Introduction

Central Europe is dominated today by homogeneous nation-states, its demography molded by the twentieth-century catastrophe of ethnic cleansing. Few places reflect this legacy more concretely than Poland. The country was transformed from a stateless, partitioned nation in 1900 into a multiethnic state by 1920, and then into a practically homogeneous nation-state after World War II. In the diverse Second Polish Republic of the 1920s–1930s, just over two-thirds of its population was Polish. Its largest minorities included Ukrainians or Belorussians at 17 percent, Jews at 9 percent, and Germans at 2.3 percent.[1] But with the cataclysm of the 1940s, Nazi and Soviet occupiers, working at times with Polish ethno-nationalists and anti-Semites, violently remade Poland into its current form: its Jews murdered in the Holocaust, its territory shifted westward by Stalin, its Germans expelled to make way for forced Polish resettlers, and its remaining Ukrainians dispersed into Poland's interior.[2] Today, nearly

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[1] These figures, based on native language, are notoriously unreliable, due to a significant presence of non-nationalized *tutejszy* (literary, "of here"), especially in eastern Poland, and pressure from census takers to increase the numbers of Polish speakers. See Joseph Rothschild, *East Central Europe between the Two World Wars* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974), 36–37.

[2] The Holocaust literature is too vast to cite here. For a work that considers the expulsion of Germans and the resettlement of Poles into western territories as part of the same historical process, see Philipp Ther, *Deutsche und polnische Vertriebene: Gesellschaft und Vertriebenenpolitik in der SBZ/DDR und in Polen, 1945 – 1956* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998). Among the Ukrainians who remained in Poland's redrawn borders after 1945, nearly 200,000 were expelled in 1947 away from their eastern Polish homelands to scattered settlements in central and western Poland. See Marek Jasiak, "Overcoming Ukrainian Resistance: The Deportations of Ukrainians within Poland in 1947" in Philipp Ther and Ana Siljak, eds., *Redrawing Nations: Ethnic*

95 percent of residents identify themselves as exclusively Polish in ethnic terms.[3]

Amid the smattering of national minorities remaining today in Poland, the largest group, largely unknown outside the country, are Silesians (*Ślązacy*).[4] In 2011, more than 800,000 individuals identified themselves as Silesian, around half of whom co-identified as both Polish and Silesian. The vast majority are clustered in south-central Poland, around the Katowice industrial conurbation, in the historical region of Upper Silesia.[5] (Practically all Silesians trace their heritage to Upper Silesia, rather than its westerly neighbor Lower Silesia.) Like Poland's other small minority groups, these Upper Silesians are also a historical residue of Poland's violent demographic revolution. But whereas national strife ultimately erased the presence of most Jews, Germans, and Ukrainians in Poland, it *created* the presence of Silesians.

This group emerged in Poland not through expulsions or resettlements, but rather through the regional invention of the very category of the Upper Silesian. Before 1945, Upper Silesia was a borderland region split among Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, and before 1918, a region belonging mainly to Prussia, tucked into its eastern fringes facing the Russian and

   Cleansing in East-Central Europe, 1944–1948 (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 173–194.

[3] Główny Urząd Statystyczny, *Ludność. Stan i struktura demograficzno-społeczna – NSP 2011*, Warszawa 2013. http://stat.gov.pl/spisy-powszechne/nsp-2011/nsp-2011-wyniki/ ludnosc-stan-i-struktura-demograficzno-spoleczna-nsp-2011,16,1.html. Last accessed May 15, 2018.

[4] The use of the term "minority" to designate Upper Silesians remains contested within Polish political discourse. The Polish government, according to its official bulletin on "National and Ethnic Minorities," fails to recognize Upper Silesians as either a national or ethnic minority, despite recognition of far smaller regional minorities such as the Tartars and Lemkos. Nor is Upper Silesian recognized as a regional dialect; only Kashub earns this distinction. The lack of recognition is justified by Silesians' similarity to Poles – the minority's ethnicity and language deemed a subgroup of those of Poles and a dialect of Polish. Fears in Warsaw over Silesian demands for widespread political autonomy are likely the underlying motivator for this nonrecognition. See Tomasz Kamusella, "Poland and the Silesians: Minority Rights a La Carte," *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe* 11 (2012): 42.

[5] *Raport z wyników województwa opolskiego: Narodowy spis powszechny ludności i mieszkań 2011*. Accessed April 3, 2018 at http://opole.stat.gov.pl/publikacje-852/rapor t-z-wynikow-w-wojewodztwie-opolskim—narodowy-spis-powszechny-ludnosci-i-miesz kan-2011-1077/. The 2011 census allowed for primary and secondary ethno-national identification; 418,000 identified primarily as Silesians (of whom 362,000 identified *solely* as Silesian); 391,000 chose Silesian as a secondary identification, the vast majority of them identifying primarily as Polish.

Habsburg Empires.[6] Yet prior to the late nineteenth century, most residents of this region would not have identified themselves as Upper Silesians. Only through German-Polish nationalist competition, territorial conquest, partitions, bloody uprisings, and ethnic cleansing from the late 1800s through the 1940s did local citizens of this borderland come to see or understand themselves as Upper Silesians. The tumultuous political changes that turned this Imperial borderland into an indisputably Polish territory after 1945 thus also created the conditions in which the Upper Silesian minority – neither fully German nor Polish – was called into existence.

What created Upper Silesians as a distinct category of people? The region possessed two unique qualities within Central Europe that proved essential preconditions. First, Upper Silesia has long been home to an overwhelming Catholic majority, hovering near 90 percent in the past two centuries. Crucially, confessional loyalties crossed linguistic lines: German and Polish speakers prayed in the same churches. In most neighboring borderland regions, in contrast, Germans were typically Protestant, and Poles Catholic. But in Upper Silesia, confessional solidarity blurred national boundaries. Second, a majority spoke a Polish-leaning dialect known as *schlonsak*, which combined western Slavic grammar and structure with a smattering of Germanic vocabulary. Moreover, a significant portion of *schlonsak* speakers were at least minimally bilingual in German.[7] Both the regional dialect and Catholic practice thus tested the bounds of ethno-national categorization, making it more difficult to appropriate locals as either fully German or Polish. One important work in particular, by James Bjork, argues for the overriding importance of these Catholic bonds in inhibiting the Polish and German nationalist projects in Upper Silesia.[8]

While these regional particularities were essential, the making of Upper Silesians was driven primarily by national strife in Central Europe from

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[6] This work is wholly concerned with German Silesia. Austrian Silesia – the slice that remained in Austria after Frederick II snatched away most of Silesia for Prussia in 1740–1742 – follows a different historical trajectory, despite similarities in ethnic makeup and national ambiguity.

[7] On the structure of the *schlonsak* language, and the politics of its construction, see Kevin Hannan, *Borders of Language and Identity in Teschen Silesia* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996).

[8] James E. Bjork, *Neither German nor Pole: Catholicism and National Indifference in a Central European Borderland* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008). Another substantial work arguing for Catholicism as a buffer against nationalist projects, especially for the interwar period, is Guido Hitze, *Carl Ulitzka (1873–1953), oder, Oberschlesien zwischen den Weltkriegen* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 2002).

the late nineteenth through the mid-twentieth centuries. During these decades, ethno-territorial struggles encompassed the endlessly diverse macro region of Central and Eastern Europe. Activists and states fought to enclose territories and appropriate the people within them for their national projects. Czech, Polish, and German nationalists (among others) fought to establish Czech, Polish, and German states and, just as importantly, to awaken their populations to their respective national loyalties.[9] As multinational empires gave way to ethnic nation-states, radical visions of national homogeneity in Central Europe accelerated into the singular bloodshed and terror of the mid-twentieth century. But Upper Silesia proves a rare case of the partial failure of national homogenization. In particular, nationalist activists and state bureaucracies failed, despite zealous efforts, to compel Upper Silesians into becoming durably loyal Germans or Poles.

This book explains that failure and draws some implications for the study of nationalism more broadly. The following chapters hone in on the conflicts between German or Polish nationalist activists and state actors on the one side and those locals in Upper Silesia skeptical of these dueling national projects on the other side. Nationalist activists escalated strife in the region through a series of movements and regime changes from the late nineteenth through the mid-twentieth centuries, ultimately using mass violence to advance their utopian goals of ethnic homogeneity. Upper Silesians weathered extreme political instability from the 1860s through the 1950s, subject to the rule of Prussia, the German Empire, the League of Nations, Weimar Germany, the Second Polish Republic, Nazi Germany, and communist Poland.

Throughout this strife, a majority of Upper Silesians proved resistant to activists who tried to nationalize them. Local citizens instead navigated a century of mass politics, world wars, mass murder, and expulsions by intentionally crafting their own national ambiguity. By passing as loyal Germans or as loyal Poles under extremist regimes, many were able to escape

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[9] Key works pointing to the explicit role of activists (and state actors) in nationalization include Brian Porter, *When Nationalism Began to Hate: Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth Century Poland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Jeremy King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848–1948* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002); Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900–1948* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008); Pieter M. Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); Kate Brown, *A Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

the worst excesses of violence. As this work argues, nationalist activists and those skeptical of national commitment became entangled in a feedback loop. Upper Silesians' wavering commitment to these national projects prompted frustrated activists to adopt increasingly harsher measures and rhetoric. With both Polish and German nationalists turning toward extremism by the 1930s, national loyalties became less attractive to Upper Silesians. Locals began hedging their bets against regime change by holding on to their bilingual, Catholic communal ties. This instrumental attitude toward the German or Polish nations only further convinced nationalists of the need for forcible racial separation. Frustrated by popular apathy, Nazi and Polish activists in the 1930s–1940s used increasing repression to achieve their visions. Thus arose the feedback loop, in which national radicalism and national skepticism reinforced each other. Today's self-identified Upper Silesians are the living remnants of this historical struggle.

To understand this fraught process of turning real communities into "imagined" national ones, it is necessary to think small: to hone in on the everyday social conflicts that bred individual loyalties, or non-loyalties, to the nation. I thus focus on a single town and its surrounding county, Oppeln (Opole in Polish). This mid-sized district capital lay in the agricultural western stretches of Upper Silesia.[10] As a city of civil servants, Oppeln had a strong German character. But travel just outside the town borders, and one encountered a network of villages dominated by *schlonsak* speakers, who generally considered their tongue a variation of Polish. Unlike in the Posen region to the north, in Upper Silesia there was no native Polish nobility or intelligentsia in the nineteenth century. Almost all Polish speakers in Upper Silesia were farmers, artisans, workers, or priests. Polish nationalism was thus destined to be a movement of social upstarts, or outside activists. The Oppeln area was also a world apart from the eastern industrial stretches of Upper Silesia, which lay some 80 kilometers to the southeast. Smokestacks, coal mines, shantytowns, and worker unrest defined eastern Upper Silesia. But the rural Oppeln area remained socially placid by comparison. This relatively quiet and understudied corner of Upper Silesia, composed of around 200,000 inhabitants by 1939, thus makes an excellent test case for creating national loyalties.[11]

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[10] Oppeln will be referred to by its German name during periods of German or League of Nations rule, and as Opole for periods of Polish rule. The same standard will be applied to other place names for which there are no English equivalents.

[11] "Die Bevölkerung des Deutschen Reiches nach den Ergebnissen der Volkszählung 1939." *Statistik des Deutschen Reiches* 552/1, 56. These figures combine the *Stadtkreis* and *Landkreis* Oppeln. In 1890, the same region had around 122,000 residents.

Nationalist activists were forced to infiltrate tight-knit villages and scramble long-standing communal ties. In their efforts to create imagined national communities, activists had to refashion local ones. The singing clubs, youth groups, priestly sermons, parades, schoolhouse politics, election patterns, intermarriages, and bar fights at the heart of this study show how communal boundary lines were remade and reshaped over generations – along both national and non-national lines.

In telling these stories, certain imbalances of power and of historical evidence must be reckoned with. The two national projects in Oppeln – German and Polish – were highly asymmetrical. Until 1945, Oppeln was a German district capital, populated by a Prussian bureaucratic elite endowed with the coercive power of the state to set norms and expectations around language and culture. This created an unmistakable assimilatory pull. The surrounding rural county mostly spoke *schlonsak* and prayed in Polish, but they attended German-language schools and (if they left their villages) sought jobs in a broader German economy.[12] The German national project thus relied on the pull of upward mobility and integration, a bargain that many Upper Silesians embraced. These means of state coercion – in particular, the setting of language policies – were pursued with varied levels of vigor, depending on the regime. German officials rarely invoked the naked violence implicitly backing their monopoly force – at least until the late 1930s, when the Nazis pummeled Upper Silesians into outward loyalty. Over the decades, most Upper Silesians who chose partial or even full German loyalty thus did so quietly. They took clerical jobs in Oppeln, married German speakers, or migrated to economically healthier German regions, usually without the drama that enters the historical record.

The Polish national project around Oppeln, in contrast, sought to upset this path to German integration. Tapping into what one scholar has called a national "inferiority complex," committed Polish nationalists (a mix of imported and home-grown activists) sought to convince "unawakened" locals that their political salvation lay in a national insurgency against their oppressive German rulers.[13] They had the harder task. This activist

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[12] According to the 1910 census, Oppeln county (excluding the city) had a 78 percent Polish-speaking or bilingual population. Census results can be found in APO, RO, Syg. 2096. The large number of Protestant, German-speaking settlements founded by Frederick II resulted in the clustering of German speakers in specific villages, with most other locales almost universally Polish speaking.

[13] On the "inferiority complex," see Stanisław Ossowski, "Zagadnienia więzi regionalnej i więzi narodowej na Śląsku Opolskim," *Przegląd Socjologiczny* IX, no. 1–3 (1947): 119.

call to national self-worth – to recognize one's true Polish roots – also demanded rejecting the upward social pull of German integration. Declaring Polish loyalty could also invite varying levels of communal and government discrimination, depending on the regime. Upper Silesians responded to the Polish national call with highly variable and ultimately fickle devotion. Their ambiguity toward the Polish cause emerges most clearly in the very public frustrations of activists themselves, who spared little invective for their wavering flock of Polish speakers. Additionally, German administrators' overwrought fears and officious disdain for Polish activists prompted copious government surveillance and handwringing. The Polish movement thus left behind a much more dramatic historical record, its successes and failures recorded by both state officials and its own activists. For these reasons, Polish nationalist activists receive far more attention in these pages than do German ones.

The story begins in the decades before 1890, when national difference played virtually no role in political life around Oppeln. Instead, a different set of battle lines was drawn: between Catholic Upper Silesians on the margins and a Protestant German core. Thanks to a religious revival starting in the 1840s, newly devout Catholic Upper Silesians fiercely resisted anti-Catholic legislation in the "small" German Empire that emerged in the 1870s. Polish and German speakers united across ethnolinguistic divides to defend their faith, thus defying the logic of nationalization. Turning these Upper Silesians into Poles and Germans thus required hard work by activists to unwind their Catholic political loyalty.

From 1890 until World War I, Oppeln witnessed the first major attempt to awaken the local population to its Polish loyalties. A single Polish activist, Bronisław Koraszewski, spearheaded a newspaper and Polish-Catholic associations. Building off regional discontent with the Catholic Center Party, a new Polish party recorded historic gains at the polls in 1903 and 1907, effectively dividing the local electorate into German and Polish camps. Yet just as electoral success peaked, Koraszewski's Polish social networks began to flounder. New, populist Catholic Workers Associations recaptured Upper Silesians' loyalties by championing bilingualism and national agnosticism. Citizens around Oppeln tired of national politics, often favoring social integration and economic advancement over their own supposedly innate national loyalties.

World War I would prove less traumatic to most Upper Silesians than the war's aftermath. The vast majority of Upper Silesians who served in the Prussian army did so loyally, despite more aggressive anti-Polish

sentiment in Germany. Polish activists benefited from Germany's hubristic fall into revolutionary chaos in 1918, and from the resurrection of a new Polish state. The Allies initially agreed to cede Upper Silesia to Poland on ethno-national grounds, but, amid German protest, reversed the decision in favor of a regional plebiscite. The Upper Silesian plebiscite, as the most significant democratic vote in all of Europe for national belonging after World War I, served as a key test of the Wilsonian principle of self-determination.[14] As I argue, Upper Silesians confounded the expectations of elites that they would willingly divide themselves into Poles and Germans. An ineffective French-led occupation, organized by the League of Nations to keep the peace ahead of the plebiscite vote, unleashed cycles of German-Polish violence that tore apart communities. For many Upper Silesians, the profound chaos of the plebiscite period only signaled the dangers of overt national loyalty. Rather than sharpen national divides, the plebiscite muddled them.

As a result of the plebiscite, Upper Silesia was partitioned between Germany and Poland, with Oppeln landing on the German side. New democratic freedoms in the Weimar Republic promised greater protection of bilingual rights. Germany and Poland, under a special League of Nations treaty known as the Geneva Accord, enforced minority protection rights in Upper Silesia. Polish nationalists hoped these freedoms would finally allow Upper Silesians to awaken to their national identities. Yet most locals shunned the institutions of Polish nationalism, such as Polish schools. At the polls, many more Polish speakers voted for Hitler than for the Polish party by 1932. Polish activists, frustrated by this apathy toward the Polish cause, subsequently rebelled against the democratic norms that had fostered locals' instrumental attitude toward the nation. They found an affinity with the rising Nazis in advocating forced racial separation. The turn toward racialist politics by the 1930s, while reflecting broader Central European trends, grew locally out of activists' frustration with national apathy.

Upper Silesians' satisfaction with bilingual and civil rights can be traced in part to the region's bilateral League of Nations protections, which proved some of the most robust in Europe. Their effectiveness depended

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[14] Plebiscites were held in Schleswig, Allenstein, Marienwerder, Klagenfurt, and Sopron, in addition to Upper Silesia. Several other plebiscites were discussed, planned, or attempted but never carried out fully. Sarah Wambaugh, *Plebiscites since the World War: With a Collection of Official Documents*, Vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1933).

in large part on their reciprocal nature. German officials were motivated to protect their Polish minority at home to pressure Poland into protecting its German minority. In a historical twist, these League protections also extended to Jews. The Geneva Accord included provisions to protect religious minorities, which were enforced in favor of Jews after Hitler's takeover in 1933. From 1934 to 1937, Jewish Upper Silesians gained a truly exceptional legal status, as all Nazi anti-Semitic laws were voided in the region. The result was a brief, but significant reprieve for regional Jews. But with the end of the treaty in 1937, Upper Silesia's Jews immediately began to suffer the same fate as those elsewhere in the Reich.

While Jews were condemned by an unbending Nazi racial hierarchy to suffer and die, Polish speakers in Upper Silesia endured a far more variable and winding fate. Ironically, national boundaries in Nazi Upper Silesia became more fluid than in the Weimar era. Nazi coordination (*Gleichschaltung*) co-opted or disbanded Catholic and workers' associations that held together the social fabric, so Upper Silesians instead joined Polish youth groups, sport leagues, or theater troupes, which were protected by the League of Nations treaty. They used Polish nationalism instrumentally as a shield to reestablish social and religious networks destroyed by the Nazis. After the League protections expired in 1937, Nazis brutally persecuted Polish activists and cowed most Upper Silesians into limiting their public usage of Polish. Yet during World War II, these trends reversed: public usage of Polish increased dramatically with an influx of forced laborers from Poland. Since it was part of the German *Altreich* (pre-1938 borders), Upper Silesia was heedlessly labeled core German territory, its Polish character overlooked in the name of fighting the war. In 1945, after 12 years of Nazi rule, national dividing lines in Upper Silesia were messier than ever before.

Failed Nazi efforts at nationalization would find their mirror image in the postwar era, with the takeover of Upper Silesia by Poland. Across East Central Europe, millions of Germans were expelled as members of an enemy nation. Yet in Upper Silesia, a large majority of Upper Silesians stayed in their homes – more than 90 percent of the prewar population in many villages around Opole (now officially renamed from Oppeln). These locals had crafted an ethnic ambiguity robust enough to survive the scrutiny of both Nazi Germany and postwar Poland. They were aided by Polish administrators' lenient and fungible verification of their national loyalties. Yet life was far from rosy for these "autochthons," as they were called. The Polish drive to eliminate signs of the enemy nation after 1945 reached extremes that even the Nazis had not attempted for bilingual

Upper Silesians. German language usage was punished with fines and imprisonment, and almost all traces of the German language – down to books, appliances, or gravestones – were seized or effaced.

Natives responded to widespread oppression largely by retreating into closed-off communities. When the Polish–West German border opened for "family reunifications" from 1956–1959, thousands of Upper Silesians fled west, reclaiming their German citizenship. By 1960, the rough endpoint of this story, Upper Silesians around Oppeln had demonstrated their fickle national loyalties under both German and Polish regimes. The Upper Silesian identity that then reemerged after 1989 as a political reaction to Polish nationalizing centralism fits the pattern established over the previous century. The creation of Upper Silesians proved no less contingent than the creation of Germans or Poles. All groupings have functioned primarily as political categories used by activists seeking to harden contingent group loyalties into fixed ethnic identities. But the story of most Upper Silesians is essentially one of refusal to adhere to the fixity of identity. Their national loyalties remained contingent, and the means of attaining them instrumental.

FROM IDENTITIES TO LOYALTIES

This story of Upper Silesian national politics suggests an alternate narrative of national struggle in Central Europe and requires an alternate analytic vocabulary. Certainly, in regions with homogeneous populations or clearly delineated ethnolinguistic and religious boundaries, activists found it exceedingly easy to unite the population around nationalist sentiment. But in many of the mixed language or borderland regions across Central Europe, residents resisted the supposedly inevitable pull toward their ethno-national identity. In some cases, confession crossed traditional national boundaries: thus Polish-speaking Protestants in East Prussia developed loyalties to Germany above those to their supposed Polish-Catholic homeland.[15] In some cases, a reversal in local hierarchies prompted national shifts: thus the previously elite German speakers of Prague were slowly assimilated into a socially ascendant Czech-speaking culture before World War I.[16] In other cases, local residents stressed the

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[15] Richard Blanke, *Polish-Speaking Germans? Language and National Identity among the Masurians since 1871* (Köln: Böhlau, 2001).
[16] Gary B. Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival: Germans in Prague, 1861–1914* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981).