

MICROHISTORIES OF GERMAN-SPEAKING RESIDENTS OF THE POZNAŃ PROVINCE VS. GEOPOLITICS

Elżbieta Rybicka follows in footsteps of Edward Said, observing that there is no innocent cultural and literary discourse about space, because „it asks us more and more questions about place politics, ideological appropriation, symbolic violence of cultural maps, even of private territories” and concludes that „geopoetics cannot be separated from geopolitics” (Rybicka 42). She notes the shift of focus from the poetics of space to its politics, from ontology to ideology. She stresses that in this context, frontiers and multicultural hybrids are especially intriguing, which does not mean „re-discovering the world, but above all a greater sensitivity to the spatial positioning of culture, history, individual, and communities” (Rybicka 42).

The Grand Duchy of Poznań¹ was created by the decisions of the Vienna Congress. Its establishment did not take into account all

¹ Since its founding, the Grand Duchy of Poznań has been an integral part of the Prussian state, but in contrast to the neighbouring Duchy of Pomerania and the Duchy of Silesia, it had a higher rank. After 1848, the name was replaced by the official Province of Poznań. In the period of tightening the policy towards Poles, the term ‘Ostmark’ [Eastern March], derived from the terminology of the Middle Ages, appears to remind us of the historical struggle for laying claim to the eastern frontiers. Until 1935, the term ‘Ostmark’ was used precisely in the context of struggle [Gerke 28–29]. This is shown, among other things, by the tendentious and politicized literature of the Eastern March [*Ostmarkenlitera-*

the geographical and historical conditions, and the boundaries of the Prussia-annexed territory did not fully correspond with the historical boundaries of the region of Wielkopolska (Serrier 262), which justifies considerations concerning geopolitics. The Province of Poznań is thus an area defined in administrative and geopolitical terms, subject of the settlement policy, first of the Prussian government, and after the unification of Germany in 1871, of the German one. Contrary to expectations, this settlement policy did not produce the desired effects and did not permanently strengthen the German element here.

German settlement activity was supported in Wielkopolska in various ways², including legislative action (Kulturkampf, the formation of the Colonization Commission, Prussian expulsions, educational laws). Prussian officials and teachers, in turn, were supposed not only to execute the authorities' policies in the field³, but to be animators of public life. Martin Broszat writes about the German population's settling this area as „officials”, especially in large cities. The author observes that „this artificial introduction of the Germanic element in this province was little suitable for the permanent restoration of Prussian-German rule” (Broszat 197). However, some of the public servants, teachers and lecturers saw themselves as promoters of the Germanic element [Träger des Deutschtums]. Their efforts were complemented by activists of local associations, editors of regional journals and authors of the *Heimatliteratur*, giving fictitious accounts of a wonderful life in the German Eastern Borderlands. For the same reason, a comprehensive cultural policy was implemented. It targeted the German population, which was to be more closely associated with what was commonly perceived as a rather unattractive region. It was hoped that the feeling of alienation would be resolved, one of the reasons for the demographic disadvantage for Germans. First, their

tur]. See also E. Połczyńska, „Im polnischen Wind”. *Beiträge zum deutschen Zeitungswesen, Theaterleben und zur deutschen Literatur im Grossherzogtum Posen 1815–1918*. Poznań 1988; M. Wojtczak, „Ostmarkenliteratur”. *Prowincja Poznańska w literaturze niemieckiej lat 1890–1918*. Poznań 2001.

² The history of German settlement in Wielkopolska harks back at least to the 13th century. It never reached such proportions and importance as in the neighbouring regions.

³ Officials were granted settlement allowances and other subsidies, and the service in the Borderlands was counted as if the time spent here was a time of war (Broszat 172).

demographics were lower than for the Poles, and second: migration at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries was meagre (Broszat 191–192).

The process of arduous construction and strengthening of the identification of German inhabitants with the region was to be additionally supported by a proper historical narrative, “treating memory in an instrumental way in order to defend an interpretation of past events which [...] undermines other interpretations” (Kapralski 20). Therefore, any measures aimed at developing this part of the Eastern March and documenting the Prussian and German presence in this area were demonstrated and perpetuated in the most varied manner, according to the determinants of historical policy. Anniversaries were celebrated, monuments unveiled, memorial days celebrated assigned and given the appropriate meaning. General-interest texts were published and *Ostmarkenliteratur* disseminated⁴. In this way, thanks to the various media, the desired content became an element of collective memory. One of the pillars of the idea of German settlement in this region was the popularization of the myth of the „German East” (Hahn 386). The state was to establish its domination here and establish collective memory on this myth⁵. The method applied for this purpose was shifting the focus from the history of events to their perception and interpretation.

It is therefore worthwhile to focus on microhistory, a case study⁶, and – on the basis of the autobiographies of German-speaking writers who, from 1815 to 1918, lived in the Province of Poznań for some time – to answer how the authorities’ activities signalled at the outset were received by the migrants. Another question to be addressed is whether or not in their personal reflections these migrants identify with the political agenda implemented by the authorities.

Thus, apart from the history of events, another issue is „what really happened” (Karp, Traba 8), and how the authors assessed the poli-

⁴ The protagonists of novels from the so-called Literature of the Eastern March series are German settlers, so-called *Kulturträger* and pioneers of the Germanic element. The purpose of this literature is, among others, to disseminate arguments in favour of the German presence in the Poznań region.

⁵ Popularization of the myth can be seen as an example of legitimising new things by ‘inventing’ their traditions. This follows the principle that if one can prove that a fact or process has roots in the past, it is for the better (Kapralski 22).

⁶ On the meaning of studies on microhistory and studies on experience (see Karp, Traba 7–22).

tics taking place before their eyes, how they experienced the actions of the state, how they remembered them, and how they wrote about them (Assmann 16). Such comparisons indicate the coexistence of actual, experienced and memorized factual history, which highlights the difference between the subjective space of the authors, the objective space of their real life and the space of science, defined by the researchers of a given field (Ungern-Sternberg 879).

Julie Burow (1806–1857), Ludwig Kalisch (1814–1882), Otto Roquette (1824–1896), Adelheid Sturm (1840–1911), Clara Viebig (1860–1952), Albert Steuer (1874–1967), Ernst Toller (1893–1939), Alfred Cohn (1901–1961), Kurt Ihlenfeld (1901–1972), and A. E. Johann (actually Alfred Ernst Johann Wollschläger, 1901–1996)⁷ are representatives of individual and collective memory of a certain temporally, spatially and to a large extent socially homogeneous group. Therefore, based on their autobiographical texts, the issue of their subjective reception of the geopolitical space inhabited by them will be discussed below. Since they are a relatively homogeneous professional group (they are mostly children of officials and teachers, plus one Protestant clergyman, one Catholic priest, and two authors of Jewish descent from merchant families), they are therefore not representative of all Germans living here between 1815 and 1918. Thus, they represent one of the many „truths” of the past (Karp, Traba 20). However, due to the high degree of the „official capacity” of German urban societies, the autobiographical texts under scrutiny deserve all the more attention, since they help to demonstrate the extent to which the individualized memory of the authors, representatives of this particular group⁸, complements the political and national memory⁹ about the Province of Poznań as „an an-

⁷ Although the saturation of individual autobiographies with regional content varies and the setting of the texts includes locations outside the Province of Poznań, the autobiographical texts identified will be considered exclusively in the Poznań context.

⁸ Due to the profession of their parents, officials or teachers, the authors are children of representatives of the authorities in the field (e.g. O. Roquette, A. Sturm, A. E. Johann).

⁹ According to A. Assmann, wherever history is used to build identity, where it is taken over by citizens, and treated as instrumental by politicians, one can talk about political or national memory. Unlike the polyphony of grassroots social memory, encompassing communications and cultural memory, which passes away with the passing of successive generations, political/national memory is more homogeneous, strongly embedded in political institutions, oriented towards survival, with a top-down impact on society (Assmann 37). It is intended to serve as a foundation of local identity, „assembled” for the immediate needs of ideologists.

cient German country". It moreover helps to establish whether or not, or to what extent these autobiography authors distance themselves from the historical policy propagating the myth of the „German East”.

Perception of both myths examined on the basis of relevant literature shows that the individual perception of geopolitical space does not have to be identical with its ideological appropriation, a result of the current political interests of the authorities. It is abundantly clear that the earlier the autobiographies authors were born – their lives coincided with the onset of the administrative unit called the Grand Duchy of Poznań – the more critical they are of the time spent here. From the perspective of those born before 1840/50, the Grand Duchy of Poznań is usually treated as a periphery of Prussia. As we know, this does not fit the vision, supported by ideological propaganda, of work in the Eastern March as, in a sense, a „promised land”. Otto Roquette, who spent the period from 1824 to 1839 here, recalls:

It was common to complain about this hopeless area (around Gniezno – E.N.), about unpleasant walks in the deep sand, without shade, because there was not a single tree around; there was nothing beautiful to look at. [...]. The authors of bibliographies were unanimous that staying here was something terrible, because almost everyone had seen a piece of the great world before¹⁰.

Another common denominator of the texts is that the authors are relatively circumspect when recalling in the memoirs their stay in the Province of Poznań, which may mean that the authors reluctantly yield to the broader context of historical events. Because if they almost skip this time period, we can assume that they are more concerned with other matters, subjectively more important, such as those related to their private inner space, rather than to the geopolitical one. The space of territorial expansion is often only the outer layer, so most treat it as marginal¹¹. There are also authors, like Ernst Toller, who imply that the Germans „considered themselves” (which indicates that this need not necessarily be true) „to be indigenous peoples

¹⁰ „Allgemein war die Klage über die trostlose Oede der Gegend [um Gnesen – E.N.], über das schlechte Spazierengehen im tiefen Sande, die Schattenlosigkeit, da kein Baum ringsum zu sehen war, der Mangel an jeglichem Reiz, auf dem das Auge hätte ausruhen können. [...] Man war einig, daß dies eigentlich ein schrecklicher Aufenthalt sei, denn fast Alle hatten die Welt in größeren Kreisen gesehn” (Roquette 43–44).

¹¹ It is also possible to admit that there may be authors who treat the political appropriation of the region as something unquestionable and thus do not refer to this issue at all.

and real lords of this country" (Toller 2). In turn, Adelheid Sturm claims that „it was not really German territory" (Sturm 4).

Restraint as to the political dimension of work and life in Poznań may also mean ignoring the government's colonial policy and everything that is directly or indirectly linked to it. Moreover, it is impossible to exclude that autobiography authors turn on unique self-censorship for patriotic reasons, because most probably they were not supposed to write critically about the Prussian / German presence in the former Wielkopolska. It was easier to ignore it and to limit it to general patterns and not to run any risks (Tazbir 16–17). After all we know that the writing of memories is directed at the recipient, hence the authors select the information and choose solutions to make the narrative more palatable. Texts written with a view to being published, their content made public, are written differently than those meant exclusively for the author.

In most cases (with the exception of A. E. Johann, C. Viebig, E. Toller), writers are not involved in political debate as they marginalise politics. For this reason, the question of whether there must be a large gap between the official current of memory and the individual perspective will remain without a conclusive answer. Its existence is indisputable as evidenced by, among others, the attitude of C. Viebig. Although the writer seems to have avoided taking a position against the official narrative, she is not silent but hides behind her own fiction¹². Her commentaries about her own novel *Das schlafende Heer* (1904) are a pretext for discussing the Polish-German neighbourly relations in the Poznań region, with politics hovering in the background. Although *Ostmarkenliteratur* is considered to be an important medium popularizing the position of the German authorities in redefining the historical image of the region, in the novel, despite being classified as *Ostmarkenliteratur*, C. Viebig criticizes the actions taken by the authorities and points to their low effectiveness. This is important information, showing the weaknesses of the one-dimensional policy of the German Empire against the Poles. Biographical memory says in this case what social memory is not yet ready to talk about.

During my stay there, the Polish issue was gaining interest in German politics. At the time, I did not yet think about writing, nor was I aware that I inhaled that

¹² C. Viebig makes use of an intertextual measure called in studies of collective memory a "remembrance of literature", or a recall of literature within literature (see Lachmann) (see Neumann 149–178).

atmosphere, whose breath is recognisable in my novel (*Das schlafende Heer – E.N.*), an atmosphere full of political, economic and religious conflict ... which led to the painful loss of not only the Province of Poznań but also of a large part of Upper Silesia¹³.

C. Viebig further emphasizes:

Without taking sides, I clearly showed how social unrest was fuelled, how difficult it was to relieve the Poles' dissatisfaction, what banal mistakes, contrary to political principles and humanity, were committed by the Germans¹⁴.

The confrontation policy, in the opinion of the author, gave rise to the Poles' uncompromising aspiration to regain independence.

She talked about that day, where as a young woman she stood by the window and watched the wheelbarrows and carts transporting from the village of Buk to Poznań unfortunate soldiers. Their noses and ears cut off with knives of fanatical Polish women, their hands and legs broken, their bodies covered with blood. And this was the time when the Polish revolution grew before me. I heard the hammering of scythes and saw their broad glow assume the colour of blood during the death harvest. I saw a white falcon in flight on a red symbol fly and heard the mad scream of the crowd:

'Poland has not perished yet -
Long live Poland!'"¹⁵.

¹³ „Während ich dort war, erregte die polnische Frage großes Aufsehen in der deutschen Politik. Ohne dass es mir bewusst war, denn ich dachte noch nicht daran zu schreiben, saugte ich mich voll mit dieser Atmosphäre, deren Atem sich durch meinen Roman [*Das schlafende Heer – E. N.*] hindurchspüren lässt, eine Atmosphäre voller politischer, wirtschaftlicher und religiöser Konflikte [...], die zu dem schmerzlichen Verlust nicht nur der Provinz Posen geführt haben, sondern auch eines guten Teils von Oberschlesien“ (Viebig 92).

¹⁴ „Ohne Partei zu ergreifen, habe ich am hellen Tag gezeigt, wie man schürte, wie man es verhinderte, die Unzufriedenheit der Polen zu löschen, welche Fehler, zu leicht zu verstehen, die Deutschen gegen die politischen Prinzipien und die Menschlichkeit begingen“ (Viebig 92).

¹⁵ „Und wenn sie dann von jenem Tage sprach, an dem sie, als junge Frau am Fenster stehend, zusah, wie drunten auf Karren und Leiterwagen die unglücklichen Soldaten vom Dorfe Buk her in die Stadt Posen gebracht wurden, mit abgeschnittenen Nasen und Ohren, verstümmelten Armen und Beinen, halb verblutet unter den Messern fanatischer Weiber, dann wuchs die polnische Revolution gewaltig vor mir auf. Ich hörte das Dengeln der Sensen, ich sah deren breites, blitzendes Blank sich blutig färben unterm Mähen der Sensenmänner, ich sah den weißen Falken fliegen auf rotem Panier und hörte das wahnwitzige Gebrüll der Menge:

'Noch ist Polen nicht verloren -
Niech żyje Polska!'" (Viebig 48).

In further considerations, it is impossible to ignore another important factor influencing the content and shape of memories. They always crystallize in the present perspective. What is meaningful and justified at present is remembered (Degen 80), because today determines individual and social remembrance, which does not come from the past but from the present (Baumgartner)¹⁶. A specific moment in which one remembers affects the thematic and emotional focus. Therefore, analyzing the autobiographical content with the time taken to write them¹⁷ down and answering questions about the moment of history and the moment of the author's life when they arise, is by all means reasonable, perhaps even necessary, to better understand the possible causes of the selection of the motifs and the way of conducting autobiographical narratives¹⁸.

Taking into account another determinant, i.e. the time lapse between the events described and the moment of remembrance, it can be seen that in two cases it is even sixty years. This must affect the „remembrance of the past” and be instrumental for the differences arising from the situational context of the autobiography and the contextual situation of the life of an autobiography author (Karp, Traba 20). So, the time lapse between actual experience and narration about it determines memory. Apparently, this effect can be seen in A. E. Johann, who discusses at length the political change in Europe and in the world and regards the Poles' longing for their own independent state as justified. He also understands well the inevitability of political change.

In the German East (...) in the Prussian Province of Poznań, earlier known as Wielkopolska, and in Upper Silesia Poles wake up. Their comprehensible longing for their own state between Germany and Russia did not expire throughout the 125 years of statelessness¹⁹.

¹⁶ Marian Golka writes about „tendencies” and „reconciliation of the past with the present” (Golka 52).

¹⁷ The years of life of the autobiographies authors span the period from 1806 (the year of Julia Burow's birth) to 1996 (the year of A. E. Johann's death). The first autobiography came out in 1857 (J. Burow), the last one in 1989 (A. E. Johann). Four books came out after their authors died (A. Sturm, C. Viebig, A. Cohn, A. Steuer).

¹⁸ On the factors and patterns of individual forgetting (Golka 51-52).

¹⁹ „Im deutschen Osten [...] regten sich in der preußischen Provinz Posen, dem früheren Großpolen, und in Oberschlesien die Polen, deren sehr verständliche Sehnsucht nach einem eigenen Staat zwischen Deutschland und Rußland an den rund 125 Jahren ihrer Staatenlosigkeit nie erloschen war” (Johann 190).

A. E. Johann and C. Viebig, referring to the term „der deutsche Osten“, allude to the myth of the „German East.“ It is worth asking here whether this is enough evidence of subordination to the ruling ideologies and their reinterpretation of history. To some extent this is perhaps true, when years later, as a consequence of the loss of this part of the Eastern March, C. Viebig presented the now former Province of Poznań as an agricultural basket of Germany. The author of a memorable commemorative text published on July 17, 1930 in *Wiesbadener*²⁰ *Tageblatt*, writes about the „German East“ as a lost paradise, when „those endless wheat fields – full granaries of Prussia – fell prey to the Poles“²¹.

At the same time, however, he continues to write about the monotonous and poor country in which, like Adelheid Sturm, there are only pines. He moreover draws contrasting comparisons between Rhineland and the Province of Poznań; the former definitely prevails.

I was born in the West, in the most beautiful corner of Rhineland, on the gentle Moselle with its vine slopes; the merry sun smiles at them from the dark blue sky. Thus, this infinite land without mountains and without diversification seemed boring to me. Cereals, beet fields, potatoes, and again potato fields, beets, cereals – oats, barley, rye and wheat, wheat – wherever I looked, everywhere in the sunshine there was the same wheat. Almost out of fear I cried out: Am I supposed to stay here?²²

²⁰ Autobiographic writings by C. Viebig originated in different periods of her life and were published correspondingly (1914, 1925, 1926, 1927, 1929, 1930, 1931) in various sources, such as: *Berliner Tageblatt*, *Kürschners Bücherschatz* (Ed. H. Hilger), *St. Galler Tagblatt*, *Räder*, *Kölnische Illustrierte Zeitung*, *Wiesbadener Tageblatt*, *Uhu – Das Ullstein Magazin*, *Die Literatur*, *Deutsche Presse*, *Monatszeitschrift für Freunde des Buches*, *Eifelkalender*, *8 Uhr-Blatt*, and *Der Gesellige*. An anthology with autobiographical texts (*Clara Viebig. Mein Leben. Autobiographische Skizzen*. Ed. Ch. Aretz, Hontheim 2002) comes out on the 50th Anniversary of the writer's death and contains earlier unpublished notes. The perspective is enriched on an ongoing basis with successive events.

²¹ Als „jene unendlichen Weizenbreiten – volle Kornkammern Preußens – den Polen anheimfielen“ (Viebig 79).

²² „Mir, der im Westen, im schönsten Winkel der Rheinprovinz geborenen, an der sanften Mosel mit den Rebenbergen über denen eine heitere Sonne von tiefblauen Himmel lächelt, zu Hause, kam diese unabsehbare Weite, ohne Berge, ohne Abwechslung, öde vor. Kornbreiten, Rübenäcker, Kartoffelfelder, und wieder Kartoffelfelder, Rübenäcker, Kornbreiten – Hafer, Gerste, Roggen und Weizen, Weizen – wohin ich sah, immer das gleiche Wogen im Sonnenbrand. [...]. Fast angstvoll rief aus: Hier soll ich belieben?“ (Viebig 124).

Still, the monotony of Poznań has an idyllic charm (ca. 1920) in the eyes of the writer:

And yet, how beautiful this flat landscape is! Estates lie in the sea of fields like islands, like enclosed kingdoms, each owner being its king²³.

This is also the mood of many other descriptive excerpts:

My great love for country life, for the land, for the infinite space where our bread grows was born there. The horizons without borders, the tree alleys that seem blue from a distance, the calm ponds surrounded by bushes, where a ponderous lily floats on the dark water. The country of my fathers, lost, but unforgettable!²⁴

In turn, A. E. Johann addresses the question of the change of the statehood of the German frontier territory, both indirectly, referring to the feelings of his father, a Prussian official who had deeply felt the loss of the Eastern March, and directly. From a personal point of view, he compares the event to the fall of the British Empire and from a perspective of several decades (*Dies wilde Jahrhundert* comes out in 1989) concludes that no political power is permanent and sooner or later each will fall. The rational nature of his autobiographical commentary from the 1980s, especially about the 1918/20 major historical transformations, clearly indicates the influence of temporal distance on the narrative of the experience of many years. The emotions and the tension that accompany every human being on the paths of life are nearly completely left out by A. E. Johann in his text. What he proposes to the reader is the transmission of turbulent events narrated by the narrator, who takes up the attitude of a witness (Czermińska 19–24), and at the moment of the autobiographical account knows the end of this story (Gusdorf 137). He therefore decides on a sober, emotionless approach and emphasizes only what at the moment of remembering seems to be most important from a factual point of view. It is clear that different experiences do not have the same im-

²³ „Und doch, know schön ist auch dieses flache Land! Inseln gleich liegen die Gutshöfe im Meer der Felder, abgeschlossene Reiche für sich, jeder Gutsherr ein König“ (Viebig 135).

²⁴ „Es ist dort, dass mir meine große Liebe zum Landleben kam, zur Erde, zu den unendlichen Räumen, wo unser Brot wächst. Horizonte ohne Grenzen, Linien von Bäumen, die in der Ferne blau werden, ruhige Teiche von Büschen umgeben, wo auf dem schwarzen Wasser, nachdenklich die weiße Blüte der Seerose schwimmt. Land meiner Väter, verlorenes Land, aber niemals vergessen!“ (Viebig 91).

portance in memory. Memory divides them into those less and more valuable, and only later is the specific meaning assigned to them (Baumgartner).

However, if this particular example does not sufficiently demonstrate that the passage of time, changing the perspective of seeing the problem, can effectively suppress the emotions, the distanced and reflective voice of A. E. Johann is probably due to the fact that ideological persuasion could be so tiresome and unacceptable in the version served by the authorities; many could actually be fed up with it. A. E. Johann knows from experience that dogmas do not stand the test of time (Johann 349). For him, the need for the „emperor and the masses“ had completely disappeared (Johann 196), and he no longer cares about politics after the First World War because the world he had grown up in (Imperial Germany) had collapsed. Although he knows a lot about the political changes taking place in Germany, Europe and the world in the twentieth century, he eventually decides to be an observer and a commentator rather than a political activist because, as he writes,

Politics is always ungrateful. As far as possible, I limit myself to private and purely human matters. Here you can still find at least a bit of sense and decency²⁵.

Pastor Kurt Ihlenfeld (1901–1972) draws attention to the political determinants and specificities of borderlands and states whose borders are weird and confusing. You have to live in the frontier area to understand the determinism of the processes taking place there (Ihlenfeld 24). K. Ihlenfeld compares the borderland to a person who, within thirty years, has changed his name four times. He writes that such a man would be locked up either in a madhouse or in jail, then concludes that there is no greater violence than the violence of victorious nations (Ihlenfeld 25).

Ernst Toller (1893–1939), too, smuggles in his autobiography a cultural-historical picture of the region and refers to the known political measures taken by the authorities.

It was only after the second partition of Poland that the Eastern Frontier was annexed by the Prussians. Still, the Germans considered themselves an indigenous

²⁵ „Politik ist immer unerfreulich. Ich beschränke mich nach Möglichkeit aufs Private und Menschliche. Da läßt sich wenigstens gelegentlich Vernunft und Anstand entdecken“ (Johann 213).

population and true lords of this country and barely tolerated the Poles. The German colonists settled in villages which, like frontline strongholds, drove wedges between hostile Polish farms and manors. Germans and Poles fought stubbornly for every centimetre of the ground. A German selling a field to a Pole was considered a traitor²⁶.

A. Sturm, too, shows two worlds: on the one hand, there is an official ideology, but on the other hand there is a place for private opinion.

Bydgoszcz, where my father was transferred, lay so far away for any inhabitant of central Germany. My mother had probably never heard of the city before. In general, the Province of Poznań was an unknown country for most Germans. At school we learned that Frederick the Great, through the acquisition of Western Prussia and the northern part of Poznań region, incorporated a valuable province into Prussia, but deep down nobody wanted to have much in common with it as in fact it was not German territory²⁷.

However, when she explains the reasons why her parents settled here²⁸, the author's bottom-up perspective is closely aligned with the official policy. The fact that her father was moved here had a particular reason.

Just as today, there was a need for energetic pioneers, who disseminated the Germanic element in the half-Polish lands. My father was precisely such an energetic pioneer who, by his very appearance, sharp mind and sincere patriotism, largely contributed to this dissemination²⁹.

²⁶ "Erst bei der zweiten Teilung Polens fiel die Ostmark an Preußen. Aber die Deutschen betrachteten sich als die Ureinwohner und die wahren Herren des Landes und die Polen als geduldet. Deutsche Kolonisten siedelten ringsum in den flachen Dörfern, die wie vorgeschobene Festungen sich zwischen die feindlichen polnischen Bauernhöfe und Güter keilten. Die Deutschen und Polen kämpften zäh um jeden Fußbreit Landes. Ein Deutscher, der einem Polen Land verkaufte, war als Verräter geächtet" (Toller 2).

²⁷ "Bromberg, wohin mein Vater versetzt war, lag einem Mitteldeutschen deshalb unendlich fern; meine Mutter hatte früher wohl kaum den Namen dieser Stadt nennen hören, wie überhaupt die Provinz Posen den meisten Deutschen ein unbekanntes Land war. Man hatte in der Schule gelernt, daß Friedrich der Große durch die Erwerbung Westpreußens und des nördlichen Teils von Posen seinem Preußen eine wertvolle Provinz einverleibt hatte; aber man mochte persönlich nicht viel damit zu tun haben, war es doch nicht echt deutscher Boden" (Sturm 4).

²⁸ A. Sturm's father was J. H. Deinhardt (1805–1867), head teacher of the Bydgoszcz High School in the years 1844–1867.

²⁹ "Man brauchte auch in jener Zeit, gerade wie heute, kraftvolle Pioniere für das Deutschtum in jener halb polnischen Gegend, und mein Vater war ein solch kraftvoller

Thus, by the very fact of their arrival in the Province of Poznań, politics entered the lives of the Roquettes, the Deinhardts or the Wollschlägers, although at the end of the day it did little to further the settlement goals that the ideologists had set for themselves. German migrants are defined here through their ethnicity rather than through the region they live in. The authors' families primarily want to cultivate national identity and distinguish themselves from other groups. This is the atmosphere they bring up children with. As far as possible, they isolate themselves from other communities and thus mentally they still live among their own, because ethnicity offers escape from this polyphonic space (Kapralski 37). They meet Poles and Jews³⁰ only in the physical space. By adopting an ethnocentric stance and excluding everything foreign (i.e. Polish), they try to strengthen their own national identity. Isolation from the ethnically dominant group of residents is confirmed by O. Roquette, who writes that „The inhabitants of Olsztyn lived on their own, separated from the Germans” (Roquette 42), and that their sense of German identity was fuelled by their „difference with regard to Polish nature” (Roquette 48).

Ultimately, in private relationships there is no glaring duplication of stereotypes and exaggerated differences. In this regard, the authors maintain a healthy distance. However, O. Roquette, who was speaking negatively about the Poles, might provoke some debate as he spoke highly about the culture of the German newcomers:

In turn, German colonists came from all directions to buy out some of the run-down estates... and through better management rose them to a better state, so that they yielded results. Former owners travelled with cash from the sale of their property to Paris, where they enjoyed themselves. Perhaps enough was left to return here, but as a rule they returned emptyhanded and settled in the smaller towns of the province, where they had no means of living. This was the situation in Gniezno³¹.

Pionier, der schon äußerlich sich Respekt verschaffen konnte und durch seinen lebhaften Geist und warmen Patriotismus dort in hohem Grade germanisierend gewirkt hat” (Sturm 4).

³⁰ The authors of Jewish descent (L. Kalisch and E. Toller) emphasize the isolation of their ethnic and religious group, despite their willingness to engage in closer contact, mainly with the Germans.

³¹ “Dagegen hatten deutsche Kolonisten aus allen Gegenden manche von den herunter gekommenen Gütern [...] gekauft, und sie durch bessere Wirtschaft wieder in besseren Stand und Ertrag gebracht. Die früheren Besitzer waren mit der Verkaufssumme nach Paris gereist, wo sie nun ein lustiges Leben begannen. Vielleicht blieb ihnen ein

The individual experiences mentioned in this analysis are to some extent homogeneous, but in certain areas they do not exclude polyphony. This might be used to obtain a perspective on the problem that takes into account the historical context and is correlated with a bottom-up, subjective perception (Assmann 49). The individual context examined here opens biographical access to the past, and unofficial biographical memory complements the official collective one.

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kleiner Rest für die Heimkehr, meist aber kehrten sie ohne denselben zurück, um sich nun in den kleineren Städten der Provinz niederzulassen und – man wußte nicht wovon zu leben. So in Gnesen" (Roquette 42–43).

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