

Belonging to the Nation: Inclusion and Exclusion in the Polish-German Borderlands, 1939-1951

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The German-Polish borderlands in the twentieth century have been the setting for several recent studies on nationalization and ethnic cleansing. These examinations have focused on policies as well as the people affected, including those that have been considered to be "nationally indifferent." [1] John J. Kulczycki has written a fine examination of the origins of the idea to purify nations and its application during and after the Second World War, a process that resulted in the resettlement of many interwar Polish citizens in Germany. Kulczycki seeks to show how the stories of those who left Poland for West Germany in the 1950s do not easily fit the narrow categories of expulsion or economic migration.

The study begins in 1939 with the Nazi invasion of Poland and ends in 1951 with the end of deportations of "Germans" from Poland to East Germany. Kulczycki examines how German and Polish officials tried to determine the nationality of people in the borderlands throughout this period. The tendency was to move from purportedly objective signs of ethnicity to subjective assessments of an individual's virtues, past behavior, and attitude toward the current regime. Notably, Kulczycki does not himself use the term "ethnic cleansing" and at least in the Polish case seems to prefer the concept of "nationality cleansing," whereby "one had to declare one's national loyalty to Poland, not just exhibit Polish ethnic characteristics" (p. 120).

Kulczycki stresses the similarities in the nationalization policies of both Nazi Germany and Communist Poland. At the same time, the book is not simply a story of a "double occupation" by two totalitarian regimes. Instead, he focuses on the deeper historical roots and broader societal support for the implementation of nationalization in both cases. These include the intellectual enterprises of *Ostforschung* and the Polish Western Idea. The latter idea of promoting Poland's right to expand westward found expression in the Polish Western Union (Polski Związek Zachodni), an interwar nationalist organization that the Communist authorities reactivated not just to garner popular support but also to collaborate actively in the process of national verification. Two interrelated strands can be discerned here: who among interwar Poland's citizens was German

enough to warrant exclusion and expulsion, and who among interwar Germany's citizens, the *Reichsdeutsche*, might be Polish enough to stay?

Kulczycki focuses first and foremost on the so-called *Volksdeutsche*. Although the term had multiple and changing meanings, in postwar Poland it largely entailed the people of the borderlands who had been on the wartime German nationality list (Deutsche Volksliste, DVL). Yet the nationality list, with its four gradations that were each interpreted differently by Nazi officials in different regions, had included close to three million people, and postwar Polish authorities soon discovered the limitations and unfairness of using incomplete German records in establishing the Polishness of the autochthonous population in the borderlands. An overreliance on actual DVL registrations meant, for example, that voluntary applicants rejected by the Germans could evade postwar reprisals, in contrast to those who had been forcibly enrolled in the DVL.

Kulczycki reveals how the verification process gradually dragged in more and more people beyond the DVL registers as property became an incentive to find more *Volksdeutsche*. Resettlers frequently denounced autochthonous farmers as Germans in hopes of taking their land, while the cronyism of local officials also relied on the goods, forced labor, and sexual exploitation of purported Germans. Central authorities however became increasingly concerned over the possible loss of genuinely Polish inhabitants and the disaffection of the autochthonous population, and Kulczycki brilliantly shows the limits of Communist control in Warsaw over local powerbrokers.

Although Kulczycki seeks to show the parallels in German and Polish policies of ethnic cleansing and nationalization, the connections remain largely left undiscussed until the conclusion. It is clear that Kulczycki is more interested in examining Polonization than Germanization. In his synthesis of recent scholarship, he covers the German occupation in about 50 pages. In the remaining 250 pages on postwar Poland, however, Kulczycki provides a fuller and more satisfying analysis, in large part by drawing on a multivolume edited collection of documents.

Yet the reliance on edited collections that focus on "Germans" in various parts of Poland after the Second World War likely influenced the author's structure and findings. Small chapters (thirteen, excluding the introduction and conclusion) broken into numerous subsections allow Kulczycki to engage the challenge of covering geographical diversity and temporal changes, sometimes in a scattered manner. In one paragraph, for example, Kulczycki provides reactions to the introduction of collective farms in Kashubia, Łódź, Katowice, and Gdańsk. This geographic breadth, along with the author's tendency to give a close relation of the sources, resulted in sometimes detailed discussions of evidence. Moreover, the terminology often gets unwieldy: the book uses "autochthons" to encompass former Reich (non-German) citizens in Szczecin and Wrocław in the "recovered territories" as well as the *Volksdeutsche* populations of Łódź and Katowice in interwar Poland. Perhaps this unwieldiness underscores the sheer challenge historians face in writing about the complex geographies of nationalism. Finally, the discussion of Jews in postwar Poland uses mostly secondary sources and is limited to a few pages.

Despite his wide geographical coverage, Kulczycki leaves out the explanation of why there was still so much variation in official responses beyond the lack of central direction. Thus, a historiographical thread that could tie

the different pieces of the two regimes together is largely absent. The book would have benefited from stepping back more consistently in order to assess developments and connections. The term "national indifference," which is used throughout the book, could have provided such a narrative focus.

Yet it is clear that Kulczycki has written an engaging and deeply informative account of nationalization policies in the German-Polish borderlands. The book presents many of the findings of German and Polish scholars of the last twenty years in English and will be helpful to advanced students and scholars alike. Judicious and fairly written, the book reminds readers that the need to respect the cultural variety of the region remains relevant to this day.

Note

[1] On national indifference, see Tara Zahra, "Imagined Non-Communities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis," *Slavic Review* 69 (2010): 93-119.

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