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Marginalization and Social Exclusion of Evangelical Masurians and Germans The Case of Post-War Elk County

Abstract

The article presents the post-war history of Evangelical population: Germans and Masurians in Elk county. For this purpose, archival sources and biographical interviews were used. Interviews with the inhabitants of the county were collected as part of two oral history projects carried out by the „Museum for Elk” Association in 2012–2013. The historical context is complemented by the available literature. One third of post-war Poland consisted of the territories being the part the Third Reich before the World War II, where a considerable part of population were Germans. Masurians formed a borderland group that became the reason of conflict between the Polish and the German. In the first half of the 20th century, both as a result of the nationalistic discourse and the assimilation pressure, most of them declared to maintain German identity. After the war, Masurians were present in the public space of Elk county as a minority group. There was the inflow of population of the eastern territories of the Second Republic of Poland and people from central Poland. The small Evangelical church in Elk in Słowackiego street was often filled with the faithful. Numerous processes and phenomena of social marginalization, exclusion and displacements resulted in nearly entire disintegration of Masurian and Evangelical community. The number of the faithful in Evangelical community proves it – there are nearly 150 people and only few of them feel Masurian origin. In the post-war vision of future Poland nationally and religiously homogenous state was believed to be an ideal solution.

Keywords: social marginalization, social exclusion, cultural assimilation, displacement, Masurians/Germans, nationalism.

Marginalizacja i wykluczenie społeczne ewangelickich Mazurów i Niemców. Przypadek powojennego powiatu elckiego

Abstrakt

Artykuł przedstawia powojenną historię ludności ewangelickiej: Niemców i Mazurów w powiecie elckim. Wykorzystano w tym celu źródła archiwalne i wywiady biograficzne. Wywiady z mieszkańcami powiatu zostały zebrane w ramach dwóch projektów historii mówionej realizowanych przez Stowarzyszenie „Muzeum dla Elku” w latach 2012–2013. Kontekst historyczny uzupełniony został dostępną literaturą historyczną. Jedna trzecia powojennej Polski stanowiły tereny należące do III Rzeszy, a znaczną część tamtejszej ludności stanowili Niemcy. Mazurzy tworzyli grupę pogranicza, która stała się przyczyną

konfliktu polsko-niemieckiego. W pierwszej połowie XX w. zarówno w wyniku dyskursu nacjonalistycznego, jak i presji asymilacyjnej większość z nich przyjęła tożsamość niemiecką. Po wojnie Mazurzy byli obecni w przestrzeni publicznej powiatu ełckiego jako grupa mniejszościowa, gdyż napłynęła ludność z ziem wschodnich dawnej II Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej oraz ludność z Polski centralnej. Niewielki kościół ewangelicki w Ełku przy ul. Słowackiego był często wypełniony wiernymi. Liczne procesy i zjawiska marginalizacji społecznej, wykluczenia i przesiedleń doprowadziły do niemal całkowitego rozpadu społeczności mazurskiej i ewangelickiej. Świadczy o tym obecna liczba wiernych we wspólnocie ewangelickiej – jest ich blisko 150 osób i tylko nieliczni posiadają mazurskie pochodzenie. W powojennej wizji przyszłości Polski idealnym rozwiązaniem miało być państwo jednorodne narodowo i religijnie.

Słowa kluczowe: marginalizacja społeczna, społeczne wykluczenie, asymilacja kulturowa, wysiedlenia, Mazurzy/Niemcy, nacjonalizm.

1. Introduction

The article presents the processes of marginalization and social exclusion of the German, Masurian and Evangelical population in the post-war Ełk County. For this purpose, archival sources and biographical interviews were used. Interviews with the inhabitants of the county were collected as part of oral history projects carried out by the “Museum for Ełk” Association in 2012–2013. Two oral history projects were completed by high school students (4 interviews) and by Stefan Marcinkiewicz and Dariusz Zuber (9 interviews).¹ The historical context is complemented by the available literature.

The war sharpened the feeling of national identification, digging deep gaps between the nations and the ethnic groups involved in it. Krystyna Kersten wrote: “When people were persecuted and killed because of being Polish, Jewish or Ukrainian, their national identity became superior to other reference systems. (...) Human life depended on nationality he/she was: Polish, Jewish, Ukrainian, Lithuanian, yet the nationality was attributed by the supreme authority, having the right to decide about human life and death”.² The racist criteria applied to ethnic and national groups by Nazis resulted in official stigmatization, discrimination, segregation, persecution and extermination. In Europe the “lords of the world” of the war era were usually Germans. Due to their brutal policy during the occupation, they were commonly hated, both during the war and after it was finished. Concurrently, one third of post-war Poland consisted of the territories being the part the Third Reich before the World War II, where a considerable part of population were Germans. The Masuria witnessed simi-

¹ Historia mówiona (19.10.2021). <https://muzeum.elk.pl/historia/>.

² Krystyna Kersten, 1989. “Polska – państwo narodowe. Dylematy i rzeczywistość”. In *Narody. Jak powstały i jak wybijały się na niepodległość?*. Ed. Marcin Kula, 461–462. Warszawa: PWN.

lar ethnic composition during that period. It is assessed that in 1947 there were 80.000 indigenous inhabitants.³

Masurians formed an ethnic group that became the reason of conflict between the Polish and the German. In the first half of the 20th century, both as a result of the nationalistic discourse and the assimilation pressure, most of them declared to maintain German identity. Nationally and religiously homogenous state was believed to be an ideal solution. This approach was predominant in the post-war vision of future Polish state. People of other nationalities were to be either displaced or they had to choose naturalization as the only option. German displacement from East Prussia was supported by the states being the winners in the war. National verification was the idea undertaken by the communist regime towards the population of Polish-German borderland, including Masurians and Warmians. These declaring Polish national affiliation were to stay, whereas those who considered themselves German were to be displaced to Germany, divided into the occupied zones. Concurrently, there was the inflow of population of the eastern territories of the Second Republic of Poland and people from central Poland.

As a result of spontaneous migration, the people having resided in Masuria so far – Masurians and Germans – became a minority group unpopular in the new socio-political circumstances. They soon started to experience social exclusion and, then, marginalization. The term exclusion that I use here means entire separation or considerable limitation of the possibilities to participate in social, economic, political or cultural life within a particular administrative area. It also refers to non-existing social bonds between certain social groups – the individuals forming the excluded community and the rest of the community. Social marginalization also refers to the individuals and groups not participating in the situations and events in which they could or should take part. Exclusion and marginalization are reflected in social stigmas, different forms of violence and discrimination. They result in the limited access to authority and decision-making processes, obligations being predominant over rights and the limited number of chances. Exclusion and marginalization might contribute to particular actions being expected, such as emigration, assimilation or acculturation. Cultural assimilation practically means “naturalization” – accepting other culture as ours’, whereas acculturation is the process of secondary acquisition of cultural competences within dominant culture, yet not abandoning our culture. In this paper, the processes of exclusion and marginalization of the Masurian and German population will be presented in aspects of social, religious and political life.

³ Andrzej Sakson. 1998. *Stosunki narodowościowe na Warmii i Mazurach 1945–1997*. Poznań: Instytut Zachodni, 360.

After the war, Masurians/Germans were present in the public space of Elk County. The small Evangelical church in Elk in Słowackiego street was often filled with the faithful. Numerous processes and phenomena of social exclusion and social marginalization resulted in nearly entire disintegration of Masurian and Evangelical community. The number of the faithful in community proves it – there are nearly 150 people and only few of them feel Masurian origin.

2. Post-front violence

On 24th January 1945, the units of the II Belarussian Front entered Elk.⁴ The county was practically depopulated, as a result of two evacuations taking place from August to October 1944 and a hasty escape in January 1945. The moment the Red Army entered Elk, the town was inhabited by approximately 1.000 people (in 1939 – 16.243), in the entire county lived 4.000 people (in 1939 – 56.129).⁵ The pervasive wave of violence began when the front passed. As early as on 25 January, Soviets executed several Lyck residents – the butcher Baginski with his wife and daughter, the electrician Lüdicke, the tradesman Reith, the flour merchant Hoyer.⁶ The doctor Schilling reported that Russian troops had killed 72 out of 78 men while conquering the town.⁷ The survivors became the victims of overwhelming violence. A woman was buried in the cemetery in Nowa Wieś Elcka: “The woman who was sent to do forced labor to Germany was killed by the s. soldier”.⁸ Rapes committed on women were frequently reported:

“They came, looking for the girls and they took them all. (...) I say «What they wanted?» He says «Soldiers went to barn with the girls». I didn’t understand it...went to the barn” (Lidia W.).

“When Russians came, my grandmother was still alive and my mother... I mean women tried to hide. Russians wanted to take the young women, yes... Every night at midnight...exactly at midnight (...) So they came, they knocked... then...and here... And asking «Where is the girl» and so. So grandmother says «She’s not here, I don’t know where she is, I don’t know». And they tried to hide, the women” (Krystyna G.).

⁴ Kurt Dieckert, Horst Grossmann. 2011. *Bój o Prusy Wschodnie. Kronika dramatu 1944–1945*. Gdańsk: Maszoperia Literacka, 290.

⁵ Jan Kawecki, Bolesław Roman. 1970. *Elk. Z dziejów miasta i powiatu*. Olsztyn: Pojezierze, 207.

⁶ Reinhold Weber. 1981. *Der Kreis Lyck. Ein ostpreußisches Heimatbuch*. Leer: Verlag Gerhard Rautenberg, 621.

⁷ Schilling. 1995. “Orkan über Ostpreußen”. Hagen-Lycker Brief 53: 52.

⁸ The name “soviet” was erased as a form of self-censorship: APS, O. Elk, County Office, Office for Construction, Affairs of war graves 1949, 130/111, p. 18.

In winter 1945, the tremendous chaos got control over the town: violence and plunder.⁹ While returning to Białystok from Giżycko, Helena Pawłowska avoided travelling through Ełk, as the bands were overrunning the area.¹⁰ In February some people living in Rajgród went looting across the Rajgrodzkie Lake. The spring brought some kind of revival. The railmen arrived to build the railway junction. Other Masurians/Germans were either employed in the estates administered by the Red Army or displaced in the Soviet Union.

“On March 19th 1945, me and my sisters, as well as 40 girls from our village were taken from our jobs, driven to Olsztyn and finally arrested. (...) On 25th March 1945, we were called and gathered, 5 people in a row. There were 1.363 women and girls, aged 13–65. 46 women were pushed into a cattle car, the door was locked, the transport to the eastern regions began. All we got to eat was two slices of stale bread, salt fish and a small spoon of sugar. (...) The journey took 16 days, on April 11th we arrived in Tchubaksov over Volga. Thirty women died during the transport”.¹¹

In April 1945, the announcement obliged all the men aged 17–60 to report to the Soviet headquarters in Ełk. The men had to appear being equipped with the clothes sufficient for 14 days. A lot of them were deported to the East¹², whereas others were made to do hard work. The fugitives, gradually returning, were gathered in the towns with Soviet headquarters and made to work hard. In Grabnik there were about 200 Germans working, in Nowa Wieś Ełcka – 150, in Stare Juchy – 300, in the suburbs of Ełk – nearly 1.500. German supervisors were appointed – their task was to be responsible for the workers who were to prepare the disposal of the former German belongings and to produce food. The residents of the neighboring countys were involved in spontaneous acts of looting of the former German property.

As early as the 2nd February, the representatives of Polish administration tried to, ineffectually, administer the Ełk County.¹³ They formally took the power on 6th April 1945 but the headquarters of the Red Army remained the main center of power. The plenipotentiary of the Ministry of Industry, Władysław Paprocki, reported in May 1945 the county was in state of unrest,

⁹ Stefan M. Marcinkiewicz. 2015. *Mityczna stolica Mazur. Między Ełkiem a Lyck*. Ełk: Muzeum Historyczne w Ełku, 141.

¹⁰ Bohdan Kozielo-Poklewski, Bohdan Łukaszewicz. Eds. 1977. *Ze znakiem „P”. Relacje i wspomnienia robotników przymusowych i jeńców wojennych w Prusach Wschodnich*. Olsztyn: Ośrodek Badań Naukowych im. W. Kętrzyńskiego w Olsztynie, 116.

¹¹ Theodor Schieder. 1955. *Deutsche Bevölkerung aus den Gebieten Östlich der Oder-Neisse*. Vol. 1. Part 2. Bonn: Bundesministerium für Vertriebene, 44.

¹² Weber. 1981. *Der Kreis Lyck. Ein ostpreußisches Heimatbuch*, 605.

¹³ Robert Syrwid. 2018. *Starostowie Warmii i Mazur w latach 1945–1950. Szkice biograficzne*. Olsztyn – Białystok – Warszawa: IPN, 332.

there was a constant inflow of the settlers and the food could only be bought for alcohol.¹⁴ On 4th July 1945, the same person reported of being interrogated in the Office of Public Security and being deprived of the weapon, necessary to perform his duties and move freely in the county.¹⁵ The emergency situation continued for a certain period. Militia reports prepared in 1945–1946 frequently report the violent acts; they were often committed against the Germans or the Masurians:

“On 3rd August 1945, the village head /surname unknown/ in Prawdziska, Elk County committed rape on O. Augustyna, living there”.¹⁶

“On 12th August 1945, in Przekopka, the militia officers stole personal belongings. The culprits were not found”.¹⁷

“On 22/23 October 1945, seven soldiers of the Red Army and three civilians broke into the flat belonging to N. Elfyda and Z. Mina residing in Kol. Syba in Elk County, robbed the clothes and committed the rape”.¹⁸

“On the 26th November, 10 individuals, including 2 with guns, the rest using sticks, made a raid on the flat belonging to S. Gertruda, having stolen a sewing machine, 8 feather blankets, 3 suits, a piece of cloth, underwear and crockery”.¹⁹

3. Settlement and “Re-polonization”

In spite of the danger from the looting Soviet soldiers and the gangs of common looters, there was a visible increase in population in the county, composed of these arriving from “the old territories”.²⁰ Initially, the settlement had the spontaneous forms, as Edward Hurcewicz recalls:

“The belongings that were left by the former inhabitants were devastated, as a result of looters’ actions. The Russians stole the machines, whereas the civilians kept looting in the deserted buildings. There was no water in the town except for

¹⁴ AAN, Operational units of the Economic Committee of the Council of Ministers and the Ministry of Industry, Operational Group Prusy Wschodnie, Reports [weekly reports of county plenipotentiaries, Kwidzyn, Morąg, Łuczany, Elk] [the data of the industry condition and the correspondence, III-VIII.1945], 214, p. 140.

¹⁵ AAN, Operational units of the Economic Committee, p. 140, 196.

¹⁶ IPN Bi 047,111/2, County Citizens’ Militia Headquarters, Reports from Elk County, August 1945.

¹⁷ IPN Bi 047,111/2, County Citizens’ Militia Headquarters, Reports from Elk County, August 1945.

¹⁸ IPN Bi 047/111/4, County Citizens’ Militia Headquarters, Reports from Elk County, October 1945.

¹⁹ IPN Bi 047/111/4, County Citizens’ Militia Headquarters, Reports from Elk County, October 1945.

²⁰ Stefan M. Marcinkiewicz. 2015. “Od migracji do modernizacji. O przestrzeni społecznej powojennego Elku”. *Elcki Przegląd Historyczny* 1: 162, 169.

the railway station and the dairy in Mickiewicz Street, where the Soviet soldiers were stationed. The purposely set fires were a frequent sight in the town. In May 1945, the first repatriated groups from Lida, Albertyn, Grodno, Grodno county, Novogrodsky county, Druskienniki, Vilnius were reported to be inflowing, although the biggest groups came from the neighboring countys. There were also groups of settlers coming from Suwałki, Białystok and Warsaw”.²¹

The assessments of the number of people living in the Elk County in summer 1945 are varied. According to the report presented by the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Republic of Poland in the Masurian County, 4.202 Polish citizens and 923 Germans were reported to be living in, on 10th August 1945, 17.000 families lived in Elk County, including 2.500 German families.²² According to the report of the Provincial Public Security Office of 12th August 1945, 20.000 people lived in Elk County (13.000 Polish, 7.000 Masurian/German), while in Elk lived 9.000 Polish and 1.000 German inhabitants.²³ Regardless the estimates, these were the elderly, women and children who composed the major part of autochthonous population. During the post-war chaos, Masurian population in the county was decreasing in its number, as a considerable number of the refugees from East Prussia was stopped by the approaching front. As the county head reported, until 5th July 1945 332 people arrived in the town and 559 arrived in Elk County.²⁴

The returnees declaring Polish nationality were formally allowed free options for their settlement. Their names and surnames were changed in the new documents, being polonized. During the re-polonization process, Horst changed into Henryk and Liselotte was transformed into Leokadia. Verification was facilitated by the fact Masurian names resembling Polish ones, like Kobialaka, Wilutzki, Kowalitzik, were transformed into Kobiałka, Wyłudzki, Kowalczyk. Verification was often a forced procedure. Gertruda Völknitz, living in Elk since 1945, recalls the following events:

“Gradually, there were fewer and fewer Russians and the Poles began to settle down. Then, there appeared the perspective of being banished. We were forced to clean the dirty houses for Polish settlers but we weren’t given a penny for the job. We weren’t given any food, either. One day, we were gathered in the street and the ordinance was read to us: these who accept Polish citizenship will be allowed to stay, they will be given food and work. Otherwise,

²¹ Alfons Bobowik. 2012. “Edward Hurcewicz”. *Rocznik Elcki* 8: 128.

²² AAN, Operational units of the Economic Committee, 214, p. 169.

²³ Tomasz Łabuszewski. Ed. 2012. *Śladami zbrodni. Przewodnik po miejscach represji komunistycznych 1944–1946*. Warszawa: IPN, 487.

²⁴ APBIA, Province Office in Białystok, Report made by the head of County Office in Elk to the Provincial Office in Olsztyn including the period from 20 May till 5 July 1945, 162, vol. 7–8.

they won't be given food stamps, so they won't be able to buy anything in the shops".²⁵

In July 1946, the county head reported there was the verification procedure including "Masurians", who mostly wanted to leave. They explained their choice by the fact their families lived in Germany. Even these who had declared being Polish, returned their declarations. The county head explained it by the "silent campaigning", encouraging them to depart Poland, heading to the occupation zones. However, it was a hostile approach demonstrated by Polish population that was a major factor. The "autochthonous population" was often ill-treated, being referred to as Germans deserving the revenge. The officials tended to tolerate the acts of prejudice, even with the militia members participating in them. The military also took an active part in the prejudice against the "autochthonous", organizing raids to exploit them as the workforce. Even legal documents proving Polish national affiliation were not accepted. These acts of lawlessness undermined positive attitudes among Masurians towards the authorities.²⁶

The Masurians who signed the Declaration of Allegiance, were not able to return to their farms, as they had been taken over by Polish settlers who had the priority in this procedure. They sometimes managed to find another home, sometimes they were able to share it with the Polish family.

Inge K. lived together with a Polish family as a child:

"My father sowed the rye, but we couldn't... we couldn't harvest our crops, we had no tools to do so. These who lived in our home, they harvested the rye. And we still have nothing... (...) and the plates... My parents buried them. Then we see... we can only see the hole in the orchard. No plates left. They used our plates, we had no plate nor spoon. So what to do? Then it was slowly better and better...".

In September 1946, PUR (State Repatriation Office) observed a large number of the Masurians returning to Poland and demanding to have their farms returned to them.

"In the month being reported, a large inflow of autochthons willing to regain their farms was observed. The farms were deserted during the war, however most of them were taken over by the settlers, there are no instructions to remove them. This makes it difficult to re-settle the Masurians to their farms".²⁷

²⁵ Gertrud Völknitz. 2000. "Erlebnisbericht (1939 bis zu Vertreibung)". Hagen-Lycker Brief 58: 96.

²⁶ APBIA, Provincial Office in Białystok, Report made by the head of County Office in Elk to the provincial governor in Białystok, March 1946, 257, k. 1.

²⁷ APS, O. Elk, State Repatriation Office, Monthly reports of the unit activities 1946, 116/1, p. 45.

The fact the Masuria county was divided into two provinces only contributed to the increase in chaos. On 7th July 1945, Ełk, Gołdap and Olecko countys became a part of Białystok voivodeship. Provincial authorities in Białystok treated Masurians in a different manner than the authorities in Olsztyn did. The provincial governor in Olsztyn allowed the Masurians who did not abandon Masuria during the war to return to their farms. However, this issue was not normalized by Białystok provincial governor. The head of the county, Krochmalski, reported Masurian and German returnees to be causing serious unrest and disorganization, preventing the settlers from sowing.²⁸

4. Social exclusion and marginalization

People declaring themselves to be German were allowed to reside in the suburbs of Ełk, Sybba (Szyba) during a certain period of time. These Masurians/Germans who were employed in the local Soviet headquarters could choose the place where they wanted to settle.²⁹ However, Masurian/German clusters appeared in the town center, in present Orzeszkowej Street (Masurian Ghetto), J.H. Małeckich Street and Kochanowskiego Street. The fact they opted for these parts of the town resulted from security reasons. Soviet headquarters were the certain refuge, both in the town and the countryside.

“When the father said: «Women, let’s go to the headquarters» No? Russian headquarters. So yes... so we went to Nowa Wieś, it was in one house.” (Irena. O)

The Sadowskis family, who returned to Ełk in June 1945, stayed in their family home in present Mazurska Street (Litzmann Str.). Because of safety reasons, they moved to the tenement house in J. H. Małeckich Street near the Soviet headquarters; they lived there with other groups of Germans and Masurians endangered by looting civilian and military groups. Gertruda Rürger also lived in this part of the town:

“In July we finally arrived in my Lyck [Ełk]. It was in Polish hands. All Germans were gathered in one house at 6 Luizy Square. It was a three floor double tenement house, once belonging to the doctors and the lawyers. The County Court was situated nearby. There were 100 people: women, children, the elderly and the new ones were still joining us. At first, my mother was taken to the headquarters in order to be denazified. We were to spend another five years in this house, who could believe it! It was like living in a ghetto, with no school, no support, no

²⁸ APS, O. Ełk, County Office, The Office of General Affairs, The protocols of county head office sessions in Białystok Province 1946, 130/6, p. 30.

²⁹ APBIA, Province Office in Białystok, Report made by the head of County Office in Ełk to the Provincial Office in Olsztyn including the period from 20 May till 5 July 1945, 162, vol. 7–8.

running water, no electricity, no working sanitary utensils. Every morning at 4 o'clock, the Poles took my mother to do forced labor. We children were left on our own. Then my mother got a job in kitchen in a boarding school. At least we had something to eat. During these four years, the Methodist pastor took care of us. He taught us lessons on Christianity in Polish. We acquired the language quickly. Besides, the pastor was sent care packages for Germans from America, he shared them with us".³⁰

Although all people suffered from hard life conditions, these were the Masurians/Germans who were in a particularly harsh situation. Polish population released their anger and frustration after the war on "Germans". Lidia W. recalled hard post-war reality in these words:

"Once we found little saccharin, then we found a packet of salt, later we found a packet of salt for animals, so we used it ... we added it to the food we cooked... Then we could find few potatoes in the cellar. So the grandfather says... it happened before... In June we say what nice potatoes there are... Let's plant a few. They came, they made us run away, «bloody Fritz», they say."

At the end of November 1945, the provincial governor of Białystok province, Stefan Dybowski, had to intervene in Masurian issues, related to the manner the Masurians were treated. These Masurians who were granted Polish citizenship by the county office, worked as home servants for Ełk officials or in the estates in the area. They spent nights in unheated rooms.³¹ The first pastor working in Ełk – Edward Małek – wrote about the Masurians serving as forced labor in the town.³²

The militia commander reported in October 1946:

"On 29th October, the local Germans were employed to clean the town, as it was agreed with the Town Council".³³

In March 1946, the head of Ełk County described the relations between the settlers, the repatriates and the Germans as hostile. Although the Germans tended to behave in a loyal manner, the incidents reflecting their unfriendly attitude towards the Polish population happened. In the village Stare Krzywe, Karol Cytner (German nationality) cut down all the fruit trees in the orchard, to prevent the Poles from using them. Cytner, Wyludzki, Sokół and Golembusz were reported to threaten Polish villagers to be banished from the village soon.³⁴ Suspiciousness

³⁰ Gertrud Rüger. 2000. "Epilog zu unserer Flucht 1945". Hagen-Lycker Brief 58: 99.

³¹ APS, O. Ełk, Ełk County Office, Correspondence 1946-1947, 130/15, p. 2.

³² Edward Małek. 2016. *Gdzie jest moja ojczyzna? Wspomnienia*. Białystok – Ełk: Wydawnictwo Prymat, 471, 489.

³³ APBIA, Provincial Office in Białystok, Report made by the head of County Office in Ełk to the provincial governor in Białystok, March 1946, 257, k. 1.

³⁴ APBIA, Provincial Office in Białystok, Report made by the head of County Office in Ełk to the provincial governor in Białystok, March 1946, 257, k. 1.

to the Masurians who were verified, continued for a certain period. The Militia report on the forest fire stated:

“P. Ludwik, an eighty-two-year-old man of Masurian national affiliation, now being a Polish citizen, has been working in a forest for many years as a physical worker (...) Considering the fact he was German before, he might have set fire in the forest due to his malice and the desire of revenge”.³⁵

Masurian population was often discriminated against, which was reported by Bogumił K. from Ogródek in February 1947. In the letter written to Białystok Province Governor in Masurian dialect, he complained about the fact the Masurians were forgotten and ignored by the authorities even though they had been promised a different approach expressed by the authorities. They were ignored while assigning seed for sowing. There was not any official who could plead their cause. The vice-starost of Elk launched the formal statement (19.03.1947) explaining the Masurians could not be treated as if they were Germans. Since then, the Masurians could be appointed as members of the Commune National Councils. Certain favoritism was to be applied instead of discrimination, as the “autochthonous communities are the people who resisted many years of being denationalized by the German”.³⁶ It resulted in the attempt to appoint one of the Masurians a village mayor (vojt), we do not know yet what the result was.³⁷

The Ukrainians resettled to Poland after the Operation Vistula in 1947 established friendly relations with Masurian community. Lidia W. reported a helping attitude they received from the Ukrainians being resettled in the village Rogale:

“And then... they rescued us... when they arrived here, they had flour. Everyone had a cow. So they took us... they took us under their wing”.

Specific social bond that formed the link between the Masurians and the resettlers of the Operation Vistula, was the fact these two groups formed the marginalized minority community.³⁸

5. Reconstruction of religious life

The issues related to religion formed the main conflict points. The building being home to the evangelical church was taken over by the Polish community in 1945. Edward Małek, the first pastor to come to Elk after the war (in 1946)

³⁵ IPN Bi 057/82/05, County Citizens' Militia Headquarters, Reports from the Elk County, May 1949.

³⁶ APS, O. Elk, Elk County Office, Correspondence 1946-1947, 130/15, p. 22.

³⁷ APS, O. Elk, Elk County Office, Correspondence 1948-1950, 130/28, p. 1.

³⁸ Stefan M. Marcinkiewicz. 2017. “Trauma dezintegracji i integracji w wymiarze lokalnym na przykładzie powojennego powiatu elckiego”. *Opuscula Sociologica* 19: 40.

during Easter was offered a small chapel used by the Prayer Association so far. Masurian community included mainly the Protestants, being identified with German life. Bohdan I. – resettled from Grodno county (born in 1933) – recalled his friend:

“I had a very close friend here (...) an autochthon and he was... well, like all of the autochthons, there were very few of them. He was hounded, as people thought if he’s not Catholic, he must be German. Here unfortunately, most of people were Protestants”.

People attending service in a church tried to hold it back from others. Lilia S. recalled:

“(...) Because we went to church here, they thought we were German. So... unfortunately. They pestered us, well... they insulted us. Yes, they did. When I went to work, I didn’t tell anybody ... I was going to church”.

The hostility between Polish settlers and the autochthonous population was demonstrated in the acts of vandalism. Church services, usually held in Polish, were continuously disrupted:

“And then, the pastor began holding services there... prayer evenings... then the windows were several times... they were smashed. Then he asked us to sit next to the wall not to be hit by a stone”. (Lidia W.)

During his pastoral service, Małłek counted up to 5.700 Evangelicals in Elk County, though there were some who did not want to be registered.³⁹ In 1947, Małłek opened a dormitory for the Evangelical youth. Lidia W. brings back the following situations:

“Pastor Małłek had these (...) skirts made to us... green they were (...) and the green emblems «Methodist youth. Masurian youth». When we were walking to the dormitory... we were walking along the path... then we were scattered with mud sometimes... no. But it was... it was just done by hooligans. The director was really... strict. When we told him about it... he just slapped him... so he had to apologize”. (Lidia W.)

E. Małłek himself became the target of the assault: “Even when the older kids were walking down the street. When they threw the egg, it could reach Małłek’s head, but it got only to his feet”. (Irena O.)

As for interfaith weddings, Evangelicals usually converted to Catholicism, as it was dominant. Interfaith weddings rarely happened in Evangelical church. Married couple B. from Prawdziski described the event:

“So many Catholics came to our wedding (...) They were told if you change your religion you have to tread on the cross”. [laughing] (Elsa B.)

³⁹ Małłek. 2016. *Gdzie jest moja ojczyzna? Wspomnienia*, 500.

Young people who had lived in German culture so far, had certain problems related to the language. Lidia W. had to learn the language from its basic level:

“Well, I couldn’t speak Polish, I spoke German. (...) My grandmother said, when given milk, say «thank you». I couldn’t do it, when I came somewhere, I said «thank you», when given the milk, I said «good morning»”.

Polish was also taught at school:

“At school... I couldn’t say «rrr»... I said «grrr» , so... We had an ABC book, there was a story about «mruczek» and «zagraj», I couldn’t get it... Later, it was better, yes...” (Lidia W.).

One of Małek’s parishioner’s children did not go to school, as they became the objects of mockery and derision, being called “Fritz” and Nazi. The woman, being a member of PZZ (Polish West Association), tried to cope with the situation, yet she was helpless. According to Alicja M. (born in 1945), as early as the 1950s, the teacher asked the children to protect the Masurian children from being ill-treated by the peers. The vice-starost of Elk County mentioned the problem of Masurian children not attending schools:

“During the talks, the head of Elk County Mr Krochmalski spoke about the schooling problems experienced by the autochthonous children who did not speak Polish. Mr Motoszko explained that the situation of Masurian children not attending school was the result of the hostile attitude of their parents towards the Polish government, or perhaps their difficult daily conditions”.⁴⁰

The authorities in Białystok did not consider the problem of Masurian population to be a serious issue.⁴¹ A considerable number of people who were not verified and the Masurians reflected this situation. According to the data presented by the County Head Office on 31st January 1949, there were 38.507 people in Elk County, including 316 Germans, 1.265 verified persons, 614 persons who were not verified but identified to be the Masurians.⁴² Organizing the structures of administration, providing security measures to the population and food production – these were the major problems to be considered by the authorities in Białystok. The direct or indirect objective for the authorities was to dispose of the autochthonous population. This resulted in the plans to leave to Germany among the Germans/Masurians.⁴³

⁴⁰ APS, O. Elk, County Office, The Office of General Affairs, The protocols of county head office sessions in Białystok Province 1947, sygn.130/7, p. 29.

⁴¹ Andrzej Sakson. 1990. *Mazurzy – społeczność pogranicza*. Poznań: Instytut Zachodni, 108.

⁴² APS, O. Elk, State Repatriation Office, Repatriation to Germany, 1949–1950, 130/23, p. 2.

⁴³ Małek. 2016. *Gdzie jest moja ojczyzna? Wspomnienia*, 488.

6. Displacement

Harsh living conditions, the feeling of being endangered by the newcomers, uncertain future and no hope for the East Prussia being regained – all these reasons made the Germans/Masurians seriously consider leaving their homeland. According to the Potsdam resolution, the German population was to be orderly transferred to the occupation zones off the Oder River. The Germans'/Masurians' departures from Ełk probably began in autumn 1945. At the end of December 1945, the mayor of Ełk Mieczysław Krzykowski reported the Masurian population being considerably reduced – it was the result of expulsions west of the Oder.⁴⁴ On 6th January 1946, a rally took place in Ełk. During the rally, quick and extensive expulsion of the German population was demanded.⁴⁵ In spring 1946, there occurred some problems related to receiving the transports with the returnees from the East. There were not enough houses and the county militia commander postulated the following action:

“It is necessary to remove the Germans who were not displaced yet and the frontier looters from Grajewo county”.⁴⁶

The reference to the departures to Germany was made in August 1946. As a result of Germans' departures, there were 120 released farms ready to be settled.⁴⁷ It was probably the result of the displacement actions begun in August 1946. These actions were not to be performed in Białystok province. G. Völknitz reported:

“We arrived in Ełk again. We collected our belongings. Next day we went to the station, we came into an open stock car prepared for the expelled. Then, our torment began again: poverty, hunger and all that you can imagine”.⁴⁸

In November 1947, the county militia commander reported that nobody tried to avoid being expelled to Germany and all the Germans “are truly willing to go”. Militia inspected whether all the Germans appointed to be “repatriated” were present. In the militia station in Stare Juchy six Germans were stopped by the patrol while they were trying to cross the Oder River illegally.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ APS O. Ełk, Records of Municipal Council in Ełk in 1945/1946, sygn. 80/17, p. 11.

⁴⁵ AAN, The Polish Socialist Party, The report of the rally in Ełk on 6 January 1946 and 235/XXIII-18.

⁴⁶ IPN Bi 057/125/4, County Citizens' Militia Headquarters, Reports from Ełk County April 1946.

⁴⁷ APS, O. Ełk, State Repatriation Office, Monthly reports of the unit activities 1946, 116/1, p. 41.

⁴⁸ Völknitz. 2000. “Erlebnisbericht (1939 bis zu Vertreibung)”, 96.

⁴⁹ IPN Bi 047/140/18, County Citizens' Militia Headquarters, Monthly reports from Ełk County November 1947.

In October 1947, “German repatriation” from Elk, Olecko and Goldap countys was planned. People were to be transported from Olecko and Elk. 227 people appointed only from Elk County. This action did not eventually take place, as the authorities in the Soviet occupation zone did not agree to accept the transport.⁵⁰ The Germans had to leave in the smaller groups during the next transport actions in 1949–1950 and in subsequent transports.⁵¹ Zbigniew A. (born in 1947) remembered his class being reduced by 50%, the pupils and the teacher, Inga Mottel. The Masurian population having been “verified”, emigrated to Germany as soon as they were allowed to do so.

7. Conclusion

During the post-war period, Polish society proclaimed the concept of Polish state as an ethnic monolith. The Second Polish Republic – afflicted by national conflicts or the ethnic minorities being used as Hitler’s tools (Sudeten Germans, V Column) was a good reason to support this standpoint. It was hard to imagine the co-existence with the Germans, considering the hostile Polish post-war attitude. Their fate was sealed during the Potsdam Conference, and the displacements was the consequence. Then, the naturalization process of Masurian and Warmian population started.

During the initial period, the Masurians/Germans in Elk County were pushed off the social mainstream. Spatial segregation was introduced, different forms of stigmatization, violence and discrimination were applied. The Germans, sometimes also the Masurians, were employed to declutter streets or to clean houses. If they accepted to declare being Polish, they were given more possibilities. They could choose the place they wanted to stay, trying to adjust to new reality. However, they were forced to lose the identity they had so far: their names and surnames were changed to sound more Polish. Due to the differences in language and religion, the society did not fully accept them, pushing them aside the social life. Germans formed the group that was socially excluded and the fact of living in Poland was regarded temporary. These who declared Masurian identity, being ready to accept Polish nationality at the same time, became formally Polish yet they were informally marginalized by Polish society. Exclusion and marginali-

⁵⁰ Włodzimierz Borodziej, Hans Lemberg, Eds. 2000. *Niemcy w Polsce 1945–1950. Wybór dokumentów. Władze i instytucje centralne. Województwo olsztyńskie*. Vol. 1. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, 525.

⁵¹ See: Stefan M. Marcinkiewicz. 2017. Powojenne wysiedlenia ludności mazurskiej/niemieckiej z powiatu Elk. In *Protestanci na Mazurach. Historia i literatura*. Eds. Jarosław Ławski, Dariusz Zuber, Kazimierz Bogusz, 138–141. Białystok – Elk: Wydawnictwo Prymat, 2017.

zation contributed to getting rid of the Masurians/Germans by either the forced expulsions or the entire cultural assimilation (naturalization). Forced emigration was often the consequence of living in the hostile environment.

Most Germans who stayed in Elk County after WWII emigrated to the West in different stages of emigration process.⁵² These who decided to stay in Elk were either elderly people or people who got married in Poland. The relations changed with time. Hostile feelings weakened. The elderly died. The young assimilated: they learnt the language, they married Polish settlers, they changed religion (eg. family members Sadowski, Wilczewski, Jelonek). Differences became blurred, less visible. They travelled mainly due to economic reasons. Edward Małek estimated that only 15 people stayed in Poland out of 284 he had confirmed.⁵³

List of people being interviewed in biographical interviews

Person	Date of birth, birthplace
Bohdan I.	(born 1933, Grodno)
Elza B.	(born 1939, Prawdzicken/Prawdziska)
Krystyna G.	(born 1939, Lötzen/Giżycko)
Krystyna K.	(born 1938, Goldenau/Kopijki)
Irena O.	(born 1936, Bartossen/Bartosze)
Lidia W.	(born 1936, Kroczyn, Chelm County)
Zbigniew A.	(born 1947, Elk)

Source: Author's own summary based on the interviews collected by "Muzeum dla Elku" Association.

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⁵² Marcinkiewicz. 2017. Powojenne wysiedlenia ludności mazurskiej/niemieckiej z powiatu Elk, 142.

⁵³ Małek. 2016. *Gdzie jest moja ojczyzna? Wspomnienia*, 516.

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