

ARTICLE

# Violence by Other Means: Denunciation and Belonging in Post-Imperial Poland, 1918–1923

Keely Stauter-Halsted 

University of Illinois at Chicago, Department of History, Chicago, Illinois, 60607, USA  
stauterh@uic.edu

Recent scholarship on post-imperial Eastern Europe has emphasised the continuation of wartime violence in post-war states. Focusing on the early years of the Polish Second Republic, this article considers how the ‘unmixing’ of Eastern European peoples also unfolded in ways not explicitly violent. Specifically, I demonstrate how the sorting of returning refugees on Poland’s new frontiers, the culling of personnel from the former imperial civil service and the submission of citizen denunciations helped to disaggregate loyal citizens from hostile foreigners. All of these practices highlight the importance of internal bordering as a process that accompanied the formal drawing of international boundaries in this period.

When American Secretary of State Robert Lansing looked across Europe from the Paris Peace Conference in the spring of 1919, he pronounced the eastern portion of the continent ‘afire with anarchy’. ‘Violence and bestiality’ were consuming society there, he observed.<sup>1</sup> In contrast to the relative quiescence of Western Europe, the collapse of land empires and the redrawing of the political map following the First World War set off a chain of violence further east, much of it aimed at eliminating national heterogeneity. Border conflicts between Poland and the Soviet Union and between Greece and Turkey consumed half a million casualties alone, while civil wars in Finland and Hungary raged long after the last peace treaty was signed.<sup>2</sup> From 1918 until the final confirmation of international boundaries in 1923 the eastern half of Europe experienced a constant drumbeat of ethnically motivated clashes, border skirmishes and revolutionary conflicts from Silesia to Smyrna, Fiume to Kaunas, resulting in no fewer than four million additional deaths.<sup>3</sup> Nowhere were these boundary issues more numerous or more complex than in the newly created Polish Second Republic, where nearly every border was violently contested. A young Charles de Gaulle arrived there in summer 1919 to discover the country engaged in no fewer than five armed conflicts with Germany, Czechoslovakia, the West Ukrainian Republic, Lithuania and Bolshevik Russia, while the interior of the country was afire with popular violence and bloody pogroms.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Alan Sharp, *The Versailles Settlement: Peacemaking After the First World War, 1919–1913* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 139.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Gerwarth, *The Vanquished: Why the First World War Failed to End* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2016); Włodzimierz Borodziej and Maciej Górny, *Nasza wojna, Tom II: Narody, 1917–1923* (Warsaw: Grupa Wydawnicza Foksal, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> Philipp Ther, ‘Caught in Between: Border Regions in Modern Europe’, in Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz, *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 485–6; Gerwarth, *The Vanquished*, 7–8.

<sup>4</sup> David A. Adelman, *A Shattered Peace: Versailles 1919 and the Price We Pay Today* (Nashville, TN: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2014), 156; Jochen Böhrer, *Civil War in Central Europe, 1918–1921: The Reconstruction of Poland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Piotr Wróbel, ‘The Revival of Poland and Paramilitary Violence, 1918–1920’, in Rudiger Bergien and Ralf Prowe, eds., *Spieß, Patrioten, Revolutionäre: Militärische Mobilisierung und gesellschaftliche Ordnung in der Neuzeit* (2010), 281–304.

Scholars have characterised these clashes variously as stemming from the collapse of empires and the disappearance of institutions of law and order, the competition for territory among successor states, the existential nature of conflicts between ethnic or ideological opponents and the general brutalisation of life among soldiers during the Great War.<sup>5</sup> Recent studies by Robert Gerwarth, Erez Manela, John Horne, Tomas Balkelis and Maciej Górný have emphasised these continuities of war in peacetime and highlighted the bloody process by which Europe's great empires were dismembered.<sup>6</sup> As Jochen Böhrer and others have shown, much of this post-war armed conflict had a more productive purpose than simply filling the void of absent imperial institutions.<sup>7</sup> Across the region the construction of new states and new international boundaries helped upend imperial hierarchies, a process that included various forms of coercion as populations were reordered and new borders policed.<sup>8</sup> Such outcomes were more than just the lingering spasms of wartime brutality or random vengeance in the absence of state policing apparatus. They were part of a sustained process of disaggregating people and property to create new categories of belonging. Targeted violence against civilians reified national and ideological frontiers, frightening people into abandoning territory or concealing loyalties.<sup>9</sup>

But the 'unmixing' of Eastern European peoples also played out in ways that were not explicitly violent. Though no less disruptive or emotionally painful for the individuals involved, disaggregating the human objects of post-war boundary making also included a series of seemingly ad hoc, informal, everyday interactions among the inhabitants of these new political entities. Decisions made along the new frontiers, in administrative offices and in exchanges among inhabitants themselves helped establish the lived realities of the newly bounded political communities. Controversies over who had rights to citizenship, permanent residence or political asylum played out long after the peacemakers finalised the outlines of the new East European states. My aim in this article is to remind us that the process of border creation extends far beyond a single set of diplomatic manoeuvres, in this case the peace treaties hammered out in Paris, and beyond the violent conflicts of newly bordered populations. Rather, 'bordering' involves on-going phases of ordering and reordering populations according to ever-changing criteria. For those on the ground, in the towns and villages along the frontier and in ethnically heterogeneous communities across these new political entities, recognition of new boundaries was a learned experience, one that was both resisted and reinforced through everyday actions and competing claims.<sup>10</sup> Armed violence was but one method for encouraging loyalty to new governments; the implied coercion of official petitions and citizen denunciations represented another means of cementing these allegiances.

In the early days of the Polish Second Republic violence helped create and reinforce ethnic and ideological boundaries, but so too did forms of bordering that did not involve explicit physical

<sup>5</sup> Piotr Wróbel, 'The Seeds of Violence: The Brutalization of an East European Region, 1917–1921', *Journal of Modern European History*, 1, 1 (2003), 125–49; Jochen Böhrer, 'Enduring Violence: The Postwar Struggles in East-Central Europe, 1917–1921', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 50, 1 (2015), 58–77.

<sup>6</sup> In addition to those noted here, see Robert Gerwarth and Erez Manela, eds., *Empires at War: 1911–1923* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Robert Gerwarth and John Horne, eds., *War in Peace: Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) and Tomas Balkelis, *War, Revolution, and Nation-Making in Lithuania, 1914–1923* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

<sup>7</sup> See also Julia Eichenberg and John Paul Newman, 'Introduction: Aftershocks: Violence in Dissolving Empires after the First World War', *Contemporary European History*, 19, 3 (2010), 183–94; Joshua Sanborn, *Imperial Apocalypse: The Great War and the Destruction of the Russian Empire* (Oxford University Press, 2014); Aviel Roshwald, *Ethnic Nationalism and the Fall of Empires: Central Europe, Russia, and the Middle East, 1914–1923* (London: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> Reece Jones, *Violent Borders: Refugees and the Right to Move* (London: Verso, 2016), 89–118.

<sup>9</sup> Balkelis, *War, Revolution, and Nation-Making*, 1–5; T. Hunt Tooley, 'Political Violence and the Border Plebiscite in Upper Silesia, 1919–1921', *Central European History*, 21, 1 (1988), 78.

<sup>10</sup> On bordering as a process, see David Newman, 'Borders and Bordering: Towards an Interdisciplinary Dialogue', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 9, 2 (2006), 171–86 and Henk Van Houtum and Ton Van Naerssen, 'Bordering, Ordering and Othering', *Royal Dutch Geographical Society KNAG*, 93, 2 (2002), 125–36.

coercion. The task of disaggregating friend from foe began in armed conflict and paramilitary attacks but soon manifested itself in everyday forms of unmixing through administrative decrees. This ‘peaceful’ process of disaggregating post-war citizens unfolded first at the dozens of new immigration stations established along the perimeter of the new state. It continued in the interior of the country with the dismissal of former imperial officials, the eviction of disloyal residents and in some cases the incarceration and expulsion of enemy aliens from Polish territory entirely. The remainder of this article assesses the matrix of ways in which the inhabitants of post-war Poland navigated fresh frontiers and considers how informal encounters helped give meaning to new political and national boundaries. I emphasise the everyday interactions that were key to reinforcing categories of belonging. Among these was the tool of citizen denunciation, which served as one of the most direct and effective instruments for excluding residents from post-war Polish citizenship, while simultaneously asserting the Polishness of the denouncer. The bulk of my documentation here considers the ‘bordering’ process among former Russian and Austrian subjects; the parsing of citizenship questions related to former subjects of the German Reich must await further research.

### Post-Imperial Contexts and Practices

The shock of the transition from empire to nation state struck Eastern Europeans at all levels, forcing communities to reorganise established patterns of pre-war behaviour. The transfer of administrative capacities from Berlin, Moscow and Vienna, along with the restructuring of systems of rule to meet the expectations of liberal democracy, required residents to navigate new categories of belonging and hierarchies of power. Residents of the newly formed Polish Second Republic experienced a ‘post-imperial’ transition in several important respects. To begin with, Poland in 1918 was a state ‘after empire’ that required the creation of new governmental offices and legal frameworks. Replacing the power structures of the fallen empires was an exhilarating, yet often unsettling, process involving a massive exchange of personnel at every level of administration.

At the same time, former imperial territory was spliced into new configurations on the perimeters of the new state, bisecting the landscape of what were once contiguous administrative units, dividing villagers from their grazing lands, merchants from supply chains and farmers from markets. As I discuss below, a whole regime of security guards, customs officials, military police, disinfectant stations and migrant barracks were put in place to process and sort returning evacuees, prisoners of war and refugees. Newly created government agencies worked assiduously to establish procedures for border crossing, surveillance of foreign nationals and care for needy migrants. Border guards processed thousands of applications to enter Polish territory each week, basing their determinations about admission on an ever-shifting combination of international law, Polish state regulations and the judgment of local officials.<sup>11</sup> Personal documents often went missing or were damaged during long periods in exile, and the forgery of residence papers and other identification documents became a cottage industry in border towns. Unclear regulations and chaos left much to the whim of immigration agents, who were forced to make subjective evaluations about who was ‘Polish’ and who was foreign.<sup>12</sup> Post offices, railway stations and customs offices were turned over to ethnic Poles, while German, Austro-German and Russian functionaries were quickly dispatched back to their ‘homes’. Banks and major industrial enterprises came under pressure to replace their staff with ‘native’ Poles. And even smaller workshops were

<sup>11</sup> Cezary Żołędowski, “‘Pierwsza repatriacja’”. Powroty i przyjazdy osiedleńcze do Polski ze wschodu po I wojnie światowej’, *Studia Migracyjne – Przegląd Polonijny*, 1, 163 (2017), 63–93.

<sup>12</sup> On the return process following the end of hostilities, see Mariusz Korzeniowski, Marek Mądzik and Dariusz Tarasiuk, *Tulaczy Łos: Uchodźcy polscy w imperium rosyjskim w latach pierwszej wojny światowej* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 2007), 212–27; Mirosław Piotrowski, *Reemigracja Polaków z Niemiec 1918–1939* (Lublin: Radakcja Wydawnictw Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, 2000); Waldemar Kozyra, *Polityka administracyjna ministrów spraw wewnętrznych Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w latach 1918–1939* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 2009), 106–13 and Jerzy Borzęcki, *The Soviet-Polish Peace of 1921 and the Creation of Interwar Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 246–.

the object of citizen complaints if they employed large numbers of ‘foreign’ Czechs, Ukrainians or Hungarians.<sup>13</sup>

But the post-imperial condition also had a second and somewhat contradictory meaning. Not only was the newly-established Polish state created out of the remnants of fallen empires, it also retained many of the governing practices and habits of rule left over from its imperial predecessors. Scholars of ‘new imperial history’ identify ‘imperial situations’ in post-imperial, actively nationalising contexts.<sup>14</sup> With the formal end of empires, population diversity did not disappear, yet the pressure to establish new forms of groupness intensified.<sup>15</sup> New administrators, politicians and civil servants could speak the language of anti-imperial state and nation building, yet their training, experience and understanding of groupness remained essentially imperial. In the Polish case, a whole cohort of civil servants, municipal police officers and local administrators who had received their training within imperial bureaucracies stepped into positions of authority in the new state. Their experiences carried over especially from Austrian Galicia, where provincial autonomy after 1867 helped establish patterns of civil authority among Polish Catholics, and from the Russian Empire, whose far-flung holdings made it impossible to place Russian-speaking staff at every level of provincial government.<sup>16</sup> Only in Prussia were Polish-speaking residents governed primarily by German imperial actors until 1914.

Continuities in administrative personnel meant that imperial practices and experiences of groupness spilled over into the early years of Polish independence.<sup>17</sup> Police investigators trained in the Habsburg Empire, for example, adopted investigative procedures that protected non-Polish ethnic minorities, stressing the needs of the *Rechtstaat* or rule of law over the exigencies of ethno-nationalism. By contrast, Polish border guards sometimes ignored official regulations and instead imposed ethnic or confessional hierarchies inherited from the Russian or Austrian context, brazenly prioritising the return and resettlement of Polish-speaking Roman Catholics, while leaving Ukrainian or Jewish residents to languish for long periods in refugee camps along the border. Even the very determination of who was Ukrainian, Russian or Polish often depended on the administrator’s view of what constituted these national groups. Yet, it is important to recognise that not all administrators policing the post-war Polish state functioned like ethno-national actors. Rather, their training and experiences from pre-war times helped guide their behaviour during the early years of Polish independence, prompting a complex combination of inputs to their official decision making.

Establishing formal practices for disaggregating the post-war population was clearly a gradual process. Decisions made along the border or in response to citizen complaints resulted from a mosaic of competing assumptions about how the population should be ordered, who constituted a threat to the state and how best to protect the country. Definition of civic status involved constant negotiations between the settled population and officialdom that had a lasting impact on the character of the new state, but were by no means consistent or predictable. Instead, evaluations of character or financial gain underpinned determinations of citizenship and residency rights, complementing and sometimes replacing legal definitions of homeland. Anxiety about the very ethnic diversity that had been central

<sup>13</sup> See footnotes 43–6 below.

<sup>14</sup> On the ways in which empires continued to serve as objects of identification long after their collapse, see Philipp Ther, ‘“Imperial Nationalism” as a Challenge for the Study of Nationalism’, in Stefan Berger and Alexie Miller, eds., *Nationalizing Empires* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2014), 573–91.

<sup>15</sup> See especially Ilya Gerasimov, Sergey Glebov and Marina Mogilner, ‘The Postimperial Meets the Postcolonial: Russian Historical Experience and the Postcolonial Moment’, *Ab Imperio*, 2 (2013), 97–135 and Ivan Sablin, ‘National Autonomies in the Far Eastern Republic: Post-Imperial Diversity Management in Pacific Russia, 1920–1922’, *History and Anthropology*, 28, 4 (2017), 445–60. On groupness as a concept, see Rogers Brubaker, ‘Ethnicity Without Groups’, *European Journal of Sociology/Archives européennes de sociologie*, 43, 2 (2002), 163–89.

<sup>16</sup> For the Russian Empire, see Andrzej Chwalba, *Polacy w służbie Moskali* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo naukowe PWN, 1999); for Galicia, Keely Stauter-Halsted, *The Nation in the Village: The Genesis of Peasant National Identity in Austrian Poland, 1848–1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

<sup>17</sup> On the continuity of imperial practices within nation states, see Paul Miller and Claire Morelon, eds., *Embers of Empire: Continuity and Rupture in the Habsburg Successor States after 1918* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019).

to life in the empires made its way insidiously into public conversations after Poland's long awaited political independence. Understanding these everyday episodes of 'bordering' helps highlight the multiplicity of sources and visions of sovereignty informing the new national imaginaries and reminds us that citizenship in post-imperial states was constructed through social practices as much as it was through diplomacy or international law.

### Map Makers and the Cartographic Invention of Poland

The diplomatic battle over Poland's frontiers began even before the armistice was signed in November 1918. The United States had entered the war partly on the promise of re-establishing Polish independence and the contours of the new country consequently became a central focus of the Paris Conference.<sup>18</sup> The novelty of the American-led peace process lay in the explicit goal of constructing nationally homogeneous states to replace the ethnic diversity of the old empires.<sup>19</sup> Members of the 'Inquiry' in Paris conducted endless surveys and held multiple referenda, consulting historical and linguistic texts and poring over imperial censuses in the hopes of defining international frontiers 'scientifically'.<sup>20</sup> Yet as Steven Seegel and others have shown, these 'map men' were also products of their time and, as such, they approached their task of reconstructing Europe with a set of assumptions founded in part in American progressivism.<sup>21</sup> The cartographers of Versailles effectively ranked cultural groups in Eastern Europe according to their perceived 'ethnic capacity'. Some, such as the Ruthenians, Ukrainians and Jews, were deemed capable of assimilating. Others, such as the Poles and Czechs, were more likely to absorb surrounding cultures and therefore could be entrusted with independent self-government.<sup>22</sup> Out of this conflicted logic, administratively centralised nation states arose, many of them comprising substantial 'minority' populations. The Polish Second Republic, with its population of roughly two-thirds self-identifying Polish-speaking Roman Catholics and one-third ethnic minorities, represented one such outcome of this diplomatic tension.

In Poland, ethnically 'Polish' officials set out to monitor the influence of what many perceived to be less developed groups of Jews, Ukrainians and Russians in the eastern *kresy* portions of the country.<sup>23</sup> This power imbalance informed the administrative disaggregation of returning exiles and played into developing tensions among residents of divergent backgrounds during the state's founding moments. Assessments of the relative merit of various population groups also ebbed and flowed depending on conditions in the interior of the country and the perceived security threat along the border. Overall, the rhythm of unemployment, housing shortages and epidemics at home, along with the constancy of border wars, helped establish an ever-shifting matrix of friends and enemies. For citizens of the new state, denunciations and other forms of public condemnation arose out of a combination of longstanding national stereotypes and learned behaviour encouraged by government proclamations.<sup>24</sup>

Not only were international borders unstable during the early post-war period, the population itself was also extremely mobile. Tens of thousands of residents had been displaced by the conduct of the

<sup>18</sup> Even in Paris amorphous discussions of Polish national 'character' influenced decisions about the country's new borders. See Denis Clark, 'Poland in the "Paris system": Self-Determination, Stereotypes, and Decisions in 1919', *Nations and Nationalism*, 25, 4 (2019), 1362–85.

<sup>19</sup> Eric D. Weitz, 'From the Vienna to the Paris System: International Politics and the Entangled Histories of Human Rights, Forced Deportations, and Civilizing Missions', *American Historical Review*, 113, 5 (Dec. 2008), 1313–43.

<sup>20</sup> Edward House and Charles Seymour, eds., *What Really Happened at Paris: The Story of the Peace Conference, 1918–1919* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1921).

<sup>21</sup> Steven Seegel, *Map Men: Transnational Lives and Deaths of Geographers in the Making of East Central Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

<sup>22</sup> Liliana Riga and James Kennedy, 'Mitteleuropa as Middle America? "The Inquiry" and the Mapping of East Central Europe in 1919', *Ab Imperio*, 4 (2006), 271–300; Lawrence E. Gelfand, *The Inquiry: American Preparations for Peace, 1917–1919* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963).

<sup>23</sup> On the civilisational hierarchies officials in the *kresy* imposed, see the path-breaking work of Kathryn Ciancia, *On Civilization's Edge: A Polish Borderland in the Interwar World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

<sup>24</sup> For an interesting discussion of national stereotypes in the settling of Poland's borders, see Denis Clark, 'Poland in the "Paris System": Self-Determination, Stereotypes, and Decisions in 1919', *Nations and Nationalism*, 25, 4 (2019), 1362–85.



war and were eager to return following the cessation of hostilities. Repeated invasions and retreats of the Russian imperial army had forced some 39 per cent of the population of Polesie and Volhynia to the interior of Russia, while Varsovians were disbursed across Russia and Central Asia.<sup>25</sup> Residents of Austrian Galicia relocated en masse to Vienna, Moravia, Prague, Hungary and elsewhere in the Habsburg lands during the Russian offensives of 1914–5.<sup>26</sup> Conducting an organised and orderly return for these exiles was all the more challenging because of their desperate material circumstances, the overall devastation of the lands to which they were returning and the shortage of identification documents. Nonetheless, in the days and weeks after the war's end, hundreds of thousands of returnees amassed on the borders, pleading with officials to allow them to reclaim their homes inside the new state.

Yet the criteria for permitting re-entry into the country were unclear and in constant flux. This was partially due to the country's shifting eastern border, which changed repeatedly from the March 1918 Treaty of Brest-Litovsk to the victories over the West Ukrainian Republic (July 1919), the Soviet Union (August 1920) and Lithuania (October 1920).<sup>27</sup> According to the language enshrined in the 1919 Polish Minorities Treaty, any individual who had been a 'habitual resident' of the areas of the Austrian, German and Russian empires that formed part of Poland, regardless of cultural background or place of birth, was eligible for citizenship.<sup>28</sup> Polish officials agreed 'not to put any hindrance in the way of the exercise of the right' of any returnees, promising to allow them 'to choose whether or not they will acquire Polish citizenship' and to treat ethnic and religious minorities equally. The new Polish government pledged that 'Polish nationals who belong to racial, linguistic or religious minorities shall enjoy the same treatment . . . as other Polish nationals'.<sup>29</sup> Poland was also home to large numbers of Russian exiles displaced by the Bolshevik Revolution. Beginning in 1922 The League of Nations issued tens of thousands of so-called 'Nansen Passports' to Russian exiles living in Poland, permitting them free passage but not full citizenship rights.<sup>30</sup> Yet all of these guidelines were violated with regularity. As with other aspects of official belonging and border formation, citizenship criteria formed part of a sustained conversation that included local and national officials, the international community and settled residents in the interior of the country.

The establishment of a stable border regime was particularly challenging in interwar Poland because of the multiple imperial frontiers that had to be eliminated internally in order to blend disparate regions into a single state, and because of the mobility of the international borders themselves. After over a century of administration under the Romanov, Habsburg and Hohenzollern Empires, old border stations had to be dismantled and new ones erected, signposts and guard towers relocated,

<sup>25</sup> Eugene Romer, 'The Population of Poland According to the Census of 1921', *Geographical Review*, 13, 3 (1923), 406–7; Mariusz Korzeniewski, 'Refugees from Polish territories in Russia during the First World War', in *War*; Peter Gatrell and Liubov Zhvanko, eds., *Europe on the Move: Refugees in the Era of the Great* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 66–87.

<sup>26</sup> Martina Hermann, "'Cities of Barracks': Refugees in the Austrian Part of the Habsburg Empire during the First World War', *Europe on the Move*, 129–55; Kamil Ruszala, 'Uchodźcy galicyjscy podczas I wojny światowej w monarchii Habsburgów', Ph.D. Dissertation (Cracow: Jagiellonian University, 2018).

<sup>27</sup> Konrad Zieliński, 'Kwestia obywatelstwa polskiego dla repatriantów, reemigrantów i uchodźców z Rosji w latach 1918–1922: regulacje prawne a praktyka urzędnicza', *Dzieje Najnowsze*, 33, 4 (2001), 23–36.

<sup>28</sup> There is a great deal of confusion surrounding requirements for formal citizenship in the early years of the Second Republic. In theory, anyone residing continuously on what would become Polish territory prior to the war was eligible. However, several exceptions made the process less than automatic. These included the denial of citizenship from anyone who had held political office in a foreign country or served in the military of another country without the consent of local authorities, or who had married a foreign citizen. The latter restriction was waved in the case of Poles who married Soviet citizens without a church marriage. See 'Ustawa z dnia 20 stycznia 1920 roku o obywatelstwa państwa polskiego', *Dziennik Ustaw*, 44, 7, 82–3.

<sup>29</sup> 'Minorities Treaty between the Principal Allied and Associated Powers (The British Empire, France, Italy, Japan and the United States) and Poland, signed at Versailles (28 June 1919)', in Perry Clive, *The Consolidated Treaty Series*, vol. 225 (New York, 1919), 412–24.

<sup>30</sup> Bruno Cabanes, *The Great War and the Origins of Humanitarianism, 1918–1924* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 133–88.

administrative personnel trained, residency and citizenship regulations drafted and procedures for processing the thousands of returning migrants established. In many cases, local residents continued to respect centuries-old boundaries between the fallen empires, while regularly transgressing new international borders where they violated deeply engrained customary practices. The Tatra mountain populations of Spiš and Orawa, whose communities were split along the Slovak–Polish frontier, routinely crossed into what was now alien territory to work, shop or visit family. Their representatives insisted that border guards permit them to pass without documentation in recognition of the intertwined nature of the communities.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, residents of Zwardoń in the Beskid Mountains still peddled their piglets and cheese in neighbouring Slovakia but were now accused of smuggling for doing so.<sup>32</sup> To make matters worse, most of the external borders of the new state had been left undefined at the peace conference and would only be settled through military conflict or popular referenda. Each new iteration of Polish sovereignty sent a flood of refugees and repatriates to hastily assembled border stations along the frontier. The lack of clarity about where Poland ended and the territories of Germany, Czechoslovakia or the Soviet Union began led to repeated accusations of illegal border crossings, military incursions and profiteering.

Immediately after the Regency Council proclaimed the independence of Poland and ceded full civil authority to Józef Piłsudski on 10 November 1918, the State Office for the Return of Prisoners of War, Refugees, and Workers (*Państwowy Urząd do Spraw Powrotu Jeńców, Uchodźców, i Robotników*; JUR) began managing the flow of refugees and returnees amassing at Polish border stations. In the first months of its existence, JUR set up six processing stations along the German–Polish frontier to facilitate the return of POWs and migrant labourers trapped inside Germany during the War and another thirteen stations along the eastern border with the Soviet Union. JUR was disbanded in November 1920, but in its two-year existence the agency processed almost a million formal applications for re-entry. At the same time, hundreds of thousands of migrants opted for a so-called ‘wild return,’ walking across the frontier on their own to avoid bureaucratic delays and obviate the need for formal identification documents.<sup>33</sup>

### Disaggregating the Post-Imperial Population

Soon after its formation the Polish parliament began debating the new state’s citizenship requirements and immigration regulations. On the face of it these policies followed closely the peacekeepers’ definition of citizenship rights. According to the January 1920 Polish Citizenship Law anyone ‘who had been registered or who was entitled to be registered as a permanent resident of the Kingdom of Poland before the Russian evacuation of 1915’ or who had lived permanently in those areas of current Polish territory that had been part of Austria or Germany before 1914 had the right to return to Poland. Yet the guidelines border guards received from government ministries could be confusing and with the crush of humanity on the border, citizenship criteria were applied inconsistently. Border guards with a particular antipathy to ethnic minorities often interpreted official policies narrowly, forbidding entry to those (including Jews and many peasants) who had not officially registered in their communities before the war, who lacked proper documents or who were deemed ‘unsuitable’ for Polish citizenship by virtue of their political affiliation, moral reputation or financial means.<sup>34</sup> Others were more sympathetic to the plight of returnees, complaining to authorities about their treatment and expressing sympathy about their vulnerabilities.

<sup>31</sup> Gendarme in Cracow to Nowy Targ gendarme, 28 Apr. 1919, Archiwum Narodowe w Krakowie, Starostwo in Żywiec, hereafter ANKr StŻ II 114, 17–8.

<sup>32</sup> Report to the Starostwo in Żywiec from state police post in Zwardoń, 12 Dec. 1919; Report to the Starostwo in Żywiec from Zwardoń, 10 Jan. 1920, ANKr StŻ II 114, 21, 95.

<sup>33</sup> Zbigniew Karpus, *Jeńcy i internowani rosyjscy i ukraińscy na terenie Polski w latach 1918–1924* (Toruń, 1999), 15–20.

<sup>34</sup> Konrad Zieliński, ‘Population Displacement and Citizenship in Poland, 1918–1924’, in Nick Baron and Peter Gatrell, eds., *Homelands: War, Population and Statehood in Eastern Europe and Russia, 1918–1924* (London: Anthem Press, 2004), 102–3.

In the early months of the return process Polish administrators appear to have believed the non-ethnically Polish population could be assimilated easily into post-war society. Those from the eastern *kresy*, for example, were admitted routinely during this period if they could show proper documents. But the practice of granting the right of return to the entire diverse population of the pre-war Polish lands soon faced challenges. As economic woes, fears of contagious diseases and anxiety about revolutionary radicals became more acute, Polish officials introduced narrower definitions of the right of return that often conflicted both with the language of the Minorities Treaty and with their own citizenship definitions. These subjective practices found their root in the wartime policies of the Polish Regency Council, the temporary administrative organ operating in the German occupied zone. The Regency Council explicitly defined Polishness as ‘people of Polish descent [including] . . . those who have lived for a long period in Russia, but who nevertheless view themselves and are viewed by others as Polish’.<sup>35</sup> Despite the passage of much more expansive citizenship law in 1920, the Galician Governor General nonetheless based his evaluation of the ‘right of return’ following the signing of the March 1921 Treaty of Riga with the Soviet Union on wartime categories, noting that the most important criteria for return should be whether ‘the father’s family has roots in the Republic of Poland and if the person uses the Polish language and upholds Polish customs and practices’. Citizenship in this sense was not a function of pre-war residence or birthplace inside Polish territory as the Minorities Treaty established, but rather, ‘the word “Polish” is understood to mean Polish nationality without regard for place of birth. Membership [*przynależność*] in a nation is the actual question; a deciding factor here is consciousness and the national feeling of a particular individual.’<sup>36</sup> Such a subjective definition of Polishness soon became a means to screen out many Jewish and Ruthenian returnees in favour of Polish-speaking Roman Catholics, including those who had maintained their main residence outside the territory of the new Polish state before the war.

In the context of frontier chaos, many Jews who had been evacuated to the interior of Russia in the early days of the war and sought to return to the new Polish state saw their applications rejected because of narrow definitions of residence rights. Rosa Kamajka, a long-time resident of Łódź (for twelve years prior to the war), was denied permission to re-enter Polish territory in December 1918 because local authorities in Łódź reported to the border station that her place of birth in the Suwalska Gubernia was not under Polish military control at that moment. They similarly noted that her traveling companion, Lana Brull, who had lived even longer in Łódź prior to the war (eighteen years), was born in Kherson gubernia on the Black Sea and thus had no right to Polish citizenship or permanent residence. Pinkus Abramczyk ran a hat store in Łódź before the war. Like many Jews he had never formally registered there and so was forbidden to return. Perhaps most poignantly, two Jewish schoolteachers from Sokołów in the Podlasie district applied on 14 November 1918 to resume their former occupations. Izaak Brunblat and Owsiej Damski had taught for many years in a religious school and were well known in their community. The Jewish Council testified that both collected salaries and would therefore not be a burden to the state. Nonetheless, although they had lived and worked in Polish territory prior to the war, they both had birthplaces inside Russia and thus technically were foreign subjects. The local Welfare Council in Sokołów concluded in its report that ‘while Grunblat and Damski may have lived in Poland for a while, they do not have the right to citizenship in the Polish state because there is no room in Poland for Jews who are foreign subjects’. ‘We have enough of our own Jews’, the report concluded. In case after case, long-time residents of Polish territory, people who operated businesses and functioned as component parts of the community were forbidden from returning and sentenced to Soviet citizenship because Poland already had ‘enough Jews’.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> ‘Instrukcji. Prawo Powrotu do Kraju’, 3 May 1918, Przedstawicielstwo Rady Regencyjnej Królestwa Polskiego w Rosji, hereafter PRRKPR, Archiwum Akt Nowych, hereafter AAN 140, 20–1.

<sup>36</sup> ‘Uchodźcy i bieżący z Rosji – rejestracja’, Office of the Governor General in Lwów, 8 Mar. 1921, ANKr Starostwo Grodzkie w Krakowie, hereafter StGKr 346.

<sup>37</sup> Rada Główna Opiekuńcza, hereafter RGO, in Warsaw, AAN 1350, 1–9.



Yet for those who could prove their commitment to Polish rituals and habits, who spoke acceptable Polish and were practicing Roman Catholics, crossing the border into Poland even for the first time was much less traumatic. This was partly because it was Polish (along with Jewish or Lithuanian) aid agencies caring for evacuees during the war who certified refugee families as qualified to receive charitable assistance from a particular national care association. The ‘certificate of Polishness’ bestowed upon aid recipients served as adequate documentation to guarantee food aid as well as to qualify holders as Polish citizens, even if they had not resided on Polish territory before the war. The Regency Council in Petersburg advised officials at the border during summer 1918 that the most important document authorising admittance to Polish territory was ‘an official Polish visa provided by representatives of the *Rada Regencyjna* in Russia, issued based on a certification of Polish ancestry provided by Polish rescue organisations’.<sup>38</sup> According to this criterion, Stanisław Witkowski, born in Yalta, could simply explain to border officials that he wished to study at Warsaw University, and he was immediately granted residence rights in the new Poland. Similarly, Alma Orłowska, the wife of a university professor and a long-time resident of Kazan, was able to obtain a visa for herself, her four children and two servants and relocate to Warsaw at the end of the war on the strength of her last name and her fluency in Polish.<sup>39</sup>

### Culling the Civil Service

Triangulations among the international community, Polish officialdom and border guards led to little clarity about citizenship criteria during the early period of return. Instead, congestion on the border prompted thousands of migrants to enter the country independently, crossing the frontier on foot rather than waiting in the endless queue to be processed. As military conflicts and revolutions in neighbouring countries intensified, authorities in Warsaw expressed increasing concern about the loyalty of return migrants. Without strict border control, the danger of admitting treacherous individuals who threatened state security was alarmingly high. Count Zygmunt Lasocki, head of the Polish Liquidation Commission, feared that ‘agitators are making use of the unregulated border situation and crossing freely into the country’ and warned that for this reason the mobile population in the interior of the country must be closely monitored.<sup>40</sup> The Interior Ministry instructed criminal courts and police stations to investigate anyone suspected of supporting Poland’s enemies and to exercise strict surveillance over ‘foreigners’, especially those in a position to exercise influence over the economy, the military or the country’s communication channels.<sup>41</sup>

The process of replacing personnel working in military and civil service positions with Polish staff was particularly fraught. Beginning in January 1919 employees who had been trusted for years working as imperial administrators found themselves stripped of their responsibilities. Civil service employees, including police, judicial personnel, teachers, postal and railway employees and workers in state-owned enterprises were quickly removed. As Rogers Brubaker reminds us, this culling of state workers was unsurprising since ‘new nation states were all . . . committed, in one way or another, to reversing historic patterns of discrimination by the former imperial rulers and to promoting the language, culture, demographic position, economic flourishing and political hegemony of the new state-bearing nation’. One of the main instruments available for new states to pursue these goals was control over recruitment to state agencies.<sup>42</sup> Soon after the outbreak of the ‘Seven Day War’

<sup>38</sup> ‘Instrukcji. Prawo do Powrotu do Kraju,’ 3 May 1918, AAN PRRKPR 140, 20–1.

<sup>39</sup> Appeal from Alma Orłowska to the Representative of the Regency Council of the Polish Kingdom in Russia, 25 Oct. 1918, AAN PRRKPR 146; Appeal from Stanisław Witkowski, 10 Nov. 1918, AAN PRRKPR 147, 227.

<sup>40</sup> Circular from Count Lasocki of the Polish Liquidation Commission to all commissioners of the PLC and the chief of police in Cracow, 19 Jan. 1919, ANKr StGKr 23, 391.

<sup>41</sup> Letter from the Presidium of the High National Court to Cracow police headquarters, 30 Jan. 1919, ANKr StGKr 23, 545, 551–5.

<sup>42</sup> Rogers Brubaker, ‘Aftermaths of Empire and the Unmixing of Peoples: Historical and Comparative Perspectives’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 18, 2 (1995), 205.

with Czechoslovakia in late January 1919 the Polish High Court announced a review of the status of 'all individuals of Czech background living within the Polish state in whatever official status'.<sup>43</sup> By early February Ukrainian nationals were also under review.<sup>44</sup> Non-Polish employees of the state-owned railway system serving as guards for military warehouses were released from their positions at this time. These were the first of many official proclamations deeming specific groups within Polish society potential enemies of the state. The dismissals left a gaping shortage in qualified personnel to manage the country's rail system (150 Czech nationals were let go from the Cracow rail system alone), forcing railway directors to appeal to remaining 'Polish' staffers to take extra shifts to make up for the absent workers.<sup>45</sup> Meanwhile, newspapers encouraged their readers to boycott Czech banks and factories whose owners were now declared 'enemies' of the Polish state.<sup>46</sup>

### Denunciations as a Tool of Belonging

But concern about political loyalty was not the only or even the primary motive for demanding that 'aliens' be removed from public life. Rather, attacks on ethnic minorities increasingly exhibited an element of personal animus or simple greed. Once official proclamations began circulating about the danger of foreign nationals, police stations across the country were flooded with denunciations detailing suspicious activities of neighbours, co-workers and shopkeepers.<sup>47</sup> This outpouring of citizen anxiety seems to have been prompted by a series of newspaper announcements reminding readers of approaching deadlines for enemy aliens to report to local police.<sup>48</sup> In the context of simultaneous wars with Czechoslovakia and Ukraine, these directives helped prompt a frenzy of accusations, in which local citizens compartmentalised their countrymen into friends and enemies based on their ethnic attachments. These denunciations provide a window into the process by which the Polish public refined its sense of collective identity and suggest some key traits that would eventually be tied to unpatriotic behaviour. Similar finger pointing in other historical settings has demonstrated the ways in which denunciations reflect an effort to find common cause between individual complainants and state authorities, offering a simple and often anonymous way for citizens to demonstrate their loyalty to a new government.<sup>49</sup> Even where denunciations were submitted for instrumental reasons, they still provide affirmation of the perceived efficacy of governing institutions in arbitrating accusations.<sup>50</sup> Letter writing in post-war Poland was arguably part of a process by which citizens claimed for themselves a voice in the new national enterprise, giving otherwise powerless ordinary people some degree of influence and creating a system of 'manipulation from below'.<sup>51</sup> Denunciations had been particularly vicious during wartime and were used on the home front across Central Europe during the First World War to filter out friends from enemies, often based on an ethnic or national algorithm.<sup>52</sup> In this

<sup>43</sup> Letter from the Presidium of the High National Court to Cracow police headquarters, 30 Jan. 1919, ANKr StGKr 23, 545.

<sup>44</sup> Andrzej Makas to Cracow police headquarters, 6 Feb. 1919, ANKr StGKr 24, 119–23.

<sup>45</sup> 'Usunięcie Czechów, Niemców i Rusinów z krak. Dyrekcyi kolejowej. Patriotyczne stanowisko naszych kolejarzy', *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny*, 27 Jan. 1919, 3.

<sup>46</sup> 'Życie gospodarcze w rękach wrogów', *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny*, 5 Feb. 1919, 2.

<sup>47</sup> These denunciations are found in the files of the Cracow District Office (Starostwo Grodzkie w Krakowie) housed at the National Archive in Cracow. The files contain accusations of disloyalty and legal investigations into 'enemy aliens' who were incarcerated in the Dąbie internment camp near Cracow.

<sup>48</sup> 'Szpiedzy Cześćcy i Ukraińscy', *Głos Narodu*, 28 Jan. 1919; 'Szpiedzy Cześćcy i Ukraińscy', *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny*, 29 Jan. 1919.

<sup>49</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick and Robert Gellately, 'Introduction to the Practices of Denunciation in Modern European History', *The Journal of Modern History*, 68, 4 (Dec. 1996), 747–67.

<sup>50</sup> John Connelly, 'The Uses of *Volksgemeinschaft*: Letters to the NSDAP Kreisleitung Eisenach, 1939–1940', *The Journal of Modern History*, 68, 4 (Dec. 1996), 899–930.

<sup>51</sup> Robert Gellately, 'Denunciations in Twentieth-Century Germany: Aspects of Self-Policing in the Third Reich and the German Democratic Republic', *The Journal of Modern History*, 68, 4 (Dec. 1996), 931–67.

<sup>52</sup> Tamara Scheer, 'Denunciations and the Decline of the Habsburg Home Front During the First World War', *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire*, 24, 2 (2017), 214–28 and Maureen Healy, *Vienna and the Fall of the Habsburg Empire: Total War and Everyday Life in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 148–59.

sense, anonymous letters of accusation represented an extension of a wartime strategy to employ state organs in the service of personal conflicts.

The practice of denouncing suspected spies or terrorists was thus a well-oiled instrument for sorting suspicious or threatening individuals from other ‘ordinary’ residents. Local residents across Poland penned complaints about any number of concerns, ranging from economic abuses to immoral activities and espionage. They attacked their friends, their neighbours, their co-workers and random people on the street. Most of the missives arrived unsigned and without postage at police headquarters; some signed off with a patriotic epithet such as ‘a good Polish woman’ or ‘a true Pole’. All of the accusations share the implicit assumption that the behaviour they described was ‘un-Polish and that it threatened the new country’s future’. In welcoming this string of citizen denunciations, law enforcement officials encouraged the population to evaluate their neighbours’ loyalty, honesty, morality and even frugality – all ostensible qualities of a true Polish patriot. But denunciation was not a one-way process. Rather, the responses of law enforcement officials and the full-throated defence of the accused from other members of the Polish community point to a process of negotiation within the post-war population as it hammered out lived understandings of national attachment. Ironically, it was police investigators themselves who screened the accusations, carefully following up on each complaint, conducting extensive interviews with the objects of the complaints and frequently determining that the denunciation lacked merit and required no additional action. Thus in some cities it was the judicial authorities who protected the rights of non-Polish inhabitants from the vindictive attacks of their neighbours.

Polish citizens began shaping a mental universe of who ‘deserved’ employment in the new state and on what grounds. Letters of denunciation from workers in breweries, banks and factories make clear that Polish men with families to support had moral priority for full-time employment in the new state. Employers penned attacks against workers suspected of disloyalty, describing the suspicious behaviour of ‘non-Poles’. Mikołaj Harasymczuk, an employee in an electrical plant, was born in Podolia and had Ruthenian grandparents. Though he claimed he was Polish, he often ‘fought with [other] Poles’ on the job. Brewery worker Rudolf Hlavek behaved ‘in a provocative way’ and ‘should be expelled and sent to his Czech fatherland’. Jan Dragańczuk, a Ruthenian mortgage specialist in a Galician bank, was attacked, arrested and interned as a foreign citizen. Such potentially disloyal employees had ‘taken the jobs of those among us with large families and who are starving’ without employment, according to anonymous letters penned to police.<sup>53</sup> ‘One starving Pole’ was deemed a more important employee than dozens of outsiders. In keeping with this view, thousands of warehouse guards, train conductors, brickyard workers, employees at tobacco plants, bakers and others were detained indefinitely in internment camps across the Polish state. Even the vegetable vendor in Dębniki was suspected of spying for the Czech side under cover of selling her produce, though in part this complaint may have been the result of her criticising the quality of Polish bread to one of her local customers.<sup>54</sup>

Many citizen denunciations stemmed from the seemingly straightforward concern that foreign nationals had failed to register with the police as ‘resident aliens’. Attacks of this type were couched in a concern about the social order. Cracovians called out an electrical worker with Ruthenian grandparents, a group of suspicious Jewish warehouse guards, a Bohemian baker and an Austro-German living alone in a large apartment, all for the simple crime of failure to register.<sup>55</sup> Yet, in time, any suspicious behaviour or conversation was grounds for turning to police. The wife of a railway man testified that she overheard a bricklayer saying disparaging things about Poland. ‘He may be of Czech or

<sup>53</sup> Anonymous letter from ‘an electrical official’ to Cracow police, 2 Feb. 1919; letter from brewery worker Jan Radłowski to Cracow police headquarters, 28 Jan. 1919; statement from Galician Municipal War Credit Bank to Cracow police headquarters, 2 Feb. 1919, ANKr StGKr 23, 809–14, 821–4, 857–60.

<sup>54</sup> Anonymous denunciation from ‘the residents of Dębniki’ to the police chief in Cracow, 3 Feb. 1919. ANKr StGKr 24, 637–48.

<sup>55</sup> Electrical official to Cracow police regarding the Ruthenian, Mikołaj Harasymczuk, 2 Feb. 1919; confidential memo to Cracow police regarding Czechs and Jews guarding military warehouse; report from the ‘members of an association’ on Piotr Kriznik, 1 Feb. 1919; anonymous letter to Cracow police regarding Jan Siefert, 4 Feb. 1919, ANKr StGKr 23, 845, 857–60, 719–22; ANKr StGKr 24, 627–36.

Moravian background', she reported.<sup>56</sup> By the fall of 1919, with border skirmishes heating up along the country's eastern border, denunciations became more pointed, frequently accusing targets of spying for one of Poland's foreign enemies. A supposed Bolshevik, Janina Zakrzewska, was working closely with the Polish Socialist Party and thus accused of 'doing things that are very harmful for Poland'.<sup>57</sup> Tobiasz Frankel, an elderly Jewish man, reportedly had amassed a great deal of wealth from unknown sources and 'continues to spy on behalf of the Czechs'.<sup>58</sup> Others were accused of harming the Polish state through their illegal transport of Polish goods. Mieczysław Salwicki complained in October 1921 that his flat mate, the Hungarian Władysław Paulsinies, met frequently with foreigners and maintained a lavish lifestyle, despite being unemployed.<sup>59</sup> And a wartime colleague of Stanisław Sokołowski baldly accused him of treason, declaring that Sokołowski had served as an 'agent of Russia' during the Russian occupation of Lwów.<sup>60</sup> Denunciation was wielded as one of many tools for untangling Poland's friends from her foes.

And yet, in many cases, the agenda of the accuser was both more complex and more banal than that of alerting authorities to harmful spies and provocateurs. Rather, these complaints can also be read in an instrumental way. Some of them address a deeper, more personal violation that was either wholly unrelated to national affiliation or distinct from the target's ethnicity. Denunciations were used to enforce sexual morality, as in the case of Bożena Klausowa of Lwów, who was accused of spying primarily because of her unorthodox habit of travelling out of town on her own and 'when she is home, she writes until late in the night'.<sup>61</sup> Sexual proclivities were also used as a defence among those who felt themselves to be wrongfully accused. Stanisław Sokołowski informed investigators that the sole reason an anonymous informer had targeted him as a traitor was that the letter writer believed him guilty of 'conducting himself in an immoral way' and the denunciation was an 'act of revenge' for this private behaviour.<sup>62</sup> Other attacks stemmed from the scarcity of basic resources in post-war Poland, especially the intense competition for apartments. Across the country, the immediate post-war period saw painful shortages of housing stock at a time when thousands of returnees and refugees required accommodations. To make matters worse, new administrators were moving into Poland's key cities, while previous imperial officials had yet to vacate. This tension over who had rights to housing prompted some of the most caustic conflicts the police and court system had to arbitrate. Cracow landlords sought to evict 'non-Polish' tenants, calling them 'parasites who should be sent to their Fatherland' for 'ostentatiously' speaking German, for holding Austrian passports or for allowing 'foreigners' such as Czechs or Ruthenians to lodge with them. Permitting such individuals to remain on Polish territory, they complained, violated the new system of 'justice and order in Poland'.<sup>63</sup>

### Contested Belonging

Interestingly, police investigators – most of them trained in conditions of imperial hybridity – took it upon themselves to look into accusations of treason and frequently rejected their claims. Inspectors read through thinly veiled eviction attempts, declaring that a Hungarian target's flat mate had engaged

<sup>56</sup> Testimony of Julijanna Majka, 11 Feb. 1919, ANKr StGKr 24, 319–22.

<sup>57</sup> Ministry of Internal Affairs, Political Department, Defensive Division, Warsaw, to the Information Section of the District Command in Cracow, 25 Oct. 1919, StGKr 31, 753–59.

<sup>58</sup> Józef Kraszewski to Cracow Police Headquarters, 23 Oct. 1919, ANKr StGKr 31, 39–45.

<sup>59</sup> Ministry of Internal Affairs to Cracow police headquarters, 31 Nov. 1921, ANKr StGKr 50, 1–6.

<sup>60</sup> Anonymous letter to Cracow police headquarters, 7 Jan. 1920, ANKr StGKr 33, 163–9.

<sup>61</sup> Police in Lwów to police in Cracow, 18 Nov. 1919, ANKr StGKr 31, 1003.

<sup>62</sup> Anonymous denunciation to Cracow police headquarters, 7 Jan. 1920, ANKr StGKr 33, 163–9; a defence of Mr. Sokołowski came from the Liga Pomocy Przemysłowej in Lwów, 29 Jan. 1920 signed by the president and vice president of League, ANKr StGKr 33, 695.

<sup>63</sup> Anonymous denunciation to Cracow police headquarters regarding Jan Seifert, 3 Feb. 1919. ANKr StGKr 23, 845; anonymous denunciation to Cracow police regarding Mr. Langer and Mr. Waliczek, 2 Feb. 1919, ANKr StGKr 23, 787–8.

in an blatant effort to oust him from their shared apartment.<sup>64</sup> An accused Czech baker had actually been born in Bochnia, just east of Cracow. Another Czech reportedly harming Polish interests was in fact an officer in a bank, had lived in Cracow for over ten years and had dutifully registered as foreign born. A supposed German national was a military construction engineer in the Polish army and had been born in Polish territory.<sup>65</sup> But municipal police were not the only ones to check on personally motivated or over-zealous efforts to purge disloyal residents. The Ministry of the Interior in Warsaw also challenged the restrictive policies of local officials where they violated the norms of the new state. In the spring of 1919 Cracow city officials sought to expel all ‘non-Polish’ residents from the city, claiming they needed the space to accommodate incoming government officials. The mayor argued that Poland’s responsibility was to secure the basic needs ‘above all of its own subjects’ rather than ‘indulging at the cost of its own people in the support of foreign subjects, most of whom were enemies of Poland’.<sup>66</sup> Such efforts to rid the country of perceived foreigners were clearly designed to eliminate the vestiges of empire that some now remembered with animosity. Former imperial officials allegedly owed no loyalty to the Polish state and thus posed a security risk. ‘A homeless Pole is closer to us than a former Austrian bureaucrat’ with a ‘fictional family’, the boulevard paper *Goniec Krakowski* affirmed. Yet the Warsaw government sought to draw a line in this instance, rejecting the blanket expulsion of foreigners based on an 1871 Austrian imperial law permitting the denial of residence rights only to those who were public nuisances, who threatened the public welfare or who refused to work.<sup>67</sup> Once again, Polish government officials defended the individual rights even of those who were nominally not citizens. The legacy of imperial thinking and rule of law still resonated in post-war Poland.

All of these complaints, whether instrumentally motivated to make way for a cherished worker or based on deeper suspicions about loyalty, helped reify emotional barriers between residents in the new Poland. Yet they also prompted confused responses from the targets of these attacks, many of whom claimed to have developed deep attachments to their adopted homelands. Often those arrested and interned or threatened with expulsion sought to change the script, pleading their case for membership in the Polish nation despite external markers that suggested otherwise. In the process, they pushed back on the very boundaries of how the new state defined its citizenry and on the criteria authorities used to legitimise its ethnic hierarchy. Responses from incarcerated individuals, their families and co-workers and the wider civilian community suggest that much of this internal boundary drawing remained unsettled during the early years of the new state’s physical borders.

Immediately after discovering that a loved one had been interned, families mobilised campaigns, appealing to authorities for the prisoner’s release. Long-time residents proclaimed Poland their ‘home’, even if their birthplace was now outside the Polish state. We read appeals on behalf of incarcerated individuals arguing that they ‘feel themselves to be Poles’, despite having been born outside of Polish territory. Many had lived and worked for decades in what would become Poland, married Polish-speaking women and raised their children in Polish. When dozens of Polish wives petitioned authorities for their husbands’ release from confinement, they noted that ‘my husband has always seen himself as a Pole and never intends to leave Poland’ despite his foreign birth.<sup>68</sup> One elderly Czech-born man, who had spent twenty-eight years in Cracow, confessed in his letter to the police that, while he once identified as a German, he wanted to be considered for Polish citizenship.<sup>69</sup> Others believed their incarceration as enemy aliens was simply a mistake. An elderly labourer on an earthworks brigade claimed to have been interned mistakenly as a Czech national, when in fact

<sup>64</sup> Report of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, state police command in Cracow, to Cracow police headquarters, 31 Nov. 1921, ANKr StGKr 50, 1–6.

<sup>65</sup> ANKr StGKr 31, 39–45.

<sup>66</sup> Memo from the Cracow Magistrate to the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Warsaw, 27 Sept. 1919, APKr StGKr 30, 301.

<sup>67</sup> ‘Brak mieszkań’, *Nowa Reforma*, 2 Oct. 1919; ‘Brak mieszkań w Krakowie’, *Goniec Krakowski*, 1 Oct. 1919.

<sup>68</sup> Appeal from Agnieszka Klewar on behalf of Antoni Klewar, 6 Feb. 1919; appeal from Joana Rozbozil on behalf of Edward Rozbozil, 5 Feb. 1919 to Cracow police headquarters, ANKr StGKr 24, 17–9, 63.

<sup>69</sup> Letter from Andrzej Makas to Cracow police headquarters, 6 Feb. 1919. ANKr StGKr 24, 119–23.



he saw himself as ‘of pure Moravian blood’. The man’s son-in-law appealed on his behalf, characterising him as a ‘peaceful person, who has never had any conflict with authorities . . . and has been continually a loyal subject of the country’. Perhaps the best evidence of his loyalty was that his two daughters had both married Poles.<sup>70</sup> Individuals with such indeterminate national affiliations often petitioned to be exempted from the police registry on the basis of subjective qualities, emphasising that they were ‘quiet workers’, hard-working employees or ‘good family men’.<sup>71</sup> Clearly, a particular set of tropes may have been chosen to represent the language of ‘Polishness’ in an explicit strategy to help liberate incarcerated family members from internment camps. Yet the fact that dozens of wives turned to police authorities and military officials in poignant attempts to liberate their husbands suggests a certain belief in the legitimacy of the mechanisms by which internal boundaries were being enforced in the new state.

By late 1921 Poland’s external boundaries had been secured and plebiscites in the border regions completed. Yet denunciations continued to pour into local police stations, focused on ever-expanding groups of suspect residents: Zionists, Bolsheviks and terrorists both foreign and domestic. Targeted individuals and their families kept up a steady stream of appeals and testimonies in defence of prisoners’ loyalty to the new Polish state. The early years of the Polish Second Republic were a time of deep national insecurity when the country’s economic upheavals and vulnerability to invasion were topics of daily conversation and sources of widespread anxiety. These on-going concerns were reflected in the restrictive policies of government institutions and in the behaviour of the broader population. Tracing the ways expressions of insecurity were transmitted between representatives of the state and non-state actors helps to show how a focus on ethnic ‘others’ made its way into civilian communities, often manifesting itself in subjective evaluations of ‘true Polishness’ that went well beyond concrete security concerns. Yet a close examination of interactions between state and society also reveals multiple patterns through which post-war bordering occurred. Government officials made formal determinations of citizenship on the frontier itself as migrants re-entered the state. Even after the borders were closed and the frontiers secured, considerations of civic status played out in contradictory ways in the interior of the country. These simultaneous modes of unmixing all informed one another, demonstrating that the nascent multi-vocal Polish state often spoke in ways that contradicted itself. Historians of the Second Republic have yet to embrace fully the complexity of this process and the multiple, conflicting and overlapping interests at play during these years. In our rush to explain the hardening of ethnic lines in the 1930s, we sometimes lose sight of the fluidity and openness of the early post-war period, and of the multiple paths that were still available in this formative moment.

**Acknowledgments.** I am grateful to the suggestions of the three anonymous reviewers for *Contemporary European History* and to my colleague, Marina Mogilner, whose interventions were enormously helpful in sharpening the analytical framing of this article.

<sup>70</sup> Józef Skrynkowicz to Cracow police headquarters. Authorities released Peranek from internment on 6 Feb. 1919 seemingly in response to this letter.

<sup>71</sup> See, for example, the statement from the Galicyjski Miejski Wojenny Zakład Kredytowy to the Police Chief in Cracow, 2 Feb. 1919, in defence of Jan Dragańczuk, Ruthene, ANKr StGKr 23, 821–4.

**Cite this article:** Stauter-Halsted K (2021). Violence by Other Means: Denunciation and Belonging in Post-Imperial Poland, 1918–1923. *Contemporary European History* 30, 32–45. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777320000466>