

Competing National and Regional Identities in Poland's Baltic "Recovered Territories", 1945-1956

Paul McNamara

National University of Ireland, Galway

Abstract: The article analyzes the manner in which Poland's Baltic "Recovered Territories", the three provinces of Szczecin, Gdańsk and Olsztyn, were incorporated into a re-constituted Polish state following the Second World War. It shows how the organic formation of a regional identity in the three Baltic provinces faced continuous interference from a regime with little or no understanding of the effects its state-building policies had upon their specific 'transnational' social, cultural, and demographic particularities. Despite the internal divisions in what was a fledgling pioneer society, the communist state never allowed for settler and indigenous groups to iron out their differences at their own pace and in their own way. Between 1945 and 1956, Polish settlers and indigenous groups in the Baltic Recovered Territories managed to form only a weak common identity not due to the policies of Poland's Communist regime but in spite of them.

Keywords: Poland, Communism, Recovered Territories, Settlement

Introduction

Poland's Baltic "Recovered Territories", that is the three provinces of Szczecin, Gdańsk and Olsztyn, witnessed sweeping changes regarding borders and population as the former German provinces of West Pomerania and East and West Prussia were incorporated into a re-constituted Polish state following the Second World War. Although under-populated and geographically peripheral, they were central to the *raison d'être* of the postwar Polish state while forced migration and ordinary push-pull settlement placed groups of Poles with strong regional and cultural differences into a 'transnational' social and demographic mosaic.¹

¹ This paper is based on research for my doctoral thesis entitled 'Resisting the Stalinist Take-over of Poland: Compromise and Conflict in the Settlement of Polish Pomerania 1945-56' to be completed at the National University of Ireland, Galway, by autumn 2013.

Until quite recently historians writing in Polish, German and English have viewed Poland's Recovered Territories during the initial post-war years mainly in terms of forced migration, settlement, ethnic cleansing and cultural appropriation rather than focus on the problems resulting from competing or mixed identities.² Moreover, a number of recent German-language case studies have concentrated on cities, such as Breslau/Wrocław, Stettin/Szczecin and Danzig/Gdańsk, in order to examine how the processes of 'degermanization' and 're-polonization' were implemented on the ground.³ Even within Poland, conflict and competition between the various ethnic, regional and national identities in the Polish Oder-Neisse lands has been dealt with more by sociologists, interested in how a new Polish society began almost from scratch, than historians.⁴ Recently, however, the complexities of settlement of the Recovered Territories filtered into the mainstream Polish media and general interest with the release of *Róża*, a much-discussed feature film which examined not only the violence, rape and looting which inhabitants of Olsztyn province experienced at the at the war's end, but the complex interaction between Polish settlers and Masurian locals and the confusion over national and regional identities.⁵ This was followed by the publication of Marcin Zaremba's, *Wielka Trwoga. Polska 1944 – 1947. Ludowa Reakcja Na Kryzys*, which also examines how competing identities in the Recovered Territories contributed to a general sense of crisis in Poland during the immediate post-war period.⁶

² These include Tadeusz BIAŁECKI, *Przesiedlenie Ludności Niemieckiej z Pomorza Zachodniego Po II Wojnie Światowej*, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 1969; T. David CURP, *A Clean Sweep? The Politics of Ethnic Cleansing in Western Poland, 1945–1960*, Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2006; Philip THER and Ana SILJAK (eds.), *Redrawing Nations: Ethnic Cleansing in East-Central Europe, 1944–1948*, Boston: Rowman and Littlefield, Inc., 2001; Alfred DE ZAYAS, *Nemesis at Potsdam: The Expulsion of the Germans from the East*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989.

³ These include Jacek FRIEDRICH, "Neue Stadt in Altem Gewand: Der Wiederaufbau Danzigs 1945–1960", in Stefan TROEBST, *Visuelle Geschichtskultur*, Cologne, Böhlau Verlag, 2010; Jan MUSEKAMP, "Zwischen Stettin Und Szczecin: Metamorphosen Einer Stadt Von 1945 Bis 2005", in Dieter BINGEN and Peter Oliver LOEWS (eds.), *Veröffentlichungen Des Deutschen Polen-Instituts Darmstadt*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010; Dagmara JAJESNIAK-QUAST and Katarzyna SKOŁOSA, *Geteilte Städte an Oder Und Neisse: Frankfurt (Oder)-Ślubice, Guben-Gubin, Und Görlitz-Zgorzelec, 1945–1995*, Berlin, 2000; Gregor THUM, *Die Fremde Stadt, Breslau 1945*, Berlin: Siedler, 2002.

⁴ These include Z. DULCZEWSKI and A. KWILECKI (eds.), *Pamiętniki Osadników Ziemi Odzyskanych*, Poznań: Instytut Zachodni, 1963, Andrzej SAKSON, *Stosunki narodowościowe na Warmii i Mazurach 1945-1997*, Poznań: Instytut Zachodni, 1998, Andrzej SAKSON (ed.), *Ziemi Odzyskane 1945-2005: Ziemi Zachodnie i Północne, 60 lat w granicach państwa polskiego*, Poznań: Instytut Zachodni, 2006, Andrzej SAKSON (ed.), *Ślązacy, Kaszubi, Mazurzy i Warmiacy – między polkością a niemieckością*, Poznań: Instytut Zachodni, 2008.

⁵ *Róża*, directed by Wojciech SMARZOWSKI, Monolith Films 2011.

⁶ Marcin ZAREMBA, *Wielka Trwoga. Polska 1944 – 1947. Ludowa Reakcja Na Kryzys*, Warszawa: Znak, 2012.

Geographical origin and social background were not the only major factors in hindering the forging of a regional or even a national identity among the Polish settlers of the Recovered Territories. For instance, the concept of "victimhood" was common to all groups, the only question being who had suffered the most, which itself became a kind of moral currency as to who had the most right to the bounty of the Oder-Neisse lands. Indeed, the victimhood of the eastern Polish settlers, themselves expellees from the east, trumped that of the local Germans and the indigenous population, despite their suffering and expulsion at the hands of the Red Army and Polish officials. Moreover, Poles from central Poland saw themselves as "pioneer conquerors" whose victimhood during the war not only gave them the right to the material wealth of the Baltic region, but to rapid social advancement above all others. They also saw themselves as top of the ethnic pecking order of "Polishness" when compared to "Sovietized" Poles from the east and "Germanized" Kashubians, Masurians and Warmians, an attitude which caused much antagonism during the early years of Polish settlement.⁷

"Degermanization" and "Repolonization"

Official Polish documents from the immediate post-war years often give a surprisingly frank and honest view of events. Due to a chronic lack of educated and qualified people, many pre-war and non-Communist civil servants were placed in senior positions and remained in them until the Communists felt strong enough to have them replaced after 1947 with obedient minions who often, but not always, attempted to portray events in the light of the Party line. Besides, practically all Poles working in government offices, whatever their political background, were fully behind the policy of "degermanization", although they were divided as to whether indigenous identities should be valued as "proof" of Poland's historical claim to the region or suppressed in order to forge a common "Polish" identity with the newcomers. Failing to consider the high probability that indigenous groups would be caught up in expulsions, even before the war's end officials from central Poland believed that the best solution to rid the Recovered Territories of Germans "would be the creation of conditions which would cause the spontaneous emigration of the undesirable element. To achieve this goal, a strong-armed policy of applying terror should be employed, while at the same time making it easier for those to leave the Recovered Territories."⁸ Having ignored several protests from the Western Allies to cease these "wild" transfers, by the end of 1945 the

⁷ Andrzej SAKSON, *Stosunki narodowościowe na Warmii i Mazurach 1945-1997*, pp. 172-173.

⁸ Archiwum Państwowe w Szczecinie, APS (Polish State Archives in Szczecin), Series 317, File 1, pp. 33-34, Urząd Wojewódzki w Szczecinie, UWS (Provincial Office in Szczecin) report, 28 March 1945.

Polish authorities in West Pomerania had managed to expel almost 300,000 people across the border. Eventually, however, the regime was to soon give in to Allied demands and agreed to organized transfers.⁹

By November 1945 the Allied Control Council had drawn up a plan for the orderly transfer of 3.5 million Germans from Poland to start on 1 December 1945 and end in July 1946. Of these, 2 million were to go to the Soviet zone and 1.5 million to the British zone.¹⁰ Although there was almost unanimous support among Poles for the general goal of “degermanization”, the files show that there were often problems on the ground in weaning the Polish settlers off cheap or free German labour. Indeed, local officials were perturbed at settler attempts to obstruct the expulsion of their German housekeepers and servants, warning that it had to be kept in mind that “the citizens of a foreign country carry within them the germ of future complications and this is why in our border region they are completely undesirable.” Others complained that a number of German women were using mixed marriages to stay: “Such marriages are fundamentally undesirable”, they argued, as the presence of these German wives could present an “internal danger” for the Polish state.¹¹

In addition, the policy of “repolonizing” Germanized indigenous groups proved more problematic due to the major challenges involved in finding suitable homes and farms for the two million Poles expelled from lands beyond the Curzon Line and now settling in the Recovered Territories.¹² In contrast to the summer period which had been relatively free of armed underground attacks when compared to Gdańsk Pomerania and West Pomerania, as the autumn of 1946 came, officials in Olsztyn began to notice signs that this was changing for the worse. More worryingly, this seemed to coincide with the movement of eastern Polish settlers into the province, thus settlers whose personal experience of Soviet rule had made them stridently anti-Communist.¹³

Although Polish settlement in 1946 in Olsztyn province was going according to plan with a total population of 377,985, including 61,753 Warmians and Masurians, there were still 97,550 Germans living there in autumn 1946.¹⁴ To make matters more complicated in this demographic mosaic, from

⁹ Stanisław JANKOWIAK, “«Cleansing» Poland of Germans: The Province of Pomerania, 1945-1949”, in Philip THER and Ana SILJAK (eds.), *Redrawing Nations: Ethnic Cleansing in East-Central Europe, 1944-1948*, Boston, Rowman and Littlefield, Inc., 2001, pp. 87-95.

¹⁰ Debra J. ALLEN, *The Oder-Neisse Line: The United States, Poland and Germany in the Cold War*, Westport CT, Praeger, 2003, pp. 40-41.

¹¹ APS, Series 317, File 1099, pp. 247-251, UWS memo marked “Secret”, 12 March 1946.

¹² APS, Series 317, File 1051, pp. 67-73, Urząd Informacji i Propagandy w Szczecinie, UIPS (Office of Information and Propaganda in Szczecin) report, no date but probably August 1946.

¹³ Archiwum Państwowe w Olsztynie, APO (Polish State Archives in Olsztyn), Series 500, File 2, p. 284, Urząd Wojewódzki w Olsztynie, UW O report, 25 January 1947.

¹⁴ APO, Series 500, File 2, pp. 51-52, Urząd Informacji i Propagandy w Olsztynie, UIPO (Office of Information and Propaganda in Olsztyn) report, 26 August 1946.

April 1947 serious problems resulted due to a sudden influx of 55,000 Ukrainian and Lemkos as part of Operation Vistula, who suddenly made up over 10% of the province's population.¹⁵ However, the fact that local Polish officials were happy to settle the Ukrainians along Olsztyn's northern border with the USSR before settling Poles there may indicate their own fears of unilateral border changes by the Soviet Union.¹⁶

Polish settlers of all backgrounds were united in their view that these newcomers were a dangerous and hostile fifth column. This was particularly true in cases of Poles who had resettled in the Baltic Recovered Territories to escape Ukrainian violence in south-east Poland in 1946 only to find that tens of thousands of their former enemies were to become their neighbours once again in 1947. Moreover, realizing that they had been abandoned in a foreign society which viewed them as "the enemy within" and hoping that they would soon be allowed to return home, the Operation Vistula settlers shut themselves off from their Polish neighbours through self-isolation and the creation of closed circles of friends and relatives.¹⁷

Indigenous identity – Cashubians, Masurians and Warmians

Although the forced migration of Germans presented the Polish Communist regime with a blank slate on which it hoped to build a Sovietized society from scratch, the two most powerful anti-Communist organizations in Poland, the Roman Catholic Church and the Polish anti-Communist underground, actively supported the repolonization of the Oder-Neisse lands. Unfortunately, as they had all come in from outside and had very set views on what constituted "Polishness", neither the regime, the church, the underground nor the settlers themselves were initially able to discern the subtle ethnic differences among regional indigenous groups with mixed Polish and German identities, such as the Cashubians, Warmians and Masurians, who were caught up in a situation where they had to constantly prove their identity to different groups of outsiders, despite having lived there for centuries. For these people, failure to prove an exclusively "Polish" identity meant expulsion, while success meant repolonization. Thus, the drive to create an ethnically-homogenous state from the most influential forces in post-war Polish society meant there was little or no room for those with "in-between" identities.

Even before the end of the war, the fledgling Polish Ministry of Public Administration (MAP) drew up a very detailed plans for the "reslavization" of

¹⁵ Andrzej SAKSON, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 136-138.

¹⁷ Maciej HEJGER, "Przekształcenia narodowościowe na Ziemiach Zachodnich i Północnych", in Andrzej SAKSON (ed.), *Ziemia Odzyskane 1945-2005: Ziemia Zachodnie i Północne, 60 lat w granicach państwa polskiego*, Poznań: Instytut Zachodni, 2006, p. 349.

the Recovered Territories which, it demanded, should “as soon as possible regain a completely Polish character. Germans may not live beside Poles.”¹⁸ In a chilling echo of the Nazi *Volksliste*, one Polish official even proposed in late March that the remaining German inhabitants be divided into three categories for future “verification” or expulsion.¹⁹ Such “verified” indigenous were to be reminded that “that each of them is beginning a new life, that the reslavization certificate is a certificate of their Polish birth, that everything up to now, even their first names and surnames, belong to a past that will never return.” Furthermore, these people were obliged to realize that this is “an act of kindness from a state to which they are indebted, [and] that this debt must be repaid.”²⁰

The verification programmes were also a way for the Polish administration to halt the depopulation of the Baltic region.²¹ In fact, it proved so difficult to attract permanent Polish settlers to Olsztyn, an already under-populated and unstable region, that at the stroke of a pen in late 1945 tens of thousands of Germans still living there were reclassified as “Masurian Poles” in order to prevent their expulsion or emigration.²² However, such compromises from the regime often led to conflict with newly-arrived Polish settlers who refused to accept their “German” indigenous neighbours as fellow Poles. An excellent bottom-up view of these tensions is provided by a fascinating and often shockingly frank collection of memoirs of Polish settlers which were collected by the Western Institute in Poznań soon after the thaw of 1956. For instance, in the village of Mikołajki Pomorskie, in Gdańsk Pomerania, where 80% of the population was indigenous to the region, Jan Jakubek, a “pioneer” settler teacher found it difficult to reconcile the ideal of “Polishness” with what he found on the ground:

The teachers’ efforts went in the direction of avoiding antagonism between the children of the indigenous population and those of the settlers, which was our greatest fear. However, there was no way to stop this. A section of the indigenous children had not yet mastered the Polish language. This was enough for the other group to call them “Krauts” and “Huns”. It was known that the same altercations took place between these children’s parents. If the children of strangers from beyond the River Bug betrayed their knowledge of Russian with only one little word, it was enough for them to be called “Ukrainians”. All the school’s efforts were aimed at erasing these regional differences.²³

¹⁸ APS, Series 317, File 1, p. 1, Ministerstwo Administracji Publicznej, MAP (Ministry of Public Administration), Plan of Decree, 28 March 1945.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 27-32.

²⁰ APS, Series 317, File 1, pp. 33-47, UWS Report, 28 March 1945.

²¹ APO, Series 500, File 12, p. 7, UIPO Report, 30 November 1945.

²² Claudia KRAFT, “Who is a Pole, and Who is a German? The Province of Olsztyn in 1945”, in Philip THER and Ana SILJAK (eds.), *Redrawing Nations: Ethnic Cleansing in East-Central Europe, 1944-1948*, Boston: Rowman and Littlefield, Inc., 2001, pp. 116-117.

²³ Memoir of Jan JAKUBEK, Instytut Zachodni Poznań, IZP, (Western Institute Poznań), *Pamiętniki Osadników 1957* (Settlers’ Memoirs 1957), File No. 66, pp. 25-28.

Further tension resulted when “rehabilitated” Cashubians returned from expulsion to find that Polish settlers had taken over their farms.²⁴ Even though the settlers concerned were given other farms to live on, this caused some from central Poland to flee their farms in Olsztyn province and that had a bad effect on the morale of those who stayed on.²⁵ Indeed, Jakubek even recalled how a German expellee had sent a letter to his old Cashubian neighbour in Mikołajki Pomorskie instructing him to keep an eye on his home and orchard and vowing to hang the new Polish occupant and his entire family from the biggest fruit tree on his return.²⁶

In Olsztyn province in August 1946, Warmians and Masurians comprised 26.5% of the population, almost a third of whom were causing major problems for local officials by attempting to avoid the verification programme at all costs. Unhappy with the very concept of having their regional or national identity completely redefined for them as “Polish”, they were fearful of reprisals should the region return to Germany in the near future.²⁷ In West Pomerania, however, more and more Polish voices appeared blaming local officials for not understanding that “Poles” had already been living in the region for centuries, and complaining that Polish settlers continued to treat indigenous groups badly: “It is generally believed that the indigenous people are Germans who have been left in this country so that they can work for free for the settlers.”²⁸ Therefore, officials advised that the repolonization campaign not only constituted a “responsibility to ensure permanent care and cohabitation with the indigenous Polish people” but a process by which the settlers could learn about the region and its agriculture from those who had been living there for generations.²⁹ Indeed, repolonization in Olsztyn province was having some, if limited success. Franciszek Iwanowski, a settler who had spent a several months teaching a group of young Warmians, soon witnessed “a watershed in their psyche. Passive, apathetic, distrustful and skeptical up to now, they began to give in” to repolonization. Indeed, he was happy to report that many of them had even become enthusiastic about learning Polish history and geography and there was more progress in learning Polish language, songs and dances: “The ice of mutual dislike had been broken ... Polish in the mouths of the indigenous people became more and more correct.”³⁰

²⁴ Archiwum Państwowe w Gdańsku, APG, Series 2603, File 15, p. 2, Minutes of meeting of Polska Partia Robotnicza, PPR (Polish Workers' Party) in Łębork, 25 March 1946.

²⁵ APO, Series 500, File 2, p. 159, Urząd Wojewódzki w Olsztynie, UWO (Provincial Office in Olsztyn) report, 8 October 1946.

²⁶ Jan JAKUBEK, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

²⁷ Andrzej SAKSON, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

²⁸ APS, Series 317, File 1182, p. 97, Polski Związek Zachodni, PZZ (Polish Western Association) to UWS, 11 November 1947.

²⁹ APS, Series 317, File 1181, pp. 1-5, UWS report, 21 November 1947.

³⁰ Memoir of Franciszek IWANOWSKI, in Z. DULCZEWSKI and A. KWILECKI (eds.), *Pamiętniki Osadników Ziemi Odzyskanych*, Poznań: Instytut Zachodni, 1963, pp. 706-710.

However, it was generally recognized that the results of repolonization programmes had left much to be desired due to several reasons. Firstly, indigenous groups had strong German roots, a fact which irked the poorly-trained Polish officials assigned to deal with them. Moreover, the large numbers of Polish criminals, looters and adventurers which had flowed into the region to hide from central Polish authorities and the hostile attitude of new settlers towards the indigenous, had done nothing to improve their frequently negative impression of Poland or Polish people. Indeed, this had even caused some who had been persecuted by the Nazis before and during the war for being members of the Polish Association in Germany to pretend to be German in order to be included in the expulsions across the Oder.³¹ In spite of its shortcomings, officials in West Pomerania claimed that repolonization had been a success as life there had regained “a Polish character”, although Cashubians comprised only 2.1% of the local population.³² In Olsztyn province, tension within the much larger indigenous community grew that spring as Warmians and Masurians became rivals over positions of influence in local government and institutions. Paradoxically, the purging by Communists of cooperative Masurians “of the German faith” made room for the Warmians who were Catholic and, in the eyes of xenophobic Communist activists, more Polish.³³

Following 1948, when the Stalinist wing of the Polish regime took over the reins of power, the regional identity of indigenous groups was strongly suppressed into a national “Polish” identity. Pressure to assess all groups in terms of “class struggle” meant that local Party organizations were now obliged to promote the social and political advancement of Cashubians, Masurians and Warmians as workers and peasants, not as “Volksdeutsch”. This, officials in Gdańsk Pomerania claimed, would enable the Cashubians to “liberate themselves” from their past of having been “agents” of the Germans.³⁴ Moreover, in autumn 1949 the MAP judged that repolonization programmes had been “completely insufficient. It is necessary for this campaign to have a class character... [and] to make attempts that these people connect themselves as closely as possible to the new Polish reality”.³⁵ Attempts to co-opt indigenous people into local government and Party organizations in a tokenistic fashion, soon ran into serious difficulties, however. For example, in 1950 one Party official in Tczew, Gdańsk Pomerania, was upset that new Party activists

³¹ APS, Series 317, File 1182, pp. 5-10, UWS report, 17 March 1948.

³² *Ibidem*, pp. 15-19.

³³ Łukasz ROGOWSKI, “Przemiany tożsamości wsi na Warmii w latach 1920-2005”, in Andrzej SAKSON (ed.), *Ślązacy, Kaszubi, Mazurzy i Warmiacy – między polkością a niemieckością*, Poznań: Instytut Zachodni, 2008, p. 312.

³⁴ APG, Series 2384, File 53, pp. 48-51, Komitet Wojewódzki Polskiej Zjednoczonej Partii Robotniczej, KW PZPR (Provincial Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party) Gdańsk, Minutes of Plenary Session, 24 June 1949.

³⁵ APS, Series 317, File 827, pp. 73-77, UWS circular marked “Confidential”, 22 August 1949.

attempting to promote such people did not seem to understand that 94% of the inhabitants in the county were Cashubians who had belonged to *Volksliste* Group III, while 80% of men there had served in the German army.³⁶

Tokenism and using the regional identity of indigenous groups, instead of “class”, when it suited the propaganda needs of the regime continued throughout the early 1950s. In Gdańsk Pomerania the gaining of Cashubian support or, at least, a neutralization of hostility, regarding the 1952 constitution was considered to be of key importance. While efforts had been made to co-opt the tiny number of “politically-active” Cashubians into highly-visible positions in local Party organizations and local government, some Party officials still pressed for the Cashubians to exchange their regional identity for a “class identity”.³⁷ In Olsztyn province, with nearly 100,000 Warmian and Masurian inhabitants, Provincial Governor Mieczysław Moczar claimed that a recent increase in the use of the German language there showed that “the enemy” was targeting the indigenous community.³⁸ Other Party officials warned of the need to be wary of ex-Nazis and “kulaks” among the Warmian and Masurian communities as those who had refused to take Polish passports showed that “there are American stool pigeons working among them.” In fact, the Party’s county committees had failed to unmask “the confidants of Adenauer and Schumacher acting against our country, against the unification of Warmians and Masurians with the settler population...”³⁹

The Atmosphere of Impermanence and Regional Identity

Another serious issue during this period was widespread crime and political instability resulting from a feeling among the settlers of the impermanence of Poland’s new borders resulting from the Potsdam Accords. In practical terms, this meant that many “settlers” were actually squatters who occupied farms and houses but invested little or nothing in their rebuilding or upkeep, while keeping their bags packed in the constant expectation of a Third World War among the Allies which would lead to the Germans’ return.⁴⁰ As a result, such attitudes had a serious effect on productivity and the economy in general and gave grist to the mill of German “revanchists” who used the deteriorating state of these farms to portray the Poles as feckless, lazy and incapable of managing the Oder-Neisse territories properly.

³⁶ APG, Series 2384, File 54, pp. 63-76, KW PZPR Gdańsk, Minutes of Plenary Session, 5 May 1950.

³⁷ APG, Series 2384, File 57, pp. 1-24, KW PZPR Gdańsk, Minutes of Plenary Session, 2 February 1952.

³⁸ APO, Series 1141, File 88, pp. 40-70, KW PZPR Olsztyn, Paper to Plenary Session, 2 February 1952.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 122-146, Paper to Plenary Session, 23 April 1952.

⁴⁰ Helena BĘDKOWSKA, *Ziemia I Morze*, Issue 23, 1957, no pagination.

The feeling of impermanence was most obvious among the Polish eastern settlers. While those who had come from what became Lithuania SSR generally understood that their forced migration was more or less permanent, those Poles who had been forced out the Polish-Ukrainian borderlands by brutal ethnic conflict continued to entertain hopes that they would soon return home. The easterners also included “Siberian” Poles who had been deported to the Soviet Gulag, and who viewed their move west to the Polish Recovered Territories not as a forced migration, but as an opportunity to escape from Soviet terror and save their very lives. Even though many of those who arrived in the wave of settlers from the east had brought supplies and tools with them, conflicts immediately arose between them and those Polish settlers already there. Not only did easterners loudly praise their land back home while criticizing the Oder-Neisse lands as infertile, but: “For a long time they argued over anything at all with anyone and were not able to live with their neighbours.”⁴¹ Soon after their arrival, the County Manager of Starogród attempted to dispel rumours that the eastern settlers intended to return to their former homes as soon as they got the chance, claiming that it was the “special concern” of the local Polish administration to help these settlers “acclimatize here, ensure they have the material means to live, as well as [their] personal security.”⁴²

Having been born and grown up in what was then Polish territory, the easterners were shocked to see that their new Polish identity cards described them as ‘Born in the USSR.’ Moreover, their own experience of forced migration led some of them to sympathize and identify with the Germans being expelled from the Baltic region. Undoubtedly this, and the fact that they invariably viewed the Soviet Union as Poland’s main enemy, made them even less popular with other Polish settlers, who feared and hated Germans and Germany the most. On the other hand, their “Russian” accents and style of dress led other settlers to believe that they were Russians masquerading as Poles whose loyalty to the new Polish state was in doubt.⁴³ Moreover, their knowledge and experience of life under the Soviets, as well as their close ties with the AK and NSZ anti-Communist underground, led both the Communist secret police and the local administration to place these eastern settlers under special surveillance and sometimes directed their settlement in order to break up old ties.⁴⁴

In addition, their central position in Poland’s traumatic and violent past, gave eastern Poles a peculiar martyrological view of themselves as patriotic

⁴¹ “Memoir of Leon KUKULSKI”, in Z. DULCEWSKI and A. KWILECKI (eds.), *Pamiętniki Osadników Ziemi Odzyskanych*, Poznań: Instytut Zachodni, 1963, p. 437.

⁴² APS, Series 317, File 1051, p. 12, Letter from Starogród County Manager to UWS, 1 April 1946.

⁴³ Andrzej SAKSON, *op. cit.*, pp. 176-179.

⁴⁴ Marek LATOSZEK, “Przemiany społeczne na Pomorzu ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem Trójmiasta”, in Andrzej SAKSON (ed.), *Ziemie Odzyskane 1945-2005: Ziemie Zachodnie i Północne, 60 lat w granicach państwa polskiego*, Poznań: Instytut Zachodni, 2006, p. 243.

lambs to be slaughtered on the altar of Polish national interests. Thus, their expulsion from the east, in the interests of aiding the new Poland gain the Recovered Territories in the west, gave them a superior right to compensation for what they had lost, not only as victims but as patriots. Moreover, as these Poles had, during the inter-war period, constituted a Polish elite which had dominated local groups of Ukrainians, Belorussians and Lithuanians, they also felt entitled to transfer their social positions to their new homes in the Oder-Neisse lands.⁴⁵ In the Polish press, moreover, the eastern repatriates were portrayed as “salt of the earth” peasant-patriots whose previous harsh existence and experience had made them the ideal “pioneer settlers”. However, settlers from central Poland were strongly criticized for treating the repatriates as “parasites”.⁴⁶ Of course, competition between central and eastern Poles over who was more Polish deflected attention from the fact that they really saw each other as rivals for property, material wealth and jobs.⁴⁷

In order to keep what settlers they had, and indeed to attract more, the Polish regime initially made serious efforts to foster both a regional and national identity in the Baltic Recovered Territories by use of propaganda. One the most significant attempts took place in Szczecin in mid-April 1946, when a major propaganda event was held entitled ‘*Trzymamy Straż nad Odrą*’ (‘We Keep a Guard on the Oder’), which was attended by over 50,000 visitors from all over the country, who received transport, bed and board for several days, a major feat of organization in a city still severely war-damaged and dealing with thousands of German expellees daily.⁴⁸ Indeed, the rally was aimed at showing the rest of Poland that rumours of the Polish “Wild West” were untrue and that West Pomerania had much to offer Poles should they decide to settle there. However, there was no escaping the fact that it had a strong political and propaganda basis which the regime hoped to use to its full advantage, especially with a national referendum scheduled for June that year. Moreover, the event was also designed to communicate to the outside world, the Soviet Union included, that Poland would fight to keep its newly-acquired lands to the last man, a fact that should be considered by the ‘Big Three’ at any future peace conference.⁴⁹

The task of creating both a regional and national identity in the Baltic region was, of course, made much more difficult by the continued presence of Soviets troops and attempts by the Communist authorities to gain control over almost every aspect of life in the region. Indeed, during the initial

⁴⁵ Andrzej SAKSON, *op. cit.*, pp. 173-175.

⁴⁶ Maria TOMCZAK, “Obraz osadników w prasie i publicystyce polskiej”, in Andrzej SAKSON (ed.), *Ziemie Odzyskane 1945-2005: Ziemie Zachodnie i Północne, 60 lat w granicach państwa polskiego*, Poznań: Instytut Zachodni, 2006, pp. 49-52.

⁴⁷ Andrzej SAKSON, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

⁴⁸ PS, Series 317, File 333, p. 37, UWS report, 29 May 1946.

⁴⁹ APS, Series 317, File 23, p. 3, UWS Press Release, 29 March 1946.

post-war period the Communist governor of West Pomerania, Leonard Borkowicz, was in no doubt that the “main factor” holding back the local economy was the presence of Soviet divisions occupying “certain properties and farms” and their protection of the local Germans, whom they jealously guarded from expulsion as a skilled workforce.⁵⁰

However, it was not “class war” which allowed the Communist regime to maintain and gain further control in the Recovered Territories before 1948, but its claiming credit for popular ethno-nationalist policies of expelling the Germans and helping Polish settlers share in the spoils. Moreover, despite its poor behavior on the ground, the settlers were convinced that the presence of the Red Army was the best chance they had of holding on to their newly-gained properties. In addition, there was also an understanding that as long as Władysław Gomułka and his “National Communists” were in control, the Polish settlers in the Baltic region felt they could become self-sufficient homesteaders without being driven into collective farms, or run small businesses for a reasonable profit. Furthermore, Catholic priests would be allowed to minister to their spiritual needs and the mixed Polish-German identity of indigenous groups would be shown more toleration. Thus, if the “National Communists” gaining a monopoly on political power was the price to be paid for political stability then many settlers were prepared to go along with it.

Although after the war Polish settlers flocked to the cities and towns of the Recovered Territories, repolonization of the countryside proceeded at a slower pace due to the danger and instability caused by the presence of Soviet and Polish marauders. For example, in the county of Gdańsk in early August 1945 there were 34,145 Germans and only 10,056 Poles.⁵¹ The Polish-German ratio was much more stark in nearby Kościerzyna county where out of a population of 47,000, Poles comprised only 13%, while *Volksdeutsch* Germans comprised 85%.⁵² However, the difficult economic situation in Gdańsk province was causing settlers to abandon properties and move to central Poland.⁵³ Of course, incidents of rape and robbery by Soviet soldiers in the Gdańsk region did not help and were not only “undermining people’s trust in Soviet army”, but were having a negative effect on the political views of settlers from east and central Poland.⁵⁴ Despite these problems, Polish settlement of the Baltic region proceeded at a slow but steady pace.⁵⁵

Despite official attempts to play down the “Wild West” image of the region, there was no getting away from the fact that settlers in the Baltic Recovered

⁵⁰ APS, Series 317, File 939, pp. 17-37, Leonard Borkowicz to MAP, Situation Report marked “Secret”, 14 July 1945.

⁵¹ APG, Series 1173, File 7, p. 5, Urząd Informacji i Propagandy w Gdańsku, UIPG (Office of Information and Propaganda in Gdańsk) report, 7 August 1945.

⁵² APG, Series 1173, File 5, p. 246, UIPG report, August/September 1945.

⁵³ APG, Series 1173, File 7, p. 9, UIPG report, 7 August 1945.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

⁵⁵ APG, Series 2603, File 1, pp. 22-27, Lębork PPR report, March 1947.

Territories had to frequently face real danger in the form of murder, rape and robbery, mainly by the Red Army, but sometimes by Polish uniformed forces. Indeed, officials reported that some Polish settlers were so frightened that they wanted to leave the region as soon as possible.⁵⁶ In Starogard county in Gdańsk Pomerania, the feeling of impermanence was accentuated by rumours and whispering campaigns that the Recovered Territories would be soon taken from the Polish state. Not only had many already left but two hundred settlers were said to have recently fled one village *en masse*.⁵⁷ One novel propaganda idea to bolster a sense of regional and national identity was for schoolchildren in Olsztyn province to send Christmas cards to the Polish émigré community in North America “strongly emphasizing ... that schoolchildren stand strongly in the defence of the eternal Piast Lands and guarding our Polish western border ...”⁵⁸. At the same time, the fear of German revanchism was used to encourage the settlers to join public protests against perceived Western designs on the region. For example, a speech in September 1946 in Stuttgart by US Secretary of State James Byrnes, which seemed to consider Poland’s “administration” of the Oder-Neisse lands an open question, drew large numbers of settlers onto the streets of Olsztyn province in protest.⁵⁹

Indeed, settlers in Olsztyn province were particularly highly-strung when it came to rumours of impending border changes. Just weeks before large numbers Ukrainians arrived there in spring 1947, Polish settlers were said to be already very perturbed by underground rumours that 30,000 German families were to return to the Recovered Territories, which were to be soon placed under British occupation. Officials reported that such “whispered propaganda” was creating such a strong atmosphere of impermanence that it was having an effect on whether settlers ran their farms with permanent settlement in mind.⁶⁰ Three years later, such feelings had not abated, with “rich peasants” in the village of Brudzewice accused of spreading rumours they had heard on foreign radio that there was a short window of a year or two for the settlers to leave the region before war broke out.⁶¹

In West Pomerania, Communist bigwigs complained local activists had not yet learned to appreciate that the region had few “old traditions” as a significant proportion of the Polish population there were eastern repatriates, “who still have certain sentiments for their old home, which is convenient for enemy propaganda”. In addition, they pointed out that while “we do not have

⁵⁶ APS, Series 317, File 1051, pp. 67-73, UIPS report, no date but probably August 1946.

⁵⁷ APS, Series 317, File 942, p. 57, UWS report marked “Top Secret”, 3 September 1946.

⁵⁸ APO, Series 500, File 1, p. 169, Letter from Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Żołnierza, TPŻ (Soldier’s Friends Society) to UIPO, 16 October 1946.

⁵⁹ APO, Series 500, File 2, p. 54, UWO Telephone Message, 1 October 1946.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 188, UWO report, 1 April 1947.

⁶¹ APS, Series 858, File 44, pp. 13-20, KW PZPR Szczecin, Minutes of Plenary Session, 11 February 1950.

the influence of the old long-sitting reaction as exists in the regions of the central provinces”, Szczecin’s location beside the GDR demanded that Communists do more to raise political “awareness”. Indeed, one Party official claimed that people were so afraid of American and German imperialism that women in shop queues were saying “Let [the Communists] do what they want, let [Poland] even be that 17th republic [of the USSR], just as long as there is no war”. Another warned that the Polish inhabitants of the Recovered Territories, and West Pomerania in particular, must realize that “even the smallest sign of weakness” regarding the economy and Polish settlement “will be especially used by [imperialists] as an argument against us, that every such fact damages our country and weakens it. ... Thus the kulak, spreading false imperialist propaganda [about] war and not sowing the land, is an enemy of our country.”⁶²

The atmosphere in West Pomerania at this time is clearly described by Leopold Przewoźniczek, a settler who lived in the city of Słupsk before moving to the nearby town of Sławno, which had been badly destroyed during the war and had seen very little rebuilding either from public or private initiative since 1945. Indeed, most Polish settlers from the east were not very interested in rebuilding as “Some say that the granting of this land to Poland has not been sufficiently guaranteed[and] that it may happen that [they] will still move from here ...” Despite efforts throughout the 1950s to convince these people that Poles had once lived there, Przewoźniczek recalled that not many seemed to believe it.⁶³

As Radio Free Europe and Voice of America focused their broadcasts on Poland during the early 1950s, Polish settlers in the three Baltic provinces became their most avid listeners, despite the threat of arrest. When in June 1953 news of the Berlin Uprising filtered through, Party officials in Gdańsk Pomerania, apart from blaming it on “Nazi provocateurs sent from West Germany by the American intelligence service”, warned that it was necessary to increase vigilance of sabotage and wrecking in local factories and farms “against the deadly enemies of Poland”. Moreover, the event had resulted in attempts being made “to sow confusion and uncertainty” among Kashubians and Polish settlers on the Baltic coast through “neo-Nazi revisionism”.⁶⁴ The atmosphere was so fevered that even a plague of Colorado beetles was considered a “serious threat” to the region in which the settlers “should show that we are able to fight for our western lands, for our crops [and] this is the matter, apart from the harvest, which is of the greatest importance.”⁶⁵ In Kartuszy county,

⁶² APS, Series 858, File 45, pp. 48-66, KW PZPR Szczecin, Minutes of Plenary Session, 4 March 1951.

⁶³ Memoir of Leopold PRZEWOŹNICZEK, IZP, *Pamiętniki Osadników* 1957, File No. 3, pp. 25-29.

⁶⁴ APG, Series 2384, File 60, pp. 39-54, KW PZPR Gdańsk, Paper to Plenary Session, 27 June 1953.

⁶⁵ APS, Series 858, File 47, pp. 108-124, KW PZPR Szczecin, Minutes of Plenary Session, 7 July 1953.

there were said to be 700 “kulaks” there getting their information from listening to the BBC and the Voice of America, as well as “from letters received from our enemies in West Germany, with whom every fourth farmer corresponds in our county.”⁶⁶

Although the Berlin Uprising initially had little impact in Olsztyn province, by mid-August 1953 Party officials were linking recent outbreaks of settler, and especially indigenous resistance, to this event. Indeed, almost everyone in the heavily-indigenous district of Rzeck was fined for not supplying documents in order to receive Polish identity cards. One Party official noted that “The events in Berlin rebounded in Poland and even more so in Olsztyn” where “revisionist Adenauer propaganda is exerting an influence on the mood of the masses.” Another had not expected the Berlin Uprising would have such a “harmful influence on the mood of the masses and [that] the kulak would spread false [and] slanderous rumours.”⁶⁷ Moreover, West German “revisionists” were using radio, letters and leaflets in a propaganda campaign which officials admitted was “revitalizing revisionist elements in our province.”⁶⁸

The Roman Catholic Church and the Polish identity of the Baltic Region

During the early years of the Polish settlement of the Recovered Territories following the war, the Communist regime, realizing that the visible presence of the Roman Catholic Church would be essential in attracting Polish settlers, ordered that the Church was not to be hindered in its operations there. From the Polish Church's position, the opportunity to both “polonize” and “catholicize” a formerly Protestant German region was too good to pass up, even if this meant that a working relationship with Communist officials had to be established. However, the programme of “Catholicization” sometimes led to conflict with indigenous groups, especially in Olsztyn Province, where the Methodist Church made strong protests to the MZO that newly-arrived Roman Catholic priests were attempting to bully local Masurians into turning Catholic in order to become “Polish”. In exchange for the regime's support on this issue, Olsztyn's Methodist leadership promised to spread the word of the region's “Polishness” to other Methodist centres around the world.⁶⁹

For Communist ideologues, not only was regional culture in the Baltic particularly frowned upon, but religious practice was seen as a serious obstacle

⁶⁶ APG, Series 2384, File 60, pp. 168-206, KW PZPR Gdańsk, Minutes of Plenary Session, 9 November 1953.

⁶⁷ APO, Series 1141, File 90, pp. 65-90, KW PZPR Olsztyn, Minutes of Plenary Session, 12 August 1953.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 94-128, Paper to Plenary Session, 12 August 1953.

⁶⁹ Archiwum Akt Nowych, AAN, (Polish State Archives in Warsaw), Series 1587, File 81, p. 8, Methodist Church to Ministerstwo Ziem Odzyskanych, MZO, (Ministry for the Recovered Territories), 11 January 1946.

for the creation of a new Communist society in a region to be settled by atheist *Homo Sovieticus*. However, as we have seen, in practice the regime was forced to recognize that the presence of Polish Catholic churches was essential for establishing Polish settlement and a national identity. Before 1948 open attacks on the Church were not yet possible, as the Communist Party was much too weak to even consider unnecessarily antagonizing or alienating any potential settler support base. In addition, up to 1948 many Party members in the region were still practicing Catholics, while local government employees took part in masses and processions, recognizing that for settlers the presence of the Polish Church in the region was a *sine qua non*. For its part, the Church also made compromises by becoming actively involved in campaigns defending Poland's new borders and its access to the sea.⁷⁰

Despite Communist support for the Church Catholicization programme on the ground, at higher levels in the regime there was major disquiet that Pope Pius XII seemed to take an equivocal position regarding the "Polishness" of the Oder-Neisse lands by refusing to appoint Polish bishops and establish full dioceses. The resulting quasi-dioceses or "Apostolic Administrations" seemed to imply that Poland's new borders were open to revision, a situation which was as unsatisfactory for the Polish bishops as for the Communist regime. Indeed, this issue was the main bone of contention between the regime and the bishops until ideologically-driven anti-clerical policies were introduced following 1948, aimed at splitting the Polish Church from the Vatican. During the first few years after the war, however, associating itself with the Church at a local level was a way for the Communist regime to both gain popularity and credibility and to guarantee the Polishness of the Recovered Territories.

Following the fall of Gomułka and his "National Communists" in late 1948, the stage was clear for the Party's Stalinist wing to openly launch two policies in 1949 which would previously have been both unthinkable and impracticable, namely collectivization of the Polish countryside and a plan to remove the Roman Catholic Church from all areas of public life. This latter policy was to be achieved through splitting the Church, promoting anti-clericalism and secular education, as well as through the confiscation of church property. While these policies were part of a coordinated Moscow-directed programme of ideologically-driven change all over the Soviet Bloc, in Poland the regime's battle with the Roman Catholic Church continued to be strongly linked with the precarious international status of the Recovered Territories. In official propaganda, the continuous criticism of the Polish hierarchy and the Vatican as hostile to recognizing the Polishness to these lands mostly had a counter-productive effect on the Polish settlers. Thus, rather than create distance between them and religion,

⁷⁰ Krzysztof KOWALCZYK, *W walce o rząd dusz: Polityka władz państwowych wobec Kościoła katolickiego na Pomorzu Zachodnim w latach 1945-1956*, Szczecin, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego, 2003, pp. 62-81.

such propaganda only strengthened the doubts which were already present in many settlers' minds regarding possible future border changes.

Alongside its ideologically-driven campaign, through a series of repressive measures the regime attempted to pressure the bishops into successfully lobbying the Vatican to raise fully Polish dioceses. The Church was divested of its agricultural land, which was a vital source of income, a move which impoverished many a rural parish in the Baltic region. Another point of attack was the questioning of the Church's right to ex-German churches in the Recovered Territories, even those Churches which had never been Protestant. "Administrative pressure" was also applied to all Catholic organizations and associations when, from August 1949, they were obliged to present themselves to the local administration for "registration". Seeing this as unpardonable interference in its internal affairs, in November the Polish bishops officially suspended almost all Catholic organizations, forcing many to continue their activities underground. Following this, the regime unilaterally dismissed the Apostolic Administrators in the Recovered Territories and replaced them with their own "Vicars Capitular".

In an effort at compromise, Polish Primate Stefan Wyszyński instructed the faithful to obey the "Vicars Capitular" for the time being and traveled to Rome in April 1951 to find a more permanent solution. Although he secured the Pope's approval to raise the status of the temporary dioceses in the Recovered Territories to ordinariates, this still did not satisfy the regime, which responded by attempting to cause a split between the hierarchy and the clergy in order to force a cutting of ties with the Vatican, limit the Church to only religious affairs, and increase the role of regime-friendly or "progressive" Catholics in Polish public life. However, in June 1953, a concerned Fr. Szelązek, Vicar Capitular with responsibility for West Pomerania, wrote to Polish President Bolesław Bierut advising that the removal of Catholic priests "cannot be carried out base on the whims and interests of individuals without concrete and real charges and evidence", but should follow "Polish reasons of state, the good of the Polish people and [be]in the spirit of stabilizing and deepening the Polishness of the Western Territories."⁷¹ Despite such advice, Cardinal Wyszyński was taken into custody on 25 September 1953 and interned in Stoczek Warmiński, a monastery near Lidzbark in Olsztyn province, the most isolated and least populated of the Recovered Territories which had the added advantage of a population which did not have a sufficiently unified regional or national identity to provide any kind of support base for escape.

Maritime Aspects and Regional Identity

The fact that the three newly-gained northern provinces brought a long Baltic coastline to the resurrected Polish state created political challenges as

⁷¹ Krzysztof KOWALCZYK, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

well as economic opportunities. Up to 1948, however, many of the region's ports were under Soviet control, and being used to ship asset-stripped machinery, food, timber and other goods to the USSR, much to the anger and annoyance of Polish Communist officials. Although official propaganda greatly emphasized the maritime nature of the region, its actual influence on creating a regional identity was severely limited during the initial post-war years. This was not only due to the fact that Polish settlement in the ports and on the coastline itself was more or less off-limits, but that many Polish settlers, especially those from the east, had never even seen the sea let alone had any idea of how to operate port cranes or sail trawlers. In fact, the only local Poles who had an experience of fishing were the Cashubians who, along with skilled German fishermen, were monopolized by Soviet commanders as an improvised fishing fleet.

Unfortunately, once Polish officials finally gained control of the ports in the late 1940s, this coincided with the Party's drive to "democratize" the fishing industry along ideological Communist lines. Although the regional identity of Cashubian fishermen was immediately seen as ideologically suspect, they were still needed to train new Polish crews. This did not stop some Party bigwigs complaining that the Polish fleet had been infiltrated by "capitalist elements", and ominously emphasizing that the many breakdowns on ships "which up to now were thought to be due to normal circumstances ... is hidden class struggle against us". Moreover, the Soviet-controlled Polish navy became an ideological battleground with officials demanding the sacking of non-Communist Polish naval training officers and their replacement with ideologically-sound Party activists. Indeed, on hearing such stories regarding the difficulties such activists had in keeping the coastal region free of "enemies", one Party official in Gdańsk Pomerania agreed that "Our province is particularly a trouble-spot as a point of contact with western imperialism."⁷²

Indeed, the early 1950s saw hysterical levels of paranoia in Poland's coastal region concerning the activities of supposed saboteurs, spies and capitalists trying to sabotage the fleet. Year-on-year large numbers of sailors were dismissed as "foreign and hostile elements" and replaced with politically "healthy" staff.⁷³ This not only damaged the fledgling fishing and shipbuilding industries by purging them of skilled professionals and fishermen, but undoubtedly had a negative effect on fostering a sense of a regional or national identity among recently arrived Polish settlers and their indigenous neighbours. Despite this being clear at the time, Stalinist ideology regarding seeking out and destroying "the enemy" drove Party officials in the Baltic Recovered Territories to ignore such concerns, with one official in the port town of Żegluga claiming

⁷² APG, Series 2384, File 53, pp. 63-87, KW PZPR Gdańsk, Minutes of Plenary Session, 23-24 November 1949.

⁷³ APG, Series 2384, File 54, pp. 63-76, KW PZPR Gdańsk, Minutes of Plenary Session, 5 May 1950.

that: "Our sailors are very much exposed to the influence of capitalist elements by being on long voyages and in capitalist ports."⁷⁴ Of course, local officials were merely parroting the Party line which had come down the transmission belts from the top. President Bierut continued to warn those living on Poland's long Baltic coastline that a port "links us with friends but also links us with enemies", and that the harbours of Poland were witnessing "ceaseless sabotage" by "imperialists".⁷⁵

The Impact of Collectivization on Regional Identity

Another crucial factor in hindering Polish settlers from gaining a sense of regional identity in the Baltic region was the imposition of collectivization. Given the fact that large amounts of free land and the prospect of becoming self-sufficient homesteaders had been the main pull-factor for settlers in the first place, attempts by the regime to force such people into collective farms after a few short years was greeted with great dismay. Such fears and uncertainties, engendered not only by plans for collectivization but the "Battle for Trade" targeting private business, eventually pushed some settlers to vote with their feet, with local authorities already reporting in 1948 that the population of the Recovered Territories had fallen, particularly in the countryside.⁷⁶ Moreover, the Baltic provinces were viewed as a *tabula rasa* for collectivization, with West Pomerania in particular being targeted, as it was almost entirely populated by newcomers with no historical or family links to the province. The situation was more complex in Gdańsk Pomerania, which included "the Polish Corridor", a sliver of land which had been part of Poland before the war. It was no surprise therefore that of the 114 collective farms set up there by February 1950, most were in the counties which had come from German West Pomerania, and the fewest in the "old counties and villages" which had been previously Polish with large Cashubian populations, and thus had maintained their pre-war regional identity.⁷⁷

Even before collectivization had been introduced, a major cause of worry was the fact that the Communist authorities seemed to deliberately delay the granting of legal title of farms to settlers in the Recovered Territories, a factor which also greatly heightened the sense of impermanence already there. Moreover, the punitive taxation system and compulsory deliveries of produce and

⁷⁴ APS, Series 858, File 46, pp. 156-171, KW PZPR Szczecin, Minutes of Plenary Session, 27 April 1952.

⁷⁵ APG, Series 2384, File 60, pp. 21-37, KW PZPR Gdańsk, Speech by Bolesław Bierut to Plenary Session, 27 February 1953.

⁷⁶ Adam MAKOWSKI, "Ziemie Zachodnie i Północne w polityce gospodarczej Polski", in Andrzej SAKSON (ed.), *Ziemie Odzyskane 1945-2005: Ziemie Zachodnie i Północne, 60 lat w granicach państwa polskiego*, Poznań: Instytut Zachodni, 2006, p. 65.

⁷⁷ APG, Series 2384, File 54, pp. 51-59, KW PZPR Gdańsk, Minutes of Plenary Session, 8 February 1950.

livestock introduced to drive private farmers into state farms instead drove the settlers not only off the land entirely, but drove them to flee the region. Thus, such policies actually not only reduced agricultural production, but left large tracts of land fallow and uninhabited. For example, Piotr Leśniak, a settler near Stupsk, West Pomerania, personally witnessed how taxes financially crippled many fellow settlers, citing the example of an owner of a 12 ha. farm who was charged 8,000 zloty in ground tax, as well as being obliged to provide compulsory deliveries of 70 quintals of grain, 100 quintals of potatoes, 3,000 litres of milk and a 300 kg pig. Such measures, he noted, led to the mass abandonment of farms in the county and a reduction in farm sizes to 5-6 ha. Between 1949 and 1956, Leśniak estimated that about 50% of farms in his area were abandoned and then occupied by other settlers, who were given three years relief from taxes and compulsory deliveries to get the land productive again. This mass exodus meant that in 1957 there was about 100 ha. of unoccupied land in his village alone which no one wanted to take on.⁷⁸ Party officials, however, treated the abandonment of farms as “kulak sabotage” and as a phenomenon which had “an economic-political character”.⁷⁹

As the pressure on Party organizations to collectivize the countryside increased, some officials began to employ harassment, persecution and even terror to achieve this aim. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the counties of Gryfice and Drawsko, West Pomerania, where in the actions of local activists were so excessive that they ended up being severely punished by the Party. As word of these incidents spread like wildfire along the Baltic coast, officials noticed a palpable increase in the feeling of uncertainty among the settlers, as well as a further wave of those abandoning the region. One settler, Franciszek Buchtalarz, recalled how there was complete lack of understanding of the farmer-settler mentality by “worker-propagandists” from the cities who had come to implement collectivization. As the eastern repatriates had already had an opportunity to see Soviet kolkhozes in reality, he noted how the Gryfice incident had caused shockwaves and panic among these settlers in particular.⁸⁰ Stanisław Bania, a settler living the village of Będolino, wrote that during this time “the countryside was surrounded by agents and spies who were their eyes and ears ... and nobody knew who was one of them.” Moreover, he recalled that ‘... nobody believed anyone else, each was afraid of the other when voicing any kind of opinion, even at home in the evenings people were afraid to say anything aloud when they were uncertain if anyone was not listening at the window.’⁸¹

⁷⁸ Memoir of Piotr LEŚNIAK, IZP, *Pamiętniki Osadników 1957*, File No. 98, p. 12.

⁷⁹ APG, Series 2384, File 55, pp. 67-70, KW PZPR Gdańsk, Minutes of Plenary Session, 11 January 1951.

⁸⁰ “Memoir of Franciszek BUCHTALARZ”, in Z. DULCZEWSKI and A. KWILICKI, (eds.), *Pamiętniki Osadników Ziemi Odzyskanych*, Poznań: Instytut Zachodni, 1963, pp. 41-50.

⁸¹ Memoir of Stanisław BANIA, IZP, *Pamiętniki Osadników 1957*, File 93, pp. 11-12.

The disastrous effects of the collectivization policy quickly became apparent in West Pomerania when mid-November 1951 figures also showed the patchy performance of certain counties regarding grain purchase targets. Curiously, while the best results had come from Nowogard with a rate of 90.5%, the worst was 60% in Pyrzyce, one of the province's most collectivized counties.⁸² Moreover, although the number of collective farms in the province had increased from 155 to 397 in just over a year, from May 1951 Party officials now noted "clear stagnation in the area of expanding [the number of] collective farms". Party officials had to admit that "the roots of this phenomenon originate in the incidents in Gryfice", incidents which were "not isolated". Moreover, they featured a "wide range of damaging practices" which had "weakened the worker-peasant alliance".⁸³

Indeed, peasant resistance to the compulsory deliveries was quite strong in certain areas, with Party officials estimating that about 40% of farmers in Olsztyn province did not provide milk supplies. Moreover, the number of collective farms being founded in Olsztyn had virtually stalled, with only four farms having been set up in 1951, compared to 127 the previous year. Faced with such peasant intransigence, Polish President Boleslaw Bierut's statements against the "kulaks" became ever more shrill, warning that Poland continued to be the target of foreign capitalist enemies with designs on its hard-won Recovered Territories.⁸⁴ Thus, it seems that for those settlers who decided to stay on in the Baltic region, the forging of a common identity was brought about by solidarity in resisting policies such as collectivization, rather than positively responding to official propaganda regarding the Polishness of the lands along the Baltic sea.

Conclusion

To sum up, the organic formation of a regional identity in the three Baltic provinces faced continuous interference from a regime with little or no understanding of the damage its policies were doing on the ground. As we have seen, even the one policy which had widespread support, namely the forced migration of the local German population, was carried out in a manner which sometimes included the indigenous groups whose continued presence was essential in order to "prove" the Polishness of the region. Despite the internal divisions in what was a fledgling pioneer society, time was never allowed for

⁸² APS, Series 858, File 45, pp. 371-398, KW PZPR Szczecin, Report to Plenary Session, 17 November 1951.

⁸³ APS, Series 858, File 46, pp. 125-147, KW PZPR Szczecin, Paper to Plenary Session, 2 February 1952.

⁸⁴ APO, Series 1141, File 88, pp. 179-201, KW PZPR Olsztyn, Paper to Plenary Session, 29 June 1952.

settler and indigenous groups to iron out their differences at their own pace and in their own way. When such divisions were then viewed through the prism of “class struggle”, the task of creating a common identity among people and social groups who were encouraged to view each other with fevered suspicion, both in terms of class and background, became nearly impossible. Moreover, rather than making the settlers feel more strongly attached to their new homeland, the regime’s continual highlighting of German revanchism only served to bolster the widespread feeling of impermanence. Apart from this, the other two factors essential for keeping the settlers in the region, namely religion and land, soon came under severe Communist attack and proved to be entirely counter-productive. In short, the period between 1945 and 1956 saw Polish settlers and indigenous groups in the Baltic Recovered Territories manage to form a weak common identity not due to the policies of Poland’s Communist regime, but in spite of them.