



# CONFRONTATION AND COOPERATION

## 1000 YEARS OF POLISH–GERMAN–RUSSIAN RELATIONS

THE JOURNAL OF KOLEGIUM JAGIELLONSKIE TORUNSKA SZKOŁA WYŻSZA  
VOL. II: 38–49

DOI: 10.1515/conc-2015-0003

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# The Poles towards the Germans – German responsibility for war crimes

**Key words:** Polish-German relations, post-war history, German syndrome, Recovered Territories

## 1. Introduction

The question of how the German population was to be treated “the moment the war ended” was not an issue under the dispute amongst the Polish political parties. They were unanimous that the Germans should be removed. Only the modus operandi was the controversial matter. It was best expressed in the speech of Edward Ochab at the meeting of the Council of Ministers on 26<sup>th</sup> May 1945 when he stated, “The issue is not limited only to the problem of not allowing the Germans to return to the Polish territories, but it is about removing the Germans within the Polish borders, and there are around 2 millions 300 thousands of them. When it comes to removing the Germans there are three points to be considered: 1) a group of Germans should be already transported across the Oder, especially the unauthorized group 2) some Germans are employed as specialists and there is no doubt we will have to use their services for some time 3) some Germans, who cannot be transported across the Oder will have to be moved to the estates in the countryside”<sup>1</sup>.

The most heated discussions concerning this issue started, however, at the meetings of Rada Naukowa dla Zagadnień Ziem Odzyskanych (Science Council for the Issues of Recovered Territories). The most extreme attitude was presented at one of the sessions by Rajmund Buławski. He said that, “Under no circumstances, as far as I am concerned, can we let the Germans stay in the regained cities, even despite our population problems. This population ought to be, in my view, unconditionally displaced, even if larger cities in new territories were to be under-populated”<sup>2</sup>.

An entirely different standpoint was presented by B. Bukowski, who stated, “Robbed, destroyed, and deserted west is not an abstract term. Nowadays, there is the influx of not only the people who would like to hold the positions of clerks, or managers, also tradesmen and independent craftsmen. Skilled workmen from central areas will not come during the next ten years, not until this part of the country is overpopulated. The west

37 z posiedzenia Rady Ministrów z dnia 26 maja 1945 r., p. 396–397.

<sup>2</sup> AAN, Ministerstwo Ziem Odzyskanych, sygn. 1679, R. Buławski, *Problemy osadniczo-przesiedleńcze Ziem Nowych*. Wystąpienie na I Sesji RDdZZO 30VII–1VIII 1945, p. 49.

<sup>1</sup> Archiwum Akt Nowych w Warszawie (further AAN), Protokoły posiedzeń Rządu RP, sygn. 5/1087, Protokół nr

cannot wait, since the lack of manpower in industry and cities means economic disaster. Therefore, we should keep the locals and direct our nationality policy on this area at this perspective". Amongst the other E. Osmańczyk and S. Sokolewski supported this view, and participated in the discussion over the suggestions of solving the population problems in Wrocław. Assuming the necessity of leaving permanently some German inhabitants of Wrocław they put forward a bold initiative of making a census associated with the declaration of nationality. What was important in this idea was the fact that to prove Polish origins it was enough to present a Polish ancestor. The authors of this idea supposed that quite a lot of Germans would declare Polish origins, since, "when the hope to stay will result in discovering all Polish grandmothers, it will provide us with a politically significant number of Germanized. Picking biologically valuable (displacing with children will increase the numbers of Germans) and specialists [the Poles in spe] will give us the opportunity to show the world that we are treating the Germans right"<sup>3</sup>. It was assumed, then, that it might be necessary to make in this group a selection which aiming at choosing the most valuable individuals. These ideas weren't approved. However, as it turned out, the economic factor played a significant part in displacement, and the German skilled workers started to leave Poland in 1948 and 1949, or even as a result of the action of "reunifying families" in the 1950s.

## 2. Germans in Poland – removal

The fate of the Germans living in Poland was finally decided at the Potsdam conference. Removing them was just the question of time. Procedures regulating this issue are a common knowledge nowadays. However, too little attention was paid to its psychological conditioning. No doubt, the stereotype of a German rooted in the Polish society as a result of war experience played a significant part. One should agree with T. Szarota Polish population inhabiting : areas incorporated to the Third Reich, Generalne Gubernatorstwo (General Government), and the areas of former Kresy Wschodnie (Eastern borderlands), had war experience of different kind. Also individual experience was of great significance. There were different perspectives of: prisoners

of camps, POWs of oflags and stalags, the ones transported away to work in Germany, as well as the ones who stayed<sup>4</sup>. The majority of them couldn't compare the image of the Germans before the war and during it since they had had no previous contacts with them. The exceptions were amongst Polish intelligentsia due to their studies at German universities and the inhabitants of Mazowsze, Pomerania, Wielkopolska, and Silesia, for whom living next to the Germans was a daily routine. For this group of people the events that had place between 1939 and 1945 were a shock. The stereotype of a German they had as a person who could be characterized as hard-working, thrifty, order loving and good at organizing<sup>5</sup> was destroyed. The state of being surprised with this new situation was often transformed into hostility. Therefore, any contacts with the Germans were perceived as national treason.

The desire for revenge and hatred towards the Germans was reflected in the attitude of army and civilian administration after the war had ended. It was the most visible in the first months after the war. The commander of 2<sup>nd</sup> Armia Wojska Polskiego (Polish Army), general Sankowski in his order from 24<sup>th</sup> June 1945 recommended his soldiers to deal with the Germans, "the way they were dealing with us". Since, "many of them have forgotten what their actions towards our children, wives, and elders were like. The Czechs could do it in such a way that the Germans themselves left their territory. The tasks should be completed in tough and determined way, to make the German scum go out of their hiding, and escape on its own, and the moment they are on their territory thank God for staying alive. *Let's not forget that Germans will always be Germans* (italics by B.N.). Doing your orders don't ask, command"<sup>6</sup>. At the same time all contacts with the Germans were forbidden. Disobedience could result in severe consequences. It was experienced by, e.g. a political officer of 86<sup>th</sup> Pulk Artylerii Przeciwlotniczej (Regiment of Anti-aircraft Artillery), who got married to a *volksdeutsch*. He was degraded<sup>7</sup>. Numerous examples prove, however, that preventing the revenge actions against the Germans was much bigger problem than fraternizing with them.

<sup>4</sup> AAN, Ministerstwo Informacji i Propagandy, sygn. 937, Sprawozdanie specjalne wysłanników Polresu E. Osmańczyka i S. Sokolewskiego.

<sup>5</sup> T. Szarota, *Niemcy i Polska. Wzajemne postrzeganie i stereotypy*, Warszawa 1996, p. 139.

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem, p. 141.

<sup>7</sup> Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe w Rembertowie (CAW), Ludowe Wojsko Polskie, sygn. III/60/5, p. 135.

<sup>3</sup> AAN, Ministerstwo Administracji Publicznej, sygn. 2471, B. Bukowski, *Zaludnienie ziem zachodnich i odbudowa*, p. 12.

The only efficient method in this case was severe punishment<sup>8</sup>.

The desire for revenge was also clearly visible in actions of civil administration. It was reflected in various regulations directly discriminating against Germans. The good example of such were in some areas initiatives of setting up special districts for the Germans and marking them. Usually the local administration ordered the Germans to wear letter "G" on their clothes. Sometimes the size of the letter was determined. For instance, the city council in Kluczbork in śląsko-dąbrowskie district, in its circular from 19<sup>th</sup> July 1945 ordered, "All the Germans<sup>9</sup> starting from the age of 5 with no exception of sex should wear a symbol on their chests on the left side, which should be in the diamond shape of 6cm, white with the black letter G in the middle, that should be 4cm wide and long, and 1cm thick"<sup>10</sup>. Administration was justifying such actions in a variety of ways. Most frequently it stated that in this way they prevented the Germans from establishing underground organizations, illegal trade or using state means of transport<sup>11</sup>. Such activities were forbidden by the Minister of Public Administration on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1945<sup>12</sup>. The authorities even admitted that, "Taking into consideration the war brutality one can understand social attitudes, showing in the right to revenge, it is the duty of state and social organs to deal with such situations the way that wouldn't make us like the German barbarians"<sup>13</sup>.

The images of war still vivid among the society caused that nobody asked the question: whether the whole German nation was guilty? Should the group responsibility be applied? It was too early for that. The

war judgments and conclusions concerning the Germans didn't change. It is enough to take a look at programs of various political groups from that time to see views of the majority of the Polish society when it came to the responsibility of the Germans. They didn't differ in the principles, since e.g. in the directives of Delegatura Rządu RP na Kraj (Government Delegation for Poland) in 1944 it was stated, "Polish nation not only fights with the Hitler's system, which for us is just another form of perennial German desire to destroy the lives of other nations, but with the whole German nation, which must be broken and weakened definitely in such a way that it will no longer be a threat for the others. From the political perspective we don't distinguish between "good" and "evil" Germans., democratic and racist Germany, rejecting all the delusions that the West had after the Great War, and which had become the foundation of the rebirth of this evil European power"<sup>14</sup>. The national group was more radical and retaliatory in its attitude, assuming the responsibility of German nation for all crimes. In the circle of ORN-Szaniec there was a consent that Germans should be made fearful of causing another war. They wanted to achieve this by a bloody revenge action. Three Germans were to be held responsible for the death of one Pole. It was stated, that "The most vicious of all should die, i.e. Volksdeutsch, the Nazi oppressors should perish in pain, we will find them even in the most remote part of the world, German soldiers must fertilize our soil, since German rule was introduced by them in Poland. Let's not forget about Polish children murdered by the Germans. Even one German should not be spared from this country of tears and mourning, we must annihilate this wolfish tribe along with their cubs. German mothers must threaten their children with Poland for centuries and teach them that those who enter it don't stay alive. It will secure us against them much better that the greatest defense line"<sup>15</sup>. This wave of revenge was also the foundation for Polish communists.

It was only near the end of the war that actions were taken in order to differentiate the image of the enemy and overcome blind hatred directed at the German nation as a whole. It was visible in the programs of ZWZ-AK (the Home Army) as well as PPR. The attempts were made to

<sup>8</sup> CAW w Rembertowie, Korpus Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego, sygn. 1584/75/64, p. 231. The attitude of civilians, civil and military administration towards *volksdeutsch* people was often more hateful than towards the Germans.

<sup>9</sup> CAW w Rembertowie, Ludowe Wojsko Polskie, sygn. III/112/90, p. 2. The order of the command of the 9<sup>th</sup> division of infantry from 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1945: and so, e.g. the murderers of three German women and a 75-year old man, who were the soldiers of the 9<sup>th</sup> division of infantry, were punished by court with degradation and sent to Penal Company.

<sup>10</sup> In the post-war atmosphere of despise towards everything of German origin, the word „a German" was often spelled in Poland with a small letter.

<sup>11</sup> AAN, Ministerstwo Administracji Publicznej, Gabinet Ministra, sygn. 163, p. 19.

<sup>12</sup> Centralne Archiwum Ministerstwa Spraw Wewnętrznych i Administracji (CA MSWiA), Ministerstwo Administracji Publicznej, Departament Polityczny, sygn. 757.

<sup>13</sup> CA MSWiA, Ministerstwo Administracji Publicznej, Departament Polityczny, sygn. 303, p. 50.

<sup>14</sup> Archiwum Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych (A MSZ) Departament Polityczny, sygn. 18/81/7, p. 15.

<sup>15</sup> Quote from: W. Wrzeński, *Naród niemiecki w polskiej myśli politycznej lat II wojny światowej*, (w:) *Polska-Polacy-Mniejszości narodowe*, W. Wrzeński (ed.), Wrocław 1992, p. 97–98.

introduce different attitudes towards the German nation and the Nazi elites. The effects, however, were little and influenced only few circles of the society<sup>16</sup>.

The attitude of the majority of the Polish society towards the Germans was best expressed by slogans: “every German is a scoundrel”, “every German is a Nazi”, or the most powerful one “a good German is a dead German”<sup>17</sup>. There were also used the terms applied to the Nazis during the war. One of the best-known ones was: black son-of-a-bitch, general scoundrel, fat pig, a gentleman in an iron hat, a little Adolf<sup>18</sup>. The Germans were not considered to be human beings at all. The attitudes of the society were especially vivid in the mass participation in public executions of war criminals. The best example was the participation of 15 thousand inhabitants of Poznań during the hanging of the former gauleiter in Kraj Warty, Artur Greiser. The execution, which had place on 21<sup>st</sup> July 1946, was filmed. It was given the revenge meaning by the announcements places around the city in form of red posters informing about the execution. They looked the same as the ones on which the lists of sentenced Poles were printed during the occupation<sup>19</sup>. In the opinion of the authorities it must have been a kind of compensation for suffering and humiliation during the war<sup>20</sup>. Punishment in such a form was commonly approved of. Therefore, the sentences after the Nurmberg trial were received with disbelief. The outrage was expressed due to the mild treatment of some people and organizations that had been tried. In this context it is worth returning to the trial of A. Greiser and the speech of his Polish defender, Stanisław Hejmowski, Ph.D. This man severely experienced during the war, whose two brothers had been killed by the Germans, stated, that “no capital punishment will make victims alive, we shouldn’t take revenge, and the gallows cannot be the gate to our neighbour’s house”<sup>21</sup>. Such an attitude, however, bore general outrage and was rare.

<sup>16</sup> Ibidem, p. 99–100.

<sup>17</sup> E. Dimitrow, *Obraz Niemców w Polsce 1945–1948*, (w:) *Wokół stereotypów Polaków i Niemców*, W. Wrzesiński (ed.), Wrocław 1991, p. 186.

<sup>18</sup> T. Szarota, op. cit., p. 161.

<sup>19</sup> E. Dimitrow, op. cit., p. 190.

<sup>20</sup> E. Dimitrow, *Niemcy i okupacja hitlerowska w oczach Polaków. Poglądy i opinie z lat 1945–1948*, Warszawa 1987, p. 236.

<sup>21</sup> R. Stando, *Niefachowy stryczek*, “Dialog”, no. 1 of May 1997, p. 36. Hanging A. Greiner in such a clumsy way that he had been suffocating for ten minutes must have been a form of revenge.

In general opinion the Germans were the nation of “born killers”, automats for killing. Such a thought repeats in the majority of accounts concerning the first years after the war. They are the best material for studies on the state of mind of the society. Many of them are in the archives of Instytut Zachodni (Western Institute) in Poznań, as the works sent for the competition called “The diaries of the settlers on Recovered Territories” in 1956. They mainly refer to the period between 1945 and 1946, being the chronicle of both private and social lives. Most probably due to the period of time when they had been written, after October 1956, one can find in them honest and direct assessment of what had been happening on the western and northern territories<sup>22</sup>. The works for the competition “the description of my village”, which was announced in March 1948 by Instytut Prasy “Czytelnik”, are of similar character. They were collected in publication “Polish countryside 1939–1948”<sup>23</sup>. When it comes to newer projects of similar character we should mention the work “I have seen the face of a man”<sup>24</sup>, which aimed at proving that the Germans and the Poles didn’t only committed cruel acts towards each other, but there were also examples of, ‘sometimes small acts of men, women and children, who saved their humanity and helped them survive, and more often than ever had become the saviours for those they should have considered enemies’<sup>25</sup>. The competition that was held in 1992 by Instytut Socjologii Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego (the Sociology Institute), “I am a German in Poland”, was of similar character. 39 works were sent for it, some of which were published in *Dialog* from 1996<sup>26</sup>. Such projects make it easier to understand the conditions present “at the end of the war” in the Polish territories as well as mutual relations between the Poles and the Germans, also in the years before the war and many years afterwards.

For the newcomers the situation in the west and north was a complete surprise, being the turning point in their lives. One might have presumed that they would aim at “bloody payback”<sup>27</sup>. It was even more probable

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem, p. 36.

<sup>23</sup> *Pamiętniki osadnika Ziemi Odzyskanych*, Z. Dulczewski, A. Kwilecki (eds.), Poznań 1970, p. 5–9.

<sup>24</sup> *Wieś polska 1939–1948. Materiały konkursowe*, K. Kersten, T. Szarota (eds.), Warszawa 1967, p. 1070.

<sup>25</sup> *Ujrzałem twarz człowieka. Polsko-niemieckie kontakty przed 1945 rokiem i po wojnie*, D. Bach, W. Lesiuk (eds.), Opole 1995.

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem, p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> Z. Kurcz, *Śląskie losy – w świetle pamiętników*, „Dialog” no. 3–4, 1996.



since the revengeful slogans let many of them survive the hardest times. They lived hoping for the coming of justice and revenge. However, it didn't happen, even though the acts of looting and rape took place<sup>28</sup>. The first contacts with the Germans in so different, comparing to the war time, situation, raised most frequently the feelings of astonishment and surprise. They are best expressed in the account of a settler who got to Krosno Odtzańskie still during the war. "Passers-by whom I met in the streets, as he remarked, were the Germans, scared, miserable, mentally broken, embarrassed at the sight of my military uniform"<sup>29</sup>. This situation and the feeling of confusion are confirmed by the accounts of Germans. Waltraut Grote describes this period in the following way, "We were completely lost. We didn't know whether we had any rights we could refer to, shortly speaking we stumbled like the blind. We lived day by day, busy protecting our lives, no matter how. Therefore, we dealt only with practical issues. When will the next transport come? Where can we get some coal or potatoes? Such news spread in a second, but in fact contacts with the others, apart from at work, were scarce. Whether we wanted it or not we lived in isolation"<sup>30</sup>. Similar observations caused some acts of sympathy. However, they were condemned by the general public. Treating Germans in human way often resulted in violent actions. Zbigniew Żaba sharing with a German family a flat in Wrocław experienced this. After the years he wrote, "One day I was visited by a neighbour. All the tenants in our tenement house are furious with you, he concluded without any introduction. You've got four Jerry scum and you don't order them to work: scrub and clean floors, sweep, do the laundry. They are staying in your flat for free and don't pay you any rent. You rebel *our Germans* (italics by B.N.), because they refuse to do anything, raise their heads and give yours as an example"<sup>31</sup>. Such

behaviour might have turned out very dangerous, as it is presented in the account by Aleksander Bednarkiewicz who defended a German woman affronted by a militia man. "What he was beating her for I do not know, he wrote, but I defended her. Sod of you tyke, or I'll beat you too, and get where maybe you haven't been yet, responded the militia man. However, I didn't step back and actually found myself in the basement under Urząd Bezpieczeństwa (Security Office). There I was called a German scum, and have to give all personal information starting from birth, and since they had nothing against me, neither my origins nor my life, apart from my defending the German woman, they released me. They threatened to punish me if I get involved in the work of a militia man"<sup>32</sup>. Many Poles didn't approve of the acts of revenge towards Germans that had place after the war. It concerned especially those who managed to survive thanks to the help of the Germans. Expressing their gratitude they often risked their lives. It was like that in the case of an officer, who helped his former German employer escape from Polish prison. According to a later account of the rescued one's son the officer was to say, "I am an ex captive of yours. Please, forgive me for treating you so violently, but otherwise I wouldn't have been able to get you out of prison. Looking for you I visited all POW camps in Gdansk and its vicinity. *You know, we the real Poles don't approve of the harm that is done there* (italics by me – B.N.). We are the Poles and not communists. I'll take you now to my wife to Sopot, where we live"<sup>33</sup>. However, these were individual cases, concerning particular representatives of the German nation.

Therefore, they should not be generalized. The feelings of dislike and even hostility were the dominant ones<sup>34</sup>. There was a general opinion that the whole German nation was guilty of Nazi crimes, since they benefited from them<sup>35</sup>. This odium concerned not only people, but also the German language. Polish administration and population announced the war against it. Most of all, they were trying to get rid of it in public space. Local administration officials issued bans concerning the use of this language in all institutions. Clerks were obliged to immediate reactions whenever, "the German language was used by clients, or there were

<sup>28</sup> T. Szarota, op. cit., p. 167.

<sup>29</sup> E. Dimitrow, *Niemcy i okupacja hitlerowska...*, p. 228. The case of Paternborn got the biggest publicity. A fight between a group of Germans and a group of former Polish POWs resulted first in the death of a few Poles. As a revenge the friends of the killed ones attacked a German town, Farstenau, which they set on fire and killed seven of its inhabitants. As a result of an action brought against the participants of these events by the authorities of the British occupation zone there were even death sentences.

<sup>30</sup> Instytut Zachodni w Poznaniu (IZ w Poznaniu), *Wspomnienia*, sygn. P81, p. 56.

<sup>31</sup> W. Grote, *Własnego szczęścia nie można budować na cudzym nieszczęściu*, (w:) *Ujrzałem twarz człowieka*, p. 183–184.

<sup>32</sup> IZ w Poznaniu, *Wspomnienia*, sygn. P81, p. 103.

<sup>33</sup> IZ w Poznaniu, *Wspomnienia*, sygn. P24, p. 65–66.

<sup>34</sup> R. Graetsch, *Za pomoc odpłacono pomocą*, (w:) *Ujrzałem twarz człowieka*, p. 188–190.

<sup>35</sup> T. Szarota, op. cit., p. 163.

other signs of German presented by citizens of the Polish State (rehabilitated, verified), and people who behaved in this way ask for their IDs and send to Referat Społeczno-Polityczny (Social-Political Office) in order to check their citizenship: ones using the German language in street clerks are obliged to ask for IDs and deliver to the nearest Militia post (MO)”<sup>36</sup>. Despite this the German language could be heard everywhere. It was used not only by the Germans but also locals. There was a report to Urząd Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego (Public Security Office) in Katowice that priests prepare children for the first communion in this language, which was forbidden<sup>37</sup>. Such a situation was allowed only on demand in following cases: home confession and holy communion, home baptism, farewell of the passed away in the house of mourning, private preparation for confirmation or wedding. There was, however, a strict prohibition of using German: at public services, mourning ceremonies at church and cemetery, church choirs and RE lessons in church<sup>38</sup>.

German names of streets, road signs and information boards was also taken care of<sup>39</sup>. This issue had already been dealt with in July 1945. It was initiated by the Commander in Chief of Militia<sup>40</sup>. All the changes were being made at the expense of owners of particular objects, or their maintainers, e.g. community or city. The most attention, however, was paid to German writing. It was thoroughly controlled and classified<sup>41</sup>. Propaganda books and literary works were destroyed. Whereas the ones on science were given to libraries. In case of doubt the decision was left to a district or county qualification commission of German books<sup>42</sup>.

<sup>36</sup> E. Dimitrow, *Obraz Niemców w Polsce...*, p. 202.

<sup>37</sup> Archiwum Państwowe w Katowicach (AP w Katowicach) Urząd Wojewódzki w Katowicach, Wydział Społeczno-Polityczny, sygn. 551, p. 4. Zarządzenie wojewody śląsko-dąbrowskiego skierowane do starostów powiatowych i prezydentów miast.

<sup>38</sup> Archiwum Urzędu Ochrony Państwa w Katowicach (A UOP w Katowicach) Wojewódzki Urząd Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego w Katowicach, sygn. K/1-1, p. 224, Raport dekadowy za okres od 10 do 20 listopada 1946.

<sup>39</sup> Archiwum Biura do Spraw Wyznań, sygn. 13/95, p. 1.

<sup>40</sup> AAN, Ministerstwo Administracji Publicznej, Biuro Ziem Zachodnich, sygn. 2420, p. 1.

<sup>41</sup> Archiwum Komendy Wojewódzkiej Policji we Wrocławiu (A KPW we Wrocławiu) Raporty sytuacyjne Komend Powiatowych i Posterunków MO za 1945 rok z powiatu świdnickiego, sygn. 347/1, p. 65. Raport sytuacyjny za okres od 1.08. do 10.08.1945.

<sup>42</sup> AP w Katowicach, Urząd Wojewódzki w Katowicach, Wydział Społeczno-Polityczny, sygn. 351, p. 11.

Initially, the attitude towards remains of creations of German culture and art was far from the assumed one. They were frequently treated in “a blunt and barbarian way”. Nobody took into account that, “documents and other post-German artifacts could hide in themselves a disguised Polish content or the content common for both nations or for the world science”<sup>43</sup>.

From the reports of local administration officials (wojewoda) it is clearly visible that such an action was of largest scale in śląsko-dąbrowski district. It was the area inhabited mainly by indigenous people, who were strongly committed to their culture and tradition (deeply influenced by the Germans). The policy of Polish authorities caused among them the feeling of discontent and mutiny. Therefore, many of the local inhabitants made decisions about leaving to Germany. Using the German language in public places, as well as cultivation of the German culture was yet another sign of resistance.

As a result Polonizing activities of the administration frequently led to absurd situations. For instance, after inspection of Urząd Wojewódzki (District Office) in Olsztyn, which had place in December 1947, finding German inscriptions “frei” and “besetz” in the toilet was considered one of the most serious charges<sup>44</sup>. Commissions were also controlling private flats and issued orders to remove German inscriptions from crockery or even towels. Whereas in state institutions fire extinguishers and ashtrays weren’t spared<sup>45</sup>. The fight also concerned German forms and tickets, which were being used by the administration since there was the shortage of new ones. Such cases were still reported in 1948, but in some areas they had been sanctioned by local authorities. It was like that, e.g. in Krakow, where the president of the city allowed using German forms for the internal use in state institutions<sup>46</sup>. The discussion started, however, when on 4<sup>th</sup> May 1948 II Klinika Chorób Wenerycznych (the Clinic of Veneric Diseases) issued the death certificate of Wincenty Pstrowski on a German form. The head of śląsko-dąbrowskie district, A. Zawadzki, made an official statement in this case,

<sup>43</sup> Archiwum Państwowe w Opolu (AP w Opolu) Starostwo Powiatowe w Opolu, sygn. 113, p. 57.

<sup>44</sup> IZ w Poznaniu, Wspomnienia, sygn. P81, p. 65.

<sup>45</sup> CA MSWiA, Ministerstwo Ziem Odzyskanych, sygn. 48, p. 83. Sprawozdanie z lustracji Urzędu Wojewódzkiego w Olsztynie w dniach od 15 do 19 grudnia 1947.

<sup>46</sup> AP w Opolu, Starostwo Powiatowe w Opolu, sygn. 113, p. 8; AP w Zielonej Górze, Urząd Wojewódzki Poznański, sygn. 35, p. 120.

remarking that, “issuing the confirmation of death on a German form four years after the occupation had ended, especially for late Pstrowski, the first fighter of labour and leading democratic activist among miners, can be described only as highly tactless”<sup>47</sup>. To avoid similar situations MAP issued an ultimate ban on using any German forms<sup>48</sup>.

As a result there also appeared an idea to exclude the German language as a subject from Polish schools. The issue was discussed during the first after war Zjazd Oświatowy (Educational Assembly), which took place in Łódź in 1945. Eventually, it was decided that the subject would be excluded in the territories which during the war had been incorporated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Reich, whereas in other districts it would be limited to minimum<sup>49</sup>.

### 3. The presence of the Germans

However, it was of the resettling of German population that was the basic demand, commonly supported. Removing the Germans was the matter of the Polish national interest. Yet, in these conditions all looting that was following this process, was frequently justified and not treated as a crime. Thus, the Germans were deprived of everything, from personal belongings to flats and houses. Therefore, some of them in despair destroyed all their possessions, or abandoned it knowing that it would be taken away anyway. A description of such a situation can be found in an account of one of settlers in Kamienna Góra in Dolny Śląsk (Lower Silesia). This member of the settlement office of PUR, described how a German inhabitant of this town behaved in this way, “There was a case when some smart German displaced himself not waiting what we would do. It happened in Marciszowo, and not really a wealthy man was the main character. He wouldn’t have been displaced anyway be-

cause there was nothing he could be displaced from. This joker built for himself a shed made of planks in some abandoned little square, installed a door and window, and moved in. To emphasise that he was mocking our displacement, he put a notice board with an inscription *Klein aber mein* (*Small but mine*) over the entrance to his palace. It is understood, that nobody removed him from this “property” and the German marched straight from there to the train to Reich”<sup>50</sup>. Such presentation of the above events proved complete misunderstanding of the tragic situation the Germans were in. There were some signs of sympathy, which, however, disappeared the moment people realized what would have happened if the Germans had had the opportunity to come back. A meaningful example was presented in the account of Aleksander Bednarkiewicz, who came from Lwów, and after arrival to the west territories settled down in Darłowo. Since, he was given a house in which its German owner was still staying, he had an opportunity to observe her displacement. A large description of this situation was included in his later account, in which he wrote, “I wanted to say something to the German women, but I was speechless. I noticed that she was crying, saying something to me or herself, and packing her stuff. I was looking at her take down little portraits of young girls and boys, and an older man from the wall. She cleaned them with a cloth and was saying something to them, holding them. At this moment I didn’t have to know any German language., since I could feel the meaning of her crying and movements. Nobody had to translate to me what I was looking at. I could feel what this stranger woman was experiencing. . She was undergoing what I had already undergone”<sup>51</sup>. However, when the leaving woman said *Aufwiedersehen* (See you) he got scared that she was convinced she would return. There are many more examples like that. A lot of Poles experienced the same. On the one hand, they felt sorry for the Germans, on the other they didn’t want to lose the stability they achieved in such a difficult way.

Quite frequently, however, the presence of the Germans was considered indispensable. It resulted from the fact that they were taken advantage of as free man power. It was vivid especially in the countryside, where farms were deserted after the Germans had been removed, since these places were even left by their Polish owners. This phenomenon was confirmed by Henryk Zudro, who recalls, “And so the people not associated

<sup>47</sup> Archiwum Państwowe w Krakowie (AP w Krakowie) Urząd Wojewódzki Krakowski, Wydział Społeczno-Polityczny, sygn. UW II-802, brak nr stron, Pismo okólne prezydenta miasta Krakowa z 15 marca 1948.

<sup>48</sup> CA MSWiA, Ministerstwo Administracji Publicznej, sygn. 281, p. 56, Pismo wojewody śląsko-dąbrowskiego do MAP z 22 kwietnia 1948, p. 67.

<sup>49</sup> CA MSWiA, Ministerstwo Administracji Publicznej, sygn. 281, p. 56, Pismo wojewody śląsko-dąbrowskiego do MAP z 22 kwietnia 1948, p. 56. Severe consequences concerned also dr F. Siese, who issued the death certificate and the head of the clinic professor T. Tempka. They weren’t excused even by the fact that the hospital had received these forms from the central dispatch.

<sup>50</sup> E. Dimitrow, *Obraz Niemców w Polsce...*, p. 202–203.

<sup>51</sup> IZ w Poznaniu, Wspomnienia, sygn. P201, p. 14–15.

with agriculture, who received farms in the West casually and job thanks to work of the Germans, after he latter ones had been displaced sold whatever they could and either left to old Polish territories or started working in their proper professions”<sup>52</sup>. A similar account was given by the mayor of Darłowo, who was reporting the feelings accompanying displacement in the following way, “The displacing action concerning the Germans from the town and its vicinity was inconvenient, since each of them had in a far some German family who in the farm belonging to a Pole did some work, and a new owner of the farm was rather supervising this work than participating in it. Taking away German workers from Polish farmers was a radical move making Poles to start working themselves and was a small revolution, since it was necessary to break up with the life it was so far and change the role of employers into the life of hard-working providers of food for the country”<sup>53</sup>. The Germans were exploited mercilessly. In one of descriptions such an account can be found, “I witnessed such cases, when a German was pursued by UB for absence at work, and when he returned from there he looked really miserable, yet nobody had enough courage to defend them”<sup>54</sup>.

It was intended to treat Germans mainly as man power till the time of their displacement. For that reason they were divided into categories. The most useful were specialists employed in industry, who were relieved from displacement. As one of the authors of accounts, originating from Dolny Śląsk (Lower Silesia) remarked, “In this 1946 there were still a lot of the Germans and they taught settlers how to deal with weaving machines. The masters of German origin were leaving as the last ones as a rule”<sup>55</sup>. The authorities wanted healthy Germans, capable of working in fields, to stay longer. The first ones meant for leaving were the elderly, children, pregnant women and caretakers of minors. According to administration they were of little use, and a huge social burden.

Initially, authorities thought it would be possible to decide from above which kinds of work Germans should be directed to. They wanted to employ them mainly at priority construction sites, e.g.: Warsaw, ports and particularly destroyed cities, bridges, roads, as well as to work in factories, mainly in Śląsk (Silesia). There were warnings, however, that there was no point in

wasting the potential of German workers by, “starving them in work camps, employing in private workshops and companies, placing the Germans in office work, assuming that such a worker is convenient and cheap”<sup>56</sup>. However, nobody was applying these directives since not following wasn’t punished in any way.

Another form of discrimination against the German population was placing them in work camps, which started to appear right after the moving of the front. Repressions that were applied there often reminded of the ones used by the Nazis. The fact that there were no written set of rules in the camps conducted this. Therefore a commander of a camp had unlimited power. Quite frequently, like the other members of a camp staff, he was a casual man. Hence, numerous incidents had place in camps. Harrassment, beating and rapes were common there<sup>57</sup>.

There was the compulsion of work in all camps. People were to work both at the area of a camp as well as beyond it. In summer prisoners were often employed in nationalized farms. The conditions of work were usually tough. Such opinions are placed even in official reports. During one of sanitary controls in Pomerania district it was stated that, “in nationalized farms, where several thousand Germans work, the conditions are below any standards of hygiene. Quite frequently, in spring and summer period there are groups of over 200 people in one place. Prisoners are staying in inappropriate rooms, sleeping mainly on floors on stinky straw, don’t get any soap or soda for washing, work from dawn till dusk without holiday rest, so they don’t even have time to clean up their dwellings, wash dirty laundry or wash their hands. They are deprived of any medical or sanitary service, the number of ones with lice reaches up to 60%, and in some places even 100%”<sup>58</sup>.

<sup>56</sup> IZ w Poznaniu, Wspomnienia, sygn. P480128, p. 3.

<sup>57</sup> A MSZ, Departament Polityczny, sygn. 18/81/7. Problem niemiecki w Polsce w momencie dzisiejszego przełomu, opracowanie dyskusyjne, Toruń 20 listopada 1945, p. 17–18.

<sup>58</sup> CA MSWiA, Ministerstwo Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego, sygn. 84/25, p. 17. The report on medical and sanitary conditions at the work camp in Potulice in the period between 1<sup>st</sup> April 1947 and 31<sup>st</sup> April 1948. The rapes were a very serious problem which was confirmed in the report on the situation in Potulice in which it was pointed out that, ‘this issue gets complicated as far as young girls are sent to work beyond the camp, to farms or other places, coming back after a couple of months pregnant. After the investigation it turned out that mostly their superiors in the workplaces force them to sexual intercourse, which result in pregnancies’. Due to that a maternity ward was set up in the camp hospital, where 61 children were born in 1946, and 40 in 1947.

<sup>52</sup> IZ w Poznaniu, Wspomnienia, sygn. P24, p. 45–46.

<sup>53</sup> IZ w Poznaniu, Wspomnienia, sygn. P62, p. 23.

<sup>54</sup> *Pamiętniki osadników Ziemi Odzyskanych*, p. 81.

<sup>55</sup> IZ w Poznaniu, Wspomnienia, sygn. P24, p. 66.



Therefore, camps must have been a severe form of both physical and mental repressions. It is confirmed by high mortality rate. It was a tragedy for many Germans, but also Poles, since indigenous people were put in such places as well. These people were not only deprived of possessions, but also dignity, and in case of indigenous people, the will to stay in new homeland. Such an attitude was the result of not only camps but the whole system of harassment.

It had place even though from 3<sup>rd</sup> Jan. 1945 the decree of KRN on fighting against national, racial and denomination hatred was in force. It was stated there clearly that, "Active breeding and over blowing national, racial and denomination hatred or cooperation in such actions as well as any reprehensible actions caused by it, will be considered within the borders of the Republic of Poland actions against the state, and will be punished severely"<sup>59</sup>. The decree included the punishment from 5 to 15 years of prison. The attitude towards the Germans, however, proved that they were excluded from the decree.

Indigenous people were in similar situation, since they were hated too. Most frequently new comers from central Poland and east saw no difference between autochthons and Germans. It can be seen in an account of an indigenous woman, who despite her young age noticed problems that appeared in Śląsk Opolski after the liberation, and after years she wrote, "The Germans are to wear a white band on a sleeve and my Mum is wearing it. Once my Mum made a small white and red flag and placed it at the entrance, but there came three men and told her to remove it and said: Since when the Germans hang out the Polish flag. Mum told them in Polish but they replied, you must be volksdeutsch. Since then Mum has been wearing a white band and isn't trying to be a Pole for any price"<sup>60</sup>.

Few new comers, who took notice of the difficult situations the indigenous people were in, didn't took any interest in their fate any way. It was especially visible in Śląsk Opolski, where many farms formerly belonging to the indigenous people were given to new comers. Most often, however, two families had to stay in the same house, till the status of the owners was decided. As a rule placing new dwellers happened in a similar

way,"...a militia man led us into a flat, as one of new comers was describing, he made me choose a room which I wanted to have. I chose the first one, there were two beds, big wardrobes, a sewing machine and other stuff, along with us there came in the owner, and the militia man says to me: everything in the flat is yours, then we are going to a barn, there is a horse and two cows, here the militia man says, one cow is for you and you can milk it. And then we went on and I went to the flat to take rest, and here comes a Silesia man and asks me if he can take the sewing machine and I say that he can, and in a while he comes again and asks me if he can take his clothes and a hat from the wardrobe, you are welcome to, and in the evening he invited me with my family to his place and treated us in a friendly way"<sup>61</sup>. Thus, the author of the account did realize that it was a Silesia man and not a German, but it didn't make him think why he was treated like that. For the majority, however, this difference was difficult to comprehend, especially when it came to the issues concerning property. It is presented in suggestive way in an account of one of the displaced, "The Poles from my village are not happy that *Germans-indigenous people* (italics by B.N.) acquire equal rights. It could see it while talking with the neighbours. Polish settlers overtook farms after 1945, and then after some time, for instance after a year or three years, there comes a German and a Pole has to step back, go somewhere else and start from the scratch. Such cases had place in my village too. Young Germans and indigenous people speak German in public, and in evenings stroll along the street until late at night and sing in German"<sup>62</sup>.

Such a situation caused that the attitude of indigenous people towards authorities and new comers was getting more and more hostile. For many this looked forward to Poland was something perfect, and getting within its borders was to improve their situation. The reality turned out to be opposite, often even brutal. First encounters with the Poles were shocking for some. "I almost couldn't believe that they are Poles, states one indigenous woman, and we knew the Poles so well, the ones who were working at bauers. It was not a long time before when they bid us farewell with tears in their eyes. They promised to write to us and not forget. One of them even said that Silesia would be Polish, and Mother lived to see Poland". The conclusion she came up with was sad, yet very true, 'Now I understand, we belong

<sup>59</sup> CA MSWiA, Ministerstwo Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego, sygn. 94/24, p. 7, Sprawozdanie z działalności lekarsko-sanitarnej na terenie więzień i obozów województwa pomorskiego w okresie od 1.01.1946 do 31.03.1947.

<sup>60</sup> CA MSWiA, Ministerstwo Administracji Publicznej, Departament Polityczny, sygn. 264, p. 6.

<sup>61</sup> IZ w Poznaniu, Wspomnienia, sygn. P577-266, p. 10.

<sup>62</sup> IZ w Poznaniu, Wspomnienia, sygn. P54, p. 2.

to the Germans, and probably all have to suffer for the guilt of the guilty. It is a collective responsibility”<sup>63</sup>.

Such attitudes and descriptions appear in accounts of all indigenous inhabitants. To confirm this we can quote yet another account, whose author made an attempt to characterize the inhabitants of his village, “Indigenous – Poles, he wrote, are of great value, most of all Poles in their hearts and souls. The indigenous, only with Polish citizenship, but German soul, they are the people who will always act in opposition, since personally I do not believe that they could remove this German layer from their soul, because it is their permanent part and Polonizing courses which they attend are never successful, as their whole identity is against it! Anyway, there must be many years of scratching before this layer is removed. The third kind of people are the Poles who came to our village. When it comes to economy they are of less value, they don’t have this hard persistence at work, shortly speaking they don’t really like their work, whereas they have great abilities for drinking and taking what isn’t theirs”<sup>64</sup>.

This situation inevitably resulted in growing tendencies to leaving<sup>65</sup>, often stimulated by local administration, which was especially visible in the already mentioned Śląsk Opolski. This phenomenon was even mentioned by the press. Referring to it here appeared a question in *Dziennik Zachodni*, “Why are the inhabitants of opolskie region or indigenous Poles leaving? Can’t they find any occupation or they lack the means to live? Is it because they feel Germans!”<sup>66</sup>. It frequently happened against their will, because they were placed in displacement transports without their consent. Indigenous people often shared the fate of Germans. They were treated as ethnically alien.

Harm they experienced is best expressed by one of settlers, “I know the indigenous that were harmed by us. I know one whose house was taken away just because there were suspicions that he is a Pole of “doubtful value”, although his whole family spoke Polish fluently

and he served as a volunteer in Polish army and fought against Germans as an officer! I know one whose house was taken away only because it was suitable for a commerce point for a Cooperative. I know one, who teaches German hastily to his youngest son and who told me that he is leaving for Hannover, because here he is just a “szwab” and “German” and therefore he should be there and not in Poland. We caused them a lot of harm and we shouldn’t be surprised that they feel like strangers here and often want to leave”<sup>67</sup>. Many indigenous people often asked the question, “What should we do? They might set up a state for us on the moon. There is a hope for a homeland”<sup>68</sup>.

## Conclusions

So the hostility and hatred towards “strangers” treated in German categories had dreadful effects<sup>69</sup>. Additionally, they were stimulated by war animosities, as well as by chaos and poverty spreading in post-war reality. There was also the feeling of transience and internal split amongst the Poles. The phenomenon of anti-Germanism was the only integrating factor in the society. It was “a kind of a platform of national agreement”<sup>70</sup>.

In this considerations it is worth including suggestions of Włodzimierz Borodziej, according to whom, “The warning against the Germans and at the same time convincing oneself of superiority towards them actually originated from fear. The Poles were afraid that the history of mid-war period would repeat, the Germans would quickly get out from international custody, they were afraid that Poland would not survive another Hitler”<sup>71</sup>.

This is a very interesting thesis, which should be strengthened with the analysis of accounts. It is, though, confirmed by studies carried out in 1987 by Henryk Galus on several families from Lwów and Vilnius, settled in Gdańsk between 1945 and 1947. It was a questionnaire on the attitudes towards the Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians and Lithuanians as neighbours in Eastern borderlands as well as the Germans as neighbours in Pomerania. Answering the question almost everybody

<sup>63</sup> *Wieś polska 1939–1948...*, vol. 1, p. 104.

<sup>64</sup> *IZ w Poznaniu, Wspomnienia*, sygn. P577–266, p. 10.

<sup>65</sup> *Wieś polska 1939–1948...*, vol. 1, p. 92.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 11. There were even the situations when children wanted to leave Poland. We can refer to the account of the above mentioned author, It seems that Mother has already decided to stay. But it is impossible! I will not go now to the first grade? So will I never attend school? The children in the village beat us, call us “Szwaby”, we almost never go there now. I’m completely depressed! With my child mind I’m packing my stuff and tell Mother that I want to leave on my own in the last transport of the Germans.

<sup>67</sup> „*Dziennik Zachodni*” z 19.08.1946, no. 227, p. 3.

<sup>68</sup> *IZ w Poznaniu, Wspomnienia*, sygn. P201, p. 12–13.

<sup>69</sup> *IZ w Poznaniu, Wspomnienia*, sygn. P245–16, p. 6.

<sup>70</sup> H. Galus, *Syndrom niemiecki u ludności rodzimej i napływowej na Pomorzu Wschodnim*, „*Przegląd Zachodni*” no. 2 of 1991, p. 67–68.

<sup>71</sup> E. Dimitrow, *Obraz Niemców w Polsce...*, p. 208.

declared the sense of threat from the Germans. The fear was reasoned with the statement that they were less familiar and it was more difficult to defend against them in danger. At the same time interviewees pointed out that they know Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Lithuanians better. As a result this type of hostility was better-known to them. The sense of strangeness towards the Germans and the indigenous was also reinforced by encountering the objects of material culture. The situation had changed, however it was along-term process<sup>72</sup>.

Nowadays the attitude towards the issue of the responsibility of the German nation has undergone a complete transformation. As the time goes by war wounds have healed and anti-German feelings have weakened. The words "a German" and "the Germans" have lost their pejorative connotation. Such an attitude can be observed mainly in the behaviour of people who were not prejudiced as a result of previous direct contacts. As a rule it refers to younger generation. Large material confirming this phenomenon was provided by the research conducted at the beginning of the 1980s. A couple of comments from that time can be the considered essential. There were the words on "understanding certain truths", "pleasant surprise that there are different kinds of people among them", and noticing humans in the Germans. The change, however, is best reflected in the statement, "now everything is different. We can't keep on saying wrong things. What happened is remembered, but we mustn't dwell on the past all the time"<sup>73</sup>. Therefore, German syndrome has acquired another meaning.

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<sup>72</sup> W. Borodziej, *Posiew nienawiści*, "Przegląd katolicki", no. 44 of 1.11.1987.

<sup>73</sup> H. Galus, op. cit., p. 65–66.



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