "Pleasure, Restraint, Backwardness, and Civilization in Eastern Europe."

57. Dreilinger, *The Secret History of Home Economics*, 203–18.

58. Ibid., 189–202.

59. Józefa Adamusowa, "O niektórych zadaniach placówek terenowych i instruktorkach gospodarstwa domowego w 1964 roku," *Gospodarstwo Domowe*, no. 1 (1964): 3.

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Bren and Neuburger discuss key features of the politics of consumption in the eastern bloc: "As in the West, consumption practices in communist societies were related to social status, gender, sociability, leisure, individual agency. . . . They were intimately tied, for example, to socialist notions of modernity and progress; that is, consumption of "modern" goods was part and parcel of the making of a modern *socialist* citizen-consumer."[60] The creation of "nowoczesna gospodyni" was training in making a "modern socialist citizen-consumer." This subjectivity was embedded in the idea of socialist citizenship for her, since she was not only responsible for running an efficient household and/or farm but also assuring that her duties contribute to the incorporation of the "backward" countryside into the communist project. Training in becoming "nowoczesna gospodyni" is similar to the role of Bulgarian domestic encyclopedias as manuals for shaping new consumption-related identities, as discussed by Cristofer Scarboro. He notes: "New, modern socialist life produced a new 'citizenry that understood themselves to be defined by their consumption habits and modern lifestyles.' These domestic encyclopedias were also intended as a means to alleviate the alienation endemic to consumer society everywhere by promoting the active involvement of the citizen-worker consumer in building her world."[61]

First and foremost, a modern housewife was supposed to be endowed with knowledge of rational housekeeping. It had to be considered as reliable knowledge that had been provided by authoritative experts. Like in post-war western societies, the transmission of knowledge from mother to daughter had become an inadequate channel for transmitting new patterns of consumption and new lifestyles.[62] Moreover, it was perceived as "backward." Home economics instructors often complained that rural women were not ready to give up traditional methods of household management inherited from their mothers and grandmothers.[63] Thus, they needed comprehensive education to become modern housewives.

The first mediation channel established by the KGD was a series of courses and demonstrations in which local female instructors taught some "modern" ways of doing housework and demonstrated how to use the new home appliances that were available from the retail trade. The KGD allocated such female instructors with the role of "warm experts."[64] Instructors were also mostly

60. Bren and Neuburger, "Introduction," 5. Chernyshova discusses a similar transformation in the Soviet Union from the Stalinist era onwards as the "drive for 'cultu redness'(*kul'turnost'*)": "official advice appointed clothes, furniture, books, and various other objects as tools for transforming the uncouth masses into cultured and modern citizens of the new state," see her *Soviet Consumer Culture*, 8.

61. Cristofer Scarboro, "The Late Socialist Good Life and Its Discontents: *Bit*, *Kultura*, and the Social Life of Goods," in Scarboro, Mincyte, and Gille, eds., *The Socialist Good Life*, 201.

62. Luisa Tasca, "The Average Housewife in Post-World War Italy," 93.

63. Władysława Ciemniewska, "O kursach na wsi," *Gospodarstwo Domowe*, no. 3 (1959): 16.

64. This term is widely used in media studies to identify the role of a person who helps others, mostly from the same social milieu, to learn how to use new technologies. For an overview of the use of concept of "warm experts" in the process of mediating technology, see: Maria Bakardjieva, "The Consumption Junction Revisited: Networks and Contexts,"

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rural females, who pursued their professional careers within the ranks of the KGD, the KGW, or other similar organizations. This meant the instructors were able to address the participants of such courses as "warm experts" in a manner of speech that was familiar to them.

From the 1960s, socialist modernity was defined by consumption and lifestyle, and this modern housewifery meant rational household management: efficient, time and effort-saving methods of work, rational purchases of home appliances, healthy cooking, and the aesthetics of everyday life. Thus, the KGD, as an expert body, developed detailed instructions on what kinds of courses should be organized in local household educational centers to meet the needs of young rural women who wanted to become modern housewives. Such initiatives showed how this organization was capable of enrolling other social actors into its campaigns. The KGD played a central role in building a broader coalition with local branches of governmental agencies, other "societal organizations," manufacturers, and trade organizations.

The second channel of mediation for the KGD was the mass media, a broad range of whom the KGD collaborated with to promote the model of the modern housewife.[65] The KGD's experts regularly contributed to popular women's magazines: *Przyjaciółka*, *Kobieta i Życie*, and *Gospodyni*. Women's magazines in the eastern bloc, like in capitalist countries, were concerned with the normative model that was appropriate for womanhood, but the message was significantly different.[66] *Gospodyni* and *Przyjaciółka* encouraged their readers to discuss current social and political issues and to engage in the activities of the local KGW branch. Political mobilization was an important element of the image of the modern housewife. Popular magazines were also engaged in consumer education. They recommended home appliances and explained how to use them. Usually, the KGD provided the aforementioned magazines with bodies of scientific and practical knowledge to be used by columnists in their articles.

This education included not only training in using "modern" consumer goods but also embracing new practices of obtaining knowledge. Instead of learning from their mothers, female housewives were taught to build their modern selfhood with new mediation channels such as reading woman's magazines, taking part in educational courses, and asking store clerks in state-owned stores for advice on how to make informed choices. Tomáš Samec and Martin *Hájek*, in a study on the production of "financialized subjectivities"

in Robert E. Kraut, Malcolm Brynin, and Sara Kiesler, eds., *Computers, Phones, and the Internet: Domesticating Information Technology* (Oxford, 2006), 97–108.

65. "It is very important to continue working in the field of propaganda and information," announced the KGD in 1970 and declared that they would provide materials for a weekly radio broadcast "Progress in the household" and cooperate with women's and general interest journals and magazines. AAN, Liga Kobiet, temp. ref. no 25/1, npag, "Ramowy plan pracy KGD na rok 1970.KGD."

66. Lynne Attwood, *Creating the New Soviet Woman: Women's Magazines as Engineers of Female Identity, 1922–53* (London, 1999), 12. For example, *Dziennik Ludowy*, a rural daily, portrayed a perfect modern housewife, who was a chair of the KGW, the head of the Modern Housewife Center, and a perfect farm manager, (AAN), Telewizja Polska S.A. Wycinki prasowe (TP), sygn. 20/140, Halina Przedborska, "W kobiecym królestwie," *Dziennik Ludowy*, July 12, 1968, 3.

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in the eastern bloc discuss how "rhetoric, devices and instructions used in manuals construct households into self-reliant actors who embrace financial products."[67] Similarly, the KGD tried to produce such self-reliant actors or, to quote Chatterjee and Petrone, "subjects capable of action and agency," provided with the knowledge necessary to embrace new foodstuff, new home appliances, and new housekeeping methods, instead of passively transmitting "backward" patterns of behavior from their ancestors.[68]

To summarize, the concept of the "modern rural housewife" propagated by the KGD was a set of normative values that had to be internalized by women for them to transform from "backward" into "modern." Such normative values were supported by discourses on health, rationality, and efficiency. Institutions from the state apparatus were responsible for the introduction of "modern" infrastructures (electricity, public transportation, running water) and services (schools, kindergartens, health centers, retail stores) in rural areas. But the introduction of the "social" element of modernization was the task of a nexus of intermediary actors discussed above the KGD, the KGW, "Nowoczesna gospodyni" centers, and women's magazines. The KGD provided rural women with training in urban style consumption and played a significant role in transmitting an urban vision of socialist modernity to rural Poland. In urban areas, consumers received such training through everyday access to new department stores, services, and extensive social networks. However, the complexity of urban/rural dynamics in patterns of consumption in late state socialist Poland lies beyond the scope of our article. Such a study requires extensive discussion on the lifestyles of peasant-workers and social networks connecting both worlds.

## Facilitating Access to "Modern" Home Appliances

Natalya Chernyshova grasps the significance of home appliances for the creation of "modern" consumer regimes in the eastern bloc:

> In the post-Stalin period, connections between the material world and the modernization project were stressed with even greater vigor. For instance, electric household durables, such as vacuum cleaners or washing machines, were celebrated as ambassadors of the scientific technological revolution in the home, while the housewives who used them were presented as domestic agents of modernization. Modernist principles of rationality and functionality in the design of consumer goods were expected to mold their users into modern citizens.[69]

The KGD supported exactly such a vision and promoted home appliances as the material infrastructure of the new "modern" Polish countryside. Unlike the East German case discussed by Zachmann, the KGD itself had a limited possibility of actually influencing the design of or determining the planned

67. Tomáš Samec and Martin Hájek, "Performing Financialized Subjectivities in Household Economy Manuals under State Socialism and Neoliberal Capitalism," *Competition & Change* 23, no. 5 (October 2019): 441.

68. Chatterjee and Petrone, "Models of Selfhood and Subjectivity," 978.

69. Chernyshova, *Soviet Consumer Culture*, 8.

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production quotas for appliances.[70] But the Committee became an important intermediary actor that produced and shared knowledge that went into the consumption of these goods.[71] Following the electrification of the countryside, which was completed in the mid-1970s, the KGD ran several campaigns aimed at the popularization of modern electric appliances. First of all, the KGD disseminated knowledge of modern household technologies, primarily on cleaning, cooking, and storing food. They developed educational materials, such as booklets, leaflets, manuals, guidebooks, and educational posters.[72] The expert magazine *Gospodarstwo Domowe* published adverts for Samopomoc Chłopska retail stores. Susan Reid argues that the role of advertising in socialist media was limited, and it was not to create new consumer demands but rather to educate the audience, and to present an accessible point of entry to a new lifestyle.[73] The advertisements were often accompanied by detailed technical instructions on how to use appliances.

The KGD was the first organization that carried out extensive consumer tests of home appliances, and they then communicated their results to the public sphere, not only with detailed results published in *Gospodarstwo Domowe*, but also by publishing more concise and accessible test results in *Kobieta i Życie* and *Przyjaciółka*. Consumer tests of foodstuff, domestic detergents, household appliances, and furniture were commissioned by Biuro Znaku Jakości, The Office for Quality Certificates. From the late 1970s, the KGD publicly complained about the low quality of the appliances that they tested. The KGD criticized the quality of consumer goods but, differently than the FK, did not appeal to consumers to organize themselves to more efficiently express their dissatisfaction.

The KGD was strongly attached to the idea of implementing modern methods of housekeeping in the countryside. First of all, the experts defined rural households in terms of backwardness and stressed that they lacked the tools and devices that were already common in urban households. Until the late 1960s, the offer of modern kitchen appliances for rural housewives still

70. Zachmann, "Managing Choice."

71. Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge, Eng., 1986), 41. For a discussion on the notion of power/knowledge relations in consumer cultures, see Frank Trentmann, ed., *The Making of the Consumer Knowledge, Power and Identity in the Modern World* (Oxford, 2006).

72. For example, in the series of booklets "The library of a modern housewife," the author encouraged rural women to purchase electric appliances, persuading them that "modern equipment, although sometimes more expensive, will work out to be cheaper in the long run than the traditional one." Henryka Borzykowska, *Nowoczesny sprzęt domowy* (Warsaw, 1968), 6; Izabela Borowiecka, *Nowoczesność w gospodarstwie domowym* (Warsaw, 1979).

73. Susan Reid, "Cold War in the Kitchen," 218. Advertisements published in *Gospodarstwo Domowe* not only presented specific appliances but also explained how they fit into an imaginary modern household, which was efficient, well managed, and well equipped: "If you still do not have a sewing machine, washing machine, hoover, juicer, food processor, radio, television set, and other durable goods necessary for a modern and rationally run household, please visit the department stores of the municipal cooperative Samopomoc Chłopska or a rural department store, which offer a wide selection of the above-mentioned articles." *Gospodarstwo Domowe*, no. 5 (1971): cover page 4.

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included meat pounders and hand foam beaters, while in the cities there were food processors, juicers, refrigerators, and freezers.[74] It is clear that the process of "normalization" of home appliances identified by Reid was faster in the cities.[75] Elizabeth Shove argues that consumption regimes offer a normative model of "normality" structured with the principles of comfort, cleanliness, and convenience.[76] The KGD, while promoting the advantages of incorporating home appliances in rural household economies, extensively used these exact terms. But such a vocabulary also referred to the "modern self" since "nowoczesna gospodyni" should structure her worldview and everyday routines on such principles. Rural housewives were supposed to not only purchase new products such as home appliances but also adopt the urban standards of housekeeping, and only then could they be recognized as modern, efficient, and successful. Further, when such issues became addressed by official governmental documents and party propaganda, the KGD used these materials to enhance its position as an expert group, whose activities augmented one of the vital elements of social policy.

Since modern household appliances were relatively expensive and not easily available in rural areas, the rental offices ran by Circles of Rural Housewives or by the PSS Społem cooperative became popular. As an expert and advisory organization, the KGD developed a model set of equipment to be found in rental offices.[77] However, they were often criticized for lacking sufficient equipment. For example, in the early 1960s, there were about 3500 rental offices, but they were described as poorly equipped, especially in terms of devices that were more needed, such as juicers, food processors, and irons.[78] The KGD also co-organized a substantial number of exhibitions dedicated to communicating market novelties, both in retail stores and "nowoczesna gospodyni" centers. Such events had a single agenda: to demonstrate what new retail products are available but also to educate the exhibition visitors about what material objects constitute a "modern" household. In cooperation with Rural Housewives Circles and "nowoczesna gospodyni" centers, the KGD organized demonstrations and lectures. These centers, supported by the KGD, organized *pracownie gospodarstwa domowego* (household workshops), where courses and demonstrations were held and which served as a model for a rationally arranged kitchen space. It was planned that these workshops would be well equipped with specialized appliances: baking pans, steam juicers, food processors, and coffee grinders.[79] The KGD instructors developed

74. "Warto kupić," *Gospodyni Wiejska*, nos. 17–18 (1963): 8.

75. Susan E. Reid, "'This is Tomorrow! Becoming Consumer in the Soviet Sixties,' in Anne E. Gorsuch and Diane P. Koenker, eds., *The Socialist Sixties: Crossing Borders in the Second World* (Bloomington, 2013), 30.

76. Elizabeth Shove, *Comfort, Cleanliness and Convenience: The Social Organization of Normality* (Oxford, 2003).

77. Helena Spalona, "Rozwój działalności w zakresie gospodarstwa domowego w Polsce," *Gospodarstwo Domowe*, no. 11 (1959): 6.

78. Janina Kołaczyńska, "Głos spółdzielczyń," *Gospodyni Wiejska*, no. 16 (1962): 5.

79. AAN, Liga Kobiet, temp. ref. no 15/36, npag, "Pracownia żywienia ośrodka "Nowoczesna Gospodyni" na 5 stanowisk pracy i 8 stanowisk pracy (1969)."

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recommendations about the equipment. Due to insufficient funding, however, many household clinics and workshops could not follow these suggestions.

In 1979 *Gospodarstwo Domowe* published a report "Household in numbers."[80] It described how Polish households were equipped with modern appliances: refrigerators, rotary and electric washing machines, television sets, vacuum cleaners, and audio cassette tape recorders. The author of the report emphasized the discrepancy between urban and rural households and argued that people in the countryside were still attached to the traditional methods of housekeeping. She complained: "In the countryside, food is stored in cellars and women clean up 'traditionally.' These are negative phenomena, as refrigerators make it much easier to feed the family, and vacuum cleaners increase the efficiency and the hygiene of work."[81] Following such an expert evaluation, the KGD presented several recommendations for governmental policy towards increasing the production quota for home appliances. This quote shows the centrality of urban/rural dynamics in the KGD modernization effort, as well as the pejorative meaning of the term "traditional."

The concept of a modern rural household equipped with a specific set of appliances became one of the "orchestrating concepts" that structured the KGD's educational activities.[82] It was not only a matter of providing the countryside with new "modern" consumer products. This was primarily the task of the manufacturers and trade organizations. The KGD intended to play a pivotal role as an intermediary actor that aimed to rework the "traditional" behavior of keeping foodstuff in cellars and manual washing. While doing so, it aimed to integrate rural females into a new socialist society by providing them with knowledge on how to actively reconstruct the material world of their households and farms. Such integration was a method of reshaping the lives of rural females and training them to embrace an urban lifestyle. The KGD campaigns intended to recreate urban "consumption regimes" in rural settings by facilitating access to durable goods that already constituted "normal" urban households.

The role of the KGD in reworking the structure of rural households with new appliances sheds more light on one of the central differences in consumption cultures in the west and the eastern bloc. In post-war western market economies, home appliances were promoted by manufacturers and their marketing departments through advertising campaigns in the mass media. As Reid noted, in state socialist producers of consumer goods carried only very limited mass-media advertising. Aside from the limited access to the goods themselves, the KGD identified as a substantial problem the lack of information about "modern" consumer goods in rural areas because of limited access to mass media. If we look at the history of home efficiency movements in the west, they defined their objective as the promotion of home appliances mostly in the pre-war era, before the spread of easy access to mass media accompanied by the development of advertising culture. In the post-war era,

80. Helena Gintelowa, "Gospodarstwo domowe w liczbach (wg rocznika statystycznego 1978)" *Gospodarstwo Domowe* no. 1 (1979): 4.

81. Gintelowa, "Gospodarstwo," 4.

82. Hand and Shove, "Orchestrating Concepts."

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the movements shifted their attention to other objectives such as conducting product testing and urging manufacturers to improve product safety and provide standardized information. As we have seen, in state socialism, although much later, such a movement still identified spreading information about the basics of using electric home appliances in rural areas as their role due to the lack of mass marketing and advertising systems.

In our paper, we have presented an imaginary Polish rural modernity as an assemblage of social and material arrangements. The KGD undertook a range of initiatives to prove itself as a partner for the state apparatus in reshaping the social strata of private farmers and providing them with compulsory training in forming "the modern socialist self." Although the organization was linked to the party and was active in disseminating party propaganda, it was not under any direct control by the state. Rather, it used specific vocabulary to show how improving home efficiency was consistent with state policy. The KGD built its position as an organization with a broad range of educational strategies that attempted to contribute to fostering the social element of this arrangement.

Going back to the notion of consumption spaces brought by Sharon Zukin and Jennifer Smith Maguire, we can see how the KGD took part in promoting new technologies (home appliances), ideologies (home efficiency), and delivery systems (state-owned rural retail stores) and dictating how rural women should experience consumption (nowoczesna gospodyni).[83] Both the promotion of the social role of the "modern rural housewife" and the knowledge necessary to incorporate household appliances in daily routines were key elements in the shaping of the "modern" consumer regime and the new social structure of rural areas. On an epistemic level, the organization provided rural housewives with a guide on world-building by defining what ways of thinking, practices, and artifacts are modern and what had become "backward" and "obsolete." In such a way it contributed to the state policies on women's emancipation. The material part of the arrangement—the design of modern and functional appliances and the supply of a sufficient quantity of appliances was mostly the responsibility of the state apparatus: economic planners, manufacturers, and trade organizations.

There is an obvious question about the reception of the KGD educational activities and its successes in creating "nowoczesna gospodyni." The KGD did extensive research on the reception of its policy, positive shifts in consumer culture, and trends such as the increase in consumption of modern products and services. When it comes to the reception of its educational campaigns, the KGD, unsurprisingly, claimed that rural females were willing to transform into "nowoczesna gospodyni." The KGD was virtually the only organization that researched consumption in rural areas. As historians, we do not have access to unbiased sources that would provide any source base to answer a complex question on the redefinition of selfhood.

For now, the home efficiency movements have been studied only as a part of the history of consumption in the US and western Europe. In the west, home

83. Zukin and Smith Maguire, "Consumers and Consumption," 173.

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efficiency movements were NGOs without the "quasi" prefix. In Poland, the KGD openly claimed that its ideology of social, economic, and technological modernization came from the west. However, the organization reworked the objectives and repertoire of western movements to fit into the local economic and social policy. Such reworking is visible in the KGD's public communications. The Committee regularly reminded that its objectives are the same as the objectives drawn in the recent public speeches of party leaders. There is very little research on how such similar organizations that intended to be intermediary actors in local consumer cultures, operated in political, economic, and social settings of state socialism. Still, despite the existence of a myriad of such quasi-NGOs in the eastern bloc, little attention has been paid to the roles of intermediary actors in shaping consumer cultures. In the eastern bloc, where the production of consumer products was organized within the state apparatus, actors other than governmental bodies, such as state research institutes and manufacturers, could have little impact on material arrangements within consumer cultures. As we have shown, however, in state socialism an intermediary actor could have a significant impact on both shaping the social roles related to practices of consumption and cultural meanings of material artifacts.

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