

Charting the Boundaries of Societies in a Trans-European Perspective The “Ruhr Poles” in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

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When forty-nine lawyers, political economists, and philosophers founded the German Sociological Association in 1909—four years after the American Sociological Society had been established in Baltimore¹—the precise meaning of “society” as the central research subject of sociology was anything but clear. Does society categorically shape all human action, or is it simply an abstract concept used to summarize the lives of individuals in retrospect? Georg Simmel raised this fundamental question on the opening evening of the founding congress in Berlin.² He advocated for basing the practice of sociology on the analysis of individuals and the various interests

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1. See Bert Hardin, *The Professionalization of Sociology: A Comparative Study; Germany – USA* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 1977).

2. Georg Simmel, “Soziologie der Geselligkeit,” in *Verhandlungen des Ersten Deutschen Soziologentages vom 19.–22. Oktober 1910 in Frankfurt a. M.*, ed. Deutsche Gesellschaft für Soziologie (Tübingen: Mohr, 1911), 1–16.

that motivate them to join forces. In contrast, in a report presented at the founding assembly the next day, Max Weber outlined three research areas that he considered of particular importance, both in Germany and in international comparison: the media, organizations, and professions.³ Simmel's focus on social interactions and Weber's emphasis on organizations reflect two poles in fundamental debates about what constitutes society and what binds it together. These discussions, which go back at least as far as the French Revolution, are as topical today as they were in 1909.⁴ In their most recent form, they revolve around questions such as how refugees should be "accommodated," as well as the extent to which solidarity and willingness to change should be embraced by both newcomers and the inhabitants already laying claim to a place. The study of how intellectuals and other public figures represent concepts of society in such debates offers one possible way to grasp the history of societies from the perspective of intellectual or conceptual history.⁵

In this article, however, I propose to explore the insights offered by investigating societies via a self-reflexive and relational history of human mobilities. Extrapolating from the example of Polish-German migratory movements, I make a case for studying the boundaries of societies in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe on the basis of spatial mobilities and the processes by which mobile people, both as individuals and in groups, construct and transform notions of belonging and difference.⁶ The point is to understand societies not as abstract systems but as the result of the practices through which people draw distinctions between themselves and others within economic and political constraints.⁷ This interplay of distinctions and categorizations on different scales also involves historians and other scholars

3. Max Weber, "Geschäftsbericht," in Deutsche Gesellschaft für Soziologie, *Verhandlungen des Ersten Deutschen Soziologentages*, 39–62.

4. Lynn Hunt, *Writing History in the Global Era* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2014), chap. 3. See also the ongoing debate over who represents sociology as a discipline, for instance, Jonathan H. Turner, "American Sociology in Chaos: Differentiation without Integration," *American Sociologist* 37, no. 2 (2006): 15–29. In Germany, this debate has recently led to the founding of the Academy of Sociology, which has profiled itself against the German Sociological Association: Gerald Wagner, "Ein Quexit in der Soziologie?" *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, January 23, 2019.

5. Such an approach was advocated by Paul Nolte in the 1990s: Nolte, "Gesellschaftstheorie und Gesellschaftsgeschichte. Umriss einer Ideengeschichte der modernen Gesellschaft," in *Geschichte zwischen Kultur und Gesellschaft. Beiträge zur Theorie-Debatte*, ed. Thomas Mergel and Thomas Welskopp (Munich: Beck, 1997), 275–98. More recently, a different perspective was adopted by Hagen Schulz-Forberg in the collective volume *A Global Conceptual History of Asia, 1860–1940* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014). For a political and theoretical perspective, see Jean Terrier, *Visions of the Social: Society as a Political Project in France, 1750–1950* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

6. I have set out this approach in more detail in Anne Friedrichs, "Placing Migration in Perspective: Neue Wege einer relationalen Geschichtsschreibung," *Geschichte & Gesellschaft* 44, no. 2 (2018): 167–95. See also the introduction to the present thematic dossier: Anne Friedrichs and Bettina Severin-Barboutie, "Mobilities, Categorizations, and Belonging: The Challenge of Reflexivity," *Annales HSS* 76, no. 3 (2021).

7. For more general considerations in the human and social sciences, which nevertheless largely ignore historically varying asymmetries of power, see Dilek Dizdar et al., eds.

who use categories to explore and classify social worlds.⁸ Lynn Hunt has recently argued that concepts of society and the self are undergoing profound changes in the context of globalization.⁹ Since the late 1990s in particular, debates about globalization have drawn attention to the ways in which changing experiences of space—for example, in relation to mobility—alter social relations and with them concepts of the self and other.¹⁰ However, such experiences are not new. Analyzing historical processes in which different actors at local, state, and other overarching levels represent and classify mobile people as separate from or part of their “own” collective can reveal much about the making and reshaping of society and its norms. Through their choice of sources and use of differentiated terminology, historians can help to deconstruct and expose overlapping and competing constructions of belonging and thus challenge dominant notions of society as a national container.

This article focuses on the movements of people from the eastern regions of Prussia—but also from the Russian Empire and Austria-Hungary—to the Ruhr region during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Studying human mobilities in this period reveals the local, regional, and cross-boundary articulations of belonging and social demarcation at a time when ever-greater emphasis was being placed on the (nation-)state. In light of debates on globalization and global history over the past two decades, historians have made renewed efforts to challenge state- or origin-centered grand narratives by turning to processes of cultural, economic, and political exchange and transfer and exploring cross-border connections.¹¹ In particular, studies with a microhistorical orientation have sought to better understand the diversity of regional and local developments beyond general trends in the political centers.¹² As important as it is to analyze the interplay of different spatial concepts (the global, the national, the local), however, some

Humandifferenzierung. Disziplinäre Perspektiven und empirische Sondierungen (Weilerswist: Velbrück, 2021).

8. On the advantages of the concept of belonging over the older but still popular “identity,” see Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka, *Zugehörigkeit in der mobilen Welt. Politiken der Verortung* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2012). On the implication of scholars in processes of categorization, see Richard Jenkins, “Categorization: Identity, Social Process and Epistemology,” *Current Sociology* 48, no. 3 (2000): 7–25.

9. Hunt, *Writing History in the Global Era*, 78 ff.

10. On the influence of border-crossing on identification, see Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Three Ways to Be Alien: Travails and Encounters in the Early Modern World* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2011). On the effects of shifting borders, and specifically the American Revolution, see Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

11. On older attempts to question the pertinence of national or imperial approaches, see Matthias Middell and Lluís Roura, eds., *Transnational Challenges to National History Writing* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

12. See John-Paul A. Ghobrial, ed., “Global History and Microhistory,” *Past & Present* 242, supplement 14 (2019); Romain Bertrand and Guillaume Calafat, eds., “Micro-analyse et histoire globale,” thematic dossier, *Annales HSS* 73, no. 1 (2018): 1–159; Angelika Epple, “Lokalität und die Dimensionen des Globalen. Eine Frage der Relationen,” *Historische Anthropologie* 21, no. 1 (2013): 4–25; Bettina Severin-Barboutie, “Attempts to Build Postwar Europe from below in Stuttgart: Failure or Forerunner,” in “Cities and

scholars have criticized the “spatial mania” of global history, which tends to overshadow other social categories and practices of identifying people.¹³ Although this focus on space is related to necessary efforts to overcome dividing lines between “Europe” and other parts of the world,¹⁴ it can mean that these studies fall back on the old emphasis on origin—even if they refer to “cultural areas” or “continents” rather than “nations.” Only a subset of global history has analyzed how actors created multiple relationships and mobilized different dimensions of belonging to bridge the distance, both geographical and social, that resulted from migratory movements.¹⁵ With these tensions in mind, my case study contributes to the renewal of a global, or more precisely trans-European historiography by tracing the multi-layered affiliations of mobile people and the conflicts linked to their categorization in an economic conurbation such as the Ruhr Valley, where several migratory movements crossed.

The case of Polish-German workers is particularly enlightening because we do not generally associate the heterogeneous newcomers to the Ruhr region in this period with a radical or “exotic” alterity.¹⁶ Used in the title of this article, the term

Migration in Post-War Europe,” ed. Brian Shaev and Sarah Hackett, special issue, *Journal of Migration History* 7, no. 3 (2021): 357–80.

13. See Christof Dejung and Martin Lengwiler, introduction to *Ränder der Moderne. Neue Perspektiven auf die Europäische Geschichte (1800–1930)*, ed. Christof Dejung and Martin Lengwiler (Cologne: Böhlau, 2016), 7–35; Bernhard Gißibl and Isabella Löhr, eds., *Bessere Welten. Kosmopolitismus in den Geschichtswissenschaften* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2017).

14. See, in particular, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia,” *Modern Asian Studies* 31, no. 3 (1997): 735–62. Serge Gruzinski, “Les mondes mêlés de la Monarchie catholique et autres ‘connected histories’,” *Annales HSS* 56, no. 1 (2001): 85–117; Sebastian Conrad and Shalini Randeria, eds., *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus. Postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2002). In the field of global studies, see also Pnina Werbner, “Global Pathways: Working Class Cosmopolitans and the Creation of Transnational Ethnic Worlds,” *Social Anthropology* 7, no. 1 (1999): 17–35.

15. See also the critique by Johannes Fabian, “You Meet and You Talk: Anthropological Reflections on Encounters and Discourses,” in *The Fuzzy Logic of Encounter: New Perspectives on Culture Contact*, ed. Sünne Jüterczenka and Gesa Mackenthun (Münster: Waxmann, 2009), 23–34. For an overview of different actor- and structure-oriented approaches to global history with a focus on France, see Romain Bertrand, “Histoire globale, histoires connectées: un ‘tournant’ historiographique ?” in *Le tournant global des sciences sociales*, ed. Alain Caillé and Stéphane Dufoix (Paris: La Découverte, 2013), 44–66. Inspiration can also be found in some “classic” sociological and geographical studies concerned with the social appropriation of space and with the effects of space on social changes; see, for instance, Georg Simmel, *Soziologie. Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot 1908), 614–708.

16. On recent trends in migration history that examine different kinds of movements from a global perspective, see Andreas Fahrmeir, “Conclusion: Historical Perspectives on Borderlands, Boundaries and Migration Control,” in “Migrations and Border Processes: Politics and Practices of Belonging and Exclusion from the 19th to the 21st Century,” special issue, *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 34, no. 4 (2019): 623–31. For a more critical position, see Nancy L. Green, *The Limits of Transnationalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).

“Ruhr Poles” nevertheless draws on a figure of thought (*Denkfigur*) that highlights their ambiguous affiliations to multiple spaces. During the three decades after 1860, the first arrivals were often regarded by Westphalian authorities as close to or already part of the population, in the sense that they came predominantly from Prussia and thus were in large part Prussian citizens. From the 1890s onwards, however, they were increasingly perceived to be “foreign” to the Ruhr Valley by the Prussian administration because they sometimes spoke a different language (as well as or instead of German), belonged to a different religious denomination, and practiced different cultural customs. Previous historical studies have often treated this group simply as “Poles,” without taking into account contemporaneous processes of categorization and self-representation.¹⁷ In contrast, I will seek to show that even as the ideals of the nation-state were growing in prominence, different constructions of belonging based on origin, achievement, religious confession, and the common humanity of subjects coexisted in the Ruhr region. For instance, authorities usually associated references to the national with other, older criteria of difference such as religious denomination, as it was often difficult to distinguish new arrivals from longer-term residents. The interplay of administrative categories and other forms of belonging ultimately produced nationalist othering and even violence against individuals, but also brought about solidarity of various kinds and degrees.

By considering how people on the move represented themselves and how they were categorized, historians can thus unearth multi-layered and alternative forms of belonging. Imposed from the outside or adopted by the actors themselves, these diverse communicative practices produced bureaucratic and legal categories as well as other, more flexible forms of self and group identification. To reconstruct this plurality, I use administrative sources held in archives in Bochum, Dortmund, Münster, and Berlin, as well as German- and Polish-language autobiographical texts written by people who moved to the Ruhr region. Only some of these texts have been published, whether by their authors or by sociologists in Poland. Analyzing both the administrative treatment of mobile people and their own perceptions offers a way to build bridges within the historiography of migration, a field that is becoming increasingly diverse and differentiated.¹⁸ As Nancy L. Green has observed, since the “transnational” or “global” turn, structuralist and poststructuralist approaches

17. For instance, Brian McCook, *The Borders of Integration: Polish Migrants in Germany and the United States, 1870–1924* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011). The classic study is still Christoph Kleßmann, *Polnische Bergarbeiter im Ruhrgebiet 1870–1945. Soziale Integration und nationale Subkultur einer Minderheit in der deutschen Industriegesellschaft* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978). Even more recent studies, which have started to evaluate autobiographical publications more extensively, still tend to include only Polish-language sources: David Skrabania, *Keine Polen? Bewusstseinsprozesse und Partizipationsstrategien unter Ruhrpolen zwischen der Reichsgründung und den Anfängen der Weimarer Republik* (Hern: Gabriele Schäfer Verlag, 2019).

18. For case studies that demonstrate how fruitful such a multi-perspective approach can be, see, for instance, Abdellali Hajjat, *Les frontières de l’“identité nationale.” L’injonction à l’assimilation en France métropolitaine et coloniale* (Paris: La Découverte, 2012); Anne

to migration history have been at odds with one another.¹⁹ While some analyze “migration regimes,” citizenship, or asylum law from an administrative, top-down viewpoint,²⁰ others study multiple affiliations, intersecting forms of mobility, and the agency of people in transit, taking a bottom-up perspective.²¹ The resulting gap between approaches not only complicates the exchange of new findings and methodological reflections, but also obscures the interplay between different state and private actors and the related negotiation of fundamental principles and aspirations expressed by people on the move. In this context, a multi-perspective approach makes it possible to understand the bureaucratic and legal conditions that shaped the experiences of people seen as “strangers” or “newcomers” without regarding them merely as objects of official action.

This multi-perspective analysis also enables us to reflect on the performative effects of administrative texts and ego-documents by integrating insights from literary studies. Working with these different sources requires a critical approach to the information presented, not least because of the specific contexts in which they were produced and transmitted. In particular, the documents produced by the Prussian authorities and the mining administration were part of the migration process and were often linked to efforts to influence political decisions; some political actors even foregrounded their own categorical framework by changing administrative practices of documenting and recording. In contrast, autobiographical texts written by mobile people constitute retrospective legitimations and interpretations. In the case studied here, such texts were predominantly, though not exclusively, drafted in the context of sociological memoir-writing contests organized in the newly founded Second Polish Republic from the early 1920s onwards.²² As we have no letters or

Friedrichs, ed., “Migration, Mobilität und Sesshaftigkeit,” special issue, *Geschichte & Gesellschaft* 44, no. 2 (2018).

19. Green, *The Limits of Transnationalism*, 49.

20. See Andreas Pott, Christoph Rass, and Frank Wolff, eds., *Was ist ein Migrationsregime? What Is a Migration Regime?* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2018); Nancy L. Green and François Weil, eds., *Citoyenneté et émigration. Les politiques du départ* (Paris: Éd. de l'EHESS, 2006); Patrick Weil, *The Sovereign Citizen: Denaturalization and the Origins of the American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

21. Natalie Zemon Davis, *Trickster Travels: A Sixteenth-Century Muslim between Worlds* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006); Linda Colley, *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh: A Woman in World History* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2007); Nikolaos Papadogiannis and Detlef Siegfried, introduction to “Between Leisure, Work and Study: Tourism and Mobility in Europe from 1945 to 1989,” special issue, *Comparativ* 24, no. 2 (2014): 7–17; Sarah Panter, ed., “Mobility and Biography,” special issue, *Jahrbuch für Europäische Geschichte* 16 (2015); Levke Harders, “Belonging, Migration, and Profession in the German-Danish Border Region in the 1830s,” *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 34, no. 4 (2019): 571–85.

22. On memoir competitions in Poland, see Katherine Lebow, “The Conscience of the Skin: Interwar Polish Autobiography and Social Rights,” *Humanity: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 3, no. 3 (2012): 297–319; Kornelia Kończal and Joanna Wawrzyniak, “Provincializing Memory Studies: Polish Approaches in the Past and Present,” *Memory Studies* 11, no. 4 (2018): 391–404; Paweł Rodak, “Poland’s Autobiographical Twentieth Century,” in *Being Poland: A New History of Polish Literature and Culture since 1918*, ed. Tamara Trojanowska, Joanna Nizyńska, and

diaries written by people on the move in the Ruhr Valley during the period studied, these texts represent the only source for historians seeking to reconstruct the perspectives and normative constructs of persons in transit. In his classic work on the “autobiographical pact,” Philippe Lejeune highlighted the contractual character of such life writings, which create a close bond between reader, narrator, and protagonist based on the performative act of reading.²³ Instead of examining the intention of an author—a problematic concept in itself—or the canons of a literary genre, he proposes that we start from our position as a reader and reflect on how we ourselves activate and transform texts by reading them. Lejeune’s reflections are still extremely helpful today in grasping the functioning of autobiographical texts: such testimonies highlight specific notions of belonging expressed in the author’s name (or anonymity), the language and title of a publication, and other paratextual elements.²⁴ It is thus necessary to distance ourselves from existing compilations and corpora, often shaped by particular concerns and identity politics, and to think through how we select and assemble different sources.

Language has always been a central medium for communicating affiliations and generating difference. The autobiographical texts express not only the perspectives and language of their authors but also those of the editors who arranged and often altered them, as well as the influence of scholars who have repeatedly studied these testimonies since the early twentieth century. Sociologists in Łódź, Poznań, and Warsaw launched a range of competitions to “promote memoir and chronicle writing” among “peasants and workers” but also among “Polonia milieus in foreign countries,” announcing their calls for contributions in Czech, English, French, German, Polish, and Russian.²⁵ In so doing, they took into account the multilingualism of those who left the eastern regions of Prussia, as well as parts of Russia and Austria-Hungary, during the late nineteenth century, including those

Przemysław Czapliński (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 627–41. This tradition of generating sociological knowledge was largely based on William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America: Monograph of an Immigrant Group*, 5 vols. (Boston: R. G. Badger, 1918–1920).

23. Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography* [1975], trans. Katherine Leary (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

24. See, for example, Carsten Heinze, “Der paratextuelle Aufbau der Autobiographie,” *BIOS. Zeitschrift für Biographieforschung, Oral History und Lebensverlaufsanalysen* 20, no. 1 (2007): 19–39; Volker Depkat, “Zum Stand und zu den Perspektiven der Autobiographieforschung in der Geschichtswissenschaft,” *BIOS. Zeitschrift für Biographieforschung, Oral History und Lebensverlaufsanalysen* 23, no. 2 (2010): 170–87.

25. See, for example, the documentation produced for the 1970 “Polonia” contest held in Warsaw, Archiwum Akt Nowych (hereafter “AAN”), Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Pamiętnikarstwa (hereafter “TPP”), no. 4104. In addition to this contest, individual autobiographies, and compilations of memoirs published before 1945, I examine materials produced for two other contests held in 1950 (for “workers”) and 1957 (for the “Polonia”). An overview of the different memoir competitions and their publication can be found in Franciszek Jakubczak, ed., *Konkursy na pamiętniki w Polsce, 1921–1966* (Warsaw: Komitet Badań nad Kulturą Współczesną Polskiej Akademii Nauk. Komisja Badań nad Pamiętnikarstwem Współczesnym, 1966).

who moved temporarily or permanently to the Ruhr region. Most of the participants nonetheless submitted their contributions in Polish, which was also the language in which the prize-winning texts were published. Before 1939, the winners were largely selected on the basis of their adherence to socialist and Catholic norms. Most of the memoirs published after the Second World War, however, were subject to censorship and used as a tool for legitimizing the Communist regime, at least until the thaw of 1956.²⁶

Regardless of whether they were considered worthy of publication, these life stories acquired historical significance from the 1970s on. In collaboration with representatives of the Communist regime, Polish scholars ensured that autobiographical texts by “emigrants” and other underrepresented groups were preserved for posterity. In particular, two sociologists from the Polish Academy of Sciences initiated the Friends of Memoirs Society (*Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Pamiętnikarstwa*), which systematically collected these texts and expanded its archive by organizing new contests.²⁷ According to these researchers, the society’s activities were inspired by William Thomas and Florian Znaniecki’s *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*²⁸ and by Weber’s interpretative sociology. The collection’s decay after its funding expired in 1991, however, reveals that the association also pursued political goals and maintained a close relationship with the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party (*Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza*). For five years after Poland’s transition, the collections were stored under disastrous conditions in cellars and even outdoors; only thanks to a civic initiative did a small proportion eventually reach the New State Archives (*Archiwum Akt Nowych*) in Warsaw. The surviving corpus thus reflects the complicated and random transmission typical of written and recorded oral testimonies from other, often mobile, members of the middle and lower classes, including former slaves, Shoah survivors, and the ex-subjects of European empires following decolonization.²⁹

This contingent transmission has epistemological consequences that need to be taken into account in the selection and analysis of these life stories. The processes by which the Warsaw collection was created and transmitted, together

26. Though even during the Stalinist period, unpublished memoirs often did not correspond to the Communist script: Katherine Lebow, “Autobiography as Complaint: Polish Social Memoir between the World Wars,” *Laboratorium: Russian Review of Social Research* 6, no. 3 (2014): 13–26, here p. 24.

27. For what follows, see Dariusz Wierzchoś, “Zwyczajne życie zwykłych ludzi. Losy archiwum Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Pamiętnikarstwa,” *Histmag.org*, 2008, <https://histmag.org/Zwyczajne-zycie-zwyklych-ludzi.-Losy-archiwum-Towarzystwa-Przyjaciol-Pamietnikarstwa-1750>.

28. Thomas and Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*.

29. On the tradition of slave narratives and different forms of postcolonial life stories, see Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Life-Writing: Culture, Politics, and Self-Representation* (London: Routledge, 2009). Many famous collections of self-testimonies are held in libraries in the United States; see, for example, Library of Congress, “An Introduction to the WPA Slave Narratives” [undated], <https://www.loc.gov/collections/slave-narratives-from-the-federal-writers-project-1936-to-1938/articles-and-essays/introduction-to-the-wpa-slave-narratives/>.

with the age- and gender-specific practices of autobiographical writing, have produced a sample that systematically differs from the actual lives of the men, women, and children who moved from Polish-speaking regions to the Ruhr.³⁰ One way to counter the bias of the memoir collection and do justice to the Ruhr's multilingualism is thus to consider texts composed in both Polish and German, which were, along with their dialects, the most common languages used in the region. Analyzed together, these texts make it possible to uncover different logics of self-representation and publishing.³¹ In contrast to the Polish-language texts, which were linked to a prestigious research agenda, German-language pieces were either isolated works (often self-published) or included in one-off collections on "proletarian lives" in Germany or "German miners." In general, their Left-leaning and bourgeois reformist editors were not particularly interested in the authors' mobility in itself.³² This did not change when, starting in the 1970s, German and American literary scholars began to study these texts as documents of the "struggle for the emancipation of the working class," as aesthetic works, and later as testimony of the specific subjectivities of workers.³³ Significantly, Polish and German publishers categorized the authors differently in their presentations of these texts: while both referred to them as "workers," only the Polish editors also labeled them "emigrants." These different categorizations and marketing strategies reveal that tacit distinctions played as much of a part in generating belonging as explicit statements about affiliations.³⁴

Divided into four sections, this article uses the case of the "Ruhr Poles" to make a broader methodological point. The first section focuses on endeavors by German-nationalist associations, political economists (*Nationalökonomien*), and representatives at different levels of government to distinguish the "Poles" in the Ruhr region from other Prussian citizens such as "Germans." I will trace how some of these actors introduced new administrative practices that helped to slowly establish

30. On gendered practices in workers' life writing, see Regina Gagnier, "Social Atoms: Working-Class Autobiography, Subjectivity, and Gender," *Victorian Studies* 30, no. 3 (1987): 335–63.

31. This ties in with the plea to analyze the construction of the "self" in relation to other groups (such as the family) and norms, responding to the debate about the rise of an individual, autonomous self during the Renaissance. See Mary Fulbrook and Ulrika Rublack, "In Relation: The 'Social Self' and Ego-Documents," *German History* 28, no. 3 (2010): 263–72.

32. On the genre of workers' life stories in Germany, see Mary Jo Maynes, *Taking the Hard Road: Life Course in French and German Workers' Autobiographies in the Era of Industrialization* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995). For an overview of workers' literature on the Ruhr region, including autobiographical texts, see Dirk Hallenberger, Dirk van Laak, and Erhard Schütz, eds., *Das Ruhrgebiet in der Literatur. Annotierte Bibliographie zur Literatur über das Ruhrgebiet von den Anfängen bis 1961* (Essen: Klartext, 1990).

33. For an overview of this research, see Birgit A. Jansen, "Bawdy Bodies or Moral Agency? The Struggle for Identity in Working-Class Autobiographies of Imperial Germany," *Biography* 28, no. 4 (2005): 534–57, here pp. 536–39.

34. This approach also ties in with praxeological considerations in interdisciplinary migration research. See Pott, Rass, and Wolff, *Was ist ein Migrationsregime?*

a uniform conception of these new arrivals as “Poles.” In the second section, I analyze how newcomers from Polish-speaking areas perceived and retrospectively classified their new social relationships, arguing that the demarcations presented by these individuals depended on broader socioeconomic issues rather than ethnic criteria. The third section examines the interferences between bureaucratic categorizations, long-standing forms of self-articulation, and scholarly representation.³⁵ Although new regulations concerning language practices in the mines helped legitimize the idea that “Poles” could be treated as inferior in these highly competitive workplaces, some scholars and social reformers campaigned for the protection of mobile workers at the international level. In the final section, I consider the broader implications of my study, focusing on the ways in which categories and norms of belonging were constituted and enforced (or not) on local, national, and international scales, as well as the associated processes of privileging or discriminating against certain ways of living. This wider perspective sheds new light on how state and private actors, including mobile people and scholars, construct and demarcate the boundaries of societies, sometimes even by mobilizing categories established in different social or historical contexts.

Nationalized Categories and Cross-Border Practices: Distinguishing “Poles” at the Regional and State Levels

When Simmel and Weber were developing their respective concepts of society, people had already been moving to the Ruhr region from mining areas in Silesia and Austria-Hungary, as well as more rural regions such as Hesse, East Prussia, and the Netherlands, for decades. In 1860, Prussian legislators had liberalized regulations on employing mine workers from other coal districts,³⁶ enabling mining companies in Westphalia and the Rhineland to hire laborers from other economic regions without seeking official approval.³⁷ Despite this new legal framework, however, the number of arrivals remained relatively low until around 1880.³⁸ During this period,

35. The term “interference” is used in the metaphorical sense and is borrowed from physics, where it describes the superposition of sound waves emanating from different centers. It was transferred to the study of culture by Clifford Geertz, “Ritual and Social Change: A Javanese Example” [1957], in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 142–69, here p. 167.

36. For a more in-depth discussion of the reasons for moving to the Ruhr region in the context of a transatlantic migration system, see Anne Friedrichs, “A Site of Shifting Boundaries: Fostering and Limiting Mobility in the Ruhr Valley (1860–1910),” *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 34, no. 4 (2019): 587–603.

37. Wolfram Fischer, “Die Bedeutung der preußischen Bergrechtsreform (1851–1865) für den industriellen Ausbau des Ruhrgebiets,” in *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft im Zeitalter der Industrialisierung: Aufsätze, Studien, Vorträge*, ed. Wolfram Fischer (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972), 161–78.

38. Königliches Statistisches Bureau in Berlin, ed., *Preussische Statistik: Die endgültigen Ergebnisse der Volkszählung im preussischen Staate vom 1. December 1880*, vol. 121, part 2 (Berlin: Königliches Statistisches Bureau, 1883), 44–45.

the largest group of “foreigners” (*Reichsausländer*) were the Dutch, but a glance at the Prussian statistics shows that the producers of this data contributed to making particular groups more or less visible through their choice of categories. From 1890, officials began classifying the population by mother tongue rather than legal status.³⁹ By this change, they demonstrated that, in addition to almost 35,000 “Dutch” and 3,000 “Italians,” there were also around 30,000 “Poles” and 2,000 “Masurians” (from the East Prussian region of Masuria) in the Rhine Province and Westphalia, most of whom were Prussian citizens.⁴⁰ Until then, these people had simply been counted as residents without any further qualification.

Despite the heterogeneity of the newcomers to the Ruhr region, from 1900 public attention focused primarily on what was conceived as a homogeneous group: the “Poles.” Examining the procedures by which different social actors categorized a specific section of mobile people as “Poles”—and not as “Prussians”—reveals how these categories were tied to shifting criteria of difference and employed in policy recommendations. It is important to note that those involved in these processes had different concerns and priorities, as a comparison of works by political economists and those published by German-nationalist associations active in the Ruhr region illustrates. At first glance, it might seem that scholars deployed similar terms to those used by the Pan-German League (*Alldeutscher Verband*) in referring to the Ruhr region’s “immigrants.” Political economists equated the newcomers with “Poles” and portrayed them as a foreign element or “tribe” whose “educational and cultural level” was lower than that of “Germans.”⁴¹ However, the concerns and basic convictions of researchers clearly differed from those of German nationalists. In his doctoral thesis, the priest Lorenz Pieper criticized the meager public assistance offered to miners,⁴² while the conservative jurist Johann Viktor Bredt, inspired by developments in the US-controlled Panama Canal Zone and South Africa, supported the mechanization of the mining industry to improve conditions.

39. *Ibid.*, 159–60. On the political function of statistics, see David I. Kertzer and Dominique Arel, “Censuses, Identity Formation, and the Struggle for Political Power,” in *Census and Identity: The Politics of Race, Ethnicity, and Language in National Censuses*, ed. David I. Kertzer and Dominique Arel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 1–42.

40. Prussian statisticians did not consider language to be an unambiguous criterion, however. The population censuses also recognized those with two first languages.

41. See, for instance, Lorenz Pieper, *Die Lage der Bergarbeiter im Ruhrrevier* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1903); Johann Viktor Bredt, *Die Polenfrage im Ruhrkohlengebiet: Eine wirtschaftspolitische Studie* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1909); Franz Schulze, *Die Polnische Zuwanderung im Ruhrrevier und ihre Wirkungen* (Bilge: Josef’s Druckerei, 1909); Max Metzner, *Die soziale Fürsorge im Bergbau. Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung Preußens, Sachsens, Bayerns und Österreichs* (Jena: G. Fischer, 1911); Stanislaus Wachowiak, *Die Polen in Rheinland-Westfalen* (Borna: Noske, 1916). For the nationalist perspective, see *Alldeutscher Verband*, ed., *Die Polen im rheinisch-westfälischen Steinkohlen-Bezirk. Mit einem statistischen Anhang, einer Sammlung polnischer Lieder und zwei Karten* (Munich: Lehmann, 1901); Johannes Altkemper, *Deutschtum und Polentum in politisch-konfessioneller Bedeutung* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1910).

42. Pieper, *Die Lage der Bergarbeiter im Ruhrrevier*.

In his view, Britain had effectively solved the “Chinese question” in South Africa by investing in new technology despite the high cost.⁴³ It is questionable, therefore, whether such scholars were enmeshed in consolidating an imperial discourse that laid the groundwork for the later National Socialist policy of conquest and rule, as recent historiography on colonialism—as well as research in Eastern and Central European studies—often assumes.⁴⁴ Not only did a jurist like Bredt affirm that Polish and German workers were of equal rank, but, unlike the German Association (*Deutsche Vereinigung*), most scholars did not make a case for suppressing “Poles” and their associations by force.⁴⁵

One reason for the widespread references to “the Poles” in the Ruhr area was that, from 1890, the Westphalian authorities were increasingly presenting them as such to the ministries in the Prussian capital of Berlin, claiming that these newcomers constituted a danger to public order. Unlike similar reflections in the provinces of Posen and West Prussia, these endeavors were not, in their early stages, linked to nationalist tendencies or associations, which only began to be established in the Ruhr region around 1894.⁴⁶ Rather, the interplay of two forms of action contributed to the spread of this stereotype: the efforts of a few Westphalian officials who depicted the Polish-Catholic associations as agents of political Catholicism, and the new administrative practices of monitoring “Poles,” initially introduced at the provincial level and then gradually expanded. The idea of using police surveillance was first advanced by the Westphalian governor (*Oberpräsident*) Konrad von Studt in the summer of 1890.⁴⁷ However, he only succeeded in persuading the Ministry of the Interior to assign Wilhelm Rost, the town clerk (*Stadtsekretär*) of Dortmund, the additional task of reviewing and translating the Polish-Catholic

43. Bredt, *Die Polenfrage im Ruhrkohlengebiet*.

44. See, for instance, Sebastian Conrad, *Globalisation and the Nation in Imperial Germany* [2006], trans. Sorch O’Hagan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). The first steps toward a critical appraisal of German *Ostforschung* (research that aimed to justify advancing the country’s eastern borders) were made in more nuanced studies: Wolfgang Wippermann, *Der “Deutsche Drang nach Osten.” Ideologie und Wirklichkeit eines politischen Schlagwortes* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1981); Michael Burleigh, *Germany Turns Eastwards: A Study of Ostforschung in the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

45. Altkemper, *Deutschtum und Polentum*. On the foundation of the German Association, see Christoph Hübner, *Die Rechtskatholiken, die Zentrumsparterie und die katholische Kirche in Deutschland bis zum Reichskonkordat von 1933. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Scheiterns der Weimarer Republik* (Berlin: Lit, 2014), 62.

46. Torsten Lorenz, *Von Birnbaum nach Miedzychod. Bürgergesellschaft und Nationalitätenkampf in Großpolen bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Berlin: Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag, 2005); Geoff Eley, *Reshaping the German Right: Radical Nationalism and Political Change after Bismarck* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).

47. Berlin, Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz (hereafter “GStA PK”), I. HA Rep. 77 Ministerium des Innern, Tit. 870, no. 38, “Letter from the governor [*Oberpräsident*] of Westphalia to the Prussian Ministry of the Interior,” January 24, 1890.

newspaper *Wiarus polski* (the Polish Herald).⁴⁸ Founded in Bochum in September 1890, the paper was systematically translated from 1891.⁴⁹

Although von Studt failed to convince the Ministry of the Interior to establish a full-fledged police surveillance unit, it is important not to underestimate the significance of the translation work undertaken by Rost. It allowed the Westphalian authorities to report to Berlin in detail on the activities of the “Poles,” and to do so quite independently of local authorities such as the mayor in Dortmund, who at this time had little interest in the new arrivals.⁵⁰ The report produced by the district governor (*Regierungspräsident*) of Arnsberg in November 1893 was mainly focused on the activities of a handful of Polish-Catholic associations and two individuals: Chaplain Franciszek Liss, the founder of the *Wiarus polski*, and Jan Brejski, its new owner.⁵¹ The fact that some quotations from the translated newspaper articles contradicted the political line of the report highlights the extent to which the translations were appropriated. For example, the document included Polish-language newspapers’ complaints about Polish-German marriages and their criticism of Chaplain Liss for privileging Catholic cohesion over “Polish national” concerns. The Westphalian authorities were well aware of these differences within the “Polish movement” (*Polenbewegung*). In the 1893 report, the district governor concluded that it was not advisable to intervene until the struggle between the democratic and monarchist wings of the Polish faction in the German parliament (*Reichstag*) had been settled.

In light of Prussia’s much-criticized anti-Polish policies,⁵² it is striking that over the next two decades the Ministry of the Interior responded with restraint to persistent provincial efforts to expand observation of the “Poles” in Westphalia and the Rhine Province, in some cases even opposing it. In other words, the production and dissemination of official knowledge about the “Poles” was not imposed by the center on regional and municipal administrations. As early as 1860, there was a police unit in Posen (present-day Poznań) that reviewed all Polish-language

48. Berlin, GStA PK, I. HA Rep. 77 Ministerium des Innern, Tit. 870, no. 38, “Letter from the Prussian Ministry of the Interior to the governor of Westphalia,” February 22, 1890; and Berlin, GStA PK, I. HA Rep. 77 Ministerium des Innern, Tit. 870, no. 38, “Draft of letter,” January 15, 1891.

49. On the history of *Wiarus polski*, see Christoph Kleßmann, “Der ‘Wiarus Polski’ – Zentralorgan und Organisationszentrum der Polen im Ruhrgebiet 1891–1923,” *Beiträge zur Geschichte Dortmunds und der Grafschaft Mark* 69 (1974): 383–97.

50. This lack of interest is expressed among other things in the fact that the observation of associations founded by the “Poles” did not start until 1883, and even then the initiative always came from the Ministry of Culture in Berlin. See, for instance, Münster, Landesarchiv NRW, Abteilung Westfalen (hereafter “LAW”), OP Münster, no. 2748, vol. 1., “Letter from the Ministry of Culture to the governor of Westphalia,” March 24, 1883.

51. See Berlin, GStA PK, I. HA Rep. 77 Ministerium des Innern, Tit. 870, no. 38, “Report from the governor [*Regierungspräsident*] in Arnsberg,” November 20, 1893.

52. For an overview of the literature, see Christoph Kleßmann and Johannes Frackowiak, “Die Polenpolitik des Deutschen Kaiserreichs 1871–1918,” in *Nationalistische Politik und Ressentiments. Deutsche und Polen von 1871 bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Johannes Frackowiak (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 23–38.

newspapers published in Prussia, translated selected articles, and distributed them in the form of a printed press review, including to the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of the Interior.⁵³ The provincial government in Münster proposed that Rost's translations be distributed in a similar way among the state and ecclesiastical authorities in Westphalia and the Rhineland. Possibly due to the pooling of expertise in Posen, the Ministry of the Interior only agreed to this proposal after a request from the Rhenish governor at the end of 1897 to extend the analysis of Polish-speaking newspapers to his province.⁵⁴ A change of this kind was significant at a time when most authorities were still communicating through handwritten letters. Not only did the new format make it possible to increase the number of recipients, but the material presented gained an official character, divorced from the person who had translated it.

Like the ministries in Berlin, representatives at the municipal level were not particularly assiduous at first in distinguishing newcomers like the "Poles" from other segments of the population. In contrast to other parts of late nineteenth-century Europe, particularly frontier regions such as the Pyrenees or Bohemia, the Ruhr Valley experienced a relatively late dissemination of nationalist ideas on the local level.⁵⁵ Only around 1900 did some municipalities call on Rost to police the assemblies held by Polish-Catholic associations in their districts, something far beyond the powers accorded to a town clerk.⁵⁶ The case of the Ruhr Valley also indicates that spatial mobility—which began to increase in this region as early as 1860—does not necessarily contribute to the emergence and dissemination of national-ethnic perceptions based on common geographical origin, as some older literature on the German Empire assumed.⁵⁷ However, the slowly developing interest of some municipalities in these issues eventually provided an opportunity for the regional and provincial authorities to extend their surveillance.

Beginning in 1900, the Westphalian authorities set about using the provincial police force to surveil the public assemblies of Polish-speaking associations. In particular, they began to collaborate closely with inspector Friedrich Goehrke, who was already monitoring the organized "Poles" on his own initiative.⁵⁸ Goehrke

53. See Marek Rajch, "Preußische Zensurpolitik und Zensurpraxis in der Provinz Posen 1848/49 bis 1918," *Archiv für Geschichte des Buchwesens* 56 (2002): 1–77.

54. Berlin, GStA PK, I. HA Rep. 77 Ministerium des Innern, Tit. 870, no. 38, "Report from the governor [*Oberpräsident*] of the Rhine Province," July 24, 1897, and Berlin, GStA PK, I. HA Rep. 77 Ministerium des Innern, Tit. 870, no. 38, "Letter from the Ministry of the Interior to von Studt," November 19, 1897.

55. Peter Sahlins, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Pieter M. Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

56. For example, Münster, LAW, OP Münster, no. 2748, vol. 3, "Letter from the governor of Westphalia to the governor [*Regierungspräsident*] in Münster," October 29, 1899.

57. Thomas Mergel, "Das Kaiserreich als Migrationsgesellschaft," in *Das Kaiserreich in der Kontroverse*, ed. Sven-Oliver Müller and Cornelius Torp (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 374–91.

58. Berlin, GStA PK, I. HA Rep. 77 Ministerium des Innern, Tit. 870, no. 38, "Report from police officer Goehrke," January 29, 1900.

was a member of the German Eastern Marches Society (*Deutscher Ostmarkenverein*), a conservative-nationalist association that had gradually gained traction in the Ruhr region from the mid-1890s.⁵⁹ In 1898, he was appointed to one of the six new posts for police officers established at the provincial level two years earlier to combat political movements such as social democracy and anarchism.⁶⁰ Although the Prussian Ministry of the Interior strongly opposed transferring the duties of the Dortmund town clerk Rost to inspector Goehrke after the former's death in the summer of 1906, the Westphalian authorities did not heed the Ministry's reservations.⁶¹ They were prepared to go to some lengths to keep an eye on Polish-Catholic associations, which they feared might support the highly Catholic Center Party (*Zentrum*). It was only in 1909 that the Ministry of the Interior voted to implement the proposal, first made twenty years before, to set up a central office in Bochum for the surveillance of "Poles."⁶² This shift partly resulted from the Ministry's failed attempt to establish a central office for the political police to surveil the social-democratic and anarchist movements in Bochum's industrial district, a project that had broken down in the face of resistance by the Westphalian district governors (*Regierungspräsidenten*).⁶³

While the Westphalian authorities repeatedly warned of the "dangers" posed by the "Polish movement," they collaborated with state and municipal functionaries who had themselves recently moved to the Ruhr region. Despite having a special status, these men had a similar migration background to those stereotyped as "Poles." Inspector Goehrke and the town clerk Rost were originally from Posen, which is why they spoke both Polish and German. Von Studt was born in Lower Silesia, and before becoming the Westphalian governor had worked for several years as administrator of the Posen district of Obernik and then in the Ministry for the "Imperial Territory" of Alsace-Lorraine.⁶⁴ Although recent studies on cultural

59. Kleßmann, *Polnische Bergarbeiter*, 86.

60. Ralph Jessen, *Polizei im Industrieviertel: Modernisierung und Herrschaftspraxis im westfälischen Ruhrgebiet 1848–1914* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991). For a classification of this development in relation to other countries, see Eric A. Johnson, *Urbanization and Crime: Germany, 1871–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

61. Berlin, GStA PK, I. HA Rep. 77 Ministerium des Innern, Tit. 870, no. 38, "Letter from the Ministry of the Interior," December 1, 1906.

62. Berlin, GStA PK, I. HA Rep. 77 Ministerium des Innern, Tit. 871, no. 109, "Letter from the Ministry of the Interior," July 13, 1909 (concerning the decree of March 26, 1909).

63. Berlin, GStA PK, I. HA Rep. 77 Ministerium des Innern, Tit. 871, no. 109, "Letter from the Ministry of the Interior," July 13, 1909 (concerning the decree of March 26, 1909). See also Jessen, *Polizei im Industrieviertel*, 154.

64. Rost is mentioned for the first time as town clerk in Dortmund's directory in 1880: Otto Jaehrke, ed., *Dortmunder Wohnungs- und Geschäftsanzeiger für das Jahr 1880* (Dortmund, 1880). See also Münster, LAW, Regierung Arnsberg, no. 14044, "Letter from the mayor [*Oberbürgermeister*] of Dortmund," July 12, 1889. On Rost's origins, see Poznań, Archiwum Państwowe w Poznaniu (hereafter "APP"), no. 2724, "Letter from the mayor of Dortmund to the police president of Posen," February 20, 1898. On Goehrke, see Kleßmann, *Polnische Bergarbeiter*, 86. On von Studt, see Landschaftsverband

conflict and misunderstanding have shown that this situation was not at all unusual,⁶⁵ it is important to note that these intermediaries contributed to the establishment of distinctions between “Germans,” “Masurians,” and “Poles”—and in so doing represented themselves as “Germans” or “Masurians.” Yet their concerns and degree of engagement differed. In his spare time, Goehrke participated in a committee of the German Eastern Marches Society dedicated to agitating among the “Masurians,” considered to be Protestant and conservative and thus a suitable target for German nationalist ideas.⁶⁶ The society’s correspondence with “Masurian” representatives, however, reveals that the latter hoped collaborating with German nationalists would bring them financial support. Otto Goroncy, a teacher who also acted as a representative of the “Masurians,” ended one letter with a request in broken German: “Seriously ill wife, ... four strong, healthy, thriving children, the many trips, purchases of publications, etc.—very, very difficult position. Thank you for your kind assistance to our association. But it is not enough.”⁶⁷ Such arrangements also indicate that the administrative differentiation between “Poles” and “Masurians” was based on personal relationships developed by particular officials with those who actively claimed to represent these emerging collectives.

As the “national” movements, whether “German” or “Polish,” grew, they fueled the newly introduced practices of observing and monitoring the “Poles.” Ultimately, the products of this surveillance are a crucial source for historians today: politically motivated recording practices in fact ensured the provision and spread of information about supposed problem groups, regardless of the convictions of those involved.

The Changing Significance of Moral Economies: Shaping the Social Relationships of Newcomers on a Local Scale

Even as the Westphalian authorities and others endeavored to draw dividing lines between “Germans,” “Masurians,” and “Poles,” such administrative distinctions often played only a minor role, if any, in the lives of mobile people.⁶⁸ The autobiographical texts, primarily written by male authors, offer insights into how individuals remembered their arrival in the Ruhr region and how they represented

Westfalen-Lippe, “Konrad von Studt,” on the website *Westfälische Geschichte*, <http://www.westfaelische-geschichte.de/per245>.

65. Pierre-Yves Saunier, *Transnational History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), particularly chap. 2.

66. Andreas Kossert, *Preußen, Deutsche oder Polen? Die Masuren im Spannungsfeld des ethnischen Nationalismus 1870–1956* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2001).

67. Berlin, GStA PK, I. HA Rep. 195 Deutscher Ostmarkenverein, no. 4, “Letter to the board of the German Eastern Marches Society in Berlin,” January 9, 1909.

68. A vanishingly small fraction of those who only spoke Polish—less than 10 percent—belonged to Polish-speaking associations. On the Polish language, see Witold Matwiejczyk, ed., *Katolickie towarzystwa robotników polskich w Zagłębiu Ruhry 1871–1894* (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 1999), table 2, 892–94.

themselves and others. Certainly, these ego-documents are not representative, and both the contexts in which they were produced and the cultural norms that inform them should be taken into account. However, they are the only sources that give a perspective, beyond the confines of state documents, on the range of perceptions and norms that mobile actors themselves, and specifically mobile men, held to be relevant. Seen from this angle, social life in the Ruhr region had more to do with conviviality, the affirmation of masculinity, family duties, and material needs than with “national” consciousness. The newcomers’ self-representations thus differed only partially from the life stories of other workers.⁶⁹ Building on ongoing efforts to revisit the concept of moral economy—understood here in its etymological sense of *oikonomia*, referring to the “management” of a household’s property and its members’ emotions⁷⁰—I will show that the economic unit of the family had a different and in some respects specific meaning for mobile individuals depending on the significance they afforded to other persons and groups.

The authors of the memoirs assessed their neighborly contacts in the Ruhr region in different ways. Their texts consistently mention social contacts outside their immediate family or communities from their own region of origin. Single men often moved into households as lodgers, paying for a place to sleep and sometimes to dine with the family.⁷¹ In the Ruhr region, almost one family in two took in such temporary boarders, compared with between a fifth and a third of households in larger cities such as Berlin, Breslau, Budapest, and Vienna.⁷² Even families who did not rent out accommodation frequently came into contact with newcomers as well as locals. For example, Moritz Grän, who was born in Bochum to parents from Lower Silesia and Pomerania, reported that his neighborhood was inhabited by people from Bochum, Lippe, and Berlin, German- and Polish-speaking Silesians, East Prussians, and individuals recently returned from Brazil.⁷³ Yet the autobiographical accounts also reveal very different concepts of privacy and the openness of families. Grän stated that although women tended to help each other, their interactions stopped at the garden fence—a kind of symbolic boundary between

69. On the debates about “mobile” and other “relational lives,” see Nils Riecken, “Relational Lives: Historical Subjectivities in Global Perspective,” introduction to “Relational Lives,” special issue, *Geschichte & Gesellschaft* 45, no. 3 (2019): 325–40. See also Friedrichs and Severin-Barboutie, “Mobilities, Categorizations, and Belonging.”

70. Didier Fassin, “Les économies morales revisitées,” in *Annales HSS* 64, no. 6 (2009): 1237–66.

71. Franz Josef Brüggemeier and Lutz Niethammer, “Schlafgänger, Schnapskasinos und schwerindustrielle Kolonie. Aspekte der Arbeiterwohnungsfrage im Ruhrgebiet vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg,” in *Fabrik – Familie – Feierabend: Beiträge zur Sozialgeschichte des Alltags im Industriezeitalter*, ed. Jürgen Reulecke and Wolhard Weber (Wuppertal: Hammer, 1978), 135–75. See also Lynn Abrams, *Workers’ Culture in Imperial Germany: Leisure and Recreation in the Rhineland and Westphalia* (London: Routledge, 1992; repr. 2002), 79.

72. On the spread of this phenomenon in Europe, see Friedrich Lenger, *European Cities in the Modern Era, 1850–1914* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 107 ff.

73. Moritz Grän, *Erinnerungen aus einer Bergarbeiterkolonie im Ruhrgebiet* (Münster: F. Coppelrath, 1983), 1–9.

family and neighbors—because of fears born of social envy. In contrast, Stanisław Drygas reported that his father was often visited by colleagues: “Germans and Poles. There was no antagonism between the two. Their common work brought them together.”⁷⁴ Drygas thus considered solidarity among workers more important than a common geographical origin, which he related to shared cultural practices rather than birth. He distinguished “Italians” from “German” and “Polish” visitors because of their different drinking habits: they preferred wine over beer and discussed the preparation of a “strange” drink, mulled wine with cloves.

Such social relationships did not always begin in the Ruhr region, but could be built on previous contacts in different places. The autobiographical accounts reveal that some newcomers already had contacts in the region before their arrival, and that these could extend beyond an individual’s circle of relatives and sometimes even beyond their own friends and acquaintances. On arriving in Gelsenkirchen, for example, the Silesian Georg Werner moved in with a family from Posen on the recommendation of a Silesian colleague’s brother. The importance he ascribed to his host family is revealed by his remark that he tried to learn Polish, though with little success: “I wasn’t even able to use Low German words, much less Polish ones.”⁷⁵ It would therefore be misleading to apply the concept of chain migration, suggesting that these movements led to ethnic enclaves.⁷⁶ Others did not come directly from their region of origin to the Ruhr Valley, and had established contacts at previous places of work. A man born near the city of Posen, for instance, recounted that he decided to travel to the Ruhr region and work in a mine after receiving a letter from a Westphalian colleague he had met during his military service in Alsace-Lorraine.⁷⁷ This diversity of situations makes it difficult to generalize: other newcomers knew nobody in the Ruhr region before their arrival.

Although these neighborhood relationships often did not last, they were of fundamental importance to male self-perception and social recognition. Analysis of the memoirs reveals that the social function of such contacts corresponded to Johan Huizinga’s concept of “play,” used to describe various human activities not connected to material interests.⁷⁸ Reminiscing about their lives, the authors often depicted their neighborhood relationships as relatively free, experimental, and existing outside economic necessities. Such evaluations also indicate that the writers constructed their life stories willfully (*eigensinnig*), in ways that were not always

74. Stanisław Drygas, *Czas zaprzeszy. Wspomnienia, 1890–1944* (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1970), 85.

75. Georg Werner, *Ein Kumpel. Erzählung aus dem Leben der Bergarbeiter* (Berlin: Die Knappschaft, 1929), 70.

76. Charles Tilly, “Migration in Modern European History,” in *Human Migration: Patterns and Policies*, ed. William H. McNeill and Ruth Adams (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), 48–72.

77. [Anonymous author], “Pamiętnik no. 1,” in *Pamiętniki chłopów: Serja druga*, ed. Instytut Gospodarstwa Społecznego (Warsaw: Instytut Gospodarstwa Społecznego, 1936), 1–29, here p. 12.

78. Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (London: Routledge, 1949).

informed by the norms of their family or their surroundings.⁷⁹ This is particularly clear in their accounts of “free love” (*miłość odluzowaną*), preferably with married women. In this context, it was important to affirm one’s masculinity by highlighting a certain sexual experience, while also foregrounding actions that demonstrated one’s Christian principles. Accounts of such pre- or extramarital relationships regularly attribute the initiation of affairs to the women involved, while the men present themselves as innocent and moral, yet coveted by the opposite sex.⁸⁰ This also shows that the male authors of the memoirs could discuss socially stigmatized behaviors by referring to Christian notions of human and particularly female sin rooted in the biblical story of the expulsion from paradise.

Though many of these men shared similar ideas about gender roles, their evaluation of such sexual relationships differed. Even Catholic-oriented narratives were sometimes based on disparate moral codes. Jakub Wojciechowski, for instance, reported that one day, when he was unable to go to work due to a worm infection, his landlady suggested that he pay her to meet his sexual needs instead of visiting prostitutes.⁸¹ She dismissed his objections—the possibility of getting caught, the breaking of the sixth and ninth commandments—so effectively that in the end he was unable to refuse. Wojciechowski relativized such violations of religious rules by invoking both his emotions and the idea of an exceptional situation caused by a “fever” (*gorączki*) and the “power” (*moc*) of nature. He also suggested that this affair in no way harmed his landlady’s marriage. Ultimately, they made love multiple times, including with her husband. In foregrounding shared human passions, this account by a mobile, Catholic worker differs from late nineteenth-century socialist autobiographies, which more strongly expressed their protagonists’ class consciousness in the living out and restriction of their sexuality.⁸²

Not all Catholic newcomers agreed that such non-marital relationships were beneficial. Another author associated a similar situation with injustice and long-term damage to his prospects, tracing his eighteen-month spell in prison back to his refusal to begin a sexual relationship with his landlady, who was also the wife of his friend.⁸³ According to his memoir, after resisting her attempts at seduction he returned from a night shift to find twelve men in the hallway, blocking his way to his room. Sensing a threat, he felt justified in “defending” himself with a small knife during the fight that ensued. The next day, half of the men went to the police or a doctor, which earned him a conviction for assault. By drawing on the topos of female guilt and describing the escalation of the conflict as an act of

79. On the concept of *Eigensinn*, see Alf Lüdtke, *Eigen-Sinn: Fabrikalltag, Arbeitererfahrungen und Politik vom Kaiserreich bis in den Faschismus* (1993; 2nd ed., Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2015).

80. Jakub Wojciechowski, *Życiorys własny robotnika*, 2 vols. (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 1971), 316 ff. See also [anonymous author], “Pamiętnik no. 4,” in *Pamiętniki emigrantów. Francja Nr. 1–37*, ed. Instytut Gospodarstwa Społecznego (Warsaw: Instytut Gospodarstwa Społecznego, 1939), 48–54, here pp. 51–52.

81. Wojciechowski, *Życiorys własny robotnika*, 316.

82. Maynes, *Taking the Hard Road*, 129–51.

83. [Anonymous author], “Pamiętnik no. 4,” 51.

“vengeance”—without ever discussing the motivations of the men involved or his own part in events—the protagonist emphasized that it was, above all, the cohesion among men that was at risk.

It is difficult to estimate how common such affairs were. Although premarital sexuality was still a common way of initiating marriage in some rural regions,⁸⁴ temporary affairs involving married men and women were certainly not accepted practice in nineteenth-century Posen, West Prussia, or Westphalia. For the authors of the memoirs, this topic served to thematize their new position as men in the Ruhr region and to reflect on the consequences of their actions, an evaluation that generally depended on their own convictions. None of the autobiographical texts imply that such relationships developed into permanent partnerships or marriages, even when the sexual contact took place between unmarried individuals. On the other hand, there is much to suggest that such affairs had particular social relevance in the region. They were not only a recurring theme in the memoirs, but were also recorded in the files of the Westphalian and Prussian authorities, where they were usually assessed as a “danger” to public order.⁸⁵ The official records evidently emphasized only one dimension of these affairs—the transgression of marriage-bound sexuality—and omitted their other social functions, such as the confirmation of Christian gender roles or the respite they offered from the demands of economic life.

In contrast to these often temporary, emotionally charged, and less binding neighborhood relationships, social boundaries were generally affirmed more rigidly when it came to choosing a marriage partner. Although love letters seem to speak a different language, at least in individual cases,⁸⁶ expressions of affection or intimacy play little part in the memoirists’ descriptions of their wives. If they are mentioned at all, it is usually to list between two and five pieces of information: age, regional origin, father’s occupation, father’s landholdings, and sometimes shared norms and qualities relevant to housekeeping, such as tidiness or industriousness. References to personal qualities are rare.⁸⁷ Overall, on the subject of marriage these texts resemble the autobiographies of less mobile workers in Germany and France, except that as well as the usual criteria of property and status they also mention regional origin.⁸⁸ One reason for this difference is evidently that almost all of the mobile memoir writers married women from their home region.⁸⁹ However,

84. Susanna Burghartz, “Jungfräulichkeit oder Reinheit? Zur Änderung von Argumentationsmustern vor dem Basler Ehegericht im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert,” in *Dynamik der Tradition*, ed. Richard van Dülmen (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1992), 13–40.

85. See, for example, Berlin, GStA PK, I. HA Rep. 120, BB VII 1 no. 19, vol. 2, “Measures to resolve problems raised by the system of boarding and lodging,” 1877–1891.

86. See, for instance, Sonja Janositz, “Entwurf eines gemeinsamen Lebens: Die Briefe der irischen Migrantin Annie O’ Donnell,” *L’Homme* 25, no. 1 (2014): 69–84.

87. See Instytut Gospodarstwa Społecznego, *Pamiętniki emigrantów. Francja, Nr. 1–37*.

88. Maynes, *Taking the Hard Road*, 139.

89. Exceptions include Grän, *Erinnerungen*, and Tomaz Olszański, *Życie tulaczce* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1957). With regard to his grandmother’s marriage, see also Heinrich W. Seidel, *Lebenserinnerungen* (Munich: Books on Demand, 2002).

common origin was not always the only or even the most important factor in the choice of a partner, as the account of the aforementioned Silesian Georg Werner illustrates. Although he did note that his fiancé was the daughter of a Silesian colleague who laid dynamite, Werner placed more emphasis on the socioeconomic aspects of the match, including the comportment of his future mother-in-law. He considered that being married would offer general advantages, observing that his married colleagues received larger lodgings and free firewood, and were better served when they came home late. When he recalled his first encounter with his future spouse, it was her mother he described in detail: “She was industrious and dutiful, reputable and straight thinking, and sympathetic to the workers’ concerns. She had a pleasant appearance, could cook very well, and the apartment was sparkling clean. In this house was a daughter of seventeen years.”⁹⁰

In other cases, too, the social role and status of a marriage partner seem to have been more important than common origin or religious denomination. Civil registration records from districts like Mengede (near Dortmund) illustrate this clearly. Although these records do not provide information about motivations for marriage, they do attest to the social practice of legitimizing ties at the civil registry office and thereby making them potentially permanent. They can thus expand our knowledge of marriage among those who moved to the Ruhr region and help place behaviors depicted in the autobiographical texts in a broader context. Given that it was mainly men who wrote memoirs, submitted them to competitions, and had them published, these official documents offer some insight into the marriage practices of both women and men. In contrast to the matches described in the memoirs, the civil records from Mengede show that men from Prussia’s eastern provinces often married women from Westphalia, and that in half of these cases the wives came from mining families (see table 1). Between 1889 and 1900, these men were also more likely to ignore confessional differences than other bachelors.

Table 1. Number of marriages recorded in Mengede (Dortmund) with at least one partner from the eastern provinces of Prussia, 1889–1900

	1889–1891	1892–1994	1895–1897	1898–1900	Total
Bride only from the eastern provinces	3	2	8	11	24
Groom only from the eastern provinces	6	6	11	24	47
Both partners from the eastern provinces	1	6	4	24	35

Source: Dortmund, Stadtarchiv, “Marriage files, Mengede office,” 1889–1900.

90. Werner, *Ein Kumpel*, 112–13.

Close analysis of the Mengede records suggests that marriage behavior varied depending on familial situations. While they did not necessarily privilege men from their home region, the social status and origin of potential husbands were particularly important to women from the eastern provinces who lived with their parents in the Ruhr Valley. Especially striking is a group of miners' daughters who behaved in a relatively uniform way: living in Mengede or a neighboring village with their parents, they did not work and all married Westphalian miners.⁹¹ A comparison with the choices of other women from the eastern provinces suggests that this pattern was likely related to the presence of their parents and contacts established through their fathers. Others traveled alone to the Ruhr region, where they worked as maids, housekeepers, ironers, and seamstresses and married men involved in a broader range of occupations: if the majority still married miners, matches were also made with farmers, assistant signalmen, and master masons. Most of these men were born in Westphalia, but some were from Waldeck, Anhalt, Hesse-Nassau, and Lippe—and of course many were originally from the same regions as their wives.

These different behavioral patterns indicate that young women from the eastern provinces took advantage of specific possibilities to stabilize or improve their socioeconomic situation. Such opportunities arose partly because of their spatial mobility, partly because of different social settings and constraints. While Paul-André Rosental's research on nineteenth-century rural France demonstrated the correlation between marriage patterns and a family's degree of openness, the data collected for Mengede suggests that individuals' marital behavior was also related to the differing, quite contingent presence or absence of their parents.⁹² The daughters of miners who had moved to the Ruhr region benefited in particular from their father's income and contacts; they chose a spouse who corresponded to their family's new professional status. It is likely that the fathers themselves did not come from mining families, as with the exception of one Silesian the young women were not born in traditional mining areas. Marriage to a Westphalian miner thus offered a way to consolidate the family's position in Mengede or a neighboring town. Other women were more proactive about taking their lives into their own hands, as in about half of these cases either the father or both parents had already died. Some even traveled alone and from place to place like men, as was the case for one twenty-two-year-old maid who left her parents behind in Bielefeld.⁹³ Marriage announcements were sometimes posted at a place of transit: the ironer Anna Spedawski, who had left her widowed mother in her hometown of Gdansk, registered her marriage in Berlin.⁹⁴

91. See Dortmund, Stadtarchiv, "Marriage files, Mengede office," 1889–1900.

92. Paul-André Rosental, *Les sentiers invisibles. Espace, famille et migration dans la France du XIX^e siècle* (Paris: Éd. de l'EHESS, 1999).

93. Dortmund, Stadtarchiv, "Marriage files, Mengede office," banns for the marriage between Georg Friedrich Hüppe and Amalie Kullack, October 8, 1899.

94. Dortmund, Stadtarchiv, "Marriage files, Mengede office," banns for the marriage between Karl August Meier and Anna Maria Hedwig Spedawski, June 13, 1899.

Taken together, the autobiographical texts and the marriage records of men and women who moved to the Ruhr Valley reflect the multiple ways such newcomers established and consolidated their new social and economic relationships. For historians, these sources reveal how the shifts in relationships caused by spatial mobility impacted individuals' life stories and their practices of self-representation.

The Same but Different: Scales of Belonging

Despite the importance of socioeconomic factors, it would be misleading to claim that the politically motivated distinction between “Poles” and “Germans” had no impact on life in the Ruhr region. The circulation of stereotypical ideas about “Poles” conditioned changes in workers' rights, as obtaining a job or advancing professionally in the Ruhr mining industry became officially dependent on German language skills. In 1898, the Prussian Ministry of Commerce and Industry instructed the highest mining authority in Dortmund, the Central Mining Office, to draft regulations on employment and language in the mines, based solely on the assumption that “immigrants” lacked a functional knowledge of German, and that this endangered the lives and health of workers in the mining industry as a whole.⁹⁵ The new police ordinance of 1899, which applied only to the Ruhr coalfields,⁹⁶ required all miners to have spoken German and made German reading skills mandatory for those in specialized positions such as signalmen.⁹⁷ This meant that Polish and German were no longer equal languages underground.

However, the new legislation does not seem to have had radical consequences. Arrivals from Prussia's eastern provinces had usually learned German at school, but Lithuanian, Polish, and Italian speakers with little or no German were also hired by the mining companies. The staff list of the Kurl colliery near Dortmund for 1911 includes a number of unskilled workers with no German (as well as a few specialized ones, such as a boilerman or *Kesselschürer*), and even several “Polish foreigners,” though it had not been permitted to employ “foreigners” (*Ausländer*) in Prussian industry since 1885.⁹⁸ It is difficult to assess whether men who spoke a different language were deprived of certain positions, as the staff lists tend to provide only partial information about the careers of those who moved on. The Kurl

95. Münster, LAW, OP Münster no. 2835, vol. 2, “Letter from the Ministry of Commerce to the governor of Westphalia and the central mining office [*Oberbergamt*],” March 10, 1898.

96. There were no similar regulations for other mining districts; see Ministerium für Handel und Gewerbe, ed., *Zeitschrift für das Berg-, Hütten- und Salinenwesen im preussischen Staate* (Berlin: Ernst 1880–1913).

97. Kleßmann, *Polnische Bergarbeiter*, 63.

98. The list includes, for instance, an entry on a Russian called Wischnewetzki, who did not speak German; the entries for several other workers state that they only spoke broken German. Between October 1 and 9, 1908, the company also employed a native Polish speaker from Austria-Hungary called Wojcik: Dortmund, Westfälisches Wirtschaftsarchiv, “List of employees at the Kurl colliery,” undated [1911].

colliery list shows that at least some experienced hewers (*Hauer*) and boiler heaters (*Kesselheizer*), already in their thirties when they left Italy and Russia, obtained a well-paid position right from the start. Others who arrived between the ages of sixteen and twenty-two worked their way up from barrow man (*Schlepper*) to apprentice hewer and hewer.

The police ordinance of 1899 does not, therefore, seem to have profoundly affected local language practices in the mines. Indeed, multilingual communication remained common. Some of the memoir authors recalled that they understood little or no German, at least at first.⁹⁹ Writing in 1958, the Silesian miner Antoni Podeszwy reported that although he had German lessons at school, he only properly learned the language when he moved to Bottrop in 1899, while his two older brothers picked it up in Westphalia and on military service.¹⁰⁰ Podeszwy's account shows that it was considered common to work with others regardless of origin or language. At his colliery, "about 2/3 to 3/4 [of the staff were] Poles (from Silesia, Masuria, Warmia, Pomerania, Posen, and other Prussian regions), also Galicians and Poles from Congress Poland," who worked together with Italians, Dutchmen, Belgians, and a "few native Germans," with whom he got on well.¹⁰¹ By distinguishing the "Poles" according to their origins in different parts of Prussia, Podeszwy echoed the attitude, common in the late nineteenth century, that being Prussian and being Polish were not incompatible.¹⁰² The importance of Polish as a language of communication in the mines is evident from the fact that in 1898 the editors of the newspaper *Wiarus polski* campaigned to have safety regulations systematically posted in Polish, as did the two main trade unions active in the Ruhr area—the Christian Miners' Union (*Gewerkverein christlicher Bergarbeiter*) and the Old Association (*Alte Verband*).¹⁰³ Their efforts were in vain, however. Although the practice was common in Silesia, the Westphalian mining authorities resisted such a policy, citing the translation work and other costs involved.

Representatives of influential organizations used the presence of the "Poles" as a specific group identifiable by their language to advocate for political changes and to expand their own influence. However, as historian John Kulczycki has observed, the two trade unions and the *Wiarus polski* had very different approaches to representing the "Poles" among the workers.¹⁰⁴ In anticipation of the 1899 language regulation, the chair of the Christian Miners' Union proclaimed that all non-German

99. Poznań, Archive of the Instytut Zachodni (hereafter "IZP"), II 332, "Life stories of young Masurians," 1947. Also published in a slightly different version as *Karol Pentowski Pamiętnik Mazurza*, ed. Janusz Jasinski (Olsztyn: Stowarzyszenie Społeczno-Kulturalne, 1959), 19.

100. Franciszek Połomski, "Ze wspomnień starego 'Westfaloka' – A. Podeszwy," *Studia Śląskie* 1 (1958): 253–64, here pp. 256–57.

101. *Ibid.*, 258.

102. On the evolution of this position over the twentieth century and its effects, see Peter Oliver Loew, *Wir Unsichtbaren. Geschichte der Polen in Deutschland* (Munich: Beck, 2014).

103. John J. Kulczycki, *The Foreign Worker and the German Labor Movement: Xenophobia and Solidarity in the Coal Fields of the Ruhr, 1871–1914* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1994), 90.

104. *Ibid.*, 160.

workers should be excluded from positions of responsibility, which were better paid. Such pronouncements did not necessarily mean that the unions ignored or harbored hostility toward Polish-speaking workers: in 1898 the socialist-leaning Old Association began publishing a Polish-language newspaper called the *Górnik* (Miner).¹⁰⁵ Rather, this statement points to the public competition between the trade unions themselves, which was so heated that the Christian Miners' Union began to use nationalized arguments to attract attention. In November 1902, the editors of the *Wiarus polski* convened a meeting to establish the Polish Professional Union (*Zjednoczenie Zawodowe Polskie*, or ZZP) and thus increase their leverage among Polish-speaking workers.

Who got to represent the Polish-speaking workers in the Ruhr area was not only controversial among the trade unions. In addition to the much-discussed overlapping network of associations, numerous Polish-language newspapers emerged in the region.¹⁰⁶ Although several referenced the struggles for greater autonomy taking place in the east, they did not consistently make the idea of a Polish nation their primary cause. This is at odds with Benedict Anderson's thesis that newspapers contributed to the invention of the nation and the spread of nationalism.¹⁰⁷ In the first place, editors of Polish-language newspapers differed as to whether the Catholic community or the Polish "nation" was more important. The *Wiarus polski*, for instance, was initially a predominantly Catholic publication, until Jan and Anton Brejski gave it a radical "national-Polish" thrust.¹⁰⁸ The *Przewodnik na obczyźnie* (Guide in a Foreign Country), printed in Herne between 1903 and 1904, took a different tack: envisioned by its editor as a counterweight to the *Wiarus polski*, the journal promoted collaboration with the highly Catholic political party *Zentrum*. From the 1890s onwards, newspapers appeared that were specifically aimed at the "Masurians," considered to be largely Protestant and therefore separate from other Polish-speaking workers. Published in Polish, German, or a bilingual format, these papers included the *Przyjaciel Ewangeliczny: Gazeta polska dla ludu staropruskiego w Westfalii i na Mazurach* (Evangelical Friend: Polish Gazette for People from Old Prussia in Westphalia and Masuria), the *Przyjaciel robotniczy* (Worker's Friend), and the *Altpreußische Zeitung* (Old Prussian Newspaper). As Andreas Kossert has

105. Christoph Kleßmann, "Polnische Bergarbeiter im Ruhrgebiet. Soziale Lage und gewerkschaftliche Organisation," in *Glück auf, Kameraden! Die Bergarbeiter und ihre Organisationen in Deutschland*, ed. Hans Mommsen and Ulrich Bonsdorf (Cologne: Bund, 1979), 109–30, here p. 119.

106. Sylvia Haida, "Die Ruhrpolen – Nationale und konfessionelle Identität im Bewusstsein und im Alltag 1871–1918" (PhD diss., University of Bonn, 2012), 139–93 and 357–59; Andrzej Paczkowski, *Prasa polonijna w latach 1870–1939. Zarys problematyki* (Warsaw: Biblioteka Narodowa, 1977); Andrzej Notkowski, "Polska prasa prowincjonalna doby powstaniowej (1865–1918). Jej funkcje społeczne i 'geografia' wydawnicza," in *Inteligencja polska XIX i XX wieku. Studia*, vol. 6, ed. Ryszarda Czepulis-Rastenis (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1991), 185–228.

107. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

108. On the *Wiarus polski*, see Haida, "Die Ruhrpolen," 150–61, and Kleßmann, "Der 'Wiarus Polski'."

emphasized, these titles were founded or at least supported by the Protestant Church, which proactively sought to counteract national-democratic and “sectarian” influences on its members moving to the Ruhr area.¹⁰⁹

Reference to large, impersonal collectives such as the “Poles” could lend weight to various political claims, but it also had downsides, especially for individuals. The effects of such categorizations on mobile workers can be reconstructed from their autobiographical texts. According to these accounts, those who could be classed as “Poles” because of their accent, name, or place of birth were occasionally vulnerable to violence in the workplace, even if they did not consider themselves as belonging to that category. Some authors recall experiencing discrimination as “Poles” in particular mines and companies—incidentally suggesting that such unequal treatment was not necessarily systematic. In his 1947 memoir, Karol Pentowski, an auxiliary laborer (*Hilfsbursche*) who identified as a Masurian and believed he spoke German like a native,¹¹⁰ recounts that during his time at a glassworks (probably the *Vestische Glashütte*), two “bad Germans” called him “Pole” and “Polish pig.” A week after they had thrust a heavy table against his stomach and forced him to sweep up shards without a brush, he fell seriously ill. That he did not perceive his surroundings to be entirely hostile, however, is clear from his comments about the unsolicited help he received from the company doctor (*Betriebsarzt*). Although he had not wanted to mention his “painful work,” the doctor recommended that Pentowski be given easier tasks, meaning he could move to another department of the glassworks. No further assaults are mentioned during his time there, nor after his move to the Alfred Krupp factory. Other reports also suggest that violence explicitly aimed at “Poles” was relatively uncommon.¹¹¹ Although newcomers occasionally recall alcohol-fueled fights in their memoirs, they did not thematize violence directed against them as non-Germans in contexts outside work. Similarly, complaints to the administration responsible for the “Deutsches Reich” workers’ housing in Bochum concerned issues such as nocturnal disturbances, unhygienic conditions linked to animals, or the rental of rooms to more boarders than officially permitted, without any obvious connection to the origin of those involved.¹¹²

It is likely that the violent incidents against individual “Poles” were related to the social pressure to perform and compete in the workplace, where the police ordinance of 1899 bolstered the idea that Polish speakers could be treated as inferior. Apart from conflicts with superiors, new workers in the mines experienced tensions because of competition for positions and the possibility that established workers would receive lower wages due to the newcomers’ lower performance. Underground, miners worked in small, hierarchically structured teams. These teams were paid collectively based on the performance of the entire group (*Gedinge*), with this sum

109. Kossert, *Preußen, Deutsche oder Polen?* 99–100.

110. Poznań, IZP, no. II 332, “Life stories of young Masurians,” 1947.

111. See Wojciechowski, *Życiorys własny robotnika*, 320.

112. Bochum, Bergbau-Archiv, 45/212: “Neighbor complaints (1904–1916),” 1904–1916.

being split according to each worker's position.¹¹³ An episode recounted in 1929 by the German-speaking Silesian Werner illustrates such conflicts.¹¹⁴ At Werner's request, the mine's chief hewer had grouped him with two Masurian brothers, one of whom was placed above him as the head of the team (*Ortsältester*). The younger brother had hoped to become an apprentice hewer, but Werner was given this post instead. According to his memoir, the two brothers initially disliked him because of his foul language, and attempted to goad him by shouting "dalli dalli." Here Werner uses a Germanized form of a Polish word (*dalej*, meaning "further") to distinguish the language used by his colleagues from his own. But in recalling the end of the episode, he suggests that material concerns were more important in the long run than family ties or different habits, at least for those who were intelligent and successful. The younger brother resigned, while the older brother was very satisfied with Werner's work "because it brought in money."¹¹⁵

Against this background, political economists and other social reformers developed broader reflections on workers' conditions, introducing the issue into international debates. Before sociological societies began to be founded around 1900 in Baltimore, Berlin, and elsewhere, and before the gradual establishment of sociology as a discipline at certain universities, economists and political scientists argued alongside church representatives and administrative officials about the effects of industrialization on working people and the state's ability to govern and control these processes.¹¹⁶ These debates extended beyond state borders. During the Paris Universal Exposition of 1900, for example, scholars and officials from countries including Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the United States founded the International Association for Labor Legislation (*Association internationale pour la protection légale des travailleurs*), building on previous conferences held in Berlin, Brussels, and Zurich.¹¹⁷ Unlike the Second International, established by Marxist-inspired socialists in Paris in 1889, this association aimed to participate in policy-making through the shared expertise of its members and the exchange of ideas about labor regulation.¹¹⁸ In addition to

113. Klaus Tenfelde, *Sozialgeschichte der Bergarbeiterschaft an der Ruhr im 19. Jahrhundert* (Bonn: Verlag Neue Gesellschaft, 1977).

114. Werner, *Ein Kumpel*, 75–76.

115. *Ibid.*, 76.

116. On the Verein für Socialpolitik (an association founded by political economists and other social reformers in 1872 to counter the liberalism that had dominated economic sciences in the 1860s), see Irmela Gorges, *Sozialforschung in Deutschland 1872–1914. Gesellschaftliche Einflüsse auf Themen- und Methodenwahl des Vereins für Socialpolitik* (Königstein: Anton Hain, 1980).

117. Sandrine Kott, "From Transnational Reformist Network to International Organization: The International Association for Labour Legislation and the International Labour Organization, 1900–1930," in *Shaping the Transnational Sphere: Experts, Networks and Issues from the 1840s to the 1930s*, ed. Davide Rodogno, Bernhard Struck, and Jakob Vogel (New York: Berghahn, 2015), 239–59.

118. See Jasmien Van Daele, "Engineering Social Peace: Networks, Ideas, and the Founding of the International Labour Organization," *International Review of Social History* 50, no. 3 (2005): 435–66, here pp. 444–45.

numerous scholars (67 of the 188 members of the patrons' committee), the association brought together employers and workers primarily from the social-Christian and social-liberal movements—and, in the case of the British section, involved several women, including its founder Gertrude Tuckwell, honorary secretary of the Women's Trade Union League.¹¹⁹

Despite cross-border exchanges and collaboration with government officials, social reformers did not universally succeed in fostering new legal regulations and administrative practices for protecting mobile workers. As Rosental has shown, at the end of the nineteenth century social reformers in many European countries pushed for bilateral treaties and international conventions that would guarantee mobile workers similar social rights to citizens of the countries where they were employed.¹²⁰ This in turn raised the question of whether state sovereignty offered reliable protection for mobile people from the lower classes. As early as 1904, Italy and France signed a treaty that went beyond the international principle of reciprocity to grant Italian workers in France similar social rights to French citizens, in return for certain changes to Italian labor law. However, such legal changes to protect mobile workers remained rare.¹²¹ In the Ruhr region, as in other economic zones with increased rates of mobility, state authorities instead sought to restrict the rights of "foreign" workers. In the US-controlled Panama Canal Zone, for instance, a regulation passed by Theodore Roosevelt's administration in 1908 stipulated that US citizens were to be paid higher wages than all other migrant groups (as well as Panamanians).¹²² The canal's chief engineer further narrowed access to better-paid positions by stipulating that those US citizens had to be white.¹²³ In comparison to the regulations instated in the Panama Canal Zone, then, Prussia's 1899 police ordinance set relatively permeable boundaries among workers, based on the bourgeois principle of merit (*Leistung*) rather than birth.¹²⁴

It is difficult to draw direct parallels between working conditions in Prussia and the situation in colonies such as German Southwest Africa (Namibia), as proponents of critical colonial historiography have recently sought to do.¹²⁵ In fact, such a

119. For the larger context, see Rosemary Feuer, "The Meaning of 'Sisterhood': The British Women's Movement and Protective Labor Legislation, 1870–1900," *Victorian Studies* 31, no. 2 (1988): 233–60.

120. See Paul-André Rosental, "Migrations, souveraineté, droits sociaux. Protéger et expulser les étrangers en Europe du XIX^e siècle à nos jours," *Annales HSS* 66, no. 2 (2011): 335–73.

121. The impact of the Treaty of Gotha of 1851 is highly controversial in migration research. See, for example, Michael Schubert, "The Creation of Illegal Migration in the German Confederation, 1815–1866," *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 34, no. 4 (2019): 527–45.

122. Julie Green, *The Canal Builders: Making America's Empire at the Panama Canal* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), 66.

123. *Ibid.*, 66–67.

124. On different notions of merit, see Nina Verheyen, *Die Erfindung der Leistung* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2018).

125. The links between colonialism and National Socialism represent a vast and complex field of study. For an introduction, see Matthew P. Fitzpatrick, "The

comparison makes the specificities of the Ruhr region abundantly clear. In particular, since the 1899 police ordinance for its mining industry did not refer to physical characteristics such as skin color, it does not seem appropriate, either in this case or in that of the 1907 act obliging Prussia's foreign workers to carry papers, to speak of a "racialization of labor."¹²⁶ Such an interpretation appears to be driven by the effort to confirm a historiographical narrative about continuities "from Windhoek to Auschwitz," rather than to precisely grasp similarities and differences in the management of "foreign" workers and in the evaluation of their "ethnicity."¹²⁷ It is precisely because ethnicity was and is not a natural attribute that it had to be attached to other social markers such as workers' citizenship (in the Panama Canal Zone), their mother tongue (in the Ruhr region), or their skin color (in German Southwest Africa). These criteria, in turn, were connected with different perceptions and different possibilities for change.

It cannot be denied, however, that Prussian language policy was far stricter than that of other states: in the Habsburg Empire, for instance, the regents pursued a kind of double strategy, seeking to strengthen German as an administrative language while also recognizing other languages in certain areas to secure the dynastic unity of the empire.¹²⁸ It is by comparing different contexts and paying close attention to the connections and transfers generated by human mobilities that historians can better grasp the multiple constructions of belonging and their scope.

Charting the Boundaries of Societies: Placing the Ruhr Valley circa 1900 in a Trans-European Perspective

Over the tumultuous first decades of the twentieth century, the interaction between these processes of differentiation and categorization at the local, state, and international levels changed profoundly, in ways that varied from region to region.

Pre-History of the Holocaust? The *Sonderweg* and *Historikerstreit* Debates and the Abject Colonial Past," *Central European History* 41 (2008): 477–503; Fitzpatrick, "Colonialism, Postcolonialism and Decolonization," in "Central European History at Fifty (1968–2018)," special issue, *Central European History* 51, no. 1 (2018): 83–89; Winson Chu, Jesse Kauffman, and Michael Meng, "A *Sonderweg* through Eastern Europe? The Varieties of German Rule in Poland during the Two World Wars," *German History* 31, no. 3 (2013): 318–44.

126. Dörte Lerp, *Imperiale Grenzräume. Bevölkerungspolitiken in Deutsch-Südwestafrika und den östlichen Provinzen Preußens 1884–1914* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2016).

127. Jürgen Zimmerer, *Von Windhuk nach Auschwitz? Beiträge zum Verhältnis von Kolonialismus und Holocaust* (Münster: Lit, 2011); Shelley Baranowski, *Nazi Empire: German Colonialism and Imperialism from Bismarck to Hitler* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). For a critique, see Robert Gerwarth and Stephan Malinowski, "Der Holocaust als 'kolonialer Genozid'? Europäische Kolonialgewalt und nationalsozialistischer Vernichtungskrieg," *Geschichte & Gesellschaft* 33, no. 3 (2007): 439–66.

128. Peter Haslinger, "Sprachenpolitik, Sprachendynamik und imperiale Herrschaft in der Habsburgermonarchie 1740–1914," *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung* 57 (2008): 81–111.

Building on studies of borderlands, the case of the Ruhr Valley shows that the new international regulations concerning the relationships between states and people influenced regional processes of differentiating individuals and groups who did not fit into the nation-state framework. Recent research on East Central Europe, as well as on Alsace and the Mediterranean, has demonstrated that the “national” reorganization of state borders in these regions contributed to fierce conflicts over the rights of so-called minorities and stateless persons, who in many places were subject to expulsions or forced to flee.¹²⁹ The problem of recategorizing people after the First World War, so apparent in Europe’s border regions, also affected other contact zones, including economic areas marked by a high degree of mobility such as the Ruhr Valley. The organized removal of approximately fifty thousand German-Polish workers and their families to northern France shows that it is not enough to characterize the twentieth century as an epoch of “ethnic” expulsions and flight movements. In this region at least, behind the seemingly homogeneous facade of the national, it was predominantly economic and religious criteria of difference that drove both newer and older forms of mobility.¹³⁰ In the context of the Ruhr’s occupation by Belgian and French troops, French and Polish representatives agreed on a legal-bureaucratic procedure in which laborers were selected by a private-sector recruitment agency before they could apply for Polish citizenship. This process was also shaped by French mining entrepreneurs and Polish trade unionists. Given that those who had once moved from Prussia’s eastern provinces to the Ruhr area were “ethnically” indistinguishable from other German citizens, the selection was based on other criteria and implicit stereotypes about working capacities: age and gender, as only men of legal working age were eligible¹³¹; willingness to join the Christian-democratic ZZP union; and health status, with checks by an officially appointed physician before workers applied for Polish papers. This procedure was quite different from the roughly parallel processes for determining nationality in

129. For an overview of East Central European research on border regions after the war, see Winston Chu, *The German Minority in Interwar Poland* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 4–11. On the period before 1918, see Brendan Karch, *Nation and Loyalty in a German-Polish Borderland: Upper Silesia, 1848–1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 10–16. For a focus on Alsace, see Alison Carrol, *The Return of Alsace to France, 1918–1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 5–13. For a *longue-durée* perspective on the history of empires, see Valérie Assan and Jakob Vogel, “Une histoire croisée des minorités en Méditerranée,” introduction to *Minorités en Méditerranée au XIX^e siècle. Identités, identifications, circulations*, ed. Valérie Assan, Bernard Heyberger, and Jakob Vogel (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2019), 9–21.

130. Anne Friedrichs, “Multiperspektivität als Schlüssel zur Kontingenz von Zugehörigkeit. Der Umzug von polnisch-deutschen Arbeitern und ihren Familien aus dem Ruhrgebiet nach Frankreich von 1922 bis 1925,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 313, no. 3 (2021): 645–85.

131. Even though women had worked in the mines of the Ruhr region during the First World War: Kai Rewe, “...wir werden sie schon zur Arbeit bringen!” *Ausländerbeschäftigung und Zwangsarbeit im Ruhrkohlenbergbau während des Ersten Weltkriegs* (Essen: Klartext, 2005), 64–68.

Bohemia and Moravia or Alsace, where a knowledge of the vernacular language or a pro-German attitude were decisive criteria.¹³²

Similar state-sponsored labor recruitment had already played a role in other contexts, including in occupied India after the British prohibition of the slave trade in the nineteenth century.¹³³ Recruitment practices in India, however, did not change the legal status of the workers concerned, regardless of whether they were sent to British or French plantation colonies in the Caribbean. In the French case, the Office for the Organization of Colonial Workers (*Service d'organisation des travailleurs coloniaux*) was founded in 1916 specifically to recruit workers, especially from North Africa, Indochina, Madagascar, and China.¹³⁴ Its organization and driving forces nevertheless differed considerably from those observed in the Ruhr region during the same period. Integrated into the French Ministry of War, the office and its work attracted considerable skepticism from trade union representatives and entrepreneurs.¹³⁵ In this context, France's recruitment of workers in the Ruhr Valley can also be seen as a way of limiting the influx of laborers from its empire and other regions with populations considered to be non-European, often due to their unfamiliar religious and social practices.

A comparison between the Ruhr region and the coalfields of northern France demonstrates the importance of a reflexive, multi-perspective, and multi-scale approach to migration history, especially for a period when the "nation" was becoming the central organizing principle of the relationship between people and states. Studies on the history of "Poles" in France have examined the arrival of miners from the Ruhr region, Poland, and elsewhere in Pas-de-Calais and Lorraine in the early 1920s, mainly from the perspective of the authorities and employers.¹³⁶ Recent research has shown, for example, that French mining companies worked with Polish consulates to support Polish-language clubs, neighborhoods, clergy,

132. Tara Zahra, "The Minority 'Problem' and National Classification in the French and Czechoslovak Borderlands," *Contemporary European History* 17, no. 2 (2008): 137–65.

133. Piet C. Emmer, "The Meek Hindu: The Recruitment of Indian Laborers for Service Overseas, 1870–1916," in *Colonialism and Migration: Indentured Labour before and after Slavery*, ed. Piet C. Emmer (Dordrecht: M. Nijhoff, 1986), 187–207; David Northrup, *Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism, 1834–1922* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

134. See, for example, Laurent Dornel, "L'appel à la main-d'œuvre étrangère et coloniale pendant la Grande Guerre. Un tournant dans l'histoire de l'immigration?" *Migrations Société* 156, no. 6 (2014): 51–67.

135. Gary S. Cross, *Immigrant Workers in Industrial France: The Making of a New Laboring Class* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), 35–98.

136. Czesław Kaczmarek, *L'émigration polonaise en France après la guerre* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1928); Janine Ponty, *Polonais méconnus. Histoire des travailleurs immigrés en France dans l'entre-deux-guerres* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1988); Philip D. Slaby, "Industry, the State, and Immigrant Poles in Industrial France, 1919–1939" (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 2005). On nineteenth-century migration from Italy, Belgium, and other countries, see the classic work by Gérard Noiriel, *Longwy. Immigrés et prolétaires (1880–1980)* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1984).

and Catholic institutions¹³⁷ in the hope of transforming mobile job-hoppers into settled workers with respect for a superior authority, whether God, their employer, or the Catholic Church. This promotion of economically desirable lifestyles under the guise of “ethnicity” influenced, though often unintentionally, the behavior of the Pas-de-Calais authorities, who perceived the “Poles” as a threat to republican order and subjected them to strict policing and harsh punishments such as expulsion without a hearing. However, this research itself often falls into the trap of categorization, emphasizing the significance of “ethnic” belonging in the newcomers’ lives without examining how those individuals represented themselves in relation to different groups and norms.¹³⁸ As a result, it has often overlooked their multilingual practices, multi-layered affiliations, and flexible ways of dealing with their diverse origins. The autobiographical texts written in this French context suggest that their authors were not always perceived by others as “Poles” or “Westphalians” (*Westfalczycy*), as they sometimes categorized themselves. Some remembered being called “Germans” and “picket helmets” (*Pickelhaube*, in reference to Prussian soldiers), or their mothers communicating with neighbors in German dialects.¹³⁹ Several memoir writers expressed solidarity with other “foreign workers”—or “white slaves,” as one termed them.¹⁴⁰ They also complained about not having the same rights as French miners to unemployment, disability benefits, and pensions.¹⁴¹ Not all of these workers remained in northern France permanently. Partly as a result of dismissals and expulsions, some moved on in the 1920s and 1930s to southern France, the southern Netherlands, or Poland, or returned illegally to the Ruhr Valley. Others took French citizenship.¹⁴² During the Second World War, those who did stay were often recognized as “ethnic Germans” (*Volksdeutsche*) by the occupying forces, depending on their commitment to the National Socialist regime.¹⁴³

The international disputes of the 1920s also affected the lives of individuals who remained in the Ruhr region and whose affiliation was doubly ambiguous due to their earlier movements and the new configuration of borders. At the end of the First World War, representatives of the triumphant powers and jurists enshrined categories such as “minorities” in international treaties and conventions (including

137. Philip H. Slaby, “Dissimilarity Breeds Contempt: Ethnic Paternalism, Foreigners, and the State in Pas-de-Calais Coalmining, France, 1920s,” *International Review of Social History* 60, no. 1 (2015): 227–51.

138. Only a few studies have examined the published compilations of autobiographical texts. See, for example, Ponty, *Polonais méconnus*, 60–68.

139. For example, AAN, TPP, no. 3985.

140. Instytut Gospodarstwa Społecznego, *Pamiętniki Emigrantów. Francja, Nr. 1–37*, especially nos. 4, 6, 7, and 34, and AAN, TPP, no. 7600.

141. AAN, TPP, no. 4186.

142. AAN, TPP, nos. 3945 and 3985.

143. For example, Berlin, Bundesarchiv, R69 and R186; Łódź, Archiwum Państwowe, Centrala Imigracyjna, no. 13. For the broader context, see Isabell Heinemann, *Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut. Das Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt der SS und die rassenpolitische Neuordnung Europas* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2003), 336 and 356.

the Geneva Convention of May 15, 1922), aimed, among other considerations, at protecting people who did not clearly belong to the new nation-states.¹⁴⁴ However, the application of international law to the defeated countries was highly controversial, including when it came to the population of the Ruhr region. The Council of the League of Nations ultimately rejected petitions citing violations against the “Polish minority,” submitted by the Union of Poles in Germany (*Związek Polaków w Niemczech*), on the grounds that the area was not under international supervision.¹⁴⁵ Those with ambiguous affiliations therefore had to rely on the protection of states such as Germany and Poland. When this failed to materialize, they often sought ways to mediate between external categorizations and pressure to present themselves as German, and their own self-image and norms. The autobiographical texts reveal that even decades later, memories of origin-related humiliation and violence, but also the particular possibilities afforded by their ambiguous status, continued to play a role for men and women born in the disputed Polish-German borderlands, as well as for their children. In Polish-language publications, they often obscured their German citizenship when justifying their involvement, or that of their sons, as German soldiers in the World Wars, though it was not always possible to avoid it completely.¹⁴⁶ While these memoirists did describe the origin-related constraints and degradation they suffered—including deportation to concentration camps—such events were integrated into narratives that tended overall to emphasize the achievements of their protagonists.

Only the most recent of these autobiographical publications foregrounds the multiple affiliations of the life it recounts. The exceptional nature of the “German-Jewish-Polish story of Leni Zytnicka” suggests that at no moment during the twentieth century were multiple spatial affiliations and religious conversions considered a model of success in any of the places in present-day France, Germany, and Poland connected by the movement of the “Ruhr Poles.”¹⁴⁷ Born in Essen in 1904 to parents who arrived from East Prussia at the turn of the century, Zytnicka’s national

144. For the impact that the Geneva Convention for Upper Silesia had on the protection of the Jewish population in this region after 1933, see Karch, *Nation and Loyalty in a German-Polish Borderland*, 186–217.

145. Berlin, *GstA PK, I. HA. Rep 77, Tit. 4032, no. 13*, “Petition of the League of Poles in Germany, Division I to the League of Nations Council in Geneva,” March 14, 1932. For the broader context, see Carole Fink, “Minority Rights as an International Question,” *Contemporary European History* 9, no. 3 (2000): 385–400. On the special regulations for Upper Silesia, see Christian Raitz von Frenzt, *A Lesson Forgotten: Minority Protection under the League of Nations; The Case of the German Minority in Poland, 1920–1934* (Münster, Lit, 1999), 116–26.

146. Stanisław Kubiak, *Wspomnienia. Pół wieku pracy społecznej wśród Polonii Westfalskiej* (Herne: Nakładem autora, 1980), 8.

147. See Heidi Behrens and Norbert Reichling, “*Ich war ein seltener Fall.*” *Die deutsch-jüdisch-polnische Geschichte der Leni Zytnicka* (Essen: Klartext, 2018). Contrast Wolfgang Emmerich, ed., *Proletarische Lebensläufe. Autobiographische Dokumente zur Entstehung der Zweiten Kultur in Deutschland*, 2 vols. (Reinbek: Rohwolt 1974–1975); Walter Köpping, ed., *Lebensberichte deutscher Bergarbeiter* (Frankfurt am Main: Büchergilde Gutenberg, 1984).

and religious affiliation changed when she married David Elimejlech Zytnicki, or “Peppi, the Count of Poland,” in 1926.¹⁴⁸ In discussions with her editors, she repeatedly stressed that she inwardly remained a member of a “normal Christian-secular family.”¹⁴⁹ This declaration is contextualized by the textual apparatus, where the editors invoke Zytnicka’s struggle between 1948 and 1979 to obtain “compensation” and “reparations” from the German state, as well as topics that she herself omitted from her memoir, from her divorce in May 1941 to her continued membership of Essen’s Jewish community until her death in 2007.

What can be gained by analyzing the boundaries of societies through legal-bureaucratic practices related to the control of mobilities, through mobile people’s self-representations, and through the interplay between these differently scaled distinctions? First, it is clear that overarching tendencies such as the spread of ethnic nationalism, often considered characteristic of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, were linked to multi-layered processes of differentiating mobile people, which themselves produced and transformed nationalizing categories such as “Polish” or “German.” Compared to the restrictions imposed at the same moment in different places, efforts to redesign the conditions of coexistence in the Ruhr region were not initially imposed from above (as in Bohemia), through the engagement of “nationalist” movements (as in Posen), or on the local level (as in the Pyrenees). Instead, a few Westphalian state officials introduced practices of observation and monitoring that solidified and disseminated the image of “Poles” as a “problem group,” an image that long retained its power both within and outside the region. These efforts on the part of a handful of officials over two decades reflected shifting concerns: initially aimed at weakening political Catholicism, they later became linked to nationalist movements. At least at the outset, then, conservative-nationalist tendencies in the Ruhr Valley were partly based on older power struggles between religious denominations. The analysis of such processes at the regional level demonstrates how provincial representatives used bureaucratic practices that influenced both state policy and the lives of the people in their administrative jurisdictions. It also reveals that, in communicating and attempting to justify these stereotypes, the Westphalian authorities themselves relied on intermediaries such as translators and bilingual police officers. Although the latter were often, like those they surveilled, newcomers to the Ruhr Valley, they positioned themselves as members of the Prussian authorities. In so doing, they pursued very different political-ideological and material objectives.

Second, a history that goes beyond studying society from an exclusively political and administrative perspective can offer insights into the lives of mobile people in all their multifaceted richness. In their autobiographical texts, individuals who moved to the Ruhr region in the late nineteenth century prioritized norms

148. The nickname given to him by Zytnicka. See Behrens and Reichling, “*Ich war ein seltener Fall*,” 27.

149. *Ibid.*, 17.

that were very different from those advocated by the authorities; their life stories often did not correspond to the statements made about them by state agencies or the many associations serving Polish-speaking groups. However, they did not simply behave “indifferently.”¹⁵⁰ The need for conviviality, the cultivation of a specific Catholic and body-bound masculinity, and material concerns were often just as important as a common language or region of origin, if not more so. Marriage practices reveal that, depending on the presence of their parents in the Ruhr region, men and women could establish a variety of ties: to Westphalian mining families, to mobile workers from other regions, and to those from their own region of origin. Taken together, the lives of the “Ruhr Poles” were thus shaped by general socio-economic practices of organizing coexistence, including different family economies and gender roles, reflecting what has been shown elsewhere for mobile people and rural milieus in Western and Eastern Europe over the nineteenth century.¹⁵¹ On the other hand, their life stories differed from the autobiographical texts written by more stationary workers. By articulating the multiple spatial affiliations and forms of conviviality engendered by their mobility, these authors often distanced themselves from familial or other socioeconomic demands in the context of capitalism. At the same time, they had to deal with politically generated ambiguities resulting from the restriction of economic rights, the shifting of state borders, and the fluctuating affiliations of their families’ region of origin. Although most of these workers were Prussian and then German citizens, spoke German, and sometimes represented themselves as German, they found themselves faced with administrative processes of disenfranchisement. In terms of ideal types, two social figures (*Sozialfiguren*) can be distinguished: the bilingual functionaries who also moved to the Ruhr Valley but acted as part of a Prussian or German organization, and those whom I have labeled “Ruhr Poles” because of their ambiguous, multiple affiliations.

Third, analyzing the interplay between administrative categorizations and the ways in which newcomers identified and represented themselves can help historians better conceptualize and differentiate the broad concept of society itself. Juxtaposing different perspectives and scales offers a fruitful starting point for rethinking and qualifying an abstract analytical term such as “society” in ways that encompass mobility, multiple affiliations, and categorization struggles as constituent elements. An emphasis on mobility also enables us to explore the transfers and connections between processes of categorization in different places. As this article has shown, tensions and conflicts often developed between constructions of belonging as a result of different processes of transfer. These transfers sometimes grew out of migratory movements themselves, specific notions of belonging

150. For an overview of the debate on “national indifference,” see Tara Zahra, “Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis,” *Slavic Review* 69, no. 1 (2010): 93–119.

151. Rosental, *Les sentiers invisibles*; Ewa Morawska, *For Bread with Butter: Life-Worlds of East Central Europeans in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, 1890–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), chap. 1.

traveling, for instance, with the Ruhr miners to northern France. But they were also the result of bilateral agreements and arrangements concerning the recruitment of workers, as well as wider debates around the protection of mobile labor. Although some social reformers and scholars advocated for international agreements on labor regulation in nineteenth-century Europe, only a few government representatives were willing to reflect on new forms of sovereignty. It was only in the twentieth century, under the influence of intellectuals such as Hannah Arendt, that representatives of different states agreed on certain generic categories designed to protect groups and individuals outside their state of origin: “minority” from 1919, and “refugee” from 1951.¹⁵² Although these international categories have often been associated with universal claims and rights, some groups in certain regions of Europe, including the “Ruhr Poles,” did not fit neatly into the categorizations shaped by the nation-state. These themes would all surely reward further research, particularly given the prevailing vision of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as the epoch of nation-building.

In conclusion, I would like to make a case for a trans-European history of societies that would historicize generic categories such as “migrant” and mobilize forgotten concepts of ambiguous belonging.¹⁵³ An approach that considers articulations of human mobility on different scales in the sense of Jacques Revel’s *jeux d’échelles* counters not only the traditional distinction between “internal” and “external” migrations, but also the application of administrative categories such as “migration” or “Poles” in the analysis and scholarly representation of ambiguous affiliations.¹⁵⁴ It is vital to be aware of one’s own positionality as a historian and to reflect on the epistemological consequences of our selection of sources, contextualization, and analytical language. In this respect, the “Ruhr Poles” offer a useful starting point for deconstructing preconceptions about the unity of certain groups and segments of a population.¹⁵⁵ Society in the Ruhr region changed

152. See the classic text by Hannah Arendt, “The Rights of Man: What Are They?” *Modern Review* 3, no. 1 (1949): 24–36. For a critical analysis of the concept of “minorities” and their rights, see Laura Robson, “Capitulations Redux: The Imperial Genealogy of the Post-World War I ‘Minority’ Regimes,” *American Historical Review* 126, no. 3 (2021): 978–1000.

153. More research is needed to explore whether this approach could be applied to imperial contexts beyond nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe. It seems that only with the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century did society come to be seen as an entity distinct from the authoritarian state and religion, composed of individuals and not just families, status groups, or confessions. See Hunt, *Writing History in the Global Era*, 81–82 and 96 ff.

154. Jacques Revel, “Micro-analyse et construction du social,” in *Jeux d’échelles. La micro-analyse à l’expérience*, ed. Jacques Revel (Paris: Gallimard/Éd. du Seuil, 1996), 15–36, here p. 19.

155. This region has long enjoyed a reputation as an economic conurbation shaped by overlapping mobilities, recently fostered by its efforts to be recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage site. See Stefan Berger, Christian Wicke, and Jana Golombek, “Burdens of Eternity? Heritage, Identity, and the ‘Great Transition’ in the Ruhr,” *Public Historian* 39, no. 4 (2017): 21–43.

profoundly over the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Integrated into shifting contexts of political, economic, and religious communication, it was shaped by overlapping migratory movements and struggles over categorization that stretched across the Atlantic, into Central and Western Europe, and throughout the European empires.

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