

## RECOVERED TERRITORY



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*A German-Polish Conflict over Land and Culture, 1919–89*



By  
Peter Polak-Springer



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*For Halina*



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Doha, 22 April 2014

Peter Polak-Springer

## NOTE ON PLACE NAMES, TRANSLATIONS, AND LABELS



All local place names in this volume have German and Polish names. During the era I examine, the choice of language was often a political choice meant to underscore one or another nation's "right" to the area the name identified. In an effort to be impartial, and to acknowledge the multiple identities of localities, in more recent years historians have written place names in the various languages they commonly appeared. This is the approach I take here. During each era, I refer to places by the official name given by the government controlling it at the time, and place the competing name in parentheses the first time I mention the place, for example, Gliwice (Gleiwitz). I refer to countries, regions, and localities commonly translated into English (e.g., the Mount of St. Anne) by their English name.

When using the terms "western" or "eastern" Upper Silesia, it is not my intention to echo the irredentist political equivalents used during the era I examine—the German *Ostoberschlesien*, or Polish *Śląsk Opolski*—but rather to refer to the two sides of the border of 1922, the former belonging to Germany and the latter to Poland. I purposely avoid overusing the terms "German" or "Polish" Upper Silesia, since such descriptors were used for irredentist purposes to mask the region's ethnocultural fluidity. Instead, I use the term the Provinz (Oberschlesien, or O/S), the official name of the German part of the region during the interwar era, interchangeably with "western Upper Silesia," and the Voivodeship (Silesia), the English translation of the Polish official name for "eastern Upper Silesia" (Województwo Śląsk) during this era.

Very often politicized historical foreign terms defy exact and undisputed English-language equivalents. All the translations in this volume are my own, unless pointed out otherwise. Whenever there may be a discrepancy between the foreign term used by contemporaries and my own term, I usually justify my own translation in the notes. For example, I use the term "Germanization" to refer to *Eindeutschung* even though the latter was used by Nazi officials to avoid the Bismarckian term *Germanisierung*, which contradicted their racially based idea of nationality. Another term that I translate with an approximate English

equivalent that hardly promotes the emphatic and symbolic idea of the original German concept is “local homeland” for *Heimat*. Indeed, in German this term also promotes connotations of “home,” “attachment” to place, and a sense of “belonging.” I often use such terms in the German/Polish equivalents in the text after translating them once.

Just as place names had a political charge, so did labels for ethnic/national groups. Very often “Pole” and “German” (“Polishness,” “Germandom”) had specific connotations based on the ideology of their authors. I therefore also sometimes place these descriptions in quotation marks. When referring to Jews I am mainly referring to the category created by government officials and organizations claiming to represent this group. Indeed, very often the people counted as part of this or other ethnic/national categories, be they Jews, Poles, Germans, or Silesians, had their own multiple identities, which unfortunately were ignored by the categorizing agents.

## ABBREVIATIONS



AA	Auswärtiges Amt (Foreign Office)
AAN	Archiwum Akt Nowych (New Records Archive), Warsaw
Amb. Ber.	Ambasada Polska w Berlinie (Polish Embassy in Berlin)
APK	Archiwum Państwowe w Katowicach (Polish State Archive in Katowice)
APK-Gl.	APK Gliwice Section
APO	Archiwum Państwowe w Opolu (Polish State Archive in Opole)
APWr.	Archiwum Państwowe we Wrocławiu (Polish State Archive in Wrocław)
BArch	Bundesarchiv (Federal Archive)
BDM	Bund Deutscher Mädel
BdO	Bund der Oberschlesier/Związek Górnoślązaków (League of Upper Silesians)
BDO	Bund Deutscher Osten (League of the German East)
BdV	Bund der Vertriebenen (League of the Expelled)
BŚ-ZS	Biblioteka Śląska – Zbiory Specjalne (Silesian Library – Special Collections)
ChD	Christian Democratic Party (Korfantists or Chadeci)
DAF	Deutsche Arbeitsfront (German Labor Front)
DNVP	Deutschnationale Volkspartei (German National People's Party)
DVL	Deutsche Volksliste (German Ethnic List)
DZ	<i>Dziennik Zachodni</i> (newspaper)
FPZOO	Federacja Polskich Związków Obrony Ojczyzny (Federation of Polish Unions for the Defense of the Fatherland)

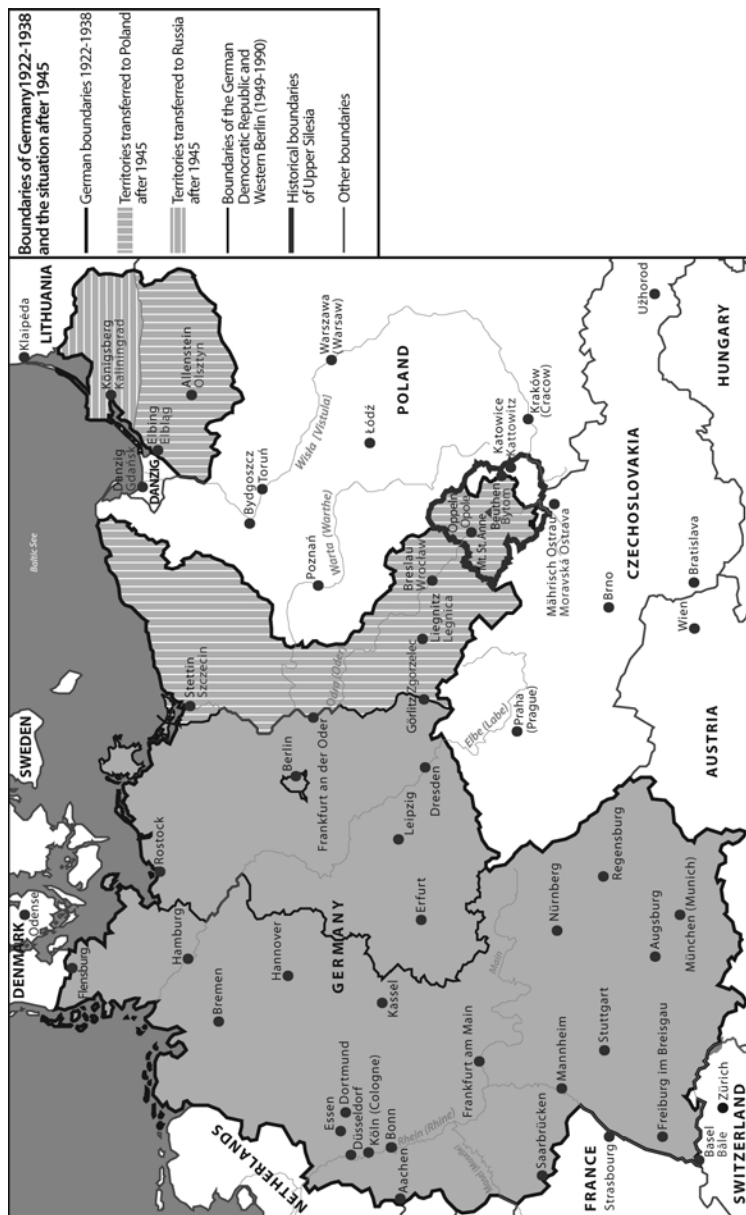
Genkons.	Deutsche Generalkonsulat in Kattowitz (German General Consulate in Kattowitz)
GDR	German Democratic Republic (East Germany)
GG	Generalgouvernement (Nazi-occupied parts of Poland)
GGŚl.	<i>Głos Górnego Śląska</i> (newspaper)
GOP	Górnośląski Ośrodek Przemysłowy (Upper Silesian industrial district)
GStA PK	Geheimstaatsarchiv Preußische Kulturbesitz (Secret State Archives, Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation)
IPN	Instytut Pamięci Narodowej (Institute of National Remembrance)
Kat.	Kattowitz (Katowice)
KdF	Kraft durch Freude (Strength through Joy)
KH	Königshütte (Chorzów, formerly Królewska Huta)
Kon. Byt./Kon. Op./Kon. Br.	Konsulat Generalny Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w (General Consulate of the Republic of Poland in) Bytomiu/Opolu/Breslau
KOS	Kuratorium Okręgu Szkolnego (School District Administration)
KPD	Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (German Communist Party)
KPP	Komunistyczna Partja Polski (Polish Communist Party)
Krsl.	Kreisleitung (County Head)
KVP	Katholische Volkspartei (Catholic People's Party)
KW	Komitet Wojewódzki (Voivodeship Committee)
KZ	<i>Kattowitzer Zeitung</i> (newspaper)
LdO	Landsmannschaft der Oberschlesier (Upper Silesian Homeland Society)
MO	Ministerstwo Oświaty (Ministry of Education)
MRN	Miejska Rada Narodowa (National Council, Municipal Level)
MSZ	Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych (Polish Foreign Ministry)
MZO	Ministerstwo Ziem Odzyskanych (Ministry of Recovered Territories)
NAC	Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe (National Digital Archives)

n.d.	not dated
NOFG	Nord und Ostdeutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (North and East German Research Society)
n.p.	not paginated
NSLB	Nationalsozialistische Lehrerbund (Nazi Teachers' Union)
NSF	Nationalsozialistische Frauenschaft (Women's League)
ODM	<i>Ostdeutsche Morgenpost</i> (newspaper)
OHB	O/S Heimatbund (Upper Silesian Regional Homeland League)
O/S (O.S.)	Oberschlesien (Upper Silesia)/Oberschlesische (Upper Silesian)
OSW	<i>Oberschlesische Wanderer</i> (newspaper)
OP	Oberpräsidium/Oberpräsident der Provinz Oberschlesien or (Governorship/Governor of the O/S Province.
OSV	<i>Oberschlesische Volksstimme</i> (newspaper)
Pr. MdI.	Preußische Ministerium des Innern (Prussian Ministry of the Interior)
PA-AA	Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes (Political Archive of the Foreign Office)
PPR	Polska Partia Robotnicza (Polish Workers' Party, the Polish Communist Party before 1948)
PSL	Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe (Polish Peasants' League/Party)
PPS	Polska Partia Socjalistyczna (Polish Socialist Party)
PZPR	Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza (Polish United Workers' Party/the Polish Communist Party)
PZ	<i>Polska Zachodnia</i> (newspaper)
PZZ	Polski Związek Zachodni (or Polish Western League, same as previously called the ZOKZ)
RAŚ	Ruch Autonomii Śląska (Silesian Autonomy Movement)
RGVA	Rossiskii Gosudarstvennyi Voennyi Arkhiv (Russian State Military Archive)
RKF	Reichskommissar für die Festigung des deutschen Volkstums (Reich Commissioner for the Strengthening of Germanism)
RP	Rzeczpospolita Polska (Republic of Poland)



RPA	Reichspropagandaamt (Reich Propaganda Bureau)
RH	Reichszentrale für Heimatdienst (Central Office for Service to the Heimat)
SD	Sicherheitsdienst (of the Nazi RF-SS Security Service)
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (German Social Democratic Party)
SR	Situation Report
StP	Starostwo Powiatowe (Polish County Government)
TRZZ	Towarzystwo Rozwoju Ziem Zachodnich (Society for the Development of the Western Territories)
UB or (UBP)	Urząd Bezpieczeństwa or (Urząd Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego) (State Security Agency of People's Poland)
VB	Volksbund (Deutsche Volksbund für polnische Oberschlesien)
VBW	Volksbildungswerk (National Cultivation Agency)
VDA	Verein für das Deutschtum im Ausland (Association for Germanism Abroad)
Woj. Śl.	Województwo Śląskie (Voivodeship Silesia)
VGB	Voivodeship Government Building (Gmach Urzędu Wojewódzkiego (Voivodeship Government Building))
VVHO	Vereingte Verbände Heimattreue Oberschlesien (or United Organizations of Upper Silesian Homeland Patriots/German Homeland Patriots)
Woj.	Województwo (voivodeship)
WUIP	Wojewódzki Urząd Informacji i Propagandy (Voivodeship Agency of Propaganda and Information)
Wyd.	Wydawnictwo (Press)
Wydz.	Wydział (Department)
ZBOWiD	Związek Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację (League of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy)
ZIOF	Zentralinstitute für Oberschlesische Landesforschung (Central Institute for Upper Silesian Regional Research)
ZM	Zarząd Miejski (Municipal Government)

ZOG	Związek Obrony Górnego Śląska (Upper Silesian Defense League)
ZOKZ	Związek Obrony Kresów Zachodnich (or Western Territories Defense League, from 1934 on called the Polish Western League or PZZ)
ZPwN	Związek Polaków w Niemczech (Union of Poles in Germany)
ZPŚl.	Związek Powstańców Śląskich (or Silesian Insurgent League)
ZWPS.	Związek Weteranów Powstańców Śląskich (or Veterans League of Silesian Insurgents)



Map 1. Boundaries of Germany, 1922–38, and the situation after 1945 (map by Dariusz Gierczak).



Map 2. Upper Silesia, 1922–38 (map by Dariusz Gierczak).



Map 3. German administrative regions in occupied Central Europe at the end of 1941 (map by Dariusz Gierczak).



## INTRODUCTION



On 31 August 1939, Nazi SS (*Schutzstaffel*) agents carried out a ploy to disguise Hitler's imminent attack on Poland as a defensive measure. In this legendary subterfuge, armed SS men dressed in Polish military uniforms broke into the German radio station in Gleiwitz (Gliwice), located near the border with Poland in Upper Silesia. (Some historians believe they were actually dressed in civilian clothing.) After holding up the station's personnel, the fake soldiers went on air to announce that the station was in Polish hands. On the next fateful day, as the Wehrmacht attacked Poland, the Nazi Party's newspaper, *Völkische Beobachter*, reported the Gleiwitz incident as an attack on "German soil" by members of the "Polish volunteer corps of Upper Silesian insurgents." Yet the incident went unmentioned as one of "fourteen border incidents" the previous night in Adolf Hitler's war declaration speech before the Reichstag on 1 September 1939. Perhaps "the Führer" chose not to draw attention to an incident whose logistical feasibility should have puzzled anyone familiar with Gleiwitz at the time. Just to reach the radio station, the "Polish invaders" would have had to make their way through a well-patrolled border, not to mention a densely populated city full of German soldiers preparing to invade Poland.<sup>1</sup>

Nonetheless, a Polish attack on German soil seemed at least plausible to residents of the industrial border city. That summer, as for nearly twenty years, Polish paramilitary members organized by a government-sponsored Insurgent League had marched with firearms to the German-Polish border, vowing to use force to "recover" the western (German) part of Upper Silesia for Poland. Long before the Gleiwitz incident, Nazi propaganda had been using such theater, as well as exaggerated stories of Poland's persecuted German minority, to persuade the public of their neighbor's aggressive threat to Germany. Even in Upper Silesia, where locals often questioned the regime's exaggerated anti-Polish rhetoric, observers of the public mood in Gleiwitz in May 1939 noted that "the anti-Polish agitation is beginning to gain influence even among leftist-oriented people," and "that it is quite possible that in the event of a real outbreak of war against Poland Hitler could indeed win over large masses for such a war."<sup>2</sup> Well-versed in the irredentism endemic to this borderland and other eastern territories, Nazi borderland

specialists wrapped their propaganda in the publicly familiar discourses and symbols of the long-standing German-Polish conflict over Upper Silesia.

Since Germany's defeat in 1918, followed by territorial losses in the Treaty of Versailles, even proponents of the Weimar Republic and fervent opponents of Nazism and nationalism as well as defenders of international peace, moderation, and diplomacy gave lip service to the notion that, in the words of historian Erich Marcks, "the current borders" were "just impossible."<sup>3</sup> Thus, the republic's defenders commonly agreed with its opponents in calling for the "recovery" of the "German east." Similarly, long before the Nazis seized power, ordinary Germans had become activists on behalf of saving the "bleeding border" from "Polonization."<sup>4</sup> In Upper Silesia and the other "lost" eastern provinces whose cause he had inherited, Hitler found a valuable grievance around which to rally German support for his own imperialist dreams of military expansion.

To win domestic and international sympathy for the invasion of Poland, Hitler's 1 September war declaration speech consciously avoided appeals to such Nazi principles as Germany's need for *Lebensraum* (living space) and the mixture of social Darwinism and racism that justified the right of the stronger. Rather, he invoked a more traditional line of argument that affirmed Germany's right as a nation-state to its eastern borderlands. At the outset, he underscored that these provinces "were and remain German," and that although they "owe their cultural development exclusively to the German people," they "had been annexed by Poland," where "the German minorities living there [have been] ill-treated in the most distressing manner!"<sup>5</sup> These phrases reflected a familiar language of popular irredentism that long before the Third Reich had been endorsed by the Weimar Republic's supporters and opponents alike.

The Gleiwitz incident—a sideshow in Hitler's invasion of Poland—drew its symbolic power from a deeply entrenched irredentist culture that emerged from post-World War I territorial conflicts between Germany and Poland. By "irredentist" and "irredentism" (and interchangeably "revisionist" and "revisionism"), I refer to the politics of contesting and claiming territory in general, whether based on purely historical and geopolitical or ethnic arguments or, more commonly, ones of a mixed sort.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, I make a claim for the inherent similarity of irredentist politics between two nations that long contested control over Upper Silesia, the geographical focus of this book. This holds true despite changes in governments and across different time periods. The area of primary interest is known as the "industrial district," a cluster of densely populated industrial urban centers, one of them being Gleiwitz. This center of coal mining and metallurgy made the larger region one of Central Europe's most industrially valuable areas. Moreover, in 1922, the League of Nations drew the German-Polish border—an object of unrelenting quarrel and contestation—right through this industrial district, making it the most coveted area to each of the two nation-states.



Throughout the interwar era, governments in Germany and Poland struggled against one another to reacculturate landscapes and renationalize inhabitants in the district and larger region. Each side deployed its own cadre of borderland nationalists (activists supported by the government, including state agents, paramilitants, scholars, folklorists, literati, and other specialists of irredentist politics) dedicated to promoting to its locals, its nation, and the international community its own irredentist myth that the borderland “always was and remained” German or Polish. These nationalists waged a cultural contest over this borderland in reaction to, and in imitation of, one another’s “cultural propaganda,” namely, discourses, propaganda tactics, and nationalization policies. They were spread through traditional written media, the new technologies of radio and film, politically symbolic enclaves such as architecture, urban planning projects, museums, mass rallies, education, and other venues.

This book represents a transnational history of irredentism as a popular culture, and its promotion at the grassroots.<sup>7</sup> It aims not only to give equal attention to both sides of the conflict but also to demonstrate how they interacted with one another in disputes over territories, spaces, and symbols, as well as with the locals they sought to mobilize to actively support their side of the struggle. I utilize this interactive transnational approach to highlight my main argument, namely, that although claiming to be emphatically opposed to one another, both of the conflicting (German and Polish) national camps and their propaganda enterprises were actually but two sides of one political culture, in which the policies and discourses of each were not only strikingly similar, but also inherently interwoven. Interaction, mutual reaction against one another’s policies and propaganda, and even mutual influence between both national camps formed the basis of this irredentist culture and the territorial conflict that it sustained. This culture played a central role in Upper Silesia’s multiple territorial “recoveries”—successive renationalizations by Germany and Poland following border revisions in 1922, 1939, and 1945. Between 1922 and 1953, the book’s primary focus, it evolved over several historical periods and under German and Polish governments of diverse ideological orientations. Since the early 1920s, regional and national governments on each side of the border—liberal and authoritarian alike—profited politically from borderland nationalism. They found it helpful for boosting Upper Silesia’s national importance, legitimizing authoritarian rule, and, in the cases of the German National Socialists and Polish Communists, for building “ethnically cleansed” societies.

Between 1939 and 1950, the institutions, discourses, policies, and proponents of this transnational irredentist culture served the acculturation goals of larger forces working to forge ethnic and political homogeneity in the borderlands. Thus, this culture became an essential instrument for social engineering projects that employed violence, expulsion, resettlement, forced assimilation—and in the case of the Nazis, genocide. Upper Silesia was part of the larger politics of

constructing utopian societies—in the annexed territories for the Nazis and in the western borderlands for the Communists. Each of these projects occurred under unique circumstances and employed different if also similar means. Whereas the Nazis focused on “re-Germanizing” the eastern parts of Upper Silesia that had belonged to Poland during the interwar era, the Polish Communists worked to “re-Polonize” the formerly German western part.

Yet each treated the vast majority of locals in its new territory as “recovered peoples” who needed to be renationalized, that is, reengineered as its model “new man.” For this purpose, each drew heavily on the transnational irredentist culture, and even appropriated and repurposed the “other’s” institutions—for example, museums, conservatories, institutes—for its own nationalizing work. By analyzing these commonalities, this book contributes to recent scholarship that breaks down the conceptual border between the imperialist policies of Nazism and communism in East-Central Europe.<sup>8</sup> On a broader scale, it aims to contribute to the history of the contestation and nationalization of borderlands, and more specifically with regards to German-Polish relations, but also to studies of regionalism and a phenomenon more recently described as “national indifference.”

### Borderland Nationalism

World War I clearly revealed the destructive potential of nationalism and the chauvinism, militarism, and racism—in this case, cultural racism<sup>9</sup>—that accompanied it. At the same time, by hastening the end of four multinational conglomerations—the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman empires—the war created opportunities for a number of previously unacknowledged nations to assert their own territorial claims. Calls for the “liberation” and “recovery” of “stolen” territories, or for their “return” to their proper national “motherland,” resounded beyond Germany’s borders. Rogers Brubaker characterized this politics of claiming a “homeland” beyond one’s nation-state borders as “external homeland nationalism.”<sup>10</sup>

This irredentism was particularly strong in multiethnic Central Europe, where the victorious Allies tried to accommodate Woodrow Wilson’s ideal of the congruity of peoples and “their lands” in their task of drawing and redrawing borders. Thus, if a nation has a right to territories inhabited by its own people, then it followed that “an independent Polish state should be erected which should include the territories inhabited by indisputably Polish populations.”<sup>11</sup> As a basic tenet for rebuilding the continent’s postwar political order, Wilsonian principles thus reinforced the dominance of nationalism in European politics. The conflict between these ideals and demographic realities often led to brutal territorial wars and population exchanges between successor states of the fallen monarchies.<sup>12</sup>

The mass mobilizing potential of territorial conflicts made grassroots irredentism a characteristic feature of interwar diplomacy. By the end of World War I, territorial conflict ceased to be the concern only of diplomats and government elites. Government agents strove to mobilize the broader public around disputed borderlands, made more graphic by irredentist symbols and slogans. Radio and film, still new media technologies, played a pivotal role in providing both informative and entertaining ways to bring irredentist discourses to the masses.<sup>13</sup>

The Hungarian-Romanian conflict over Transylvania offers a case study in irredentist mass politics. Holly Case has recently described how Hungary accompanied its annexation of the northern part of this region in 1940 with a whole “language and science of legitimacy” that identified the new territory as a “liberated” or “reannexed” Hungarian province, thereby promoting a “sense of interrupted continuity being restored.” Social scientists, such as ethnographers, racial anthropologists, and geographers, along with natural scientists, such as climatologists and botanists, worked to create a myth of this region’s “national belonging.” Urban planners, architects, and builders assisted in this enterprise by giving Transylvania’s capital, Koloszar, a Hungarian appearance. State cultural politics aimed to resocialize the masses to accept this national identity by creating symbolic spaces and staging mass rallies that celebrated “liberation” and “reannexation.” Thus, Case argued, the territorial conflict “between Hungary and Romania ran much deeper than high diplomacy, saturating domestic politics, social science, cultural institutions, and ideas of statehood.”<sup>14</sup>

This popular irredentism was part of a larger innovation in mass politics in twentieth-century Europe, where, as Philipp Ther argued, “nationalism had been transformed from a political ideology into a social reality.”<sup>15</sup> This process began in the second half of the nineteenth century with what Rogers Brubaker referred to as “the nationalizing nation-state.”<sup>16</sup> Early nation-building policies involved a degree of cultural homogenization, as exemplified by the German chancellor Otto von Bismarck’s *Kulturkampf*, a cultural struggle to cripple the political influence of Catholicism in the newly united Germany. According to Brian Porter, by the fin de siècle, a new nationalism had emerged, which in reaction to the liberal model of an inclusive multicultural nation based on patriotic ideals defined the nation by exclusivist ethnic and linguistic criteria.<sup>17</sup> Exemplified by the Pan-German League and Roman Dmowski’s (Polish) National Democracy, the new nationalists worked to standardize the physical and cultural characteristics of the essential (or core) elements of their respective nations, their particular peoples (*Volk* in German, *lud* in Polish), and their territories. (From *Volk* comes the commonly used *völkisch* for these politics.) Their insistence that the state should safeguard the supremacy of its core people, who often inhabited areas of Central Europe that extended beyond the borders of one nation, gained enormous political influence in the midst of postwar revolutions and dislocations.

Wilsonianism strengthened “the spell” of building homogenous nation-states in Central Europe.

In its role as social engineer, the nationalizing nation-state often employed procedures that have come to be known as “ethnic cleansing”—defined by Norman Naimark as “the removal of a people and *all traces of them* from a concrete territory.”<sup>18</sup> By promoting “population exchange” between Greece and Turkey, the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) formally made expulsion an internationally endorsed “solution” to the “problem” of diversity within a given nation, particularly in contested border areas. Moreover, mass migrations—in Brubaker’s words, the “unmixing” of populations—followed post-World War I border revisions, usually in response to more informal cultural and economic pressures in nationalizing nation-states. Hitler’s extreme nationalism and ethnic cleansing policies emerged within this broader context.<sup>19</sup>

Fearing irredentist aggression from an adjoining nation-state, governments of multiethnic borderlands often resorted to “cleansing,” “unmixing,” and nationalization. Caitlin Murdock’s work on the Saxony-Bohemian borderland (separating Germany and Austria-Hungary and, later, Czechoslovakia) demonstrates that postwar state authorities imposed unprecedented control and surveillance over frontier regions. Nation-states categorized the inhabitants of these areas along ethnic-national lines and demanded that they constantly reaffirm their identity with and loyalty to the nation-state. A specific “borderland rhetoric” reinforced these politics by positing the politically constructed “borderland” as an “endangered” and “bleeding” entity that at the same time represented the nation’s “fortress.”<sup>20</sup> This ideology, which I refer to as borderland nationalism, legitimated an intrusive politics of nationalization and homogenization. For example, restrictions on border crossing threatened the traditional rhythms of local life in regions that prior to their classification as “borderlands” were marked by unimpeded movement and nonnational identities.<sup>21</sup> As Tara Zahra’s work has demonstrated, such policies even invaded family life in cases where national activists pressured parents to send children to schools that instructed in “their” language.<sup>22</sup>

### The German-Polish Borderlands

Following the post-World War I territorial settlements, the German government increased control over its remaining, but now “endangered,” eastern provinces, to which the new nation-states of Poland and Czechoslovakia laid continuing claims. Fervent opposition to territorial losses imposed on Germany united otherwise divided Germans of almost all political orientations, and in turn weakened faith in the new Weimar Republic. The “bleeding border”—a term that depicted territorial loss as an amputation of vital parts of the German nation—became

a symbol of national victimization, as did the many displaced individuals, both those who fled their “lost *Heimat*” (local homeland) and those stranded on now Polish territory.<sup>23</sup> Interwar Germany’s claims to its *Volksdeutsche*—ethnic Germans who were citizens and inhabitants of other countries—amplified calls for the return of “German cultural soil” (*Deutsche Kulturboden*) on which these groups resided. As Annemarie Sammartino demonstrates, this irredentist discourse presupposed an official conceptualization of citizenship along the specific ethnic and cultural lines of “Germanness”—itself a result of border revision.<sup>24</sup>

Throughout the interwar period, Germany posed the greatest threat to the territorial integrity of the new Polish state. Long before the Nazis assumed power, the Weimar Republic explicitly called for the return of Poland’s most vital territories: Danzig and the Polish Corridor, which provided Poland’s only access to the sea, and eastern Upper Silesia, its only center of industry. This perceived threat provided a justification for the discriminatory treatment of Germans and the persecution of German minority organizations in Poland.<sup>25</sup> These groups helped fan the flames of Polish irredentism, which aimed not just to defend the republic’s existing borderlands, but also to expand them with claims to territories in Germany, Czechoslovakia, and other neighboring states.

The brutality of the Third Reich’s acts of territorial aggression has long cast a shadow on the historical memory of the irredentist politics of other nations during the interwar era, particularly on the part of those who became Hitler’s main victims. Defending and expanding “endangered” borders was integral to the irredentist political culture common to most countries of Central Europe. The new Polish state—born of six territorial military conflicts against its neighbors and plagued by the resulting grievances—serves as a prime example of how the quarrelling successor states of the former Habsburg Empire contributed to making Central Europe a powder keg for World War II.<sup>26</sup> In the end, the establishment of the German-Polish border by western European statesmen at Versailles was met with protests from political elites within *both* nations. Interest in the “struggle” to protect and expand the borderlands aroused widespread and serious interest among the publics of both Poland and Weimar Germany. Like the *Volksdeutsche* in Poland, so Poles in Germany’s borderlands had their own minority organizations, which became the state’s tools for irredentist politics.<sup>27</sup> Poland’s invasion and annexation of the Czechoslovakian border region of Teschen Silesia (Tešín or Zaolzia) in the wake of Hitler’s annexation of the Sudetenland following the Munich Conference in October 1938 marked a culmination of this irredentist fervor. Hungary followed suit that November by taking territory in southern Czechoslovakia, including Carpathian Ruthenia. Clearly, Germany’s annexation of the Sudetenland—however great its iconic role as a premonition of the war to come—represented broader discontent over Central Europe’s borders.

Responsibility for the war that enveloped Europe clearly rested with the Nazi regime’s unilateral determination to build a continental German empire

stretching even into Soviet Eurasia, not with this widespread irredentist fervor. Nevertheless, in Munich Hitler was able to exploit the internationally accepted ideal of a nation's "right" to "its" territories in order to sufficiently disguise his imperialist aims to suit the European appeasers.<sup>28</sup> Although this ruse failed in the case of Poland, the Nazis portrayed their invasion as a struggle to "recover" territory and "liberate" its "*Volksdeutsche*."<sup>29</sup> For many ordinary Germans, including some who may not have been Nazis, this notion conferred moral value to at least the initial phase of the Third Reich's military aggression. Persuaded by these ideals—the subject of Elizabeth Harvey's work on women's activism in these regions—they zealously engaged in the work of "Germanizing" the annexed formerly Polish western borderlands, which were also known as the "recovered lands" (*wiedergewonnene Länder*).<sup>30</sup> The German myth of "recovering" lands that "were and remain German" functioned as a more familiar and traditional, culturally as well as regionally based nationalist discourse. Part of a larger narrative of the "German east" that legitimated German hegemony over its wider eastern European "sphere of influence," it applied specifically to the formerly Prussian borderlands of interwar Poland.<sup>31</sup> Working in tandem with a more esoteric Nazi discourse on racial hygiene, this mainstream irredentist language legitimized the "Germanization" of the annexed territories through ethnic cleansing, which included acculturation, expulsion, resettlement, and genocide.

Upon liberating Poland from Nazi German occupation in 1945, the Soviet Union installed a Polish Communist regime to govern the country. Likewise, Poland's borders were redrawn to incorporate Germany's eastern provinces (the so-called Oder-Neisse territories, named for the rivers that formed the new border), such as Pomerania, eastern Brandenburg, and Silesia. Indeed, the expulsion of millions of Germans followed. As Hugo Service argues in his work on postwar Silesia, while Poland's westward territorial shift was formally decided only by the "Big Three" Allied leaders (the United States, Great Britain, and the USSR), it marked the realization of the long-standing dreams of Polish nationalists, particularly followers of Roman Dmowski, the original author of claims to these lands. Working with the Communist regime to ensure the success of their longed-for western border, they helped promote the regime's own "recovered territories" myth to rationalize the annexation. Indeed, in some respects similar to how the German territorial myth had functioned as an alternative to Hitler's racism, the Polish counterpart offered a nationalist ideology as a substitute for a widely detested Marxist-Leninism to legitimate Poland's new political order. Borderland nationalists working with the Communists used this myth to justify the expulsion of Germans, to idealize the "recovery" of "Poles from Germany," and to glorify the engineering of an ethnically homogenous society in these provinces.<sup>32</sup>

German and Polish myths of "recovered territories" functioned as the ideological backbone of two inherently interwoven irredentist cultural-political

enterprises, whose development stemmed from the conflict fostered by the shared post-1919 border. Throughout the interwar era in particular, cultural politics were at the center of what I will refer to as a territorial *cold war* (or a state of heated political tension but not actual war) between these nations, waged by propaganda and acculturation policies. During the war and immediate post-war era, these cultural-political enterprises worked to nationally (re)integrate the “other’s” borderlands and their populations. By focusing on one of Central Europe’s most hotly contested borderlands, Upper Silesia, across a number of decades, this book examines successive episodes of border redrawings during the heyday of war and nationalism in Europe from a (trans)national political as well as a local “everyday life” perspective. It is also meant as a contribution to the more recent shift in scholarly interest—particularly with regard to the 1939–50 era—from the politics of exclusion (e.g., genocide and expulsion) to inclusion (e.g., resettlement, nationalization, acculturation).<sup>33</sup>

### The Struggle over Upper Silesia

The economic importance of Upper Silesia’s industrial district made the region a particular flash point in German-Polish relations. The resulting conflict was fully as fierce as the more celebrated dispute over the Polish Corridor and its port city of Danzig. The bilateral national struggle over the region grew particularly fierce from the late winter through the summer of 1921. Although propaganda played a key role in this conflict, Upper Silesia was the only region in which the Allies’ prescription of a plebiscite to resolve the territorial question was followed by open war, which began with a Polish armed offensive. The so-called third Silesian insurgency of May and June 1921 aimed to take the borderland by force after the Germans had won the majority of votes in the plebiscite. It remained the fiercest armed conflict between Germany and Poland until World War II.

The League of Nations resolved the conflict to Poland’s advantage, essentially annulling Germany’s plebiscite victory. To the great dismay of both Germans and the region’s locals, in 1922 it drew a border right through the industrial district, separating residential districts, coal mines, roads, waterways, and railways. Poland received the bulk of the industrial district, one of Central Europe’s centers of coal mining and metallurgy. Just as the Polish Corridor represented the country’s sole outlet to the sea, eastern Upper Silesia was its only industrial province. Given that Germany retained several ports and richer industrial areas, its stake in these territories was more a matter of honor than of economic necessity. Indeed, holding onto them was also a means for Germany to maintain its foothold in East-Central Europe. Intensifying Germany’s sense of grievance, the Upper Silesian decision came after Poland had been awarded all the other