9

Crafting communist paternalism: the voices of lacemakers in Koniaków, Poland, 1947–1962

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Introduction

While doing ethnographic fieldwork among lacemakers in the Polish village of Koniaków, I stumbled upon a pocket-sized pamphlet celebrating the artistic achievements of the craftswoman Maria Kulej (1928–1998). Produced by the Polish Association of Folk Artists in the early 1980s, the brochure contains her professional biography, images of her work, and a picture of the artist surrounded by her mother, daughter and a young granddaughter. All four are dressed in folk costume and a large, rectangular lace doily lies spread across Kulej's lap, showcasing the delicate and three-dimensional floral motifs characteristic of fine Koniaków laces. Turned slightly away from the camera and with eyes cast down, all four appear to be concentrating on their crocheting apart from Maria's elderly mother who looks out at the camera with a questioning eye. Maria Kulej, the short text tells us, kept prominent company through her labours as an artisan, having completed tablecloths and doilies for statesmen as diverse as Josef Stalin, John F. Kennedy and Charles de Gaulle. According to the author, however, she gained the greatest pleasure from making lace tablecloths for the popes John XXIII, Paul VI and John Paul II. With its jumbled references to Soviet dictators, French generals and Roman Catholic Popes, the pamphlet manages to present Kulej as both an emancipated socialist woman forging an illustrious artistic career and as a rural woman steeped in local vernacular culture and conservative rural tradition. Here, images of family, faith and rural tradition are mixed with references to Cold War geopolitics.

The characterisation of Maria Kulej as both family matriarch, rural artisan and cultural diplomat reflects the complex political and symbolic field in which Koniaków's lacemakers operated throughout Poland's communist period.[1] Identifying vernacular crafts as a key aspect of national culture and identity, Polish artists and urban intellectuals established a large number of philanthropic and state-backed initiatives supporting rural artisans from the

late nineteenth century.[2] After the Second World War, these initiatives came under the economic and ideological control of the Polish United Worker's Party (PZPR). Keen to draw rural artisans into the new Soviet-style planned economy, party officials enjoined them to join craft cooperatives under its leadership. Regarded as an ideologically progressive form of production and ownership, the cooperative system promised to bring steady work, assured sales and a modicum of self-governance to artisans. Bringing rural crafts under the purview of state institutions, nationalisation, however, also paved the way for their politisation. Seeking to present itself as the legitimate heir to Poland's existing national traditions, the PZPR set about repackaging romantic ideas of peasant culture and lifeways with the aim of creating a new, socialist vernacular culture.[3] This involved the extraction of rural traditions from their everyday context and their deployment for aesthetic and political effect in public spaces and events. It also saw the discursive 'folklorisation' of rural culture, including the rebranding of artisans and homeworkers as 'folk artists' and the material culture of the peasantry as 'folk art'.[4]

This chapter examines the post-war reorganisation of Koniaków's cottage industry as a radical experiment which reimagined the economic, cultural and social role of rural craft for the twentieth century. Drawing on archival material and oral histories, it documents lacemakers' experience and understanding of socialist reform. As multiple chapters in this volume attest, communities of lacemakers across Europe were a popular target for humanitarian projects during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. In the face of poverty, unemployment or war, wealthy patrons established philanthropic initiatives which aimed to create fair conditions of labour by facilitating a direct relationship between producer and consumer. Such projects were framed by relations of class and moral economy, relying on ideas and images of the (un)deserving poor, the virtuous female homeworker and the socially responsible consumer. In contrast, the Polish post-war experiment was explicitly anti-capitalist and anti-class by nature. At its heart, it promised an end to the exploitation of the peasantry and rural working classes and to secure their welfare through their incorporation into a more equitable socialist economy. Furthermore, this project of social emancipation was a paternalist project in which the state took on the role of commercial and artistic patron rather than a philanthropic scheme appealing to the moral conscience of the consumer. Indeed, profit sat low on the authorities' list of motives for supporting local craft production. It was trumped by the ideologically more important goal of ensuring employment for rural populations and designing products which could showcase Poland's vernacular culture as an organic part of socialist modernity.

A number of scholars have documented the economic and ideological appropriation of 'folk arts' by communist regimes across the Eastern Bloc, focusing predominantly on the institutional histories of state-run folk art organisations. Few, however, have documented the ways these processes of reorganisation and resignification were negotiated by rural artisans themselves. In this chapter, I use archival materials and ethnographic interviews to capture the experiences of Koniaków's lacemakers using their own voices. Their experiences present some interesting challenges to thinking about humanitarian handicrafts in general and efforts to revive lacemaking traditions more specifically. At first glance, it appears that the socialist experiment had success in furnishing lace and its producers with a new social and economic role, while stripping lace of all its traditional associations with luxury and Christian tradition. Yet, with more scrutiny, it becomes clear that the project of socialising folklore suffered many of the same contradictions and tensions as philanthropic schemes in capitalist countries. Lacemakers found their opportunities for work and self-expression were both encouraged and curtailed by the planned nature of the socialist economy: the cooperative system appeared to offer them agency and the opportunity for self-governance, but also made them employees of an organisation within an inflexible, centralised economic system. Furthermore, the humanitarian impulse which underpinned socialist paternalism – expressed both in the form of central planning and in the perception of craft work as a kind of 'social benefit' (given out according to need rather than talent or market demand) – was in constant tension with lacemakers' own self-perception as skilled artisans.

Koniaków lace

Koniaków lace is delicately floral, made by the successive looping of fine cotton or silk threads using a crochet hook to build up complex motifs which are linked together to form doilies, tablecloths or items of clothing (Figure 9.1). Like the technique of crocheting itself, however, Koniaków lace is not a wholly indigenous invention but arose from the meeting of local peasant crafts with urban, bourgeois tastes during the interwar period. Ethnographers have traced the origins of the tradition to the introduction of a general course in needlecraft and domestic economy at the village school from 1886.[5] The development of a repertoire of indigenous motifs took off when local women adopted the technique for making and decorating the czepiec, or matron cap: a small white bonnet worn by women under their headscarves. An obligatory part of a married woman's attire, the matron's cap had previously been decorated with a strip of bobbin lace or machine-made lace. By 1900, however, caps were being made using the crochet

Figure 9.1 An elderly lady attending a festival in Koniaków wearing a traditional lace *czepiec*

technique, the frontispiece containing ever-more elaborate motifs which imitated the floral machine lace.[6] By the 1920s, more than sixty women in the village were engaged in making and selling lace czepce in the nearby market town of Jablunkov (now in the Czech Republic).[7]

The transformation of the nearby market towns of Wisła and Ustron into spa towns in the early 1900s brought further impetus for commercialisation and stylistic change to Koniaków lace. With the help of Maurycy Roth, the Jewish owner of a general goods shop Wisła, and Wanda Sochaczewska, a Warsaw socialite with connections to the artistic circles in Krakow, women in the village began to turn out doilies and tablecloths in lace for an urban audience.[8] Given that piecework could be completed at home, lacemaking was compatible with childcare and running the family smallholding, the traditional responsibilities of women in the Polish Highlands. From 1931, lacemakers gained support from the Society for the Promotion of Folk and Domestic Industry (*Towarzystwo Popierania Przemysłu Ludowego i Domowego*) in the nearby urban centre of Cieszyn. Reflecting a combination of salvage ethnography and philanthropy typical of the time, the Society aimed to counter the creeping 'urbanisation of rural life' and 'vanishing of folk art' by documenting the contemporary, vernacular ornamentation of Cieszyn Silesia. It was just one of several organisations, including the Katowice-based Union of Polish Women's Societies (*Związek Towarzystw Polek*), which sought out exhibition space and commercial outlets for Koniaków lace in Wisła, Katowice and the capital, Warsaw.[9] By the outbreak of the Second World War, a lively cottage industry had been established in the village, turning out lace edgings and doilies – affectionately named *różićki* (rosettes) by lacemakers because of their round form and floral design.

The manufacture of *różićki* for an outside audience continued after the cessation of the war and the establishment of the communist-led Polish People's Republic. The post-war period ushered in a significant change in the organisation of craft production and sale, as the disparate philanthropic initiatives led by well-meaning urbanites were disbanded in favour of a network of state-sponsored folk art cooperatives. In 1947, the local lacemaker Maria Gwarek (Figure 9.2) and a dozen colleagues established a small lacemakers' cooperative (*Spółdzielnia Koronkarska*), which was subsequently incorporated into the Katowice-based Cooperative of Folk and Art Production 'ArW' (*Spółdzielni Przemysłu Ludowego i Artystycznego* 'ArW'). Founded with the aims of 'creating the best possible conditions for professional and social work for employing women and young people, as well as invalids and persons with limited capacity for labour',[10] the Cooperative brought together Koniaków's lacemakers with embroiderers, weavers, knitters and other artisans from the wider area. It pledged not only to organise 'cottage industry activities' and the 'purchase and sale of the

Figure 9.2 Lacemaker Maria Gwarek

subject of this activity' but to offer members and their families 'the possibility of using social, cultural and sports services and facilities'.[11] In practice, this activity translated into the running of a socialised form of putting-out system: the ArW supplied artisans with materials and tools, and guaranteed a steady stream of product orders from the regional sales bureau located in Katowice. Until her death in 1962, it was Maria Gwarek who distributed orders among the members and collected and dispatched the finished lace to the cooperative headquarters.

Like all other folk art cooperatives across post-war Poland, the ArW was brought under the executive control of the Cooperative-State Central Agency for Folk and Art Industry (*Spółdzielczo-Państwowa Centrala Przemysłu Ludowego i Artystycznego* – CPLia) 'Cepelia' in 1950.[12] Established in 1949 through the consolidation of more than eighty existing craft cooperatives and small-scale manufacturers, the official remit of Cepelia was the 'organisation of folk production and folk manufacture as part of the small folk and art industries' and the 'care of folk craftsmanship due to its artistic

values'.[13] In practice, this dual role translated into two – at times conflicting – institutional objectives. The first was the commercial goal of coordinating the production of craft items by supplying cooperatives with raw materials, designs and tools, and subsequently to market and sell these products through a state-run network of branded folk art shops across Poland and abroad. The second objective was to reshape craft into a contemporary expressive medium by bringing together ethnographers, art historians, designers and artisans to develop attractive goods on the basis of vernacular traditions. This involved redesigning products of functional use into decorative objects for a mainly urban audience,[14] as well as educating consumers on their aesthetic virtues and their place in the new socialist materiality.[15] It also supported the artistic development of cooperative members by staging regular competitions and exhibitions at regional and national level, allowing artisans to showcase independent work to the public.

The establishment of the ArW illustrates that lacemakers – and other female artisans in the area – were receptive to this discourse. Apart from a wage, membership of the cooperative offered women access to social benefits and a state pension reserved for those with the ideological status of 'toilers' (that is, state employees). It also gave lacemakers an active stake in the ArW as an enterprise. Membership was subject to the payment of an annual fee which bought artisans a share in the cooperative. Owning shares gave them the opportunity to earn a modest dividend from any profits earned, but it also made members liable for covering any losses which could not be offset by the organisation's reserves. Membership also gave craftswomen the right to attend and vote at the cooperative's general meetings which decided on policy, elected a governing executive and approved annual reports. While the overall fiscal strategy and artistic direction remained in the hands of functionaries in Katowice and Warsaw, certain administrative and executive posts were open to artisans. Lacemakers regularly became members of the ArW's governing council, as well as of subcommittees which oversaw matters of quality, membership and the use of cooperative resources for social and cultural purposes. The involvement of artisans in the formal structures of the ArW meant they were not only responsible for the day-to-day running of the cooperative's activities in Koniaków (doling out and collecting work and wages) but also had insight into and a degree of influence over the way roles and resources were managed from year to year. In this way, membership could serve as a pathway for women to forge careers as managers and artisans.

The incorporation of the ArW into Cepelia thus brought certain advantages to Koniaków's lacemakers. The cooperative structure provided a stable, state-backed framework for the existing cottage industry, allowing craftswomen to continue exercising their trade in much the same way as before the war. It also promised them a degree of self-determination by

inviting them to profit from their (collective) labour and to participate in the management of the cooperative's work, finances and artistic authority. Koniaków's lacemakers, however, faced two significant challenges to their ability to exercise control over their work. The first challenge arose from the lack of flexibility and practical limitations imposed by the principles of the command economy. As I show below, the planning of production, distribution and sales by central authorities often took little account of the realities of supply and demand, creating tensions between artisans, cooperatives and the Cepelia leadership. The second was the patriarchal attitude of the communist authorities to female employment. Despite an official commitment to gender equality, officials perceived women's abilities and need to work through the prism of family life: work was seen as a 'necessary evil' for single women and lone mothers, or as a source of supplementary income to that of a low-earning male 'breadwinner'.[16] While many lacemakers in the village shared such conservative attitudes towards craftwork as employment, the official perception of employment as secondary to women's domestic and reproductive duties had consequences for the way their concerns about production, profitability and artistic integrity were addressed.

Factories of 'folk art'

In October 1951, the ArW held its third quarterly meeting in the mountain resort of Wisła, with members coming together to elect associates for its governing body, discuss its accounts and hear the production plans for the coming year. A representative from Cepelia's offices in Katowice opened the meeting with a summary of the cooperative's achievements over the preceding year. Noting that the ArW was one of the largest cooperatives in the region with 303 members, he praised the assembled artisans for their efforts over the preceding year. The ArW, he declared, was performing 'at the forefront in terms of production' and had overfulfilled its planned production quota by 125 per cent.[17] Next, a member of the cooperative treated the assembled membership to a lecture on the 'significant importance of cooperative movement in the period of the 6-year plan'.[18] Drawing rural populations into the national economy, cooperatives were the ideal tool for addressing the 'problems caused by the disproportion between the development of industry and the development of agriculture'. Making up one-third of the cooperative membership, Koniaków's lacemakers found themselves singled out for special attention. The chairwoman of the ArW's board, Lidia Materna, noted that since gaining 'control of the cottage industry in the centre for lacemaking in Koniaków', the ArW had succeeded in 'raising the artistic level and number of employees' from the village.[19] She announced

a further plan to arrange a twenty-day vocational training course for lacemakers in the first quarter of 1952.

Replete with references to state economic policy and its official discourse of productivity, the minutes of the meeting reveal official expectations of the organisation and role of folk craft in a modern socialist society. The most important of these was that the manufacture of craft items and 'folk art' could be directed in the same way as production in other industries. At Cepelia's first general meeting, the Minister of Arts and Culture Włodzimierz Sokorski emphasised that the remit of the organisation was to facilitate *the mass production* of folk craft.[20] He presented the cooperative system as a mechanism for introducing standardised product designs and work methods which would transform 'individual artistic prowess into industrial production on a national scale'.[21] Following the Marxist-Leninist maxim that labour was key to production of value, officials also assumed that higher production rates would bring economic prosperity. Following the principles of Stalinist central planning, production targets and employment conditions for individual cooperatives were set by the Ministry of Small Industry and Crafts (*Ministerstwo Przemysłu Drobnego i Rzemiosła*) and the Central Union of Labour Cooperatives (*Centralny Związek Spółdzielnii Pracy*). In the spirit of Soviet-style Stakhanovism, artisans were encouraged to embrace 'socialist competition' in order to achieve ever-higher production targets. Indeed, production plans were often raised by up to 20 per cent annually with few accommodations being made for the specific nature of craftwork and domestic production, and no attention at all being paid to the presence (or absence) of consumer interest in craft objects.[22]

Reading through the minutes of the ArW's quarterly meetings in the period 1950–1962, it soon becomes clear that this production-driven model of artisanal manufacture was incompatible with both domestic production and the realities of post-war Poland. Members of the ArW's board admitted that 'it was not easy to apply competition amongst homeworkers',[23] many artisans in the cooperative being unable to produce large quantities of goods and remaining unreceptive to calls for rivalry with their colleagues. The ever-increasing production quotas were a particular problem for lacemakers, who undertook intricate, labour-intensive work which could not be standardised or mechanised.[24] They often struggled to fulfil the orders, especially during the summer months when agricultural work competed with craftwork for their attention. And even when they were motivated to work, they were held back by a chronic lack of good-quality cotton thread for crocheting.[25] These supply-side problems were compounded by a lack of consumer interest in traditional products. Wartime destruction and the demise of private enterprise following the Communist Party takeover created a shortage in basic goods such as textiles, furniture, crockery and clothing. Despite Cepelia's

commitment to reforming public taste and 'adjusting the assortment to the needs of the market',[26] post-war consumers had little appetite for decorative items and traditional craft goods which could be easily substituted by more practical, inexpensive industrial products. Indeed, throughout much of the 1950s, Cepelia subsidised the production of items such as lace doilies with the production of more popular products like furniture and toys.[27]

Problems of overproduction and missing demand were compounded by the authorities' expectation that Cepelia and its constituent cooperatives operate as self-financing business enterprises, subjecting them to 'market commercial pressures in a non-market economy'.[28] For Koniaków's lacemakers, the resulting pricing structure translated into low piece rates. Low levels of renumeration for their work, however, threatened to jeopardise their membership of the ArW. In 1950, membership required the purchase of 2000 zł worth of shares, to be paid in four instalments of 500 zł. Yet, at a meeting in October that year, lacemakers told the assembly they were unable to afford these payments and requested permission to pay their dues in smaller monthly increments of 200 zł. This arrangement was reconfirmed at regular intervals over the next decade. Thus, while lacemakers were numerically strong, their work made a proportionally smaller economic contribution to the activities of the cooperative than that of other artisans. The sense that lacemakers were the 'poor cousins' of the cooperative was compounded by the unprofitability of their product. In 1958, the ArW projected a modest profit of 5 per cent on lace doilies, but accounting showed profits to be closer to 0.8 per cent per item.[29] Lacemakers queried whether it was even worth their while making lace doilies. Their concerns were dismissed by the ArW chairwoman Lidia Materna, who told members present that 'Koniaków lace would stop being unprofitable because the production was set to increase, and most of it would be shipped abroad for export.'[30]

Materna's answer illustrated the biases of contemporary productivist thinking which located value in manufacturing (rather than in sales), as well as Cepelia's increasing dependence on foreign markets for the profitable disposal of unwanted inventory.[31] Indicating that lacemakers should not concern themselves with the profitability of their products, however, it also dismissed their legitimate concerns about the viability of their craftwork and their membership of the cooperative. This awkward exchange suggests that the self-perception of Koniaków's lacemakers was somewhat at odds with the agenda of Cepelia's representatives – and perhaps even with aspects of the socialist project of state-sponsored craftwork as a whole. Indeed, as I show below, lacemakers often displayed an ambivalent attitude towards employment in the cooperative. While all women appreciated craftwork as a regular source of income, the majority never fully embraced the title of 'folk artist' and often resented the imposition of craftwork on their roles as

mothers and rural housewives. Some members appeared reluctant to accept directions given by Cepelia officials. Rather, the archival material suggests that they tried to mould the cooperative system to suit their own aspirations using their pre-war experience. This included contesting certain decisions made by the cooperative leadership, as well as attempting to draw financial resources from the ArW and Cepelia to the village in order to gain more control over the production and sale of lace.

Enterprising women: artists, workers … or rural housewives?

Drawing women into the workforce was a central concern for the PZPR government, which sought to rapidly redevelop the heavily deprived areas of the countryside after the destruction of the war. The conflict had not only depleted many villages of their male workforce but had dissolved many of the traditional structures and social ties of rural society, sometimes requiring women to take on the role of breadwinner. A particular concern of the authorities was the question of how war widows and wives of disabled or low-earning husbands might be supported to find profitable employment.[32] This concern translated into several initiatives aimed at creating jobs for women, including the so-called Action for Employment (*Akcja Zatrudnienia*) in 1947. This three-year programme included vocational training and the establishment of cooperatives specifically aimed at offering employment for women 'whose material situation was particularly burdensome'.[33] The training offered was overwhelmingly for 'typically cooperative and artisanal professions, such as cap-making, gastronomy, bag bonding, cutting and sewing, haberdashery, slipper manufacturing, brush-making, and the like, as well as typing and nursing'.[34] A similar initiative to develop 'female' cooperatives in sectors such as toy manufacture, linen production and knitting was launched in 1956 by the Central Cooperative Movement.[35] Despite the fact that Stalinist discourses presented employment as a path to female emancipation, gender equality and social justice, these efforts remained constrained by a conservative (but perhaps realistic) understanding of the limitations agricultural and family duties put on women's employment.[36]

Lacemakers in post-war Koniaków welcomed the offer of employment in the cooperative, but this was often seen as supplementary to existing income streams and household duties. As one elderly lacemaker told me: 'Here in the mountains, we did not have the luxury of being able to put away money. The men had far to go to work and we value men's work. And they did not earn much, so it [lacemaking] was done more so that there was some small money, to help the men with supporting the home and the children' (PL,

eighty-eight years, 2009). The reality of membership in the ArW, however, belied this vision of lacemaking as flexible, part-time homework. Orders for doilies, tablecloths and sartorial elements such as collars and cuffs were handed out on a monthly basis, and a high quality of execution was expected from lacemakers.[37] As one craftswoman pointed out at a ArW cooperative meeting in 1960, lacemakers were only able to complete their quotas if they could dedicate themselves full time to the craft. However, lacemaking was not paid well enough to justify full-time employment: 'if someone takes care only of the crocheting, they can earn. But when there is a farm, you have to look after the farm. Because I would lose more on my farm than I would earn on it [lacemaking].'[38] The result was that lacemakers worked long hours and simplified the craftwork itself by repeatedly using a limited number of lace motifs or by making lace using coarser thread.

Most lacemakers employed by the ArW thus shared a pragmatic attitude towards craftwork, rather than viewing it as a source of artistic identity or even occupational identity. They were not alone in rejecting the label: surveys run by Cepelia's internal research department in the 1970s and 1980s show that this perception was typical for members of Cepelia's artisanal cooperatives across Poland: most artisans characterised themselves as employees or as workers in their trade, reserving the title of 'artist' for colleagues who were particularly creative and skilled.[39] Unable to directly influence the setting of production targets and piece rates, lacemakers thus tended to find other ways to make their concerns and voices heard. One of these areas was the allocation and use of the cooperative's communal funds. Their purchase of shares (and any profit accrued) contributed towards the running costs of the cooperative and various 'socio-educational' and charitable causes: a sports club, a folk-dance troupe and one-off donations to other institutions, such as a home for the elderly. However, time and again, lacemakers queried the necessity of using cooperative funds for the support of social and educational purposes, as well as the legitimacy of sick pay and claims for financial support from non-productive members. At the meeting of the ArW membership in July 1958, for example, they protested against the allocation of over 3000 zł to the Sports Association 'Start' (*Zreszenie Sportowe Start*), which supported physical activity for the general public and rehabilitation activities for the disabled. What direct benefits, they asked, could this association bring homeworkers like themselves?[40]

Another way in which lacemakers asserted their agency was to push for more independence from the cooperative structure. In the spring of 1961, they petitioned the head office of the ArW in Katowice – and through them, Cepelia in Warsaw – to be allowed to open a retail outlet directly in Koniaków to sell lace to the increasing number of tourists that had started to visit the area. This suggestion ran counter to all structures of production,

Figure 9.3 Photographs and diplomas of the lacemaker Helena Kameniarz displayed at her former residence. Kameniarz represented Koniaków's lacemakers in the Association of Folk Artists.

sale and supply within Cepelia, bypassing all the established processes of administration and decision-making in the organisation. It also challenged the prevailing opinion among the Cepelia leadership that folk arts should be removed from small, provincial 'bazaar shops' and their sales concentrated into 'snob shops' in major Polish cities where their quality and desirability would be validated.[41] Koniaków's lacemakers asserted that selling locally would boost the quality and quantity of their products, encourage savings in the consumption of raw material and – most importantly – guarantee them better piece rates for their work. Perhaps unsurprisingly, their request was turned down by the ArW and Cepelia on the grounds that it was administratively and economically unworkable. However, it signalled lacemakers' willingness to challenge the principles of the cooperative system, an impulse which later led many to become members of the Association of Folk Artists (*Stowarzyszenie Twórców Ludowych*) (Figure 9.3). Founded in 1968 by and for artisans wishing to operate outside the constraints of the cooperative system, the Association gave its members the legal right to operate as self-employed craftspeople, as well as offering them dedicated exhibition spaces and commercial outlets.

Conclusions

Communist parties across the Eastern Bloc brought rural crafts under the control of the state after the Second World War, regarding vernacular culture as an ideal tool for economic, social and political integration. In Poland, the production and sale of vernacular crafts was organised in a series of local and regional cooperatives under the purview of the Warsaw-based Central Agency for Folk and Art Industry 'Cepelia'. These cooperatives replaced a patchwork of private workshops and philanthropic organisations which sought to support the production of rural crafts from the late nineteenth century. The reorganisation of craft into a state-supported model was partly driven by a need to reimagine the economic and ideological role of rural craft for socialist society, as well as a desire to ensure employment for rural populations which had been devasted by the conflict. They formed part of the wider ideological promise made by the Polish United Worker's Party to steer post-war reconstruction and industrial modernisation along socially equitable principles, and to secure the welfare of rural communities after the devastation of the war. The consolidation of rural crafts into a state-run cooperative structure was therefore wrapped up in promises of emancipation along the lines of class and gender, and the promise of a national revival of vernacular culture under the paternalist protection of the socialist state.

Drawing on archival and ethnographic research among lacemakers in the village of Koniaków, I have sought to uncover how artisans experienced the socialist reorganisation of rural craft, constructed their professional identities and perceived the promises of the communist regime. Early adopters of the cooperative system, Koniaków's lacemakers joined the Katowice-based Cooperative of Folk and Art Production (ArW) in ever-increasing numbers from 1947 to 1989. The cooperative became the biggest employer of women in the village, giving them access to a small but steady income from craftwork, as well as the right to social benefits and a pension. It also allowed them a limited involvement in the organisation of artisanal production on a local level and the use of cooperative funds for educational and social activities. The collectivisation of craft production thus offered women the chance to become employees of the state – workers in a worker's state. It also entailed a reshaping of artisanal labour to suit a Soviet-style planned economy driven by a productivist ideology and assumed that artisanal manufacture could be managed using the same principles as any other sector. The mismatch between the labour-intensive nature of crochet lacemaking and this production-driven model meant that women often struggled to fulfil their orders on time. At the same time, the paradoxical disregard for consumer tastes on the part of the Cepelia leaders and the requirement that ArW turn a profit left lacemakers working for low rates. At times, producing crochet lace was actually unprofitable for the cooperative, but they retained their membership by virtue of the socialist state's policy of full employment.

These systemic problems had consequences for the relations between lacemakers and the cooperative leadership, as well as their own professional identities. Despite its purported democratic nature, the cooperative structure tended towards hierarchy and inflexibility. While they were invited to take an active role in running the cooperative and to air their concerns at cooperative meetings, lacemakers often found their voices were overruled by ArW and Cepelia functionaries. As a result, craftswomen accepted the economic security offered by the cooperative system but were frustrated by the lack of control over production, sales and renumeration that state patronage entailed. The archival record reveals that Koniaków's lacemakers struggled to reassert their agency vis-à-vis the ArW leadership by seeking greater control over the sale of their product and contesting the use of cooperative funds. It also shows that despite the overtly socially progressive rhetoric of the socialist state, latent issues of gender and class remained. Rather than being genuinely equitable, the system reproduced many of the tropes we see in other – non-socialist – interventions into craft communities: low wages, and the reproduction of handicrafts as an occupation for those difficult to employ due to sex, physical ability or youth. Contrary to the overtly emancipatory rhetoric of the communist authorities, the paternalist

system of craft production was underpinned by traditional notions of gender and gender roles. Given that many lacemakers shared conservative attitudes towards female employment, this disjuncture may have made them even less receptive to the professional identities constructed for them by the authorities. The majority never embraced the role of 'folk artist' offered by the regime, a role which presented female artisans as both socialist workers and the embodiment of vernacular tradition.

Handicrafts have often become part of humanitarian schemes in response to conflict, economic crises, environmental disaster and the displacement of populations. As the contributions to this volume show, such schemes have a rich history which is often framed by relations of class, race and colonial power. Emerging from the specific historical and ideological context of the early Cold War, Poland's post-war experiment with socialised craft production also strove to use the production and sales of crafts as a mechanism for development which was directed by the state (rather than by private individuals through philanthropic initiatives). Its architects sought to address similar concerns about poverty, exploitation and securing the future viability of craft communities using a non-capitalist model which symbolically (and economically) downplayed the commercial aspect of craftwork and displaced the consumer from the heart of humanitarian action. As such, the moral discourses and cultural tropes which characterised many of the other schemes presented in this book (e.g. images of the deserving poor, of virtuous domesticity and of the socially conscious consumer) were replaced by romanticised notions of rural tradition with a socialist favour. And yet, the cooperative organisation of craft production under Cepelia faced many of the same challenges as other, non-socialist schemes. One of these was how to balance a desire for authenticity with the need to modernise the product range to the suit the populations' increasingly urban, industrialised lifestyle. Another was balancing the ideological imperative of giving artisans access to stable, equitably paid work while needing to turn a profit.

Notes

1 Poland was ruled by the communist Polish United Worker's Party from 1947 until 1989.
2 Ewa Klekot, *Kłopoty ze Sztuką Ludową. Gust, ideologie, nowoczesność* (Gdańsk: Fundacja Teritoria Książki, 2021); Piotr Korduba, *Ludowość na sprzedaż* (Warszawa: Fundacja Nowej Kultury Bęc Zmiana/Narodowe Centrum Kultury, 2013).
3 Józef. Burszta and Bronislawa Kopczynska-Jaworska, 'Polish Ethnography after World War II'. *Ethnos*, 47:1–2 (1982), 50–63.

4 Burszta and Kopczynska-Jaworska, 'Polish Ethnography after World War II'; Aleksander. Jackowski, *Cepelia: Tradycja i współczesność* (Warszawa: Fundacja "Cepelia" Polska Sztuka i Rękodzieło, 1999).
5 Barbara Poloczkowa, 'Koronki koniakowskie', *Polska Sztuka Ludowa*, 22:4 (1968), 209–240, 245–246; Małgorzata Kiereś, *Koronka Koniakowska* (Istebna: Gminny Ośrodek Kultury, 2010).
6 Kiereś, *Koronka Koniakowska*.
7 Agnieszka. Dobrowolska and Tadeusz Dobrowolski, *Strój, Haft i Koronka w Województwie Śląskiem* (Kraków: Nakładem Polskiej Akademji Umiejętosci, 1936).
8 Kiereś, *Koronka Koniakowska*.
9 Janina Orynżyna, *Przemysł ludowy w Polsce* (Warszawa: Nakładem Tygodnika "Polska Gospodarca", 1938).
10 ArW, Protokol, Walnego Zgromedzenia Członków, 3 November 1950, Katowice.
11 *Ibid*.
12 From 1962 the Union of Cooperatives in Folk and Artistic Industries (Związek Spółdzielni Przemysłu Ludowego i Artystycznego).
13 M. Woźniak, 'Problemy Wytwórczości Ludowej w Pracach Zakładu Badawczego Związku "Cepelia"', *Etnografia Polska*, 14:2 (1975), 91–108, p. 93.
14 For Koniaków's lacemakers, this meant increased orders for sartorial accessories (gloves, collars and cuffs) and domestic accessories (doilies, tablecloths), as well as special orders (such as diplomatic gifts and Christmas decorations). Lacemakers were not furnished with design templates to work from, but orders outlined the number and dimensions of the products required, and occasionally specified the nature of motifs to be included.
15 Piotr Korduba, *Ludowość na sprzedaż* (Warszawa: Fundacja Nowej Kultury Bęc Zmiana/Narodowe Centrum Kultury, 2013).
16 Natalia Jarska, 'Gender and Labour in Post-War Communist Poland: Female Employment 1945–1970', *Acta Poloniae Historica*, 110 (2014), 49–85.
17 ArW, Protokol, Walnego Zgromedzenia Członków, 9 December 1951, Gliwice.
18 *Ibid*.
19 *Ibid*.
20 Daniel Stone, 'Cepelia and Folk Arts Industries in Poland, 1949–1956', *The Polish Review*, 54:3 (2009), 287–310, p. 297, my emphasis.
21 Korduba, *Ludowość na sprzedaż*, p. 153.
22 Korduba, *Ludowość na sprzedaż*.
23 ArW, Protokol, Walnego Zgromedzenia Członków, 9 December 1951, Gliwice.
24 Some lacemakers in contemporary Koniaków blame the inflexible, centralised nature of production for ArW for what they see as a gradual decline in the quality of local lace: 'Cepelia insisted that the motifs were identical. So, there was no artistic development of lacemakers. Women wanted to earn money because there was no industry in the mountains, so they made big, easy things. So creativity got neglected.' Interview, TR, 65 years, Koniakow, 2009.

25 Deflecting questions about chronic shortages, the cooperative leadership called for artisans to exercise the 'greatest possible efficient resource-management' and 'to combat waste and inaccurate working patterns' (ArW, Protokol, 1951). At a 1955 meeting of folk artists arranged by Cepelia's Katowice offices, Maria Gwarek argued that lacemakers struggled with a 'lack of raw materials for the production of lace' and that there was 'great difficulties in determining prices' as a result (Kiereś, *Koronka Koniakowska*, p. 42).
26 ArW, Protokol, Walnego Zgromedzenia Członków, 9 December 1951, Gliwice.
27 Stone, *Cepelia and Folk Arts Industries in Poland*; Korduba, *Ludowość na sprzedaż*.
28 Stone, *Cepelia and Folk Arts Industries in Poland*.
29 ArW, Protokol, Walnego Zgromedzenia Członków, 21 March 1958, Katowice.
30 *Ibid*. Cepelia started exporting textiles, woven baskets and dolls from the early 1950s. By the latter years of the decade, it established retail outlets in major European cities such as Brussels, Frankfurt and Milan. In 1960, a shop was opened on New York's Fifth Avenue (Korduba, *Ludowość na sprzedaż*).
31 Korduba, *Ludowość na sprzedaż*.
32 Jarska, 'Gender and Labour in Post-War Communist Poland', p. 56.
33 *Ibid*., p. 78.
34 *Ibid*., p. 79.
35 *Ibid*., p. 80.
36 Jarska, 'Gender and Labour in Post-War Communist Poland'; Malgorzata. Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
37 Finished products were then evaluated first by an inspector nominated from their own ranks and then by a central committee in Warsaw from within Cepelia, and categorized as a higher-quality 'type 1' or lesser-quality 'type 2' product. The remuneration for a 'type 2' product was significantly reduced.
38 ArW, Protokol, Walnego Zgromedzenia Członków, 28 May 1960, Koniaków.
39 Maria Woźniak, 'Wytwórcy Ludowi Między Własnym Środowiskiem a "Cepelią"', *Polska Sztuka Ludowa*, 38:1–2 (1983), 9–17.
40 ArW, Protokol, Walnego Zgromedzenia Członków, 21 March 1958, Katowice.
41 Korduba, *Ludowość na sprzedaż*.