

Beata Halicka

# The Everyday Life of Children in Polish-German Borderlands During the Early Postwar Period

**Abstract:** *The Polish-German border created in 1918, following Poland's regaining of independence, was moved approximately 200 km west in 1945. As a result of forced migration and, in many instances, the almost complete exchange of populations, this region experienced significant social transformation. In conducting my research on the everyday life of the inhabitants of this border zone, an important source was autobiographical documents, especially settlers' memoirs, mainly of Poles who had settled these regions following the war. This article presents conclusions resulting from working with these kinds of sources, with particular consideration regarding childhood memories and the mechanisms behind the construction of memory. The fate of children living in this region following the Second World War have been presented both from their own perspective and on the basis of testimonies of adults describing their family life, their work in schools or institutions in which they dealt with children and young people. Central issues include topics such as harsh living conditions, dealing with traumatic wartime experiences and their longing for a lost homeland, the beginnings of Polish education, the discrimination and exclusion faced by German-speaking children, as well as education conducted in a nationalist and patriotic spirit.*

## Introduction

During a meeting with German and Polish witnesses of the post-war period – former and current inhabitants of Pyrzany in Western Poland born in the 1930s – Adam I., a Polish man, and Roschen S., a German woman, told their stories. Roschen S. spent the first years of her life in Pyrzany when it was still called Pyrehne and was part of the German Reich. In summer 1945, together with her mother, she was forcibly expelled beyond the Oder by Polish soldiers. Adam I., however, spent his childhood in a Galician village in the east of Poland which, together with his family, he was forced to leave and settle in the German territories joined to Poland in 1945. As Adam I. describes, his homeland was a beautiful hilly land with fertile soils and a mild climate. After a long and tiring journey, Adam and his family reached the west of Poland. In their minds, their first and most enduring impression of this new and completely unfamiliar land was of the River Warta valley, which seemed to them to be a dull and flat landscape with poor sandy soils and overwhelming dampness, as well as a plague of mosquitoes, all of which convinced them that it was not fit for habitation. However, Roschen S. could not

agree with such a negative portrayal of her little homeland. Finally, unable to hear any more of Adam's complaints, she interrupted him by indignantly shouting, 'But this is not true, as our homeland was so beautiful.'<sup>1</sup>

## Methodology

This incident, which I witnessed in May 2011, shows how subjective our memory is and how strong the tendency is to idealize our childhoods. How, therefore, should one examine the history of everyday life when the autobiographical sources on which it relies to a large extent seem to be so unreliable? Above all, one should remember that the authors of all types of autobiographical accounts display only partly the reality they witnessed. Their accounts are constructions which, above all, reflect their system of values and attitude to life. That is why the contemporary historian who examines everyday life prefers to have access to many different autobiographical accounts referring to the same events, as well as confronting them with other historical sources. Thus, their aim is less to discover what happened but much more to unravel the subjectivity of people's experiences and memories.

In Poland, sociological and social-historical research on everyday life began in the 1920s. Indeed, the well-known Polish sociologist Florian Znaniecki developed a method of memoir competition after returning from a research stay in Chicago following the First World War. The central idea was to collect submitted diaries, testimonies and autobiographies – life writing – from ordinary people. Scholars then produced analysis and often compiled volumes, in which academic introductions were followed by life records and correspondence, as extensive extracts or full versions, intertwining analysis and autobiographical extracts.<sup>2</sup> Although qualitative sociological research became a popular phenomenon in the Polish memoir boom of the late 1950/60s, it faded in the mid-1970s, just as western scholars associated with British oral history or French biographical sociology

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- 1 See results of an oral history project under my supervision called 'Germans, Poles and Ukrainians on the path of remembrance of forced migration' financed by the Europe for Citizens Program available at: [www.pyrzany-kozaki.eu](http://www.pyrzany-kozaki.eu) (last visited 5 February 2016) and in: Beata Halicka, Bogusław Mykietów, eds., *Kozaki – Pyrehne. Polen, Deutsche und Ukrainer auf dem Erinnerungspfad erzwungener Migrationen / Kozaki – Pyrzany. Polifonia pamięci o przymusowych migracjach we wspomnieniach Polaków, Niemców i Ukraińców* (Skórczyn: Wydawnictwo Instytutowe, 2011).
  - 2 William I. Thomas, Florian Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, 5 vol. (Chicago and Boston: Richard G. Badger, The Gorham Press, 1918–1920). Complete 5 volume available at: <http://chla.library.cornell.edu/c/chla/browse/title/3074959.html> (last visited 5 February 2016).

became the focus of interest on it.<sup>3</sup> In Germany, Alf Lüdtké<sup>4</sup> was the most important representative of research on everyday life. In the 1980s, however, Poles returned to their rich tradition, above all, through the works of Tomasz Szarota on everyday life in occupied Warsaw, as well as to the works of Marcin Kula.<sup>5</sup> Their innovation was that the subject of their historical research included not only processes, structures, facts and dates, but also human emotions, life stories and individual experiences. Thus, oral witness accounts, as well as written autobiographical documents, became an important source and were subject to the same criticism of sources as occurs regarding traditional archival research.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, it is worth paying particular attention to the fact that memoirs, either written or related orally soon after the event, as well as those recorded after several years, differ from those recorded half a century later, for example. This time gap causes us to quite often unconsciously mix our own experiences with facts that we have heard about or we have read somewhere else.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the so-called 'official' version of history imposes itself on the presentation of one's own memories in order for social expectations to be fulfilled:

This refers to the description and evaluation of every event. The longer the time distance is, the vaguer particular elements and themes become. Thus, as a source the value of these accounts decreases as they have an exceptionally subjective character. After fifty years or more witnesses often remember the events that were particularly emotionally

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- 3 Paul Andrew Vickers, 'Peasants, professors, publishers and censorship: memoirs of rural inhabitants of Poland's recovered territories (1945-c.1970)', PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, 2014, available at: <http://theses.gla.ac.uk/4821/> (last visited 5 February 2016).
  - 4 Alf Lüdtké, ed., *Alltagsgeschichte. Zur Rekonstruktion historischer Erfahrungen und Lebensweisen* (Frankfurt am Main-New York: Campus-Verlag, 1989).
  - 5 Tomasz Szarota, *Okupowanej Warszawy dzień powszedni: studium historyczne* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1973); Tomasz Szarota, *Warschau unter dem Hakenkreuz. Leben und Alltag im besetzten Warschau 1.10.1939 bis 31.7.1944*, (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1985); Marcin Kula, *Krótki raport o użytkowaniu historii* (Warszawa: PWN, 2004); Piotr T. Kwiatkowski, Lech M. Nijakowski, Barbara Szacka, Andrzej Szpociński, *Między codziennością a wielką historią. Druga wojna światowa w pamięci zbiorowej społeczeństwa polskiego* (Gdańsk-Warszawa: Scholar 2010).
  - 6 Heinke M. Kalinke, ed., *Brief, Erzählung, Tagebuch. Autobiographische Dokumente als Quellen zu Kultur und Geschichte der Deutschen in und aus dem östlichen Europa* (Freiburg: Johannes-Künzig-Institut für ostdeutsche Volkskunde, 2000), 7f.
  - 7 Hans J. Markowitsch, Harald Welzer, *The Development of Autobiographical Memory* (Hove and New York: Psychology Press, 2009).

strong, thereby losing their capability of assessment. Moreover, they frequently lose the ability to place them in time.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, while researching post-war everyday life it is recommended to look for ego-documents written in the 1940s and 1950s or seek out those which were based on prior notes, diaries or letters.<sup>9</sup> Admittedly, such documents were written in a communist context, that is, under social or even political pressure. However, they are distinguished by their paying more attention to detail and presenting the problems, concerns and joys which were important then and which today have frequently lost their significance. Although they usually contain a subjective and biased viewpoint, full of stereotypical evaluations, they include a huge amount of information on the way of thinking and acting, living conditions and the external circumstances which the witnesses of the period had to face. Using these sources for research on the wartime and post-war experiences of children is particularly important due to the fact that the witnesses of the period who are still alive today were young children during the Second World War. Even if they possibly managed to remember much of those events, their account will be either the perspective of a child or will become a construction in which it is not their experiences that will dominate but information received from others, often with a large time gap.

In examining the fate of children and youths in the western territories of Poland during the early postwar years, one must take into account the specific nature of the border region which came into being in 1945 as a result of border changes, as well as the specific nature of a population affected by the experience of forced migration. Here, one will discuss both the German civilian population forced to evacuate, flee, or later suffer expulsion from their homelands, as well as newly arrived Polish settlers, many of whom had come to these regions unwillingly. In the case of the young inhabitants of this region which interest us, one will discuss, above all, the orphaned German children who stayed on in the Oder basin region for various reasons, as well as the children of settler families who arrived here accompanied by their closest relatives. In most cases, such children had also been scarred by war, had lost family members and, for a long period, neither had proper living conditions nor opportunities for education. Therefore, the taking on of such research perspectives allows the consequences of relocated borders and forced migration to be closely examined. Indeed, by relying on examples of the

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8 Bernadetta Nitschke, *Wysiedlenie ludności niemieckiej z Polski w latach 1945–1949* (Zielona Góra: Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogicznej, 1999), 19.

9 Barbara Kubis, *Poznawcze i kształcące walory literatury dokumentu osobistego* (Opole: Uniwersytet Opolski, 2007), 74.

fates of individual children and youths, it is possible to show these consequences in a long-term context as their stories were recorded with a certain time gap, thereby enabling certain conclusions to be reached and each individual's fate to be evaluated. Moreover, the youngest generation was the subject of education in line with the establishment of a new government in this region. As Marcin Zaremba has shown, this was an exceptional combination of national and communist ideals.<sup>10</sup> Both through school and the organization of leisure time, significant influence was gained over children and youth which frequently imposed views in conflict with those handed down in families. On the other hand, the communist system guaranteed educational opportunities at all levels, including the children of the lowest social classes, thereby gaining support from this section of society.<sup>11</sup>

### **Historical background of the region over the long twentieth century**

The eastern regions of Germany which were joined to Poland due to the Potsdam resolutions of August 1945 had been ruled by Germany for many centuries. Along with the partitions of Poland at the end of the eighteenth century, the Prussian state also acquired the Wielkopolska region and so-called West Prussia which was situated even further east. It was not until the early twentieth century that the Oder became a border region. When, in 1918, the Polish state regained its independence, Germany had to return a significant part of its Prussian provinces in the east. Upper Silesia was divided, while on the basis of the Treaty of Versailles, the Oder, which for nearly two centuries had been a Prussian river, now became an international waterway. It was, however, styled as a 'German' river or more properly 'a river of the German East'.<sup>12</sup> The decisions which were made at Versailles inflamed the political mood: historical justifications were sought for German revisionist claims towards Poland, as well as the rights of the German minorities in Poland.<sup>13</sup> When, through brutal might, Germany, as the Third Reich, once

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10 Marcin Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm. Nacjonalistyczna legitymizacja władzy komunistycznej w Polsce* (Warszawa: Trio, 2001).

11 Marek Wierzbicki, *Młodzież w PRL* (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2009).

12 According to the Eastern border of Germany see: Klaus Zernack, 'Deutschlands Ostgrenze', in Alexander Demandt, ed., *Deutschlands Grenzen in der Geschichte* (München: C. H. Beck, 1991), 140–165; Jan Maria Piskorski, '1000 Jahre der deutsch-polnischen Grenze', *Jahrbuch für die Geschichte Mittel- und Ostdeutschlands* 44 (1996), 129–150.

13 Jörg Hackmann, 'Deutsche Ostforschung und Geschichtswissenschaft', in Jan M. Piskorski, ed., *Deutsche Ostforschung und polnische Westforschung im Spannungsfeld von*

again took control of significant territories of the Polish state, thereby creating its own General Government, police forces and protectorates, over two million Polish forced labourers were sent to the Reich proper and thus, also to the regions along the Oder.<sup>14</sup> At the moment of the defeat of Nazi Germany, the eastern front which had been planned to reach as far as the Volga, was moved westwards by the Allies to the Oder and Neisse rivers. This fact led to the fall of Prussia and the German Reich which was accompanied by an ethno-demographic revolution in the form of the flight, expulsion and forced migration of the German population. The effect of these events was to lead to the radical metamorphosis of the Oder border regions.<sup>15</sup>

The historical regions of Brandenburg and Pomerania, as well as part of Silesia, were divided while the Oder entered the canon of terms of official political language. Indeed, it became part of the abbreviated term 'the Oder-Neisse line', the trademark of the Yalta Agreement.<sup>16</sup> On this occasion, the new power arrangements in Europe gave Poland the opportunity to sanction its own territorial claims through the circulation of a range of myths, namely: the characteristic German 'Drive to the East', centuries-old German cultural and military aggression, as well as the reconstitution of Poland within the 'natural borders' of the territory ruled by Poland's Piast dynasty at the turn of the first millennium.<sup>17</sup> Thus, the terms 'German eastern borders', 'the borders of the German East', as well as 'the western borders of Poland' are loaded with ideological meaning.

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Wissenschaft und Politik. Disziplinen im Vergleich (Osnabrück: fibre Verlag 2002), 25–46, here 31 onwards.

- 14 Valentina Maria Stefanski, 'Polnische ZwangsarbeiterInnen in Deutschland. Anmerkungen zum Forschungsstand und zu Perspektiven der Forschung', *Inter finitimos* 6 (2008), 82–100.
- 15 Karl Schlögel, 'Odra – przemyslenia na temat miejsca pewnej europejskiej rzeki w historii kultury', in Karl Schlögel, Beata Halicka, eds., *Odra-Oder. Panorama europejskiej rzeki* (Skórzyn: Wydawnictwo Instytutowe, 2008), 19–39, here 35 onwards.
- 16 Wojciech Roszkowski, *Cień Jałty. Raport* (Warszawa: Muzeum Powstania Warszawskiego, 2006); Tadeusz Marczak, *Granica zachodnia w polskiej polityce zagranicznej w latach 1944–1950* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1995).
- 17 Examples include: Zygmunt Wojciechowski, *Polska – Niemcy. Dziesięć wieków zmagania* (Poznań: Instytut Zachodni, 1945); Maria Kielczewska, Andrzej Grodek, *Oder-Neisse, die beste Grenze Polens* (Stuttgart, 1949) (Polish edition: Maria Kielczewska, Andrzej Grodek, *Odra-Nisa, najlepsza granica Polski* (Poznań: Instytut Zachodni, 1945)); Kazimierz Golczewski, *Tysiąc lat nad Odrą i Bałtykiem* (Szczecin: Instytut Zachodnio-Pomorski, 1966).

The lands to the east of the Oder and Western Neisse became places of almost complete population exchange, the severing of the cultural continuity of one society and the creation of new traditions and communities. This concerned, in particular, the lands situated in the central and lower Oder. Approximately 50 per cent of the German population fled the region due to the approaching eastern front while the remainder were either expelled between June and July 1945 or forcibly migrated during the following months and early postwar years. Before the war these regions had been inhabited by almost 8.5 million people, mainly Germans. The Polish share of the population in 1931 comprised 8.7 per cent and lived primarily in Upper Silesia and southern East Prussia.<sup>18</sup>

The settlement of Polish populations was a process which ran parallel to the forced migration of the German inhabitants. Propaganda campaigns aimed at encouraging settlement were already begun by the Provisional Government of the Republic of Poland during the first months of 1945, thus long before the final decision regarding the Oder-Neisse line. Plans for coordinated settlement campaigns were replaced in April 1945 with a decision to allow uncontrolled or 'wild' campaigns aimed at settling the greatest number of people in the regions concerned in the shortest possible time. This was a consequence of the loss of 46 per cent of Polish territory, according to its 1938 borders, to the Soviet Union and the resulting necessity to accelerate the transfer of the Polish population from the eastern borderlands, known as the *Kresy*.

The Polish authorities decided to commence the settlement of the former German lands without waiting for a formal decision from the Allies on the matter. Indeed, a Polish presence in these regions was meant to be one of the decisive arguments at a future peace conference. Both operations were conducted under the pressure of Soviet *faits accomplis* in conditions insufficient for organisational readiness. These plans gave way to improvisation and their uncontrolled implementation due to which many thousand people experienced material losses, suffering, disease and even death. One consequence of these decisions was the chaos which governed during the first few months, combined with an invasion of looters and enormous fluctuations in population. The statistics which were presented by the Polish government at the end of 1945 were meant to display significant progress in the settlement campaign. However, they did not describe entire transports comprising tens of carriages packed with people who were sentenced to spend

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18 Grzegorz Hryciuk and Witold Sienkiewicz, *Zwangsumsiedlung, Flucht und Vertreibung 1939 bis 1959. Atlas zur Geschichte Ostmitteleuropas* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2009), 16.

weeks vegetating at railway stations or in open fields, deprived of the most basic care and transported to the wrong destinations or forced to return.

The lands east of the Oder and Western Neisse joined to Poland in 1945 were subsumed by a multitude of organizational and economic problems whose solution constituted a major challenge for the Polish state during the years following the war. This caused many difficulties, especially during the first months of 1945 when the Provisional Government of the Republic of Poland was limited in asserting its rights by the Soviet military authorities and the lawlessness of certain Red Army commanders. Other serious problems occurred concerning staffing, a lack of transport resources and supplies.

The activities of both government and non-government organizations dealing with the problems of the new territories, along with the lack of a clear division of tasks, caused incidents of overlap and organizational chaos. This phenomenon was affected additionally by the battle between the main rivals for government power, namely the Polish Peasants' Party (PSL)<sup>19</sup> and the Polish Workers' Party (PPR),<sup>20</sup> which intensified during the second half of 1945. The latter, employing Soviet support, gained a significant advantage which allowed it to establish, on 13 November 1945, the Ministry for the Recovered Territories to be headed by Władysław Gomułka, the Secretary General of the PPR and Deputy Prime Minister of Poland.<sup>21</sup> The scope of operation of this ministry, in fact, encompassed all areas of social and economic life of these regions.

The first settlers in the regions concerned were Poles who had followed just behind the westward-advancing Red Army and who, either arbitrarily or with the approval of Soviet commanders, took on the roles of representatives of the Polish administration. Quite often such people took advantage of the situation to enrich

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19 PSL was the main non-communist rival of the Polish communist movement and enjoyed much greater popular support, especially among Poland's farmers. Between 1945 and 1947, the communists conducted a concerted campaign to destroy the PSL, eventually forcing its leader, Stanisław Mikołajczyk, to flee the country in late 1947.

20 The Polish Workers' Party was the cover name of the Polish communist movement whose leadership was largely Moscow-trained and directed. Following its destruction of the PSL in 1947, it absorbed its remaining rival, the Polish Socialist Party, into a Polish United Workers Party (PZPR) in the following year.

21 Władysław Gomułka, espoused 'National Communism' which sought to reconcile Marxism-Leninism with traditional Polish national aims for self-determination and less direct control from Moscow. In 1948, as the Stalinist wing of the PPR gained control, Gomułka experienced a spectacular fall from grace and narrowly avoided execution. His equally spectacular return to power following the post-Stalinist thaw of 1956 provided a basis for the PZPR to continue its rule for several decades to come.

themselves, loot property left behind by fleeing Germans and then sell it on in so-called central Poland. It is difficult to call such people 'settlers' as usually they did not stay long in one location and frequently changed their place of residence. More deserving of the term 'settlers' are the inhabitants of neighbouring border counties who moved, as a rule, from not very far away and occupied abandoned German farms. At an earlier stage, one may come across Polish forced labourers or groups returning from POW or work camps in Austria and Germany. The Provisional Government of the Republic of Poland attempted to encourage POWs and forced labourers to settle in these regions.

The movement of settlers reached its peak in May 1945, thus following the capitulation of Germany, from which time one may already speak of a more or less organized campaign. Special shuttle trains were inaugurated by which settlers from the further regions of central Poland arrived. However, due to insufficient rolling stock, a section of the population, mainly those from neighbouring regions, managed to reach the western and northern territories by horse-drawn vehicles or even on foot.

From spring 1945 the regions along the Oder had begun to receive settlers from the formerly Polish eastern borderlands. This was carried out on the authority of an agreement concerning population exchanges which the Polish Committee for National Liberation, an organization created by Polish communists, signed with the governments of the Ukrainian, Byelorussian and Lithuanian Soviet republics in September 1944. Indeed, the first transports of expellees left Byelorussia and Ukraine by the end of 1944 while from Lithuania they departed in January 1945. Between 1944 and 1948, over 1.1 million Poles were 'repatriated' from east to west. Additionally, after 1955, over 250,000 Poles returned from Siberia and other territories of Soviet Union and settled in the west of Poland. Moreover, the holocaust left only about 160,000 Polish Jews, mostly in Soviet territory, and who on their return to Poland were settled in the western territories. Indeed, in July 1946, 80,000 Jews were living in Lower Silesia while about 30,000 were based in West Pomerania.<sup>22</sup> However, most Jews did not stay in western Poland after 1945 and moved abroad.

Those inhabitants of central Poland and Wielkopolska deciding to settle in the western and northern territories had to have a settler's certificate issued by their local county council, on the basis of which they received free transportation and food. Although the settlers were forced to pay for any properties they occupied in

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22 All statistics based on: Witold Sienkiewicz, Grzegorz Hryciuk, *Wysiedlenia wypędzenia i ucieczki 1939–1959. Atlas Ziemi Polski* (Warszawa: Demart, 2008).

the new territories, the terms of repayment were spread over ten years and based on favourable conditions. Farmers usually repaid this money through agricultural produce. Moreover, Poles returning from German concentration camps and staying on in the western territories were considered as settlers or expellees and received appropriate settler certification or, in the case of those who came from the regions absorbed by the USSR, a certificate of compensation aimed at replacing their property.

The new society of Poland's western territories arose, and was noted for its particular mixture of cultures and traditions. It comprised three main groups, classified according to their background, namely: settlers from central Poland and Wielkopolska (48.9 per cent), expellees from the territory annexed by the Soviet Union (27.7 per cent), as well as the so-called autochthons, the indigenous inhabitants of these lands (19.7 per cent).<sup>23</sup> The percentage share of certain groups varied from region to region. Moreover, apart from these three groups, one must also mention those Poles who had emigrated either before or during the Second World War and, following 1945, had decided to return to their homeland. These officially-termed 're-emigrants' comprised less than 4 per cent of the general settler population.<sup>24</sup>

Although one of the main Polish political goals during the postwar years was to build national unity, one must however emphasize that within the new territories there were also those who represented other national groups. The late 1940s and early 1950s saw the German share of the population at its height, although attempts were made to camouflage their number in official statistics by classifying them as 'Polonised Autochthons'.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, in 1947, as part of 'Operation Vistula', over 136,000 ethnic Ukrainians were forcibly resettled in the western and northern lands. For the new inhabitants of the Oder region, the moment of their arrival, confrontation with strangers, and facing life in a depopulated land were all important experiences. The archival documents provide us with information

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23 National census conducted on 3.12.1950, taken from Robert Skobelski, *Ziemie zachodnie i północne w okresie realizacji planu sześćoletniego 1950–1955* (Zielona Góra: Redakcja Wydawnictw Humanistyczno-Społecznych UZ, 2002), 33; Patrycy Dzierżyński, *Osadnictwo rolne na Ziemiach Odzyskanych* (Warszawa 1983), 253.

24 National census conducted on 3.12.1950, taken from Robert Skobelski, *Ziemie zachodnie i północne w okresie realizacji planu sześćoletniego 1950–1955* (Zielona Góra: Redakcja Wydawnictw Humanistyczno-Społecznych UZ, 2002), 33.

25 Hugo Service, *Germans to Poles. Communism, nationalism and ethnic cleansing after the Second World War* (New York: Cambridge, 2013).

as to how the transport and distribution of people in homes and farms were organized. Knowledge of how these new arrivals felt during their first days there and how they managed in new surroundings is to be found in memoirs written during the early post-war years.

### Settler memoirs as a historical source

My research was based on both archival documents gathered in the Polish National Archives in Szczecin, Zielona Góra and Warsaw and on the subject literature, as well as on settler memoirs. Following the Second World War various institutions (mainly research institutes, as well as cultural institutes and newspaper editors) announced competitions for the best memoirs in Poland's northern and western territories. Indeed, the so-called 'memoirs to order', resulting from several competitions held by the Western Institute in Poznań, may be considered some of the most interesting and broadest in scope. This institute was the leading research institution on Germany and the Recovered Territories, while pioneering the revival of memoir sociology through the sociologist Zygmunt Dulczewski, who himself had been a student of Florian Znaniecki. The aim of the institute was both the roles of conducting academic research and popularizing its findings.

Following 'the political thaw' which took place in Poland after 1956,<sup>26</sup> Polish sociologists from the Western Institute came up with an initiative for the first competition for gathering the memoirs of the Polish settlers of the so-called 'Western Lands' or 'Recovered Territories'.<sup>27</sup> Later competitions took place in 1966 and 1970 in which the respondents were asked about their experiences during and following the war, about their reasons for settling in the 'Recovered Territories', about the course of settlement itself, as well as about the first years in their new place of residence. Insofar as the texts sent to the competitions of 1966 and 1970 were dominated by rhetoric full of socialist propaganda, those from the late 1950s were written in the spirit of the October 1956 changes and are characterized by more freedom of thought, a critical assessment of reality and an openness in describing

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26 The so-called 'Polish October', the climax of a process which began Stalin's death in March 1953 and eventually led to a wave of de-Stalinization, the release of thousands of political prisoners and a loosening of state censorship in late 1956. It also brought about the return of Władysław Gomułka and his policy of 'National Communism.'

27 Selected and censored memoirs appeared in the anthology: Zygmunt Dulczewski, Andrzej Kwilecki, eds., *Pamiętniki osadników Ziemi Odzyskanych* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 1963 and 1970).

mistakes and failures.<sup>28</sup> For this competition 229 testimonies were entered 205 of which were accepted into the competition, the remaining 14 deemed not to have conformed to the criteria of the competition.

When analysing these memoirs regarding the fate of Polish children, one should state that only very few of these concern people who, in 1945, were still children. Most of the entries for the competition were sent by people who had already started new lives by the Oder as adults. In their accounts often appear children about whom they write as parents, teachers, representatives of local government or medical services. When portraying the situation of children in this region after 1945 one should therefore distinguish between sources written from the perspective of a child and those from the perspective of an adult. The topic I have researched could be deepened by taking into consideration memoirs sent for the second edition of the competition in 1966, which was addressed to the young generation of those living in the 'Recovered Territories' who had been born during the closing years of the war or just after it. However, as most of the entries sent for this competition were written in the spirit of the propaganda of the time, I did not take them into account. Indeed, the flourishing of research after 1956 began to fade in the later 1960s, as official policy gradually shifted towards declaring the 'Recovered Territories' fully-integrated with Poland.

## First months after arrival

The situation of Polish settlers in the 'Recovered Territories' was so peculiar as here we are not only dealing with a group of forced migrants who settled in a new place and had to get used to living in a different society. In this way a completely new society came about in which, in a heavily war-affected region, it had to create structures of authority, schools, social and cultural institutions, as well as rebuild factories and organize agricultural production. It is no wonder that the first years were quite chaotic as not everything could have been organized at once. Many settlers came to the west in order to loot, get rich quickly and not necessarily to

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28 An anthology of uncensored memoirs was published in German under my editorship.: Beata Halicka, ed., 'Mein Haus an der Oder'. Erinnerungen polnischer Neusiedler in Westpolen nach 1945 (Paderborn, Schöningh, 2014). The Polish edition was published in Kraków in 2016, entitled: *Mój dom nad Odrą. Pamiętniki osadników Nadodrza po 1945 roku.* (Kraków: Universitas, 2016).

work for the common good. This is why my latest book, devoted to the subject of the Oder basin during the initial post-war years, is entitled *The Polish Wild West*.<sup>29</sup>

Stanisław Jędrzejowski who had fought in the Warsaw Uprising, arrived in the Western Territories in the early 1945 and took part in the foundation of the Polish administration in the town of Szczecinek in Pomerania. He describes the view of the city in spring 1945 in the following manner:

The destruction left by the war in this area was immense. Ruins and rubble and those walls still standing were blackened by smoke. The streets and cobbles were torn up by bullets or trenches and the pavements were buried under debris. [...] Life had come to a halt in the full meaning of this word and began to awaken again only a couple of weeks later. The permanent inhabitants [Germans – B.H.] who had remained in the town returned to the streets after a couple of days. The first signs of new life after the Soviet Army had passed through on their way west were the newly-arrived settlers from Central Poland. The majority of these were so-called looters who were not afraid of anything and acted on the principle to take everything that wasn't nailed to the ground, to rob everything and take it away. [...] All of this happened at a time when there were still no civilian administrative bodies. Life was uncontrolled and there was a lot of injustice. Delinquent acts were committed without inhibitions, and everything could be bought for home-made moonshine and vodka. Soviet soldiers were selling the horses and cattle they were driving eastwards. [...] The town at the time looked strange as it was divided into two parts. The Soviet part was occupied by the Soviet army and the Polish part was where the settlers settled down. At the time each street offered a peculiar sight. People moved quickly and furtively [...] and there were no children to be seen on the streets.<sup>30</sup>

The author of the above-quoted memoir focuses on the havoc which had been brought by war. In contrast to the widely circulated views that Poles were finding fully fitted-out farms in these regions, even with the proverbial still-hot soup standing on the stove, the reality was frequently different. Following the advance of the eastern front, the stationing of Red Army units for long periods, along with the initially completely haphazard nature of the conduct of the Polish administration and the incompetence of those assigned with conducting it, most towns and villages, as a rule, were found to be in a very poor state. Indeed, if they had not been destroyed by wartime activities, they were plundered, any livestock either

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29 Beata Halicka, *Polens Wilder Westen. Erzwungene Migration und die kulturelle Aneignung des Oterraumes 1945–1948* (Paderborn, Schöningh, 2013). A Polish edition: Beata Halicka, *Polski Dzik Zachód. Przymusowe migracje i kulturowe osvajanie Nadodrza 1945–1948* (Kraków: Universitas, 2015). This project has been financed by the Polish-German Foundation for Research.

30 Memoir of Stanisław Jędrzejowski, P10/1957, 40, Archive of the Western Institute, Poznań.

slaughtered or carried off, while food and seed stores were used up. As a result, the situation of the new Polish settlers was not easy. While many of them, it is true, received a roof over their heads and their occupation of living quarters was frequently organized for them, those arriving later found that the home awarded to them had most often been completely stripped of its furniture and fittings. The promised government help not only arrived with great delay but was inadequate which resulted, in fact, in many families starving during the winter months.<sup>31</sup> In the towns and cities, the Soviets usually asset-stripped factories, workplaces and confiscated valuable objects from private homes. The new inhabitants faced the task of having to start from scratch regarding reconnecting water and electricity supplies, along with food provisions and the cleaning-up of ruined towns and cities. In fact, it was several years before urban life returned to normal. Moreover, interpersonal problems were not lacking with most conflicts igniting over the awarding of homes, workshops and shops. It was not until autumn 1945 that a more precise outline of tasks for certain government offices and courts appeared.

### **My typology of settlers**

The initial post-war years in Poland witnessed a battle for government power and, as a consequence, a social revolution took place and a communist regime was introduced by force. All of these changes also left a significant impact on the lands joined to Poland in 1945. Thus, the settlers' memoirs open an insight into the social acceptance of these changes, as well as into the attitude new inhabitants of the Oder region had towards propaganda claiming 'the settlement has been completed successfully'. In my book *The Polish Wild West* I have divided the settlers of the 'Western Lands' into three groups depending on their attitude towards the new political situation and adopted the following three typologies of people:

- highly enthusiastic pioneers of the 'Recovered Territories'
- looters, or 'resourceful entrepreneurs' of the Polish 'Wild West'
- exhausted war victims and settlers yearning to return home.

Many Poles, mainly those from central Poland and the province of Wielkopolska who, to a greater or lesser degree, voluntarily decided to settle here, honestly believed in the declared right of Poland to the 'Recovered Territories.' This was in accordance with the notion that the Poles had regained these territories after centuries-long sacrifice as an act of historical justice. The Second World War, as

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31 Zaremba Marcin, *Wielka Trwoga, Polska 1944–1947. Ludowa reakcja na kryzys* (Kraków: Znak, 2012).

well as the German occupation, were seen as the crescendo of a 'thousand-year struggle' between Germany and Poland,<sup>32</sup> which would lead to a righting of the balance for the traumatic experience of the past.

During the first years of the post-war period, looting was a widespread phenomenon. Due to great movements of populations, as well as the lack of a stable administration, a very specific situation occurred in the Oder region. Indeed, the enormous amount of goods and possessions which had been abandoned by their former owners and left unsupervised could very easily be appropriated by others. Moreover, from a legal standpoint, looting belonged to a 'grey area' and was accepted and practiced by the majority of the new Polish society. It became one of the daily activities performed not only by criminals but also respectable people with the best intentions. Virtually in all the memoirs which I have examined, the subject of looting comes up sooner or later. Looters undoubtedly belong to these groups of new inhabitants of the Oder region who found themselves well-off in difficult initial conditions. In fact, it was no longer than two or three years before most of those involved in such activities ended up in prison or were forced to flee in order to save themselves. For others, however, looting created a material basis of a new life which stabilized with time.

From spring 1945 refugees and expellees from the eastern borderlands of Poland began to arrive in the Oder region. They had endured a journey of several weeks in freight wagons, often having already suffered the trauma of the Soviet and German occupations,<sup>33</sup> as well as the Polish-Ukrainian civil war.<sup>34</sup> On their arrival at their destination most of them found themselves in a state of culture shock. Depending on their physical and emotional state of well being, they found their place in their new environment and began to engage with it, albeit at different tempos. Some people shut themselves away in their private life, isolated

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32 See the political text by Zygmunt Wojciechowski, *Polska – Niemcy. Dziesięć wieków zmagania* (Poznań: Instytut Zachodni, 1945).

33 Germany and the Soviet Union invaded Poland in a coordinated campaign in September 1939 and divided the country between them. Eastern Poles found themselves under Soviet rule until June 1941 when Hitler launched Operation Barbarossa and eastern Poland endured Nazi rule. This changed again back to Soviet rule during the latter stages of the war as the eastern front moved westwards and eastern Poland was permanently absorbed into the Soviet Union.

34 A conflict which existed almost as a separate war within the Second World War, it featured extreme Ukrainian nationalists using the period of wartime destabilization to massacre tens of thousands of Poles in the provinces of Galicia and Volhynia in an effort to ethnically-cleanse Ukraine, peaking in 1943. Polish retaliatory killings amounted to at least several thousands, although wildly diverging figures are claimed by both sides.

themselves from others, thereby losing the possibility of satisfying their need for recognition, social contact or self-development. Frequently, this had a negative impact on their health with some sitting on their unpacked suitcases for years afterwards or reliving the trauma of war.

In Polish memoirs from the late 1940s and 1950s it is difficult to find accounts concerning such human tragedies. Indeed, they did not suit the communistic ethos of the settler whose was meant to be actively involved with the resettlement and economic growth of the Oder region. Although it is true that criticism of shortages, mistakes and failed projects was tolerated 1956 (even if such critical texts were mostly not published and therefore remained unknown to the public sphere), it was rare, however, that someone presented this from the point of view of victimhood. The authors of the memoirs sent to the Western Institute in Poznan did not write (or wrote only indirectly) about their own suffering, longing for home, apathy or the life which they had lost.

Settlers who, to some extent, voluntarily came to the Oder basin, that is, those motivated by a desire to look for better living conditions (many of them had lost their houses and property during wartime,) found it a bit easier in the new reality. However, those expelled from the eastern marches of Poland known as the *Kresy*, usually had a major problem reconciling themselves to the new situation. Enormous homesickness for their homeland made them suffer from extreme apathy, as well as declining health. A young girl, Izabella Grdeń, describes her first weeks in the Oder basin as follows:

We moved into the house of a German who was friendly and understanding. He helped us move our things in and even for some time, before we got a loan of grain, he fed us all. Of course, for this we helped him with the work on the farm which he was very happy about. He was only amazed as to why we were not trying to find another good farm like other people. Well, we were not able to farm on a bigger scale. Dad was old, Mum too. Adaś was small, and what about me? As for me, I was not much use to them. We did not have a horse. What were we to do? *Co było robić?* Admittedly, we often went with Adaś to further farms, frequently to uninhabited villages far away [where we] traipsed around [and] looked at the houses but we still stayed on in our digs at the German's house not knowing what we were waiting for. Dad said that when things settled down he would get work at some office, we would move to the town in order for myself and Adaś to continue our education. And that is how the days passed. We sat in uncertainty.<sup>35</sup>

From Izabella Grdeń's further memoirs, we discover that her parents did not decide to change their place of residence. They were unable to reconcile themselves to the new conditions. In contrast to their parents, children usually found their

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35 Memoir of Izabella Grdeń, P150/1957, 40, Archive of the Western Institute, Poznań.

place in the new society much more quickly and more easily accepted the loss of their family home as they did not have such a strong attachment to it as their parents. Moreover, driven by normal curiosity of the world at large, settler children quickly familiarized themselves with their new surroundings and tried to help their closest relatives. In the case of the Grdeń family, one may even gain the impression that it was the growing children who came up with initiatives to improve their living conditions in this new place while their parents took a rather passive role, as if they were consumed by lethargy in yearning for their lost homeland. It was only after several years that Izabella and her brother took up work in the town and supported their parents financially. Before they reached adulthood, however, they attended a country school which was not very easy at the beginning.

### **New schools in the new territories**

In the under-populated Western Lands there was a lack of teachers, school buildings were often damaged and their furnishings and fittings destroyed. The lack of teachers was a nationwide problem as during the war the Nazis, as well as the Soviets, treated the Polish intelligentsia – including teachers – with particular cruelty. Many of them were murdered or, even up to after the war, held in Soviet camps. The result of this was that many schools remained closed for a long time. For example, in the province of Szczecin it was only in 1950 that all children began going to school.<sup>36</sup> It turned out that working with children on whom the experience of war had left its mark was an enormous challenge for teachers.

A long-lasting picture of children and young people is portrayed by Julian Łucjan Bazgier who, together with his wife, settled in Uciechów (Bertholdsdorf) near Dzierżoniów [Reichenbach] in Lower Silesia. Having got rid of the illegal occupants of the school building with the help of the school inspector and having renovated it with the support of Germans living in the village, he was able to commence lessons:

To school came about twenty children of different ages and possessing various levels of education up to then. I divided them into six classes and had to treat each pupil individually as teaching them all together was out of the question. These were big and small savages, almost all of whom had some psychological trauma, which was no wonder. After all, some of them had survived only by chance, hidden in some corner of the house in which

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36 Feliks Jordan, 'Oświata i kultura w województwie szczecińskim i koszalińskim', *Przegląd Zachodni* 9/10 (1954), 39–55.

some 'hajdamaks'<sup>37</sup> had slaughtered their closest relatives. And then the arduous journey of the transport of repatriates and months of poverty [awaiting further transport – B.H.] in Tarnowskie Góry. All this must have taken its toll on these young souls who had stopped being young anyway as they had experienced life from the most hideous aspect, not excluding matters of a sexual nature.<sup>38</sup>

This experienced teacher realized that one could help children by including them in the life of the school and the entire borough, showing them perspectives and values encouraging them to study. That is why he tried to involve, not only the pupils and the parents but also the other inhabitants of the village, in school activities and rural life by organizing festivals and cultural events together with them. In this way many teachers took over the role of local organizers of cultural activities. Julian Bazgier set up an amateur theatre while his wife ran a female choir and gave dancing lessons in the parish hall. Both of them significantly brought about the joining together of new inhabitants of the village who were so culturally diverse. They also helped to create a feeling of community through work and by celebrating together.

Such optimism, however, did not rule everywhere or left some people after a short initial phase, as soon as it became clear that the number of problems were increasing rather than decreasing. Thus, from the notes the school inspector Wiesław Sauter we discover that at a meeting of teachers from the county of Świebodzin on 7 September 1945 the mood was rather pessimistic. The teachers used the opportunity to complain about their difficult situation.<sup>39</sup> Some underlined that material situation of most teachers was not the only problem but also very difficult working conditions. Apart from that, there were substantive issues such as how to teach children who had gone through six years of war and occupation, some of whom had never attended school. Children in a class were of very different ages, had come from various regions, spoke different dialects and some had poor knowledge of the Polish language or did not know it at all. This referred in particular to the children of the *Kresy* who used a mixture of Belorussian, Ukrainian, Lithuanian and Polish and for whom literary Polish caused them significant problems. Many children from so-called 'autochthon' families, that is people of mixed Polish-German background indigenous to the 'Recovered Territories', spoke only German and to be taught Polish from scratch. The curriculum and books which

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37 Originally a term regarding Galician Ukrainians from the impoverished bourgeoisie, or bands of Cossacks during the seventeenth century rebelling against the Polish gentry through bloody revolt.

38 Memoir of Julian Bazgier, P128/1957, 63, Archive of the Western Institute, Poznań.

39 Memoir of Wiesław Sauter, P177/1957, Archive of the Western Institute, Poznań.

teachers had at their disposal did not take into account the exceptional situation affecting the region. Thus, teachers themselves had to decide which methods to employ and how much to demand from their pupils in order to achieve the best results. Jan Jakubek writes about his school as follows:

The first year of work in the primary school in Mikołajki Pomorskie after the end of the war had an experimental and equalizing character namely, the teacher tried to equalize the level of education which the pupils of separate classes possessed.<sup>40</sup>

### Education in a nationalist spirit

Educational and cultural activities were usually conducted in a patriotic, or even a nationalist spirit which, during the first post-war years, was connected with such personal beliefs among teachers and organizers of cultural events. Polish sociologist Andrzej Kwilecki was working with teachers' memoirs already in the late 1950s and recognized that competition participants 'largely represent the *pioneering* portion of teachers, the most ideologically and socially sophisticated part'.<sup>41</sup> He described teachers' pioneering achievements during the 'initial uncertainty and chaos' when they formed 'dynamic bonds' with other early settlers when 'society was able to perceive values common to all groups and to undertake and fulfil collective tasks'.<sup>42</sup>

Only when the communist authorities had become stronger, that is between 1946 and 1947, political pressure intensified and both in schools, as well as in cultural activities, patriotic content took on stronger and stronger overtones of communist propaganda.<sup>43</sup> Together with the change of the political system, universal education was introduced in Poland, not only at the primary level but also at

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40 Memoir of Jan Jakubek, P66/1957, Archive of the Western Institute, Poznań. Long sections of this memoir were published in Zygmunt Dulczewski and Andrzej Kwilecki, eds., *Pamiętniki osadników Ziemi Odzyskanych* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 1963), 629–642.

41 Andrzej Kwilecki, *Rola społeczna nauczyciela na Ziemiach Zachodnich w świetle pamiętników nauczycieli – osadników* (Poznań: Instytut Zachodni, 1960), 18.

42 Andrzej Kwilecki, *Rola społeczna nauczyciela na Ziemiach Zachodnich w świetle pamiętników nauczycieli – osadników* (Poznań: Instytut Zachodni, 1960), 45 and 120, quoted in: Paul Andrew Vickers, *Peasants, professors, publishers and censorship: memoirs of rural inhabitants of Poland's recovered territories (1945-c.1970)*, PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, 2014, available at: <http://theses.gla.ac.uk/4821/> (last visited 5 February 2016), 214.

43 Krzysztof Kosiński, *O nową mentalność. Życie codzienne w szkołach 1945–1956* (Warszawa: Trio, 2000).

the secondary and higher levels. Children from simple worker or peasant families could receive free education while the state further supported them with cheap or even free accommodation in dormitories, fed them in communal canteens and provided them with inexpensive textbooks. This was strongly supported by society in general. Indeed, one could observe a great commitment to the best functioning of schools as it was believed that education opened the perspective for a better life for young people. The authors of the memoirs of 1956 devoted much attention to this aspect of social life. Zbigniew Bieniasz describes this as follows:

The Western Lands were governed by a specific situation. The people here did not pay much attention to material wealth. Nobody then had it anyway. The ex-German property which had been taken over could not create a great attachment [and] it did not bring too much joy as most of the people coming here lived still with the memories of their homeland and the material goods they had inherited from their ancestors. The new circumstances of life gave rise to the worship of new values, namely those which were indestructible and could never be taken away and die together with the person – the worship of knowledge and skills which are always capable of standing up to disaster.<sup>44</sup>

The author of these words entered into professional life as a teacher during the first post-war years. Settling down in the Oder basin gave him the opportunity for social advancement while he himself, in getting further education and being socially-active, tried to use this new beginning as best as possible. One could get the impression that this man, who had come from a simple peasant family which had been expelled from the east and who had borne the burden of the experience of forced labour in Germany, tried to renounce the German cultural inheritance of the Oder basin from his memory. This is why he decided to build his future on a framework of values which could not be so easily destroyed. Losing his homeland and the tragedy of war had taught him not to get attached to material goods and places too much. As a young man he believed could change the world and that he was allowed to participate in the shaping of a new society. It is difficult to evaluate today to what extent such an attitude was the result of personal beliefs and to what extent it had been shaped under the influence of socialist propaganda. Such beliefs were shared by many young people who honestly believed in the ideals promoted by the communists. This led to many inter-generational conflicts as quite a large section of the older generation, in particular Poles expelled from the east, had a hostile attitude towards the new political system. Young people, however, sooner

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44 Zygmunt Bieniasz, 'Droga do mądrości', in Zdzisław Linkowski, ed., *Wiosna na rumowisku i inne wspomnienia pionierów* (Gorzów Wielkopolski: Gorzowskie Towarzystwo Kultury, 1987), 145–154, and here 153.

accepted the new situation and, at least in the first post-war decade, got engaged in building this new reality in an uncritical fashion.

### **The fate of German children**

When taking into account the everyday life of children in the 'Recovered Territories' during the initial post-war years, one may not forget German children who remained for some time in their home towns and villages before being expelled to Germany. However, their fate was not described in the memoirs of Polish settlers. Despite it being passed over in silence, some incidents are known where Polish families adopted orphaned German children, usually hiding their background and attempting to assimilate the child as quickly as possible and erase all traces of their past. Taking into consideration that seven million Germans had lived in the territories, before they had been joined to Poland in 1945,<sup>45</sup> one may imagine that the number of children who during wartime had either become orphans, were lost, were raised by only parent or by relatives, was very large. Edward Swanstrom, who after the war ran the US National Catholic Welfare Conference in Europe, states that in 1950 there were still from 160,000 to 180,000 children who had become lost as result of flight, expulsion and deportation and had not managed to find their parents.<sup>46</sup> Orphaned German children who were left in the territory of Poland were sent to children's homes and then deported to Germany. Attempts were made to polonise children who had come from mixed families. However, children who stayed with their relatives among civilians were, above all, prone to hunger and were persecuted by Polish settlers. The hostile policy towards Germans by the Polish state did not foresee any material aid and frequently denied Germans medical aid. German children were also often deprived of the possibility of attending school in the German language and were forced to attend Polish schools where they faced universal discrimination. This unflattering and insufficiently-researched chapter of Polish post-war history is one in which children were charged with the sins of their parents, denied all aid, were allowed to become physically exhausted, and in extreme conditions, starve to death. R. M. Douglas' book 'Orderly and Humane: The Expulsion of the Germans after the

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45 Grzegorz Hryciuk and Witold Sienkiewicz, *Zwangsumsiedlung, Flucht und Vertreibung 1939 bis 1959. Atlas zur Geschichte Ostmitteleuropas*, Bonn, 2009, 16.

46 Edward E. Swanstrom: *Pilgrims of the Night: A Study of Expelled People* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1950), 13, 18–19.

Second World War<sup>47</sup> offers shocking photographs of starving German children who arrived in this state on transports from Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. There is no doubt that during these difficult post-war years the Polish administration had to contend with an enormous amount of problems and burning issues, which needed immediate attention. Polish children were also in need of adequate care. The school inspector, Wiesław Sauter, describes his impressions of one of the schools near the German border in September 1945 as follows:

The children although dressed cleanly were very poor, some were without shoes or warm clothing and almost all of them were malnourished with livid complexions. The conditions with supplies in Gubin were really difficult [with] crazy high prices not often seen in many other towns in the [Polish] west. The feeding of the children was an essential condition for their health and for the possibility of continuing further with their education.<sup>48</sup>

For these children the means for their nourishment, education and proper development were found, because scarce resources were distributed along national lines. However, for German children remaining in Poland until the late 1940s there was a lack of human compassion and the will to provide aid without regard to their nationality or the views of their parents.

## Conclusions

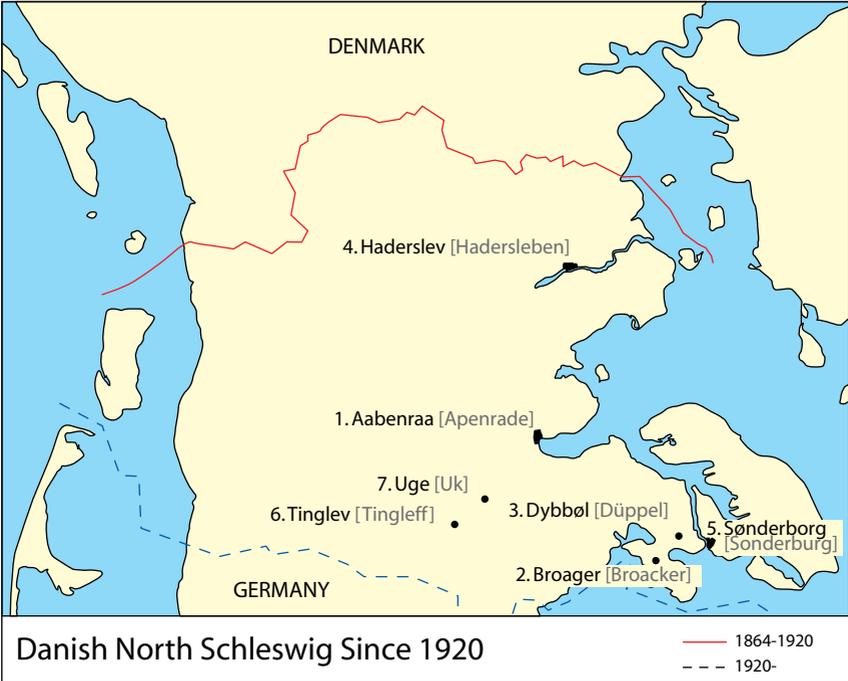
The fate of children who experienced forced migration is a subject which, unlike the history and memory of children of war, has been very poorly researched. It is undoubtedly an important part of the research of a borderland region which, regarding the consequences of the relocation of the Polish-German border, continues to demand further and deeper analysis. Due to the fact that, seventy years following the Second World War, the number of witnesses to this period is continually decreasing year on year, researchers dealing with this question are forced to reach for written testimonies or recorded interviews. These are often fascinating sources while their critical reading allows for a better understanding of the experience and emotions of those who created this history. As analysis of selected memoirs has shown, the everyday life of children in postwar western Poland was not divorced from the problems and challenges which adults had to face. Indeed, taking the perspective of a child allows us to discern the differences in perception of living conditions in a new location, as well as the role of children and youth in

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47 R. M. Douglas, *Orderly and Humane: The Expulsion of the Germans after the Second World War* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2012).

48 Memoir of Wiesław Sauter, P177/1957, Archive of the Western Institute, Poznań.

government policies and initiatives aimed at legitimizing Poland's administration of the new borderland regions. Indeed, it was the younger generation of the new settlers which found itself at the centre of things during the carrying out of the aims of building a new society in the spirit of nationalist and communist ideals.



Map 5: Danish North Schleswig since 1920.