

Recovered Territory: A German-Polish Conflict Over Land and Culture, 1919-1989. By Harry Harootunian. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015) Pp. 302. Hardcover, \$100.00

Peter Polak-Springer's *Recovered Territory* is a transnational narrative of Upper Silesia, a contested borderland between Germany and Poland whose regionalism clashed with the two states' attempts to provide the province with an inherently "German" or "Polish" identity. While the monograph's subtitle provides an overall periodization that spans a seventy-year period (1919-1989), its primary focus lies in the first half of that block (1921-1956) during the successive border re-drawings that resulted from the post-World War I plebiscite, the Nazi invasion of Poland and occupation of all of Upper Silesia, and the succeeding Polish state's communist takeover. Ultimately, Polak-Springer presents the first half of twentieth-century Upper Silesia as something comparable to a tinderbox, where the buildup of nationalist and local tensions would serve to ignite future transnational conflicts. Local resistance at the bottom, towards nationally directed ethnic homogenization from above, only served to further perpetuate "national indifference" among the ethno-culturally mixed Upper Silesian population.

While Chapter One provides the reader with a broad, politically-orientated history of the region, Polak-Springer's main focus begins to take shape in the next two chapters on the interwar period, where he showcases the irredentist efforts of both German and Polish borderland nationalists (with assistance from their national governments) in their respected halves. To illustrate their agendas, he provides vivid examples and explanations of how public institutions and commemorations were manipulated for a variety of reasons. Two examples, however, glaringly stand out from the rest: political self-legitimation and the reinventing of regionalism. The latter encompasses the monograph's main theme, as both sides attempted to promote *national* regionalism where the population's identity could be homogenized along ethnic/national lines in order to justify its integration in to Germany or Poland. This was exemplified in several ways, from border rallies to commemorate the pro-German Plebiscite or the pro-Polish Third Uprising that challenged the former's results, to the appropriation of cultural markers such as folk costume, song, and architecture to showcase an inherent if not anthropologic link between the region and the state (and to especially exclude the other). Locals engaged in such activities for reasons ranging from acquiring material benefits to offsetting the risk of employment discrimination. But overall, they embraced this special status or exclusiveness in order to protect themselves against nationalization (129). However, political currents sought to capitalize on this nationalization agenda, mainly after 1926 with the rise of Poland's Sanacja and Germany's National Socialist regimes. Modern architecture and technologies served to symbolize each side's claim of superior work, culture, and civilization over the other (89). Both ultimately propagated Upper Silesia as a poster child in their state's fight for borderland rectification in order to show their respected nations that they could protect their territory and interests from their cross-border enemies.

Nazi-occupied Upper Silesia during World War II (Chapter Four) shared many similarities to the ways in which the postwar communist authorities of Poland administered the entire region (Chapter Five). Although ideologically divergent, both regimes continued the

cultural cleansing set up by Polish and German borderland nationalists during the interwar period. But in addition to the symbolic renaming or rebuilding of public institutions or regional artifacts, Nazis implemented ethnic cleansing in order to create a “clean break” between Germans and Poles, as well as to differentiate “good” Germans from “bad” ones. This distinction was based on a Nazi classification system that scaled from 1-4, where 1 was an “excellent” German, 2 was “good,” 3 was an “in-between,” and 4 was considered “bad” and unassimilable (149). After 1945, the Polish communists seized political opportunism to consolidate ruling legitimacy by adopting this same classification system to re-Polonize the territory. This (need a subject here) was accomplished not only for their choice to adopt nationalist ideology over the less popular Marxist-Leninism, but also in riding the wave of Germanophobia that seized Polish society in the postwar years (185, 189). Aside from Nazi-genocidal practices or Communist-directed population expulsions, both regimes also instituted reeducation courses to further their aims to erase even the slightest trace of the deemed “foreign” dialect or its traits. Failure to partake in such programs could result in punishment, but due to the failure to reinforce such strict ordinances, initial enrollment soon dwindled. With due respect, the Epilogue rounds out the monograph with a broad overview for the period of 1956-1989, more so outlining traces of exclusive Upper Silesian identity and its struggles with the Polish communist government, whose intensity and depth nowhere compares to the first thirty-five tumultuous years.

Polak-Springer provides an impressively voluminous count of primary and secondary sources to exhibit both the German and Polish desires for investing in the transformation of Upper Silesia. Secondary sources include monographs on Upper Silesia and the history of German-Polish territorial struggles, while primary sources cover a wide array of archives and periodicals, in addition to interwar period monographs that potentially exhibit partisanship on the matter. A fascinating consultation of such sources can be found in Chapter Three, particularly with the example of the battle over whose Silesian museum executed a more impressive display of cultural propaganda and appropriation. Photos of both museums are placed within the descriptive text to reinforce the reader’s imagination of the grandeur that both sides used to outdo each other. And when it comes to capturing the political agendas and nationalist aims of both institutions, Polak-Springer utilizes both government and public channels to reinforce this notion of a cold war during the interwar period. With the opening of the Polish version, one government report by a German borderland nationalist grudgingly praised the museum’s extensive exhibit offerings and the promotion of a “Polish core historical narrative of the *Lud Śląski* (Silesian people), an ‘ancient Polish people’ ” (99). The German equivalent was built in response to act as “a scholarly weapon to defend against claims of the ancient Slavic or ancient Polish character of the Silesian region [made by Polish academic].” An issue of the *Ostdeutsche Morgenpost* provides a good disparity on the latter, citing the German museum as an “insufficient investment” and paling in contrast to its Polish counterpart that is ripe with displays of nationalization politics (108-109).

From a regional perspective, with a concentration on cultural propaganda and cleansing as a means to integrate a nationally contested borderland, *Recovered Territory* escapes the often-narrow scholarly focus on Upper Silesia as a territorial hindrance to German-Polish foreign relations. Its contribution to East Central European scholarship lies in Polak-Springer’s assertion

that it was primarily external forces that saw the region's national integration into a German or Polish state as imperative towards legitimizing national claims over the territory. Compared to the widespread variety of works on nationalism and nation-states, this monograph is a valuable addition to the emerging field of regional consciousness studies. It further suggests that much work remains to be completed on this phenomenon of "national indifference." Is it perpetuated by nationalist agendas that fail to find fertile grounds for support, or is it as simple as a group of peoples rejecting national symbols, ideas, practices, or institutions that they find foreign?

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