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Remembering the Others in the narratives of new settlers. The case of the Western Territories in the post-war Poland

Abstract

The purpose of the text is to present the nature of the memory of the “Others” in post-war Lower Silesia in the biographical narratives of those displaced from Eastern Galicia. The group of “Others” includes the autochthonous population of Lower Silesia, but also distinct groups who came to Lower Silesia after the war: those displaced by the Operation Vistula, people from central Poland and Greater Poland, Jewish survivors and Soviet soldiers. The stories of the “Others” present us with a fragment of the post-war world, redefined by war and migration. Using the memoirs of Eastern displaced persons, the article shows how Eastern displaced persons remember their first contacts with the “Others”, but also stereotypes and opinions about other national and ethnic groups in the first postwar years in the Western Territories of Poland. Using the example of excerpts from biographical narratives in the text, correlations between representations of groups of “Others” and the formation of a sense of settlement in the new territories and the construction of postwar self-identification.

Keywords: Lower Silesia, identity, displaced persons, stereotypes, Eastern Galicia, biographical narratives, memory, intercultural communication

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie charakteru pamięci o „Innych” na powojennym Dolnym Śląsku w narracjach biograficznych przesiedlonych z Galicji Wschodniej. W grupie „Innych” znajduje się ludność autochtoniczna Dolnego Śląska, ale także odrębne grupy przybyłe na Dolny Śląsk po wojnie: przesiedleni w ramach akcji „Wisła”, ludność z terenów centralnej Polski i Wielkopolski, ocalali Żydzi i żołnierze radzieccy.

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Opowieści o „Innych” prezentują wycinek powojennego świata, przeddefiniowanego przez wojnę i migrację. W tekście na podstawie wspomnień przesiedleńców ze Wschodu przedstawiono, jak przesiedleńcy pamiętają pierwsze powojenne kontakty z „Innymi”, ale także stereotypy i opinie dotyczące innych grup narodowych i etnicznych w pierwszych powojennych latach na Ziemiach Zachodnich. Na przykładzie fragmentów narracji biograficznych w artykule ukazano korelacje między przedstawieniami grup „Innych” a kształtowaniem poczucia zadomowienia na nowych terenach i budowaniem powojennej samoidentyfikacji wśród przesiedleńców z Kresów Wschodnich.

Słowa kluczowe: Dolny Śląsk, tożsamość, przesiedleńcy, stereotypy, Galicja Wschodnia, narracje biograficzne, komunikacja międzykulturowa

Introduction

Biographies are a subjective type of source – accounts of historical events they offer include not only verifiable facts, but also opinions and reactions of the authors and their group (Cała 2005: 10). The consolidation of individual and social memories poses a very interesting question from a research point of view. Some of its elements are considered true by the society, whereas others are hardly remembered or shaped to become part of a memory cluster. However, memory must form an interpretative whole shaped by members of a given group (Holzer 1995: 31). War and its consequences, such as deportations, are a critical experience for people affected by it. Clinical psychologists claim that when undergoing such an experience, the “I” is smashed, and it goes through a transformation to become re-built (Szymkiewicz 2013: 119). Forced resettlement related to the border changes after WWII is an example of such an experience.

This article is based on field research conducted using the method of narrative biographical interview. Its subjects were deportees from the South-Eastern provinces of the Second Polish Republic who came to live in Lower Silesia in Poland, after the post-war territorial changes². When in

² The text is based on the analysis of twenty-five biographical interviews. The interviewees were people born in the 1920s and the first half of 1930s in the eastern provinces of the Second Polish Republic, in small towns and nearby villages of Eastern Galicia – a territory which before WWII was in the Second Polish Republic, and after the war was incorporated into the Ukrainian SSR. The interviewees came from Polish or mixed Polish-Ukrainian families, and as such had the possibility to move to the post-war Poland. Field research was conducted in the years 2011–2017 in selected towns and villages in Lower Silesia in Poland: Legnica, Jawor, Jelenia Góra and local villages. Some interviews were conducted as a part of research programmes: in 2011, an oral history grant from the Remembrance and Future Center in Wrocław, entitled „The period of settlement of the lands of Lower Silesia in the memory of people resettled from the eastern borderlands of the Second Polish Republic”; 2012 oral history grant from the Center for Re-

1945 the Polish borders were redrawn, Eastern Galicia where the interviewed people came from was incorporated into the Ukrainian SSR, whereas formerly German Lower Silesia – where they moved to – became part of post-war Poland. This article focuses on recollections of people displaced from the East, on how – in the first post-war years of their forced resettlement in the Western Territories in Poland – they remembered the Others, and how they organized their lives in a new place. War and experiences such as mass deportations, contribute to consolidating interpretative reserves typical for national groups, and they perpetuate stereotypes and prejudices (Kaźmierska 1999: 53–54). This is why I wanted to find out how the interviewees shaped their identity after the war in the territories, where almost every inhabitant was new to the area, and also how they remembered their first years after the war and life in new reality in Lower Silesia, whose autochthonous population had been almost entirely removed. In this work my aim is to show how the image of the Other is built in recollections of post-war Lower Silesia, and of the importance of those images to identity narratives of the people I talked to.

Identity of the interviewed and the image of the Others

Experience is the key to understanding. No matter if we are interested in our own or somebody else's experience, it always belongs to someone, and is based on intimacy. It can be expressed only thanks to culture and through the language. The language is the medium of formulating an experience, translating it from an inner sensation into a story so that it can be understood or further related to others (Kaniowska 2003: 57).

Even though the nature of memories is individualistic – since they represent experiences of a particular person – yet some of them are shared by a group, family, small community, or a nation. This collective memory determines our identity also in relation to others (Ricoeur 1995: 27).

membrance and Future in Wrocław entitled: „The First Ten Years of Settlement in Lower Silesia in the Memories of Persons Displaced from the Eastern Borderlands of the Second Polish Republic”; 2103 Grant of the Faculty of Historical and Pedagogical Sciences of the University of Wrocław (No. 1220/m/KEAK/13); 2014 Grant of the Faculty of Historical and Pedagogical Sciences of the University of Wrocław (No. 2260/m/KEAK/14). The interviews were recorded during field research for the doctoral dissertation „War and Displacement in the Memories of People Born in Eastern Galicia Living in Lower Lower Silesia and Western Ukraine”, written under the supervision of University of Wrocław professor Eugeniusz Kłosek. I discuss some of the conclusions presented in this article in the book „Świat, który już nie istnieje. Polskie i ukraińskie opowieści biograficzne (1918–1956)”, Wrocław 2022.

The turning point in the life stories the displaced people told me was the change of Poland's borders after Yalta, and migrations that resulted from it. The interviewed would describe in detail the moment of the displacement, and the context in which the decision about moving was being made. In their stories, going west would always be the beginning of the end to the old life, it would always divide the narratives into "before" and "after". My interviewees focused only on the first years after the war, their first impressions after arriving in the post-German Lower Silesia, and how it felt rather strange; they also spoke about traits typical of those newly arrived in the Northern and Western Territories, and about building their lives there. For the most part, they called themselves "Kresowiaks" (T/N: Polish: "Kresowiacy", from the term "Kresy", which refers to the former eastern regions of Poland – Borderlands) and "Zabuzanie" (T/N: meaning "people from the other side of the river Bug"). Sometimes, they also offered the names related to the Second Poland Republic's towns and cities, such as "brodzianie" and "lwowiaczy" (T/N: derived from Brody and Lviv, respectively), even if they grew up in villages close to Lviv. Some of these people attended meetings organized by Kresowiak organizations, and took interest in publications about the South-East Borderlands, which undoubtedly affected the canons of narrative of the Kresowiaks' collective memory.

Biographical narrative is related to certain stages and periods in one's life, a person presents their whole life, giving it basic order and identity structure. The way the biography is told reflects the way it is felt and interpreted at the moment of telling. Autobiographies give us not only an account of the events that the person witnessed and his or her reactions to them, but also present internal changes and identity developed over years (Schütze 2012: 152). Moreover, there is no such a thing as "false" biographical narratives, since from the perspective of the speaker's experience, they are all very much true. This is a type of subjective truth, the centre of which is single man's story, based on meanings given to experiences and the interviewee's reflections (Filipowski 2010: 29). Biographical stories are not simply individualistic creations; they are always a part of the social world, immersed in collective consciousness, myths, ideas, and notions. In the case of biographical narratives, even "false" statements remain true from the psychological perspective, and this kind of truth can have as much value and be as dependable as accounts full of facts (Portelli 2018: 31).

The Other has been the central element of the interest of cultural anthropology for years, since meeting otherness is the moment when we lose the feeling of confidence in our own position, our sense of certainty is shattered, we find ourselves at the point where we can discover new meanings (Dybel 2021: 12). Meeting another person makes us not only notice their

otherness, but also realize our own selfness, and consolidate our own identity. Comparison and contrast usually make us more aware of our own identity, and of the uniqueness of our group. The choice of ideas and notions about the Other that a group uses to create stereotypes about other groups, is founded not only on current social variables, but also on historical circumstances (Tokarska-Bakir 2008: 56). This is why not infrequently stories about the Others are closer to imagined representation than objective truth.

First years of settlement in the post-war Lower Silesia

Apart from people displaced from the Eastern territories of the former Second Polish Republic, also thousands of settlers from Central Poland and Greater Poland arrived in the Western Territories in the post-war Poland: few hundred people were registered daily by the State Repatriation Bureau (*Państwowy Urząd Repatriacyjny*; Zaremba 2012: 242). Generally, those new settlers were young bachelors – most typically they would go west to either look for a new place to live, or to see what the situation was like there, and after finding a house they would have their families join them; whereas in case of the Easterners, whole families were forcibly resettled. Not only people displaced from the East and those coming from Central Poland and Greater Poland came to the “Wild West”; there was also a great number of looters. Literally everything was taken to Central Poland: from tableware, to down, to furniture and clothes. Every city and every town had its own market for looted items (*szaberplac*).

Lower Silesia – a territory from which most of the Germans had been removed – became a destination also for Jews. Right after the war, there were some measures undertaken by the state to protect the Jewish population, and there was a plan for a permanent Jewish settlement in this region. However, both the international situation, and the political changes in Poland – in 1948, Bierut came to power – brought a shift in the authorities’ attitude towards Jews, who would set up Zionist associations and start immigrating to Palestine. Lower Silesia was attractive also to those who had to leave Central Poland due to political reasons: underground activists, or enemies of socialism. With new documents and new identities, they could start post-war lives in the lands where everybody was a newcomer (Halicka 2015: 187–188).

The first settlers who arrived in Lower Silesia in 1945 had to face a life full of chaos, where robbery and plunder and the law of the strongest were common ways of behaviour. Most of the Polish transferees from the East and newcomers from Central Poland considered the Oder-Neisse line

unstable, and for this reason the resettlement was more of a chaotic process than a well-planned programme. The authorities organized a propaganda campaign to help the settlers with their sense of identity (Halicka 2015: 185). These lands were commonly referred to as the “Regained Territories”. The mood created by the post-war authorities regarding the annexation of the Northern and Western Territories by Poland is well reflected in the words Władysław Gomułka said after the Potsdam conference: “Old Polish lands in the North and West, forcibly torn away from Poland over hundreds of years by German greediness, have now been restored to us under the treaty” (Gomułka 1946: 6).

In May 1945, the Polish administration incorporated Lower Silesia. At the beginning, there were groups of “pioneers” whose job was to facilitate introducing order and to organize work in those territories. They were not the only ones entrusted with the task of organizing life in the so-called Regained Territories. District plenipotentiaries and operational groups were set up by the Economic Committee of the Council of Ministers (*Komitet Ekonomiczny Rady Ministrów*; Hytrek-Hryciuk 2013: 140). Settlement programme and the official propaganda were aimed at uniting those lands with the rest of the country. When the Soviets entered the Western Territories, they treated them as a conquest, a prize for winning the fight against “the enemy”, and so robberies, looting, and rapes (mostly of German women³) were common. During such “actions”, the plundering soldiers were usually drunk, they started fires which brought more damage than the war had. Overall, the level of security in Lower Silesia right after the war was catastrophic. In 1946, crimes were committed here four times more often than in other provinces of the post-war Poland, which was connected with the fact that the Soviet army stationed there and with the influx of migrants from other parts of the country (Hytrek-Hryciuk 2013: 159). Soviet soldiers would search passengers on trains, confiscate their luggage, attack train stations, there were also instances of throwing “disobedient passengers” out of a window. Such acts of violence and robberies were so common that civilians tried to defend themselves on their own initiative by appointing night guards and setting up formations called country militia – a few armed men who would patrol the neighbourhood at nights (Zaremba 2012: 190).

³ Rapes on autochthonous inhabitants were reported in more than a half of the Lower Silesia districts. After the war, they were said to be less frequent, but after a great number of regular Russian army units arrived in the western parts of the post-war Poland, the numbers went up. Estimates say the total of 1.4 million women and girls were raped on the territories east of the Oder and Neisse rivers (Hytrek-Hryciuk 2013: 81–82).

German population who did not escape the Soviet front and was not evacuated in the winter of 1945, remained in Lower Silesia. Feeling insecure and afraid of “the Russkis”, most Germans tried to run away as fast as possible, and those who were not lucky enough to go by train, travelled by car, in horse-drawn carts or on foot (Hytrek-Hryciuk 2013: 62). The communist authorities built their claim to Lower Silesia on the idea that those lands had been the old lands of the Piast dynasty, and so their goal was to eradicate any past presence of the Germans in those territories. From the perspective of the post-war migration, one has to bear in mind also the issue of securing places to live and work for the millions of resettled Poles. Getting rid of the autochthons would solve the problem. It was in line with the Polish Workers’ Party’s (*Polska Partia Robotnicza*) propaganda myth of the Regained Territories – and the idea that returning those lands to Poland was an act of historical justice (Borodziej 2000: 56). Both the displacement of the German population, and the attitude of the authorities towards the German possessions and property were part of propaganda aimed at winning the new settlers’ favour (Halicka 2015: 151). The politicians wanted to win the trust of the newcomers by incorporating into Poland a territory of about one hundred thousand square kilometres, by “de-Germanizing” it and resettling it with Polish population, and all this immersed in talk of building a nationally homogenous Poland. German schools were closed, property confiscated, evangelical churches destroyed, and German mural advertising and signs were painted over. There were, thus, two directions in the process of “removing” the Germans: one was by organizing their forced resettlement, and the other by creating conditions which would encourage the Germans to leave (Kacprzak 2010: 217).

Thus, Lower Silesia was the area where the Germans were displaced from, and the Poles and Jews came to live in. The Western Territories became destination also to Ukrainian population resettled from the territories on which Operation Vistula (*Akcja Wisła*) was launched, and that included displaced Lemkos and Ukrainians from the Bieszczady and Low Beskids regions. The decision was entirely up to the authorities as to who would find themselves in the expelled group. Most of those forcibly relocated to Lower Silesia during Operation Vistula were people from the Lower Beskids and from the eastern districts of the Rzeszów region. It was assumed that as a result of the Operation, the Ukrainians would gradually become assimilated. For example, up to 1952, they did not have the possibility to be educated in Ukrainian (Syrnyk 2013: 84–85). According to the anti-Ukrainian propaganda that accompanied the Operation, the expelled Lemkos and Ukrainians were “rezuni” (T/N: in the Old-Polish language a *rezun*, plural: *rezuni*, meant a murderer, a killer; the word derives from the Ukrain-

ian term for a butcher), “banderowcy” (Banderites), and “bandits”. What is more, those people met settlers from Volhynia and Galicia, who had suffered anti-Polish persecution and for whom that group of newcomers was synonymous with supporters of the Ukrainian partisans (Drozd 2006: 400).

Pre-war Lower Silesians – Germans as seen by the resettlers

Autochthons with whom the expellees from the East interacted in the first year after the war, included mainly women, children, or the elderly (Miształ 1998: 87–88). Before resettlement programmes started, the Germans – treated as “the Nazis” and “the enemy” – were simply forced out. These actions were spontaneous and sometimes also Polish settlers leapt into them; they were often carried out in a brutal way. The German population were left with nothing to live on, and often found themselves dependent on their new neighbours’ generosity. Fear and misery experienced at the end of the war and in the period right after, led many autochthons to suicide (Berendt 2009: 55). Propaganda presented the Germans as “the nation who began the war”, and so there was a collective understanding that they should atone for the wrong they did. Some of the interviewees recalled the cruel way of treating the German soldiers who were in hiding:

In 1945 when we came, even after the war was over, it was in June. There were some German survivors here in the woods – a few Germans [hiding] here and there. (...) But the Poles caught them, they were so young, foolish, and they would shoot them on spot, instead of taking these [Germans] prisoner, they killed and buried them in the forest, like a dog (Man, born in 1928, after the war lived in Jawor)⁴.

This person talked about “coming after” Germans hiding in the woods in a reproving manner. Some others recalled exploiting the Germans who remained on these territories as free physical workers, eg. for house renovations or farming. A recurring motif in the memories of the Germans remaining in Lower Silesia were the murders and rapes of German women in the first post-war period. In the stories told by the interviewees both crimes referred to as common. Also, both were rarely punished (Hytrek-Hryciuk 2014: 276). Undoubtedly, the anti-German propaganda along with the lack of punishment for the offences committed by the Soviet soldiers, only added to the violence. War trauma manifested itself in the feeling of fear which determined the way people behaved, in particular in Eastern and Central

⁴ Some of the interviewed people requested to remain anonymous, especially those from small villages. In such instances, I do not provide the name of the village they live in, only the county.

Europe it affected whole civilian populations. During wartime, a widespread phenomenon can be observed – it is called value dimorphism and consists in duality of attitudes and moral values: high for family and low with regard to others. Family ties become strengthened and narrowed down to the closest family members who become the centre of one's life and actions (Zaremba 2012: 96–97). This duality can be seen also in post-war memories. The interviewees described the widespread violence towards the Germans, yet they rarely talked about any acts perpetrated by other people who settled in Lower Silesia, but rather in stories about raped German women there were more often Poles mentioned:

Our Poles came, and so they hanged out with the Russkis, and there was one such woman who took the Russkis and told them: "There's a pretty woman in here". I don't know if they found [that German woman]. And so, these Russkis had to find this German woman, because she had told them... And then my brother told [me what he saw once]: "There was a line of soldiers..., the husband had to stand and hold his wife, and they [soldiers raped her,] they had it with her" (Man, born in 1930, lived in Jelenia Góra).

In all recollections, the situation of the Germans is presented as very difficult most of all because of the threat of aggression, and not only from the Soviet soldiers, but sometimes also from the locals. The Germans, who were being resettled, were usually treated by the newcomers as remains of the fading past, a consequence of the inevitable border changes. They were remembered as posing no threat, since they were mostly women, children, and the elderly. Also, their presence there did not undermine the Polish identity of those lands (Kopczyńska 2010: 193).

Despite the post-war anti-German propaganda, the Germans were more often than not described in a neutral or positive way, as a group who experienced forced resettlement just like the people from the East did. The interviewees mentioned they felt sympathy towards the leaving Germans, they stressed "the common fate" (Wylegała 2009: 60). Sometimes, the German hosts, with whom the interviewees lived under one roof, were referred to as "our" Germans:

I remember when our Germans were leaving and they cried, and so we cried. I was little, and I cried, and they left it all to us. Took with them only a little, the most necessary things, and left the rest. Some Poles might have treated them badly. But I mean, they were displaced, and we were displaced, too (Woman, born in 1932, lived in Jelenia Góra).

In the post-war narratives, the Germans were portrayed either as victims – in the case of rapes and murders they suffered in the first year after the war from the Soviet soldiers – or forced resettlers affected by totalitarianism. The interviewees did not perceive them in line with the propagan-

da assumptions as “Nazis”, “murderers”, or “occupants”. Having been expelled from their homes themselves, they saw that the resettlement put the Germans in the same situation they had been in when they were forced to leave Eastern Galicia. This is why many of them felt compassion toward the German inhabitants of Lower Silesia who were forced to leave their land.

They came like a force... Soviets as seen by the interviewees

When the interviewees talked about the “Russkis” and the “Soviets”, they meant a lot of various groups, but in colloquial speech there was no difference between them. In the recollections, a “Russki” was a stranger from the East, someone who spoke Russian and remained man of the USSR. This group comprised both Soviet soldiers coming back home from Berlin, as well as administrative workers who had been resettled to Lower Silesia from the East and sympathized with communism. The post-war authorities were chaotic. This was a result of a lack of staff and a conflict between various commanding offices. And Soviet soldiers were poorly disciplined and prone to violence, convinced of their own victory and superiority over the civilian population, and they posed a threat to all civilians, regardless of nationality (Ruchniewicz 2018: 16).

In particular, the interviewees devoted a lot of attention in their memories of the Others to those Soviets who lived or worked near Legnica. Soviet troops stationed there, and there was a considerable number of garrisons. Moreover, the Soviets chose the city to be the headquarters of the operational unit called the Northern Group of Forces (*Północna Grupa Wojsk*). On the one hand, the Soviets stationing in Legnica were described as a significant group, privileged with access to better goods, own schools, or shops only for the military. On the other, in some of the stories, we can notice the Soviets were shown as rude, churlish soldiers living with their families in Legnica, which at that time was called “Little Moscow”:

After the war, there was a difference in clothes, when the Soviets came, the Red Army, what ragged coats the soldiers wore! And the Russian women, when they came to their husbands those officers, non-commissioned officers, back then there were still shops, Polish shops, with clothes, and they would buy a nightdress, for the night, to sleep. And they would put it on, and wear it, so beautiful and silk, and they wore it [the nightgown] like a day dress (Woman, born in 1927, lived in Legnica).

Both the war and its consequences, such as border changes and post-war migrations, are individual experiences, but of collective significance.

They relate to collective processes – and even though each person faces them in his or her own way, yet they can also be experienced within a group, included in a construct made of identical war circumstances (Rokuszewska-Pawełek 2002: 131). For this reason, some motives, like “city legends”, repeatedly emerged in the interviewees. One example is quoted above, when the woman talks about the Russian women dressed in silk nightgowns.

According to witnesses, in the first year after the war the Soviets were most of all soldiers returning from Berlin – intoxicated with alcohol, violent, and wild. They felt not only heroes, but also owners of those lands. All recollections describe them as “wild” and “Asian” soldiers who lack respect for other people. The interviewees called them a destructive element – a “swarm”:

We are walking [and looking for a place to live in Legnica, as we were living at granny's], and my mum says: “Look here, there are so many nice, unoccupied houses”. So, by the end of the day, she cleans it, and it was stinky and filthy and full of rubbish after the Russkis. Wastes everywhere, mum cleaned it up, worked a lot. And a Russki comes and says: “What are you doing? It's ours. Out!”. And mum says: “Damn you, I cleaned your shit and now you're kicking me out”. They threw us out (Woman, born in 1933, lived in Legnica).

There are two issues arising from the accounts regarding the Soviets and their behaviour in Lower Silesia after the war. The first one is connected with epithets such as a force, a “destroying wave” – these stories talked about rapes on German women, drunk Red Army soldiers wreaking havoc. In such instances, they were compared to “the forces of nature”, called “a mass” hard to oppose (Bokszański 2016: 92). Other names used to describe them included “the savages”, “strangers from Asia”; they belonged to the world of nature, not culture. The second element in the recounted stories is the neutral or positive image of some Soviet soldiers who – presented as individuals – were in a way exceptions to the rule. This kind of stories presented the Soviet soldiers as merry, sociable, well-behaved, sensitive, and cordial towards other people. However, in comparison to the stereotypical Soviet, seen as a “force”, such accounts were exceptions. They underlined empathy the Soviet soldiers demonstrated in face-to-face interactions with the interviewees. Particular traits ascribed to other groups do not have to coincide, and at times they even may exclude one another, as such is the “inalienable” characteristic of commonplace images. Therefore, stories told about other groups give us a full spectrum of features of a particular group. These features define the area of variability which contains the ideas about the Others presented by the interview-

ees (Bokszanski 2016: 89). For this reason, in the general picture of the Soviets in the post-war Lower Silesia we find some stories which are “exceptions”, so to speak, but still they are told to portray the character of the group as a “force” which poses a threat to others.

Lemkos, Boykos, Ukrainians stories about resettlers from Operation Vistula

In 1947, as a result of Operation Vistula, a new group of people from the south-eastern parts of Poland was forcibly resettled to the Northern and Western Territories. It consisted of Lemkos, Boykos, and Ukrainians⁵, including some Roma people (Szewczyk 2022: 120). During this action, 21,000 people were relocated to Lower Silesia (Berendt 2009: 76). The negative stereotype about the newcoming Ukrainians, reinforced by communist authorities, was that they were “rezuni”, murderers, and partisans (Michna 1995: 51). This led other resettlers to feel prejudice against new resettlers from Operation Vistula, whom they clearly perceived as either members of or supporters of Ukrainian guerilla. The Operation itself was conducted quickly, the newcomers did not have sufficient provisions, and the farms they were allotted were devastated (Syrnyk 2011: 147). Their group was relocated to the Western Territories of the post-war Poland as one of the last. The Ukrainian population were often forced to seek help from the state (ration cards were issued) or from those who had been resettled to those territories before them. Moreover, the victims of Operation Vistula were also under scrutiny by the Security Service – they were treated as suspicious and requiring special supervision (Syrnyk 2013: 158).

For the interviewees, the most important part of the story about the people displaced during Operation Vistula was the issue of ethnic identity of the Lemkos. Their ethnicity would come up every time they were mentioned in a conversation. While the interviewees did not focus their stories on the displaced Ukrainians, they talked about the Lemkos in far more detail, questioning, however, their “Ukrainness.” The accounts pointed out both the similarity between the Lemkos and the Ukrainians, and that the Lemkos were friendly towards the Poles:

⁵ People relocated during Operation Vistula were different, both in terms of culture and consciousness. Even after WWII, ethnic categories used by Polish and Ukrainian elites when carrying out ethnic cleansing were not clearly defined and fully recognized by local communities (Kosiek 2017: 62).

They were half this and half that, neither Polish, nor Ukrainian. They spoke good Polish, and were friends with Ukrainians, 'cause they considered themselves ones, but in truth they all preferred to befriend Poles rather than Ukrainians (Man, born in 1926, lived in Jawor).

Some accounts stress that it was the Lemkos themselves who did not agree to be identified with Ukrainians:

Our neighbours were Lemkos. And she [the neighbour] says to me: "Kaziu, why are they calling us Ukrainians? But we are not Ukrainians!". So, I say: „Listen, Ania, your language is just so similar to Ukrainian, and the spelling, and there's the territories...". So I say to her, politely, and I don't mention those bands. Well, they were really decent people, can't say anything [bad] [...] When they brought them, it was rare, but sometimes this and that would drink a little, and they would stand by a Lemkos' house and shout out: "Here a flower, there a tree, deep in shit Ukraine will be!" And again, they were our neighbours, and so there was [respect]. We lived in the next house, so my mum would say sometimes: "I don't want you go to them now, it's their holiday". They rather assimilated (Man, born in 1928, lived in Legnica).

The man emphasized good relations with Lemkos, however, he also talked about perceiving them by some settlers as involved with Ukrainian guerilla, even though – as stressed by the interviewees – those were rare cases. Memory plays a special role in creating a group's identity – it transforms itself in such a way as to form, for a moment, a coherent whole that would fit the identity of the given community. Members of the group strive to remove – forget – whatever might divide the group, make its members distant from one another (Halbwachs 2010: 422). For the most part, the interviewees indicated their relations with the Lemko community were good, and that they did not consider them Ukrainians; moreover, Lemkos were sometimes referred to as a Polish ethnic group. Of great importance was the fact that Lemkos spoke Polish, and that under the Second Polish Republic the authorities treated them, along with Boykos and Hutsuls, as Polish ethnic minority. As was the case with the Germans, for the interviewees also the Lemkos were people forced to leave their homes and relocate. It was frequently underlined in the interviews that people displaced from the East understood the difficult situation and the distress suffered by the expellees from the Carpathians. It was also stressed that aversion or violence on the part of some inhabitants of the Northern and Western Territories characterized some unidentified Others, and not the interviewees themselves. An interesting part of the recollections about resettlers from Operation Vistula is connecting one's own fate to the fate of the newcomers, since the interviewees underlined that both groups were relocated "not of their own free will".

New Jewish inhabitants of Lower Silesia as remembered by the interviewees

Even though Jews were a separate repatriation group, they came to post-war Poland in accordance with the people exchange agreement of 1944. Most of the Jews who arrived in the Northern and Western Territories settled in small towns. On the one hand, the reason for that were all those empty, formerly German buildings. On the other, the authorities had ordered that trains transporting Jews would not stop in larger towns and cities to prevent them from settling in urban areas, as so many other people desired (Halicka 2015: 356). As settlers, they were the group the interviewees talked about the least when describing the post-war society and life in Lower Silesia. Jews were not in the mainstream of the memories, and they emerged during conversation only when direct questions about them were asked, which happened during the second part of the interviews, where the researcher asks particular questions he or she is interested in, if these questions have not emerged earlier during the conversation.

Memory is not a collection of recollections one remembers, but their interpretation. It is more important not what we remember, but how we remember it. This is why – when talking about the subject of memory – we should explain beforehand, how and why we create this particular image of the past, what it is that holds interest to social sciences and liberal art (Szacka 1995: 68–76). The small proportion of post-war recollections referring to Jews is interesting since after the war Lower Silesia was the so-called Jewish housing area, with about 100,000 inhabitants. Towns and cities with the biggest Jewish populations were: Dzierżoniów, Bielawa, Legnica, Pieszyce, Wałbrzych, Kłodzko and Jelenią Górę (Szajda 2017: 560). It was easier for Jews to “build a new life” in the Western Territories, however, even here Jews were subjected to acts of violence. There were murders in, for example, Głuszyca, Ziębice, Wałbrzych, and Kłodzko, Jewish houses were robbed, anti-Semitic leaflets were distributed (Halicka 2015: 360). The interviewees lived in small towns in which thousands of Jews settled after the war, and those of them who lived in villages, would meet Jews for example in their workplaces. In a few accounts they were remembered first of all as tradesmen, the interviewees recalled areas in towns where there used to be Jewish shops. Those were, however, just brief mentions, frequently based on stereotypical opinions about Jewish community, and in many cases pejorative names such as “Żydek”, “Żydki”, “Żydy” were used (T/N: “Żyd” and “Żydzi” being the neutral terms):

There was some more hatred toward Ukrainians, and the Jews were tolerated, 'cause they knew trading a bit. A Żydek knew how to sell, how to encourage, and in a kind manner. I don't know why they left [Poland], because here in Legnica there were lots of Jews. There were a lot of Jews, and they went to join their families or [they went] to find a new place. I've no idea, nobody threw them away from here, from Legnica (Woman, born in 1930, lived in Legnica).

Among all the accounts, one is truly exceptional in this matter: one of the interviewees recalled that his father was surprised by the number of Jews in the town. Given the account quoted above, it shows how many different attitudes there were towards the Jewish community after the war, including conspiracy theories and the issue of Jewish communists (*żydokomuna*):

There were lots of Jews in every street [in Legnica]. There in the centre, in the outskirts in the country, there was not a single Jew on farms. After the war, Jews started this rumour that they had all died out in Oświęcim, but they didn't die out. Lots of Jews remained in Russia [...] And so came here, to Poland, as communists. [We come to Jawor,] father says: "Where are all these Jews from?" Where there was business, there were miners, they earned good money, so there were Jews here, in Poland. Peace Defenders Cooperative [in Jawor; *Spółdzielnia Obrońców Pokoju*], this makes more than 200 people, [workers], seamstresses. Pionier [T/N: a factory]. All of management – Jews, swindlers. They changed names already during the war, the one in this Pionier. Miedzianogóra – this is not a Jewish name?! (Man, born in 1928, lived in Jawor).

By following people's life stories, we can find a way to understand their everyday life and mentality at a given time in history (Kohli 2012: 128). The abovementioned "żydokomuna" originated in opinions – quite popular in some circles – that Jews were partially responsible for introducing communism into Poland (Halicka 2015: 355). Moreover, the quoted words repeat what used to be said about "the mythical Jew" in the past: that Jews only seemingly do not differ from the rest of the society, that they take great care not to stand out too much (Janion 2009: 106). Dislike for Others, usually accompanied by fear, is typically an individual, and not collective trait (Czykwin 2008: 61). This thesis is well reflected in the stories about the post-war Jewish community of Lower Silesia. Apart from "big" historical events and personal experiences, the interviews are also full of emotions, attitudes, opinions, second-hand stories. Sometimes, as it happens in case of memories about Jews in Lower Silesia after the war, historical facts would be pushed into the background, giving way to collective images and certain canons of remembrance formed under the influence of prevailing discourses.

Jews were not a frequent subject in the analysed interviews on post-war history, yet stories and mentions about them provide a wide array of opinions and feelings. One cannot help but think that memories about the Jewish population belonged to unwanted remembrance. The reason for that was not only the fact that the Jews were “strangers”, but it might have also resulted from the feeling of guilt evoked by witnessing the Holocaust, the stigmatisation of Jews, and the post-war exclusion of remembering about the Jewish community from the collective way of remembering history in general (Kapralski, Niedźwiecki, Nowak 2019: 48–49). Usually in their stories the interviewees presented Jews as tradespeople occupying certain parts of the city, or as an imagined and “hated” group responsible for bringing communism to Poland. They were more of opinions rather than stories about actual meeting Jews, which may signify that there was no contact between the interviewees and the Jewish inhabitants of Lower Silesia, and what is more – that the Jews were considered strangers, and sometimes even a threat. This may be caused by defence mechanisms aimed at preserving positive image of the group, defending it from memories that could challenge its image (Kapralski, Niedźwiecki, Nowak 2019: 53).

Newcomers from Central Poland – Our people, Others, or Strangers?

The most discussed by the interviewees group of post-war immigrants to Lower Silesia were Poles who had come from Central Poland. They came to the Western Territories seeking a better life, enticed by propaganda and pioneer slogans about resettling “ancient Slavic lands”. After the war, newcomers – both those who came to the Western Territories from Central Poland, and those who were forcibly resettled from elsewhere – had to deal with an entirely new landscape and environment, they had to establish new societies in towns and villages. In the first post-war period the political situation did not create favourable conditions for integration of the various immigrant groups. After that initial period, the factors that would bring those groups together were first of all institutions such as schools, factories and plants, and Church – where everyone, regardless of where they came from – had to speak Polish (literary style). The same religion was also of immense importance. It caused the people displaced from the East and the “Centrolaks” (T/N: *Centrolak* is a slang term referring to a person coming from “Centrala”, meaning Central Poland) – as they were called by the interviewees – to have a common identity denomi-

nator, as well as a space in which they could interact (Jacher 2011: 73–74). The authorities tried to erase differences between regions by emphasizing the national, Polish character of the people from the Northern and Western Territories. Elements of community life served the purpose of manifesting Polishness. Examples include hanging out Polish flags on buildings or holding big religious and national celebrations (Ruchniewicz 2018: 24–25). According to the interviewees, the situation where the lives of the resettlers and the newcomers from Central Poland run two separate courses, lasted till the mid-1960s. School and Church performed a crucial role in the process of social unification. While in their accounts about the Others the interviewees devoted more attention to the newcomers from Central Poland than to other groups, they also presented them in a more negative manner. Undoubtedly, the reason for that was the fact that some of those who arrived from Central Poland questioned the Polishness of those relocated from the East, as most of the interviewees recall:

When I came here, I got married [to a “Poznaniak” – T/N: a man from Poznań or the Poznań region], and many times my husband goes: “One can tell who you are because of your black palate [T/N: Polish *czarne podniebienie* literally means “black palate”. As an idiom, it means “being spiteful, malicious”]. (...) But I knew I was Polish, but some people here, those who came from Opoczno, from the Piotrków and Warsaw regions, then they thought we from the East were Ukrainians (Woman, born in 1933, lived in Jawor).

Another problem, and in a fact an accusation when talking about “Centrolaks”, was the issue of their voluntary resettlement to the Western Territories. For those forcibly relocated from the East, the people coming from Central Poland were frequently competitors in terms of housing and farms. The interviewees compared both groups of Lower Silesia settlers, stressing that their families were forced to leave Eastern Galicia, whereas the other group of newcomers from Central Poland had a choice, they could anytime just go back to where they were from:

[In the village there were] five farmhouses, close to the forest. Then there was the forest, the fields, and a house, an empty one. The rest of the houses were taken by those [newcomers] from “Centrala”, as we used to call [those] from Central Poland. Because many from Central Poland came there, and settled in farmhouses. So, at the beginning [the contact] was not so good, later it was possible to come to an agreement. It also depended on the people, but it wasn’t friendly [at first], ‘cause, as they say, we had to, and they didn’t have to come there. So [the conversation] would go like this more or less: “Why did you come, nobody invited you here, and we were thrown out”. I say, in those five houses [by the forest], we were kind of immigrants “from abroad”, so to speak (Man, born in 1932, lived in Jawor).

The relations between the resettlers and the newcomers from “Centrala” were affected by the difference in the reasons and the moment of arrival. People from Central Poland had priority in taking farmhouses because they arrived first. The interviewees said it was injustice, and during the interviews they would call the Central Poland newcomers “con men”, “parvenus”, and “looters”:

There were lots and lots of people from the East, less of them from “Centrala”, because those from “Centrala” would come, take whatever they could, loot and go back to their place. And [in villages,] there were mostly those people from the East. Whole villages, near Przemyśl, there was a Krościenko, a Majdan, that’s the names of these villages, and they would keep on talking about them (Woman, born in 1928, lived in Jawor).

As stressed in many accounts, some of the newcomers from “Centrala” migrated back to their homeplaces, taking the looted goods with them. People from Central Poland were privileged right from the beginning, there were more of them, they held civil servant positions, they were nicknamed “the pioneers”, and the authorities were generally biased in favour of them. Having arrived earlier, they took the best houses, and looted nearby buildings abandoned by their owners – for example, they appropriated farm animals (Halicka 2015: 350). These disproportions had an impact on interpersonal relations, and right from the beginning of the settlement in the new place, conflicts would arise, as the interviewees recalled.

In terms of economy, the resettlers from the East constituted a kind of underclass. Their financial status was lower than that of the rest of Polish newcomers. Not only were the Kresowiaks poorer, but they also could not count on support from families who would live nearby. The interviewees often drew comparisons between the two groups and underlined the poverty of the immigrants from the East. In one account we can find the following description of how the “Centrala” settlers made fun of those forcibly resettled from the East:

At first, those from “Centrala” thought we were some kind of lower class, and that [they] were kinda better than us, that [we] were penniless. All came penniless. Take me, all I had was a shirt on my back, and a torn one, as well. My mother used to wear rags that the Germans had left, and she found this pillowcase, so she gave it to this neighbour the seamstress, for a shirt. So, she made a shirt for me, a white one with short sleeve. But these sleeves were made from another fabric, yellowish, ‘cause there wasn’t enough [of this fabric]. And that’s how we slowly made our way (Man, born in 1926, lived in Jawor).

The superiority assumed by the „Centrolaks” towards the Easterners and the injustice in house allotment made the inhabitants of the post-war Lower Silesia stick with “your own people” (Halicka 2015: 351).

The interviewees also emphasized the widespread family-centrism – it was customary to help one’s “own people”: family, neighbours, or the group the person identified themselves with. Lack of interest in getting into contact with the Others surely had an impact on stereotypization of other groups. As a result of social injustices and cultural differences, manifested, for instance, by different clothes or language, in the first years after the war these two groups of Poles in the Western Territories were practically strangers to each other.

Some had problems even with the [Polish] language, [before the war] we spoke at home both, and some spoke only Ukrainian. But then, after the war we had everyday-life problems, for example, there was no stove coal. Such were mundane problems, but nobody got sappy about it. Why, there were people from the regions of Rzeszów, Kraków, Tarnów, and they would call us names, that we were Ukrainians. And that’s how it was (Woman, born in 1932, lived in Jelenia Góra).

The number and nature of the descriptions of contacts between the resettlers from the East and the “Centrolaks” indicates they were a group important both for the organization of life, and for the post-war atmosphere. Having their Polishness challenged was for the resettlers from the East one of the most painful experiences. Problematization of identity in the post-war Western Territories lied not in the fact that it was re-defined, but in the fact that it was developed in relation to the Others. And so, for the Kresowiaks, “being Polish” meant something different than it meant for people from Central Poland (Kaźmierska 1999: 45). The Easterners had a different definition of Polishness taken from a multi-cultural eastern part of the Second Republic, where mixed (Polish-Ukrainian) marriages and bilingualism were common. After coming West, they had not re-defined their identity, and not because it was internally problematic for them, but because other Poles challenged it. The objection was made within the dimension of one’s personal identity which is experienced through contacts with others and is related to social recognition and being included in a group (Assmann 2008: 146). Humiliation, using the words “Ukrainians” and “Russkis” in an offensive way, making fun of poverty, lack of manners, clothes, and the use of dialect full of words from Ukrainian, etc. – for all those and more reasons, the “Centrolaks” were remembered by the Kresowiaks in the worst possible way, as a group filled with flaws, and they had the worst opinion of all the groups new to Lower Silesia. The post-war feeling of being “inferior” and problematization of identity caused by the reaction of the settlers from “Centrala” led some of the interviewees to present the “Centrolaks” like a mirror image – in the narratives, the culture of the Easterners was extolled, and the “Centrolaks” were described as poor and uneducated:

Why, those who came from „Centrala” here, they wore long dresses, also young [women] wore them, and a smock, and a flower-patterned headscarf wrapped around the head. And this family arrived, their girls were my sisters’ age and became friends, and one day they were in the field, picking cotton, I think [...] And they started talking, as the girls do: “So show me your panties... And you show me yours”. They fell down and it turned out, that these [girls] from “Centrala” didn’t have any panties. [...] I tell you, the eastern culture was much higher than that from “Centrala” (Woman, born in 1933, lived in Jawor).

The process of creating collective memory is connected with forming collective identity. The past lifts our self-esteem, it serves to transmit behaviour and symbols typical of the society we belong to. In the above example we can also notice that collective identity is dependent on the Others. It is established by means of ongoing dialogue with the Others; whether we agree with what they think about us, or oppose the image created by them (Taylor 2002: 48). The quoted passage gives us an excellent example of a stereotype about people from Central Poland being poorer and more marginal. However, a stereotype is a means of conveying “double identity” – it portrays the Others, but at the same time it defines Us, our group. It draws up the borders of group identity (Modi memorandi 2014: 461).

Summary

People’s individual judgements about others are easier to change, and sometimes people disagree with them, whereas collective opinions about the Others are formed over many years, and they are related to presenting one’s own group in a positive light while making unfavourable judgements about alien groups (Bystroń 1995: 45). What is important is that negative opinions are usually not contradicted, but quite often they are repeated as “well known truths”. Contacts with Others contribute to realisation of one’s own identity and differentiating one’s group from other groups (Bystroń 1995: 45). Thanks to the Others the image of one’s group is built, and the group’s autostereotype is confirmed. Stereotypes about own and others’ groups are specific to regions, yet they are often subject to a wider, discursive national narrative (Pyrah 2015: 169). Stories about post-war contacts between resettlers from the East and the Others, both the autochthonous German population and the newcomers to the Western Territories, illustrate this relation.

Barbara Kubis who has analysed accounts offered by Kresowiaks emphasizes the popular view that people from the East were the “Soviets” or the “Russkis”, and all locals were called “Germans”, whereas the name

“Pole” was reserved only for those coming from Central Poland. The groups not only kept to themselves, but they were also conflicted. In the first years after the war, inhabitants of a village or a city district would reinforce old regional divisions (Kubis 2007: 280). Negative portrayal of the “Centrolaks” that emerges from the narratives produced by my interviewees comes from lack of acceptance on the part of the settlers from Central Poland, as well as the fact that they challenged Polishness of the resettlers from the East. Marriages between resettlers and the newcomers from Central Poland and Greater Poland were frowned upon. Sometimes the traits found in Kresowiaks by the people from Central Poland were a mirror image of the traits the interviewees found in the people from Central Poland. According to the resettlers, this confirmed the superiority the eastern culture had over the culture of the newcomers from Central Poland and Greater Poland, and it also helped some group members to overcome complexes. The way the Others in Lower Silesia were remembered was influenced also by war experiences. An example of that are accounts describing the Soviet soldiers – “savages” who destroyed all around them. On the other hand, the Germans – even though the post-war communist propaganda referred to them as an enemy – were perceived by the interviewees as autochthons and civilians. The interviewees mentioned acts of violence against German women, and they identified their experiences with those of their displaced German neighbours. The above stories show the influence of social processes in Lower Silesia in the first years after the war on forming and developing the collective identity of Kresowiaks.

As Ricouer underlined, narrative identity comprises selected “stories about oneself” (1992: 41). Stories about the Others are at the same time stories “about oneself”, since they include not only memories about the situation of these groups, but also opinions and ideas about the Others, which may give us some insight into the relationship between the resettlers and other groups, rather than into the situation of the minority group. With these stories, the resettlers from the East gave meaning to their past and present – they put their reality in order, shaped their identity. Of course, the stories contain description of actual situation of different groups inhabiting Lower Silesia, yet more often they are a manifestation of cultural patterns, values, and norms of the resettlers groups. This is an example for functional memory that consists in forming and reinforcing identity, although what is characteristic here is that it only focuses on certain events that it considers essential for the future, the aim of which is to bond the group.

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