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EXAMINING FATE: THE DEBATE OVER CHILDREN'S IDENTITY IN THE BORDER AREAS OF INTERWAR EASTERN UPPER SILESIA

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Abstract
This article deals with two little-known disputes over the national identity of a population in the interwar border area of Eastern Upper Silesia. This area was transferred from Germany to Poland after World War I as a result of a plebiscite. Its local population, the Silesians, did not consider themselves entirely German or Polish, but still underwent a process of Polonization. The plebiscite took place in Upper Silesia in 1921, prompting international controversy and internal debate within the Polish state about how to define the nationality of the Silesians in the context of their internationally protected rights as a "minority." As this article shows, the Silesians were utilized by Central and Western European politicians as objects of international diplomacy and by the Polish authorities to advance their internal policies. The story of "Maurer's children" and Silesian children born out of wedlock illustrates the reaction of the Silesian population to the interwar politics of nationalization. These cases attracted international attention from 1926 to 1928 and brought questions of national minorities, bilingual children, and self-definition of nationality vis-à-vis the state's requirements to the level of international debate.
Keywords: World War I; League of Nations; Poland; Upper Silesia; education; nation-building
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Introduction

This article aims to present and examine the national identities of two local populations during the interwar period, in the course of the unique and relatively unknown history of the Central European border area of Eastern Upper Silesia. Sovereignty over this area shifted from Germany to Poland after World War I and the local population underwent an intensive process of re-nationalization or "Polonization." My study focused mostly on the former German city Kattowitz, or Katowice, which after the shift of the border became the capital of the new Polish Voivodeship of Silesia. The Silesians were required to decide their national affiliation, although for the most part they had never fully considered themselves to be either German or Polish. Therefore, after the shift of the borders, they became the target of an official process of Polonization.

I also focus on the interwar attempt to determine nationality in the two border areas based on the language skills of its inhabitants, which led to widespread international debate. I analyze this through the prism of two cases: "Maurer's children" (who were so called because they had to undergo examinations of their knowledge of the German language that were supervised by a Swiss school inspector, Walter Maurer) and children born out of wedlock to Silesian mothers. Comparison and contrast of the two cases enables me to situate the two "micro-historical" cases within the "macro" history of Central Europe between the wars. The debate over nationality of the Silesians was conducted "from above" by the Silesian Voivodeship, German and Polish national activists, the League of Nations and the Court of Justice in The Hague, based on demands "from below" of the Silesian inhabitants for education of their children in one or the other of the two languages (and with the language, constructing a sense of national belonging).

Although I focus on the specific region of Eastern Upper Silesia and its capital, Katowice, the questions of national belonging and nationalization, of multi-national states and of the imposition of national, linguistic, and religious identities on minorities compared with their own self-definition were common in the successor states of Austria-Hungary during the interwar period. My methodology of examining "macro" history through "micro" history is highly useful with regard Silesia and other politicized areas with international importance. As Andreas Kappeler wrote in his 2009 article about the increasing importance of micro-historical studies on the one hand and what he termed "supranational" studies on the other: "History should not be treated only on the level of the nation and the state but also on sublevels such as towns, villages and regions,

families and individuals. Microhistorical studies are one of the blossoming fields of contemporary research ... On the other hand, supranational levels are becoming much more important in transnational history."[1]

Therefore, I trace the process of nationalization from "above" in the daily life of the minority inhabitants of border areas of Silesia. I also examine the wider phenomenon of nationality and its creation, and its applicability not only to one specific successor state, Poland, but to many other areas of Europe.

My article deals with the flexibility and uncertainty of the nation-building process, and its dependence upon international political and diplomatic decisions in addition to the internal situation within the state. Its first two parts are dedicated to the development of institutions (mainly the educational system) and to the political background of Central Europe that influenced the debate over the nationalization of Silesian children. The second half of the article focuses on the reaction of the local Silesian population to attempts to influence its children's sense of national belonging. The children learned to use the same arguments and rhetoric as the authorities used. In doing so, they "nationalized" themselves, in accord with the strategy created by the authorities.

My article also gives my sources a voice, adding a broader, transnational accent to the question of self-definition that other border societies were wrestling with in other successor states in Central Europe. My sources are mostly primary ones found in the State Archives of Katowice. Letters and correspondence written by German and Polish patriotic and nationalist organizations, the Silesian Voivodeship's educational authorities, the German and Polish governments, the League of Nations, the Court of Justice in The Hague and last but not least, ordinary Silesian citizens, as well as official reports by multiple authorities and interwar periodicals, shed light on fascinating discussions of perceived nationality and national definition in the successor states and their newly created border areas.

Despite this article's focus on Eastern Upper Silesia and its capital of Katowice, there were common issues in all successor states of the interwar period in terms of nationality and nationalization, of multinational states and of national, linguistic, and religious definitions of minorities, both by others and in their own self-definition. Focusing on the processes of nationalization and Polonization provides an opportunity to trace the influence each process had on the other.

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[1] Andreas Kappeler, "From an Ethnonational to a Multiethnic to a Transnational Ukrainian History," in *A Laboratory of Transnational History: Ukraine and Recent Ukrainian Historiography*, ed. Georgiy Kasianov and Philipp Ther (Budapest: CEU Press, 2009), 68–69.

My article contributes to an understanding of the influence of micro history on macro history, and the relations between minorities and ruling majorities in the nationality discourse of the twentieth century.

Although it was a part of one postwar successor state that was similar to other disputed Central European border regions, Upper Silesia nevertheless had its own special features. It was of major international importance because of its natural resources, its pro-regionalist minorities, and special treaties that had influence on minority rights. The unique character and legal status of Upper Silesia and its minorities sparked much debate in international bodies and in the Polish government. The postwar treaties did not entirely determine the borders of the newly created successor states, including Poland, based upon where various ethnic groups were settled. Therefore, some of these populations were divided by the new frontiers and the term "national minority" came into vogue. As a result of the peace treaties and agreements, the new minorities obtained special rights that allowed them to retain their own languages, customs, and religion within their new states. In Upper Silesia, through which the new German-Polish border passed, legislating minority rights took longer than in some other European border areas. According to the Treaty of Versailles, the final shape of the border could only be established after a plebiscite, which was to take place in March 1921, two years after the treaty was signed. Therefore, in the run-up to the plebiscite, both the German and Polish governments tried to "nationalize" the Silesian ethnic populations in accord with their own desires.

Several ethnic groups inhabited Upper Silesia. As the region industrialized and its rich coal mines were developed, the formerly rural local population began to identify in their workplaces with the German or German-speaking managerial teams, but also with Slavic-speaking workers migrating from the northern and eastern border areas of Prussia, Russia, and Galicia. Each group brought with it its own language or dialect. The coexistence and common work environment produced a special creole language, of which there were different versions in Silesia.[2]

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[2] Marek Czapliński, "Śląsk w 2. polowie XIX i na początku XX wieku (1851–1918)," in *Historia Śląska*, ed. Marek Czapliński and Elżbieta Kaszuba (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2007), 327–330, 355–365; Tomasz Kamusella, *Silesia and Central European Nationalisms: The Emergence of National and Ethnic Groups in Prussian Silesia and Austrian Silesia, 1848–1918* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2007), 72–84, 272–274; Tomasz Kamusella, *Schlonzska mowa. Język, Górny Śląsk i nacjonalizm*, Vol. 2 (Zabrze: Narodowa Oficyna Śląska, 2006), 33–38, 67; Hunt T. Tooley, *National Identity and Weimar Germany: Upper Silesia and the Eastern Border, 1918–1922* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 14–20;

Historians and anthropologists focusing on different areas in the world have examined the process of nationalization directed "from above" in industrialized areas in both theoretical and empirical ways. The "constructivist" research done by Ernest Gellner in the 1980s was dedicated to nationality as a construct, which arises as a reaction to the processes of modernization and industrialization of a society. Institutions, especially schools, played a significant role in the process of nationalization.[3] Catherine Frost analyzed Gellner's study (as well as many other studies focusing on different sources and aspects of nationality) in her book dedicated to nationalism in Ireland and Quebec.[4] Frost emphasized two important phenomena on which, according to Gellner, modern nationality is based: the economic developments of the modern era and the development of the educational system, which went hand by hand with economic progress. In connection with the sense of national belonging "constructed" by the authorities, the new political and educational institutions, and their interrelation with Silesian society, which consisted mainly of industrial workers, it is important to mention the contributions of Benedict Anderson and of Eric Hobsbawm.[5] Anderson's concept of nationhood regarded the nation as an imagined political community.[6] Along with Hobsbawm's theory of modern power structures as agents of nationalization, Anderson's work was a cornerstone for the work of a later generation of scholars who dealt with questions of nationalism and the nationalization process. For instance, Tara Zahra focused on the fight for education in the "national mother tongue," and against bilingualism and Germanization of Czech children that was led by Czech nationalists in the Bohemian lands from the second half of the nineteenth century through the beginning of the twentieth century.[7]

Until recent decades, most research on Upper Silesia and its population was done either by Polish or by German historians, including Tomasz Falęcki and Ernst Bahr. In their studies, history was written lopsidedly: it was either

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Tomasz Kamusella, *Schlonzsko: Horní Slezsko, Oberschlesien, Górny Śląsk. Esej o regionie i jego mieszkańcach* (Zabrze: Narodowa Oficyna Śląska, 2006), 72–82.

3 Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983); Ernest Gellner, *Culture, Identity and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

4 Catherine Frost, *Morality and Nationalism* (London, New York: Routledge, 2006).

5 For instance, Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

6 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Books, 2006).

7 Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900–1948* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008).

pro-Polish or pro-German and identified Silesians as either Poles or Germans.[8] The methodology used in these studies was based on a pro-nationalist ideology that interpreted more than it observed. Population groups had to be fitted into norms that were dictated by state ideology.

However, in the last two decades a later generation of German scholars has started to deal with the history of Upper Silesia in a comprehensive, comparative, and informative way that is not exclusively pro-German. They are raising new research questions. Studies conducted by Kai Struve and Philipp Ther are examples of the new direction in German research. So is a book by the Polish-German historian Andrzej Michałczyk.[9] These new contributions offer readers a broader and more objective picture of Upper Silesian history from a scholarly German point of view.

Another group of scholars who have dedicated themselves to researching Upper Silesian history have also come onto the scene: the Silesians themselves. The most prominent representative of this group is Tomasz Kamusella and his work on Silesian nationalism.[10] Additional studies dedicated to the history of Upper Silesia have recently been written by the English-speaking scholars Timothy Wilson and James Bjork.[11] Wilson's book is a comparison of Upper Silesia and Northern Ireland, concentrated mostly on the plebiscite and the Silesian uprisings. The book by Bjork examines the Silesian community and its interaction with German and Polish societies, focusing on the religious life of the Silesians within Prussia until the end of World War I. Two additional studies published in 2015 by Peter Polak focused on the self-definition of Silesians after the borders shifted and their interaction with the German and Polish authorities,

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[8] Tomasz Falęcki, *Niemieckie szkolnictwo mniejszościowe na Górnym Śląsku w latach 1922–1939* (Katowice: Śląski Instytut Naukowy w Katowicach, 1970); Stanisław Mauersberg, *Szkolnictwo powszechne dla mniejszości narodowych w Polsce w latach 1918–1939* (Warszawa: PAN, 1968); Ernst Bahr, *Oberschlesien nach dem zweiten Weltkrieg: Verwaltung, Bevölkerung, Wirtschaft* (Marburg: Herder-Institut, 1975).

[9] Kai Struve, *Oberschlesien nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg: Studien zu einem nationalen Konflikt und seiner Erinnerung* (Marburg: Herder-Institut, 2003); Kai Struve and Philipp Ther, eds., *Die Grenzen der Nationen. Identitätenwandel in Oberschlesien in der Neuzeit* (Marburg: Herder-Institut, 2000); Andrzej Michalczyk, *Heimat, Kirche und Nation: Deutsche und polnische Nationalisierungsprozesse im geteilten Oberschlesien 1922–1939* (Köln: Böhlau, 2010).

[10] Tomasz Kamusella, *Silesia and Central European Nationalisms: The Emergence of National and Ethnic Groups in Prussian Silesia and Austrian Silesia, 1848–1918* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2007).

[11] Timothy Wilson, *Frontiers of Violence: Conflict and Identity in Ulster and Upper Silesia, 1918–1922* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); James Bjork, *Neither German Nor Pole: Catholicism and National Indifference in a Central European Borderland* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008).

in a case study of a borderland society's cultural and social dynamics.[12] Last but not least, in 2016 James Bjork, Tomasz Kamusella, Timothy Wilson, and I published a monograph dedicated to the nationalization process in Upper Silesia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[13]

Historical Background of Upper Silesia: The Plebiscite and its Aftermath

In the Middle Ages, the region of Silesia belonged to several Polish rulers from the first Polish ruling dynasty, the Piasts. In the fourteenth century, Silesia became part of Bohemia, and in the sixteenth century it became part of the Habsburg domains. During the War of Austrian Succession in 1742, most of the region was incorporated into Prussia by King Frederick II, who called it the Province of Silesia.[14] After World War I, the Treaty of Versailles mandated plebiscites in several disputed European regions. The aim was to stabilize borders according to the needs of local societies, clarifying which society would form the major population in each new successor state and which would become an official national minority.[15]

Of all the areas where plebiscites were to be conducted, Upper Silesia was the most significant because of its industrial importance. The question was

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[12] Peter Polak-Springer, *Recovered Territory. A German-Polish Conflict over Land and Culture, 1919–1989* (Oxford, New York: Berghahn, 2015).

[13] James Bjork, Tomasz Kamusella, Timothy Wilson, and Anna Novikov, eds., *Creating Nationality in Central Europe, 1800–1950: Modernity, Violence, and (Be)longing in Upper Silesia* (London: Routledge, 2016).

[14] Robert J. W. Evans, *Austria, Hungary, and the Habsburgs: Central Europe c. 1683*–1867 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 123–124; Jolanta Tambor, *Oberschlesien – Sprache und Identität* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2011), 30–31; Tooley, *National Identity and Weimar Germany*, 7–10; Gabriela Wąs, "Dzieje Śląska od 1526 do 1806 roku. Śląsk we władaniu Habsburgów, Śląsk pod panowaniem pruskim", in *Historia Śląska*, ed. Marek Czapliński and Elżbieta Kaszuba (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2007), 122–275.

[15] Plebiscites were held in two other areas, one of which was the disputed region of northern Schleswig. After the plebiscite of 1920, the area was divided into North Schleswig, belonging to Denmark with a German minority resident there, and South Schleswig, belonging to Germany with a Dutch minority. The other plebiscite area comprised East and West Prussia. See Sarah Wambaugh, *Plebiscites since the World War*, Vol. 1 (Concord, NH: Rumford Press, 1933); Tooley, *National Identity and Weimar Germany*, 56; Karen M. Pedersen, "Die deutsche Minderheit in Dänemark und die dänische Minderheit in Deutschland," in *Handbuch der mitteleuropäischen Sprachminderheiten*, ed. Robert Hinderling and Ludwig M. Eichinger (Tübingen: Günter Narr, 1996), 32–56. For more about the interwar plebiscite in Memel, see Ruth Leiserowitz, *Sabbatleuchter und Kriegerverein. Juden in der ostpreußisch-litauischen Grenzregion 1812–1942* (Osnabrück: Fibre, 2010), 287–312.

whether the territory would be part of Germany or of the resurrected Polish state. Immediately after World War I, Upper Silesia became the focus of intensive international debate and tensions. These debates formed the background of the region's political and social development during the interwar period.

The victorious Allies decided that the plebiscite would be held on March 20, 1921, in the entire disputed area of the formerly Prussian Upper Silesia. In the run-up to the voting, both German and Polish nationalists used various tactics and propaganda to persuade voters in the region and strengthen national patriotism on their sides. German-Polish tensions increased, and they erupted into unrest and violence in the first two Silesian uprisings in 1919 and 1920. Nevertheless, the plebiscite took place as scheduled and almost 60 percent of the votes favored becoming part of Germany. The Allies were then supposed to make the final decision as to whether the territory would belong to Poland or Germany. A short time after the plebiscite, on May 3, 1921, a third Silesian Uprising broke out among partisans of the Polish cause. They hoped to sever the region from Germany and join the Polish Republic. In July, the issue of Upper Silesia was transferred to the League of Nations, which decided to partition the region.[16] Thus the area then known as Eastern Upper Silesia became part of Poland, with Katowice (formerly Kattowitz) as its capital. The region obtained some autonomy in the 1921 Polish constitution.

On May 15, 1922, after the final partition of Upper Silesia, the League of Nations ratified the "Geneva Convention" between Poland and Germany, known as the Upper Silesian Convention. Poland and Germany agreed on economic and political arrangements in Upper Silesia and signed agreements on minority rights that were to be valid for fifteen years, until 1937.

In order to resolve disputes and complaints from both sides, a Mixed Commission was established. It received complaints submitted by the Polish population in Oppeln (Polish Opole) in the part of Upper Silesia in Germany, and complaints from the German population of the Silesian Voivodeship in Katowice, its capital. The representatives of the two national groups had the right to petition the League of Nations in case their rights were impaired. Among its duties, the Commission had to prepare letters for the Court of Justice in The Hague. The Commission consisted of two German members, two Polish members, and a president, who was to be neither Polish nor German.[17] As a result, Upper Silesia had a special interna-

[16] Wilson, *Frontiers of Violence*, 30, 105–107; Tooley, *National Identity and Weimar Germany*, 87–98; Tambor, *Oberschlesien*, 32–34.

[17] Georges Kaeckenbeeck, *The International Experiment of Upper Silesia: A Study in the Working of the Upper Silesian Settlement 1922–1937* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1942), 573–575;

tional status, and both the Geneva Convention and the Mixed Commission played an essential role in resolving disputes between the German representatives in Polish Eastern Upper Silesia and the Polish state.

In order to avoid accusations of bias in the Mixed Commission, the League of Nations decided to nominate a person from a neutral state as president of the Commission. After some dispute and debate, Felix Calonder was nominated in a Polish-German agreement. Calonder had been the Swiss foreign minister in 1919–1920 and was President of the Swiss Confederation in 1918. In 1920 he left political life in his home country and agreed to take the position at the Mixed Commission. He moved to Katowice in Upper Silesia.[18] For the League of Nations and the Court in The Hague, Katowice was the capital of an important region within a new successor state, Poland. It also symbolized respect for the postwar agreements to respect minority rights. It was not incidental, therefore, that Calonder chose the city as his new place of residence. After he moved to Katowice in 1922 (when the city was transferred to the Polish state, together with the entire region of Eastern Upper Silesia), Calonder headed the Mixed Commission for fifteen years, until 1937.

The pro-Poland inhabitants of the region and of Katowice questioned the choice of Calonder as president of the Commission. As a German speaker who did not know Polish, he was accused more than once of being pro-German and having contact only with the region's German-speaking population. In addition, Calonder's remuneration was a permanent target of criticism from the Polish inhabitants of Katowice, who referred to his "high endowment, castle and auto."[19] Calonder's residence was indeed a castle. Located in Świerklaniec, the most prestigious suburb of Katowice, it belonged to one of the richest inhabitants of the area, Prince Henckel von Donnersmarck, who made it available to Calonder.[20] While serving in the position, Calonder had several confrontations with the Polish government, but the Polish side did not succeed in ousting him.

In November 1921, German activists in Polish Silesia founded the German-Upper Silesian National Association of Polish Silesia for Protection of Minority Rights (*Deutsch-oberschlesischer Volksbund für Polnisch-Schlesien zur*

Stanisław Komar, *Górnośląska Konwencja Genewska pomiędzy Polską i Niemcami 1922–1937* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Śląskiego, 1937), 14–15; Falęcki, *Niemieckie szkolnictwo mniejszościowe*, 24–25; Jan Łączewski, *Michał Grażyński (1890–1965). Sylwetka polityka* (Częstochowa: Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogicznej, 2000), 44–45.

[18] Paul Stauffer, *Polacy, Żydzi, Szwajcarzy* (Warszawa: PAN, 2008), 18–20.

[19] Karl Scheurer, *Tagesbücher* (Bern: Hermann Böschenstein, 1971), 307.

[20] Stauffer, *Polacy, Żydzi, Szwajcarzy*, 27–28.

Wahrung der Minderheitsrechte, or Volksbund), which had its head office in Katowice. The organization sought to defend the interests of the German-speaking minority in the Silesian Voivodeship. It was particularly active in matters of education. The Volksbund also filed petitions with the League of Nations when it thought the rights of the German-speaking minority in Polish Eastern Upper Silesia were being impaired.[21]

Creation of the Educational System in Polish Silesia

After the Geneva Convention was signed, the Polish government, together with the government of the newly formed autonomous Silesian Voivodeship, launched the process of creating a new educational system.[22] The character and future of the schools, one of the most important of state institutions, had already been discussed by members of the new government in 1918, when the Polish Second Republic was established.[23] As discussed below, how to unify the school system remained under discussion until 1922.[24]

The process of creating a school system within the Polish state as a whole was extremely complicated, because it entailed combining three former school systems: Russian, Austro-Hungarian, and Prussian. These systems were inherited by the Second Polish Republic from the states that had governed its territory for so many years before it was established. An entire national school system had to be created and unified, but the issue in the Silesian Voivodeship was even more complicated than elsewhere in Poland because of its special political and legal status as an autonomous, formerly Prussian entity. The Polish March Constitution proclaimed Poland a democratic republic on March 17, 1921. It emphasized the equal rights of all Polish citizens, regardless of their

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[21] P. Kazet, "Niemieckie ugrupowania polityczne w Polsce," *Sprawy Narodowościowe*, No. 2 (1927): 112–113; Stanisław Mauersberg, *Szkolnictwo powszechne dla mniejszości narodowych w Polsce w latach 1918–1939* (Warszawa: PAN, 1968), 49; Matthias Kneip, *Die deutsche Sprache in Oberschlesien. Untersuchungen zur politischen Rolle der deutschen Sprache als Minderheitensprache in den Jahren 1921–1998* (Dortmund: Universität Dortmund, 1999), 59.

[22] I have analyzed this process in my earlier work "Creating a citizen: Politics and the education system in the post-plebiscite Silesian Voivodeship," in *Creating Nationality in Central Europe*, ed. Bjork et al., 128–148.

[23] Bolesław Reiner, *Wyznania i związki religijne w województwie śląskim (1922–1939)* (Opole: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Śląskiego w Opolu, 1977), 228.

[24] Jolanta Szablicka- Żak, *Szkolnictwo i oświata w pracach Sejmu Ustawodawczego II Rzeczypospolitej* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Sejmowe, 1997), 53–54, 68–69; Reiner, *Wyznania i związki religijne*, 13–19; Wanda Garbowska, *Szkolnictwo powszechne w Polsce w latach 1932–1939* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1976), 13.

nationality or religious confession. Article 111 stated: "Citizens are guaranteed freedom of conscience and confession. No one [citizen] can be restricted in his rights as enjoyed by other citizens because of his confession and religious convictions."[25]

The Silesian Voivodeship already had a well-organized and effective Prussian school system which, while it had some positive structural and organizational aspects, had to be transformed into a Polish-speaking system.[26] Under the Geneva Convention and the Little Treaty of Versailles, the Polish government had an obligation to support the education of minority populations throughout the country. Therefore, the matter of minority schools in the Silesian Voivodeship was of special concern. Establishing the German-speaking minority schools was one of the most hotly debated issues in the Silesian Voivodeship in the interwar period. It was more complicated than the creation of the Polish-speaking school systems because, in the interwar Second Polish Republic, the educational system was assigned a significant ideological role: even the German-speaking minority schools had to promote a pro-Polish ideology of citizenship among pro-German Silesian children.

The Eastern Upper Silesian schools were the last in Poland to be reformed, after formerly Russian schools in Eastern Poland, and even after similar former Prussian schools in Greater Poland (Wielkopolska) and Polish Pomerania (Pomorze Gdańskie, Pommerellen), which came under the supervision of the Polish Education Ministry in January 1920.[27] Before 1922, a large part of the state's efforts had been directed toward modifying the school system in the former Polish Kingdom areas (*Królestwo Polskie*) and to some extent in the former Austro-Hungarian lands. Most of the well-organized Prussian structure of Upper Silesia was left unchanged until then.

In the Geneva Convention on Upper Silesia, Germany and Poland not only agreed on economic and political conditions for Upper Silesia, but also signed agreements concerning minority rights in the area for a span of fifteen years, up to 1937.[28] The Convention emphasized minorities' right to implement their own educational systems. It stated that the minorities in both the German and the Polish parts of Upper Silesia "shall have an equal right to establish, manage and control at their own expense ... schools and other educational establishments,

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[25] *Konstytucja 17 Marca 1921 R.* (Warszawa: Księgarnia Gustawa Szylinga, 1921), 21.
[26] Szablicka-Żak, *Szkolnictwo i oświata*, 17.
[27] Ibid., 22.
[28] Geneva Convention, 1922, art. 64, as quoted in Kaeckenbeeck, *The International Experiment of Upper Silesia*, 601.

with the right to use their own language."[29] In addition, it required that both countries provide a "public educational system ... in which a considerable proportion of Polish nationals of other than Polish speech are residents, [along with] adequate facilities for ensuring that, in the elementary schools, the instruction shall be given to the children of such Polish nationals through the medium of their own language."[30]

Therefore, from the very beginning of the Silesian Voivodeship, its school system was subject to the relevant articles of the Geneva Convention and sometimes, to a liberal interpretation of them.[31] The Convention not only included an obligation to create a German-speaking minority school system in Poland, but also for the Polish government to accept that a large portion of the Silesians in the new Polish state would have to be recognized as German-speakers and would be raised as Germans. The existence of two sets of state schools separated children from the same society and the same area during the school day, and quickly created two different national affiliations among Silesians, Polish and German.

A short time after signing the Convention, the Polish state began the process of establishing minority schools in the Silesian Voivodeship. Even after the final ruling of the League of Nations and the signing of the Convention, the Polish authorities were ambivalent about opening up German schools in the sensitive border area, which had just been taken from Prussian rule and had yet to be Polonized. The authorities were concerned that opening minority schools would damage their "national interests."[32] For the local population, the schools would

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[29] The whole paragraph reads: "Polish nationals who belong to racial, religious or linguistic minorities shall enjoy the same treatment and security in law and in fact as the other Polish nationals. In particular, they shall have an equal right to establish, manage and control at their own expense charitable, religious and social institutions, schools and other educational establishments, with the right to use their own language and to exercise their religion freely therein." Geneva Convention, 1922, art. 68, as quoted in Kaeckenbeeck, *The International Experiment of Upper Silesia*, 604.

[30] Geneva Convention, 1922, art. 69, as quoted in Kaeckenbeeck, *The International Experiment of Upper Silesia*, 604–605. In these articles the two vague phrases, "a considerable proportion" and "other than Polish speech," gave rise in the following years to multiple discussions and correspondence among the Polish authorities, the inhabitants of the area, pro-German and pro-Polish organizations, and the League of Nations. So did the next sentence in the same article: "This provision shall not prevent the Polish Government from making the teaching of the Polish language obligatory in the said schools." Later on, this rather ambiguous sentence received a slightly different interpretation from the Polish government regarding the number of hours of Polish-language instruction in the minority schools.

[31] For more on the meaning and interpretation of the Geneva Convention articles on the minority language, see Kneip, *Die deutsche Sprache in Oberschlesien*, 62–66.

[32] A report from the Minorities' Department (1923), 10, Archiwum Państwowe w Katowicach (State Archives in Katowice), Śląski Urząd Wojewódzki, Katowice (Silesian Governor's Office, Kato-

symbolize failure of the state's pro-Polish policy, which, according to the official ideology, was the result of years of struggle to free Polish-speaking Silesian children from Germanization and German-language education.

The opening of the German minority schools created an additional problem for the Polish state: instead of producing new Polish citizens, they would fill the Polish Silesian Voivodeship with a new generation of German-speaking Silesian children who perceived themselves as Germans. Thus, the Polish state contradicted its own ideology by empowering the German minority. Figuratively speaking, it would be cultivating a large crop of Germans with its own hands, thereby damaging its interests in its sensitive western border area. The sources show that the process of opening the minority schools was not going to be easy – from the perspective of the central Polish government, the local authorities, or the local population.[33]

The May 1926 Coup and Educational Policy in Polish Silesia

After the May 1926 coup d'etat by Józef Piłsudski, a new government was installed in Warsaw. Already during the second half of 1926, the policy of Piłsudski's associates increasingly focused on strengthening the homogeneity of the Polish state. In September 1926, Michał Grażyński, a strong ally and companion of Piłsudski, was appointed to the post of Voivode of Silesia, which he occupied until September 1939. In a short time, Grażyński gradually began to restrict the autonomy of the Voivodeship, making it more Polish-oriented.[34]

Grażyński's policy influenced the sphere of education, particularly in the minority schools. Between 1922 and 1927, the number of minority schools in Polish Upper Silesia increased from 60 to 100 (according to other sources, from 59 to 115).[35] Assuming that the number of Silesians who proclaimed themselves to be Germans during the plebiscite did not change, the growing number of schools presumably indicated an increasing anti-Polish, pro-German tendency among the Silesian population of the Voivodeship. Despite Polonization (or

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wice, hereafter UWSL), No. 27, Wydział Oświecenia Publicznego (Department of Public Education, hereafter OP), No. 1120.

[33] Judy Batt and Katarzyna Wolczuk, *Region, State, and Identity in Central and Eastern Europe* (London: Frank Cass, 2002), 115.

[34] Albert S. Kotowski, *Polens Politik gegenüber seiner deutschen Minderheit 1919–1939* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998), 136–140; Łączewski, *Michał Grażyński*, 56–79.

[35] Falęcki, *Niemieckie szkolnictwo mniejszościowe*, 36; Mauersberg, *Szkolnictwo powszechne,* 128, 140; Zygmunt Stoliński, "Szkolnictwo niemieckie w Polsce," *Sprawy Narodowościowe*, No. 3 (1928): 239.

sometimes in reaction to it), a large number of Silesian parents preferred to identify their children as German-speakers and send them to the minority schools. Apparently, they believed that children educated in Polish-speaking schools had a less promising future than those educated as German-speakers. That consideration, together with the tradition of schooling in the German language before the region was transferred to Poland, influenced Silesian parents to send their children to minority schools. Such considerations clearly had nothing in common with the nationalistic or linguistic considerations prescribed by the Polish and German authorities and by the League of Nations. The gap between the population's official nationality and its actual self-definition led to a clash in the second half of 1926.

In September of that year, Polish authorities rejected most of the almost nine thousand new applications to study in the minority schools. The reason was the children's insufficient knowledge of German, which indicated to the government that they were of Polish rather than German nationality. In reaction, the Volksbund sent a petition to the Mixed Commission.[36] The authors of the petition insisted that the children were bilingual or spoke mostly Creole, and did not know either German or Polish well. The authors emphasized that it was the right of the individual to decide to which nationality he belonged.[37]

The petition engendered a great deal of correspondence and debate about who should decide about a child's nationality, whether a Silesian child could be bilingual, and how to define Creole: was it Polish or German? The Silesian Voivodeship was one example of many Central European border areas where the local population did not conform to the new national-linguistic vision of the authorities. Defining nationality on a linguistic basis soon raised to the question of whether language was indeed the right tool for turning a multicultural society into a nation.

On December 15, 1926, the Mixed Commission published its ruling on the Volksbund's petition. In it, Felix Calonder gave his opinion on the petition at hand and the individual's right to self-definition of national identity in general. Calonder adduced a theory, called the "subjective principle," according to

[36] Mirolub, "Wyrok Stałego Trybunału Sprawiedliwosci Międzynarodowej w sprawie szkol mniejszościowych na Górnym Śląsku," *Sprawy Narodowościowe*, No. 5 (1928): 513; Paul Stauffer, *Polacy, Zydzi, Szwajcarzy*, 37.

[37] Mirolub, "Wyrok Stałego Trybunału," 513–514; A complaint from the German government to the Permanent Court of International Justice in The Hague and the reaction of the Silesian Vojvodeship Office in this matter (1928), 57–63, Archiwum Państwowe w Katowicach, UWSL 27, OP 1567.

which a person's nationality is not constant or objective but is instead flexible and depends only on the will of the individual at the moment.[38]

This idea sparked opposition from the Polish government, which viewed membership in a national or linguistic group as both constant and objective. For them, an individual's national identification largely depended on his linguistic affiliation. Hence it was against the state's principles, as well as well as principles of good pedagogy, to send Polish-speaking children to German-speaking minority schools without sufficient knowledge of German that they could benefit from their studies.[39] Since the Polish government and the Mixed Commission could not agree about enrolling the presumed Polish-speakers' registration in minority schools, from 1926 to 1928 the issue underwent three stages of deliberation involving the Mixed Commission, the Council of the League of Nations, and the Permanent Court of International Justice in The Hague.

"Maurer's Children"

At the beginning of 1927, after the Polish government rejected both Calonder's "subjective principle" and the Mixed Commission's proposed solution, the Volksbund insisted on appealing the issue of school enrollment to the League of Nations. The authorities of the League were bound by the treaties to accept the appeal, but undoubtedly found themselves in a complicated situation, where any decision they made would be considered inappropriate. On the one hand, League member states did not agree with Calonder's "subjective principle" and did not favor the registration of Polish-speaking children in the German minority schools. On the other hand, according to the Geneva Convention, the authorities were not permitted to interfere and assess the credibility of the nationality claims of those who claimed to be "German-speakers."[40] Therefore, in order to resolve the complex matter and avoid denunciation by one side or the other, the Council of the League of Nations had to employ considerable creativity. In March 1927 it reached a conciliatory decision: it would send an expert to the Voivodeship who would personally gauge the German-language proficiency of the minority schoolchildren whose enrollment had been rejected, and rule on

[38] Mirolub, "Wyrok Stałego Trybunału," 514; A complaint from the German government, 7–8.
[39] Mirolub, "Wyrok Stałego Trybunału," 514; A complaint from the German government, 5–9, 62.
[40] Mirolub, "Wyrok Stałego Trybunału," 514.

their ability to study in the German-speaking schools.[41] It seems that the League was attempting to display a neutral stance toward both Germany and Poland, while giving the Silesians themselves a voice in the matter.

In the same month it was decided to send a Swiss school inspector, Walter Maurer, to the Silesian Voivodeship to personally examine the German-language proficiency of each child whose enrollment in a minority school had been rejected. Altogether he examined about 1735 pupils.[42] Presumably, it was an unpleasant experience for the children, which would heavily impact their future. Not too much is known about the personality or later activity of Walter Maurer, but his name eventually became infamous among the children who were examined by him and whose future depended on his decision.[43] "Maurer's children" (as they were called) had to endure the pressure of their parents, the school authorities, and the foreign school inspector, and take an exam which would decide the course of their life: whether they would grow up as Germans and speak German as their mother tongue, or to grow up as Polish speakers and be Poles. In the event, their nationality was forcibly and traumatically imposed upon them.

Apparently, it was not entirely clear to the authorities how to conduct the exams. The foreign expert's presence in both urban and rural schools frightened the local governments and the parents of the children to be examined. Their fears sometimes manifested themselves in absurd ways. For example, in several Voivodeship towns, by decree of the local authorities, attempts were made to bring the children to the exams by force – escorted by police. This stopped only after a specific injunction from the central school office in Katowice.[44] The exams attracted much international attention. They were a solemn and extraordinary event, and the school principal had to be present on the day of the exam in each school. Detailed specifications for the required equipment of the examination halls (pictures, paper, ink pens, and tissue-papers) were distributed to the school authorities.[45]

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[41] Ibid., 514; A complaint from the German government, 6–9; Mauersberg, *Szkolnictwo powszechne*, 31–35.

[42] "Sprawy Mniejszości Narodowych na 50-ej sesji Ligi Narodów," *Sprawy Narodowościowe*, No. 3/4 (1928): 455.

[43] Although I have not found much information about the personality of Walter Maurer or his activity, more may be located in the local Swiss Education archives.

[44] German language exams executed by a delegate of the League of Nations in Wielkie Hajduki (1927–1928), 20, Archiwum Państwowe w Katowicach, UWSL 27, OP 1395.

[45] Ibid., 32.

According to the results of the exam, about 48 percent of the children did not know German sufficiently to carry out their studies.[46] Hence they had to transfer to the Polish-speaking schools, mostly against their parents' wishes. The Polish side accepted this ruling wholeheartedly. Polish authorities emphasized the poor knowledge of German among so-called "minority children" and insisted that the examined Silesian children were most similar to Polish children, if not actually Polish.

As far as both the Council of the League of Nations and the Polish authorities were concerned, the children who failed the exams had no choice but to transfer to the Polish-speaking schools. Early in their lives, then, "Maurer's children" got the impression that their Polish identity and language were the outcome of failure, and that they were less worthy than their German-speaking peers.

Among the other linguistic issues mentioned in the League of Nations protocol were those of bilingual children and speakers of the Silesian dialect. These issues sparked debate not only in the region itself but in the international arena as well. The Volksbund sought to categorize some of the Silesian children as "bilingual," speaking both Polish and German, or both the Silesian dialect and the German language. The Polish authorities maintained that there were no real bilingual children. A child's mother tongue was the language he spoke at home. Polish officials also criticized the idea of a Silesian dialect that could be regarded both as the mother tongue of many children and as a German dialect. They insisted that the Silesian dialect was the same as the Polish language, just somewhat "corrupted" during the years of Germanization and isolation from the linguistic source. According to this view, every Silesian child was in fact a Pole, whose dialect could easily be upgraded to proper Polish language.[47] This was not, of course, the view of the pro-German Volksbund, nor did Calonder share it.

In response to the repeated petitions of the Volksbund, the issue of "Maurer's children" was taken up by the Permanent Court of International Justice in The Hague. The Volksbund's petition to the court of December 31, 1927 was also backed by the German embassy in The Hague. The petition and the embassy's letter were based on quotations from the relevant Geneva Convention paragraphs about the rights and education of minorities. The Volksbund's interpretation of these paragraphs raised interesting questions about the national and linguistic affiliations of Silesian children. For instance, to avoid a sensitive definition of Silesian children as Germans per se, the authors of the petition chose to present

[46] Łączewski, *Michał Grażyński*, 146.
[47] A complaint from the German government, 5–9, 11–12, 20–24, 30–31, 37–40.

them as no less than a distinct race of people. They also represented the history of the Silesian people as part of German history.[48] Although the authors admitted that the Silesian language was a "special Slavic dialect," they emphasized the differences between it and the "literary" Polish language, which was unknown to the children and was difficult for them to learn. Here the authors once again hinted at the "Germanness" of the Silesian children, asserting: "It is equally difficult or even more difficult for the Upper Silesian children to learn the Polish literary language as for the children born on the Lower Rhine, in Westphalia or in any other province ... to learn the Hoch-Deutsch."[49] Moreover, according to the authors: "It is easier for a Polish child to learn German than for an Upper Silesian child to learn Polish literary language, because in studying the literary Polish language the child is disturbed by the similar expressions from his own language which have a different meaning, while the German language does not create any difficulty of this kind for an Upper Silesian child."[50]

However, the petitioners rather contradicted themselves by noting the closeness between the Polish and Silesian languages and the linguistic remoteness of German, a fact which weakened their own position. In response, the Polish authorities prepared a long and detailed attempt at refuting the arguments of their German opponents. They complained about Calonder's pro-German attitude and again emphasized the Polish ethnic and linguistic affiliation of the Silesians.[51]

In addition, the Polish authors claimed that a person's ethnic group was "easy to demonstrate by surname, historical research etc.," and compared the ethnic affiliation of Silesians to the "Scots and Welsh in England, Normans and Bretons in France, Tatars and Armenians in Poland." All of these "represent minorities, although they generally consider themselves as Englishmen, Frenchmen or also Poles." They went on to say that "this concept is well known in Poland for centuries, where the type *natione Polonus gente Ruthenus* produced the most fervent patriots."[52] Continuing this rather idyllic representation of a perfect fit between ethnic and national self-definitions, the authors cited Jewish multilingual education in Poland ("Jewish schools with different languages of instruction teaching ... Polish, Hebrew and jargon of German origin") as an example of the Polish state's tolerance of various ethnicities and religions among its citizens.[53]

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[48] Ibid., 62.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid., 12.
[52] Ibid., 40.
[53] Ibid.

It is difficult to assess what role, if any, the petition and the response to it played in the ruling made by the Permanent Court. In any case, in April 1928 the Hague Tribunal ruled that self-identification was not sufficient to register a child in a minority school, dealing a blow to the Volksbund.[54]

The case of "Maurer's children" involved a clash between two ideologies in the mid-1920s, when the postwar treaties and consensus began attract criticism. The policy of the German side, backed by the Deutsche Volkspartei's Gustav Stresemann, the pro-nationalist Volksbund, and Calonder, can be considered an attempt to revise or even abandon the framework of the minority treaties. Whereas to them belonging to a minority was a subjective decision, the Polish side invoked "objective reality." This "objective" approach based membership in a minority on national, cultural, and linguistic criteria. It gained currency with the postwar minority treaties and subsequently relied upon them for support.[55] Poland, the Council of the League of Nations, and the Hague Tribunal all adopted it. Defining a minority according to rather vague ethnic and linguistic criteria, even if they were objective, led however to a call for revision of the minority treaties less than ten years after they were signed.

The desire to preserve the postwar status quo was not the only consideration guiding international peace organizations such as the League of Nations or the Court of Justice in The Hague. The postwar definition of minority would eventually come to harm some of those minorities' members. However, the international organizations saw a much greater potential for harm in creating a precedent of individual interpretation that contravened the then-accepted norms. Allowing individuals to decide upon their minority status would reject the authority of postwar international law and damage the precarious balance established by the peace treaties.

As a result, the ruling in favor of an "objective" definition of minorities was in force until 1931. At that point, after repeated petitions by the Volksbund, the Hague Tribunal ruled that children could be enrolled in a German-speaking minority school even without knowing the German language. This ruling applied retroactively to those children who had been turned away from the minority schools in 1927. These pro-German Silesian children were now allowed to join the German-speaking schools in the fifth or sixth grade after several years of study in the Polish-speaking schools, even without knowing the language of

[54] Mirolub, "Wyrok Stałego Trybunału," 512–533; "Sprawy Mniejszości Narodowych," 453–454.
[55] Mirolub, "Wyrok Stałego Trybunału," 514–533.

instruction.[56] After five years of being treated as Poles because of their "failure" in Maurer's examinations, they were treated as Germans. The international political and social reality of 1931 in Western and Central Europe had so changed since 1927 that certain postwar laws and principles began to be reconsidered.

The nationality of Maurer's children was constructed in a process which involved several years of international discussions, debate, and intervention by various international organizations and the authorities on various levels of power. It depended on the fluid, changing political situation in interwar Europe.

"Children Out of Wedlock"

At the same time that the issue of "Maurer's children" was in controversy, petitions were submitted to the League by so-called "unmarried mothers" from the Silesian Voivodeship who wanted to enroll their out-of-wedlock children in the local German-minority schools. The issue emerged at the beginning of December 1924 when the Volksbund sent a petition to the Mixed Commission in which three unmarried mothers, who claimed to belong to the German-speaking minority, complained about the compulsory enrollment of their children in the Polish-speaking schools, against their will. The complaint was investigated for several years; meanwhile, similar complaints from other unmarried mothers in the same region were added to the petition.

Most of the abovementioned complainants had tried to enroll their children in minority schools, but their applications were rejected by the local authorities.[57] The rejections were based on the claim that the mother was not legally responsible for her child's education and therefore could not determine his or her national affiliation or enroll him or her in any school. Since in most cases the father of the child was unknown or absent, responsibility passed by law to a local tutor. It seems that the tutors were chosen by the regional authorities without consulting the mothers, and in most cases they were pro-Polish patriots.

One can imagine then that such loyal Polish tutors took all measures necessary to avoid their pupils' enrollment in minority schools, and that the children were directed into the Polish-speaking schools.[58] The mother's opinion in these cases was not considered in light of their lack of legal responsibility but also of their low social status. In a traditional, religious society like Silesia, an

[56] Falęcki, *Niemieckie szkolnictwo mniejszościowe*, 84; Łączewski, *Michał Grażyński*, 147.
[57] A report on school applications by unmarried mothers (1927–1928), 8–9, 12–14, Archiwum Państwowe w Katowicach, UWSL 27, OP 1568.
[58] Ibid., 23.

unmarried woman with a child was usually viewed as "immoral," and her behavior was deemed "suspicious."

The authorities and the local population agreed on that point. In March 1928, the school authorities asked one of the regional police offices to gather information about the women who had signed the petition. Among the matters they were asked to investigate, along with the mother tongue of the children and the nationality of the mothers, was "the moral behavior of the mothers." On this point, officials could conclude either that "despite the fact of having children out of wedlock, the behavior of the mother could be considered moral" or that "she [the mother] behaves in an immoral way."[59]

After weighing the petition in 1927, the Mixed Commission decided to give the unmarried mothers the right to enroll their children in schools as they wished. Even though this ruling was based on the Geneva Convention's paragraph about the right of minority children to be registered by the person responsible for their education (*la personne responsable de l'éducation*), it encountered obstacles posed by the Polish authorities.[60]

According to the former Prussian law in the area, as well as the contemporary German law, mothers were responsible for their children's education. Polish law, as mentioned earlier, did not allow that. This fact created disagreements between the Volksbund, which supported the German legal tradition, and the Polish authorities.

Another issue that was debated among Polish officials concerned a mother's rights regarding her child. According to Polish law, a mother was not permitted to take responsibility for her child in "public" matters. Yet a mother had the right to be responsible in the "private" sphere of raising her child, particularly when it came to providing for immediate necessities.[61] Thus, the decision of the Mixed Commission caused the Polish side to reconsider this rather philosophical question: whether a child's education should be the private domain of his or her mother or the public domain of the state, represented by the state-appointed tutor.

On May 29, 1928, Michał Grażyński himself brought the debate to an end by ruling in favor of the Mixed Commission's decision and the German side of the controversy. After reviewing the matter in a rather one-sided fashion, he decided

[59] An interesting point is that most of the petitions on out-of-wedlock children were for children born during or shortly after World War I. Hence, one cannot exclude the possibility of sexual violence conducted by soldiers against the local women.

[60] A report on school applications by unmarried mothers, 8–9, 13, 46.

[61] Ibid., 23.

that in case of disagreement between the unmarried mother and the tutor about the school in which the child should be enrolled, the mother's decision would prevail.

Grażyński's decision implied a de facto right of unmarried mothers to register their children as they wished, without subservience to the state. Presumably, this decision also entailed a certain concession by the Polish authorities that education and language matters were part of the individual, subjective sphere of life rather than the public or objective sphere.

Such a sudden, sharp shift in favor of the German minority by a pro-Polish official might not have been accidental. Grażyński's ruling was published and sent to all authorities nine days after a fifth round of elections took place in Germany on May 20, 1928. In these elections, the left-wing parties (the SPD and the KPD) did well. A short time later, the new German government presented its foreign policy positions. They included proposals to return the Saar area to Germany and for foreign troops to evacuate the Rhineland.[62] Some rumors about these plans presumably reached the Polish government and prompted concerns about Eastern Upper Silesia, whose borders could be revisited as well.

Apparently, the results of the German elections, together with considerations of the balance of power between Germany and Poland, were among the factors which led the Polish government (which itself had just held elections in March 1928) to make some concessions to the German minority in Poland.

Conclusion

This article examines the use of a particular educational system as a mediator of nationality. On the one hand, it reflects the day-by-day process of creating a national identity at the micro level of Eastern Upper Silesia. On the other hand, it uses the educational system to assess the influence of local controversies on the macro level of international diplomacy. The debate about the educational system in the Silesian Voivodeship involved some sensitive interwar European political issues that concerned the peace treaties and their significance. These issues lurked behind the controversies over the rights of minorities and the nationality of bilingual children in Upper Silesia.

[62] Zara Steiner, *The Lights That Failed: European International History 1919–1933* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 458–459; Klaus Hildebrand, *Das vergangene Reich. Deutsche Außenpolitik von Bismarck bis Hitler 1871–1945* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1995), 496–497.

In light of the fact that post-Prussian Eastern Upper Silesia enjoyed autonomy as a Polish Voivodeship and was an area protected by international law under League of Nations supervision, the two cases of "Maurer's children" and the children born out of wedlock clearly demonstrate the close link between the micro-level of the local population and the macro-level of the state and international politics during the interwar period. The cases enable us to examine fascinating controversies about national and linguistic identity within the international diplomatic milieu. Finally, they facilitate tracing the political tensions and questions which underlay contemporary debate about individual rights.

Moreover, the Polish authorities on the one hand and the Swiss and German authorities on the other took different positions on the vague, complex question of membership in a national and linguistic group. The objective or subjective treatment of the question of nationality depended on the political tradition of the states involved. Therefore, Germany and Poland created their own solutions for the mismatch between the objective, official nationalities of the Silesian population and their self-definition according to their own tradition. The two states' political aims paid little attention to the individual interests of the "German" minority in Poland, however defined.

Here again, issues of minority rights, nationality, and language, which were meant to benefit the minority itself, were taken out of their primary context. In most cases, minorities' nationality issues were exploited as questions of frontiers and power were settled; the local Silesian population was left in the position of a useful hostage. The dynamic between the institutions of power and the minority population that were nationalized in the borderlands supports several hypotheses of Gellner's constructivist theory, as well as those of Anderson and Hobsbawm. The post-World War I discussions about nationality in the successor state of Poland were conducted in an industrial border area with a creole population, which lacked a clear self-defined nationality that coincided with the desires of the new authorities in power. The population adapted itself to the nationalist rhetoric of the authorities and demanded its rights using their rhetoric – a linguistic definition of nationality – not because they entirely so defined themselves, but in order to survive in the uncertain postwar reality of a newly created state. This happened not only to the population of Eastern Upper Silesia, but also to almost every other minority whose national-linguistic identity, which sometimes was inculcated by force, became a tool of international or domestic politics, and for achieving its own aims.

This article advances a broader, transnational interpretation of the questions of self-definition that were common to border societies within the successor

states in the whole area of Europe, but especially Central Europe. It traces the inculcation of nationality from "above" in the daily life of a border minority. In so doing, it examines the phenomenon of nationality and how it is created, taking into account the flexibility and uncertainty of the nation-building process and its dependence on both international political and diplomatic decisions and the internal situation within the state. The lessons of this case study are applicable not only within the specific successor state, Poland, but in many other parts of Europe.

Questions of self-definition, when that is different from the national authorities' definition, and of state-enforced inculcation of nationality are relevant to many regions of the world. This article has sought to shed light on the sources of conflict in Europe in the interwar period, examining one case, that of Upper Silesia, in depth. It has also clarified how national identity is self-defined, and how it originates from motives that are far from clearly national and ideological.