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On the margins of ethnic cleansing in Poland 1945–1949: The fate of German citizens who could claim non-German ethnicity after the Second World War

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The Second World War had a devastating impact on Poland and its population. In the first phase of the war, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union collaborated in the destruction of the country, each seizing control of half of its territory. In the eastern half, the Soviets oversaw violent political cleansing and radical social and economic changes. As part of this, hundreds of thousands of Polish citizens were sent eastwards to the Soviet interior. In the western half, the German occupiers quickly destroyed the top layer of Polish society, then moved to ghettoise the Jewish population and expel hundreds of thousands of Polish citizens eastwards from territory which had been annexed to Germany. In June 1941, the Third Reich attacked the USSR and took control of all of Poland. It then began its genocide against Europe's Jews, using Poland as the unwilling host for the murder of three million Polish Jews and many hundreds of thousands more from other countries. Germany's terror and violence also claimed the lives of up to three million non-Jewish Poles.

Poland emerged from this horror politically, economically, socially and ethnically transformed. But the transformations continued after the war. A new communist-controlled government – levered into power by Moscow after July 1944 – oversaw further radical political, economic and social restructuring, and also the continued ethnic re-ordering of the population. The latter was intertwined with a similarly massive territorial transformation: the Soviet Union annexed pre-war eastern Poland in 1944, then persuaded the Western Allies to compensate Poland with vast territories from Germany, the latter confirmed at the Potsdam Conference in summer 1945. The loss of Poland's eastern territories removed the majority of the country's large interwar Ukrainian and Belorussian minorities, but the addition of pre-war German territories brought millions of new German residents within Poland. Around five million of the latter had fled pre-war eastern Germany in the final months of the war, to escape the arriving Red Army, never to return. However, there were still over 4.5 million remaining there once the war was over – about half of them concentrated in the least war-affected southern region of Lower Silesia[1].

Yet the post-war ethnic changes were no simple by-product of territorial shifts. Poland's communist-controlled government actively implemented a campaign to bring Polish ethnic homogeneity to the whole of this previously highly multi-ethnic country (in which almost one-third had declared non-Polish

1 H. Service, *Germans to Poles: Communism, Nationalism and Ethnic Cleansing after the Second World War*, Cambridge 2013, pp. 14–30, 48–52, 324.

ethnicity in interwar censuses). Stalin fully supported and facilitated this campaign – believing that a more ethnically homogeneous Poland would benefit the USSR's security and geopolitical interests. Domestically, too, the campaign was backed by parties across Poland's truncated post-war political spectrum and by wide sections of society. As Marcin Zaremba has argued, the traumatic experiences of war and occupation had instilled a collective "fear" in Poland's population, which manifested itself, among other ways, in a heightened intolerance for ethnic "others"[2]. The primary "others" in the immediate post-war landscape were Germans and Ukrainians. In September 1944, Poland's *de facto* government signed population exchange agreements with the Soviet authorities, enabling the removal of just under half a million of the remaining ethnic Ukrainians from Poland to the USSR by 1946. Then, in several phases, and with the active assistance of all three main Allied Powers, the government uprooted around 3.6 million Germans from Poland to Germany during 1945–1949, the vast majority of them German citizens living in pre-war German territories (meaning around 7.5 million were displaced from these territories in total, including the previous mass flight in the final months of the war). Only around four million Polish settlers were brought to these territories to replace the Germans by the end of the 1940s – around 1.3 million of them so-called "repatriates" transported from Poland's lost eastern territories as part of the Soviet exchange agreements[3].

This essay will focus on the region of Lower Silesia (*Dolny Śląsk* in Polish, *Niederschlesien* in German). Lower Silesia was a large region in pre-war Germany's eastern territories which, like most other parts of these territories (the main exceptions being western Upper Silesia and southern East Prussia – more on which below) had an overwhelmingly ethnically German population before 1945: meaning German citizens who spoke German as their first language and regarded themselves as Germans. As such the ethnic cleansing process in this region was almost exclusively a matter of expelling the remaining German population and repopulating the region with Poles. However, what happened on the margins of this ethnic cleansing process? Did all the German citizens living in Lower Silesia before the war actually regard themselves ethnically as Germans, and were the small numbers who did not expelled too? What about German citizens who had been systematically excluded from the German ethno-racial community (*Volksgemeinschaft*) under

2 M. Zaremba, *Wielka Trwoga: Polska 1944–1947*, Kraków 2012, especially pp. 555–556.

3 H. Service, *op. cit.*, pp. 48–52, 315–333.

the Nazis – were they expelled too? This essay will address these questions by looking at three sets of people holding German citizenship in Lower Silesia, which each had a basis to claim non-German ethnicity in the immediate aftermath of the war: Jews, Poles and Czechs. It will do so through a local case study of Hirschberg/Jelenia Góra District (*Kreis*, *powiat*) – a mountainous district located in southern Lower Silesia, next to Czechoslovakia's northern border, with 115,000 inhabitants before the war. Using this case study, this essay will examine how, despite the near-comprehensive character of the ethnic cleansing process in Lower Silesia and most other areas of Poland's new territories, small "ethnic escape routes" were opened up on the margins of this process, which certain sets of Germans citizens were able to take to avoid expulsion[4]. It will argue that, while these people were small in number, their fates shed significant light on the basic character, parameters and objectives of the Polish government's ethnic cleansing campaign after the Second World War.

German Jews

The first set of people we will examine are the small number of surviving German Jews (German-speaking and holding German citizenship) who remained in, or returned to, Lower Silesia at the war's end. In the immediate aftermath of the war, the Polish government seemed to offer them an ethnic exemption from the expulsion of Germans, on the basis that they had been ethno-racially excluded from the German *Volksgemeinschaft* in the Nazi period. Most of the few German Jews who survived Nazi Germany's genocide without emigrating abroad, did so through the relative protection of being married to a non-Jewish German or being categorised as a "partial Jew" (*Mischling*). However, others survived in camps, in hiding or using false identity papers. Many of Lower Silesia's surviving Jews migrated immediately to Allied-occupied Germany at the war's end, en route to Palestine and elsewhere overseas. But up to 2,000 attempted to resume life in the region after liberation, particularly in its main city, Breslau/Wrocław, but

4 This essay will not examine non-ethnic "escape routes" from expulsion for German citizens, such as the political one of official recognition as an "anti-fascist" of the Nazi period – a status which exempted people from certain anti-German measures, but, ultimately, did not offer real protection from expulsion to Germany. See H. Service, *op. cit.*, pp. 280, 331; R. Douglas, *Orderly and Humane: The Expulsion of Germans after the Second World War*, New Haven 2012, pp. 191–192.

also in locations elsewhere, including in our case-study location, Hirschberg/Jelenia Góra District. In this district, unusually, German Jews formed the majority of Jewish residents in summer 1945, numbering probably over 100 individuals and, aside from Wrocław's, this district's German Jewish population remained the region's main one over the next couple of years[5].

Before we move further into what happened to German Jews in Lower Silesia, we should address the connected fate of the many Polish Jews who settled in this region in the early post-war period. Most Jewish people who survived the genocide in Nazi forced labour camps in Lower Silesia were not German citizens, but citizens of East-Central European countries, especially Poland. Many of the thousands of Polish Jews who reached liberation in these camps decided to remain in this region after the war, recognising that it was becoming part of Poland and had suffered much less war-damage than their home areas. Very soon after the war, a group of Polish Jewish survivors of the Reichenbach camp convinced the new Central Committee of Jews in Poland (CKŻP) in Warsaw, and via that institution the Polish government, to adopt a plan to turn Lower Silesia into the post-war home for Poland's Jews. The CKŻP began advertising the region as an ideal destination for Jewish survivors to restart their lives, and the government directed trains there carrying Polish Jewish "repatriates" from Poland's lost eastern territories and from the Soviet interior. The result was that by spring 1946 there were over 80,000 Polish Jews living in Lower Silesia – not a small proportion of the roughly 300,000 Polish Jews who survived the Holocaust[6]. This new large Polish Jewish population and its highly developed organisational life – involving CKŻP regional and local committees, political parties, religious associations, newspapers, cooperatives and diverse cultural activities – were a significant part of the general context in which many of Lower

5 Archiwum Państwowe we Wrocławiu Oddział w Jeleniej Górze (hereafter APJG), 123/II/18, report by JG starosta, 6 VIII 1945, pp. 3–26; B. Szaynok, *Ludność żydowska na Dolnym Śląsku 1945–1950*, Wrocław 2000, pp. 26–27, 42, 106–108; H. Hirsch, *Gehen oder bleiben? Deutsche und Polnische Juden in Schlesien und Pommern, 1945–1957*, Göttingen 2011, pp. 33, 52.

6 D. Stola, *Jewish emigration from communist Poland: the decline of Polish Jewry in the aftermath of the Holocaust*', "East European Jewish Affairs," vol. 47 (2017), no. 2–3, pp. 169–179; A. Cichopek-Gajraj, *Beyond Violence: Jewish Survivors in Poland and Slovakia, 1944–1948*, Cambridge 2014, pp. 155, 179–212; B. Szaynok, *op. cit.*, pp. 26–28, 44–55; E. Waszkiewicz, *A History of Jewish Settlement in Lower Silesia, 1945–1950*, "Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry," vol. 23 (2011), pp. 507–519; H. Service, *op. cit.*, pp. 214–229; B. Gutterman, *A Narrow Bridge to Life: Jewish Forced Labor and Survival in the Gross-Rosen Camp System, 1940–1945*, New York 2008, pp. 2, 95–99.

Silesia's surviving German Jews attempted to restart their lives at the war's end. Yet although the most important of the Polish Jewish institutions – the CKŻP's committees – did make some efforts to help German Jews, generally they treated them as outsiders to their community. In our case-study location, Jelenia Góra District, the situation was slightly different because there German Jews outnumbered Polish ones at first, and the local Jewish committee was led initially by the former. However, by early 1946 hundreds more Polish Jews had arrived and they soon constituted the large majority of the local Jewish population[7].

Yet a more important part of the circumstances facing German Jews in Lower Silesia was the actions being taken against Germans at this time. As mentioned, around half of the Germans remaining in Poland's new western and northern territories (pre-war eastern Germany) at the war's end were in Lower Silesia. In June to July 1945, the Polish military and local civilian authorities carried out disorderly expulsions against the remaining German population, attempting to march them to Allied-occupied Germany. These unsystematic expulsions had only a modest impact in terms of uprooting the remaining German population; nevertheless, they drove home the message that the new territories were now hostile lands for Germans. At the same time, hundreds of thousands of Polish settlers started arriving, mostly on State Repatriation Office trains, in Poland's new territories from its pre-war territories; these settlers included "repatriates" from the lost eastern lands. In the parts of the new territories where large numbers of German residents remained after the war's end, such as southern Lower Silesia, this put huge pressure on available housing and resources. Germans were forced by the new local government authorities to take settlers into their homes or crammed into other housing to make room for them. The authorities also subjected Germans to various measures of segregation and exclusion – including the compulsion to wear white armbands, forced labour and expropriation – partly with the aim of inducing them to leave for Germany "voluntarily"[8].

7 APJG, 123/II/18, report by JG starosta, 6 VIII 1945, pp. 3–26; Archiwum Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego, Warsaw, 303/V/62, table compiled by the CKŻP's records and statistics dept on the no. of Jews registered with each Jewish committee in January, July and December 1946, undated, pp. 1–3; B. Szaynok, *op. cit.*, pp. 27–43, 50, 56–78; H. Hirsch, *op. cit.*, pp. 33, 40–43, 52; A.R. Hofmann, *Die Nachkriegszeit in Schlesien: Gesellschafts- und Bevölkerungspolitik in den polnischen Siedlungsgebieten 1945–1948*, Köln 2000, pp. 373–375.

8 H. Service, *Reinterpreting the Expulsion of Germans from Poland, 1945–1949*, "Journal of Contemporary History," vol. 3 (2012), pp. 536–539; H. Service, *Germans to Poles...*, pp. 92–103.

Complaints made by the CKŻP, its local committees and the affected individuals to the government authorities makes clear that German Jews in Lower Silesia were often subjected to these anti-German measures. Not quite two months after the war's end, on 27 June 1945, Poland's Ministry of Public Administration issued an instruction stipulating that German Jews must be exempted from wearing white armbands, forced labour, expropriation and forced resettlement. However, this seems to have made little difference to how they were treated locally, which was more dependent on local official attitudes than on central directives[9]. We can turn to Jelenia Góra District for illustration of this. Evidently unaware of the ministry's late June 1945 instruction, in early August Jelenia Gora District's chief local government official (*starosta*) asked Lower Silesia's regional governor (from 1946: *wojewoda*), Stanisław Piaskowski, how Jews without Polish citizenship should be treated, at the same time explicitly questioning their property rights. In a follow-up letter in mid-September 1945, he added that many Germans were joining the local Jewish committee merely "to protect their property from possible takeover by Poles". But at the same time, he suggested that German Jews should be provided with documents to protect them because it "would be unjust to treat these people one and all as being equal to Germans". Meanwhile, also in mid-September 1945, Jelenia Góra's local branch of the Office of Public Security (post-war Poland's political police) instructed the district's Jewish committee to withdraw from German Jews membership and documents protecting them from anti-German measures[10]. Clearly, then, there were some rather mixed views among Jelenia Góra District's key officials on the status of German Jews, and it is evident that the ministry's clear instruction to exempt them fully from anti-German measures had not arrived or was being ignored.

In particular, German Jews do not seem to have been exempted from expropriation measures during the first year after the war. The district's Jewish committee, therefore, felt the need to intervene against this. For example, during December 1945 it managed to get the authorities to reverse two such confiscations, but failed in a third case[11]. One individual who experienced

9 B. Szaynok, *op. cit.*, pp. 42–43, 56; H. Hirsch, *op. cit.*, pp. 35–39; K. Čapková, *Germans or Jews? German-Speaking Jews in Poland and Czechoslovakia after World War II*, "Kwartalnik Historii Żydów," vol. 2 (2013), p. 350; A. Hofmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 373–377.

10 A. Cichopek-Gajraj, *op. cit.*, p. 161–163; B. Szaynok, *op. cit.*, pp. 42–43; K. Čapkova, *op. cit.*, pp. 350–351; A. Hofmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 372–374; H. Hirsch, *op. cit.*, pp. 42–43.

11 A. Hofmann, *op. cit.*, p. 375.

this during 1946 was a 72-year-old German Jewish woman, Auguste Thiel, who survived the Theresienstadt camp in pre-war Czechoslovakia and returned after the war to the guesthouse she ran in the small town of Szklarska Poręba (Schreiberhau) in Jelenia Góra District. In April 1946 the town's Polish mayor (*wójt*) and chief of police (*Milicja Obywatelska*) assisted a Soviet commander in forcing her and her non-Jewish German staff out of the guesthouse so that the Soviet and his people could occupy it. When she lodged an official complaint about this, the *starosta* gave her formal permission to return to the property. However, still in October 1946 the situation remained unresolved, and it is not clear what the eventual outcome was[12].

This had happened despite the fact that this particular woman was reportedly in possession of a "temporary certificate of Polish ethnicity [*narodowość*]", issued by the district's local government (*starostwo*)[13]. We will discuss the process by which German citizens could gain "verification" as "autochthonous" Poles in the next section. The important point to note here is that, despite the 27 June 1945 ministerial instruction that German Jews must be exempted from anti-German measures, including expropriation and forced resettlement, it appears that many felt the only realistic way of getting protection from these actions was acquiring official categorisation as an ethnic Pole. As historian Anna Cichopek-Gajraj has shown, the government actually issued instructions and legislation in the period August 1945 to April 1946 which seemed to indicate that all Jews, regardless of previous citizenship or language, could gain "temporary certificates of Polish ethnicity", opening the pathway for acquiring Polish citizenship. But in practice this seems to have been very difficult. It may be that only those German Jews who had some way of demonstrating genuine ancestry in Poland were generally successful. Lower Silesia's regional Jewish committee reported in the early post-war period that most German Jews who applied for these certificates were rejected. An example from Jelenia Góra District is Ilse Kriege from Cieplice Śląskie (Bad Warmbrunn), a Jewish woman married to a non-Jewish German dentist, whose application was unsuccessful[14].

Combined with the difficult general conditions, the government's deliberate fostering of a hostile environment for Germans achieved the desired effect, causing hundreds of thousands of Germans to leave Lower Silesia and the rest

12 A. Cichopek-Gajraj, *op. cit.*, p. 163; B. Szaynok, *op. cit.*, p. 56; H. Hirsch, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

13 A. Cichopek-Gajraj, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

14 A. Cichopek-Gajraj, *op. cit.*, pp. 160–165; K. Čapkova, *op. cit.*, pp. 348–362; H. Hirsch, *op. cit.*, pp. 38, 51–52; A. Hofmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 371–377; B. Szaynok, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

of Poland's new territories "voluntarily" during 1945. They did so individually and in groups; by foot, horse-drawn cart, lorry, bus and train; with and without the assistance of the Polish government authorities. Many German Jews were part of this migration. A particularly large number of Lower Silesia's German Jews – reportedly almost 1,100 – left Wrocław in September 1945 on four buses arranged in cooperation with Erfurt's Jewish community. The Polish authorities also organised at least one train for German Jews after November 1945. The region's German Jewish population must, therefore, have already been greatly depleted by the end of 1945[15].

Around one million of the over 4.5 million German citizens remaining in Poland's new territories immediately after the war had been displaced to Germany by the end of 1945 – through a combination of disorderly summer expulsions, pressured migration, and a number of expulsions using cargo trains in the later months of the year[16]. In February 1946, a much more organised and systematic mass displacement of Germans by rail got under way – now overseen by the Allied Powers in accordance with their Potsdam Agreement of August 1945. Cargo trains full of Germans travelled during 1946, first to the British Occupation Zone of Germany, and from July also to the Soviet Zone. The first train from Lower Silesia departed from Wrocław on 19 February 1946 and trains began leaving from other Lower Silesian locations in the weeks following. Many of the region's remaining German Jews were on these trains. Returning to our case study, the first displacement train departed from Jelenia Góra on 23 May 1946, with many more leaving during the following months, carrying many tens of thousands of local Germans to Germany. One witness claimed that many of the district's remaining German Jews had already been transported to Germany on a displacement train before this, in March 1946. If this information is correct, it must have involved travelling voluntarily to another location in Lower Silesia to board a displacement train. This was actually quite common among the region's remaining German citizens at this time because, although this was unambiguously a forced expulsion process for non-Jewish Germans, many decided to bring their inevitable expulsion forwards by boarding trains elsewhere[17].

15 On the participation of German Jews in this migration see H. Hirsch, *op. cit.*, pp. 45–47; A. Hofmann, *op. cit.*, p. 375. More generally on this pressured "voluntary" migration, see: H. Service, *Germans to Poles*..., pp. 102–103.

16 *Ibidem*, p. 328.

17 *Ibidem*, pp. 104–106; H. Hirsch, *op. cit.*, pp. 48–49; B. Szaynok, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

It is clear, then, that some German Jews were transported on these displacement trains during 1946. What is less clear is whether they were compulsorily transported – that is, forcibly expelled – as was the case for the general German population. Turning again to our case-study location, there is no concrete evidence that our district's remaining German Jews were compulsorily transported during 1946. However, in September 1946, shortly before a second phase of displacement trains got under way there, the official in charge of population movements within Jelenia Góra District sent a letter to Lower Silesia's Voivodship Government in Wrocław asking two questions: should "German citizens of Jewish descent" be displaced from the district? And if so, should they undergo "voluntary displacement" or "forced displacement like the Germans"? Lower Silesia's Commissar for Repatriation Issues, Roman Fundowicz, was unable to answer this himself, so forwarded it to the Main Delegate for Repatriation Issues at the Ministry for Recovered Territories, Józef Jaroszek. The latter's response was brief and vague: "I must stress that it is our task to repatriate the German population"[18]. However, the fact that Lower Silesia's key official overseeing the expulsion had no clear policy on this makes it very possible that Jews were among the Germans compulsorily transported from Lower Silesia during 1946, perhaps also from Jelenia Góra District.

However they departed, voluntarily or compulsorily, only a handful of the up to 2,000 surviving German Jews living in Lower Silesia in summer 1945 remained after the organised expulsion of Germans was largely finished in mid-1947. Local government authorities registered a total of only 130 German Jews in the whole of Lower Silesia at that time, including 30 in Wrocław and 20 in Jelenia Góra[19].

With the vast majority of German Jews already gone, in June 1947 the Ministry of Recovered Territories drafted legislation which would have allowed any German Jew who could demonstrate a "loyal attitude" towards the Polish nation – but importantly not requiring them to demonstrate Polish ethnicity in any sense – the right to remain in Poland. But this proposal seems to have later been dropped[20]. We know that some Jews holding German citizenship did manage to remain living in Lower Silesia beyond the 1940s and that some

18 Archiwum Państwowe we Wrocławiu (hereafter APW), 331/VI/359, letter from JG starostwo's soc-pol dept, 11 IX 1946; letter from Fundowicz, 30 IX 1946; letter from Jaroszek, 30 X 1946, p. 64.

19 B. Szaynok, *op. cit.*, pp. 107–108; Hirsch, *op. cit.*, p. 52; A. Hofmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 375–377.

20 A. Hofmann, *op. cit.*, p. 376.

probably did so through being "verified" as "autochthonous" Poles. However, there were actually two other possible routes which German citizens, whether Jewish or non-Jewish, could take to remain. One was being married to a Polish citizen or to a "verified" "autochthonous" Pole. The other was being categorised as a worker with indispensable skills. In short, it is possible that most remaining German Jews fell into these last two categories, rather than being "verified" as ethnic Poles[21].

Regarding Jelenia Góra District's wider German population, it had already shrunk to around 90,000 individuals before the systematic displacement operation began in May 1946. The overwhelming majority were then transported from the district in three phases between then and October 1947, with a further 800 or so sent in 1948–1949. This left an officially registered German population numbering roughly 1,500 remaining beyond the 1940s[22].

Overall, then, German Jews in Poland's new territories only had slightly greater scope for avoiding anti-German measures, including expulsion, than the general German population. Most did avoid forceful expulsion, but only because they left before the systematic displacement transports got going in their localities in spring 1946. And there is good reason to believe they probably would not have generally avoided compulsory displacement to Germany had they stayed. There were certain ways to avoid this fate and even acquire Polish citizenship, but in practice these were not available to most German Jews. The Polish government contemplated making all German Jews eligible to remain as permanent residents, but did not ultimately follow through with this. German Jews were not the target of the government's post-war ethnic cleansing campaign and, in that sense, they stood on the margins of it. However, in practice they were largely swept up into it together with non-Jewish Germans.

German Poles

Another set of German citizens with a potential ethnic basis to avoid expulsion were those the Polish government regarded as "autochthonous" Poles. There were two regions in Poland's new western and northern territories where a large

21 In contrast, the potential *political* route for German citizens to avoid displacement, namely official recognition as an "anti-fascist" of the Nazi period, turned out to offer little protection from expulsion. See footnote 4 above.

22 H. Service, *Germans to Poles*..., pp. 104–124.

proportion of local people spoke Polish dialects (often alongside German): western Upper Silesia and southern East Prussia. In the former, the post-war authorities developed an ethnic "verification" process from spring 1945 onwards, ostensibly aimed at sifting ethnic Poles from Germans among the local population, so that the former could apply for Polish citizenship and the latter could be expelled. This model was gradually adopted elsewhere, including southern East Prussia, and the government standardised the process for the whole of Poland's new territories in April 1946. Although presented as a stringent ethnic screening process, the practice of verification in western Upper Silesia was clearly geared around categorising the large majority of remaining locals as Poles – meaning only those with very overt German identities or highly dubious Nazi-era records (but mere Nazi Party membership was generally no obstacle) were rejected from positive verification. The result was that 851,000 German citizens were verified as Poles in this region in the early post-war period – comprising 56 per cent of the entire pre-war population and the vast majority of the just over one million German citizens verified as autochthonous Poles in Poland's new territories as a whole. Southern East Prussia's authorities were also keen to categorise large numbers of locals as autochthonous Poles, but for a variety of reasons, only a small minority took up this opportunity, most instead choosing to depart to Germany. In the north-eastern corner of Lower Silesia, too, there had been significant numbers of Polish-dialect speakers before 1945, but, again, most never submitted verification applications before departing to Germany[23].

But what happened in the majority of localities in Poland's new territories where, until 1945, the overwhelming majority of local people had spoken only German and regarded themselves as Germans? This was true of most districts in Lower Silesia, including Jelenia Góra District. Although local authorities in Lower Silesia had already begun issuing "temporary certificates of Polish ethnicity"

23 G. Strauchold, *Autochtoni polscy, niemieccy czy… Od nacjonalizmu do komunizmu (1945–1999)*, Toruń 2001; J. Misztal, *Weryfikacja narodowościowa na Ziemiach Odzyskanych*, Warszawa 1990; H. Service, *Upper Silesia in the Age of the Ethnically Homogeneous Nation-State*, in: J. Bjork, T. Kamusella, T. Wilson, A. Novikov (eds.), *Creating Nationality in Central Europe, 1880–1950*, London 2016, pp. 200–203; R. Blanke, *Polish-Speaking Germans? Language and National Identity among the Masurians since 1871*, Köln 2001, pp. 279–310; A. Hofmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 326–330; S. Jankowiak, *Flucht, Vertreibung und Zwangsaussiedlung der Deutschen aus der Wojewodschaft Breslau (Województwo Wrocławskie) in den Jahren 1945 bis 1950: Die Jahre 1946–1950*, in: W. Borodziej, H. Lemberg (eds.), *"Unsere Heimat ist uns ein fremdes Land geworden…"*, vol. 4, Marburg 2004, pp. 427–432.

to certain individuals in 1945, the regional government does not seem to have started to orchestrate a more systematic verification process until after April 1946, prompted by the Ministry of Recovered Territories' 6 April order aimed at standardising verification processes across these territories[24]. In Jelenia Góra District, two verification committees were established in late spring 1946 to evaluate applications, one serving residents of Jelenia Góra town, the other covering the rest of the district. Based on the committees' decisions, "temporary certificates" were issued to successful applicants by the district's *starostwo* or by Jelenia Góra's town administration, giving these people eligibility to apply for Polish citizenship. From 1947, the verification committees were then dissolved and the Office of Public Security took charge of screening the applications[25]. In total, around 2,000 residents of Jelenia Góra District submitted verification applications between 1946 and 1949. Of these, 1229 – roughly 60 per cent – received positive decisions. Around 17,000 people were verified as autochthonous Poles in Lower Silesia as a whole[26].

Who exactly were these German citizens verified as autochthonous Poles in Jelenia Góra District in the early post-war years? It is very likely that some were not actually pre-war residents of the district, but rather post-war migrants from western Upper Silesia[27]. Another set were almost certainly Poland-born

24 A. Hofmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 301, 326–331; S. Jankowiak, *op. cit.*, pp. 427–432; G. Strauchold, *op. cit.*, p. 51; A. Cichopek-Gajraj, *op. cit.*, pp. 160, 163.

25 APW, 331/VI/35, report by JG starostwo's soc-pol dept, 31 VIII 1946, pp. 32–34; APW, 331/VI/31, report JG town admin, 2 III 1946, pp. 7–23; APW, 331/VI/51, report by JG starosta, 1 IV 1947, pp. 15–16; APW, 331/VI/34, report by JG town admin, 31 VII 1946, pp. 25–27; APJG, 123/II/21, report by JG starosta on year 1947, undated, pp. 248–279.

26 APW, 331/VI/50, report by JG town president, 23 VI 1949, pp. 121–125; APJG, 130/47, report by JG town admin's settlement dept, 18 VI 1947, pp. 219–221; APW, 331/VI/51, report by JG starosta, 1 IV 1947, pp. 15–16; APJG, 123/II/21, report by deputy JG starosta, 23 VIII 1947, pp. 223–229; APJG, 123/II/20, report by JG starosta, 20 IX 1947, pp. 123–124; APW, 331/VI/51, report by JG starosta, 2 XI 1948, pp. 77–78; APW, 331/VI/51, report by JG starosta, 3 XII 1948, pp. 79–81; APW, 331/VI/51, report by JG starosta, start III 1949, pp. 98–100; APW, 331/VI/50, report by deputy JG town president, 23 VI 1949, pp. 121–125; APW, 331/VI/50, report by JG town president, 31 V 1949, p. 119; APW, 331/VI/50, report by JG town president, 23 VI 1949, pp. 121–125; APW, 331/VI/51, report by JG town president, 29 IX 1949, pp. 143–151; APW, 331/VI/50, report by JG town president, 30 XII 1949, pp. 141–149; APW, 331/VI/51, report by JG starosta, 6 VII 1949, pp. 137–142; A. Hofmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 326–330; S. Jankowiak, *op. cit.*, pp. 430, 432; G. Strauchold, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

27 APW, 331/VI/51, report by JG starosta, 6 VII 1949, pp. 137–142; Bundesarchiv Bayreuth, Ost-Dokumentation (hereafter BOD), 1/207, testimony by Albert S., Schreiberhau, undated, pp. 183–195; BOD, 1/207, testimony by Oskar S., Berbisdorf, undated, pp. 29–32; BOD 2/188, testimony by Walter S.-G., Niederschreiberhau, 10 I 1948, pp. 175–197.

individuals who had migrated to Germany and lost their Polish citizenship at some point before the war[28]. However, it is clear a significant number were long-resident locals who had never previously felt strong connections to Polishness or to Poland. As suggested in the previous section, some may have been German Jews, but much more numerous were the non-Jewish locals who were positively verified[29]. Since this part of Lower Silesia was not one in which local people before 1945 had spoken Polish dialects, these must have been individuals able to show some ancestral connection to Poland or able to find other means, perhaps including bribery, to convince officials of their Polish credentials. Paul H. from the small town of Bad Warmbrunn/Cieplice Śląskie claimed, in his post-war testimony, that a "few Germans discovered [...] their old Polish great, great, great grandmother. They ran into the offices of the Polish authorities and told them that they wanted to become genuine upright Poles"[30]. Robert W. from the village of Ludwigsdorf/Chromiec remembered that one local villager could prove her Polish descent so was not transported to Germany with the other locals in 1946 – choosing to remain after leaving her husband for the Polish settler sharing their home[31]. On the other hand, one *starostwo* official claimed in summer 1946 that many residents had been verified as autochthonous Poles "who did not really have a single trace of Polish roots"[32].

In short, as the case of Jelenia Góra District illustrates, despite the ultimately systematic and near-comprehensive character of the ethnic cleansing process in Lower Silesia and most other regions of Poland's new territories, an "ethnic escape route" was opened up on the margins of this process allowing some local German citizens to avoid expulsion. This ethnic exit path arose because the post-war communist-controlled government did not only aim to

28 S. Jankowiak, *op. cit.*, pp. 430–431; APW, 331/VI/38, report by JG starosta, 2 XII 1946, pp. 96–97.

29 APJG, 123/II/20, Report by JG starosta, 31 I 1949, pp. 240–244; APW, 331/VI/35, report by JG starostwo's soc-pol dept, 31 VIII 1946, pp. 32–34; APW, 331/VI/51, report by JG starosta, 1 II 1947, pp. 1–4; APW, 331/VI/51, report by JG starosta, 31 V 1947, pp. 20–21; BOD, 1/207, testimony by Richard K., Eichberg, undated, pp. 57–58; testimony by Willi F., Schmiedeberg, 2 VIII 1955, BOD, 1/207, 171–175; BOD, 1/207, testimony by Paul H., Bad Warmbrunn, 10 IX 1958, pp. 243–249; BOD, 1/207, testimony by Gustav H., Krummhübel, 14 III 1950, pp. 115–121; BOD, 1/207, testimony by Alfred E., Kupferberg, undated, pp. 127–130; S.. Czepułkowski, *W Karpaczu*, in: A. Kotlarska (ed.), *Pamiętniki mieszkańców Dolnego Śląska*, Wrocław 1978, p. 297; S. Jankowiak, *op. cit.*, pp. 429, 431–432; A. Hofmann, *op. cit.*, p. 329.

30 BOD, 1/207, testimony by Paul H., Bad Warmbrunn, 10 IX 1958, pp. 243–249.

31 BOD, 1/207, testimony by Robert W., Ludwigsdorf, undated, pp. 133–138.

32 APW, 331/VI/34, reports by JG starostwo's soc-pol dept, 30 VII 1946, 31 VIII 1946, pp. 3–37; S. Jankowiak, *op. cit.*, p. 430.

make the territories' inhabitants homogeneously Polish; it also sought to give the takeover of these territories some sort of ethnic legitimacy, by finding native Poles living across them. This meant finding "autochthons" not only in the main Polish-dialect-speaking areas of western Upper Silesia and southern East Prussia, but also in the previously German-speaking locations, such as Jelenia Góra District.

German Czechs

The final set of German citizens we will examine was far more marginal to the overall ethnic cleansing process in Poland's new territories: ethnic Czechs. The only area in these territories with a significant population of ethnic Czechs was around Kłodzko (Glatz) in south-eastern Lower Silesia. Up to 8,000 were living there in 1945. Although not a huge population, their presence provided the ethnic rationale for Czechoslovak forces to attempt an annexation of that area in May to June 1945. This brought Czechoslovak and Polish forces near to armed conflict, but the Soviets prevented this and ensured the area became part of post-war Poland. Most of the area's ethnic Czechs decided to relocate to Czechoslovakia during the early post-war years, but some remained. Much like the verification process outlined above, the Polish authorities subjected them to an ethnic screening process in these years, aimed at sifting out the Germans for expulsion but allowing the ethnic Czechs to remain in Poland. By late spring 1947 just over 1,000 had been verified as ethnic Czechs, while 434 applicants had been categorised as Germans to be expelled. All other local ethnic Czechs migrated voluntarily to Czechoslovakia[33].

Outside the Kłodzko area, across the southern belt of Lower Silesia, there were much smaller pockets of ethnic Czechs. Historian Tomasz Kamusella has suggested that by 1945 almost all these people were German-speakers with only vague memories of their Czech ethnic origins[34]. Yet, as we saw in the previous section, even the most tenuous connection to ethnic non-Germanness could open up a pathway out of expulsion.

33 T. Kamusella, *The Dynamics of Policies of Ethnic Cleansing in Silesia in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Budapest 1999, p. 334.

34 *Ibidem*, p. 268.

We can turn once again to our case study, Jelenia Góra District, to examine what happened in practice to these people. This district actually contained quite a significant number of people claiming Czech ethnicity after the war – several hundred individuals according to the district's *starostwo*. Some of these may have migrated from Czechoslovakia in the interwar period, but the majority were probably long-established locals. In the second half of 1945, the district's authorities tried to induce some – perhaps only the recent immigrants among them – to migrate to Czechoslovakia. Around a dozen families reportedly did so by the end of the year. In the early period the local authorities also seized homes from a number of residents who were later verified as ethnic Czechs, forcing officials to hand these back to them in early autumn 1946. A more systematic ethnic screening process for ethnic Czechs does not seem to have begun in this district until the second half of 1947, when a "mixed Polish–Czechoslovak verification committee" started work there. Much like the verification process for ethnic Poles examined in the previous section, this committee aimed to distinguish between ethnic Czechs and Germans among the applicants. However, unlike in the main verification process, the successful applicants apparently received Czechoslovak rather than Polish citizenship. Yet that still enabled them to remain and retain their homes in the district – only those categorised as Germans were expelled. By September 1947 the committee had rejected applications from around 130 individuals, designating them for expulsion to Germany. How many people the committee positively verified as ethnic Czechs and therefore allowed to remain beyond the 1940s is uncertain, but it most probably exceeded 100 individuals[35].

In the Kłodzko area, most of the people verified as ethnic Czechs chose not to stay put in the long term: 90 per cent of them had already left for Czechoslovakia by 1950[36]. It seems unlikely the same happened in Jelenia Góra District, as lingering anxieties over the recent Czechoslovak–Polish territorial dispute were presumably a key push factor in the Kłodzko area, but not present here.

35 APJG, 123/II/18, report by JG starosta, 6 VIII 1945, pp. 3–26; APJG, 123/II/18, report by JG starostwo's soc-pol dept, 3 IX 1945, pp. 86–88; APJG, 123/II/18, report by JG starosta, 3 XI 1945, pp. 127–132; APJG 123/II/18, report by JG starosta, 5 XII 1945, pp. 185–200; APJG 123/II/18, report by JG starosta, 5 I 1946, pp. 206–214; APW, 331/VI/36, report by JG starostwo's soc-pol dept, 30 IX 1946, pp. 24–25; APJG, 130/47, report by JG town admin's settlement dept, 18 VI 1947, pp. 219–221; APW 331/VI/51, report by deputy JG starosta, 31 VII 1947, pp. 26–27; APJG, 123/II/20, report by JG starostwo's soc-pol dept, 26 IX 1947, pp. 136–137.

36 T. Kamusella, *op. cit.*, p. 334.

In any case, this verification process had enabled a noticeable number of local German citizens to avoid expulsion from Poland, comprising another "ethnic escape route" from the post-war ethnic cleansing campaign.

Conclusion

In his important study of population policy in early post-war Silesia, Andreas Hofmann discussed how Jews with German citizenship "took on a notable in-between position [*Zwischenstellung*] with their membership of German culture and society on the one hand and their status as victims of Nazi racial policy on the other, in which they formed a particular kind of touchstone for the nationalities policy of the Polish government"[37]. For Hofmann, the case of the German Jews revealed that the aim of this ethnic cleansing policy was to rid Silesia of all carriers of German language and culture, irrespective of whether they were perpetrators, bystanders or victims of Nazi crimes. In broad agreement with this, our discussion of German Jews showed how the vast majority of survivors who tried to return to life in Lower Silesia after the war, were sooner or later swept up into the general uprooting of Germans, whether this happened in an overtly forced or ostensibly voluntary way.

In fact, all three sets of German citizens we have examined occupied some sort of "in-between" position in Poland's post-war ethnic cleansing campaign – an uncertain position on the margins of the main dynamics of this ethnic transformation – from which they each seemed to have some chance of avoiding forced relocation, but nevertheless were more likely than not to get sucked into it in the end. To some extent, what all three sets of German citizens highlight is just how comprehensive the ethnic cleansing process in Lower Silesia and the rest of Poland's new western and northern territories was. If we put aside the rather distinct case of western Upper Silesia, the number of German citizens who attempted these ethnicity-based routes out of expulsion was very small compared to the overall number expelled – and all faced significant obstacles in securing their ethnic basis to remain in Poland. To be clear, the main story to tell of this early post-war ethnic transformation is that the vast majority of remaining German citizens were expelled and replaced by millions of Polish citizens.

37 A. Hofmann, *op. cit.*, p. 372.

Nevertheless, by examining these three cases, we have added important nuance to the general picture of this ethnic cleansing process. The case of German Jews reveals that the post-war Polish government was not intent from the outset on uprooting all Germans, in that it seriously considered exempting those Germans who had been persecuted as Jews under the Nazis. Ultimately, however, it did not follow through with this and, as we have seen, the small number of German Jews who remained after the 1940s, probably did not generally do so on the basis of their Jewish ethnicity. The cases of "verified" Czechs and Poles, in turn, tell us something about the limits and compromises of the ethnic cleansing campaign. By consciously keeping a Czech minority in place in Lower Silesia, albeit a very small one, the government authorities showed they were not pursuing the objective of Polish ethnic homogeneity to its logical extreme (and it is beyond the scope of this study, but the same could be said of the fact that around 140,000 ethnic Ukrainians or Lemkos were resettled from south-eastern Poland to Poland's new territories from 1947). Somewhat differently, by verifying as autochthonous Poles many local people who were only able to speak German and felt little or no connection to Polish culture or society, the authorities showed a readiness to prioritise another objective over that of comprehensively de-Germanising and Polonising the population of the new territories. This competing objective was the desire to give Poland's Allied-backed takeover of these territories some sort of ethnic legitimacy, by demonstrating that there were already autochthonous Poles living there. And specifically: by demonstrating that these native Poles lived not only in the interwar German–Polish borderland-region of Upper Silesia, but also in localities deep into pre-war German territory, such as Jelenia Góra District. As mentioned above, another important compromise in the ethnic cleansing process was the government's decision to retain quite a large number of Germans deemed to have indispensable work skills – but this is a somewhat different case to the ones we have focused on in this essay, since these people were exempted on economic not ethnic grounds, and the government viewed this only as a temporary necessity.

Overall, what the fates of the Germans Jews, German Poles and German Czechs of Lower Silesia highlight is that the way the Polish government authorities ethnically cleansed this region and the rest of Poland's new western and northern territories after the war, while often violent, disorderly and involving much local arbitrariness, was not uncompromising and without moments of moral hesitation. Most of the German citizens who attempted to take these ethnic escape routes out of expulsion, probably failed in their efforts. However,

some succeeded. And their continued presence in Lower Silesia and other regions in Poland's new territories was one of the ways in which a degree of ethnic heterogeneity survived beyond the 1940s.

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On the margins of ethnic cleansing in Poland 1945–1949: The fate of German citizens who could claim non-German ethnicity after the Second World War

Abstract

After the devastating Nazi German occupation of Poland during the Second World War, Poland's communist-controlled government pursued a campaign to bring Polish ethnic homogeneity to this previously multi-ethnic country in the years 1944–1949. In most of the territories which Poland gained from Germany at the war's end this centred on the expulsion of the remaining Germans and their replacement with Polish settlers. But what happened on the margins of this ethnic cleansing process? This essay will focus on the region of Lower Silesia, examining the "ethnic escape routes" which seemed to open up for certain German citizens to avoid expulsion in these years, specifically through Jewish, Polish or Czech ethnicity. Using a local case study, it will argue that while these people were small in number, their fates shed significant light on the basic character, parameters and objectives of the Polish government's ethnic cleansing campaign after the war. In particular, they reveal how local arbitrariness intervened, but also important ways that this campaign was deliberately not taken to the extremes it could have been, allowing a degree of ethnic heterogeneity to survive beyond the 1940s.

Keywords

Postwar Poland, Nazi Germany, Lower Silesia, 1945, ethnic cleansing, expulsion, Germans, Jews, Poles, Czechs, ethnicity, ethnic screening

Słowa kluczowe

powojenna Polska, III Rzesza, Dolny Śląsk, 1945, czystki etniczne, wysiedlenie, Niemcy, Żydzi, Polacy, Czesi, narodowość (etniczna), weryfikacja etniczna