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Silesian Harm and Upper Silesian Awakening

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Abstract:

The first part of the paper introduces the definition of the term Silesian harm and describes ways in which it can be observed among Upper Silesians. Further, the author elaborates on how the phenomenon emerged during the interwar period and how it was strengthened during and after the World War II, which led to exacerbation of national and ethnic conflicts in Upper Silesia. One of the effects of the World War II, was the invasion of the Red Army on Silesian lands and a wave of hatred, which led to the tragedy of the civilian population, referred to today as the Upper Silesian Tragedy. In the end, mechanisms of strengthening and consolidation of the sense of harm and abuse among the population of Upper Silesia are studied. The role of the Silesian harm in the process called 'the Upper Silesian awakening' has been scarcely studied in scholarly literature before, but its evolution indicates that the role it plays among the indigenous population of Upper Silesia has changed. Silesian harm is no longer seen as a stigma, but it has become a motivation for social and political action and participation.

Keywords:

Upper Silesians, Silesian harm, Silesian injustice, ethno-regionalist movement, collective memory, ethnopolitics

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Introduction

The currently developing Upper Silesian movement – an ethno-regionalist movement in Upper Silesia – associated with the pursuit of autonomy and the will to maintain the cultural distinctiveness of the Silesian ethnic group, draws on such well-established syndromes present among Upper Silesians as the Silesian harm. However, a new narrative of remembrance is being created, based on what is local, what is Silesian, what is 'ours', because "Silesianism is a mental context established through space-time, historical experiences, behavioural and mental habits. Due to the unveiling of individual experiences which accumulate the past

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and the present, it is possible to reach the most important questions about what Silesianism is” (Kunce, 2007, p. 67).

The phenomenon of the Silesian harm seems to have undergone a serious evolution after 1989: it has ceased to be merely an element stigmatizing the native population of Upper Silesia and has become one of the elements allowing ethnic mobilization. Randall Collins puts emphasis on this conversion: “a successful social ritual operating in the collective gathering of a social movement is a process of transforming one emotion into another. The ritualized sharing of instigating or initiating emotions which brought individuals to the collective gathering in the first place (outrage, anger, fear, etc.) gives rise to distinctively collective emotions, the feelings of solidarity, enthusiasm, and morality which arise in group members’ mutual awareness of their shared focus of attention” (2001, 29). It seems that these remarks can be applied analogically to the process of mobilization of Upper Silesians and the transformation of the Silesian harm syndrome.

The aim of this paper is to analyse the evolution of the role of the Silesian harm among the Upper Silesian community from the perspective of its transformation. The research question is as follows: Did the phenomenon of the Silesian harm have an impact on the development of the Upper Silesian ethnoregionalist movement after 1989? In order to answer the question, historical, cultural and sociological studies, as well as press articles and legal acts were analysed. The research was conducted by analysing the narrative appearing in various sources and referring to the collective memory of Upper Silesians and the Silesian harm. The following text refers mainly to the territory which, in the interwar period, gained the status of the Silesian Voivodship (and was covered by the regulations of the *Statut Organiczny Województwa Śląskiego of 1920* [*the Organic Statute of the Silesian Province*]) within the Second Republic of Poland. This paper is rather exploratory in nature and aims only to encourage further deliberations. Moreover, it does not cover all the issues related to the examined phenomenon (see: Gerlich, 2010; Smolorz, 2013).

The Silesian Harm

The Silesian harm is a social phenomenon, existing among the native population of Upper Silesia (in the so-called Prussian part, which was incorporated to Prussia after the Silesian wars 1740-1763), but is still difficult to define. “Tadeusz Kijonka, a local poet and – what is important for us – an activist engaged in the protection of Silesian culture, long ago expressed his views about the issue, stating that: <the so-called Silesian harm (...), one can long talk about old resentments,

complexes and complications of this issue. It is not a new issue, and even more, it is not a problem that is easy to solve. Because of this, it is worth revisiting accurate and thorough diagnoses (...) from the years before World War II (...) warning of the impending downfall. This can be followed by an assessment of the old prejudices and accusations of separatism. Afterwards, the war added fire to old accusations of separatism, particularism, and national indifference of a significant part of the population, which created new dramatic barriers, resentments, and divisions, perfidiously exploited by manipulators and dodgers (...). It was accompanied by (...) a neglecting attitude toward local traditions, expressed by different sorts of *kulturtragers*>” (Kijonka, 1988 after: Gerlich, 1994, p. 5). The social perception of this phenomenon is expressed in the above-mentioned definition and the sense of harm is still present in the collective memory of Upper Silesians. It directly concerns coming to terms with the past, with the changeability and political instability of the Silesian lands in the 20th century. So far, the Silesian narrative has been mostly transmitted unofficially; it was private, family narration (Copik, 2014), and the collective memory of Upper Silesians still, to some extent, bears the hallmarks of latent memory (Hajduk-Nijakowska, 2010, p. 74). For the purposes of this paper, the term ‘collective memory’ is understood as a system of images about the past and a narrative about the past, as well as a process of their reproduction and interpretation (Kansteiner, 2002).

The phenomenon of the Silesian harm, as an element of collective memory, is one of the current factors integrating the Upper Silesian community and clearly distinguishing it as an ethnic group from other groups (Wanatowicz, 2004, p. 212). The remembrance of harm, of alienation, of a sense of distinctiveness and of old ethnic conflicts in the region has survived in the family tradition for generations. Today, also people who could not participate in the historical events that gave origin to the harm identify with it (Czapliński, 2006). The Silesian harm syndrome has become an element of Silesians’ self-identification, passed on to and processed by successive generations.

Origin – the Interwar Period

Some authors see the beginnings of the Silesian harm much earlier, for example Michał Smolorz sees its roots as early as in the 17th century in the Counter-Reformation conducted by the Habsburg dynasty (2013, p. 118), and Marek Czapliński – in the 18th century, in the incorporation of Silesia into Moravia and its deprivation of the rights the region used to have within the Austrian Empire (2006, p. 60). It seems, however, that for an average person from Upper Silesia, the interwar period is the first historical moment when problems of distinguishing

features of this community become visible. The plebiscite campaign, followed by the transition of parts of Upper Silesia from German territorial sovereignty to Polish sovereignty in 1922, resulted in the studied area in population transformations which gave rise to a sense of harm felt by Upper Silesians. During the inter-war period the harm was caused by Poles, but also the memory of harm caused by Germans before 1922 (especially during the Kulturkampf) was still present in the collective memory.

During the plebiscite campaign (1920-1921) Upper Silesia was a place of both pro-Polish and pro-German propaganda. The *Orędownik Komisarjatu Plebiscytowego*, a press organ of the Polski Komisarjat Plebiscytowy [*Polish Plebiscite Commissioner's Office*], already in its first issue outlined stereotypes concerning the situation of the Silesian people in Upper Silesia, i.e. Silesian is the same kind of Pole as the one from central Poland; Silesian is an honest worker oppressed by Germans; the aim of Poland and Poles is to protect Silesians from German invaders (*Orędownik Komisarjatu Plebiscytowego*). Germans quickly responded with leaflets containing such slogans as "Poland is a seasonal country" or "Death comes from Poland" (Kaczmarek, 2019, pp. 336-340). Fighting for these lands, both countries claimed not only their rights to the territory, but also the right to determine the nationality of the population (which is typical for border areas) (Bahlcke, 2011, p. 35), without taking into account the opinions of the local population. However, among Silesians, a large group of nationally indifferent people were present and according to various sources, it was from 30% to even 50% of the population (Błaszczak-Wacławik, Błasiak, & Nawrocki, 1990, p. 52). Moreover, on the basis of the 1910 census conducted by the Prussian authorities in the Regierungsbezirk Oppeln (Opole administrative unit, part of Upper Silesia region), it can be shown that 53% of the population declared that they spoke Polish, 40% declared that they spoke German, and 4% described themselves as bilingual, but the language divisions did not perfectly reflect the ethnic divisions (Kaczmarek, 2011, p. 52). Wojciech Korfanty pointed out that, in his opinion, 1/3 of the population who had declared the use of Polish language was most likely nationally indifferent.

A mythical image of Poland was created during the plebiscite period, however, it did not survive the confrontation with reality after 1922. In addition to the economic problems of post-war Poland, the question of cultural verification of the native population appeared. As Marian Gerlich points out: "the very trend of verification of the national attitude was seen as a process. After all, for Germans, 'Polish-speaking Silesians' were indeed 'Polish-speaking Prussians', subjects of the King, a group immersed in 'regional awareness'. However, when the process of

crystallization of national awareness among the Upper Silesians began, the term *Wasserpölacken* adhered to them. And in the new reality that back then existed in Poland, the indigenous population was again subjected to a kind of verification” (1994, p. 16). Both Polish and German nationalisms had evident problems in determining who the Upper Silesian people were. Although Upper Silesians lived on their land inhabited by their ancestors, there was a problem with defining their membership and place in the emerging national communities. Some people hoped that this problem could be solved by strengthening the regional culture and the region as such under various autonomy projects (Kaczmarek, 2019, pp. 62-71). At the same time, various projects for the region’s independence were also developed (Muś, 2016).

After the plebiscite, in the part of Upper Silesia that belonged to Poland, the process of change of power, change of administration and migration of people began. Some of newcomers (mainly from other regions of Poland), especially the intelligentsia, were perceived by Silesians as arriving there with a sense of ‘cultural mission’, i.e. spreading Polish culture, Polish language and Polish customs among the native population. They were called *kulturtragers*. The image of a *gorol* (Pole from central or eastern Poland) was created at this time (with features even worse than those of a German official), which was overlaid on the earlier image of an unskilled worker (Gerlich, 1994, p. 13).

The absence of social and professional advancement opportunities for the native population was perceived as harm. Admittedly, for many, this was nothing new as the social situation in the period of the Prussian rule had looked the same, but this was not what was expected of independent Poland. Unfortunately, the dreams and social expectations concerning the change in the state of affairs did not come true, and Silesians – the indigenous inhabitants of the Upper Silesia region – remained an under-represented group in senior administrative positions, and also in the industrial sector. Officials from other regions of Poland replaced German officials. In addition, the need to compete for jobs with newcomers was even more troublesome, and for Silesians, work was a priority and a traditional value. Furthermore, the Silesian values such as the work ethos or customs and traditions differing from those of other Polish regions were depreciated. It was the most painful for Silesians that their *godka* (the Silesian language) – the tongue of their parents and grandparents – was attacked because it was not Polish enough. Silesians felt humiliated, regardless of whether this was the purpose of the actions taken by new settlers or not (Gerlich, 1994). The myth of Poland the Motherland evaporated, “which was probably the most glaringly manifested in the 1927 *Odezwa do ludu śląskiego* [*Address to the Silesian People*] by Wojciech Korfanty, in

which he presented his disappointment with the way Silesia was treated by Poles, but at the same time declared his devotion to Poland” (Kulik, 2014).

In this climate, Silesia-centrism started germinating: “with Silesia-centrism clearly continuing, this situation started to halt the process of opening up ‘outwards’ and reinforced the ‘inwards’ trend, a trend that is characteristic of local communities” (Gerlich, 1994, p. 17). The behaviour model was based on maintaining tradition and dissociating oneself from the changes taking place in the region. The interest in politics and Poland was decreasing in favour of a return to taking care of local, family matters. Private culture remained a conglomerate of Czech, German, Polish and Silesian influences.

1939

The year 1939 was written down in the memory of Europeans as the year of great events and the beginning of the catastrophe that was World War II. It was no different in Upper Silesia. Military operations were carried out in this area from 1 September, and the defence of Upper Silesia was carried out by the Independent Operational Group Silesia under the command of General Jan Jagmin Sadowski, which was a part of the Kraków Army. However, the regular army was withdrawn from the area on 2 and 3 September. Then only civil defence remained.

Upper Silesians felt that Poland was abandoning them. Many civilians fled simultaneously with the Polish Army. These were mainly people who had settled in the region during the interwar period, but not only – Upper Silesians were also escaping. The others were left alone. And some of them decided to fight in forests, in towns, trying to stop the march of the Nazi army, but to no avail. When the German army entered these lands, civilians reacted in various ways. Polish propaganda after 1945 gladly presented this moment with cheering Silesians-Germans in the background, hanging swastikas on buildings and joyfully greeting the army. But it is not the whole truth: “between hanging a flag with the swastika and shooting at German troops there is, after all, a lot of indirect behaviour: people went out in the streets, stood there and watched the troops. (...) people observed these troops with great admiration due to their organizational efficiency, their quick march. It was not a dominant, but a significant group” (Polak, 2004, p. 15). It should be stressed that the majority of ordinary people had no idea about the situation in Nazi Germany. If the population greeted the troops, they “greeted them as Germans, not as Nazis. This is an extremely important thing because those people would learn later that this was a Germany completely different from that of Kaiser’s” (Polak, 2004, p. 15). The situation of border regions such as Upper

Silesia meant that people were not so impressed by the occurring changes – some of them approached the issue of statehood indifferently, some cultivated their national sympathies privately and believed that the entry of the Nazi army would not change much. However, such indifferent behaviours were later misrepresented and Upper Silesians were reproached for them, mainly for propaganda purposes. For the Upper Silesian people, silence when facing defeat, and guarding their own family, work and home was wisdom, not betrayal. In the situation in which they found themselves, experience (from before World War II) told them that thanks to such an attitude they would maintain their identity; it was a defensive reaction to the threat to their safety, in both physical and cultural dimensions.

In December 1939, a census (*Einwohnererfassung*) was carried out. The purpose of the census was to determine the national composition of the area, to determine the number of Silesians who could be Germanised, and to separate Poles. The census was ordered by Himmler. The following description is not surprising: “<Germans came and started billing us for Poland. And in 1945 Poles came back and started billing us for the German times. And so it went round and round, always the same. We are doing our job, we live at home, and we are always judged (...)> This is a view rooted in a specific tradition, a view that is still valid today” (Gerlich, 1994, p. 20).

The World War II Period

The hardest test for the inhabitants of Upper Silesia was the conscription to the Wehrmacht. Since the majority of the region's inhabitants were considered to be Germans, they were subject to obligatory conscription, which lasted from 1940 to 1944. More than 250,000 Silesians were enlisted in the army. Some of them (around 40,000) were sent to the front and later deserted to fight in the Polish Armed Forces under the command of General Anders (Kaczmarek, 2010). Some of them died wearing the German uniform, while others, going through different paths of fate, returned to Silesia or emigrated to Germany. There were many reasons for emigration: one of them was the situation of the Silesian lands during the period of their ‘liberation’ by the Red Army, and also the difficulties in crossing the German-Polish border in 1945.

As of March 1941, the *Deutsche Volksliste* [German National List] was obligatory in the territories incorporated into the Third Reich. In Silesia, it covered almost the entire population and was compulsory. Pursuant to Himmler's ordinance of 16 February 1941, failure to submit the *Volksliste* resulted in being sent to a concentration camp (Błaszczak-Wańców, Błasiak, & Nawrocki, 1990,

p. 47). However, the most often various forms of administrative and economic pressure were used. Employers were also involved in persuading undisciplined workers to sign the list by threatening them with worse working conditions and dismissal. By the end of the war, the sanctions got tougher and refusal to submit was even punished by death (Czapliński, 2002, p. 407). The division into groups in Upper Silesia was as follows: 11% of the population was assigned to group I and II, 65% of the population to group III, and 4% to group IV (Kaczmarek, 2011, p. 260). German citizenship was granted to members of groups I, II and III of the DVL, although in the case of group III it was incomplete citizenship, granted only for the purpose of extending conscription. After 1943, group III representatives were granted full German citizenship (Węcki, 2015). The second group was intended to be 'restored to German', and the third group – to be Germanised. The fourth group, the Polish element, was to be removed from Silesia by applying various forms of deportation to the General Governorate for the Occupied Polish Region and even by biological extermination (Błaszczak-Waławik, Błasiak, & Nawrocki, 1990, p. 44). According to the assumptions of the Gauleiters Josef Wagner and Fritz Brett, Upper Silesia was German, it was only necessary to properly remind Upper Silesians about it and educate them with regard to the sense of their German nationality. In result, during the occupation, about 80,000 people were displaced from the Katowice region (Węgrzyn, 2012, p. 35).

The Upper Silesian region was also used economically for the needs of the Third Reich's economy. It was overexploitation – local raw materials were used too intensively, and there was no intention to maintain a stable level of development of the Upper Silesian industry (Czapliński, 2002). Prisoners of war (usually Russians) were used as a cheap labour force in industrial plants, which did not have a positive impact on the morale of Silesian workers. The normal production cycle in the region was disturbed.

The war in the area was ended by the winter offensive of the Red Army in 1945. Silesia was prepared to defend itself as *Festung Oberschleisien*, but step by step, the Soviet army broke the resistance of German troops. Germans carried out large-scale evacuations of the local population. It is estimated that 750,000 people were evacuated from the right bank of the Odra River (Kaczmarek, 2011, p. 265).

When Silesia was under the rule of the Third Reich, Silesians showed forced submissiveness to authorities, while maintaining a sense of their own identity and striving to stay away from political matters. But, "faith in the Allied Forces' victory – one of the main elements motivating the will to fight in the occupied territories – was not synonymous with the hope of Silesia's return to the Motherland. This was already confirmed by experience" (Błaszczak-Waławik,

Błasiak, & Nawrocki, 1990, p. 54). Apart from Upper Silesians identifying themselves with Polish culture and Upper Silesians who were mostly attached to their own region and locality, there was also a large group of Upper Silesians identifying themselves with the German culture. The cultural conglomerate in these lands made it extremely difficult to assess the attitudes of Upper Silesian people as a social group during World War II. Many decisions and behaviours were forced by the political situation in which the indigenous population of the region found itself, because not all Upper Silesians were Germans and not all Upper Silesian Germans were Nazis.

After the World War II (1945-1949)

When the World War II was over, for Upper Silesians the fight was still to continue. The entry of the Red Army and the emergence of a new socialist government in the region was a painful experience for the native population for many reasons. Hunger and war damage are typical consequences of any war, but the events that will be described here are, to a large extent, specific to Silesia (and to some degree to other areas historically linked to Germany). “The ‘Liberation’ of Upper Silesia, especially its western part, which had belonged to the Third Reich before the war, is still remembered today mainly through the prism of murder, rape, robbery, deportation of people and transport of equipment to the USSR. Soviets retaliated against innocent civilians for all crimes committed by Germans during the campaign in the East” (Dziurok, 2015, p. 8). For Red Army soldiers, entering the Silesian lands was often the first opportunity to come into contact with Western European civilization, which in many cases caused shock and aroused envy, which turned into an even deeper hatred for the ‘Germanic lands’” (Węgrzyn, 2012).

The Red Army treated the former German lands as war prey: German estates and the German population were treated by the Soviet Union as war reparations, to which the Allies had agreed (this was confirmed at the Yalta Conference in 1945) (Dziurok, Linek, 2011, p. 268). Alongside the lands which had belonged to Germany in the interwar period, Upper Silesia was also subjected to repressions: “demoralized by the war, Red Army soldiers contributed fundamentally to the depressing extent and scale of crime spreading in conditions of disintegration or destruction of all social norms. Their behaviour went far beyond hooliganism and marauding (...). The large-scale destruction of the region’s material resources did not stop with the end of the war” (Kaszuba, 2002, p. 431). The entry into the lands with an unclear national identity of the native population quickly led to the treatment of Silesians and the wealth of this land as objects.

The first objective (at least as it was perceived by policy-makers) of the new authority established in this area was score-settling for the war times and de-Germanisation of Silesian lands. This was the spirit of the *Trybuna Śląska*, a daily paper of the Komitet Wojewódzki Polskiej Partii Robotniczej [the Voivodship Committee of the Polish Workers' Party], which in its 1st issue of 2 February 1945 stated: "We, Silesians, must first of all clean our house. Silesia must be Polish! We know what to do with Gestapo and SS-men (...). We also know what to do with the Polish lackeys of German executioners, who today are zealously putting on their white and red armbands (...). In the very first days of freedom in our lands, we encountered German provocations. German bandits set fire to Polish houses; a sergeant cadet of the Polish Army was murdered round a corner in a street in Katowice. German bandits think that their fifth column will be roaming in our land (...)." Today it is difficult to determine the truthfulness of the accusations made by the authors of the proclamation, taking into account the fact that until 1947 independence organisations based on the Armia Krajowa [the Home Army] and the Polish Underground State structures were active in the Silesian lands (Dziurok, Linek, 2011, p. 277). Nevertheless, a systemic approach was applied to the task of clearing Silesia of Germans.

The first decree of 28 February 1945 on the exclusion of the hostile element from society (*Dekret o wyłączeniu ze społeczeństwa wrogiego elementu*), provided for the national verification of persons enrolled in groups III and IV of the DVL and the possibility of rehabilitation of persons from the group II. The verification followed a relevant declaration and an oath of loyalty, provided that nobody reported that a given person had wanted to be included in the DVL. Rehabilitation was carried out in the form of court proceedings, it had to be proved that an entry in the list was made against the will of the person or under duress. Rehabilitation could take place if nobody reported otherwise. If an application for rehabilitation was rejected, such a person could be placed in a concentration camp, sent to a forced labour camp, and their property would be forfeited. Even more radical proposals were presented: "suggestions were made in various verification committees that we should first relocate all Silesians to camps and then see what to do with them" (Polak, 2004, p. 21). Abandoned estates were nationalised in accordance with the Decree of 2 March 1945 on abandoned and derelict property (*Dekret o majątkach opuszczonych i porzuconych*), and yet "a neighbour's denunciation was enough to send a person – a traitor of the nation – to a prison or camp, while the 'kind neighbour' or another person who had only just arrived here would take care of the abandoned flat. As far as people from group II of the Volkslist are concerned, the scale of abuse was massive" (Polak, 2004, p. 19). The rules of verification and rehabilitation were amended twice: by the Act of 6 May

1945 and the Decree of 28 June 1946 on Criminal Responsibility for the Betrayal of Nationality (*Ustawa z dnia 6 maja 1945 roku i Dekret z dnia 28 czerwca 1946 roku o odpowiedzialności karnej za odstępstwo od narodowości*). Criminal liability was liberalised under these laws; pursuant to the latter act, only those who had reported to the occupier's organisation or applied for an entry in the DVL were to be punished. Pursuant the last act – Decree of 15 November 1946 on the seizure of the assets of the states that were at war with the Polish State between 1939 and 1945 and the assets of legal persons and citizens of those states, and on compulsory administration of those assets (*Dekret z dnia 15 listopada 1946 o zajęciu majątku państw pozostających z Państwem Polskim w stanie wojny w latach 1939 – 1945 i majątku osób prawnych i obywateli tych państw oraz o zarządzie przymusowym nad tymi majątkami*) – former German assets were to be seized as war reparations.

At the same time, mass migration of the population continued. On the one hand, it had the form of forced displacement of people of German nationality, which in 1945 and the following years affected up to 400,000 people (Dziurok, Linek 2011, p. 272), who were first held at temporary meeting points and then usually sent by train to the West. After 1946, the repressions diminished, and displacements took the form of more or less voluntary 'family reunification campaigns'. On the other hand, fugitives, casualties and imprisoned persons were replaced by newcomers from the regions of Kielce, Kraków and Łódź, often focused on appropriation of property and looting. The next wave of newcomers who settled here consisted of those forcibly displaced from *Kresy Wschodnie* (the Eastern Borderlands), so-called repatriates: "most of the displaced people settled in the cities of the former Upper Silesian Voivodship, i.e. Bytom, Zabrze, Gliwice and Opole. In 1945, a total of 160,000 newcomers came to Upper Silesia, and at the end of 1948, there were as many as 353,000 of them, including 193,000 so-called repatriates" (Woźniczka, 2010, p. 59). In the period of the Polish People's Republic propaganda was aimed at creating a stereotype of a German as an SS-man, an arrogant rich man, a tyrant and a Nazi, while Poles were portrayed as good, just and wronged people, martyrs for a national cause (Kamusella, 1999). Huge population changes in Upper Silesia took place largely under duress, which caused social conflicts, and many of those conflicts remain unresolved to this day. This is the only way to explain the stories of surprise of then-newcomers at the porcelain and cutlery they found in the houses they had been allocated, but also the disrespectful attitude towards *Kresowiaczy* (people from the former Eastern Borderlands of the II Republic of Poland) shown by the native population.

What we refer to nowadays as 'the Upper Silesian tragedy' was yet another change in the multitude of changes taking place at that time: "The Upper

Silesian tragedy is defined as repressions against the innocent civilian population of Upper Silesia applied after the completion of the activities on the front, mainly due to their nationality. These included not only deportations to the East, but also crimes committed by the Red Army soldiers, looting and mass rapes. It was also the illegal placing of civilians in camps by the Polish Communist authorities, carried out without any legal sanction” (Dziurok, 2015.01.25, p. 4). At least 2,000 people were killed by the Red Army soldiers during the ‘liberation’ period, although some sources provide much higher numbers (Dziurok, 2015, p. 8). In the western part of the province, transition camps were established for people who were to be expelled to Germany. Camps were located mainly in the eastern part of the province: the Jaworzno camp – on the grounds of the Auschwitz sub-camp – is estimated to have received as many as 14,500 people; the Świętochłowice-Zgoda camp, which existed from March to November 1945, received 3,500 people, almost 2,000 of whom died; the Mysłowice camp, which was established in February 1945 and operated until the autumn of 1946, received 4,900 people, of whom over 2,000 died (Rosenbaum, 2012, p. 10). In the western part of the province, resettlement camps in conjunction with labour camps were established, such as the camp in Łambinowice.

Furthermore, deportations of Silesians lasted throughout 1945. Some of the people did not return to their homes until 1947 and many died. To this day, 30,000 names of those deported have been confirmed, and historians from the Instytut Pamięci Narodowej [Institute of National Remembrance] estimate that there may have been as many as 50,000 of them. They were sent to work in industrial plants in Donbass, the Caucasus and the Ural Mountains, Kazakhstan and Siberia. The number of those who died during transport or at work remains unknown (Dziurok, 2015, p. 9). They were treated as ‘living war reparations’. In the region of Upper Silesia, the consequences of population losses during the war, migration period and the exploitation policy of the new communist authorities were labour force shortages and problems with production (Bartoszek, 2014).

A Polish unification policy was introduced in Silesia – its aim was to eliminate all traces of German culture, the distinctiveness of Silesian culture and to Polish this land entirely: “in the reality of the Polish People’s Republic, such ‘unifying’ activities met with the approval of the party apparatus and did not get justice. These were just some of many elements of the policy of uprooting Silesians by cutting their ties to the past, by denying them the possibility of mourning, by removing what made Silesia a common home. The destruction of remembrance also meant forcing people to leave their homes and displacing them from their territories (...)” (Kopka, 2014, p. 53). The first steps were the destruction of German signs, inscriptions and even tombstones, changing street names and the

surnames of inhabitants. In the name of unification with the other parts of Poland, traces of German culture, which had contributed to the development of this region, were destroyed. Upper Silesians were to stop being Upper Silesian and to become the same Poles as those from central Poland. Once again, Silesian language was depreciated and Silesian culture was replaced by revolutionary model of life. Although the following example concerns Lower Silesia, it perfectly reflects the atmosphere prevailing in the whole of Silesia at that time: “works of art from sacred and residential buildings were transported to museums in central Poland. Lower Silesia became a ‘warehouse of building materials’. Bricks from the monuments of history demolished in Wrocław were used to rebuild the capital, stone cladding and architectural details from Lower Silesian palaces were used, among others, in the construction of the Palace of Culture and Science” (Kubik, 2013, p. 71).

The Silesian tradition has since remained in a specific diaspora. The Germans and Silesians who left for the West during and after World War II cultivate their traditions on the other side of the border on the Odra/Oder and Nysa Łżycka/Lusatian Neisse. These are mainly German traditions which have evolved in Silesia and continue to be maintained by Silesians, but they are also Silesian traditions. Numerous private institutions have been established in Germany, the best known of which include Landsmannschaft Schlesien [the Silesian Compatriots’ Association], Landsmannschaft der Oberschlesier [the Upper Silesian Compatriots’ Association], as well as state institutions such as Stiftung Kulturwerk Schlesien [the Foundation for Silesian Culture] in Wurzburg, which helped to open the Silesian Museum in Goerlitz, Stiftung Schlesien [the Silesian Foundation] in Hannover, Stiftung Haus Oberschlesien [the Upper Silesian Home Foundation], which helped to establish the Museum of Upper Silesian Lands in Ratingen, and Centrum Haus Schlesien [the Silesian Home Centre], which maintains Silesian traditions.

In the period of the Polish People’s Republic, the power apparatus in Upper Silesia was largely composed of incoming people, and Upper Silesians were an under-represented group (Błaszczak-Waławik, Błasiak, & Nawrocki, 1990, p. 78). In such conditions, it seems correct to speak of the political colonisation of Silesia. Similar practices concerned promotions to higher positions in the industry, including the most traditional mining sector. In many cases such positions were offered to incoming people while Upper Silesians were disregarded. There was a return to the inequivalent interregional exchange, which lasted until 1989 and can be referred to as the economic colonisation of the region. It triggered a specific attitude of Silesians to authorities: “the majority of respondents at that time were guided by the principle of staying away from politics and distrustfully observing the actions of new authorities. Some of them were even hostile, and the hostility

resulted both from perceiving the authorities as ‘non-Polish’, which concerned the areas of the former Silesian Voivodship, and ‘anti-Silesian’” (Błaszczak-Waławik, Błasiak, & Nawrocki, 1990, p. 90). Once again, the new Poland was not friendly to Upper Silesians and Silesianism itself, separate and peculiar in relation to totalitarian morality, it aroused aversion of new authorities. It meant that Silesianism was excluded from public culture and had to go underground again. There was no talk of separateness, otherness and the right to cultivate one’s traditions. This message existed, as in the past, in the family or neighbourhood environment, but not in the official culture. Upper Silesians did not have the right to Silesianism in the Polish People’s Republic.

In February 1945, authorities established the Śląsko-Dąbrowskie Voivodship – an administrative unit that was not based on historical regions or social divisions. Moreover, on 6 May 1945, *Statut Organiczny Województwa Śląskiego* [*the Organic Statute of the Silesian Province*], which had given the Silesian land autonomy before the war, was repealed. All these changes were supposed to lead to the elimination of the Silesian character of Silesia and its full Polonisation.

Silesian Harm Today

In their minds, Upper Silesians still have a sense of harm, which is a catalyst for ethnic conflict (Birbir et al. 2016; Saxton, 2005). The narrative about the Silesian harm is related to the verification of the population and its nationality, an attempt at national assimilation through Germanisation or Polonisation, and a series of actions ensuing from these assumptions (Kamusella, 1999, p. 396). The features attributed to the Silesian harm, which as a phenomenon spread in the consciousness of the population in the interwar period, were consolidated during World War II and in the post-war period. It was only after 1989 that ‘the Upper Silesian awakening’ became possible. The term was proposed by Dr. Tomasz Słupik in 2010, when Upper Silesian ethnoregionalists were for the first time successful in local government elections (Redakcja PS, 2010) and revived the debate concerning the old, unresolved conflicts and harm. The return to the ‘Silesian harm’, evident since the late 1980s, should be seen in this context: “however, this overwhelming conviction persists, which is recorded in collective memory, that the Silesian land is being exploited, just like the indigenous people. It is, therefore, above all, the Upper Silesian people who are the victims, not the beneficiaries of the political change (...)”. (Gerlich, 2010, p. 192).

“Nowadays, the so-called Silesian harm is fuel for movements that disagree with what is happening in Silesia”, concluded Marek Twaróg in 2014, and

we should agree with this statement. The feeling of harm was transformed into a force aiming to change the political and social situation of Upper Silesia and its inhabitants. This change is emphasized by Elżbieta Anna Sekuła, who writes in her book about the appearance of the ‘RAŚ generation’ in the 1990s. The manifestation of this power is Upper Silesians’ declarations of ethnic (sometimes national) distinctiveness. The most striking evidence of this is the results of the last census of 2011, where almost 850,000 people declared their Silesian nationality, of which over 375,000 stated it was exclusive (*Struktura narodowo-etniczna, językowa i wyznaniowa Polski*, 2015, p. 122). These declarations were also a way to take a stand on contemporary issues: they resulted from disappointment with the processes of the reconstruction of the region, both transformation and decentralisation, which were dominated by the model of restructuring by liquidation, rather than restructuring by creation. The very process of transformation is associated with the closing of mines and ironworks that have provided employment for many decades, with existential threats and impoverishment. Moreover, the decentralisation process was basically carried out in isolation from the identity issues of the region’s inhabitants, a good example of which is the establishment of the Śląskie Voivodship in the geographical shape in which it is still present today: that is to say, it is an administrative unit combining part of the historical lands of Upper Silesia with territories of Małopolska (Lesser Poland): part of Wyżyna Krakowsko-Częstochowska (Częstochowa part of Polish Jura, called Częstochowa Upland), Zagłębie Dąbrowskie (Dąbrowa Basin) and Żywiecczyzna (Żywiec Area).

The emergence of the Upper Silesian movement should be considered as the emergence of a protest movement both social and political in character. The region of Upper Silesia has already been identified as a specific political arena (Trosiak, 2016, p. 63), where for years successive rulers have been accused of making decisions in isolation from the needs of the region, conducting a robbery economy (an example of such an approach can already be found in the article entitled *Kolonia wewnętrzna [Inner Colony]* which appeared in *ABC. Pismo śląsko-dąbrowskiej “Solidarności”*, issue 1/1989, 29.12.1989). These elements are basically the components of the Silesian harm syndrome. Today it is also possible to witness the process of the transformation of the phenomenon of harm into a force in the political field – this time it is becoming a mobilizing force. The need to give power to the regional community in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity and for its inhabitants to take responsibility for their own Heimat (the need to become the hosts of the region) has long been proposed by the Ruch Autonomii Śląska [Silesian Autonomy Movement] and other Silesian ethno-regionalist organisations in their political platforms (Sekuła, 2009, p. 173). Moreover, the movement’s attempts to have Silesians recognized as an ethnic minority by the Polish law and

to obtain rights for them resulting from this status, as well as its main demand of autonomy for the region are primarily based on overcoming the syndrome of the Silesian harm (with emphasis on the ongoing character of the process rather than its current status). Growing support for this political agenda was confirmed by voters during the local and regional elections in 2010 and 2014.

Also, the specific revival of Silesian culture should be interpreted in the context of transforming the sense of harm into motivation to act. In this respect, we deal with social actions on an unprecedented scale, aimed at emphasising the value of native culture (Smolińska, 2006, p. 114). Above all, it is about revitalising the Silesian speech, trying to codify it and create literature in the Silesian language. Also, the growing demand for folklore and various folklore forms of mainly popular culture, the emergence of such commercial ventures as the Gryfnie.pl shop and many others, show the community's keen interest in Silesian culture. The popularity of the *Po naszymu, czyli po śląsku* [In our language, in Silesian] competition and feasting events such as the *Śląskie Gody* [The Silesian Feast] also have their community-forming dimension. What should be mentioned in this context is music in which the Silesian atmosphere is easily rendered, as exemplified by the so-called Silesian disco, as well as by the establishment of such bands as *032* or *Oberschlesien*. Both in the public space and in popular culture, it seems that Silesianism is increasing from year to year. However, these are not conservative, traditional forms of Silesianism, but attempts at a modern approach to people's own traditions and culture. Silesians actively strive (on their own and by negotiating with the state) to ensure that their cultural security is understood as the possibility of living in accordance with their traditions, customs and using their language, but also as the opportunity to process and reinterpret the existing culture (Wieviorka, 2018).

Conclusions

The Upper Silesian harm is a social phenomenon present in the awareness of the Upper Silesian community and a part of their common ethnic, but also regional identity: "Upper Silesian identity is thus manifested in many areas of life, creating a strong sense of the 'we' community and a foundation that distinguishes the region from other areas of Poland" (Szczepański & Śliz, 2014). It is manifested in a sense of distinctiveness from dominant Polish culture and a sense of the lack of influence on one's own fate. It also appears in a sense of misunderstanding, humiliation and depreciation of cultural identity (non-dominant culture) of this ethnic group. The appearance of the phenomenon of the Silesian harm is connected with the first 'national score-settlement' of the plebiscite period (interwar period),

but this syndrome was reinforced during the period of nationality verification carried out by German authorities and subsequently by Polish authorities in the years 1939-1949.

Studying this phenomenon is crucial for the understanding of the development and consolidation of the Upper Silesian movement after 1989. It is also an important factor influencing German-Polish, but also Silesian-Polish and Silesian-German relations in the context of the so-called policy of remembrance, which still requires the constant involvement and attention of decision makers. However, the Silesian harm has not only remained part of the collective memory but has also evolved into a force allowing the ethnic mobilization of Upper Silesians. Today, it is above all a motivation for the activities of the Silesian ethno-regionalist movement in the social, cultural and political aspects. It is also used by the movement's activists and politicians to create narration, especially during electoral campaigns. It has become a unique force that strengthens people's will to hold on to their individuality and identity, and has created bonds of solidarity among members of the community.

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