THE EXPULSION OF ETHNIC GERMANS FROM POLAND AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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The Second World War has been extensively studied by both Western and Eastern scholars alike. But what is less known from the Western perspective is the expulsion of around fourteen million Germans from Poland alone after the conclusion of the war. This was not by happenstance, but rather the result of historical ideologies framed by nationalists within Poland and legitimated by the newly created United Nations. The Western Allies after both the First and Second World Wars were primarily concerned with creating conditions that would placate simmering nationalist tensions in Europe. As such, what we see with the creation of the League of Nations after the First World War would directly result in causing the Second World War. This paper will examine the extent the League of Nations and United Nations interlinked ethnicity and citizenship as a combined ideology within Europe. Through legal documents, newspaper articles, and primary documents of the period, it is determined that the Western Allies had much more influence in promoting and legitimizing Polish nationalism than previously thought. This would directly lead to the actions of expelling millions of ethnic Germans while the Allies turn a blind eye.
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Introduction

The construction of nation states in Europe combined the ideology between nation (ethnicity) and state (citizenship). The full effects of this were seen during the First World War and its aftermath, think Armenian genocide, with increased tensions occurring prior, during, and after the Second World War. In the aftermath of the vast destruction of the Second World War, the United Nations was created to prevent and police potential conflicts between nations. This was the stated goal behind the founding of the United Nations, and this idealistic vision is at the center of many historical accounts of the immediate post-war period. In fact, though, the picture is more complicated, as both the League of Nations after the First World War and the United Nations after the Second World War also created the conditions for conflict between different ethnic groups, most notably between Poles and Germans. These tensions were at the root of the forced population transfer of Germans after the Second World War, a practice that the United Nations legitimized through the application of its supra-national legal framework.

It is true, of course, that today we find the United Nations as a legal bulwark that is able to standardize common practices internationally. This propels the animal spirits of global trade as barriers to entry are decreased and tighter economic integration benefits member nations and those countries that adhere to dictated principles. Greater cooperation instills newfound efficiencies that are not inherent to countries operating in isolation and as such the inclusiveness of an organization like the United Nations creates the opportunity for greater wealth among member nations. But, most critically we find the United Nations’ granted powers supersede those of sovereign countries. This
newfound agency lays the foundation where a global apparatus can dictate economics, politics, and crises in ways that were previously untenable. Local or regional conflicts now are directed to relevant agencies within the United Nations, many of which lack the understanding of nuances occurring on the ground level. We can find countless examples of actions taken within Africa, where the hostilities are curtailed to some degree, but through actions taken by the United Nations a sort of eternal limbo is created. All of this lends itself to the shrinking relevance of individual nation states and a sort of rebirth of the centralization of empires which we have seen in the past. No other place would this be more apparent than the decisions made under the auspices of the United Nations after the conclusion of the Second World War. The laboratory conditions in which ethnicity and citizenship were now applied in Europe would be telling for the forced expulsion of Germans not only in Poland, but all of Europe.

The intrusion of large nation states creating frameworks that covered the continent of Europe already began prior to the Second World War, when Germany and the USSR created a general framework of their interests (Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact) and afterwards between the Soviet Union and the Western Allies (Tehran, Yalta, Potsdam Conferences). While these frameworks created by nation-states were important due to the regionality and localization of these agreements, within the scope of the world they were held to little regard in terms of merit of agency when compared to the United Nations. If two sovereign countries had a treaty that the United Nations deemed “illegal”, it would have the weight of the collective members against the two sovereign nations, with the ability to enact punitive measures. For example, a country in Asia might be indifferent to agreements made between countries in Europe, as it sought its own foreign policy
irrespective of proclamations by other nations. Here, the creation of the United Nations is an important turning point for the legitimacy of action while undertaking population transfers, as well as the creation and distillation of nationality, universality, and locality. The power and agency granted to the United Nations allowed for the legitimacy in the expulsion of “German” communities through created mechanisms of defined groups. These newly defined parameters amounted in the expulsion of numbers which were previously unimaginable, but through a new framework of ethnically defined nationalism vested by the United Nations did the conditions become tenable.

The slow erosion of regionality and localized nuances ceded themselves to the global power dynamic that exists today. The failings of the League of Nations, casting aside the United States' decision to not enter as a member, came from the lack of authority and legitimacy it had on the world stage. While it was an extremely progressive and unique institution for its time, it lacked the centralization needed to bend countries to its will. As we will see in the 1920's with the random expulsions of Germans within Poland, the inability of the League of Nations to retaliate in any substantial form was the crux of its ineffectiveness on the world stage. This is where the creation of the United Nations becomes much more fundamental in the fabric of a nation's DNA as it now has the authority to intercede on sovereign land as well as impose unilateral sanctions. This type of intervention by a global entity rather than a singular sovereign nation created the legitimacy in which it was able to supersede the nation state's role as protectorate of people within its realm. Expulsions during this time period are usually linked to Naziism both domestically in Germany as well as in foreign countries they had occupied. The
Nazi’s used multiple avenues in which to distort and coopt the German public in order to drag them into the fold of the Nazi Party platform. First, they distorted philosophers such as Nietzsche to instill the idea of a “superman” (Übermensch) like race existing if they denigrated and eliminated ethnicities they deemed weak and inferior. Secondly, they used historical context to reorient past mistakes, such as the German surrender of the First World War, to promote the Nazi Party as one who acknowledged the public’s confusion and position themselves as the party who would not have done it if in the same position. Combining these created a fervor among the German people who went along with the Nazi Party platform until the very end of the Second World War. The action’s undertaken by the Nazi Party ultimately led to the historical ramifications of singling out Germany as the sole creator and instigator of bloodshed, loss of life, families broken apart, and all the other negative connotations that are rightfully placed on it. But what I am trying to show within this paper through interpretations of frameworks designed solely by Western Powers and enacted upon Europe is that the Allied Powers had a hand in the instability that followed the conclusion of the First World War. Their attempt to create what they honestly believed to be a more practical and civil society in the aftermath of the war contributed greatly towards the beginning of the Second World War and subsequent mass expulsion of ethnic Germans in its aftermath.

In Part One, this paper will trace the development of Poland’s creation through the Versailles Treaty. While the Western Powers, specifically Woodrow Wilson, were keen on assembling a team of academics well versed in the demographics and geography in Europe, they could not have anticipated the results of their actions. The paper will examine nationalists use of an idealized Poland through historical context, which would
be the anchor of what Poles would attempt to achieve through the First and Second World Wars with their state of Poland. After a review of the rise of nationalist conflict between Germany and Poland in the pre-war period, the paper examines the League of Nations’ role in the plebiscites which were to determine whether Germany or Poland were to be awarded historically contested land. These plebiscites would not only have the consequence of land being awarded to either Germany or Poland, but on the inhabitants as well, as the vote would anchor citizenship and ethnicity in unison. In Part Two, the paper moves on to examine Poland’s expulsion of German communities prior to the Second World War. These “wild expulsions” as they were called would be the prelude for what was to come of the German minorities residing in Poland. Next, examining the closer bonds between sovereign countries, such as between Germany and Russia prior to the Second World War, will help to show the greater focus on broader change in Europe. As the paper draws to its conclusion, we will see how the Western Powers again assemble to create the United Nations, a global organization which would have more power vested to it than its predecessor. This would set the pretext for the largest forced movement of humans in history at that time.

Part One

Poland Prior to 1939

Europe had found itself mired in factionalism divisions prior to the conclusion of the First World War. The assassination of Archduke Ferdinand not only had resonating effects on all of Europe but confirmed the sentiments of those which had lived under the
umbrella of the semi-autonomous empires which had existed for centuries prior. Gone were the vestiges of an all-encompassing monarchy which held the keys to life within their realm, subjecting all inhabitants to the loose unity which had bound subjects of varying race, ethnicity, and religion. The age of the nation-states had arisen and with that the tightening of a social fabric within society had begun to develop. Identity based on spoken vernacular, religion, geographic location, or anything simply imagined had taken hold of Europe. The beginnings of Poland were born from this chaos of the First World War. While previously existing in various forms, this new nation-state had arisen at the direction of Western influence. Specifically borne from one of Woodrow Wilson’s famous “Fourteen Points”, the case had begun to be made for the development of nations through nationality and citizenship. This realignment had the purpose of shifting populations into homogeneous sections, aligned on a multitude of factors such as religion, spoken vernacular, as well as “identified” nationality. But as these regions currently were under the auspice of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the generational mixing of ethnic backgrounds due to the internal policies as well as adoption of cultural practices of the lands they lived on proved to be much more difficult in practice. Lost in the flurry of activity from the realignment of borders and the creation of the new Polish state were the actions taken within the Versailles Treaty which had shifted sovereignty of not just arbitrary lands but of specific regions which had economic importance and historical significance to ethnic minorities. What would be apparent to those on the ground would be the complete lack of understanding on the part of Western allies in attempting to reshape Europe into a “safer” and easier to control model. What Western allies feared most was a repeat of the First World War, which until then had been an
inconceivable amount of death, loss of wealth, as well as the unraveling of society. So, they took upon the onus to ensure that minority factions, which had been the cause of the First World War, would no longer be such a flashpoint for Europe.

Thus, the Versailles Treaty, through the legal mechanics of the League of Nations began the process of shifting and reshaping Europe into a model which had previously never been tried before on such a scale. A line can be drawn from the position of the Western Powers within the Versailles Treaty to the carnage which would occur decades later in the form of the Second World War. Within the next section I will examine the lands given to Poland as a whole under the Versailles Treaty and specifically two regions that were now under Polish domain: Upper Silesia and the Posen Region. These two regions are quite opposite in nature, with Upper Silesia being predominantly German with a large Polish minority and Posen being predominantly Polish as well as the center of Polish nationalism due to its historical context of Polish origin. When examining these two regions we can find overlaps of imagined statehood and the exportation of Polish nationalism out of Posen to Upper Silesia through figures such as Wojciech Korfanty who chaired the Polish plebiscite committee in Upper Silesia as well as organized the second and third Upper Silesian Uprisings. This future deputy Prime Minister of Poland at the beginning of the creation of a Polish state called on the inclusion of regions such as Posen, Upper Silesia, and parts of West and East Prussia. This was not just happenstance for Korfanty to call for the inclusion of these regions within a unified Polish state, but rather a historical reckoning of what can be. Posen had been the center of Otto von Bismarck’s Germanization efforts after the unification of the German Empire in 1871, but even prior to that Prussian attitudes towards this significant Polish minority were
harsh and repressive of nationalistic attitudes. To say that Polish nationalism had sprung out of the First World War would be far off base as we can track these simmering attitudes to the initial Prussian annexation of this territory in the late 1700’s. Polish nationalists had the advantage of drawing on a historically unified Poland that had since been carved up and annexed by the Austro-Hungarian, German, and Russian empires.

An Idealized Early Poland

To understand “ownership” of these lands is similar to studying human rationalization of race within the context of history. The complexity and constant evolution of a civilization’s placement within a geographic region lends itself to long simmering divides between opposing peoples as well as having the effect of a sense of longing. While kingdoms and empires benefited their inhabitants by providing protection and standards of living, the combination of multiple peoples from different geographic regions which included differing language, religion, and attitudes combining to create a lasting society was more imaginative than practical. Empires at this time lost regions in war not due to overwhelming defeat of their whole territory, but rather a single decisive defeat. While the losing empire would have certain territories annexed or conditions imposed on it, for the most part they continued to operate constantly trading pieces of land. This became similar to a jigsaw puzzle with pieces that were different from the original board game, where territories would be attached to the greater empire which continued operating in a static environment.

Upper Silesia and Posen are territorial regions that have a long history of bouncing between civilizations, from the Bohemian Kingdom to the Kingdom of Prussia,
to right before the First World War where the German Empire had the rights to that land. It is interesting to note that Poland as an entity did exist at one point, but much earlier before the rise of the contemporary civilizations that occurred after it. The predecessor to the Polish state as we know it was controlled by the Piast dynasty, which effectively ruled from approximately the 10th to 14th centuries. This Slavic group of people had conquered and carved out a void within Central Europe and throughout this time began the process of culture creation through both common practices and vernacular. Old Slavonic was the dominant vernacular used at that time and the cohesion of a singular language within a large geographic region had the ability to create a lineage of a fellow people. This created human experience was contrasted with the tightening bonds between the Piast dynasty and the Holy Roman Empire, one which was homogenous culturally and the other an amalgamation of people anchored by a religion. The nobility within each realm had begun to marry one another and with this caused a migration of a differing people in both vernacular, common practices, and religion. While these differences might seem antiquated, they still hold some resemblance of the modern “us and them” tropes. The German language was introduced from these marriages between nobility, and with that began the process of breaking apart a relatively homogeneous realm into one more diverse. Additionally, these marriages led to additional transfers of ethnic Germans into lands that were predominantly Polish.\footnote{Karch, Bredan. 2018. *Nation and Loyalty in a German-Polish Borderland: Upper Silesia, 1848-1960*. Cambridge University Press. 28.} Along with these populations began the eventual Polish conversion from a more or less Paganistic background to that of a Catholic one. With the changes in religion and the vernacular, the common practices of the population
which inhabited the lands under the Piast dynasty began to shift. You had what Polish historians would call a “Germanization” of the area and one that would be less uniquely Slavic in nature. But, going forward these two dominating cultures would be the only ones to interact and play a part within this region. While clearly you had subgroups and minorities that existed within these regions, they were grossly outnumbered in both population and cultural strength to match the hegemony that these two cultures had.

Within this early time period, the Piast dynasty became a lightning rod for both Polish and German intellects. It is here where the earliest interaction between these two cultures allows for the differing perspectives of what was to occur in the early half of the 19th century. From the Piast dynasty you find the perfect example of a homogeneous “Polish” population that later on the Polish intellectuals and elites can call on for the new unification of a similar Poland. This is the perfect foil in which the guise of mass population transfers can occur, in a similar vein to how the Nazi platform operated under Adolf Hitler in the unification of lost “German” lands that they rightfully owned. It is interesting to note as well that the same notion of cultures that were in close proximity with shared history were used by the Nazi’s as a rationalization of a shared heritage which needed to be reunited, meanwhile just a few decades prior to that the expulsions the Polish were conducting in the 1920’s and 1930’s were illogical and illegal. From here we can see the Polish, with the guidance and authority from the West conduct a revisionist sweep on past history in order to claim authority and domain over a territory. Hitler was not unique in a recalling of a grand past that needs to be restored, and it was something that occurred time and time again throughout history prior to him, and we are once again able to see this occur after the conclusion of the Second World War.
The recognition of Poland as an entity in early European history is an important distinction that Polish historians would draw on after the Second World War. The early territories of Upper Silesia, Poznan, and Galicia would prove to be instrumental to Polish recognition of these regions as well as the ensuing population transfers that would occur. For Polish hegemony, it is an especially important distinction for historians to draw recognition to the fact that these territories at one point in time in early European history had been unified under Polish rule, with a uniquely Polish population. As time went on and populations had mixed through the differing arrangements of treaties and allies, these uniquely Polish regions had ceased to exist. Through the constant flux, German (Prussian, Austria-Hungary) populations were a significant minority in these regions. This would not be a serious issue in peace time, as many of the empires and monarchies of the past through proclamations had ensured minority rights for the populations living under its domain. But this deeply entrenched German minority would prove to be a profoundly serious issue for Polish nationalists going forward, as these regions were beginning to see the mixing and evolution of cultures through the latter half of the 19th century through Germanification efforts as well as greater acceptance of Protestantism. So, with this notion of agency, Polish historians had seen it extremely pertinent to present these regions as a once homogeneous, wholly Polish state.² It is also important to remember that until the end of the nineteenth century, Poland was not found on a map of Europe. The mixing of culture and people over centuries would need to be quickly and

methodically undone if the Polish were able to re-exert hegemony over their long-lost territories.

Upper Silesia

While both the Posen and Galicia regions were important to all nations who laid claim on it, none was more important than Upper Silesia. This region more than any of the others offered great economic wealth in the form of coal and other mineral resources. Germany, which had gained ownership of this region after its unification in 1871 began to utilize this region heavily. This centralization of German states propelled the country to the forefront of the mining industry, of which Upper Silesia was becoming known as one of the larger deposits within the region. To put it in perspective for Germany, Upper Silesia amounted to around a quarter of coal production, eighty-one [percent] of zinc, and thirty-four [percent] of its lead.\(^3\) Losing this region would prove costly for a nation navigating in a world that was becoming increasingly industrialized and mechanized. Something that was more common in the past than what we see now is the notion of migrant workers, and in this form was that of German miners sent to Upper Silesia. Through decades of migratory work, villages and work camps that were setup to mine these resources had become permanent fixtures of German culture within Poland. While this region was homogeneous in religion, being majority Catholic; culturally, ethnically, and linguistically, Upper Silesia was mixed. But this did not hinder many Poles in becoming bilingual in order to achieve greater social mobility. Germanization was an active policy in the region and primarily focused on the vernacular by establishing

language ordinances which prohibited speaking Polish at public meetings. This type of transfer of culture within Poland increasingly became a flashpoint for Polish nationalists, who's movement became more pronounced at the turn of the 20th century.

The mining industry in Upper Silesia becomes more complicated when you begin to examine the layers of management and unskilled laborers alongside the amazing growth of output in just a few decades' time. From 1852 to 1885 mining output within this region increased over 1,000 percent. Through this breakneck speed in output, the capital outlay required would naturally come from wealthy families in this region, of which the Prussian landowners, Junkers, would naturally gravitate to. Junker industrialist families such as Henckel von Donnersmarck would have a controlling say in the hierarchy and organization of these firms, and as a leading Prussian noble family, many of the management and skilled positions would be filled with Germans. To say that German ownership of mining rights in this region was skewed would be an understatement, as approximately 92% of total output would come from fourteen of the twenty-two firms operating in this region. This created a wide disparity between German and Polish workers, as representation of Poles within management positions was almost nonexistent. The majority of Poles would be staffed as unskilled laborers, such as shovelers, sorters, and haulers and would be paid less than their German counterparts. In lower managerial roles, German speakers would outnumber Polish ones at a rate of two


6 Crago. Nationalism. 61.
to one and only three of 420 mining directors and administrators spoke Polish.\(^7\) This German strategy of blocking Polish nationals from ever attaining large percentages of managerial positions helped to keep a lid on greater prosperity for the local Polish population. Understandably, the Prussian families controlling industry within Silesia sought these measures for greater ability to control output and direction of raw materials which were of great importance to the expanding German Empire.

Posen

While Upper Silesia was the industrial center, the Posen province stood in contrast in terms of its economic output and population. The province of Posen was mostly agrarian in nature and did not benefit from having mineral resources which were sought after in aiding industrialization. Germanization efforts in this region were much stronger in Posen than it was in Upper Silesia, and as such Posen did have a predominately strong Protestant base, which stood in contrast to Upper Silesia where Germans did share the Catholic faith with Poles. This was a complicating factor where religion became intermixed between Poles and Germans, rather than an easy delineation between religion and ethnicity. As such, in 1886 Prussian authorities had set up “The Colonization Commission” whose strategy was to have state-funded purchases of land owned by Poles and transfer the ownership over to Germans.\(^8\) While the results were less than successful. Polish land ownership actually increased in the decades following due to Polish nationalist resistance, it showed the determination of German policy in creating

\(^7\) Ibid. 72.

\(^8\) Karch, *Nation and Loyalty*. 69-70.
easily understandable delineations between who was a German and who was Polish.

Another anti-Polish German policy established in Posen was that of a slightly altered Kulturkampf. This had become a major focus of Otto Von Bismarck, as one of the results of the unification of Germany was that of large swaths of land containing large populations of Catholic believers. This Prussian policy in abstract was the perceived coalition of surrounding catholic countries and the conspiracy of lay Catholics to identify with the Pope’s policies and meddle in local politics. Due to the importance of the Pope and Catholic dogma to practicing Polish elites, this made religion the kink in the chain in which German policy sought to break.9

Unlike Upper Silesia which held great importance in terms of economic value, Posen was a region in which the grassroots Polish nationalist movement had a strong footing and sought to export their ideologies and resistance towards Germanization efforts to others. This is mainly why the German efforts of usurping common culture and creating distinctions between a Pole and German were more severe than in other areas. Posen had the distinction of having historical ties to a more recent Polish state, the Polish-Lithuanian Kingdom, and this base led intellectuals to promote Polish nationalism to other regions such as Upper Silesia which lacked the more modern connection. This historical tie coupled with the fact of a more homogeneous Polish population segregated by spoken vernacular and religion created the grounds to block German assimilation. Additionally, due to the demographics, local politics in Posen were able to bolster these trends by creating political parties such as the Catholic Center Party which sought to

9 Karch. Nation and Loyalty. 51.
advance on the diffusion of culture and people in regions such as Upper Silesia. Rather than set the battle in terms of a nationalistic tone, they aimed directly at the issue of religion and the German Kulturkampf policy. On this basis Polish intellectuals believed it would be much easier to promote universal Catholic rights, as while ordinances passed banning the Polish language existed, exceptions were made for religious services.¹⁰ The German Catholics and others they sought to fold into this party were one and the same to activist Poles in Posen. They sought to preserve the religious as well as the bilingual nature in a region like Upper Silesia through the preservation of religious rights. Posen was home base for many of the leading Polish newspapers and intellectual work that sought to lessen the distinction between a German Catholic and a Polish speaker. But as already stated, the Center Party sought to avoid the battles on a nationalistic tone, which many Poles were uncomfortable with as they saw the greatest threat to a Polish state being the German Empire. As such, the Center Party which had been at odds over Otto von Bismarck’s policy towards Catholicism eventually ruled in a coalition together with German nationalist parties. This alignment with German nationalistic principles tarnished its image going forward as a blocking agent of German advancement on Polish culture. What once had strong support among Poles and Germans alike, discontentment started to rise among the ranks of Center Party members on their lack of progress of lay people across the regions. The growing sentiment was that the Center Party was more concerned with clerical appointments of the Roman Catholic Church than that of Poles in these regions. This would lead to the advancement of the first Anti-Protestant/Pro-Polish party called the Polish National Democrats (Endecja) which would be based in Posen.

¹⁰ Ibid. 53.
Consequences of the Versailles Treaty

The First World War brought about major shifts of thought when imagining minority groups within a country. Europe was now well aware of how minority groups can alter the status quo, as evident with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand by Bosnian Serb Gavrilo Princip. The last words Gavrilo stated at his trial would ring true for all stateless or minority groups in Europe for the upcoming decades, “I am a Yugoslav nationalist, aiming for the unification of all Yugoslavs, and I do not care what form of state, but it must be freed from Austria”. No longer were minority groups satisfied with halfhearted protective measures by self-serving monarchies, who mostly viewed these groups as subversive. The curtain had finally fallen on the age of Empires which had controlled these large swaths of land and a new age where nationalistic principles were eschewed. It is here that we find the first foray of Western Powers to seek to control and sequester these minority groups into a more manageable system. We see for the first time in modern history a massive realignment of Europe on the basis of homogeneity. Vestiges of the past such as the Austro-Hungarian, German and Russian Empire ceased to be relevant in a fast-changing process of border realignments, and shortly after the Great War the creation of the League of Nations brought about what can be considered the usurpation of Empiric dominions.

The Paris Peace Conference was controlled by four major Western Powers, the United States, Britain, France, and Italy. These victors sought to not only better control

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of radical and minority groups, but also the continent of Europe as a whole. The creation of the League of Nations as well as five major treaties were prepared at the peace conference. Professor James T Shotwell, who was a member of the “The Inquiry”, a group of advisors brought on by Woodrow Wilson to help with the drafting of materials, stated: “Again, the sentimental claims of history are often just as real as the demands of nationality. The fact that Upper Silesia had never belonged to Poland since the rise of modern states is as real a fact in its way as the national history of Bohemia. The century-long submission of the Slovenes to the Hapsburgs makes difficult a correct reading of plebiscites in that section of the new kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. In planning for the future one cannot ignore the bearing of these historic factors in the erection of new states”. From the outset it was recognized that many claims being made on these contested borderlands were somewhat imagined in nature. But for this reason, the policies and international agreements made in the over 400 articles drafted were that of interpretation and as such the Allies sought to create a structure which allowed themselves to better handle the region. If plebiscites from the past were to be discounted due to the shadow of the empires which called for them, then the mechanism in which to determine identity would come from a multitude of factors, both imagined and tangible. Factors such as religion, spoken vernacular, place of birth, self-determined status, etc. all lend credence to the person answering the question. Reality at that point is how the respondent imagines it, to throw away the results of plebiscites that were done not even a decade prior because of a perceived bias in the results would only lead further

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down the rabbit hole of nationalistic tendencies until the ultimate resulted in a homogenous bloc.

With Europe undergoing a transformative realignment, the Western delegation at the Versailles Treaty determined it imperative that Poland sign a separate treaty guaranteeing minority rights. With nationalism surging throughout the continent, the western delegation understood that the void created with the dissolution of the empires within Europe would create an opportunity for violence and retribution among majority populations. The newly created Polish state was unique as it was wholly devised by a western international coalition, not traditional regional powers. It was also created under the guise of a partitioned homogeneous distinctiveness, that of Polish identity, culture, and imagined ancestral positioning. With this in mind, the Western Powers sought to contain the pent-up nationalistic feelings with guarantees they would “protect the interests of inhabitants of Poland who differ from the majority of the population in race, language, or religion.” With the realignment of borders that would make up Poland, the contested region of Posen, most of the industrial basin of Upper Silesia, and the province of Galicia would now be under the control of a Polish nation state. This now created the dichotomy of Polish nationals who gained full agency of the contested lands as well as the notion of previous German settlers as subversive agents. In the following sections we will explore how border realignment shaped a newly created Poland as well as the demographics and realizations that were understood at the ground level.


14 Hacken. The Treaty of Versailles. Article 93.
Nearing the end of the Great War, the Western Powers had begun to devise overall concepts and end goals for what they hoped to accomplish in a revised Europe. Woodrow Wilson’s speech to Congress on January 8, 1918 was the clearest of any nation involved in the war of what they hoped to accomplish through peace deliberations. Woodrow Wilson’s thirteenth point in his address to Congress concerned Poland and an overarching idea for what he wished to accomplish in establishing an independent Poland. “An independent Polish state should be erected which should include the territories inhabited by indisputably Polish populations, which should be assured a free and secure access to the sea, and whose political and economic independence and territorial integrity should be guaranteed by international covenant. While the whole statement might seem grandiose and tinged with idealism, the part of Poland attaining a secure access to the sea was based on demographics and the economic reality of that time. West Prussia was the closest region which had a very sizable minority Polish population, with the German census of 1910 pegging German representation at 64% and the remainder Polish. Economically, the situation becomes even clearer as without a major port city, the newly created nation state of Poland would either be dependent on Germany for exports or be completely reined in by its inability to move products outside its borders.

The German city of Danzig, which is situated on the Baltic Sea was the perfect solution to enable Poland to compete economically with its neighbors. But, while West

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Prussia had a very sizable Polish minority, the city of Danzig was overwhelmingly German. The Inquiry team under Woodrow Wilson understood the dynamics at play when trying to rearrange the borders to fill as many conditions as practical under the circumstances. They again relied on historical Polish ownership of West Prussia as a means to place most of the region under Polish jurisdiction. But how can they award the major port city of Danzig to Poland with such an overwhelming German population? It was decided that the city of Danzig would be ceded from Germany and instead proceed under the auspices of the League of Nations. Poland would have influence in its external affairs and use of the city, articles 100-108 in the Treaty of Versailles deal with this specifically and the language within the text illuminates the vision in which Western Powers sought to break down the German collective agency. Specifically article 105, “On the coming into force of the present Treaty German nationals ordinarily resident in the territory described in Article 100 will ipso facto lose their German nationality in order to become nationals of the Free City of Danzig”\(^{17}\) and article 106, “Within a period of two years from the coming into force of the present Treaty, German nationals over 18 years of age ordinarily resident in the territory described in Article 100 will have the right to opt for German nationality. Option by a husband will cover his wife and option by parents will cover their children less than 18 years of age. All persons who exercise the right of option referred to above must during the ensuing twelve months transfer their place of residence to Germany. These persons will be entitled to preserve the immovable property possessed by them in the territory of the Free City of Danzig. They may carry with them their movable property of every description. No export or import duties shall

\(^{17}\) Hacken. The Treaty of Versailles. Article 105.
be imposed upon them in this connection”. Immediately after the Treaty of Versailles went into effect, German nationals within the jurisdiction of Danzig would lose their identity overnight. While they did have the ability to go through a process to opt-in declaring oneself German, they would sentence themselves as emigrants. This would effectively set in motion the slow cessation of German identity and culture as Poland began to build its own export city.

Another aspect of awarding West Prussia to Poland and creating a corridor towards the Baltic Sea was the suddenly disconnected piece of East Prussia still under the jurisdiction of Germany. Creating the Polish corridor allowing access to the sea in effect severed Germany with its East Prussian province, creating a situation in which residents were separated along a hostile border. One of Wilson’s stipulations in his Fourteen Points was to guarantee Poland unfettered access to the sea. But there was nowhere for the Paris delegation to redraw borders to allow for this except to go upwards towards the Black Sea. This would create an important dilemma between Polish and German relations going forward as Poland would continually abuse the intentions of this treaty for its own benefit. For example, stipulated in Article 104 were six major objects concerning Poland’s rights and access to the Free City of Danzig.

Article 104

“(1) To effect the inclusion of the Free City of Danzig within the Polish Customs frontiers, and to establish a free area in the port.

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“(2) To ensure to Poland without any restriction the free use and service of all waterways, docks, basins, wharves and other works within the territory of the Free City necessary for Polish imports and exports.

“(3) To ensure to Poland the control and administration of the Vistula and of the whole railway system within the Free City, except such street and other railways as serve primarily the needs of the Free City, and of postal, telegraphic and telephonic communication between Poland and the port of Danzig;

“(4) To ensure to Poland the right to develop and improve the waterways, docks, basins, wharves, railways and other works and means of communication mentioned in this Article, as well as to lease or purchase through appropriate processes such land and other property as may be necessary for these purposes,

“(5) To provide against any discrimination within the Free City of Danzig to the detriment of citizens of Poland and other persons of Polish origin or speech;

“(6) To provide that the Polish Government shall undertake the conduct of the foreign relations of the Free City of Danzig as well as the diplomatic protection of citizens of that city when abroad.”

From the text, it is easy to see that the important German port city of Danzig has all but been essentially ceded to Poland, while publicly remaining under the protection of the League of Nations. With full access and control and while utilizing the German port, Poland began to construct its own independent port, Gdynia. This sidestepping took place as Poland began to feel the realities of a German population operating the port. Beginning on February 14, 1919 the Polish-Soviet War had broken out due to the vacuum created by the aftermath of the First World War. The dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire had enabled territorial ambitions of both Poland and Soviet Russia. Soon each respective country was marching their armies towards each other in order to realize more favorable borders. What was initially a relatively small conflict of less than one hundred thousand men on each side in 1919 soon ballooned to close to a million men

19 Ibid. Article 104.
on each side the following year, which at one point imperiled the newly created Polish state. As Western allies were supplying arms and munitions to Poland during the war, German dockworkers, upset at the notion of helping Poland, went on strike.\textsuperscript{20} As a response, Poland would utilize Danzig less and less, preferring their own port for most trade while simultaneously having a stranglehold on exports within the Free City of Danzig. The Polish-Soviet War ended on March 18, 1921 with the signing of the Peace of Riga which awarded additional territories to Poland not originally in the Versailles Treaty, allowing Poland to focus more closely on domestic affairs. The reaction of the German dockworkers by striking during the war was not lost on Poland and their convictions of their German minority grew stronger.

\textbf{Plebiscites}

The Versailles Treaty and in turn the League of Nations had upended centuries of traditional demarcation by arbitrarily redesigning new borders under imagined pretenses. This was done in a twofold manner, one consisting of a plebiscite followed by the loss of prior citizenship in contested regions. This would in effect instigate minority groups to move on their own, all the while being provoked by mechanisms created by the League of Nations. Article 91 specifically states “German nationals habitually resident in territories recognized as forming part of Poland will acquire Polish nationality ipso facto and will lose their German nationality. German nationals, however, or their descendants who became resident in these territories after January 1, 1908, will not acquire Polish nationality without a special authorization from the Polish State. Within a period of two

years after the coming into force of the present Treaty, German nationals over 18 years of age habitually resident in any of the territories recognized as forming part of Poland will be entitled to opt for German nationality. Poles who are German nationals over 18 years of age and habitually resident in Germany will have a similar right to opt for Polish nationality. Option by a husband will cover his wife and option by parents will cover their children under 18 years of age. Persons who have exercised the above right to opt may within the succeeding twelve months transfer their place of residence to the State for which they have opted. They will be entitled to retain their immovable property in the territory of the other State where they had their place of residence before exercising the right to opt. They may carry with them their movable property of every description. No export or import duties or charges may be imposed upon them in connection with the removal of such property. Within the same period Poles who are German nationals and are in a foreign country will be entitled, in the absence of any provisions to the contrary in the foreign law, and if they have not acquired the foreign nationality, to obtain Polish nationality and to lose their German nationality by complying with the requirements laid down by the Polish State”.

Here we can see the complete redivision of these lands based on perceived ethnicity and citizenship. We will explore the Upper Silesian, Posen, and other contested regions’ plebiscites to see exactly what occurred in each region. The knock-on effect this had in later decades would be extraordinary as these mechanisms would be amplified after the conclusion of the Second World War.

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21 Hacken. The Treaty of Versailles. Article 91
Upper Silesia

The plebiscite for Upper Silesia was mandated to take place on March 20th, 1921. This was a huge blow for German morale as they believed that this region should not have been included in discussions for redivision as the ethnic demographics of the region were so split among Germans and Poles. This inflamed tensions further between Germans and Poles as each laid claim to this particularly important economic and industrial region, claiming historical ownership as well as demographics. From the perspective of the Versailles Treaty, you are able to understand how arbitrary the devised boundaries were to the plebiscite. Article 88 goes into detail on carving out the portion of Upper Silesia which is to undergo the direct vote and you are able to see that without any natural boundaries or real demarcation within the region, the Allies began to use fixed points of certain towns, roads, and railways in order to create boundaries with which to operate in. With these boundaries and terms set by the Allies, Poland had much to gain from a successful determination. Germany on the other hand, would lose authority of this land regardless of a successful vote in its favor, as the stipulations within the Versailles Treaty were to treat a German determination of Upper Silesia as an autonomous zone.\footnote{The New York Times, 1919. "Autonomy for Silesia." 24 July: 2.} Regardless, both Polish and German nationalists began to campaign for the upcoming plebiscite as it would determine future representation of this region's character.

As the terms in article 91 stated that men born within the region were able to have a vote, this was immediately seized upon by both Germans and Polish alike. Volunteer
groups from both sides began assembling and crafting agendas which worked best among the linguistically diverse but religiously homogeneous population. The first major source of contention within the region was among a group of German irregular volunteers called the Freikorps. This unit, in the same spirit as the French Foreign Legionnaires, operated as a paramilitary unit consisting mostly of German veterans of the First World War. As the German army had mostly been forced to disband with the conclusion of the War, this group of irregulars were tasked with keeping the peace and to quell communist uprisings which were taking place all over Europe, looking to destabilize industry within the region and cause unrest. The social unrest coupled with irregular soldiers from both the German and Polish origin, as well as infighting between Western powers on the interpretation of plebiscites in specific regions would bring nationalistic elements to the forefront. These elements would prove to be the beginning of the first of three Upper Silesian uprisings to occur which would affect the plebiscite as well as dramatically alter the determined borders.

The first uprising took place on August 15th, 1919 when the Freikorps fired on Polish miners who were on strike. This general strike had originally begun with a few mines within Upper Silesia over the necessity for higher wages in order to afford rising food costs. This would not have been out of the ordinary, but discontentment soon spread to Polish workers from factories and mines from other areas which had also been affected by closures. Coal production volume within Upper Silesia had been greatly affected by the ending of the First World War as well as compulsory deliveries of coal imposed by the Allies.23 As such, total production volume within Upper Silesia in 1919

was a little over what was produced in 1900 and down a little over 40% from the beginning of the war.\textsuperscript{24} As such, closures of factories and mines were commonplace which resulted in a large contingent of unemployed Polish workers who mostly occupied these low skilled jobs. The snowballing of additional mines and other industries joining into this strike eventually led to over 90% of Upper Silesian mines being shut due to work stoppages culminating into a list of demands by workers.\textsuperscript{25} As fate would have it, no one knew who fired the first shot in the town of Myslowice that injured a soldier, but the return fire resulted in the deaths of 10 people. This set off a chain reaction of protests and fighting that spread to other towns in the area, bolstered by nationalists’ groups flooding into the area such as the Polish Military Organization (POW). While the fighting was intense, with artillery and machine guns being utilized, order was restored approximately ten days later on August 25th. While the Germans quickly crushed this spontaneous uprising, it was just a taste of what was to come.

The Second Uprising took place during a precarious time in the newly established Poland. Russian Bolsheviks who had toppled Tsarist Russia were now keen on advancing their revolution westward into Europe. Likewise, Polish leaders understood that war with Russia was inevitable as the Bolsheviks were looking to spread their revolution further into Europe and were already doing so along many of the border countries on Russia's border. Conflict broke out in 1919 with initial success in the early part of the Polish-Soviet War going to Poland. The tides soon turned and by August 1920

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Poland found not only its capital city of Warsaw in peril, but also its existence as an independent nation. Soviet troops were within 75 miles of Warsaw and Polish citizens were on edge. During this time, a German newspaper in the city of Kattowitz (part of the industrial triangle) printed an erroneous story on August 17, 1920 that the city of Warsaw had fallen. This prompted Germans to go out into the streets in celebration for what they believed was the end of the Polish independent state. Soon though, this celebration turned into a mob and they began looting Polish stores as well as setting fire to the regional Polish Plebiscite Office. These actions would again cause German and Polish paramilitary nationalist groups to enter Upper Silesia. Figures such as Wojciech Korfanty, a future deputy Prime minister of Poland, was a prominent Polish nationalist based in Poznan at the time. He immediately began to rally Poles to counter the German celebration. Within a few days a reported fifty-thousand-armed Poles had swarmed into the industrial triangle and captured the region. Unlike the first uprising which was spontaneous, this was an organized full-scale assault that targeted organizations and offices which ethnic Germans mostly held, such as political offices, businesses, police forces, and even schools. As the First World War had ended only a few years prior, many of the existing social practices of the Prussian past were still operating. The language requirements of the Prussian past were still in effect within Upper Silesia, which limited the occasions in which the Polish language may be used in an official capacity as well as the limitations of Poles to make inroads within local police forces and other bureaucracies such as administrative posts. For reasons such as this, many

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institutions that were attacked would seem random in nature from an outsider's perspective, but Korfanty wanted to systemically break down all the Germanization efforts of the past few decades. What the League of Nations viewed as a mob incited by false news was actually a much deeper and profound reaction by the Poles.

Also, in anticipation of the future plebiscite, German efforts in funding propaganda and other measures in “frightening” the Polish voters away in Upper Silesia were underway. Retribution was quick and immediate as well if Polish partisan were captured, with reports from the New York Times correspondent reporting, “It is stated in plain terms that the Germans are shooting all prisoners they capture”. But, with this uprising, Poles suddenly found themselves in control of not only the industrial triangle, but the administrative buildings in the region. Simultaneously, due to infighting within Allied Powers with regards to the plebiscites in the many areas within Poland, France had more control over the Upper Silesian among the Allied Powers. But, due to limitations on troops and a seemingly disregard for the actions occurring on the ground, not much was done to stop the marauding gangs of both sides from attacking each other. With Polish nationalists having the upper hand, Korfanty saw the opportunity to open negotiations with the Inter-Allied Commission and the Germans in order to restore peace. Terms were agreed to and on August 28th published that German police forces were to be disbanded with a new unit to be equally represented by both Polish and Germans. The following day, Korfanty published an article in which he called on Polish nationalists


who had come into the area in support to lay down their arms. But while he is calling an end to the violence, he justifies the actions in a way by the great injustices suffered by the Polish people within the region. Polish nationalists were gaining traction as actual progress was being made in the evening out the playing field for Polish people in the area.

These accomplishments coupled with the success of beating back the Soviet forces, resulting in a signed peace treaty, created great momentum for Polish success in the upcoming plebiscite. Poles would not forget the success they had in these armed insurrections, with a third uprising, the largest and most deadly of the three, to occur after the results of the upcoming plebiscite. On March 20th, 1921, approximately 1,186,758 votes were cast out of an eligible pool of 1,220,978. To say this day was highly anticipated from both the Polish and German sides would understate it as a little under 3% of eligible voters did not cast any vote. The day had finally come in which Polish nationalists anticipated unexpected results and the German psyche would finally know its fate of a particularly important industrial region. As fate would have it, unlike plebiscites in other regions which were clear-cut in either direction, Upper Silesia would be less decisive. After years of campaigning, lives and property lost, and increasing ethnic tension, Germany finally learned of the results it had been hopeful for. Overall, Upper Silesia voted in favor of Germany with a little under 60% with 707,393 votes, with the remaining in favor of Poland.


With a majority win, Germany was quick to declare victory. But Polish officials were quick to point to the relatively mixed results as well as the criteria established by the Treaty of Versailles. Article 88 was especially important as it detailed exactly who could vote in the Upper Silesian plebiscite as well as how the Commission would determine the results. Specifically, subsection 4 became important to Polish nationalists as they would both decry and utilize the language to their advantage. Here we can clearly pinpoint the complete lack of understanding of the situation by the League of Nations and the associated foreign powers. The arbitrary guidelines in which the plebiscite was to be assessed lacked the reality of the region in totality as well as the historical nuance. German settlers for decades had been planted in Upper Silesia as part Bismark’s Germanification of the region, but now the League of Nations sought to cut through it by delineating the region on the basis of citizenship. Polish and German nationalists alike were not concerned in the least by the official status of one’s citizenship, but rather the ethnic identity of the region. This would become abundantly clear a few decades later when Poland would systematically expel all ethnic Germans from its border.

Section 4 of Article 88

“The vote shall take place at such date as may be determined by the Principal Allied and Associated Powers, but not sooner than six months or later than eighteen months after the establishment of the Commission in the area. The right to vote shall be given to all persons without distinction of sex who:
(a) Have completed their twentieth year on the 1st of January of the year in which the plebiscite takes place-
(b) Were born in the plebiscite area or have been domiciled there since a date to be determined by the Commission, which shall not be subsequent to January 1, 1919, or who have been expelled by the German authorities and have not retained their domicile there. Persons convicted of political offences shall be enabled to exercise their right of voting.
Every person will vote in the commune where he is domiciled or in which he was born if he has not retained his domicile in the area. The result of the vote will be determined by communes according to the majority of votes in each commune.”

The language of “foreigners” being able to return to their place of birth in order to vote would be a rallying cry for the Polish, who deemed these emigrants as unconnected to the local population. Many of these native Upper Silesians did indeed vote for Germany, but it was not nearly enough to sway the overall vote in favor of Poland. Regardless of this fact, the Polish press pushed ahead with conspiratorial stories alleging that a massive wave of foreign German voters tipped the scale in their favor. This created a very persuasive intrigue among the Polish population as the logic of foreign voters being able to travel to Upper Silesia to vote and then return to where they came from created an unsettling feeling. But Polish nationalists had much to celebrate as they were able to point to the less decisive results in the Industrial Triangle. While the Germans had won in the cities such as Kattowitz, the Polish working class who lived in the surrounding village were a major source of contention in the plebiscite results. As outlined in subsection 4 of Article 88, the Commission would examine the results not on overall vote totals but rather on the basis of communes (small villages) in the region. So, while much of the land west of the Oder River voted predominantly for Germany, the Polish working class who provided the labor in the coal factories and other industry resided mostly in the lands east of the Oder. This was extremely important as while a majority of the region did vote for Germany, the crown jewel of Upper Silesia, the


Industrial Triangle, was essentially a toss-up when including all the small villages who had voted in favor of Poland. The following subsection in Article 88 also made it nearly impossible for the Commission to be able to rule in a definitive manner.

Section 5 of Article 88

“On the conclusion of the voting, the number of votes cast in each commune will be communicated by the Commission to the Principal Allied and Associated Powers, with a full report as to the taking of the vote and a recommendation as to the line which ought to be adopted as the frontier of Germany in Upper Silesia. In this recommendation regard will be paid to the wishes of the inhabitants as shown by the vote, and to the geographical and economic conditions of the locality.”

Based on the interpretation of Article 88, Polish nationalists would claim the Industrial Triangle for Poland as many villages surrounding the majority German cities had voted for Poland. But in the same vein, how could the Commission strip out the most economically important area in favor of Poland and award the rest of the land to Germany? For Germany it was all about the messaging of the cultural and historical unity of the region as well as the importance of the natural resources for the German economy. Realizing the results of the plebiscite were not as clear cut as the Commission needed in order to make a decisive decision, the German press remarked on the economic importance for Germany in being able to satisfy reparation payments for the war.33 For Poland, it was adhering to the language in the plebiscite mandate as the muddled results made it less of a definitive victory for Germany. Wojciech Korfanty would use this opportunity to rally his nationalistic base. In one such example Korfanty would state,

“The Polish government will do everything so that the eternal enemy of our damnation cannot, with the help of satanic whispers, deprive us of our victory and won’t impose on us again the yoke of age-old slavery and brutal exploitation”\(^\text{34}\). With both ethnic bases rallying and claiming the region for each other, the Inter-Allied Commission had a difficult decision on its hands. Through infighting between Western countries on their own respective policy on what should occur in Europe, the Commission reached an impasse and were not able to reconcile the decision. So, the Inter-Allied Commission submitted two potential plans to the Supreme Council. One plan would award the western portion of Upper Silesia to Germany, which voted overwhelmingly for Germany, but award the entire Industrial Triangle to Poland. The other would also award the western portion to Germany but would only award a ridiculously small portion of the Industrial Triangle to Poland, with Germany retaining this key area.

With this particularly important region within his grasp, Korfanty launched the third and final Silesian Uprising. On May 2nd, 1921, Polish paramilitary flooded the region relatively unopposed and began pushing west. Germany countered with sending in its own paramilitary units, and soon a quasi-proxy war began in Upper Silesia. The Inter-Allied Commission was slow to react to this, again due to internal infighting amongst British, French, and Italian forces who were in charge of Upper Silesia during the plebiscite. But what is important to remember and something that will show up again in the aftermath of the Second World War is the Western allies’ disposition towards the German people. With numbers reaching up to forty thousand strong for both the Polish

\(^{34}\) Gazeta Robotnicza. 1921. "Rodacy!" 27 March.
insurgents and German irregular soldiers, the Inter-Allied Commission was quick to make public a note which prohibited Germany from recruiting irregular volunteers from outside the Upper Silesian region, while the same demand was not made to Poland.\textsuperscript{35} This would be enough for Korfanty to realize Poland had the upper hand in the deadliest of all the uprisings and began peace talks to bring the insurgents back behind a demarcation line. It just so happened that the geographic line that was chosen by Korfanty was exactly what he was aiming to achieve with the plebiscite results, which was a majority of the Industrial Triangle awarded to Poland. With the demand of the occupied region to not be controlled by German forces accepted by all sides, hostilities drew to a close and a general amnesty was issued by the Allied Commission which drew harsh critique from Germany, who saw Poland as the sole aggressor.\textsuperscript{36}

With the original recommendation from the Inter-Allied Commission having been unable to render a decision and passing two recommendations to the Supreme Council, this council now found itself unable to determine an acceptable outcome and passed it to the League of Nations to decide the fate of this region. Through the juggling of these commissions and western powers who were unable to find an objective decision, we see how difficult it was to satisfy the conditions of the plebiscite with the reality at ground level. The League of Nation’s commission on this matter soon rendered a decision, awarding a little less than a third of the land in Upper Silesia to Poland. At first glance this may seem like a decision which would upset Polish nationalists, but when we see in

\textsuperscript{35} The Annual Register. 1922. \textit{A Review of Public Events At Home And Abroad}. Vol. 163. Edited by M. Epstein. London: Longmans, Green, and Co. 179.

economic terms what was awarded to Poland, we begin to understand the gravity of the decision and the consequences for Germany. “Of 61 coal mines 49 and ½ fall to Poland, the Prussian state losing 3 mines out of 4. Of a coal output of 31,750,000 tons, 24,600,000 tons fall to Poland. All iron mines with an output of 61,000 tons fall to Poland. Of 37 furnaces 22 go to Poland, 15 to Germany. Of a pig-iron output of 570,000, 170,000 tons remain German, and 400,000 tons become Polish. Of 16 zinc and lead mines, which produced 233,000 tons in 1920, only 4 with an output of 44,000 tons remain German. The towns of Königshutte, Kattowitz, and Tarnowitz, which had voted by large majorities for Germany, were given to Poland”. We see the absolute victory from Poland's perspective in gaining a majority of the especially important Industrial Triangle and the absolute devastation to German economic output and its ability to satisfy reparation payments to the Allied Powers. This region which voted in majority for Germany would be the most economically fruitful for the new Polish state.

East Prussian Plebiscite

Articles 94-108 concern the East Prussian issue and the newly annexed Free city of Danzig. What is important is that while planners conceded that East Prussia was overwhelmingly of German origin, they still called for a plebiscite on the southern frontier of East Prussia in order to determine the allegiance of outlier villages. The regions which were to have a plebiscite were Allenstein and Marienwerder under the auspices of the Inter-Allied Commission. While this vote was almost symbolic in nature as these regions were overwhelmingly in favor of Germany, Poland continued to press

these claims at the chance of increasing the size of the Danzig Corridor. Likewise, Germany was assured of the populace’s voting intentions and while there were partisans who intimidated local Polish populations, the Germans were not as forth ward in campaigning heavily in this area. French, British, and Italian forces would administer the plebiscite as well as ensure safety with protective troops deployed. But tensions amongst the Allies would soon be apparent as the French were keen on helping Poland in any way they can\textsuperscript{38}, while the British were wary of a completely crippled Germany which would be unable to push back against an ever-increasing Bolshevik force which now controlled Russia.

Poland’s actions on the ground also did not help in persuading the British of their honest intentions of letting voters to the polls. This was made apparent by the difficulty of German “out” voters who were born in the region and fell under the criteria of those able to vote even though they lived elsewhere now. HB Beaumont was particularly horrified by the treatment of these German voters crossing the Danzig corridor and the difficulty they endured by Polish border soldiers. The tensions between Allies and the situation on the ground in Poland became so tense that the British Foreign Office officially rebuked HB Beaumont for his remarks concerning Polish actions which undermined the plebiscite. He stated, “We all came here sympathizing with Poland, but since we have seen things at close quarters, we have without exception changed our views. Even Prussian militarism was gentle compared with what is going on all round our frontiers. Our impression is that aggression is more likely from the side of Poland than

Germany. Germany is bound hand and foot and can hardly be aggressive for a long time to come”. 39 This is telling of the frustrations that were occurring in the reimagining of citizenship and culture at the hands of the western Allies. A final plebiscite date had been arranged for July 11, 1920 and the results were as expected in the regions of Allenstein and Marienwerder. Both voted overwhelmingly in the affirmative for East Prussia, with the total votes in Allenstein equaling approximately 97% and 92% in Marienwerder. 40 With limited hostilities from both sides, this plebiscite did little to comfort the German people other than to remind them of how much of a majority of their own were now disconnected. It proved to be a deeper cut when looking at the results in the aggregate as there was little to be gleaned from the votes other than the complete unity of the Prussian people in these two regions. But, as these disputed regions were now settled through plebiscites, Poland would turn its focus to the historical goal of ridding itself of its German minority. De-Germanization would take the place of diplomacy and soon fringe German communities would find themselves summarily deported (illegally), with ethnic Poles replacing them.

Part Two

The “wild” Expulsions

While the League of Nations at that time was the centerpiece under which the new Europe operated, the legal pathways which countries were to follow in terms of deportations were not followed, and in most cases ignored. In Poland specifically, it had


found itself on a fast-track to attain its goal of a unified Polish state, and to that end began deportation of German communities. What is striking is how quickly these deportations began after the conclusion of the First World War. In a matter of years after its conclusion, Poland began summary deportations of fringe “German” communities which had resided within these regions for decades. Throughout this process, Poland would repeatedly ignore World Court orders and League of Nations proclamations on the rights of minorities and would instead seek the fastest and in their view the safest path towards a nationalist Poland. Unlike the United Nations, the League of Nations had extremely limited options for nations not following protocol and signed treaties and did not have the ability to enforce mandates or intervene within a nation's sovereign space. Poland took advantage of this situation through its summary deportations of Germans and by doing so showed the lack of legitimacy the League of Nations had on the world stage. While proclamations and rulings would be written with the best intention, Poland simply designated communities for deportation and these orders were quickly executed.

It is here where we also find remnants of the effects of the Versailles Treaty when pertaining to nationality. The plebiscite commissions had been created with the purpose of identifying and enumerating ethnic demographics in borderland regions which they had understood to be a source of contention. While the results of these plebiscites had run their course in identifying ownership of contested regions, they had the effect of categorizing populations which had previously been left mixed for generations. These German communities had been established through different means, some through migratory trades and others purposefully by decree in order to “Germanize” the land. All
reasons aside, Poland felt it necessary and justified to pursue a mandate in which these identified and enumerated scattered communities would be targeted and deported. These deportations could be considered a dry run for what was to come in the following decades, where deportations would occur on a scale previously unseen in human history.

With Poland’s borders now settled with the conclusion of the plebiscites and conflicts with its new neighbors, Poland began work on targeting minority groups within its borders. While it had signed treaties guaranteeing the rights of minorities within its borders, they made life difficult for the remaining German communities. Through newspaper reports we find that it was not a hidden agenda on Poland’s part in what it was trying to accomplish as we find multiple instances of Poland reneging on their signed treaties. From the onset, Poland sought the combined ideology of the nation-state (citizenship and ethnicity). This would be summarily reported on through international newspapers as Poland slowly tested the waters of expelling fringe German communities that did not align with what Poland ultimately sought, which was a homogenous Poland. The historical implications of continuing to have these German “settlers” would weigh on the Polish nationalist narrative of a continuation of the Piast dynasty, one where Polish culture was supreme.

Operating on the periphery of Poland’s actions was the World Court, which was the international court created as a result of the ratification of the League of Nations. Seeing that Poland was slowly expelling more and more Germans as a result of the plebiscite, the World Court decided to take up a case concerning this targeted minority. First, the World Court had to deem whether the actions being undertaken by Poland were
under the purview of the court, and if in the affirmative, to determine whether Poland was living up to its minority rights agreement under international standards. Fortunately for the German settlers, the World Court decided to reaffirm the minority rights of these targeted Germans.\textsuperscript{41} This was a historic moment for the court as it was the first major decision that was in favor of Germany. These German settlers were afforded private and property rights, regardless of a differing sovereignty. But, unfortunately for the German settlers as we will see, this had little bearing on slowing down the expulsions.

The void created after the First World War allowed for Poland to experiment with expulsions in a very targeted manner. For what can only be considered a dry run for what was to come approximately two decades later, these fringe German communities which voted to retain their German citizenship during the plebiscites finally had to answer to Polish nationalism. The World Court affirming the minority rights of the German settlers had no bearing on Poland continuing these expulsions, as there were few ramifications for not following the order deemed by the court. Approximately fifty thousand Germans were forced to vacate their homes as a result of how they voted.\textsuperscript{42} This would be on the basis of their citizenship, while obviously ethnicity was directly attached to the decision. It is important to note here that many of these individuals and families had completely assimilated to Polish culture, with many speaking only Polish. But, if these ethnic Germans were so integrated into Polish culture, why would they have voted for Germany in the plebiscite? “Because I and my forefathers always have been German,”\textsuperscript{43} one


\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
deportee was quoted as saying. It is here where we can understand the deeply rooted
tensions and nuances between ethnic Poles and Germans who had occupied each other’s
lands for centuries. While many of these ethnic Germans no longer spoke their own
language, with many perhaps having Polish spouses, they still reverted to identifying with
their historical ancestors. It is here we are able to understand Polish nationalists’
obsession with any sort of significant German minority residing within Polish borders.
While they might have been fully integrated culturally, if any conflict were to occur
between Germany and Poland, this minority would side with Germany.

Identity as a concept

Monarchies and empires that operated within Europe prior to the First World War
had the ability to govern large swaths of land in a semi-autonomous nature. These lands
would be of varying demographics which were all subjects to the head of the state. This
semi-autonomous nature, while obviously having exceptions, had the benefit of mostly
allowing differing people and customs to live together. But, after the conclusion of the
First World War we find that this wide encapsulating ideology would become much more
narrowed in nature. Gone was the idea of looking at collective populations, but rather
homing in specifically on what you wanted as a subject and extrapolating from there. The
collective whole would be broken up and divided into many pieces which would benefit
the nation-state as a whole and cast away those who were not to be served. It is here
where identity becomes much sharper in focus compared to the centuries prior and we
find many examples of this magnification on Polish and German settlements alike. While
these communities had mostly lived in relative peace, this magnification of identity helped to fuel preexisting Polish attitudes towards German minorities. Identity based on class was something that was very apparent in the minds of Polish workers who saw their German counterparts in mostly supervisory roles. While this was the concoction of Prussian domestic policy within its industry that it controlled within Poland, this layered German bureaucracy was less thought of as a class-based struggle but more of an ethnic one. The lens of ethnicity, irrespective of citizenship would prove to be a powerful motivator for Polish nationalists seeking to expel their German coworkers.

Poland 1939-1945

Prior to the First World War we mostly see that legal frameworks within nation states are internal policies with a narrow focus. Whether it be domestic or foreign, much of the power was vested in the apparatus that made the decision for the respective country, whether that be a president, prime minister, or king. This isolation in decision making lends credence towards a hardline approach with an us vs. them mentality. But, leading up to the First World War, we begin to find bilateral treaties which guaranteed the protection of the receptive signatory of the other country in case either was to be attacked. With globalism and the bonds of international trade still in its infancy, these treatises were short on integrated cooperation and more protective in nature. Much of these treaties can be attributed to the network Otto von Bismarck built in Europe during his time in power within the German Empire. In order to guarantee peace, he helped facilitate a complex network of secretive pacts between differing countries which would make it more difficult for empires to attack each other, with one example being the
Reinsurance Treaty between Germany and Russia. This pact was so secretive that only a few members from both countries knew of its existence, which helped to sway hostile actions and keep the status quo within Europe. While this mostly played into the hands of protecting a country’s foreign interest and position on the world stage, it did set in motion the idea of closer cooperation between countries with shared goals.

One such defining treaty was between Germany and Soviet Russia prior to Germany’s invasion of Poland. The Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, signed on August 23, 1939, would prove to be much broader than a simple non-aggression treaty. It is here where we find cooperation between nation states in creating a framework that deals with broad themes such as economics, politics, as well as border realignment. Central Europe was to be carved up into spheres of influence, mostly pertaining to German or Russian economic interests. For Poland, this meant that the invasion by Germany on September 1, 1939 was orchestrated not just by Germany, but with the support of Soviet Russia as well. Adolf Hitler confirmed as much when he gave a speech on September 19, 1939, at the port city of Danzig no less, stating, “Poland will never rise again in the form of the Versailles Treaty. That is guaranteed not only by Germany but also guaranteed by Russia”.

This orchestration was very symbolic in nature as Hitler made comments on many of the items covered within the Versailles Treaty that struck a nerve with German citizens at the conditions imposed on them by the Western Allies. To give the speech at Danzig was to show German defiance at what occurred close to two decades prior.

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Tighter cooperation between nation states did not only occur between Germany and the Soviet Union. Later on in the war, after the Soviet Union had been betrayed by Germany with the launch of Operation Barbarossa, or the German invasion of the Soviet Union, the Allied Powers and the Soviet Union began the groundbreaking work which eventually led to the creation of the United Nations. These multitude of conferences were the most detailed and overarching since the Versailles Treaty, and even in comparison this was much larger in scope. Beginning with the Tehran Conference, which took place between November 28 and December 1, 1943 in Iran there began preliminary discussions between the “Big Three”, the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union. These major world powers telegraphed their intentions should they be victorious in the war by stating, “With our Diplomatic advisors we have surveyed the problems of the future. We shall seek the cooperation and active participation of all nations, large and small, whose peoples in heart and mind are dedicated, as are our own peoples, to the elimination of tyranny and slavery, oppression and intolerance. We will welcome them, as they may choose to come, into a world family of Democratic Nations”.

This sets the stage for these three world powers to seek a definitive solution to the problems in Europe. But what is interesting to note is that Stalin pressed for a revision of Poland’s border after the conclusion of the war. Even at the first conference between Allies, the Soviet Union insisted that the borders drawn up after the conclusion of the First World War were not satisfactory. Stalin preferred to use the geographic lines drawn up by Lord Curzon, who was the British Foreign Secretary at that time. This

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demand effectively would cede land awarded to Poland after the First World War to the
Soviet Union. But the Allies were in a precarious position at this time during the war and
they could not get bogged down by taking a hard stance on a contrary position. The
Allies agreed in principle to the demand by the Soviet Union but would compensate
Poland by extending its western border further to the Oder and Neisse rivers. Even here
we find the Allies placating foreign policy goals among each other amidst a world war,
perhaps not understanding that by extending Poland’s borders that far east that Poland
would receive land that was overwhelmingly German. But the immediacy of the world
war in front of them allowed for these overarching decisions to be made without too
much input from anyone other than the three major Allies who attended the secretive
conference.

The Yalta Conference took place between February 4 and February 11, 1945 near
the Crimea in the Soviet Union. This conference would be much different than the first
in that the war was effectively drawing to a close and the Allies attending the meeting,
the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union knew that they were leading the charge
in reshaping Europe going forward. We begin to find a much more aggressive stance
from the Allies with regards to Germany and reparations. It was agreed that forced labor
was to be an accepted form of payment, which along with the expulsion of Germans from
Poland was to be the single most neglected topic in the aftermath of the Second World
War. The Soviet Union would utilize millions of German prisoners of war to rebuild
their industry as well as place many of them in gulags, many of whom died there.

46 Ibid.
Additionally, the Soviet Union secured guarantees that Poland would have free elections (the Soviet Union would renege on this) provided that Communists were allowed in the postwar Polish government. These conditions that were imposed on Poland would be another act of self-interest that furthered the goals of the “Big Three” but did little to alleviate the internal pressures being felt in Poland.

The capstone Potsdam Conference which occurred between July 17 and August 2, 1945 in Germany would shape Europe and the world to this very day. One primary concern during these conferences was the drafting and formation of the United Nations as well as the evolution of cooperation between countries. Initially working within a narrow framework mostly concerned with national borders within Europe, advancing the foreign policy goals of individual sovereign countries, we find born out of this a far-reaching global cooperative. The United Nations that were negotiated during the three major conferences built upon the foundation of the League of Nations, improving what was one of the greatest hindrances, its inability to act. Looking to move past the limited ability of the League of Nations, the vested powers within the United Nations usurped individual nation states and instead sought to establish international standards and accords which it believed better suited the world. With 110 articles covering such topics as economics, security concerns, a council of foreign ministers, and an international court of justice, there is no realm in which the United Nations does not intercede. Within the First Article, the first statement seems to strike at the core of what was to come in Poland after the conclusion of the Second World War.

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Article 1, Subsection One

“1. To maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace, and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace”.48

Within the first article, the United Nations spells out exactly what was holding the League of Nations from becoming an effective global apparatus, which was the imitation of a sovereign entity to impose its will on countries not following internationally agreed standards. But, hidden deeper within the context of the United Nations is the distinction between ethnicity and citizenship. Sub article two hints at this slightly when viewed through the lens of the aftermath of the Second World War.

Article 1, Subsection Two

“2. To develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace”.49

Poland’s insistence during its creation after the First World War and in the decades leading up to the Second World War was primarily focused on the issue of its minority population. The large German minority, which it found inherent with the


49 Ibid.
arbitrary border realignments, was a symptom of a much larger issue. The lack of a completely homogeneous Polish population was something that many Polish elites and academics would point to as a real obtainable goal. The reimagining of modern Poland from the perspective of the Piast dynasty helps to build the ideal country for ethnic Poles. Having dealt with significant minority German populations within Poland for the better part of a century and having faced two world wars, they were ready to push for a drastic solution. This becomes a very real possibility when you examine the vague wording of the second subsection. Again, similar to the League of Nations, much of the treaties and workings of ground level situations were arbitrary decisions made by committees who were not fully aware of the nuances. At this moment in time, the Polish government would be able to finally execute what it has been wanting to do, rid itself of its minority German population. With a vague interpretation of the second subsection of Article 1 in the United Nations charter, this would set in motion Poland’s decision to begin mass expulsions on a level the world has never seen.

The Allied Powers had finally had enough with regards to the First and Second World Wars and the negative effect minority populations had on nation states. So, with the Potsdam Conference the Allies took the extreme measure in allowing the expulsion of millions of ethnic Germans. After the border realignments had been agreed to in the earlier conferences, Soviet Russia and Poland began summarily expelling millions of ethnic Germans. The Allied Powers (the United States, Britain, and France) were aware of what was occurring but did nothing to stop it other than issue the following proclamation “any transfers that take place should be effected in an orderly and humane
manner”. This was the most telling of all the actions taken thus far in how far the Allied Powers were willing to go in order to create tranquility in post-war Europe. While clearly Article One of the United Nations allows for self-determination of peoples, would that also apply when it was inflicted on millions of innocent civilians who were now forced from their homes? The German people as a whole were targeted after the conclusion of the war, whether it was right or wrong, this occurred under the guidance of the Western Powers and specifically under the auspice of the United Nations. When trying to imagine the lengths to which Poles and Soviets might have gone in ridding their German minority, it is hard to not compare the significance of these events versus the historical blame that is imposed on Germany.

Poland Post 1945

As we have seen from the events leading up to this point, the global hegemony of the world lay in the hands of Western influence. Poland had suffered much more compared to many of its neighboring countries as a result of the Second World War. Being sandwiched between Germany and the USSR led to many intense battles that were fought on their land. The partisan movement in Poland was also more organized and determined in fighting their German occupiers and reprisals were severe. The infrastructure of the country was mostly destroyed, and the city of Warsaw had been

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partitioned and redrawn as a result of the Jewish ghetto built there by the Germans, with the city subsequently destroyed from fighting and air raids near the end of the war. To say there were ill feelings felt towards the German people would be an understatement and they got to work ridding themselves of their large German minority once and for all. It would no longer be a piecemeal approach in which individual settlements would be issued deportation orders as in the 1920's, but rather a large scale, all-encompassing edict that would affect anyone who declared themselves of German origin. Similar to the destruction of Poland, this mass expulsion would be just as severe in terms of scale.52 It is also at this time where we see great hypocrisy from the winning side of the war, the Western Powers. From the traditional narrative of the Allies being the just side to win the war against fascism and eugenics, this moral high ground takes a very drastic backseat to the actions being taken at ground level at the very conclusion of the war. In synchronicity with the United Nations proclamations for the expulsion of Germans back to the newly drawn and designated East Germany, we find similar scope of tools utilizing ethnic identity of which Western Powers would accuse the Soviet Union of promoting in order to control and subjugate their newly acquired lands. This would be apparent in the subsequent literature published during the peak of the Cold War where American historians would push the narrative of Soviet policy in Europe after it had regained the land controlled by Germany and instituted Soviet policies amongst the local populations on the lands now intended to hold onto.

The Western Powers were at the very least accepting of this mass reorganization of people within Europe on the basis of ethnicity and citizenship as it promoted their own country's foreign policy of stability within Europe as well as a now crippled Germany. France's eternal enemy Germany would have its minority population vacate the historical fighting grounds of Alsace-Lorraine as well as a now powerless Germany, England would find itself digging out of the rubble and attempting to rebuilt its traditional trading routes as the center of finance, America would exit the war at the highest influence it had to date, primarily funding the rebuilding of Europe through the extension of debt to differing countries, keeping soldiers and bases across Europe and Asia as a reminder of the global power it now held, and most importantly holding a major position on the United Nations Security Council, essentially cementing itself as the de facto hegemonic ruler through the apparatus of the United Nations.

With the Curzon line officially Poland’s new realigned border, the recovered territories it received as a result were predominantly German. Many Germans had fled on their own after the plans were announced at the Potsdam Conference, but there were still many millions of Germans left. Poland quickly began summarily expelling German villages one by one as quickly as they could. In just five years’ time after the conclusion of the Second World War, Poland had expelled over eight million ethnic Germans alone from these recovered territories. With the Curzon line officially Poland’s new realigned border, the recovered territories it received as a result were predominantly German. Many Germans had fled on their own after the plans were announced at the Potsdam Conference, but there were still many millions of Germans left. Poland quickly began summarily expelling German villages one by one as quickly as they could. In just five years’ time after the conclusion of the Second World War, Poland had expelled over eight million ethnic Germans alone from these recovered territories. 53 In total, approximately twelve to fourteen million Germans would be forced from their homes in Poland and pushed towards Germany. 54

The effects of this mass movement of people were not studied by the United Nations, having such mechanisms in place as a standard process devised where German families would be able to secure safe passage or a dwelling at the location they had in mind. Rather, Polish officials would arrive in villages and order all ethnic Germans to leave within a few days. Clearly, that was not enough time to secure possessions and proper payment for private property, but these civilians had no other choice. They would be able to fight the expulsion by attempting to prove their Polish ancestry, but by this time Poles and the newly devised government were in such a frenzy that many Germans decided that the best course of action was to follow the expulsion orders.

The tragic loss of life that occurred during these expulsions is another disheartening fact lost in the history pages, with at least half a million civilians perishing on their trek. These civilians, most of whom were completely innocent would be forced into deplorable conditions, whether it be on cattle cars, or to walk many miles open to the elements. While most of those who perished were the old and the young, this loss of life was accepted by the Allies, who turned a blind eye to the chaos occurring in Poland. While the closest ally, the Soviet Union, had much better knowledge of the ground level activities that were occurring, they were indifferent towards the plight of the German people. The Soviet Union had suffered an extraordinary amount of civilian and military deaths as a result of the war, and to them it was a form of retribution. Not to mention, the millions of Germans they utilized in forced labor camps in even more deplorable conditions made it highly unlikely that the Soviet Union would intercede in any form. Likewise, the United States and Britain were aware of what was occurring with the forced expulsions, but they too turned a blind eye. The United Nations, which would
have been able to put a stop to these expulsions, only proclaimed that they were to occur in a humane manner. At an important crossroad, the United Nations failed its first big test in protecting not only minority rights, but human rights as well. It is here that the Western powers, together with the Soviet Union allowed one of the largest forced movements in history without so much as an interruption to the process.

Conclusions

The United Nations was created to never allow for the conditions that would be the prerequisite for a world war. While it had vested powers, which were previously unheard of for a global organization, it had failed to act decisively during the years after the conclusion of the Second World War. Millions of Germans were expelled from their homes on the basis of their ethnicity which was contrary to the articles within the United Nation’s foundation. But, within this same vein the United Nations also was complicit in allowing discrimination on the basis of ethnicity and citizenship through vague interpretation within their articles. The right to self-determination for example, would be something that Poland could argue was within their right to go about doing towards their minority German population. Obviously, that line of thinking was never to be tolerated in the spirit of the United Nations, yet the organization still did not act. Could it be because of the ethnicity that Poland was targeting? The Nazi Party was responsible for not only starting the war by invading Poland but had a political and social platform that was unlike anything the world has seen in a modern country. One could say that the Ottoman Empire has a similar basis when carrying out their genocide of the Armenian
people, but that was confined to their borders, while the Germans attempted a worldwide reach.

Regardless of the reasons, the United Nations was still complicit in allowing for the mass expulsion of numbers the world had not seen previous to that time. The historical context for this had also been greatly influenced by the subsequent Cold War that followed the conclusion of the war. Much blame and focus were put squarely on the Communist regime for promoting ethnic and class struggles in the huge swaths of land the Soviet Union now had under its domain after the war. This was specific to Poland as well, as one of the main sticking points in allowing for the readjustment of borders with the Curzon line was to allow free elections within Poland. The Soviet Union had never intended to allow autonomy in the lands they now controlled and undermined this process in Poland, installing a communist government which the people of Poland felt was again a great betrayal by the Western Allies. These installations of communist governments by the Soviet Union were the basis of Western Allies repositioning the historical context in that homogeneity was at the core of communist dogma. Much literature by academics in the following decades were certainly influenced by this line of thinking. But, could the incomplete and self-serving strategy created by world powers through the First and Second World War in Europe influence Polish nationalists to finally take the reins and enact sweeping policies themselves?

There is no doubt that many countries within Europe had felt the need to expel their German minorities after the conclusion of the Second World War, and did so, but none had a minority as large as Poland. Up until then, population transfers of this
magnitude were not possible if not for the complicity of a global organization like the United Nations in allowing that to happen. Historically regional players would involve themselves in conflicts of this magnitude, as we had seen countless times in the past with the Russian Empire being the self-proclaimed “protectorate” of Christians within the Balkans. But Europe was undertaking a historical realignment, just like it did after the conclusion of the First World War, but this time nationalism among nation-states had a laser focus on ethnicity and citizenship. Poland nationalists would seek to restore their vision of the Piast dynasty within a new modern Polish state. This would involve the complete de-Germanification within its borders, wiping away every vestige of its German and Prussian past.
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