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Nationalization campaigns and teachers' practices in Belgian–German and Polish–German border regions (1945–1956)

Machteld Venken*

Institute for East European History, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria

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This contribution looks into nationalization and education in European borderlands in the early post-World War II period. Belonging to Belgium and Poland, respectively, in the interwar years, the Eupen–St. Vith–Malmedy and the East-Upper Silesia regions came under German rule during World War II. Returned to the Belgian and Polish nation-states once the war was over, the regions experienced a pronounced upheaval in the population profile as a result of population transfers and reorientations in education curricula. The aim of these measures was to guarantee the national reliability of borderland inhabitants, with a special role being designated for teachers, who were perceived as crucial in the raising of children as national citizens imbued with certain core values. This contribution compares the methods employed by the authorities in selecting educational personnel for their borderlands, the nationalizing role teachers were to play and the way teachers gave meaning to their professional practices.

Keywords: nationalization; teachers; education; border regions; Belgium; Poland

Introduction: nationalization, borderlands and teachers

Studies in nationalization, unraveling the intricacies of nation formation and stabilization in core areas of nation-states, have long been popular features of mainstream historiography (Kumar 2006, 10). Nationalization covers all political and social attempts to get people to identify with the nation-state. Scholars have pointed to the limitations of nationalization in borderlands, where the twin processes of state centralization and national homogenization are disrupted (Duhamelle, Kossert, and Struck 2007, 10; Ther 2000, 410). With national policy drawing borders in space and between social beings, selected inhabitants are included into the imagined community of the nation-state, while distance from those designated as “others” is increased (Anderson 1991, 6). Despite the attempts of nation-states to hold a strong position in borderland policy-making, actors make their own use of nationalizing initiatives, through practices they negotiate the way in which they let nationalization affect their lives. Borderlands are therefore “not marginal but central sites of power” where national identifications are created and contested (Zhurzhenko 2010, 74). While studies have unraveled interactions between politicians acting at central and local levels, we know less about how political ideas influenced the lives of other borderlanders. The way national measures were interpreted by borderlanders can be inferred by looking at concrete life paths and life practices (François, Seifarth, and Struck 2007, 19). Through

*Email: machteld.venken@univie.ac.at

such actions people identified themselves, that is, they gave meaning to themselves and their environment, thereby refuting, negotiating or reinforcing degrees of national loyalty.

In his work on nationalism and education, Schleicher indicates that the “setting of territorial boundaries as a national principle was developed in Europe along with the use of education to confirm its legacy” (2008, 31). For example, from 1871 onward teaching in Germany was used as a means of educating and raising children as national citizens. The state became one of the main employers of teachers next to the social and religious organizations that had previously dominated the field. While historical research on the relationship between nationalism and pedagogy at a central state level has long been a well-established research field, less is known about the way nationalization influenced teachers in borderlands.

Irina Livezeano’s pioneering book on cultural politics and national integration in Greater Romania and Tara Zahra’s study on the Bohemian borderlands both cover the post-1918 period and clearly showed how state makers saw education as the primary road to nationhood, and how the realities of multiethnic and multicultural borderlands hindered the realization of that nationalistic dream (Livezeanu 1995, 302; Zahra 2008a, 49). Following World War II attitudes toward ethnic and linguistic minorities fundamentally changed. Lemberg draws a distinction between the situation after World War I, where many European countries had a number of ethnic or linguistic minorities receiving protection from the League of Nations, and the prevailing ideal of international negotiations in the aftermath of World War II, where an ethnically clean nation-state was deemed most desirable, with minorities being considered “a cause of conflict per se” that no longer needed protection, but integration within the nation-state (2000, 168–179).

Nationalization campaigns of the early post-World War II period have already been analyzed, but the picture offered by studies is still incomplete. They have tended to pay most attention to regions’ purification of those considered to have cooperated with the Nazis, overlooking areas such as economic recovery, social policy and education (Huyse and Dhondt 1994; Osękowski 2006, 28–31). Since local border studies and historical source publications have already provided evidence that special educational policies for teachers were designed, it is worth investigating more closely ties between nationalization and educators in European borderlands in the early post-war period (Schmitz 1993, 17; Schwall, Spoden, and Spoden 1987, 78; Snoch 1998, 31).

The Belgian–German and Polish–German border regions: similarities and differences

The Eupen–St. Vith–Malmedy region and the Western provinces of Poland have switched sovereignty many times over the course of history. More or less the same Belgian territory that had been German until the end of World War I was annexed by Germany in 1940. In the aftermath of heavy fighting during Hitler’s last offence the region was returned to Belgium. The larger Polish–German border region consists of terrains that did not all switch sovereignty in similar ways. The Eupen–St. Vith–Malmedy region and the East-Upper Silesia region have most in common: Belgian or Polish in the interwar years, they came under German rule in the duration of World War II, and were reunited with the Belgian or Polish nation-state afterwards.

The Eupen–St. Vith–Malmedy region stretches over 1060 km² and had a population in 1945 of 61,901 people living in 29 municipalities and small cities distributed over three cantons (Kleu 2007, 14; Schärer 1978, 86). Although the Belgian mainland had been occupied and the Eupen–St. Vith–Malmedy region annexed, the Belgian nation-state used

the same measures for verifying people's war activities for both since it considered the annexation to have been illegal. With German citizens having been evacuated by the end of the war, the purification was focused on locals. Twenty-five percent of them were suspected of having collaborated with the enemy, of whom 1503 (quadruple the national average) were found guilty. More than 7000 had their civil rights removed, either temporarily or permanently, and the courts annulled the Belgian citizenship of 1325 male citizens along with their families, often because they had taken up public activities such as teaching during the war. These people saw no other option but to leave for post-war occupied Germany (Lejeune 2007, 83–85). Purification entailed serious consequences for the organization of public life. About half of the men entitled to vote (Belgian women would receive that right in 1948) were excluded from compulsory voting in the elections of 1946 (Lejeune 2007, 113). Citizens deprived of civil rights were also not allowed to take up public positions, which included teaching (Kleu 2007, 94).

In 1939, the East-Upper Silesia region annexed by Nazi Germany had a surface area of 4216 km².¹ After the war, the terrain became an administrative part of the Silesia Voivodeship, also called the Silesia-Dabrowski Voivodeship.² Whereas the surface area remained almost the same, the amount of inhabitants fluctuated. In 1946, statisticians counted 1,623,500 inhabitants, of whom 1,506,324 were Polish, 15,878 Germans, 3136 held other identifications; the war past and national identification of another 98,145 individuals was under inquiry (Dziurok and Kaczmarek 2007, 549). By the Spring of 1945, the Polish Provisional Government of National Unity had already launched a campaign aimed at deporting Germans. Transports for pre-war German citizens (*Reichsdeutsche*) were organized and those whose stay was considered especially harmful, such as teachers, were given priority of departure (Sakson 1998, 62, 72). These teachers lost their jobs following the regulation of 22 May 1945 issued by the Curatorial of the Silesian School District in Katowice forbidding their further employment (Jaworski 2004, 209). No figures are available of the exact number of teachers leaving the region after World War II. Overall figures show that between 1945 and 1950, 54,841 Germans from East Upper Silesia had been asked or were forced to leave (Łempiński 1979, 162, 217, 220, 255).

Along with differences in the size of the regions and the number of inhabitants and migrants, there is a difference in the nature of early post-war political regimes. Whereas nationalization in Belgium focused on the restoration of parliamentary democracy (Conway 2012, 125), in Poland it concentrated on the installation of a communist regime (Zaremba 2001, 135). We explore whether, despite the dissimilar conditions in both regions, a comparison of teachers during renationalization campaigns enables the detection of similar developments.

Research question, sources and methodology

This article focuses on teachers in two European border regions during renationalization campaigns carried out in the early post-war period. It researches relationships between nationalization policies, the selection of teachers, the role of teachers and teachers' attempts to give meaning to nationalization.

Historiography started to investigate the time after World War II in the Eupen–St. Vith–Malmedy region in the 1990s. The most prevalent studies researched the political cleansing of collaborators and indicated that post-war purification also affected teachers (Brüll 2011, 156; Kleu 2007, 77). Thanks to the recent opening of the archive of the Government District Eupen–St. Vith–Malmedy, a deeper insight into the selection of teachers and a better understanding of the role of teachers could be obtained. An exhaustive

search for the published and archived testimonies of teachers, family members and pupils was carried out in order to shed light on the way teachers gave meaning to nationalizing policies. Early post-war renationalization in East Upper Silesia has been investigated in much more detail and studies on schools in the Polish People's Republic have also been carried out (Hofmann 2000; Kosiński 2006, 111). Information on the selection and role of teachers is therefore provided on the basis of an in-depth literature study. The testimonies of teachers and pupils were selected from archived and published sources gathered by Polish sociologists during communism, as well as from recently published autobiographical volumes.

The research findings of the two regions are placed next to each other in what Kocka and Haupt would call an asymmetrical comparison. Without offering a systematically worked out comparison, the article shows that the research findings on the Belgian region can be understood more broadly thanks to comparing them with the Polish one (Haupt and Kocka 2009, 5). Comparisons of border regions rarely take place; most studies are limited to a region situated on the border of two neighboring nation-states. Comparing border regions in Western and Eastern Europe, something, for example, Tara Zahra worked out with reference to nationalization processes in French and Czechoslovakian borderlands, is even more seldom practiced (Zahra 2008b). Although some edited volumes proclaim to compare border regions in pan-Europe, they consist of splendid abstract introductions after which single case-study chapters follow (Duhamelle, Kossert, and Struck 2007; François, Seifarth, and Struck 2007; Lemberg 2000; Loew, Pletzing, and Serrier 2006).

Selecting the right teachers in the Eupen–St. Vith–Malmedy region

A letter of the Eupen–St.Vith–Malmedy region's mayors from 7 September 1939 reminded local teachers to act according to the Belgian decree of 1935 obliging teachers to remain in service in wartime. However, in January 1940, the Belgian Ministry of Education informed teachers living outside of the region but commuting to schools in the border region that they were no longer in charge (Lejeune 2007, 141–143). In addition, evacuation transports brought teachers living in the border region to more centrally located Belgian areas. For example, on 15 April 1940, 20 of the local pre-war teachers (approximately half) left the city of Eupen together with their family members (Lejeune 2005, 143).³ It is unknown how many teachers in addition left the region on their own initiative. Despite the fact that the teachers who stayed were officially paid by the German state from the annexation on 10 May 1940 onward, only in September 1944 did the Belgian Government-in-exile in London officially fire the ones still professionally active in the region (Kleu 2007, 79). During the war, the scarcity of local educational personnel was compensated for with the influx of German teachers. They carried out the mission to bring up a new generation of monolingual German youth devoting their lives to the *Reich* (Schärer 1978, 217).

After liberation, the number of local educational personnel had dropped from 250 in the war years to 110 (of whom 55 were women), mostly because of men who had been enrolled in the Wehrmacht did not return home until months later (Lejeune 2007, 141). A list from September 1945 (now kept in the archive of the Government District) consists of 110 teachers and the names of 34 are crossed out.⁴ It offers the first archival proof of the effects of the special purification campaign launched among teachers who had been active under the German regime. The number of teachers who were suspected of collaboration and needed to quit teaching increased rapidly.⁵ By 1947, 144 of the 250 local teachers

who had continued teaching were at least temporarily discharged from their position (Lejeune 2007, 143).⁶ It is impossible to trace back how many of these teachers were among the 1325 male citizens who, along with their families, moved to post-war occupied Germany after Belgian courts had annulled their Belgian citizenship, since sources do not give information about their professional activities (Lejeune 2007, 83–85).

At the same time, new educational personnel were appointed. A policy measure prevented municipalities in the border region from appointing their educational personnel for four years (Lejeune 2007, 43). Unlike in the mainland, teachers were selected by the Ministry of Education, and jobs were made more attractive through a bonus compensating for the harsh working conditions in the partly devastated border region, a small wage supplement for daily commutes to the region, or a bigger one in case of a settlement (Lejeune 2007, 148, 228).⁷ The Archive of the Governmental District reveals that between 1945 and 1947, 191 teachers (of whom 75 were women) were nominated.⁸

A list from 1947 covering the staff of primary schools in 9 out of the 26 border municipalities is a source of considerable insight into the influence of the campaign on the composition of educational staff. Since it contains information on small cities and municipalities, the list can be considered representative (Table 1).

Among the total of 70 teachers, 45 enjoyed continuous employment since the pre-war period. Ten of these 45 were born in the region and returned from evacuation once the war was over.⁹ The largest number of teachers consisted of pre-war commuters who had stopped teaching in the region following the recommendation of the Ministry of Education in 1940, and now returned to their pre-war positions. The list also named a teacher who was born in Aachen and already lived in Belgium before the war, as did other German citizens.¹⁰ There were 25 teachers who were employed in the region after the liberation. One young local teacher entered the labor force after the war, while two older locals had most probably officially resigned from their teaching jobs during the war. The majority of newly appointed teachers (20) were commuters coming from the Wallonian provinces Luxembourg and Liège. Fourteen of them were born after 1920 and entered the labor force for the first time. In addition, six older teachers from Wallonian provinces made their way to the region. The Ministry of Education's policy of granting commuter teachers better working conditions than those who did not have to commute clearly had its effects. The

Table 1. Teaching staff in primary schools in 9 out of 26 municipalities of the Eupen–St. Vith–Malmédy region (1947).^a

	Amount
Total amount of teachers	70
Total amount of female teachers	31
Amount of teachers continuously employed since the pre-war period	45
Local teachers	10
Pre-war commuters	30
Teachers born in Germany	1
No accurate data available	4
Amount of teachers for the first time employed in the region after the liberation	25
Local young teachers	1
Young commuters	14
Local old teachers	2
Old commuters	6
No accurate data available	2

^aBezirkskommissariat. File 284. Liste du personnel enseignant. Janvier 1947.

list shows that only 20% of the teachers employed in part of the border region in 1947 were locals, and that all other teachers were brought in from the Belgian mainland. The immense impact this had on life in the schools and on the professional lives of local teachers who were refused further teaching opportunities is examined in greater depth below.

In 1950, municipalities regained their right to appoint educational personnel. As most of the teachers appointed in the years before had received permanent positions, possibilities to reverse the employment strategy of the Ministry of Education were limited. Municipalities could replace formerly appointed teachers if they retired, resigned or seriously misbehaved.¹¹ In the District Archive, I found 47 appointments for the canton of Eupen between 1950 and 1956.¹² Teachers leaving the work force were replaced by young local teachers who had finished their degrees in Wallonia.¹³ The correspondence between the school inspector J. Detilleux working for the Ministry of Education and the District Commissioner H. Hoen shows that this practice was not uncontroversial. In his letter of 24 December 1954, the inspector worried that by opting for local teachers, municipalities destroyed “the joyful effects of the politics implemented in the East-Cantons by the government”. The District Commissioner responded by pointing to the municipalities’ full responsibility for appointing the personnel.¹⁴

Detilleux’s fear was fuelled by the fact that municipalities had been given the right to reconsider the situation of unemployed local teachers at the end of 1954. A paper of 19 March 1955 held in the Archive of the Governmental District lists 66 decisions taken by municipality councils following appeals of individual teachers. Five teachers were considered unsuitable for future employment, as they had moved to Germany where they were teaching. Six were given the guarantee of a position as soon as a teaching vacancy matching their profile appeared. The majority of unemployed local teachers were to be re-integrated, that is, to be appointed after having gone through a procedure checking their teaching capacities, or their case would be reconsidered in the future and lead to availability, reintegration or retirement. The fact that municipality councils took decisions behind closed doors irritated the Ministry of Education. A letter to the District Commissioner with requests for more information on the employment of formerly condemned collaborationists shows frustration about the incapability to intervene (Table 2).¹⁵

The role of teachers in the Eupen–St. Vith–Malmédy Region in the early post-war period

In 1948, the Mayor of Eupen, Hugo Zimmerman, tried to explain why employed teachers in the region received relatively better conditions than before and better conditions than anywhere else in Belgium:

If we want all people here to really and sincerely think, feel and act as Belgians, we need to reeducate our people with the help of nationally conscious teachers. By means of appropriate rules concerning the language issue, for our workers as well as for our

Table 2. Municipal decisions 1954–1955 regarding unemployed local teachers (66).^a

Unsuitable	5
Available	6
Favorable for revision	27
Reintegration	27
Without opinion	1

^aBezirkskommissariat. File 287. Lettre de H. Hoen à Monsieur le Gouverneur de la Province de et à Liège 9.3.1955.

studying youth, we need to give the opportunity to get in a closer contact with the core of the country.¹⁶

Nationally conscious teachers were to play a pivotal role in the nationalization campaign, whose official aim was “the equality in all respects of the region’s inhabitants with those from the other parts of the country”¹⁷ but as by the Minister of Education Auguste Buisseret simply put as: “One has to tear out what is obnoxious in German culture.”¹⁸ The teachers were seen as the heralds of the homogenization between the border region and the mainland. By educating a new generation of enthusiastic citizens who would act as advocates of an invented shared national feeling, they could ensure the stability of the national borders.

The Belgian nation-state’s concern for equal treatment of the border region in comparison to the rest of the country led to the introduction of five special measures, of which three were related to education. This clearly shows the importance of education in the renationalization campaign. The first measure, the appointment of educational personnel, is discussed above. In addition, by increasing compulsory education from the age of 14–16, the government aimed at providing two more years of school to those youngsters most exposed to education under the German regime (Lejeune 2007, 43). For this purpose, a type of secondary school was set up under the control of the Ministry of Education. Before the war, all regional schools had been provided for by the Catholic Church, which received state subsidies and accepted municipal control. Catholic primary schools trained boys to become farmers and girls to become housewives until they were 14 years old. Only a small number of pupils received further training in one of the three regional classic grammar schools. Two new vocational schools aimed to prepare youngsters for a career in manufacturing in the Wallonian industry. Although these schools were closed after two years, they saw their successors in Royal Athena, fully developed state-owned secondary schools competing with the grammar schools. Archival sources indicate for example that in 1947, the Royal Atheneum in Malmedy employed 20 teachers, instead of 18 in the Collège Patronné in Eupen.¹⁹ At the end of his career as a District Commissioner, H. Hoen reflected:

Well-equipped vocational schools were to be founded, because the nation needed excellently trained craftsmen, urgently by that time, and still for a long time afterwards. The welfare of the future labour force was not the only reason why the government wanted to prepare these measures, they also wanted to win over the parents, who were concerned about their children’s future, and that was perhaps the best national advertising campaign for Belgium.²⁰

Offering more children the perspective of a career was an attempt to overcome the obstacles encountered during the war and was considered a powerful means to bind them to the nation-state. The Ministry of Education could control such training much easily in its state-owned schools than in the Catholic ones, and the higher entrance fee for the latter seemed to encourage a flow to the former. The increase in vocational schools was a significant feature of the process of democratizing the Belgian post-war school system, but the recent Belgian past of the Eupen–St.Vith–Malmedy region and the invasive educational policy in the early post-war period showed the phenomenon much more overtly here than further inland (Witte and Van Velthoven 2010, 137–140).

The children’s horizon of thinking needed to change from East to West. The tolerant attitude toward German influences during the interwar years was believed to have contributed to the success of separatist political movements, which needed to be prevented from taking root again (Schmitz 1993, 21). In contrast to the bilingual policy from the interwar years, the French language became omnipresent. Many of the immigrating teachers did not speak any German, and after an intense introduction to the French language, French

became the only language for children from their fifth class onward. Coursebooks were screened for the way they depicted Germany and a photograph of King Baudouin the First became a fixture in all classrooms (Kleu 2007, 86–88, 127). Library policy offers a further example of how Belgian state agencies tried to enforce the Belgian culture in the region. When a law was introduced in 1952 concerning the subsidizing of public libraries, prescribing subsidies to be granted regardless of the book acquisition policy pursued at a local level, representatives of the Ministry of Education insisted that, through the school inspectorate, local French-speaking teachers would be asked to assist local librarians in their task. This would ensure state subsidies were used for buying books in French, whereas local municipalities could continue to invest their budget in buying German books.²¹

The nationalization campaign was deeply influential for as long as the German–Belgian political relations remained tense. In an era when television broadcasting started to cross national borders (1952), and the European Coal and Steel Community came into being (1951), the Belgian–German border remained one of the most difficult to cross in Western Europe (Lejeune 2007, 231). In 1956, both states submitted to international developments and signed a bilateral agreement finalizing the course of the border-line, enhancing easier border crossing and facilitating cultural exchange.

Teachers giving meaning to renationalization in the Eupen–St. Vith–Malmédy region

The exhaustive collection of twenty nine archived or published (fragments of) testimonies of teachers, family members and pupils gathered for this article is not representative of the profile of the early post-war educational staff.²² No testimonies focus on teachers starting to commute to the region after the war or on local teachers whose careers were not affected by the renationalization campaign. Only two testimonies give information about the life practices of pre-war commuter teachers. The son of a commuter teacher, René Thomas, recalled, for example:

My father came from the province of Luxembourg. His birthplace was Parette, which is situated 20 kilometers from Arlon (. . .) My parents were teachers and lived in a service house, because my father was working as the Head Teacher in Walhorn.

On the day of the German invasion, the whole family flew to inner Belgium. René continued: “He spent the long war years in Parette with his family. A third son, Jo, was born in these years. After the war, my family returned to Walhorn and my parents resumed teaching.”²³

Most of the testimonies offer insights into the practices of teachers affected by the renationalization campaign. Thirteen of them were selected for a narrative reading. These testimonies concern either teachers who in the end received the right to teach in Belgium, or left their Belgian teaching position for good. Representative for the first type of testimonies (six in total) is the life path of Johann Josef Genotte. Johan was born in 1920, received his teachers’ degree in 1939 and was called up for compulsory Belgian military service afterwards. When Germany annexed the border territory, he served in the Belgian army until the country capitulated, and then spent a short period of time in France as a prisoner of war.²⁴ Johann started teaching in the annexed border region on 1 September 1940 as an assistant teacher.²⁵ From September 1941 onward, men from the region could be recruited for the Wehrmacht. Johann was called up in 1943 (Quadflieg 2008).²⁶ He was refused further teaching after the war and worked on

a farm until he was employed by the municipality of Raeren on a temporary basis in October 1952, and as a tenured teacher in August 1961.²⁷

Willy Havenith's life path is a representative of the second type of testimonies, providing information about five male teachers who started teaching in Germany, and about two female teachers who became housewives in post-war Belgium, not an unusual career for women in these times. Because we have no other data about teachers who left the Belgian educational labor force, these testimonies offer interesting insights. Willy would have received his teachers' degree in June 1940 had his home town not been invaded a month earlier.²⁸ Just like Johann Genotte, he became a local assistant teacher and was called up for service in 1943. He made use of that opportunity to finish his teaching degree in Dortmund. Since he could not enter the Belgian educational labor force after the war, Willy Havenith took up a job as a clerk in a dairy business.²⁹ Willy kept on being refused for teaching opportunities in his birth region, even after passing a Belgian teaching examination in French in 1953. Following the bilateral agreement of 1956, he moved across the border and started teaching in the Aachen District, where he ended his career as a Deputy Headmaster of a secondary school.³⁰

In their testimonies most narrators stressed the pro-Belgian feelings of teachers. Johann Genotte, for example, pointed out that his behavior was not without danger during the war:

A German woman came along who wanted to buy something from me and, because I did not sell her anything, she said to me, "I might have guessed! The fat man up the hill told me you openly hate Germans." (...) And then another said, "Watch out! The way you're going, this won't end well."³¹

Overt pro-German attitudes are absent in the testimonies, which corresponds to the collective shame inhabitants carry about the region's war past (Fickers 2004). Nevertheless, implicit positive messages can be traced back, such as in the testimony of the wife of Willy Havenith:

I did not have the impression that Willy felt sorry he could not teach in Belgium. He was very satisfied with his job in the school of Monschau (...).³²

The material situation of unemployed local teachers in the early post-war period is often presented as one where they are forced to take up employment in Germany despite their pro-Belgian sentiments, as in the narration of this anonymized child:

From 1951 onward all siblings one after the other started their higher education (...) In the end, in 1953, the financial situation forced father to take up a job as tenured elementary school teacher in Germany. This was possible because, given a Decree from 1942, he and all family members possessed both Belgian and German citizenship. Our parents had difficulties enduring both the separation from their children and the move itself, since they were and remained Eifler inhabitants with body and soul!³³ (Lejeune and Klausner 2008, 293)

Narrators present local teachers as innocent victims of the post-war renationalization campaign whose intentions for continuing teaching during the war were wrongly interpreted. Swearing loyalty to the Führer and party membership in the Nazi Party, important criteria in the post-war judgment of war collaboration, recur in the testimonies. A majority of interviewees, like Ms Johanna Knippert, tried to get away from the topic of swearing loyalty during the interview: "Did I have to take the oath during the war? I can't say precisely anymore."³⁴

Only Herbert Schumacher elaborated. Just like Willy Havenith, he had not finished his Belgian teaching degree when Germany invaded and had worked as an assistant teacher. Unlike Willy, however, he took a Belgian course in the early post-war and received his

teaching certificate in 1948. Herbert was allowed to take the exam since he had not sworn loyalty. Pointing out that requirements during the war had differed in the region, Herbert explained he had merely done what had been asked of him, just like other teachers in other municipalities. In the post-war period that turned out to be lucky for him, and unlucky for others:

I did not take the German oath. It was never demanded of me. The situation in Hückelhoven was totally different (then in other municipalities-MV). They were so acquainted with us (...) they were not so German-minded (...) I cried when I got the Belgian diploma. I was practically the only one here in Belgium. I don't know anybody else. All became teachers in Germany (...) there were many of them (...). I was lucky.³⁵

Most narrators also try to circumvent the topic of Nazi Party membership. In the rare cases membership is mentioned, teachers are narrated as passive receivers of a membership card. An anonymized child of a deceased teacher recalled:

At the end of 1941 or at the beginning of 1942 our father started to have problems with the Nazi Party. Officially, civil servants did not need to become party members. But he soon got into trouble! A deadline was imposed for people who had refused party membership: one could either join the party or leave school service. A well-meaning friend wrote our father's name on the last night of the deadline on the party's list, without his knowledge by the way. In this way he became a party member.³⁶ (Lejeune and Klausner 2008, 288)

Although such cases may have taken place, it is difficult to believe that there were no local teachers who became party members in a more active way.

Selecting the right teachers in the East-Upper Silesia region

After liberation, much effort was invested into the deportation of Germans, including the teachers who had been brought in during the war from the mainland, and the verification of local inhabitants of Slavic descent according to their war classification in the *Volksliste*. That crucial divide among the population was introduced in 1941 and distinguished into four categories: people who had been involved in pre-war pro-German activities (I), those who were considered to have kept their *Germanness* (II), polonized individuals of German descent (III) and polonized persons who were believed to be able to undergo *Regermanization* (IV). Categorized people had been promised the same rights as Germans, including the possibility to work as assistant teachers, but had also been faced with the obligations, such as recruitment in the Wehrmacht (Czapliński 2002, 409). Most local pre-war Polish teachers remained uncategorized during the war, and many who had not been arrested, sent away or executed had continued their profession in secret (Trzebiatowski 1983, 9; Walczak 1987, 57–66).

In the early post-war period, the first category people, like *Reichsdeutsche*, were automatically subjected to transfer, whereas the second category people had court pronounce its verdict on their individual case, and the third and fourth category people needed to swear loyalty to the Polish post-war state (Hofmann 2000, 265). Historiography generally presents the verification as a political choice between the German and Polish national or ethnic identification, whereas in practice, many people let social and psychological preferences, such as the right to stay if declared Polish, prevail (Popieliński 2006, 407). Although the government by the end of 1946 declared its verification program successfully completed, the resistance of local Upper Silesians remained significant and tensions over language and property rights continued (Ther 2000, 429). In the end, about 850,000 Upper Silesians were verified (Bahr, Breyer, and Buchhofer 1975, 70).

Let us try to reconstruct the composition of the educational staff in the East-Upper Silesia region after World War II. Next to Reichsdeutsche and unverified teachers, other pre-war teachers did not return to the post-war educational workforce (Jaworski 2004, 209). Estimates put the death rate of Polish-speaking teachers during World War II at 30% of the pre-war corps (Walczak 1987, 793). Moreover, an indefinable number of teachers left the profession because they could not identify with the new regime (Starościak and Piotrowski 1975, 418). As a result, the qualification standards of the Ministry of Education appointing urgently needed teachers were necessarily minimal (Szlufrik 1980, 171). Poles from central Poland, from pre-war Eastern Poland, and forced laborers deported during the war to the USSR, were urged to resettle in the Western borderlands and to take up employment as teachers (Hofmann 2000, 112 and further). Young Polish teachers were favored ahead of their pre-war colleagues, while party membership became an important criterion for receiving a teacher's position (Kosiński 2006, 112–113). A recent study on the ideological influence of political parties on pedagogical secondary schools in the years 1944–1956 shows how non-party members were removed from teaching positions all over post-war Poland, but the intensity with which this was carried out was greatest in Silesia. In 1950, only 15% of teachers of Silesian pedagogical secondary schools did not have the politically required qualifications (Chmielewski 2006, 77, 84, 89).

Although the information available in publications on the composition of educational staff in East Upper Silesia is not as detailed as the Belgian archive findings offered here, it is clear that the renationalization campaigns in both border regions resulted in similar teachers' profiles.

The role of teachers in East Upper Silesia in the early post-war period

As was the case in the German–Belgian borderlands, education was considered a crucial tool to polonize East Upper Silesia and transform it into an integral part of the nation-state. As early as June 1945, an All-Polish Educational Meeting organized by the Communist Committee preceding the post-war government was asking for:

The organisation, as soon as possible, of intellectuals, teachers and educational activists, who, going to the West, will become a decisive factor in the great unification of the ancient Polish lands.³⁷

The teachers were seen as the front runners of the polonization of the Western territories. Courses aimed not only at alphabetization and upgrading the knowledge of the Polish language, but also of the (local) history and geography. Polonization could bring the different groups who already lived or came to settle in the region closer to each other. When inhabitants became infused with the same language and the same vision of the region's past, their social inclusion within the national Polish state seemed increasingly possible (Magierska 1978, 248).

Unlike in Belgium, the war devastation in Poland was immense, the post-war border changes were much greater and the state was simply poorer. It would last until the 1950s, when investments in the educational sector were brought into line with political intentions. Just as in Belgium this led to an allocation of didactic means incomparable with any previous moment in the country's history (Szlufrik 1980, 267). Figures indicate that whereas in 1938, 4870 primary school teachers were teaching in 807 schools in Polish Silesia, by 1945 those numbers had dropped to 2945 teachers employed in the 427 operating primary schools (Snoch 1998, 38).³⁸ By 1955, the amount of primary school teachers had tripled to 8943 and the amount of schools to 1201.³⁹

This rise took place within the framework of the ideological offensive launched after the forged elections in 1947. A new educational commission detailed how schools were to bring up youngsters loyal to the new regime (Kosiński 2006, 69). It dictated the closure of privately owned schools, favored children of lower social backgrounds and developed a program preparing these children for blue-collar work in state agricultural companies or coal mines. Teachers also needed to strictly follow the handbooks printed by a monopolistic state-owned series of publishing houses, and a transformation of local libraries into centers for socialist education occurred (Kosiński 2006, 26–35). “A book”, as a note of the Ministry of Education on the revision of book collections from those years reads, “is like a soldier. It needs to prepare adequately to fulfil its duty”.⁴⁰

Although weaker social ties in the borderlands made people more vulnerable to national infiltration than in the mainland, until the late 1940s there were whole villages of unverified inhabitants where the population had an autarchic lifestyle. Local inhabitants were convinced that it was wiser to learn their agricultural profession from their parents than from the teachers brought in who were unfamiliar with the land (Snoch 1998, 71). The riots of 1956, which started in Poznań but spread throughout the whole country, led to a more conciliatory approach from the communist authorities. National reforms included educational changes such as the return of pre-war teachers who had been fired in the 1940s, more freedom in the teaching of humanistic school topics and higher requirements for teachers (Kosiński 2006, 40–41). What the destabilization brought to the surface was that the nationalization campaign had not resolved the differences between locals and immigrants (Linek 2000, 389). Polish authorities saw only one solution and signed agreements with both German states enabling about 275,000 persons from Poland to migrate westwards between 1955 and the beginning of 1959 (Stola 2010, 473, 480–481). The loss of population was partly compensated for by the influx of Poles released from Soviet working camps (Ruchniewicz 2000).

Teachers giving meaning to renationalization in East Upper Silesia

Thirty three testimonies collected for this article provide information about early post-war teachers’ practices. Most of these testimonies were initially gathered by Polish scientific institutes, which from the mid-1950s onward launched memoir competitions and used the incoming materials for sociological research. The findings and published memoirs supported the idea of successful economic progress and social integration (Řezník 2009, 228). Because the collection of the scientific institute in East Upper Silesia, the Katowice Institute, was lost, testimonies archived in other institutes were taken into account. A narrative reading of four testimonies providing information about teachers’ practices in East Upper Silesia is contextualized by means of an interpretation of 29 testimonies from the Warmia and Masuria region (the former East Prussia region). It is the latter, out of all the Western provinces of Poland, that has most in common with East Upper Silesia. Unlike the other Western provinces, up to 80% of the population remained local in the early post-war period in both regions, a percentage that only started to drop seriously in the middle of the 1950s (Kaszuba 2002, 457; Sakson 1998, 81).⁴¹

My collection contains reports of school inspectors (5), reports of teachers sent to school inspectorates (17), testimonies of pre-war teachers (3), testimonies of teachers starting employment after World War II (6), one testimony of a German teacher evacuated from East Prussia at the end of the war (Harvey 2003, 287–288) and two testimonies of pupils. As is also true of the Belgian case, the testimonies are not representative of teachers’ practices in the early post-war period. The collection contains neither testimonies

of German teachers leaving East Upper Silesia at the end of the war, nor ego documents of older local teachers. The testimonies present the practices of immigrating older teachers, immigrating younger teachers and local younger teachers.

A research on testimonies of older teachers migrating to the Western provinces in the early post-war period was carried out by sociologists Andrzej Kwilecki and Józef Chałasiński in the 1950s and 1960s. Both pointed to the heroic self-representation of teachers as proliferators of the Polish culture. Whereas Kwilecki placed the accent on what he called “the ideological pioneering role of teachers”, Chałasiński’s colleague, more critical toward the communist regime, also showed the limited possibilities of the teachers’ work and the internal hesitations they faced (Gołębowski 1969, 31; Kwilecki 1970, 136). The testimony of a school inspector migrating from central Poland to Katowice reflects on that limited influence as follows:

The devastation of cities and many towns after the war, the harsh struggle for survival, the absence of the majority of breadwinners, the continuous fascist propaganda about the return of Germans to Silesia, all that did not mobilise the local youth’s attitude to Polish schools. The percentage of youth not going to school was astonishing.⁴²

Archived ego documents of pupils shed light on practices of young teachers starting their career in East Upper Silesia after World War II. In 1983, Maria Kryweń-Golda, who had a Polish-speaking mother and a German-speaking father, recalled with enthusiasm the influence of immigrating Polish teachers on her polonization:

Mama spoke Polish very well of course; it was her mother tongue. Unfortunately I was in a terrible situation. Mama signed me up for a Polish secondary school, and, well, then it started! (...) In this difficult time the attitude of wonderful Polish teachers to us “locals” was heavenly. (...) They were understanding and patient. For me, they were one of the synonyms of “Holy Poland”.⁴³

Rather less enthusiasm is expressed in this rare recent testimony of a pupil voicing his frustration at the negative impact of the Polish teaching. Although Heinrich Piskorski was born in former East Prussia, his situation is comparable to many local pupils of East Upper Silesia:

Once a Polish woman and her daughter came to us and said she had moved to Linów to teach all children. Erwin and I were to go to a Polish school. It was not far and the teaching would not do us any harm. There were two other boys in the school. Werner and Walter K. I don’t remember other German children went to that Polish school, apart from the four of us. I didn’t learn with great enthusiasm and that’s not so surprising, as I didn’t understand a word of Polish.⁴⁴

Heinrich would feel himself as an outsider until he migrated to Western Germany at the end of the 1950s. During the interview, he preferred to speak German.

Two testimonies published by Józef Chałasiński shed light on practices of local young teachers from East Upper Silesia. Because the archive of his research is not yet available for research, only in the future will we know to what extent the testimonies he published were subjected to censorship. For instance, an anonymized woman born in 1937 left her village in order to study at a pedagogical institute in Raciborz. She started teaching in a primary school at the age of 17, and received additional training until she became a qualified teacher in 1956. She was then sent to her birth village and recalled:

Boys were only interested in having fun, drinking vodka, fighting (...) Now they started to read books from the library and vocal talents, actors and soccer players were found ... Our group increased little by little. Our good example worked (...) I would like to thank my Fatherland and the people’s authorities for all their goodness and especially for ensuring free development and learning.⁴⁵

In their narrations, the two teachers glorify the social and cultural change they could contribute to and thank communist authorities for possibilities of social advancement.

Conclusion

Scrutiny of early post-war renationalization processes in Europe ought to prompt us to rethink some of our conceptions about European diversity and nationalism, and find a way to get beyond the typical east/west binaries of traditional historiography. For example, while it has generally been assumed that Central Europe was a unique location for intense renationalization in the early post-war period, this text reveals that the Belgian and Polish renationalization campaigns shared similar motives and mobilization strategies.

As nationalization processes tend to show themselves more overtly in borderlands, this article investigates the relationship between diversity and nationalism by focusing on two similar regions: the Belgian and Polish borderlands that switched sovereignty to the Third Reich at the beginning of World War II, and reverted to Belgium and Poland afterwards. More specifically, it takes as a starting point the respective educational policies of the two countries. Both the Belgian and Polish authorities considered education a primary road to nationhood and designated a special role for teachers in the borderlands, subjecting them to intense nationalization campaigns between 1945 and 1956. This article makes an asymmetrical comparison of these nationalization campaigns and attempts to unravel how the authorities composed educational staff for their borderlands, what nationalizing role was envisioned for teachers and how teachers gave meaning to their early post-war professional practices.

In her article “The ‘Minority Problem’ and National Classification in the French and Czechoslovak Borderlands”, Tara Zahra was able to break through the usual east/west binaries (and tell an entirely different story to the one presented by the traditional historiography) by bringing to the surface the fact that linguistic diversity in the interwar years was met with significantly harsher policies of national classification in France than in Czechoslovakia (Zahra 2008b, 165). Similarly, my article offers a fresh insight into the shapes of the European story about diversity and nationalism in the post-war Western and Eastern borderlands where minorities encountered more radical nationalist mobilization than before.

The remaking of nations on both the Belgian and Polish borders entailed the outmigration of undesired teachers, the verification of local teachers and the influx of selected new ones. Most Germans had left the Eupen–St.Vith–Malmedy region before the end of the war, whereas many Germans moved away from East Upper Silesia within the following years. The emigration from Poland was often forced upon them, but it was also true that Belgian court cases often left locals deprived of a Belgian citizenship with no other possibility than to emigrate. In both regions, local teachers judged to have been sympathetic to the German war regime lost – either temporarily or otherwise – their civil rights and teaching possibilities. A carefully selected corps of teachers from the mainland was brought into both the Polish and Belgian borderlands.

Regardless of their differences in ideology, Belgian and Polish authorities both believed that teachers could offer children the perspective of a meaningful future within the post-war national set-up. Policy measures therefore endeavored to reach more children and to keep those children for a longer time in school. The relative European tolerance of the interwar years was exchanged for a harsher unilingual language policy, the screening of handbooks and suchlike.

The lives of teachers were heavily influenced by the renationalization campaigns. An intensive search for the existing testimonies made it possible to offer a narrative reading of

the way teachers gave meaning to their post-war professional practices. Whereas Belgian testimonies shed light only on the self-victimized narrations of local teachers affected by the purification campaign, Polish testimonies give voice only to immigrating teachers who personally embodied the mission to nationalize the borderland. The selectiveness of the existing ego sources works complementarily, as teachers with similar profiles lived in Belgian and Polish borderlands. A comparison of these research findings serves to broaden our knowledge of both border regions, the variety of teachers' life experiences and the narrative ways of presenting them.

With earlier national political stabilization, the smaller size of the border region, and the smaller war devastation, the early post-war renationalization campaign in Belgium was more easily realized there than in Poland. But its effects were later mitigated. The differences in entrance fees for Catholic and non-Catholic secondary schools became the central topic of a great national debate on the role of religion in society. By subsidizing both systems, the so-called School Pact from 1958 consolidated confessional peace and institutionalized segmented societal pluralism (Depaepe 1998, 250). Later, the political agenda opened the door for language disputes between the Flemish and the Walloons. The Belgian–German borderland highly benefitted from this, leading to the region receiving cultural autonomy at the beginning of the 1970s. The Polish national policy became much more conciliatory after the 1956 protests, but later hardened again. Differences in political regimes and practices entailed a further differentiation between the Belgian and Polish border regions in the years to follow. It is hoped that this explorative comparison might open the path to a productive debate on new avenues to pursue in further research.

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Notes

1. The figure does not include trans-Olza Silesia, which had been returned to Poland following the Munich Agreement of 1938.
2. Next to the pre-war Polish East-Upper Silesia region, the Silesia Voivodeship encompassed what had been called the Regierungsbezirk Oppeln until 1945 and the Zagłębia Dąbrowskie region. The latter belonged to the Kielce Voivodeship in the interwar period and became included within the Regierungsbezirk of Katowice during World War II. Detailed regional statistical figures provided information concerning the surface area and number of inhabitants of the pre-war East-Upper Silesia terrain for the years 1945 and 1950.
3. Archive Stadt Eupen. Nachkriegszeit Sig. Nr. C.4.8.II. 1373 Emigranten. Verzeichnisse der Personen die nach dem 10 Mai 1940 in das Innere des Landes ausgewandert sind. Figures of official transports are only available for persons domiciled in Eupen.
4. Archive Bezirkskommissariat (further Bezirkskommissariat). File 285. Liste des membres du personnel enseignant en cause 1945.
5. Royal Belgian Archive Eupen. GS MAP 2 Gesetzesammlung. Mémorial administratif de la Province de Liège. Tome CXXXVIII, 1945, deuxième semestre. "Membres du personnel enseignant. . ."; see also the Royal Decree of, for example, 5 September 1945.
6. Bezirkskommissariat. File 283, 284 and following files. For the right to appeal, see the Royal Decree of 9 April 1951.
7. Bezirkskommissariat. File 303. Unterrichtspersonal. Gehaltszulage.

8. Bezirkskommissariat. File 285. See the Royal Decrees of 29 March 1946, 6 June 1946, 6 July 1946, 13 August 1946, 27 August 1946, 17 December 1946, 7 January 1947, 30 January 1947, 18 March 1947 and 11 April 1947; Lettre de H. Hoen aux bourgmestres de 12 February 1946.
9. Bezirkskommissariat. File 313. Frau Dizelle, Lehrerin. Lettre du personnel des écoles industrielles et ménagères du soir à Monsieur le Bourgmestre de Malmédy (no date).
10. See, for example, also: Archive Stadt Eupen. Nachkriegszeit Sig. Nr. C.4.8.II. Map 1389 Unterlagen betr. die Unterstützung von Familien von Reichsdeutschen, die vor 1940 nach Eupen umgesiedelt sind.
11. See, for example: Bezirkskommissariat File 291. Du registre aux délibérations du conseil à Raeren de 2 June 1953.
12. Bezirkskommissariat. Files 289, 290, 291.
13. For an example of a young teacher, see Bezirkskommissariat. File 290, Registre aux délibérations du Conseil Raeren 16 October 1952 Françoise Hurdebise.
14. Bezirkskommissariat. File 291. Lettre de H. Hoen à J. Dédilleux de 29 December 1954.
15. Bezirkskommissariat. File 291. Lettre de division délégué à Brabant à H. Hoen 28 February 1956.
16. Zimmerman on a meeting with the Belgian Minister of Internal Affairs and other mayors of the Eupen–St.Vith–Malmedy District in 1948 (*Grenz-Echo*, 20 January, 1948, pp. 3–4).
17. Belgian Royal Archive Eupen, H. Hoen, *Commissariat d'arrondissement adjoint 1945–1965*, p. 25.
18. *Le Soir*, 19 June, 1946.
19. Bezirkskommissariat. File 299. 19 December 1947 Composition du corps professoral du Collège Patronné; 5 January 1947 Liste du personnel d'Athéné Royal de Malmédy.
20. Belgian Royal Archive Eupen, H. Hoen, *Exercice 1951*, p. 97.
21. Bezirkskommissariat. File 309. Réunion du 7 janvier 1952 concernant l'étude du plan d'éducation populaire pour les cantons de L'Est, p. 10.
22. Jenniges (2004), Lejeune and Klausner (2008), Mennicken (2005) (interviews are referred separately to below), Mertes (2005). Archive Zwischen Venn und Schneifel. Erlebnisberichte. IV, E, 41. René Thomas 10 May 1940 Auf der Flucht geboren ... 10 May 1940 (further: Thomas).
23. Thomas. See also Jenniges (2004, 76).
24. Interview. Josef Genotte, pp. 18–19.
25. Interview. Josef Genotte, p. 18; Interview with Mrs. Annemie Havenith, p. 15.
26. Interview mit seiner Ehefrau Annemie Havenith, p. 15.
27. Interview mit seiner Ehefrau Annemie Havenith, p. 15; Bezirkskommissariat. File 290. Du registre aux délibérations du conseil communal, séance 16 October 1952. Création d'un instituteur à titre provisoire, and file 295. Letter of H. Hoen to Monsieur Le Gouverneur de la Province de et à Liège 8 August 1961.
28. Interview mit seiner Ehefrau Annemie Havenith, p. 15.
29. Interview. Josef Genotte, p. 20; Interview mit seiner Ehefrau Annemie Havenith, p. 16.
30. Interview mit seiner Ehefrau Annemie Havenith, p. 16.
31. Interview. Josef Genotte, p. 18.
32. Interview mit seiner Ehefrau Annemie Havenith, p. 16.
33. See also the interview with Bruno Kalbuch, the son of the local teacher Jakob Kalbusch, in which he recalls how he needed to leave the comfortable teachers' service house (Mennicken 2005, 33).
34. Interview with Johanna Knippert, p. 26.
35. Interview with Herbert Schumacher, pp. 23–25.
36. See also the interview with Alois Neissen, p. 42.
37. Archive of New Acts, Warsaw, PKWN, Resort Oświaty, Wydział Reformy Szkolnej, Ogólny zjazd oświatowy 6.1945, p. 1.
38. In 1945, East Upper Silesia encompassed pre-war Polish Silesia as well as the Dąbrowa Basin.
39. *Rocznik* 1955, p. 98 and *Rocznik* 1956, p. 100, provide figures for the Voievodship of Katowice, since 1950 the administrative unit encompassing the pre-war Polish Silesia and the Dąbrowa Basin.
40. Archive of New Acts, ASS, Wybrane zagadnienia z zakresu opieki inspektora nad bibliotekami szk. 1949 r., 478/168, k. 55 (cited in Kosiński 2006, 131).
41. Unpublished testimonies were gathered in: Ośrodek Badań Naukowych (Olsztyn – OBN), Instytut Zachodni (Poznań – IZ) and Instytut Śląski (Opole – IŚ). Published testimonies

- were found in Chałasiński (1965), Dulczewski and Kwilecki (1970), Karp and Traba (2004), Harvey (2003), Wieczorka (1988), Filipkowski (1978) and Popiołek and Szefer (1970).
42. Popiołek and Szefer (1970, 102–104). Also Franciszek Iwanowski provides information about the disinterest of local children for Polish schools (Dulczewski and Kwilecki 1970, 634); archived school inspectors' reports and reports of teachers give insights in the material situation of schools: OBN file R-158.
 43. IŚ. Pamiętniki trzech pokoleń mieszkańców Ziemi Odzyskanych. Konkurs ogłoszony przez Instytut Śląski w Opolu i Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Pamiętnikarstwa w Warszawie w 1985 r. Zbiory Specjalne Biblioteki IŚ, A 3156. Vol. 98. Maria Kryweń-Golda, p. 5. See also: OBN R-13 and IZ Pamiętnik 67.
 44. Heinrich Piskorski in Karp and Traba (2004, 331). One can also read about negative attitudes of autochthons in, for example, OBN R-158-X-1, p. 9, Weronika Michałowska.
 45. Chałasiński (1965), testimonies no. 2979 and 3421 offer similar life paths: "Uczę w rodzinnej wsi": 669, 674; see also Filipkowski (1978, 169).

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