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## Voices from the past

In this issue, we share research based on memoirs of settlers of the Western and Northern Territories (obtained by Poland from Germany after World War II).

We would also like to inform you that:

- The call for papers, panels, and workshops at the [@IMISCOE Annual Conference](#), which will be hosted by the University of Warsaw on July 3-6, 2023 is now open. Deadline: Dec. 5
- The 2022 [#JoannaMatejko competition for best MA / PhD thesis](#) (in Polish, English or translated) on migrations to/from Poland is open. Deadline: Nov. 30
- The Research Network on Ukrainian Migration, created by [@CMR Warsaw](#) [@EUI EU](#) [@MaastrichtU](#) [@UNUMERIT](#) will be inaugurated on Nov. 8. Join [in person in Maastricht or virtually](#).



*Join us July 3-6, 2023 for the IMISCOE Annual Conference hosted by CM at the University of Warsaw, © Mirosław Kaźmierczak*



# Voices from the past – autobiographical perspective on the migration and settlement on the Polish Western and Northern Territories

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## Introduction

Following the Second World War, the territorial adjustments forced upon the countries of Central and Eastern Europe resulted in historically exceptional levels of population displacement. Poland was the country most heavily affected by those boundary changes. The USSR, US and UK, at the conferences at Teheran (28.11-1.12.1943) and Yalta (4.02- 11.02.1945), determined that the eastern border of Poland was to follow the so-called Curzon's line ([Eberhardt, 2012](#)), resulting in the loss of approx. one hundred seventy thousand square kilometres (approximately 46% of its pre-war territory). In turn, at the Potsdam conference (17.07-02.08.1945), Poland was allowed to annex the German territories to the East of the Oder-Nisse rivers (an area of approx. one hundred thousand square kilometres) ([Eberhardt, 2012](#)). Those territorial adjustments were followed by mass and often compulsory resettlements. After the expulsion of Germans from the newly annexed Western and Northern Territories (whose pre-1939 population

comprised over 8 million predominantly German inhabitants), over 4 million Polish settlers arrived. The new inhabitants of the newly settled areas fell into four basic categories: 1) autochthonous population (1 million people), 2) settlers from central Poland (2,5 million people), 3) settlers repatriated from the USSR – primarily from the former “eastern borderlands” (1,3 million), 4) re-emigrants from abroad (230 thousand people) ([Osekowski, 2015](#)).

The [Institute for Western Affairs](#), whose main goal was to research and support the processes of settlement in the Polish Western and Northern territories, had collected personal journals of the new inhabitants, continuing the tradition of Florian Znaniecki. Altogether, three rounds of contests were organised:

- Journal contest for the settlers of the Regained Territories announced in 1956 (December)
  - a total of 227 entries were received,
- Journal contest for the young inhabitants of the Regained Territories announced in 1966

– a total of 167 entries were received,  
● Journal contest for the inhabitants of Western and Northern Territories announced in 1970

– a total of 747 entries were received.

Most notable materials were collected in 1956 and 1970, as the journals were written in periods of profound political change, which seemed to have inspired them. The authors exercise more freedom of expression, divulging information hitherto kept secret and memories from the early moments of settlement.



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### **The research project**

The project "New society on the Polish Western Territories. Personal journals of settlers from an autobiographical perspective" involved a multi-pronged strategy of empirical research, which included

**Literature review** – encompassing both contemporary literature and earlier writings on the diary method, the process of settlement in the Western and Northern Territories, pre-existing content analyses of settler diaries, as well as current research on

social and political transformations in these areas.



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**Content analysis of the diary corpus** – Quantitative text analysis, performed within the framework of the classic paradigm of quantitative content analysis, was supplemented in the project's final phase with machine text mining procedures. A detailed catalogue of problems was developed and operationalised into variables. The research tools comprised two complementary documents: a database and a code key. The database, in the form of a spreadsheet, included all the variables being measured – in columns – and subsequent copies of the body read – in rows. On the other hand, the coding manual specified classification rules for individual variables. The research team developed the coding manual and instructions for human coders. All the research material that underwent preliminary verification regarding suitability for the project was analysed this way. The content analysis enabled the identification of specific topics and systematic insight into the thematic structure of the corpus.

In addition to classical quantitative content analysis, the project implemented machine text mining approaches using computer-based natural language analysis (NLP) and topic modelling techniques: an analysis based on a keyword search using regular expressions and thematic modelling using Dirichlet's latent allocation algorithm (LDA).

**Qualitative text analysis** – due to the multitude of thematic threads present in the diaries, the research team decided to isolate several essential and recurring themes: looting practices in the immediate post-war period, social cohesion capacity of new communities in the Western and Northern Territories, sensory landscapes in the memories of the settlers, traumas endured by the settlers. The diaries selected for qualitative analysis were those considered the most promising during the preliminary quantitative analysis stage.

**Research with contemporary inhabitants in the Western and Northern Territories** – based on the results of the preceding stages, ethnographic field research and qualitative interview areas were selected. Seventy-six in-depth interviews were conducted in 20 locations (8 in the former East Prussia and Pomerania, 8 in Lower Silesia and 4 in Lubuskie and Western Pomerania) with authors of the diaries or their surviving family members as well as individuals playing the role of local memory custodians. Based on the collected recordings, transcripts were subjected to qualitative analysis.

## **Key findings**

### ***Characteristics of the post-war migration movement on the Western and Northern Territories and the starting point for social integration in this area***

In the post-war resettlement process, the "host society" barely existed. Settlers were "accepted" by places, buildings, infrastructure, and artefacts left by the previous inhabitants. Integration took place in a society comprising almost exclusively of recent migrants.

Most of the settlers were ethnic Poles. However, they came from culturally different regions and had entrenched stereotypes regarding views about each other's group characteristics, which initially led to frequent conflicts and negatively impacted social cohesion.

It was impossible to publicly cherish the memory of the territories in the East, publicly lost by Poland to the Soviet Union. Any attempts at founding associations of the displaced from the East ended in failure and repression.

Until the 1970s, the stay in the Western and Northern Territories was treated by the inhabitants as temporary, especially by those who came from areas other than the regions of central Poland. The status of the post-war border was uncertain. World War III between the West and the Soviet Union was a much-feared possibility.

### ***Factors that influenced the formation of a new society in the Western and Northern Territories***

Integration occurred in difficult post-war economic conditions, as many towns lay in ruins. At the same time, the settlers espoused the desire to return to "normal life" after the war experiences.

The emergence of new identities in the Western and Northern Territories was a long-term process; complementary identities co-existed: the old, related to the place of origin and the new – externally motivated and controlled. Old identities functioned in the context of forced official denial, negation and detachment from the roots – in the context of personal, private relationships. New identities were ideologically strengthened and shaped as essential to official and professional social life.

Institutions played a fundamental role in shaping new identities: the school, the army, local authorities, the Catholic Church, and the official ideology. The essences formulated in this way had a predominant macro dimension, without the possibility of referring to the local or regional context. In the process of identity formation, references to small local histories were deliberately abandoned, replacing them with a standard message about the Proto-Slavic "regained lands" incorporated into the national state.

No one regional/ethnic culture proved predominant. Instead, there was a need for negotiating and agreeing on how to celebrate holidays in families and localities

(they were marked together, combining different elements).

### ***The contemporary state of social integration***

Differences in traditions and costumes referring to places of origin prevailed until the 1970s but are no longer discernible. However, since the 1980s of the twentieth century, and especially after 1989, there has been a renaissance of interest in the public sphere regarding migration and places of origin of various settlement groups, manifested by new monuments, obelisks, commemorative plaques, and street names. Associations of those coming from the eastern areas of pre-war Poland were also formed, encompassing their families and friends; in fact, all settler groups have their associations, which operated on many levels (primarily, local). Nowadays, they receive the support of local, regional and central authorities.

The effect of local policies in the Western and Northern Territories is the ethnicisation of old regional differences, treating different Polish regional groups as separate in the ethnocultural sense (to emphasise the multiculturalism of a given city or region). At the same time, there is a decrease in the importance of customs derived from the places of origin in everyday life, especially in younger generations (disappearance of vocabulary and dialect accent, changes in the kitchen, unification of the costume, disappearance of elements of regional cuisines).



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