Communism, Nationalism, and Identity in a Polish-German Borderland, 1945-1950

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THESIS

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<td>ACC</td>
<td>Allied Control Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>AK</td>
<td>Home Army</td>
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<td>CKŻP</td>
<td>Central Committee of Polish Jews</td>
</tr>
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<td>GO KERM</td>
<td>Government Operation Groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPP</td>
<td>The Communist Party of Poland</td>
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<td>KRN</td>
<td>Polish State National Council</td>
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<td>MAP</td>
<td>Ministry of Public Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIP</td>
<td>Ministry of Information and Propaganda</td>
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<td>MO</td>
<td>Civil Militia</td>
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<tr>
<td>MPiH</td>
<td>Ministry of Industry and Commerce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MZO</td>
<td>Ministry of the Recovered Territories</td>
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<tr>
<td>PPR</td>
<td>Polish Workers’ Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>PPS</td>
<td>Polish Socialist Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSL</td>
<td>Polish Agrarian Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUR</td>
<td>State Repatriation Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PZPR</td>
<td>United Polish Workers’ Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PZZ</td>
<td>Polish Western Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UB</td>
<td>Security Office (State Police)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UPA</td>
<td>Ukrainian Partisan Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WKŻ</td>
<td>Provincial Jewish Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>ZOKZ</td>
<td>The Union for the Defense of the Western Borderlands</td>
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Summary

This dissertation examines the social and political history of ethnic consolidation, population movements, and the transnational implications of redrawing borders and communities in Lower Silesia (a borderland transferred from Germany to Poland in 1945). Throughout my work, I illuminate the impact of displacement and uprooting on the creation of a new national order set against the backdrop of a social and political revolution in postwar Poland. My analysis of Lower Silesia suggests that new self-perceptions of settlers materialized through interactions among diverse ethnic groups as well as through the memory of population transfer. The postwar Polish-German borderlands became a place where identity, citizenship, and national belonging were reshaped and disputed by migrants, expellees, repatriates, and high-ranking national and international leaders.

“Communism, Nationalism, and Identity in a Polish-German Borderland” argues that the coexistence of different settlers – Poles, Germans, Soviets, and Jews – shaped the eventual Polonization of Lower Silesia. The Polonization of the western borderlands thus entailed the participation of Poles and non-Poles. Polonization, moreover, was also an integral part of communist nation building. It was not limited to redrawing borders and redefining identities, but also included redefining social hierarchies, family life, and relations between the sexes, and the construction of a communist society. The cultural, political, and ideological ramifications of making former German lands Polish are a central theme of this dissertation.
**Introduction**

Władysława Gilewska, a nineteen year-old Polish woman from what used to be eastern Poland, now incorporated into the Soviet Union, had no chance of remaining home. Gilewska placed her trust in Polish and Soviet officials to protect her family and ensure their survival. But Władysława could not have been prepared for the hardships and sacrifices still ahead. Very little planning went into the postwar population exchanges between Poland, Germany, and the Soviet Union. Repatriates, expellees, and other settlers comprised mere pawns on a convoluted chessboard set up by the wartime victors. After all, nobody had bothered to ask Władysława about her own wishes as regards to her fate. This may have been callous and cruel but in the minds of the Allies, population shifts were absolutely necessary. Individuals like Władysława supplied the basic raw material for the construction of postwar nation-states in East Central Europe. Polish communists often linked postwar migrations of Poles to honorable and patriotic acts. To Polish families from the eastern borderlands (*kresy*), however, there was nothing honorable about traveling knee-deep in animal dung, exposed to assault and starvation, packed into trains bound for a distant and unfamiliar land they did not identify as Poland.

Władysława and her family had good reason to dread repatriation: the concept itself was illusory. The Allies’ favorite term – repatriation – obscured the humiliating and deadly process that transformed postwar European states like Poland into ethnically homogenous entities. With sanitary conditions deteriorating at each step of the journey, it is not at all surprising that detailed descriptions of pests, stink, and filth dominate repatriate memories. Władysława noted with disgust the abominable state of hygiene in her transport: “My husband and I rode in a sealed car with cows and horses. Sleep and
hygiene were out of the question. We spent the entire two-week-long journey ankle-deep in muck and manure.\textsuperscript{1} Since animals, especially goats and cows, supplied most families with the essential nutrients to endure an excruciating exodus, milking, drinking, and eating involved sharing a common space with flies, fleas, worms, and lice. Maintaining a degree of cleanliness often entailed a prodigious effort of waging war against microscopic vermin:

> And once again those lice (\textit{wszawica})! I remember how my father would take me in his arms, strip away my clothing, and begin removing as many pests as possible. We would engage in this ritual throughout most of the journey. I’ll never forget that feeling of relief – the welcome absence of ferociously biting critters.\textsuperscript{2}

Humiliating conditions such as the ones described by Władysława became a way of life for millions of Poles, Ukrainians, Jews, and Germans. Poland had experienced war and occupation for almost six years. The war was now over and a new struggle well under way. There was nothing certain about postwar life in Poland. Whatever confidence the victorious Allies may have felt as their tanks rolled onto German soil, Władysława’s own confidence was virtually nonexistent. The village where the Gilewskis settled lay 25 kilometers outside of Breslau (soon to be renamed Wrocław). The rules of the local society (comprised of Poles, Germans, and Red Army servicemen) were distressingly ambiguous. Instead of praise and much-needed state assistance, families like the Gilewskis bore their fears, suffering, and homesickness in silence. A new Polish culture was slowly taking shape in former German territories that the Allies assigned to Poland. Repatriates like Władysława may have suffered but the prize – Polish communists sermonized – was an ethnically homogenous Poland. For most Poles transplanted to the


\textsuperscript{2} Ibid.
new western provinces, the struggle to get through those first few months and years was utterly life altering. The experiences of these migrants and their heretofore-untold stories along with the state’s efforts to create a “new Poland” in the former German lands are the subject of this dissertation.

**The Western Territories between Poland and Germany**

Nazi and Soviet occupations of Poland during World War II commenced a six-year period of unprecedented violence in European history. Forced migrations and the destruction of multicultural communities shaped the wartime experiences of Poles, Jews, Belarusians, Ukrainians, and Germans, inhabitants of the historical Polish lands. Migrations and border shifts in the postwar period prolonged the suffering of populations already deeply scarred by displacement, ethnic cleansing, and genocide. For many, there loomed an exodus of epic proportions, which ultimately estranged entire communities from the comforts and familiarity of what used to be home. The trail of cruelty, terror, and death led through filthy embarkation points at countless train stations in Eastern Europe and ended with arrival in a hostile and inhospitable foreign place. The displacement and transfer of millions occurred in a rapidly changing political context, which ultimately catapulted Polish communists into power.

This study will focus on building new communities in the so-called Western Territories, in particular Lower Silesia, the most populous province transferred to Poland from Germany after the war. The significance of postwar demographic and territorial changes, however, extends far beyond the new Polish western frontier. The unfolding view of this study affirms the centrality of transnationalism. Rather than proceeding from
the perspective of the nation-state, the narrative alternates between varying borderlands and their respective populations. The emphasis centers on interacting peripheries placing the study’s vantage point on the very fringes of states and societies. Spatially and temporally displaced peoples from the peripheral axes of three different states – Poland, Germany, and the Soviet Union – comprise the central actors of the following narrative. Their calamitous stories are this study’s pivot.

But individuals and communities, whether in peace or war, are usually under the scrutiny and at the mercy of all-powerful states. By combining social and political history, this work centers on the diverse interaction among postwar actors: the Polish communist state, settlers, repatriates, and expellees. The social transformations and negotiations of political power between communists and ordinary people “on the ground” can be used as a metaphor for creating the new social order in post-1945 Poland. Moreover, these processes can also be used as a window into the larger European experience of postwar recovery and survival.

Polish communists depicted the Western Territories as the final frontier of an epic struggle between German and Polish nationalisms. This study explores the social and political shift from German to Polish cultural hegemony in Lower Silesia in the context of a social revolution caused both by the war and the communist takeover. As part of this process, it will also demonstrate how complicated the job of Polish communists was in imposing a unified national identity on borderland societies mutilated by war, ethnic cleansing, and postwar migrations. Thus, I examine postwar experiences from both the

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perspective of the communists and the people they oversaw in Poland’s “new west”: settlers and the local inhabitants known as autochthons. My study addresses pivotal questions for the understanding of post-1945 Europe: what was the role of mass population movements in the reconstruction of war-torn societies? How did displaced people start new lives in unfamiliar territories and adverse circumstances? Most significantly, how did the new communist authorities and settlers from central and eastern Poland renegotiate the meaning of the new frontier and the postwar national community in general?

**The Logic of Postwar Nation Building and Population Transfers**

The uprooting and redrawing of human communities that began during World War II continued to deeply affect the reconstruction of Eastern Europe long after the last shots of the war were fired. The war transformed multiethnic environments by nationalizing land and people where for centuries cultural fluidity characterized social interactions. After 1945, the revival of public life in borderland regions, such as Lower Silesia overlapped with the establishment of ethnically homogenous communities. What the war failed to finish, the communist regimes in Eastern Europe pledged to complete. In the case of Poland this spelled the end of multicultural homelands and the triumph of the ethnically homogenous nation-state.

Although ethnic tensions were a consistent feature in the lives of most East Europeans during the interwar period, by 1945 the war had accelerated what many nationalists sought to accomplish: the construction of ethnically-based states. Borders were sketched anew, communities ripped apart, and national identities renegotiated. Most
significantly, the Nazi occupation destroyed one of the region’s landmark communities – the East European Jewry. The prior destruction of Jews and Jewish culture and the forced removal of Germans from Poland permitted Polish communists to act as a forerunner of social and cultural change that culminated in the ethnic homogenization of the country. The desire to cleanse Polish lands, in particular territories seized from Germany, had the potential to unite the people with the Soviet-imposed regime.\(^4\)

Justification for the mass transfer of people and resources, however, materialized beyond Poland’s borders. Allied agreements at Teheran, Yalta, and Potsdam linked peace and stability in Eastern Europe to the ethnic purification of states.\(^5\) In this respect, Western powers shared the concept of national consolidation through ethnic cleansing with communist leaders. With the Allies’ consent, communist regimes continued the ethnic cleansing that Hitler and Stalin had initiated during the war.\(^6\) Polish communists capitalized on the crimes of Nazi and Soviet occupiers to forge a new postwar society. Ironically, in the process, they embraced ideas of prewar Polish nationalism to mobilize and reshape society.

Most importantly, deportations, expulsions, and repatriations comprised fundamental building blocks in the communist effort of reconstructing Poland. Building a Polish nation-state forced the new regime to identify and claim Polish inhabitants of the territories ceded to the Soviet Union after 1945 for the Polish nation. The transfer of 2.1 million Poles from the western Soviet republics to the new provinces as well as the

simultaneous expulsion of more than eight million Germans from western and northern Poland left Eastern Europe virtually unrecognizable. The society that emerged after 1945 in Poland encountered a social and political reality remarkably different from the one before 1939. The communist drive to remove ethnic minorities, in particular Germans and Ukrainians, succeeded in bolstering the cultural hegemony of ethnic Poles.

According to the 1931 census, Poles represented around 65 percent of the interwar Polish state. By 1948, however, Poland became approximately 95 percent ethnically Polish and Roman Catholic. Between 1944 and 1949, Poland’s borderlands in the west and southeast are best understood as social laboratories of postwar ethnic cleansing. Throughout the half-decade following World War II, communists supervised the near total destruction of German culture in western Poland, as well as the eviction or internal displacement of Ukrainians, Łemko-Ruthenians, and Belarusians. The movement of diverse populations in and out of Poland thus reflected the demarcation of new physical and social spaces for the reconfiguration of Polish national identity. Consequently, forced migrations solidified the communist regime’s plan of building a new social and political order.

In the first postwar years, it was impossible to ignore the tremendous difficulties that forging a mono-ethnic nation-state entailed. Social, economic, ideological, and technical considerations complicated the repopulation effort. The main communist goal in the territories ceded to the Soviet Union was to collect the local Polish population and

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8 Joanna Beata Michlic, *Poland’s Threatening Other: The Image of the Jew from 1880 to the Present* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 69.
transfer it to Poland. In this context, the eastern Poles were to function as ethnic raw material for resettlement and assimilation of the new lands annexed from Germany. In contrast, the communist mission in the Western Territories rested on the swift and successful expulsion of the dominant nationality, the Germans, and the national verification of autochthons. The latter often identified with their place of residence or religion rather than modern nationalism. At the same time, the criteria for determining who was a Pole and who was a German or an autochthon were far from obvious. The lands annexed from the defeated Third Reich represented a hybrid culture where Germans coexisted with Poles, Czechs, Silesians, and Jews. Repatriation and resettlement of Poles, systematic expulsions of Germans, and the assimilation of those uncommitted to any of the two dominant nationalities, ultimately ensured a radical reorientation of regional social hierarchies.

**Historiography and Historical Debates**

The existing historical literature focuses on postwar western Poland primarily as a site of the ethnic cleansing of Germans.11 Two prominent works, Norman Davies and Roger Moorhouse’s *Microcosm: Portrait of a Central European City* and Gregor Thum’s *Uprooted: How Breslau Became Wroclaw during the Century of Expulsions* exemplify a new trend focusing on the complexities of multicultural coexistence in the Polish-German borderlands. Both Davies and Thum present regional studies through the experiences of

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one city, Wroclaw (Breslau), the historical capital of the Silesian borderland.\textsuperscript{12} While Davies and Moorhouse concentrate on a cultural history of Silesia, from the ancient period to the end of the twentieth century, Thum centers his analysis on the political events and social developments following World War II. Both authors illustrate a picture of Silesian history that is essentially transnational. \textit{Microcosm} depicts the cultural contributions of Poles, Czechs, Germans, Jews, and Austrians as fundamental features of the region’s long history. Likewise, when discussing the national verifications of autochthons and the mass transfers of Poles, Germans, and Ukrainians, Thum sketches a very complex ethno-cultural map of postwar Silesia.

The experiences and memories of German expellees from Poland are at the heart of a more recent study, Andrew Demshuk’s \textit{The Lost German East: Forced Migration and the Politics of Memory, 1945-1970}. Demshuk discusses at length the impact of displacement on the integration of Ostelbien expellees in postwar West German society.\textsuperscript{13} In the period following World War II, the prospect of recovering the Heimat (homeland) comprised the expellees’ continuous obsession. The memory of expulsion from now Polish Silesia informed the perceptions, politics, and worldviews of entire communities of Ostelbien transplants in West Germany. (The Ostelbien – “East of the Elbe River” – is a German concept encompassing territories lost to Poland. From the Polish point of view, the Western Territories are the Ostelbien).

Witnessed from the Polish perspective, however, the history of postwar migration takes on a new set of meanings. The Polish and German experiences (as well as


memories) of homelessness and banishment in Poland’s Lower Silesia are yet to be cast into a single study. My dissertation, therefore, will break new ground by attempting to weave together a narrative in which the interactions between both the incoming (Polish) and the outgoing (German) populations set the stage for a new postwar society. Indeed, Polish-German encounters in post-1945 Lower Silesia symbolize the zero hour for the attempted construction of a Polish communist nation-state.

New questions of communist nation building surface in T. David Curp’s A Clean Sweep?: The Politics of Ethnic Cleansing in Western Poland, 1945-1960. Unlike the previous scholars, Curp focuses on the Poznań area in western Poland, outside the new Western Territories. Nevertheless, Curp’s explanation of ethnic cleansing as a crucial legitimating factor, bridging the communist regime with the masses can be used to understand the interactions between communists and settlers in the newly incorporated territories. The role of territorial integration in the communist-led ethnic homogenization campaign and the creation of new political loyalties, however, are yet to be explored.

Recent studies have pointed to the unexpected connections between communism, nationalism, and Catholicism in postwar Poland, the theme that is central to my work. Mikołaj Stanisław Kunicki’s recent work, Between the Brown and the Red: Nationalism, Catholicism, and Communism in 20th Century Poland – The Politics of Bolesław Piasecki, addresses the complicated relationship between cross-ideological actors in postwar Poland. In particular, Kunicki demonstrates how prominent prewar Polish nationalists reconciled their commitments to fatherland, Church, and the Soviet-imposed communist regime. Communism and nationalism, Kunicki argues, were not necessarily

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inseparable. In directing the historical spotlight on Bolesław Piasecki, the leader of the postwar PAX association, a communist-sponsored organization seeking to reconcile progressive Catholics with the regime – (“socialist in its involvement and nationalist in its worldview”) – the author sheds light on the seemingly unexpected intersections between nationalism, communism, totalitarianism, and religion.\textsuperscript{15} While postwar Polish communists reinforced the integral nationalist vision of Polishness, they also recognized the centrality of Catholicism to Polish national identity. The regime’s intricate courtship of some Catholic-nationalist leaders illustrates the entanglement of religion with postwar Polish nation building. Providing Poles with a regime-sponsored Catholic and nationally conscious organization appeared to reinforce the communists’ legitimacy at the helm of the nation.

Like Kunicki, Michael Fleming’s work, \textit{Communism, Nationalism and Ethnicity in Poland, 1944-50}, highlights the importance of cross-ideological connections for the crystallization of communist rule in Poland. Party members, prewar nationalists, and Catholic clergymen comprised eager contributors in the delimitation of postwar Polish national identity. Fleming takes a broad perspective, drawing critical links between national homogenization in Poland and the policies and interests of the international community as well as the two major Cold War “warriors.”\textsuperscript{16} The victorious Allies openly encouraged Polish communists to ethnically reshape Poland. In doing so, they indirectly reaffirmed the uniqueness of nationality as a new “prime identity indicator.”\textsuperscript{17}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Michael Fleming, \textit{Communism, Nationalism and Ethnicity in Poland, 1944-50} (London: Routledge, 2010).
\item Fleming, \textit{Communism, Nationalism and Ethnicity in Poland}, 18.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
class opened new avenues for unconventional relationships with members of the prewar Right and the Church. The content of Polishness would heretofore trump other considerations, in particular those based on class. Postwar Polish nationality policy was thus “closely aligned with the assumed imperatives of building [Polish] socialism.”

Population movements and the communists’ revamped approach to nationality ultimately made possible a “Poland for the Poles.”

Historians only partially have examined the role of expulsions and repatriations in forging a new political and social reality in postwar Eastern Europe. While they have devoted considerable attention to the expulsions of East European Germans, research on the forced migrations of Poles from eastern provinces ceded to the Soviet Union to the territories vacated by those same Germans remains scarce. Thus, historians still need to address some critical questions: How did the experiences and mindsets of eastern Poles, the so-called kresowianie, influence the self-perception of settlers and postwar society in general? How did the old and new inhabitants of the territories annexed from Germany identify themselves in the postwar reality? Resettlement in a strange and undomesticated land distorted familiar social relations, undermining prewar regional patriotisms, creating the possibility for more people to embrace a modern national identity. To what extent, then, did encounters between Poles, Germans, and autochthons shape the emergence of Polish communities in western Poland? Did Poles and Germans engage in a cultural war of national supremacy, that the official propaganda would have us believe? How did the inhabitants of the Western Territories accommodate themselves to the rapidly changing postwar cultural and political context?

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18 Fleming, *Communism, Nationalism and Ethnicity in Poland*, 21.
This dissertation expands on many of the issues raised by historians such as Davies, Moorhouse, Thum, Demshuk, Curp, Fleming, and Kunicki. In particular, it addresses themes of nation building and social engineering in the new postwar territories. While scholars scrupulously examined political and social upheavals under communist rule, the significance of the Western Territories in mobilizing and transforming society has not been investigated. This study thus contributes to the cultural history of nationalism and communism, two ideologies that have rarely been explored as interdependent systems. Examining the experiences of migrants – repatriates from the East and settlers from the Polish heartland – will broaden our understanding of the complexities behind forging new loyalties, taming unfamiliar lands, and renegotiating old identities.

**Disputing Territories, Renegotiating Identities**

This dissertation makes three important contributions to the English-language historiography of post-World War II Europe. First, I examine the western borderland as a site for multiple national projects – not only Polish, but also Jewish, and separately, Zionist. Second, I explore the Western Territories as a colonial space for economic exploitation by Poles and Soviets, and the Polonization of indigienous populations (the so-called autochthons), who did not always identify with modern integral nationalism. A rare example of a study that did explore the relationship between communism and nationalism in forging a new society, albeit in Romania, is Katherine Verdery’s, *National Ideology Under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceausescu’s Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

Integral nationalism, especially in the context of modern Polish history, assumed the centrality of language and ethnicity (and, increasingly after World War I, religion) to Polish national consciousness. Ethnocentrism deemed this brand of nationalism hostile to so-called “outsiders” or “others,” especially the Jews and national and cultural minorities who did not subscribe to narrowly defined national criteria. At the same time, integral nationalists vied for the support of so-called nationally indifferent populations, individuals with supranational or regional loyalties. During the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries,
Finally, I look at the former German territories as a laboratory for creating a new communist system almost from scratch.

My analysis of the Western Territories, in particular Lower Silesia, suggests that new self-perceptions materialized through interactions among diverse ethnic groups as well as through the memory of population transfer. Indeed, I argue that there was no clear-cut state model of fostering a homogenous national identity. Instead, encounters between different cultures as well as the unprecedented experience of forced mass migrations contributed to a new social and political order in historical Polish-German borderlands. The multicultural Western Territories played a crucial part in the post-1945 reconstruction of the Polish nation-state and the relations of Polish citizens with the new Soviet-backed communist regime. This borderland became a place where larger questions of identity, citizenship, and hegemony were articulated and disputed by both ordinary people and high ranking national and international leaders.

Polonization and the ethnic homogenization of traditionally diverse peripheries occupied a central position in the prevailing communist discourse of postwar reconstruction. Whether willingly or unwillingly, migrants and settlers from all over Eastern and Western Europe helped redesign the ethnic fabric of the Polish nation. Nevertheless, changes in the postwar self-understandings of individuals charged with borderland societies, such as the Silesians, for instance, were frequently caught in the crossfire of German and Polish integral nationalists. Both groups contested the Silesians as members of their own respective national communities. Silesians, however, had very different ideas about identity and nationality. To the annoyance of both Germans and Poles, they often looked to Catholicism or their native realm as the primary crux of their self-understanding. Nevertheless, postwar Polish nationality policy made an aggressive claim on the indigenous populations of Upper and Lower Silesia. The choice between “indifference” and Polishness ultimately determined one’s postwar fate: continuity in one’s homeland or expulsion from the new Poland. For further reading on integral nationalism please refer to Brian Porter, *When Nationalism Began to Hate: Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth-Century Poland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); For further reading on national politics in nineteenth and twentieth-century Silesia please consult Tomasz Kamusella, *Silesia and Central European Nationalism: The Emergence of National and Ethnic Groups in Prussian Silesia and Austrian Silesia* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2007) and Tomasz Kamusella, *Schlonzko* (Opole: Narodowa Oficyna Śląska, 2006).
ethnically remaking western Poland cannot be understood without first examining the historical context of official debates about nationhood and nationality.

Polish communists and nationalists played a pivotal role in the conceptual reframing of postwar Polishness and their reflections (and disputes) about nationality contributed to the formation of Polonization as a state-sponsored ideology. Chapter 1 focuses on communist and nationalist understandings of Polishness, specifically its uses for classifying, mobilizing, and shifting resources and populations. Gradual expulsions of Germans, the collection of Poles from all corners of Europe, the confiscation of German property, and, most importantly, the meticulous work of cataloging those uncommitted to any national option left communists with little choice but to seek alliances in unlikely places.

Polonization was fueled by seemingly incompatible organizations: those that were well versed in interwar nationalist hate and those that professed communist ideology. The Polish Western Union (Polski Związek Zachodni – PZZ) and the Government Operational Groups (Grupy Operacyjne – GO KERM) actively engaged in the process of projecting Polish cultural power deep inside German-speaking Europe. It was under the watch of the PZZ and the GO KERM that German cultural hegemony was first weakened, and then finally disarmed. A belief gradually took hold among Polish communist officials, then, that Right-wing ideas about national struggles in sensitive borderlands could be reconciled with building ethnically Polish, working-class communities.

While the PZZ and the GO KERM dispatched its “experts” to explore and secure former German lands for Poland, the real heavy lifting of moving the most important resources – repatriates and settlers – rested with the State Repatriation Office (Państwowy...
Chapter 2, then, offers an overview of how Polish settlers and German expellees became the objects of direct state intervention during postwar reconstruction. Both Polish and international leaders like Gomułka, Stalin, Churchill, and FDR insisted on the ethnic purity of postwar states. The consolidation of ethnically bound nation states became a condition of peace and recovery. But purification was no simple matter. Forging clean-cut and mono-ethnic societies in regions where multiculturalism reigned supreme required a commitment to locate, sift through, isolate, and, finally, transport those fit for resettlement. The State Repatriation Office, an agency created by Polish communists to deal with population movements, specifically oversaw the fate of millions of Germans, Poles, Ukrainians, and others. The activities of the Office were of great significance to Polish leaders: the PUR was the communists’ “motor” of ethnic rearrangements. The construction of a “Poland for the Poles” thus depended on the State Office’s progress.

The plight of Polish Jews in Lower Silesia between the demise of the Nazi regime and the crystallization of Polish Stalinism is the subject of chapter 3. In particular, I look at the impact of Jewish community building on the political and ethnic shape of postwar Poland. The Jewish settlers embodied the tension inherent in the communist project of nation building. On the one hand, Polish communist leaders embraced diverse ethnic groups in the name of social justice and internationalism. On the other hand, they still saw the Jews as a potential threat to the ethnic uniformity they hoped to establish in the region. The Jewish experience and the interaction between the Jewish community and other settlers are central to my analysis of postwar displacement and reconstruction.
Approximately forty percent of Polish Jewish Holocaust survivors would rebuild their cultural existence in Poland’s Lower Silesia. I focus on the short lifetime of this particular community in 1945-1948. The Jewish community was significant for its participation in two major projects of national reconstruction. Indeed, Polish Jews in Lower Silesia contributed to the rebirth of Jewish life in both Poland and Palestine. While Jewish and Polish communists considered transforming the Jews into loyal Polish citizens and, ironically, agents of Polonization of former German territories, their Zionist rivals saw the Ostelbien as a springboard for the settlement of Eretz Israel. These communists and Zionists thus competed for the loyalties of the same constituency: survivors of the genocide who escaped the Holocaust through Soviet exile. The history of Polish Jews in postwar Lower Silesia can ultimately be understood as the history of a fractured society wavering between reconstruction in Poland and reconstruction in Israel. This section of the dissertation traces the short lifespan of this society.

Chapter 4 concentrates on postwar repatriations from the so-called kresy, the prewar eastern territories of Poland now part of the Soviet Union. Migrations of Poles from former eastern Poland comprised critical moments in the construction of Polish communities in the new western provinces. In this chapter, I analyze the impact of relocation, often conducted in abject and unsanitary circumstances, on the creation of pioneering Polish communities. Indeed, I examine the choices and decisions that led approximately two million kresowianie, inhabitants of the eastern borderlands, to flee, often voluntarily, to “the other,” less known Poland. Memoir literature and records of the State Repatriation Office make clear that wartime experiences – the Polish-Ukrainian civil war, Soviet and Nazi occupations as well as the genocide of local Jewry – were all
critical factors in pushing *kresy*-Poles toward repatriation. These repatriates considered relocation as an opportunity to escape vengeful neighbors, a landscape stained with the blood of their families, and a cherished homeland now under the domination of a foreign and detested state. This chapter, then, explores the wider social context in which Polish women and children – the bulk of the repatriate population from the *kresy* – assigned meaning to their postwar experiences. Their decisions were marked by a combination of anxiety and pragmatism, which ultimately moved this human cargo from one dangerous periphery to another. The meanings *kresy*-Poles attached to the conditions at embarkation points and on dirt and pathogen-infested transports are crucial to understanding how the experience of repatriation reshaped postwar Polish identities.

Chapter 5, then, shifts the focus from the Soviet-annexed *kresy* to the culturally alien and unfamiliar Western Territories. I pay particular attention here to individual accounts of the living conditions in the new environment of the so-called “wild west,” being especially mindful of relations between neighbors, local authorities, as well as the indigenous population. Although the status of Polish settlers in Lower Silesia appeared to trump the status of local Germans, Poles felt just as tenuous and vulnerable as their neighbors scheduled for expulsion. I argue that resettlement in the west should be viewed through a wider lens and understood as a series of conflicts and tensions between and among different categories of settlers: Poles from the *kresy* and Poles from the heartland, German residents and Polish migrants, Poles and the local bicultural autochthons, and Poles, Germans, autochthons and the Soviet military *komendaturas*. The work of Polonization was thus complicated by a multiplicity of factors – some mundane, others
more pressing – seriously frustrating communist and nationalist authorities in both Wroclaw and Warsaw.

The history of postwar Polonization is filled with ironies and contradictions. Chapter 6 traces the Polish state’s strategies to further the cause of Polonization, highlighting the changing political setting which first consigned all Germans for expulsion and then made exceptions labeling some as “worthy of Polish citizenship.”

More specifically, I examine here the national verification action of “dubious” Germans and “nationally indifferent” autochthons. Studies indicate that there was a tendency to inflate the number of former German citizens verified as Poles to boost the state’s claim to territories outside the nucleus of Polish culture.21 Communist authorities forced those who were validated to surrender their dialects and local culture and embrace wholeheartedly re-Polonization. Those less fortunate, individuals and families who failed verification, were expelled from their homelands to Allied-occupied Germany.22

Interestingly, in the Western Territories who was a Pole and who was a German was ultimately determined by an alliance of communists and nationalists. These two seemingly ideologically opposed groups collaborated for the benefit of the nation by delimiting ambiguous boundaries of national belonging, in some cases encompassing people with little or no knowledge of the Polish language or culture. German and autochthon Catholics, often without being asked, were classified as Polish. In still other cases, family connections to Poles or having anti-fascist convictions were more than

enough to qualify many an autochthon for membership in the Polish nation.\textsuperscript{23} The temptation and eventual assimilation of some Germans and autochthons was something that Polish communists and nationalists could not resist. Poland’s ability to maintain the Western Territories depended on its partial absorption of economically skilled and culturally versatile Ostelbien residents. Postwar reconstruction thus balanced on the crux of a contradictory dictum: expel the Germans, Polonize the expellees.

An issue that generated the most heated discussions in postwar Lower Silesia included the role of Polish women on the frontier and sexual “boundary-crossing” between Germans and Poles. In particular, gender relations and family life were of pivotal concern to both the communist and the nationalist authorities. The war undermined traditional gender roles threatening to disrupt what authorities saw as appropriate models of family life. Unlike the forced migrants from the Soviet Union, most settlers from central Poland ran off to the Western Territories voluntarily. These pioneers were disproportionately young males (under the age of thirty).\textsuperscript{24} Some looked for excitement: seizing German “treasures,” robbing and looting, searching for adventure. Others left to establish new social worlds of family, comradeship, and work. The presence of demobilized Polish and Soviet soldiers, also predominantly male, rendered western cities like Wrocław and Legnica overwhelmingly homo-social. The communist press expressed great anxieties over the masculine and youthful attributes of the newly annexed territories. Press articles encouraged women to settle in the new west and fulfill their national duties as wives and mothers. Sexual excesses of men, intimate acts between

\textsuperscript{23} Autochtoni na Ziemiach Zachodnich, 20 March 1946, Archiwum Państwowe we Wrocławiu (APWr), Państwowy Urząd Repatriacyjny Oddział Wojewódzki we Wrocławiu, Dział Ogólny: Repatriacja Niemców – Sprawy Tajne od nr. 1 – 43 1946 r., Sygn. PUR, kk. 58-59.

\textsuperscript{24} Marek Ordyński, Życie Codzienne we Wrocławiu 1945-1948 (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy imienia Ossolińskich, 1991), 32.
German men and Polish women, the soaring number of illegitimate births, and rampant venereal disease were all part of the social landscape.\textsuperscript{25} Polish leaders were not indifferent to these lapses in public morality. They rejected them entirely and made their feelings known in newspapers and gazettes. Chapter 7 reconstructs some of these feelings.

Because of inadequate access to primary source materials, the Polish Catholic Church and its cultural activities in the lands vacated by the Germans is beyond the scope of this study.\textsuperscript{26} Nevertheless, the Polish Church’s mission of securing the ecclesiastical property of the German Catholic and Protestant churches is undoubtedly a decisive episode in the history of postwar Polonization. The clergy’s pursuit of forging a Polish Church administration in the Western Territories inadvertently reinforced the communist nation-building project. The Church accelerated the construction of Polish communities in areas where few previously existed.\textsuperscript{27} The Polish Catholic hierarchy replaced the German ecclesiastical administration thus forging Polish rather than German communities of the faithful. In many cases, clergymen from central and eastern Poland brought along with them Polish members of their former diocese or parish. Consequently, the influx of Polish Catholics radically altered the confessional panorama of the traditionally mixed Protestant-Catholic borderlands. At the same time, religious conformity enabled Polish cultural uniformity. The transition of Church authority from German to Polish hands strengthened the link between Catholicism and Polish national identity. Ultimately, in the postwar context, religion emerged as a valid marker of

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ordyłowski, \textit{Życie Codzienne we Wrocławiu}, 33, 128-129, 153.
\item The Roman Catholic Church in Poland generally grants access to pre-1945 Church documents only.
\item Strauchold, \textit{Autochtoni Polscy, Niemieccy, Czy...}, 76
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
nationality in the new territories. The ways in which religion shaped communist nationality policy, particularly in Lower Silesia, is touched upon in chapter 6.

The Polish communist regime’s Polonization campaign in postwar Lower Silesia initiated sweeping ethnic rearrangements that proceeded very gradually and culminated in the uprooting and reinvention of people and territory. The major casualties of this callous policy were the Ostelbien Germans and their local culture. Polonization, although generous to some Germans, ultimately benefited the Polish settlers. Poles, whether from the heartland or the kresy, had the most to gain from ongoing evictions of over three million Lower Silesian indigenous residents. Western repatriations offered the kind of social mobility that staying in war-ravaged central Poland or the kresy could not have guaranteed. Most dramatically, the former German territories functioned as a laboratory where Polish communists and nationalists settled debates on citizenship, ethnic cleansing, and nationality. Postwar Polish national identity, however, was a project constantly in flux, understood quite differently (sometimes radically so) by different groups of migrants, settlers, and authorities. In the end, communists, nationalists, repatriates, and expellees – Germans and Poles – supplied a complex forum for a reimagined Polish nationhood.
Chapter One
Realm of Fantasy, Realm of Struggle: The Polish Western Union (PZZ) and Visions of Postwar Polonization

We need to approach the case of the western borderlands both constructively and decisively. A constructive position will enable us to unburden (rozladować) imperialist tensions in these typical junker provinces. This, moreover, leads us to a dilemma: extermination or reslavization? [...] Our analysis has fortunately presented us with an alternative solution: the extermination of German expansionist tendencies through the removal of German colonizers and the reslavization of the autochthons.28

The author of this cold-blooded analysis was a member of the communist-dominated Polish State National Council (Krajowa Rada Narodowa – KRN). Contrary to initial impressions, Szymon Żołna was neither a nationalist nor a promoter of genocidal policies. Nevertheless, the rhetoric of extermination and mass relocation – so jarring to modern sensibilities – framed the political consciousness of postwar European leaders like Żołna both on the Right and the Left. In the mid-twentieth century, Europe’s communists and nationalists reached into the rhetorical arsenal of imperialism and nationalism to mobilize and mold postwar populations into compliant citizen-subjects. Żołna, then, was a product of his time, a period when Nazi and Stalinist terror reshaped Europe into a zone of violent uprooting. Wartime ethnic cleansing, he believed, had become a catalyst for the long awaited experiment of nation building in Eastern Europe: an experiment based on the principle of ethnic homogeneity.

Żołna was thus not the first to articulate extreme measures to solve population problems. At the beginning of the twentieth century, European powers – the French in Algeria, the British in South Africa, and the Russians in Central Asia – pursued radical

28 Memoriał w sprawie zagadnień zachodnich, 1945, Archiwum Akt Nowych (AAN), Biuro Prezydialne Krajowej Rady Narodowej – Wydział Prawny, Sygn. 144, kk. 7-8.
population measures to catalogue, discipline, and demographically reorder colonial subjects and spaces. The European powers’ addiction to colonialism and its often heartless methods survived World War II, informing the way the victors, in particular Great Britain and France, imagined global politics. Mark Mazower argues that prominent western leaders like Winston Churchill, for instance, saw “the proposed new international security architecture centered on the United Nations as a way to cement white rule, not give it up.”\(^{29}\) The belief in a white “civilizing mission” with its attendant terminology of conquest, domination, and suppression continued to make its mark on postwar European political culture. This language of civilization was, according to Mazower, deeply embedded in the West’s understanding of modern statecraft.

Moreover, ideologies of conquest were as relevant in as they were outside of Europe. Indeed, what historian Peter Holquist terms “demographic conquest” was intricately bound up with the very machinery of the modern state. This form of conquest entailed an unshakable commitment on behalf of the state to classify, deport, expel, and, sometimes, *exterminate* societies seen as “unreliable” or threatening to the “social body.”\(^{30}\) New social disciplines such as anthropology, ethnography, and military statistics provided the modern state with techniques of unprecedented “social intervention.” This “science of society” shaped the encounters between Western states and different sets of populations in both Europe and the colonies.\(^{31}\) This understanding of demographic engineering surpassed World War II and, perhaps unexpectedly, influenced communist


\(^{31}\) Holquist, “To Count, to Extract, and to Exterminate,” 116.
nation-builders in states such as Poland that had no previous record of European overseas colonization.

Thus, with ample precedents, postwar Polish leaders expressed their desire for an ethnically homogenous nation-state in a language familiar to European colonizers, nationalists, and imperialists. Szymon Żołna’s emphasis on extermination to curb imperialism in territories traditionally dominated by the Prussian nobility, the Junkers, while highlighting the class dimensions of German “rule” in western Poland, suggests that postwar communism and nationalism were difficult to untangle. Germans were thus coupled in the communist imagination as both class and national enemies. The ideological ramifications of forging Polish communities in former German lands placed the Poles in the role of powerful engines of social and political transformation. Transfers and repatriations, then, facilitated a state-driven, top-down project of reshaping Poland into an ethnically homogenous and working-class nation-state, one free of the paralyzing prewar ethnic tensions that had prevented Poland’s development.

Communists in Warsaw thus envisaged western Polonization through the prism of colonization. At the same time, however, communists were suspicious about Polish society’s comprehension of the urgency of colonizing (and simultaneously Polonizing) former German lands. Polish leaders frowned upon the alleged low level of “cultural literacy” of Poles transplanted west. The establishment of a national system of settler institutions to oversee Poles and the crystallization of Polishness in yet unmapped regions was fundamental to solidifying links between state and society. The Polonization, or as Żołna has put it – “reslavization” – of the Western Territories was thus as much about indigenizing Polishness as it was about “Polonizing” communism. In both cases, former
German territories functioned as a pivotal testing ground for population politics and ideological indoctrination. The construction of an institutional superstructure to facilitate the development of Polish communities in these unmapped lands is at the center of this and the next chapter.

The campaign to ethnically revamp the new Western Territories, however, went significantly further than fixing new borders and transferring populations. Making a definitive break with the cultural, architectural, and political legacy of Germandom in places like Lower Silesia entailed the mobilization of all sectors of Polish society: workers, peasants, the intelligentsia, kresowianie and the settlers from central Poland. The Soviet onslaught into Eastern Europe in 1944 and 1945 had officially liberated the region from Nazi domination, but the territories reassigned to Poland after World War II had yet to be sufficiently Polonized to be soundly considered Polish. Approximately twelve million Germans inhabited regions that now made them unwelcome residents in Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia. By far the largest group – eight million – resided in the “new Poland.”

At the same time, seen from the perspective of the communist-dominated government, the Polonization of former German territories created a unique opportunity of forging alliances with the masses. The communists linked the incorporation of the new western provinces to a kind of national rebirth. High party officials like Władysław Gomułka fused national and socialist rhetoric to convince Poles not to dispute the alleged Polishness of the Western Territories. The patriotic duty of Polish workers and peasants – the new ruling social classes – was to revive the lands of their medieval forebears
The reunion of the Western Territories with the nation was a culmination of the supposedly ageless conflict between Germans and Poles. “Re-Polonization” thus conceptualized a new patriotic obligation. Communists demanded that all Poles, in particular migrants in former German lands, espouse the goals of western Polonization. The state branded those who refused to perform their national duty as insufficiently patriotic. Indeed, strengthening the connection between party and nation through the urgency of westward migration was inseparable from the regime’s plan of colonizing the Polish-German frontier.

But Polish migrants in the new western provinces could not dismantle and erase German culture all by themselves. The work of delineating, mapping, and domesticating unfamiliar lands rested with three postwar institutions that literally “carted” Poles and “wheeled” Poland across the linguistic frontier of German-speaking Europe. The Government Operation Groups (GO KERM), the State Repatriation Office (PUR), and the Polish Western Union (PZZ) all stood at the forefront of a national revolution promising the foundation of an industrialized, urbanized, and most importantly, nationally-conscious society. They saw German property, infrastructure, industries, and urban centers, as the preexisting structure for the imminent creation of an ethnically Polish arcadia.

According to this logic, forced migrations and ethnic uprooting functioned as the twin forces of nationalization and industrialization. The Western Territories were a sanctuary of culture and industry in an intricate maze of German-sounding streets, place-names, and navigational systems. In this sense, they held ample promise for the arrival of

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32 Maria Kornilowicz et al., Western and Northern Poland (Poznań: Zachodnia Agencja Prasowa, 1962), 16.
a Polish utopia. All that appeared to be necessary was to seize the soil and evict its owners. If the Germans built-up *Ostelbien* cities and trade, the PZZ argued, they could easily be replaced with Poles from other parts of Poland. If they erected factories, mining facilities, and textile centers, the GO KERM reasoned, it was nothing that Polish ingenuity could not smoothly appropriate. If they tended large estates and had abundant personal effects, the PUR concluded, they could serve as the material foundations of a forthcoming Polish society.

The map of the Western Territories was thus complicated by competing visions of Polish statesmen in teams and institutions such as the GO KERM, PUR, and the PZZ. Yet beneath the surface of these visions lay an irresistible desire to colonize, uproot, and exploit people and territory. The tension between creation and destruction as well as transfer and cleansing is clearly detectable in countless reports and recollections scattered throughout the archives. These tensions engendered feelings of ambivalence that bred periodic fissures between vision and reality, translating often into rifts between settlers – subject to government policies – and authorities personifying the state. This chapter examines these periodic rifts by focusing on nationalist “visions” of Polonization as articulated by officials in the Polish Western Union (PZZ). Ultimately, the enterprise of creating a literate, industrialized, urbanized, and “nationally-aware” Polish society in the *Ostelbien* involved violent upheavals validated by institutions embodying the state on the local level. Because of its exceptional story, moreover, I devote this entire chapter to the history of the PZZ. The outlines of a postwar Polish nationality policy premised on nationalist ideas authored by the PZZ can be unmistakably gauged in the unconventional relationship between Polish communists and nationalists. It was during their ideological
rendezvous with the nationalists in the Polish Western Union that the communists articulated their vision for the annexed Western Territories. What follows in this chapter, then, is a discussion of an institution that paved the way for postwar Poland’s “politics of displacement.”

**Making the Western Territories Polish: The PZZ on the Frontier**

The intersection between communism and nationalism in postwar Poland was exemplified in radical population politics. The identification of communism with ethnic rearrangements, in particular the establishment of an exclusively Polish nation-state, opened new avenues for unconventional partnerships. The communist recruitment of the prewar Polish Western Union, a nationalist organization seeking to extend Polish cultural hegemony in Polish-German borderlands, confirmed Warsaw’s commitment to western Polonization. After the war ended, PZZ officials, who had consistently asserted their hostility to Germans and their culture, now found a shared interest with communists: the desire to transform former German territories into the cultural property of Poles. Communists and nationalists viewed Germans as representatives of class and national enemies – Junkers, Nazis, imperialists, and capitalists. The assumption of Polish officials, both on the Left and the Right, was that the German nation and state were mortal threats to European peace and security and, in particular, Polish independence. As succinctly put in a 1945 PZZ report: “The elimination of the German nation and state from the community of peace-loving nations is a condition of postwar reconstruction.”

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33 Memoriał PZZ dla Ministerstwa Ziem Odzyskanych w przedmiocie programu zachodniego w polityce polskiej, 1945, AAN, Biuro Prezydialne Krajowej Rady Narodowej – Wydział Prawny, Sygn. 45, k. 1.
Postwar Polish communist priorities, with the removal of Germans top among them, reflected the urgency of PZZ reports. The goal of communist population politics was to replace Germans with Poles, particularly in the Western Territories, so they could be stabilized and integrated into new homes and communities. Drawing up these communities, however, in a way that reinforced communist domestic and foreign policies – rebuilding Poland and solidifying its new geopolitical position – required cross-ideological collaboration. The PZZ was best prepared to address questions of Polish-German relations in sensitive western borderland regions. Unlike the Polish Workers’ Party (Polska Partia Robotnicza – PPR), the postwar communists in Poland, the PZZ had two decades-worth of experience in disputing “German rights” to the so-called western borderlands (kresy zachodnie). It was this combination of anti-Germanism and Polish integral nationalism that made the PZZ a powerful symbol of what postwar communists were trying to achieve.

Interestingly, the interwar PZZ’s anti-communism appeared to matter little in the drastically revised postwar context. This was clearly reflected in the following statement made by a PZZ official: “Although we were enemies in other fields of political activity, we were confident that on this specific field [the Western Territories], we will meet as friends.”34 The needs of the nation – the integration of lands inherited from Germany – transcended ideological antagonisms bringing communists and nationalists together.

The PZZ embraced postwar Polish communism, surprisingly eagerly, as the realization of Polish “western politics,” the liberation of the western borderlands from

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German cultural domination.\textsuperscript{35} Communists and PZZ activists agreed that Poland had only one enemy: Germans and their “chauvinism, racism, self-aggrandizement, and boorish force (chamska szla).” Moreover, the belief that German culture was a “natural” incubator of fascism is something that Polish communists and nationalists shared.\textsuperscript{36} The new communist regime’s “anti-Germanism” then provided the PZZ with an incentive to adapt to the new political context, especially after Stalin made clear Poland’s territorial gains in the west. While Stalin saw postwar frontier shifts as compensation for the Soviet annexation of the Polish eastern provinces (kresy wschodnie), the PZZ welcomed Poland’s westward relocation as the triumph of Poles over Germans in a “timeless” national struggle in the Western Territories.\textsuperscript{37} This idea of historical justice, however, embodied in the PZZ’s aspiration to conquer German land, harked back to nationalist thinking of the interwar period.

The belief that the Germans were a menace to Polish cultural survival in East Central Europe was widely held and promoted by interwar National Democrats (Endecja), the ideological antecedents of the PZZ. Roman Dmowski, the leader of National Democracy in prewar Poland who died in 1939, raved about Germany’s dangerous appetite for Polish land, in particular historically disputed areas seized by Prussia and then incorporated into the Wilhelmine Empire. In 1921, in response to the danger in the west, a group of Polish nationalists with ties to Dmowski’s movement formed the Union for the Defense of the Western Borderlands (Związek Obrony Kresów

\textsuperscript{35} Memoriał o współpracy w przedmiocie Polskiego Związku Zachodniego z Ministerstwem Ziem Odzyskanych, k. 26.
\textsuperscript{36} Przemówienie Pana Prezesa Specjalnego Sądu Karnego na Okręg Warszawski Witolda Mniszewskiego, 1945, AAN, Biuro Prezydialne Krajowej Rady Narodowej – Wydział Prawny, Sygn. 147, k. 3.
\textsuperscript{37} Przemówienie Pana Prezesa Specjalnego Sądu Karnego na Okręg Warszawski Witolda Mniszewskiego, kk. 3-20.
Zachodnich – ZOKZ), the precursor of the PZZ. The aim of the Union was to “stimulate vigilance among Polish society along the western frontier […] to cultivate a memory of the brothers left behind on the other side of the Polish-German border.”

Dissatisfaction with the western frontier – the exclusion from the interwar Polish state of the allegedly timeless Polish cities such as Oppeln (Opole) and Danzig (Gdańsk) – radicalized Union irredentists.

Between 1921 and 1934, the Union strengthened its role as an advocate of Polish national interests on both sides of the Polish-German border. Union activists sought to increase public awareness about “the evils of German imperialism” in the disputed western borderlands. This was the Union’s self-proclaimed educative role. On the one hand, the ZOKZ sought to “liquidate German influence” in Poland’s Upper Silesia, Poznań, and Pomerania – provinces recovered from Germany after World War I. Expulsions of local Germans accompanied by policies benefitting the growth of an indigenous Polish middle-class, in places like Toruń, Bydgoszcz or Poznań, were central to this process. On the other hand, enlisting “Polish masses” for a national confrontation with their hostile oppressors in Germany served the needs of Poland’s “western interests,” in particular the eventual conquest of the German Ostelbien. The ZOKZ estimated that there were 1.5 million Poles eagerly awaiting help and direction in Gleiwitz, Oppeln, Brieg, and Leignitz. The mobilization of these people required ceaseless agitation, reinforcement, and alertness. According to Union activists, vigilance

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38 Memoriał o współpracy w przedmiocie Polskiego Związku Zachodniego z Ministerstwem Ziemi Odzyskanych, k. 24
(czujność) and loyalty to Polishness were the twin pillars of Polish life in Germany. Resisting German national coercion was a life-shaping force, the *modus operandi* of Poles living on the doorsteps of Poland. Revolutionizing the Polish minority in Germany was thus a militant first step for the takeover of contested borderland spaces.

Yet interwar Polish nationalist fascination with the German Ostelbien was not just about fixing historical errors or readjusting maps shaped by uprisings and plebiscites. The very proximity of German culture which had an allegedly anti-Polish and anti-Slavic essence, seemed especially perilous, and ZOKZ activists devoted much of their energy to preparing Poles for the inevitable: a civilizational clash in the borderlands. But the militant nationalism of the ZOKZ with its consistent Germanophobia threatened to undermine its claims to institutional respectability. In 1934 the Union for the Defense of the Western Borderlands metamorphosed into the Polish Western Union (PZZ). During a time of Polish-German rapprochement – Poland signed a Non-Aggression Pact with the Third Reich that same year – militant anti-Germanism did not seem politically expedient.

Nevertheless, in spite of a more restrained PZZ, nationalist activists continued to devote considerable attention to the struggle between the two cultures in the Ostelbien region. From the perspective of the PZZ, Germans and Poles served as symbols of their societies: Germans as vile and aggressive colonists – the executors of *Drang nach Osten*, the collective will of the German nation, and Poles as innocent victims and martyrs in the apocalyptic struggle for the recovery of the cultural property of Poland.

The PZZ’s expertise in borderland questions, in particular, the question of Polonization in former German territories, made Union devotees indispensable partners.

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40 Memoriał w przedmiocie współpracy Polskiego Związku Zachodniego z Ministerstwem Ziem Odzyskanych, k. 24
for postwar Polish communists. Communist experience in “western politics” paled in comparison to the PZZ’s consistency in lambasting all things German. Indeed, in contrast to the PZZ, Polish communists were masters of inconsistency, particularly in nationality matters. The interwar Communist Party of Poland (Komunistyczna Partia Polski – KPP) condemned the Polish state as innately hostile to national minorities. While KPP members were certainly critical of Nazi Germany and Adolf Hitler, the party’s commitment to undermining the Polish interwar state certainly did not lessen. Imagining Poland as reactionary, nationalist, and fascist allowed the KPP to maintain its internationalist credentials. This commitment to internationalism as well as open affection for the Soviet Union was most clearly manifested in the KPP’s denunciation of Polish independence.

Rejection of Polish statehood certainly did not ingratiate the KPP with interwar Polish leaders, lest of all the leadership of the interwar PZZ. Stalin’s purge of the KPP in 1938 indicated an abrupt rupture in the Polish communist movement and its temporary departure from the Polish political arena. During World War II, the Polish Workers’ Party (PPR), the successor of the interwar communists, reemerged as a much more national and consistent alternative to the KPP. Forging an ethnically homogenous nation-state and shifting postwar Poland into German-speaking Europe was a radical break from prewar communist traditions.

The reemergence of the PZZ in the postwar period recast traditional political relationships making nationalism reconcilable with communism. Edward Osóbka-Morawski, the foreign minister of the communist-dominated government and later its first prime minister, expressed his support for the PZZ: “The Polish Committee of
National Liberation supports both morally and materially the activities of the Polish Western Union… I wish these citizens [PZZ activists] fruitful work (owocna praca) on behalf of the reborn Republic.”  

Osógka-Morawski’s endorsement of the PZZ symbolized the new Polish government’s willingness to collaborate on the issue of ethnic homogenization with prewar nationalists.

Also, equally significant, for the first time in the history of the organization, prominent communists such as Zenon Kliszko joined notorious prewar nationalists like Zygmunt Wojciechowski as chief board members of the Union. (Kliszko served as the vice-chairman of the central office). Interestingly, the chairman of the postwar PZZ was Waclaw Barcikowski, member of the Democratic Party (Stronnictwo Demokratyczne – SD), and someone who did not identify with the legacy of the interwar Endecja. At the same time, most rank-and-file PZZ members were extremely well versed in the language and traditions of the prewar nationalist Right. They often came from traditional strongholds of the prewar National Democracy: the Poznań and Toruń regions.

In November 1944, the Reactivation Committee of the Polish Western Union articulated its goals for western Polonization. The prewar confrontation over the identity of the borderlands shaped PZZ discussions about its mission in the new provinces. This discussion would demarcate several pressing aims. First, PZZ officials upheld “Polish historical rights” and the inevitability of Poland’s “mandate” in former German

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43 Memoriał w przedmiocie współpracy Polskiego Zwiąiku Zachodniego z Ministerstwem Ziem Odzyskanych, k. 24

44 Strauchold, Autochtoni Polscy, Niemieccy, Czy..., 31.
territories.\textsuperscript{45} This “colonial-speak” – the British, for instance, had a mandate in Palestine – cushioned the PZZ within a broader European debate about nation building in colonial possessions. Second, re-Polonization, “the material and spiritual unification of the Western Territories with Poland,” surpassed all other goals as the top priority of the entire Polish nation.\textsuperscript{46} “The western program in Polish politics” was inseparable from overcoming the age-old adversary: the Germans. The plan of “maximum re-Polonization” (\textit{pełna repolonizacja}), however, demanded the cooperation of the entire nation.\textsuperscript{47} No other goal was as urgent or potent as the colonization and integration of the borderlands. The prospect of reclaiming the West captivated Polish nationalists, fastening the PZZ to the postwar communist regime.

At the same time, PZZ activists recognized the centrality of communism in the postwar political context. Polish nationalists considered the communist regime as the only capable agent to carry on the nationalist mission in the western borderlands. The PZZ hailed the Ministry of the Recovered Territories (\textit{Ministerstwo Ziem Odzyskanych} – MZO), headed by the prominent Polish communist Władysław Gomułka, as an agency of “great need.” It looked upon the MZO as the chief political authority charged with spearheading a top-down Polish cultural revolution in former German territories. Forging links between the PZZ and the MZO became a way of consolidating alliances: these two institutions would draw-up the ground rules for Polish nation building in the new western provinces.

\textsuperscript{45} Memoriał dla Ministerstwa Ziem Odzyskanych w przedmiocie programu zachodniego w polityce polskiej, 1945, AAN, Biuro Prezydialne Krajowej Rady Narodowej – Wydział Prawny, Sygn. 9/Org/46, k. 8.
\textsuperscript{46} Memoriał dla Ministerstwa Ziem Odzyskanych w przedmiocie programu zachodniego w polityce polskiej, k. 7.
\textsuperscript{47} Memoriał o współpracy w przedmiocie Polskiego Związku Zachodniego z Ministerstwem Ziem Odzyskanych, k. 26.
Indeed, nationalists in the PZZ believed that cooperating with the MZO would serve the interests of the nation: some explained this collaboration as central to reversing the centuries-long Germanization of the western borderlands. Others thought in more practical terms. The transplantation of Poles west did not seem realistic without the credentials and resources of the MZO, an agency whose jurisdiction covered one-third of postwar Polish territory. “Sinking deep roots” in the western borderlands thus could not proceed without this critical assistance.\footnote{Memoriał dla Ministerstwa Ziem Odzyskanych w przedmiocie programu zachodniego w polityce polskiej, 1945, AAN, Biuro Prezydialne Krajowej Rady Narodowej – Wydział Prawny, Sygn. 9/Org/46, k. 3.} In the end, nationalist fantasies and realistic everyday concerns of rank-and-file Union activists set the tone for PZZ-MZO interactions.

**Progressive Nationalism or National Communism? Selling the PZZ-Communist Alliance**

Given the intricacies of communist and nationalist agendas, the relationship between these two seemingly opposed camps had to be officially justified to the public. There was a large constituency among postwar Poles, in particular among followers of Roman Dmowski, who were skeptical about the communist-nationalist alliance. Archival documents suggest that co-opting Polish society onto the communist bandwagon, no matter how “nationalist-friendly,” was a constant challenge for the PZZ. A Union-report from mid-1945 lamented that “strong Endek political traditions hamper a portion of Polish society from enthusiastically embracing the current Polish [political] reality.” These traditions presumably included the prewar nationalist Right’s anticommunism, an element intentionally downplayed by the postwar PZZ. Nevertheless, the report goes on
to stress the value of nationalist attitudes and depicts these resistant *Endeks* as “valuable human material” (*wartościowy materiał ludzki*), potential recruits for the communist state’s Polonization of the Western Territories.⁴⁹

The PZZ employed a variety of tactics to convince these hesitant ordinary Poles about the nationally constructive work proffered by the new regime. The Polish Western Union depicted itself as a “middle-man” between anticommunist but valuable Poles and the Soviet-sponsored Polish Workers’ Party. Indeed, the PZZ offered a platform that could “unite the entire society behind the state’s campaign of maximum re-Polonization in the Recovered Territories.”⁵⁰ In other words, the Union reassured alienated *Endeks* that cooperation with the communists did not necessarily indicate support for communism or the Soviet Union. The quest to make western Poland Polish thus had the potential to break the defiance of nationalist resisters.

Unlike in the interwar period, Union activists in post-1945 Poland used communist language of progress and revolution to demonstrate the inseparability of communism from nationalism: “Nationalism is not a foe of social progress, and although it can be deployed in a backward direction, it can also be used to move society forward.”⁵¹ According to this understanding, progressive nationalism – the kernel of national communism – could serve as an endowment for a social revolution from above. Consequently, communism could channel nationalism for constructive ends: the stabilization of postwar society along ethnic lines, the establishment of an ethnically

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⁴⁹ Memoriał o współpracy w przedmiocie Polskiego Związku Zachodniego z Ministerstwem Ziem Odzyskanych, 1945, AAN, Biuro Prezydialne Krajowej Rady Narodowej – Wydział Prawny, Sygn. 5/Org/Z, k. 27.

⁵⁰ Memoriał o współpracy w przedmiocie Polskiego Związku Zachodniego z Ministerstwem Ziem Odzyskanych, k. 27.

⁵¹ Memoriał w sprawie zagadnień zachodnich, 1945, Archiwum Akt Nowych (AAN), Biuro Prezydialne Krajowej Rady Narodowej – Wydział Prawny, Sygn. 144, k. 11.
homogenous working class, and the crystallization of an identity based on membership in a modern national community.

Nevertheless, PZZ activists were also alarmed about the reverse development: the need to convince some communists, particularly those devoted to internationalism, about the benefits of communist-nationalist matrimony. Just as some Endeks distrusted the “national license” of communists, so some communists – former KPP members – distrusted the alleged progressiveness of nationalists. Given the lack of goodwill between the extreme Right and the extreme Left in the interwar period, this mutual distrust is hardly surprising. Some communists, notably Jewish but also Polish members of the PPR, associated the Endecka and the PZZ with hooliganism, racism, and antisemitism. Prominent Polish Jewish communists like Szymon Zachariasz feared nationalism’s infiltration of the Polish Workers’ Party. The PPR-Fraction, the Jewish section of the communist party, consistently criticized and denounced “national communists,” leaders like Władysław Gomułka, for their dangerous connections to prewar nationalists. This criticism was not entirely groundless. Gomułka as Minister of the Recovered Territories openly embraced the PZZ’s contributions to postwar Polish population politics, particularly in the sphere of Polonizing nationally dubious borderland populations. The rift between the “internationalist” Fraction and the “nationalist” communists is just one example of how contested cross-ideological collaboration really was.

With good reason then loyal and uncompromising communists doubted the sincerity of prewar nationalists. After all, was it possible, within the space of roughly six years, for nationalism to become socially progressive? Could war and genocide –

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unleashed by a particularly brutal Nazi occupation – convert the hatred of the prewar Polish Right into an acceptable force of social transformation? In the immediate postwar period, the answers to these questions were still far from clear. The PZZ, however, responded by making a strong case for the rehabilitation of nationalism:

Ruling [post-1945 Poland] demands the transformation of the direction and quality of Polish nationalism. We now have the opportunity to use nationalism to fulfill current political goals… all we have to do is control nationalism’s nervous system.53

The harnessing of nationalism to communism was seen as a step toward accomplishing pressing needs – for instance, the Polonization of the Western Territories – and in this manner domesticating the Soviet-imposed regime.

In the end, or so ran the PZZ argument, cooperation was not just desirable it was unavoidable. Consistent with this logic, the Western Territories were widely seen as a “testing ground” where nationalists could demonstrate their loyalty to the communist state. Polonization was thus a litmus test for the communist-nationalist alliance. The mission to make German lands Polish paralleled the nationalists’ “outward” metamorphosis into communists. This was baptism through fire. And these were the terms for cross-ideological collaboration.

Central to this argument – and consistent in most PZZ reports – was the belief that the regime’s Polonization campaign could not possibly proceed without the participation of Union nationalists. The PZZ, in the midst of the debate about the usefulness of cross-ideological alliances, emphasized its “important role in educating Polish society about the Western Territories, and in particular, the emotional coalescence (emocjonalne zbliżenie)

53 Memoriał w sprawie zagadnień zachodnich, 1945, Archiwum Akt Nowych (AAN), Biuro Prezydialne Krajowej Rady Narodowej – Wydział Prawny, Sygn. 144, k. 11.
of Poles with this issue.”\textsuperscript{54} Statements like these betrayed the Union’s intention to assert itself as an expert on borderland questions of settlement, repopulation, and expulsion. The PZZ’s position on the postwar ladder of state-power depended on its ability to claim institutional ownership over western Polonization. While “only the Democratic Bloc [the political coalition led by the PPR] can guarantee Poland’s new borders,” it lacked the necessary tools to ensure Polish cultural supremacy.\textsuperscript{55} Clearly, the redrawing of borders was not enough for the PZZ. A Union report drafted in Poznań in 1946 warned: “The Polish nation won the territorial war but has yet to claim victory in the national war.”\textsuperscript{56} National triumph entailed a demographic mêlée in which Poles from all over the political spectrum accepted PZZ leadership and engaged the enemy.

The PZZ thus depicted itself as a guide in the borderland wilderness, a willing and ready resource for Polish operatives, civil servants, repatriates, party activists, and other settlers.\textsuperscript{57} More importantly, its self-proclaimed role as supreme arbiter of population politics in former German territories, carved out a niche for interwar, aggressively anti-German Polish nationalists. This combination of communism, anti-Germanism, and prewar conceptions of struggles between nations had serious implications for constructing Polish communities in the Western Territories.

The PZZ model for western Polonization included three central elements. First, shifting Poland 200 kilometers west created a need to shift people to fill the new spaces

\textsuperscript{54} Memoriał o współpracy w przedmiocie Polskiego Zwiąiku Zachodniego z Ministerstwem Ziem Odzyskanych, k. 28.
\textsuperscript{55} Sprawozdanie z działalności PZZ za okres 1944-1947, 1947, AAN, Biuro Prezydialne Krajowej Rady Narodowej – Wydział Prawny, Sygn. 82, k. 3.
\textsuperscript{56} Memoriał w sprawie polskiej ludności autochtongicznej na Ziemiach Odzyskanych i regulamin powoływania i funkcjonowania obywatelskich Komisji Weryfikacyjnych, 1946, AAN, Zarząd Główny Polskiego Związiku Zachodniego – Wydział Społeczno-Polityczny, Sygn. 8, k. 93.
\textsuperscript{57} Memoriał dla Ministerstwa Ziem Odzyskanych w przedmiocie programu zachodniego w polityce polskiej, 1945, AAN, Biuro Prezydialne Krajowej Rady Narodowej – Wydział Prawny, Sygn. 9/Org/46, k. 3.
and make sure that the new borders would endure. The Polish and Soviet governments mobilized Polish settlers and repatriates for the repopulation of lands taken from Germany. According to Union officials, the role of the settler (osadnik) was to “grow” into the soil of the new lands. Indeed, to merge socially and nationally with the landscape.  

But the PZZ questioned the “cultural credentials” of Poles from near and remote homelands. “The struggle against regionalism (zwalczanie dzielnicowości)” and galvanizing a strong national consciousness among “insufficiently Polish” Poles, especially repatriates from the former eastern kresy, was a top priority.  

The PZZ warned Polish state officials about the dubious commitments of ethnically suspect Poles (such as, for instance, the kresowianie).

Second, the PZZ recognized the significance of ethnic hatred in mobilizing Poles – witnesses of Nazi occupation – behind the project to culturally remake the Ostelbien. The PZZ, with the support of Gomułka’s MZO, made anti-Germanism socially respectable. This, to a large degree, was also a reflection of postwar international consensus: “Both the American and British governments were ‘sympathetic’ to the Czechoslovak and Polish cases for expulsion of the Germans and, like the Soviets, had ‘no objection in principle.”  

The notion that Germans, historically the great disturbers of peace in the region, were unwelcome in liberated East Central Europe – outside of the Allied occupation zones of Germany – helped legitimize ethnic conflict.

58 Memoriał PZZ dla Ministerstwa Ziem Odzyskanych w przedmiocie programu zachodniego w polityce polskiej, kk. 109-111.
59 Memoriał w przedmiocie współpracy Polskiego Związku Zachodniego z Ministerstwem Ziem Zachodnich, k. 28.
Anti-Germanism was generally popular in countries where Nazi occupation was most ruthless. The PZZ claimed that

The responsibility for hitlerite crimes rests with the entire German nation… Prevention of new German aggression demands stripping Germany of lands that it had deceptively and violently robbed from other nations, including ancient Polish lands on the Oder, Neisse, and Baltic.61

Anti-Germanism then was a security measure against a potentially resurgent Nazism. The threat of German irredentism coupled with radical postwar population politics made anti-Germanism a core value of the PZZ resettlement project.

Third, “the war for the biological and spiritual power of the Polish nation” demanded the recruitment of borderland populations straddling the ethnic divide between Germandom and Polishness. The PZZ connected the battle between Poles and Germans to the regeneration of “dormant nations” (uśpione narody).62 Union nationalists identified the so-called autochthons as the Slavic victims of the Drang nach Osten, German historical incursions into “rightfully” Polish territories: “After centuries of separation from the nation, Poland is not just recovering lost territories but also lost populations, which despite separation and brutal Germanization, always remained Polish.”63 This was a reflection of the PZZ’s self-perception as a policeman of Polish cultural hegemony: “an enforcer of Polishness (polskość) in Poland’s Western Territories.”64

But clearly the people who needed most enforcing were the nationally ambiguous autochthons. The PZZ saw the autochthons as indigenous raw material for the

61 Projekt rezolucji programowej Polskiego Związku Zachodniego, 1945, Archiwum Państwowe we Wrocławiu (APWr), Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza – Komitet Wojewódzki we Wrocławiu, Zespół/Dział Komitet Wojewódzki PPR we Wrocławiu – Wydział Propagandy, Sygn. 1/VII/43, k. 76.
62 Memoriał w sprawie zagadnień zachodnich, k. 9.
64 Projekt rezolucji programowej Polskiego Związku Zachodniego, k. 75.
establishment of Polish communities in the Western Territories. The autochthons were the “ethnic glue” linking incoming populations of Poles with the ancient western soil. Their unique knowledge of the western frontier, their ability to morph between Polish and German cultures while retaining a strong local and religious identity, placed them at the heart of PZZ’s nationalist fantasies. The challenge, then, was how to find an adequate approach to convince the autochthons that they were neither Germans, Silesians, Lusatians nor Catholics but that they were Poles: Poles rediscovered after centuries of occupation by Germans, Prussians, Junkers, and Teutonic knights (these designations were often used interchangeably).

Still more significant, however, was the question of national verification. On the one hand, communists and nationalists hailed the autochthons as rediscovered national treasures. If we are to believe the official propaganda, they were supposed to be treated as “privileged Poles.” The autochthons had allegedly preserved the continuity of Polish culture in lands stolen by the Germans. Reunification under Polish state domination was thus a reward for centuries of resistance to Germanization. On the other hand, however, Polish administrators in the Western Territories questioned the national loyalties of the autochthons. The autochthons were at best bilingual and at worst poor or inept speakers of Polish. Some had Polish family names but could not speak the language; others, quite the opposite, spoke adequate or broken Polish but had German names. Biculturalism, at the same time, was often associated with insufficient Polishness or, worse still, a cover for hidden Germanness.

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65 Ministerstwo Pracy i Opieki Społecznej do Obywatela Prezydenta Bolesława Bieruta, 4 August 1945, AAN, Biuro Prezydialne Krajowej Rady Narodowej – Wydział Prawny, Sygn. 147, k. 77.
National Verification of the Autochthons

Postwar communist propaganda, inebriated with lethal anti-Germanism, vowed that “not one German will remain in the Recovered Territories.”67 The milder alternative was to “isolate [the German population] in work camps, or segregate it in specially designated city/town districts.”68 In this atmosphere of state hostility to all things German, many autochthons could not have felt secure about their continued status in the borderlands. National verification, specifically designed with the autochthons in mind, was the proposed remedy for national ambiguity. An official stamp of approval, verification clarified who was a Pole and who a German.

The PZZ interpreted national verification as an attempt to rescue autochthons from German cultural contamination.69 This task was purportedly an expression of “urgent state and national needs.”70 The PZZ enjoyed a decisive role in regulating ethnic verification in the western borderlands. This was yet again an example of significant nationalist influence in shaping postwar communist population policies. An instruction circular drafted by the PZZ in Poznań described verification as vital to the nation’s biology: “The re-Polonization process [the essence of verification] will enable the autochthons to merge with the nation’s organism (organizm narodu)... We must solidify an emotional union (związek uczuciowy) between the nation and these recovered Poles.”71

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68 Memoriał PZZ dla Ministerstwa Ziem Odzyskanych w przedmiocie programu zachodniego w polityce polskiej, k. 108.
69 Memoriał PZZ dla Ministerstwa Ziem Odzyskanych w przedmiocie programu zachodniego w polityce polskiej, k. 107.
Verification of the autochthons, moreover, involved a carefully demarcated hierarchy of importance. Children and youth were at the top of the verification pyramid, followed by adults and the elderly. The PZZ’s fixation with Polonizing young autochthons confirms Tara Zahra’s identification of children as a “national property to be ‘reclaimed’ after the war.”

In the eyes of Polish communists and nationalists, children comprised the most nationally vulnerable population of the Western Territories. Like the Czech and German nationalists, postwar leaders in Poland “saw both a grave threat and seductive potential in borderland children.” The PZZ, in particular, expected forcefully denationalized “borderland children” to merge with the Polish national organism: “Children and youth, reluctant victims of Germanizing schools and organizations, must quickly submit themselves to Polishness.” Interestingly, neither the PZZ nor the communists trusted the national commitments of young autochthons. Verification committees indicated more generally the postwar state’s rejection of personal autonomy in establishing one’s nationality. National identity was no longer a matter of individual choice. Consequently, verification committees affirmed the right of experts to assign identities to vulnerable and contested populations. Autochthons, both children and adults, but especially children, had no choice but to submit to committee rulings.

Who were these experts vested with the unique power to adjudicate nationality? Verification committeemen sat at the cutting edge of re-Polonization. According to the

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PZZ, Polish cultural assimilation was the most critical aspect of postwar reconstruction: “Fusing (stapianie) different population groups into one whole (całość) plays an important role in rebuilding Polish statehood.”\textsuperscript{75} Theoretically, then, all Poles were fair game for verification: settlers, emigrants, repatriates, autochthons, etc. In practice, however, committeemen were most interested in verifying the autochthons. District and Municipal National Councils (\textit{Gminne i Miejskie Rady Narodowe}), scattered throughout the Western Territories, elected 12 to 24 candidates to local verification committees. These candidates were supposed to represent different settler constituencies. One PZZ directive instructed national councils to include members of the Polish minority in prewar Germany as well as repatriates from eastern Poland. Another one stressed the involvement of the state Security Office (\textit{Urząd Bezpieczeństwa – UB}). Nevertheless, most of these officials served a purely ornamental purpose. The most important positions on the council were usually assigned to PZZ-men. Each commission had three to six seats specially earmarked for the PZZ.\textsuperscript{76} The slightly larger verification committees, the provincial committees (\textit{wojewódzkie komisje weryfikacyjne}), included the provincial governor (\textit{wojewoda}), two deputies delegated by his office, three members elected by the Provincial National Council (\textit{Wojewódzkie Rady Narodowe – WRN}) and three representatives of the PZZ.\textsuperscript{77} Elections, appointments, and delegations thus provided these committees with a certain democratic legitimacy.

\textsuperscript{75} Wojewódzki Urząd Informacji i Propagandy do Ob. Ob. Kierowników Powiatowych Oddziałów Informacji i Propagandy, 28 August 1946, AAN, Zespół Ministerstwa Informacji i Propagandy, Okólniki Urzędu Informacji i Propagandy Województwa Wrocławskiego, Sygn. 58, Nr. Mikrofilmu 27966, k. 38.
\textsuperscript{77} Regulamin powoływania i funkcjonowania Obywatelskich Komisji Weryfikacyjnych, k. 98.
Although assigning Polish nationality was a process directed from above, undergoing verification required a personal willingness to surrender one’s identity to the scrutiny of the state. In May 1946, Gomułka’s MZO, the most devoted ally of the PZZ, set the criteria for national verification. The two most important stipulations involved “location and the declaration of loyalty” (miejsce zamieszkania i deklaracja wierności).\(^\text{78}\) Polish citizenship was open to autochthons who, a) were permanent residents of the Recovered Territories before January 1, 1945, and b) declared an oath of loyalty to the Polish state and nation.\(^\text{79}\) These criteria expanded an earlier MZO policy, set in April 1946, considering most autochthons eligible for Polish citizenship. But this generous 1946 policy contradicted previous PZZ understandings of Polishness. Linguistic and “cultural fluency” in Polish, even if rudimentary, was something that the PZZ expected from authentically Polish autochthons. Clearly, as demonstrated by some MZO policies, nationalism was not the only consideration informing the decisions of high-ranking officials like Gomułka. Economic and logistical considerations were just as important.

Difficult conditions on the ground required flexibility and improvisation. Poland’s wartime human losses combined with the need to revive industry and commerce called for a liberal verification policy. Autochthons – no matter how Polish or German – were a potential workforce and human catalyst of postwar regeneration. Verification committees thus often (though inconsistently) bestowed Polishness on applicants with even a


\(^{79}\) Ministerstwo Ziem Odzyskanych – Departament Administracji Publicznej, Okólnik nr. 46, k. 51-52.
“shadow of Polish background.”\textsuperscript{80} I will address the contradictions of postwar Polish nationality policy in greater depth in Chapter 6.

The collective needs of the nation, then, placed tremendous power in the hands of committeemen assigning identities to autochthons. The PZZ highlighted verification as a matter of \textit{collective} rather than \textit{individual} rights: “Verifications are undertaken in the interest of state and nation \textit{not} the individual (\textit{jednostka}).”\textsuperscript{81} Local, municipal, and provincial committees conducted investigations, shedding light on the dark corners of applicants’ lives. Committeemen interrogated witnesses, “reliable ethnic Poles” – friends and acquaintances of “culturally suspect Poles.” A witness could be anyone from a neighbor, teacher, and employer to a spouse, colleague or a landlord. Most importantly, however, “witnesses could not be other unverified Poles.”\textsuperscript{82} Once the committee verified an applicant’s cultural and linguistic fluency in Polish, the chairman of the local committee would draw up a certificate (\textit{zaświadczenie}) of Polish nationality.

Smaller verification committees, however, also reserved the right to appeal dubious applications to higher committees. Thus, district committees petitioned municipal committees to resolve ambiguous cases of Polish nationality. The same logic applied to municipal committees appealing up the regional and provincial ladder. Dubious cases were often the result of inconsistent witness testimonies or an applicant’s poor mastery of Polish. It was thus not uncommon for verification committees to pass vague judgments, failing to establish Polishness when both the candidate and the witnesses seemed questionable at best.

\textsuperscript{80} Grzegorz Strauchold, \textit{Autochtoni Polscy, Niemieccy, Czy...}, 58.
\textsuperscript{81} Regulamin powoływania i funkcjonowania Obywatelskich Komisji Weryfikacyjnych, 1946, AAN, Zarząd Główny Polskiego Związku Zachodniego – Wydział Społeczno-Polityczny, Sygn. I, k. 98.
\textsuperscript{82} Regulamin powoływania i funkcjonowania Obywatelskich Komisji Weryfikacyjnych, k. 99.
Beyond the issue of verification, there was also an administrative side to western Polonization. PZZ officials were, of course, alarmed with the slow and contradictory process of national verification, but they were perhaps even more alarmed by its costs. The MZO estimated that the projected cost of re-Polonization for the fiscal year, 1948, would exceed 100 million złotych. Budgetary spending associated with “enforcing Polishness,” particularly among the autochthons, threatened to bankrupt the national treasury. Re-Polonization-as-rhetoric was the most urgent goal of postwar reconstruction; re-Polonization-as-reality diverted critical resources from other postwar projects outside of western Poland. To put it simply, making western Poland Polish was a far costlier enterprise than any of its champions had envisioned. Re-Polonization entailed the mass building of schools, libraries, camps, clubs, sporting facilities, etc. Even more significantly, on the local level, it meant changing the names of entire regions from the German to the Polish language, a process that proved expensive, indeed. In the course of 1945 to 1950, signage, streets, rivers, roads, institutes, directories, villages, and towns underwent a lightening-speed Polonization.

“Polonization-Gone-Wild” – Blind and Reckless Verification

The most intimate aspect of this enterprise, in particular for the autochthons, was the orthographic conversion of family names. Officials in the MZO maintained that changing the spelling of German-sounding family names “gave the [indigenous] population of the Recovered Territories an opportunity to cut the last thread linking its

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identity with the German nation.” Converting one’s name from a German to a Polish spelling was both a public and a private act. New Polish names reflected one’s inclusion in the Polish nation: indeed, they validated an individual’s identity as a Pole. Holding on to German names was allegedly dangerous because it betrayed one’s sympathy for German culture: “this external manifestation undermines sacred (święte) Polish national feelings and may disqualify some citizens from inclusion in Polish society.”

Entrenching Polish culture in the Western Territories thus made the intimate lives of ordinary people a legitimate battleground for Polonization.

German names, however, did not disappear overnight. PZZ and MZO officials worried that name-conversions appealed to Germans with some knowledge of Polish who sought to evade population transfer. According to communist authorities in Warsaw, Germans “posing as Poles” – so-called wolves in sheep clothing – ought to be denied the privileges of Polish citizenship: “Germans impersonating (podszywanie) Poles are a threat to state interests.”

Blind and reckless verification – or Polonization-gone-wild – where Germans manipulated the system and attained Polish citizenship was something the central authorities vehemently condemned. In reality, however, stricter guidelines for Polonization alienated the very people that the system most desperately wanted to co-opt: the autochthons.

The experience of Wilhelm Böhm is a case in point. Wilhelm was a self-proclaimed autochthon from Wałbrzych in southwestern Lower Silesia. Despite his

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86 Dekret o zmianie imion niemieckich w postępowaniu uproszczonym przed urzędem stanu cywilnego, 1946, AAN, MZO-Zmiana nazwisk i imion. Przywrócenie nazwisk i imion polskich. Projekty dekretu, okólniki, korespondencja, podanie, Sygn. 326, Nr. Mikrofilmu B5430, k. 43.
German-sounding first and last name, Wilhelm identified with Polish culture. Whether he did so from patriotic sentiment or out of fear for expulsion is hard to gauge from the documents. Nevertheless, on April 6, 1946 and again four months later, Wilhelm petitioned the Provincial Office (Urząd Wojewódzki) in Wrocław with requests for a name change. In particular, he wished to change his family name from Böhm to the more Polish sounding Bem. In many cases, the Polonization of names smoothed the way for securing Polish citizenship. Name-change could thus be a precursor of Polish national status.

Unfortunately for Wilhelm, the Provincial Office turned down his requests. Aggravated with this course of events, he finally appealed to the MZO, asserting quite ingeniously: “the Ministry has a stake in my claim… is it not in its interests to see less and less German-spelled names?” Böhm’s assertiveness confirms an awareness of a more liberal and “German-friendly” policy of accommodating “insufficiently Polish” autochthons. While some Germanized autochthons or “Germans posing as Poles” were able to pass as authentically Polish, others confronted government officials paranoid about German manipulators.

It was one thing to reject petitions of autochthons with German names, but it was another to decline appeals of autochthons with clearly Polish ones. For instance, the local militia (Milicja Obywatelska – MO) in Kłodzko, “dispensed a negative opinion about the Polishness” of autochthon, Ludwik Wesołowski. Wesołowski was a member of a prewar

Polish organization in Germany and he appeared to be an “authentic Pole.” Nevertheless, this did not stop the militia from questioning his national identity. In Wrocław, the urban militia rejected an autochthon Urbański’s “appeal for [national] rehabilitation” claiming that his request was invalid. Urbański’s ultimate fate was expulsion. Also in Wrocław, local authorities revoked the Polish citizenship of a prominent dentist, Dr. Worth, because of his questionable Polishness. Worth, a German autochthon who married a Polish woman from Upper Silesia (her maiden name was Wójcik), claimed significant exposure to Polish culture as grounds for Polish citizenship. Like Urbański, the doctor was also expelled. These cases attest to the fluid and often-arbitrary nature of national verification and name-change proceedings.

**Conclusion**

The MZO and the PZZ dispensed directives highlighting the privileged status of autochthons in the Western Territories as guardians of Polish culture under German historical domination. But when officials on the ground interpreted these directives selectively, assigning Polishness took on arbitrary overtones. In the end, the Polish Western Union’s policing of nationality in the western borderlands had far-reaching implications on local residents, but perhaps not the kind that were originally intended. Polonization, whether in the hands of nationalists or the communists, created a polarized society in which Polishness and Germanness were continuously contested and re-evaluated. Interestingly, in the end, Polonization had less of an impact on transforming

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“suspect” autochthons into “authentic” Poles than it did on forging an atmosphere of impermanence and resentment.

Despite its many challenges, however, the communist party remained staunchly committed to western Polonization. High-ranking communists like Władysław Gomułka, echoing the sentiments of the PZZ, saw limitless opportunities in the annexation and ethnic transformation of the former German territories. Peaceful coexistence between the Polish and German nations, especially in the western borderlands, was out of the question. Indeed, Gomułka saw the re-Polonization campaign as the major ideological issue of the day. With the international political climate in favor of states without ethnic minorities, postwar Polish leaders turned the resettlement of the Western Territories to their advantage. Both the Polish communists and their nationalist allies justified turbulent population movements by claiming the title of righteous enforcers of postwar stability. The expulsion of Germans and the resettlement of Poles was purportedly the only solution to ensuring peace and stamping out fascism. Nevertheless, as demonstrated in this chapter, ethnic rearrangements for the purposes of peace and stability generated more difficulties than solutions. In spite of their claim to hold the key to the borderland nationality question, neither the PZZ nor the MZO could clearly delineate the boundaries between Germanness and Polishness. As we shall see in the next chapter, the activities of the Government Operational Groups (GO KERM) and the State Repatriation Office (PUR) created even more contradictions.
Chapter Two
The Regulation of Migration: The Operation Groups (GO KERM) and the State Repatriation Office (PUR) at the Forefront of Postwar Polish Population Politics

As indicated in the previous chapter, making the Western Territories Polish started with an imperial fantasy enunciated by the PZZ and subsequently adopted, for a variety of motives, by the communist leadership to facilitate the ethnic assimilation of former German lands. The Polish Western Union’s idea of Polonization was then ornamented with class-based ideology, merging nationalism with communism, as embodied by the GO KERM. During the spring of 1945, the communists charged these special operation groups with the takeover of German industry and infrastructure. The GO KERM dispensed squads of Polish administrators and specialists to the new territories to secure property, factories, and industrial facilities abandoned by the Germans. Having reached their destinations with a conception of the Western Territories as the cultural and historical property of the Polish nation – clearly the influence of the PZZ – the GO KERM proceeded to pave the way for the establishment of a Polish industrial proletariat.

The primary task of the State Repatriation Office (PUR), then, was to bolster the PZZ and the GO KERM, in particular their vision of an industrialized and strictly Polish nation space. Communist authorities, first in Lublin and later in Warsaw, empowered the PUR to repopulate, revive, and “re-Polonize” former German areas. This extraordinary task demanded a mass mobilization of Poles from all corners of Western and Eastern Europe. Polish and Western historians have not adequately explored the grand story of the PUR. But when it comes to the reconstruction of postwar Poland in all its turbulent
and violent dimensions, the history of the GO KERM and the State Repatriation Office as well as their squads of administrators, civil servants, repatriates, and settlers are absolutely central to Polonization. Those millions of seemingly nameless Polish and German migrants who traversed hundreds (and in some cases thousands) of miles to “find” their new postwar homelands would not have been able to complete their journeys without the aid of the GO KERM and the PUR. It is in large part thanks to the records of both agencies that we are today able to imagine how the experience of migration shaped the lives and everyday realities of the average Polish settler.

**Pioneers of Polish Statehood: The GO KERM as Vanguard of Economic and Administrative Polonization**

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the campaign to make the Western Territories Polish had a cultural and linguistic component. Promoting Polish settlement in the Western Territories was predicated upon a rigorous state-sponsored crusade against “all-things German.” The very existence of German culture, its perpetual presence in the urban and rural spheres, promised to keep the most diligent of Polonizers busy. Shifting Poland west created a surprisingly controversial contest over the meanings of national identity. Communists and nationalists saw re-Polonization as a symbolic conflict over the identity of the western borderlands. The human and material resources of the conquered territories were its emblematic trophies. I have already discussed the pivotal role of autochthons as “national treasures” and human “keys” to the region: autochthons recovered from centuries of foreign rule allegedly legitimized Poland’s claims to the Ostelbien. In this section I argue that German property was as significant to the communists as the autochthons were to the nationalists. Communists saw German
property as symbolic, recovering possession of their own, the products of Polish blood and sweat. Taking control was an act of historical justice. It would pave the ground for the eventual establishment of a Polish working-class society.

In this section, I discuss how the Polish confiscation of German assets, enterprises, and industries in the Western Territories helped accelerate and, indeed, jumpstart Polonization. Polonization was not just about cultural or linguistic assimilation. It was also about theft (szaber oficjalny), expropriation, industrialization, and the redistribution of pilfered property, no matter how all this was rationalized. Just as the PZZ depicted itself as an expert on sensitive nationality questions, so the communists claimed ownership over economic matters. In the Western Territories, however, economic and ethnic interests reflected more generally the compatibility of communism with nationalism. The activities of the postwar Operational Groups (GO KERM) are yet another example of cross-ideological common ground. While the PZZ enjoyed considerable autonomy in forging population policies, the communists claimed more leverage in setting economic policies. The task of embedding Polish economic hegemony in former German lands lay with special government-sponsored operative units – the GO KERM.

The Polonization of the Western Territories officially began under the shower of bullets that swept Upper Silesia, East Brandenburg, and Pomerania during the Soviet offensive in January 1945. As the Red Army pushed west to Berlin, Polish administrative teams charged with seizing power in the rear made their first steps into the embattled borderlands. The primary purpose of these Operational Groups was to gain a foothold in territories, which at that point were only “Polish on paper.” Assembled in Kielce,
Częstochowa, Kraków, and Katowice, the GO KERM was of profound importance to the communist regime. Members of the Operational Groups were some of the first representatives of Polish state power in territories heretofore ruled by the Nazis.\textsuperscript{90} The GO KERM thus focused on administrative and economic Polonization, the emergence of Polish civilian authority in areas literally aflame from Soviet and Nazi incursions. Creating an administrative net in the Western Territories was naturally a crucial component and a precondition of cultural Polonization, the sphere of PZZ activity. The confiscation of German property and the consolidation of Polish rule were hence the twin pillars of GO KERM activity.

If the Ministry of the Recovered Territories (MZO) was the patron and supervisor of cultural Polonization, the Ministry of Industry and Commerce (\textit{Ministerstwo Przemysłu i Handlu} – MPiH) became the manager of administrative and economic Polonization. The MPiH along with the Economic Committee (\textit{Komitet Ekonomiczny}) of the communist-dominated government viewed the western borderlands as a laboratory for the establishment of a postwar Polish industrial working class. In April 1945, they dispensed Stanisław Piaskowski, a prominent socialist, to oversee the development of a nascent Polish administration in Lower Silesia. Piaskowski, a former vice-governor (\textit{wice wojewoda}) of the Kielce province in central Poland, assembled a team of 400 activists: an embryo of what would become the administration nerve center of the Wrocław province. (\textit{województwo wrocławskie}).\textsuperscript{91} From April 1945 until June 1946, Piaskowski supervised

\textsuperscript{90} Notatka dla Ministra Minca o pracy Grup Operacyjnych, 1945, AAN, Grupy Operacyjne K.E.R.M. i Ministerstwa Przemysłu – Kierownictwo, Okólniki i instrukcje: Kancelaryjna, dotycząca sprawozdawczości, dotycząca pracy Grup Operacyjnych na Ziemiach Odzyskanych, Sygn. 1, k. 17.
the construction of a local Polish civilian administration while donning the role of
government plenipotentiary (pełnomocnik rządu). His influence, however, would
continue to grow as governor (wojewoda) of the Wroclaw province, a position he
maintained from 1946 to 1949.

Empowered with the communist government’s consent to endow Lower Silesia
with a Polish administration, Piaskowski and his staff assumed the self-proclaimed role
of pioneers (pionierzy). The plenipotentiary’s team left central Poland in April 1945
armed with vehicles, benzene, money, and, most importantly, maps and statistics. This
logistical enterprise unfolded in the midst of an ongoing war spasmodic flights of
inhabitants. In fact, when Piaskowski arrived in Lower Silesia, most of the southern and
western counties were still in the hands of the German military. Festung Breslau (fortress
Wrocław) resisted the Red Army until May 1945. Piaskowski’s new Polish
administration had to set up shop in Trzebnica, miles away from the fight for Festung
Breslau. The struggle for the identity of the borderlands, then, transpired in the middle of
a larger struggle between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. The “unfinished business”
of the war, in particular the Soviet priority of suppressing Hitler’s Germany, threatened to
postpone Polonization. The invention of a Polish Dolny Śląsk overlapped with the
destruction of the German Niederschlesien (both the Polish and German terms denote
Lower Silesia).

92 Joanna Hytrek-Hryciuk, Rosjanie Nadchodząc! Ludność niemiecka a żołnierze Armii Radzieckiej
(Czerwonej) na Dolnym Śląsku w latach 1945-1948 (Wrocław: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2010), 126.
93 Korespondencja z Ppor. M. Barbanella, 14 April 1945, AAN, Grupy Operacyjne Komitetu
Ekonomicznego Rady Ministrów (K.E.R.M.) i Ministerstwa Przemysłu – Kierownictwo, Grupa Operacyjna
Śląsk Dolny: Korespondencja dotycząca pracy w terenie, Sygn. 69, kk. 1-3.
94 Both concepts denote Lower Silesia.
For Piaskowski, as for many Polish communists and socialists in early 1945, the war between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union was just a temporary nuisance. In most cases, Polish “state-bearers” did not even wait for the battles to be over. In the weeks preceding German capitulation, GO KERM activists succeeded in creating 3,000 administrative positions in local and municipal centers scattered throughout the Western Territories. Then again, in the ten days following the fall of Berlin and the official end of the war, Poles reactivated 2,000 factories and electrical facilities. This was exactly the kind of work that the MPiH and the Economic Committee in Warsaw had in mind when they visualized the economic takeover of German property. According to the MPiH, the GO KERM was a catalyst of economic revolution, a resuscitator of Polish economic life in previously German lands: “the operational groups are an organizational nucleus for the local economy and industry as well as a regulator of the labor force.”

GO KERM activists were expected to set the stage for the great repatriation actions that would fundamentally transform the ethnic content of the western borderlands.

In strictly economic terms, the confiscation, nationalization, and redistribution of German factories, businesses, and property had a profound impact on the Polonization of the region. Poles – repatriates, settlers, and re-emigrants – were the symbolic beneficiaries of the GO KERM’s economic revolution. The stabilization of fragile, transplanted societies in culturally alien lands depended on their integration in local and regional economies. Channeling Polish settlers into industrial occupations – factories and

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95 Notatka dla Ministra Minca o pracy Grup Operacyjnych, 1945, AAN, Grupy Operacyjne K.E.R.M. i Ministerstwa Przemysłu – Kierownictwo, Okólniki i instrukcje: Kancelaryjna, dotycząca sprawozdawczości, dotycząca pracy Grup Operacyjnych na Ziemiach Odzyskanych, Sygn. 1, kk. 16-17.
96 Orientacyjna instrukcja o pracy grup operacyjnych na Ziemiach Zachodnich, 27 March 1945, AAN, Grupy Operacyjne K.E.R.M. i Ministerstwa Przemysłu – Kierownictwo, Okólniki i instrukcje: Kancelaryjna, dotycząca sprawozdawczości, dotycząca pracy Grup Operacyjnych na Ziemiach Odzyskanych, Sygn. 1, k. 32.
facilities only recently held by Germans – comprised a domestication process, a condition for Polonization’s success. The GO KERM thus supplied the economic and logistical substance to the PZZ’s nationalist fantasies.

Although they rarely worked in concert, the GO KERM was closely related to the PZZ. Unlike the Polish Western Union, the Operational Groups traced their origins directly to the postwar communist government. Indeed, the GO KERM was far more dependent on communists, enjoying far less institutional autonomy than the PZZ. To reiterate a point from the last chapter, the communists, inadequately exposed to nationality questions in the western borderlands, were far more reliant on the PZZ than the other way around. The relationship between the party and the PZZ was predicated upon the idea that Union members would educate communists about the western terra incognita. The GO KERM then took PZZ interpretations of “Polish national rights” in the west to justify the communist agenda of economic Polonization.

Communists like the Minister of Industry, Hilary Minc, understood that the construction of Polish communities could not proceed without the Polonization of German enterprises. Minc’s ministry instructed the GO KERM “to organize from scratch (od podstaw) Polish industries and economic life and make them available for immediate use. The [Operational Groups’] performance and seamless activities, all based on military discipline, will ensure a smooth takeover of the new territories and their utilization.”

This feeling of entitlement to the west – the belief that German resources were eagerly awaiting Polish repossession – was clearly influenced by nationalist thinking. The communist desire to economically dominate the new provinces effortlessly blended with

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97 Orientacyjna instrukcja o pracy grup operacyjnych na Ziemiach Zachodnich, k. 32.
the nationalist obsession of ethnic and cultural transformation. GO KERM and PZZ objectives thus confirmed the postwar reconciliation of communism with nationalism.

This process of blending nationalist and communist priorities in the Western Territories was accompanied by a curious, and perhaps unexpected, embracing of colonial rhetoric (mentioned in the last chapter). Communist states were in theory anti-colonial states. Lenin and Stalin saw European dabbling in overseas imperialism as an expression of capitalist greed. They depicted Soviet socialism as fundamentally aligned with de-colonization: as inseparable from Indian, African, and Asian struggles against European rule. It is thus surprising to see colonial rhetoric in postwar Polish references to the Western Territories. To be sure, Poland had never participated in nineteenth- and twentieth-century European colonization. In fact, Polish national leaders, particularly during political statelessness (1795-1918), liked to emphasize Russian, Austrian, and German exploitation of Poland as a kind of European colony. The era of partitions thus showcased the Poles in the role of colonial victims.

At the same time, and perhaps ironically, Polish attitudes toward Ukrainians, Lithuanians, and Belarusians, particularly in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, resembled a colonial relationship in which Poles were quite clearly colonizers. Poles had a so-called manifest destiny in the eastern kresy, territories that prior to the partitions were integral parts of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The east on Poland’s doorstep was often portrayed as a natural realm for Polish power politics and expansionism. The post-1945 period thus presented Poland with a new context to old colonial discussions. As indicated in the previous chapter, the PZZ viewed the Western Territories as the cultural property of Poles. Indeed, the Polish Western Union shifted
Poland’s “colonial gaze” away from the eastern *kresy* onto the western *kresy*. This shift would have real implications particularly in the postwar period. This colonial perception of the west reinforced the communist-nationalist campaign to remake land and people into Polish state property. This was a profoundly important development. It marked the Polish communist regime’s willingness to engage in unexpected and startling tactics to secure Poland’s foothold in foreign territories.

The concern that the postwar territorial shifts would remain impermanent and that Polish settlers would be unable to adequately displace German expellees was at the heart of the colonial debate. This concern was most prominent among PZZ activists, but it also gripped the attention of the communists. Jerzy Starościak, a delegate to the Presidium of the National Committee, gave voice to these fears: “if Poland fails to resettle the new territories within a year, she will lose them forever. To prevent this we need to intensify the repatriation actions.”\(^{98}\) Communists invoked the rhetoric of colonization in two separate settings. First, party officials linked the urge to colonize to wider anxieties about real and imagined German saboteurs. Polish colonization of the western borderlands was a preemptive move against nationalist and fascist wreckers. These wreckers were allegedly hidden among culturally hesitant autochthons and the untrustworthy German population. Indeed, Germans were said to be covert colonists themselves:

Undisguised and concealed Germans (*Volksdeutsche*) should not be allowed to colonize the west. The question of resettlement is a matter of Polish power and existence… Institutions [such as the PUR – State Repatriation Office] need to monitor the national quality (*jakość narodowa*) of settlers.\(^{99}\)

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\(^{99}\) Ibid.
The threat of German colonialism – a slice of paranoid rhetoric straight from the PZZ playbook – brought Polish communists and nationalists together. Strengthening the Polish presence in the disputed borderlands thus involved heated debates about the capability of Poles to withstand the existential danger of German colonists. The message was then clear: German colonialism could only be opposed by communist-sponsored Polish colonialism.

For both communists and nationalists, then, whatever the defeat of Nazi Germany meant, it was not a release from fear. The continued imbalance of Poles vis-à-vis Germans in the Western Territories – with Germans still outnumbering Poles as late as 1947 – provided yet another impetus for Warsaw’s plans of colonization. Communists also discussed colonizing the borderlands in the context of great population movements. The Presidium of the National Committee went as far as outlining which overpopulated districts in central and southeastern Poland could potentially “colonize” insufficiently de-Germanized districts in Lower Silesia.\(^{100}\) For instance, the Wadowice, Nowy Sącz, and Tarnów districts of the Kraków province were supposed to colonize the Trzebnica, Milicz, Syców, Strzelin, and Oleśnica districts in the Wrocław province. Kraków itself was assigned to contribute 2,100 of its residents to colonize Wrocław. Conversely, Jasło, Przemyśl, and Tarnobrzeg – districts in the Rzeszów province – shared in the colonization of Nysa in the Opole region as well as Legnica, Złotów, and Chojnów in the Wrocław province.\(^{101}\)

For communists in the Presidium as well as rank-and-file GO KERM activists, colonization was a reaction to internal and external threats. Internal – the destabilizing

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\(^{101}\) Ibid.
potential of Poland’s inherited population of Germans; external – the Western Powers’ reluctance to recognize Polish frontiers and looming irredentism among disgruntled expellees in occupied Germany. The communists saw colonization, moreover, as a preparation for the great repatriation actions. Yes, Poles were supposed to “colonize” former German lands, but the intention was to rapidly merge the colony with the metropole; to make the periphery indistinguishable from the ethnically-homogenous heartland. Thus, colonialism served the needs of postwar communist nation building. It added a heretofore-absent urgency of turning undomesticated, alien territories *rapidly* and *efficiently* into centers of Polish culture. Colonization then comprised one more thread in the intricate web of postwar Polonization.

The Ministry of Industry envisaged colonization as a temporary procedure, a stepping-stone to the total absorption of the Western Territories. Once again, the purpose of colonizing the west was to fuse the periphery with the center; indeed, to accelerate Polish settlement and confront head-on the imminent German peril. To do this constructively, the MPiH suggested dividing the new provinces into four administrative zones: Upper Silesia, Lower Silesia, Western Pomerania, and East Prussia. Special plenipotentiaries handpicked by the Economic Committee subsequently administered these zones. These government delegates acted as de facto governors presiding over an *apparat* staffed by the GO KERM. Their most urgent task was to determine the economic specificity of the German districts (*kreis*) under their jurisdiction. This was often a

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dangerous job entailing reconnaissance missions into the smoldering intestines of Ostelbien industry.

GO KERM operatives drew up lists of German factories and plants forecasting the kind of expert manpower that their reactivation would demand. Their reports indicated a desperate need for engineers, technicians, shop-floor workers, and machine operators.\(^\text{103}\) This skilled labor force was supposed to be culled from the incoming Polish population, a constituency, as it turned out, with very limited industrial qualifications. It was then part of the GO KERM’s challenge to recruit not just a Polish labor force but also a Polish management. The pursuit of qualified workers and specialists was a formidable task that ultimately necessitated the detainment of some Germans, particularly those best trained in industrial professions. Economic needs thus did not always neatly line up with the so-called needs of the nation. The communist goal of reactivating Ostelbien industry jeopardized the Poles’ position in the “timeless” borderland conflict articulated by the PZZ in the last section.

The Ministry of Industry responded to the GO KERM’s reports by issuing instructions on how to categorize and integrate Polish workers. Polish settlers and repatriates were supposed to be carefully screened into the industrial workforce. This, on the one hand, reflected the ministry’s concern about reinvigorating the postwar economy of the borderlands. But, on the other hand, it also confirmed the communists’ approach to stabilizing incoming communities of migrants by channeling them into the workforce. Industrial professions comprised a sort of compensation for the damages and trauma of the Nazi occupation. Settlers and repatriates were to be rewarded for their sufferings by displacing Germans on the hierarchy of labor in the Western Territories.

\(^\text{103}\) Ibid.
But as many GO KERM activists discovered, creating a Polish hierarchy of labor was no simple matter. Inadequate professional training among Polish workers was one thing. Soviet confiscations and dismantling of German industries was another. The Red Army treated German industry in both the Soviet occupied zone and the territories transferred to Poland as “early reparations.” Between March and July 1945, the Soviets rapidly dismantled large factories including metallurgical plants as well as energy and chemical enterprises. Soviet divisions went as far as pulling the plug on Lower Silesian telecommunications: the phone lines on the road from Wrocław to Legnica were “seized” by the Red Army as part of its reparation-collections.

Soviet dismantling (demontaż) continued even after the Poles assumed power in June 1945. On August 15, 1945 the Poles and Soviets reached an agreement compensating Poland with seized industrial properties in the Recovered Territories.¹⁰⁴ (Of course, with the exception of those already sent to the Soviet Union). Delegates specially appointed by the Polish plenipotentiaries in Lower Silesia, Western Pomerania, Upper Silesia, and East Prussia supervised this process. The GO KERM then compiled reports about the condition of transferred industries.¹⁰⁵ The economic revolution in the Western Territories was thus contingent on many factors beyond the control of Polish officials in the GO KERM. The Red Army, recalcitrant Germans, as well as the general dismay in the aftermath of war complicated the GO KERM’s activities and ultimately delayed the construction of a Polish workforce loyal to the communist regime.

However, the prospect of participating in the GO KERM’s mission of claiming the Western Territories for Poland filled many young, idealistic Poles with excitement.

¹⁰⁵ Orientacyjna instrukcja o pracy grup operacyjnych na Ziemiach Zachodnich, kk. 36-37.
For Poles like Mieczysław Nowak, a youth from Sosnowiec, the spring of 1945 was filled with promise and hope. True, the war had left a canopy of death and ruin on the Polish landscape. Yet the drive to rebuild – to put Poland back on its feet – opened new avenues for social advancement, especially for destitute and displaced youth from the central provinces. From the perspective of the GO KERM, Nowak was a model candidate for recruitment. A son of a miner and a peasant domestic, Nowak was the personification of “the new postwar Pole” – pliable, optimistic, energetic, and, most importantly, an activist with the right social pedigree. The communist regime saw children of peasants and workers as the future of Polish peoples’ democracy.

Nowak’s father died in January 1945 leaving him the head of his impoverished family. Weeks after his father’s passing Mieczysław decided to pursue an education at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków: “I left home with a kiss from my mother and a hotheaded attitude, leaving for the big city.” Nowak had just turned twenty-two. Contrary to his mother’s and his own expectations, his stay in Kraków would be a short one. Once in Kraków, the former capital of Nazi-occupied Poland, Nowak would do significant soul-searching. The institution that would capture his imagination, however, would not be the university. On the contrary, it would be the GO KERM.

Nowak arrived in Kraków just in time to meet Jerzy Iwański, the representative of the Economic Committee (KERM) dispatched from Warsaw. Iwański was in charge of compiling an operative group with the assignment of transplanting Polish administrative power to Lower Silesia. In fact, the case of the Kraków GO KERM is characteristic of how operative groups were organized in Lublin, Kielce, Częstochowa, and Katowice.

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Local GO KERM chairmen dispensed by the center focused on enlisting young Poles, usually males, enticing them with promises of adventure and upward social mobility. The depiction of Operative Groups as legitimate outlets for youthful escapades cannot be understated. The temptation of exploring the unknown made an impact on young audacious men like Nowak.

A desire for adventure – a longing for the unfamiliar – informed my decision to leave Kraków for the west [...] A certain youthful romanticism inspired me to make this serious lifetime commitment [...] The years 1945-46 were the most exhilarating time of my life!107

Like many Poles of his generation, Nowak fantasized about a western terra incognita, a land of mystery and prosperity but also fear and uncertainty. This seemed like the perfect setting for satisfying youthful cravings and aspirations. Nowak could not have made a more favorable decision.

Nevertheless, little time elapsed before Mieczysław began questioning his decision. Going west could be a heavy burden exposing GO KERM operatives to constant dangers and surprises. The road to Trzebnica, the temporary base of Polish administrative activity in Lower Silesia, was long and perilous. Nowak’s first encounters with the unknown were tragic: “A German woman and her infant lay facedown in the dirt in a roadside ditch outside of Opole.”108 Death and dirt appeared to be inseparable. Their magnitude only intensified with each passing kilometer to Trzebnica. The view of Festung Breslau set aflame by Soviet and Nazi bombardments impressed itself on Nowak’s memory: “Smoke and dust. Raging fires and deafening explosions.” This indeed was the circus of death – the dark heart of the beast – Wrocław.109

107 Nowak, Garść Refleksji Pioniera Ziemi Wrocławskiej, kk. 43-44.
108 Nowak, Garść Refleksji Pioniera Ziemi Wrocławskiej, k. 43.
109 Nowak, Garść Refleksji Pioniera Ziemi Wrocławskiej, kk. 45-46.
By nightfall, however, the vehicle carrying Nowak and other members of the GO KERM arrived in the Polish nerve center of Lower Silesia. In Trzebnica, Iwański’s activists reported to the regional plenipotentiary, Stanisław Piaskowski. The future governor of the Wrocław province was a generous and compassionate (troskliwy) man. Piaskowski provided operatives with food and temporary apartments. He also tried to alleviate the young men’s fears with the pledge of postwar comforts and relief. The Western Territories were depicted as a realm of hidden treasures, the “promised land” for underprivileged youth and a testing ground for postwar Polish affluence.

But the reality on the ground in Trzebnica turned bright visions of prosperity into remote fantasies. The scenery in and around Trzebnica comprised a dreadful sight not unlike Nowak’s earlier glimpses of Wrocław. The earth was littered with corpses of steel machinery, broken-down vehicles, abandoned tanks as well as an insufferable odor of spilled benzene. Starving dogs roamed like dark apparitions through the rubble. The city smelled of death and defeat, and, unfortunately for the GO KERM, Trzebnica appeared to be typical of “liberated” Lower Silesian cities. The road to social advancement that both Iwański and Piaskowski promised the young GO-KERM’ers led through destruction, disease, debris, and demoralization. Installing Polish administrative power in Lower Silesia ensued against a backdrop of urban pandemonium.

Nowak’s encounter with Legnica would be equally unforgettable. The road to Legnica was inundated with fleeing Germans. The Red Army’s conquest of Lower Silesia brought millions of Germans under Polish and Soviet rule, primarily women, children, and the elderly. The conquered population lived in constant fear, uncertain about its status vis-à-vis the Poles and Soviets. In particular, they feared banditry and
rape. While drunken Red Army soldiers roamed the streets stirring up panic among adolescent girls, mobs of *szabrownicy* (Polish “treasure seekers”) robbed, looted, and sometimes terrorized German women and men. Nowak describes relations between Poles and Germans in Legnica as “rarely good.” Poles did not want to share the city with a so-called “criminal nation.”¹⁰ Crisscrossing waves of migrants continued to suffocate the city weeks after the last shots of the war were fired. German evacuees from the rural areas soon mixed with exhausted and starving voyageurs from all over Poland: repatriates from the east, settlers from the heartland, and detainees from Soviet-liberated work camps. Legnica thus turned into an anthill with streets functioning as rivers of human flesh – colliding and bursting at the seams. Trzebnica and Legnica: this was the Sodom and Gomorrah of Poland’s Lower Silesia.

From its very first days in Piaskowski’s realm, the GO KERM declared a war on what appeared to be an uncontrollable plague of looting. The *szabrownicy* comprised a particularly dire challenge. Not only were they stealing and pillaging, they also set fires threatening to incinerate the whole city. From the perspective of the nascent Polish civilian authorities, *szabrownicy* posed the biggest danger to public order and safety. As indicated by Nowak: “The phenomenon of *szaber* made me ashamed to be a Polish pioneer.”¹¹ Looting was so widespread that it literally left public officials feeling powerless in what they could do to secure occupied and abandoned properties from unforeseen damage. Absolute power in Legnica rested with the Soviets, *not* the Poles, and maintaining public order necessitated official cooperation with the Red Army. But for the great majority of the incoming Polish population of Legnica, cooperation with the

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¹⁰ Nowak, Garść Refleksji Pioniera Ziemi Wrocławskiej, kk. 50-53.
¹¹ Nowak, Garść Refleksji Pioniera Ziemi Wrocławskiej, k. 58.
Soviets was undesirable. Poles harbored no illusions that the “masters of life and death in Legnica were the Russians.” In some sense then good relations with the Soviets were more important than good relations with the Germans.

At the same time, Poles resented “the Russians” for acting as if they indisputably owned Polish Legnica: “Poles looked askance at the Soviet soldiers reigning unceremoniously on the streets of Piast Legnica.”112 The allusion to the Piasts, the medieval rulers of Poland and, in particular, the Silesian domain, including Legnica and Wrocław, was not accidental. Public references to “Piast Wrocław” or “Piast Legnica” demonstrated that many Poles were internalizing the communist interpretation of postwar territorial shifts as the work of historical justice. Official postwar propaganda reminded ordinary Poles that Polish communism was indispensable to the national recovery of medieval Piast lands. Communists, including the PZZ, emphasized, however, that the return of Legnica and Wrocław would not have been possible without Soviet assistance. It is this outside assistance – not the role of Polish communists per se – that ordinary Poles in the Western Territories disputed. There was a hierarchy of distrust that shaped everyday Polish perceptions of Germans, Soviets, and Polish communists. The Soviets and the Red Army were at the very top of this hierarchy. Indeed, public distrust of the “Muscovites” (Moskale) inadvertently facilitated a sort of nervous toleration of subversive activities, including szaber. Thus, looting – as long as it kept property out of Soviet hands – could be conceived as patriotic. The GO KERM’s cautious cooperation with the Soviets, in many cases, exacerbated szaber.

Alongside szaber and Red Army excesses, a new type of Polish civilian administration developed, one in which the GO KERM played a prominent role. Once in

112 Nowak, Garść Refleksji Pioniera Ziemi Wrocławskiej, k. 60.
Legnica, Nowak and the other members of Iwański’s entourage, divided the GO KERM into two separate teams: an industrial and an administrative group. Nowak found himself in the former set. The task of the industrial group was to secure machinery and equipment in hastily abandoned German factories and plants. The latter group helped create a viable municipal government that could then act to uphold public order, and, for instance, help thwart szaber. While both groups played with the proverbial fire, engaging in dangerous activities, it was the industrial teams that had the most hazardous jobs.

For example, Nowak’s tasks included inventorizing (inwentaryzacja) state property, listing all shutdown industrial facilities, and preventing the looting and pilfering of confiscated estates. None of these responsibilities proved to be easy:

> We worked twelve hours a day. We did not have enough people to do what was expected of us. We conducted our work while constantly tired and hungry. Our everyday meals consisted of miserable potato soups. In the end, circumstances forced us to raid empty and abandoned German homes looking for flour, sugar, potatoes or dried prunes. Oh, those were very difficult days!113

This passage demands a more thorough analysis because of the contradictions that it, perhaps unintentionally, reveals. On the one hand, as demonstrated by earlier quotes, Nowak condemns szaber as a shameful, epidemic, and criminal act, blaming it for tense relations between Germans and Poles. On the other hand, he confesses that the GO KERM, the very institution that was supposed to police szaber, engaged in looting “empty and abandoned” apartments. Clearly, the GO KERM could not have it both ways. How could government officials like Nowak and his colleagues pose an example to ordinary citizens when they themselves had dirty hands? Was looting and pilfering the unacknowledged price of the communist regime’s quest to culturally and economically

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113 Nowak, Garść Refleksji Pioniera Ziemi Wrocławskiej, kk. 55-56.
transform the Western Territories? What, if any, were the “moral constraints” to postwar Polonization?

Almost from the very beginning, then, economic and administrative Polonization had resulted in a contradictory situation. The communists in Warsaw envisioned the Western Territories as a staging ground for a social and economic revolution enabled by the state. The transfer of Ostelbien property from German to Polish hands was supposed to catalyze suitable conditions for the genesis of a Polish industrial proletariat. The GO KERM was the symbolic embodiment of this vision. Young and idealistic Poles bearing the banner of party and nation were the alleged human symbols of this transformation. The taming of the western terra incognita tested their willpower as young Polish men, loyal party members, and beneficiaries of economic and administrative Polonization. But the presence of uncooperative Soviet troops, resentful Germans, and “law-bending” Poles complicated the task of making western Poland Polish.

Violence, lawlessness, exploitation, and neglect were the darker aspects of state-endorsed Polonization. Distrust between Polish administrators and the different groups of Polish settlers was an ongoing problem, in many respects even greater than the problem posed by Germans and autochthons. Rallying Poles behind western Polonization was thus no easy matter. As the next section will demonstrate, Polish settlers and repatriates had their own ideas of Polonization, and they were not always attuned with communist and nationalist ideas. The intersection between migration and postwar nation building would prove tremendously vital.
The PUR as Policeman of Postwar Migrations

In every case that has been so far examined, I have argued that the postwar Polish state conducted significant ideological preparation before actually claiming the Western Territories. Indeed, Polish leaders created a conceptual framework that blended communist and nationalist objectives in the campaign to culturally and politically remake former German lands. PZZ and MZO nationality policies as well as the GO KERM’s construction of a Polish power apparatus, first in places like Trzebnica and Legnica and later in Wrocław, were the embodiment of these objectives in Lower Silesia. Like the PZZ, the GO KERM saw its mission as paving the ground for a mass ethnic, economic, and social revolution in regions traditionally outside the Polish cultural sphere. But the institution deserving foremost credit for accelerating and intensifying Polonization was the State Repatriation Office ( Państwowy Urząd Repatriacyjny – PUR). This section focuses on the PUR as the quintessential engine of postwar nation building in Poland. While the PZZ and the GO KERM functioned more as cartographers of relocation, the PUR was the actual policeman of all post-1944 population transfers. I thus examine the role of the State Repatriation Office as the most influential institution in the postwar development of Polish communities in former German territories.

Established on October 7, 1944, the PUR was the communist regime’s main vehicle of postwar ethnic rearrangements.\footnote{Piotr Eberhardt, 
Migracje polityczne na ziemiach polskich (1939-1950) (Poznań: Instytut Zachodni, 2010), 144.} As correctly stipulated by Dr. Bolesław Walawski, the head of the Legal Department of the National Presidium, “All issues related to settlement and immigration rest[ed] within the competency of the State
Repatriation Office.\textsuperscript{115} The integration of Polish migrants from central Poland and the Soviet Union in the \textit{Ostelbien} as well as the expulsion of the native German population comprised two primary goals of the State Repatriation Office. My examination of the PUR suggests that struggles with uncontrollable settlers and corrupt employees as well as lack of interagency assistance ultimately endangered the communist mission of domesticating, integrating, and Polonizing German lands. Social, economic, political, and technical considerations threatened to delay the regime’s homogenizing objectives. Remaking communities and reinventing national identities were urgent goals that the communists were, in the end, ill-equipped to assume.

Polish communists expected the State Repatriation Office to solve the problem of population displacements generated by wartime deportations and postwar border changes. Between 1944 and 1949, the PUR was the main state agency vested with the unique power of evicting, transplanting, and constructing entire communities. The State Office was central to creating a mono-ethnic Polish nation-state. The agency mobilized Polish repatriates from the western Soviet republics for the national mission of Polonizing former German lands. For the \textit{kresowianie} (Poles from Soviet-annexed eastern Poland), repatriation entailed the abandonment of regional homelands for a strange new land that they could only see as a product of a foreign culture.\textsuperscript{116} Having reached their destinations in territories annexed to Poland from Germany, the State Office encouraged individuals to surrender old regional identities in favor of an identity based on membership in an


ethnically homogenous nation-state. According to the State Office director, Michał Sapieha, “The goal of the repatriation actions is to mix the Polish population so thoroughly that all regional differences and provincial patriotisms disappear.” The State Repatriation Office was thus at the cutting edge of the post-1945 nation-building process, stimulating an identity based on ethnic conformity and loyalty to the communist state.

But renegotiating identities and forging alliances between communists and different groups of settlers did not proceed evenly in the context of postwar deprivations. Scarcity, banditry, demoralization, tenuous and often corrupt civil authorities – or their outright absence – posed a serious challenge to the construction of exclusively Polish communities. In this environment, the State Repatriation Office confronted a reality mostly detrimental to social engineering and nation building. Entrenchment of communist rule and the unification of Poles in an ethnically pure nation-state, however, were inseparable from the Office’s “repatriation project.” As one of the most important communist agencies in the immediate postwar period, State Office activities embodied a complex project of assigning new identities, forging political loyalties, inventing new traditions, domesticating alien territories, and imposing a new cultural hegemony.

Nevertheless, conflicts between PUR employees and migrants, including intra-agency debacles pitting powerful directors and ministers against bureaucrats and administrators on the ground, suggest that ideological commitments were rarely sustained. The challenges the State Office faced were too overwhelming for the creation

117 Okólnik (Nr. 11/P-S) lokalnej komórki PUR, date unknown, APWr, Dział Ogólny: Okólniki i Zarządzenia Władz Centralnych, 1945-1947 r., Sygn. PUR, kk. 381-382.
118 Gregor Thum, Obeć Miasto, Wrocław 1945 i potem, translated from German into Polish, Małgorzata Słabicka (Wrocław: Via Nova, 2006), 14.
of stable communities. While most Office leaders aimed to redefine society, the activities of agency employees, settlers from central Poland, and repatriates from the eastern *kresy* rarely conformed to communist directives.

Despite these challenges, Polish communists wasted no time in asserting their authority in the political and social life of Soviet-liberated Poland. The establishment of the communist-dominated government in Lublin meant first and foremost the delineation of Poland’s eastern frontiers. To bolster their legitimacy, and driven by a desire to sideline the London government-in-exile, the “Lublin Poles” enacted four different treaties with the neighboring Soviet republics. The first treaty, signed in July 1944 confirmed the Soviet Union’s annexation of the Polish *kresy* (eastern borderlands).\(^{119}\) State Office documents specify that the subsequent two treaties, signed the following September, involved the Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Lithuanian Soviet republics in the repatriation of “all” eastern Poles. The final agreement, drafted on November 6, 1945, enabled Warsaw to claim for Poland some Polish deportees dispersed throughout the Soviet interior during 1940 and 1941.\(^{120}\) Consequently, from the very onset, “population politics” – what the scholar Jerzy Kochanowski termed “gathering Poles into Poland” – dominated communist domestic and foreign policies.\(^{121}\)

The 1944 repatriation treaties required a special government agency catering to the needs of repatriates and expellees. Polish communists entrusted the State Repatriation Office with providing technical and humanitarian assistance to millions of migrants.

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\(^{120}\) Instruktarz w sprawie repatriacji Polaków ze Związku Radzieckiego, November 1945, Archiwum Państwowe we Wrocławiu (APWr), Dział Ogólny: Okólniki i Zarządzenia Władz Centralnych 1945-1947 r., Sygn. PUR nr. 1, k. 184.

\(^{121}\) Kochanowski, “Gathering Poles into Poland,” 135.
inside and outside Poland’s borders.¹²² Władysław Wolski, the Minister of Public Administration (Ministerstwo Administracji Publicznej – MAP), oversaw the PUR’s activities. Wolski closely cooperated with the State Office director, Michał Sapieha, ensuring that the agency’s 7,785 employees diligently assisted displaced individuals.¹²³ The regime empowered Wolski and Sapieha with far-ranging autonomy in the articulation of the state’s population policies.¹²⁴ The director shaped the PUR’s “repatriation project” in compliance with the communist tenet of nation building. He formed guidelines and dispensed directives that called for the ethnic homogenization of Poland through carefully orchestrated and supervised population movements.

A government decree on repatriation entrusted Sapieha’s agency with three primary tasks: regulation of the influx of repatriates on Polish soil; the deployment of repatriates in new communities in the Western Territories; and the organization of relief for settlers, including allocation of housing and providing settlers with jobs.¹²⁵ These tasks were part of a larger project seeking to accelerate Polonization in former German territories. The State Office “repatriation project” thus intended to turn the PZZ’s vision of borderland cultural homogeneity into a reality. To Sapieha and Wolski, borderland populations comprised ethnic raw material for the renegotiation of a postwar Polish national identity. In the end, State Office activities of transfer and expulsion facilitated the ethnic and social homogenization of Poland.

In May 1945, just weeks after the end of the war, the Central Committee of Resettlement (Centralny Komitet Przesiedleńczy) intensified its public propaganda campaign, calling upon Poles to do their patriotic duty and go west. Promises of work, justice, and prosperity received great publicity, and, most importantly, resonated with landless, starving, and uprooted Poles, survivors of war, genocide, and partisan struggles. The Central Committee created an image of the Western Territories that would speak to the grievances and needs of all social milieus. In this sense, the postwar propaganda campaign glorifying the new western provinces was “above-class”:

Peasants! You no longer have to migrate overseas. The new Poland has sufficient land for you for eternal ownership. You want bread? The west has bread! You want land? The west has land! […] The urban population will find workplaces, businesses, and shops in the west abandoned by the Germans. The professional intelligentsia will find clerical and office work. Compatriots (rodacy)! Go west (na zachód)!\(^{126}\)

This overzealous deployment of jingle-like slogans was critical in mobilizing Poles from all walks of life behind the government’s western Polonization. Making the west Polish entailed the participation of the entire nation. The settlement of the Western Territories demanded a kind of ethnic solidarity previously unseen in Polish history. The communists, however, were intent on forging it.

But the communist-dominated regime certainly did not have it easy in galvanizing popular support for its policies. From the perspective of many ordinary Poles, the shadow of illegitimacy, including the government’s connections to the Soviet Union, hung over it like a dark cloud. One strategy to boost the regime’s credentials was identifying with the

needs and aspirations of Polish society. Another one was to resort to populist and nationalist slogans such as this one:

Compatriots! Historical justice had been done. The German invader, the mortal enemy of the Polish nation and of the entire Slavdom (Słowiański) fell, defeated by the might of the nation. The power of the Third Reich lies in ruins. Lands stolen by the Teutonic Knights, the Bismarcks and Hitlers are returning to the motherland. The invader has fled beyond the Oder, leaving behind villages and towns, factories and manors, sown fields and blooming gardens.\(^{127}\)

The message was unmistakable. The repopulation and, most importantly, the re-Polonization of the Western Territories were not just objectives of the communist regime. Rather, they were the embodiment of a collective national will. The needs of the nation, so proclaimed the official propaganda, demanded the migration of Poles west.

But for most Poles, the needs of the nation were not always as important as their own individual needs. For many ordinary Poles, migration did, in fact, serve a practical solution to everyday postwar concerns such as sustenance, safety, and mobility. The abysmal living conditions in the central provinces with the overpopulated countryside and the ongoing Polish-Ukrainian civil war in the Soviet-annexed southeastern \(kresy\) beckoned many of the uprooted to try their luck out west. For some, then, the risk of “going west” was frequently a matter of survival. According to Mieczysław Kuna, a PUR inspector in Warsaw, “settling the West was met with great interest among the population of the most devastated areas.”\(^{128}\) The central provinces, in particular the Warsaw region, lay almost entirely in ruins. The Nazis, in their quest to crush the 1944 Warsaw Uprising, leveled everything in their path. As a result, by the time the war was over, most factories, buildings, and the infrastructure in general were in various stages of decay. This state of

\(^{127}\) Ibid.

deterioration had an adverse effect on the quality of life in the region. Heart-landers (centralniacy), especially young, idealistic men – not unlike their peers in the GO KERM – looked upon migration as salvation from the wreckage of war. The communist propaganda of western prosperity thus did not fall on deaf ears. Settlers from central Poland embraced communist slogans less for nationalist than for practical reasons. “Going west” was frequently a matter of life and death and thus worth the risk.

Like the heart-landers, Poles in the Soviet-annexed kresy often perceived repatriation as an escape from death. Unlike their compatriots in central Poland, however, the kresowianie rarely had a choice in the matter. Although officially repatriations of Poles from the western Soviet republics were depicted as voluntary, in reality Soviet authorities regularly coerced the Polish population into fleeing beyond the Bug.\textsuperscript{129} But, as alluded to earlier, the Soviets were not the only obstacle to Polish cultural survival in the kresy. In an August 1944 report, Józef Parnaś, a sanitation official in Volhynia, declared that Ukrainian “anti-Polish terror” is driving local Poles to a state of desperation. Volhynian Poles allegedly viewed the Polish communist government as a preferable alternative to “Ukrainian fascism.”\textsuperscript{130} The kresowianie thus saw repatriation as one very sensible response to the threat of Ukrainian-provoked ethnic cleansing. Fearing that ethnic conflict would continue, even after the re-imposition of Soviet rule in Polish-Ukrainian borderlands, the kresowianie risked the journey west. Their manager of migration was none other than the State Repatriation Office.

\textsuperscript{129} Sprawozdanie z podróży służbowej W. Wolskiego do Kijowa, Mińska i Wilna w sprawach repatriacji, 21 October 1944, AAN, Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego, Repatriacja – sprawy ogólne, Sygn. 1/21, Nr. Mikrofilmu 24069, k. 5.

In August 1945, Wolski estimated that 1.3 million eastern Poles expressed an interest – and indeed registered with the State Office – for departure into Poland. Of this number, between November 1944 and July 1945, only 500,000 were transported and subsequently dispersed throughout the central and western provinces. While many ended up in the Opole, Szczecin, and Wrocław regions, others chose to rebuild their lives in Białystok, Toruń, Lublin, and Kraków. The experiences of settlers in the Western Territories, however, are at the center of this study. Their “quest west” would have the most striking ethnic and social implications on territories traditionally part of Germany. The State Repatriation Office was, once again, the symbolic vehicle of Polish encounters with the newly annexed provinces.

As indicated earlier, however, “going west” did not proceed without challenges. The institutional corruption within the State Office, particularly among employees in local units, impeded the resettlement process. Inadequately staffed local units took up the task of Polonization in the context of immense destruction and social fragmentation. Lack of interagency cooperation, together with communication and transport problems, stranded State Office activists in unstable environments unfavorable to building new Polish communities.\(^{131}\) In June 1945, 200 PUR employees oversaw Lower Silesia, a province with approximately three million Germans scheduled for expulsion.\(^{132}\) Because of this serious institutional deficiency, the Red Army assisted the State Office in the unloading of trains with Polish settlers from the east. Thanks to Soviet aid, in May 1945 the State Office succeeded in allocating German property to 1,500 repatriates in 3,370

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132 Ibid.
rural establishments.\textsuperscript{133} The PUR’s lack of staff and resources thus demonstrates that nationalist messages of swift and successful Polonization clashed with realities on the ground.

The commitment to Polonization and the redistribution of German land, however, was not the only problem. From 1945 to 1946 anxiety about the ideological “fitness” of both agency employees \textit{and} the people they oversaw – the migrants – topped the list of government concerns. Communists expected all agency employees in the Western Territories to be attentive and obedient. After all, they were at the forefront of an “epochal” historical development: the state entrusted them with overseeing the repopulation and integration of “ancient” Polish lands. In light of this great task, PUR authorities in Łódź emphasized loyalty and discipline among employee cadres.\textsuperscript{134} Each state employee had a chance to prove his/herself by serving the nation and the cleansing of Poland’s new frontiers supplied a fitting opportunity. Likewise, the regime expected repatriates from the \textit{kresy} and settlers from central Poland to don the role of Polish pioneers. In settling the west, they were to halt the perpetual threat of eastward German expansion. Official propaganda portrayed the Polonization of the former Ostelbien as historically just.\textsuperscript{135} Understandably, then, communists received news of corrupt and disloyal state employees as well as deceptive and unruly “pioneers” with considerable alarm.

But authorities in Warsaw were also concerned about the “national fitness” of the recipients and executors of Polonization. The newly annexed Western Territories

\textsuperscript{133} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{134} Instructions to sections of PUR in the Recovered Territories, 18 June 1945, APWr, Dział Ogólny: Okólniki i Zarządzania Władz Centralnych 1945-1947 r., Sygn. PUR nr. 1, kk. 5-6.
\textsuperscript{135} Thum, \textit{Obec Miasto}, 106.
represented a “multi-layered hybrid culture” where Germans coexisted with Poles, Czechs, Silesians, Lusatians, and Jews.\textsuperscript{136} The criteria for determining who was a Pole and who was a German in this new western region of Poland was thus far from clear. The fluidity of ethnic and cultural identities among Poland’s borderland populations – east and west – demonstrated that “making nationality the organizing principle of statehood” in Eastern Europe required a brutal suppression, already started during the war, of the multicultural reality of the territories between Berlin and Moscow.\textsuperscript{137} How then was one to tell one nationality from the other? How did the old and new inhabitants of the territories annexed from Germany identify themselves in the postwar reality? In the era of ethnically based nation-states, who would decide the nationality of those still undeclared?

\textbf{The PUR in the Western Territories}

When Polish settlers and their State Office supervisors arrived in the Western Territories, they frequently engaged in dubious and often illicit behaviors. Reports dispatched from the central office in Łódź to all regional sections of the PUR in the newly annexed provinces reflect serious concerns about the “repopulation” activities of its employees. According to the PUR director, Sapieha, Office employees’ “private possession” of materials originally intended for repatriate use could not be tolerated. Sapieha was particularly alarmed about thievery among some of the agency’s regional staff. He points to cases were employees had stolen bicycles, farm implements, horses,

carriages, and typing machines.\textsuperscript{138} Communists saw the transfer of property from German to Polish hands as essential to the reactivation of social and economic life in the western borderlands. Their organization of the GO KERM, the focus of the previous section, was a reflection of this commitment. But the State Office employees’ reluctance to uphold this commitment, often motivated by greed and postwar poverty, ultimately threatened to severe the very tenuous bonds that linked the regime with its subjects. Indeed, the Office’s frequent failures in properly accommodating Polish settlers deepened the Poles’ distrust of the Soviet-imposed regime and perpetuated negative stereotypes of communists.

The drive to accelerate the replacement of Germans with Poles failed to address actual problems generated by the resettlement process. Scheming repatriates and settlers kept undermining the regime’s campaign of assimilating former German provinces. According to Sapieha, “a large percentage” of migrants deserted the properties assigned to them by local organs of the State Office in search of better accommodations. The director recommended that allocation of German assets be denied to all saboteurs and tricksters. At the same time, Sapieha ordered the entire regional Office staff to treat all Polish settlers with incredible caution. Repatriate data were to be carefully scrutinized, most importantly, each individual’s new address and place of employment.\textsuperscript{139} As long as these “pioneers” attempted to cheat the system, Sapieha insisted on a strict surveillance of the settler population’s activities. Thus, some Poles’ skillful exploitation of communist

\textsuperscript{138} Instrukcje do wszystkich oddziałów PUR na Ziemiach Odzyskanych, 30 May 1945, APWr, Dział Ogólny: Okólniki i Zarządzenia Władz Centralnych 1945-1947 r., Sygn. PUR nr. 1, k. 53.
\textsuperscript{139} Okólnik (Nr. 17), 6 June 1945, APWr, Dział Ogólny: Okólniki i Zarządzenia Władz Centralnych 1945-1947 r., Sygn. PUR nr. 1, k. 345.
administrative disorder confronted the State Office with a unique burden of registering, educating, spying on, and policing repatriates.

Although PUR leaders attempted to improve the material conditions of settlers, illicit behaviors of some made it increasingly difficult. On the one hand, some settlers noticed widespread corruption in local State Office cells vested with the power to cater to their needs. On the other hand, some diligent employees of the Office encountered deceptive and erratic settlers. The case of Ryszard Pilecki is a typical example of how many settlers behaved in the Western Territories. Pilecki was born in 1919 in Vilnius, the main city in the northeastern kresy (now Lithuania). After the war he registered with the State Office for repatriation to western Poland. The Office in Szczecinek assigned Pilecki to a farm in the village of Pilburg. The agency expected Pilecki to stay in Pilburg and contribute to the creation of a Polish agricultural community there. To the surprise of the authorities, however, Pilecki pillaged his new farm, selling its “living inventory” and fleeing “in an unknown direction.”

In a similar scenario, the PUR provided repatriate Aleksander Kasiel with a small farm in the village Nowe Worowo. Like Pilecki, Kasiel looted his own property, selling its lone “German” cow, and deserted his new home. One may suspect that he left for another part of the former German territories to do the same. Numerous “tricky” repatriates approached local organs of the State Office in the Western Territories with multiple requests to be granted ex-German properties. The more successful types gained access to farms and households, robbed them, and afterwards escaped with their booty in “unknown directions.” After a substantial break of a few weeks they repeated the familiar

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140 Opuszczone niemieckie gospodarstwa, date unknown, APWr, Dział Ogólny: Okólniki i Zarządzenia Władz Centralnych 1945-1947 r., Sygn. PUR nr. 1, k. 157.
141 Ibid.
pattern of registration, theft, and flight.\textsuperscript{142} Clearly, repatriate “cheats” and corrupt State Office employees could not have made the Polonization of foreign lands easy for the communist regime. The unpopularity of communism along with the mutual distrust of state authorities and “pioneers” maintained a tense social atmosphere damaging to the regime’s objective of forging a proletarian society.

In spite of popular attitudes, however, the regime in Warsaw pressed on with its western repatriation project. In particular, it viewed the verification of nationality as central to the “un-mixing” of the ethnically diverse western provinces: “Verification and rehabilitation aimed at nationally segregating the region’s residents into Germans and Poles.”\textsuperscript{143} Nevertheless, standards for verification differed from region to region. The “disentanglement” of Poles, Germans, Silesians, and other “locals” proved to be a formidable task. The degree of difficulty of sifting Poles from Germans depended on the borderland in question.

In the central part of Silesia, chiefly the Opole region, deeply rooted multiculturalism challenged the regime’s capacity for distinguishing between Poles and Germans. While most of the inhabitants of Lower Silesia identified with the German nation, the most vital components of self-identity in the Opole region included religion, local dialects, and residence.\textsuperscript{144} In fact, to simplify the task of ethnic verification, as argued by Bernard Linek, communists recognized most former German citizens in this

\textsuperscript{142} Zachowanie repatriantów na Ziemiach Odzyskanych, 22 March 1946, APWr, Dział Ogólny: Okólniki i Zarządzania Władz Centralnych 1945-1947 r., Sygn. PUR nr. 1, k. 158.

\textsuperscript{143} Linek, “‘De-Germanization’ and ‘Re-Polonization’ in Upper Silesia, 1945-1950,” 124.

region as ethnic Poles.\textsuperscript{145} Local state administrators did not ask the inhabitants of the Opole region whether they preferred being Poles or Germans. Rather, they assumed that the more multicultural a society the easier it would be to “re-Polonize” it. Thus, as the example of Opole Silesia demonstrates, the regime adopted a more liberal verification policy in areas where deeply ingrained multiculturalism prevented the clear separation of Poles from Germans. The different socio-demographic realities of the constituent parts of the Western Territories ultimately did not allow for a uniform verification policy.

In some areas communists interpreted Catholicism as a valid marker of Polish national belonging. In still other examples, hybrid autochthon identities – irrespective of religion – were sufficient enough to point to an allegedly “Germanized” or denationalized “Polishness.” In South East Prussia, for instance, it was widely understood that Catholicism denoted “Polishness” while Protestantism indicated “Germanness.”\textsuperscript{146} The fact that there were many German Catholics among this population did not deter Polish communists from classifying them as “Germanized” Poles. Thus, the process of verifying nationality in the Western Territories confirmed the social construction of national identity. The lack of a strict and universal verification policy demonstrates how unprepared the communists were to take on the arduous task of ethnic homogenization.

Indeed, nation building in postwar Eastern Europe stimulated complicated questions of a political, social, and moral character that not all governments knew how to address. Why was ethnic verification so important to territorial integration and reconstruction? What effect did ethnic homogenization have on the postwar economic and social integrity of the Western Territories? The removal of the Ostelbien Germans

\textsuperscript{145} Linek, “‘De-Germanization’ and ‘Re-Polonization’ in Upper Silesia, 1945-1950,” 124.

and the destruction of their culture allowed Polish communists to present themselves as moral leaders of the nation. The acquisition of the Ostebien borderlands symbolized a final victory in the historical struggle between the German and Polish nations.\textsuperscript{147} The “multi-layered” cultural reality of the borderlands, however, interfered with the communist ethnic project.\textsuperscript{148}

**Administrative Neglect and Corruption**

Unruly and unpredictable settlers were not the only threats to Polonization. Polish administrators, communist party members as well as local PUR officials jeopardized the formation of a new Polish community in Lower Silesia. For example, the *wicestarosta* of Syców, uninterested in accommodating a transport of settlers from southeastern Poland, ordered all 151 migrants to go back to Chełm.\textsuperscript{149} In a similar case, this time in Oleśnica, the local *starosta*, having conducted a brief conversation with newly arrived Poles, expressed his “willingness” to have them return “whence they came from.”\textsuperscript{150} Clearly, these decisions could not have been endorsed by the center. The success of Polonization depended on the continuation of large repatriation actions. Poles migrated to the Western Territories from all corners of prewar Poland. Time and time again, however, they were confronted with incompetent or “misinformed” officials, such as the leaders of Syców and Oleśnica, whose actions threatened to sabotage Polish interests in Lower Silesia. From the perspective of the center, places like Syców and Oleśnica were fertile breeding

\textsuperscript{147} Maria Kornilowicz et al., *Western and Northern Poland* (Poznań: Zachodnia Agencja Prasowa, 1962), 110.

\textsuperscript{148} Davies and Moorhouse, *Microcosm*, 59.


\textsuperscript{150} Ibid.
grounds for the emergence of new Polish communities. But the reality on the ground illustrated a significantly different picture. It turns out that Lower Silesia was also a breeding ground of administrative incompetence.

Fear, uncertainty, and the lack of resources drove many officials to neglect the incoming Polish population. The Poles in Oleśnica were left completely to their own devices. The State Repatriation Office at the disembarkation point greeted migrants empty-handed. The local staff advised the arriving group of settlers to search for properties on their own (szukać na własną rękę): homes were allegedly up for grabs. The nonchalant manner of the PUR chief in Oleśnica disabled many repatriates. He set out to convince migrants that the Germans would return to the region. According to Jan Grubecki, a government inspector, the chief was actively undermining settler confidence, claiming that the Germans would soon enough reclaim their old property. “When they return,” he proposed, “the Poles should accept them and share in the upkeep of estates.”

Faced with such advice, Polish settlers and repatriates felt particularly bewildered. On the one hand, the official propaganda was infecting society with anti-Germanism and promises of western abundance. On the other hand, high-ranking local officials – communists, administrators, and State Office employees – discouraged Poles from sinking roots in their new environment. This contradictory behavior threatened to derail the communist plan of domesticating, assimilating, and centralizing former German lands. It also deepened settler skepticism about Poland’s ability to retain the new

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151 Ibid.
152 Ibid.
territories. Clearly, not all of what the State Repatriation Office did served the interests of postwar Polish population politics.

In the end, the activities of the PUR confirmed a radically new socio-demographic order. Communist insistence on population transfers and ethnic cleansing as major tools of postwar nation building ultimately, though very unevenly, accelerated the ethnic homogenization of postwar Poland.153 World War II and its aftermath revealed a fundamental break with the multicultural legacy of prewar Poland.154 The postwar ethnic cleansing in East-Central European borderlands that for centuries witnessed the “interpenetration” of diverse cultures paved the way for the renegotiation of national identities.155 The State Repatriation Office served a key role in the attempt to implement this ideological campaign of ethnic and social purification.

But it was also commonplace for State Office employees on the local level to undermine policies dispensed by the center. The conduct of these employees as well as the “unruliness” of some Polish migrants restricted the regime’s resettlement and integration processes. Although the Western Territories ultimately became constitutive parts of Poland, the ethnic fabric remained, to some extent, diverse, which became more visible years and decades after the mass repatriation actions.

Conclusion

The fantasy of an ethnically homogenous Poland without ethnic complexity and troublesome minorities provided a strong basis for a communist-nationalist alliance. From the perspective of postwar Polish leaders, the Western Territories had to be re-imagined as spaces devoid of Germans. Officials in the GO KERM, PZZ, and the PUR debated the Polonization of former German territories while equipped in codes, maps, statistics, and observations. In fact, the activities of all three institutions confirm James C. Scott’s assertion that civilizing, colonizing, and reinventing land and people were indispensable components of modern statecraft:

The builders of the modern nation-state strive to shape a people and landscape that will fit their techniques of observation… Reducing great complexities at the periphery of the state meant consolidating the center’s ‘direct rule.’

Scott explores the role of the “ruling center” in generating a legible society as a transmitter of conformity and political power at the farthest margins of the state. Through imagining, observing, and simplifying, modern states thus articulate the criteria of citizenship and nationality.

In the case of postwar Poland, the tasks of “creating a legible society” and “reducing complexities” involved the creation of an institutional superstructure. Disseminating the communist blueprint for Polish nation building in the Western Territories was an enterprise that ultimately involved government officials, migrants and their families, as well as state-sponsored agencies such as the GO KERM, PUR, and the PZZ. These agencies were at the forefront of postwar nation building in Poland. They stood at the top of an ideological hierarchy that merged communism with nationalism. In

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the postwar context, then, the road to ethnic homogeneity necessitated interactions between communists and nationalists, a top-priority alliance catalyzed by the desire to make German lands Polish. The communist regime’s mobilization of the PZZ, GO KERM, and the PUR set these interactions into motion.
Chapter Three

In the aftermath of World War II, approximately forty percent of Polish Jews who survived the Holocaust, settled in the Western Territories. 157 Jewish survivors, with few other options and slim resources, hoped to rebuild their cultural and political existence in former German lands. This chapter focuses on the short existence of this community in 1945-1948. It argues that the Jewish community in the Polish-German borderlands was significant not only for the rebirth of Jewish life after the Holocaust, but also for shaping postwar Polish politics and society in general. In fact, in the immediate postwar period, some Jewish political leaders in cooperation with the nascent Polish communist regime embarked on a project to transform Jews into loyal communist citizens and, ironically, agents of Polonization of former German lands. At the same time, Zionism, a competing project with much older roots in the Jewish community, reemerged with renewed force. Thus, the Polish-German frontier became a place where questions of identity, citizenship, and hegemony were most heatedly contested not as much by Poles and Germans but surprisingly by postwar Jewish leaders.

During the early postwar years, Lower Silesia was a magnet for Polish Jews, in particular for those who spent the war years in the Soviet Union. 158 These settlers migrated to small and large urban centers such as Wrocław, Dzierżoniów, Wałbrzych, and Bielawa. This was a masculine and youthful society – men outnumbered women and

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157 The Nazi occupation of Poland during World War II annihilated approximately ninety percent of Poland’s prewar Jewish population. See Joanna Beata Michlic, Poland’s Threatening Other: The image of the Jew from 1880 to the present (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 196.
young and middle-aged adults (19 to 49 year-olds) dwarfed other age groups. According to Polish historian Bożena Szaynok, in 1946, on average, men comprised 540 and women 460 out of every 1,000 Jewish repatriates from the East.\(^{159}\) In contrast to its prewar antecedent, this was also a far more secularized and “nationalized” society. Zionist aspirations and plans of nation building in Palestine soon came to enjoy unprecedented prominence in a community whose return from the edge of destruction was nothing short of miraculous.

War and genocide radically redrew the relationship between Jewish politics, identity, and religion. Holocaust survivors, no matter how secular, often treated religion as a marker of Jewish national identity, even when identifying less with its ritual and rabbinical traditions. Jewish national politics, the epitome of which was Zionism, and the Zionist nation-building project in Palestine, eventually attracted the loyalty of the vast majority of Jews in Lower Silesia. How and why this happened is the central theme of my discussion. Ultimately, the project of transforming Jews into an exemplary Polish working class loyal to the communist regime was not successful. In 1946, 70,000 Jews would leave Poland through Lower Silesia ultimately bound for Eretz Israel.\(^ {160}\) The history of postwar Bricha – the illegal emigration to Palestine – and the foundation of Israel are thus intimately linked to the history of Jews in Polish-German borderlands.

My discussion opens with an overview of Jewish politics in the aftermath of World War II in Poland and the profile of the Jewish community in Lower Silesia. I then examine a specific strategy of productivization (produktywizacja) and occupational

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restructuring (*przewarstwowienie*) shaped and negotiated by Jewish communists who cooperated with the Polish Workers’ Party or PPR, the Soviet-backed communists in Poland. I use the phrase “Jewish communists” to denote political rather than ethnic belonging: members of the Jewish section of the Polish Workers’ Party, otherwise known as the PPR-Fraction. In a similar way, when I say “Polish communists” I mean the PPR ruling-elites. Polish communists and their responses to popular antisemitism is the subject of the closing section. I argue that the communist leadership’s failure to convince Jews about the new state’s commitment of suppressing anti-Jewish sentiments in Polish society contributed to the success of Zionism. Ultimately, the communist project of remaking Jews into dutiful members of the Polish nation and exemplary proletarians failed.

**Reconstructing Jewish Politics in Postwar Poland**

Political leaders in Warsaw struggled with the question of accommodating a Jewish minority in a postwar Polish workers’ state. An estimated number of 244,964 Jews lived in Poland in 1946 compared to between 3 and 3.5 million in the interwar period. The figure from 1946, moreover, indicates an uninterrupted downward trend in the size of the Jewish community in postwar Poland. Polish historian Grzegorz Berendt, for instance, estimates that anywhere between 330,000 and 525,000 Polish Jews survived the war, mostly in the Soviet Union. In May 1945, the Central Committee of Polish Jews (*Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce – CKŻP*) registered approximately 42,662

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Jewish survivors of the Nazi occupation of Poland.\textsuperscript{163} Clearly, Jews exiled by the Soviets to settlements in Central Asia and Siberia, dominated the postwar Jewish community. Their wartime experience was significantly different from that of the survivors of the Nazi occupation. While Jews from the General Government (the Polish heartland occupied by the Germans during the war) could consider Soviets to be “liberators” from the Nazi extermination policies, Jewish survivors of Soviet deportations may have had more mixed reactions. This, in turn, influenced their responses to the communist project in Poland.

The persistent adherence of some Jews to Zionist politics and dabbling in \textit{Bricha} – illegal emigration from Poland to Palestine strictly forbidden by Warsaw – intensified communist distrust of Jews.\textsuperscript{164} Communist policy, at least at the outset, left no room for accommodating the Zionist notion of building a Jewish state in Palestine. Rather, Polish and Jewish communists sought to create a modern Jewish industrial proletariat loyal to Poland and clothed in Polish culture.\textsuperscript{165} Zionism, the logic went, was dangerous because it implied a rejection of both communism and Polonization.

At the same time, official policies sanctioning \textit{legal} emigration complicated and contradicted the communist party’s interpretation of Zionism. On July 21, 1945, Edward Osóbka-Morawski, the prime minister of the communist-dominated government, proclaimed the opening of doors to those Jews eager to leave the country.\textsuperscript{166} By September 1949, the government in Warsaw even extended to Jews an opportunity to

\textsuperscript{163} Berendt, \textit{Życie Żydowskie w Polsce w latach 1950-1956}, 89.
\textsuperscript{166} August Grabski, \textit{Żydowski Ruch Kombatantcki w Polsce w latach 1944-1949} (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo TRIO, 2002), 37.
choose between Polish or Israeli citizenship. But leaving Poland legally or declaring Israeli citizenship was no simple act. On the one hand, legal emigration was often mired in bureaucratic red tape and high cost making it difficult to leave the country without breaking any laws. On the other hand, leaving for Palestine, a remote and what appeared to be an unstable place while forfeiting Polish citizenship was not a decision that many took lightly. Between 1944 and 1947, approximately ten percent of Polish Jews left Poland legally. A far greater number, 140,000 Jews, left the country through clandestine border crossings in the southern provinces including Lower Silesia.

Most Jewish survivors in postwar Poland identified with modern secular culture: they tended to speak Polish and dressed in the manner of cosmopolitan and educated Poles. Orthodox Jewry, the largest Jewish community of prewar Poland, comprised the largest group of Holocaust victims. At the same time, the violent erasure of Orthodox and Hasidic constituencies from the Jewish political landscape during World War II did not necessarily mean the outright suppression of religious politics. On February 6, 1945, the communist-run Ministry of Public Administration (Ministerstwo Administracji Publicznej – MAP) legalized Jewish religious congregations (Żydowskie kongregacje wyznaniowe) under the leadership of Dawid Kahane. Kahane’s party, the Mizrachi, was also the only legal Jewish religious political party in postwar Poland. The Mizrachi were successful at depicting themselves as modern and progressive religious Zionists. Indeed, the party was quite moderate on social policy and religious practice. This was in stark contrast to the more conservative and traditional Agudah. The communists condemned the Agudah (known officially as Agudat Israel), renowned for its cooperation with the interwar Polish

167 Grabski, Żydowski Ruch Kombatanki w Polsce w latach 1944-1949, 39.
168 Grabski, Żydowski Ruch Kombatanki w Polsce w latach 1944-1949, 38.
dictator, Marshal Józef Piłsudski, and its opposition to Zionism, socialism, and communism. The Agudah’s activities were henceforth considered illegitimate and illegal.

The most influential Jewish parties, however, were the secular Zionist factions, in particular those left of center. The Zionist movement in Poland re-entered postwar Polish politics as a powerful arbiter of Jewish interests, in particular as a promoter of a Jewish national home in Palestine. As such, Zionists presented the most compelling threat to communist ambitions of cultivating Jews as agents for the Polonization of former German lands. Members of Poalej-Syjon (both left and right factions), Haszomer Hacair, Hitachduth and Ichud fostered the idea of national reconstruction, in the imminent arrival of a Jewish yishuv (community) in Eretz Israel, which became the ideological objective of all Zionists in postwar Poland. The Jewish yishuv in Lower Silesia – the destination of repatriates from the Soviet Union – was only instrumental as a prelude to settlement in Palestine. In the eyes of Zionists, the yishuv in Poland would be a mobile community, movable from the edge of construction in Lower Silesia to the edge of reconstruction in Israel.

The idea of mass emigration to Palestine faced strong communist opposition – in particular, opposition from Jewish communists – and threatened to fatally divide postwar Jewish communities. Communists and members of the Jewish socialist party, the Bund,

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170 Mendelsohn, On Modern Jewish Politics, 26, 72.
172 Szaynok, Ludność żydowska na Dolnym Śląsku, 9.
advocated the emergence of a Jewish yishuv in Poland rather than Palestine. They expected this community to be loyal to Warsaw, immersed in Polish culture, yet at the same time, free to enjoy cultural autonomy. This in itself, however, was contradictory. On the one hand, communists and socialists (and especially the Bund) hoped to retain Jews in Poland – in some sense Polonizing them. On the other hand, the recognition of the Jews as a nation with specific needs for cultural autonomy entailed a certain accommodation of Jewish nationalism. To the dismay of the Bund and the communists, moreover, accommodating Jewish nationalism inevitably meant widening the postwar “Jewish street” to include Zionists. Thus, from the very beginning, the official project of transforming Jews into loyal communists and exemplary proletarians was inconsistent: it fostered Jewish identity as a separate group while simultaneously reinforcing the appeal of Zionism and its call for a Jewish national home outside of Europe.

But if there was a lack of genuine unity between communist and Zionist leaders, they did unite behind the establishment of a Jewish organization under the auspices of the communist state, that would be responsible for catering to the needs of all Polish Jews. Formed in November 1944, the Central Committee of Polish Jews (CKŻP) comprised left-wing Zionist, socialist, and communist factions that operated collectively as an umbrella organization and representative of the Jewish yishuv on Polish territory.\(^\text{173}\) The limited pluralism of the CKŻP – its inclusion of communists and their opponents – was supposed to reflect the new regime’s sincerity toward Jews. In reality, however, the communists filled a supervisory niche, keeping an eye on Zionists who might try to turn the committee into a vehicle for debating Jewish reconstruction in Palestine.

Official mistrust resulted in contradictory stands: on the one hand, communists endorsed Jewish anti-imperialist struggles targeting British mandatory power in Palestine. On the other, communists denounced Zionist attempts to mobilize Polish Jews behind the highly contentious cause of emigration.\textsuperscript{174} Communist wavering between praising anti-imperialist Jews in Palestine and deploping the pro-emigration sensibilities of Zionists in Poland served a transparent political purpose. As argued by Michael C. Steinlauf: “Certainly, until the late 1940s, the goodwill of the West and of western Jews was important both to the Soviet Union and the new Polish state, especially when such goodwill was accompanied by financial aid.”\textsuperscript{175} The limited democratization of Jewish institutions such as the CKŻP, accompanied by cautious support for the liberation of Palestine from “British occupation” thus signified a complex ritual of communist courtship of Polish and foreign Jews. It also was meant to demonstrate the benevolence of the new regime and its acceptance of cultural and political autonomy.

An important feature of the postwar Jewish community in Poland was its strong Jewish national consciousness. The belief in a distinct “Jewish nation,” separate from the gentile nations, captured the imaginations of many young Jews. To be sure, Zionism played an important albeit limited role in prewar Jewish politics in Poland. Indeed, it usually had to compete with more influential political currents such as the Agudah, the party of Orthodox Jews, or the Bund, the party of Jewish socialists. As a result of the Holocaust, however, the influence of the non-Zionist parties significantly declined in postwar Poland. World War II then had a nationalizing effect on the survivors. The vast

\textsuperscript{174} Okólnik o pracy i zadaniach PPR wśród ludności żydowskiej, October 1947, Archiwum Państwowe we Wrocławiu (APWr), Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza – Komitet Wojewódzki we Wrocławiu, Sygn. 48, kk. 106-107.

\textsuperscript{175} Michael C. Steinlauf, Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 48.
majority identified with distinctly Jewish political formations, especially those trumpeting Jewish national rights and aspirations. Zionism thus emerged from the wreckage of war stronger than at any other time prior to the Nazi invasion of Poland.

Moreover, the brand of Zionism that reemerged after the war was predominantly left leaning and secular. Zionist parties like the Poalej-Syjon-Left and Ichud did not consider religion a central part of Jewish identity. Most leftist Zionist factions saw the Jews as a nation rather than a religious group. But this did not necessarily mean that there was no place for religion in the postwar Jewish national imagination. In January 1949, Jewish community leaders registered 49,375 “Mosaic faithful” (wyznawców mozaizmu) in Poland. According to the Ministry of Public Administration, in 1949 there were 55 Jewish congregations, which laid claim to 105 synagogues and houses of prayer. For a society that was overwhelmingly young and indistinct from non-Jews, these were impressive numbers. The largest religious communities resided in “Old Poland,” in Łódź and Kraków. Lower Silesia, however, was also a significant site for Jewish worship, highlighting the prominence of religious activity among repatriates in places like Wrocław, Dzierżoniów, and Legnica. But religious activity did not necessarily connote a strong personal commitment to the spiritual traditions of prewar Orthodox Judaism. It was not uncommon for Holocaust survivors to view religious practice as an affirmation of one’s Jewishness, a confirmation of Jewish national identity.

Indeed, for many survivors, reconnecting with religious rituals offered an opportunity to recapture what the war almost entirely swept away: a feeling of connectedness with other Jews, a revival, at least in part, of a community that could never be the same. Religion thus became a marker of cultural belonging, and, increasingly, the

176 Berendt, Życie Żydowskie w Polsce w latach 1950-1956, 125.
key to membership in the postwar Jewish national community. This, in a sense, was a departure from the prewar period. Most religiously observant Jews in the interwar era would most likely reject Zionism: they saw little use for it in their Polish homelands. In the postwar period, however, religious practice was no longer seen as irreconcilable with Jewish national aspirations.

An important factor that deserves clarification, however, is the communist response to the postwar Zionist resurgence. Polish and Jewish communists viewed Zionism and Jewish emigration from Poland through two different lenses. While Jewish communists were unreservedly committed to integrating Jews with the rest of Polish society, Polish communists did not always see eye to eye with their colleagues in the PPR-Fraction. The Polish PPR elite, leaders like Władysław Wolski and Władysław Gomułka, interpreted Zionist slogans of Bricha as conducive to the construction of an ethnically homogenous Poland. Wolski who was the first postwar Minister of Public Administration openly endorsed voluntary Jewish emigration to Israel. Indeed, Wolski periodically reassured Adolf Berman, the leader of Poalej-Syjon-Left, about the Polish communists’ cooperation in facilitating unobstructed transfers of Jews to Israel.\footnote{Berendt, Życie Żydowskie w Polsce w latach 1950-1956, 59.}

Ironically, Wolski’s relations with Jakub Berman were not as cordial. Unlike his brother Adolf, Jakub was a communist, not a Zionist. He was also one of the main architects of the Ministry of Public Security (Ministerstwo Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego – MBP). Wolski was an ardent critic of Berman seeing no place for Jews in high-ranking positions within the party. To be sure, Wolski’s anti-Jewish tirades were almost exclusively leveled at assimilated, “Polish-identified,” Jews. But that did not stop other
prominent Polish communists like Bolesław Bierut from chastising Wolski as a dangerous provocateur.\textsuperscript{178}

Nevertheless, Wolski’s anti-Jewish attitudes were not as marginal as Bierut may have thought. Polish communists, unlike their Jewish colleagues, had a tendency to view Jews through a complicated prism. Indeed, they expected Jews to know “their place” in Polish society. On the one hand, those not yet culturally integrated and interested in leaving Poland were \textit{not} seen as threats. On the other hand, those indistinguishable from Poles and fully committed to Polish politics and culture were often seen as suspicious. While some Jews like Jakub Berman were branded as potential threats because of their power and high level of assimilation, others like Adolf Berman, who were hastening the end of the Jewish community in Poland, were welcomed and embraced. Thus, in the end, communists like Wolski did not always see Zionism as detrimental to Polish nation building.\textsuperscript{179}

Władysław Gomułka went even further in his analysis of the Jewish question in postwar Poland. Gomułka along with his wife, Zofia Gomulkowa, who came from a Jewish family, imagined the party hierarchy as a space reserved exclusively for ethnic Poles. Gomułka often lamented about the high proportion of assimilated communist Jews in high-ranking positions in the Ministry of Public Security. He perceived the Jews in critical state posts as a potential liability, reinforcing popular images of the communists as foreigners and “Judeo-Bolsheviks.” At one point, Gomułka even suggested instituting

\textsuperscript{178} Berendt, \textit{Życie Żydowskie w Polsce w latach 1950-1956}, 68.
\textsuperscript{179} For more on the Berman brothers, see: Marci Shore, “Children of the Revolution: Communism, Zionism, and the Berman Brothers,” in \textit{Jewish Social Studies} 10.3 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 23-86.
a *numerus clausus* that would prevent Jews from advancing too high on the party totem pole.180

Unlike their ethnic Polish colleagues, Jewish communists urged Holocaust survivors, both systematically and consistently, to reject Zionism and the temptation to emigrate. Jewish communists like Szymon Zachariasz, the leader of the PPR-Fraction, saw Zionism as a greater threat to a postwar Jewish revival in Poland than Polish antisemitism. Zachariasz pressured Polish communists to end their toleration of Zionists and to accelerate the Polonization of the remaining community of survivors. According to Polish historian August Grabski, Jewish communists were especially “satisfied” with the nationwide liquidation of Zionist parties in 1949-1950.181 They were particularly eager to transform Poland’s Jews, both socially and politically into loyal citizens and workers. Zachariasz and his counterpart in the CKŻP, Hersz Smolar, highlighted their loyalty to internationalism and the principles of Marxism-Leninism. At the same time, they condemned “Jewish nationalism” as reactionary, incompatible with communism, and at the service of imperialist powers.182 Their unwavering opposition to Zionism stood in stark contrast to the actions and public pronouncements of Polish communists like Wolski who venerated Zionists for contributing to the reduction of the Jewish community. Clearly, there was a serious disconnect between communist Jews like Smolar and Zachariasz and communist Poles like Wolski and Gomułka. While occupational restructuring and the cultural assimilation of Polish Jews energized the former, ethnic homogeneity and the advancement of Poles was a goal for the latter. How then would Jewish integration into postwar Polish society affect the reconstruction of Poland?

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Workers and Pioneers: The Jewish Community in Lower Silesia

From the perspective of many Jewish survivors, Lower Silesia appeared to be an ideal place for the rebirth of a postwar Jewish community. According to Padraic Kenney, “Jews were among the first arrivals in the area. Purged of the Germans, this territory reminded them of neither Germany nor Poland.” A transitory “land-in-between,” the territory offered a refuge from the persistent antisemitic sentiments of central Poland. The Jews who eventually made Lower Silesia their home consisted of two main population clusters: a small group of liberated prisoners from local concentration camps and a far larger group of Jewish repatriates from the Soviet Union. Both of these communities were comprised primarily of Jews who prior to the war inhabited the eastern borderlands (kresy) of Poland, the territory that was now incorporated into the Soviet Union.

When the Soviet and Polish armies entered Lower Silesia they encountered Jewish survivors of forced labor originally taken captive from Poland. There were 7,000 Jews scattered across the region, former inmates of the Gross Rosen concentration-camp network. These former prisoners supplied the critical raw material for the ethnic transformation of an uncharted land and the indigenization of Polish-Jewish culture. While many Zionists perceived these Jews as future reinforcements for the settlement of

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184 Protokół nr. 36 z posiedzenia Prezydium WKŻP we Wrocławiu, 23 April 1947, AŻIH, CKŻP Wydział Organizacji i Kontroli, Sygn. 303/II/124, kk. 62-63.
185 After the Nazi-Soviet pact of 1939, 1.2 million Polish Jews found themselves under the Soviet occupation. Ironically, Soviet occupation, however brutal, spared many Polish Jews the horrors of Nazi death camps. Many of these Jews returned to Poland after the war and settled in Lower Silesia. See Jan T. Gross, Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland’s Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 8-9; and Saul Friedländer, Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939-1945: The Years of Extermination, 43.
187 Szynok, Ludność żydowska na Dolnym Śląsku, 19.
Palestine, Polish communists portrayed them as “pioneers of Polishness.” As such, former camp-inmates served an important ideological function in two projects of the postwar period: Polonization of former German territories and the Zionist organization of Bricha. Thus, Lower Silesia became the contested space for both Polish communist and Zionist leaders.

The history of the Jewish yishuv in Lower Silesia can be divided into two stages. The period from June 1945 through July 1946 marked a steady rise in the numbers of Jewish repatriates from exile in the Soviet Union. This first phase is characterized by the emergence of Jewish committees, the most important one in Rychbach (later renamed Dzierżoniów), which supervised the welfare, educational, employment, housing, and medical needs of the new settlers. The turning point between the first and the second period was the Kielce pogrom of July 4, 1946. Although the pogrom occurred 450 kilometers from Wrocław, it unleashed a moral panic that radically transformed Lower Silesia from a center of postwar Jewish life in Poland to a springboard for a mass exodus to Palestine.

Prior to Kielce, however, the role of Lower Silesia in forging a Jewish autonomous space on the outskirts of the Polish-German frontier was central. During this first period, the size of the yishuv peaked between approximately 90,000 and 100,000 inhabitants or over forty percent of Poland’s postwar Jewish population. Most Jews who arrived in Lower Silesia during the great repatriation actions of 1946 settled in small and large cities such as Wrocław, Rychbach, Wałbrzych, and Legnica. For most of this

188 Aktualna sytuacja rolnictwa żydowskiego na Dolnym Śląsku, 9 August 1947, AŻIH, CKŻP Wydział Produktywizacji, Sygn. 303/XII/175, k. 17.
population the immediate postwar years were a time of great uncertainty and turmoil. Between February and April 1946, Soviet transports bearing 45,000 Jewish repatriates rolled into Polish train stations from the Caucasus, Ukraine, Russia, Kazakhstan, and Siberia. According to CKŻP statistics, sixty percent of this ragged and sorely tested humanity were young women and men capable of productive labor. The great majority of Lower Silesian Polish Jewry was between the ages of 20 and 45. The greatest proportion of these survivors (25,000) disembarked in small towns and cities throughout Lower Silesia. Within three months this number nearly quadrupled making Lower Silesia the prime destination for Jewish repatriates.

Jewish settlers participated in the Polonization of German agriculture and industry. They entered agricultural occupations rarely available to Jews in interwar Poland, taking over large German farms and cultivating the soil. Polish communists considered taking on traditionally peasant work as a sign of Polonization. A postulate of the first congress of Jewish agricultural workers in Lower Silesia insisted that one of the most pressing national needs in postwar Poland is the sowing of land in “the newly recovered territories.” Cultivation of the soil was thus synonymous with cultivation of Polishness. As such, Jewish involvement as farmers and agricultural workers in former German territories reinforced Polish nation building.

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190 Sprawozdanie z Wydziału Repatriacji przy CKŻP, April 1946, AŻIH, CKŻP Wydział Repatriacji, Sygn. 303/VI/6, k. 76.
191 Szajnok, Ludność żydowska na Dolnym Śląsku, 27.
192 Sprawozdanie z Wydziału Repatriacji przy CKŻP, April 1946, AŻIH, CKŻP Wydział Repatriacji, Sygn. 303/VI/6, k. 76; Bożena Szajnok, Ludność żydowska na Dolnym Śląsku, 51.
193 Aktualna sytuacja rolnictwa żydowskiego na Dolnym Śląsku, 9 August 1947, AŻIH, CKŻP Wydział Produktywizacji, Sygn. 303/XII/175, k. 20.
194 Uchwały przyjęte na I-szym Zjeździe Rolników Żydów na Dolnym Śląsku, 30 September 1945, AŻIH, CKŻP Wydział Produktywizacji, Sygn. 303/XII/168, kk. 130-131.
At the same time, Polish Jews in Lower Silesia were even more important in the project of Jewish nation building outside of Poland. Younger Jews welcomed Zionist slogans calling for mass emigration (aliyah) to Palestine. Much of this youth spent the war years in Soviet exile or in the wooded partisan-lands of Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine – experiences that often enhanced their allegiance to Jewish nationalism. This was in stark contrast to older Jews, a minority within the yishuv, who sought to sink deep roots in Lower Silesia as a way to reaffirm their sense of stability after years of nomadic existence.\textsuperscript{195}

The generational divide among survivors of the Soviet and Nazi occupations had profound implications on the outline of postwar Jewish politics in Poland. Most Jews who arrived from the Soviet interior were uninterested in the reconstruction of traditional Jewish shtetl culture. Unlike the Jewish community destroyed by the Nazis and their collaborators during the war, the yishuv that gradually emerged in Lower Silesia increasingly sympathized with Zionism.\textsuperscript{196} Different groups of Zionists on the western frontier helped foment a powerful cultural revolution from below by founding Jewish schools with Hebrew as the main language of instruction; business associations catering to Jewish and Polish clienteles; and kibbutz settlements – farming cooperatives for Jewish pioneers awaiting transfer to Palestine. Zionists cooperated with communists, primarily through local committees, in the allocation of financial resources for Jewish repatriates; the opening of Jewish theaters; the construction of monuments commemorating the 1943

\begin{footnotes}
\item \textsuperscript{195} Szaynok, \textit{Ludność żydowska na Dolnym Śląsku}, 61.
\item \textsuperscript{196} Szaynok, \textit{Ludność żydowska na Dolnym Śląsku}, 65.
\end{footnotes}
Ghetto Uprising in Warsaw; and the staging of protests against British “imperial” abuses in Palestine.197

Jews from all walks of life took to the streets of Lower Silesian towns demonstrating against light sentencing of Nazis in the Nuremberg trials. Protests were noted even in smaller communities such as Duszniki Zdrój, Ludwikowo, and Nowa Ruda where over 130 people voiced their anger at the western powers.198 The relative freedom of Jews to organize, protest, and engage in cultural activities in Lower Silesia indicated that in contrast to interwar Poland, the new “people’s democracy” may have viewed Jews as equal to Poles.

For communists and Zionists alike the Jews who arrived on Soviet trains comprised raw material for an experienced working-class society. “We know that Polish Jews,” a communist directive opined, “having resided six long years in Soviet Russia, were employed in all branches of industry – they worked in colossal Soviet industries: in metallurgy, in mining, and in automotive enterprises.”199 These skills were indispensable to Polish and Zionist leaders on the frontier. Lack of skilled Polish labor meant that the new regime had to unwillingly rely on the expertise and professionalism of German specialists. The use of German labor, however, threatened to debilitate the communist plan of ethnic and cultural homogenization. But the cooption of Jews, hardened and “specialized” by the experience of Soviet exile, suggested a remedy to this problem. Thus throughout 1946, Jewish repatriates from Bashkiria, Chelyabinsk, Krasnodar, Leninabad,

198 Komunikat Wydziału Kultury i Propagandy przy WKŻ we Wrocławiu, 8 October 1946, AŻIH, CKŻP Wydział Kultury i Propagandy, Sygn. 303/XIII/246 (2), lack of page number.
199 Społeczeństwo żydowskie w Polsce czeka obecnie wielkie zadanie, 1946, AŻIH, CKŻP Wydział Repatriacji, Sygn. 303/VII/5, k. 1.
and Magnitogorsk, were funneled into the industrial triangle of Lower Silesia – the Rychbach, Walbrzych, and Kłodzko regions – where their expertise was most urgently needed. The Zionists, of course, were not to be outdone by the communists. For very similar reasons, Zionist activists monitored disembarkation points throughout Lower Silesia, searching for qualified and able-bodied Jews, enticing them with promises of a better life in Eretz Israel. Soviet exile ironically enhanced the social status of Jews in the Western Territories. Communists and Zionists competed for a trained Jewish workforce, which they clearly saw in those new settlers.

Anti-Jewish attitudes and the legacy of wartime demoralization often complicated the nature of Jewish employment on the turbulent frontier. Polish Jews in Lower Silesia tended to decline working-class occupations in favor of cooperative movements (spółdzielczość). Postwar Polish Jewry was an insulated community, psychologically traumatized by the war. The desire to cling together was very strong. In contrast, the communist drive to immerse Jews within a Polish working-class culture was often perceived as an attempt to weaken the community. The establishment of Jewish cooperatives was an effective means to counteract this pressure. These cooperatives supplied a kind of “social glue” that promised to hold Jews together.

In February 1946, the CKŻP in Warsaw helped found a Central Jewish Cooperative “Solidarność.” The idea behind “Solidarność” was to kindle Jewish entrepreneurship, fostering employment opportunities within a safe Jewish

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200 Możliwości zatrudnienia Żydów w przemyśle Dolnego Śląska, year unknown, AŻIH, CKŻP Wydział Produktywizacji, Sygn. 303/XII/168, k. 117; Sprawozdanie Wydziału Repatriacji WKŻ za okres od 25.1V. do 1.VI.1946 r., June 1946, AŻIH, CKŻP Wydział Repatriacji, Sygn. 303/VI/63, k. 4.

environment.\textsuperscript{202} Thanks in part to the material support of the state as well as outside charity organizations (most notably the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee), by September 1947 Lower Silesia was the setting of one hundred Jewish cooperatives engaging in metal, garment, leather, and food industries, and employing 2,855 people.\textsuperscript{203} That same month, the Jewish cooperatives “Zgoda,” “Warszawianka,” and “Solidarność,” among others, celebrated a cooperative holiday in the center of Wrocław. The festivities served the purpose of self-promotion, but also included artistic events with special guests and public lectures.\textsuperscript{204} Jewish cooperatives in Wałbrzych, Bielawa, and Rychbach engaged in similar public activities, rising to the center of Jewish commercial life throughout most of urban Lower Silesia.

Jewish cooperatives and businesses thus helped stimulate the Polish economy and breathe new consumer life into decimated cities like Wrocław and Legnica. As such, Jewish enterprises, serving under the auspices of the Polish state, were a critical factor in the Polonization of the region. The communist-dominated government acknowledged this by granting concessions in the form of subsidies to the WKŻ (provincial Jewish committees) and the CKŻP but also by promoting Jewish culture in Lower Silesia: theater, schools, cooperatives, and youth groups.

But the usefulness of Jews as indispensable allies in the Polonization of German lands began to dwindle following the Kielce pogrom of July 1946. The developments in Kielce significantly bolstered the position of Zionists in Jewish society. According to WKŻ reports, Jewish petitions for legal emigration from Poland rose by 120 percent just

\textsuperscript{202} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{204} Komunikat Wydziału Kultury i Propagandy, 10 October 1947, AŻIH, CKŻP Wydział Kultury i Propagandy, Sygn. 303/XIII/246, k. 40.
a month after the pogrom. Palestine was not the only destination of Jewish emigrants in the post-Kielce period implying that Zionist messages were selectively filtered by different groups of Jews. Other popular destinations, noted in November 1946, included the two American continents, Australia, Great Britain, and Finland. That Jews were leaving Poland in ever-larger numbers placed communists in a very awkward political situation. Communist conflation of Polish anti-Jewish violence with the so-called anti-communist forces of reaction politicized the pogrom, distracting public opinion from its real causes. In addition, blaming the anti-communist opposition made party leaders in Warsaw look reluctant to confront the problem of Polish antisemitism. This reluctance, in turn, discredited the regime in the eyes of those wavering between reconstruction in Israel and reconstruction in Poland.

The New Proletariat: Productivization and Occupational Restructuring

Still, until 1948 Jewish communists worked hard to integrate the Jewish community into the project of building communism. The prime architect of the Jewish yishuv in Lower Silesia was Jakub Egit, a Jewish communist who spent the war years in Soviet exile. Egit, an assimilated Polish Jew, believed that work and integration were central to Jewish rebirth in postwar Poland. At a time when Zionists dreamt of a Jewish

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205 Sprawozdanie Wydziału Emigracyjnego przy WKŻ we Wrocławiu za miesiąc lipiec 1946 r., August 1946, AZIH, CKZP Wydział Emigracyjny, Sygn. 303/XIV/8, k. 96.
206 Sprawozdanie z działalności Wydziału Emigracyjnego przy WKŻ we Wrocławiu za miesiąc listopad 1946 r., December 1946, AZIH, CKZP Wydział Emigracyjny, Sygn. 303/XIV/8, k. 92.
207 Szaynok, Z Historią i Moskwą w tle, 60.
208 Szaynok, Ludność żydowska na Dolnym Śląsku, 30.
nation in Palestine, communists like Egit imagined a Jewish living space on former German territory. In his memoir, *Grand Illusion*, Egit declared that

[he] was haunted by the thought that here, in this land which the Germans had cultivated for so many years, the Jews could exact their retribution and justice and could repudiate Hitler’s ‘final solution’ by making this former German territory a Jewish settlement.\(^\text{209}\)

When prominent Jewish communists like Egit spoke of “productivization,” they essentially had two things in mind. First, they hoped to crystallize a working relationship between communists and the Jewish community; second, they were determined to chip-away at the appeal of Zionism by advancing a preferable alternative in Polish communism. This strategy to productive Poland’s Jews was also accompanied by promises of cultural autonomy and social equality. The insistence that productivization rather than emigration is the solution to the Jewish question offers a unique insight into how class ideology shaped the process of Polonization.

Jewish communists in Lower Silesia encouraged Holocaust survivors to shed their distinct “Jewishness.” This “Jewishness” was allegedly embodied in bourgeois “habits” such as trade and commerce. Both Polish and Jewish communists saw proletarianization and secularization as central to the transformation of the Jews into a distinctly and culturally Polish working-class society. Egit and the PPR-Fraction stressed the necessity to train Jewish specialists in heavy industry, mining, and textiles.\(^\text{210}\) In this way, Jews were to become genuine proletarians.

The case of Świdnica, a city in southeastern Lower Silesia, demonstrates how the process of productivization worked “on the ground.” The Jewish *yishuv* in Świdnica


\(^{210}\) Problem produktywizacji Żydów, October 1946, AŽIH, CKŽP Wydzial Produktywizacji, Sygn. 303/XII/154, k. 14.
crystallized on April 13, 1946 when a train bearing approximately 1,000 Polish Jews arrived in nearby Kraszewice from the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{211} The work of organizing Jewish life in Świdnica was often conducted on train cars by groups of Jewish committee members, mostly communists, who promoted different occupations to different sets of repatriates. These efforts then continued on the disembarkation point in Kraszewice, which served as a recruiting spot for the establishment of a Jewish workforce in Świdnica. The local productivization director, Mosze Strenger, assisted the registration process in Kraszewice segregating Jews according to skill and profession.\textsuperscript{212} A registration-survey of the incoming population was supposed to propel the ideological task of “restructuring” Jews into the proletariat. Luba Szmulowicz, the head of the local Jewish committee, explained that assigning occupations to repatriates was no simple matter: “In spite of the difficulties, however, today we can admit with great satisfaction that there isn’t a factory in the area that does not employ Jewish workers – many of whom regularly exceed labor quotas.”\textsuperscript{213}

But not all Polish employers were eager to collaborate in the recruitment of Jews in Lower Silesia’s workforce. An individual by the last name of Prukieit, a Jewish communist from Wałbrzych, complained about discriminatory practices affecting the employment of Jews in local industries. In particular, he noted “a lack of good will” among Polish management, dead set against including Jews on the shop floor.\textsuperscript{214}

\textsuperscript{211} Rok Osiedla Żydowskiego w Świdnicy, 1946, AŻIH, CKŻP Wydział Organizacji i Kontroli, Sygn, 303/II/113, k. 3.
\textsuperscript{212} Rok Osiedla Żydowskiego w Świdnicy, 1946, AŻIH, CKŻP Wydział Organizacji i Kontroli, Sygn, 303/II/113, kk. 3, 7.
\textsuperscript{213} Rok Osiedla Żydowskiego w Świdnicy, 1946, AŻIH, CKŻP Wydział Organizacji i Kontroli, Sygn, 303/II/113, kk. 2-3.
\textsuperscript{214} Koło PPR przy Komitecie Żydowskim w Wałbrzychu do Koła PPR przy Wojewódzkim Komitecie Żydowskim we Wrocławiu, 6 May 1946, APWr, Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza – Komitet Wojewódzki we Wrocławiu, Sygn. 48, k. 127.
According to Prukieit’s grievance, during regular “round-ups” of unemployed workers in Wałbrzych, employers regularly skirted Jews in favor of their Polish counterparts. This conduct of Polish managers, Prukieit warned, worked to the detriment of Polish-Jewish relations. The exclusion of Jews from Wałbrzych industries heightened Jewish suspicions of Poles, breaking ties between the two communities, and reviving the charge of Polish antisemitism. More alarmingly, however, the unwillingness of Poles to work side by side with Jews played into the hands of Zionists – the major opponents of productivization in Poland. The communist quest to transform Polish Jews into a loyal and dynamic proletariat was thus predicated upon the eagerness and compliance of ordinary Poles – workers, managers, and bureaucrats – to participate in this process.

While relations between Poles and Jews were tense, especially in the industrial workforce, other spheres of everyday life testify to a different picture. Beneath the radar of the law, Poles and Jews occasionally demonstrated that similar circumstances – poverty, shortage, unemployment – warranted joint covert action. For example, in August 1945 the State Security Services (Urzęd Bezpieczeństwa – UB) arrested a “person of Mosaic faith” and his Polish assistant attempting to transport illegally seized merchandise from Klodzko. The two men were accused of looting (szaber) and subsequently detained.

Another area of common interest involved clandestine activity at the Polish-Czechoslovak border. According to UB reports, Poles and Jews often cooperated in

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215 Koło PPR przy Komitecie Żydowskim w Wałbrzychu do Koła PPR przy Wojewódzkim Komitecie Żydowskim we Wrocławiu, 6 May 1946, APWr, Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza – Komitet Wojewódzki we Wrocławiu, Sygn. 48, k. 127.

216 Sprawozdanie dekadowe PUBP za czas od dnia 21.VIII.1945 r. do dnia 31.VIII.1945 r., 31 August 1945, Instytut Pamięci Narodowej we Wrocławiu (IPN-Wr), WUBP we Wrocławiu, Sygn. IPN WR 053/384, kk. 21-33.
organizing and ultimately conducting illegal border crossings. Those individuals interested in a supervised passage beyond Polish borders paid the equivalent of fifty dollars for a special escort who then arranged an illegal transport in Kłodzko. The Jewish committee in Dzierżoniów estimated that 1,092 people – Jews and Poles – risked such a journey.217 At their best then, the quest to improve one’s quality of life – whether through thievery in Poland or illicit border crossings outside Poland – fostered a sense of comradeship among some Poles and Jews. Clandestine Polish-Jewish alliances, however, were not what the communists had in mind when they articulated their goals for productivizing Jews.

Jewish communists envisaged productivization as a powerful weapon in the struggle against postwar Polish antisemitism. But ironically, tensions between Poles and Jews were most pronounced at the very site of production – the workplace. For example, Polish workers in Wałbrzych and Kłodzko perceived Jews as competitors for scarce jobs in factories and commerce. In larger cities such as Legnica and Wrocław, Poles resented what they believed was the Jewish domination of trade and small businesses.218 Nevertheless, Egit and his Fraction encouraged Polish Jews: “[Jewish workers] have to manifest along with the rest of the working class loyalty to People’s Poland as well as loyalty to the communist party…”219 From the point of view of Jewish communists, the successful assimilation of Jews into the new Polish proletariat would help overcome ethnic hostilities and contribute to creating a harmonious society.

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218 Szaynok, Ludność żydowska na Dolnym Śląsku, 82.
219 Sprawozdanie z działalności WKŻ we Wrocławiu, May 1949, AŽIH, CKŻP Wydział Organizacji i Kontroli, Sygn. 303/II/134, kk. 27-33.
Postwar Antisemitism and the End of the Jewish community

The campaign to recruit Holocaust survivors into the workforce was stymied from the very beginning by the persistent presence of antisemitism. Although designed to mollify and eradicate antisemitic attitudes among Poles on the shop floor, the policy of productivization exacerbated tensions and Polish resentments of potential Jewish competitors. This development needs to be seen in the larger context of postwar Polish antisemitism. Modern Polish antisemitism cannot be reduced to rivalries over work or access to limited economic resources in the aftermath of a cataclysmic war. Rather, antisemitism developed in the late nineteenth century and combined religious and secular traditions in complex ways. Racial antisemitism was not as prominent in Poland as it was in Germany. In an overwhelmingly peasant and Roman Catholic society, explicitly racist ideas were limited to the leaders of the Right, especially proponents of Roman Dmowski’s National Democracy (Endecja). According to Brian Porter-Szücs, the belief that Jews were out to undermine Christianity captivated Polish Catholics even more than racist ideas endorsed by the Endecja. It does not mean, however, that the two messages could not be combined in skillful ways by political leaders seeking support from the masses. Traditionally, most Polish peasants did not understand and, consequently, were reluctant to embrace explicitly “racialist anti-Semitism,” but they nevertheless harbored and acted upon beliefs that were common to modern and pre-modern hatreds of Jews.²²⁰

Undoubtedly, World War II and the Nazi occupation of Poland made racial antisemitism more accessible to the masses. Nazi official propaganda marking Jews as racially inferior and subhuman exposed Poles to a ceaseless torrent of racial and ethnic

hatred. At the same time, however, the religious conception of the Jew as inimical to Christianity (often emanating from the local church pulpit) continued to shape Polish perceptions of Jews. In the words of Porter-Szűcs: “The idea that the Jews were behind a massive plot to destroy Christian civilization was so deeply ingrained that most Poles could see the Jews as victims, but not as innocent victims.”221 Thus, while few Poles embraced the Nazi notion that the Jews were racially inferior, they nevertheless viewed the Holocaust in Poland with considerable “moral ambiguity.” “For most Polish Catholics, intervening in a fight between two dangerous foes [Nazi Germany and the Jews] made no sense.”222 Both the Jews and the Nazis rejected Christianity and both supposedly wished to undermine Poland. Polish involvement in the struggle between these “two foes” hence did not seem expedient or morally compelling.

A history of religiously and nationally informed antisemitism, however, cannot fully explain postwar anti-Jewish attitudes and violence. The specific experience of World War II played an important role. According to Jan T. Gross, postwar antisemitism in Poland was fueled by the question of Jewish property. He argues that economic considerations, in particular the link between social advancement and the takeover of Jewish property aggravated relations between Poles and Jews. The promise of upward mobility, enabled by the genocide of over three million Polish Jews, galvanized a social revolution with clear benefits for the Polish peasantry and the urban proletariat. Poles could now step into the cultural and social vacuum left by the Jews. The return of Jewish Holocaust survivors thus confronted ordinary Poles with an unusual dilemma: the return of Jews from concentration camps or places of hiding appeared to block the social

221 Porter-Szűcs, Faith and Fatherland, 316.
222 Ibid.
advancement of Poles. Jewish demands for restitution thus amplified already sharp antisemitic resentments. Consequently, the notion of Jews as anti-Christian “conspirators” combined with the alleged threat of survivor-restitution made postwar Poland a fertile ground for antisemitic attitudes.

Yet, the desire for property was only one expression of the wartime experience. Polish historian Marcin Zaremba traces anti-Jewish violence in postwar Poland to the “psycho-social” impact of World War II. He argues that wartime Nazi and Soviet occupations deprived Poland of its most educated and culturally productive elements who would have been crucial in maintaining social order and the traditional coexistence of diverse ethnic groups. The Polish intelligentsia barely survived the war. According to Zaremba, sixty to seventy thousand postwar Poles possessed higher education. Peasants comprised the vast majority of postwar Polish society. (Poland counted 24 million citizens at the close of World War II). Zaremba suggests that postwar demoralization (a legacy of the war) combined with the absence of socially prominent Poles created the right preconditions for chaos and violence. This dearth of respectable elites purportedly facilitated the breakdown of societal relations and traditional values in small and larger communities throughout Poland. Postwar public order was thus affected by the disintegration of the traditional social hierarchies. Anti-Jewish violence hence transpired in the context of a profound social crisis.

The tradition of prewar religion-dominated antisemitism and the wartime breakdown in social relations were verifiable major factors in fueling anti-Jewish actions.

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223 Gross, Fear, 46.
in the Western Territories. The desire for Jewish property (the central claim in Gross’s work) could not be a catalyst of conflict in former German lands because social advancement there was tied to the dispossession of Ostelbien Germans rather than Jews. But, even without conflicts over property rights, Zaremba argues that the material deprivation of Poles in the Western Territories escalated social and ethnic tensions. These tensions were especially visible in the workplace. Competition for scarce resources – apartments, employment, living space, and everyday provisions – fostered a climate of mistrust and hostility among new settlers in general. Tensions between Poles and Jews existed within an overarching framework of strained relations between Poles, Germans, Soviets, and autochthons. The social reality of the western frontier was thus different from the more explicitly anti-Jewish climate in postwar central Poland, but tense relations among the inhabitants there had direct influence on all the competing agendas.

Secular and religious hatreds followed Polish settlers to the former German territories. Anti-Jewish attacks in Lower Silesia ensued against a backdrop of frontier-violence generated by forced migrations, ethnic cleansing, and military activity. The distant Kielce pogrom of July 4, 1946 was also a watershed in Polish-Jewish relations with strong implications in Lower Silesia. When the communists spoke of emancipation through new occupations and working-class consciousness, many Jews could not help but imagine the Polish proletariat as a hotbed of antisemitism. The pogrom in Kielce corroborated these fears, fostering a feeling of collective insecurity.\footnote{Jan T. Gross, \emph{Upiorna Dekada: Eseje o stereotypach na temat Żydów, Polaków, Niemców, komunistów i kolaboracji, 1939-1948} (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Austeria, 2007), 77.}

At the heart of the pogrom was a fabricated rumor pitting the blame for the violation of a Christian child on local Jews. The myth of Jewish ritual murder galvanized
an emotional outburst that ultimately culminated in a Polish mob’s slaughter of 42 Jews.\textsuperscript{227} News of the pogrom in Kielce triggered further violent behavior as Poles at train stations throughout central Poland assaulted Jewish passengers. The impact of the pogrom reverberated everywhere facilitating a shift in Jewish perceptions of Poles, communism, and the yishuv in postwar Poland.

More significantly, the pogrom forced Jewish leaders – both communists and Zionists – to ponder some very pressing questions: could a Kielce-type pogrom happen in Wrocław, Dzierżoniów, or Wałbrzych? Could the Jews feel safe anywhere in Poland, even as far as the Polish-German frontier? Was Zionism, and its endorsement of Bricha, a safer alternative to communism and the instability of the frontier? No matter how Polish Jews rationalized these questions, the fact remains that following the Kielce pogrom the Jewish yishuv in Lower Silesia began to shrink rapidly.

Although the pogrom occurred in central Poland, it nevertheless expedited a reshuffling of the Jewish yishuv in Lower Silesia. The Kielce pogrom catalyzed migrations of Jews from villages and towns to large urban centers throughout all of Poland.\textsuperscript{228} More significantly, however, the pogrom added a moral boost to Zionist calls for Bricha and subsequent relocation to Palestine. By the end of 1946, approximately 70,000 Jews departed Poland.\textsuperscript{229} But the Kielce pogrom did not find its counterpart in Lower Silesia. In fact, the former German territories remained the safest place for Jews in

\textsuperscript{227} During the pogrom in Kielce, Poles murdered a total of 36 Jews on the spot. A few days later, as a result of death from injuries in the local hospital, the tally of victims reached 42 persons. See Bożena Szaynok, “The Role of Antisemitism in Postwar Polish-Jewish Relations,” in Antisemitism and its Opponents in Modern Poland, 272.
\textsuperscript{228} Szaynok, Ludność żydowska na Dolnym Śląsku, 93.
\textsuperscript{229} Szaynok, Ludność żydowska na Dolnym Śląsku, 99.
all of Poland. Anti-Jewish sentiments, then, were expressed in more subtle, less murderous, ways.

According to WKŻ reports, the state of public safety in Lower Silesia gradually deteriorated after the Kielce pogrom. On July 11, 1946 in the Świdnica region, the UB investigated a case of “antisemitic agitation” in a confectionery factory in Fryborg (contemporary Świebodzice). Polish workers in Fryborg disseminated rumors about a fantastical crime in which a group of Jews allegedly murdered 60 Polish children in Kraków. Quickly revealed as untrue, the rumor fueled calls for revenge by the factory workers in Fryborg. The intervention of local state security forces (UB) prevented matters from sliding out of hand. Still, the “pogrom atmosphere” in Fryborg was strikingly reminiscent of the prior week’s developments in Kielce. In both cases a rumor of Jewish ritual murder provoked widespread hysteria and the calls to action. As in Kielce, the “pogrom that might have been” in Fryborg demonstrates the explosive combination of rumor, myth, and religious prejudices in catalyzing anti-Jewish hostility.

The setting of a factory for a potential pogrom is particularly illuminating. According to communists, the factory-floor was critical to creating a communist society. The factory symbolized a site of emancipation for any traditionally marginalized group and a laboratory for social change. Indeed, communists saw in the factory a facilitator of a Polish-Jewish working-class alliance. Time and time again, WKŻ leaders argued that

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231 Sprawozdanie delegacji służbowej do Świdnicy, July 1946, AZIH, CKŻP Wydział Organizacji i Kontroli, Sygn. 303/II/135, kk. 24-35.
equal rights and social emancipation could only be achieved on the shop floor.\textsuperscript{233} They envisaged the shop floor as a place to suppress antisemitism. This idealized workplace was a world apart from reality. Factories often functioned as outlets for violence and the nurturing of social tensions.

Many Polish workers tended to perceive Jews as uninvited guests and undeserving beneficiaries of the new system.\textsuperscript{234} This general suspicion of Jews thrived in a context of postwar demoralization that, as argued by Jan T. Gross and Marcin Zaremba, was a legacy of the Nazi occupation: “that Jews were being murdered did not seem to shock many people in Poland in 1946. It was accepted matter-of-factly by individuals from all walks of life.”\textsuperscript{235} More puzzling, however, given the importance placed upon integrating Jews and Poles by the communist leadership, was the lack of a strong reaction to anti-Jewish violence from Warsaw. Government remained largely passive in spite of the evidence of a widespread and popular perception in Polish society that Jews were dispensable. Steadfastly communists interpreted antisemitism in ideological terms: they linked antisemitic violence to the anti-communist political opposition, members of the underground, the Agrarian Party (\textit{Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe} – PSL), etc. Indeed, communists conflated anti-Jewish violence with clandestine activity targeting the state. In countless official reports, the expression “anti-Jewish” is rarely divorced from the expression “anti-state.”\textsuperscript{236} The unwillingness of communist leaders to confront the complexity of popular antisemitism ultimately undermined the construction of a Jewish

\begin{footnotes}
\item[235] Gross, \textit{Fear}, 111.
\item[236] Sprawozdanie z działalności WKŻP na Dolny Śląsk we Wrocławiu, October 1946, AŻIH, CKŻP Wydział Organizacji i Kontroli, Sygn. 303/II/128, kk. 7-8.
\end{footnotes}
yishuv loyal to Poland and Polish culture. In the end, tensions between Poles and Jews in workshops and factories struck a lethal blow at the program of productivizing Polish Jews.

Antisemitic incidents transpired also in cities and towns outside workplaces. In the aftermath of the Kielce pogrom, the myth of ritual murder contributed to creating a “pogrom atmosphere” in Kłodzko and Wrocław. According to one report, the “energetic vigilance” of local militia and UB forces “liquidated these efforts in embryo.” The provocation in Kłodzko, however, could have taken a less fortunate turn. Reportedly, a female prostitute in the center of town attempted to rouse a mob of Poles to stop a Jewish man in her apartment from raping a two-year-old German child. The woman captivated her audience – no doubt aware of the Kielce pogrom – with a far-fetched story that interlaced deviant sexual behavior with the myth of Jewish ritual murder to spur the crowd into action.

The UB and militia forces, however, reportedly prevented the pogrom. Both the man – who turned out to be of non-Jewish origin – and the prostitute were incarcerated that same day. Interestingly, the UB report does not mention the fate of the German child or what motivated the woman to stir up havoc. Perhaps things would have proceeded differently if the victim was Polish and not German. Regardless of the outcome, however, attempts to launch pogroms in Lower Silesia suggest that Jews could

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237 Sprawozdanie Wojewódzkiego Urzędu Informacji i Propagandy we Wrocławiu, July 1946, Archiwum Akt Nowych (AAN), Ministerstwo Informacji i Propagandy, Sygn. 551, k. 81.
238 Ibid.
240 Sprawozdanie Wojewódzkiego Urzędu Informacji i Propagandy we Wrocławiu, July 1946, AAN, Ministerstwo Informacji i Propagandy, Sygn. 551, k. 81.
not feel safe even in the seemingly uncharted Western Territories. In this climate of “failed pogroms,” it is not surprising that Polish Jews were fearful of integration and increasingly receptive to Zionism. By autumn 1946, the Jewish community in Lower Silesia shrank to only 60,000, a loss of 30,000 people in the aftermath of Kielce.\textsuperscript{241}

As the incidents in Fryborg and Klodzko demonstrate, no other charge had as much emotional voltage in the Polish assessment of Jews as the myth of ritual murder. This form of religious antisemitism suggests that many Polish settlers in Lower Silesia were still caught in the mentalities and traditions of old peasant prejudices. In the “Dierig” firm near Bielawa, Weronika Rydlikowska, a factory worker, disseminated gossip about a friend who supposedly sold her child to Jews for ritual purposes.\textsuperscript{242} As with the incident in Fryborg, tales of ritual murder sparked widespread dread, which only dissipated after UB interference. Despite attempts of authorities to calm local anxieties, rumors of Jews abducting and killing Polish children paralyzed communities, culminating in torrid emotional outbursts. For instance, the UB had to detain Polish citizens Janina Krawczyk and Jan Soroka for publicly denouncing Jews in Dzierżoniów as murderers. Soroka was caught saying: “for the killing of just one Polish child, I would murder all Jews.”\textsuperscript{243}

Security service officials also had to incarcerate Agnieszka Dudkowa, a Polish settler, who aggravated local anxieties by claiming that Jews in Bielawa were scheming “to slaughter their fortieth [Polish] child.” Just a month earlier a similar incident ended in


\textsuperscript{243} Raport do tablicy statystycznej pracy Sekcji Śledczej PUBP w Dzierżoniowie za czas od dnia 1.XI.1947 r. do dnia 15.XI.1947 r., 15 September 1947, IPN-Wr, WUBP Wrocław, Sygn. IPN WR 053/350, kk. 531-533.
the arrest of Aleksander Orłowski. Orłowski, a Polish repatriate in Bielawa, accused local Jews of slaying Polish children.\textsuperscript{244}

Tensions in Lower Silesia continued to escalate through 1947. On October 27, 1947, for example, in Dzierżoniów a Polish youth, Józef Markowski, was found dead with his throat slashed open. Local UB investigation confirmed that the twelve year-old died after accidentally falling on broken bits of a clay dish.\textsuperscript{245} The fact that the boy expired on the property of a known local Jew, Chaim Szwarc, significantly complicated the investigation. Within a matter of days, Poles in Dzierżoniów incited a community-wide panic, linking the accidental death of Markowski to a possible ritual murder. A few days after the boy’s passing, the UB detained four individuals, all women, for publicly denouncing Chaim Szwarc with full responsibility for the alleged crime. Two of these women were active members of the community: Janina Żurawska was an elementary school teacher and Anna Syska was a worker in a textile factory in Dzierżoniów.\textsuperscript{246}

Wartime brutalization provides one aspect of the explanation for local unrest. But deeper antisemitic traditions predating the war, in particular strong nationalist and religious hatreds tying Jews to conspiracies and vices, continued to frame the states of mind of many Poles years after the war.\textsuperscript{247} The legacy of these practices and mindsets was present in postwar Lower Silesia. Resentment of Jews thus remained socially respectable, and indeed, in some cases, expectable.

\textsuperscript{244} Raport PUBP w Dzierżoniowie na dzień 15 lipca 1946 r., 15 July 1946, IPN-Wr, WUBP Wrocław, Sygn. IPN WR 053/387, kk. 114-116.
\textsuperscript{246} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{247} Porter-Szűcs, Faith and Fatherland, 272.
For some Poles, anti-Jewish pronouncements indicated one’s “true” Polishness. Tadeusz and Edward Cichostepski, employees in a local factory in Dzierżoniów, addressed their coworkers in the following way: “the current government has to change because it is run by Jews, including the Jew Gomułka.” Gomułka was a Pole with a working-class background, but that did not appear to bear any significance. From the perspective of many self-professed postwar Polish patriots, to throw one’s lot with the Soviet-imposed communist government was tantamount to promoting the interests of Jews. And because Polish interests could not be synonymous with Jewish interests, Poles who welcomed communist rule appeared to surrender their Polishness. These mindsets were a legacy of Roman Dmowski’s thinking on Polish-Jewish relations in prewar Poland. Dmowski often argued that loyalty to Polish national wellbeing entailed a tough line against Jews and their alleged allies. Dmowski’s anti-Jewish sentiments were clearly reflected in the attitudes and actions of some Polish settlers in Lower Silesia. As indicated by Zygmunt Klimaczyński, a Polish migrant to the region and a “patriotic critic” of the government: “if it were not for the Soviets, we would have massacred all the Jews.”

But antisemitism also penetrated the hierarchy of communist officialdom in Lower Silesia. On June 13, 1945, representatives of a local Jewish committee approached Kazimierz Orczykowski, the deputy governor of the province, with a request to help facilitate the productivization of Jews in Wałbrzych. After listening to Jakub

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249 Ibid.
250 Protokół z utworzenia komitetu w Wałbrzychu, 13 June 1945, AŻIH, CKŻP Wydział Organizacji i Kontroli, Sygn. 303/II/23, k. 18.
Eisenberg, the main delegate of the local WKŻ, Orczykowski expressed serious misgivings about extending employment opportunities to Jews. In particular, he feared a potential Jewish takeover of industry in Wałbrzych, one of the most important industrial centers in Lower Silesia.251 During the meeting, Orczykowski sought to strike a compromise with Jewish committee members. He told Eisenberg that industrial occupations in Wałbrzych shall be open to Jews, but only to those lacking “Semitic looks” (semicki wygląd). The deputy governor defended his posture by explaining that during the initial postwar years it is best not to engage “Semitic-looking” Jews in the delicate process of rebuilding Poland.252

Why should the employment of Jews in local industry be a problem under a system that condemned Nazi racial ideology and pledged equality to all its citizens? In the end, Orczykowski’s exchange with Eisenberg reveals as much as it conceals. The deputy governor was certainly conscious of the power of antisemitism in Polish society. His comments can be interpreted as an awkward attempt at protecting Jews from antisemitic attacks. By rejecting Jewish workers with “Semitic looks” he might have believed he was forestalling a potential pogrom. No matter what his motivations, it was clear that different forms of antisemitism shaped communist policies and interactions with Jewish leaders in all facets of postwar life.

Tensions between Poles and Jews rose incrementally in the period between the end of the war in May 1945 and the Kielce pogrom in July 1946. Then as news of the pogrom spread to Lower Silesia, “failed pogroms” and “moral panics” swept the region from Kłodzko and Wałbrzych to Rychbach and Fryborg. Jews did not feel safe anywhere

251 Protokół z utworzenia komitetu w Wałbrzychu, 13 June 1945, AŻIH, CKŻP Wydział Organizacji i Kontroli, Sygn. 303/II/23, k. 18.
252 Ibid.
they went. In the summer of 1947, the UB and militia investigated a brutal execution of Abraham Holender, the victim of a robbery in Świdnica. The investigation did not prove fruitful – the perpetrators remained at large. Later that year in Strzegom, local “hooligans” vandalized a synagogue breaking all its windows and looting its interior. Militia investigations failed to identify the culprits.

Local militia often chose not to react to anti-Jewish actions. Acts of vandalism and harassment towards the Jewish community went unpunished in Strzegom. A small town located between Wałbrzych and Legnica, Strzegom after the war was home to 469 Polish Jews and 3,531 Poles. According to Jan Słowikowski, a local inspector of the Ministry of the Recovered Territories, the Polish population of Strzegom had a particularly difficult time adjusting to their Jewish neighbors. Słowikowski received regular complaints from Jews that Polish youth assaulted Jewish passers-by by bullying and throwing stones. In yet another complaint, Jewish residents alleged that Poles vandalized and destroyed the local Jewish cemetery, a remnant of what used to be Lower Silesia’s German Jewry. Słowikowski was overwhelmed with Jewish pleas for intervention; apparently the local militia unit was unresponsive to these complaints. His intervention accelerated a personnel change in the Strzegom militia, but nothing was done to restore the local Jewish cemetery. In the long run, limited interference in preventing or punishing antisemitic acts helped the Zionists. The movement appeared to

253 Sprawozdanie inspektora Jana Słowikowskiego, 28 May 1948, AAN, Ministerstwo Ziem Odzyskanych, Sygn. 1356, kk. 358-359.
254 Ibid.
255 Ibid.
256 Ibid.
257 Ibid.
be the only defender of Jews by offering a workable solution of emigration and building a Jewish state elsewhere.

The reluctance on the part of the communists to take action cost the support of many young, idealistic, and secular Jews who henceforth dabbled in *Bricha*. In the post-Kielce period, Jewish life continued in Lower Silesia but in ever-smaller numbers. The “pogrom atmosphere” following the events of 1946 facilitated a reorientation in Jewish perceptions of Lower Silesia. Instead of a new paradise for the Jews, the province now became a critical exit route for Jews out of Europe. As such, its significance grew as it became less a Polish-German and more a Polish-Israeli borderland.

**Conclusion**

The communist pledge to remake Jews into loyal citizens of a Polish workers’ state meant primarily Polonization. This Polonization, concealed behind the project of communist productivization, demanded a rejection of Zionism, traditional Jewish customs, and a symbolic abandonment of the “ghetto.” This was the project of Polish and Jewish communists. In reality, ordinary Polish workers tended to perceive Jews as “different” and potentially threatening to the Polish community no matter how culturally assimilated or secular they were.

The most decisive factor facilitating the shift from the edge of construction in Lower Silesia to the edge of reconstruction in Palestine was the communists’ reluctance to combat postwar antisemitic attitudes in Polish society. On the one hand, Polish communists wanted to transform and productivize the Jews. On the other hand, they also wanted to stay legitimate in the eyes of ordinary ethnic Poles. To a large degree, this
tension appeared impossible to solve. In the absence of an effective communist response to Polish physical and verbal attacks against the Jews, slogans for the productivization and reinvention of Jews as Poles, ringed tremendously hollow. In the end, contradictory policies emanating from Warsaw (uncertain about the role of Jews in forging a Polish nation-state) strengthened the resolve of the Zionist movement in Poland.

By mid-1948, the overwhelming support of Jews for Zionism in the Polish-German borderlands contributed to the founding of Israel (an independent state since 14 May 1948). As such, between 1945 and 1948, Polish-Jewish relations in Lower Silesia comprised a formative episode in the process of Zionist nation building outside of Poland’s borders. One may argue that the history of the Jewish community in postwar Lower Silesia was as important to forging a new ethnically homogenous Polish state as it was to propel the establishment of the State of Israel.
Chapter Four
The Road from Paradise: The Kresowianie on the Trail to Rediscover Poland, 1944-1946

Irena Kacperek, a thirteen-year-old resident of the Lwów region in what used to be southeastern Poland, evoked the consequences of Soviet victory on her life and that of her homeland: “In the autumn of 1945, my family and I received ‘repatriation cards’ – one-way tickets out of Poland. It suddenly dawned on us that territories that were Polish for centuries would no longer be part of Poland.” A youth deprived of her adolescence by war and dislocation, Kacperek held no illusions about the triumph of communist power in the region. Polish encounters with Soviet occupation in the eastern borderlands (kresy) in the early stages of World War II often meant deportations to distant regions as punishment for so-called counterrevolutionary activities. For Kacperek and other Poles, the Soviet victory in World War II appeared to be a harbinger of more collective displacement and migratory trauma. The phrase, “one-way ticket out of Poland,” suggested that Irena and other kresowianie felt driven out of the Poland they knew and into a Poland that they hardly knew at all.

Like many of her Polish and Ukrainian neighbors in the village of Raj (meaning, “Paradise”), Kacperek experienced World War II as a series of occupations: first Soviet, then Nazi, and then Soviet again. Seen through the eyes of a child, the war signified an assault on paradise: the intimate setting of family, community, church, and authority – the

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258 Irena Kacperek, Utracenie mojego Raju, Ossolineum – Wrocław, Dział Rękopisów, Zarząd Fundacji „Krzyżowa” dla Porozumienia Europejskiego, Sygn. 61/93, k. 29.
hallmarks of social order in countless places like Raj across war-ravaged East Central Europe.  

The dual occupation – Soviet and Nazi – left enduring marks on young Irena’s memory. “The Soviet occupation brought the deportation of most local Poles to Siberia. The Nazi occupation brought the obliteration of most Jews in nearby forests and ravines.” The war also “enraged Ukrainian nationalists” fueling their onslaught against Poles, “merciless in its execution.” The despair generated by competing local and extraterritorial forces bent on radical social engineering and entailing mass death and displacement, chipped away at the order and certainty indispensable to reconstructing communities.

The redrawing of human and territorial boundaries constituted the foundation of a postwar European order. Population transfers were normalized and endorsed by most political leaders following 1945. This chapter discusses the ordeal of Poles banished from their multicultural homelands in the eastern borderlands of what used to be prewar Poland, now part of the victorious Soviet Union. Hoisted with new identities as “repatriates from the East,” this chapter explores how eastern Poles (kresowianie) – the majority of whom were women and children – made sense of their new circumstances, indeed how they understood their abrupt homelessness and rationalized their intense feelings of loss.

Rebuilding post-1945 Poland was inseparable from restoring, reuniting, and reinventing Polish families. “Microcosms of the nation,” the reinstitution of the family

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259 Kacperek, Utracenie mojego Raju, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich we Wrocławiu (Ossolineum), Dział Rękopisów, Zarząd Fundacji „Krzyżowa” dla Porozumienia Europejskiego, Sygn. 61/93, kk. 30-37.

260 Kacperek, Utracenie mojego Raju, Ossolineum – Wrocław, Dział Rękopisów, Zarząd Fundacji „Krzyżowa” dla Porozumienia Europejskiego, Sygn. 61/93, kk. 29.
played a pivotal role in the return to certainty and order in postwar Europe.\footnote{261} In this sense, the family and the state were inseparable; the former depended on the strength of the latter. And the interaction between both is at the center of this chapter.

\textit{“Our Poland was stolen from us!”}

Dejected by the Soviet recapture of the eastern \textit{kresy} in 1945, Irena Kacperek clung desperately to the Poland she knew in the multicultural and mythical East. Kacperek states: “The Poland I was leaving behind was beautiful and diverse. This beauty would be lost forever in spite of our deepest wishes. Our Poland was stolen from us and we would never lay eyes on her again.”\footnote{262} To Irena and many Poles like her, the eastern borderlands of prewar Poland, the so-called \textit{kresy}, were the only true Poland. This was their homeland, a place sprinkled with forests, valleys, hidden creeks, and majestic meadows – a living topography where the spiritual worlds of Orthodox Judaism, eastern and western Christianity overlapped. This was the realm of “unrepeatable beauty” that could never be re-created anywhere else.\footnote{263}

Nevertheless, Irena Kacperek’s conception of Poland – with its cultural nucleus somewhere on the eastern margins of the prewar Polish state – tells us very little about the region’s ethnic complexity. Using the example of eastern Galicia, Yaroslav Hrytsak argues that in borderland regions “no single identity was so compelling that its

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\footnotetext{262}{Kacperek, \textit{Utracenie mojego Raju}, Ossolineum – Wroc\l{}aw, Dział Rękopisów, Zarząd Fundacji “Krzy\ż{}owa” dla Porozumienia Europejskiego, Sygn. 61/93, kk. 30.}
\footnotetext{263}{Kacperek, \textit{Utracenie mojego Raju}, Ossolineum – Wroc\l{}aw, Dział Rękopisów, Zarząd Fundacji “Krzy\ż{}owa” dla Porozumienia Europejskiego, Sygn. 61/93, kk. 31.}
\end{footnotesize}
dominance was assured.\textsuperscript{264} The practical consequences of this diversity soon became apparent when the map of Poland was redrawn. The multiethnic mosaic of the eastern \textit{kresy} posed many challenges for the Polish and Soviet campaign to identify Polish candidates for repatriation to central and western Poland. In this borderland region, the content of national identity was constantly in flux. Poles lived side by side with Ukrainians, Belarusians, Lithuanians, and Jews.\textsuperscript{265} Instead of embracing a modern national identity, some of these “border dwellers” preferred to identify with their religion or place of residence. In most cases, eastern Poles spoke in different accents and cultivated different traditions from those of Poles in central Poland. Some considered themselves superior to heartland Poles, who did not value cultural and religious diversity in the same way.\textsuperscript{266} Conversely, Poles from central Poland often considered their co-nationals from the \textit{kresy} as not entirely “Polish,” but rather indistinguishable from Ukrainians and Belarusians.

At the same time, however, the great majority of Polish-speakers – members of the intelligentsia and the civil professions – identified strongly with Polish culture. Their exposure and proximity to other ethnic groups while allowing them to occasionally cross the boundary between, for instance, “Polishness” and “Ukrainianness,” did not necessarily indicate national ambivalence or indifference. It merely meant that the \textit{kresowianie} infused their nationality with the potential for cross-cultural osmosis. This was different from the experiences and self-perceptions of heartland Poles who

comprised ethnic majorities among scattered islands of Jewish, and to a lesser degree, German cultures. Thus the Poles’ unchallenged ethnic domination of the central provinces offered fewer opportunities for straddling cultural boundaries.

For repatriates like Kacperek, to leave the kresy was to cross a boundary between the familiar and the unknown, the realm of one’s ancestors and a landscape of strangers. Leaving the East was almost tantamount to a betrayal of everything that seemed intrinsically Polish: the graves of ancestors, the forests, the streams, the rural poverty and decay, and the Ruthenian songs of the countryside and mountains. The notion that Poland had vital cultural and historic claims in the kresy was a romantic myth that many Poles were unprepared to leave behind.

Moreover, for the kresowianie Poland’s dominance in the kresy offered a clear conceptual framework for the transmission of Western cultural values east. Poles living among eastern Slavs and Jews perceived themselves as most adequately equipped to facilitate enlightenment and progress in the kresy. The feeling of being at the frontline of a cultural project seeking to entrench Western and thereby Polish power in historically contested territories filled many kresowianie with fervor and pride. Indeed, it made them feel morally superior to heartland Poles, residents of the more ethnically homogenous central provinces. This chapter examines how repatriation and postwar ethnic cleansing disrupted borderland identities, intervening and rearticulating the content of Polishness among the kresowianie. The uprooting of Poles in the kresy illuminates a

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267 The kresy held a very important place in Polish nationalist ideology. They reminded Poles of Poland’s pre-modern identity as a multicultural eastern European commonwealth. These diverse lands were central to Polish national self-understanding. The kresy served as a repository of the commonwealth legacy. They were also a site of major interwar ethnic disagreements between Poles, Ukrainians, and Lithuanians. After the war many Poles perceived the detachment of the kresy from Poland – reaffirmed by the communist regime – as a national tragedy. See Timothy Snyder, The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus 1569-1999 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 136.
gradual shift in the content and meaning of Polish nationality, in particular among the uprooted. This process, nevertheless, did not take place in a vacuum.

Wartime experiences of ethnic cleansing and forced migration converged with preexisting understandings of a “morally superior Polishness” to produce a new locus of national identity. While moral superiority would remain a staple of repatriate identity for years following World War II, the experience of banishment strengthened consciousness and galvanized a process through which some repatriates began to see themselves as subjects of an ethnically homogenous nation-state: a state with a stake in the national commitments of its citizens. The postwar regulation and surveillance of the conduct and identities of repatriates reflected the Polish state’s desire to enlist the kresowianie in the settlement of former German territories, and, more importantly, in the creation of a communist nation-state.

The fact that typical repatriates were in most cases underage and female underscored the urgency of migration, because, as indicated by Tara Zahra, “women and children were seen as a form of national property to be ‘reclaimed’ after the war.” In other words, Poles from the Soviet-annexed kresy functioned as ethnic raw material in the unprecedented project of socially and nationally transforming Poland. This project was largely a product of wartime Nazi and Soviet demographic engineering which ultimately – by the end of the war – set “the foundations [for] a new and less complicated continent.” The road from paradise thus ultimately changed and rearticulated the self-perceptions of Poles like Irena Kacperek, paving the way for a mass postwar renegotiation of where (and indeed what) is Poland and who is Polish.

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Transgressions in Paradise

Repatriate testimonies found in the Ossolineum archive in Wrocław reveal their authors’ uncertainty about the continued place of Poles in the postwar kresy. Living on the edge of two competing utopias – one Nazi, one Soviet – the kresowianie could not be sure of their fate. Moreover, the work of cleansing and uprooting Poles in the kresy went beyond the great-power politics of Hitler and Stalin. Ukrainian nationalists, in particular members of the OUN-Bandera (Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists), were especially committed to the erasure of Poles and Polish culture in an area that they perceived to be the cultural and political property of Ukrainians. Rivaling the NKVD and the Einsatzgruppen in their attack on civilians, the OUN-Bandera embraced a campaign of ethnic terror that would leave many communities of the southeastern kresy virtually empty of Poles. By March 1943, the OUN launched the Ukrainian Partisan Army (UPA), charged with the goal of undermining Nazi and Soviet power while, at the same time, reserving special venom for Polish civilians.

To be sure, the fratricidal conflict in the kresy involved unspeakable atrocities perpetrated by both Poles and Ukrainians. This civil war would have momentous ramifications for the two communities, populations that interacted on various levels of sociability prior to the Nazi and Soviet invasions. In particular, Polish memory of World

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270 Timothy Snyder explains the general thrust of Nazi utopias in wartime Eastern Europe. He argues that the Germans flirted with four primary utopias in the summer of 1941: “a lightning victory that would destroy the Soviet Union in weeks; a Hunger Plan that would starve thirty million people in months; a Final Solution that would eliminate European Jews after the war; and a Generalplan Ost that would make of the western Soviet Union a German colony.” See Timothy Snyder, Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 187.

271 The Einsatzgruppen were special murder squads entrusted with the mass extermination of Polish and Soviet political elites, including the mass slaughter of Jews (civilians) behind frontlines in occupied Eastern Europe. The chief method of murder involved mass executions on the edge of carefully dug pits and trenches. See Timothy Snyder, Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin, 126-127.

War II in Galicia and Volhynia (the two primary regions comprising the southeastern kresy) entangled not only Soviet commissars and Nazi executioners but also Ukrainian partisans as primary threats to Polish survival.

Polish repatriates leaving the kresy following the end of World War II somberly recalled Ukrainian transgressions “in paradise.” Janina Sikorowska, the daughter of a teacher from eastern Galicia, remembered the last day in her hometown:

We left Zaleszczyki with our hearts broken. Our beloved Dniester [River] flowed with the corpses of savagely murdered Poles – women with breasts cut-off, severed limbs, and eyes slashed out.273

Ukrainian partisans from the vicinity, doubtless neighbors or acquaintances, most of whom knew their victims, butchered Sikorowska’s uncle. At the same time, in different contexts, emotional proximity between Polish and Ukrainian neighbors could also be a godsend. Krystyna Węgrzyn, the daughter of a Polish school director in Uhorniki, Stanisławów province, professed owing her family’s life to the generosity of an elderly Ukrainian woman (a family friend). Sometime in November 1944, Krystyna and her mother would spend the nights – the apex of UPA activity – in their Ukrainian neighbor’s hut: “we were simply too afraid of the partisans!”274

Awareness of Ukrainian resentments and growing insecurity persuaded many Polish families to leave the kresy. In May 1945, a Roman Catholic priest from outside of Uhorniki persuaded Krystyna’s father to save his family and leave for Poland. “We were torn about what was to become of us after the war,” recalls Krystyna. “Father did not want to leave Uhorniki. My parents feared putting everything on the line for a journey to

the unknown west. Our neighbors – Ukrainians – pledged to protect us.” But the priest’s arguments were compelling: “Your time may not have come yet… but sooner or later, the partisans will draw nearer!” On June 29, 1945, Krystyna, her parents, and the family cow boarded a transport bound west. Sad, but at the same time hopeful, Węgrzyn and Sikorowska understood their departure as a new lease on life, an opportunity to live as Poles in safety, and a chance to rebuild their lives in a climate unimpeded by fear.

The Poles’ historical proximity to Ukrainians in the southeastern kresy was predicated upon cultural exchanges and relationships that often bound them together as friends, spouses, neighbors, and colleagues. This cross-cultural intimacy was precisely why Polish repatriates leaving the kresy were so grief-stricken. They struggled with understanding the wartime ethnic violence that ultimately placed so much distance between the two communities. To Poles like Władysław Żółnowski, a resident of Rohaczyń in eastern Galicia, the prewar image of docile Ukrainian peasants and wartime Ukrainian “bandits” appeared irreconcilable. According to Żółnowski, Poles and Ukrainians comprised a family, both figuratively and sometimes literally:

We all knew each other… Poles (Roman Catholics) visiting their Ukrainian relatives would often attend services at a Greek Catholic Church (cerkiew). In the summers, Poles and Ukrainians would celebrate ‘Polish’ and ‘Ruthenian’ holidays, sing Ruthenian songs and dance at local festivals.276

Polish repatriates clearly distinguished between Soviet and Ukrainian transgressions. Unlike Soviet offenses, crimes perpetrated by Ukrainians were more intimate and personal. Ukrainians, the largest national minority in interwar Poland, comprised a familiar element on the multicultural landscape of the southeastern kresy.

276 Władysław Żółnowski, Biada nam zbiegi, Ossolineum – Wrocław, Dział Rękopisów, Zarząd Fundacji „Krzyżowa” dla Porozumienia Europejskiego, Sygn. 47/98/2, k. 249.
Poles and Ukrainians knew each other: in places like Galicia and Volhynia they lived in close proximity for centuries. Czesław Borowski’s description of a Ukrainian crime testifies to the intimate proximity between victims and victimizers:

A young Polish girl from my town (in eastern Galicia) recognized in her murderer a friend from her prewar school years. She begged him to spare her life explaining that her entire family was already dead. The girl called out to him in Ukrainian: ‘Nykolu, my brother (braczyku mij), take pity on me.’ The bandit responded: ‘I was once your brother, now I am your butcher (bylem ci brat a teraz kat)’

The Ukrainian-Polish civil war was thus one of the most bloody and complex chapters of a long and mutually experienced history.

The UPA’s assault on local Polish communities was incomprehensible because it violated two central tenets of kresy society as understood by Poles: cooperation and coexistence under Polish-state domination. The wartime struggle between the two communities pitted father against son, neighbor against neighbor, and spouse against spouse. Consequently, Ukrainian transgressions in the kresy left a deep scar in the memory of the kresowianie, in some sense even deeper than the wounds inflicted by the Soviets.

According to Timothy Snyder, World War II in the kresy was a multilayered conflict with larger and smaller players engaging in mortal combat that at its peak mobilized virtually everyone: civilians, armies, partisan forces, women, men, children, Poles, Jews, Ukrainians, Soviets, and Nazis. “Nevertheless, at every point,” Snyder argues, “the war divided rather than united Ukrainians and Poles.”

Integral nationalism – the belief that at the heart of each modern nation-state lies an ethnically homogenous community – shaped the programs of both Polish and Ukrainian nationalists in the area.

277 Czesław Borowski, Fragmenty życiaorysu dla swoich dzieci, Ossolineum – Wrocław, Dział Rękopisów, Zarząd Fundacji „Krzyżowa” dla Porozumienia Europejskiego, Sygn. 58/93/1, k. 17.
278 Snyder, Reconstruction of Nations, 155.
With Poland under the absolute domination of outside powers, nationalists in the OUN and UPA sought to recreate western Ukraine – a territory that overlapped with the Polish conception of *kresy* – as a realm virtually devoid of Poles. The construction of an ethnically pure Ukrainian nation space, however, resulted in a program of mass elimination. The OUN-Bandera “drew fateful conclusions about the impossibility of a Polish minority in a [future] Ukrainian state.”

National egoism – obligations to the Ukrainian nation – would thus supersede less pressing obligations to neighbors, colleagues, friends, and relatives. Following World War II, Polish awareness of Ukrainian aims in the southeastern *kresy* mobilized many behind the cause of repatriation to the other, less known Poland.

Repatriates describe instances of local Ukrainian hostility with remorse and trepidation. Zbigniew Zelmański, an eight-year-old child at the time of his departure from Podhorce in eastern Galicia, remembers his family’s trip to the embarkation point in Stryj: “Near the train station, I saw people watching our every move, silently mouthing the words *Lachy* [derogatory name for Poles] and *smert Lacham* [death to the Poles].”

Polish families rounded up at collection centers such as Stryj, Stanisławów, or Lwów bore their suffering with resilience, but also some regret. They were often of a split mind: homesickness and loss mixed easily with abandonment and betrayal. In Irena Kacperek’s hometown, Raj, Soviet officials evicted Polish families replacing them with Łemkos and Ukrainians. Irena and her family ended up in nearby Brzeżany, awaiting permission to board a transport for Poland. The thought of her neighbors snatching her small slice of paradise generated tremendous heartache.

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Ukrainian takeover of Polish property is a recurring theme in many repatriate accounts. Franciszek Hawrysz and his family, residents of Hrehorów – a town ceaselessly targeted by “UPA bandits” – were forced to leave their home community for Łukowiec Żurawski, a village next door. “Ukrainians referred to Łukowiec as ‘the Polish ghetto’ on account of its overwhelmingly Polish population displaced by UPA terror… Houses abandoned by Poles in Hrehorów were assigned to ‘Bajkanie’ a Ukrainian mountain people from the Carpathian foothills.”

Many of these accounts suggest that the tragedy of evacuees and repatriates was not just personal but was also interpreted as national. In a traditionally borderland society where ethnic and cultural boundaries blurred around the edges and identities continuously shifted what is perhaps most striking about Polish grievances and testimonies is the persistent urgency to label personal ordeals a central part of the broader national drama. War and ethnic cleansing galvanized the nationalization of human suffering in the kresy. The same Poles who danced at Ukrainian festivals, attended Greek Catholic services, and sang Ruthenian songs suddenly became the personification of the maltreated and suffering Polish nation. The anguish of Polish repatriates from the kresy is expressed in national terms with clearly identifiable anti-Polish and treacherous individuals: bandits understood to be Ukrainians and communists understood to be Russians. Whenever voicing a narrative of abandonment, loss, and betrayal, repatriates reached for the framework of the martyred nation that was rarely prevalent in the interwar kresy.

Polish communists in Poland played a pivotal role in transforming the kresowianie into new Polish residents of the Western Territories. On the one hand, they

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assumed the task of persuading and collecting eastern Poles for the purpose of leaving the kresy. On the other hand, the Polish administration of the newly annexed Ostelbien provinces demanded the replacement of Germans with Poles from central and eastern Poland. Ethnic pandemonium in the southeastern kresy, in particular the Polish-Ukrainian civil war in eastern Galicia and Volhynia, reinforced the communist goal of gathering Poles for westward migration. Ukrainian persecution of Poles drove thousands of kresowianie into the hands of the new Polish communist authorities. The postwar enterprise of forging a homogenous nation-state in Poland thus involved the careful and deliberate exploitation of ethnic fears and resentments.

Communist officials in the State Repatriation Office (PUR) paid close attention to the popular mood in the kresy. According to P. Drosik, a sergeant in the PUR: “Polish families beyond the Bug [River] in Western Ukraine are eager to leave for Poland because of the looming threat of destruction from Ukrainian nationalists.” Yet another report, authored by Józef Parnaś, a sanitation official stationed in Volhynia, mirrors the urgency expressed by Drosik. In it Parnaś concludes:

Ukrainian fascists systematically murder Poles. 200,000 Polish citizens have already perished in western Ukraine. Injured families see salvation only in the communist government [in Lublin] and repatriation.

Communist officials used the threat of the “Ukrainian peril” to galvanize robust actions of registering and repatriating “endangered” Polish families west.

Responding promptly and directly to civilian grievances also provided an opportunity to forge alliances with the persecuted group. Swift response to Polish calls

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for protection ingratiated the Soviet-backed communist regime with the victims of Ukrainian terror. Persecution, trepidation, and political expediency thus overlapped, generating a climate in which survivors of Soviet occupation and the Polish-Ukrainian civil war endeared themselves to Polish communist authorities (whose claim to legitimacy rested with Moscow). To many repatriates from the kresy, Polish communism symbolized the culmination of their agony, and the promise of salvation in strange and distant lands.

For Polish residents of Galicia and Volhynia, the Ukrainians embodied a barbaric and mortal enemy, the converse of everything that was dear and Polish. Adam Pilecki-Leliwa, a young Pole from Galicia, lamented Ukrainian excesses:

To us, Polish children, our primary enemies were Ukrainian patriots. They demonstrated their hatred for ‘Polshcha’ by stripping the corpses of fallen Polish men, by vandalizing their places of eternal rest, including churches and shrines.\[284\]

The identification of Ukrainians as beasts, violators of Poles – dead or alive – and the defilers of Polish national symbols such as Roman Catholic churches underscore the desire of some repatriates to consign Ukrainians to a lower rung of civilization. When the UPA came to a small town, Łosznów, “rivers [in the Tarnopol area] overflowed with the flesh and blood of murdered Poles.”\[285\] Bernadeta Świrska recalls the Ukrainian “hunt for Poles” gaining momentum during Christmas 1944. Lucky for her, she was able to escape to her grandfather’s village occupied by Soviet troops: “The Banderowcy [OUN forces] feared attacking settlements under direct Soviet control.”\[286\]


\[285\] Bernadeta Świrska, Opis historii mego życia w okresie Osadnictwa Polskiego po roku 1945 na Ziemiach Zachodnich i Północnych, Ossolineum – Wrocław, Dział Rękopisów, Zarząd Fundacji „Krzyżowa” dla Porozumienia Europejskiego, Sygn. 58/93, k. 79.

\[286\] Ibid.
even when set against the Godless and hated “Russian hordes” – instigators of deportations and breakers of families – the Ukrainians still managed to look less civilized.

Krystyna Telichowska clearly echoed this sentiment: “We were afraid that Russians and Germans would start killing us just like the Ukrainian nationalists – the slaughterers of Poles.” According to Polish testimonies from the kresy, Nazi and Soviet crimes paled in comparison to Ukrainian transgressions. The Poles thus chose the “communist danger” over the “Ukrainian danger” by deciding to leave for the “unknown Poland.” In the perception of Poles like Świrska and Telichowska, bloodthirsty Ukrainian thugs represented a special kind of threat to Polish cultural survival. Unlike the Soviets, in particular the NKVD and the Red Army, the Ukrainians threatened to eradicate the Poles physically, finally, and immediately. The “Ukrainian danger” was thus seen as potentially genocidal – and this clearly sets it apart from Polish perceptions of the “communist threat.”

When the kresowianie describe Soviet violations of Polish cultural life in the kresy, they explicitly label them as abuses leveled against a collective Polish nation. As argued by Katherine Jolluck in her seminal work, Exile & Identity: Polish Women in the Soviet Union during World War II, during times of great calamity ordinary people tend to link their suffering to national ideas more than in times of peace and stability. Analyzing the experiences of Poles in Soviet exile during World War II, Jolluck suggests that individuals of both sexes expressed their connection to a common national history, which helped shape a sustaining identity as well as a collective hope for

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287 Krystyna Telichowska, Repatrianci, Ossolineum – Wrocław, Dział Rękopisów, Zarząd Fundacji „Krzyżowa” dla Porozumienia Europejskiego, Sygn. 60/93, k. 181.
the future. Polish individuals often saw themselves as part of one family, sharing a drama that stretched back into history.288

Through constructing Polish communities in their places of exile, building national bonds that the war helped intensify, Poles – the great majority of whom were females – succeeded in reproducing and delineating the nation outside Poland. Thus, in response to the external circumstances of exile, the experiences of Poles in the wartime Soviet Union helped stimulate a distinct Polish national identity.

The Polish experience of Soviet oppression was qualitatively different from the so-called “Ukrainian danger.” In contrast to Ukrainians, the Soviets were an outside power set upon degrading, detaining, and deporting members of the Polish nation. According to Katherine Jolluck,

Bolshevik ideology cast the Polish nation as reactionary, one led by members of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie – exploiting classes destined, in the Marxist scheme of historical progress, for oblitera-

In the communist lexicon the conception of “class enemies” and “counterrevolutionaries” conveniently overlapped with the idea of the Polish nation. When applied to the multicultural matrix of the southeastern borderlands where Poles dominated the social hierarchy, “to be Polish” indicated more generally a suspect nationality of “exploiters and speculators” bent on the mistreatment of lower classes: Ukrainians and Jews. The complete annihilation of Poles, however, was not a Soviet objective in occupied eastern Poland.

Repatriate anxieties about the Soviet Union were more concerned with the cultural rather than physical survival of Poles. Deportees saw Soviet communism as an

attempt to undermine and destroy Polish linguistic and material culture. In this sense, many Poles condemned “Bolshevik communism” as the direct progeny of Russian autocracy and expansionism. Time and time again, repatriates express alarm about the Soviet Union’s ambition to “Russify” the kresy. Janina Sikorowska’s father, a pedagogue by profession, did not think he could continue being a good parent without being a good Pole. To many Poles, leaving the kresy in the postwar period was tantamount to saving one’s traditions and culture. Eugeniusz Kotowicz explained it to his children this way: “So we will become homeless wanderers. We will leave this place so I can raise you to be good Poles and not Muscovites (Moskale).”

Soviet administrators and commissars intimidated local Poles, encouraging them to register for repatriation into Poland. The Soviets were unmistakably losing patience with some Poles’ reluctance to leave their homelands. “My mother was often harassed by Russians,” confides Krystyna Zawadzka. “They kept nagging her with questions: when are you going to leave for Polska?” Bernadeta Świrska wrote: “The Russians kept insisting that we must leave the kresy because we are like the weeds among the wheat.”

This carefully calculated deprecation of candidates for repatriation intended to cut the bonds of loyalty and community that bound many Poles to the kresy. Unlike the Ukrainians, however, who reached for more extreme solutions, the Soviets engaged in transfers and exchanges, creating the illusion of a less harmful campaign of state-run ethnic cleansing.

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“We left home squeezing out tears”

Julia Ostrowska felt completely forsaken. Alone with a nine-month-old child on her family estate in Łoszniów, Tarnopol province, she could only think of despair. As the warfront gathered steam and began shifting west with a vengeance, the needs of the nation dictated that her husband join the Polish military.

On that fateful day, May 5, 1944, I was left behind with a small child. Lacking any assistance and accompanied by great fear, I was forced to evacuate in July 1945.293

To many repatriates from the kresy, Julia’s story is a typical depiction of the plight and suffering of many eastern Poles. Husbandless and defenseless in the event of a partisan assault (Ukrainian partisans were merciless in their execution of Polish women) Julia would herself become a typical refugee: a woman, a Pole, and a mother.

The day of “evacuation” – an ambiguous term coined by the Polish state to disguise the coerced nature of Polish departures – seized Julia with anguish and hurt. Women like Julia would lose control of their properties, their claim to family possessions such as furniture, art pieces, jewelry, or clothing, and – most unhappily – they would be forced from their homes with a one-way ticket from what they considered their personal paradise. Confiscations of family estates and the removal from homelands amounted to a surgical amputation: the alienation of the soul from the body. “The howling of dogs, the wailing of cats, vegetables unpicked in the gardens, blades of wheat gesturing in the wind as if in mourning – this is how we left home, squeezing out tears.”294

The kresowianie struggled to accept their ultimate fate: banishment from places they called home. The decision to go westward generated a public neurosis, dividing

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294 Ibid.
loved ones and straining marriages. The pressure to leave was tremendous, but the reluctance to do so was just as strong. Helena Stosio of Drohobycz, a town in southeastern Galicia, remembers the tension between her parents on the eve of departure:

My parents recurrently addressed the dangers of repatriation. Their positions were always divergent. Father was inclined to stay. Mother, on the other hand, insisted on leaving. ‘What are we going to do here in the company of Muscovites?’ she would say.295

From the very beginning of World War II, Polish families endured impossible odds to stay together, making cohesion and reunion often unattainable. In spite of the war’s end in May 1945, Polish families in the kresy continued to struggle with life-altering decisions thrust onto them from above. The fact that many families outlasted threats to their unity deserves special acknowledgement. In October 1945, Helena’s parents reached a consensus: “they eventually made the bitter decision to abandon Drohobycz.”296

The decision to leave behind one’s property, bargaining off priceless family heirlooms to ensure a modicum of financial security on the road to an uncharted land, heightened the already familiar sense of gloom. Henryk Stafiej, a child at the time of repatriation from Podwysokie near Brzeżany, recalls the tension in his household:

Father cried for days. My parents sold what they could. They bought a goat; its milk was supposed to sustain us. I loved that goat! It was my first pet. Mother called her Baśka. She liked to eat newspapers. During the journey I fed her Russian ones.297

The seven-year-old Henryk touchingly elucidates the trauma endured by the Stafiej family. His devotion to Baśka enabled him to find solace in dire circumstances:

296 Ibid.
297 Henryk Stafiej, Oczami i sercem dziecka, Ossolineum – Wrocław, Dział Rękopisów, Zarząd Fundacji „Krzyżowa” dla Porozumienia Europejskiego, Sygn. 47/98/2, k. 137.
We arrived at the embarkation point. Someone was pulling Baška, weeping and shrieking. Mother cuddled me with tears; she did not want to leave. Baška joined us in the car assigned for humans. I was relieved.298

Unlike some adults, children sought comfort and strength in emotional bonds with parents, siblings, and pets. In contrast to their parents, they recognized a threat to their families first and to the nation second. Although they perceived the calamity about them it is not always clear that they understood its connotations.

Nevertheless, the sense of leaving a childhood arcadia – even if untainted by Polish patriotic sentiment – did not escape the scrutiny of children. Janina Sikorowska was twelve when her family was forced out from their home in eastern Galicia. She witnessed most of the emotional disarray that escorted Poles to collection points in towns and cities.

The road to the embarkation point in Zaleszczyki appeared to take a lifetime. Soon enough we longed for the Podolian black earth, our beloved Dniester, the nuts, grapes, and fruits of our native land.299

The prospect of exile from sacred homelands made young repatriates even more anxious about a potential separation from all that they considered dear.

Less fortunate children such as the eight-year-old Anna Lange of Dąbrowa, spent the formative years of their young lives in continuous exile.

I was only three when a terrible fate had befallen my family in the kresy. In February 1940, we were dumped into cattle cars that took us 14,000 kilometers away to the frozen north. I screamed through most of the journey: ‘let us out! Let us go home!’ Then in 1946 we were uprooted once more to a strange place in another part of Poland.300

Anna’s hazy memories of her grandfather’s large estate in the *kresy* are superseded by more harrowing recollections of hunger, cold, depravity, and death in Siberian exile. Separation from her father and chronic encounters with death robbed Anna of her childhood.

The coercive edge of exile left thousands of Polish children emotionally stunted and frail. In the aftermath of World War II, victors and humanitarians looked upon children as mostly “malleable” for the unprecedented project of European national regeneration. According to Tara Zahra, children remained at the center of an international dispute about the reconstruction of states decimated by war and genocide: “lost children were both victims and beneficiaries of the drive to create nationally homogenous states in Europe.”[^301] The tragedy of Polish, Jewish, and European minors – survivors of the most brutal “civilian war” in human history – was the ongoing politicization of their childhood. Children were the overwhelming casualties of wartime violence and postwar ethnic cleansing and nation-building. Those who survived displacement, repatriation, and reunification in new postwar communities transformed into adults literally overnight. The plight of the *kresowianie*, in particular its depiction in repatriate memoirs, was often portrayed as an attack on Polish families: an assault on defenseless women and children. Their relocation from the *kresy* to the “new Poland” was indispensable for the construction of an ethnically homogenous Polish nation-state.

Deportations, evictions, and repatriations comprised central features of the Polish experience in territories seized, lost, and recaptured by the Soviets. Julia Ostrowska’s departure from Łoszniów, an expedition undertaken on foot, was not the last traumatic experience of her journey. The second stage of Ostrowska’s ordeal involved one of many

wearisome arrivals. (The road from paradise encompassed multiple crisscrossing departures and arrivals, a seemingly endless quest with no known destination and, in most cases, no certain termination). The conditions at the local embarkation point in Trembowla left much to be desired. Dirt, stench, larceny, and starvation intensified human grief, by now aggravated by homesickness and expulsion. Local authorities, mostly Soviet-recruited militiamen, took advantage of the repatriates’ helplessness. The Trembowla militia worked tirelessly to dispossess and humiliate alienated Polish families. Individuals attempting to travel with an excess of 100 kilograms of wheat (the quota limit per individual) were detained and cross-examined. Families in possession of unregistered typewriters or radio equipment underwent harassment, in the end losing ownership of many prized personal effects.

Repatriates recount the consternation and chaos that they encountered at embarkation points throughout the *kresy*. They describe a reverie of sounds, shouts, and stink, punctuated with grisly acts of despair. Julia Ostrowska spent two weeks awaiting a transport to Poland in Trembowla: “The security forces at the train station engaged in ruthless plundering filling all of us with dread. People begged, shouted, and resisted but to no avail.” Helena Stosio’s father, aware of the pitiful conditions at the local collection point in Drohobycz, ventured alone to the train station to erect a small wooden shack for his family. “My mother and I reached the station on October 3, 1945,” Helena recalls, “father had already built a shack (*buda*) where we would live for the next several

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303 Ibid.
days. Unfortunately, two long weeks had passed before the transport finally arrived.\textsuperscript{304}

Violent autumn weather, including vicious torrents of rain, turned stations like Trembowla into virtual campgrounds (obozowisko) of mud, filth, and disease:

The wind kept moving our shack back and forth. We watched from between the wood planks our ‘neighbors’ – petrified villagers cramped together in sheds along with their livestock.\textsuperscript{305}

The stench of unwashed humanity attended by the irrepressible odor of animal waste was not the only hazard of “camp-life” at embarkation points. “Nights were usually the worst time for us. Violent outbursts, armed burglaries, and incursions by Russian bandits frightened us into sleeplessness.”\textsuperscript{306} Appalled by these conditions and yet powerless to do anything about them, repatriates like Helena sought consolation in the prospect of a new beginning in postwar Poland. In the words of Irena Kacperek: “There was great hope associated with the transport – that violence, dirt, poverty, and hunger would all end.”\textsuperscript{307}

As with other repatriate memoirs depicting the road to locally scattered embarkation points, Bernadeta Świrská reconstructs her family’s tribulation through the prism of gender. A child at the time of the mass repatriations, Bernadeta recounts the strength and fortitude of female relatives rallying the family behind a westward voyage:

Grandmother prepared potatoes and dry noodles for the journey. She worked ceaselessly night after night. In the meanwhile, mother worked in the fields… Mother had an impossible burden. There were no men to help – all of them were

\textsuperscript{305} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{306} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{307} Irena Kacperek, \textit{Utracenie mojego Raju}, Ossolineum – Wrocław, Dział Rękopisów, Zarząd Fundacji „Krzyżowa” dla Porozumienia Europejskiego, Sygn. 61/93, k. 31.
on the front. The people who remained were women, children, the elderly and the feeble.\textsuperscript{308}

The “dual occupancy” and the accompanying military operations thrust countless Polish women into the roles of primary decision-makers and family providers. Women blamed Germans, Russians, Ukrainians, and the war in general for hijacking their men, creating circumstances in which they had to exercise independent will. But they also interpreted their tasks in national terms: they had to ensure the survival of the nation.

According to Jolluck, Polish women’s wartime experiences of dislocation linked their roles as mothers, wives, and wardens of the private sphere to their roles as defenders of the Polish nation. Men’s commitment to the nation – the social expectation of sacrifice on the warfront – stood in clear contrast to women’s responsibilities to children, siblings, the elderly, and the wounded. Women’s sacrifice on behalf of Poland was thus revealed “through the daily care and maintenance of the nation’s smallest unit – the family.”\textsuperscript{309}

The separation of the home front from the warfront along gendered lines is clearly reflected in repatriate testimonies. Fighting men and defenseless women recur sporadically in the account of Irena Kacperek, the repatriate we encountered at the beginning of this chapter. “The Polish men of Brzeżany organized self-defense militias near churches and cloisters to guard their families from Ukrainians.”\textsuperscript{310} Men in this particular case are cast in the role of militant protectors, shielding their women and children from the threat of their hostile neighbors. The actions of these men kept their families alive, ensuring the survival of the nation right through the final stages of the war.

\textsuperscript{308} Bernadeta Świrska, \textit{Opis historii mego życia w okresie Osadnictwa Polskiego po roku 1945 na Ziemiach Zachodnich i Północnych}, Ossolineum – Wrocław, Dział Rękopisów, Zarząd Fundacji „Krzyżowa” dla Porozumienia Europejskiego, Sygn. 58/93, kk. 80-81.

\textsuperscript{309} Jolluck, \textit{Exile & Identity}, 110.

\textsuperscript{310} Irena Kacperek, \textit{Utracenie mojego Raju}, Ossolineum – Wrocław, Dział Rękopisów, Zarząd Fundacji „Krzyżowa” dla Porozumienia Europejskiego, Sygn. 61/93, k. 31.
At the same time, mobilizing the family behind the cause of repatriation would not have been possible without the participation of women. “After father left for the front,” remembers Kacperek, “mother sold most of the household furniture, leaving only the cow. She also prepared some food for the road, not forgetting to petition for a repatriate card (permitting departure from Brzeżany).”311 Thus, while men engaged in more direct actions stifling perceived threats from Soviets and Ukrainians, women took what appeared to be less excessive measures to provide for their loved ones’ passage to safety. Ultimately, women’s conduct complemented the more direct actions of men: their handling of the national crisis in the kresy was just as valiant as that of men.

Polish women identified their primary task as facilitators of Polish national culture in a time of grave uncertainty about its continued existence in the kresy. Cruelty, alarm, neglect, and suspicion of Soviets and Ukrainians (invaders and neighbors) were all significant aspects of the repatriate experience. To many Polish women uprooted by Soviet eviction policies, their failure to leave could have endangered their efforts to transmit Polish cultural norms to a new generation of Poles. The prospect of nurturing their children in a violent, destitute, and, most importantly, Godless place distressed many Polish women. Some women conflated the consolidation of Soviet rule in the kresy with the spread of atheism. The Soviet crackdown on Polish elites, members of the intelligentsia and the urban professions, paralleled the shutting down of churches.312 Suppression of the Roman Catholic Church in the Soviet zone of occupation sent a strong

311 Kacperek, Utracenie mojego Raju, k. 31.
signal to the Polish population of the region. An attack on the Catholic Church was often interpreted as an attack on Polish identity.313

Relocation to “the other Poland” – a region both strange and unfamiliar – offered an opportunity of continuing a distinctly Polish way of life, including a revival of religious activity. Ironically, then, continuing the traditions of ancestors ultimately demanded the relinquishment of ancestral lands and emotional attachments. The immensity of this sacrifice was widely known and acknowledged: it held a central place in the consciousness of those forcefully uprooted.

Making sacrifices for the promise of stability and collective relief, however, required deep personal introspection and an unbending commitment to faith and fatherland. “After spending two nights at the embarkation point in Stanisławów,” recalls Krystyna Zawadzka, a repatriate from Sokal,

we were finally shoved into industrial train cars with no roofs and little heat. But none of that mattered. I was leaving with the hope that in Poland I will find open churches and the liberty to attend mass. In the face of an indefinite future, this alone absorbed me with great hope and courage.314

Krystyna’s yearning for the sound of church bells and the freedom to openly worship God informed her expectations of the distant and unknown land that she would soon have to call home. This vision of “the other Poland” as a salvation from the Poland stolen and desecrated by communists, bandits, Russians, and Ukrainians made repatriates like Krystyna long for a morally reconstituted homeland. For her as for many others, relocation was the first step in a drawn-out process to rebuild and re-imagine Poland.

313 Gross, Revolution from Abroad, 4.
Repatriate testimonies bear witness to the power of German and Russian invaders in the undoing of Poland’s moral fiber. The journey west was thus a moral crusade in the pursuit of a morally elevated Poland – a territory not unlike the arcadia of prewar childhood memories – where Polish national values, at the center of which lay Catholicism, could be re-engraved. Repatriate stories of journeying west suggest that a re-embracing of prewar notions of Polishness was inseparable from establishing a new life in new lands. As potently evoked by Krystyna Zawadzka: “here [in our new homes in the Western Territories] we sought to recapture what the war had taken away from us.”

If the road to the embarkation points appeared grisly, the macabre that the uprooted encountered on transports bound for Poland defied imagination. According to individual testimonies, the trains assigned for the transfer of Poles were unfit for moving humans. Cars stinking of animal and human dung, open-roofed industrial carriages meant for the transport of coal or heavy machinery inundated with the stench of bodily fluids supplied a typical snapshot of repatriate misery. Franciszek Hawrysz’s expedition from Chodorów to Lubin in the Western Territories took approximately six weeks:

My family was cast off into a train-wagon intended for wood. Our livestock – cows, chickens, and goats – were slightly worse off: they were loaded onto dirty cattle cars… The journey west was horrible! The train made frequent stops, at times not moving for hours. Hunger and dirt was a constant companion. Lice and scabies continuously plagued us.

Other repatriates report inhuman conditions with death in the role of a frequent visitor. “Conditions on the transports were simply despicable,” writes Bernadeta Świrska.

There was no water – a complete lack of sanitation! In the course of two weeks our car was unfastened, left for days motionless on the side rails. Nobody

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315 Zawadzka, Repatrianci, k. 254.
bothered to check on us. We were treated worse than cattle! Several people perished in front of our very eyes.\textsuperscript{317}

Exposure to death and disease hardened some while fracturing others. Helplessness drove many onto the edge of despair. According to a Polish youth from Lwów, it was not uncommon for repatriates to flee transports, taking advantage of a pause in the journey and running into the thicket. In still other cases, “people got accidentally left behind as trains abruptly sped away from designated rest areas.”\textsuperscript{318} Separation and flight thus threatened to breakup families, magnifying an already tense situation.

Julia Ostrowska – the repatriate from Łoszniów we encountered earlier – was an industrious wife and mother. Like other lucky Polish kresowianki (women of the East), she was a survivor of one Nazi and two Soviet occupations as well as the Polish-Ukrainian civil war. Following her husband’s conscription to the People’s Army in May 1944, Julia assumed the immense responsibility of preparing for the journey west. On the way to the embarkation point accompanied only by her nine-month-old infant, Julia convinced herself that the worst was behind her. After all, what could have been worse from Ukrainian terror and Soviet evacuations? Women like Julia could not have possibly foreseen the abject circumstances still ahead of them. Clearly, the worst was yet to come:

After waiting for two weeks at the station in Trembowla the open-roofed transport finally arrived. We boarded the train four families per car. The voyage lasted three weeks. I kept my child alive almost exclusively through breastfeeding. Malnourishment and torment did not spare anyone.\textsuperscript{319}

\textsuperscript{317} Bernadeta Świrska, \textit{Opis historii mego życia w okresie Osadnictwa Polskiego po roku 1945 na Ziemiach Zachodnich i Północnych}, Ossolineum – Wrocław, Dział Rękopisów, Zarząd Fundacji „Krzyżowa” dla Porozumienia Europejskiego, Sygn. 58/93, k. 81.

\textsuperscript{318} Pseudonim „Harmaki,” „Życzę Ci, abyśmy wszyscy zostali we Lwowie,” Ossolineum – Wrocław, Zarząd Fundacji „Krzyżowa” dla Porozumienia Europejskiego, Sygn. 61/93, k. 17.

Julia clung frantically to the hope that things would get better on the other side of the Polish-Soviet border. But the voyage through Poland turned out to be even more reckless: “Aside from hunger, cold, dirt, and lice, there was also a great calamity: a fire exploded in the adjacent car! The transport halted and the flames had to be extinguished.”\textsuperscript{320} Julia eventually made it to Wrocław-Brochów in one piece: her infant, unlike less fortunate newborns, lived to see its new home.

Personal strength was not always enough to reach an intended destination. In other cases, money and bribes helped determine directions and termination-points. Disgruntled railway-men, upset about their meager wages and clearly uninterested in supervising the human cargo under their jurisdiction, extracted large sums of money from repatriates. In some cases, desperate passengers offered railway workers money to accelerate a given transport. According to Stanisław Wołkowski, a Pole from Dobrewody, “there were times when repatriates tried to bribe train personnel to speed-up the journey. People would pool together money to collect a pay-off large enough to hasten the transport. This generally had the desired effect.”\textsuperscript{321} Corruption on the transports, in particular the backhand dealings between repatriates and train personnel, reflected a complex process during which human relationships were continuously renegotiated. Polish railway workers coaxed passengers from the kresy with promises of a safer and quicker passage in exchange for material rewards. But Poles were not the only ones staffing and overseeing transports. Soviet soldiers were usually more fastidious in

\textsuperscript{320} Ibid.
their taste for Polish bribes. A young girl from Vilnius in the northeastern kresy remembers:

Our train kept halting. During longer stops we would organize a ‘collection’ (składka) to induce our guardians to push on. We then delivered our ‘collection’ to Russian soldiers, our escorts. We provided them with vodka, sausage, and money.\footnote{Barbara [no last name], \textit{Nie wybiera się sobie ani daty, ani miejsca urodzenia}, Ossolineum – Wrocław, Dział Rękopisów, Zarząd Fundacji „Krzyżowa” dla Porozumienia Europejskiego, Sygn. 58/93 (2), k. 46.}

Other repatriates, such as Eliza Bator, also of Vilnius, recall frightening Soviet soldiers demanding jewelry and watches. During a border inspection, a Soviet soldier singled out Eliza’s mother for a more in-depth search.

My mother had a beautiful Swiss watch with a golden bracelet. The soldier demanded to know the origins and content of the watch. My mother addressed him carelessly: ‘it is made of cheap American gold,’ – her answer was a good one.\footnote{Eliza Bator, \textit{Jest pierwsza połowa maja 1946 roku}, Ossolineum – Wrocław, Dział Rękopisów, Zarząd Fundacji „Krzyżowa” dla Porozumienia Europejskiego, Sygn. 59/93 (1), k. 3.}

Observing uneasily her mother’s exchange with the Red Army inspector, Eliza fully realized the grave risk that her mother was committing. Transfer regulations – it is unclear if they were drawn-up by Poles or Soviets – strictly forbade repatriates from crossing the border with more than one item of gold. Nevertheless, Eliza’s account suggests that Polish women on her transport rarely took notice of these regulations:

Like my mother, many women hid valuable jewels and gold in small cosmetic jars filled with skin-care lotions and creams. Each jar would contain at least one 5- or 10-ruble gold coin, as well as rings, necklaces, and bracelets.\footnote{Ibid.}

The possession of carefully concealed “personal treasures” served an imperative strategic purpose. Repatriates, in most cases women, used gold pieces and personal effects to bargain even a small degree of safety for their loved ones. A golden watch or necklace sometimes had the power to shorten an unhygienic and life-threatening journey. In still
other instances, an expensive piece of jewelry could buy soup, milk or water. In the great majority of cases, however, survival depended on one’s ability to use the very little that one had to bargain and negotiate a tolerable existence on what appeared to be an endless journey.

Evicted from their homelands for reasons that they did not quite understand, the repatriates struggled to stay alive in conditions that threatened to undermine their identities as Poles and human beings. Irena Kacperek’s ordeal en route from Brzeżany is a typical depiction of a population transfer:

The train stops – bandits? Machinery flaw? The conductor announces that the locomotive had broken down. We all understood what that meant. People began collecting money, taking out food and especially alcohol… but the train kept stopping and stopping – and the alcohol kept flowing and flowing. Eventually we ran out of alcohol losing all hope of reaching our destination.

Conclusion

The fate of Poles like Irena Kacperek, Julia Ostrowska, and Bernadeta Świrska, witnesses of Soviet and Nazi excesses, involved unprecedented levels of violence and uncertainty. Dislocation and upheaval, the constituent parts of forging communist and fascist utopias, were absolutely central to the identity of East-European borderlands, microcosms of paradise for so many Poles, Ukrainians, Jews, and Germans. But the creation of one person’s paradise required the destruction of another’s. Thus the quest for a racially-pure “Nazi utopia” as well as a Soviet society free of class enemies and counterrevolutionaries – totalitarian projects incubated in the laboratory of Eastern Europe – spelled the end of countless Polish communities in the kresy such as Raj.

325 Kacperek, Utracenie mojego Raju, k. 31.
In postwar Poland, forced migrations confirmed a radically new socio-demographic order. This new order would facilitate the uprooting and transplantation of Poles, Germans, Ukrainians, and Hungarians from places that all considered their personal paradise. In the Polish context, communist insistence on population transfers and ethnic cleansing as major tools of postwar nation-building ultimately fulfilled the interwar nationalist aim of “Poland for the Poles.” World War II and its aftermath revealed a fundamental break with the multicultural legacy of the interwar Polish Republic and its early-modern predecessor, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

Postwar population movements, in particular the transfers from the kresy, contributed to shaping popular perceptions of communist authority. Repatriates from the kresy resented communists for depriving them of their homelands. Indeed, to most kresowianie, their new homes in western and northern Poland – territories that not long ago were integral parts of Germany – represented an unfamiliar and foreign landscape. Neither the material culture nor the local topography seemed recognizably Polish. Repatriates perceived the annexation of former German lands with a mix of antipathy and indifference. In contrast, many viewed the loss of the kresy, their ancestral paradise as a great personal and national tragedy. At the same time, however, exposure to the alien culture and inhospitable landscape of the Western Territories provoked a significant reorientation in the identities and outlooks of most Polish migrants. With the “small homelands” of eastern Galicia, Volhynia, and the Vilnius region lost to the Soviet Union, “the locus of identity” among eastern migrants gradually began to shift toward an identity

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327 Morawska, “Intended and Unintended Consequences of Forced Migrations,” 1061.
based on loyalty to an ethnically homogenous Polish nation-state. How this came about is explored in further detail in the next three chapters.

Danger and hostility defined the context of frontier life for most Polish settlers and repatriates in the Western Territories. This perception of a fatal frontier populated with devious Germans in a ghastly “unknown” captivated Polish migrants before even reaching their new homes. Official propaganda linking Germans with genocidal atrocities (as a justification for taking their land) was not reassuring to the new arrivals. Poles from central Poland and the kresy assumed danger as the natural setting for their new lives in strange and alien lands. And how could they not when confronted with messages like these:

There is only one great undeniable truth (niezaprzeczalna prawda): the Polish republic confronts only one danger – the German danger. Indeed, all Slavic tribes have only one eternal foe – the Teutonic German! (Niemiec Krzyżak)

Witold Mniszewski, a high-ranking Polish official and the author of this indictment, chose his words carefully when depicting the Germans. Certainly, the allusion to the Teutonic Knights (Krzyżacy) was not accidental. Mniszewski, although a communist, was well versed in the Polish nationalist lexicon, zealously promoted by the Polish Western Union (PZZ). Stigmatizing contemporary Germans with the brush of medieval lore – the Teutonic Knights were the militant incarnation of gruesome and “bloodthirsty” Germans – reminded Poles about the clear and present danger on the undomesticated frontier.

Memoirs and testimonies in Polish archives and institutions such as the Ossolineum suggest that Polish settlers were often concerned about losing their lives

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should their paths cross with Germans. With over three million Germans in Lower Silesia on the eve of Nazi capitulation, Polish-German encounters were inevitable. And as Poles quickly discovered, social interactions with the so-called “national foe” comprised an unavoidable complement to living on the frontier. Indeed, survival dictated that settlers sometimes ought to ignore the sort of official rhetoric such as the statement quoted above by Witold Mniszewski. They had to look beyond the image of the “Teutonic German” to forge relationships with people, who though culturally alien, held the key to domesticating the region. Indeed, it is my argument that the Germans were absolutely central to cultural Polonization. The consolidation of Polish cultural power two hundred kilometers deep into German-speaking Europe could not have occurred as rapidly and efficiently without the conscious, though not necessarily enthusiastic, collaboration of Germans.

The displacement of one culture by another thus demanded cross-cultural cooperation, intimate exchange, and the forging of surprisingly genuine and affable relationships. No one knew the Western Territories – not that long ago the eastern periphery of the Third Reich – as well as its native inhabitants, the Ostelbien Germans. Throughout the immediate postwar period, Germans would remain a constant source of indispensable information for eager and curious Poles building new homes while wrestling with their own homelessness. (This was especially the case with repatriates from the kresy).

Despite official messages, then, Germans, perhaps ironically, were at the very forefront of Polonization. German farmers often helped Poles get established on their country estates. German workers, engineers, and specialists helped redirect Ostelbien
industry toward Polish markets and production targets. Germans shared and frequently surrendered their apartments to Poles. They navigated the local landscape facilitating, sometimes willingly but more often reluctantly, the Polonization of Lower Silesia’s towns, infrastructure, enterprises, and businesses. Indeed, in an ironic and tragic twist, Germans witnessed and in many ways facilitated their own cultural undoing. The story of Polish-German interactions in postwar Lower Silesia is thus about much more than fear, danger, and national antagonism. The indigenization of Polish culture in former German lands necessitated a certain level of intimacy, social and sometimes sexual proximity between repatriates and expellees, the incoming and the outgoing population. The nature of this intimacy as well as the quality of trans-cultural exchange between these awkward and unfamiliar neighbors is the subject of this chapter.

From the very beginning, communist policies of institutionalizing and indigenizing Polish domination in Lower Silesia were contradictory. On the one hand, official propaganda ostracized Germans as fascists and enemies, dissuading Polish and Jewish settlers from establishing relations with communities on the verge of expulsion. In an April 1945 interview with the Polish Press Agency, “Polpress,” Bolesław Bierut, the first president of communist Poland, stated: “Six centuries had passed and the inheritors of the Teutonic idea (idea krzyżactwa) continue the tradition of Teutonic bestiality.”

Echoing Witold Mniszewski, in particular through his association of medieval European knights (whose orders also included Dutch, Scandinavian, and English members) with modern Germans, Bierut warned Poles about the hazards of befriending the enemy.

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331 Czym są dla Polski Ziemie Odzyskane, 12 April 1945, Archiwum Państwowe we Wrocławiu (APWr), Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza Komitet Wojewódzki we Wrocławiu, Wydział Propagandy, Sygn. 1/VII/43, k. 179.
But interaction with the national “Teutonic foe” was not that easy to avoid. On the other hand, survival in the harsh social and economic reality of the western frontier promised at least a minimal level of cooperation between Polish “treasure-seekers” and German “treasure-guides.” Poles and Germans realized that given their powerlessness in determining geopolitical outcomes, mutual cooperation held the promise of stability for both communities, at least in the short term. The hunt for loot and the desire for economic exchange had the greatest potential to unite incoming settlers with outgoing expellees. These encounters transpired in a gradually changing political and social landscape.

The presence of large German communities in places like Wrocław, Wałbrzych, Kłodzko, and Legnica assured that, from the very beginning, Polish settlers and repatriates would have to share a common space with people they learned to identify with evil and deceit. Settler narratives, however, include uplifting stories of Polish-German camaraderie, demonstrating that some Poles were unreceptive to official propaganda. Warsaw’s vilification of Germans while sometimes inciting fear also provoked acts of compassion and the willingness of both sides to trespass barriers to sociability imposed from above. In the end, Poland’s Lower Silesia was forged and remade out of the contacts and dealings of several groups not accustomed to close cooperation. Poles, Germans, Jews, Soviets, and autochthons comprised the five main communities. Nevertheless, encounters between the two largest groups – Poles and Germans – set the tone for the cultural and social redefinition of the region.

The resourcefulness of both groups, including the occasional desire to violate ethno-cultural frontiers, had the most far-reaching implications for the long-term identity

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332 Thum, Obce Miasto, 159-167.
of Lower Silesia. The defeat of the Third Reich combined with the triumph of the Soviet Union enabled Poles to dominate the cultural geography of the region and to do so without questioning their right to control the landscape. The Germans, however, would continue to shape the future of Lower Silesia. The ethnic and linguistic transformation of their homeland could not have proceeded without their involvement. Relations between ordinary Poles and Germans “naturalized” the frontier by making it intelligible and familiar. Consequently, the experiences of both groups hastened the stabilization of the frontier. This model of stabilization, however, is not what the communists had in mind when advocating integration and Polonization. Communists such as Bierut and Mniszewski foresaw the domestication of the Western Territories through a ceaseless promotion of ethnic divisions. The Germans were Poland’s so-called hereditary enemies, and relationships between Poles and the “descendents of Teutonic Knights” were strongly discouraged.

But in reality, the boundaries between the local German population and incoming Polish settlers were startlingly porous. To the dismay of many communists, the myth of the Ostelbien Teutonic Knights did not have much significance for Poles living six hundred years later. To be sure, divisions on the frontier were quite strong but they did not always run between ethnic communities. On the contrary, more often than not, they ran through ethnic communities. For instance, Polish repatriates from the kresy often kept aloof from their compatriots of central Poland. Thievery, violence, and unfamiliar cultural practices such as religious worship divided Polish easterners from the Polish heart-landers. In surprisingly many cases, repatriates from beyond the Bug forged harmonious bonds with Ostelbien Germans. Thus, in spite of Polish communist and
nationalist wishes, Germans played a major role in shaping the communities, institutions, and discourses of Polish statehood in the immediate postwar period.

The crystallization of a Polish national space in Lower Silesia required interethnic exchange and the continued presence of Germans in the local public sphere. The contribution of Ostelbien Germans in shaping the postwar Polish community, as well as more broadly, the process of Polonization, has not received sufficient attention. This chapter thus examines the ways in which cross-cultural trespassing accelerated the ethnic, social, and political shift in Lower Silesia’s identity. Poles and their German neighbors built postwar Poland’s most complex centers of culture upon a foundation of mutual animosity but also cooperation and struggle. Yet the strategy of cooperation appeared to be surprisingly effective in facilitating a Polish Lower Silesia.

“Hitler kaput!” Encounters with the “German Other”

Helena Janiga’s memories of the first encounter with her new hometown, Wrocław, are dominated by images of soot, smoke, and rubble. Helena could not grow used to her new surroundings. She arrived in the Lower Silesian capital from Wilno, one of the premier cultural centers of interwar Poland (now Vilnius, the capital of Soviet Lithuania from 1940 until 1991 when Lithuania regained its independence). It was June 11, 1946 and Helena’s disembarkation at the Nadodrze train station thrust her into a crushing reality. “Here a frighteningly new life, on charred ground (zwęglona ziemia), a sea of rubble and people from all over Poland and the world… This is a new world, a new unknown life, indeed, an unknown future.”333 Helena felt overpowered by the

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strange sounds and smells. Her destination, the mythical, medieval Piast Wrocław, had little in common with what she considered her lost Polish Wilno. As far as she was concerned, Wrocław was a dim and smoldering crater, somewhere in the darkest corner of a distant and foreign land.

The view was truly dreadful. Everywhere the eye could see bombed-out and incinerated houses, streets swimming in wreckage, and on this miserable landscape, people! German inscriptions mark the mutilated buildings. Old German women crowd the streets selling their very last possessions. There is a mixture of languages, dialects, and accents.³³⁴

Clearly, this was not the Poland of Helena’s childhood. Postwar Polish communists expected repatriates like Helena to take up the mantle of western Polonization and make the burdensome adjustment of living on the frontier. At only nineteen, Helena was quite lucky. Neither old nor sick, she would don the role of pioneer and, as the official propaganda would have it, bind Lower Silesia “organically and spiritually with Poland.”³³⁵

The official propaganda, however, failed to prepare Polish migrants for the architectural, cultural, and linguistic Germanness of their adopted homelands. Inquisitive Polish memoirists identify large German communities, comprised mainly of women and children, particularly in the urban areas, as the most common element of the sinister landscape. Germans were ubiquitous in virtually the entire region. No amount of communist propaganda could persuade Poles like Helena that Lower Silesia was more Polish than eastern Galicia or the northeastern kresy. The region’s tower of Babel, Wrocław, but in terms of its ethnic composition still Breslau, continued to remind Poles

³³⁴ Ibid.
³³⁵ Memoriał PZZ dla Ministerstwa Ziem Odzyskanych w przedmiocie programu zachodniego w polityce polskiej, 1945, APWr, Komitet Wojewódzki PPR we Wrocławiu – Wydział Propagandy, Sygn. 1/VII/43, k. 115.
of its Germanness long after the postwar repatriations were over. The Poles’ acceptance of Wrocław – as well as other Lower Silesian towns and cities – as their new homeland had surprisingly little to do with internalizing aggressively nationalist communist propaganda linking the new territories to Poland’s historical inheritance. Instead, the quest for everyday survival, which often forced Poles and Germans to cooperate despite mutual suspicions, did considerably more to stabilize the frontier. Interactions with Germans made Poles view the world around them with slightly less distance. Relationships were built upon the rubble of mutilated streets and buildings. Straddling the cultural divide was a common survival strategy among people displaced by war and migration. Cross-cultural encounters enabled settlers to overcome insurmountable fears and uncertainties.

There was very little in the everyday lives of Poles on the frontier that was not subject to some level of interaction with their Ostelbien neighbors. Krystyna Węgrzyn and her family resumed their postwar lives in the company of Germans. The journey from Stanisławów in the western Ukraine to Oleśnica in Lower Silesia, spanned 600 kilometers and the longest two weeks of Krystyna’s life. Resentment of the Germans had been knocked into repatriates like the Węgrzyns by memories of the Nazi occupation. German occupiers rounded up Polish women and youth in Grabicz, a small town near Stanisławów where Krystyna spent the war, hurling them into forced labor in the Reich. Interestingly, Hungarian soldiers, Germany’s allies during World War II, protected Poles from Nazi excesses: “Hungarian men sympathized with young Polish maidens, and when the Germans came searching for workers to dig trenches at the front, the Hungarians
shielded us.” But Hungarians would not accompany Poles to their new, unexpected homes in the Western Territories. And, perhaps surprisingly, as Krystyna quickly discovered, Hungarian protection from the Germans of the Oleśnica region would not be necessary.

The Węgrzyns were lucky in that they were able to survive the railcar journey without succumbing to disease, or conceivably even worse, enduring separation. For many other repatriates the voyage west was often a death sentence culminating in bandit attacks, robberies, exhaustion, starvation, and dysentery. Surviving the journey, of course, was just a prelude to more life threatening bedlam on the frontier. Krystyna’s father, however, a schoolteacher from the kresy, was one of the more fortunate repatriates. The small Polish education bureau in Oleśnica offered the elder Węgrzyn a teaching position in nearby Cieśle. As elsewhere in the Western Territories, Polish teachers were in high demand in postwar Lower Silesia. This is hardly surprising seeing that linguistic Polonization was a top priority of the communist-dominated state.

Teachers like Krystyna’s father were some of the first representatives of the Polish intelligentsia in small rural communities like Cieśle in the new western provinces. They were charged with reviving a vulnerable generation of Poles whose education was disrupted by war and migration, simultaneously catalyzing attachments to the new landscape and government. Teachers were also important as rescuers of autochthons and the enforcers of Polonization in former German territories.

By the time the Węgrzyns arrived in Cieśle most real estate was in Polish, German, or Russian hands. Soviet officers seized a few buildings on the edge of town.

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What followed was a Polish stampede, mostly repatriates from western Belorussia, for undamaged or partially intact properties. Since they were latecomers, the Węgrzyns had to share a building with two female German cousins and their families. Sharing a common living space with Germans, however, required a significant psychological shift. After all, not too long ago Germans were the slave drivers and executioners of Poles. But Polish relations with these Germans in Cieśle were surprisingly cordial. The Węgrzyns and their German housemates cooked, washed, and even worked together. The experience of cohabitation strengthened interpersonal bonds, making the common living space, as well as, more generally, the local public sphere, more home-like and inviting.

After a year of dual-living arrangements, private misfortunes on both sides became shared household misfortunes.

By the end of October, our old German woman (nasza starsza Niemka) became very sick. The doctor diagnosed her with an advanced-stage cancer. A few days later she passed away and a local pastor laid her in the grave. This was a difficult time.337

The camaraderie between Poles and Germans was often powerful and genuine enough to suppress harmful stereotypes generated by war and ethnic hatred. The case of postwar Cieśle demonstrates a willingness on behalf of the Polish and German communities to trespass ethnic and cultural boundaries. Crossing the ethnic and cultural frontier was thus part-and-parcel of domesticating what appeared to be a strange and alien territorial frontier (at least from the Polish perspective).

Gradually, with the first school year coming to a successful close, the Węgrzyns returned to the routines of prewar family life as practiced, at one point, in Stanisławów. This routine included escalating contacts with local Germans. Krystyna reminisces:

A prominent estate owner lived in town along with his caretaker and cook. He was an older and intelligent gentleman. He would often visit us needing something translated and written in Polish. My father knew German very well and took pleasure in helping this country squire.\textsuperscript{338}

The Węgrzyns thus made a conscious effort to forge strong links with Cieślę Germans. They learned valuable lessons from their Ostelbien neighbors, the most important one – maintaining and accepting the community as their own. The affinity between Polish and German families testified to the limits of the nationalist and communist propaganda showering repatriates and settlers from above. Bolesław Bierut’s slogan of the Teutonic menace would likely not find an echo in Lower Silesian Cieślę. The contradiction between evil yet at the same time benevolent Germans was something that most Polish settlers grappled with on the western frontier. Perhaps Krystyna’s words put it best: “Although the Germans were our enemies, the ones from Cieślę were always generous and polite.”\textsuperscript{339}

Settler recognition that there were two types of Germans – those who were evil and those who were “generous and polite” – did not sit well with Polish authorities. As emphasized in chapter 1, the PZZ saw the Western Territories as a combat zone between two antagonistic nations whose struggle would allegedly continue long after the last shots of the war were fired. According to this siege mentality, the Polonization campaign would slowly but surely facilitate the victory of Poles and Polishness. Thus, Germans in places like Cieślę, Oleśnica, and Wrocław – Nazis, Junkers, and Teutonic Knights – were to be disarmed and uprooted. Unlike the Węgrzyns, then, Polish communists and their nationalist henchmen consistently denied the existence of “benevolent Germans.” “The entire German nation is responsible for Hitlerite atrocities… The Polish nation is thus

\textsuperscript{338} Węgrzyn, Wspomnienia Repatriantki, k. 184.
\textsuperscript{339} Ibid.
faced with a great historic responsibility to thoroughly re-Polonize the recovered territories.” Obviously, Polish settlers in Lower Silesia, including families like Krystyna’s, were either unaware of their “responsibilities” or chose consciously to ignore them. Document after document in Polish central archives hint at Warsaw’s unease about Poles “striking it good” with Ostelbien Germans. While it is difficult to estimate how typical the experience of the Węgrzyns was for the settlers as a group, testimonies at the Ossolineum suggest that the case of Cieśle interethnic camaraderie was not necessarily that rare. Evidently, Poles in Lower Silesia did not always prioritize ethnic struggle as a central tenet of frontier life.

Studying the memoirs of Polish repatriates from Soviet-annexed eastern Poland, it is striking how the western frontier transformed people, both the incoming and the outgoing populations. Repatriates regarded frontier life with great reservations. Most of them anticipated danger and hostility, particularly from local Germans. But when Poles arrived in Lower Silesia, they confronted a reality, in many ways, different from what they had expected. Franciszek Hawrysz, a repatriate from eastern Galicia, arrived in Lubin, a town in northwestern Lower Silesia, on St. Michael’s Day, September 29, 1945. Hawrysz recalled that in the autumn of 1945, Germans and Russians were the two main nationality groups in Lubin (Lubën). Women, children, and the elderly figured prominently among the local German population. The Russians, in contrast, were primarily young servicemen hailing from the Red Army.

The Hawrysz family occupied a building, which they momentarily shared with young Soviet army men. But the Red Army in town did not set the tone for Polish-
German interactions. Lubin’s Germans comprised the largest ethnic community, and, one upon which the Poles would have to increasingly rely. According to Hawrysz, “relations with Germans were good. A German neighbor came regularly to feed our chickens. Initially there was a concern that he may poison the livestock.”³⁴¹ But the Hawrysz household quickly warmed up to the man: “we shared our eggs with the German who would frequently come back to feed the chickens.”³⁴² Polish repatriates like the Hawrysz family thus redrew community boundaries in Lubin to include local Germans. The initial fear of “conspiring and poisoning” Germans gradually dissipated, giving way to more intimate and practical interactions.

The lack of friction between Germans and Poles in Lubin was reflected in the everyday public rituals that both communities partook in. Polish and German families frequently made use of the local UNRRA office (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration), discharging material and nutritional assistance to people dislocated by war, ethnic cleansing, and genocide. For example, the Hawrysz family obtained horses, indispensable to plowing and sowing the soil, from the local UNRRA.³⁴³ The UNRRA also distributed food, clothing, and medicines to countless Polish and German families in Lower Silesia as well as other, much more devastated regions of Poland. Poles and Germans, however, also interacted in churches, market squares, and playgrounds. Polish residents of Lubin even attended German funerals. The kresowianie, accustomed to elaborate funerals during which families spent an entire night praying and singing religious hymns, struggled to understand the shockingly modest Evangelical “cult

³⁴² Ibid.
³⁴³ Ibid.
of death.” The Hawrysz’s deceased German neighbor was placed on a bed sheet in a wooden hut meant for chopping timber. This seemed to have puzzled the elder Mrs. Hawrysz but ultimately it did not stop her from paying her respects to the departed German. 344

Relationships between German and Polish children suggest a common social world for Lubin’s youngest inhabitants. Hawrysz recalled his childhood in Lower Silesia: “Polish and German children played together and taught each other new songs.” 345 Despite the linguistic communication barrier, then, music brought the youngest members of the two communities together. “In 1947 when the Germans were leaving town,” Hawrysz writes, “there was sobbing and tears. The cooperation between [Poles and Germans] made families closer (zбли́жено родзины зе собя).” 346

Consequently, despite what appeared to be rigid cultural boundaries, German residents of Ostelbien towns and cities did not entirely reject the incoming Polish population. Part of the explanation lies in their inability to decide their own fate: international treaties and agreements ensured that the German presence east of the Oder and Neisse would be temporary. But Germans also understood that Polish settlers and repatriates were as powerless about their situation as they themselves were. Polish repatriates from the eastern kresy, for instance, were no more eager about moving to Lower Silesia than German expellees were about leaving it. Postwar leaders like Truman, Churchill, and Stalin did not consult the populations of East Central Europe about their thoughts on forced migration. Decisions imposed from above had real and devastating implications on entire societies on the ground in borderland regions like Silesia and

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344 Ibid.
345 Ibid.
346 Ibid.
Galicia. To say then that relations between Poles and Germans on the Ostelbien frontier were exclusively fraught with tensions and hostility was to miss the complexity of postwar cross-cultural interactions. To be sure, tensions and aggression often did arise. Yet, contrary to what the PZZ may have imagined, they were not always generated by Polish or German nationalism. Instead, scarcity, lack of housing, counterproductive civilian and military authorities, as well as uncertainty about future prospects galvanized adversity between and among different sets of Lower Silesian inhabitants. But where there was adversity, “level-headed” Poles and Germans set the tone for dialogue and cooperation.

The need for community and stability became a powerful force in shaping Polish-German encounters in Lower Silesia. Irena Kacperek, the repatriate from Raj who was at the center of the previous chapter, recalled the Germans of the Lubań area with nostalgia: “In our new home there were Germans, polite and diligent – they did not resemble those from wartime.” In reality, however, this young woman’s impression of Germans and their homeland was much more complicated. Curiosity, astonishment, and alarm weave their way intermittently into her narrative. Kacperek and her family disembarked in Lubań but they would not stay there for long. Instead, the family sank roots in nearby Piastowo (Küper), a small agricultural community, which many local Germans considered backward. For Irena, however, her new hometown outshone her native Raj:

It is May 6, 1946. Five weeks of a horrific journey in a freight car separate me from Raj – five weeks and one hundred years of civilization! We have a multistory home with electricity, adjoining buildings, agricultural machinery, a beautiful garden, and over seven hectares of land. Unfortunately, there are also Germans.

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347 Irena Kacperek, Utracenie mojego Raju, Ossolineum – Wrocław, Dział Rękopisów, Zarząd Fundacji „Krzyżowa” dla Porozumienia Europejskiego, Sygn. 61/93, k. 34.
348 Ibid.
As demonstrated by other memoirists, for instance Krystyna Węgrzyn, interethnic cohabitation was a normal, if not typical, part of frontier life. Irena eventually clarifies that her initial suspicion of Germans had more to do with the understandable awkwardness of sharing a common living space with strangers than with nationalist resentments. The German family on the joint estate in Piastowo comprised four individuals: a father, mother, adult son and underage daughter. Irena surmised that the family’s wealth had something to do with membership in the Nazi party. The family’s Nazi connections, however, did not stop Irena from befriending Eta, the estate-owner’s daughter. Interestingly, neither “cultural distance” nor the German family’s dubious political past was great enough to hinder amiable cross-cultural encounters: “We worked together in the fields and ate meals at one table.”

Occasionally, relations between Poles and Germans would get even more intimate. Irena was not the only Pole seeking the German daughter’s attention. A close friend of the Kacperek family – a “cheerful and flamboyant man” whom Irena’s father befriended in the military – lived as a guest on the Piastowo estate. This “army friend” tirelessly courted Eta, seeking her affection and ingratiating himself with her parents. Eta’s love affair with the Polish charmer confronted her with a life-altering decision. By mid-1947, as the last local Germans were preparing for expulsion, Eta’s parents received an order of eviction. Polish provincial authorities were accelerating their “clean sweep” of Lower Silesia: the last remaining Germans were expected to leave for the occupied zones of Germany. The order to leave threatened to undermine the communal bonds so cautiously built and maintained in spite of cultural boundaries. From Eta’s perspective,

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349 Ibid.
the choice between her parents and her lover was an excruciating one. In the end, as reported by Irena: “Eta and father’s friend married and moved to a neighboring village where they took charge of a house with a smithy.”

With the expulsion of the Germans, disillusionment and gloom spread throughout the Polish society of Piastowo. The abrupt departure of their Ostelbien neighbors provoked bitter memories among repatriates like the Kacpereks. Irena, in particular, felt overwhelmed with emotion:

I saw in the neighborhood Germans thrown out of their homes with literally one suitcase. There were instances of pilfering and violence… I remembered at that moment our people – how they were taken to Siberia.

Irena’s recollection of deportations in Soviet occupied eastern Poland during World War II helped her understand the tragedy of Lower Silesian Germans. In many ways, wartime deportations to Siberia as well as postwar repatriations from the kresy bore a striking resemblance to the uprooting of Germans in the Western Territories. The fates of Polish repatriates and German expellees were thus intimately intertwined: both had to leave their homelands and both had to start new lives in strange, unfamiliar places. This experience of “uprootedness” sparked unexpected relationships and genuine displays of empathy between people with tragically similar biographies. Among other things, then, Polish-German encounters affirmed the power of human compassion in the face of overwhelming adversity.

Exile was not the only experience that galvanized bonds between the two populations. The harsh conditions of frontier life, including poverty and the breakdown of public order, especially in the immediate postwar period, drew Poles and Germans

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350 Ibid.
351 Ibid.
together. The Soviet military invasion of the Ostelbien borderlands as well as poorly managed forced migrations sowed great insecurity among both incoming and outgoing populations. People on the edge of survival, cut off from their families, deprived of food, fuel, and warmth, as well as standard hygienic practices, typically did not think of abstract priorities such as Polonization, ethnic struggle, or “historical justice.” Julia Ostrowska’s arrival in Lower Silesia is a fitting illustration of this. Not long after the war separated Julia from her husband, Ostrowska and her infant found themselves in Wrocław-Brochów. The blazing ruins of the incapacitated Silesian fortress, however, would not remain home for long.

Fire appeared to be an inseparable part of Julia’s perilous odyssey. The three-week long journey from Trembowla in eastern Galicia witnessed an astonishing explosion in one of the transport cars. Ostrowska was fortunate to escape the blaze but flames continued to follow her in Lower Silesia. Julia’s predicament finally lessened upon arrival in Stary Wiązów, outside of Strzelin. This Lower Silesian town would be the site of a happy reunion as Ostrowska’s husband, now a demobilized soldier, joined her on the frontier. Like the Węgrzyns, the Ostrowskis commenced their frontier life in the company of Germans. In Julia’s words:

Living with the German family was not that bad. We were forced to share our poverty. I was very poor and so were the Germans. The German family was comprised of seven individuals including four children below the age of ten.352

Julia and her husband eventually had three children of their own but, for the most part, they would not recall the Germans. By 1947, most of the local Ostelbien population was gone. The Węgrzyn, Kacperek, and Ostrowski stories demonstrate, however, the

prominence and proximity of Polish-German encounters in postwar Lower Silesia. Perhaps ironically, then, interactions with Germans were a kind of prerequisite of western Polonization. Poles learned to identify with Lower Silesia through their exchanges with Ostelbien neighbors.

Whether willingly or unwillingly, then, destitution and insufficient living space merged the social worlds of Poles and Germans on the frontier. But nothing generated as much sympathy and interdependence as the threat of violence and the abuse dealt out by local authority. Bernadeta Świrksa recalled with shame the brutality that Polish power signified to the Germans of Wojnowice, a small town on the outskirts of Wrocław.

One night a terrible shriek coming from a German woman’s house woke mother and me. The civic militia (Milicja Obywatelska) was beating up her son and demanding a ransom (okup) in gold. [The boy] was beaten terribly! According to Świrksa, the friendly German woman possessed an ability to distinguish between good and bad Poles. This ability was emblematic of a “frontier mentality” that both Poles and Germans learned to maneuver to their advantage. In an ironic twist – the inverse of communist propaganda – just as Poles like Węgrzyn differentiated between evil and “polite” Germans, so the Germans viewed the incoming Polish population through bifurcated lenses.

Clearly, from the Germans’ point of view, the Polish militia did not belong to the same category of Poles as the Świrski family. Appalled by the behavior of local law enforcement, Bernadeta’s mother alerted the soltys, coincidentally a relative. The soltys intervened on the German woman’s behalf rescuing her son from further injury. The results were spectacularly swift: “A little while later the entire family departed. Mother,

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in spite of great difficulties, supplied the family for the road. Eventually we received a
thanking letter from Germany, claiming the we had saved the son’s life.”

The Świrski family’s intercession with the militia endeared the German woman and her son to
their benevolent Polish neighbors. Convivial relations between both families continued
even after the last Germans left town. When years later Bernadeta’s mother fell seriously
ill, medicine, in particular penicillin – so difficult to access in Poland – arrived
mysteriously from Germany. Frontier injustice hence catalyzed unexpected amity with
the potential of lifetime relationships in spite of cultural and geopolitical boundaries.

Interestingly, for some Germans, postwar transfers of Poles to Lower Silesia
appeared to be a blessing. Roman Zuber, a repatriate who settled in Małuszów (Malitsch)
near Legnica in 1946, recalls the words of a forty-one year-old German priest, Alfons
Meyer: “‘Poles are Catholics,’ Meyer would emphasize. ‘Now our church will have more
followers than the [rivaling] evangelical church.’” Unlike ethnicity, Roman
Catholicism was one “identity-layer” that many Poles and Ostelbien Germans shared.
While Protestantism dominated the northern sections of German-speaking Europe,
Catholic rituals and traditions were especially influential in the south. Nevertheless, the
confessional landscape of Silesia proved a bit more complex. While Catholics
significantly outnumbered Protestants in Upper Silesia, particularly in the Opole and
Katowice regions, Lower Silesia remained rigidly multi-confessional. For example,
Catholics, Protestants, and Jews formed the three major religious communities of prewar
Breslau (Wrocław). Rivalries and tensions between German Catholics and Protestants

\[354\] Ibid.
\[355\] Roman Zuber, Wspomnienia – Tom III, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich we Wrocławiu – Dział
Dokumentów Życia Społecznego, „Moja Rodzinna Historia” – pamiętniki z konkursu Gazety Wyborczej i
ZNIO 2002, Sygn. XXIV-2, k. 21.
reached periodic crescendos in rural Lower Silesia. As mirrored by father Meyer’s statement, postwar migrations of Poles to the region promised to upset the confessional equilibrium between Catholics and Protestants. To more religiously devout Germans, Poles were often seen as co-religionists with the potential to reinvigorate Lower Silesia’s Catholicism. Historians thus need to be very cautious in their evaluation of Polish-German encounters on the postwar western frontier. In some instances, religion was strong enough to override differences based on ethnicity. In this sense, Catholicism appeared to hold the necessary “social glue” binding Germans and Poles, at least in some rural districts.

These heartening tales of mutual understanding and cooperation, sad to say, are not the only stories to be told in an objective account of resettlement and expulsion. Alfons Meyer was not representative of all Ostelbien Germans. Not all places appropriated for Polish settlement in Lower Silesia had welcoming and accommodating Germans. Polish life often existed on the margins of small Lower Silesian communities with large German populations. According to Tomasz Szarłata, a PUR inspector in Wrocław, local Germans in the vicinity of Psie Pole (Hundfeld) terrorized a newly arrived community of repatriates. Szarłata submitted the following report to the PUR office in Łódź:

Germans are returning en masse to their old homes, evicting [Polish] repatriates. There are even clashes (starcia) between Germans armed with pitchforks (widły) and defenseless [Polish] settlers. The state administration is powerless to help.\footnote{Raport Tadeusza Szarłaty, pracownika Państwowego Urzędu Repatriacyjnego (Oddział we Wrocławiu), 6 June 1945, AAN, Państwowy Urząd Repatriacyjny: Zarząd Centralny – Biuro Dyrektora, Tajne i poufne pisma, korespondencja dotycząca bezpieczeństwa pracowników ZC i Oddz. Wojew. oraz repatriantów, Sygn. I/10, k. 50.}
Hence, for some Germans turning to violence was yet another response to the abrupt Polonization of their home communities. Frustrations generated by a collapse of societal and economic norms accompanied by perceived inequities propelled some Germans toward violence. Polish memoirists who wrote about Lower Silesia decades after the postwar population transfers tended to stress the absence of conflict between Germans and Poles, choosing perhaps to soften the harshness of unhappy encounters. Archival evidence supports both scenarios, however. The frontier could be welcoming and dangerous, peaceful and insecure, for both ethnic groups.

But ethnic conflict also manifested in more subtle ways. Upon his arrival in Kostów, Władysław Bielecki, a repatriate from the Tarnopol region in eastern Galicia, recalls the deep hostility of the indigenous residents.

The local population mistrusted the newcomers, but thankfully, there were no rapes. There were, however, frequent robberies of newly obtained properties, because most of the repatriates were lone women with children. [These robberies] certainly did not spare my mother and aunt whose cows were mysteriously stolen.357

Gender figures prominently in Bielecki’s account of postwar life in Lower Silesia. Husbandless and fatherless female Polish repatriates were vulnerable and faced special difficulties in making the transition to life on the frontier.

According to Bielecki, local Germans perceived the incoming Polish population through the prism of gender. Deprived of their male relatives, Polish women like Bielecki’s mother and aunt were fair game for thievery and harassment. Salvation finally arrived in the form of demobilized Polish servicemen, men like Bielecki’s father.

357 Władysław Bielecki, lack of title, Ossolineum – Wrocław, Zarząd Fundacji „Krzyżowa” dla Porozumienia Europejskiego, Sygn. 59/93 (1), k. 11.
After a while, mother contacted father who managed to survive the war… He was finally demobilized in the late autumn. Father then began looking for a suitable place of settlement, because [Kostów] lacked appropriate conditions.  

Bielecki’s narrative encourages us to reevaluate the role of gender in the postwar campaign to repopulate the Western Territories. Based on his account, it is unmistakable that Kostów “lacked appropriate conditions” because it lacked men, particularly Polish men. Bielecki also demonstrates that Polish migrants viewed the frontier as an aggressively masculine space. Even the idea of a “female settlement” heavily populated with “dangerous” Germans, in particular, German men, sounded so unnatural that it appeared virtually inconceivable.

The unpredictability of the frontier with all its attendant hazards was clearly no place for lone Polish women (or children). The fact that gender structured Bielecki’s sense of security in Kostów is evident in how he describes the plight of Poles from Tarnopol. “Frontier security” was hence predicated on the expectation that men would accompany women on the perilous quest to integrate and tame the Ostelbien wilderness. Lower Silesia was thus no country for vulnerable and “men-less” Polish women.

Fear, desperation, and violence drove many people to incomprehensible lengths. Stories of beatings, sadism, and sexual aggression abound in the archives. But fear and the encounter with the “frontier other” could also bring out the best in people. Mieczysław Nowak, the young pioneer and GO KERM activist introduced in chapter 2 describes some of his first impressions of Ostelbien Germans. One encounter that clearly stands out is his meeting with Ruth Günter. Nowak stumbled upon Ruth while breaking into a German house in Legnica. His inspection of the living quarters appeared to confirm the official propaganda’s depiction of Germans as villains: “On the wall, fixing his dead

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358 Ibid.
gaze on me, was a portrait of a Prussian Junker with a combed, curly mustache... In the corner above the desk, a small golden-framed portrait of the Führer...” Evidence of German wickedness need not be sought in extermination or forced labor camps. It was visible and on display in abandoned villas and houses scattered throughout the Western Territories. At least this is what the Polish communists would have liked settlers to believe. Portraits and images of Hitler, prominent German wartime leaders, or the Prussian nobility, so officialdom argued, pointed to German complicity in war and genocide. At the very least, these images insinuated an immoral tolerance that many ordinary Germans conferred upon the Nazi regime. It is unclear, however, how typical the Günter residence really was.

Still, Nowak’s observations did not end there. Carefully hidden behind the living room door was an emaciated girl of no more than eighteen years of age.

She looked at me with the eyes of a disoriented animal. A thought ran through my head: could she have been raped?! I did not know German very well... She finally spoke: ‘Mutti und Vatti gestorben [mother and father have died].’ She gestured at the portrait with an anxious fleeting look: ‘Hitler kaput [Hitler is dead].’

Nowak’s encounter with Ruth left him feeling bewildered. The last person he expected to find in an old junker home was a deserted, petrified, and famished German girl.

Instinctively, I wanted to embrace her, rub her playfully on the head. But I dared not to. I did not want her to misunderstand me. Instead, I shared my sandwich with her... Timidly, I reassured her that the war is over and that now there will only be peace. ‘Hitler kaput.’

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361 Ibid.
Nowak could not reconcile the ghostlike figure of Ruth with the venomous public depictions of evil and conniving Germans. Ruth eventually recounted her experience of rape to Nowak. The memoirist does not identify the culprit(s).

But in narrating his encounter with a German rape victim, Nowak acknowledges one of the most widespread and taboo aspects of frontier life. For both German and Polish women on the frontier, danger, instability, and violence meant primarily rape. Sexual violence was one of the key manifestations of everyday life in places that were only gradually transitioning from German to Polish administration. And unlike other forms of frontier dangers, sexual excesses complicated relations between incoming and outgoing populations.

Polish memoirists, in particular women, are ambivalent in their descriptions of sexual violence in postwar Lower Silesia, but many of their accounts hint at the existence of rape. These hints are often subtle, and, in the overwhelming majority of cases, limited to descriptions of Soviet military misconduct in local towns and cities. Soviet violations of German women on both sides of the Oder and Neisse comprised the most extreme form of postwar ethnic revenge. Norman Naimark maintains that it was not unusual for the Red Army to rape German females as young as twelve or thirteen. Time and time again, gang rapes and individual physical abuses would turn murderous. Elizabeth D. Heineman links Soviet violations of German women to a broader campaign of ethnic revenge:

With the Soviet advance on Germany, the desire for revenge after a horrifyingly brutal German occupation, permission from above to ‘let off steam,’ and Russian

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habits of binge drinking combined to spark a wave of ‘wild’ rapes of women whose bodies stood in for the German nation as objects of revenge.\textsuperscript{363}

Perhaps unexpectedly, these “wild rapes” in Silesia affected both the Polish and German populations. In ethnically mixed areas where the boundaries between Polishness and Germanness were most indefinable, women identified as Germans, regardless of protestations, were raped or killed on the spot.\textsuperscript{364} To be sure, repatriate and settler memoirs admit the existence of rape in Lower Silesia but rarely discuss Soviet violations of Polish women. It appears that Polish and local autochthon women were more likely to be victims of rape in Upper rather than Lower Silesia.

Nevertheless, local Polish authorities in both regions tended to disregard the welfare and safety of Germans, particularly that of German women. According to Naimark, Polish communists’ “desire for retribution” was often fiercer than the Soviets’: “Orders went out from the Polish communists to expel Germans by whatever means necessary, to ensure incorporation as well as occupation.”\textsuperscript{365} The leadership in Warsaw thus indirectly encouraged local Polish authorities to turn a blind eye to Polish or Soviet victimization of Germans. Attitudes in official circles, however, did not always correspond with the attitudes and social mores of ordinary Poles such as Nowak, for instance. Also, the desire for retribution, though quite strong among some Polish settlers, was not always sustained in the unique frontier conditions highlighted in this section.

The case of Nowak’s exchange with Ruth suggests that some Poles attempted to rationalize and understand German misfortunes. Nowak laments in his memoir: “I wanted to tell Ruth about the bestial acts committed by Germans in [wartime] Poland and

\textsuperscript{364} Naimark, \textit{The Russians in Germany}, 75.
\textsuperscript{365} Ibid.
Russia… about the many Polish girls who against their will were sexually exploited in brothels, etc.”

But, in the end, he refrained from telling her. Instead, the episode at the Günter residence led Nowak to a series of reflections about crime and punishment and the price of revenge. The experience of “frontier-rape” often humanized people, even when its victims hailed from beyond the ethnic divide. In many cases, Polish interactions with German rape victims called into questions the validity of propaganda sanctioning and encouraging ethnic divisions and retributions.

According to Polish historian, Joanna Hytrek-Hryciuk, 1.4 million females were raped east of the Oder-Neisse during the transition from German to Polish political hegemony in the Western Territories. Between April and June 1945, Red Army servicemen raped approximately 100,000 women and girls: 20 percent of these victims eventually became pregnant. The majority of the victims were young German women like Ruth Günter. These waves of sexual violence ultimately culminated in the birth of so-called “Russenkinder,” children of mixed German and Soviet parents. Most of these children would never meet their fathers. Rape in the Ostelbien borderlands hence served as a weapon of war: a tool for both the humiliation and the subordination of the “frontier other.”

The experience of German women, however, also indicated more broadly, how the frontier was “gendered.” In the winter and spring of 1945, Poles and Soviets encountered the Western Territories as a realm of Germans, and, simultaneously, a realm

366 Mieczysław Nowak, Garść Refleksji Pioniera Ziemi Wrocławskiej, November 1991, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich we Wrocławiu (Ossolineum), Zakład Fundacji „Krzyżowa” dla Porozumienia Europejskiego, „Repatrianci,” Sygn. 61/93, kk. 52-53
368 Ibid.
of women. Among young Polish men like Nowak, for example, interactions with underage, parentless, and petrified German girls fostered intense feelings of anxiety, shame, and disbelief. Germans like Ruth Günter had little in common with propaganda images of bloodthirsty and evil Teutonic Knights, Junkers and Nazis. This contradiction was visible to some but there were many who chose to ignore it. Mass rapes of German females thus symbolized the rape of the frontier: the restructuring of cultural hegemony, which plunged the Germans onto the bottom of the social hierarchy. Soviet rapes of Ostelbien women also foreshadowed the gradual ethnic erasure of Germans from the cultural map of the Western Territories. Rape is thus an inseparable feature of both wartime and peacetime ethnic cleansing.\footnote{For a broader discussion on sexual violence under the cover of war, please consult: Elizabeth Heineman (ed.), \textit{Sexual Violence in Conflict Zones: From the Ancient World to the Era of Human Rights} (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).} I will return to the theme of sexual violence in the chapter on family life and gender relations in postwar Lower Silesia.

Polish memoir literature offers a revealing glimpse into the nature and quality of interactions between Poles and Germans on the postwar western frontier. On the one hand, Polish settlers expressed great fear and uncertainty about the prospect of domesticating what appeared to be a culturally unintelligible landscape. On the other hand, and perhaps surprisingly, Poles were often more eager to cross ethno-cultural frontiers than the official propaganda was willing to concede. Deploying discourses of nationalism, the communist-dominated Polish state sought to legitimize its takeover of former German lands while, at the same time, discouraging Poles from forging ties with the “frontier other.” Ethnic resentments between the incoming and outgoing populations were supposed to accelerate the “de-Germanization” and simultaneous “re-Polonization” of the region.
But in the absence of strong enmity – relations between the two communities tended to be stunningly stable if not cordial – the quest to socially and ethnically transform Lower Silesia had to be delayed. Poles and Germans were rarely as distant as the regime in Warsaw would have liked. They often formed relationships, cultivated lifelong camaraderie, and in some instances, married and raised families. During the onslaught of mass repatriations and expulsions, Poles and Germans often imagined their communities as reconcilable and capable of fusion. In a way, then, Polish-German everyday encounters can be seen as a form of resistance to the uprooting tendencies of the center. Thus, the proximity between Poles and their strange new neighbors in strange new territories shaped the inception of a Polish-dominated Lower Silesia.

**Encounters with “other” Poles and Soviets**

Polish settlers felt oddly out of place in the Western Territories. While the communist-dominated government and organizations such as the PZZ highlighted Poland’s so-called destiny in the “new west,” Polish settlers and repatriates had serious reservations. The “Germanness” and foreignness of the frontier – visible in the local topography and architecture – seemed, at times, overwhelming. Ordinary Polish migrants viewed places such as Lower Silesia through terrified and dejected eyes: there was very little that reminded them of the communities they had left behind. They anxiously sought a slice of familiar ground and often failed to find it. Moreover, encounters with Ostelbien Germans, and what appeared to be the region’s immovable Germanness, engendered feelings of ambivalence and a rejection of official propaganda. Henryk Stafiej, a repatriate from eastern Galicia who settled in Wołów, recalled: “The PUR told father that
the Recovered Territories were ancient Polish lands stolen by the Germans but no one believed it.” Repatriates like Stafiej’s father were painfully aware that Lower Silesia was not Polish and that Poland’s rights of ownership came courtesy of Soviet goodwill. And if Lower Silesia could not become Polish – because of a potential new war or a Soviet change-of-heart – it would make little sense to accept it as a new home. As shrewdly reiterated by the elder Stafiej: “Just one atomic bomb and we’re going back to Lwów! (Jedna bomba atomowa i jedziemy znów do Lwowa!)”

The syndrome of impermanence among Poles, especially repatriates from the kresy, was overpowering. The kresowianie’s dilemma was twofold. First, they felt duped by Polish state officials who pledged that the new west was a site of stability and affluence. This image of the Western Territories as spilling over with milk and honey was dashed very quickly, almost immediately following disembarkation. Second, Poles from central Poland, the so-called heart-landers, claimed the great majority of undamaged properties even before the repatriates had arrived. Lack of housing comprised one of the most common disputes between settlers from the heartland and repatriates from the kresy. These disputes were significant because the quest for living space was inseparable from the Polish communist state’s mission of renegotiating postwar national identity. Polish historian Sebastian Ligarski argues that “living space” was the primary site of socialization, indeed, the place where one learned “to be a Pole, a worker, neighbor,

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370 Henryk Stafiej, Oczami i Sercem Dziecka, Ossolineum – Wrocław, Zarząd Fundacji „Krzyżowa” dla Porozumienia Europejskiego, Sygn. 47/98/2, k. 141.
371 Ibid.
friend, and citizen.” In a way, then, the postwar transmission of national values was predicated on the successful restoration of the private sphere. The Polonization of the western frontier led through the living rooms, kitchens, and bathrooms of Polish migrants, the private spheres of both heart-landers and the kresowianie. The shortage and subsequent competition for living space among and between different groups of settlers meant that the emergence of a “new Pole” in the former German territories would have to take some time to emerge.

But economic and material considerations were not the only factors complicating relations between and among settlers on the frontier. Cultural discrepancies, in particular differences in each group’s spoken Polish – different accents, dialects, levels of education, and daily rituals – shaped the incoming population’s perception and reception of new and fragile communities. To some extent, in surprisingly many contexts, relations between the kresowianie and the heart-landers were significantly more strained than relations with local Germans. In many instances, Germans scheduled for expulsion empathized with Poles whose homelands were literally swept from beneath their feet. This shared experience of “uprootedness” became a powerful force in facilitating interactions between kresy-Poles and Ostelbien Germans. It did little, however, to promote bonds with Poles from central Poland – settlers who arrived in the new provinces, for the most part, voluntarily.

The kresowianie preferred to watch Polish heart-landers from a distance: they felt offended by the latter’s perceived vulgarity, prejudice, and cunning (cwaniactwo). This was not always easy, however, since the heart-landers dominated the emergent Polish

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community. In larger urban centers, 65 to 75 percent of the Polish population traced its roots to central Poland. For example, in 1947 in Wrocław, the provincial capital, heart-landers comprised 74 percent of the Polish community. Most Polish Wroclawians arrived from the Poznań, Warsaw, Kraków, and Rzeszów provinces. In contrast, the kresowianie contributed roughly 16.1 percent of residents. It is important to note, however, that neither the kresowianie nor the heart-landers represented cultural monoliths.

Misunderstandings between Poles from the Kraków and Warsaw regions were as common as misunderstandings between Poles from Kielce and Lwów, or Lwów and Wilno. The experience of population transfer combined with the hardships of frontier life sharpened “identities based on origin,” although these rarely lasted longer than one generation.

I argue that identities such as kresowianin or heart-lander (centralniak) were products of frontier life, and, in particular, the interactions between and among different groups of Poles. As such, they are constructions and designations of the postwar period. The actions and observations of Polish state authorities – members of the communist party, the militia, and state security forces (UB) – inadvertently facilitated this process. Militia and UB reports are cluttered with denunciations and references to kresowianie and centralniacy. Thus, local Polish officialdom infused life into concepts that did not necessarily “stick” or even exist prior to the postwar population movements. Consequently, both categories were postwar inventions that in many cases were internalized, negotiated, renegotiated, and later discarded by the very people they were meant to describe. Certainly, not all settlers subscribed to these identities.

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374 Ibid.
But then there were those who did. As I demonstrated in chapter 4, there were some important cultural distinctions between Poles from former eastern Poland and settlers from the heartland. The content of Polishness in the *kresy* sometimes diverged significantly from its counterpart in central Poland. Some of these differences had to do with diverse interpretations of religious practice, family relations, openness to other cultures, as well as linguistic expression. While certainly not monolithic designations, distinctions between Poles from the east and Poles from the center were real enough to create rifts in new settler communities. In some cases, heart-landers denied the Polishness of *kresy*-Poles, calling them Ukrainians and foreigners. Repatriates from the *kresy* thus customarily avoided living with or next to migrants from the heartland.

The rifts between different groups of Polish settlers deeply unsettled authorities in Warsaw. The Polonization of former German lands could not proceed without the participation of all Polish migrants. Acceptance of the frontier as a legitimately “Polish space” depended, to a large extent, on the heartlanders’ acceptance of *kresowianie* as fellow Poles. Polonization, then, was not just about the removal of Germans. On the contrary, Polonization was also about Polonizing and “equalizing” different groups of Polish migrants. The Western Territories were thus the principal site of postwar Polish nation building. Postwar Polish identity would undergo its most painful metamorphosis in places like Lower Silesia. As I argue throughout my study, this was the place where state officials, most often communists, renegotiated and homogenized Polish national identity.

The multicultural context of the western frontier sharpened identities based on regional origin. Cultural boundaries between different communities of Poles in Lower Silesia were strikingly rigid in the immediate aftermath of World War II. Postwar
migrations and rampant ethnic violence created a social climate based heavily on fear and distrust. Polish settlers often responded to this societal turbulence by withdrawing into their “regional-identity-shells.” People locked themselves away in a dream world of lost and abandoned communities. Homesickness and the violent instability of the postwar “wild west” aroused powerful desires for a return to the prewar order. The fantasy of “homecoming” – a yearning for lost paradise – atomized, in particular, the repatriates, forestalling the emergence of a unified Polish community. Fixation with old homelands and disillusionment with frontier life colored people’s perceptions of strangers, even if they were culturally familiar. In the postwar imagination of the *kresowianie*, for instance, Poles from central Poland were a savage horde of looters, peasants, thrill-seekers, and law-breakers.

This feeling of cultural superiority among repatriates from the *kresy* was one response to the volatility of the frontier. But it can also be seen as a reflection of many *kresy*-Poles’ social background. Lower Silesia’s first Polish teachers, civil servants, and professors hailed overwhelmingly from the *kresy*. To be sure, professors and administrators from Kraków, Poznań, and Warsaw also contributed to the founding of a “western” intelligentsia. And for their part, the heart-landers, just like the *kresowianie*, were not a socially or culturally homogenous group. Heart-landers arrived in Lower Silesia from all corners of “Old Poland,” though the largest waves included Poles from the Kielce, Kraków, Rzeszów, Poznań, and Warsaw regions. While some possessed formal education and identified with the intelligentsia, the great majority were rural dwellers seeking to escape the poverty, devastation, and overpopulation of the heartland. Although supposedly arriving of their own “free will,” in reality, the near total wartime
destruction of the Warsaw region, for example, was a catalyst of out-migration. The extreme destitution of the center thus drove countless Polish peasants into the newly annexed western periphery.

But places like Lower Silesia occupied an unusual place in the heart-lander imagination. The former German territories were a hazardous space of hidden treasure, packed roads, and smoldering buildings, where Poles from the center startlingly confronted “Ukrainian” and “Belarusian” cultures of the prewar Polish east. As it eventually turned out, however, these so-called Ukrainians and Belarusians were none other than the aforementioned kresowianie. Thus, before the heart-landers actually met their eastern compatriots, they had imagined them as Ukrainians and Belarusians. The accents, dialects, and mannerisms of these “strange” people from the kresy underscored their perceived “otherness.” The Germans were thus not the only “other” on the frontier.

Encounters between Polish repatriates, settlers from central Poland, and Germans scheduled for expulsion shaped the quality of social and cultural interactions. From the perspective of sixty-plus years, these frontier divisions and misperceptions may seem comical and trivial. But in that postwar moment of western reconstruction, the lack of solidarity between different groups of Polish settlers threatened to derail the communist project of ethnic and social transformation.

Repatriates from the kresy remembered the journey west as having a tremendous impact on their perception of “old Poland” and its inhabitants, the heart-landers. The frontier was thus not the only site of interactions between the kresowianie and their Polish compatriots west of the Bug. The voyage west from Soviet-annexed eastern Poland sometimes took five to six weeks, in extreme cases stretching a few months.
Transports made frequent stops at train stations throughout central and western Poland. Now and again, breaks in the journey would lengthen into hours though it was not uncommon for transports to remain idle for days at a time. During these breaks, repatriates like Waclaw Wolny and his mother, ventured outside train stations in search of food and shelter. In their minds, the unknown journey west carried the promise of salvation from the icy dunes of Siberian exile. (The Wolny family had spent six years in Soviet Siberia). The prevailing wisdom was that the Western Territories, no matter how dangerous and unstable, were a significant improvement from life in the taiga.

Waclaw’s hope for a better life among his countrymen was suddenly dashed in Poznań, a transit point on his family’s expedition to Oleśnica.

Our return to the motherland (matka ojczyzna) was accompanied by disappointment and joy. Misery, having followed us from Siberia, forced mother and I to beg in Poznań. People shut their doors, laughing at us, calling us wild (dzicz), outcasts, and Russians (kacapi) seeking to occupy [Poznań].375

The reaction of the Poznań residents foreshadowed conflicts and tensions endemic on the western frontier. The Poznań Poles’ accusations were a crushing blow for the Wolny family, all the more so since they were both unmerited and deeply hurtful. Waclaw did not understand how he could possibly be a “kacap” after enduring six long years of Soviet communist persecution. Accusations such as these generated divisions that would only deepen in the “frontier conditions” of Polish community-building in postwar Lower Silesia. The Wolny family’s journey eventually ended in Oleśnica. Their quest to find a common language with settlers from other parts of Poland, however, would sadly continue.

For Polish repatriates like the Zuber family, the Lower Silesian town of Malitsch was a symbol of the “wild west” where Polishness was supposed to be “rebuilt.” The Zubers traveled west from eastern Galicia. They had heard of Lower Silesia from communist authorities (unclear if Soviet or Polish ones) in the \textit{kresy}:

The authorities pressured undecided [Poles] to leave… They said that now was the best opportunity to depart, because the ‘Recovered Territories’ still had open estates, that the journey was free, that we could take many things, and later these opportunities may no longer be available.\textsuperscript{376}

The year was 1946 and the machinery of relocation was in full operation. Between 1945 and 1947, 1,570,321 repatriates and settlers descended upon Lower Silesia. In total, 4,082,610 Poles – 2,220,772 heartlanders and 1,861,838 \textit{kresowianie} – made their way to the new western provinces during those two short years.\textsuperscript{377} The Zubers were insignificant atoms in the machinery of repatriation, and no doubt they felt this keenly. In April 1946, the family boarded a transport in Stanisławów and left for the “foreign western lands.”\textsuperscript{378}

For Polish repatriates like the Zubers – former inhabitants of the southeastern \textit{kresy} and witnesses of a particularly brutal Polish-Ukrainian civil war (described in chapter 4) – postwar relocation to Lower Silesia should have come as a release. Little did they know that the price of relocation meant the exchange of one violent frontier for another. Escape from the ethnic violence of the \textit{kresy} went hand in hand with building a new life in dangerous, unstable, and unpredictable circumstances. The Zubers’ first impression of the western frontier was marked by deep anger. Polish communists and heart-landers were generally the recipients of these resentments:

\textsuperscript{377} Piotr Eberhardt, \textit{Migracje Polityczne na Ziemiach Polskich (1939-1950)} (Poznań: Instytut Zachodni, 2010), 208-209.
\textsuperscript{378} Zuber, \textit{Wspomnienia – Tom III}, k. 1.
Poles forcefully driven from the east were cheated by the Polish communist authorities. They had left their estates beyond the Bug [River] to find most of the properties [in the W.T.] taken up by people from central Poland… [Poles from the center] moved onto these lands earlier than the Poles from across the Bug. They claimed the best, least damaged estates.\textsuperscript{379}

Disillusionment with the postwar Polish state was thus linked to the scarcity and poverty of the frontier, experiences that often set Pole (\textit{kresowianin}) against Pole (heart-lander).

This antagonism between different groups of Polish settlers also found expression in the everyday-life context of frontier living arrangements. The housing shortage in Malitsch (later renamed Małuszów) forced the Zubers to occupy a devastated house recently abandoned by Red Army servicemen. To make matters worse, a Polish family from the heartland already occupied the “better part” of the property. The Ściesiek family was as eager to share their living space with the Zubers as the latter felt about being their guests. In the cramped conditions of this communal residence, the Zubers’ contempt for the Ściesieks was impossible to hide. Frictions were daily phenomena:

Ściesiek […] claimed the better half of the home – the entire right section – as well as the better portion of the outbuildings. Negotiations (\textit{rokowania}) with this stubborn, stricken with asthma and strongly insecure (\textit{zakompleksiony}) man from central Poland were not easy.\textsuperscript{380}

This was the backdrop to the social and ethnic revolution on which a postwar Lower Silesian society would be built. The people that the communist regime entrusted with the domestication and Polonization of the western frontier were recruited, for the most part, from families like the Ściesieks and Zubers. However, rivalry over living space, mutual distrust, and lack of goodwill on both sides watered the seeds of resentment and hostility. In an ironic twist, then, Polish repatriates and settlers – heart-landers and \textit{kresowianie} –

\textsuperscript{379} Zuber, \textit{Wspomnienia – Tom III}, k. 18.
\textsuperscript{380} Ibid.
posed the most enduring threats to the success of Polonization. The communists could not have expected such a challenge.

Roman Zuber’s assessment of daily life in Malitsch, moreover, was particularly illuminating. Interactions between different groups of Polish migrants on the western frontier demanded a ceaseless process of negotiation. The crushing scarcity, lawlessness, and misery of frontier life compelled newly arrived Poles to negotiate with each other to gain even a modicum of stability. As settlers quickly learned, nothing – not food, not living space, not safety – was guaranteed on the frontier. People prevailed by cunning, violence, thievery, and deceit, contributing to the moral panic sown by war, genocide, and displacement. Frontier brutality seriously undermined the fantasy of western prosperity throwing people into compromising situations. In the absence of stability and firmly entrenched law and order, people had to bargain away their very last possessions (and sometimes even their conscience) just to stay afloat in the dirt and rubble. Zuber’s mother, in spite of the elder Ściesiek’s unfriendliness, reluctantly shared her livestock with the family from central Poland. Ściesiek controlled all the barns and butcheries on the estate.\footnote{381} The Zubers had to beg to use facilities that, at least in theory, were jointly owned. This often resulted in humiliating situations where one family’s survival depended on the benevolence of another. Joint-administration of estates, however, was a rite of passage in Poland’s Lower Silesia.

The Zubers’ relatives, the Knihinicki family, had a different experience. While both families settled in Malitsch, the Knihinickis shared a large estate with a German family. Georg Alt owned 40 hectares of his own land with a residence that miraculously escaped wartime devastation. Unlike the Ściesiek-Zuber household, the Alts lived

\footnote{381} Ibid.
peacefully with the Polish family from the *kresy*. Georg Alt allowed Lonio Knihinicki, for instance, to use his farm tools and livestock-buildings. Both families would sow the fields and cultivate crops. The friendship between the German and Polish families would “last many years.”382 With time, however, the Alt estate also became home to two other Polish families. The six-member family of Marcin Jaworski was particularly problematic. The Jaworskis migrated to the Legnica region from southeastern Poland. They were passionately committed to driving both the Alt and the Knihinicki families out: Marcin’s plan was to seize the estate and become its primary owner. To the dismay of the Knihinickis, Jaworski successfully secured the eviction of the Germans (Alt and his family settled temporarily in an abandoned shack on a neighboring estate. They would eventually leave for occupied Germany).383

But Jaworski’s greediness seemed to have no bounds. Next, he turned his ire on the Knihinickis themselves. According to Roman Zuber, Jaworski tried repeatedly to evict the Knihinickis. Time and time again, he accused the family from the *kresy* of pretending to be Poles and supporting Ukrainian nationalists (*Banderowcy*). Denouncing the Knihinickis as Ukrainians served two possible goals. On the one hand, casting a shadow over the Polish family’s national identity opened the possibility of seizing their portion of the coveted estate. On the other hand, “unmasking” hidden saboteurs and opponents of the communist state (Home Army members, *Banderowcy*, *Wehrwolf*, etc.) ingratiated “authentic” and loyal Poles like Jaworski with the local authorities. The Lower Silesian militia and UB were tirelessly cracking down on the so-called anti-communist opposition. Settlers like Jaworski must have been aware of this campaign.

382 Zuber, *Wspomnienia – Tom III*, k. 15.
383 Ibid.
Denouncing the Knihinickis carried the promise of rewards: more living space and – more importantly – status in the community. In the end, however, Jaworski’s deceptive tricks failed to work. The Alts would remain the principal victims of the Pole’s envious wrath.

German property and the promise of social mobility were irresistible to the founders of Polish communities in the Western Territories. At the same time, the desire for German possessions provoked unexpected animosities and rivalries that precluded the emergence of stable communities. Feliks Krotowicz, a repatriate from Lwów, lamented that Poles from the kresy were usually the last in line for “frontier goods:”

German property – furniture, bedding, kitchen utensils, valuable works of art, etc. – were first pilfered by Soviet soldiers and sent as war loot (łup wojenny) to Russia. What followed, then, was a levée en masse (pospolite ruszenie) of a thousand different crooks (cwaniacy), mainly from central Poland.384

Repatriates from the kresy, by and large, identified szaber (described in chapter 2) with settlers from the central provinces. Nevertheless, looting or as Krotowicz called it “thoughtless vandalism” (bezmyślny wandalizm) engulfed almost everyone: Soviets, Poles, heart-landers, repatriates, men, women, youth, and the elderly. Indeed, for many settlers in Lower Silesia szaber was an indispensable survival strategy. Because of the widespread destitution, people turned to pilfering and thievery as a way to provide for themselves and their loved ones. But of all the actors on the turbulent frontier, the stereotype of szaber clung most rigidly to heart-landers. An inspection of the disembarkation point in Legnica, organized by the PUR in July 1945, seemed to confirm Krotowicz’s remarks about heart-lander crooks. According to the PUR:

Every person arriving in this area (Legnica) for purposes of settlement, becomes willingly or unwillingly a so-called *szabrownik* (looter). Having engaged in *szaber* (amassing what they possibly can), they then depart with the thought of never returning to this region again.\(^{385}\)

Although the report does not explicitly blame settlers from central Poland for the *szaber*, there are some illuminating hints implicating the heart-landers. First, repatriates from the *kresy* generally arrived in concentrated small groups: members of the same family tended to travel together along with their livestock. Women, children, and the elderly comprised a disproportionate number of these *kresy*-Poles. It is highly unlikely, though certainly not impossible, that they would disembark in a place like Legnica, engage in quick *szaber*, and re-embark to repeat this pattern elsewhere. Second, the *kresowianie*, in general, had nowhere to go back to: their old homes in the *kresy* were off-access, sealed beyond the new Polish-Soviet border. The heart-landers, in contrast, always had the possibility of seizing loot and “returning home” to central Poland. These settlers were typically young, unmarried males without families, who migrated to Lower Silesia in search of German treasure. In his examination of postwar Wrocław, the historian Padraic Kenney argues that “in early 1946, a quarter of those coming from central Poland returned home, disillusioned by the atrocious conditions of life in Wrocław, while many others tried their luck in other Lower Silesian cities.”\(^{386}\) The *kresowianie* did not have this luxury. The heart-landers, then, were considerably less committed to “rebuilding Poland” in places that they themselves doubted would remain

\(^{385}\) Sprawozdanie z działalności Punktu Etapowego dla Polaków z Zachodu i Południa w Lignicy za czas od 30.VI.1945 r. do 18.VII.1945 r., AAN, Państwowy Urząd Repatriacyjny – Zarząd Centralny, Biuro Dyrektora, Tajne i poufne pisma, korespondencja dotycząca bezpieczeństwa pracowników ZC i Oddz. Wojew. oraz repatriantów, Sygn. I/10, k. 68.

Polish for long. Thus, from the perspective of young Polish thrill-seekers from the center, Lower Silesia’s primary significance lay in its status as a reservoir of booty.

_Szaber_ remained central to the _kresowianie_’s perception of the heart-landers. Repatriates from the _kresy_ saw rampant looting and pilfering as the primary obstacle to the stabilization of the frontier. Disgust with _szaber_ drove some Poles, like Franciszek Rudnicki, for example, to write grievance letters to high-ranking Polish leaders in Warsaw. Rudnicki was a repatriate from “beyond the Bug” who settled in Jelenia Góra in October 1945. In a heartrending account addressed to Bolesław Bierut, the _kresowianin_ lamented about his dangerous journey to Lower Silesia: “All the food and clothing that I owned were robbed on the transport bound west. I was left hungry, barefoot, and naked.”

Tragically for Rudnicki, conditions on the train from the _kresy_ were as perilous (if not less so) as on the frontier. Jelenia Góra’s reputation as a center of larceny and violence – its high concentration of _szabrownicy_ from the heartland – frightened many _kresowianie_.

According to Rudnicki, moreover, Poles from central Poland, from the local administrators to anonymous bystanders, frivolously and openly engaged in _szaber_:

_Having had traveled throughout the Jelenia Góra region, I saw with my very eyes officials of the PUR, district commissioners (wójt), and local mayors (sołtys) – everyone in possession of large estates in Central Poland – partaking in _szaber_, hoping for a better life._

Rudnicki settled in Jelenia Góra living in a leaky, drafty, and chilly barrack, and became so disheartened with his condition, that he finally solicited high-ranking local

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388 Ibid.
Polish authorities for help. Regrettably, the local authorities’ indulgence in *szaber* and their own private interests – including hoarding German loot and sending it back to central Poland – made repatriates like Rudnicki shame-stricken and resentful. Grievance letters addressed to Bierut or Gomułka were often last-ditch efforts to look for justice over the heads of “demoralized” frontier officials. The archives remain mute on the Polish communist leader’s reaction.

*Szaber* was so widespread in Lower Silesia that there appeared to be little local or central authorities could do to stop it. According to a 1946 Inter-party Coordinating Commission (*Międzypartyjna Komisja Porozumiewawcza*) in Jelenia Góra, the crackdown on *szaber* required extreme measures. The commission even discussed opening a special detention camp in Krzyżatka. The facility was supposed to function as a holding pen for thieves and looters as well as a symbol of the state’s struggle against *szaber*.389 Contrary to the commission’s wishes, however, the plan was never implemented. There were simply not enough resources or perhaps even willingness to sponsor such an enterprise. The crisis generated by *szaber* would thus remain within the realm of ill-equipped local law enforcement.

Jan Borenstein, the deputy mayor of Cieplice in the Jelenia Góra region, expressed outrage over the prevalence of *szaber* under his jurisdiction.

It is not uncommon for civilian and military individuals to arrive in Cieplice, search for furniture, and smuggle their loot to Central Poland or take it to other locations in the Recovered Territories.390

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Lower Silesian towns like Cieplice and Jelenia Góra attracted waves of Polish migrants – often settlers from the heartland – as important centers of German loot and treasure. Lower Silesia was thus a refuge for thieves, crooks, outcasts, and explorers of all kinds, providing an outlet for activities outside the confines of the law. Deputy mayors like Borenstein were in many ways powerless to enforce public order, especially when state authorities themselves sanctioned these activities. “Individuals caught [engaging in szaber],” Borenstein lamented, “often claimed to have permission (zezwolenie) from higher authorities.”

This legal ambiguity – a familiar feature of postwar frontier life – exacerbated szaber, while, at the same time, escalating tensions between different groups of Polish settlers.

The problem of reconciling Lower Silesia’s Polish settler population complicated the communist regime’s plan of rapid Polonization. The persistence of szaber throughout the second half of the 1940s ensured that this reconciliation would be slow and painful. The upheaval generated by szaber was so devastating that, in the space of a few months, settlers reluctantly accepted it as a normal part of daily life. Indeed, looting and pilfering was not just a hooligan or “lowbrow” activity. Polish representatives of the state – civil servants, bureaucrats, and political activists – the very people charged with eradicating szaber, contributed to its pervasiveness. In Bystrzyca Kłodzka and Nowa Ruda, Polish officials participated in the plundering of German estates. Edmund Kurzoń and Edward Chiżyński, inspectors of the Ministry of the Recovered Territories (MZO), described the manifestations of szaber in Bystrzyca. Poles allegedly used the local post office to send entire parcels of stolen and pilfered goods – the properties of recently evicted Germans –

391 Ibid.
to locations in central Poland.\textsuperscript{392} The fact that the post office facilitated \textit{szaber} indicates how some local authorities (indirectly or perhaps directly) sanctioned the kinds of activities that the government was officially determined to suppress.

But \textit{szaber} was not the only factor threatening to delay western Polonization. Surprisingly, even more than the \textit{szabrownicy}, the most intractable challenge to the integration of the western frontier came from the Soviets. The Red Army posed a significant obstacle to the establishment of durable and deep-rooted Polish communities. From the perspective of Polish officials in former German lands, Poland’s postwar relationship with the Soviet Union resulted in a contradiction. On the one hand, the Polish claim to the \textit{Ostelbien} depended on Soviet benevolence. Unlike Great Britain and the United States, the Soviet Union was the only great power to consistently hold up Poland’s rights to the Western Territories. On the other hand, the success of Polish nation building in Lower Silesia was intimately tied to the swift integration of lands in which Soviet troops acted as a persistently destabilizing force.

Red Army servicemen regularly undermined the construction of a Polish society in territories assigned to Poland by Moscow. Soviet soldiers frequently beat, robbed, sometimes kidnapped and occasionally raped Polish settlers and repatriates. Soviet military authorities engaged in a complicated game of “divide and rule,” turning local German residents against incoming Polish migrants. Polish administrators sometimes had to wage what appeared to be futile battles to minimize the harm wreaked by Soviet excess. Perhaps ironically, then, the Red Army – the force that officially liberated Poland

from Nazi occupation – represented the most serious impediment to western Polonization.

Despite Stalin’s endorsement of a Polish Ostelbien, Soviet troops were the de facto rulers of the region, particularly in the period between January and late May 1945. The Soviets not only swept the Western Territories of the German army, they also opened up the area for Polish settlement and migration. As early as September 5, 1944, Moscow drew up a plan for military administrative units (komendatury wojenne) as special army headquarters in territories and urban centers seized from the enemy. On January 22, 1945, the Red Army began organizing command posts throughout Lower Silesia. Polish historian Joanna Hytrek-Hryciuk argues that the komendatury functioned as protectors of German property as well as policemen of the conquered civilian population.393 Their most important task, however, was to maintain peace and order behind frontlines: a task which proved challenging to implement. Norman Naimark compared the Soviet komendatury to U.S. military districts in the American zone of occupied Germany:

Unlike the local branches of the American military government, the kommandanturatas often had no specially trained staff and Soviet officers were assigned to regions and jobs about which they had little or no knowledge.394 Authorities in the Soviet zone of occupied Germany, as well as the Ostelbien provinces formally transferred to Poland, were unprepared to confront the unique needs of the people “in their care.” But there was one task that the komendatury executed with great efficiency: Soviet servicemen shared with the Polish szabrownicy an insatiable appetite for theft and plundering.

394 Naimark, The Russians in Germany, 13.
Thus, as it quickly became clear, “protection of German property” was synonymous with confiscation. From the very beginning, Soviet authorities in Legnica—the Red Army headquarters in postwar Lower Silesia—sanctioned an indiscriminate campaign of stealing from Ostebien Germans. Soviet forces in the Złotoryja and Jelenia Góra regions confiscated German guns, radios, furniture, sowing machines, typing machines, bicycles, motorcycles, etc. From the perspective of Germans as well as, increasingly, Polish settlers, Soviet military administration unavoidably meant that all inhabitants of Lower Silesia were fair game for dispossession. The Red Army’s engagement in widespread violence and looting ultimately placed it at odds with the emerging Polish administration.

The Soviet presence in Lower Silesia was comprehensible to the nascent Polish authorities only as a facilitator of Polish national goals. Just as the Soviets forged the komendatury, Stanisław Piaskowski, Warsaw’s plenipotentiary for Lower Silesia, commenced building from scratch a Polish civilian administration. As demonstrated in chapter 2, Piaskowski “set up shop” in Trzebnica (later relocating to Legnica) in April 1945, awaiting the transfer of power from Soviet to Polish hands. Reinforced by the GO KERM, Lower Silesia’s future governor played a critical role in bringing the western periphery closer to Warsaw. Piaskowski navigated the convoluted web of overlapping Soviet-German jurisdictions to carve out a niche for Polish officialdom. But Soviet and Polish interests did not always converge.

Soviet support for a Polish Ostebien, for instance, often involved an unforeseen role for Lower Silesia’s Germans. To the disdain of Poles like Piaskowski, Red Army officials openly endorsed German participation in the system of local administration. In
fact, Germans continued to hold public office in places like Jelenia Góra, Szklarska Poręba, Karpacz and Polkowice through July 1945.\textsuperscript{395} German mayors who climbed the local power-ladder under the Third Reich enjoyed untroubled prominence in communities overrun by Soviet forces. The fact that Germans – both disgraced Nazis and well-known anti-fascists – administered centers earmarked for Polish migrants with the blessing of the Soviets infuriated Poles. Although the Red Army officially transferred civilian power to Piaskowski on May 28, 1945, Soviets and Germans continued to co-rule Lower Silesia for at least three more months. This awkward coexistence between Poles, Soviets, and Germans at the highest echelons of local administrative power significantly complicated the postwar repatriation actions. Polish settlers – having recently arrived in Lower Silesia – were often confronted by three separate bureaucratic machines neither of which knew, with certainty, where the competencies of one ended and another’s began. This political chaos, in addition to ongoing Soviet violence, contributed to further destabilizing the frontier.

Polish repatriates and settlers came into contact with the Soviets before even leaving their transports. Inspectors of the State Repatriation Office reported haphazard attacks on Polish passengers perpetrated by Red Army soldiers. One report opined:

> Intervention with Soviet authorities is critical in order to regulate the situation on trains […] Soviet authorities need to order their soldiers to refrain from journeying (zaniechanie wycieczek) into train-cars transporting repatriates since these sorts of visits (odwiedziny) usually end by disheartening passengers […] and the emptying of Polish pockets, not to mention [the confiscation of] luggage and bundles.\textsuperscript{396}

\textsuperscript{395} Hytrek-Hryciuk, “Rosjanie Nadchodzą!” 129.
\textsuperscript{396} Sprawozdanie z działalności Punktu Etapowego dla Polaków z Zachodu i Południa w Lignicy za czas od 30.VI.1945 r. do 18.VII.1945 r., 18 July 1945, AAN, Państwowy Urząd Repatriacyjny: Zarząd Centralny, Biuro Dyrektora, Tajne i Poufne pisma, korespondencja dotycząca bezpieczeństwa pracowników ZC i Oddz. Wojew. oraz repatriantów, Sygn. I/10, k. 69.
The security of Polish migrants was of great concern to Warsaw and its representatives in the Western Territories. The Poles aboard these transports were, after all, agents of Polonization of former German lands. Soviet intimidation of Polish “pioneers” greatly unnerved the communist leadership in Poland. As negotiations with the Red Army ensued in 1945 and 1946, it became apparent that the Soviet komendatury had little control over their servicemen.

Soviet soldiers regularly conducted raids of train stations, the main disembarkation points for Polish migrants in Lower Silesia. According to Major Imiolek, the head of the Provincial Office of Public Security (Wojewódzki Urząd Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego) in Wrocław, Soviet soldiers staged carelessly planned attacks on train stations throughout the region. For example, in Żóraw, Red Army men attempted to rob the cash registers at the town’s main station. The attack ended in a violent skirmish: soldiers beat up Polish officials and passengers before finally being encircled by agents of the UB. Repatriates from former eastern Poland witnessed regularly the violence and banditry of “undisciplined” Soviet soldiers. Irena Kacperek, the repatriate from Raj, recalled random attacks during her transport’s frequent stops throughout Poland. The journey to Lower Silesia was typically bound up in an endeavor to stave off robberies, kidnappings, beatings, and assaults from adventurous bandits and loot-seeking, trigger-happy, and inebriated Soviet soldiers. For repatriates like Kacperek, the precarious voyage west supplied a moment of awareness – a painful and hopeless realization that

398 Kacperek, Utracenie mojego Raju, k. 31.
prewar comfort and security may be difficult to recapture. The violence spawned by the Red Army, in part, contributed toward shoring up such feelings.

Nowhere were the Soviets as threatening and intrusive, moreover, than in the small and large communities away from the main disembarkation points. Reports of Soviet “marauders” terrorizing, raping, and exploiting both local Germans and the incoming Polish population abound in the archives. For example, on April 27, 1946, Soviet soldiers broke onto the property of Ida Höning and Erna Friedrich in Kamienna Góra. The men first robbed then shot the two German women. The local Polish militia enlisted the help of the Red Army command in Kamienna Góra but the investigation did not generate results: the suspects remained at large.399 Two months later, on June 2, 1946 Soviet soldiers invaded the apartment of Mieczysław Jarosz, a Polish settler, also in Kamienna Góra. The culprits detonated the entryway by using a hand-held grenade. The device devastated the apartment, obliterating the kitchen and bedroom walls, and inflicting injuries on Jarosz. Once again, local law enforcement failed to detain the suspects.400 Thus, as both Poles and Germans quickly realized, their property – no matter how limited or meager – exposed them to Soviet confiscations and violence. Ongoing Soviet incursions in urban and rural Lower Silesia provided a constant threat deterring the emergence of firmly entrenched Polish communities.

Interestingly, the Red Army’s harassment of Poles and Germans continued despite Soviet promises to discipline servicemen. For instance, on July 18, 1946 Red


Army soldiers, under the cover of night, pillaged the estate of Kazimierz Skule, a settler in Środa Śląska. According to Stanisław Kuśnierz, the Polish militia chief in Środa, the offenders broke into Skule’s barn confiscating two horses. The estate owner, then, attempted to prevent the trespassers from seizing his property. The confrontation, however, ended tragically for the Pole: Skule died of gunshot wounds in the hospital in Środa.\footnote{M.O. – Komenda Powiatowa – Referat Służby Śledczej – Środa do Wojewódzkiej Komendy M.O. Wydział Kryminalno-Śledczy we Wrocławiu – Meldunek Nadzwyczajny, 18 July 1946, AAN, Ministerstwo Ziem Odzyskanych: Śląsk Dolny – Woj. Wroclawskie. Meldunki Nadzwyczajne (o stanie bezpieczeństwa) za m-ce V – VIII 1946, Mikrofilm Nr. B-6149, Sygn. 1022, k. 94.} Perhaps unsurprisingly, Kuśnierz’s investigation failed to end in arrests.

The fate of Dr. Bräuer, a German resident of Jelenia Góra, was not unlike that of Skule. According to Wojciech Tabaka, a local plenipotentiary of the Polish government, “four men in Soviet uniforms” vandalized the property of the aforementioned doctor. In a case strikingly reminiscent of the explosion in Kamienna Góra, the suspects barged into the apartment with grenades, setting ablaze part of the living quarters. The apartment was subsequently pillaged (spłądrowane) and turned upside down. The most horrific act of the break in, however, was the soldiers’ execution of the German doctor in front of his three children. Soviet transgressions in places like Środa, Kamienna Góra, and Jelenia Góra demonstrate that murder, theft, and brutality were an indispensable part of social life on the frontier. More importantly, neither ethnicity – one’s professed Polishness or Germanness – nor official alliances – the postwar Polish-Soviet friendship, for instance – mattered in warranting an escape from violence. Red Army excess in former German territories produced both Polish and German victims. Polish and Soviet authorities could do very little to stop it.
Norman Naimark has suggested that the postwar Soviet military occupation of Germany served as a vehicle of social control and transformation. Soviet military administrators, with Stalin’s blessing, “perfected local mechanisms for destroying social networks, class and professional associations, labor solidarity, and village community.” The frontier violence described thus far occurred in areas under Soviet military domination in the wider context of a gradually emerging Polish civil administration. The Red Army’s penetration of Lower Silesia created the ideal circumstances for a violent uprooting of a social order that the Soviet leadership identified with class enemies and the Third Reich. Soviet occupation of the Ostelbien undermined traditional hierarchies, breaking down societal barriers, introducing previously inexistent actors (Poles and Soviets), and injecting brutality and force into civilian private spheres. Soviet military authorities with the willing or unwilling cooperation of Polish civilian officials, thus, engaged in a colossal project of social transformation, rewriting the ethnic and cultural content of former German lands. The brutalization of social interactions in Lower Silesia as manifested through military and civilian excesses (rape, murder, plunder) complimented Polish nation building while translating into reality Moscow’s plan of forging new, communist-friendly societies. Soviet military rule was thus a catalyst of class and ethnic revolution.

But if the Soviet presence in Lower Silesia was supposed to benefit the Poles – by accelerating Polish nation building – Polish settlers certainly did not see it that way. During the years of postwar migrations, Poles constructed an image of Soviet commissars and soldiers as largely detrimental to Polish national interests. The reality on the ground reinforced traditional Polish stereotypes of Russians as reckless, wild, and despotic.

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Descriptions of frontier-life in official government documents generally confirmed most of these images. Kazimierz Grochulski, Warsaw’s plenipotentiary for the Jelenia Góra region, illustrated the threat to public order that Soviet servicemen allegedly posed:

On April 6, 1946, an unknown Russian soldier conducted a robbery of wallets in the town’s market square. A Polish militiaman subsequently escorted [the Russian] to the military command post [komendatura]. The individual was retrieved by other Russians who subsequently set him free. Moments later, he ran and opened fire on the civilian population on Długa and Pańska streets. In the end, five people were injured.403

The pointlessness of this crime underscored the prevailing perception among Poles that the Russians were brutes, disrespectful of human life, and, most importantly, a threat to their continued existence on the frontier. On the hierarchy of so-called frontier dangers, no one and nothing could possibly compete with the Soviets.

Nevertheless, the Soviets were almost impossible to avoid in the daily reality of the postwar Western Territories. When a Soviet soldier arrested Władysława Gilewska’s husband outside of Wrocław, Gilewska fell into despair. By the time he was released, the repatriate from the kresy was so badly beaten that his wife hardly recognized him. It was unclear why the Soviets assaulted the man. The tragedy hit the Gilewskis on a more intimate level. “My husband,” Władysława explains, “fought with the Russian partisans [during World War II]. He deactivated German mines (rozminowywał) and this is how Russian soldiers rewarded him for all his hard work.”404 The Gilewskis’ sense of betrayal, to some degree, encapsulates the attitude of Poles vis-à-vis the Soviets in the postwar period. Not only had Poland surrendered its eastern provinces (kresy) to the

403 Raport Kazimierza Grochulskiego, Pełnomocnika Rządu R.P. na miasto Jelenia Góra, 8 April 1946, AAN, Ministerstwo Ziem Odzyskanych, Dolny Śląsk, Woj. Wrocławskie, Meldunki nadzwyczajne (o stanie bezpieczeństwa) za luty, marzec i kwiecień 1946 r., Mikrofilm Nr. B-6148, Sygn. 1021, k. 29.
Soviet Union, Polish migrants in the new Western Territories had to cope with deleterious and ongoing Soviet abuses. There thus appeared to be an unbridgeable gap between Polish settlers, in particular the kresowianie, and Soviet military power on the frontier. The presence of the Red Army in Lower Silesia was a humiliating reminder of the kresowianie’s lost paradise in the east (now part of the Soviet Union) as well as Poland’s postwar dependence on Moscow. Lastly, Soviet military transgressions, particularly in the Western Territories, threw into serious doubt Moscow’s commitment to ensuring postwar border shifts.

For Polish authorities and settlers alike, postwar stability itself was contingent upon the departure of Soviet troops. According to Polish socialists in Lubin, “Soviet soldiers repeatedly rape the Polish population. Our district is deprived of transport, industrial enterprises, livestock, properties, [etc.]”405 In Oleśnica, the Red Army’s confiscation of potatoes and wheat threatened to stimulate starvation. As late as October 1945, in the Syców region, all the best, undamaged properties were in the hands of the Red Army. Soviet reluctance to transfer German estates to Polish settlers intensified the Poles’ suspicions of “Russians,” boosting discontent and indifference (bierność). Likewise, in the Szprotawa district, Soviet pilfering and requisitioning, in particular confiscation of Polish cattle, ignited an outbreak of violence. Soviet soldiers engaged in battles with Polish militiamen for stolen loot and livestock. In the Wołów region, Soviet automobile thefts left the local Polish Socialist Party (PPS) without a means of

405 Sprawozdanie z II-go Wojewódzkiego PPS-u w dniu 21-22/X.45 r. we Wrocławiu, 22 October 1945, IPN-Wrocław, WUBP we Wrocławiu, Sprawozdania dekadowe Wydz. do Depart. MBP za 1945 r. Sekcja IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, III. Tom II, Sygn. IPN WR 053/384, k. 156.
transport. The Red Army’s domination of Lower Silesia, then, made it an unlikely place for the development of steadfast and lasting Polish communities.

Nevertheless, transports bearing Polish migrants continued to saturate the newly annexed western provinces in spite of Soviet transgressions. Repatriates and settlers certainly resented the “Soviet contribution” to western Polonization but there was little they could do about it. Red Army soldiers were a central part of the frontier landscape. When a train bearing Polish repatriates from the kresy made a three-week stop outside of Katowice, a tragedy befell the Świrski family. In the words of Bernadeta Świrska:

One day, a Russian soldier took our horse. Mother begged him to return the animal but to no avail. The drunken soldier threatened that he would kill us. He then hit mother on the head. She fell and screamed for help. The assailant caught mother, tore her blouse, and kept her firmly in his grip. God rescued mother that day! A Russian sentry (wartownik) shot the drunken soldier in the leg.

Świrska’s account is particularly illuminating for two reasons. On the one hand, the perils of frontier life included brutal encounters with inebriated and unhinged Soviet soldiers. On the other hand, as demonstrated by the elder Świrska’s rescuer, Red Army servicemen could also be a godsend. Although it is hard to deny the high level of destruction wrought by Soviet forces in places like Lower Silesia, it is easy to forget that not all soldiers pillaged, drank, and raped. No matter what role they played, however, one thing remains clear. The process of domesticating, rearranging, and transforming (beyond recognition) former German territories entailed the participation of Soviets. Poland’s Lower Silesia was thus as much a product of Polish-Soviet interactions as it was of Polish-German and German-Soviet ones.

406 Sprawozdanie z II-go Wojewódzkiego PPS-u w dniu 21-22/X.45 r. we Wrocławiu, 22 October 1945, IPN-Wrocław, WUPB we Wrocławiu, Sprawozdania dekadowe Wyd. do Depart. MBP za 1945 r. Sekcja IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, III. Tom II, Sygn. IPN WR 053/384, kk. 156-159.
407 Świrska, Opis historii mego życia w okresie Osadnictwa Polskiego, k. 82.
Conclusion

The history of postwar Lower Silesia provides new insights into how state-sponsored processes of ethnic and social transformation functioned on the ground. It highlights the role of cross-cultural interactions as critical factors in the emergence of an ethnically Polish Lower Silesia. As demonstrated by this chapter, repatriates from the kresy, settlers from the heartland, local Ostelbien Germans, and the Soviet military regime were all indispensable players in the unmaking and remaking of Poland’s “new west.” Poles were thus hardly the only actors in Warsaw’s plan of Polonization.

On the one hand, the consolidation of Polish cultural hegemony on the western frontier entailed the systematic uprooting of Germans. Between 1944 and 1948, the Polish communist-dominated government supervised the near total destruction of German culture east of the Oder and Neisse. The movement of diverse populations in and out of Lower Silesia thus reflected the demarcation of new physical and social spaces for the reconfiguration of the Polish state and Polish national identity. On the other hand, the ethnic reinvention of “the new west” required the participation of unlikely actors: Germans and Soviets. The Poles desperately needed both the Germans and the Soviets to indigenize and legitimate Warsaw’s administration of the Western Territories. Ethnic coexistence thus set the tone for the Polish communist state’s gradual absorption of former German lands. Polonization, then, clearly ensued unevenly and selectively in the complex cultural and political reality of the postwar western frontier.

Time and time again, Poles and Germans rejected the “frontier roles” imposed on them from above. While communist authorities in Warsaw expected Polish migrants to remain at a safe distance from their Ostelbien neighbors, heart-landers and kresowianie
had their own interpretation of what was safe and what was distant. In surprisingly many
cases, Poles – particularly the kresowianie – maintained genuine and affable relations
with people, who in the long term, they would gradually displace. Economic shortage, the
lack of living space, as well as mutual fears and uncertainties bound the region’s old and
new residents together. The abysmal living conditions on the frontier offered Poles and
Germans the opportunity to trespass cultural boundaries. These “border crossings” often
resulted in lifelong friendships, romantic relationships, as well as new communities and
traditions. The prevalence of cross-cultural exchange was a central theme of daily life on
the postwar western frontier.

Bridging the ethnic divide, however, was not always attainable. Although scarcity
and destitution accelerated interethnic exchange, not all of these encounters were
accompanied by goodwill. Germans uprooted by the chaos of the approaching warfront,
returned to Hundfeld, for example, to discover their homes occupied by Poles. The resort
to violence was a temptation some struggled to suppress. Painfully confronted with their
sudden homelessness, some Germans vented their anger by violating Poles. Nevertheless,
a careful examination of the archives suggests that confrontations between Poles and
Germans were more the exception rather than the rule. Far more typical, on the contrary,
were antagonisms implicating the participation of Red Army servicemen. Instead of
mitigating conflicts, Soviet personnel consistently and tirelessly exacerbated both the
economic and social crises on the frontier. Poor military discipline as well as
contradictory policies emanating from the Soviet komendatury, lax in their restraint of
military overindulgence, contributed to the postwar brutalization. By murdering, raping,
and raiding Polish and German residents, Soviet soldiers hindered and, ultimately,
delayed the successful stabilization and Polonization of the frontier. Military excess, then, had a disastrous effect on postwar Polish nation building as well as, more generally, the reconstruction of the region.

At the same time, Lower Silesia’s reputation as a “wild west” and center of booty galvanized an outbreak of pilfering and uprooting driven, largely, by settlers from central Poland. This unprecedented looting polarized the social landscape ultimately preventing the emergence of stable Polish communities. Not unlike hyenas nibbling a carcass, groups of szabrownicy crisscrossed the region clearing entire districts of German “treasure” and booty. Soviet harassment in combination with szaber thus posed the most serious challenge to local Polish administrators. Polish officials were generally powerless to stem the tide of frontier violence spawned by larceny, vandalism, rape, and murder. All of this mayhem, however, was in fact a central attribute of postwar Polonization. Violence, poverty, and, more broadly, public insecurity – transpiring in the context of great repatriation actions – were emblematic of the transition from German to Polish cultural and political rule in the Western Territories. The postwar Polish communist project of cultural transformation, then, suggests that the formation of new communities in foreign and undomesticated lands was the result of complex interactions between the Polish state, incoming and outgoing populations, and the Soviet occupational regime.
Chapter Six
Where the German ends and the Pole begins: Dilemmas of Identity and Citizenship

The presence of approximately seven million Ostelbien Germans in the annexed western lands complicated the debate over postwar Polish citizenship. Polish leaders in Warsaw regarded former German citizens in the Western Territories through two different lenses. On the one hand, postwar communist and nationalist propaganda lambasted the Germans as an “enemy nation,” a community fit for expulsion and expropriation. On the other hand, however, communists promoted the newly acquired Western Territories as a site of forced labor as a punishment for the region’s indigenous Germans: “The German population loses all of its rights. It shall be treated as criminals momentarily on the loose (chwilowo na wolności). [The Germans] are to be used for work.”  

The tension between official portrayals of Germans as enemies and an indispensable labor force informed discussions of postwar citizenship in Poland. Despite the desires of Polish and international leaders to create an ethnically homogenous state, multiculturalism persisted. Policymakers in Warsaw wanted to unify Poland culturally and politically, but circumstances in the former German territories, at least in the first half-decade following World War II, precluded the emergence of an ethnically uniform Polish nation-state. The presence of native Germans

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408 Odpis – Wytyczne dla Organizacji Społecznych w sprawie akcji przesiedleńczych, 12 June 1945, Archiwum Akt Nowych (AAN), Zespół Ministerstwa Informacji i Propagandy, Akcja przesiedleńcza ludności na tereny nowoodzyskane. Plany, sprawozdania, opracowania Komisji Propagandy przy Centralnym Komitecie Przesiedleńczym; Wykazy oraz korespondencja, Mikrofilm Nr. 28665, Sygn. 777, k. 15.
would, then, continue to challenge the aspirations and visions of Polish nation builders long after the last shots of the war were fired.

In the eyes of the communist regime, the revival of economic and social life in the Polish-controlled Ostelbien depended on the local German population. Familiarity with the landscape as well as experience in industrial professions catapulted Germans into a co-starring role as catalysts of cultural and economic Polonization. Ostelbien Germans often took part in Poland’s cultural and political expansion west, but that role was frequently circumscribed by experience, skill-level, age, gender, occupation, and openness to the new “Polish social order.” Collaboration in the Polish project of cultural transformation in the western borderlands symbolized the fundamental dilemma of German existence in their old homelands: it offered an alternative to expulsion and the promise of continuity under the auspices of a new albeit foreign state while, at the same time, reshuffling preexisting social hierarchies to the detriment of old residents.

Clearly, one’s status on the postwar western frontier – experiences, skill-level, and willingness to engage the new system – determined whether one was permitted to remain in western Poland or be cast out beyond the limits of the frontier. Ironically, German commitment to Polonization, exhibited through a readiness to acquire fluency in “matters Polish,” created unexpected opportunities for former citizens of the Reich to cross cultural boundaries. The Western Territories were thus a laboratory for experiments in the postwar renegotiation of Polish national belonging.

Poland’s encroachment on German territory abruptly restructured previous cultural hierarchies, but the experiment of rearticulating membership in the Polish nation was hardly an indictment of local German culture. Ostelbien residents quickly realized
that in unforeseen ways, the boundaries between Germanness and Polishness were strikingly porous. In “reviving” Polishness in the so-called recovered territories, Germans quickly and cautiously learned to defend their interests, communities, and culture: indeed, their very presence in the western borderlands. The price was participation in Polonization. Work on behalf of the new Polish communist state as well as the acquisition of Polish “cultural fluency” opened avenues for securing Polish citizenship. Although many Germans were uninterested in becoming citizens of Poland, the benefits of Polish citizenship – namely, remaining in the old homeland (Heimat) – persuaded some to stake their lot with the new ruling regime. Postwar frontiers of Polish national belonging were expanded, in surprisingly unanticipated ways, to include non-Polish populations and even more important – those who were associated with the attempts to exterminate the Polish nation. Why and under what circumstances was this possible?

At the same time, reclassifying and assigning Polishness to ethnic Germans tells us as much about the “subjects under scrutiny” as it does about the agency charged with scrutinizing applicants: diverse state and local actors. This chapter explores the interactions between Ostelbien Germans – a society on the verge of expulsion – and the postwar Polish communist state – the ultimate delineator of Polish national identity. I argue that former German citizens did their best to engage and sign on to the projects of the Polish state, in order to secure their position in the postwar Polish national community. In particular, Ostelbien Germans wrote letters and petitions to prominent Polish officials, including Władysław Gomułka and Bolesław Bierut, confirming their willingness to become Poles and raise their children in a “Polish spirit.” Letter writers sought to convince relevant state authorities of their genuine affinities for Poland as well
as their flexible and removable Germanness. Some went so far as to enlist the participation of Polish allies – “genuine” Poles who could corroborate their eagerness to cross cultural boundaries. These allies often included neighbors, friends, lovers, and relatives. Hence, ordinary, rank and file Poles – through their sponsorship of local Germans – contributed to official debates about the size and shape of the postwar Polish national community.

Germans learned to manipulate ambiguous and notoriously inconsistent Polish nationality policies. At the same time, not all Germans were allowed to engage in this activity. Ostelbien residents had to convincingly demonstrate their bonds with Polish culture – whether through family connections, relationships with Poles, or pro-Polish sympathies. Those who succeeded had the best chance of remaining in postwar Poland. For the vast majority of Germans, however, expulsion was unavoidable. How did Polish officials envisage exclusion and inclusion in the postwar Polish nation? Where was the line between “assimilation” and expulsion for the Germans? In the end, this process was contentious, incoherent, and dependent on the changing needs of state and local leaders – that is, arbitrary instead of rational or systematic.

How the Polish state delineated boundaries of Polishness in May 1945 was not necessarily consistent with how it redrew those same boundaries in 1946 or 1947. The reconstruction of the region, along with the pressing need to revive the local economy, sometimes meant a more generous approach toward Germans, particularly those with industrial skills. This would often entail the bridging of the social and cultural distance separating Germans and Poles on the frontier. Likewise, the pressing need to absorb and stabilize the region – fuelled by the communist desire to showcase Poland’s postwar
vitality on the international arena – called for the continued presence of former German citizens. At the same time, Polish nationality policy – in spite of official propaganda berating “everything German” – suggests a conflict between the state’s impulse toward national homogenization and the accommodation of “culturally versatile” ethnic minorities. In the end, as I argue throughout this chapter, Warsaw’s inconsistent management of “frontier nationality” fostered some, limited but fertile cross-cultural collaboration.

Local residents of all nationalities in places like Lower Silesia thus became a focal point for the re-articulation of a postwar Polish national identity. The power to adjudicate nationality – to assign and reassign identities, indeed, to Polonize or to expel – was henceforth in the hands of the state and the local population.

The Anatomy of Expulsion (Vertreibung)

In the territories that Poland acquired at the expense of Germany in 1945, uprooting, resettlement, and expulsion were the primary tools of social reorganization. According to Polish scholar, Piotr Eberhardt, Poland possessed in excess of eight million Germans at the close of World War II. 978,800 were long-time residents of “old Poland,” roughly the area surrounding Poznań, Toruń, Bydgoszcz, and Łódź. Some of these Germans traced their origins to the prewar Baltic States, Romania, Hungary, and Ukraine.

410 Tezy w sprawie przesiedlenia, 1945, AAN, Zespół Ministerstwa Informacji i Propagandy, Akcja przesiedleńcza ludności na tereny nowoodzyskane, k. 100.
and participated in the Nazi quest during World War II to Germanize Poland. They were often known by the Nazi designation, *Volksdeutsche* or “ethnic Germans.”

The vast majority of postwar Poland’s German population, however, included former citizens of the Third Reich who inhabited the *Ostelbien* provinces: Western Pomerania, East Brandenburg, Lower Silesia, Oppeln (Opole) Silesia, Danzig (Gdańsk), and East Prussia. With the exception of Danzig which was a free city under the mandate of the League of Nations prior to 1939, all of these regions were integral parts of the prewar German state. Unlike the *Volksdeutsche*, then, *Ostelbien* Germans enjoyed the privileges of German citizenship prior to World War II. When the Allies redrew the postwar map of Eastern Europe, there were approximately 7.1 million *Ostelbien* Germans in Poland, through absolutely no will of their own. Of this number, the largest proportion, namely 3,228,600 resided in Lower Silesia. Because of the displacement generated by the Soviet invasion as well as the Polish government’s improvised (“wild”) and more systematic expulsions, this number would be further reduced to 1,376,229 by the end of 1945.

From the very beginning, however, the process of registering and counting *Ostelbien* Germans proved immensely challenging. During the months leading up to the Potsdam Conference in mid-summer 1945, approximately 300,000 to 400,000 civilians

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413 For a discussion of the *Volksdeutsche* and their role in “Germanzing” Nazi-incorporated Polish territories, such as the Warthegau, for example, see: Elizabeth Harvey, *Women and the Nazi East: Agents and Witnesses of Germanization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 78-118; Mark Mazower, *Hitler’s Empire: How the Nazis ruled Europe* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008), 79-82, 88-89, 539.


fled the region earmarked for Poland fearing the impact of Soviet and Polish evictions.\footnote{Gregor Thum, \textit{Uprooted: How Breslau became Wroclaw during the Century of Expulsions} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 63.} Starting in January 1945, Red Army forces swept through Silesia, clogging the roads with evacuees, displaced persons, victims of ethnic cleansing, and survivors of camps and forced labor. While most of these civilians eventually found refuge in Allied-controlled rump Germany after hostilities ended, hundreds of thousands returned to their homes east of the Oder and Neisse discovering a new cultural and political reality.\footnote{Thum, \textit{Uprooted}, 63.} Much of this population would be once again uprooted following the Allies’ decision at Potsdam to cleanse Eastern Europe of Germans.

The postwar forced migrations enjoyed wide public support. Historian Mark Mazower explains: “Expulsion was certainly \textit{not} just the product of Stalin or Churchill’s decrees; it was precisely what many people who had endured years of humiliation at the Germans’ hands wanted.”\footnote{Mazower, \textit{Hitler’s Empire}, 546.} Thus, the brutal nature of the Nazi occupation of Poland contributed to a popular desire for revenge. The hatred of Germans permeated Polish society making it susceptible to radical measures championing the displacement of ethnic undesirables. Mazower suggests that this eagerness for retribution mobilized Poles and Czechs behind the nascent Soviet-sponsored communist regimes. Furthermore, expulsion held the promise of great benefits, particularly for East European communists: “it had helped communism come to power and identified it with the national cause.”\footnote{Mazower, \textit{Hitler’s Empire}, 549.}

Popular support was important in propelling postwar displacement, but not all Poles welcomed population shifts with equal enthusiasm. The \textit{kresowianie}, for instance, having experienced relocation from Soviet-annexed eastern Poland, tended to

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{417}{Thum, \textit{Uprooted}, 63.}
\footnotetext{418}{Mazower, \textit{Hitler’s Empire}, 546.}
\footnotetext{419}{Mazower, \textit{Hitler’s Empire}, 549.}
\end{footnotes}
sympathize, often openly, with Ostelbien Germans. There is also evidence to suggest that many Poles failed to understand the logic of mass population transfers. Polish settlers in the Western Territories were uncertain about their futures. Many suffered from a “syndrome of impermanence,” expecting another world war to once again change the human and geopolitical landscape of Europe.\footnote{Thum, \textit{Uprooted}, 186-189.} What was the purpose of forcefully evicting Germans then? Would they not come back one day anyway? Would they not want to reclaim their old property and possessions? Was there even a point of allocating so many resources in the costly enterprise of shuffling millions upon millions of people?

Soviets rather than the Poles were the initial catalysts of expulsion. Polish authorities in Lower Silesia experimented with expulsions for the first time in the summer of 1945. Because of the chaotic nature of this activity and lack of international support (this was before the Potsdam Conference), historians often refer to this campaign as “wild expulsions” (\textit{dzikie wypędzenia}).\footnote{Kraft, “Ucieczka, Wypędzenie i Przymusowe Wysiedlenie Niemców z Województwa Wrocławskiego w latach 1945-1950,” 223.} The participation of the Polish military was a chief characteristic of these actions. Poles sought to evict Germans along the new southwestern border zones, especially from the area around present-day Żary, Żagań, Zgorzelec, Lubań, Lwówek Śląski, Bolesławiec, and Jelenia Góra. The cleansing of the border regions began on June 20, 1945 and lasted two whole weeks. According to German historian, Claudia Kraft, Polish soldiers uprooted Germans without notice, means of transport, or the opportunity to gather their belongings. The military then escorted expellees on foot to the border and dumped them in what would become the Soviet zone of occupied Germany.\footnote{Ibid.} The enterprise of uprooting the “border population”
was one of the most drastic acts of the new Polish administration. More importantly, this first wave of Polish-coordinated expulsions “was not endorsed by international law.”

The Potsdam Conference of July-August 1945 temporarily halted the “unauthorized” expulsions. The Allies agreed that the displacement of Germans was inseparable from Polish security interests. Thus, the leaders of the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union officially sanctioned the continuing evictions of Germans from Poland. They drafted specific rules and regulations to ease and “humanize” the ongoing expulsion process. The Allied Control Council (ACC) supervised the gradual displacement of Germans from Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary. It also guaranteed the nutritional and sanitation needs of families and individuals scheduled for transfer. The Allies estimated that the forced migrations would continue through the summer of 1946. The Control Council foresaw the transfer of two million Germans to the Soviet zone and 1.5 million to the British zone of occupied Germany. These operations were supposed to commence in December 1945 and culminate in July 1946.

Embarkation at collection points in major cities and towns like Wrocław, Legnica, Jelenia Góra, and Wałbrzych (to name just a few) comprised the first step on the itinerary of expulsion. According to official state instructions, Gomułka’s MZO financed,

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428 Eberhardt, Migracje polityczne na ziemiach polskich, 179.
supervised, and enforced the “repatriations of Germans from Polish territory.” Interestingly, Polish officials seldom referred to the transfer of Germans from Poland as expulsions. Instead, the State Repatriation Office (PUR) as well as the MZO strongly preferred the term “repatriation.” This word choice is significant because it ultimately concealed the forced and involuntary nature of these migrations. Ostelbien Germans resisted this official rhetoric, referring to their plight, at the time and for decades afterwards, as expulsion (*Vertreibung*).

Polish state documents, however, remain mute on forced migrations. Instructions emanating from Warsaw foresaw carefully choreographed and, most importantly, humane repatriations. These “organized transfers” were supposed to be conducted under the watchful eyes of verification commissions staffed with militiamen, UB security forces, and civilian state personnel. The Polish civic militia (*Milicja Obywatelska*) played a pivotal part by gathering and delivering local “German repatriates” to the collection points near (or at) train stations. The technical aspects of the repatriations were then delegated to representatives of the PUR. Local PUR cells prepared embarkation points for repatriates: they supplied Germans with food, sanitation, medical care, fuel (*opal*), and security on each transport. The main task of the State

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429 Istrukcja dla władz administracyjnych o repatriacji ludności niemieckiej z granic Państwa Polskiego, lack of date, AAN, Państwowy Urząd Repatriacyjny: Zarząd Centralny, Wydział Etapowy – Sprawy dotyczące repatriacji Niemców. Instrukcje, plan repatriacji i korespondencja z Deleg. do Spraw Repatriacji Niemców, Sygn. VIII/35, k. 2.


432 Istrukcja dla władz administracyjnych o repatriacji ludności niemieckiej z granic Państwa Polskiego, lack of date, AAN, Państwowy Urząd Repatriacyjny: Zarząd Centralny, Wydział Etapowy – Sprawy dotyczące repatriacji Niemców. Instrukcje, plan repatriacji i korespondencja z Deleg. do Spraw Repatriacji Niemców, Sygn. VIII/35, k. 2.

433 Ibid.
Repatriation Office was, thus, to ensure that the MZO’s guidelines were properly executed.

The extent of the PUR’s power in facilitating transfers of Germans is particularly striking given that its management of transports from the Soviet Union – the trains bearing the kresowianie – already left it overstretched. The PUR in Wrocław, for instance, administered the screening of individual repatriates, including the bundles, cases, and luggage of large German families. The State Repatriation Office instructed Polish customs officers to confiscate hard currency and “excess jewelry” (nadmiar biżuteri). It also employed doctors and sanitation officials to oversee the repatriation of the ill, especially individuals with venereal diseases. Those diagnosed as sick were to be quarantined in separate cars. Also, Germans lacking appropriate documentation, in particular those with indispensable industrial skills (fachowcy) were systematically barred from boarding transports. Warsaw expected State Office personnel to monitor and root out Germans with obligations to the Polish state. The PUR’s duties, then, went beyond organizing and directing transports. Enforcement of Polish state interests was a central theme in State Office activities.

Although Ostelbien residents experienced “wild” and more systematized expulsions a year prior to 1946, the subsequent two years widened the demographic chasm between local Germans and Poles. Between February and April 1946, 203,852 expellees left Poland aboard 131 transports. Individuals classified as “useless” filed into expulsion queues in Wrocław, Kłodzko, Rychbach (Dzierżoniów), Ząbkowice, Kłodzko, Rychbach (Dzierżoniów), Ząbkowice,

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434 Protokół z odprawy dyrektorów PUR w MZO w sprawie wznowienia repatriacji ludności niemieckiej, 8 June 1948, APWr, Państwowy Urząd Repatriacyjny – Oddział Wojewódzki we Wrocławiu, Dział Ogólny, Repatriacja Niemców: Sprawy tajne i poufne, Sygn. PUR Dz. Og. Ref. Og. 66, kk. 8-9.
435 Ibid.
Bystrzyca, and Zgorzelec. They were joined in May and June by expellees from Jelenia Góra, Wałbrzych, Bolesławiec, Lubań, Oława, Środa Śląska, and Żary. In June, alone, 91 transports shuttled 144,765 individuals to British-occupied Germany. Then a month later, in July 1946, the Soviets permitted Polish authorities to send more expellees to their zone in occupied East Germany.

According to Polish historian, Stanisław Jankowiak, between February and October 1946, the Polish state cast out 834,693 Lower Silesian Germans. Statistically, not unlike Polish repatriates from the Soviet Union, the overwhelming majority of this “useless” human cargo consisted of women and children: 412,155 women, 234,260 children, and 188,278 men. Thus, approximately a year after the 1946 expulsions began Polish authorities supervised 434 transports earmarked for the British zone alone. Jankowiak estimates that they included 717,616 former German citizens. At the same time, the Soviet zone received 192 transports with 337,332 expellees. As indicated by a local Polish census taken in January 1947, 200,800 Germans still remained in Lower Silesia. Incredibly, not even two complete years after World War II, the overwhelming majority of Ostelbien Germans were already “swept” out of their prewar homelands.

With this speed and efficiency, a “Poland for the Poles” appeared barely a mile away.

In reality, however, Ostelbien Germans remained in places like Lower Silesia until as late as 1949 and 1950. Eberhardt suggests that a marked transition in the ethnic content of the Western Territories – a shift favoring newly arrived Polish settlers – was not reached until 1946-1947. Clearly, 1946 was the beginning of the end for Ostelbien Germans. In that year alone, approximately 1.4 million Ostelbien residents left Poland for

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436 Ibid.
438 Ibid.
British and Soviet-occupied Germany (short of the expected target of 3.5 million expellees).\textsuperscript{439} Transports stocked with “unwanted Germans” left Lower Silesia via one of two exits: Kaławsk (today Węgliniec) and Tuplice.\textsuperscript{440} The largest number of transports passed through Kaławsk: 886,652 Germans aboard 512 trains left Lower Silesia – and concurrently Poland – through this crossing-point.\textsuperscript{441}

The ethnic rearrangement of the Ostelbien, from the Baltic Sea to the Carpathian Mountains, indicated a new stage in the region’s history. Most significantly, population transfers – unprecedented and colossal in scope – created a new cultural and political hierarchy in Lower Silesia. Polish leaders such as Stanisław Piaskowski, Warsaw’s plenipotentiary for the region, initially excluded the possibility of Polish-German coexistence under his control. Piaskowski believed that Nazi wartime atrocities in Poland provided Polish settlers in the Western Territories with a blank check to set the region’s destiny.\textsuperscript{442}

Piaskowski was hardly the only one fantasizing about a mono-ethnic and exclusively Polish Lower Silesia. Norman Naimark argues that “anti-Germanism” was one tendency that communists and anti-communists shared. The leader of the Polish Agrarian Party (PSL) and the main opponent of the communists, Stanisław Mikołajczyk, was as eager to see Germans leave Poland as high-ranking communists such as Bolesław Bierut and Władysław Gomułka. According to Naimark, “Mikołajczyk saw the expulsion

\textsuperscript{439} Eberhardt, Migracje polityczne na ziemiach polskich, 183.
\textsuperscript{440} Eberhardt, Migracje polityczne na ziemiach polskich, 181.
\textsuperscript{441} Eberhardt, Migracje polityczne na ziemiach polskich, 182.
\textsuperscript{442} Kraft, “Ucieczka, Wypędzenie i Przymusowe Wysiedlenie Niemców z Województwa Wrocławskiego w latach 1945-1950,” 221-222.
of the Germans as a social as well as national act.”\textsuperscript{443} Polish leaders took it for granted that the expulsion of Germans was a major premise of postwar reconstruction.

Local leaders in Lower Silesia shared these views. Bolesław Drobner, the first Polish mayor of postwar Wrocław (Breslau) and a prominent socialist, endorsed the idea of ethnic apartheid as a temporary solution to the Ostelbien’s “German problem.” In particular, Drobner suggested isolating Germans in a separate district of Wrocław, thus limiting Polish-German interactions. Had it been successfully implemented (which it never was), Drobner’s policy of segregation would have amounted to a kind of “ghettoization.” Although it did not quite work in Wrocław – the Lower Silesian capital was an anthill in constant motion, with Germans, Poles, and Soviets moving to and fro – the idea of erecting ghettos to police the boundary between incoming and outgoing populations was by no means abandoned. In fact, smaller communities outside of Wrocław were much more successful in isolating and “ghettoizing” their Germans.\textsuperscript{444}

Other Lower Silesian urban centers, including Wrocław, Wałbrzych, and Legnica, enacted special regulations obliging Germans to wear arm-bands with the letter “N” for Niemiec (German).\textsuperscript{445} Paradoxically, then, similar policies limiting the mobility of Polish Jews under Nazi occupation, especially in the period prior to the industrial killings in extermination camps, remained central to Polish thinking on the postwar “German question” in Poland.

But the reality of postwar reconstruction also created the need to detain and exploit so-called “useful” Germans. Although the postwar period was an ideal time to

\textsuperscript{443} Naimark, \textit{Fires of Hatred}, 124.
\textsuperscript{444} Kraft, “Ucieczka, Wypędzenie i Przymusowe Wysiedlenie Niemców z Województwa Wrocławskiego w latach 1945-1950,” 220.
\textsuperscript{445} Naimark, \textit{Fires of Hatred}, 128.
fulfill the Polish nationalist dream of a “Poland for the Poles,” economic and social considerations dictated against the eviction of all Ostelbien Germans. Władysław Gomułka’s MZO comprised the nerve center of Polish expulsion policy. Gomułka delegated responsibility for the plight of Ostelbien Germans to Józef Jaroszek. As the Primary Delegate for the Repatriation of the German Population (Główny Delegat do Spraw Repatriacji Ludności Niemieckiej), Jaroszek supervised the creation of a Polish expulsion infrastructure.\textsuperscript{446} The delegate’s office cut through multiple civilian and military jurisdictions, capturing within its convoluted web the entire Western Territories. Swollen with millions of “stateless” Germans, Jaroszek further distributed his power among Regional Plenipotentiaries (Pełnomocnicy Okręgowi) such as Roman Fundowicz. Fundowicz was the head of the Commissariat of Repatriation from Lower Silesia (Komisariat do Spraw Repatriacji z Dolnego Śląska) and a chief enforcer of expulsions in Wrocław. The Lower Silesian Commissar’s office shaped the fortunes of local Ostelbien residents, particularly between 1946 and mid-1947, the years when Poles would eclipse the local German population. Dependent on both Piaskowski and Gomułka – Polish leaders notorious for their public tirades targeting Germans as “Nazis” and “foes” – the Commissariat segregated Germans into “useful” and “useless” categories. Those deemed useless were the first in line for eviction.

As the forced transfers of Germans continued and intensified, Polish leaders in Lower Silesia outlined a plan for the stratification of candidates for expulsion with economic considerations in mind. On January 22, 1946, Piaskowski hosted a conference of Polish officials charged with fixing the fate of Ostelbien Germans. Present at the event

were representatives of Gomułka’s MZO as well as other “experts” on issues of repatriation. Delegates to the convention affirmed their commitment to orderly and humanitarian expulsions. Germans were thus entitled to food, warmth, and protection on transports. Polish leaders separated Germans into three distinct categories. Express priority was granted to the “least productive elements”: individuals without work, the elderly and frail, and those injured or handicapped. Next in line were former German citizens employed in private enterprises (Polish delegates tended to view them as detrimental to the building of a socialist society). Finally, Germans whose labor was considered to be indispensable to the postwar Polish state, in particular, individuals employed in large state industries, were relegated toward the very back of the expulsion queue.\footnote{Jankowiak, “Lata 1946-1950,” 240.} The delegates’ main concern was thus to curb the mobility of Germans with critical industrial skills.

Polish debates over the future of Ostbelgien Germans indicated, more generally, a tension between displacement and detainment as possible solutions to Lower Silesia’s “population problems.” Although there was an emerging consensus favoring the expulsions, it was not always clear who deserved to be expelled. In the end, scheduling Germans for population transfer was a complex process that involved the decision as to where Germanness ended and Polishness began.
“Hidden Germans” and “One-hundred-percent Poles”: Ostelbien petitions for Polish Citizenship

Between January and October 1945, the office of the Lower Silesian plenipotentiary, Stanisław Piaskowski, bestowed citizenship rights on applicants fluent in Polish with no connection to the Nazi Party. Political affiliation and linguistic capabilities were the main qualifications for inclusion in the postwar Polish nation. Successful applicants then signed a declaration of national loyalty (Deklaracja Wierności Narodu) which was supposed to symbolically cement the new citizens’ commitment to Poland. Polish historians estimate that approximately thirty to forty thousand German citizens of Polish background resided in the Western Territories in May 1945. To complicate matters, there was an additional 107,000 Poles, forced laborers in Nazi-administered Lower Silesia, who needed to “reclaim” their Polish citizenships. Indeed, petitions for Polish citizenship were literally a matter of life and death. The right to property – and, most importantly – the right to remain in Lower Silesia were intimately tied to the acquisition of Polish citizenship. The fear of losing the very foundation of one’s material existence often informed decisions to assert one’s “loyalty to Poland.” The co-option of “culturally versatile” Germans with the right political credentials (anti-fascism) as ethnic raw material for the construction of Polish society enabled a portion of the indigenous inhabitants to claim membership in the postwar Polish nation.

Defining Germanness and Polishness were of profound importance to state officials in the ethnic verification commissions scattered throughout the Western Territories. These commissions were comprised of so-called experts on Polish nationality. As demonstrated in Chapter 1, communists, nationalists (members of the

PZZ), military and state personnel dispensed Polish nationality to candidates most “fit” for Polonization. Determining the “fitness” of each candidate, however, proved difficult to measure. The criteria for establishing Polishness underwent a significant shift in April 1946. Linguistic capabilities and political loyalties were no longer sufficient in distinguishing Poles from Germans. The ideas of Zygmunt Izdebski, a Polish scholar and theoretician affiliated with the PZZ, contributed to this shift. Although Izdebski’s work concentrated overwhelmingly on Opole Silesia, in particular the national loyalties of its indigenous inhabitants, his theories on borderland identities had wide implications for ethnic verifications throughout the entire Western Territories. Izdebski was a fierce opponent of regional or local identities.\textsuperscript{449} He urged the postwar communist-dominated state in Warsaw to take an active role in suppressing regional patriotisms. According to Polish historian Grzegorz Strauchold, Izdebski believed that “regionalism” was intimately connected with separatism and as such posed a mortal threat to the unity of the nation.\textsuperscript{450} Radical re-Polonization was purportedly the best solution to this problem.

But radical measures of determining and, subsequently, assigning nationality ultimately entailed a liberal verification policy. In early 1946, Izdebski articulated his vision of national verification to communist leaders in the Ministry of the Recovered Territories (MZO). In particular, Izdebski outlined the most crucial criteria of borderland Polishness: psychological traits (cechy psychiczne), lifestyle (sposób życia), way of speaking (sposób mówienia), and child-rearing practices (wychowywanie dzieci).\textsuperscript{451} These unusually vague criteria for delineating nationality were supposed to guide verification

\textsuperscript{449} Grzegorz Strauchold, \textit{Autochtoni Polscy, Niemieccy, Czy... Od Nacjonalizmu do Komunizmu (1945-1949)} (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2001), 75.
\textsuperscript{450} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{451} Strauchold, \textit{Autochtoni Polscy, Niemieccy, Czy...}, 57.
commissioners in their identification of Polishness. As such, they functioned as clues of Polish nationality. More importantly, however, they enabled Polish authorities to reinvent Ostelbien inhabitants through a process known as “wide verification” (szeroka weryfikacja). Consequently, neither the language skills nor the self-perceptions of former German citizens really mattered in the end. Nationality would henceforth be determined by loosely crafted criteria scrutinizing every aspect of an individual’s life. Assigning Polishness thus resembled a game of “hide and seek” where specific traits and behaviors hinted at an otherwise “hidden nationality.” By spring 1946, Władysław Gomułka’s MZO was translating Izdebski’s theories into policies with real implications on the lives of citizenship applicants.

On April 6, 1946, the Ministry of the Recovered Territories infused new life into Izdebski’s theories by introducing extremely vague stipulations to national verification policy. Language and politics (opposition to Nazism) would continue to matter but could not, by themselves, connote Polishness. The MZO expected former German citizens to prove their attachment to the Polish nation. Legitimate “proof of attachment” included membership in legal or illegal Polish organizations; cultivation of Polish mores (obyczaje); and displays of solidarity with other “real Poles” under Nazi occupation. These, in addition to Izdebski’s ambiguous criteria, were supposed to finally mark out where the German ended and the Pole began.

Not surprisingly, Gomułka’s vague regulations made it tremendously difficult to both prove and interpret “true Polishness.” For instance, it was far from clear what constituted “Polish mores:” Religious rituals? Family organization? Comprehension of

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452 Ibid.
the Polish language? Likewise, the idea of solidarity with “other Poles” opened a Pandora’s Box of ambiguities: Lower Silesia was never occupied by the Nazis – it was an integral part of the prewar German state. So how could Lower Silesian Poles verify their support and solidarity with Poles hundreds of kilometers away in Nazi-occupied Poland? There were, of course, Polish forced laborers in German Lower Silesia but it remained unclear if those were the people the MZO had in mind when delineating the “solidarity clause.”

Moreover, Polish officials did not just demand an oath of loyalty to the new state, they also insisted on documentation authenticating one’s pre-1945 status. Keeping track of nationality necessitated an intricate paper trail. Documents confirming one’s identity, however, were not always available. Verification commissions, including the official state police, the UB, screened candidates, collecting birth certificates, work warrants, letters, property deeds, etc.\textsuperscript{454} It was not uncommon for former German citizens not to possess the adequate paper certification. Still others – in the whirlwind of war, displacement, and lawlessness – lost all legitimate documentation. In addition, to complicate matters further, another disruptive factor included overstaffed verification committees with a barrage of shouting voices, each one with a conflicting idea on what constituted Polishness. There thus appeared to be an insurmountable predicament: commissions charged with delegating nationality regularly violated and misinterpreted unclear and questionable guidelines set by the center. Consequently, where Germanness began and Polishness ended depended on the competence, composition, and commitment of specific verification commissioners.

The MZO’s adjustment of Polish citizenship policy in April 1946 drew a line in the sand (albeit an extremely faint one) separating Ostebien Germans from newly discovered or rediscovered Poles. According to Polish estimates from 1990, 11,832 candidates in Lower Silesia underwent national verification in the first half of 1946. Commissioners throughout the region verified 5,537 applicants as legitimate Polish citizens. But who were these applicants? How did verification personnel interpret their claims?

With verification commissions remotely quartered in large towns and cities, the ritual of petitioning for Polish citizenship often involved writing grievance letters. Ostebien Germans and autochthons – residents of rural Lower Silesia – may have imagined that this was the only way to alert relevant state authorities about their intention of becoming citizens. These letters were frequently addressed to the MZO or prominent communist leaders: Władysław Gomułka and Bolesław Bierut. This suggests that many petitioners may not have been aware of the existence of verification commissions. Conversely, having received a negative response from a specific commission, some applicants may have wished to appeal to higher authorities in Wrocław or Warsaw. But writing letters was in itself an obstacle, particularly for Germans whose knowledge of Polish was rudimentary (if not nonexistent). In communities where relations between Poles and Germans were satisfactory, applicants for Polish citizenship solicited the help of their neighbors. In some cases, however, Germans sought assistance from Poles whom they had known prior to 1945. It was not uncommon for these Germans to be in intimate relationships with their neighbors from across the ethnic divide.

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The case of Eliza Krauze of Borasin, Góra Śląska district, was quite typical. Krauze’s petition was written on April 13, 1946 by Henryk Moniecki, her fiancé. In the letter (the addressee was Władysław Gomułka) Moniecki attempts to convince the Minister of the Recovered Territories of Krauze’s “Polish credentials.” The Pole’s account suggests familiarity with the MZO’s stipulation about “German displays of solidarity with Poles” as a condition for acquiring citizenship. According to this clause, Germans like Eliza Krauze who shielded Poles from Nazi harassment during World War II, were eligible for Polish citizenship. In his letter, Moniecki depicted his fiancé in an unmistakably pristine light: “[Krauze] was my female savior (wybawicielka) from death and starvation. She is a ‘Reich-German’ woman (Rajchsdojczerka) who, during the entire period of Nazi occupation, had great trust in Poles… Many Poles owe her their lives.”

Krauze, a German woman who presided over a group of Polish forced laborers (though it is unclear in what capacity) in Lower Silesia, was socially and culturally unacquainted with Poland. She was not even an autochthon. Moniecki made clear that his fiancé is an authentic German: a Rajchsdojczerka, the top category on the Nazi nationality list (Volksliste).

Yet none of this appeared relevant to the interethnic couple. What mattered was that Krauze was an anti-fascist, an opponent of the Nazi regime, and a “savior” of Poles. Wartime relationships between Poles and Germans, in particular German sympathy and defense of Polish forced laborers, were grounds for postwar Polish citizenship. Ethnicity was thus hardly the most critical indicator of postwar national belonging. Applicants for Polish citizenship could express their nationality through past and present deeds, feelings,

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and intentions. Under the right circumstances, a German of Guhrau in 1944 could thus become a Pole of Góra in 1946.

In their written petitions, Ostelbien applicants were expected to highlight their connection to the Polish nation. But in cases where German applicants relied on Poles to help craft these letters, both the applicant and the translator affirmed their national loyalties. Polish settlers writing on behalf of their Ostelbien neighbors, friends, and fiancés took a significant risk in promoting the interests of Germans. Interactions between both groups transpired in the context of fluctuating “frontier hatreds,” pitting some ethnic communities against others. Also, official propaganda emanating from Warsaw ceaselessly reminded settlers about the dangers of German partisans, fascists, “junkers and Teutons.” Crafting letters and petitions glorifying individual Germans as “saviors” and “defenders of Poles” could have easily backfired. Interethnic camaraderie, in particular sexual relations between Germans and Poles, was not something the communist regime wished to endorse publicly. More alarmingly, staking one’s lot with Germans opened the possibility of denunciation by incoming Polish settlers eager for properties still in the hands of likely expellees. Helping “Germans become Poles” was thus a potentially alienating and hazardous enterprise.

Archival sources indicate that Poles who felt invested in the civic status of local Germans saw their own national identity as a matter of dispute. Many were doubtlessly aware that the fate of Ostelbien residents was already sealed in Warsaw and Potsdam. By following the logic of the MZO’s citizenship criteria, they could have easily assumed that by defending and sympathizing with Germans they could themselves be perceived as Germans or “disloyal Poles.” Clearly, from the point of view of some, this reverse logic
threatened to make Germans out of Poles. In Henryk Moniecki’s appeal on behalf of Eliza Krauze, the petition-writer introduces himself as a “one-hundred percent Pole” *(stu procentowy Polak)*. In yet another petition, written by Edward Włodarczyk on behalf of his German parents-in-law, the Hoffmans, residents of Piotrolesie, the author emphasized that he was “a Pole, a Polish soldier from the German front.”457 This emphasis of letter-writers stemmed partially from the acknowledgement of the new cultural hierarchy in the post-German territories. Stressing their Polishness endowed authors with an air of authority and cultural superiority. More significantly, however, declaring one’s Polishness confirmed one’s commitment to the nation while, simultaneously, dispelling any national ambiguities. The grievance letter/citizenship petition thus opened to outside (state) scrutiny the national identities of both the (German) applicant and the (Polish) letter-writer.

Self-declared Poles who petitioned on behalf of their German friends often depicted themselves as rightful bearers of Polishness in the Western Territories. Poles in relationships with Germans reassured Polish authorities of their diligent role in the construction of Polish communities in former German lands. Settlers like Henryk Moniecki and Edward Włodarczyk, for example, utilized official propaganda by elevating their commitment to Polonization. Włodarczyk appealed to Bolesław Bierut to allow him, a husband to a German wife and a Polish father, to rear his children in a specifically Polish fashion: “The children, of course, are reared in the Polish spirit (*w duchu polskim*). My wife, the daughter of the Hoffmans, runs the house in a Polish spirit,

457 Prośba o łaskę do Pana Prezydenta Państwa, 12 February 1947, AAN, Ministerstwo Ziem Odzyskanych, Podanie o nadawanie obywatelstwa polskiego poszczególnym osobom, Sygn. 324, Nr. Mikrofilmu B 5428, k. 92.
speaks Polish, and [even] feels like a Pole (czuje się Polką).” In emphasizing the unmistakable Polishness of the household, Włodarczyk portrays himself as an agent of Polonization in the private sphere. Włodarczyk’s commitment to a domestic “Polish spirit” was supposed to reassure communist leaders of his unwavering dedication to the state’s cultural priorities. At the same time, the reference to his wife, presented here as a success story of Polonization, reaffirmed the authority of Polish masculinity and the Polish man’s vitality in upholding Polish culture on the frontier. Włodarczyk further argued for the inclusion of his parentsin-law in the Polish community.

In a similar manner, Marceli Kulawiak, a Polish settler in Żary, sought to rehabilitate his sister, Anastazja Pinocci, for the Polish nation. On August 30, 1946, Kulawiak wrote a letter to Gomułka explaining the history of Anastazja’s German citizenship and her desire to return to her original Polishness. According to the letterwriter, Anastazja married Angelo Pinocci, a “hidden German,” a few years prior to World War II. For some mysterious reason, Pinocci’s German background was unbeknownst to Kulawiak’s sister. Although her husband’s name hinted an Italian ancestry, Anastazja maintained that his “Germanness” only became clear to her during the Nazi administration of Upper Silesia. (The letter fails to explain how the couple communicated: in Polish? German? Italian?) Both Anastazja and Angelo were citizens of prewar Poland. In fact, Angelo served in the Polish military and participated in the September campaign of 1939. According to Kulawiak, during his captivity in a German

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458 Ibid.
POW camp for Polish servicemen, Nazi officials reclassified Pinocci as an ethnic German (Volksdeutsche). Upon reunion with his family, Angelo persuaded his wife to sign the Volksliste and accept German citizenship. Kulawiak then explains that his sister only reluctantly and after many heated disputes finally succumbed (uległa) to her husband. In addition to being coerced by Pinocci, Anastazja hoped that by signing the Volksliste she would have more control over the future of her child. Kulawiak reassured Gomulka that his sister raised her son – in spite of the German husband – in a “purely Polish spirit” (w duchu czysto polskim).\(^{460}\) Anastazja’s status as a Polish mother symbolized her continued attachment to the Polish nation.

The postwar fate of Anastazja was dramatic. While Marceli Kulawiak joined other settlers and repatriates on the western frontier, his sister languished in Jaworzno, a Polish-run forced labor camp for Germans. Anastazja’s tragic plight was a source of distress for the entire family. Kulawiak argued that the five-year sentence at Jaworzno was a great injustice, particularly for a mother who, consistently and unwaveringly, immersed her child in Polishness. Kulawiak’s grievance thus shows how settlers in Lower Silesia challenged conceptions of citizenship and national loyalty even when they transcended the western frontier. Public debates over the boundaries of postwar Polish national belonging in the Western Territories had nationwide implications. Settlers like Kulawiak learned to manipulate the postwar language of Polish citizenship to claim and reclaim their relatives for the nation. More importantly, the experience of Anastazja Pinocci demonstrates how external circumstances – for instance, war and frontier shifts – reshape the contours of individual national identity.

\(^{460}\) Ibid.
Not all “genuine” Poles were eager to promote individual Germans for Polish citizenship. Some made it their duty to root out, in particular, Germans who posed as Poles. Johann Borek’s appeal for Polish citizenship is a case in point. On June 10, 1946, Borek addressed a letter to the Polish plenipotentiary in Jelenia Góra, requesting reclassification from a German to a Pole. Borek was born in 1881 in Königshütte (Królewska Huta, today Chorzów), a town in then German-administered Upper Silesia. Between 1900 and 1914, Borek found work in Hirschberg (Jelenia Góra) as a hotel waiter. Enlistment in the German military during World War I was a major disruption in the applicant’s biography: the Silesian native fought valiantly on the western front in France and Belgium. Following the end of the war, Borek rewarded himself for his service by purchasing a hotel in Bad Warmbrunn (Cieplice) in German-controlled Lower Silesia. His tenure in Lower Silesia witnessed the rise and fall of the Third Reich as well as the emergence of a postwar Polish administration.

Although Borek considered himself an ethnic Pole and an anti-Nazi, he had to wage a long struggle to authenticate his nationality. Perhaps surprisingly, Polish settlers in Cieplice, Johann’s new neighbors, challenged the Silesian man’s Polishness. A few of his neighbors went as far as to protest Borek’s appeal for citizenship by petitioning high-ranking Polish authorities in Jelenia Góra. In one such petition, Feliks Łecki, a recently arrived Polish settler, depicted Borek as an “arrogant” and despicable man: “In [Johann’s] every movement and gesture, one could feel the contempt as well as hatred for

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461 Odpis do Pełnomocnika Rządu R.P. na Obwód Nr. 29 w Jeleniej Górze, 10 June 1946, AAN, Ministerstwo Ziem Odzyskanych, Powiat Jelenia Góra, Województwo Wrocławskie – Sprawozdania z inspekcji, raporty sytuacyjne, materiały z dochodzeń, zażalenia na postępowanie władz administracyjnych, Sygn. 1293, Mikrofilm Nr. B-6464, k. 213.
462 Odpis do Pełnomocnika Rządu R.P. na Obwód Nr. 29 w Jeleniej Górze, k. 220.
the Poles (czuć było nienawiść do Polaków)." Lêcki saw Borek’s nationality as unmistakably German. Interlaced throughout his letter are references to “that German” (ten Niemiec). While he does not openly acknowledge it, Lêcki’s portrayal of Borek suggests that the Silesian’s appeal for citizenship may have been a last-ditch effort to hold on to his estate.

Nevertheless, rumors about Borek’s alleged resentment of Poles were quite rampant in Cieplice. According to Józef Urbański, yet another Polish neighbor, “Johann-Hans Borek is a man with decidedly hostile views of the Polish nation.” The Silesian man allegedly responded to the sudden influx of Poles in Cieplice by publicly denouncing the new settlers and their “inferior” culture. He also supposedly picked fights with local residents such as the Pole, Lewkowicz. Polish authorities initially assigned Lewkowicz to share Borek’s estate. Unhappy with this state of affairs, Borek routinely abused the Polish settler, devastating his potato crops as well as picking his gooseberries (agrest). Borek’s excesses were allegedly the legend of town! In the end, Urbański declared the man a menace to society. Moreover, he claimed that men like Borek were a major obstacle to the state’s project of Polonization: “Borek who is indisputably an enemy element (wrogi element) […] hopes to remain here [in Cieplice] for the purposes of damaging the Poles’ quest of fixing (utrwalanie) Polishness in the Western Territories.”

465 Ibid.
466 Ibid.
Neither Łecki nor Urbański, however, had the last word. By mid-August 1946, the news of the tense situation in Cieplice finally reached the Polish district administrator (starosta powiatowy) in Jelenia Góra. To the dismay of local Poles, officialdom outside of Cieplice had a different view of things. Although not an official endorsement of Borek’s Polish nationality, W. Tabaka, the Jelenia Góra district administrator, chastised Poles in Cieplice for setting their gaze on the Silesian man’s property. As specified by Tabaka: “In my opinion, the problem was not with Borek but with the villa he owned in town.” Despite the explosion of gossip attesting to Borek’s anti-Polishness, the intervention of outside authorities in Jelenia Góra bolstered the petitioner’s claim for Polish citizenship. While Poles like Łecki and Urbański may not have welcomed the verdict, the district administrator’s decision confirmed the state’s engagement in settling nationality disputes. At the same time, Łecki and Urbański’s challenge of Borek’s nationality also indicated that some settlers manipulated state rhetoric – the language of Polonization – to further their own interests. Poles and Germans on the frontier paid close attention to the official slogans emanating from Wrocław and Warsaw. Both groups recruited the state for their own specific needs. Former German citizens could thus solicit the help of the Polish state to protect themselves from zealous and covetous Polish settlers.

Johann Borek was not the only one whose nationality was contested by the locals. The case of Dr. Aulich generated an even bigger uproar. The investigation of this Silesian doctor ultimately drew the attention of the Polish military and the MZO making it one of

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the most high profile citizenship disputes in the region. According to Captain Aumer, a Polish military official, Dr. Aulich worked covertly to undermine Polish interests in Lower Silesia. Aulich’s status as head of the Administrative-Legal Division of the Jelenia Góra district (kierownik Wydziału Administracyjno-Prawnego starostwa) as well as his key role in adjudicating Polish nationality to German applicants caused great consternation among Polish military personnel.\textsuperscript{468} Having conducted an in-depth investigation of Aulich, local state security forces (UB) unearthed a “hidden past” in the doctor’s background. In particular, the UB smeared Aulich as a Nazi collaborator and, worst of all, an authentic German. Police investigators traced the doctor’s wartime activities to Nazi-occupied Zakopane, a resort town in the Tatra Mountains south of Kraków. According to official reports, between 1939 and 1940, Aulich was the German commissioner (starosta) for the Zakopane district.\textsuperscript{469} While the breadth of his wartime activities remained unreported, Aulich’s alleged collaboration with the Nazis was enough to cast his national loyalties into serious doubt.

Captain Aumer’s denunciation of Aulich, including letters to Polish civilian and military officials, galvanized a heated debate over the meanings of Polishness, Germanness, and the role of ethnically ambiguous individuals in assigning national identities. To concerned Polish leaders like Aumer, Aulich was a top priority case. The Silesian doctor was at the very forefront of the re-Polonization campaign in Jelenia Góra: he reviewed German and autochthon petitions for postwar Polish citizenship. His position at the cutting edge of Polishness turned him into a target of military and police


\textsuperscript{469} Ibid.
investigations. Was Aulich the right candidate to delegate Polish nationality if he himself was insufficiently Polish? Could a German – and former Nazi collaborator – preside over the re-Polonization of other Germans?

While it is clear that Captain Aumer strongly disbelieved Aulich’s Polish credentials, the local district administrator, W. Tabaka, thought otherwise. On August 14, 1946, Tabaka released a statement defending the Silesian doctor’s reputation:

As far as Dr. Aulich is concerned, he works very efficiently, and is regularly assisted by comrade Krzyżanowska. In particular, Dr. Aulich is very detailed (szczegółowy), perhaps even too detailed when it comes to interpreting the law […] He is of the opinion that every applicant of Polish background should be returned to the Polish nation. I do not hold anything against him.470

Tabaka’s approval of Aulich’s work was a snipe against Aumer. The Jelenia Góra district chief expected members of his staff, including Aulich, to enforce the boundaries between Germans and Poles, to retrieve for Poland the most dependable former German citizens. This was indeed in conformity with MZO stipulations as well as the official plan to detain in Poland the most “useful” Germans. At the same time, Aumer’s challenge of Aulich both on a personal and professional level, indicated that Polish authorities continued to be divided (and perhaps confused) about what really constituted “true Polishness.”

Nevertheless, the case of Dr. Aulich appears to be exceptional. Polish officials in Lower Silesia generally dealt with more harmless disputes of national classification. For example, Karol Renner’s predicament was far more typical. Renner was a resident of Kudowa-Zdrój (Bad Kudowa), a German citizen, and a prominent dentist. Renner’s

continued existence in Kudowa, however, was jeopardized by the ongoing expulsions supervised by Poles. The German dentist’s grievance letter, addressed to Bolesław Bierut, attested to the petitioner’s valiant deeds, including sheltering Jews during Nazi rule. Renner allegedly hid Edyta Moussly and her two children in his large Kudowa home. He also sent food packages to his Jewish friend, Ismael Herman, an inmate of the Theresienstadt concentration camp.\textsuperscript{471} The German man’s selflessness and uncompromising devotion to his friends, acts that put him at risk with the Nazi regime, made him an ideal candidate for Polish citizenship. As with many other applicants, conduct, feelings, and deeds paved the way for membership in the postwar Polish nation.

Renner’s petition is a good example of how local Germans used everything available to them to persuade Polish authorities of their “true loyalties.”

My wife Emma, born in Bydgoszcz, is the daughter of Maria Rozalia Gmińska [Renner does not mention her father], a one-hundred percent Pole and Catholic (stuprocentowa Polka i katoliczka) and she feels herself a Pole. Because of her Polish background she was, on numerous occasions, detained by the Gestapo. I too am of Polish heritage – my parents are from Upper Silesia.\textsuperscript{472}

Renner’s account served to highlight his lifelong proximity to Polish culture and ethnic roots by reasserting Polish ancestry. He also solicited the support of Captain Podwyszyński, the Polish militia commandant in Kudowa: “Renner has a good attitude toward state and parliamentary authorities […] I support the German man’s [Renner Karol] request for Polish citizenship.”\textsuperscript{473}

Similar petitions were sent to the PZZ, another entity recognized by the state as an authority on national identity. The PZZ took a similar approach to defining citizenship, in

\textsuperscript{471} Do Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej w Warszawie, 14 October 1947, Archiwum Państwowe we Wrocławiu (APWr), Prezydium WRN we Wrocławiu Nr. XVIII/399, Sprawy Narodowościowe, Sygn. K-203, k. 92.
\textsuperscript{472} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{473} Ibid.
which ethnicity and religion were not always the primary indicators. Rather, *deeds* mattered the most. For example, Augustyn Piec, a Protestant, and his family were granted Polish citizenship because they “acted Polish”: Piec participated in the Silesian uprisings of 1919-1921 against German rule in Upper Silesia. During his meeting with representatives of the Wroclaw PZZ, Piec presented his benefactors with photographs of his friends (*koledzy-powstańcy*), comrades-in-arms during the Silesian uprisings.\(^474\) Piec’s heroism on the battlefield carried more weight than his religious affiliation as a non-Catholic.

The dominant postwar narrative of building an ethnically homogenous Polish nation-state obscures the history of national ambivalence in the former German territories. It will not stand up against close scrutiny of the stories of everyday people, such as those related here. The ambiguous and contested definition of Polishness sometimes based on ethnicity and religion and at other times on actions, shaped cultural and political life on the western frontier. The struggle over what makes one a Pole revealed the limitations of postwar nationality policy. While Polish communists supervised the unprecedented project of “making Poland Polish,” their decisions were often contested on the local level. For example, those who were classified as Poles might simultaneously be seen as Germans by their friends, relatives, or neighbors, and vice versa. The sense that the cultural boundaries between Polishness and Germanness were permeable and fluid continued to shape life on the frontier, in spite of the ongoing population transfers.

\(^{474}\) Ibid.
Leaving the “Laboratory of Polishness”

“Wide verification” with its emphasis on expanding the boundaries of Polish national belonging to include “useful” and culturally versatile Ostelbien residents indicated a willingness on the part of the Polish state to accommodate some Germans. Yet, postwar petition-letters for Polish citizenship demonstrate that both Polishness and Germanness were continuously contested and renegotiated. Both the letter-writers and the representatives of the Polish state failed to reach a consensus on a singular definition of Polish national identity. What did quickly become clear, however, was that those who underwent and subsequently failed national verification would be sent “home to the Reich” (Allied-occupied Germany). This section maps out the plight of these outcasts.

As indicated in the previous section, attachments to the local homeland sometimes outweighed attachments to the broader national community. Johann Borek and Karl Renner – indigenous inhabitants of Lower Silesia – desperately sought a way to inject themselves in the Polish project. Why did they desire to remain in the strongly anti-German Polish state and submit their lives and identities to the intrusive scrutiny of state officials?

Ostelbien petition-writers struggled to adapt to the hastily changing geopolitical and cultural context of the frontier. Nevertheless, when compared to the abysmal conditions in German lands west of the Oder and Neisse, life in the Polish-administered Ostelbien seemed marginally less menacing. Transfer to occupied Germany, they must have reasoned, would be excruciatingly difficult and ominous. Despite the obstacles and distress of living under Polish state domination, many Ostelbien Germans found comfort in Polish citizenship: the privilege of staying in a familiar environment with access to
their property and wealth. Although their new Polish neighbors sometimes challenged their status as co-citizens, this was a price that some petition-writers were willing to pay for remaining in their homelands.

Old homes and new citizenships, however, were not guarantees of security. As the cases of Borek and Dr. Aulich demonstrated, Polish settlers and state officials habitually contested the Polishness of “suspect” or “insufficiently Polish” Poles. Former German citizens, by their very presence, threatened to undermine the Polonization of the frontier. In this atmosphere of “frontier paranoia,” the position of Ostelbien Germans in western Poland continued to deteriorate.

It was not uncommon for Polish authorities to treat Germans whose presence in Lower Silesia spanned multiple generations like adversaries and intruders. This was particularly the case with communities, which Polish officials designated as “useless.” In some towns, such as Kamienna Góra (Landeshut), local Germans suffered a most humiliating castigation, so brutal that it defied standards of human decency. According to a grievance letter addressed to the MZO, members of the Polish community in Kamienna Góra joined the local militia to “punish” their German neighbors. Dr. Franc, the author of the complaint, implicated newly arrived Polish settlers in the brutal denigration of Germans. On April 10, 1946, the Polish militia rounded up German men, women, and children, and escorted them to the nearby Jewish cemetery. As recounted by Franc, militiamen coerced Germans – irrespective of age or gender – to excavate Jewish graves and exhume the corpses:

German men were forced to rip off decayed flesh (zdzierać zbutwiałe ciało) from the bones and dabble in it (babrać się w tym) in buckets of water. German women
were forced to sift the earth with their bare hands. Then, they took the bones to a mass grave (zbiorowa mogila) and covered it with sand.\textsuperscript{475}

The message emitted by Polish authorities was thus unmistakable: ultimate responsibility for the extermination of European Jews lay with \textit{all} Germans, regardless of political leanings. Harassment and expulsion then appeared morally justified. While it is hard to conclude how widespread such ritualized acts of public humiliation really were, the fact that one occurred in Kamienna Góra suggests that many Poles sought to exact what they saw as justice on Germans as a collectivity.

German residents of Kamienna Góra endured harassment for four straight days. According to Franc, there were moments when the unfolding drama turned violent: “The Germans who passed through the cemetery gates were whipped by the Polish militia and stoned by the [Polish] civilians.”\textsuperscript{476} Because Polish law enforcement sanctioned and provoked the violence, the excesses remained unreported. Alerting the Soviets was also futile. Franc contended that Soviet servicemen joined Polish militiamen by the cemetery gates. It was not rare for “Russians” to cheer the Poles’ unrestrained behavior. On April 13, 1946, Poles and Soviets compelled their detainees to supplement their “work” digging up graves with German songs: “Germans were forced to sing ‘Ich hatt einem Kameraden.’ Shortly thereafter, gathered in front of the city hall, they had to sing ‘Deutschland, Deutschland über alles.’”\textsuperscript{477} Singing these hymns was supposed to underscore the Ostelbien residents’ alleged attachment to the Third Reich. Clearly, in the

\textsuperscript{475} List Dr. Franca – tłumaczony przez Joanne Szole, 23 April 1946, AAN, Ministerstwo Ziem Odzyskanych, Kontrola repatriacji Niemców – Sprawozdania z inspekcji, Sygn. 1027a, Mikrofilm Nr. B-6157, k. 14.
\textsuperscript{476} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{477} Ibid.
eyes of Polish and Soviet officials, the Germans of Kamienna Góra were guilty by association.

During the months and years following World War II, local Germans grew accustomed to fear and violence as well as dehumanizing “frontier turbulence.” Whether as “newly-clad” Polish citizens or dejected expellees, Ostelbien inhabitants could not be certain of their future. Either option – remaining in Poland or departing for the west – carried significant risks and, worst of all, little guarantee of a better life. Still, unlike Germans verified as Poles who could hypothetically find support in the PZZ or the MZO, individuals slated for expulsion were virtually deprived of help. Local and state Polish authorities perceived German expellees, especially those labeled as useless, as an exceptionally heavy burden. Families scheduled for expulsion frequently felt like uninvited guests or unwanted neighbors in communities they considered their homes. While many warmed up to their new Polish neighbors – in particular, if they were Poles from the kresy, who were also victims of expulsions – Germans regularly encountered hostility from Polish officials, including young and disgruntled settlers from central Poland. Incidents such as the one in Kamienna Góra convinced those still uncertain about their prospects that the only remedy to their plight lay in their complete displacement.

Expulsion, then, became a life-shaping force, a central experience in their Ostelbien identity. Many displaced Germans would recall Poles and Soviets as extinguishers of their borderland culture.

As with the Polish kresowianie, forced migration thrust Ostelbien Germans onto an entirely new trajectory in life. For many, especially the rural population, relocation in the British and Soviet zones of occupied Germany was the first time they set foot west of
the Oder and Neisse. The move to the “other Germany” was often accompanied by a huge culture shock. The infrastructure and cultural landmarks in places like Leipzig, Cottbus, Dresden or Hamburg resembled little those of Breslau, Leignitz or Hirschberg. Even the language appeared different. “Going home to Germany” – a place beyond the recognizable frontier – meant transitioning to a life in a foreign and inhospitable place.\textsuperscript{478}

Postwar occupied Germany was an immense campground of refugees and displaced people from all over Europe: Jews, Poles, Germans, Ukrainians, Russians, Serbs, Croats, as well as many others, languished in D.P. camps, scattered throughout devastated rump Germany. The widespread destruction, including burnt-out buildings and uprooted motorways targeted during Allied air raids, magnified the alienation that the expellees from Poland must have felt. Rebuilding one’s life on the smoldering edge of western civilization demanded sacrifices and hardships.\textsuperscript{479}

While expulsions from the Western Territories were rarely a death sentence, they frequently left Germans ill equipped, vulnerable, and unprepared for what lay ahead in their new destinations. Theft and plundering, enabled and encouraged by Polish authorities, dispossessed outgoing Germans of most personal effects. For example, Burgel Weinert, an Ostelbien woman from Paczków outside Wroclaw, recalls how Polish “policemen” processed expellees in the Manfred villa:

Young, uncouth-looking (\textit{obskurnie wygl	a dający}) men, searched our luggage and [Polish] families took what they liked. They took watches, jewelry, and even food. While the men were escorted outdoors, the women were shamelessly (\textit{bezwstydnie}) undressed.\textsuperscript{480}

\textsuperscript{479} Rainer Schulze, “The German Refugees and Expellees from the East and the Creation of a Western German Identity after World War II,” in (ed.) Philipp Ther and Ana Siljak, \textit{Redrawing Nations}, 307-320.
\textsuperscript{480} Zażalenie z Kalawska (Kohlfurt), 29 April 1946, AAN, Ministerstwo Ziem Odzyskanych, Kontrola repatriacji Niemców – Sprawozdania z inspekcji, Sygn. 1027a, Mikrofilm Nr. B-6157, k. 26.
For the vast majority of expellees, the experience of displacement was usually entangled in humiliating and helpless encounters with “uncouth” Polish authorities. At the same time, Weinert’s recollection of ordinary Poles at the villa suggests that – as in Kamienna Góra – the local Polish population participated, or at least witnessed, the degradation of Germans. Poles, both directly and indirectly, benefited from the “shameless stripping” of expellees. There was very little about the plight of Ostelbien Germans that did not somehow implicate the incoming Polish population.

It took extraordinary self-discipline for an expellee to question or reprimand Polish authorities. Germans who felt personally affronted, for instance women who were physically examined and subsequently stripped at Manfred, struggled to conceal their frustration. Burgel Weinert writes: “The situation was so despicable, that I hit one of those ‘lords’ (‘pany’) on the fingers, which helped. They did not take anything from me because I did not own anything special.”\textsuperscript{481} Weinert, like many other expellees, blamed Polish officials for her humiliating detainment. They complained about the confiscation and redistribution – in front of their very eyes – of their most prized personal possessions. Some Germans dealt with their anger by suppressing it, or by openly, yet cautiously, expressing their feelings through a slap, kick or a hit just like Burgel Weinert had done. They may not have been aware of the potential consequences such outbursts could have provoked, but they wanted to do something to articulate their misfortune. In most cases, however, resistance to overindulgent Polish confiscators failed to alleviate the situation.

If we are to believe Polish inspectors of the major embarkation points in Lower Silesia, stealing from expellees was commonplace. Moreover, government inspection

\textsuperscript{481} Ibid.
reports confirm the involvement of ordinary Poles in the expropriation of Germans scheduled for departure. For instance, Stefan Piątek’s report describes widespread lawlessness and abuse at the embarkation point in Strzelin. Piątek was the head of the local District National Committee (*Powiatowa Rada Narodowa w Strzelinie*) with wide ranging powers to oversee migration traffic in town. On December 29, 1946, the district chief evaluated a repatriation “control point” (*punkt kontrolny*) at an old German movie theater, the Capitol. Polish authorities used this building to screen Strzelin’s Ostelbien residents, conducting detailed checks of individuals and their luggage. According to Piątek, screening techniques in Strzelin bore a striking resemblance to those at the Manfred villa, described by Burgel Weinert. The district chief’s report, however, was more detailed in its observations of local Poles:

> Although ostensibly State Security forces (*Władze Bezpieczeństwa*) [...] tried to maintain order and harmony in controlling the Germans, unknown individuals, both women and men, kept entering the building. Apparently, the [local Control] Commission granted these individuals permission to seize small and large packages (*pakunki*).  

The common belief thus was that stealing from the Germans was good and just because these people were the alleged enemies of the Polish nation. Piątek’s reaction was to immediately admonish the Control Commission. In particular, he reminded the Commission that “seizing ex-German property (*mienie poniemieckie*) was tantamount to stealing from the state.”  

Startled by the district chief’s reprimand, Commission members swiftly proceeded to bar the local Polish population’s entry into the theater. Not

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483 Ibid.
a moment went by, however, and Piątek’s orders began to be violated: “As I withdrew to an undetectable location, I continued to see more [unauthorized] confiscations […]”

Expropriating Ostelbien Germans played a critical part in cementing bonds between incoming Polish populations and local representatives of the Polish state. Local authorities, from the very beginning of postwar population transfers, daunted, detained, and dispossessed the expellees. The confiscation and redistribution of German valuables was consistently the goal. Polish officials were very much aware that Lower Silesia’s richest resource was its indigenous population. Tapping into this seemingly boundless “human reserve” offered opportunities for relatively quick material advancement. Climbing the local social ladder, however, was one but not necessarily most essential goal. Polish officials in the Western Territories used the redistribution of German “loot” as an opportunity to ingratiate themselves with the incoming Polish settlers. The Germans thus served as indispensable players in the tightening of social bonds as well as galvanizing a sense of community between different groups of Poles. German property, indeed the prospect of redistribution, promised to overcome the ideological distance between Polish administrators and the migrants in their keeping.

The journey to the collection points did not always end in embarkation. In Jelenia Góra, for example, Polish militiamen regularly rerouted expellees to the local police commissariat for further investigations. According to a militia inquiry, on October 15, 1946, Polish authorities detained 91 Germans at the train depot attempting to leave Poland without proper documentation. What followed was a catalogue list of illegal and humiliating activities, which left most of the detainees in deep trauma. Germans complained of suffering beatings and other physical abuses (znęcania się) while held

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484 Ibid.
captive in the militia commissariat. Women were allegedly undressed and the men beaten. These excesses prompted an internal investigation, which failed to produce any relevant conclusions. In a letter to the militia headquarters in Warsaw, the chief of the local militia, H. Wolińska, denied any use of torture. According to Wolińska, Germans were treated in compliance with established regulations (z zachowaniem wszelkich przepisów). Could the local expellees have lied about their mistreatment? What kind of reason would they have for slandering Polish authorities? Archival materials suggest that credibility tended to rest with the victims rather than Polish law enforcement.

But perhaps the most astonishing and, from the perspective of the German expellees, most frightening aspect of their departure from Poland was the poor and dangerous state of Polish transports. Following embarkation at Altwasser in the Wałbrzych district on May 14, 1946, “three men in Polish police uniforms” held up a group of Germans in car number sixteen. According to Richard Weimar, the transport car chief (kierownik wagonu), Poles stole “one luggage and one basket with clothes, one sack with bedcovers, and one suitcase with food.” The journey from Altwasser to Kalawsk, the crossing point from Poland to the Soviet-zone of Germany, was a precarious venture with devastating consequences. Helene Wolf, a fifty-year-old passenger aboard car sixteen, endured serious injuries to her face. It is unclear if she was hit or stabbed by one of the assailants. Weimar also recalled the random use of violence: “People were

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485 Odpis zeznania z transportu No. 14 (pociągu Nr. 158) z 14 maja 1946, 15 May 1946, AAN, Ministerstwo Ziem Odzyskanych, Powiat Jelenia Góra, Woj. Wrocławskie, Sprawozdania z inspekcji, raporty sytuacyjne, materiały z dochodzeń, zażalenia na postępowanie władz administracyjnych, Sygn. 1293, Mikrofilm Nr. B-6464, k. 60.
486 Ibid.
threatened with revolvers – they were beaten with rubber truncheons." Fortunately for the expellees, Red Cross personnel provided the wounded with swift medical attention.

On his arrival in Lower Silesia following the end of World War II, Stefan Wojciechowski was assigned to work as a health clerk (referent zdrowia) at the transfer point in Tuplice, on the Polish-East German frontier. On July 20, 1947, Wojciechowski examined a Polish transport of Germans from Lidzbark-Warmiński. To the great dismay of the health clerk, the transport was deprived of medications, sanitation gear, or even a simple first aid kit (apteczka). Upon further inquiry, Wojciechowski discovered that the special sanitation car lacked the obligatory Polish nurse (siostra sanitariuszka). The train had traveled over six hundred kilometers without adequate medical care. According to a German official, the transport’s sole Polish nurse abandoned the train at a stop prior to Tuplice. Wojciechowski’s irritation framed his letter of complaint to the provincial PUR office in Wrocław: “Please issue the relevant regulations to force sanitation nurses to pilot their transports all the way to Tuplice, and not arbitrarily abandon them, leaving weak elements (element słaby) aboard the trains to their fate.” In spite of official directives, then, the fate of German expellees was clearly far from a priority for Polish state personnel.

The same frustrated and startled spirit was in evidence in Polish reports from Kaławsk. Like Tuplice, Kaławsk was a transfer point for expellees on their way to Soviet-occupied Germany. According to Dr. Zempliński, a Polish medical official in Kaławsk, the miserable conditions at embarkation points supervised by the PUR were

487 Ibid.
sufficient to discredit Poland in the eyes of the international community. Zempliński’s report draws a picture of irreparable negligence:

There is no greater image of misery and despair as the so-called PUR [collection] points in the Recovered Territories. These points are administered in such a way, that the refugee passing through them, experiences a maximum of discomforts, dirt, cold, and hunger. Poland thus creates the impression of a country where human beings are valued less than dogs. The task of the PUR is to discredit Poland both inside and outside its borders.\textsuperscript{489}

Polish medical experts compared transit points for processing German expellees as unworthy for even animals. In Zempliński’s mind, the “de-Germanization” of the Western Territories manifested itself through the proliferation of dirt, debris, and disease at Polish-run processing centers.

The complete neglect of basic human needs of the outgoing population threatened to cast a shadow over the postwar Polish state. Using official state rhetoric to alert Polish authorities about the crisis in Kaławsk, Zempliński wrote: “The goal of de-Germanization is to impoverish the Recovered Territories and maximally disgrace us in the eyes of foreign observers. [Yet another goal] is to create the worst conditions of existence for the Poles settled here.”\textsuperscript{490} The successful Polonization of former German lands thus depended on orderly, humane, and improvised population transfers – all of which appeared to be absent in Kaławsk. The frustration of Polish medical personnel also revealed a tension between the professional duties of caring for the ill (irrespective of nationality) and the commitment to Polonization.

Doctors assigned to treat and tend to the needs of Polish repatriates worked in dreadful conditions not much better than those assigned to care for Germans. Dr. Leszek

\textsuperscript{489} Sprawozdanie PUR w Kaławsku za czas od 11.6.1947 do 20.6.1947 r., 22 June 1947, APWr, Państwowy Urząd Repatriacyjny – Oddział Wojewódzki we Wrocławiu, Dział Ogólny, Sygn. PUR, Dz. Og. Ref. Og. 66, k. 73.

\textsuperscript{490} Ibid.
Sożyński, a PUR medical specialist in Wrocław, lamented about the inexperienced staff and inadequate facilities for the treatment of repatriates at his embarkation point. While Sożyński concurs with Zempliński about the appalling conditions of transfer points for Germans, he identifies the plight of Poles in Lower Silesia with even worse depravities:

At the center of everyone’s interest [Polish authorities] in Lower Silesia is the question of German repatriation, while the state of care, provisions, and shelter for Poles returning from the West, leaves much to be desired. A number of inspections showed that, in general, doctors do not follow sanitation instructions, limiting themselves to dispensing medical advice (porady) in the embarkation clinic (ambulatorium). Lack of initiative in this area is striking.491

The general lack of medications as well as insufficient numbers of adequately trained doctors and nurses threatened to produce a real health crisis at collection centers. Moreover, “Polish elements from Soviet labor camps as well as demobilized soldiers,” Sożyński continues, “had a special propensity for contaminating and devastating shelters.”492 The combination of inexperienced medical personnel as well as unruly and demoralized Polish settlers set the stage for violence and epidemics. Those who were unfortunate enough to work in PUR-administered embarkation and processing points lived in a hazardous environment where disease, filth, brutality, and death were undesired yet constant companions. Nationality or citizenship – one’s Germanness or Polishness – failed to shield those undergoing embarkation or disembarkation from hunger, dirt, or disease. Pathogens or viruses tended to care little about one’s national identity.

An unremitting deficit of medical supplies and sanitation gear beset virtually every collection point in Lower Silesia. Regional and local PUR cells were desperate for

492 Ibid.
disinfectants, soaps, and latrines. Jan Pawłowski, a PUR official in Wrocław, bewailed Polish personnel’s inability to provide Germans and Poles with proper hygiene checks:

The most important matter, the delousing (odwszawianie) of repatriates, is not going according to plan because of the lack of understanding of its importance by the shelter personnel […] The sanitation state of the unloading ramps is extremely unhygienic […] The shortage of portable latrines leads to the cluttering of unloading spaces with waste which emit obnoxious odors (nieznośne wonie).\footnote{Wyciąg ze sprawozdania z działalności Okr. Oddz. PUR we Wrocławiu z dnia 14 czerwca 1946 r. za miesiąc maj b.r., 14 June 1946, AAN, Państwowy Urząd Repatriacyjny – Zarząd Centralny, Sygn. X/41, k. 68.}

The embarkation clinic in Wrocław registered 17,000 diseased individuals in the month of June 1946 alone (though it is unclear if they were Poles, Germans or both). According to Pawłowski’s estimates, PUR doctors diagnosed 800 repatriates with scabies, 22 with typhus fever, 118 with malaria, and 70 with tuberculosis.\footnote{Ibid.} These statistics, Pawłowski insists, were a significant improvement from previous months. Still, it is abominably clear that, in spite of the wishes of Polish and international leaders, population transfers in and out of Poland were significantly deficient in humanitarianism.

At some embarkation points, attempts to prevent the outbreaks of epidemics ultimately led to the suspension of transports. In Oleśnica (Oels), for instance, the temporary shutdown of repatriation actions in December 1946 left 1,012 Germans trapped at the collection center. The situation was especially dire for 239 elderly expellees, who slept, ate, and vegetated at the train station while immersed in an unsanitary environment.\footnote{Odpis do Komisarza dla Spraw Repatriacji Ob. Kapt. Fundowicza Romana we Wrocławiu, 26 December 1946, AAN, Państwowy Urząd Repatriacyjny – Zarząd Centralny, Sygn. X/41, k. 154.} Dr. Jerzy Bogner, the Polish medical authority in Oleśnica, contended that “living conditions are inadequate, and this is due to the lack of mattresses (sienniki) for the elderly, meager nutrition and a lack of suitable nursing care.”\footnote{Ibid.} Bogner
estimated that approximately four elderly individuals (*starcy*) died at Oleśnica per week. The Polish doctor attributed this to an abysmally low standard of hygiene as well as the lack of sanitation equipment, like washing areas and latrines. He also observed German expellees wearing, day in and day out, the same dirty and germ-infested clothes. Bogner warned Polish authorities that the most practical remedy for forestalling a potential outbreak of typhus at the embarkation point in Oleśnica was to revive the repatriations.497 In other words, the very action that was supposed to prevent the spread of infectious diseases (halting the transports) exposed expellees at the collection centers to even grislier dangers. Debates about how to protect the health of German migrants ended when repatriations resumed in 1947.

**Conclusion**

On October 21, 1948, Jan Słówikowski, a PUR inspector in Wałbrzych, expressed his doubts regarding the impact of the ongoing expulsions of Germans on Poland’s long-term stability. Like many officials fluent in postwar communist propaganda, he understood that the central purpose of the forced migrations was to create an ethnically homogenous Poland. But Słówikowski was disturbed by the unsanitary conditions and violence that accompanied the deportations. *Ostelbien* Germans left with hate, poverty, sorrow, and disgust. How could this dreadful experience serve the interest of the postwar Polish state?

Słówikowski was struck by the arbitrary and illogical nature of determining who would be allowed to stay and who would be set aside to leave. He reported how challenging it was to ensure that no Poles found themselves among those scheduled to

497 Ibid.
depart: “Among the Germans undergoing repatriation – in almost every transport – I came across individuals speaking Polish, with even Polish last names.” Inspectors like Słowikowski were greatly alarmed with the contradictory and arbitrary verifications of Poles in the Western Territories.

The Ministry of the Recovered Territories shared Słowikowski’s anxiety. An MZO circular from 1948 admitted: “The re-Polonization action of the R.T. [Recovered Territories] has not everywhere produced satisfactory results (wystarczające wyniki)…” So who was a Pole and who was a German? Thus after the process of verification and expulsion that involved so much political energy and expertise on the part of Poles, the question remained open. It was not solved even in the minds of the officials directly involved in determining where the German ended and the Pole began.

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498 Sprawozdanie z przeprowadzonej kontroli repatriacji Niemców z punktu zboczego PUR-u w Wałbrzychu w okresie of dnia 18-21.X.b.r., 21 October 1948, AAN, Ministerstwo Ziem Odzyskanych: Kontrola repatriacji Niemców – Sprawozdania z inspekcji, Sygn. 1027a, Mikrofilm Nr. B-6157, k. 85.
Chapter Seven
Gendering the Frontier: Women, Men, and Nation-Building

Repatriation and resettlement of Poles, systematic expulsions of Germans, and the assimilation of those uncommitted to any of the two dominant nationalities, facilitated the ethnic homogenization of the Western Territories. A careful examination of everyday life, in particular the gender ideology of the ruling cultural and political system, offers a unique glimpse into how Polish nation-building unraveled on the ground in postwar Lower Silesia. Polish women, alongside Polish men, participated in the Polonization of the frontier. Why is gender important in this context? According to Padraic Kenney, Polish women under communism did not think of themselves only as women. [Instead] women defined themselves also as workers, as consumers, and as Poles. Yet each of these identities acquired a certain power as a result of the conjunction with gender […] Moreover, gender identity gave women access to particularly powerful symbols, the most important of which was motherhood.

Polish women in the Western Territories also defined themselves as pioneers. Gender, and its representation on the Polish-German frontier, thus reveals a new understanding of ethnic homogenization in communist Poland. The role of the female pioneer offered Polish women the unprecedented opportunity of contributing to the broader national project of renegotiating postwar Polishness.

Family and gender relations played a pivotal role in official Polish approaches to creating a working-class society in the new western provinces. Warsaw’s vision for an ethnically Polish and proletarian Lower Silesia centered on restoring and bolstering the family as the dominant site of national reconstruction. Polish socialists, communists, and

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nationalists alike expressed their conceptions of “proper” national life by delineating forms of appropriate gender roles and family life. Everyday struggles on the frontier, for example the plight of wandering men, women, and children, had momentous political implications, in particular on the construction of a strong Polish nation-state. Local authorities in Lower Silesia identified delinquency, prostitution, venereal disease, alcoholism, as well as Polish-German cohabitation as the primary threats to postwar national regeneration. At the same time, the local communist, socialist, and politically unaffiliated press labeled some of these same practices as particularly harmful to the project of Polonization. In short, disruptive patterns of female and male behavior, specifically the reluctance to marry, raise children, and work outside the home, threatened to erode the official nation-building project. Communists and socialists in Wrocław, then, imagined the postwar Polish nation through the prism of traditional, gender and family relations.

It was simultaneously expected, however, that the advent of state-socialism would revolutionize and transform Polish family life. Gender was fundamental to nation building, including communist nation building. Gender equality was central to transforming social relations, but at the same time, Polish communists paid attention to Polish traditions in implementing communism. This also meant appropriation of traditional gender roles. The reinvention of prewar family values, furthermore, meant first and foremost creating stability symbolized, to some extent, by women focused on domestic life and on upholding moral values after the cataclysm of war. At the same time, the role of women in the family was supposed to mirror women’s growing activist

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role in the public sphere. The family thus functioned as a kind of looking glass for the articulation of a postwar socialist society. In this chapter, I argue that Polish women were expected to play a central part in the Polonization of the frontier. Throughout my analysis, I utilize gender as, in the words of Joan W. Scott, a delineator of ‘‘cultural constructions’’ – the entirely social creation of ideas about appropriate roles for women and men.’’\textsuperscript{502} The gender ideology of the postwar Polish communist regime had significant far-reaching ramifications on the Polonization of the new western provinces. For communists, socialists, and nationalists, family and gender relations – with the Polish woman’s increasingly public role, particularly in the labor force – formed the bedrock of the new society, a blueprint for crystallizing Polish culture in previously (and recently) German spaces.

Focusing on public debates and images, this chapter traces the dual project of socialism on the frontier: creating a literate, cultured, and “ideologically sound” Polish working class, and at the same time restoring the traditional family centered on women’s maternal role. I argue that traditional ideas about maternity, femininity, and fertility became especially visible in territories recently annexed from Germany as shapers of the public image of the Polish family and nation.

The consolidation of communist rule, moreover, necessitated the new ruling regime’s engagement of women in other capacities as well. As aptly put by Malgorzata Fidelis: “Communism, as a modern mobilization system, required the involvement of the masses. Women could not remain passive or detached.”\textsuperscript{503} Thus, communists and their


\textsuperscript{503} Fidelis, \textit{Women, Communism, and Industrialization}, 41
allies negotiated with traditional family models while at the same time, creating a semi-autonomous space for women as workers, mothers, homemakers, and wives.

Ironically, endorsement of female emancipation overlapped with rigid societal assumptions about women’s “natural roles” as guardians of the domestic sphere. The postwar communist regime’s conception of gender roles thus recast women as public actors – citizens and workers – while, at the same time, failing to discard allegedly natural female proclivities toward home and hearth. And nowhere was women’s femininity so intensely scrutinized and pored over as in the former German territories. The public debates about women’s rights in Lower Silesia, for instance, occurred against the backdrop of broader anxieties about the biological displacement of Germans, bolstering birth rates among migrants to enable Polonization, and the maintenance of Polish communities in hostile and uncharted lands.

Redefining the social meanings of womanhood in postwar Poland was no simple matter. There was no clear revolutionary blueprint for a specifically communist approach to the “woman question.” The founding fathers of communism provided only limited guidance. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels saw family and gender relations as intrinsically linked to interactions between classes. Alfred G. Meyer argues:

Everything [Marx and Engels] examined, including the oppression of women and the relationship between the sexes within and outside the family, was to be understood in its functional relationship to the class structure and the class struggle.\(^\text{504}\)

But communists also understood that women were not just passive victims of class-based conflicts. They were doubtless aware of women’s recent historical roles in forging Western European nation-states. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries,

Germany, France, Great Britain, and Italy have each solicited the participation of women as reproducers of national communities, transmitters of culture, “signifiers” of national boundaries, and a surrogate workforce during national emergencies.\(^{505}\)

Polish communists thus did not work in a vacuum; they knew that women were proof of national vitality, demonstrated by their “natural roles” as reproducers and contributors to the economy. On one level, then, the Polish regime’s gender politics transpired in a wider pan-European context of contending with women as new political subjects. Women’s contributions to European state-making were, of course, significant; but their sacrifices and responsibilities rarely fostered the same kinds of rewards and privileges zealously accumulated by the opposite sex. The plight of women in western democracies was thus hardly the prototype of social justice that Polish communists may have had in mind. The case of the Soviet Union, the so-called homeland of socialism, was by far a more instructive model.

The early Soviet state radically redefined the boundaries between private and public, bestowing upon Soviet women gender and class equality.\(^{506}\) In the first two years following the October Revolution of 1917, the Bolsheviks enacted reforms “neutralizing gender differences,” liberalizing marriage and divorce laws as well as pulling women out of the home and into the factories.\(^{507}\) Lenin and his followers believed that the social organization of production had an impact on the social order, including the roles and


relations between women and men.\textsuperscript{508} According to Inessa Armand, the first director of the Zhenotdel, the women’s section of the Bolshevik Party, women’s emancipation was directly dependent on the perseverance and triumph of the “working class as a whole.”\textsuperscript{509} Women’s involvement in the party, indeed, their commitment to the revolution, was a condition of their equality. The transformation of the private realm – the socialization of housework including familial obligations such as child rearing – promised to facilitate women’s integration within the traditionally male-dominated workforce. The pursuit of a state-run domestic realm, however, encountered a series of unforeseen obstacles, chief among them, men’s reluctance to imagine a gender-neutral public sphere. “Without a commitment to reconfigure the meaning of masculinity and men’s roles in the family,” Elena Shulman explains, “women retained the burdens of caretaking in the home when promised state assistance did not materialize.”\textsuperscript{510}

The Bolsheviks’ tactics of state-building had wide-ranging implications on the condition of Soviet women, but their unwillingness to challenge male perceptions of family and work life ultimately slackened their commitment to gender equality. Richard Stites suggests that the early Soviet regime’s endeavor to recruit women on behalf of building a revolutionary social order “often took the form of tokenism.”\textsuperscript{511} Soviet leaders’ attitudes toward women reflected a larger history of intellectual disenchantment with allegedly ignorant Russian women. Elizabeth A. Wood argues that the conviction that women were backward, superstitious, and apolitical – indeed, “a potential hindrance to

\textsuperscript{509} Wood, \textit{The Baba and the Comrade}, 76.
\textsuperscript{510} Shulman, \textit{Stalinism on the Frontier of Empire}, 31.
social development” – had deep roots in Russian history.⁵¹² These assumptions about women’s alleged resistance to modernity permeated the Russian intelligentsia, molding the consciousness of communist revolutionaries.⁵¹³ The Bolshevik approach to female emancipation was thus contradictory and daunting. As communist activists liberalized family and marriage laws, they nevertheless continued to view Russian women “as trapped in their ‘backwardness’ and ‘darkness.’”⁵¹⁴ This contradiction would only be exacerbated in the 1930s with the onset of Stalinism.

In the Soviet Union, the conflicts between emancipating women and industrializing the state galvanized a series of debates which, in the end, led to the dissolution of the Zhenotdel and the “strengthening” of the family. It was not long before officials in Moscow took note of the negative effect that placing women in the workforce had on Soviet men.⁵¹⁵ Soviet industry, particularly during the Stalinist 1930s, was both sex-segregated and male-dominated. Male hegemony in the labor force intensified even further under Stalinism. In many ways, this was a reaction to the demographic crisis and social experimentation of the 1920s. With dangerously high divorce rates, hastily declining birthrates, and a rising tide of abortions, the “emancipated Soviet woman” was increasingly identified with social turmoil as well as lack of class vigilance. Time and time again, Stalinist officials blamed women’s abrupt entry into the public sphere for destabilizing and weakening the labor force.⁵¹⁶ In emphasizing that communism was reconcilable with marriage, family, and reproduction, the Stalinist regime bestowed new

⁵¹⁵ Shulman, Stalinism on the Frontier of Empire, 39.
meanings onto Soviet womanhood. Strengthening the family was thus indispensable to bolstering the working class. Gender neutrality, family planning – in particular, access to abortions – and women’s penetration of traditionally male occupations had to be incrementally jettisoned: male officials and workers frequently viewed them as unconstructive, if not subversive. Soviet women thus learned that their obligations to the state entailed labor in both the private and the public spheres. Clearly, both production and reproduction were at the very core of Stalinist womanhood.

Although Polish women had considerably different experiences of motherhood and sexual mores than their Soviet counterparts, postwar Polish communists highlighted the “socialist woman” (kobieta socjalistka) as a model most befitting Polish women. The communist and socialist press in Lower Silesia glorified the new “socialist woman,” in particular her Soviet incarnation, stressing the stereotype of patriotic and productive though also domestic and familial heroines of labor. This tendency served at least two purposes. First, Polish communists hailed the progress and emancipation of Soviet females as a natural product of communism’s affinity for women. Liberation from the drudgery of domestic life as well as exploitation of women in the workplace was something that supposedly awaited all women – regardless of nationality. Polish communists fluent in Friedrich Engels’ theories about women’s labor believed that industrialization and the socialization of the means of production would eventually make possible female emancipation. Keeping in mind women’s sensibilities and aspirations, communist party leaders hoped to mobilize Polish women behind Polish communism.

517 Shulman, Stalinism on the Frontier of Empire, 40-41.
The second purpose of the Lower Silesian press’s fixation with the “socialist woman” carried a more educational function. Polish communists and socialists distrusted Polish women’s outlooks on family life, working-class consciousness, and societal obligations. And whereas the postwar regime claimed to be devoted to the construction of a working-class culture, it rarely (if ever) recruited women as active and equal partners in this process. Men set the terms of sexual equality while simultaneously depriving women of a voice in redrawing postwar gender roles. The image of the “socialist woman,” as illustrated on the pages of the postwar Silesian press, encapsulated the worldview of men committed to propelling women into the public sphere without questioning their domestic duties. The “socialist woman” was both about empowering Polish women as it was about educating readers about communism and each citizen’s (male and female’s) duty to the state. On the one hand, women were taught about the workplace – to work side by side with men and exceed labor quotas much like their Soviet role models before them. On the other hand, however, obligations to the family and the community – all couched in a language persistently reinforcing the rigidity of female and male roles – were just as important. In the end, then, as emphasized by Fidelis “women [in postwar Poland] were caught in the web of maternal politics and traditional gender hierarchies.”

Set against this background, the quest for female emancipation and integration within the labor force on the same terms as men appeared just as unfathomable in Poland as it was in the Soviet Union. Unlike in the “homeland of socialism,” however, the tremendous moral authority of the Roman Catholic Church with its promotion of patriarchal family structures supplied a different dynamic to discussions of gender.

519 Fidelis, Women, Communism, and Industrialization, 61.
equality in Poland. The Polish Church was adamant in connecting women’s earthly duties to domesticity, maternity, and obedience to men: fathers, husbands, and the Almighty.

The Church consistently defended Polish women as bulwarks of home and family life. According to the scholar D. Peter Mazur, postwar Catholic clergymen consistently reminded women that through their roles as mother(s), coworker(s), and citizen(s), Catholic women must not neglect their Christian responsibility; they must offer spiritual and religious guidance to their children, thereby assisting the church with the essential religious indoctrination in the Catholic faith.520

The Church hierarchy in Poland hence perceived the communist emancipation of women as potentially hazardous to Catholic beliefs about the centrality of family, marriage, and maternity. The Church’s template of female “spiritual duties,” then, supplied a competing alternative to the communist regime’s program of social emancipation.

Indeed, the Church had a long history of proffering Marianism – the cult and example of the Virgin Mary – as a Catholic alternative to women, an alternative to liberalism, socialism, and communism – ideologies set on socially transforming Polish men and women. In contrast to the secular left, the Church and its Christian allies hoped to exclusively focus women on their obligations in the home and family. As eloquently put by Brian Porter-Szűcs: “The Virgin’s maternal model was used to discuss the four S’s of the feminine ideal: service, sacrifice, suffering, and selflessness.”521 The idea of a Marian, “mother Pole patriot” (Matka Polka) was a reminder to Polish women to resist purportedly harmful secular ideas, and sustain Polish national values in the domestic

sphere. From the perspective of the Church, women’s national roles were thus inseparable from their “natural” roles in the private realm.

In the end, the question of how the Polish family was to be reconstituted in the Western Territories was contested by both the communist regime and the Catholic Church. In an ironic twist, however, both institutions continued to see Polish women as absolutely pivotal to national and family interests. Although on the surface Church and state appeared to be practically incompatible, their position on women’s status in the domestic realm offered common ground. From the outset, the communist regime’s anxiety about male “settlers-gone-wild” as well as their resistance to marry and settle down was regarded as a threat to the state’s hegemony in former German lands. Intimate relations between Poles and Germans, the proliferation of sexual violence, venereal disease epidemics, and ongoing brutalization of social relations threw into question the activities and functions of new families and communities. The role of female repatriates and settlers as public and private enforcers of Polonization is thus an indispensable chapter of solidifying Polish rule in the new Western Territories.

“Gendering” Myths: The Construction of the Motherland

Gendered images were deeply entrenched in the communist language about the Western Territories. Indeed, the “recovery” of the medieval Piast realm was often depicted as the return of these territories to the motherland (macierz), a term rarely used in the Polish language. Historical myths played a central role in solidifying intimate social bonds between the new rulers and the ruled. The regime used various myths and propaganda to mobilize society in pursuit of its goals. The so-called “Recovered

522 Thum, Obce Miasto, 262.
Territories” and their Slavic history represented the forefront of postwar communist propaganda. Prominent party members like Władysław Gomułka and Edward Ochab argued that the possession of these lands allowed Polish history to come full circle. The party’s manipulation of historical myths was fundamental to its quest of galvanizing an ethnically homogenous nation-state.

Postwar communist propaganda highlighted the Piast Dynasty as the original founders of the Polish nation. Although the medieval Piast kingdom was a fluid and unstable entity, the regime exaggerated its territorial links to the lands between the Oder and Bug Rivers. Thus, the construction of the “Recovered Territories” allowed the party to portray itself as the legitimate redeemer of Poland’s rightful place in Europe. It was able to depict Poland’s postwar territorial modification as a “return to the motherland” (powrót do macierzy).

Why were the themes of rediscovery and motherland so important to the discussions of postwar integration and reconstruction? Did gender-specific terminology play a major role in the regime’s propaganda? What was the purpose of continuously invoking the motherland, particularly in official rhetoric highlighting the reunification of the Western Territories with the rest of “old Poland”? The national mission in the so-called motherland (macierz) was a common recurring theme in many of Gomułka’s speeches, particularly in the 1940s and 1960s. Also, at a time when most Poles considered it patriotic to refer to the Polish lands as fatherland (ojczyzna), why was the party insistent on using the more feminine-oriented terminology? Were there significant differences between the connotations of using fatherland as opposed to motherland? What made it such a vital part of the official party line?

523 Thum, Obce Miasto, 253.
The regime attempted to use the motherland theme to establish a new framework with which to discuss Polish nationality and territoriality. It viewed the lands between the Oder and Bug Rivers – the so-called Piast territories – as an organic unity, unnaturally separated by Germans from “the mother” territories of central Poland. More importantly, the term motherland symbolized something very intimate, natural, and permanent. It strove, to some extent, to distract Poles from the painful loss of the eastern borderlands. The fatherland (ofczyzna) connoted a place of personal origin or homeland. The eastern borderlands (kresy wschodnie) were the fatherland of over two million kresowianie. It is significant that the kresowianie often referred to their lost lands as “small fatherlands.” The communists were not ignorant of this fact. They realized that a great many of the “easterners” remained ambivalent toward building Polish communities in Lower Silesia. To many Poles, Lwów and Wilno were cherished parts of their homeland, indeed their fatherland. Nevertheless, both cities were excluded from the rigidly defined geography of the motherland. The motherland was Wrocław and Szczecin, Kolobrzeg and Opole. These places may have been strange or unfamiliar, but they nonetheless comprised constitutive parts of the unchanging and timeless maternal realm. And all Poles needed to learn and accept this new special and symbolic rearrangement.

In a curious way, communist fixation with the motherland was strikingly reminiscent of the Catholic Church’s promotion of Marianism. According to Brian Porter-Szűcs,

Marian worship is almost invariably perceived in [twentieth-century] Poland as a national devotion. Even the model of femininity she [the Virgin Mary]

524 Korniłowicz, et al., Western and Northern Poland, 7.
525 Thum, Obce Miasto, 253.
exemplifies is remarkably similar to the Matka-Polka [Mother-Pole patriot], with her emphasis on service, selflessness, sacrifice, and suffering.\textsuperscript{526} As with Polish Catholicism, postwar Polish communism was riddled with nationalist attitudes inundated with gendered overtones and meticulously plucked rhetoric blending militancy and sacrifice with motherhood and femininity. Indeed, in startlingly analogous ways, both the Church and the state used gender-specific terminology to communicate their respective national visions with Poles. The Church’s “Mariological vision of Poland” educated the laity about the centrality of Polish family life, in particular the role of women in sustaining “the national hearth and home.”\textsuperscript{527} This conception of Poland as a battlefield with Mary in the role of “militant protector” and “exemplar of feminine domesticity” easily transcended the postwar secular/religious divide.\textsuperscript{528}

The communists, in particular the ethnically Polish elite, like Gomułka, Bierut, Ochab, and Wolski, were fully literate in Catholicism’s dualistic vision of Polish femininity. Religious symbolism, especially its gendered subtexts, was scrupulously appropriated to fit the communist context. In spite of multiple disagreements, both the Church and the state agreed about Polish women’s specifically feminine and nurturing obligations to the nation. The motherland can thus be conceived as a site of national regeneration, in particular through the restoration of the family, while, at the same time, indicating a battlefield for the postwar struggle of Polonization.

The postwar communist regime tried to focus Poles on the national project in the west, drawing on the “motherland myth” to crystallize bonds with the western \textit{terra incognita}. Of course, encouraging Poles to feel invested in migration and nation building

\textsuperscript{526} Porter-Szücs, \textit{Faith and Fatherland}, 390.
\textsuperscript{527} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{528} Ibid.
was just one side of the coin. By the mid-twentieth century, Catholicism and its specifically gendered Mariological ideology were part and parcel of Polish national identity. For many Polish women and men, going west was not just about adventure, social mobility, and loot. The Catholic and regime-inspired cult of motherhood and family ideology found a pronounced echo with migrants whose deepest wishes was to revive war-disrupted traditions. Western Polonization was thus also about work, domesticity, respectability, and reproduction.

The communist conception of the motherland tapped into traditional notions of Polish family life and gender relations. On the one hand, the idea that the motherland demanded sacrifices, in particular penetration and domestication of the unknown was indispensable to the settler identities of men. On the other hand, however, the communist regime attempted to redefine the “motherland myth” for women. Indeed, the regime tried to depict the western borderlands as a space where women’s productive and reproductive duties would acquire new significance. Going west, then, was a stepping-stone to female emancipation. Women would work alongside men to make Polishness the cultural nucleus of the west. Women, at the same time, would facilitate Polonization through household work: raising children and supplying the necessary social glue to hold families together. The family was thus a microcosm of the nation: a bastion of national strength and the moral domain of women. Women’s most important contribution to Polonization was hence to safeguard the family and supervise men in national renewal. The call to “reunify” the west with the motherland provided Polish settlers – men and women alike – with a strong sense of collective duty. The gendered language of official propaganda empowered migrants, in particular Polish women, to fulfill their national obligations
generously, obediently, and selflessly: their so-called natural vocations as wives and mothers supplemented equally pressing needs of migration and colonization.

**Mothers, Wives, and Female Pioneers**

Like their male counterparts, Polish women viewed resettlement in the Western Territories with considerable apprehension. This skepticism was especially visible among female repatriates from the Soviet-annexed eastern provinces. Women from the *kresy*, in contrast to the female population from the heartland, had little to say about their fates: Poland’s loss of the eastern lands left approximately two million Poles simultaneously homeless and stateless. With the men either gone, missing, or mobilized into partisan and military units, the brunt of repatriation was most frequently shouldered by women. As emphasized in chapter 4, the postwar plight of the *kresowianie* tells a story that is overwhelmingly feminized. Driven from their homelands by the decisions of international leaders and traumatized by a particularly vicious Polish-Ukrainian civil war, repatriate-women (*repatriantki*) turned to the messages, official narratives and slogans emanating from Polish authorities to master and understand the new reality on the western frontier. Most of this hastily patched-up knowledge served practical needs, informing *repatriantki* of how to register their families, apply for properties, and seek restitution for incurred injuries. Official messages targeting women, however, also alerted female repatriates of their newfound status as pioneers of Polishness.

Communist and nationalist slogans promising limitless abundance in the Polish west emboldened some while perturbing most *repatriantki*. There were many women, like Anna Wilkojc from the Vilnius region, who had serious doubts about the success of
Polonization, and who openly voiced their discontent. Wiłkojc’s grievance letter to the Ministry of the Interior (Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych) recounts the repatriantka’s frustration with the Polish government’s “western promises”:

We came to Lower Silesia, settled here, and began to work. They called us pioneers. This is all very beautiful (To bardzo pięknie)! […] We were brought to the Piast territories from our settlements where we lived since the Jagiellonians – and we were left at the mercy of bandits and all kinds of terror […] We took with us cattle […] but it was all robbed within a couple of days.529

Official propaganda rallying women on behalf of the state’s mission on the western frontier presumed an activist role for Polish females. The postwar Polish state offered settler- and repatriate-women the kind of opportunities it usually bestowed only on men.

At its basest, it assigned Polish women a critical role in the complicated process of ethnically and socially remaking the west. At the same time, whether it intended to or not, the state empowered women to – alongside men – criticize and reprimand its institutions. Hence, women like Wiłkojc felt invested in the postwar nation-building project. Perhaps ironically, the abysmal conditions on the western frontier provided women with a language and vocabulary suitable to expanding female autonomy.

But going west also catapulted women to a privileged position of “Polonization assistants.” According to communist and nationalist officials, in order to succeed, Polonization had to be policed in the home. The regime-sponsored settler newspaper, Osadnik na Ziemiach Odzyskanych (The Settler in the Recovered Territories), highlighted women’s pioneering obligations by glorifying their alleged “innate abilities”:

Because, in many cases, women have a better approach to society (lepsze podejście społeczne) and a greater sense of responsibility, and, as mothers and

529 Odpis do Ministerstwa Spraw Wewnętrznych w Warszawie, 6 January 1946, Archiwum Akt Nowych (AAN), Ministerstwo Ziem Odzyskanych, Akta pow. Oleśnica: Sprawozdania poinformacyjne, materiały z dochodzeń, skargi i zażalenia ludności miejscowej na postępowanie władz, Nr. Mikrofilmu B6493, Sygn. 1322, k. 117.
homemakers (gospodynie) they have a strong impact on the family, women may contribute [...] great services (ogromne usługi) to the settlement action.\textsuperscript{530} 

The female-run home as bulwark of nationalism and nucleus of society, however, was hardly a Polish exception. In her analysis of German women’s participation in the Nazi colonization of Eastern Europe during World War II, Elizabeth Harvey contends that under Hitler “the ideology of the \textit{Volkstum}, including the role in its cultivation played by domesticity and ‘womanly’ work and the corresponding function of women as missionaries of Germanness in the East acquired the status of official doctrine.”\textsuperscript{531} In both the Polish and German cases, women were expected to support their respective regimes by “assisting in the cleansing of conquered spaces” and solidifying the new cultural order.\textsuperscript{532} The notion that Germanness and Polishness “began in the home” was something that these modern regimes shared.\textsuperscript{533}

The restoration of the family as a central pillar of the postwar social order in the Western Territories thrust women under the microscope of the communist-dominated state. The Polish struggle for the identity of the recently German \textit{Ostelbien} borderlands cut right through the atrium of the domestic sphere. Family responsibilities were henceforth national responsibilities. Postwar communist leaders expected women to make families receptive to the needs and desires of the Polish nation. One of these most urgent “national needs” demanded the cultural transformation of the western borderlands: “The success of the [resettlement] action at this stage depends on the socialization

\textsuperscript{530} “Władze państewowe doceniają społeczną rolę kobiety!” January 1946, Biblioteka Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego (BUW), Osadnik na Ziemiach Odzyskanych, Sygn. 011881, Nr. 1 (1-10), k. 15.
\textsuperscript{532} Harvey, \textit{Women and the Nazi East}, 79.
\textsuperscript{533} Harvey, \textit{Women and the Nazi East}, 9.
(uspołecznienie) and the contributions of the lowest social unit – the family.”

According to the Osadnik, equipping the family for Polonization was inevitably tied to the social activation of women. The postwar national needs, in particular western Polonization, set women alongside men as irreplaceable actors in the unfolding drama of building Polish communities from scratch.

This vision of women as moral guardians of the family and nation unlocked new doors for the penetration of the public sphere. For instance, in its quest to “activate Polish women,” the Osadnik proposed new fields of female activity:

1) women’s participation in the organization of settlement delegation personnel;
   [and] 2) the appointment of women to all corporate bodies, such as Settlement, Agrarian, Verification, and Repatriate-Aid Commissions.

The Osadnik’s idea of women’s work reflected Elizabeth Harvey’s contention that “women’s activities, whether focused upon the individual family or on activities within the wider society, could be represented as a seamless continuum of ‘maternal’ service to the nation, bridging the private and public worlds.” National obligations thus provided women with new avenues for public expression. Participation in Polonization, whether through service in the public or private spheres, made women’s work meaningful and important: indeed equal to the tasks of men. The national mission in the west hence provided women with tools to dispute their traditional roles at the hearth, home, and crib.

However, assumptions about women’s “natural” and intrinsic functions continued to shape official Polish expectations of women. While women were certainly encouraged to, in the words of Elizabeth Harvey “challenge conventional ‘separate spheres’

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534 “Władze państwowe doceniają społeczną rolę kobiety!” January 1946, Biblioteka Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego (BUW), Osadnik na Ziemiach Odzyskanych, Sygn. 011881, Nr. 1 (1-10), k. 15.
535 Ibid.
536 Harvey, Women and the Nazi East, 4.
ideology,” Polish public officials anticipated that women would know their place in the gradually emerging social order. In her analysis of women in nineteenth-century partitioned Poland, the historian Martha Bohachevsky-Chomiak explains:

Women’s consciousness was a factor of class and education, but the consciousness of oppression of the sex was easily subordinated to the awareness of the oppression of a group or a nation.537

National emancipation thus took precedence over social emancipation. Indeed, the notion that women’s rights came second to national rights continued to frame the mindsets of Polish national activists long after the reemergence of Poland in 1918. Social and cultural factors informed the decisions of Polish communists, in particular in relation to the “woman question” following World War II. Inequality in wages, occupational opportunities, and educational qualifications masqueraded behind formal and legal equality making female workers less likely to advance as high as their male counterparts.538 National needs – as envisaged by male policymakers, in particular the quest to rebuild and industrialize Poland – superseded the need of transforming women into equal citizens on par with Polish men. Not unlike their prewar predecessors, then, communists continued to subordinate full-fledged women’s emancipation to more urgent ideological aims such as reviving industry and specializing male workers.

But how did this translate into the social and political context of the post-1945 western frontier? The postwar Polish press made it clear that Polonization had its masculine and feminine components. Indeed, Polish leaders in Lower Silesia foresaw women and men’s roles on the frontier as complementary yet different. “The Recovered

Territories,” opined the Osadnik, “awaited a masculine human being (oczekują człowieka męskiego). Weakness (charłactwo) and softness – better let them stay in the cramped and stuffy dwelling!” There can be little doubt that Osadnik’s allusion to “weakness and softness” was nothing less than a veiled reference to Polish women. Polonization was not for the tender-hearted, the weak-willed or gentle. Domestication of the frontier required stamina as well as a ceaseless test of spirit, cunning, and astuteness – attributes commonly associated with men.

This was work for the coarser sex and “weakness and softness” had to be exorcised lest they jeopardize the national mission. Women’s so-called natural inclinations circumscribed their tasks on the frontier. According to the Osadnik, a specifically gendered division of labor would ultimately determine women and men’s duties with respect to Polonization. While women would facilitate Polishness through their natural domestic proclivities – supplemented with limited public activism – men would do all the heavy lifting, including uprooting Germans, reviving industry and infrastructure, and managing migration.

The Osadnik’s idea of male and female work on the western frontier generated confusion and inconsistencies. It was very easy to be confused by the contradiction between the repatriantka as public activist and, at the same time, a homemaker and mother. On the one hand, propaganda outlets such as the Osadnik, promised women increased personal autonomy in the western borderlands. On the other hand, however, they perpetuated attitudes and notions seriously damaging women’s chances for emancipation. Zofia Reuttowa, a contributor to the Osadnik, attempted to rectify the

539 “Do śmiałych należy świat!...” January 1946, Biblioteka Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego (BUW), Osadnik na Ziemiach Odzyskanych, Sygn. 011881, Nr. 2 (1-10), k. 4.
confusion by clarifying the feminine aspects of western Polonization. In an article aptly titled “What the Woman Desires in the Recovered Territories” (Czego pragnie kobieta na Ziemiach Odzyskanych), Reuttowa identified five major concerns for women in the region: childcare, the establishment of new homes, the eviction of German women, social harmony, and a higher quality of service in institutions representing the state. Polish women’s roles as guardians of children, men, and the nation were unmistakable in Reuttowa’s article. The interests of women thus allegedly revolved around the nucleus of the home, on the policing of ethnic boundaries in the public sphere, indeed, on the maintenance of Polishness through educating their children and keeping their men away from “other,” non-Polish women. The pioneering Polish woman’s primary task was to uphold Polish cultural hegemony. Moreover, women as guardians of children and men defended not only their families and communities but the entire Polish nation. In the end, then, Polonization could not proceed without the dedicated participation of Polish women.

The Threatening Female “Other” on the Frontier

German women posed a particular threat to the process of Polonization. In “What the Woman Desires,” Reuttowa stated bluntly: “We don’t want to see German women (Nie chcemy widzieć Niemek)” Reuttowa used the prevailing gender ideology linking women to the private sphere to condemn both German women and the German nation:

The question of getting rid of German men and women – women who are to a large degree responsible for educating (wychowanie) the German nation as well as

540 “Czego Pragnie Kobieta na Ziemiach Odzyskanych,” Zofia Reuttowa, January 1946, Biblioteka Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego (BUW), Osadnik na Ziemiach Odzyskanych, Sygn. 011881, Nr. 3 (1-10), k. 3.
541 Ibid.
shaping its asocial instincts (*aspołeczne instynkty*) – is exceedingly urgent! Only then will the female Pole (*Polka*) consider herself the legitimate hostess (*gospodyni*) of the Recovered Territories.542

This emphasis on German women as the biological sources of the “criminal” German nation reflected the potential uses of gender ideology in legitimating the uprooting of *Ostelbien* residents. The good, patriotic Polish female pioneer was expected to recognize, support, and facilitate, the expulsion of Germans and the erasure of their culture. In contrast to Polish men, however, for Polish women, the struggle against borderland Germans was exemplified by the struggle against the “demoralizing German woman.”543

The postwar communist, socialist, and non-affiliated press warned their readers about the one, unchangeable, and generic type of German woman. According to the socialist news-gazette, *Naprzód Dolnośląski* (Forward Lower Silesia), German women were supposedly insistent, sneaky, seductive, and sick. In the article, “The Danger of Polish-German Marriages” (*Niebezpieczeństwo mażeństw polsko-niemieckich*), Andrzej Kruszyński, a socialist correspondent, lamented that 85 percent of German women were carriers of venereal diseases. “Not uncommonly,” Kruszyński maintained, “these include the heaviest (*najcięższe*) and deadliest infections.”544 The message then was clear: Polish women and men had to be aware of the potential threat posed by German women. Polish men, in particular, had to strive to resist the sexual advances of German temptresses. Violation of ethno-sexual boundaries could not be taken lightly: indeed, sexual discipline was inseparable from national discipline. Cohabitation with the “ethnic other” appeared so risky that it threatened to endanger the Polish national project on the western frontier.

542 Ibid.
543 Ibid.
544 “Niebezpieczeństwo mażeństw polsko-niemieckich,” Andrzej Kruszyński, 7 May 1946, Biblioteka Dolnośląska, *Naprzód Dolnośląski*, Nr. 72 (98), k. 5.
“No honest and intelligent male Pole (Polak),” Kruszyński berated, “should ever marry a German woman!”\(^{545}\) German women – the so-called perpetuators and reproducers of Nazis and Nazism – thus appeared to be an even greater menace than German men.

German women were purportedly also conscious collaborators in the German historical crusade to conquer and denationalize the East (Drang Nach Osten). As reproducers of the German national community, women acted as key “Germanizing agents,” injecting themselves into Slavic societies through marriages and sexual relations with Czech, Polish, and Ruthenian men. According to Kruszyński, this process resembled a “conquest through mixed marriages (podbój przez małżeństwa mieszane).”\(^ {546}\) “The tragedy of the peoples conquered by the Germans,” the socialist correspondent explained, was their “blind” eagerness to engage in sexual relations with German women. These militant and cunning women, then, embodied the violence, brutality, and greed of their national collective. Kruszyński urged Polish settlers, in particular Polish men, to be sensible and defiant to this “feminized form” of Germanization. Though he recognized Polish men’s sexual urges and fantasies, in the end, he reminded them that their primary interest was one and the same with the national interest. Avoiding the advances of German women was an irreproachably vital tenet of western Polonization.

The postwar image of the German woman often fulfilled a special pedagogical role. German women symbolized physical border posts demarcating national boundaries in the absence of rigid cultural markers. They thus personified both the forbidden and untamed aspects of the frontier: indeed, they directly contributed to making Polonization an unusually arduous undertaking. According to Leopold Daniłowicz, Kruszyński’s

\(^{545}\) Ibid.
\(^{546}\) Ibid.
colleague at *Naprzód Dolnośląski*, German women’s primary threat to Poles resided in their sexuality and maternity. Daniłowicz lectured his Polish readership about the vices of German motherhood: “Children born to a German mother will always be German! They shall suck out of her breast hatred to Poles and everything that is Polish. A she-wolf cannot nurture an eagle (*wilczyca nie wychowa orła*).” 547

The virtual demographic overrepresentation of women among *Ostelbien* residents scheduled for expulsion appeared only to enhance the idea that German women were the only thing that stood in the way of complete Polonization. Daniłowicz’s suggestion that Germans, in particular women, were incapable of raising Poles ruled out the prospect of Polonizing or assimilating husbandless or fatherless female expellees. The she-wolf would always spite the eagle and German women could not be expected to become loyal and genuine Poles, least of all the mothers of future Poles. The differences between Polishness and Germanness were thus demarcated by biological, supposedly innate racial traits: blood, scent, and breast milk.

Communists and socialists required Polish men to demonstrate their national loyalty through a specific sexual behavior: avoiding German women and establishing marriages and families with Polish women. Sexual fidelity was thus envisaged as national fidelity. The continued presence of German women frustrated Polish plans of culturally reshaping the frontier. Interestingly, the Lower Silesian press saw Polish men and their supposedly unruly sexual instincts as the main obstacle to creating ethnically homogenous communities. Leopold Daniłowicz, the *Naprzód*’s chief proponent of

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exclusively Polish marriages, warned his male readers about the tragedy of lusting after German women:

The Polish male (*Polak*) who marries a German female (*Niemka*) is typically a weak human being (*slaby człowiek*) […] who lacks any solidarity with the Slavic race (*rasa słowiańska*) […] How low can one fall when seeking friendship among German women, at the same time as murderous bandits organize so-called (*akcje*) operations to destroy the achievements (*dorobek*) of his family and ancestors […] Such a man cannot be our compatriot or our brother. He cannot be a pioneer [of Polishness] in the Recovered Territories.⁵⁴⁸

Polish men who acquiesced to German women forfeited their membership in the “Slavic race.” Daniłowicz’s choice of words is instructive: although an avowed socialist, he uses the rhetoric of the extreme right, particularly racial ideology, to shame Polish men. Sexual activity with German women went beyond violating class or proletarian interests. Forging relationships with non-Polish women brought down the ire of the entire race! Daniłowicz’s use of racial terminology demonstrated the utmost importance that Polish communists and socialists attached to ethnically compatible marital and sexual unions. Also, the fact that similar demands were never articulated for Polish women seeking out German men reveals the extent to which gender conditioned Polish official perceptions of the local *Ostelbien* population. Sexual discipline and national fidelity were thus more likely to be demanded of Polish men than Polish women.

In postwar Lower Silesia, any sign of Polish-German camaraderie, especially of a more intimate nature, launched a flurry of condemnations on the pages of the local press. Public sympathy for expellees, everyday business interactions or cross-ethnic entertainment such as dancing or drinking provoked rapid and assertive reactions from major local dailies. For instance, the communist-sponsored *Pionier – Dziennik Dolnośląski* (Pioneer – A Lower Silesian Daily), considered Polish-German interactions

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid.
as “the sole and most important problem” in the Western Territories. Like the socialist Naprzód, the Pionier viewed the conduct of Polish males as the most reprehensible. The combination of devious German women and directionless Polish men outraged the local press.

The Pionier accused male Polish trespassers of ethno-sexual boundaries of inadequate national consciousness or outright national betrayal. Interestingly, it identified recreational pastimes, popular with both Polish and German youth, as principal sites of undesirable and scandalous behavior:

Just glance at the dance floor (parkiet) and tables – they are too frequently occupied by Polish men socializing with German women [...] That is enough (dość)! This is a scandal and an affront (obraza) to the Polish nation in the highest degree! [...] We cannot allow ourselves to enter into close relationships with the greatest enemy of Polishness in the course of a thousand year history.

What ultimately threatened to drive a wedge between Polish pioneers and the Polish nation (as exemplified by its connection to the communist party) was the shimmer and sparkle of leisurely pursuits, especially when such pursuits resulted in mixed marriages, ethno-sexual relations, etc. Boozing, dancing, and frolicking thus had the potential to delay if not outright suppress western Polonization. The blind impulses of Polish males together with the sexual insolence of German females were once again the primary culprit.

The postwar Lower Silesian press made every effort to ensure that its readers understood the dangerous nature of Polish-German unions. Gravely anxious about the future of the nation, newspaper correspondents saw Polish men’s relationships with

549 “Życie i Praca Dolnego Śląska. Bolesne, lecz prawdziwe! Dlaczego młode tańczą z Niemkami?” Author unknown, 30 October 1945, Biblioteka Dolnośląska, Pionier – Dziennik Dolnośląski, Nr. 55, Rok I, k. 3.
550 Ibid.
German women as part of a larger threat to the triumph of Polonization. These anxieties often clustered around the twin issues of childrearing and reproduction. The socialist *Naprzód* had the direst forecast for the future:

Shall we believe that contemporary German women could possibly rear their children into full-fledged (pełnowartościowych) Poles? Let’s seriously think of the future! The postwar generation of Polish children must have a strictly and unyieldingly Polish soul. This soul must be hardened in Polishness from the very first moments of consciousness, especially here in the western borderlands (*kresy zachodnie*). It is difficult to penetrate the secrets of the female German soul (*tajniki duszy Niemki*) […] Let’s always remember that the German hydra never sleeps […] We cannot possibly allow the emergence of a generation of half-Poles, half-Germans (*pokolenie pół-Niemców, pół-Polaków*).  

The press urged Polish readers to be mindful of the limits of tolerance and the grave consequences of ethnic intermarriage. Everyone now had to fulfill one’s obligation to the nation – report, discourage, and condemn Polish-German unions – or risk being labeled as insufficiently Polish or unpatriotic. In some instances, news-correspondents threatened to publicly chastise individuals and businesses exhibiting too much openness toward Germans: “We will report addresses, last names, and entertainment venues (*lokale rozrywkowe*) until finally all irresponsible persons learn how they ought to act, what should be allowed and what shouldn’t.”

Polish youth, especially young, sexually adventurous males, were held accountable for their nation’s future. As more Polish men were classified as “weak-willed,” “smitten,” and outright degraded by German women, a growing number of newspapers reached out to Polish women to “correct” the situation. The Polish women’s most urgent task was to reverse the demoralization wrought by ethnically mixed couples.

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551 “Groza problemu małżeństw mieszanych na Ziemiach Odzyskanych” B. Rogala, 31 October 1946, Biblioteka Dolnośląska, *Naprzód Dolnośląski*, Nr. 218 (244), Rok II, k. 4.
552 “Życie i Praca Dolnego Śląska. Bolesne, lecz prawdziwe! Dlaczego młodzież tańczy z Niemkami?” k. 3.
In many respects, then, Polish women were the key to Polonization’s success. At the same time, however, the focus on the Polish man as a possible violator of the proper sexual and national conduct resulted from the fact that there were more Polish men than Polish women in the Western Territories. The journalists’ attacks on Polish men probably justified, in a sense, that many Polish men formed relationships with German women in the absence of Polish women: hence, the official encouragement for Polish women to move to the new west.

**Polish Women at the Forefront of Polonization**

Polish women and girls were initially hailed by their benefactors in the press as the remedy to the frontier “social crisis.” From its inception, the communist and socialist press had favored specific groups, such as Polish women, workers, and peasants. Women were often lionized as “morally superior” to men, dedicated and eager workers as well as model homemakers and mothers. Time and time again, journalists and correspondents offset the image of the devious fräulein with the spotlessness and chastity of the kobieta socjalistka (the socialist woman). According to Stefania Moszczeńska-Pemlingerowa, a correspondent at the Naprzód, the Polish woman’s only flaw was her timidity and diffidence:

> For too long, women had been the proverbial neck upon the body of some prominent man, husband, brother or lover. Our first task [in Lower Silesia] is to nurture a new type of Polish woman so that she may be both a wife and a mother, and, at the same time, a professional worker (pracownica zawodowa) as well as a social activist (działaczka społeczna).

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553 “Gdzie nasze miejsce?” Stefania Moszczeńska-Pemlingerowa, 6 June 1946, Biblioteka Dolnośląska, *Naprzód Dolnośląski*, Nr. 96 (122), Rok II, k. 5.
Socialist commentators recast women’s traditional roles in political terms and encouraged Polish *socjalistki* to see themselves differently from German women. In contrast to German women, initially accused of thwarting Polonization by blinding Polish men, Polish women mobilized their “innate resources” to consolidate the state’s mission in the west. Indeed, to a significant degree, the state’s case for the assimilation of former German lands rested upon the shoulders and “maternal instincts” of activist Polish women. In many ways, then, women’s contributions to western Polonization were just as (if not more) meaningful than the contributions of Polish men.

Grandiose headlines in the communist press called on Polish women to buttress and protect Poland from internal and external enemies, in particular the German enemy. The communist news-organ, *Trybuna Dolnośląska* (Lower Silesian Tribune) extolled women’s so-called maternal obligations as central to national and *international* reconstruction. In both communist and socialist propaganda, the image of the Polish “female mother” (*kobieta matka*) conveniently overlapped with the prototype of the “female socialist” (*kobieta socjalistka*). According to the *Trybuna*,

> The female mother as the most important nurturing agent (*czynnik wychowawczy*) of society has here [in the Western Territories] a very conscientious role. To a significant degree, the Polish woman will help determine Poland’s relations with Slavic nations, especially ones with the Soviet Union; relations that shall guarantee peace and stability and, in the event of a military conflict with Germany, shall keep us and our friends safe.\(^{554}\)

Women (though really only mothers and wives) were thus catalysts and upholders of postwar peace. Polish females who understood their commitment to the nation in terms of reproduction were reinvented into a kind of national elite. Communist writers conceived

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\(^{554}\) “Kobiety walczą o trwały pokój świata,” D. S. B., 7 June 1946, Biblioteka Dolnośląska, *Trybuna Dolnośląska*, Nr. 95 (116), Rok II, k. 6.
postwar social reconstruction – the reestablishment of social tranquility and public order – as a natural domain for women. In some sense, then, women embodied the peace.

Not only did officials in the press expect Polish women to “rein in” directionless Polish men; they were also adamant in providing women with a louder voice in debates about postwar national revival. “The work of restoring the Western Territories to their former Piast look (piastowski wygląd) requires great sacrifice,” lamented the Trybuna. “This work demands the participation of broad masses of women (szerokie rzesze kobiet).” In spite of these animated slogans, women’s work on behalf of rebuilding Poland continued to be seen through the prism of traditional gender roles. At the same time, however, (at least rhetorically) the work of motherhood suddenly acquired both national and international implications.

The communist press ardently promoted the coalescence of the “female socialist” with the Polish mother and homemaker. Communists and socialists in Wrocław communicated their vision of postwar Polish femininity by underlining the new state’s commitment to the needs of working women. Interestingly, what women “wanted” usually denoted what male policymakers thought they wanted. The construction of a Polish “female socialist” was closely connected to prewar notions of maternity, femininity, and household work (as perceived through the gaze of Polish men). In a special weekly section entitled Życie Kobiety (Woman’s Life), the Trybuna identified women and children (opieka nad dzieckiem i kobietą) as its number one priority. The

555 “Kobiety czynnikiem postępu i kultury,” author unknown, 15 June 1946, Biblioteka Dolnośląska, Trybuna Dolnośląska, Nr. 101 (122), Rok II, k. 4.
556 “Czy kobieta powinna stronić od polityki?” Leopold Daniłowicz, 28 December 1946, Biblioteka Dolnośląska, Naprzód Dolnośląski, Nr. 265 (291), Rok II, k. 5.
defining principle of women’s life under the new communist regime was thus cultivating – literally “reproducing” – the Polish working class.

The growth of a postwar Polish proletariat was further facilitated by the regime’s endorsement of onsite factory nurseries (żłobki fabryczne) and childcare centers. “From the first moments of the consolidation of the new economic reality in Poland,” the Trybuna opined, “we have energetically proceeded to provide women and children with the care they deserve.”557 This state-sponsored family policy meant that in Wrocław alone 1,053 children could take advantage of forty brand new nurseries attached to major industrial facilities. During that same year (1946), factory committee boards opened 118 onsite preschools with 15,300 children in attendance. The Ministry of Industry projected the construction of additional 180 preschools as well as fifty so-called care stations (stacje opieki) in early 1947.558 The intention behind all of these projects was to propel women into the workplace while enlarging the power of the state in the everyday socialization of children.

Still, both the communists and the socialists expected female workers to return to their “natural” roles of raising children once off the worksite. While the state could certainly alleviate women’s burden in the home, it did not intend to displace female workers as the primary nurturers of young Poles. This supposedly remained the unavoidable task of the kobieta socjalistka.

Even as the local press encouraged women to raise future generations of Poles, however, it also called for the education and social re-stratification of women. After all,

557 “Opieka nad matką i dzieckiem w Polsce demokratycznej,” lack of author, 8 August 1946, Biblioteka Dolnośląska, Trybuna Dolnośląska, Nr. 145 (166), Rok II, k. 3.
558 Ibid.
as the communists quickly realized, Polonization could not proceed without immersing Polish women in science and learning. The communist *Trybuna* made this point loudest:

In the Western Territories there cannot be a woman who does not know how to read and write! If there still are illiterate females (*analfabetki*), women’s organizations should arrange special courses. There should also not be any unqualified female workers (*robotnice niewykwalifikowane*). Every working woman needs to undergo extra-training courses (*kursy dokończające*) so she is fully aware of her trade’s demands.\(^{559}\)

Revolutionary beliefs about social justice mandated that women’s social situation drastically improve in the new postwar reality. While this did not necessarily mean full-fledged equality, it nevertheless provided women with greater access to work and education than at any other time prior to 1945.

Moreover, educating and impelling women into the workforce had wider significance for western rather than central Poland. Communists expected female “assistants of Polonization” to be adequately versed in the Polish language and culture. Unlike in the more ethnically homogenous heartland, women on the frontier had specific cultural and *national* duties. These “pioneering obligations” required that all female activists be fully aware of their consciousness as educated Poles. The national mission in the west – with its strong emphasis on rebuilding Poland upon the ruins of the “Germanized” borderlands – made it a pivotal site for the communist indoctrination of Polish women.

There were still many Poles, however, who questioned women’s dedication to pioneer-work, and who openly voiced their doubts. The *Trybuna*, for instance, chastised its female readership for a strikingly low level of political engagement:

\(^{559}\) “Kobiety czynnikami postępu i kultury,” author unknown, 15 June 1946, Biblioteka Dolnośląska, *Trybuna Dolnośląska*, Nr. 101 (122), Rok II, k. 4
It is time to abandon isolationism (*odosobnienie*), the tendency to close yourselves off in your homes! The Polish woman (*kobieta polska*) has not only the same political rights as men; she also has specific duties, the primary one being social activism in the field of culture.\(^{560}\)

The communist press thus portrayed women’s traditional “attachment” to the domestic sphere as potentially subversive. Women on the western frontier needed to feel emboldened: although the official rhetoric of Polonization wrapped itself up in slogans venerating manliness, communist and socialist commentators refused to leave women untouched. Women’s national duties on the frontier had both private and public ramifications. Although “politically immature” and supposedly unresponsive to the new reality, postwar Polish leaders relied on Polish women – once having shed their “backwardness” – to participate in extending Poland’s cultural hegemony westward.

But, as erroneously encapsulated by the *Osadnik na Ziemiach Odzyskanych*, gossip, timidity, and grief brought out the worst in women. Zofia Reuttowa, the *Osadnik* contributor cited earlier, poured scorn on Polish women, condemning their so-called natural predilection for sensationalism and conflict. According to Reuttowa, women, unlike men, were tainted by a whole gamut of reproachful behaviors. These behaviors, moreover, had to be suppressed for Polonization to effectively proceed:

> In the name of bringing stability to our collective existence, my dear housewives (*drogie gospoście*), we have to rid ourselves of characteristics, which we women often possess. These character traits are known to all women. They include the pointless gossiping about our neighbors (*bliźni*), jealousy, as well as our disposition for conflict and endless arguing.\(^{561}\)

Reuttowa’s rant in the *Osadnik* betrayed a substantial dose of impatience with women.

On the one hand, she acknowledges women’s involvement in setting the foundations for a

\(^{560}\) Ibid.

distinctly Polish cultural order. On the other hand, however, she remains fearful that women may jeopardize their newfound national and social prospects (on the new western frontier). For some Poles, including commentators like Reuttowa, women’s “natural tendencies” toward arguing and gossip, raised all kinds of doubts about women’s so-called fitness for frontier work. Undesirable characteristics and a penchant for the unconstructive threatened to derail the “very serious” work of male pioneers.

Some commentators genuinely feared the disruptive effect of “socially” and “politically unfit” women on the work of resettlement. This mistrust of Polish women is deftly illustrated in the above-cited passage by Zofia Reuttowa. But perceptions of women as potential obstacles to western stabilization surfaced also in other news outlets. The Słowo Polskie (The Polish Word), for instance, a politically non-affiliated news organ, regularly printed articles about crazy, dangerous, and “unhinged” women. According to the Słowo, Janina Jakobsze, a Polish woman in Oława, assaulted her neighbors’ two-year-old son while his parents were in church. The boy incurred multiple injuries to his head when Jakobsze beat him with a brick. The victim died a few hours later in a local hospital.\(^{562}\)

In yet another article, sensationally titled, “Aunt swayed nephew to kill uncle” (Ciotka namawia siostrzeńca by zabił wuja), the Słowo depicted how greed, deviance, and jealousy could deprave the most virtuous of women. Mrs. Semlowa, a Polish re-emigrant from France, was the “talk of town” in her new community of Biała Krakowska, a settlement outside of Wałbrzych. Semlowa was supposedly a degenerate woman, a reputation she acquired following her arrival in Lower Silesia. At some point in early

\(^{562}\) “Wariatka zabiła dziecko cegłą,” author unknown, 15 May 1947, Biblioteka Dolnośląska, Słowo Polskie, Nr. 132 (190), Rok II, k. 6.
1947, Semlowa’s nephew (eleven years her junior) joined the family estate in Biała. When things started to go awry between Semlowa and her husband, Karol, the aunt sought emotional support in her nephew, Józef. By spring of 1947, Semlowa and Józef concocted an intricate plan to murder Karol. On March 30, Józef lured his uncle onto the estate courtyard where he eventually butchered him with an axe. Following the crime, the aunt and nephew dragged Karol’s corpse to the nearby forest where they tried to pass off the murder as a bandit attack. Although it remains unclear how the Słowo amassed its information, the newspaper’s harshest judgment fell upon Semlowa: “In light of the witness testimonies, it is indisputable that Semlowa was the motor of the crime (motor zbrodni) and Józef Semla its executor (wykonawca).”

Clearly, in both the cases of Oława and Biała, the newspaper identified women as a major threat to the public order. Scandalous and unpredictable women allegedly placed a profound burden on Polish settlers seeking to “de-Germanize” the west. The Słowo often portrayed Polish women as irrational, tragic, and extreme. Women and their supposedly ludicrous natures disrupted the more serious work of making western Poland Polish. For example, in Bystrzyca, a Polish female repatriate regularly bragged about having two husbands. The woman (unnamed in the article) settled in Lower Silesia with her two children and lover. Having mistakenly assumed that her husband had perished on the warfront, the repatriantka eventually married her lover, also a kresy-man. Not two months went by, however, and the presumably “dead husband” reemerged in the woman’s life. Strangely enough, “the man held no grudges against his wife and did not even make a scene in

563 “Ciotka namawia siostrzeńca by zabiłwuja,” author unknown, 1 May 1947, Biblioteka Dolnośląska, Słowo Polskie, Nr. 118 (179), Rok II, k. 4.
town. Indeed, he remained polite to his substitute (zastępca).”\textsuperscript{564} What was perhaps most fascinating, moreover, was the kresy-woman’s reaction to public scrutiny: “Do with me as you want (róbcie ze mną co chcecie), but I love both men! Please do not nullify my second marriage! I consider both unions very important.”\textsuperscript{565}

Although these reports do not outright condemn Polish women as significant threats to the national mission in the west, they do betray a kind of impatience with female settlers. News organs like the \textit{Słowo} found some women’s conduct annoying and inexplicable. Indeed, press correspondents took far more liberties reprimanding women than they did reprimanding men. While Polish men could certainly err as they did when they “flirted” with German women, Polish women were almost always at fault if they failed to comply with the roles of “frontier mother and wife.” The key to the postwar press’s frustration with Polish women lay in their rejection (or circumvention) of these assigned roles. The purpose of these articles was thus to spotlight nonconformists and remind female readers about their legitimate place on the frontier.

The project of Polonization involved policing ethno-sexual boundaries. This effort reflected the social reality on the frontier: the numerical predominance of men and the scarcity of Polish women. Zofia Reuttowa bewailed the disproportionate sex ratio in postwar Lower Silesia as particularly alarming:

Let me tell you my dear female readers (czytelniczki) about these territories which are impatiently awaiting young Polish women in anticipation of turning them into wives and mothers. The Recovered Territories are summoning Polish women so they may join, side by side, male settlers (mężczyzna-osadnik) and together with them forge healthy families. The male settler is often lonesome […] The settler family (rodzina osadnicza) has to, on its own, sustain the large western estates.

\textsuperscript{564} “Zona dwóch mężów,” author unknown, 3 May 1947, Biblioteka Dolnośląska, \textit{Słowo Polskie}, Nr. 119 (177), Rok II, k. 4.
\textsuperscript{565} Ibid.
For this reason, among others, families ought to be large, fit, and vigorous (prężna).\textsuperscript{566}

Despite the promises of integration in the public realm, then, official press organs like the Osadnik continued promoting the family and domesticity as primary sites for women’s labor. Families were frequently depicted as outposts and fortresses of Polonization. During the period of mass postwar migrations, Polish leaders and commentators in the press assigned Polish women critical roles in these outposts.

Moreover, the arrival of Polish women in the Western Territories symbolized a transition from “political backwardness” to citizenship and national activism. The language of female mobilization, however, failed to renounce women’s traditional tasks in the private sphere. On the contrary, it infused women’s domestic and familial obligations with new meanings and values. By going west, then, women quickly learned their place. To the dismay of some pionierki, female emancipation arrived in the guise of old routines and habits. In the end, then, what mattered most (to the official press at least) was Polish women’s capacity to procreate, raise children, and maintain families. These were the hallmarks of “feminine Polonization.”

Press articles encouraging women to marry were an explicit element in the official discourse on everyday life in postwar Lower Silesia. In November 1946, the Naprzód Dolnośląski reporter, Leopold Danilowicz, interviewed two “ordinary Polish girls” about their aspirations in Wrocław. Marysia and Zosia arrived in the Silesian capital with the sole purpose of finding male companions. “I am certainly not getting any younger,” recounted Marysia, a “pretty blonde” (piękna blondyneczka) from the central provinces. “At home there was only work and work. There was no one to wait for. In the meantime, 

everyone spoke of ‘the West,’ so I finally decided to risk my luck and leave.”

Marysia’s loneliness and yearning for a mate catapulted her out of the home and into the urban workforce. From there it was only a short step to the nightlife and leisurely pursuits of a major urban metropolis.

Marysia turned up in Wrocław on a Wednesday. On Friday she found work at a factory; on Saturday she set off to a party. These parties are our heroines’ best shot at meeting men [...] ‘Where else am I to find a boy (chłopiec)?’ Marysia explains. ‘It is better to meet one at a party rather than on the street.’

Instead of reprimanding Marysia for having “loose morals,” Daniłowicz applauded her outgoing nature with the phrase “right on” (słuchnie)! After all, there was nothing wrong with the girl’s “natural urges.” At a time when Polish officials were desperately promoting large Polish families as catalysts of western Polonization, Marysia’s actions may not have seemed so scandalous. Had she been pursuing “German boys,” Daniłowicz’s reaction may have been different. But frolicking with Polish men carried no obvious dangers. On the contrary, it appeared to reinforce the state’s mission of ethnically homogenizing the region. Interactions between Polish boys and girls thus had the potential of stabilizing and strengthening the Polish community on the frontier. It was only a matter of time before girls like Marysia married and had children of their own.

Marysia’s escapades on the dance floor provided her with the kind of confidence she previously did not know she had. Her newfound freedoms played an important role in remolding relationships with her peers. In a letter to Zosia, a friend from the heartland, Marysia writes: “‘Come by, Zosia! There are many boys, work is easy to find, together we shall be merrier (Chłopców dużo, o pracę też łatwo, razem będzie nam wesele)!”

568 Ibid.
From then on, Daniłowicz reveals, “the two girls have never missed a Saturday night out.” By her third Saturday party, Zosia was engaged and ready to start a family. In Daniłowicz’s words: “The boy is solid (porządny) and Wrocław is a joyful city!”

Having socially advanced out of the destitute central provinces, young Polish girls like Marysia and Zosia owed their happiness and autonomy to the postwar political order which provided them with opportunities to migrate, party, and prosper. Their identification with Wrocław – their transformation into urbanites and socialites – was intimately linked to their identity as settlers and workers. Their fortune in finding men and starting families gave them a reason to support the new cultural and political system in the west. The road to happiness had very real ideological implications on the western frontier.

It is difficult to gauge how many women found this kind of life acceptable. Although many Polish women migrated to Lower Silesia, they were more likely to arrive with their families, if not with their husbands than definitely with their children or parents. A careful analysis of repatriate memoirs offers a more realistic glimpse into the experiences of kresy-women on the frontier. Repatrynające like Irena Kaśperek, Janina Sikorowska, Julia Ostrowska, and Bernadeta Świrska journeyed to Lower Silesia with their relatives, friends, and neighbors. Like other migrants from the former eastern kresy, most of these women were fully conscious of postwar social crises and developed strategies for survival that most likely did not include “partying” and “boy-hunting.” They regularly petitioned state and repatriate committees inquiring about the fates of their husbands and fathers. They shouldered a profoundly heavy load: cultivating new estates,
struggling for scraps of food, applying and reapplying for repatriate aid, and overcoming fears of local populations. Their vulnerability and dire situation precluded the possibility of Saturday night outings or frolicking with other men, be they Polish, German or Soviet men.

What the press articles reveal, then, is a fragmentary illustration of Polish women’s everyday existence in postwar Lower Silesia. What they do more accurately, however, is capture the anxieties of Polish officials and, in particular, their perceptions of the social crisis on the frontier. The postwar Lower Silesian press viewed the local gender imbalance, including the “dangerous” proximity of German women, as indicative of an exceptionally grim “frontier problem.” The *Słowo Polskie* treated the distorted gender ratio in Wrocław like a bombshell: “We find it surprising that our city, in contrast to other Polish cities, displays a disproportional surplus of men in the urban population […] Typically, men comprise only one-third of inhabitants in most cities.” The tone of the article suggested that there was something not entirely right with male-dominated spaces. The dearth of Polish women in Wrocław implied a potential fissure in the official project of ethnically and socially remaking the borderlands.

In the public imagery, women’s contributions to Polish nation-building carried two separate stipulations: Polonization through pioneering activities, including the physical reconstruction of the region, and, more importantly, Polonization through marital and family obligations. Communist correspondents did not hide their preferences: they openly affirmed the latter at the expense of the former. Dr. Danuta Skrzeszewska-

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Bieńkowska, a *Trybuna* contributor, recognized the state’s role as a promoter of maternity and reproduction. This University of Wrocław scholar explained:

> The state has a duty to grant women legal care (*opieka prawna*) as well as endow maternity with financial assistance through the creation of clinics, nurseries, hospitals, etc. Unfortunately, only a small number of women are aware of these resources.\(^{572}\)

The state, then, was morally responsible for assisting Polish women with nurturing the next generation of Poles. As citizens of the new communist Poland, women were purportedly able to enter the public sphere – primarily through joining men in the workplace – but the state, nevertheless, would not allow these “surrogate workers” to forget their commitments to the family. Becoming a “female citizen” (*obywatelka*) of postwar Poland thus prevented women from proceeding too far outside the framework of the family.

Maternity and family life, however, were not the only spheres of women’s lives that the press considered legitimate. The local communist press, in particular the *Trybuna*, took a special interest in women’s postwar fashions. Each week, the *Trybuna* issued a “feminine supplement” in which it dispensed hygiene, makeup, and style advice to allegedly “fashion-starved” Lower Silesian women. Perhaps, unexpectedly then, local communist commentators played a leading role in the frontier fashion revolution. This preoccupation with “everything trendy” was partially connected to alleviating people’s transition from wartime to the postwar reality. In an article fittingly titled “Let’s forget about the war!” (*Zapomnijmy o wojnie!*)*, the *Trybuna* placed special emphasis on individual self-improvement and the return to esthetics, in particular, female esthetics:

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\(^{572}\) “Społeczne problemy macierzyństwa,” Dr. Danuta Skrzeszewska-Bieńkowska, 23 May 1946, Biblioteka Dolnośląska, *Trybuna Dolnośląska*, Nr. 83 (104), Rok II, k. 3.
For too long women have been trapped in various (rozmaite) uniforms [...] Fashion, which the war treated with such neglect (po macoszemu), is finally seeking its revenge (szuka odwetu) [...] It requires of women a more feminine silhouette (kobieca sylwetka): a nice, very slim breast line, prominent hips, and a slenderer waist.\footnote{“Zapomnijmy o wojnie!” author unknown, 23 May 1946, Biblioteka Dolnośląska, Trybuna Dolnośląska, Nr. 83 (104), Rok II, k. 3}

The communist press thus communicated to women a return to social normalcy through fashion. Now that the wartime troubles were finally over, women were expected to don a dress, apply some rouge, and pay attention to their figure. The \textit{Trybuna} took pity on its female readers, urging them to “look more like women.” In addition to family and national obligations on the frontier, western migration exposed women to new trends, fads, and ideas about femininity. Female pioneers worked for the nation but they also worked with (and \textit{for}) men: looking “esthetically pleasing” was part and parcel of this work. The communist project of social emancipation was thus, perhaps surprisingly, inseparable from the objectification of women.

In Lower Silesian press debates on the lives and duties of Polish women, communist-friendly correspondents consistently emerged as the most eager proponents of feminine esthetics. The \textit{Trybuna Dolnośląska} contained an array of articles educating its female readers about the virtues of makeup, blouses, skirts, and perfume. \textit{Trybuna} correspondents favored self-sufficient working women who knew how to dress and “look enjoyable.” For example, consider the following passage from the weekly \textit{Trybuna} insert “Woman’s Life”:

Most of us are working women (kobiety pracy). Work fills our day and leaves us very little free time […] However, we do not resign ourselves from being women (nie rezygnujemy z miana kobiety) and we know that we have to be fashionable (musimy być modne). Indeed, we need to keep pace with fashion.\footnote{“Co się nosi i co się będzie nosiło” Jaga [no last name provided], 22 August 1946, Biblioteka Dolnośląska, Trybuna Dolnośląska, Nr. 156 (177), Rok II, k. 4}
The *Trybuna*’s preoccupation with “feminine-looking” women, indeed its promotion of women who “remembered to be women,” suggests that communists had absorbed ideas about appropriate femininity from more *bourgeois* sources. A quick examination of the weekly “Woman’s Life,” in particular the drawings of supposedly working-class women (looking suspiciously like their *bourgeois* counterparts in France or England), betrays the extent to which communists imagined women through an intra-class lens. Press commentators hammered out the specifics of women’s dress: hats (*kapelusze*), frocks (*sukienki*), boots (*buty*), bags (*torebeczki*), scarves (*apaszki*), and jewelry (*biżuteria*).\(^{575}\) The prospective working-class Polish woman was supposed to be a lady. She had to be elegant and pragmatic, and, most importantly, unambiguous. This in itself generated a contradiction: while legally women and men were allegedly indistinguishable, in reality communists used fashion and hygiene to delineate, advocate, and enforce gender boundaries.

A 1948 article in the *Słowo Polskie* illustrated the importance of female beauty and style to both Polish women and men. In an amusingly titled article, “A Woman Wants to Please” (*Kobieta chce się podobać*), a newspaper correspondent describes a typical Polish husband’s expectation of his working wife:

> The husband, no matter how loving he may be, is after all a man […] He returns home for dinner and he is very tired. An esthetic impression (*wrażenie estetyczne*) works very refreshingly on a fatigued man. But at home he encounters his wife, ‘looking very domestic’ (*przerobiona na domowo*), incapable of generating any esthetic emotions [in her husband]. Is it any wonder that the man eats his dinner quickly and avoids looking at his wife?\(^{576}\)

\(^{575}\) Ibid.

\(^{576}\) “Kobieta chce się podobać” J. K., 3 October 1948, Biblioteka Dolnośląska, *Słowo Polskie*, Nr. 273 (683), Rok III, k. 4.
The message thus was clear: the postwar fashion revolution in Lower Silesia was as much about men as it was about women. The regional Polish press expected women to work on their looks as hard as they did on the shop floor. An “esthetically pleasing” woman was an indispensable part of the postwar Polish household. Women had to appeal to men:

A skirt is not everything! We should not display ourselves to men disheveled (rozczochrane). We have combs in order to use them! Hot fatigued faces can be rejuvenated in seconds with powder and water [...] An esthetic look is not just about being more attractive. It is also about not alienating men (niezrażania mężczyzn).

Lower Silesian newspapers hence taught women how to stimulate and excite their husbands. The commentary in the postwar local press suggests that Polish officials – with communists top among them – continued to view women through an objectifying male gaze. A “real” Polish man conceived of his masculinity in relation to “esthetically pleasing” and subservient women. An unkempt Polish woman drew into question her insecure husband’s masculinity.

The postwar regional press thus conceptualized frontier Polonization through a strikingly convoluted gender prism. On the one hand, newspaper correspondents participated in official debates about the need to empower women, particularly through admitting them into the traditionally male-dominated workplace. On the other hand, they insisted that women’s contributions to Polonization include childrearing, domesticating men, and looking “aesthetically pleasing.” The cultural mission to ethnically remake the frontier thus had two different gender dimensions. While men were expected to partake in the more dangerous and dirty aspects of pioneer work, women were more generally depicted in less activist settings.

\[577\] Ibid.
That is not to say, however, that women’s work was not envisaged as meaningful or important. Postwar Lower Silesian newspapers infused traditionally female tasks with special significance. According to this understanding, female work in the domestic sphere (when combined with work in the factories) had far-going national implications. The stabilization of the frontier – its very destiny as a Polish cultural realm – depended on women’s acquiescence to a “pioneer double burden.” Postwar Polish officials continued to operate, then, within a highly bifurcated prewar gender order. Women, even under communism, had to negotiate their place in the new social order while subject to the whims and desires of, frequently, unaccommodating men.

**Conclusion**

The project of creating an ethnically Polish and working-class society transpired in the context of postwar debates about the role of femininity, fertility, and maternity on the frontier. Gender and nationality meant different things in the turbulent backdrop of the Ostelbien borderlands. To be Polish and female acquired new meanings on the frontier. While patriarchal family models continued to shape communist and nationalist approaches to gender interactions in gradually crystallizing Polish communities, notions of social justice and gender equality were by no means abandoned. Communists sought to include women in the cultural mission of transforming the frontier by opening the traditionally male-dominated workplace. Injecting women into state-run industries, however, was not necessarily a top priority for state authorities. Women’s work on behalf of Polonization, namely the establishment of families and marriages, trumped all other commitments.
Indeed, female emancipation was not always compatible with national reconstruction. Rebuilding Poland, in particular reviving Polishness in areas that did not experience Polish rule since the Middle Ages, demanded biological sacrifices especially on behalf of women. Polish leaders saw women as transmitters of culture and, most importantly, reproducers of the nation. The work of creating stable homes for the reconstituted Polish family rested upon the shoulders of female pioneers. To be a female pioneer demanded, first and foremost, then, the reconstruction of the home and hearth. Gender “equality” in this context was understood as working for the nation in agreement with one’s feminine or masculine qualities.

Polonization through family and domestic work made women’s contributions both meaningful and important. The postwar Lower Silesian press sought to persuade women that their efforts were equal to the tasks of men. The mission to culturally transform the west politicized the domestic sphere, placing women in the role of policing Polish national identity. The home-place was no longer just a site of “household drudgery” and childrearing: it was henceforth the production/nerve-center of Polishness. Women as pioneers of Polishness thus held the key to Polonization’s success. The very tasks that traditionally entrapped them in the home now thrust them to the forefront of the national mission.
Dissertation Conclusion

While the jubilant Allies toasted the crushing of the Third Reich in May 1945, their victory spelled a cruel reality for the inhabitants of East Central Europe. To be a Pole, Ukrainian, German or a Jew during the final stages of World War II very often meant being cast out of one’s homeland potentially forever. Even those who lived to see the end of the war would pay a brutal price: the loss of one’s family, community, and stability. By the end of the 1940s, wartime conditions of dislocation, deprivation, and destruction continued to shape the lives of those whose fates were initially sealed by the postwar victorious powers. The war that historians neatly consign to the familiar time brackets of 1939-1945 did not end with Germany’s defeat. The unspeakable confrontation that decimated and uprooted millions of Europeans continued under the guise of postwar forced migrations, repatriations, and population transfers. German expellees, Polish and Jewish repatriates, and countless scores of Slavic, Magyar, Baltic, Turkic, and Tatar “outcasts” were bound together by a shared experience of loss, powerlessness, and displacement. From the perspective of the uprooted, it seemed futile to resist, let alone escape postwar banishment and the seeming mercilessness of wartime victors.

This investigation made territory and identity central to the understanding of the Polish communist state’s nation-building objectives. In particular, I examined the impact of postwar population movements on the construction of ethnically Polish communities in territories that prior to 1945 were an integral part of the German state (in this case, the Third Reich). Throughout my work, I suggested a new outlook on the renegotiation of postwar Polish national identity. I did this primarily by focusing on nationalism in the
context of merging former German provinces with the core of ethnic Poland. By exploring the relationship between territorial consolidation and the communist state’s undertaking of nation building, I underscored just how essential the legacy of “integration through cleansing” was to the regime’s reinvention of Polishness.

The communists perceived the transformation of Polish national consciousness as something good and progressive. The nation, for the communists, demanded collective action and a ceaseless sense of duty. The collective needs of the nation, in particular in territories where the ethnic content was far from clear, trumped all other individual needs. Nationalism in Lower Silesia was, above all, about the consolidation of the Polish nation through migration, displacement, and frontier work. The Western Territories, then, served as a kind of ground zero, a laboratory for the emergence of a modern, socialist, proletarian, and, most importantly, homogenous and perfected Polish identity.

The question that initially captured my imagination (especially when I was in the beginning stages of conceptualizing this dissertation), was how is it that territories that for centuries comprised vital pieces of German-speaking Europe, could so rapidly and totally become Polish? Indeed, what was the role of forced and voluntary migrations in the unmaking of former German homelands? How does one even begin to trace the process of ethnic homogenization or Polonization in the context of deportations, repatriations, expulsions, and war?

My examination of Lower Silesia demonstrated that multiculturalism continued to exist long after the last shots of the war were fired. In fact, multiculturalism and the coexistence of Poles, Germans, Soviets, and Jews shaped the eventual Polonization of this part of Poland. I argued that the ideological project of making the Western Territories
Polish depended on diverse interactions between different groups of settlers, in particular Germans, Jews, and Poles. Perhaps unexpectedly, then, the Polonization of the borderlands entailed the participation of Poles and non-Poles. Polonization, moreover, was also a part of specifically communist nation building. Thus, it was not limited to redefining “national” identities, but also included redefining social hierarchies, family life, and relations between the sexes.

Cross-cultural encounters on the frontier, thus, comprise one of several themes in this dissertation. My study also centered on citizenship, national identity, migration, and the construction of communism. The western frontier was a site for multiple national projects that involved the participation of Poles, Germans, Jews, and other settlers. The space that these diverse actors inhabited set the stage for forced assimilation, the collaboration of Polish communists and nationalists, and economic exploitation by Poles and their Soviet sponsors. The Polish communist leadership was able to resolve the contradiction between nationalism and communist modernity, allowing promoters of an exclusively ethnic Polish nationality to redraw the boundaries between Germanness and Polishness. The new Western Territories were thus a testing ground for radical population policies as well as the construction of a strictly Polish communist society. The cultural, political, and ideological ramifications of Polonization serve as central threads that bind all seven chapters. I consider this an integral theme of my study and the most promising contribution of my work to the current historiographical debates.

The postwar communist regime in Poland used Polonization in the borderlands as a mobilizing force. Communists believed that Polonization offered a path to “indigenize” communism, and that the cleansing of borderland spaces was a pivotal stop along this
path. Before one could construct a working-class society – the logic went – ethnic undesirables and minorities had to be removed. In the postwar communist imagination, national minorities were associated with the failed Versailles system, a system that promoted the rights of diaspora peoples who were often blamed for sparking World War II. But Polonization had as much of an impact on mobilizing Poles behind westward migration as it did on widening the boundaries of Polish citizenship to include Jews as well as culturally versatile Germans and Silesians. The campaign of Polonization was thus responsible for at least three characteristic aspects of ethnic relations in the postwar western borderlands: 1) it opened up former German lands for the resettlement of Polish Jews and the Zionist-communist competition over the productivization of Holocaust survivors, 2) it redrew the relationship between traditionally antagonistic ideological actors, namely Polish communists and their nationalist adversaries, and 3) it carved out a space for Polish women to explicitly participate in the public enterprise to erase German culture.

The first theme centered on nation building (not only Polish but also Jewish). Polish Jews were some of the first representatives of Polish culture in postwar Lower Silesia. Jewish repatriates from the Soviet Union reactivated German factories, industrial enterprises, and set up cooperatives. In doing this, they paved the ground for the nationalization and Polonization of the local economy. This special group of repatriates acquired pivotal industrial skills in Soviet exile. In many cases, they were more specialized than ethnic Poles, which made them very attractive to Polish communist and Zionist recruiters.
The second theme related to Polonization included the process of assigning or adjudicating nationality – a process that involved cross-ideological cooperation between Polish communists and prewar radical nationalists. There is a vast body of scholarship on the cultural construction of national identity in Eastern Europe but this scholarship focuses almost exclusively on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. My work demonstrated that nationalists helped communists demarcate boundaries of national belonging. Postwar Polish leaders, whether on the Left or the Right, agreed on the centrality of Catholicism to Polish national identity. Their preoccupation with what Mikołaj Kunicki labels “ethno-confessional nationalism” meant that the postwar Polish Church had surprisingly a lot to say about nation building on the frontier. Wherever they went, Polish Catholics – both the clergy and the laity – redrew the confessional boundaries of Lower Silesia. As they did so, they inadvertently contributed to the communist and nationalist Polonization project. Ideas about Catholic homogeneity reinforced the mission of ethnically transforming postwar Poland. Continuities in Polish history – in this case, drawing on elements of the interwar tradition and Polish national identity as synonymous with Catholicism – can shed new light on how communism was consolidated. A more in depth analysis of this process would require an examination of Church archives in Poland – something that is not easy in the wake of the Polish church’s “closed-door” policy in regards to granting access to post-1945 collections.

Lastly, the third theme involved gender, sexuality, and family life on the postwar frontier. Family and gender relations are perhaps the most overlooked aspects of postwar Polish nation building. The historiography of the Polish takeover of former German lands tells us very little about the participation of Polish women in this process. Illuminating
feminine and masculine components of Polonization is probably the most innovative part of this dissertation. In the end, women’s contributions to Polonization facilitated the ethnic and cultural transformation of Poland’s new western provinces.

The study of Polonization can also provide us with meaningful clues for the examination of nation-state building in other cultural and historical contexts. Modern states, particularly in the twentieth century, required a constant practice of ethnic and racial labeling and so inadvertently indoctrinated their populations to the belief that ethnicity was inherent, fundamental, and a crucially important characteristic of all individuals. The Polish communist state constantly asked its citizens – males and females – for their nationality. It also asked their neighbors, employers, relatives, political representatives, and other professionals. In this respect, the postwar Polish state is no different from other states including the United States, Great Britain, France, Germany or the Soviet Union. Polonization has thus a lot to teach us about nationality as a valuable form of social capital in a modern society and state. Assigning and contesting nationality is one of the pillars of modern statecraft. The study of communist Polonization can thus provide us with meaningful clues as to how nations are imagined and identities renegotiated.
Epilogue

The challenges of stabilizing Polish society in the former German territories continued well into Polish Stalinism. Although the most turbulent of the population movements had finally ceased in the early 1950s and the process of Polonization was declared to be complete by the regime, Polish settlers and their families could not help but view their future in starkly uncertain terms. The syndrome of impermanence, particularly for those outside the urban centers, polarized communities. While violence posed a lesser threat than a decade earlier, robberies, plundering, ruin, and hunger took much longer to eradicate. Drifting, uprooted elements survived by picking pockets, intimidating settlers, or stealing livestock and vandalizing the countryside. Time and time again, the occasional child stumbled upon an undetonated mine or gun shell, intensifying the entirely familiar sense of gloom and doom. All through the 1950s and into the 1960s, piles of rubble, deteriorating roads and buildings, rekindled and kept alive painful memories of war and dislocation. The same exhausted people that the communists asked to “reclaim” the west for the nation were now ordered to help industrialize and modernize Poland.

The Stalinist Polish state, as elucidated by Padraic Kenney, “harbored great ambitions to recast […] and mobilize society toward great economic and political goals.”578 The industrial capability of the new provinces, and, in particular, the economic superiority of Upper and Lower Silesia, made major urban centers like Wrocław the focal point of the Polish Stalinist project. The newcomers that arrived in Lower Silesia after 1945 for the purposes of Polish nation building supplied the ideal human material for the

construction of an industrial working class. The cultural revolution unleashed by Polonization thus found its counterpart in the social and political revolution embedded in Polish Stalinism. Industrial labor and radical social change coalesced with ideologies based on class and nation to accelerate Polonization. The ethnic erasure of Lower Silesia’s German past gathered renewed steam in the 1950s and the post-Stalinist 1960s. Polonization and Stalinism were thus clearly inextricable.

One of the most prized methods of reenacting Polish ownership of the western borderlands included state-sponsored public commemorations and nation-wide cultural events, including the popular song festivals in Opole, Zielona Góra, and Kołobrzeg. Among the most prestigious events to hit Lower Silesia in the 1950s was the tenth anniversary of reclaiming the west. In May 1955, Bolesław Bierut, the “little Stalin” of Poland, reminded the inhabitants of Wrocław of their tasks and triumphs. In particular, the communist leader praised Polish pioneers for domesticating and liberating (wyzwolenie) the Western Territories. At the same time, Bierut condemned the supposedly revisionist West German state as well as its promoters in London and Washington, D.C. The entire spectacle was a carnival of anti-Western, anti-German, and anti-imperialist propaganda. Behind the powerful party secretary marched Polish soldiers – the enforcers of Polishness in Lower Silesia – as well as local officials and administrators. The message was thus unmistakable: the basic norms of prewar German life had long ago dissolved; legitimacy had been restored; Poland basked in the historical limelight.

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However, the one event that played a preeminent role in the commemoration of the homogenous Polish nation was the 1966-millennium celebrations of Polish statehood. The popularity of the celebration was particularly important because it provided a measure of the extent to which the regime succeeded in indoctrinating Poles to a new Polish national identity. The state-sponsored millennium festivities were also crucial because they displayed a unique consensus between the regime and its chief antagonist, the Roman Catholic Church. Although unofficially competing for the “heart and soul of the nation,” both the Church and the state agreed on the inherent Polishness of the Western Territories. The Church’s unshakable compliance – the only institution the nation supposedly trusted – was a moral and legitimating boost to the regime. Identifying itself with the regime’s claims of retrieving the west for Poland, the Church indirectly reinforced the communist mission of nation building.

During the “millennium decade” the communist regime embraced nationalism the way it never had before. The Polish communists under the leadership of Władysław Gomułka, the former Minister of the Recovered Territories (MZO) and co-architect of Polonization, utilized nationalism as a legitimizing force. Gomułka was purged from the party in 1951 for his so-called nationalist deviation. When he came back to power on the wave of de-Stalinization in October 1956, the new communist leader used nationalism as a sort of tether to bind society with the party. Gomułka increasingly depicted the Polish communist party as a guarantor of Polishness in the vulnerable western borderlands. His nationalism – incubated during his reign as MZO overlord for the new provinces – alleviated “frontier fears” of a potential German resurgence. The people who felt most comforted by Gomułka’s anti-German tirades were usually older settlers and repatriates
for whom westward migration was a major turning point in life. But increasingly, a new generation of Poles born in the Western Territories following the period of postwar migrations felt less threatened by an alleged German revanchism. Polish nationalism, nevertheless, framed the social reality of most Poles in the millennial 1960s.

The communist exploitation of Polish anti-Germanism and antisemitism were two disturbing features of the party’s agenda throughout the 1960s. The anti-Zionist campaign of 1968 which sought to “weed-out” Poles of Jewish descent who supposedly harbored sympathies for the “imperialist” Israeli state marked yet another turning point in the history of postwar Jews in Lower Silesia. Even tacit support for Israel, in particular during the Arab-Israeli conflict in 1967, could subject a man to a charge of Zionist agitation. Those Jews proud of both their Polish and Jewish heritage had to choke down their anger as the communists increasingly insisted on the irreconcilability of loyalties to Poland with loyalties to Israel. The party’s anti-Zionist witch-hunt irreparably crippled the remnants of Jewish communities that survived the aftershocks of the 1946 Kielce pogrom. To be a Polish Jew in post-1968 Lower Silesia meant being indistinguishable from other Poles. Only those most acculturated and invested in Polish culture could fall through the cracks of the anti-Zionist political grinder.

Gomułka had various ways of rationalizing his anti-German and anti-Jewish policies. The party first secretary – the hero of the Polish October – recognized that communism in Poland was often interpreted as a form of external cultural and political

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domination.\textsuperscript{582} Indeed, to the majority of Poles, a Kremlin apparatchik lurked behind the party’s ideological veils. Worse still, many Poles continued to conflate communist rule with non-Polish, in particular, Jewish domination. Nationalism thus proved to be a useful tool for Gomułka to domesticate communism – to make it seem more “homegrown” – as well as consolidate his political power. The idea of Polishness based on the notion of a timeless, ethnically pure national community with moral rights to the former German territories was critical to this endeavor.

It is an open question what the inhabitants of Lower Silesia genuinely thought of Gomułka’s national communism and, more importantly, their region’s role in its enactment. While the local communist elites actively promoted the nationalist narrative of Lower Silesia’s “reunification” with the Polish motherland, slogans of historical justice spewing ethnic hatred fell increasingly on deaf ears, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s. The anger of exhausted women and men, of frightened, uneasy, and depleted workers overtaxed by communist promises of inexistent prosperity, was easily provoked especially following the failed economic experiments of Gomułka’s successor, Edward Gierek. During the late 1970s and throughout the political and economic crises of the 1980s, Lower Silesia remained a focal point of opposition and reform of communism. In the words of Polish historian, Grzegorz Strauchold, Lower Silesia had become a defiant “fortress” (\textit{twierdza}), a testing ground for communism’s ultimate challenger – Lech Wałęsa’s Solidarity movement.\textsuperscript{583}

Once a laboratory for western Polonization, the region was now transformed into a laboratory of a counter-politics with the powerful desire for political and social change.


\textsuperscript{583} Strauchold, “Budowanie socjalistycznego społeczeństwa na Dolnym Śląsku,” 19.
Throughout the 1980s, Poland’s “wild west” became a gateway for ideas \textit{from} the West. Approximately 250,000 Poles, over 85 percent of employed individuals, joined Solidarity in Wroclaw.\textsuperscript{584} An autonomous nationwide labor union and a social movement, which comprised an unprecedented alliance between workers, intellectuals, and the clergy, Solidarity tempted Polish society with dreams of reform and a new social “openness.”

The local Solidarity leader, Władysław Frasyniuk, kept the movement alive during the bleak period of Marshal Law (declared on December 13, 1981 by General Wojciech Jaruzelski). While the communists interned about four hundred Solidarity activists in Wroclaw, Frasyniuk and a female activist Barbara Labuda oversaw the underground maintaining open channels of communication with other cities and the near abroad. The dire situation in Poland – with civil rights suspended, shortages of consumer goods, and tanks rolling through city streets and country roads – attracted the attention of international opinion. For the first time since the end of World War II, Germans, particularly in the Federal Republic, looked at Poles and Solidarity with extraordinary veneration. Placing the collective memory of the postwar expulsions on the historical backburner, Germans sent letters, money, parcels, and gifts to alleviate the crisis of their eastern neighbor. West Germany’s moral support went a long way to paving the road for post-communist rapprochement. Solidarity’s victory, then, included turning the tables on both German and Polish memories of postwar migrations. It suddenly became possible for both Poles and Germans to see themselves as victims of processes set in motion by forces outside their control.

\textsuperscript{584} Norman Davies and Roger Moorhouse, \textit{Microcosm: Portrait of a Central European City} (London: Pimlico Press, 2003), 480.
A historical rupture was not only apparent in the 1989 transition from communist rule to liberal democracy, it also strongly informed relations between post-communist Poland and the new, reunified German state. Ever since the end of World War II, resentment to postwar Poland, cultivated in West Germany by expellee activists, precluded the establishment of a stable relationship between the two states. In any regard, Cold War politics and the ensuing tensions between the two power blocks – the Soviet-dominated East and the American-dominated West – worked to the detriment of Polish-German relations. Furthermore, Poland’s territorial shift westward made the communist leadership in Warsaw indisputably subject to the whims and good graces of their Soviet overlords. (Moscow proclaimed itself the chief guarantor of postwar Polish frontiers). When the Bonn government under Helmut Kohl presided over the reunification of West and East Germany in 1990, it also recognized the inviolability of Poland’s Western Territories. With German recognition of postwar Polish frontiers and the total collapse of the Soviet Union in the fall of 1991, Poland could now confidently claim its ownership and cultural presence in the former Ostelbien.

In historical retrospect and in view of the decelerating Cold War, the path from the ethnic cleansing of postwar East Central Europe to a reunified Germany and an emancipated Poland began with the displacement of millions. Throughout the 1990s and into the new millennium, Polish and German historians undertook the belated effort of debating and problematizing forced population movements. From the very onset, then, an understanding on behalf of both states to address the painful memories of expulsions and repatriations exemplified post-1989 Polish-German relations. A sudden interest in their homeland’s complex past among new generations of Poles in contemporary Lower
Silesia frames the ongoing cultural and intellectual exchanges between Warsaw and Berlin. The precondition for such interactions was naturally a willingness of the two societies on the opposite banks of the Oder and Neisse rivers to reexamine postwar history. At the turn of the twenty-first century, this proved a challenge that both Poles and Germans heeded.

The analysis of Polonization outlined here implies that the postwar communist regime succeeded in homogenizing Poland, but this process certainly did not occur in the same terms imagined by Władysław Gomułka and other prominent Polish leaders. Although Lower Silesia became overwhelmingly Polish following post-1945 population transfers, the fabric of the new society remained, to a significant degree, diverse. Regionalism continued to coexist with a gradually evolving and ethnically bound national identity. More alarmingly, however, the Polish inhabitants of urban centers like Wrocław repeatedly contested the legitimacy of the communist regime. The Lower Silesian capital tended to be at the center of challenging the regime not only in the heyday of Solidarity but also earlier. For instance, Wrocław youth joined the 1968 student demonstrations and, perhaps surprisingly, counter-cultural movements found a durable niche on the local urban landscape (with jazz clubs and student theaters as particularly influential). In the 1980s, the Orange Alternative challenging communist rule was born in Wrocław.\textsuperscript{585} In many ways, proximity to the West and the diversity of the population (reflecting multiple understandings of Polishness) tended to promote a sort of cosmopolitan Polishness rather than one based on integral nationalism. This cosmopolitan identity had a lasting impact on Polish society and it continues to be redefined by Poland’s membership in the

European Union (EU) as well other global initiatives. With the transition to liberal democracy, the project of Polonization – a distant relic of the early communist period – would give way to a far more imperative project of Europeanization. Making Poland “European,” in particular integrating the Polish state within the EU political and economic edifice, would prove just as important in the post-communist period as making western Poland Polish was in the immediate postwar period. Perhaps ironically, then, Polonization comprised one of many steps on Poland’s road “back to Europe.”
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- History Department Award, UIC, support for writing dissertation, 2011-2012.
- The Kosciuszko Foundation Research Scholarship, archival research in Poland, 2010-2011.
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Selected Conference Presentations


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Professional and Teaching Experience

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Invited Lectures (Selected)

Lecture(s) on the French and Industrial Revolutions – in History 101: Western Civilization since 1648 (Instructor: Professor Nicole Jordan) at the University of Illinois at Chicago – February 20 and 25, 2013.

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