

Eastern European Cities in Transition after WWII:
A Literature Review and Examination of
Prospects for New Methods and Avenues of Historical Inquiry

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Introduction

The Red Army's occupation of Eastern Europe at the end of WWII gave Stalin's USSR an unprecedented opportunity to rearrange its western frontier according to a logic that equated geopolitical security with ethnic stability and homogeneity. Stalin used this opportunity to redraw the borders and carry out ethnic cleansings of the states and populations which were to fall under Soviet control during the postwar division of Europe. These postwar border changes centered on what had been the interwar Polish state; the USSR's borders were shifted westward at Poland's expense, while Poland's border was shifted westward at Germany's expense. As a result, the major cities of L'viv and Vilnius, which had belonged to the interwar Polish state (as Lwów and Wilno), were transferred to the Ukrainian and Lithuanian SSRs, respectively, while the previously German city of Königsberg was renamed Kaliningrad and transferred to the RSFSR. The major German cities of Breslau and Stettin became the Polish cities of Wrocław and Szczecin as a result of Poland's westward shift, while in the North of Poland the German city of Danzig (nominally the 'free city of Danzig' during the interwar period) became the Polish city of Gdańsk. All of these border changes were accompanied by forced population transfers. Germans were expelled from Gdańsk, Kaliningrad, and Poland's new western territories (referred to by Poland's new communist state as the 'Recovered Territories'), which included Wrocław and Szczecin. They were replaced by Poles, many of whom had been expelled from their own homes in eastern Poland, along with Jews from that region. In what had been eastern Poland, Vilnius was repopulated by ethnic Lithuanians and Russians, and L'viv by ethnic Ukrainians and Russians, while German Königsberg became the predominantly ethnically Russian city of Kaliningrad.

Large bodies of historical literature deal with the geopolitical calculations and ethnic cleansings/forced population transfers that accompanied these postwar border changes, but the English-language literature which specifically focuses on the transitions experienced by the foregoing major cities represents a small and underdeveloped field of historical inquiry. Within this field, the most attention has been given to Wrocław and L'viv; Gregor Thum's work on Wrocław (translated from German) and William Jay Risch's work on L'viv stand as two of the only English-language monographs devoted wholly to an individual city's experience of the postwar Eastern European border changes.¹ Timothy Snyder's seminal *Reconstruction of Nations* deals extensively with the transitions experienced by Western Ukraine and Lithuania, as part of its larger exploration of how the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth transformed into the modern nation-states of Poland, Ukraine, Belarus, and Lithuania over the course of four centuries. It is

¹ William Jay Risch, *The Ukrainian West: Culture and the Fate of Empire in Soviet L'viv* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 2011; Gregor Thum, *Uprooted: How Breslau Became Wrocław during the Century of Expulsions*, translated from the German by Tom Lampert and Allison Brown, translations of Polish sources by W. Martin and Jasper Tilbury (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

cited by most scholars of the postwar transitions, contains crucial context for L'viv and Vilnius's transfers, and along with Snyder's *Bloodlands*, provides an excellent background and general context to the transitions as a whole.² Kate Brown's *Biography of No Place* examines the history of the Polish-Ukrainian borderland (*kresy*) – from the 1920s through WWII – as an ethnically ambiguous and centralization-resistant backwater that was hammered into the Ukrainian SSR during these years.³ Much of Brown's innovative methodology is applicable to and could greatly bolster the prospects for further research in the field of post-WWII transitions.

The existing literature on transferred cities has initiated several lines of inquiry – related to the pervasiveness of nationalist propaganda, the psychology of the migrant experience, and the burden of collective memory – that will be of great interest and use to historians interested in the erosion, transformation, and stabilization of material culture and nationality identity in cities. Nevertheless, histories of transitioned cities could all benefit from more attention to the type of far broader national construction contexts used by Snyder, or to methodologies such as those used by Brown, which are attuned to the often esoteric impulses of bureaucratic political culture and the mixture of rote cynics and true believers which it encompasses. A shift away from traditional high culture lenses and towards areas such as popular literature and standardized, mass-produced architecture would also enrich and broaden a field of study that has tended to set its gaze on a predictable collection of prominent monuments, famous historic districts and classic memoirs. Moreover, an application of Snyder's long-term contexts or Brown's methodologies reveals that even these classic elements of the urban landscape and thought-scape can turn out to be much less predictable in their national and political allegiances than histories have often suggested.

Much of the existing literature on transitioned post-WWII cities deals with the vigorous propaganda campaigns that were waged by socialist regimes in an attempt to convince the new populations of these cities that the transfers were historically justified and morally righteous. Section I introduces several of the main features of these campaigns as discussed by historians of this propaganda, including their sense of urgency and intensity, the unstable ways in which they combined socialist and nationalist themes, and how pre-WWII national attitudes influenced the development of this propaganda. These mythmaking campaigns were manifested through all manner of rhetoric and accompanied by varying degrees of physical transformation. Such campaigns could contain a fascinating mixture of successful morale-boosting, egregious excess, and psychological contradictions, and perhaps constitute the phenomenon that is most distinct to the study of transitioned cities. Section II discusses the ways in which these frequently quixotic

² Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569-1999* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

³ Kate Brown, *A Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

nationalist campaigns interacted and clashed with the built environment, and how they influenced changes in the built environment through the physical and rhetorical manipulation of symbols and monuments. It also discusses the ways in which historians might develop more convincing ways of explaining these campaigns by examining the roles that political culture and individual motivation played in their prosecutions. Kate Brown's methodology provides examples of how such historical inquiries can be carried out. Moreover, discussions of propaganda and symbols would be less predictable and myopic if they did more to attend to long-term or broadly regional comparative contexts such as those used by Snyder, with all the great ironies and hidden influences that such contexts can uncover. Another historiographical problem addressed here is the 'high culture' and preservationist biases that have confined some discussions of transferred cities to overly-narrow limits. The persisting influence of these cities' prewar aesthetic influence, in spite of all propaganda and physical transformation, is also discussed in this section.

A fair amount of historians' attention has also been devoted to the study of how, within the context of individual cities, diverse groups of migrants interacted with outgoing populations, with each other, and with the minority groups that remained. These experiences, which are discussed in Section III, were often marked by psychological dislocations and adjustments, as well as potent nostalgia that could only be fully expressed and alienation that could only be truly overcome after the fall of communism. Section IV discusses these post-communist transitions, the last of the major themes which historians of these transitions have focused on. The fall of communism in these cities paved the way for previously restricted explorations of pre-WWII history and re-evaluations of collective memories and myths. Post-communist expressions of local and multicultural identities were often prompted by a variety of motives – of both blatantly commercial and sincerely moral sorts – that hinged on the political statuses and insecurities of the newly sovereign nations which inherited these shatter-zones of memory. Lastly, analyses of memoirs and fictional literature show that while the 'high literature' of the transfers has expressed the foregoing complexities with great elegance and moral perspicacity, popular literature has also brought about the potential for important moral reckonings with collective memory.

I: Postwar Propaganda

i) The Intensity of Nationalist Propaganda in a Transferred City

Gregor Thum has written extensively on Wrocław's postwar propaganda, which provides an incredible example of the many forms which nationalist propaganda campaigns can take. Propaganda in Wrocław was disseminated to the public through scholarly institutions, the Catholic church, popular publications, local guidebooks, museums, festivals, cultural gatherings,

local historical societies, architecture, monuments, symbols, and place names.⁴ Popular histories told Wrocław's new residents the story of an eternally Polish land, and made the postwar settlement seem like a heroic and historically justifiable correction of the region's past travails; history was boiled down to a "'thousand year struggle' between Poles and Germans,"⁵ after which Germans got their comeuppance when – at the end of WWII – they destroyed their own city and Poles claimed what was rightfully theirs. The medieval Piast dynasty was portrayed as the fountainhead of the region's "eternal Polishness,"⁶ which had endured through ages of non-Polish rule, even into the dark ages when Prussian imperialism had driven Wrocław's fortunes into brutal decline. All of the complexities – political capitulation, patterns of cultural and economic exchange, Prussian influence, complex migration patterns – of the region's history were elided by the official narrative. Readers of the official story would have missed the great economic and cultural influence that the Holy Roman Empire and especially Prussia had on Wrocław, and would have been presented with a picture that conflated Prussia with the Third Reich. Moreover, the glowing postwar revival portrayed by these popular histories clashed with the litany of troubles depicted in the settler memoirs which were published at the time, as well as people's personal experiences of postwar scarcity and degradation. This clash between propaganda and everyday reality undermined the credibility of the official narrative, as did the contradictions brought about by the manner in which officialdom served both nationalist and socialist agendas.⁷

ii) The Shaky Foundation of Postwar Propaganda in Transferred Cities: the Union of Nationalism and Socialism

Understanding the geopolitical calculations that led to the border changes and forced population transfers of 1945 provides an important foundation for understanding the interplay between nationalism and socialism in the propaganda that followed throughout the socialist period. The literature on the geopolitical strategy behind these border shifts, and the literature on the population transfers themselves, represent entire fields of study unto themselves. Timothy Snyder's *Bloodlands* and *Reconstruction on Nations* are excellent starting points. For urban historians, it is important to realize that from the very outset, the Communists – i.e. the Soviet Union in cooperation with national Communist Parties – wanted to be seen as giving Wrocław, Szczecin, Gdańsk, Vilnius, and L'viv as gifts to the Polish, Lithuanian, and Ukrainian nations.⁸ This propaganda angle was an important determinant of how the political culture of these cities –

⁴ Thum, *Uprooted*; all of these forms of propaganda are covered in detail in chapters 6-10.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 224.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 223.

⁷ *Ibid.*, Chapter 7, "Mythicizing History," examines popular histories about Wrocław.

⁸ See Snyder, *Reconstruction*, Chapter 5 for Vilnius, and 182 for Western Ukraine; Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 313-315, 324-326 for the "Recovered Territories," which included Wrocław, Szczecin, and Gdańsk; Thum, *Uprooted*, 194-198, for the "Recovered Territories"; William Jay Risch, *The Ukrainian West: Culture and the Fate of Empire in Soviet L'viv* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), Chapter 2 for L'viv.

a mixture of nationalism and socialism that was at times mutually supporting and at other times contradictory – would develop over the ensuing decades.

In *Bloodlands*, Snyder explains how nationalism and socialism became intertwined as Poland's new eastern and western borders were being hammered out. Poland's appropriation of formerly German territory was designed to bolster popular support for the Polish communists, who would be seen as expelling Germans in order to give property to Poles, while the Soviets would be seen as backing the arrangement and keeping the German threat at bay.⁹ As Snyder puts it: “[the Polish communists] would profit from the desire of many Poles to remove the Germans, and take credit for the achievement of a goal, ethnic purity, that seemed self-evident to most leading Polish politicians by the end of the war.”¹⁰ Snyder also explains how the border shifts and population transfers helped the communist system work its way into a country that was an unlikely candidate for communist revolution (Stalin said implementing communism in Poland would be like ‘putting a saddle on a cow’);¹¹ the new system would cement itself naturally in the course of the transfers:

People who had both lost old homes and gained new ones were utterly dependent upon whomever could defend them. This could only be the Polish communists, who could promise that the Red Army would protect Poland's gains. Communism had little to offer Poland as an ideology, and was never very popular. But Stalin's ethnic geopolitics took the place of the class struggle, creating a durable basis of support, if not legitimacy, for the new regime... The “recovered territories” gave many Poles who had suffered during the war a better house or a bigger farm. It allowed for land reform, the first step in any communist takeover. Perhaps most of all, it gave a million Polish migrants from eastern Poland (annexed by the USSR) a place to go. Precisely because Poland had lost so much in the east, the west was all the more precious.¹²

The very process by which the border shifts were carried out ensured that the transferred cities would be propped up by nationalist rhetoric and grounded in socialist power. They were carried out on the strength of the Red Army and in service of Stalin's geopolitical calculations, in which ethno-nationalist stability was intended to bolster state security. Nationalists in Poland, Ukraine, and Lithuania could then claim, however disingenuously, that they had won long-awaited victories by accomplishing the transfers.¹³ But ultimately, historians of the transfers must consider the point with which Snyder ends his chapter in *Bloodlands* on ethnic cleansing:

⁹ Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 313-315.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 314.

¹¹ Norman Davies and Roger Moorhouse, *Microcosm: Portrait of a Central European City* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2002), 411 for Stalin's remark.

¹² Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 325-326.

¹³ See the citations given in footnote 8. For an explanation of how Stalin regarded ethno-nationalist stability and the postwar security of Eastern Europe, see Snyder, *Reconstruction*, 182-187.

How long could east European societies accept that communism was national liberation, when their communist leaders were obviously beholden to a foreign power, the Soviet Union?... Stalin needed his appointed east European leaders to follow his wishes, exploit nationalism, and isolate their peoples from the West, which was a very difficult combination to achieve.¹⁴

Snyder highlights the idea that the transfers were built upon a contradictory pact between nationalism and socialism. They were presented to inhabitants of transferred cities as a national achievement, even though they had been made possible by Red Army occupation and backed up over the decades by Soviet political dominance. And although nationalist and socialist propaganda complemented each other at times, the façade eventually crumbled as societies increasingly came to acknowledge that their nations were not actually liberated or protected, but instead subjugated by Soviet rule.

iii) Pre-WWII National Attitudes towards Transferred Cities

It is thus also important for urban historians who examine propaganda to consider the ways in which the inheritors of transferred cities had regarded them before the transfers were actually brought about by the force of the Red Army. Ruthless postwar propaganda campaigns sometimes had their roots in prewar nationalist narratives, which had originally been created to serve national geopolitical ambitions, but were used after the transfer to serve the consolidation of socialist ambitions as well.

For instance, Snyder shows how prewar Lithuanian nationalists yearned to acquire Vilnius and make it Lithuania's capital, even though it contained only a tiny minority of Lithuanian speakers. Yet as the historic capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania – the medieval polity which nationalists invoked when claiming that Lithuania had a historically-legitimate right to exist – Vilnius was a potent national symbol. But the city was ultimately appropriated as Lithuania's capital as a result of the calculations of Stalin and the Soviets, who had the real power in the region to draw new borders and create new nations.¹⁵

Snyder also charts the rise of modern Ukrainian nationalism in L'viv and the surrounding regions of Galicia and Volhynia, which included the terrorist and ethnic cleansing atrocities committed by the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) during WWII.¹⁶ This history of virulent nationalism had a profound influence on L'viv's postwar intelligentsia. Bill Risch

¹⁴ Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 337.

¹⁵ Snyder, *Reconstruction*, 53, 77-79, 81-83, 88-89. Also see Part 1 of *Reconstruction* in general, much of which focuses on the origins and the ultimate trajectory of the modern Lithuanian national movement, and "concentrates on the city of Vilnius." (5)

¹⁶ Snyder, *Reconstruction*, Part 2.

focuses heavily on the tensions between the city's postwar intelligentsia and Soviet bureaucrats, who were highly suspicious of nationalist leanings in the region.¹⁷

Wrocław, on the other hand, had never before the war been thought of as Polish in any serious capacity.¹⁸ Moreover, Poland lost Vilnius and L'viv – two of its beloved cultural citadels – as a result of the postwar transfers. Yet, thanks largely to postwar nationalist propaganda – which, despite its mendacity and censorship also fostered a psychological sense of belonging in the city – Wrocław eventually also became a key Polish cultural center.¹⁹

Nationalists' prewar and postwar conceptions of these cities thus meet in unexpected ways. The once "incontestably German" Breslau eventually became the incontestably Polish Wrocław, partly due to a pressing "psychological need" to cope with an alien environment.²⁰ The once very Polish and Jewish Wilno/Vilne, long yearned for by Lithuanian nationalists, became the capital (Vilnius) of an SSR in which Soviet authorities and Lithuanian communists allowed Lithuanian culture to thrive.²¹ And L'viv – a bastion of Polish culture which had nevertheless fostered a strong Ukrainian nationalist tradition – was absorbed by the Ukrainian SSR, only to endure a long and wavering battle between its Ukrainian nationalist inclinations and the suspicions of its Soviet administrators.²²

II: Transitions and the Built Environment

i) Explaining National Monuments and Symbols

Historians have often discussed urban transitions in terms of the physical monuments that inevitably spring up or are hacked down after a city comes under the control of a new nation with a new ideology. It is a commonplace, when writing about transitioned cities, to point out the renaming of prominent places and streets and the construction or demolition of at least the most renowned monuments.²³ Yaroslav Hrytsak, for instance, has written a detailed description of the

¹⁷ Risch, *Ukrainian West*, Chapters 5 and 6.

¹⁸ Thum, *Uprooted*, 190-191; Davies, *Microcosm*, 412.

¹⁹ Thum, *Uprooted*, 5, 215-216, 381.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 5, 190-191, 215-216, 381, "incontestably German" quotation on 190, "psychological need" on 216.

²¹ Snyder, *Reconstruction*, Chapter 5.

²² See footnotes 16 and 17.

²³ Tamás Sajó, "Urban Space as *Erinnerungslandschaft*. The Case of Lemberg/Lwów/Lvov/L'viv," *European Review* 21, no. 4 (October 2013): 523-529; Bohdan Tscherkes, "Stalinist Visions for the Urban Transformation of L'viv, 1939-1955," in *L'viv: A City in the Crosscurrents of Culture*, ed. John Czaplicka (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 205-218; Jan Musekamp, "Szczecin's Identity after 1989: A Local Turn," in *Cities after the Fall of Communism: Reshaping Cultural Landscapes and European Identity*, ed. John Czaplicka, Nida Gelazis, and Blair A. Ruble (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 320-329; Stefan Berger, "A City and Its Pasts: Popular Histories in Kaliningrad between Regionalization and Nationalization," in *Popularizing National Pasts: 1800 to Present*, ed. Stefan Berger, Chris Lorenz, and Billie Melman (New York: Routledge, 2012), 293-294; Gregor Thum, "Cleansed Memory: The New Polish Wrocław/Breslau and the Expulsion of the Germans," in *Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe*, ed. Steven

Sovietization of L'viv's street names, followed by their Ukrainianization after independence.²⁴ With regards to L'viv's monuments, Risch discusses the destruction of a Jewish cemetery, the transfer of Polish monuments to Gdańsk and Wrocław, the construction of an elaborate monument to Soviet 'liberation', the placement of a Lenin statue in a somewhat less ostentatious location than that which had originally been considered, and the locally-lamented lack of a monument to Taras Shevchenko.²⁵

John Czaplicka, in his introduction to an edited volume on L'viv's multicultural history, admonishes us that a careful examination of those figures who have been honored as heroes in L'viv's cityscape will betray the murkiness of their supposed "national" origins.²⁶ The literature on transitioned cities in general, when it brings up these physical monuments, could benefit from more discussion of the way in which these symbols originally acquired their politically-charged significance. This is one area in which Snyder's *Reconstruction of Nations* can serve as a useful background. Part 1 of Snyder's study is concerned with how the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth gave birth to competing modern Lithuanian and Polish nationalist movements which both laid claim to the city of Vilnius. As part of this process, the memory of Polish-language poet Adam Mickiewicz was appropriated for exclusionary nationalist purposes by activists in both movements.²⁷ In Snyder's history, Mickiewicz serves as a symbol of how early modern allegiances to the Commonwealth splintered into competing modern ethno-nationalist movements.

Monuments to Mickiewicz can be found all over the lands of the former Commonwealth today. We can read about Polish author Stanislaw Lem's childhood recollections of Mickiewicz Avenue in Lwów,²⁸ how one of the first big cultural events in postwar Wrocław was a recital of

Béla Várdy, T. Hunt Tooley, and Agnes Huszár Várdy (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 333-357; Thum, *Uprooted*, Chapters 8 and 9; Davies, *Microcosm*, 490. Also, for studies on the commemoration of Jewish history in transferred cities, see "Commemorating the Future in Post-War Chernivtsi," *East European Politics and Societies* 24, no.3 (2010): 435-463 for a discussion of the post-war commemoration of WWII in Chernivtsi (which transitioned from Romania to Ukraine after WWII), and the exclusion of Jewish history from the city's commemorative practices, which were dominated by a Sovietized version of exclusionary Ukrainian nationalism; Michael Meng, *Shattered Spaces: Encountering Jewish Ruins in Postwar Germany and Poland* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011) for "a study of the material traces of Jewish life in Berlin, Warsaw, Potsdam, Essen, and Wrocław over the past sixty years... [which] pursues two main questions over six decades: What happened to Jewish sites after the Holocaust? How have Germans, Poles, and Jews encountered them since 1945?" (xii); Omer Bartov, *Vanishing Traces of Jewish Galicia in Present-Day Ukraine* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); and Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer, *Ghosts of Home: The Afterlife of Czernowitz in Jewish Memory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

²⁴ Yaroslav Hrytsak and Victor Susak, "Constructing a National City: The Case of L'viv," in *Composing Urban History and the Constitution of Civic Identities*, ed. John J. Czaplicka, Blair A. Ruble and Lauren Crabtree (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 140-142, 149-160.

²⁵ Risch, *Ukrainian West*, 45-49.

²⁶ John Czaplicka, "L'viv, Lemberg, Leopold, Lwów, Lvov: A City in the Crosscurrents of European Culture," in *L'viv: A City in the Crosscurrents of Culture*, ed. John Czaplicka (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 17. (As "ambiguous act[s] of commemoration" (17) he gives the examples of an 1898 statue of Polish King Jan III Sobieski and the post-WWII commemoration of Cossack leader Bohdan Khmel'nyts'kyi)

²⁷ Snyder, *Reconstruction*, Part 1.

²⁸ Stanislaw Lem, *Highcastle: A Remembrance* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1995), 3.

Mickiewicz's epic *Pan Tadeusz* in July 1945,²⁹ how the aesthetic orientation of L'viv's Mickiewicz statue was blunted by the city's first Stalinist planners,³⁰ and how Vilnius itself, the city which perhaps loomed largest in Mickiewicz's own legend, did not get its own statue of the poet until 1984.³¹ It would be difficult to study the history of the region without encountering the invocation of Mickiewicz somewhere. But a historian's perfunctory nod to a Mickiewicz street or statue as simply a 'national' symbol vastly oversimplifies a complex history, and fails to explain how this ubiquitous commemoration of Mickiewicz is so remarkable.³²

Snyder's *Reconstruction of Nations* helps unveil the complicated history behind many of the mythical national symbols that now populate the region's urban landscapes. It shows how a symbol such as Mickiewicz can be fraught with a variety of clashing and subjective connotations. Mickiewicz came to be regarded as national hero by both Poles and Lithuanians, but in both cases, national activists clung to a skewed, overly-simplistic interpretation of the poet that fit their modern definition of a nation as a territory which encompassed a homogeneous ethnic group within its borders. In reality, Mickiewicz was a child of the gentry class of the defunct Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which he fought to restore, and which ordered its lands according to an early modern idea of nationality that was based on political principles, rather than ethnicity (although Polish was the hegemonic language of high culture and politics within the Commonwealth). In the inter-war period, the federalist ideas of Józef Piłsudski were an updated version of the broad political compromises that held the old Commonwealth together. These ideas, however, were shunned by influential nationalists on both the Polish and Lithuanian sides. These modern nationalist movements claimed Mickiewicz as their own symbol, yet if anyone was channelling the romantic poet's true spirit, it was Piłsudski. A federation with minority rights is a complicated prospect, and it was the simplest (and least Mickiewiczian) ideas about the nation which would win out during the twentieth century.³³

It was with the backing of Stalin and the Red Army that Lithuanians were able to seize and populate the city of Vilnius and realize their long-held nationalist dreams, which were forged

²⁹ Davies, *Microcosm*, 413.

³⁰ Bohdan Tscherkes, "Stalinist Visions for the Urban Transformation of L'viv, 1939-1955," in *L'viv: A City in the Crosscurrents of Culture*, ed. John Czaplicka (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 209.

³¹ Snyder, *Reconstruction*, 70-72.

³² Uilleam Blacker, "Urban commemoration and literature in post-Soviet L'viv: a comparative analysis with the Polish experience," *Nationality Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* 42, no. 4 (2014), 640. Blacker, however, takes a more nuanced view of national icons; in discussing how reconciliation with and rediscovery of L'viv's Polish history has remained selective in the post-Soviet era, Blacker also notes that, "Echoes of the Polish past remain, however, in the city's topography, in Polish street names, some of which were reinstated under independence, and the names of important landmarks, such as the Potocki Palace (the city's art gallery). The central monument to Adam Mickiewicz, built by the Poles under Habsburg rule, remained untouched during the Soviet period and retained its Polish-language inscription of the poet's name. It is still maintained as a central part of the city's memoryscape, reflecting Mickiewicz's status as a poet who, as a national symbol for Lithuanians and Belarusians as well as for Poles, transcends national boundaries. Indeed, Khrushchev is reported to have approved of retaining the monument in 1946, citing the Ukrainian people's love for the poet." (640)

³³ Snyder, *Reconstruction*, 29, 90-91.

through linguistic and pseudo-historical arguments related to the medieval Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the appropriation of Mickiewicz's ideas, and opposition to surrounding national and imperial causes.³⁴ After WWII – during which most of Vilnius's Jewish population was murdered in the Holocaust – most Poles were forcibly expelled from Vilnius, making it the capital of a Lithuanian SSR built upon opposition to the ethnic diversity that had had such a profound influence on the true Mickiewicz of the old Commonwealth.³⁵

The type of background provided by Snyder could inspire historians who refer to national 'high culture' symbols to try to dissect how these symbols are much more than what they appear to be and have been conflated with on the surface; how they are fluid and can be used for a multitude of ends; how a statue of Mickiewicz in independent Vilnius tells a hidden story fueled by the personal emotions of national activists, and how it stands for a lot more than the dream of a righteous thirst for independence come true. The region's old standbys for memorials and monuments – Mickiewicz, Cossacks, the OUN, Stepan Bandera, Ivan Franko, Mykhailo Hrushevsky, Roman Dmowski, Józef Piłsudski – cannot be described as simply 'national' symbols after absorbing Snyder's account of the far from 'pure' origins of these nations and activists. Snyder's elucidation of national origins has a humbling effect on the urban historian regarding the cityscape of majestic monuments, which represent contradictions and contrivances as much as zealous national visions. In reality, these symbols that fill the urban landscape – like the heart of Piłsudski, removed from his body (which was buried in Cracow) and buried in pre-WWII Vilnius³⁶ – often clash with the narratives and other symbols that surround them, and shatter the simplest nationalist categorizations.

However, in considering these symbols, merely debunking a myth or pointing out its fallaciousness is, as Snyder points out, a futile and misleading exercise. *Reconstruction of Nations* aims to answer the question of how modern nations arose, and much of the answer lies in the creation of a set of myths and symbols, over the course of centuries. Snyder is concerned with the *process* of this creation; the motives and goals of the activists and creators. His goal is not to argue with or mock these myths, but to explain their origins; as he puts it, "to argue with metahistory risks accepting its rules of engagement: and nonsense turned on its head remains nonsense."³⁷

³⁴ Ibid., 88-89.

³⁵ Ibid., 91-92; in addition to the specific page numbers listed, the preceding two paragraphs summarize the ideas in Part 1 of *Reconstruction*.

³⁶ Ibid., 70-72 for Piłsudski's heart and an amazing discussion national symbols.

³⁷ Ibid., Introduction: 1-12, quotation on 10.

ii) The Destruction of National Symbols and the Role of Political Culture in Nationalist Campaigns

At times, Thum's monograph on post-war Wrocław applies Snyder's principle by not merely turning the postwar Polish myth on its head, but explaining why authorities deemed such a myth to be necessary for this city, in which people were anxiously "sitting on packed suitcases" with the belief that the postwar settlement was bound to be reversed. Thum devotes a great deal of effort to assembling a picture of this "impermanence syndrome" based on first-hand, ground-level perspectives; a method that sheds light on why people were driven to buy into such an extreme propaganda campaign.³⁸

Thum's chapter on the eradication of old German symbols and names in postwar Wrocław gives many incredible examples of the ideological fervor at work when national attributes are hammered into new and unlikely places, and highlights the excesses and contradictions which often occur as a result.³⁹ Re-namings were informed by far-fetched notions of national "purity" that quashed previous layers of names derived from the complexities of Wrocław's local character. An incredible amount of pedantic academic effort and argumentation went into this expert-led analysis of place names. Beyond just street names, the names of natural and man-made places all over Poland's 'Recovered Territories' were subject to 'purification'. Most egregiously, individual people with German-sounding names (first or last) were officially pressured to Polonize their names.⁴⁰

Thum also goes into detail about how German symbols were chiselled out of Wrocław's cityscape; the postwar Polish administration devoted a massive amount of resources to erasing all German words from public life throughout the "Recovered Territories." The administration's instructions here are difficult to believe at times; the de-Germanization of inscriptions applied to building facades, typewriters, Bible quotations on altars, wayside crosses, ashtrays, beer coasters, etc.; as Thum writes, "the purposes of the campaign were baffling. It occurred at a time when many people were struggling to survive..."⁴¹

But despite such baffling excesses, the de-Germanization campaign can also be seen as part of a much more profound struggle to overcome a legacy of occupation and displacement, and a biting sense of alienation and insecurity.⁴² The campaign may seem unlikely and farfetched, but placed in the larger context which Thum's book describes, one is compelled to reflect on, in the first place, the extraordinarily unlikely and farfetched policy of a forced

³⁸ Thum, *Uprooted*, see Chapter 5, titled "The Impermanence syndrome," and its section titled "Sitting on Packed Suitcases" (186-189), and 215-216, 221, 384-385.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, Chapter 8, "Cleansed Memory"

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, see the section titled "Polonization: Places, Streets, and People" (244-266)

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, see section titled "De-Germanization: Inscriptions, Monuments, Cemeteries" (266-287), quotation on 268.

⁴² *Ibid.*, see Chapter 5, titled "The Impermanence syndrome"

population transfer that resulted in the mass displacement of Poles to a city which few had ever dreamed might become Polish.⁴³ It is one thing to refer to a group of people as simply ‘uprooted’ or ‘displaced’, but it is difficult to get a handle on later excesses and travails without being shown, in detail, the fields of rubble and the traumatic psychological uncertainty that Thum describes throughout his book. It is easy enough to read a quick overview of a regime’s ideological program and think about how seemingly pointless, or ignorant, or excessive it was, but Thum’s history prompts reflection beyond the commonplace assumption that such nationalist campaigns are simply the work of irrational zealots and ideologues.

Thum’s *Uprooted* is largely devoted to describing the atmosphere of impermanence and alienation which pervaded postwar Wrocław, detailing the seemingly quixotic nationalist campaign that aimed to overcome this aura, and evaluating the campaign’s successes and failures over the long term. Nevertheless, a more in-depth examination of the psychology behind such campaigns would be a worthwhile addition to the literature. Wrocław’s nationalist campaign was marked by excesses, contradictions, and egregious, irrational lies at every step. Thum gives a reason for this: the population transfer and the war-shattered and unfamiliar environment left the new population of Wrocław utterly demoralized; they felt that they could never feel at home in such a city, so the government created an extreme nationalist campaign to help them feel like they were living in a rightfully and historically Polish city that they could be proud of. People were also uncertain whether the postwar border shift would be permanent, so the government and the people had to convince themselves and others that these territories were rightfully theirs, and would remain so.⁴⁴

Seen in this light, parts of the campaign are understandable, but many of its excesses and contradictions are still baffling, and still seem unnecessary when one really pauses to reflect on them. Did German words really need to be chiselled out of every tiny nook when resources might be put to much more practical use elsewhere? After all, as Thum later points out, everyone’s private homes were full of German objects that could not help but make their presence felt.⁴⁵ Did the German-sounding names of individual autochthons in the new territories really need to be Polonized when, as Thum points out, everyone else in Poland was able to keep their German-sounding names?⁴⁶ Thum describes the propaganda, shows us its official justifications, and points out its contradictions, but this method alone does not give us a complete picture of the motivations that were driving government activists to such extreme lengths.

The literature on transitioned postwar cities, which describes extreme nationalist campaigns like the one in Wrocław, could benefit from a trip beyond the usual archives into the

⁴³ For how there was no significant prewar lust among Poles for Wrocław, see Thum, *Uprooted*, 190-191; Davies, *Microcosm*, 412.

⁴⁴ Thum, *Uprooted*, Chapter 5 for “The Impermanence Syndrome,” and Chapters 6-10 for the propaganda campaign.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 382-385.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 265.

dynamics which actually drive government bureaucrats and leaders to pursue such nonsensical policies. Brown, in *A Biography of No Place*, “examines how the multiethnic border zone of the *kresy* became a largely homogenous Ukrainian heartland in the course of three decades, 1923-1953.”⁴⁷ Brown’s study, as it concerns itself with such an obscure and ambiguous region, repeatedly comes up against the limitations of the statistics and categories that fill the government archives.

For instance, Brown finds that a historian may scan the archives and form a certain theoretical concept of the short-lived and long defunct ‘Marchlevsk Polish Autonomous Region’.⁴⁸ But she shows how the archives can tell us one thing – one great big lie based on a theory of how to organize ethnic statistics to show how an ancient countryside is progressing – while the story of why the Soviets assembled such an archive reveals the actual complicated and refractory attitudes and cultures of the people whom the statistics represent. As Brown explains:

Trying to uncover the essence of the Marchlevsk Region from the documents left behind is like trying to read an autopsy report to determine the nature of the personality, the value of the life. If there was a special quality to the Polish Marchlevsk Region, moments, at least, of pride, or a swelling sense among those who believed in the project that they were building something worthwhile...these documents hardly narrate that story.⁴⁹

By looking at the archives for information on the autonomous region, Brown is constantly presented with reports of dazzling progress and organization. The problem is that “when Soviet officials wanted to please their superiors, they drew up charts. In the chart they expressed progress in terms of numbers, which rose steadily from year to year. In fact, their superiors chided them if the numbers remained static from one year to the next. Progress amounted to a quantifiable formula...”⁵⁰ This formula covered up all sorts of ambiguous and

⁴⁷ Kate Brown, *A Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 2. In the introduction, Brown explains the term *kresy*: “Between historic Poland and Russia runs an amorphous corridor once called *kresy* (borderlands, in Polish), now more generally known as the Chernobyl zone... Because of the region’s ambiguous and marginal characteristics, describing the *kresy* in terms traditionally used by the geographer and historian presents problems... The region is best described as the fringe which threaded in and out of what today is central Ukraine. In general terms, it lies between the Dniestr and Dnepr rivers, west of Kiev, south of the Pripiat Marshes, and east of Novograd-Volynsk in the former tsarist provinces of Volynia, Podillia, and Kiev in what is today portions of the Kiev, Zhtomyr, Khmel’nitskii, and Vinnytsia provinces. Historically, the *kresy* has no definite polity because it was never the seat of power but always the periphery...” (1-3)

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 20-21, “The Poles, like all officially recognized ethnic groups in Ukraine, were granted cultural and geographic autonomy as part of the Soviet nationality policy whereby Soviet officials formed out of the smallest villages national territories, to be run in separate languages with distinct cultures and languages.” (20) The Marchlevsk Polish Autonomous Region was to be “a Polonized autonomous region which would serve as an example for Polish workers and farmers to the west of the border, as it developed independently a proletarian society based on Polish culture.” (21) It lasted from 1925-1935.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, quotation on 18-19; this paragraph and the remainder of this section are drawn from Chapter 1.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

bungling realities. Brown finds that the archival “Marchlevsk was... a numerical creation... a fictional representation sketched out in tabulated columns,” which were drawn up by super-optimistic theorists.⁵¹ But the reality – seen through the reports of various official investigators – was a far cry from the glowing infrastructural and economic progress summed up in the reports.

The Bolsheviks were obsessed with setting their lands in order through statistics and categories of every variety. However, another problem with this intense desire to categorize lay in the ambiguousness of a region where cultures, dialects, and religious loyalties overlapped in so many ways; a region in which “it was hard to tell the difference between Poles and Ukrainians because both were simply peasant... no two villages were alike; each place contained a different blend of language, ethnicity, and social composition.”⁵² This dashed the expectations of Soviet administrators, who were grounded in academic theories, and who decided who fit into what category.

Brown goes beyond the unbelievable hyperboles and exhortations of the archives and elucidates the particular bureaucratic culture that motivated the Soviet administration to draw up hyperbolic reports and enact wildly unrealistic policies. The reality on the ground clashed with the expectations of bureaucrats, who in turn responded stubbornly, pushing back with their quixotic, theoretically-driven demands, which were sanctioned by the spirit of the revolution. The inner dynamics of this political culture explain how policy makers can proceed according to their own reality, so far out of touch with the actual needs of their subjects. The quixotic nationalist campaigns mounted by postwar cities in Eastern Europe are similarly full of excesses and contradictions. If we subject them to the type of scrutiny which Brown applies to her study, we might begin to gain a better understanding of their extremist tendencies.

iii) Modernist Urban Planning and ‘High Culture’ Bias in Urban History

Thum dedicates two chapters of his book to architecture and urban planning, focusing mostly on the reconstruction of historic buildings and districts.⁵³ In Chapter 4, he provides an overview of the various phases of postwar reconstruction in Wrocław, which included the restoration of Old Town after Stalin’s death, the end of socialist realism in 1956, and the construction of low-cost, modernist, standardized apartments in the 1960s and 1970s.⁵⁴ Thum describes where the aesthetics of these modern apartments clashed with their surroundings and where they managed to mesh with them, where they were monotonous and where they began to display more variety, and how the planning of Wrocław generally proceeded in a very disjointed manner.⁵⁵ In this section, Thum seems to take for granted that historic preservation is inherently

⁵¹ Ibid., 23.

⁵² Ibid., 39.

⁵³ Thum, *Uprooted*, Chapters 4 and 10.

⁵⁴ Ibid., Chapter 4.

⁵⁵ Ibid., see the section titled “1956 and a Changing Building Policy” (160-167)

worthwhile and that modernist housing should only be mentioned in passing as a regrettable, cheap, aesthetically-displeasing solution to housing shortages and population growth. Thum ends his section on post-1956 building policy with a note of relief:

Due to the precarious financial situation in communist Poland numerous projects were never, or only partially, implemented... This also meant, however, that Wrocław was not fully hit by the modernist euphoria that swept postwar urban planning. While many European cities today bemoan the demolition of historic neighborhoods and the dissolution of an irregular street plan in favor of a “modern,” “automobile friendly” pattern of streets, damage of this kind is comparatively limited in Wrocław. Given the enormity of the destruction that the city suffered during the war, the number of its historic buildings that have preserved is astounding.⁵⁶

This focus on aesthetic comparison misses the purpose of these modernist housing projects, which was to provide a low-cost, salubrious solution to housing shortages. Thum does note that “the poor quality of these buildings often meant that they began to deteriorate prematurely and thus did not provide a satisfactory long-term solution,” but does not go into any substantial detail about their social or economic merits or flaws.⁵⁷ His cursory treatment of modernist housing and focus on historic preservation and restoration is representative of the broader scholarship on transitioned cities. The literature would benefit from more research into whether standardized socialist architecture created experiences that were unique to a particular transitioned city. A traditional bias in favor of high culture seems to pervade the literature on these cities, and the topic of modernist architecture remains mostly unaddressed.

Thum’s treatment of standardized housing is also representative of how historians of these transitions are often preoccupied far more with nationalism than socialism. The implication of this focus seems to be that nationalism had far more to do with the unique experience of these transitioned cities; indeed, the intensity of national activism and propaganda efforts is one of the major themes that makes these cities worthy of specific attention by historians. But more attention could be given as to whether the experience of socialism was significantly distinct in these cities.

Elizabeth Clark, in her article on postwar reconstruction in Gdańsk, also focuses on the preservation of historic ‘high culture’ architecture. She describes how planners emphasized buildings with positive Polish connotations – related to the city’s grain trade, maritime character, or Hanseatic membership – and tried to downplay the presence of modern Prussian

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 160-167, quotation on 163; Thum dedicates a vast amount of space to Old Town, but only seven pages to building policy after 1956.

architecture.⁵⁸ Clark's article serves as a cursory overview of postwar and post-communist reconstruction trends with a few examples of key historical landmarks or districts.⁵⁹ Her examination of the built environment is focused mostly on physical changes, like a detailed guidebook that takes you on a tour of prominent urban landmarks. In generally adhering to such a tone, however, the literature on these cities has not delved very far into the way these projects actually affected the ordinary inhabitants of these cities; how intensely did *they* identify with Gothic spires or deride administrative buildings left over from the Prussian era? One wonders how much impact costly and pedantic historic restoration could have had on the daily lives of average citizens, or how much more important the influence of modernist housing might have been.

Moreover, this sort of cursory overview – which often resorts to broad historiographical tropes instead of seriously examining local culture – can be confusing and unhelpful in terms of its contribution to our particular field of study. For instance, in outlining the mostly unrealized First General Plan for L'viv, which was formulated during the first Soviet occupation of the city (1939-1941), Tscherkes adopts a tone that is intended to convince us that the plan was immensely far-reaching in its destructive impact, and that it was thankfully never realized.⁶⁰ Tscherkes' summation of the plan gives a good example of the standard lens through which urban scholars tend to regard socialist planning and heritage preservation:

Modeled on the Soviet transformations which had caused such irretrievable loss of architectural and cultural monuments in Moscow, Kyiv, Kharkiv, and other cities, Kasianov's plan threatened L'viv's venerable historical silhouette. It would have required the demolition of important historical quarters and much of the city's formidable network of open spaces. In hindsight, the plan cannot be regarded in the neutral or even positive light which it was afforded by architectural historians during the Soviet era.⁶¹

Tscherkes treats the Second General Plan of 1946 in a similar manner. He describes this plan – which also “remained largely unrealized” – as “gargantuan” and “radical,”⁶² yet he also notes how remarkable the plan's preservationist tendencies were:

... [despite] obvious propagandistic overtones, this fledgling preservation effort was a total anomaly at a time when most capital cities of the Soviet bloc were losing many of their architectural and cultural monuments to epic planning projects. In a period of Stalinist dictatorship, [the planner's] approach was hardly common or logical, and it is

⁵⁸ Elizabeth Morrow Clark, “Reshaping the Free City: Cleansed Memory in Danzig/Gdańsk, 1939-1952,” in *Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe*, edited by Steven Béla Várdy, T. Hunt Tooley, and Agnes Huszár Várdy (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 319-320.

⁵⁹ Clark, “Reshaping the Free City,” 311-331.

⁶⁰ Tscherkes, “Stalinist Visions,” 207-209 for the First General Plan. It is also important to note that “as the Second World War drew to a close, L'viv's architectural and cultural monuments emerged relatively unscathed.” (209)

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 208.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 210-211.

fair to say that much of the city's later trajectory in local preservation... was informed by this policy of the 1940s.⁶³

Tscherkes goes on to describe some of the imposing monuments and realigned layouts which the new plan entailed, as well as its use of a typical communist ideological framework, complete with Lenin and Stalin statues as centers of attention, a triumphal arch, a monumental plaza and parade ground, etc.⁶⁴ Tscherkes also lists some of the most prominent completed monuments and buildings of the Stalinist era, which he describes as mostly adhering to the neo-classical Stalinist tenets of the day. He asserts that such projects, though “never realized on a considerable scale in L’viv... nonetheless... significantly affected the appearance of L’viv,” and made a significant contribution towards the Sovietization of the city.⁶⁵ He also notes that “many of the ideological, social, and economic aims of the plans were nonetheless successful despite their limited architectural implementation.”⁶⁶

Overall, this sort of approach is couched in well-worn tropes intended to portray a struggle between new and old architecture. It focuses on major historical landmarks in a way that obscures any deeper insight into the transformation of urban life and culture – that is, how the broad population was affected over the long term, in cultural and psychological terms, for instance. Such an overview makes it difficult to imagine how much these supposedly stark monumental intrusions really made their presence felt. Also, based on Tscherkes' own descriptions, it is difficult to believe that either of the plans, if fully implemented, would have been as cataclysmic or Sovietizing as the author makes them sound. And Tscherkes' offhand comparisons to Moscow and Kyiv give little insight into the tangible ways that L’viv's local character made its presence felt. The literature on these cities would benefit from a more substantial comparative approach to the urban environment, which would shed light on what constituted a “radical” plan, a praiseworthy amount of preservation, or a “successful” amount of Sovietization for these cities, and to what degree urban transformation truly affected a broad segment of the population.

iv) Architectural Propaganda and the role of Personal Motivations in Nationalist Campaigns

Thum and Risch⁶⁷ have both drawn attention to how the propagandistic portrayal of historic architecture in a transitioned city aimed to create a nationalist narrative that, to a certain degree, could mesh with the already extant physical framework of a city. This meant that certain architectural styles often came to be regarded as national simply due to the malleable arguments of propagandists and their subjective willingness to interpret them this way. For instance, Gothic

⁶³ Ibid., 211.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 209-213 for the Second General Plan.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 213-218, quotation on 218.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 218.

⁶⁷ Risch, *The Ukrainian West*, 45.

architecture was seen as a beacon of national culture by both Germans in Breslau and Poles in Wrocław; as Thum puts it, “this appropriation of one and the same architectural style with diametrically opposed propagandistic objectives illustrates once again the baselessness of the concept of national architecture.”⁶⁸ A similarly murky situation existed with regards to “Prussian” architecture in Wrocław, which was derided by official Polish propaganda, but still needed for practical purposes.⁶⁹ Therefore, it was again a question of subjective interpretation:

Architectural styles rarely recognize national boundaries, and what was regarded as typically Prussian or German in the western territories of Poland... was more specific to the times than to the country. We should bear in mind that neither a “German historic building” nor a “Polish historic building” existed in and of itself. A building became one or the other in the subjective perception of the society in question, and this perception could change at any time... Whether a building was declared Polish, or at least of unspecific nationality and as such worthy of protection, was dependent to a great degree on the determination and argumentative interpretation of the preservationists.⁷⁰

Thum devotes a chapter of his book to the reconstruction and restoration of Wrocław’s Old Town. His focus here is on how the official narrative of Poland’s new territories as fundamentally Polish influenced restoration decisions. The oldest historical styles – Gothic and medieval – which were the most strongly associated with Polishness in the propaganda, were emphasized the most, despite the high cost of their restoration. The fate of other styles was also dependent on how they meshed with the official narrative; as such, Habsburg-associated buildings were treated with “benevolent neutrality,” while buildings associated with Prussia often fared much worse.⁷¹

It is surprising that such an elaborate and costly restoration program could take place under a communist regime. In Thum’s book, the role of communism is relegated to a background presence; his focus is mainly on the postwar nationalist narrative of the ‘Recovered Territories’. Occasionally, socialist rhetoric is seen to compliment this nationalist program, usually in a somewhat perfunctory way.⁷² When socialism does come up in Thum’s sections on historic reconstruction, some of the contradictions are glaring. For instance, Thum points out that the Polish communist state largely financed the costly reconstruction of Gothic churches. This was definitely weird, he admits, but those behind the decision cited “propaganda benefits,” because the official propaganda had associated these churches with the Piast dynasty and Wrocław’s

⁶⁸ Thum, *Uprooted*, 348.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, see section titled “The Anti-Prussian Reflex” (360-372). Also, the extent of wartime damages to Wrocław’s buildings is summarized on 331-333, and Thum notes that “the extent of war damage suffered by the different architectural epochs appears to have been inversely proportional to the value attributed to those epochs in post-1945 Poland,” (333), meaning that more modern buildings suffered less damage.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 363.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, Chapter 10, “benevolent neutrality” quotation on 349.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 197-198 for an example of perfunctory socialist rhetoric intertwined with the nationalist narrative.

Polish origins.⁷³ Some of Wrocław’s medieval fortifications were also restored “at great expense, (and without any practical purpose).”⁷⁴ Thum also describes how the restored historic facades of apartments in Old Town actually veiled working class apartments which were built according to modernist dimensions that allowed for a better flow of air and sunlight, rather than historic dimensions. Restoration of these facades – which could be associated with German capitalism – was intended to highlight their Polish attributes where possible and to symbolically spurn German capitalism by using the dwellings of its old perpetrators as working class apartments.⁷⁵

But despite the justifications by bureaucrats in official propaganda, the foregoing projects themselves still seem rather surprising and contradictory; the opulent architecture of past exploiters was restored by a self-declared egalitarian regime. Bureaucrats said this would yield “propaganda benefits”; it was all part of their general mission to make the city feel more Polish. But going beyond the official reasons for why the communists supported these decadent and seemingly wasteful projects, there are other intriguing questions to be asked about the relationship between communism and nationalism, and the motivations of bureaucrats. To what extent were the communist tendencies of bureaucrats being overshadowed by nationalist goals? Were Party members generally more loyal to nationalism than communism? To what extent were they true believers in socialist egalitarianism, and therefore liable to resent the contradictions of this historic restoration? Who actually ended up inhabiting the so-called “working class” apartments with patrician facades?

Kate Brown, in her research on Soviet nationality policy in the *kresy*, gives an excellent illustration of how a particular political culture can drive the seemingly incomprehensible actions of government bureaucrats. To help us understand this culture, she outlines the personal biography of one of the key leaders of this nationality policy.⁷⁶ As with so many historical figures, Jan Saulevich’s biography can serve as a microcosm of larger historical trends.⁷⁷ To tell the story of how someone like Saulevich, a true believer, dedicatedly pursued the far-fetched project of organizing nationally autonomous regions in the highly underdeveloped and ethnically ambiguous *kresy* sheds a lot of light on the problems of Soviet nationality theory as a whole.

Glossing over individual biographies and going straight to official correspondence often makes nationalist campaigns seem absurd and sociopathic. It would be possible for a historian to remark on someone like Saulevich’s contribution to history with simply a brief word on his failed and far-flung efforts to reorganize an old order according to impractical theories. Brown, however, delves into the political culture that made people like Saulevich tick, and comes to a different conclusion:

⁷³ Ibid., 329, 333-335, “propaganda benefits” quotation on 335.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 346.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 155-156, 354-358.

⁷⁶ Brown, *No Place*, this section is drawn from Chapter 1.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 37: “Saulevich’s biography bears a personal likeness to the arch of Soviet rule in the borderlands.”

...although many things have been said about the Evil Empire, the totalitarian Soviet state and its divide-and-conquer nationality experiment, I have been persuaded after reading most of Saulevich's professional correspondence that this noble-born Pole spent years splashing over muddy roads, sleeping in tick-ridden straw mattresses, signing his leaky pen to proposal after proposal because he wanted people, in whatever form they happened to take – Polish, German, Czech, Ukrainian, Jewish – to believe in the Soviet state, to find a home at last after decades of the knout.⁷⁸

Brown relates Saulevich's personal background, which she places in the context of the region's fading Polish nobility. He was a product of a noble class which mounted failed rebellions – in 1830 and 1863 – against tsarist rule and descended into poverty as a result. Ethnicity and class structure then continued to mingle and shift until the feudal idylls of the region were crushed by the wars of 1914-1921.⁷⁹ So Saulevich set out to bring order to this poor, uneducated backwater, which was home to innumerable, ineffable local cultures:

Culture was enacted in particularly local formulas – under the linden tree, in front of the stove, on a bench before the prayer house, in line at the grain mill during the harvest...each place had its own culture (in lower-case letters); its own vernacular for language, tradition, and identity... it had become very difficult, without the markings of class and religion, to tell the difference between a Pole and a Ukrainian.⁸⁰

But Brown suggests that Saulevich, with his elite Polish upbringing, probably understood nationality according to the old impulses of Polish high culture, which were informed by writers like Mickiewicz:

In the works of these Romantic writers, it was easy to distinguish a noble Pole from a peasant Ukrainian. The writers penned poetic sentences full of longing for a lost idyll of simplicity, of Polish aristocratic honor unyielding to tsarist repression, and of swampy, superstitious mystery.⁸¹

Saulevich's biography shows how a true believer can be motivated to spearhead such an unlikely campaign; one which was intended to represent the proletarian Polish nation in Soviet Ukraine. Urban historians of transitions might consider how, first of all, Saulevich et al.'s policy of giving every ethnic group – in a complicated scattering of tiny, ethnically ambiguous localities – its own array of national institutions was quite bold and experimental.⁸² Just as the Soviet nationality policy of the 1920s took a large leap of faith in its projection of a theory onto a murky

⁷⁸ Ibid., 50.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 34.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 36.

⁸¹ Ibid., 36.

⁸² Ibid., 20: "...Soviet theorists came up with the contradictory notion of organizing the internal borders of the first socialist state not in terms of efficiency or production, as one would expect of a modernizing internationalist regime, but around national borders and ethnic identity. It was a peculiar experiment."

and unlikely reality, so the transfers of entire populations in and out of cities after WWII projected an extreme theory of national stability onto a much larger and equally unlikely reality. Brown shows how the people assembling her archives wanted to see the world. The literature on transitioned cities could benefit from a similar exposition of the personal motivations and cultural impulses that drove the Communist Party bureaucrats of the postwar period, who presided over such elaborate propaganda and urban restoration campaigns in cities like Wrocław.

v) The Persistence of the Prewar City

The degree to which the “venerable [prewar] historic silhouette[s]”⁸³ of transitioned cities had an impact on their broader populations is another theme which deserves more attention. However, several historians have attempted to point out how the physical presence of these historic environments specifically influenced the development of high culture in the postwar period, although this theme also deserves more attention.

Both Davies and Thum⁸⁴ cite examples of rural villages in Poland’s western territories which deteriorated and were not revitalized for decades; these tiny localities were devastated by “the loss of local knowledge accumulated over generations, of traditions expunged from one day to the next.”⁸⁵ Such examples prompt the question: “How would a social organism as complex as a city cope with the total exchange of its population and the loss of local knowledge and urban tradition?”⁸⁶ For example, the following are Thum’s self-declared research questions:

How could Wrocław, which was devastated in the Second World War and lost its entire established population, become a thriving city again? How did the Polish settlers and their descendants not only overcome their feeling of foreignness and establish roots in the formerly German city, but also develop a sense of civic pride unsurpassed anywhere else in Poland? And how was it possible to make of Wrocław not merely a city in Poland but truly Polish city, if only in the course of an extended process that is still ongoing today?⁸⁷

The frames of cities – majestic streets, bridges, parks, theatres, churches, universities, and skylines – were inhabited by new elites who were inspired to fill the post-transfer voids with their own cultural projects. Thum notes the important influence which the shape of prewar Breslau had on the general postwar trajectory of Wrocław, and how the postwar inhabitants in the city were inspired to prove their

...ability to reconstruct and revive a city whose destruction had been caused by the Germans. For this reason, Wrocław could not help but communicate with Breslau. The

⁸³ Tscherkes, “Stalinist Visions,” 208.

⁸⁴ Thum, *Uprooted*, 1-2, 89-90; Davies, 442-444.

⁸⁵ Thum, *Uprooted*, 1.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

size of the city prior to 1945, the number of its inhabitants, its architecture, and its technical and cultural institutions – all of these became benchmarks for Wrocław after 1945. If the city had been merely a social space, then Breslau would have been extinguished with the expulsion of its inhabitants and a completely new and different city would have arisen after the war... This, however, was not the case. In the background of the postwar city, the prewar city was always present. At first the relation between the two was marked by Wrocław's desire to negate and occasionally outstrip Breslau. However, with increasing distance from the Second World War and diminishing political tensions between Germany and Poland, and initially interested and ultimately respectful encounter developed between the Polish city and the German one...⁸⁸

Davies also points out the remarkable flourishing of Wrocław's postwar cultural life, noting that, "one cannot deny that the passion for Polish culture was driven in part by the very un-Polish character of the setting."⁸⁹ New inhabitants did not only want to compete with past successes in their own nationalistic ways, however; some were clearly inspired by the multicultural history that historic silhouettes evoked. Risch's book, which focuses heavily on L'viv's postwar cultural life and intelligentsia, points out the Ukrainian nationalist elision of the city's heritage, but also the inspiring ecumenical feelings L'viv's architecturally rich and varied European skyline – which "escaped WWII relatively unscathed" – evoked for the artists and intellectuals who inhabited it.⁹⁰ In general, the physical environment of these cities in some cases spurred elites into nationalistic competition with the cultural achievements of prewar cities, and in other instances drove them to explore and be inspired by the old worlds.

IV: The Migrant Experience

Some historians have zoomed in from the large-scale view of border shifts and forced population transfers to the level of individual cities in order to give us a close-up view of how geopolitical calculations and mass migrations affected the everyday experiences of the populations who filtered in and out of transferred cities. In the initial stages of the transitions, relations on the ground between outgoing and incoming ethnic groups and administrations were often predictably marred by atrocities and exploitation, but historians have also pointed out examples of cooperation and mutual sympathy between nominally antagonistic groups. With regards to the long-term migrant experience, some of the most interesting research has highlighted the psychological consequences of these urban transitions; although heavy

⁸⁸ Ibid., 7.

⁸⁹ Davis, *Microcosm*, 446.

⁹⁰ Risch, *The Ukrainian West*, 103-115, "unscathed" quotation on 7. Also see Czaplicka, "L'viv, Lemberg, Leopoldis, Lwów, Lvov," 31: "The residents of L'viv have inherited this architecture, and it is the most characteristic and perhaps the most valuable element in the diverse cultural landscape of the city. The city's fine architectural composition serves as a call to the inquisitive intellect and creative imagination to reconnoiter and reconstruct, and to take pride in the multifaceted heritage associated with the city. The current [i.e. post-Soviet] population of the city is confronted with the indications of that past day in and day out, and this shapes its identity in relation to a city that was perceptibly and richly shaped by the crosscurrents of European culture." (31)

propaganda was used to alleviate a climate of impermanence, this propaganda and censorship clashed with the reality of daily life and individual memories, and reconciliation with the censored past could only proceed after the fall of communism.

i) Atrocities during the Forced Expulsions/Ethnic Cleansings

The history of the postwar expulsions – their causes, the atrocities that took place on the ground, and their legacies – is a massive subject in and of itself. Snyder’s *Bloodlands* and *Reconstruction of Nations* are both seminal works that in part deal with the subject.⁹¹ *Reconstruction of Nations* marks the ethnic cleansing of the region as a pivotal moment in a long-term narrative (1569-1999) of how modern, ethnically-defined nations arose from what was once the vast, multiethnic empire of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. For instance, Snyder draws attention to how Galicia and Volhynia’s experience of WWII – defined by both Nazi and Soviet occupations – was a crucial period in the solidification of people’s ability to see the world around them through starkly ethno-nationalist lenses. The genocide and deportation policies of these occupiers depended on the ruthless categorization of nationality – through ID Card systems for instance – and ground these national definitions firmly into people’s minds.⁹²

Davies and Thum, in their studies of Wrocław, cover the expulsions from a close-up view, helping us to see the transfers from a local perspective, as they unfolded over the course of about two years,⁹³ and as Poles and Germans – brought face to face in these extraordinary circumstances – continued to interact with each other on an everyday basis.⁹⁴

For the purposes of urban historians, the general power dynamics which characterized these expulsions provide an important background for understanding how people from different regions and ethnic groups interacted with each other in the immediate postwar period as well as over the long term. For instance, in what would become Poland’s new western territories, brutal atrocities were inflicted on the German population by the invading Red Army; as Snyder notes, “during the march on Berlin, the Red Army followed a dreadfully simple procedure in the eastern lands of the Reich, the territories meant for Poland: its men raped German women and

⁹¹ Snyder, *Bloodlands*, Chapter 10; Snyder, *Reconstruction*, especially Chapters 4-5 and 8-10.

⁹² Snyder, *Reconstruction*, 158-162; also see Brown, referring to the *kresy*, in *No Place*, 10: “...in the wake of World War II, the racial definition of nation-state had become habit, which meant that the compulsion to organize populations and space by race did not slacken but intensified.”

⁹³ Thum, *Uprooted*, 62-65; “The transfer [of Germans from Poland] was essentially completed in late 1947. Another roughly 140,000 Germans were evacuated from Poland between 1948 and 1950, for the most part people who had been classified as indispensable workers and not been permitted to leave earlier; and in addition more than 35,000 German prisoners of war and a large number of German children from orphanages. All told, more than 3.5 million Germans were transferred from Poland to postwar Germany between 1945 and 1950. This corresponded approximately to the number who had been evacuated or who had fled the Red Army in 1945 without ever returning.” (65)

⁹⁴ Thum, *Uprooted*, Chapters 1-3 and Davies, *Microcosm*, 407-454 both contain detailed accounts of the postwar population transfers and expulsions with a focus on Poland’s new western territories.

seized German men (and some women) for labor.”⁹⁵ In the immediate aftermath of the Soviet takeover (May 6, 1945) of Wrocław, Davies notes that “arson, rape, robbery, and systematic looting proceeded unrestrained.”⁹⁶

Snyder also points out that the specific circumstances under which Red Army atrocities were committed were also a result of Hitler’s Nazi ideology: “As so often, Stalin’s crimes were enabled by Hitler’s policies. In large measure, the German men were there to be seized, and the German women to be raped, because the Nazis failed to organize systematic evacuations.”⁹⁷ This negligence stemmed from Hitler’s thinking that “if Germans lost their war of salvation, there was no longer any reason why they should survive. For Hitler, any suffering that Germans might endure was a consequence of their own weakness.”⁹⁸ As such, Hitler’s brand of suicidal nationalism and imperialism was important to the tragic dynamic under which the cities in the western territories changed hands. The situation in Wrocław offers a specific example of the consequences:

In Lower Silesia, [Gauleiter] Karl Hanke was concerned that flight would undermine his campaign to make Breslau (today Wrocław) a fortress that could stop the Red Army. In fact, the Red Army surrounded Breslau so quickly that people were trapped. Because German civilians left too late, they died in far higher numbers than they might have.⁹⁹

The circumstances of Breslau’s defeat were important for a variety of other reasons as well. The immense destruction wrought by Germany’s prolonged and suicidal defense of Breslau would have a profound impact on Wrocław’s long and dismal road to material recovery.¹⁰⁰ And it furthered propagandistic goals by allowing postwar Polish nationalist historians to point out how destructive the German influence on Wrocław had ultimately been.¹⁰¹

⁹⁵ Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 315-319; quotation on 316.

⁹⁶ Davies, *Microcosm*, 408, see 407-409 for the Soviet takeover of Wrocław, and 417-425 for the terrible experiences of the Germans during the expulsions from Wrocław and what would become Poland’s new territories, in which atrocities were committed by the Red Army and Polish soldiers and settlers; also see Thum, *Uprooted*, 53-65, for an overview of the expulsion of Germans from Poland’s western territories.

⁹⁷ Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 318.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 319.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 319.

¹⁰⁰ Thum, *Uprooted*; see the section in the prologue titled “The Destruction of Breslau” (xvii-xxxi); “The fanaticism of the Gauleiter and the narrow-mindedness of the last fortress commander, who could not muster the courage to end a battle long after it had become senseless, cost tens of thousands of lives. Entire neighborhoods of Breslau became uninhabitable. Most of the monuments were reduced to ruins and a large part of the city’s art treasures, libraries, and archives were irretrievably lost. In early February 1945, Breslau was one of only two German cities with populations over 500,000 that were still intact (the other was Dresden); by the end of the war, it was one of the most severely damaged cities in all of Europe.” (xxix-xxxi) This destruction’s effects on Wrocław’s material recovery are mentioned throughout Thum’s book; especially 140-160.

¹⁰¹ Thum, *Uprooted*, 239-240.

Like the Red Army, Polish soldiers often behaved with extreme vengeance towards the German population as it was expelled from the western territories.¹⁰² Snyder gives an account of the chaotic expulsion of Germans during the summer of 1945 – modelled after the expulsions of Germans taking place in Czechoslovakia at the time – which took place as the Polish communists were creating a *fait accompli* that they could present to the delegates of the upcoming Potsdam Conference (July 1945), who were to decide shape of Poland’s new borders; “The officers of the new Polish army told their troops to treat the German peasants as the enemy. The entire German nation was guilty, and not to be pitied.”¹⁰³ Even after the allies accepted the Oder-Neisse Line at Potsdam – while stipulating that future expulsions must take place under “more humane conditions” – the new Polish government induced “voluntary repatriations” of Germans from the western territories by engineering ongoing atrocities, including forced labor, imprisonment, and murder.¹⁰⁴ As Poles and Jews from eastern Poland were expelled from the lands that were transferred to the USSR, and Ukrainians from southeast Poland were expelled to Ukraine or dispersed throughout Poland’s new territories during Operation Vistula (1947), similar atrocities were widespread.¹⁰⁵ Upon this background, urban historians have examined how these brutal dynamics were sustained or alleviated over the short term and the long term, and have sought to trace what became of these vengeful attitudes and how they ended up influencing the formation of collective memory and interethnic and international relations over the long term.

ii) Relations between Ethnic Groups in Transferred Cities

Thum begins his book on Wrocław by outlining the precarious postwar administrative situation on the ground. The key to these early days of Polish Wrocław was that “the actual rulers of Wrocław were not the representatives of the Polish state but the commanders of the Red Army.”¹⁰⁶ This initial power dynamic would end up having a profound impact on the long-term infrastructural and economic prospects of the city, as huge amounts of industrial machinery and valuable goods were plundered and carted off hastily by the Red Army – although Thum also points out how Wrocław’s material assets were dismantled by Poles too, in service of cities in Central Poland.¹⁰⁷ Historic grievances translated into tense relations on the ground between Poles

¹⁰² Davies, *Microcosm*, 417-425; also see Thum, *Uprooted*, 62-65.

¹⁰³ Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 320.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, quotations on 321; see 320-324 for a general overview of the expulsion of Germans from Poland’s new western territories.

¹⁰⁵ See Snyder, *Reconstruction*, 187-201 for expulsions in the Poland/Ukraine border region and for Operation Vistula; Davies, *Microcosm*, 425-428 for the brutal conditions experienced by Eastern expellees; Thum, *Uprooted*, 65-74; and Snyder, *Bloodlands*, Chapter 10, and also 327: “Soviet policy was to remove both ethnic Poles and ethnic Jews from the former eastern Poland, but to keep Belarusians, Ukrainians, and Lithuanians.”

¹⁰⁶ Thum, *Uprooted*, 28.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, see “Soviet Dismantling” (110-118); here, Thum also puts the dismantling in the context of the massive setback that the USSR’s economy suffered during the war, as well as the economic capacity which Poland actually gained by relinquishing its East and gaining the West; he notes that it is also “difficult to judge” (117) Poland’s losses against the backdrop of post-war Stalinist economics and general post-war scarcity; also see “Polish

and Soviets, as the Red Army marauded freely while spurning the presence of the slipshod new Polish administration. Part of this disdain was manifested in the way that – in the early months – the Soviets allowed, cooperated with, and showed favoritism towards a new German administration in the city, which was responsible for the remaining German population.¹⁰⁸ However, Thum also balances out this portrait of Russian control with an interesting historiographical point:

In recent works, Polish historians have judged harshly the actions of the Red Army in the western territories, which is understandable given that the subject was taboo for many years. Nevertheless, we should bear in mind that at a time when Polish security forces were still being established, it was the Soviet presence that gave Polish state institutions the authority they needed, in particular vis-à-vis the German population. One must therefore ask whether the task of establishing a bare minimum of public order during this initial phase would not have been even more difficult without the Soviet presence.¹⁰⁹

Davies, however, in his general description of the difficulties that the Soviets encountered while trying to ‘saddle the cow’, has another insight into the paucity of Polish Communist authority at the time:

For one thing, Communism had always been deeply unattractive to Catholic Poles, and doubly so after Soviet misconduct in 1939-41. For another, Stalin had made the bad mistake of murdering virtually the entire of *actif* of the pre-war Polish Communist Party in the Great Purge of 1937-9. As a result, less than a decade later there were not enough trained Polish Communists alive to run a factory, let alone a country of thirty million people.¹¹⁰

Similar power dynamics led to a similarly ignominious and confusing situation for Szczecin’s postwar Polish administration, which in the early months after the transfer was twice temporarily ousted from the city due to ongoing political wrangling among the Allies over the new border’s status, during which time the German administration helped repopulate the city with tens of thousands of displaced Germans. At one time, the “two civilian authorities [German and Polish] exist[ed] alongside each other in Szczecin, as well as the [Soviet] military administration.” It was during this same early postwar period that the Soviets took advantage of the strategic/military benefits that came with their ability to control Szczecin’s port.¹¹¹

Dismantling” (126-132); here, Thum focuses especially on the Polish dismantling that benefitted Warsaw’s reconstruction during the massive brick collection campaign of the early 1950s, which wracked Wrocław with much unnecessary destruction at the behest of an ill-organized initiative.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 29-43.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 36.

¹¹⁰ Davies, *Microcosm*, 411.

¹¹¹ Jan M. Piskorski, Bogdan Wachowiak, and Edward Włodarczyk, *A short history of Szczecin*, trans. Kate Wilson (Poznań: PTPN, 2002), 181-186, quotation on 183.

Transitioned cities were also in a unique position to exploit the labor potential of outgoing populations that were regarded as enemies.¹¹² Thum describes the complicated labor system which was foisted on the many Germans who remained in the western territories while the expulsions were being carried out. Expulsions were organized according to an ID Card system for Germans whereby the least skilled workers were to be expelled first, while the more skilled and harder-to-replace workers were forced to remain behind for longer periods. Highly skilled workers, however, being in such high demand, were at times treated and paid quite well by competing employers, and as such became “an odd kind of forced laborer.”¹¹³ In general, however, German workers were used in the early postwar weeks as unpaid forced laborers, and were then paid lower wages and given lower rations than Poles. The ID card system was exploited as unqualified Germans were given high-skill ID Cards so they could be forced to stay behind and then used for cheap labor; in the meantime, Poles, who had to be paid more, struggled to find work.¹¹⁴

Atrocities were often brought on by a combination of festering national-historic grievances and opportunities for revenge, but it is important to keep in mind that potential expellees sometimes remained in these cities for years while waiting for the expulsions to be completed, and small minorities – for instance, of Germans in Wrocław or Poles in L’viv – remained in the cities even after the expulsions ended.¹¹⁵ Looking beyond historically obvious antagonisms, historians can uncover instances of cooperation and mutual sympathy in everyday relations between rival ethnic groups.

Thum and Davies both draw attention to such instances of cooperation. As Thum writes of the new Polish western territories in general: “...in many places Germans and Poles coexisted for months or even years, sometimes under one roof. In rural areas it was by no means unusual

¹¹² Holtom, “Königsberg to Kaliningrad,” 285-286 explains how German labor was exploited in postwar Kaliningrad.

¹¹³ Thum, *Uprooted*, 85.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 79-87.

¹¹⁵ Thum, *Uprooted*, 87-88 describes the German minority that remained in Wrocław; Risch, *Ukrainian West*, 33-34; describes the expulsion of Poles from L’viv: “In a September 1944 agreement between the Polish People’s Republic and Soviet Ukraine, Poles and Jews living in what was then western Ukraine were to be “evacuated” to Poland, while Ukrainians living in Poland were to be “evacuated” to Soviet Ukraine... Soviet officials... completed expulsions [of Poles] only as of 6 March 1947. Soviet mismanagement (including bribes demanded of departing Poles), continued need for Polish skilled laborers, and resistance by Poles themselves slowed the expulsions. However, international recognition of Poland’s postwar borders, street violence provoked by Ukrainian nationalists and the NKVD, threats of arrest and exile, and confiscation of apartments and ration cards forced Poles to comply. L’viv’s Polish population declined dramatically. In December 1944, at the start of the expulsions they had constituted 62.8 percent of the city’s population. By 1 January 1955, there were only 8,600 of them, a mere 2.3 percent of the city’s total population and only 5 percent of what had been its Polish community in 1939.”, also see 62-65 and 83-97 for more on L’viv’s postwar Polish minority and continuing connections to and confrontations with Polish culture. Also see Holtom, “Königsberg to Kaliningrad,” 285-286 describes the stages by which Germans were expelled from Kaliningrad in 1947 and 1948, adding “A few ‘specialists’ were to remain in the region until 1951, although there is anecdotal evidence that a very small number of Germans remained in the area and acquired Soviet citizenship.” (286)

for German farmers to operate their farms together with the new Polish owners for a time. The hardship of surviving the difficult times often bridged their differences.”¹¹⁶ Davies cites the account of a Polish settler whose family, by force of circumstances, temporarily shared a home with a German family after he first came to Wrocław:

...For my part, I saw that both sides were somehow joined by the same miserable fate. We [Poles] had been driven from our native soil by the [Ukrainian] bands, and they [the Germans] were paying for a war that had been started by a devil... Despite the language barrier, our relations developed in a friendly fashion.¹¹⁷

Risch draws attention to instances of cooperation and cultural exchange involving L’viv’s postwar Polish minority, describing how in some cases “good relations... developed between local Poles and the new L’vivians. Poles too poor or too elderly to leave became like family to new residents who had to share apartments with them.”¹¹⁸ He also describes how “L’viv’s few remaining educated Poles still contributed to the new city’s cultural life”; for example, through the Polish People’s Theater, founded in 1958.¹¹⁹

Although historians have described some of the particular processes and policies by which ethnic cleansing was accomplished, the literature on transitioned cities could benefit from further research into how minorities and people with ambiguous ethnic identities fared in cities after the expulsions had ended. Thum, Davies, and Risch have all explored this topic.¹²⁰ Davies notes the psychological pressures felt by the Germans who remained in Wrocław, as well as mixed Polish-German families.¹²¹ He notes that remaining Germans “lived a curious and often schizophrenic existence... adopt[ing] Polish norms to the point where their true identity would be kept concealed from all but the most trusted friends.”¹²² Davies also cites a poem by Eva Maria Jakubek, in which the poet, of German origin, overcomes her bitterness and gracefully reconciles herself with the Polish traditions that surround her: “I live in two dimensions / not only of speech: / I float to and fro / on an invisible line - / at home now / both here and there.”¹²³

¹¹⁶ Thum, *Uprooted*, 66; also see 77-89 for the vicissitudes of “German-Polish Coexistence” in Wrocław in general; on 81, Thum describes “a more than two-year transition period of coexistence between Germans and Poles in Wrocław. They encountered each other on the streets and in stores. They met as coworkers. They lived in the same apartment buildings. Both sides therefore had an opportunity to break down prejudices and hostilities through personal contacts with neighbours and colleagues. No doubt many Poles came to see the everyday presence of Germans as normalcy in what were hardly normal times.”

¹¹⁷ Davies, *Microcosm*, quotation on 432; 431-432 discusses interactions between Poles arriving in Wrocław and the new territories and the Germans still living there, noting instances of callousness but also of mutual empathy; also see 433-434, which describes the rough conditions and the tensions experienced by rural settlers, who faced lonely, unfamiliar conditions, and angry Germans, yet here Davies also points to cooperation and mutual empathy.

¹¹⁸ Risch, *Ukrainian West*, 63.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, quotation on 63; see 62-65 and 83-97 for more on L’viv’s postwar Polish minority and its continuing connections to and confrontations with Polish culture.

¹²⁰ See footnotes 141-145.

¹²¹ Davies, *Microcosm*, 435-437.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 435

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 437

However, the pressure which Polish culture put on Polish-German families was especially apparent in a city like Wrocław, which was filled with people struggling to establish roots and a clear identity, and was therefore prone to assert its Polish character and push aside ambiguous identities even more forcefully.¹²⁴ Thum also includes a brief mention of the small remaining German minority in Wrocław and Lower Silesia, noting that in the 1950s some German institutions were permitted in the city and the region, and that even after most remaining Germans emigrated in the 1950s, some still remained in Wrocław, with the church as their main gathering point.¹²⁵

iii) The Long-Term Psychological Consequences of the Transfers

Although one encounters hints or occasional examples of cooperation between ethnic groups, sifting through the literature on transferred postwar cities and regions – which focuses so frequently on the atrocities of ethnic cleansing and the legacy of hateful propaganda which it left in its wake – leaves one wondering whether all these groups really did continue to hate each other like the propaganda, and probably their own bitter experiences, urged them to. To find answers, one can look at the actual interactions of people, or examine how collective memories evolved in people’s minds after the other group had left. One way to do this is to examine the collective memories that circulated in the public sphere. Snyder, for instance, discusses the persistence of collective myths with regards to both Vilnius and western Ukraine, noting how Lithuanian nationalist histories were republished in the post-Soviet era, and how post-Soviet Lithuanian schoolchildren learned to be ashamed of the 1569 Lublin Union (with which the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth originated), or how Poles and Ukrainians adhered to heated and conflicting narratives of OUN insurgents and postwar ethnic cleansing in the Polish-Ukrainian border region.¹²⁶

Another way of looking at the legacies of these transfers involves an examination of the memories and attitudes that formed in the private sphere. Thum explores how life in Wrocław was, on the one hand, inside individual homes, surrounded by heaps of possessions that had once belonged to German families, and on the other hand filled with rhetoric that decried, dehumanized, and downplayed the German history of the city. The problem was that the old paintings and furniture which Germans had been forced to leave behind made it poignantly obvious that these ordinary people had once filled the city and tried their best to live the happy

¹²⁴ Ibid., 437

¹²⁵ Thum, *Uprooted*, 87-88. The fate of the postwar Jewish minority in Wrocław and the surrounding region is also briefly discussed by Thum and Davies; see Davies, *Microcosm*, 438-442 and Thum, *Uprooted*, 71-74. For the fate of the postwar Jewish minority in L’viv, see Risch, *Ukrainian West*, 57.

¹²⁶ Snyder, *Reconstruction*, 101-102 for the revival of Lithuanian nationalist myths in the post-Soviet era; 98 for how enmity with Poland persisted throughout the Soviet period - “In the grand compromise wherein Lithuanian communists mediated between Soviet power and Lithuanian society, Poland played the important role of common foe.” (98); for Polish and Ukrainian collective memories of ethnic cleansing, see Chapter 10, “Communism and Cleansed Memories (1947-1981).

lives that people everywhere seek.¹²⁷ Here is one variety of a psychological condition familiar to all students of state socialism; the dual existence – so emblematic of late communism – in which people become experts at saying one thing and living and believing another. This condition is often discussed with regards to the failure of empty communist propaganda, but here Thum is describing a dual existence born of the mendacity of nationalist propaganda. Although such an existence was bound to take a demoralizing psychological toll, Thum notes that collective catharsis could only really begin after the communist era of censorship had ended.¹²⁸

Another example of the psychological effects of the disjuncture between propaganda and everyday experience is related by Davies, who cites a Wrocław resident's somewhat happy childhood remembrance, drawing attention to how,

...impressions of a different order were preserved by people whose childhood was passed in post-war Wrocław. A woman who would rise to high positions in Poland's diplomatic service remembers the ruins with great affection. 'We children had enormous fun playing in the rubble,' she recalled. It was the perfect playground for hide-and-seek, with endless nooks and cellars for exploring. Every day was a treasure hunt that produced a magical array of rusty helmets, playing cards, badges, bullets, broken pots, bayonets, bric-a-brac and broken machines...¹²⁹

This same woman goes on to describe the fear that came with living in the starkly war-torn environment. She also describes the experience of being surrounded by all manner of German consumer goods, while an official taboo on speaking about Germans prevailed at her school. However, the memories described here are particularly elucidating; being a child, and therefore probably much wiser than adults suffering under the same strenuous psychological demands, she has the sense, on one of her class field trips, to light her cemetery candles in front of some German graves, despite her history teacher's instructions to the contrary.¹³⁰ This source could also be indicative of the experiences of a new generation that actually became attached to its city, and was not as alienated, jaundiced and amenable to officialdom as its parents' generation, which had been so thoroughly ground down by the stress and terror of war, occupation, and displacement.¹³¹

¹²⁷ Thum, *Uprooted*, see section titled "The City without a Memory" (382-385); this is one of the best sections of Thum's book; see 384: "Through the everyday objects they left behind, the Germans appeared to the Polish inhabitants of the western territories not only as the occupiers and revanchists portrayed in state propaganda, but also as private individuals who had lovingly furnished their apartments and had led lives as civil and normal as their own. It is perhaps not too much to suggest that the Poles' rapprochement with the Germans following the traumatic experience of the Second World War began with these everyday household objects of the German era. But for all that, political circumstances prior to 1989 did not allow the contradictions between public suppression of the German past and private, everyday encounters with it to be addressed openly." (384)

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, Chapter 11.

¹²⁹ Davies, *Microcosm*, 435.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 435.

¹³¹ On generational differences, see Gregor Thum, "Wrocław and the myth of the multicultural border city," *European Review* 13, no. 2 (May 2005): 233, where Thum describes "... a new generation of Wrocław citizens,

The personal reflections of Polish poet Adam Zagajewski also provide a great deal of insight into the generational differences between those who spent their formative years in a city from which they were expelled, and their children. In his memoir – *Two Cities: On Exile, History, and the Imagination* – Zagajewski describes how his family was expelled from Polish Lwów when he was only four months old; they settled in Gliwice, which was transferred from Germany to Poland after WWII. The older generation of expellees in Gliwice failed to adjust to their new surroundings, and continued to see life through the lens of their old city, while Zagajewski, though empathetic to their plight, came to like the “ugly industrial city” that he grew up in.¹³² In a later essay, Zagajewski reconciled his mythical second-generation memories of Polish Lwów with an empathetic view of the new Ukrainian L’viv’s postwar history and inhabitants.¹³³

iv) Migrant Diversity

A diverse group of settlers, which Thum describes in detail, made up the new population of Wrocław and Poland’s new western territories. Some settlers were recruited through government campaigns that made these territories out to be a gold mine and the journey westward a patriotic pilgrimage. These settlers included the very poor, those whose prospects had vanished during the war, and people from nearby regions who could maintain ties with their original homes. Another group was made up of those who had been expelled from eastern Poland under deplorable conditions, who had lost all their possessions, and who were “not even permitted to publicly lament the loss of their homeland and the inhumane circumstances surrounding their forced evacuation.”¹³⁴ There were also Polish “reemigrants” from elsewhere in Europe, who were recruited for their skills, uprooted Jews, many of whom would later emigrate from Poland altogether, Ukrainians from southeast Poland who were dispersed throughout the western territories during Operation Vistula in 1947, and autochthons – already living in the western territories – such as the Masurians of East Prussia, who identified with the German

most of whom were born in the city and are less burdened with the traumatic experiences of World War II and the Cold War prejudices. They began to question the official view of the local history and to point to its shortcomings and contradictions.” (233); also see Gregor Thum, “Wrocław’s Search for a New Historical Narrative: From Polonocentrism to Postmodernism,” in *Cities after the Fall of Communism: Reshaping Cultural Landscapes and European Identity*, ed. John Czaplicka, Nida Gelazis, and Blair A. Ruble (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 76. Also see Jerzy Kochanowski, “The Eastern Provinces of Poland during the ‘Brief’ 20th Century: Changes of Borders and in Memories,” in *Border Changes in 20th Century Europe: Selected Case Studies*, ed. Eero Medijainen and Olaf Mertelsmann, (Berlin: Lit, 2010), 99-111, which discusses the changes in the emotional and political attitudes that Poles held towards the *Kresy* and Eastern Poland from after WWI through the end of communism, and which is discussed in section III, part vi of this essay; also see Snyder, *Reconstruction*, 89, for an excellent summation of the generational differences between expelled Lithuanian Poles and their children.

¹³² Adam Zagajewski, *Two Cities: On Exile, History, and the Imagination*, trans. Lillian Valee (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1995), 1-68, “industrial city” quotation on 4.

¹³³ Adam Zagajewski, *A Defense of Ardor*, trans. Clare Cavanagh (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2004), Chapter 10, “Should We Visit Sacred Places?”

¹³⁴ Thum, *Uprooted*, 69.

nation, but were viewed as Polish by the postwar Polish state, and whose loyalty to Germany often persisted throughout the postwar period.¹³⁵

Thum also describes how the high demand for professionals in Poland after WWII meant that many Polish elites from L'viv – from which many settlers were transferred to Wrocław – quickly left Wrocław's degraded postwar conditions for more auspicious fronts within Poland. Although “the widespread belief persists to today that it was mostly eastern Poles, particularly expellees from L'viv, who settled in Wrocław after the war,” Thum maintains that the new population of Wrocław was actually very diverse, although eastern Polish elites, many of them from L'viv, still formed an important part of Wrocław's new intelligentsia.¹³⁶ Davies also describes Wrocław's L'vivian émigrés:

They were intensely patriotic, deeply resentful of their fate and thoroughly disenchanted with Communism even before they arrived. They brought with them their lilting border accent, together with many of their traditions and institutions. They provided the backbone of the Polish University of Wrocław, which opened its doors in September 1945, and they filled the ranks of Wrocław's depleted professions of doctors, lawyers and engineers. For a generation at least, the name of Lwów was one that the Communist regime dreaded.¹³⁷

Kochanowski has noted that for those eastern migrants who remained within Poland, whose memories were censored, a sort of “schizophrenia” existed wherein the aura of personal items and important cultural artifacts that had also been transferred from the east served as a persistent reminder of their old lives.¹³⁸ Kochanowski cites Adam Zagajewski's memoir, ‘Two Cities’ as an expression of this condition:

The mother of the writer treated the Silesian city [Gliwice/Gleitwitz in the western territories] as their ancestral Lvov. The park where little Adam was taken for walks is dubbed after their local park in Lvov; the streets in the neighbourhood have the same

¹³⁵ This paragraph drawn from Thum, *Uprooted*, 65-74; see Snyder, *Reconstruction*, 195-201 for more on Operation Vistula, and Richard Blanke, “Polish-speaking Germans and the Ethnic Cleansing of Germany East of Oder-Neisse,” in *Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe*, ed, Steven Béla Várdy, T. Hunt Tooley, and Agnes Huszár Várdy (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 281-292 describes the autochthonous Masurians of East Prussia, who “were mainly Polish by language, or the descendants of recent Polish speakers, but with a more or less developed German political consciousness.” (281) According to Blanke, “the Masurians present the clearest and best-documented example anywhere in Eastern Europe of national consciousness developing counter to native language.” (281) Also, they were abused as Germans by marauding Poles and Soviet soldiers, yet were pressured to remain in Poland, as proof of a prewar Polish presence in the region. Regarding the term ‘autochthon’: “Masurians were classified officially [by Polish authorities] (along with most Warmians and Upper Silesians) as “autochthons,” a term meaning simply people who have been born where they currently live; but applied in this case only to people of quasi-Polish descent. The criteria for autochthon status were left intentionally vague in order to produce the largest possible indigenous population.” (285)

¹³⁶ Thum, *Uprooted*, see section titled “Searching for Urban Settlers,” (89-98), quotation on 94.

¹³⁷ Davies, *Microcosm*, 429.

¹³⁸ Kochanowski, “Changes of Borders and in Memories,” 105-108.

names as the ones that surrounded their house in Lvov. Modest belongings, brought from Lvov, are the most important possession in the apartment taken over from a German family.¹³⁹

Another key point made by both Davies and Thum is that eastern Poles often clashed culturally with central Poles as they came together in Wrocław; central Poles often spurned eastern Poles, perceiving them as backward (or aristocratic!), while easterners were more opposed to communism and the USSR due to their previous experience of communist occupation (from 1939-1941 and after 1944). Thus, easterners became an important part of the cultural, but not the government elite in the city. Easterners were also suspicious of the motives – i.e. profiteering – of central Poles who moved to Wrocław.¹⁴⁰ Nevertheless, rural and urban, as well as eastern and central migrants to Wrocław, did eventually, over the decades, assimilate into a “melting pot,” of nationally homogenized Polish culture.¹⁴¹ Wrocław¹⁴² and Poland’s new postwar territories provide a prime example of how diverse immigrant populations encountered each other in transitioned cities and regions. And although the memories and political loyalties of these different groups were often suppressed by the state, with varying degrees of success, they continued to affect everyday interactions in the city.

According to Thum, there was also significant tension in early postwar Wrocław between experienced urbanites and the overwhelming part of the city’s population that came from towns or villages. Rural customs and lifestyles permeated the city, and sidewalk goats, improvised gardens, and affronts to gentility could be found on every corner. This ubiquity of improvised gardens was actually a trend throughout postwar European cities as people coped with the realities of shattered infrastructure, but these customs took a long time to die out in a city like Wrocław, which remained strewn with ruins for so long.¹⁴³

¹³⁹ Ibid., 106-107.

¹⁴⁰ Thum, *Uprooted*, 97-98, 178-181; Davies, *Microcosm*, 425-426.

¹⁴¹ Thum, *Uprooted*, 181.

¹⁴² See Snyder, *Reconstruction*, Chapter 5, for some insights into the postwar ethnic composition of Vilnius, which included Lithuanians, Russians, Poles, Jews, and Belarusians, in which Lithuanians constituted a majority of 50.5% by 1989, and in which Lithuanian culture replaced Polish high culture’s historic status in the city, thanks to a compromise with Soviet authorities. For statistics on the postwar ethnic composition of L’viv, which included Ukrainians, Russians, Jews, Poles, and Belarusians, and in which the Ukrainian population grew to constitute a majority of 79.13% by 1989, see Risch, *Ukrainian West*, 41-42, and see especially chapters 2-4 of Risch’s book for the migrant experience in postwar L’viv. For more on ethnic/demographic change in postwar L’viv, and its relation to industrialization/modernization, see Martin Aberg, “Paradox of Change: Soviet Modernization and Ethno-Linguistic Differentiation in L’viv, 1945-1989,” in *L’viv: A City in the Crosscurrents of Culture*, ed. John Czaplicka (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005) 285-301.

¹⁴³ Thum, *Uprooted*, see the section titled “The Ruralization of Wrocław” (98-104); see Risch, *Ukrainian West*, 65-69 for tensions between L’viv’s “city natives” (66) and “western Ukrainian villagers who came to L’viv... over the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s... to work at new industries emerging in and around L’viv. They settled in high-rise concrete apartment buildings of new suburbs in New L’viv, Maiorivka, and Sykhiv. These neighborhoods were considered more rustic and uncouth than downtown L’viv. By the 1970s, these new neighborhoods had led to what one postwar generation L’vivian called the city’s “ruralisation”” (65) Also, “[Western Ukrainians’] connections with past anti-Soviet resistance, both real and imagined, marked them off from other L’vivians.” (67) Also see Aberg, “Paradox of Change,” 292-293 for notes on L’viv’s “ruralization” (292).

With regards to the rural areas surrounding Wrocław, Davies notes how they experienced an extreme and extended period of economic stagnation, owing to the inefficiency of communist economics, migrants' unfamiliarity with the conditions of these new localities, and their profound despair and reluctance to settle in after being expelled from their homes in the east, the discussion of which was officially censored.¹⁴⁴

Although Thum also mentions the wider 'Recovered Territories' frequently, while Risch aims to paint a picture of the broader 'Ukrainian West', and sometimes the entire Soviet West, both of these books focus mostly on the cities of Wrocław and L'viv themselves. Davies' focus is broader, encompassing much of the region and the country while including many specific examples from Wrocław. Overall, however, the literature on transferred cities could certainly benefit from a more comparative approach towards the ways that life in these cities may have differed from other *cities* – specifically other transferred cities – at the time.¹⁴⁵

v) Alienation and Impermanence

One theme that comes up frequently in the literature on these cities is the feeling of alienation that new settlers felt in relation to these foreign environments.¹⁴⁶ Throughout his book, Thum describes the many factors that caused this feeling in Wrocław; geopolitical doubts and revanchist demands over the postwar border changes, the foreign aura of the architecture, the transition some settlers made from a rural to an urban environment, postwar ruins, crime, and administrative corruption, periods of coexistence with those who were about to be expelled, and nostalgia for a lost homeland all led many settlers to feel that their bizarre sojourn was to be but a temporary one.

In general, Thum provides a paradigm through which other historians might consider this theme. This "impermanence syndrome," is the central theme running through Thum's entire monograph, which at its core tells the story of how the Polish state and Wrocław's citizens struggled to overcome their environmental alienation throughout the postwar decades. In Wrocław, "there was a widespread tendency among newcomers throughout the western

¹⁴⁴ Davies, *Microcosm*, 442-444.

¹⁴⁵ Blacker, "Popular Literature" and Blacker, "Urban commemoration and literature in post-Soviet L'viv" are both excellent examples of a comparative approach towards post-Soviet era collective memories in transitioned cities.

¹⁴⁶ Some examples include Tscherkes, "Stalinist Visions," 206-207, for the foreign aura of architecture in L'viv; Holtom, "Königsberg to Kaliningrad," 286-287, 289-290 for the general foreign aura of postwar Kaliningrad; Musekamp, "Szczecin's Identity after 1989," 306 for the connection between the dubious status of the new Polish-German border and the widespread "feeling of temporality" in Szczecin, which was a "walkable distance from the German border"; Laimonas Briedis, *Vilnius: City of Strangers* (New York: CEU Press, 2009), 229 for alienation felt by postwar Vilnius's new residents; Davies, *Microcosm*, 417, for the relation between the dubious legal status of the 'Recovered Territories' and its "climate of impermanence".

territories to never really settle into their new surroundings. Instead, for years or even decades, they led a provisional existence, as if they were living far from home.”¹⁴⁷

The way Thum organizes his monograph gives the reader a good indication of how this atmosphere arose and how it was dealt with. The hinge of Thum’s narrative is his chapter on “the impermanence syndrome.”¹⁴⁸ To summarize the arc of Thum’s argument in its simplest form: Wrocław’s early postwar years were characterized by widespread material and moral degradation, problems which were compounded by the lack of an effective state administration and the chaotic, traumatized, and diverse mixture of migrants streaming through the city. The bleakness of these early conditions, the foreign environment, and fears about a reversal of the new national borders created a feeling of “impermanence” that became the transition’s central feature; people were convinced that they would not become permanent inhabitants of Wrocław. The state-led creation of a massive nationalist propaganda campaign – which accompanied Wrocław’s reconstruction at every step – was largely a response to these feelings of impermanence; it aimed to make citizens feel like proud, optimistic, and rightful heirs to the city, and it aimed to show those looking on from abroad that these territories were going to remain Polish. This propaganda succeeded in some ways, but also left a legacy of psychological contradictions that could only be effectively dealt with after communism had died.

Thum’s chapter on “the impermanence syndrome” is also notable for its excellent use of diary excerpts that detail the impressions of settlers coming to the ruined and foreign city for the first time in the early postwar period. The chapter opens with a long diary excerpt from June 1945, detailing a surreal journey into the city:

... we got out of the train car. There was a large, marshy field full of hundreds of carts amid puddles that sloshed underfoot... We fit all these reserves into a blue baby carriage, one of the ones standing in the field... the air was saturated with the smell of fire... we had to negotiate an enormous crater that spanned the entire width of the street... In many of the yards, roses had begun to bloom, unnecessary somehow in this devastated city... Across the street there was a zoo. You could see two zebras walking past behind the fence... Animals were screaming out of view of the street, probably from hunger or thirst... There in the little cemetery a man, no doubt a German, was standing on a cart harnessed to an emaciated horse and kicking a corpse into a deep pit...¹⁴⁹

The excerpt is taken from the very interesting diary of Joanna Konopińska, whose reflections Thum refers to throughout the book. Of the excerpt, Thum notes:

Joanna Konopińska’s account of her arrival in Wrocław reads like the apocalyptic vision of a civilization in complete collapse. Her words illustrate vividly the enormous

¹⁴⁷ Thum, *Uprooted*, 186.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, this is the title of Chapter 5

¹⁴⁹ Joanna Konopińska, *Tamtem Wrocławski rok: 1945-1946: Dziennik* (Wrocław: Wyd. Dolnośląskie, 1987), 36-42, quoted in Gregor Thum. *Uprooted*, 171-173. (Diary entry is from June 12, 1945) 171-173

discrepancy between the actual experiences of Polish settlers and the patriotic appeals of the government, which spoke of the western territories as ancient Polish soil, a land of milk and honey that was to be resettled after centuries and that promised prosperity to all comers.¹⁵⁰

Adding to the impermanence, the tenuous legal nature of the border settlement fed fears that Poland's gains in the west could be reversed. In international law, the Oder-Neisse Line agreed to at the Potsdam Conference was not officially recognized until 1990.¹⁵¹ As Davies points out, "from the legal point of view, the transfer of Breslau to Polish rule was provisional."¹⁵² Davies also explains the complicated and shaky Allied diplomacy that determined the fate of Breslau, which, "as distinct from other parts of the 'Recovered Territories' was transferred to Poland only as the result of a last-minute change of heart."¹⁵³ It has also been pointed out how similar doubts over future diplomatic wrangling and possible reversals affected residents of postwar Szczecin – which sat right on Germany's border – and Kaliningrad.¹⁵⁴

The transfer of Kaliningrad to the USSR was, unlike other postwar territorial transfers, not backed up by claims of historical or ethnic ownership, but appears to have been mostly the result of practical geopolitical security considerations.¹⁵⁵ Kaliningrad's repopulation proceeded very slowly after the postwar period; "by 1988 [it] had still not reached the 1939 levels for this part of East Prussia."¹⁵⁶ This was partly due to the area's fluctuating economic character, which was based on military and maritime jobs, and uncertain geopolitical status.¹⁵⁷

vi) International Perspectives, the Diaspora of Transferred Cities, and Nostalgia

Davies' research on Wrocław makes an important contribution to our topic in terms of its use of primary sources, which in general represent a wide spectrum of viewpoints that often goes

¹⁵⁰ Thum, *Uprooted*, 173.

¹⁵¹ Davies, *Microcosm*, 415-417, 494; and Thum, *Uprooted*, 388-389.

¹⁵² Davies, *Microcosm*, 415.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 415-417, quotation on 415.

¹⁵⁴ See Musekamp, "Szczecin's Identity after 1989," 306 for the connection between the dubious status of the new Polish-German border and the widespread "feeling of temporality" in Szczecin, which was a "walkable distance from the German border"; and Holtom, "Königsberg to Kaliningrad," 284-287, 289-290, see 284: "...as with the incorporation of the Baltic Republics of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania [into the USSR], the acquisition of Königsberg was never formally accepted in international law."

¹⁵⁵ Holtom, "Königsberg to Kaliningrad," 283-285 discusses the debate on why Kaliningrad became part of the USSR. For a comparison with Wrocław's situation, see Thum, "The myth of the multicultural border city," 231-232: "First and foremost, the new Wrocław citizens had to be convinced of the irreversibility of the border and the population shifts of 1945. Given the traumatic experiences of 1939, there was a perception in Polish society that the Potsdam agreement could become null and void if a sudden political change took place in the international constellation, and that Poland could not rely solely on Soviet guarantees of the post-war borders. In the case of the former German city of Königsberg, which became the Russian city of Kaliningrad in 1945, its incorporation and Sovietization could be based primarily on the on the right of the conqueror and the military power of the Soviet Union. However, the Polonization of Wrocław would not have been possible without the effort that the Polish government devoted to the historical justification of the border and the population shifts of 1945."

¹⁵⁶ Holtom, "Königsberg to Kaliningrad," 286.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 286-287.

beyond the city and its region to incorporate international perspectives on Wrocław's transition. For instance, he looks at the opinions – at first revanchist but eventually peaceful – of German expellee associations, as well as those of Jewish ex-Breslauer organisations. He also remarks on the individual fates of various notable twentieth century figures who were originally from Breslau or Wrocław and whose memories of their ideologically embattled hometown influenced their diverse international careers.¹⁵⁸ Also recounted are the impressions of foreign visitors to Wrocław, for whom it was difficult in the early years to ascertain the politics of the one-party state for what they actually were.¹⁵⁹ And interesting insights are derived from the impressions of former Breslau residents who visited Wrocław after 1956, and who were surprised by the general poverty and neglect that had changed the face of their hometown.¹⁶⁰

Laimonas Briedis' examination of the history of Vilnius from medieval times is built entirely around the perspectives of foreign visitors to the city. In his chapter on Vilnius – considered the “Jerusalem of the North” prior to WWII and the Holocaust¹⁶¹ – in the postwar period, Briedis draws attention to the memories and cultural traditions that were carried on by the city's Jewish diaspora in Israel, America, and France, but which had been erased from the physical landscape of postwar Vilnius.¹⁶² Elegies for these stamped out memories were also written by Lithuanian poet Judita Vaičiūnaitė and Russian poet Joseph Brodsky.¹⁶³

The impressions of various foreign travellers or those seeking family roots in Vilnius are filled with predictable lamentations on how the city's multifaceted history had been stifled or neglected by ideologically-constrained locals, yet Briedis also shows how some of Vilnius's residents were still – despite official Soviet propaganda – influenced by Vilnius's old religious spirit, which made itself felt through “the domes and spires of the Baroque churches [which] still dominated the skyline of Soviet Vilnius.”¹⁶⁴ This perennially rediscovered skyline influence paralleled the situation in L'viv, which, as Risch points out, also had a rich and beautiful architectural legacy which couldn't help but inspire the local *intelligentsia*.¹⁶⁵ Again we see the inevitability of the tension between simplistic propaganda and the richness of the physical environment in these cities. And like L'viv, Vilnius was considered a comparatively hip, western Soviet city; according to Briedis, “the modern aesthetics of Vilnius, especially in architecture, theatre, jazz music, design and fashion, were a bit more western-oriented than anywhere else in the Soviet Union.”¹⁶⁶

¹⁵⁸ Davies, *Microcosm*, 482-488.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 453-454.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 474-477.

¹⁶¹ On the vital prewar Jewish character of Vilnius, see Snyder, *Reconstruction*, 56-57, 74-75, quotation on 75; also see 84-87 for the Holocaust in Vilnius, and 91: “About 90 percent of Vilne Jews had been killed in the Holocaust...”

¹⁶² Briedis, *City of Strangers*, 230-232.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 231, 236-237.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, on the old religious spirit, see 235-236, quotation on 236; on various foreign impressions, see 232-244.

¹⁶⁵ Risch, *Ukrainian West*, 103-115.

¹⁶⁶ Briedis, *City of Strangers*, 236.

Jerzy Kochanowski adds to the discussion of the diaspora and nostalgia with his research on changes in the emotional and political attitudes that Poles held towards the *Kresy* and eastern Poland from after WWI through the end of communism. He explains the differences in emotional yearning and revanchist demands between generations and between émigré groups and those expelled eastern Poles who remained in Poland. For a post-WWII generation longing for the landscapes of Vilnius and L'viv, so recently lost, the sense of displacement was intensely emotional and nostalgic. But this nostalgia faded when a younger, less emotionally-invested generation realized the practicalities of the situation. Kochanowski sums up this generational shift: "The majority of Poles consider the Polish presence in the Eastern Borderlands a closed chapter of the past; a myth sentimental and touching at the same time, but which is resting in the cemetery of history."¹⁶⁷

Kochanowski also shows how revanchist demands and the display of nostalgia had a lot to do with state policy and the rhetoric of influential political figures; émigré groups could make revanchist demands all they wanted, while eastern Poles dispersed within communist Poland were censored from publicizing their nostalgia in any way.¹⁶⁸ But gradually – as Kochanowski notes, and Snyder explains in detail in Chapter 11 of *Reconstruction of Nations* – a new group of rising Polish politicians and intellectuals accepted the territorial status quo, and with all practicality and realism their rhetoric about preserving Poland's postwar eastern borders was widely accepted in Polish politics by the eve of communism's collapse.¹⁶⁹

This acceptance of such a devastating loss shows how heavily revanchist demands and territorial claims can hinge on the rhetoric of influential activists. The once vital Polish cities of Vilnius and L'viv, thanks largely to the clear-headed realist policies which Snyder explains, were given up by a new generation which soberly admitted that although they respected the Polish cultural history of the east, future territorial cataclysms in the region were no longer desirable.¹⁷⁰ Here, one can compare the influence of political rhetoric to the pre-WWI and pre-WWII yearning for Vilnius among Lithuanian activists, who imbued a barely Lithuanian city with the emotional and mythic significance of a city worthy of the devotion and rallying cries of all Lithuanian speakers.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ Kochanowski, "Changes of Borders and in Memories," 102-111, quotation on 111.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 102-111.

¹⁶⁹ Kochanowski, "Changes of Borders and in Memories," 104-111; Snyder, *Reconstruction*, Chapter 11.

¹⁷⁰ Kochanowski, "Changes of Borders and in Memories," 104-111.

¹⁷¹ Snyder, *Reconstruction*, Part 1.

V: Post-Communist Transitions

i) Reconciliation with Buried Prewar History

Although the study of post-communist transitions represents an entire field unto itself, it can also provide important insights into postwar transitions. After communism, citizens of transitioned cities could explore the real prewar histories of their cities, as well as elements of their national postwar histories that were suppressed under communism. Historians researching the post-communist era of these cities often point out the degree to which prewar history was suppressed by communism, and then discuss how reconciliation with this history and the assertion of a new local identity have proceeded so far.¹⁷² The extent of this reconciliation has often been contingent, however, on the politics of the present, and the degree to which broader national identities or integrated European identities have been embraced or rejected throughout Eastern Europe.

This line of inquiry, which concerns itself with the degree to which postwar myths were cast aside, shows us how much staying power they had in the first place. Thum points out that “the notion of Polish-Soviet friendship... does not appear to have had much of an impact on Polish society,” because, unlike the Polish national myth in the western territories, people did not need it to alleviate their alienation and survive psychologically.¹⁷³ In Kaliningrad, however, which remains part of Russia, the Soviet myth appears to have had relatively strong staying power. Despite some tentative steps towards reconciliation with the city’s German history – for instance, in museums, public ceremonies, and historicist architecture – the city has remained strongly tied to its Soviet *and* Russian identities.¹⁷⁴ The city is also home to influential veterans groups who are heavily invested in narratives of Stalin’s greatness and the USSR’s WWII victory; Kaliningrad is “plastered with monuments to the conquering Soviet army.”¹⁷⁵ Also, the publication in the 1990s of an oral history of early Soviet settlers in Kaliningrad, which included

¹⁷² Examples include Holtom, “Königsberg to Kaliningrad”; Berger, “Kaliningrad between regionalization and nationalization”; Olga Sezneva, “Locating Kaliningrad/Königsberg on the Map of Europe: “A Russia in Europe” or “a Europe in Russia?”” in *Cities after the Fall of Communism: Reshaping Cultural Landscapes and European Identity*, ed. John Czaplicka, Nida Gelazis, and Blair A. Ruble (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); Thum, “Polonocentrism to Postmodernism”; Thum, “Wrocław and the myth of the multicultural border city”; Musekamp, “Szczecin’s Identity after 1989”; Hrytsak and Susak, “The Case of L’viv”; Clark, “Reshaping the Free City”; Blacker, “Urban commemoration and literature in post-Soviet L’viv” (Blacker’s article compares L’viv’s reconciliation with the prewar past with reconciliation in Wrocław and Gdańsk, as well as other Polish cities, and makes one of the best contributions to the subject of post-communist transitions in transferred cities.

¹⁷³ Thum, *Uprooted*, 215-216, quotation on 215.

¹⁷⁴ Berger, “Kaliningrad between regionalization and nationalization,” 288-307.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 293-294, quotation on 294.

memories that clashed with the old Soviet myths, was blocked by government authorities amidst heated controversies.¹⁷⁶

L'viv's transition out of communism, by contrast – which included the snowballing momentum of local nationalist movements, for instance – shows that many of the city's inhabitants were eager to cast aside L'viv's Soviet character.¹⁷⁷ Since the fall of communism, Ukrainian nationalist memory culture has remained strong in L'viv, and has even been “re-invigorated” in the post-communist period, as the expression of Ukrainian nationalism is no longer dictated by Soviet limits. Commemorative reconciliation with ignored histories – such as Polish and Jewish histories – “has been sparse and often problematic since independence,” and the Ukrainian nationalist perspective has remained dominant. Moreover, the commemoration of controversial OUN figures indicates the persistence of problematic Ukrainian nationalist narratives.¹⁷⁸ Overall, in an important insight into this troubled state of memory culture in L'viv, Uilleam Blacker suggests that Ukrainian national identity in the post-communist era has remained on relatively shaky and embattled political ground, and “has been continually undermined by Ukraine's elites,” such as more pro-Russian figures like president Viktor Yanukovich. Therefore, residents of a nationalistically-inclined city like L'viv “feel fiercely protective of their Ukrainian identity,” which presents a barrier to recognition of the elements of history that might undermine this identity.¹⁷⁹

Since Poland gained independence, Szczecin and Wrocław have both encountered controversy and fears of ‘re-Germanization’ as they have moved to officially commemorate German history.¹⁸⁰ Szczecin's location on the border of Germany and Poland has made fears of German economic takeover even more pronounced.¹⁸¹ Because of this peripheral location in Poland, the city has also suffered from a “chronic inferiority complex” about its local identity, which has underlain its search for local heroes to commemorate since independence.¹⁸² Gdańsk provides an interesting case for comparison; as an ongoing legacy of its more nationally ambiguous prewar history, it has at times, since independence, emphasized its history as a ‘free city’ and its more neutral merchant character.¹⁸³ Indeed, in his introduction, Thum cites the foregoing characteristics as reasons for why he chose to research the postwar transition of

¹⁷⁶ Holtom, “Königsberg to Kaliningrad,” 289-291.

¹⁷⁷ For snowballing nationalist movements, see Padraic Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution: Central Europe 1989* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002) and Padraic Kenney, “L'viv's Central European Renaissance, 1987-1990,” in *L'viv: A City in the Crosscurrents of Culture*, ed. John Czaplicka (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005)

¹⁷⁸ Blacker, “Urban commemoration and literature,” 638-642, “re-invigorated” quotation on 638, “sparse and problematic” quotation on 639; also see Hrytsak and Susak, “The Case of L'viv,” 155 for controversial commemoration of OUN figures and Ukrainian nationalists.

¹⁷⁹ Blacker, “Urban commemoration and literature,” 649-650, quotations on 649.

¹⁸⁰ Musekamp, “Szczecin's Identity after 1989,” 305-334 for Szczecin; Thum, *Uprooted*, 402-408 for Wrocław.

¹⁸¹ Musekamp, “Szczecin's Identity after 1989,” 329-330.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, quotation on 325, examples of local commemoration are given throughout the article.

¹⁸³ Clark, “Reshaping the Free City,” 320-321, 326-328.

Wrocław instead of Szczecin – where it would have been hard to tell which aspects of the transition were the result of the city’s status as an economic backwater – or Gdańsk – which had always had more of a historic Polish affiliation.¹⁸⁴

Studies of these post-communist transitions have also drawn attention to the variety of selfish and meaningful motives that have driven recognition of the multicultural past. For instance, the desire to attract investors and promote tourism, or to appear eligible for EU membership in Poland, has often spurred a city’s desire to look like a modern and cosmopolitan European city.¹⁸⁵ Berger asserts that “for the overwhelming majority of Kaliningraders, a stronger identification with the city does not equate to a desire for re-Germanization, but rather for building a more beautiful but no less Russian city.”¹⁸⁶ Thum notes all of the above motives – EU membership, tourism, attracting investment – with regards to Wrocław’s embrace of its diverse history, but also points out that there were activists in Wrocław who even before independence promoted honest reconciliation in a meaningful way, “as its own reward.”¹⁸⁷

Furthermore, Blacker’s comparative analysis of post-communist commemoration in Polish cities – including Wrocław and Gdańsk – and L’viv, points to the positive side of aspirations towards the EU’s political/memorial culture.¹⁸⁸ Poland has been generally integrated into the EU traditions of reconciliation and memory culture, while Ukraine remains far from such integration:

The varying levels of integration into European/Western institutions and of internal security have important implications for memory culture, including at the local level. The opportunity and encouragement to explore, commemorate and question its own history in the context of its EU integration has been a crucial element of Poland’s transformation over the past two decades. The postwar European project, into which Poland was fully re-incorporated in 2004, was built to a large extent on memory: the discourses of human rights, tolerance and co-existence that lay at the rhetorical foundations of postwar Europe, and eventually the EU, were a result of the often problematic processes of dealing with the traumatic past of the war and the Holocaust.¹⁸⁹

In his final chapter, Thum opens an important debate by asking how much Wrocław’s new post-communist narrative – with its somewhat facile focus on multiculturalism – is simply fostering the creation of a new myth. He suggests that if one looks at the history of a city like

¹⁸⁴ Thum, *Uprooted*, 4-5.

¹⁸⁵ Berger, “Kaliningrad between regionalization and nationalization,” 294 for tourism, 296 for investment; Sezneva, “Locating Kaliningrad/Königsberg,” 213 for tourism; Musekamp, “Szczecin’s Identity after 1989,” 308 for tourism, 319 for EU motives; Clark, “Reshaping the Free City,” 327-328 for economic motives in Gdańsk; Thum, *Uprooted*, 392 for all of these motives, as well as NATO membership.

¹⁸⁶ Berger, “Kaliningrad between regionalization and nationalization,” 302.

¹⁸⁷ Thum, *Uprooted*, 392.

¹⁸⁸ Blacker, “Urban commemoration and literature,” 646-650.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 648.

Wrocław as a naturally multicultural hub through the centuries, it can tend to obscure the nature of events and periods that need serious recognition and consideration on their own terms, such as the forced population transfer of 1945. Thum asserts that reconciliation should strive to address each period as honestly as possible, and not simply explain everything away as one ongoing multicultural process. He accuses Davies' *Microcosm* – which was largely funded by Wrocław's municipal government – of presenting the city's history in this way.¹⁹⁰ Thum summarizes this new turn in the city's collective memory – which, he suggests, remains unreconciled with the grim truths of the forced expulsion of Germans – in an article devoted specifically to the subject of the multicultural myth:

Apparently, the majority of Wrocław citizens still wish somehow to preserve the myth of the old Polish town that returned to its Motherland in 1945 and simply to add the history of the German city and put a strong emphasis on Wrocław's Europeanness. The population exchange of 1945 is included in the new historical picture, but by persistently placing it in a wider framework of the numerous changes the city underwent in the course of its history, it appears a less dramatic and significant part of the city's narrative. By and large, it is this historical patchwork that has thus far emerged from the search for a new understanding of the local history. But multiculturalism in this sense may become a new historical myth, not justifying but downplaying the tragedy of Wrocław's historical past.¹⁹¹

Thum also makes the crucial point that Wrocław's reconciliation with Germany was inextricably linked to the fall of Communism;¹⁹² the Polish communist system's legitimacy, from the very beginning, had been based on avoiding such reconciliation:

While anti-German attitudes generally declined over time, giving way to pragmatic perspectives and even to deliberate efforts to overcome old hostilities, they were kept alive artificially in Poland for decades. At the plenum of the Central Committee of the Polish Worker's Party in February 1945, it was explicitly stated that hatred of Germans created opportunities for unifying Polish society politically... The German threat was the communist leadership's most powerful argument in convincing the Polish people of their need to remain allied with the Soviet Union and accept the leading role of the communist party. Reference to the German threat served to nip in the bud any criticism of the political system in Poland and any questioning of the postwar international order. Thus it was in the political interests of the communist party to preserve fear of Germans and to fan it by means of propaganda.¹⁹³

Thum points to one of the most poignant examples of this pact's ill effects when he describes the rejection, on the part of Polish society and Communist officialdom, of "a letter of

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 394, 407-408.

¹⁹¹ Thum, "Wrocław and the myth of the multicultural border city," 234.

¹⁹² Thum, *Uprooted*, 388, and the section titled "The Revolution in German-Polish Relations" (385-392)

¹⁹³ Ibid., 385-386.

reconciliation sent by the Polish Catholic bishops to their German colleagues in November of 1965. The central message of the letter, “We forgive and ask forgiveness,” was understood in Warsaw as an attack on the political system of the People’s Republic.”¹⁹⁴ Here, the crucial insight into the nature of postwar propaganda was that it was essentially based on *avoiding forgiveness*. However, in Thum’s view, as soon as communism ended, “the local history of the region ceased to be a political issue. Its residents were suddenly able to decide for themselves how they wanted to remember the past of their hometowns and what meaning they would attribute to the material legacies of the German period.”¹⁹⁵ Wrocław’s citizens were finally free to explore the German history that had filled their streets, churches, and apartments every day for decades, although political issues such as those related to EU accession still would have undoubtedly influenced commemoration efforts.

A city’s transition out of communism can also provide insight into how its prewar identity might have persisted beneath the surface throughout decades of communist censorship. Padraic Kenney’s research on L’viv’s late 1980s nationalist movement suggests that the city, with its important prewar and Soviet-era assertions of Ukrainian nationalism,¹⁹⁶ could hardly wait to seize the opportunity to openly embrace its local Ukrainian identity.

Kenney’s research on L’viv’s ‘Lion Society’ – a local student movement formed in 1987 for the purpose of reviving local Ukrainian cultural traditions – is an excellent example of the persistence of local identity in a transitioned city. Kenney discusses how the Society – though inspired by older nationalist and dissident intellectuals – attempted to work within the Communist system to promote benign cultural traditions, gather local stories, revive local craftmaking, sing local folk songs, and clean local gravestones, including Polish graves in L’viv’s famous Lychakiv cemetery. The revival of these traditions was eagerly received and participated in by L’viv’s citizens.¹⁹⁷ The movement also concerned itself with “‘creat[ing] a new Ukrainian culture,’ since the official one was simply useless.”¹⁹⁸ Kenney asserts that

no other movement in Central Europe... so thoroughly combined local dreams and national politics. But nowhere else in the region had the population been so silenced, either. The Lion Society searched for the micronationalism of everyday practice, underneath the macronationalism of forbidden holidays, banned writers, and violated sovereignty. Micronationalism accomplished the same goals, awakening people’s hunger for greater freedom. It was also less directly threatening to the regime.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 386.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 389.

¹⁹⁶ Snyder, *Reconstruction*, Part 2; and Risch, *Ukrainian West*.

¹⁹⁷ See Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution; Central Europe 1989*; and Kenney, “L’viv’s Central European Renaissance, 1987-1990”

¹⁹⁸ Kenney, *Carnival of Revolution*, 127.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 128.

ii) High Culture vs. Mass Culture and Prospects for Reconciliation

The traditional high culture bias which pervades physical urban history also skews research into other cultural aspects of transitioned cities. The contrast between the myopia of traditional historians and those who are endeavoring to take mass culture seriously can be seen clearly in a comparison of the scholarship of George Grabowicz and Uilleam Blacker, who both research literature and memory in postwar L'viv. While the 'high literature' related to the transferred cities²⁰⁰ undoubtedly captures, with great potency, the emotional intricacies and reconciliations of life in these cities, Uilleam Blacker's highly original critique of the cities' popular literature makes a vital contribution to our topic by showing how the oft-ignored realm of mass culture can work to influence reconciliation and collective memory through other forms and styles.

In his discussion of the postwar Polish literature written about L'viv, Grabowicz focuses mainly on three expellee memoirs which he points to as exceptionally original and well-written.²⁰¹ Grabowicz praises Józef Wittlin's *Mój Lwów*, for example, in lofty terms, referring to it as part of a "poetics where the real and the childishly perceived meld perfectly to construct a timeless and universal vision of the human condition," and asserting that it goes "beyond the merely virtual to the authentically, transcendently human and thus also the mythic."²⁰² But Grabowicz then proceeds to relentlessly mock the more recent popular literature on L'viv from his scholarly pulpit.²⁰³ He dismisses one recent book of memoirs by Nadiia Morykvas for pandering to the popular demand for "Ukrainian "L'viviana," and the popular discovery of the cachet of "myth" and "mythmaking."²⁰⁴ He asserts that this type of writing is "inevitable and not deserving of particular attention – except for the way in which it reminds us that no topic is proof against banality, and that the essence of the L'viv theme, as of any other cultural narrative, inheres in the tone and the perspective, not in the manifest content."²⁰⁵

Grabowicz goes on to mock L'viv's Iurii Vynnychuk,²⁰⁶ a writer of popular local histories and compiler of local story collections. Grabowicz sums up Vynnychuk's publications

²⁰⁰ Lem's *Highcastle* and Zagajewski's *Two Cities* are two of the best (see footnote 201 below).

²⁰¹ George C. Grabowicz, "Mythologizing L'viv/Lwów: Echoes of Presence and Absence," in *L'viv: A City in the Crosscurrents of Culture*, ed. John Czaplicka (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 323-331. Here, Grabowicz discusses Józef Wittlin's *Mój Lwów*, Stanislaw Lem's *Highcastle. A Remembrance*, and Adam Zagajewski's *Two Cities*.

²⁰² Grabowicz, "Mythologizing L'viv," "poetics" quotation on 326, "transcendently human" quotation on 325.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 336-339.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 336.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 337.

²⁰⁶ A summary of Vynnychuk is given by Uilleam Blacker in "Popular Literature, the City and the Memory of Vanished Others in Poland and Ukraine: The Cases of Marek Krajewski and Iurii Vynnychuk," *Slavonica* 18, no. 1 (April 2012): see 39: Vynnychuk's "output is varied, crossing back and forth between 'high' and 'low' genres," but he is "best known at home for his popular publications on local history and culture," and has also edited collections

as “unabashedly popular and commercial; they are stitched together hastily and eclectically and make little pretense at literary and cultural sophistication; their kitschiness appears to be programmatic and as such can serve as an example of newly discovered Ukrainian camp.”²⁰⁷ He goes on in this fashion, accusing Vynnychuk of “exploit[ing] the rich vein of nostalgia that remains a prominent feature of the L’viv identity.”²⁰⁸ Grabowicz does, however, point out how Vynnychuk conjures up and is nostalgic for the multicultural past of L’viv in a somewhat remarkable way, evoking the city’s multicultural history – Polish, Ukrainian, Jewish – without any real attention to the differences between these groups; “the emphasis throughout is on a general, overarching ‘L’vivness.’”²⁰⁹

Grabowicz’s tone is representative of a bias that dismisses important cultural trends – whether socialist housing or popular literature – because of an opposition to aesthetic “banality.” Whether Grabowicz is right about Vynnychuk’s lack of literary sophistication is beside the point. As Uilleam Blacker shows, Vynnychuk reaches a large audience with vivid descriptions of the prewar urban landscape of L’viv; he is responding to a demand by his readers and influencing how local citizens think about their past.²¹⁰ A historian’s goal, as well as a critic’s, should be to consider the merits, flaws and influence of this phenomenon on its own terms.

By taking mass culture seriously and critiquing it on its own terms, Uilleam Blacker shows how it can have an important psychological influence on urban dwellers by spreading awareness of prewar history to a mass audience; indeed, probably far more of an influence than the type of contrived physical monuments which urban historians are often so preoccupied with.²¹¹ Blacker compares Vynnychuk’s popular L’viv history books with the popular detective fiction of Polish writer Marek Krajewski, which is set in prewar Breslau. Both authors owe their popularity largely to the high demand – in Poland on the one hand and Western Ukraine on the other – for stories that draw on local prewar history.²¹² Blacker explains why popular literature is an important area of study for historians of urban history and memory:

Urban texts, of course, vary widely, and are represented in both ‘high’ and ‘low’ genres. Without doubt, some of the most insightful and important writing on cities has come in the form of poetry and artistic prose. However, in order to describe the actual interrelations between people and cities, and the mnemonic dynamics involved in these

of “lost classics of popular L’viv and Galician literature from the early 20th century, with an emphasis on ghost stories and detective fiction.” (39)

²⁰⁷ Grabowicz, “Mythologizing L’viv,” 337.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 337-338.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 338-339, quotation on 338.

²¹⁰ Blacker, “Popular Literature,” 38-39.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 44: “Both Vynnychuk and Krajewski thus invest their cities with memory through an intensive literary ‘inhabiting’ of urban space, through guiding their readers around its topography, and engulfing them in its sensory reconstruction. These tactics echo Paul Connerton’s idea that the inhabited, experienced city ‘locus’ is far more resonant for memory than any monument or memorial deliberately created to cultivate memory.” (44)

²¹² *Ibid.*, 39-40.

interrelations, it is perhaps more instructive to examine authors who are widely read by the inhabitants of the cities they describe. The very fact of an author's popularity, while not immediately indicative of originality or great art, undeniably points to the fact that she or he is answering a need among her or his readers... The commodification of the past found in the works of Krajewski and Vynnychuk – which, while they represent valuable works of literature in their own right, are clearly meant to sell – does not, I would argue, imply cynicism towards or disregard for the relationship between city and memory; in fact, both writers use popular idioms to provide a route by which their audiences can access and imagine the complex and difficult memories inscribed in their cities.²¹³

Blacker describes a number of techniques through which both Krajewski and Vynnychuk revive the prewar memories of their cities. Both authors use “topographical exactness,” for instance, with Krajewski making use of detailed footnotes to explain how the map of German Breslau translates to the contemporary map of Wrocław, and with Vynnychuk also pointing out exact locations and relating them to entertaining tales.²¹⁴ Both writers also “perform a sensory reconstruction of their respective cities,” creating a detailed world filled with vivid street views, the tastes of pubs and coffeehouses, the sounds of old popular songs, or the feel of the dust of besieged WWII Breslau.²¹⁵

The detailed sensory impressions evoked by this type of writing let readers experience a realistic atmosphere in which stimuli are absorbed passively. This leaves them feeling connected to urban spaces in a way similar to those who actually lived in these spaces and absorbed their impulses. Blacker suggests that this type of connection to past memories has a much greater mnemonic impact than a memorial monument, which requires an active response, “demand[ing] our comprehension and interpretation.”²¹⁶ Just as Blacker has answered the question of how people psychologically engage with the historical memory presented by popular fiction, historians of monuments and architecture could attempt to further ascertain how the general public engages with these physical objects, if it all.

Blacker points out how Vynnychuk excludes most of the uncomfortable and violent elements from his accessible and entertaining portraits of L'viv's multicultural past; “the histories of oppression, armed conflicts, pogroms and deportations – aspects that the city's current inhabitants often prefer to forget.”²¹⁷ Krajewski, by contrast, paints a somewhat traumatic and frightening picture of prewar Breslau, but one which is conveyed through a popular medium, and is thus also quite accessible and “non-confrontational.”²¹⁸ Blacker notes that while some might criticize these methods, there is merit to this accessibility, as these popular formats are

²¹³ Ibid., 38-39.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 42-43, quotation on 42.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 43-44, quotation on 43.

²¹⁶ Blacker, 44-49, quotation on 44, also see footnote 103.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 47.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 47-48, quotation on 48.

making a buried and uncomfortable history accessible and engaging to people who might not otherwise explore it. Having thus kindled their interest, these popular works could eventually guide them towards deeper reflection on other, bleaker historical matters which they might have ignored had they been presented in a starker framework:

While Vynnychuk could be accused of only telling part of the story, one could also see his strategy as opening a door for L'viv's inhabitants to begin to engage with the multi-ethnic past of their city in a non-confrontational setting. Perhaps, in this setting, the present community can begin to internalize the memory of the lost communities that Vynnychuk evokes, and thus begin to mourn the passing of these communities, and, through this circuitous route, begin to work through the more traumatic elements of the past.²¹⁹

Unlike those who presume that the public should approach history like professional historians, and engage with humanity's tragedies like academics, Blacker draws attention to the specific needs and demands of the audience in question. He courageously and realistically points out, without the usual moralizing, that people have different stylistic and emotional inclinations:

[Krajewski and Vynnychuk] show that problematic urban memory is not exclusively the territory of poets and writers of high-brow prose, whose descriptions often rely on melancholy, the exploration of trauma, or reflections on the irreversible loss of the past... Despite the reservations of some theorists, Krajewski and Vynnychuk demonstrate that mass, consumer culture and the popular genres that it involves can facilitate a constructive/constructed urban memory that can in turn foster a sense of connection with a place. In the cases of L'viv and Wrocław, whose communities often struggle to come to terms with their urban memoriescapes, the creation of such a connection is badly needed... it could also be argued that this entertaining, pleasurable postmemory²²⁰ creates a point of access to these pasts for those inhabitants who may not otherwise have the interest, the inclination or the opportunity to engage with them: it is difficult, after all, to persuade people to engage with a past that is framed exclusively in terms of trauma, violence and guilt. The urban memory provided by Vynnychuk and Krajewski provides a counterweight to those discourses of the past that in their fierce pursuit of historical truth often merely push memories further back into denial and forgetting. Instead, this pleasurable postmemory attracts readers towards the past. Readers of Vynnychuk's popular works may be led to his more subversive, challenging work on L'viv's history, or to the work of his contemporaries on the same topic, while Krajewski's readers may well

²¹⁹ Ibid., 47.

²²⁰ Ibid., 45-47: Blacker explains this term that "[Marianne] Hirsch uses the term in relation to the Holocaust, to describe the inherited traumatic memory of the generation whose parents and grandparents lived through the Nazi genocide: they have no direct memory of the trauma, or of life before the trauma, but the sheer power of their forebears' memory of catastrophe and loss, carried through stories, objects and photographs, means that it is internalized by them as though it were their own. For Hirsch, 'postmemory's connection to the past is not actually mediated by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation'," (45-46) but of course notes that "an important difference from Hirsch's discussion, however, is the activation of the postmemory mechanism through the medium of popular, entertainment literature, and thus in a non-trauma context." (47)

venture in to the rich body of contemporary Polish literature on ‘post-German’ places. The postmemory of pleasure that is found in the work of these two authors could thus potentially lead to an engagement not only with the pleasure, but also, in time, with the complexity and pain of urban pasts.²²¹

Conclusion

The border changes and massive forced population transfers/ethnic cleansings that followed WWII resulted in the creation of Eastern European cities – Wrocław, Szczecin, Gdańsk, L’viv, Vilnius, and Kaliningrad – which were host to urgent crises of adjustment and stabilization. In the context of sometimes contradictory socialist and nationalist efforts to cement legitimacy and stability, massive propaganda campaigns sought to reshape collective memories and aesthetic impressions. Officials sought to control and define the uses of symbols and monuments in the physical realm and link them to a rhetorical scheme in which urban histories were confined to the simplistic channels of national continuity and permanence. However, historical contexts on the regional and epochal scale, such as those developed by Snyder, have demonstrated the ultimate malleability of such nationalist programs and the ongoing flux of such schemes of symbol appropriation by conflicting groups over the course of centuries. Also, dysfunctional socialist political cultures – such as those elucidated by Brown – in the postwar era may have spurred the excesses of nationalist programs, even as broader socialist ideologies perennially clashed with nationalist mentalities.

Yet such mentalities and policies themselves clashed with everyday life in a forcibly transitioned cityscape. Everyday life was often permeated by psychological attachments to abandoned cityscapes and feelings of alienation within new ones. Nationalist campaigns were also complicated by variegated architectural landscapes and malleable propaganda, and by the interactions of migrants of various ethnic and regional backgrounds. Historical inquiries into everyday life could also be greatly expanded by examinations of the broadly influential – in terms both cultural (i.e. popular literature) and spatial (i.e. modernist housing) – realm of mass culture. Disjunctures between the built environment, propaganda, and the migrant experience were thus established, but could not be fully or openly dealt with by citizens until after the fall of communism. This transition from communism prompted its own political disjunctures, caught as it was between a new set of competing policy initiatives, each of which again implied a degree of control over symbols – in this case those symbols related to post-communist assertions of nationalism or European integration.

This literature review has gravitated towards the work of four historians – Timothy Snyder, Kate Brown, Gregor Thum, and Uilleam Blacker – for the simple reason that their works represent a highly original, interesting, and enjoyable spectrum of writing styles, methodologies,

²²¹ Ibid., 48-49.

and viewpoints which urban historians will find instructive. Snyder has reconstructed the long-term history of the region's modern nation-states in a way that shatters the proud ethno-nationalist tropes that permeate Eastern Europe's collective memory and physical landscape, and has also outlined the fascinatingly complex story of why these national myths and movements were invented in the first place. Brown has delved into the history of an obscure and ethnically ambiguous region – the true character of which lies far beyond traditional sources – in order to elucidate the cultural impulses that lead to such extraordinary clashes between national theory and local identity. Blacker has courageously drawn attention to a field of inquiry traditionally spurned by academics; by seriously considering mass culture on its own terms, he has shown that it can have a potentially profound and far-ranging impact on the way people relate to their urban environments. He shows how popular literature can help mend the psychological rifts created by the urban transitions of 1945, filling the prewar gaps in a wide audience's collective memory.

Finally, Thum's seminal work should be consulted as a potential model for all historians considering the subject of urban transitions in the region. His most important contributions to the study of transitioned cities are his vivid portrait of the "the impermanence syndrome" that characterizes such environments, his detailed outline of the enormous nationalist propaganda effort that was created to alleviate this syndrome, and his commentary on the long-term psychological effects of this propaganda. He has made it clear that these three major features make the experience of a transitioned city worthy of particular attention by historians. It is also important to note the positive tone with which Thum's final chapter – despite the city's legacy of mendacious propaganda and psychological disturbances – draws attention to how Wrocław's rise to become "one of Poland's leading cultural metropolises" was an "achievement [that] borders on a miracle."²²²

²²² Thum, *Uprooted* 381-382, quotations on 382.

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