Grzegorz Strauchold
Institute of History, University of Wrocław

Ethnic issues and the functioning of Silesia as a region in the years 1918-1945

Abstract:

The 20th century was among the most dramatic in the history of Silesia. At the turn of the 20th century, Prussia and the German Reich as a whole saw the emergence of a modern German nation. As a result, the German nation, dominant in Silesia, was to become a paragon for all ethnically non-German populations. Social changes resulting from World War I cemented the formation of the German nation and also hastened the formation of Polish national sentiment in Upper Silesia. At the same time, a group of Upper Silesians not possessed of the idea of belonging to a nation while feeling strongly connected to their region was always in existence, and this group does not lend itself readily to easy analysis. Attention must also be paid to the activities of Silesian nationals (the so called Schlonsaken).

The partition of Silesia (primarily Upper Silesia) between Germany and a reconstituted Poland had a chaotic influence on the worldview of many of the inhabitants of this land. Many Germans found themselves within the borders of the new Polish state, which they did not accept, while many Upper Silesians felt dissatisfied and unappreciated within the Polish Republic. During World War II, Upper Silesia, which previously captured both German and Polish identities, was subjected to an intensive policy of Germanization following its unlawful incorporation into the Reich in 1939. This policy also attracted many to the ideas of National Socialism. These factors were undoubtedly both cohesive and disruptive to the inhabitants of this land.

Keywords:

Czechisation, Germanisation, Polonisation, Silesianess

The ethnic situation in Silesia prior to the outbreak of the Great War[1]

The inhabitants of German Silesia in the period before the Great War showed remarkable differences in their views regarding affiliation to national communities. The territory was populated by indigenous Germans, descendants of settlers who

[1] On the subject of the history of Silesia and its inhabitants see the following recently published papers: Michał Lis, *Górny Śląsk. Zarys dziejów do połowy XX wieku*, Opole 2001; Joachim Bahlcke et al., *Śląsk i Ślązacy*, transl. Michał Misiorny, Zofia Rybicka, Warszawa 2001 (original title: *Schlesien und die Schlesier*, München 1996); *Historia Śląska*, ed. Marek Czapliński, Wrocław 2002; Piotr Pregiel, Tomasz Przerwa, *Dzieje Śląska*, Wrocław 2005; *Dolny Śląsk. Monografia historyczna*; Arno Herzig, Krzysztof Ruchniewicz, Małgorzata Ruchniewicz, *Śląsk i jego dzieje*, Wrocław 2012 (original title: Arno Herzig, *Schlesien. Das Lan Und Seine Geschichte in Bildern, Texten und Dokumenten*, Hamburg 2008); *Historia Górnego Śląska. Polityka, gospodarka i kultura*; *Opole. Dzieje i tradycja*, eds Bernard Linek, Krzysztof Tarka, Urszula Zajączkowska, Opole 2011.

had come there as early as the Middle Ages. In Lower Silesia, indigenous Germans made up a predominate portion of the total population.

Throughout the late modern period they had a sense of national connection with their compatriots inhabiting historically German territories. These feelings had been intensifying throughout the 19th century alongside the formation of the modern German nation[2]. That is what led to integration between the Silesian Germans and the remaining German-speaking groups that were residing in the territory of the unifying Germany.

At the same time, when the German territories were unified 'by fire and sword' in 1871 by Prussia and 'little Germany' as it was known, was born, a several-decades-long process of rallying the German people around their new ideological homeland began, as personified by the Protestant Hohenzollerns. This process started from the moment of Habsburg Silesia's incorporation into the Prussian state in the mid-18th century and was virtually completed in the closing decades of the 19th century in Protestant Lower Silesia[3].

The situation in Upper Silesia where the majority of the population was Catholic was quite different. This group was largely influenced by the Centre Party, which did not act against the state of the Hohenzollerns, as a political subject, but which nonetheless frequently remained in long-term opposition to Prussian political elites. Upper Silesian Catholics, who were devoid of a sense of German nationality, began to consolidate around this party. What is more, they were seeking the Party's support against Berlin's pro-Germanisation policy to develop a uniform German nation within the boundaries of the Reich. This therefore continued at least up until the close of the 19th century a process of disintegration, which was in addition, destructive for the state's unification policy.

At the same time the inhabitants of both parts of Silesia who were German by conviction included Germans who were of Slavonic origin but who underwent a centuries-long process of voluntary assimilation. Their attitude mirrored that of the direct descendants of German settlers.

At the outset of the 19th century it was hard to estimate the number of people of Slavonic descent who had only recently developed their sense of German nationality. Several reasons lay at the root of them doing so. This was the result of a conscious

[2] Cf. the extensive chapter entitled 'Problem tożsamości narodowej na ziemiach niemieckich w XIX w. i pierwszym trzydziestoleciu XX w.', in: Joanna Nowosielska-Sobel, *Od ziemi rodzinnej ku ojczyźnie ideologicznej. Ruch ochrony stron ojczystych (Heimatschutz) ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem Śląska (1871-1933)*, Wrocław 2013, pp. 35-131.

[3] Cf. Heinrich August Winkler, *Długa droga na Zachód*, vol. 1: *Dzieje Niemiec 1806-1933*, Wrocław 2007 (orig.: *Der Lange Weg nach Westen*, Band 1: *Deutsche Geschichte vom Ende des Alten Reiches bis zum Untergang der Weimarer Republik*, München 2005), chapters 5. and 6., pp. 205-353.

and intensive Germanisation policy conducted by the Prussian (and German) state, as well as conscious, opportunistic decisions made with the intention of secure for oneself an easier career. This was the result of independent processes of assimilation, where the attractiveness of the German culture and civilisation made part of Slavonic Silesians draw closer to the German nation. Nonetheless, independently of the aforementioned reasons (which naturally occurred in various combinations) these people identified themselves-when it came both to words and deeds (i.e. election choices) with the German nation. Therefore from the German point of view the aforementioned intentions were a factor which both attracted people to 'Germanness' and at the same time drew them away from their indigenous, Slavonic 'Silesianness'.

Just prior to the First World War a relatively large group of newly-arrived immigrant German specialists, officials, industrial managers, bank officials etc. lived in the Silesian territories – which was particularly conspicuous in Upper Silesia. This community constituted another component of the German Silesian ethnic group and their conduct was typical for other German inhabitants of this territory. What is more, they fully identified themselves with their German ideological homeland as personified by the dynasty of Hohenzollerns that ruled both in Prussia and in the German Reich.

In (mostly Upper) Silesia these were the Slavs that constituted the majority of the population[4]. Nonetheless, I would like to highlight that such an ethnic origin cannot be automatically regarded as tantamount to Polish nationality. Silesia (mainly Upper) provides us with an excellent example to support the aforementioned statement. The majority of Silesians of Slavonic origin who inhabited this region were characterized by wavering views on the subject of their nationality. Moreover the boundaries of their affiliation to one or another nationality were fuzzy and are difficult to precisely define. When it comes to this particularly large group – whose actual size is hard to estimate – it is even difficult to determine the shape of their views connected with the issue of national affiliation; these people, throughout their history, particularly for reasons of their plebeian background and the fact that they resided on the outskirts of the Habsburg state, and later the Kingdom of Prussia, had no opportunity whatsoever to form an opinion in this respect. Connected by a local, small-scale rural culture (transplanted to the industrial cities they migrated to in search of work) they were first and foremost characterized by their sense of being Silesian. And this quality – with the exception of certain groups – was at the

[4] A great deal of literature has been devoted to this issue. Cf.: *Śląsk – etniczno-kulturowa wspólnota i różnorodność*, ed. Barbara Bazielich, Wrocław 1995. Papers included in this study refer also to ethnic aspects.

time not yet coupled with a sense of being part of a Silesian nation in the modern sense of this expression. Both this ethnic and ethnographic majority was no doubt ready to be endowed with nationality. Its attitude towards the German nation, which reigned in Silesia up until 1919 were dependent on the nation-building taking place at that time and industrialization-related processes, as well as on the force of Prussian (and also German) statehood. Hence, in the case of these people, it would be difficult to determine the principal processes which attracted or drew them away from 'Germanness'. At the same time it is important to notice that the adoption of certain national attitudes constituted a disintegrating factor for the local, deeply-rooted communities. Yet, what needs to be underscored here is that there, in fact, hardly existed only one local Silesian community. People focused on their Catholic faith, which they regarded as a universal, traditional system of moral values. In their everyday life however they focused on their immediate surroundings. They cultivated local occupations, customs and dialects. Very many of them saw the region of their residence as their most important point of reference. When it comes to Upper Silesia the situation of the people of the region was very complex[5].

What should, however, be pointed out once more is that this was – excluding a small group of Slavonic Protestants from nearby Namysłów (Namslau) – an entirely Catholic population. Religious affiliation determined the behaviour of the indigenous Silesians even much later and came to the surface even in the early years of Nazi rule in Germany.

The territory of Upper Silesia was also inhabited by a small group (difficult to precisely define), which was characterized by a sense of belonging to the Polish nation[6]. Over time such attitudes were adopted by successive members of the local Silesian community. These phenomena were connected with the national revival in the period of the Spring of Nations (1848/49). In the Russian, Prussian and Austrian Partition, which at the close of the 18th century extended to the territories of the former Commonwealth of Poland, in the second half of the 19th century concepts of 'rebuilding' Polish independence emerged. They aimed not only to regain at least part of the late Commonwealth territories but also to extend the newly reborn state by territories which were not included in the partitions but inhabited by ethnically

[5] Cf. on the subject of the region's role: Heidi Hein, *Region jako punkt wyjścia do badań nad kwestiami narodowymi. Znaczenie mitów, symboli, rytuałów i kultów*, [in:] *Górny Śląsk wyobrażony*, pp. 36-51. When it comes to discourse on the subject of factors which integrated and disintegrated regional communities in this territory cf. also: Piotr Madajczyk, *Obcość jako wyznacznik*, pp. 109-122 and previous chapter in this book written by Tomasz Przerwa, *Social structure and social groups in the processes of integration and disintegration of Silesia as a region (1918-1945)*.

[6] Ryszard Kaczmarek, *Ludzie – stosunki demograficzne, struktura społeczna, podziały wyznaniowe, etniczne i narodowościowe*, [in:] *Historia Górnego Śląska*, pp. 39-56.

Polish communities. It was Prussian Upper Silesia that was basically considered to be such a territory[7]. And it was on this territory that the Polonisation campaign, as it became known, was conducted by Józef Lompa and Karol Miarka. The native Upper Silesian activist[8] Wojciech Korfanty was increasingly more successful[9].

This task was not easy especially because Poles had, for decades, been deprived of their own, independent state and they could appeal to the Silesian community only by means of religious arguments (where Catholicism could indeed be associated with 'Polishness') and historical/sentimental arguments. This was all the more so difficult because Silesia had been part of the Polish state only stretching back to the Middle Ages, and no representatives of the Silesian-Polish nobility, which would evidence this fact, had managed to survive until the period of history under discussion. Hence, it was particularly difficult for the Silesian, Slavonic masses to identify themselves with a state that they were actually unfamiliar with. The group of Silesians whom the Polonisation campaign was targeting was only slowly beginning to consider arguments emphasizing the old, glorious history of the Polish state.

A phenomenon which exerted a substantial influence on the history of the German East was the *Ostflucht* as it was known. Western Germany, richer and securing better labour conditions, received an immense influx of immigrants. Upper Silesia was being deserted by both indigenous peasants and industrial labourers. Because of this the local communities were deprived of their most energetic and resourceful members. The Silesians who migrated and settled there were more often than not exposed to overwhelming multi-ethnic influences. German culture and civilisation was omnipresent and its influence was clearly a force that attracted these individuals towards the German nation. At the same time they were coming across migrants from Poland, i.e. from Greater Poland, who, being most frequently conscious Poles, cultivated their nationality in their new places of residency as well. Undoubtedly, in this confrontation 'Germanness' had got off to a better start and enjoyed a far better position as an emanation of the nation who in fact reigned in the country. There is

[7] When it comes to the latest works on the subject cf.: Marian Mroczko, *U źródeł polskiej myśli zachodniej*, [in:] *Nad Odrą i Bałtykiem. Myśl zachodnia: ludzie – koncepcje – realizacja do 1989 r.*, eds Magdalena Semczyszyn, Tomasz Sikorski, Adam Wątor, Szczecin 2013, pp. 15-27. Also: Teresa Kulak, *Śląsk w polskiej myśli politycznej do 1918 roku*, [in:] *Podział Śląska w 1922 roku*, pp. 51-62.

[8] The term 'Upper Silesian', which was seemingly easy to define, raised a great deal of controversy almost a century ago. Cf.: Maria Wanda Wanatowicz, *Wieloznaczność pojęcia „Górnoślązak" w latach walki o przynależność polityczną Górnego śląska po I wojnie światowej*, [in:] *Wokół historii i polityki. Studia z dziejów XIX i XX wieku dedykowane Profesorowi Wojciechowi Wrzesińskiemu w siedemdziesiąta rocznicę urodzin*, eds Stanisław Ciesielski, Teresa Kulak, Krzysztof Ruchniewicz, Jakub Tyszkiewicz, Toruń 2004, pp. 903-915.

[9] Mieczysław Pater, *Polskie dążenia narodowe na Górnym Śląsku (1891-1914)*, Wrocław 1998.

also no doubt about the fact that the issues of the economic status of hired labourers were not without significance in all the processes that took place among the ethnically Polish Silesians. Higher standards of living in the Ruhr region to a large extent fed into these people's attitude towards the German nationality and state. These numerous factors in turn had their unique influence on the electoral choices of Silesians during the plebiscite of 1921.

Prussian Silesia was also inhabited by Jews, who were most numerous in Wrocław (and who actually deserve all the credit for the great prosperity of the metropolis, one of the greatest in contemporary Germany), but who were also present in the Upper Silesian industrial region. The group was not very large, but some of its members were very influential, connected to the governmental and industrial establishment. Many-while not abandoning their Jewish origin or religion that most practiced-fully identified themselves with the German nation and state. Therefore, they constituted part of the modern German nation[10].

It would be difficult to classify the territorial section of Upper Lusatia as part of historical Silesia only because as a component of the contemporary Kingdom of Saxony it was incorporated into Prussia. Not long after the Congress of Vienna this area was incorporated into Silesia as part of its administrative territory. Next to the Germans, Slavs and Lusatian Sorbs also resided there. These groups are, however, outside the scope of this paper.

Whereas, Austrian Silesia was undoubtedly the part of the historical territory of the region. In its western stretch whose principal centre was Opava (Troppau, Opawa), Czechs resided (who originated from the region of Moravia), Germans (Austrian Germans) and a small group of Jews. The local Czech community to some extent responded positively to the pro-national slogans which in opposition to the Habsburg state called them to rebuild their native state. At the same time this group – who was generally indifferent to religion – was becoming subject to the process of assimilation by the German nation. Subjection to German assimilation was a serious problem for the residents of the newly developed Czechoslovakian state, namely, Silesian Moravians, who, instead of identifying themselves with the Czech nation, considered themselves to be part of the German nation. The local indigenous Germans, mostly Catholics, had a sense of connection with the Empire of the German and Catholic Habsburgs. In the middle of Austrian Silesia there lay an important industrial centre called Ostrava (Ostrau, Ostrawa), a Moravian enclave in Silesia.

[10] Maciej Borkowski, Andrzej Kirmiel, Tamara Włodarczyk, *Śladami Żydów. Dolny Śląsk. Opolszczyzna. Ziemia Lubuska*, Warszawa 2008. The work, whose publication was financed by the Museum of the History of Polish Jews, is a compendium of the history of Jewish presence in the formerly German and now Polish territories.

The town was predominantly German, however it was also home to Czechs, Jews and Poles-Silesians. Already in the 19th century the town was referred to as the Polish Ostrava. This was due to the ethnic composition of the population of the eastern part of Austrian Silesia at the outset of the 19th century. The territory witnessed the clash of three nations: state-ruling and Vienna-oriented Germans, who outnumbered the representatives of other nations in the management boards of local industrial companies. The Czechs who, to a large extent, aspired for independence remained in opposition to both Austrian Germans and local Poles. And eventually, Poles, who were the most numerous on both sides of the river Olše (Olsa, Olza), which cut through this former territory of the Duchy of Cieszyn (Teschen, Těšín). It was there that from the close of the 19th century until the Great War interesting nation-building processes were taking place. The local community of Silesians was Protestant, ambivalent towards Catholicism, which was promoted by the Habsburgs. At the same time at the turn of the 20th century Cieszyn Silesia (Czech: Těšínské Slezsko, Polish: Śląsk Cieszyński, German: Teschener Schlesien) became the cradle of two national orientations. One of them was focused on 'Polishness'. The city of Cieszyn (Teschen, Těšín), situated by the Olše river at the heart of the Duchy, became the heart of the Polish national movement. But one more ideology came to life in this territory. Its thesis – put forward by Józef Kożdoń – put stress on the existence of a separate Silesian nation (the so-called *Ślązakowcy*). The intention of people who promoted this view was the creation of a separate Silesian state. Its boundaries were to extend also to the territory of Prussian Silesia.[11] It was this circle that at the close of the First World War gave birth to slogans promoting the creation of the separate Silesian state, which was to be inhabited and ruled by the Silesian nation. This industrialized territory saw the arrival of a group of migrant Poles-Catholics who were attracted there by opportunities of starting a career in the developing local coal mining and steel industry. They originated from Austrian Galicia, the territory which until the First Partition of Poland (1772) was part of the Polish Commonwealth. Despite being Catholic, they objectively strengthened the Protestant, local Polish society. This phenomenon met with resistance from the members of the local Czech community, who claimed that Cieszyn Silesia was undergoing Polonisation. Therefore it is possible for us to conclude that within this small territory, among quite small group of people various nation-building phenomena occurred, both integrating and disintegrating Silesians; mutually contradictory.

[11] Extensive information on Silesian separatism is contained in the study by: Dariusz Jerczyński, *Historia narodu śląskiego*, Zabrze 2003. Cf also: Elżbieta Anna Sekuła, *Po co Ślązakom potrzebny jest naród? Niebezpieczne związki między autonomią i nacjonalizmem*, Warszawa 2009.

These processes continued later on and found their – sometimes even violent – outlet in the first years following the First World War.

The Great War (1914–1918) and its immediate consequences for Silesia and its inhabitants up until the year 1922

The unexpected – even at the brink of the summer of 1914 – outbreak of the First World War brought about considerable changes regarding various groups of population residing in Silesian territories situated within the boundaries of Prussia-Germany. Mass enlistment into the army, which more often than not hindered and later on even disorganized the regular industrial production processes, removed great masses of people from their previous environments. Silesians from rural areas, who cultivated their local and religious customs, often showed a sense of being 'locally' Silesian, just as their fellow countrymen (often members of the same families) while in the trenches were coming in touch with native Germans who originated from various corners of the Reich. It was at that time, during the tragic war events, in authentic conditions of brotherhood in arms, established in the trenches that marked the formation within the Hohenzollern Empire of a uniform – though still regionally fragmented – German nation. In the second half of the 19th century and in the first years of the 20th century among Austrian Germans a sense of belonging to a uniform nation expanded. A nation, which extended to all Germans also those who resided in the territories outside the Habsburg Empire[12]. The process of uniting the German nation had already been initiated in the Romantic era and continued throughout the Springtime of the Peoples and during the unification of Germany under Hohenzollern reign.

Participation in bloody battles, waged by citizens of all nationalities residing in the Empire, consolidated among the many subjects of Wilhelm II Hohenzollern who were not German, a sense of being part of a German nation. This was therefore a crucial factor that united Silesians, especially Silesian recruits of both German and Polish origin into one, German nation. At the same time soldiers from Silesia were meeting in the aforementioned trenches with many Polish recruits from the annexed by Prussians territories of Greater Poland, Gdańsk Pomerania (Danzig Pomerania, at that time part of Western Prussia) or Powiśle (klein Westpreussen)and Warmia (Ermland, at that time part of Eastern Prussia). These were those that-quite opposite to the soldiers of German nationality-influenced Silesians in a completely different way.

[12] Piotr M. Majewski, *„Niemcy Sudeccy" 1848-1949. Historia pewnego nacjonalizmu*, Warszawa 2007, pp. 115-141.

They were drawing them closer to 'Polishness'. But it is very difficult to determine the number of Silesians who returned from war as nationally conscious Poles.

The prolonged war brought about a gradual growth of social radicalism. The situation in Upper Silesia – just as in the entirety of Germany – was highly unstable. Here however, the ever-strengthening tensions were coupled with organically connected national and state elements. Next to the revolutionary slogans – internationalist by principle – also slogans of national, or rather nationalist overtones were increasingly vocalized. The process was controlled by three opinion-forming centres: German, Polish and Czech (Czechoslovakian)[13]. This activity was classified as – at least by the Polish and Czech fractions – a strongly disintegrating factor in Upper Silesia.

It was unimaginable for the elites of the German Reich that the consequences of the war – which was obviously lost – would include territorial losses. Claims addressed to the Berlin authorities by their counterparts in Warsaw and Prague[14] were considered unjustified whims. There were no prospects whatsoever for any voluntary cessions in the territories of Upper Silesia. They were all the more so valuable for German government as they constituted the second greatest industrial region of the German Reich[15]. Also this territory, in the eastern outskirts of the country, became the hub of opposing German propaganda. It met with the enthusiastic reception of the local Germans but also of people who were ethnically Slavonic-Silesian, and viewed the German state as a predictable guarantor of lawfulness, administrative efficiency and a moderately stable labour market.

At the same time we should not fail to notice that the local community of Silesians included a group which actually during this particular war, and especially towards its conclusion, stood in clear opposition to the German pro-national proposal, especially when battles ended up in spectacular defeat. Within the ethnic, local Upper Silesian group – whose size has not yet been determined – ideas emerged that pointed to a sense of belonging to the Polish nation among the inhabitants of this territory. These impulses whose strength – I would like to emphasis – was unspecified were consolidated by the news of the revival of an independent Polish state. These were in fact the factors which excluded part of the local population from the influential range of German nationality and pushed it towards affilia-

[13] On the situation of Silesia in the 'triangle' of geopolitical expectations cf. for example: Przemysław Hauser, *Śląsk między Polską, Czechosłowacją a separatyzmem. Walka Niemiec o utrzymanie prowincji śląskiej w latach 1918-1919*, Poznań 1991.

[14] Jaroslav Valenta, *Górny Śląsk w czeskiej myśli politycznej do 1918 roku*, [in:] *Podział Śląska*, pp. 51-62.

[a15] For such was still – contrary to its common name of the Weimar Republic – the official name of the German state.

tion with its Polish counterpart. These were, however, by no means 'easy' decisions. We must not forget that in the territories of Upper Silesia aside from the national issue there was also the issue of identification with a particular state. Formerly, the state as it was known consisted for the local population of nothing more than the Prussian Kingdom (broadly understood as the German Reich). This fact, however, was not necessarily – at least up until the close of 1918 – tantamount to an unconditional sense of belonging to the German nationality. Still, even in the face of the downfall of 'their' state, in Silesia – mostly Upper Silesia – and predominantly among Slavonic Silesians, there was an extensive group of people whose national belonging remained unspecified. Attempts to exploit this phenomenon were made by the advocates of the thesis on the existence of a Silesian nationality. The factor of regionality (localness) was to make it easier for them to convince the Silesians to adopt the idea of a separate Silesian state[16].

The situation was complex and increasingly tense in the then contemporary Austrian Silesia where, already much earlier than in German Reich, in a territory that was to a large extent Evangelical, a phenomena emerged that I have decided to analyse.[17] One of them was the Polish-national circle. Its centre was the small town of Cieszyn (as the population of the larger and more eastern-situated industrial town of Bielsko (Bielitz, Bílsko) was predominantly German). Silesian Evangelicals from this territory, objectively supported by the incoming Polish Catholic migrants from Austrian Galicia, made efforts to unite this part of Silesia with Poland whose process of regaining independence was in progress. For them this was a natural process, all the more so that October 1918 saw the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. And so, the territory – unlike in Upper Silesia – was still lacking a national organisation which would guarantee its continuation of power and which could serve as a potential point of reference. The Habsburg Empire was replaced by an ostensible geopolitical void, ready to be 'redeveloped'. The close of 1918 saw the rise of an independent Czechoslovakian state, which included the territories of historical Bohemia, Moravia and – according to Prague's ambition – also the entirety of contemporary Austrian Silesia. Austrian Germans made efforts to reach another goal. As they were increasingly often, though imprecisely, referred to as Sudeten Germans, they came up with the idea to establish their own, separate state, one unconnected with the German Reich but also not to be included in Czechoslovakia. Territories

[16] For a map illustrating the proposed boundaries of an awaited, separate Silesian state see D. Jerczyński, *Historia*, p. 90.

[17] Marek Czapliński, *Dzieje Śląska od 1806 do 1945 roku*, [in:] *Historia Śląska*, ed. M. Czapliński, pp. 349-351; Maria Wanda Wanatowicz, *Historia społeczno-polityczna Górnego Śląska i Śląska Cieszyńskiego w latach 1918-1945*, Katowice 1994, pp. 14-22.

that were to become part of this new organism were to extend also to the territories of Silesia,

The collapse of the Habsburg monarchy did not put an end to the Silesian national circle in Cieszyn Silesia (the eastern part of contemporary Austrian Silesia) – nor to its other units. The advocates of Silesian nationality became actively engaged in propaganda all the more so that calls emerged to establish 'the Free State of Upper Silesia'. This issue – only recently more widely present in academic literature – deserves particular attention. The Prussian Upper Silesia Silesian national movement was animated by activists of the local Catholic Centre party. Later, in the autumn of 1918, Rybnik saw the formation of the so-called Upper Silesian Committee (*Komitet Górnośląski*), where a significant role was played by the brothers John (Johann) and Thomas Regink. Their manifesto included a brochure, issued in December, entitled 'Upper Silesia as a separate state'. There, serious fears were expressed regarding the incorporation of Silesian territories to the newly reborn Polish state, which was actually regarded as an 'offender' responsible for the future ruination of Silesia by the Poles. On the other hand, Priest Prelate Carl Ulitzka of Racibórz (Ratibor, Ratiboř) advocated the formation of a separate Silesian Province, one detached from Prussia, which was to function within the republic of Germany as a new land with an internal autonomy that could be compared with that of say, for instance, Bavaria. The efforts centred on achieving the complete independence or at least autonomy of Upper Silesia and also of the former Austrian Silesia were continued for some time. Yet, they nonetheless brought no notable results. In the fierce battle for this state, all action took place within the German-Czech-Polish triangle. And what is remarkable is that soon there was only Berlin and Warsaw left on the battlefield. The pro-Silesian movement was considered by world powers to be a rather exotic fantasy[18].

The creation of an independent Czechoslovakia was used both by the government in Prague and the local – in former Austrian Silesia – Czech activists to achieve their private territorial ambitions. Prague together with its supporters, namely, Silesian-Czech activists, was planning not only to take over the entire former Austrian Silesia but also to annex extensive Silesian territories, which were at that time included in Prussia (and the German Empire). Their greatest ambition was to take control of at least part of the wealthy Upper Silesian industrial zone. Their most basic prerogative was to incorporate ('to regain') lands, where – in the opinion of Prague governing bodies and their local supporters – Moravian-Silesian people still

[18] Dariusz Jerczyński, *Historia*, pp. 87-95. See also in this book the article by Tomasz Kruszewski, *Silesian Administrative Authorities and Territorial Transformations of Silesia (1918-1945)*.

lived. These calculations also related to the territories which were German at the time: Silesian sections of Racibórz, Głubczyce (Leobschütz, Hlubčice) and Hlučín (Hultschin/Hulczyn). This was a small territory where opposing political-national fractions resided. As I have already mentioned, a significant role in this territory was played by the Polish seasonal industrial labourers of Galicia (Catholics). Some of them settled down in this territory and gave rise to quite significant Polish-national strongholds (Catholic). Their presence met with the permanent disapproval of Czech national circles, who remained in ideological confrontation both with the local Germans and local Silesians-Poles and the 'Ślązakowcy' (supporters of the idea of a free Silesian state) as they were known. Such was the situation of the country facing the modified geopolitical situation following the Great War- a territory where three and even four forces clashed aiming to transform it into a sphere of domination of one particular national group. What needs to be underscored once more is that these tensions were fuelled and consolidated by the sharp rivalry over these territories between Czechoslovakia and Poland.

Territorial claims regarding Upper Silesia put forward by Prague and Warsaw were characterized by – theoretical and hard to be precisely estimated – the force of attraction towards 'Czechness' targeted at the southern territories inhabited by people who belonged to the regional Moravian group. They are made all the more difficult to be precisely judge-and this has been confirmed by the latest Czech findings-because most of them did not feel a part of the Czech nation, even as members of the regional Moravian group. These Moravians were surprised, when – as inhabitants of the former Austrian Silesia – by decision of the powers at the Paris Peace Conference, they were incorporated into Czechoslovakia. Also for members of this group, at the time residing in Germany, it was no less surprising to witness themselves being placed under the jurisdiction of Prague. This is the Hlučín Region (Czech: Hlučínsko, German: Hultschiner Ländchen, Polish: Kraik Hulczyński) we are referring to, which was situated between Ostrava and Opava[19]. The decisions taken in Paris, instead of enlarging the population of Czechs residing in Czechoslovakia, extended the number of Germans of regional, ethnically Moravian origin. Not much later, this group, which felt like part of the German nation, strengthened the ranks of the Sudetes Germans and alongside them and because of their emancipation ambitions, became an ever-growing source of problems for the Prague authorities.

Far more drastic, but also not lacking in consequences that would reach several years into the future, turned out to be the rivalry between Prague and Warsaw, whose subject was the Duchy of Cieszyn, part of former Austrian Silesia. The moment

[19] Krzysztof Nowak, *Kraik Hulczyński (1920-1938)*, [in:] *Historia Górnego Śląska*, p. 250.

when the Polish and Czechoslovakian states were just in the phase of formation and both Warsaw and Prague were first and foremost focused on consolidating the very existence of these two entities, political centres were not actively engaged in the events taking place in both of their-mutually desired borderlands. Local communities – Silesian-Polish and Silesian-Czech – residing in this 'eye of the cyclone' reached a local agreement regarding the distribution of temporary territorial borders, based on the criterion of nationality and language. Had the provisions been accepted and become the basis for the outline in this location of the Polish-Czechoslovakian border it would most probably have been possible to prevent the continuous streak of rocky relations between the two Slavonic countries in the interwar period. This agreement was then not only an attempt to solve the issue of the Habsburg legacy but also an integrating factor with the potential to contain the local nationality-related conflicts through the integration of Czechs-Moravians with the national centre in Prague and Poles with the centre in Warsaw. What needs to be emphasised is that the Polish side in its efforts to gain the largest possible part of the historical Silesian region (which up until that time had changed hands between Germany and Austria) did not come up with any subsequent demands which would exceed the criterion of ethnicity. The local agreement was for the Poles all the more so beneficial because based on its provisions the boundaries of the late Polish Commonwealth were to extend to the industrial region, rich in mineral ores with its centre in Karviná (Karvin, Karwina). Nonetheless, Prague decided to achieve the objectives of its territorial programme in the former Silesia by military force. The primary plan was to annex the entire Duchy of Cieszyn, which would extend the population of the already multi-national Czechoslovakian state – according to estimates – by over 100000 ethnic Poles. The short-lasting war fought in January 1919 between the invading Czech regular armies and infrequent Polish units, mostly thanks to local actions of self-defence, concluded in a truce which was unsatisfactory for both sides of the conflict. It resulted in a temporary separation of interests, mostly along the nearby line of the Olše river, which cut Cieszyn Silesia into two almost equal halves. Such a solution had already at the time forced a large number of local inhabitants who considered themselves to be Poles to remain outside the territory of Polish Commonwealth[20]. The situation of Cieszyn Silesia was growing ever more complicated due to the on-going Polish-Russian war. The military conflict between the clearly anti-Russian Poland and the generally (which was to a large extent historically determined) pro-Russian Czechs was a serious setback for plans

[20] As stated by Marek Czapliński, based on the relevant Polish literature, among 293 inhabitants residing on the Czech side, there were ca. 75-100 thousand Poles, cf.: *idem*, *Dzieje Śląska*, p. 351.

to defend the West from revolutionary Russia. In this situation, the issue of the boundary outlines of Cieszyn Silesia was to be determined by the Allies. In September of 1919 they took a decision to resolve the issue of the territory by means of a plebiscite. Nonetheless, this project never saw the light of day due to the Bolshevik threat to Europe. In July 1920 during the ally conference in Spaa (Belgium) Polish delegates in exchange for a strengthening of Western aid for Warsaw in its conflict with Russia agreed to revoke the plebiscite. Decisions that were made during the conference in Spaa led to a division of the Cieszyn Silesia territories which became the subject of a conflict along the lines of a suspension of military actions. The externally imposed decisions led to a serious, continuous national crisis in this section of Silesia. On the Polish side, where the Silesian Germans remained – whose largest group was focused on the industrial town of Bielsko – a policy of integration was introduced. In principle, it was to have two dimensions. This included attracting and convincing the members of local communities to develop a positive attitude towards Poland. For the Germans it did not turn out to be attractive enough. They still had fresh memories of the Habsburg period, when they belonged to the ruling nation. However, what could be considered a success were actions undertaken by the Polish state authorities towards the local Silesians-Poles in spite of the fact that they were predominantly Protestant.

The Silesian-Polish population remained on the Czechoslovakian side, in the quite narrow strip on the western bank of the river Olše which constituted a majority in this territory. In this multi-national state, which throughout its entire history maintained a rather stable, democratic character, a policy of integration was also conducted. And the Poles were, too, among its targets. Usually the policy was unsuccessful. Polish activists considered it to be damaging for 'Polishness'. What is more, it was conducted by the state, which was not only considered nationally alien and acquisitive, but also religiously neutral. Czechoslovakia was densely populated by a group of at least several thousand Poles who considered themselves – also under formally democratic Czech rules – to be underprivileged[21]. Not much later such feelings were to be exploited by the expansive policy of Warsaw (in the ultimatum of 1938). What is more, the local community of Poles had a chance to continuously observe the so-called 'scheme' against the republic which was concocted by the Sudetes Germans. And that could have consolidated not only the Poles' sense of satisfaction from the trouble of the ruling Czech nation but also the conviction that the imposed changes of boundaries were not necessarily permanent.

[21] Krzysztof Nowak, *Śląsk Cieszyński (1920-1938)*, [in:] *Historia Górnego Śląska*, pp. 250-254.

The situation in the German part of Silesia unfolded with no less drama and with much greater engagement of propaganda tools and political and military measures. Polish and Czech territorial claims gave rise to a threatened sense among the local inhabitants who identified themselves with the German nation, but also supported the building and tightening of unity among the community of Silesian Germans. In the context of the disintegration of the territory of Silesia this was no doubt a factor that brought the German population closer to one another.

What needs to be remembered here is that the Polish delegation who attended the Paris Peace Conference, headed by the eminent politician Roman Dmowski, presented Warsaw's rather extensive territorial demands. The Poles decided to call for the enlargement of their newly introduced country by including the entirety of Upper Silesia. At the root of such a claim lay the fact that this territory was mostly inhabited by a Silesian-Polish population, much larger than that of the local Germans. The desire to include the largest possible Polish population in the Polish territory was motivated also by purely economic calculations. The aim was to take over Upper Silesian industry, the great region full of natural resources and coal mining and metallurgical facilities. To this and to the initially favourable stance of the Allies – most importantly France – the Germans reacted with desperate resistance. Therefore the Allies decided to conduct a plebiscite in the territory – which was still formally part of the German Reich – whose date was agreed to March 1921. What needs to be pointed out here is that Silesian Germans neither ceased to be the ruling nation – be it because of their control over the local administration – nor were they ready to renounce this status. This made the situation of the local Polish activists all the more difficult and dangerous, for even their lives were in danger.

As I have earlier highlighted, among the members of part of the ethnically Polish-Slavonic Upper Silesian population feelings emerged which were drawing them closer to 'Polishness'. This process was much more similar to that which drew their fellow countrymen – whose population size was difficult to determine – towards 'Germannness'. The pro-Polish attitudes – which were clearly illustrated by the plebiscite results – were surely much weaker in more urbanized territories where the labourers quite often resided in cities originally from the first generation or continued to reside in the nearby villages. At the same time in rural areas and especially in industrialized zones the German administration and bodies of civil order continued to maintain their strong position. Silesian labourers were strongly dependent on their German principals and German management. What is more, in line with the local, regional tradition it was not common to strive for a higher level of education than that of vocational. In cases when individuals nonetheless decided

to do so, they had to 'pay' for it by accepting German nationality. Therefore, ethnically Polish Silesians were almost entirely deprived of their own, Polish (Silesian) elites. These were only just in the process of formation, also as a result of the Polish press and Polish organizations' activities. Even in Upper Silesia, which was incorporated into Poland in 1922 the continuous lack of well-educated local Silesians was still an issue. Even in spite of the efforts of the Voivode Michał Grażyński, who since 1926 conducted active pro-Polish policy and an equally strong anti-German policy.

As far as in the urbanized and industrialized zones the local Silesian population continued to lean towards the German nationality, the situation in the countryside was different. More often than not in the rural communities so-called 'Polish kings' emerged. These were peasants who were particularly rich and self-sufficient farmers. In the context of the lawful, stable and predictable German state they were not dependent on any direct pressure from the German establishment. However, as at least some of these people felt unsatisfied with not being members of the ruling nation, – and this was illustrated by the plebiscite results from part of the examined territories – this constituted the most fertile ground for the pro-Polish propaganda.

The decision to conduct the plebiscite led to a gradual national polarisation in the territory inhabited by its respondents. Nonetheless, in spite of this fact a large proportion of the local Silesians continued to present a neutral national attitude. Their bond with local or regional communities was much stronger than with the abstract notion of a nation.

Although the Polish-German conflict in the territories of Upper Silesia was conducted in the interest of two countries – Germany and Poland – the propaganda of both sides claimed that the conflict was 'in the interest' of the local, Silesian people. This latter term was to describe Silesians-Germans or Silesians-Poles. In the quest for selecting the supporters of these national fractions from among the great mass of people with no crystallized national identity that was nonetheless – paradoxically – overlooked was that such Silesians did in fact exist. They were offered a choice between two radically different options: 'Polishness' (and Poland) or 'Germanness' (and Germany). There was no way – also when it came to the ally policy-makers – that Silesian nationality and national expectations would be acknowledged (the idea of 'the Free State of Silesia') by both competing states. The fight – both military and political – continued somewhat alongside the element of local Silesianness. What needs to be added is that the postulated Silesian nationality boundaries put forth by the supporters of the future independent country did not include all the territories of historic Silesia. That is why even the successful adoption of this plan would have result in the fragmentation of the region.

In the period prior to the plebiscite, in August 1919 and August 1920, Upper Silesia witnessed two Polish (pro-Polish) armed revolutions. In Polish historiography they are recorded as the First and Second Silesian Uprising. At the root of the initial conflict, alongside the national issues, lay economic aspects. The increasingly impoverished masses of labourers, mostly local Silesians, rebelled against acts of repression they came to suffer under the German public order units. Several days of prolonged fighting concluded with a defeat of the insurgents and an exodus of soldiers and activists from Poland. This brought bloody German acts of repression which further weakened the perspectives for further pro-Polish activity.

In July 1920 the Polish Legislative Sejm (Parliament) in Warsaw, (under threat from the victorious Red Army approaching from the east), and in order to make the Polish 'state and national offer' more attractive, passed a legal act called 'the organic statute of the Silesian Voivodeship' which was to apply to all the citizens of the plebiscite territories, which were to be eventually included in Poland. This signalled a realist approach by the Warsaw government, which in spite of all the chaos, to some extent seemed to take into account the complexity of the current ethnic situation. The Polish proposal to introduce autonomy (including the creation of an independent Silesian Sejm) was coupled with similar attempts on the German side. Berlin was promising – in the event of retaining control over the plebiscite area – to create a completely new Upper Silesian province. These actions were taking place during the worst crisis of the Polish state since it had regained its independence, as Poland was under threat of being annihilated by Bolshevik Russia. This state – skilfully publicized by German propaganda – no doubt motivated all the undecided to make up their minds.

Meanwhile, the terror used by the Germans following their suppression of the First Silesian Uprising was making it extremely difficult to conduct the Polish plebiscite activity under the leadership of Wojciech Korfanty. In order to protest against these difficult conditions the Polish side made a decision to prompt another revolution in August 1920. In August, the Second Silesian Uprising had a far wider scope than the first one. Nonetheless it also ended in military defeat and another exodus of the insurgents, politicians and activists. During their stay in Poland they were awaiting an opportunity to actively participate in the fight for the national identity of Upper Silesia. Such a chance emerged in the spring of 1921.

The events of the years 1919-1920 undoubtedly, both in terms of words and (military) actions contributed violently to a progressing national polarization which bore fruit in the changes within the two local ethnic groups. There took place in 'the acceleration' of local history, which explained the ethnic situation in Upper Silesia.

Subsequent individuals from the volatile native Silesian group were making their choice between Polish and German nationality. Yet, there was still a large group which continued to maintain a neutral stance on nationality.

In the pre-plebiscite period propaganda/political/national efforts were increased with support from Berlin and Warsaw respectively. The German side was producing sentimental-national arguments and drew attention to Upper Silesia's inhabitants' functioning as part of the Reich. The Polish side centred its arguments on national issues associated with the social sphere. Silesians were to be convinced that as part of the German state they were being subject to absolute national discrimination. It is hard to determine to what extent the minds of the addressees could be moved by arguments which brought up memories of a Silesian connection with the medieval Polish state.

Poland lost the plebiscite by a ratio of 40.35% (ca. 479,000 votes) to 59.65% (ca. 706,000 votes). It has been estimated that ca. 90% of the respondents who originated from the plebiscite territory but who resided outside it were in favour of the Germans. This internal group of migrants, eligible to vote, was estimated at 192,000 people. There is also no doubt that the Germans were also supported by the majority of city residents[22].

This fact may not be undermined by the justification that towns were populated by a number of indigenous, often formerly immigrant Germans.

The Allies were forced in this situation to divide the territory up. They chose the proposal of Italian Alberto de Marinis and Englishman Harold Percival – based on the percent of votes in favour for Poland in districts (*Kreise*, *powiats*) which bordered on the Republic – to award Warsaw with many arable and forested areas to the north and south of the industrialized area[23]. Moreover, Germany was to keep the lands situated to the west from the agglomeration of the great coal mining-metallurgical urban centres. Yet, no doubt even such serious damage inflicted upon Poland did not satisfy the German party, which kept bemoaning the destruction of the unity of the historic Upper Silesian territory. For the Polish side the loss came as a shock, which was soon after further deepened by the Allies' proposals to divide the plebiscite area. As a result, the plebiscite commissioner, Wojciech Korfanty, decided to launch another pro-Polish uprising and appointed himself as its dictator. His decision was in line with the intentions of Warsaw, not only devoid of several

[22] Alicja Galas, Artur Galas, *Dzieje Śląska w datach*, Wrocław 2001, p. 224.

[23] According to this concept Poland was to receive the districts (*powiats*) of Rybnik, Pszczyna and several communes (*gminas*) of the district of Katowice.

thousand people of ethnic Polish origin, but also devoid of the life-giving local industrial region.

May of 1921 saw the outbreak of the Third Silesian Uprising. It was the greatest armed conflict in the entire history of the land. It's character was seemingly that of 'a small-scale, local war', which even – also seemingly – resembled a civil war, as the opposing forces were to a large extent composed of native Upper Silesians of Polish origin. At the same time both 'absent' sides of the conflict did their best to provide the opponents with notable military-logistic aid. The German side offered the help of a voluntary *Freikorps* (whose members included Viennese academics), which were in fact regular German army units only masked under different names. When it comes to Poland, great efforts to support 'their' cause were made by the commanders of the Polish Army, providing the insurgents with food, officers, and soldiers. The uprising was then 'a silent' Polish-German war which took place with the considerable engagement of the Silesian people.

The military events led to a further polarisation of the national attitudes of the ethnically Polish Upper Silesians. Some groups were clearly in favour of 'Germanness', others chose 'Polishness'. It is invariably difficult to precisely determine how large the perpetually undecided group was. A situation such as this – which was surely subject to change – continued across the Upper Silesian territory at least up until 1945 when the entire disputed territory as well as an almost entire historical Silesia came to be part of the Polish state. Wojciech Korfanty claimed that the group, whose members considered themselves to be neither 'Polish' nor German, constituted 1/3 of the entire population of Upper Silesia.

The battles, often bloody and fierce (like for instance the one that took place at Góra Św. Anny (St. Anna's Berg) near Opole, did not result in an ultimate victory for any of the sides. Though, the withdrawal of the army from the neighbourhood of the aforementioned hill caused the Poles to lose their strategic initiative. Following battles that lasted several days, Wojciech Korfanty proclaimed a truce. The Poles again submitted themselves to the disposition of the Allies. The extensive territorial claims of the Polish state led to armed demonstrations (which were further supplemented by the aspirations – which were as a matter of fact authentic – expressed by part of the Upper Silesian population), resulted in the Allies introducing a new division of the state plebiscite territory. This time Poland received, additionally, the greatest share of the industrial section of the plebiscite territory (in total: 1/3 of the entire plebiscite territory). The Germans retained only three larger cities: Bytom (Beuthen), Gliwice (Gleiwitz, Hlivice) and Zabrze (Hindenburg). Berlin and the local community of Germans considered this decision to be an overt

injustice brought about by the Allies. During the following two decades the multi-course German propaganda consolidated the myth of a fragmented homeland and a nation torn-apart. In fact, on Polish territory a large number of indigenous Germans continued to reside[24]. Unfortunately, due to the volatility of national attitudes in this territory it is impossible to determine their precise number. This was caused by the considerable demographic change which came as a result of another territorial division of this land. The territory which was retained by Germany was left by a large group of Silesians-Poles who migrated to Poland, and territories incorporated into Poland were left by a group of indigenous Germans (or indigenous Silesians who considered themselves to be Germans). The ethnic situation in this territory was to a certain extent balanced by the Polish-German Upper Silesian convention signed in 1922, which also provided aid for the ethnic minorities who inhabited the fragmented plebiscite territory[25]. Berlin was rather willingly getting rid of Silesians who declared themselves to be Polish. So did the government in Warsaw – as a matter of fact not only in this territory – which exerted pressures on the Silesian Germans by means of an action to force Silesians to confirm their chosen nationality. Those who declared to be German were under a pressure to emigrate across the nearby western border.

A divided Silesia 1922-1939

The division of the plebiscite territory between Germany and Poland weakened the ranks of the aforementioned Polish nationalists who mainly resided in the rural areas of Upper Silesia, which were retained by Germany. This territory was often increasingly referred to in Poland – after its largest city – as Opole Silesia. The loss of a large group of Polish activists, as well as a sense of failure in the efforts to join the land to Poland was not without significance for in hampering the process of establishing bonds with the Polish nation by the local Silesians. This was not however tantamount to widespread support for 'Germanness'. There was still a large group whose national attitude was either volatile or simply neutral, who were focused on cultivating familiarity, localness and regionalism. As a result, the Silesian-German society was not visibly consolidated in this territory. What is more, both the local Germans and the state establishment felt threatened by the potential peril of the Polish, demographic. In recognition of this perceived hazard to the region being

[24] Cf. the latest in terms of volume absolutely pioneering study, on both the Polish and German publishing market, by J. Nowosielska-Sobel, *Od ziemi rodzinnej*, pp. 375-411.

[25] For more information on the subject cf., footnote no. 1 and: Maria Wanda Wanatowicz, *Historia społeczno-polityczna*, pp. 22-40.

flooded by Slavonic influence – in a territory which had remained German for centuries – a plan was put into action (following the outbreak of the Great war and intensified during the Nazi regime which involved replacing names of Slavonic origin with completely new, 'pure' German names. In places where a threat was not identified – for instance in Mecklenburg – the old Slavonic names were retained throughout the entire period of the Third Reich. In the Germans' view this practice was to lead to a consolidation of the German character of Upper Silesia and strengthen its integration with the rest of Germany. This most probably also strengthened the sense of a threat among the population of local Germans and could also build up their sense of connectedness with the region where they resided. For the native Silesian population the Germanisation of towns' names seemed to be clear evidence of at least the reluctance of the German state to acknowledge Slavonic historical otherness. It would be hard to say to what extent this policy could have – for one thing – 'convinced' any group of Silesians to a national integration with the local Germans and to what extent – for another-it could have strengthened any group's sense of belonging to the Slavonic or even Polish community.

In the territory incorporated into Poland, in the autonomous Silesian Voivodeship – especially in the period when the Upper Silesian convention (1922–1937) was effective, and provided bilateral protection for ethnic minorities – nationally conscious Germans did not experience effective a Polonisation – integration policy up until 1926. It happened in spite of the fact that individuals connected to the nationalist ideology of Roman Dmowski – the former leader of the Polish delegation at the Paris Peace Conference – continued to stand at the helm of the state. Nationalists and their co-allies were focusing on raising Polish community in line with the national spirit, even at the expense of national ideology. They however failed to gain support for their ideas both among part of the ethnically Polish Silesians and – especially – the local nationally conscious Germans. As we see, there were no noticeable examples of support for Polish nationality. Both natively Silesian groups – the German and the ethnically Polish – remained in a seeming stagnation. The Germans were undoubtedly awaiting their return under the power of Berlin's government. Both groups were apt observers of the doings and effectiveness or helplessness of the newly introduced Polish state. The territories of the new Voivodeship, devoid of a native Silesian office and management personnel, saw the influx – official and unofficial – of a mass of migrants of various sort from the lands former belonged to Russia and Habsburg Empire together with their various customs, habits and lifestyles, as well as various attitudes towards work and customers. What became noticeable in the streets of Silesian cities was the presence of numerous immigrant

Jewish communities seeking to quickly improve their material status. The local Silesian community was treated in a manner that was far beyond their expectations. Silesian Germans en bloc were openly treated as enemies of everything that was Polish. The native Silesians were commonly perceived as secondary citizens, for whom 'the leaseholders' from the former Russian Kingdom of Poland and Galicia attempted to civilize. Silesians (often the veterans of the Silesian Uprisings), were treated on their own land as secondary citizens and thus they perceived the Polish rules with growing criticism. Their initial enthusiasm towards the potentially attractive Polish nation and state which they had awaited both with curiosity and anxiety quickly waned. Similar feelings were becoming more and more common not only in circles with no crystalized national views, but also among the locally nation-conscious Poles. The march to 'Polishness' was rapidly suppressed. Paradoxically this had a unifying effect on the local, Silesian community that was confining itself – in opposition to the Polish state – to its own regional group[26].

In German Upper Silesia a mixture of a German and native Silesian community resided. The latter was divided into a group which was conscious of its being part of the Polish nation and a much larger group of Silesians who identified themselves with the region or locality itself. This situation did not favour the unification of the inhabitants of the country. All of them were influenced by the policy conducted by the German state, which invariably highlighted the injustice of the division of Upper Silesia and the sense of being threatened by the Polish state approaching from beyond the 'burning border' as it was known. The intention of Berlin was that the policy would lead to the integration of local people and to their identification with 'Germanness'. The German state was also trying to influence the German people who came to reside in Poland and to strengthen the sense of their unity with the German state but also their sense of unity with the remaining Upper Silesian Germans who resided in the territory of the German Reich. The illusion of the region's existence as a uniform organism inhabited by people unfairly divided by territorial borders was persistently maintained.

In the Polish section of Upper Silesia, the local community was also divided, just as on the German side. This fact favoured neither of their senses of regional unity. However, the policy of the Polish state was slightly different than that of

[26] There are plenty of literary sources on the subject, many of which have been published only recently. Cf. footnote no 1. and the older publication of Maria Wanda Wanatowicz, *Historia społeczno-polityczna*, pp. 41-144. It is also worth becoming familiar with the almost quarter of a century-old study where the relations in interwar Polish Upper Silesia are very adequately illustrated. Cf.: Mirosława Błaszczak-Wacławik, Wojciech Błasiak, Tomasz Nawrocki, *Górny Śląsk. Szczególny przypadek kulturowy*, Warszawa 1990, pp. 7-41.

Berlin. Warsaw's policy towards the Polish minority residing on the German side was not particularly active. If any attempts were made to strengthen the nation-building processes focused on improving identification with the Polish nation, they were not accompanied by any territorial claims towards Germany. Poland, battling with many internal problems, in reference to the territories of Silesian Voivodeship attempted to conduct the policy that would integrate the local people with the remaining part of the Polish nation. At the same time, attempts were made to minimize the role played in this territory by the numerous and economically strong German minority. Under the pretext of democracy, efforts were undertaken to exclude the German national element from social life of Silesian Voivodeship. These actions, motivated by the Polish national interest did not favour integration within the local community. Neither did the Polonisation policy. In the all-Polish context, in principle it was to serve as an integrating factor. In reality, however, for the locally-residing native community it performed the role more of a potentially disintegrating factor by 'removing' part of its representatives from their local groups and incorporating them into the Polish nationality.

At the same time the issues of nationality were inseparably intertwined with purely political ones. After all the measure of successfulness of the Polish state in the Silesian Voivodeship was the ability (or inability) to solve painful issues regarding everyday existence and the social security of multi-member Silesian families.

The day-to-day reality of the Weimar Republic was characterised by economic problems. But even during these materially difficult times, in a country to a large extent impoverished by the Great War, German Upper Silesia was treated with exceptional care. As part of 'the torn-apart country', resting on the Polish-German 'burning border', even in the largely anarchy-dominated Germany, the region was offered continuous ideological care by the state and German patriots who emphasized the injustice that had been done not only to Germany, but also to the local communities through the fragmentation of the region[27]. In propaganda-related campaigns German elements of local 'Silesianess' were highlighted for instance through the practice of placing schools under the patronage of the eminent German and Silesian poet Joseph von Eichendorff. Also regional Silesian dialects were tolerated – in contrast to the strategy that had been implemented prior to the Great War. The importance of traditional, local, family, and religious values was emphasized. This strategy was also adopted in East Prussia at the time. The purpose of these actions – whose strategic aim was the re-unification of the

[27] J. Nowosielska-Sobel, *Od ziemi rodzinnej*, pp. 375-411.

country within the German borders – was to develop a possibly widespread sense of affiliation of Silesians with 'Germanness' and of Silesia with Germany.

At the same time heated polemics were taking place within the Polish national minority, as well as a rivalry in the childhood education field. For the German government it was important that the role of the local, minority Polish education be minimized. This sort of activity took place continuously up until the outbreak of the Second World War, and yet was accompanied by a specific, apparent pacification connected with the Polish-German declaration of non-aggression of 1934[28].

The Jews continued to exert a considerable influence in GermanSilesia, also Lower Silesia. It was Wrocław in Lower Silesia that continued to be the greatest concentration of Jews in Silesia. Their community – as I have already pointed out – was steadily drawing closer to self-identification with the German nation. This tendency prevailed even in spite of the unfavourable feelings towards the Jews manifested following the First World War, when they were being repeatedly accused of sharing-responsibility for the defeat and for the propagation of the communist ideas. This last charge was false particularly in reference to the Jews who were owners of mid to large-sized businesses and those who worked in the liberal professions.

The situation in Germany had become even more complicated at the turn of the 1930s when Germany saw the rise of the national extremist but also the socially radical, and at that moment, left-wing Nazi Party (the National Socialist German Workers' Party, abbreviated as NSDAP) under the leadership of Adolf Hitler. The party wanted to reach every group and class of the contemporary German society. Its ideologists focused their attention-alongside the workers and members of the urban middle class-on the peasants, whom the communists had nothing to offer. Therefore, efforts were undertaken to integrate at least a part of the Silesians, labourers or peasants (and independent of their national attitudes) around the totalitarian proposals put forward by NSDAP. Nonetheless, it was not an easy task for the Nazis to approach traditional, Upper Silesian communities that were much attached to Catholicism. The Catholic Centre Party continued to enjoy a very high position in the area. Local Catholics (with various national attitudes) were therefore focused around political religious parties. This was for sure-to a certain extent-a locally integrating factor. At the same time the expansive Nazis were doing their best to implement their vision of a uniform German nation. To accomplish this mission they were using-especially after coming to power-radical and repressive methods. This was no doubt a factor which consolidated the disintegration of local communities. The Nazis were extreme nationalists. What could

[28] It is worth mentioning here a study of a Wrocław historian, which is still relevant today: Wojciech Wrzesiński, *Polski ruch narodowy w Niemczech*, Poznań 1970.

not be therefore underestimated were their intentions to attract the so far undecided Upper Silesians to German nationalism. While not leaving behind the potential influence exerted on this segment of the population by the national socialists we need to highlight the integrating role of German-nationalist slogans such as *Deutschland erwache* ('Germany, wake up'). The ideas of Nazism were also directed towards the German segment of the population in the Polish Silesian Voivodeship[29].

In the Polish part of Upper Silesia the aforementioned unfavourable circumstances of the initial years of the Polish administration were multiplied by the country's difficult economic situation. The loss of the German market, intensified by the German-Polish customs war, were very difficult conditions for the newly created state – *nolens volens* – which exerted a negative impact (from the point of view of the purposes of the Polish state) on the attitudes of many Silesians. If it was normal that the local Germans did not feel naturally connected to the completely alien Polish state, native Silesians had to wrestle with the difficult conditions of material life, as well as with the difficult conditions of existence within a country for which they were nominally Poles. It was indeed so even though many of them identified themselves neither with the country nor with the nation. Silesians – even those converted to 'Polishness' – still had to struggle with the crisis of an internal conviction of accuracy – or inaccuracy – of choosing a Polish nationalist (national) option. They felt underestimated by the Polish government. As a matter of fact they were indeed often removed from administrative functions under the pretext of a lack of formal education and inadequate knowledge of Polish. The Upper Silesian dialect was commonly, publicly ridiculed by the immigrant, 'ordinary' Poles, but also by official factors. One of the results of this situation was the revival of the idea of Silesian separatism.

This situation in this territory was additionally complicated by the existence of a strong, in an organizational and economic sense (also thanks to considerable support from Berlin) German minority, who strongly criticised the fact they were being forced to reside in Poland. The aforementioned factors were responsible for the fact that the state of social and national disintegration was maintained in the formally autonomous Silesian Voivodeship.

The Polish policy towards the residents of Upper Silesia underwent radical changes following the May Coup d'Etat of 1926 carried out by Marshal Józef Piłsudski. The previous policy of Polonisation, conducted based on the ideology of National Democracy was rather unsuccessful. The rules of the so-called Sanation personified by the new Voivode, Michał Grażyński, abusing slogans of state policy,

[29] Ewa Waszkiewicz, *Doktryna hitlerowska wśród mniejszości niemieckiej w województwie śląskim w latach 1918-1939*, Wrocław 2001.

were tantamount to – as a matter of fact – severe anti-German and pro-Polish policy. Gradually this policy started to bring about success. Hard to define in terms of size and origin groups of the native, younger generations began to identify themselves with the state and with the Polish nation[30]. At the same time this often ruthless activity of Michał Grażyński simply prompted the hatred of large parts of the Silesian population, who were far from identifying with the despised Polish nation. This was the factor which could encourage these circles both to identify themselves with 'Germanness' but also to consolidate their sense of being part of the 'Regional Silesian Group'.

For a couple of years following the Nazis' rise to power in Germany in January 1933 – with no clear counteraction of the Polish government – there was a partial Nazification (although never total) of the German minority movement. It was toned down by the Polish-German declaration of 1934 but due to the opposite aims of Poland and Germany in Upper Silesia (in both halves of the population) local relations were gradually worsened as the conflict between Berlin and Warsaw at the close of the 1930s was increasing.

Following the legal, constitutional assumption of power over Germany, the Nazis moved on to the implementation of their new economic policy on a grand scale. The policy seemed to confirm their declarations on the building of social security. This had to be of much significance for the vast industrial territories of Upper Silesia, though the Nazis did not enjoy as much support from the local population as they did from that of Lower Silesia. At the same time the policy of attracting society to the new totalitarian power was supported by the excessive use of nationalist slogans and using them as the basis for shaping educational policy. Also the totalitarian policy of providing citizens with social care for their entire lives bore fruit in an effective plan to focus part of the Silesian (also native) youth and indoctrinated children around the person of Chancellor Adolf Hitler.

No doubt the 'high-sounding' and much more modestly implemented social policy of the Nazis consolidated among the most impoverished classes of society the looming sense of social justice, when the state would prevent an uncertain future and even create a stable foundation for prosperity. The growing integrity of the Nazi policy had to be coupled with the progressive erosion (the extent of which was difficult to estimate) of part of the historically Silesian circles. The policy bore fruit in the shrinking of the group of people who gravitated towards this 'Germanness' (mostly) or 'Polishness' at the expense of the ongoing (especially in the villages) regionalism.

[30] Cf.: M. Czapliński, *Dzieje Śląska*, pp. 394-406; M.W. Wanatowicz, *Historia społeczno-polityczna*, pp. 41-144.

At the end of the 1930s the growing and increasingly evident Polish-German conflict towards the close of the period of peace brought about a growing tensions in Opole Silesia, resulting in an almost total cessation of Polish activity in this territory (also because of acts of terror).

In their attacks, the German Nazis were in fact not striving to completely liquidate 'Polishness'. Their purpose was to attract native Silesians to the ideology and nationalist slogans of the NSDAP. The policy they implemented with the local Jewish population in mind was quite different. The Jews were classified, in principle, as the worst enemy of Germans and 'Germanness'. Their fate was identical to that of the Jews in the entirety of contemporary Germany. Only to some extent and to a certain moment (up until 1937) could the Upper Silesian Jews count on the protection of the expiring Upper Silesian convention. This 'besieged community' as it was defined in the literature was gradually being deprived of all its rights. Its living space was increasingly whittled away at, regulated by increasingly restrictive rules-starting from the renowned Nuremberg Laws of 1934. The 'Crystal Night' of 1938, as it became known, put an effective and drastic end to the Jews' 'normal' functioning in the policed, racist and extremely anti-Semitic Germany. During this pogrom Wrocław suffered an irretrievable loss, namely, the destruction of one of the greatest synagogues in Germany. During the Second World War, in the early 1940s, Silesian Jews were deported to mass extermination camps and slaughtered. Only a few survived[31].

Right after the First World War problems arose prompted by the unfulfilled territorial expectations of Prague and its stillborn dreams of rallying Poles from Zaolzie (the western part of Czech Cieszyn Silesia) around Czechoslovakia to which the Czech nation found their radical although temporary solution at the close of the 1930s. At the time of 'the disassembling' of the Czechoslovakian state, and beginning with the Munich agreement of the 30th September 1938, Warsaw decided to settle this 'old' score. The Polish party forced Prague-by means of an armed ultimatum-to perform a territorial cession to the benefit of Poland. At the beginning of October the disputed territory (in 1919 annexed by the Czechoslovakian soldiers as a result of an armed attack) was incorporated into Poland. The occupation process of these territories was accompanied by a large-scale propaganda campaign and described as the fair recovery of territories annexed by the Czechs.[32] It was also

[31] Cf. i.e.: Abraham Ascher, *The Jews of Breslau under Nazism*, Stanford 2007; Willy Cohn, *Żadnego prawa – nigdzie. Dziennik z Breslau 1933-1941*, selected fragments by Norbert Conrads, Wrocław 2010 (original title: *Kein Recht, nirgends. Breslauer Tagebücher 1933-1941*, Köln 2008).

[32] See a very interesting – Polish-Czech – work on the subject that has been published only recently: K. Nowak, *Między historiografią polską a czeską*; Mecislav Borak, *W czechosłowackiej i czeskiej historiografii*, [in:] *Historia Górnego Śląska*, pp. 449-455.

meant to be an – as it later turned out a very much deceptive – expression of conviction of the superpower status of Poland at least in this region of Europe.

An undoubtedly large proportion of local Silesians (whose size is difficult to assess) derived a sense of satisfaction by becoming part of Poland. Neither did they hide their pro-Polish national feelings. The participation of Poland – even though it was justified by the fact of its formerly being treated unfairly – in the partition of the neighbouring country resulted in the two Slavonic countries being again divided by a chasm. The Poles from Zaolzie who were to pay for this in 1945 following the rebuilding – the shape of which took its borders from before the Munich conference – of the Czechoslovakian state.

During the war these territories became the administrative units of the German Reich and were subject to campaigns similar to that of the *Volkslist* in Upper Silesia. The effect of such a campaign was to lead to a complete 'Germanisation' of the local population, and on a short-term basis to bring them into the scope of German influence as well as forcing them to serve in the German army. Also these doings, undertaken immediately following the war, became a pretext for the Czech party to repress the Polish community of Zaolzie.

Silesia during the Second World War[33]

The war, initiated by the invasion of Poland, manifested itself in radical ethnic tensions in the Polish part of Upper Silesia (in the German part the possibilities to display pro-Polish attitudes had been previously almost totally prevented). The joyful welcoming of the German troops, 'liberators', in Silesian towns was not always a result of the German, Nazi propaganda. Following the annexation of the Polish parts of Upper Silesia, the German Nazis set about liquidating all forms of an organized Polish national movement. The strategic aim of the Germans from the very beginning was the complete Germanisation of the annexed Upper Silesian territories and the optimal elimination of pro-Polish national attitudes or expectations. The aim of the German nationalists was the administrative and forceful creation of a state of social unity in this territory, which was to become a fundamental condition by which all its inhabitants could identify themselves with the German nationality. This policy

[33] On the subject of issues connected with the participation of both parts of Silesia in the Second World War cf. – of older studies – for example: *Śląsk wobec wojny polsko-niemieckiej 1939 r.*, ed. Wojciech Wrzesiński, Wrocław-Warszawa 1990; Mirosława Błaszczak-Wacławik, *Zbiorowość śląska w okresie okupacji niemieckiej*, [in:] Mirosława Błaszczak-Wacławik, Wojciech Błasiak, Tomasz Nawrocki, *Górny Śląsk. Szczególny przypadek kulturowy*, p. 41-65; M.W. Wanatowicz, *Historia społeczno-polityczna*, pp. 41-65.

undoubtedly contributed to the deepening of divisions among the native people of Silesia and to the disintegration of this group.

The situation in both parts of Upper Silesia reunited within the actual territory of Germany was not identical[34]. Opole Silesia was treated by Berlin as German both in terms of ethnicity as well as territory;(the local population of Poles was marginalized; this was also the purpose of the Nazi People's List (*Volkslist*) of 1939). Indeed, all forms of Polish activity (such as education, publishing, self-organisation) and displaying a pro-Polish national attitude were suppressed. The residents of the region as German citizens were by definition, as were the inhabitants of Germany, obliged to serve in German military formations. At the same time the local people during the war were witnessing terrible atrocities inflicted upon great masses of foreign forced labourers and prisoners of the Nazi concentration camps working in local industrial and farming facilities. It would be nonetheless difficult-in the face of a lack of reliable sources-to assess what exactly the influence of these events and observations was on the potential variability and shaping of ethnic and ideological attitudes of native Silesians.

Inasmuch as pre-war Silesia was 'mute', the situation in Polish Silesia (at the time part of Germany) was all the more so dynamic. It was also there that efforts were undertaken for the quickest possible integration of both the territory and its citizens with the Germans. This integration consisted of a striving for the quickest possible Germanisation of the entire local population. As a matter of fact, it is beyond a doubt that in the face of such a radically changing situation, due to the repressions, but also because they were so impressed by the brilliant German victories in the first years of war, a hard to identify group of native Silesians consciously took the German side and started to identify themselves with the Nazi objectives. It was similar also when it comes to the local indigenous Germans and previously Germanised native inhabitants. For part of them this was made all the easier as their thoughts had already earlier gravitated towards accepting German nationality. This deepening state of fragmentation of the local communities did not however mean an increase in significance of the Germanised Silesians in the territory they inhabited. The Nazis were not going to leave too much power in the hands of the local people. They carried out a policy of relying on immigrants from outside Upper Silesia.

The Polish citizens (in accordance with the rules of international law they formally maintained this status, which was unacceptable for the Nazis) were included in the so-called German People's List. The idea to divide those listed into

[34] Cf.: M. Czapliński, *Dzieje Śląska*, pp.406-424; Ryszard Kaczmarek, *II wojna światowa (1939-1945)*, [in:] *Historia Górnego Śląska*, pp. 255-266.

four groups was to facilitate the gradual liquidation of potential or active Polish pro-national attitudes. The list was also to enable a balanced calculation of the German demographical potential in this territory and to eliminate the potential activity of the Polish resistance movement as well as propaganda of Polish government in exile. Differently classified locals were also supposed to be entirely engaged in the military life of the German state. For this purpose German Nazi organizations were actively extended.

The locals were above all to serve as the source of recruits for the German armed forces. The omnipresent German propaganda was reaching to the local native communities and wreaking moral havoc among the members of the younger generations. The opposing Polish side both could and indeed did make attempts to influence the society, even by means of the Catholic Church's activity. These institutions – just as the Polish government in exile – discreetly encouraged people to sign the *Volkslist* in order to avoid 'biological losses of the population', which was to return to the territory of the Polish state following, as it was assumed, the quickly concluded war resulting in Hitler's defeat.

The failures of the Nazi-German integration were especially evident in the two last years of the war, and especially when, in 1944, several thousand German soldiers from the Polish section of Upper Silesia deserted the German army and, as if to verify their attitude, were included in the Polish army on the Italian front. This considerable number of deserters – produced not only in the last years of the global conflict – was composed both of individuals who were disappointed by Nazism, 'Germanness' and the German state (a drawing-away factor) as well as of a group that was very difficult to define, and whose choices had been made under fear of being forced to personally bear the consequences of the expected defeat of Germany. The German government were also noticing the growing – during the ongoing Second World War – practice of using the Silesian dialect and Polish.

At the outset of 1945 the Germans were forced out of Polish Upper Silesia, and soon later out of Opole Silesia by the Red Army which was approaching from the east. The German occupation was replaced by the horrifying and murderous yet temporary Soviet occupation.

Conclusions

Over a period of approximately half a century the inhabitants of Silesia had been subjected to the overwhelming pressure of these restless times. The Jewish people fewer in number who in the vast majority were Germans of Jewish origin,

and not infrequently functioned outside Judaism, in the 1940s found themselves on the verge of total physical annihilation. In the Second Reich and in the Prussian state they were responsible for the modernisation of Germany. They, too, often played important political roles; in the period prior to the Great War they were the driving force of urbanisation and industrialisation. The German Jews, in the number of ten thousand, fell fatal victims of the First World War military campaigns. Following the defeat and fall of the Empire these were the Jews who were accused of co-participation in the plot against the German state and they shared at least part of the responsibility for the alleged 'stab in the back' which resulted in defeat. These events had (but rather did not make use of) their potential to hamper the process of the gradual gravitation of consecutive citizens of the German Reich of Jewish origin towards absolute affiliation with the German nation, its culture and civilisation. This process was violently stopped, starting with the outset of 1939, which marked the assumption of power by the Nazis headed by Adolf Hitler. The NSDAP came to power by bandying around extremely racist anti-Semitic slogans. During the 1930s, beginning with the famous Nuremberg Laws of 1934 the Jews were gradually deprived of their civil rights. In spite of the fact that up until 1937 in the territory of German Upper Silesia they were still being protected by the Upper Silesian convention (1922-1937) this fact did not prevent them from falling victim to the all-German bloody pogrom of 1938 called 'the Crystal Night'. As a result of the 1940s deportations of the Jewish population from Silesia to mass extermination camps, their functioning in society was brought to a horrible and permanent end. Very few Silesian Jews managed to live through the Second World War. It is most probable that the Silesian-Jewish population residing in Silesia contributed to the integration of the local community. Yet, this was only in the dimension of its sense of a connection with the German population. So, the Jews could feel like 'locals' only inasmuch as the local Germans felt like locals as well.

The local Germans in the period prior to the First World War – originating both from the group which had been migrating to this territory for several hundred years and from the group of Germanised native Silesians – had a sense of residing in a specific, ethnically mixed area. Both these groups were subject to two, by no means unconnected processes. The first one was the growing sense of being part of a uniform community of all Germans focused on the German Reich. The second was-the ever-strengthening-sense of connection with the region of their residence[35]. What was then undoubtedly taking place was a process of mutual integration of part of the local community focused around the German national core. The German

[35] Cf. relevant chapters: Joanna Nowosielska-Sobel, *Od ziemi rodzinnej*.

academics have even recently mentioned the existence of 'a Silesian tribe' in order to illustrate the unity of this local community[36].

At the same time this three-sided processes were taking place among the local Upper Silesian population. The group showed a continuous sense of being part of the local community which was diametrically opposed to that of the Germans. Their sense of unity was consolidated by the conscious fact of their longstanding residence in their own territory among the same – both close and distant – neighbours spent communicating by means of a commonly understood dialect. From this segment of the population groups of people who confirmed their affiliation with the German of Polish nation started to break free which was viewed by locals as a disintegrating factor. What needs to be remembered here is support of the idea of politically independent Upper Silesian people and country by a separate activists. Ideologically they were headed towards a unification of the entire native Upper Silesian community within a uniform nation. This was therefore a factor whose clear objective was to integrate the Slavonic inhabitants of the region. Yet, contrary to the expectations of Silesian separatists they did not gain wider social support, and they were in fact eliminated from the political life by both Polish and German activists.

During the quarter of a century that followed the Great War, the Silesian Germans were growing generally, as a result of the continuous activity of the German nationalist circles within the community of nearly a million Silesians whose members were ethnically Polish. This process was alternatively slowing down and speeding up in the years immediately following the First World War. As a result of the plebiscite, Upper Silesia witnessed a polarization of national attitudes (towards a crystallized 'Germanness' or 'Polishness') among the nationally-neutral, ethnically Polish population of Silesia. This fragmentation of Silesia brought about important consequences for the existence – as a uniform group – of the local population. The local Germans, who prior to the war were largely focused on the ideal of localness, suddenly found themselves residing in two hostile countries. Similarly, the local Silesians found themselves divided by an unfriendly border. This was undoubtedly a factor which contributed to the disintegration of these communities.

The divided Upper Silesia continued to witness the progress of these nation-building processes. On the German side of the border, despite the Upper Silesian Convention which had been put into effect thereby protecting the Polish minority-which no doubt existed there officially represented by the legally-operating Association of Poles in Germany – some groups nonetheless seemed to gravitate towards

[36] This thesis appears several times in the deliberations contained in the book of Joachim Bahlcke. Cf.: Joachim Bahlcke et. al., *Śląsk i Ślązacy*.

German nationality. This process was radically sped up under the rule of the national socialists. In the context of the anti-Polish activities, which following the worsening of Polish-German national relations assumed the characteristics of pure terror, the Germanisation of Silesian children and youths, who were additionally lured with the slogans of National Socialism, progressed. The mixture of very complex issues connected with this phenomenon was to face the Polish state with the advent of the winter of 1945 when following the arrival of the Red Army both parts of Upper Silesia saw the introduction of a new Polish administration.

The aforementioned processes, most importantly those related to Germanisation (voluntary and involuntary), were significant disintegration factors of the local community. Nonetheless, even during the reign of the Nazis, and despite the progressing Germanisation and ideologisation of the children and youth, the Upper Silesian, regional core continued to last.

On the Polish side of the border the clash between the intentions of the generally anti-Polish, well organized and economically strong German minority and the representatives of the Polish state striving to Polonise the Upper Silesian territories that were controlled by them from 1922 continued. Poles also had some successes on their account. In 1927 the Priest Emil Szramek, a native Upper Silesian, became the head of the Upper Silesian Society of Friends of Science established at the close of the 19th century. This greatly contributed to the development of the local Silesian/Polish intelligentsia. The symbol of Polonisation and anti-German activity of the voivode Michał Grażyński was the foundation, in the 1930s, of the Silesian Institute in Katowice – an institution created by immigrant Poles. The Polonisation policy of Warsaw, whose prerogative was national raison d'etat, was targeted at the local communities including Silesian Germans, who were considered harmful, as well as ethnically Slavonic/Polish Silesians. When viewing this group as a regionally – although often passively – uniform community, the Polish state's actions against it were a significant factor in its disintegration. In spite of this fact, outside the group which was conscious of its 'Polishness' there was a large group whose members first and foremost identified themselves with their local, regional communities. The inevitable mistakes of the Polish administration whose members originated from outside the Silesian Voivodeship, namely from the lands of former Russian and Habsburg states, made it not in the least easier for the people to choose Polish nationality. But also on the German side, despite the seemingly utmost affiliation to 'Germanness' there were still a group of people who identified themselves first and foremost with 'Silesianness'.

The Second World War again remodelled the Silesian consciousness, views, evaluations. The initial years of the stunning military successes of the German army (up until the defeat in Stalingrad at the outset of 1943) undoubtedly had the potential to tip people towards taking the side of 'Germanness' on both sides of the pre-war border and shatter the permanence of regional community focused on its localness. What is worse, in Polish Upper Silesia annexed by the Wehrmacht (soon afterwards incorporated into the Reich as the so-called 'recovered' territories) the perverse policy of national divisions was conducted. In the conditions of a ruthless fight against all manifestations of 'Polishness' in the previous Silesian Voivodeship the German People's List (*Volkslist*) was introduced. The list constituted in fact 'an irrefutable offer' to the Silesian people, and especially to those of ethnically Polish origin. Performed at the time – under compulsion, in a calculated manner, with joy – national choices were difficult to verify precisely. A similar strategy was adopted by the German Nazis in the annexed and was soon to be later incorporated into the Reich territories of the former Duchy of Cieszyn. Also in this case – the local Silesian people were burdened with consequences – on the Polish and on the Czechoslovakian frontier. Later, as early as in the spring of 1945, the Polish-Czechoslovakian territorial conflict was again exacerbated.

The madness of the Second World War inflicted immense suffering on the community of Silesia. Throughout the period of this great conflict and directly afterwards a great number of Silesians died, and many more were forced to leave their place of origin. The Silesian Jews were slaughtered by the German Nazis, the vast majority of local Germans were forced by the Poles to migrate from Silesia to their country which was occupied by the victors of war and stripped of a number of territories. The native, ethnically Polish Silesians independently of their previous national choices or their lack thereof were confronted with the nationalist, ruthless policy of the pro-communist, not sovereign Polish state. The existence of their historically local community found itself greatly endangered.