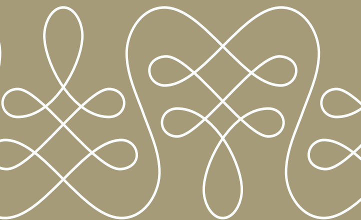
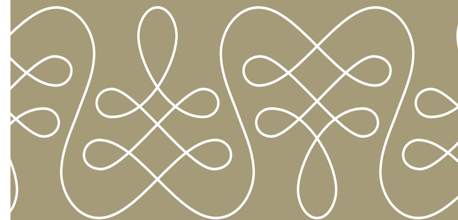
The

Hungarian Historical Review

New Series of Acta Historica Academiæ Scientiarum Hungaricæ

Émigré Communities

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East Central European Émigré Communities in the Low Countries: Agency, Transfers, Impact

Kim Christaens, Luke Dodds, and Tamás Scheibner
Special Editors of the Thematic Issue

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Civil Engagement and Cultural Transfers between Central and Eastern European Migrants and the Low Countries (from the 1930s to the Present): Introduction

Kim Christiaens
KADOC Documentation and Research Centre on Religion, Culture and Society, KU Leuven
kim.christiaens@kuleuven.be

Luke Dodds
KADOC Documentation and Research Centre on Religion, Culture and Society, KU Leuven
luke.dodds@kuleuven.be

Tamás Scheibner
HUN-REN Research Centre for the Humanities; ELTE University of Budapest
scheibner.tamas@abtk.hu

Recent historiographical trends have increasingly challenged the traditional narrative of 1989 as the "end of a contest" between East and West, the culmination of a long-standing ideological battle between two opposing, fortified, and ideologically-bound political camps.[1] In recent years, research has highlighted both the diversity of actors operating within the supposed Eastern "Bloc," alongside the interactions taking place across the "Iron Curtain." György Péteri, among others, has for almost two decades sought to "deconstruct" this popular notion and call instead for greater recognition of the multifaceted transnational flow and transfer of ideas, information, and people between East and West, replacing or at least supplementing the old terminologies with the more permeable conception of a "Nylon Curtain."[2] Central to this reconceptualization of Cold War history as a fluid and interconnected one is the attention given to the anti-communist émigrés and dissidents who engaged in heavy lifting both at home and from afar against state socialist regimes, the product of a decades-long movement to contest the "mock homogeneity" of the bipolar Cold War world.[3]

When subjected to the camera obscura of the popular imagination, the term "dissident" projects images of the trade unionists of NSZZ Solidarność in

1 Krastev, "The Spectre Haunting Europe," 89.
2 Péteri, "Nylon Curtain."
3 Mazurkiewicz, "Political Emigration from East Central Europe," 68.

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Poland or Czechoslovakia's Charter 77 and their many supporters and opponents in the diasporic émigré circles. However, the diversity of Central and Eastern European political action is also encapsulated in the priests and ministers in East Germany, folk musicians in the Baltic states, and an immense parade of "feminists, peaceniks, and artists" noted by Paul Betts.[4] But the very notion of the "dissident" itself is a contested one, applied post-1945 to simplified mass mobilizations against state socialism firmly within the Cold War political scope, and in this framework, these kinds of mobilizations have received the lion's share of scholarly attention.[5] Closely related is the term "émigré" understood as an explicitly political actor working tirelessly in exile, perhaps best represented by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn in West Germany or Czesław Miłosz in France and then the United States.[6] The contribution of émigré communities to the flow and exchange of ideas went beyond mere political opposition, however, and they were instrumental in shaping a broader understanding of cultural resistance and human rights, or what was sometimes termed Cold War liberalism, thereby enriching the European cultural and intellectual landscape.[7] Yet these émigrés represent but one form of migrant among many, obscuring the wider history of East-West migrations throughout the twentieth century and its range of manifestations. Though underground art movements or clandestine literature produced abroad were emerging from Central and Eastern European émigré communities, challenging state-imposed narratives and offering alternative perspectives on life under socialism, they were merely one facet of the much wider population movements crossing the imagined frontiers running through the heart of Europe.[8]

When discussing émigrés among the migrant populations of Central and Eastern Europe travelling westward, we must recognize that the Cold War lens narrows our view of the longer histories of European migration. Central and Eastern European migration to Western Europe has occurred in large numbers since at least the nineteenth century and throughout the interwar period, though

4 Betts, "1989 at Thirty: A Recast Legacy," 274.

5 For a selection of studies on dissident activity, see Zadencka et al., *East and Central European History Writing in Exile 1939–1989*; Nekola, "For the Freedom of Captive European Nations"; Łukasiewicz, "The Polish Political System in Exile, 1945–1990."

6 For the stories of these individual émigrés, see Pearce, *Solzhenitsyn: A Soul in Exile*; Kołodziejczyk, *Czesław Miłosz in Postwar America*.

7 Moyn, *Liberalism against Itself: Cold War Intellectuals and the Making of Our Times*.

8 Apor et al., "Cultural Opposition. Concepts and Approaches"; Nießer et al., "Cultural Opposition as Transnational Practice."

these antecedents have received comparatively little scholarly attention.[9] The emergence of the post-war political order and the restrictive regimes of mobility under communism did not so much "divide the Europe migration space" as simply push this migration towards new dynamics.[10] If we depart from the Cold War image of the "émigré," which equates East-West migration with dissidence, and instead take stock of politics as merely one of several factors influencing migration across the continent, we may open challenging yet fruitful avenues of historical inquiry. While renewed interest has brought about a boom in research on historical and contemporary East-West migrations, there remains much to be done with regards to branching out beyond the most prominent, valorized figures, seeking instead to locate "alternative perspectives [and] move away from concentrating on well-known exiles" who have already been well represented in the historical literature and probe hidden histories of migration across the entirety of twentieth-century Europe.[11]

This special issue takes up the task of broadening our historical understanding of East-West migration, filling in the gaps of everyday migrant life, and expanding the chronological framework beyond the Cold War period (1945–1989). The articles investigate a variety of cases relating to Central and Eastern European émigré and migrant histories in order to expound on a central issue about which we still know comparatively little: the contribution of these Central and Eastern European migrants to contemporary European civil society and culture. The contributions in this special issue aim to invert the traditional focus and ask instead how Central and Eastern European émigrés and migrant communities affected the local communities they joined and explore the influences they not only had on social movements, but also on civil society and community life. We bring into view actors whose stories have been neglected by the existing scholarship, and by adopting methodologies which consider memory, heritage, and oral histories, alongside traditional archival research, the contributions trace and highlight the lasting, if subtle, legacies that these migrants left in their adopted societies.

9 For notable research in this timeframe, see Goddeeris, *La Grande Emigration Polonaise en Belgique (1831–1870)*.

10 Wallace and Stola, "Introduction," 13. See also: Schönhagen and Herbert, *Migration und Migrationspolitik in Europa 1945–2020*.

11 Hammel and Greenville, *Everyday Life in Exile*, p. xii. This book serves as an excellent example of these alternative perspectives, covering a similar topic in the context of exiles and Jewish refugees in the context of Nazi Germany.

Departing from these vantage points, the special issue focuses on migrant communities in Belgium and the Netherlands (the Low Countries) from the 1930s to the present day. These collaborative efforts are the result of a two-year research project, “Émigré Europe: Civil Engagement Transfers between Eastern Europe and the Low Countries, 1933–1989.” The project enjoyed the financial support of the CELSA fund (Central Europ Leuven Strategic Alliance). As a joint venture between KADOC-KU Leuven (Belgium), Eötvös Loránd University (Budapest), Jagellonian University (Kraków), and Charles University (Prague), the undertaking grew out of the ambition to bring Central European historians and scholars into close contact with Western historians. It has resulted in a survey of Central European émigré activity in Belgium and the Netherlands, four international conferences (in Leuven, Prague, Kraków, and Budapest), and the production of a public heritage exhibition hosted online by KADOC.[12] Additionally, the pilot for an international prosopographical database of Czech, Hungarian, Polish, and Slovak emigration in the Low Countries from the 1930s to 1989 has been developed in the Nodegoat research environment.[13] Though the project took the histories of Central European migrants in Belgium and the Netherlands as its point of departure, the intention was to present historical concepts, methods, and findings that can serve as inspiration for broader research incorporating more Western and Eastern European nations and cases. The primary goal of the project has been to explore new perspectives, and the findings and insights that have been collected here aim to further a more subtle understanding of European cultures of contact, dialogue, inclusivity, and exclusivity from a migration perspective.

The contributions included in this issue reveal the extent to which (and the senses in which) Eastern European networks of migrant and émigré communities can be considered important factors in shaping contemporary Western European understandings of Central and Eastern Europe, and vice versa. As emphasized before, they look beyond the political engagements, observing more deeply the cultural transfers that took place between home and host societies. To do so, the research included in this special issue analyses various exchanges and practices

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12 The survey of émigré actors, organisations, and periodicals, in the context of the Polish community in Belgium, has been integrated into the Online Database for Intermediary Structures (ODIS), of which KADOC is a participating management institution [https://www.odis.be/hercules/_nl_home.php]. The “Émigré Europe” heritage exhibition can be viewed at kadocerfgoed.be [https://kadocheritage.be/exhibits/show/emigreeurope].

13 For more information on the Nodegoat platform, visit https://nodegoat.net/.

of self-organization and engagement that occurred between migrant and host communities. Certain contributions also highlight the impact that interactions and relationships with the host society can have on migrant actors or on how the host society is motivated to act by Central and Eastern European political developments. By looking at transnational contacts and exchanges prior to and beyond the presumed caesurae of 1945 or 1989, the issue sheds new light on different processes and alternatives of European integration beyond the institutional level and center-periphery approaches that have dominated public and academic narratives.

From both a conceptual standpoint and in its methodological approaches, the "Émigré Europe" project has placed heritage at the center of its investigations. This has primarily been done through immersion in understudied or previously neglected archives: whether through the personal archival collections of individual migrants to Belgium and the Netherlands in the articles of Żaliński and Coudenys or of host society actors in the contribution of Dodds, or through investigation of Belgo-Polish migrant religious organizations, as in the article by Praszałowicz and Kuźma, and Dutch professional milieus in the contribution of Michela and Šmidrkalová. The special issue also incorporates the issue of transnational motivations and means of Belgian solidarity with Eastern European nations like Romania, informed by oral history methods in the article by Herrera Crespo. The methodological implications of heritage and memory sit at the forefront of the contribution of Hajtó, whose investigations of Hungarian families in the Low Countries also draws on literary, oral, and web sources, emphasizing the potential that cultural heritage can serve in uncovering the hidden memories of migrant experience across generations and into the present day, charting the spaces and methods of interaction between migrant and host societies.

The articles in this issue come together to offer a multi-perspectival view, combining information on the émigré and migrant communities themselves with information on the local institutions (religious, civil, and transnational) which supported new beginnings for émigrés and served as structures of reception, integration, and interaction. Among the contact sites under analysis are political activist circles, pastoral schools and community councils, churches and religious communities, and heritage societies and workplaces. These sites, where members of the host society and the various migrant communities mingled, arguably played crucial roles in co-creating a culture of civil engagement. The contributions cover a broad chronological scope, from the late interwar period

(Coudenys) to the present (Hajtó). In many ways, the research also acknowledges and challenges the idea of an inclusive and tolerant societal landscape, which in recent years has been a notion presented by Europe in general and the Low Countries in particular, for example in the spaces of solidarity demonstrated by Michela and Šmidrkalová, the intergenerational legacy and wider societal interest in migrant communities in the work of Hajtó, or the role of migrants in the preservation of common European heritage investigated by Praszałowicz and Kuźma. In contrast, the articles also demonstrate challenges to this notion of self-represented inclusivity: the Belgian-led organization at the center of Herrera Crespo's investigation is influenced by émigré networks but limited by the lack of migrant agency, for example. And it is not only barriers between migrant and host that appear in this research, as there is also a distinct lack of engagement between different migrant communities or even, in some instances, successive generations of migrants of common national origin, supporting the conclusions of Idesbald Goddeeris in his wider study of Polish community responses and layers of "indifference" in Belgium to Solidarność.[14]

The questions addressed by this special issue pertain to the preservation and reformulation of émigré heritage and identity through interaction with host societies, or the ways in which political, cultural, and religious markers can influence the practices and attitudes of migrant communities. The agency of host societies in facilitating mobility, aiding or resisting integration, or engaging with transnational networks and campaigns also emerges as a persistent issue in the research, cast against the often subtle but ever-present political backdrop not only of the Cold War, but also of the rise in migration-related anxieties in Western Europe from at least the 1970s.

The impetus and findings of this special issue, in seeking to illuminate not only the impact of Western host societies on Central and Eastern European émigrés but also the inverse, and in centering migrant and émigré heritage in the realms of political, civil, and cultural engagement and transfer, are particularly pertinent. The solidarities (and their limits) that transcended Europe's Nylon Curtain, along with networks and barriers that characterized East-West migration over the course of the century, seem a lost memory today.[15] As the hidden histories of these communities fade into the past, and new dynamics of interaction and opposition between West and East emerge, this innovative exploration of émigré

14 Goddeeris, "Solidarity or Indifference?"

15 Christiaens and Claeys, "Forgotten Friends and Allies."

history and heritage reasserts the civil and cultural contributions to modern Europe. These contributions have been shaped by migrations that facilitated encounters and dialogues of culture, civil engagement, and political activity, bridging East and West.

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Articles

"The Past Must Be Given a Place": Migration, Intergenerational Transfer, and Cultural Memory Practices in Belgian Families of Hungarian Descent*

Vera Hajtó
HUN-REN Research Centre for the Humanities

This article investigates the intergenerational effects of migration on the memories of Belgian families of Hungarian origin, focusing specifically on how these effects can prompt the second and third generations of migrant families to bring their private memories and identity constructions into the public sphere. Their social participation becomes a crucial element in their quest to uncover their families' histories. While the memory of the migration experience was initially contained in the "archive" (the private sphere), it eventually transitions into the "canon" (the public sphere), becoming accessible to those outside the family circle. Using published biographies of second-generation members about their immigrant parents, photographic images, texts of a theatre play, group conversations on social media (Facebook), and interviews with members of the second and third generations, this article offers a varied source material to explore these questions. By pushing the boundaries of historical research and memory studies, it demonstrates that the memories of migration can have long-lasting effects that connect people and families with larger communities and the social sphere.

Keywords: migration, identity, memory, memory work, family, intergenerational relations, cultural memory, archive and canon, Hungarian child relief project, Belgium

In the course of governmental negotiations in 2019, the Flemish government under the leadership of Prime Minister Jan Jambon reached an agreement to follow the Dutch example and develop a Flemish cultural canon. An independent committee of experts worked on the Canon of Flanders for almost three years before presenting it to the general public in May 2023. From more than five hundred possible subjects, they selected sixty Flemish "windows" focusing on politics, culture, archaeology, economy, science, ecology, and sports. The

* This study was conducted under the auspices of the research project "Émigré Europe: Civil Engagement Transfers between Eastern Europe and the Low Countries 1933–1989," which received financial support from the CELSA fund (Central Europe Leuven Strategic Alliance).

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purpose of the governmental agreement on the Canon is to create anchor points in Flemish culture, history, and sciences which can be used for support and inspiration in three fields: education, integration processes, and the heritage and tourism sectors.[1] A wide and controversial social discussion surrounded the preparation of the Canon in the course of which historians and other experts got into heated public debates on the question of how to canonize national history and whether it is desirable or even possible to do so. The fragmented Belgian cultural and political landscape made these debates even more intriguing and created a challenging problem. As a result of the public discussions, it was also necessary to refrain from generalizing the concept of Flemish identity, and the commission responsible for the project decided to separate the Canon of Flanders from Flemish identity. Following the principles of tolerance and diversity, the heritage and memories of the different migrant communities in Belgium also got a place in the Canon. Among them there is a photo and a short note on the history of the Belgian-Hungarian child relief project, which is a very interesting fact from the perspective of this paper.[2] Its mention is surprising, as the migration of Hungarian children to Belgium in the mid-1920s was a largely forgotten episode of shared Belgian-Hungarian social history a few years ago. What happened in the meantime? How did a mostly privately shared history of a now small (a couple hundred families) group of people (Belgians and Hungarians) became part of the Canon of Flanders? How did this "forgotten" history of a once widely known event in the lives of the Catholic communities of Belgium again become a noted part of the public/national/regional canon? The aim of this paper is to venture answers to these questions by looking at the private and public activities of the second and third generations of descendants of the Belgian-Hungarian child relief project and the processes by which memories have been shared in this community across generations. I consider how these activities helped dislodge family memories from the private sphere and gave them a place in public knowledge. Three specific cases of transgenerational activities will be examined to uncover how

1 https://www.canonvanvlaanderen.be/content/uploads/2023/05/Canon_Rapport-aan-de-minister_7MEI.pdf. Last accessed on June 12, 2023. The content of the website was also published as a book: *Canon van Vlaanderen in 60 vensters* (Gent: Borgerhoff en Lamberigts, 2023).

2 https://www.canonvanvlaanderen.be/events/de-wereld-in-vlaanderen. Last accessed on June 12, 2023. There is a mistake in the text. The Hungarian children are referred to as refugees *(vluchtelingen)*, but in the original sense of the word they did not belong to this category of migrants. They did not flee their home country.

memory of migration can define generational ties and how these memories in return become public heritage.

Short History of an Old Story and Its Consequences

The Belgian-Hungarian child relief project was a humanitarian transnational initiative between Hungary and Belgium. The idea of temporarily placing Hungarian children with foreign families where they could regain their strength after the devastation of World War I came from Dutch citizens who worked during the war as volunteers in Hungary, which was in a difficult situation economically and socially.[3] The project started in 1920 in the Netherlands. Other European countries, such as Switzerland, England, and Denmark joined the Netherlands shortly thereafter, and in 1923, Belgium followed suit. The project was organized along denominational lines. Therefore, as Belgium was an overwhelmingly Catholic country, the organization of the project rested in the hands of the large Catholic community and its networks. The children were transported by trains from Hungary to Belgium, and they were distributed upon arrival among the volunteer host families. The original intention of the organizers was a so-called "holiday" of six months for children who were malnourished but not sick. They were supposed to be fed well, attend the local schools together with their Belgian peers, and follow the Catholic traditions of the local community. The Hungarian organizers took care that only Catholic Hungarian children were placed in Belgium. While the various aspects of the journey to a foreign country and the placement of the children with families once they had arrived were relatively well organized, the decision of which children would return and when remained flexible. This decision was left up to the Belgian and Hungarian

3 The Netherlands as a neutral party in World War I offered humanitarian help not only to Hungarians but also to Austrian children. These were the first large scale humanitarian child transports where unaccompanied young children crossed national borders to spend time with families in other countries. This initiative was unprecedented within Europe. In the subsequent decades of the twentieth century, many other humanitarian child relief projects were set up. However, the organizers of these later projects were trying to save children from imminent dangers of war or persecution, which was not true in the case of the Hungarian and Austrian children. The later projects included Spanish children fleeing from the Spanish civil war, Jewish children of the well-known *Kindertransport,* Finnish children escaping to Sweden, Greek children being rescued from civil war, and the children of the many Displaced Person camps in Germany and Austria. These projects differed based on their specific humanitarian goals and, most importantly, the political agendas behind them. However, the individual experiences of the participating children were often very similar. See Lagretta, *The Guernica Generation*; Zahra, *The Lost* Children; Danforth, "We Crossed a Lot of Borders."

families. They were able to discuss and decide among themselves or sometimes even unilaterally when the child would return to Hungary or whether, in some cases, he or she would remain in Belgium. This had serious and often unforeseen consequences later, not only for the ways these children came to understand their identities but also for their children's and grandchildren's perceptions of themselves.

Many Hungarian children remained in the care of their Belgian families longer than six months. Some of them stayed years with their host families, and some remained in Belgium forever. Altogether approximately 21.000 Hungarian children came to stay in Belgium in the framework of this project. Due to the scarcity of contemporary administrative data, we can only make a rough estimate of 4 percent concerning the number of children who never returned to Hungary or, after having returned, decided (or had the decision made for them) to travel back to Belgium and settled there for good.[4] The children who remained in Belgium for good became immigrants, whether of their own decision or not. Their migration experience was unusual, in that it was shaped in no small part by the constraints of childhood. Like adult migrants, they experienced the cultural rupture that is an inevitable part of migration. They were separated from their native culture and from the environment and people they knew and, most importantly and most formatively, from their parents and other family members. As children, they quickly learned the language and the local habits, attended school, joined youth organizations, and thus, unlike adult migrants, they were socialized in Belgium rather than in Hungary. They did not differ, from the perspectives of religion and skin color, from the local population, and this contributed to their successful structural integration.[5] Although they remained Hungarian citizens until marrying a Belgian man or woman or completing the process of naturalization, because of their integration and socialization into Belgian society as children, the question of citizenship remained a minor administrative factor in their lives.[6] While their structural integration seems to have been very successful, their identificational integration, how they perceived

4 For detailed information on the history of the Belgian-Hungarian child relief project see Hajtó, *Milk Sauce and Paprika.*

5 I am using the concepts of *structural integration*, which can be measured more or less objectively by mapping social mobility, school results, housing patterns, etc., and *identificational integration*, which is subjective and refers to the extent to which migrants and their offspring keep regarding themselves as primarily different. Lucassen, *The Immigrant Threat,* 19.

6 The children could not be adopted by their Belgian parents or be given Belgian nationality as children because the adoption of minors in Belgium was only legalized in 1940. Hajtó, *Milk Sauce and Paprika,* 24.

themselves vis-à-vis the rest of the society, was more complex and problematic. Very often feelings which bordered on melancholy seem to have lingered, as well as some attachment to their country and culture of origin, at least to the extent that they either knew or imagined it. If they preserved transnational connections with Hungary (for instance with their Hungarian families), the two identities, Hungarian and Belgian, intermingled. Moreover, for many of them, separation from the early childhood environment and especially from their birth parents proved a traumatic experience. They sometimes developed traumatic disorders or depression. They were often unable to form healthy relationships with their partners and incapable of performing healthy parental roles.[7] In their late life-testimonies, these people often shared the difficulties they faced while growing up and establishing their own families in Belgium.[8]

Why Memory Matters and How It is Transferred

The secondary literature on cultural memory has persuasively shown that movement and memory are closely intertwined. Memories are on the move.[9] They travel with migrants as intangible possessions that migrants cannot and will not get rid of because memories connect places and help preserve existing social ties and build new ones.[10] As the process of migration involves dislocation not only from people and social connections but also from biographically important places, remembering these places and people is a way for migrants to bridge the gap between their past and future lives. These memories, however, are not stable entities. They are also on the move, not just in space but also in time. They change together with the migrants and their circumstances. In general, memories change over time. We remember different aspects of the same event

7 Most interestingly, recent discoveries in neuroscience and in the fairly new field of epigenetics show the possibility of transgenerational transmission of traumatic experiences within one's body. According to these studies, it might be possible to carry the traumas experienced by our parents through epigenetic changes, or changes in gene expression as a consequence of environment and behavior. Therefore, emotional deprivation as a consequence of neglectful or traumatized parenting can cause changes in gene expression.. See: Klosin, et. al., "Transgenerational Transmission of environmental information in *C. elegans*," and Hens, "Dynamiek en ethiek van de epigenetica," and Assche, "Strategies project: Genetic and epigenetic aspects. Depressive symptoms in adolescence: genes & environment."

8 Hajtó, "The 'wanted' children," and Hajtó, *Milk Sauce and Paprika*.

9 Rigney, *The Afterlives of Walter Scott. Memories on the Move;* Assmann and Conrad, *Memory in a Global Age;* Palmberger and Tošić, *Memories on the Move*.

10 Ibid., 12.

at different moments of our lives.[11] The concept of moving memories in time can also refer to a generational transfer, when memories in the form of family stories, tacit knowledge, mnemonic objects, and even bodily habits are passed down to the offspring of the person who migrated.

While in the past, memory was often the most important or even only possible way migrants could maintain some form of psychological and emotional connection to the social networks and family in the home country, in recent years, technology has changed communication without necessarily dislodging memory from its crucial position. One of the main reasons for this is that memory is closely connected to our identity construction. If we look at the process of migration, we can see that both memory and identity are in an endangered position. The experience of migration causes rupture and alteration in both processes. This is why migrants often struggle with the reconstruction of both. This process of recovery, however, often takes a long time and might not be completed before the migrant dies. If this is the case, another generation may inherit the incomplete reconstruction of their family history and a fragmented personal identity.[12] As Leo Lucassen very aptly put it, "integration, just like assimilation, is viewed as a non-linear, long-term, and thus intergenerational process."[13] The adults who had come from Hungary to Belgium as children and later took Belgian spouses established mixed families in which their children often shared the cultural heritages, identities, and personal memories of both parents. Moreover, the children and sometimes even the grandchildren of these families regularly struggled with the unfinished projects of their parents to resolve problematic integration from the perspective of personal identity. In other words, they had to figure out the most important questions faced by people who had undergone some cultural rupture in the past caused by movement. These questions included the issue of cultural belonging, how the cultural identities of members of the second and third generations in migrant families evolved, and most importantly, where the origins of their identities as people who had inherited more than one cultural tradition lay. They often faced the challenging necessity of reconstructing the stories of their parents. These reconstructions

11 Leydesdorff, *Oral History*, 25.

12 There has been substantial research on generational transmission of traumas in Holocaust studies. The body of research is so large that I only mention here the works of Marianne Hirsch, who combined postmemory theory with generational transmission of memories in the form of family photography. Hirsch, *Family Frames;* Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory.*

13 Lucassen, *The Immigrant Threat,* 19.

sometimes became very painful processes. This was particularly true when the parents had shared traumas or painful memories of their migration experiences, intentionally or unintentionally. In certain cases, we can talk about the concept of postmemory, when "the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their birth but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right."[14] However, within one family not every sibling necessarily experienced the need of reconstruction and the need to resolve traumatic legacies in the same way. Some felt compelled to research their parents' past while others were content to know only what had been shared with them.

These descendants of the people who had come as children to Belgium through the Hungarian relief project mostly shared their memories within the limited circle of family and friends. In some cases, they maintained a connection with their Hungarian families and Hungary. In the 1960s, for example, when traveling between the two countries became easier, many families spent holidays in Hungary or in Belgium visiting relatives or old host families. As a natural consequence, after the death of the parents (the original participants in the migration experience), the children slowly started to lose their connections to the other country and to the memories of their parents. This was when they often realized that they needed to know, research, and talk more about these memories and this heritage. Until recently, with very few exceptions, these private memories remained within the family.[15] They were talked about and showcased in the form of photographs, artifacts, and other mnemonic objects within the private family "archive."[16]

The influential theories of Aleida Assmann on cultural memory draw a distinction between active and passive remembering. Assmann calls active remembering the *canon*, which is accessible to the wider audience in the form of books, articles, and other publications (published by mainstream publishing houses) or in exhibitions held by museums and other cultural institutes. Assmann refers to passive remembering as the *archive*, to which access is limited because

14 Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory," 103.

15 One example is the literary work of the Belgian writer Rudi Hermans, discussed later in this essay.

16 The "From private to public: Memories of migration, family heritage, and continuity where Belgian-Hungarians and Dutch-Hungarians meet the public sphere" part of the online exhibition *Émigré Europe. Central and Eastern European émigrés in the Low Countries, 1933–1989*, which is hosted by the Belgian documentation and research institute KADOC (Katholieke Documentatie- en Onderzoekscentrum voor Religie, Cultuur en Samenleving), shows how these mnemonic objects are presented in the private sphere of the migrants. https://kadocheritage.be/exhibits/show/emigreeurope. Last accessed on June 12, 2023.

the objects in the archive remain within the private spheres of individuals and families. Most interestingly, the elements of the two forms of remembering can change places. Memories of events that remained in the archive thus can suddenly appear in the public canon and vice versa.[17] The second and third generation of the original participants of the Belgian-Hungarian relief project are increasingly engaged in the process of bringing family memories from the archive into the public canon. They remember and reimagine their childhood memories, deconstructing and recontextualizing them in the transfer process from archive to canon. These descendants are actually engaging in "memory work."[18] In her fascinating book, Annette Kuhn actively stages, recontextualizes, and analyzes her memories of childhood. She also demonstrates how, while processing the raw material of personal memories through memory work, she produces new memories, and she shows how potentially therapeutic this process might prove. This therapeutic effect has been observed and experienced by the descendants during their memory work. It brings an additional sense of relief not only to confront painful personal family memories but also to share them with the larger public.

Over the course of the past ten or fifteen years, there has been an upsurge in public activities in the form of publications, theater performances, interviews, films, exhibitions, and online community building.[19] These activities have played a major role in how the story of the relief project is becoming better known by the Belgian general public and how it found its way into the Flemish Canon. There are key participants, however, who regularly drive this process forward

17 Assmann, "Canon and Archive."

18 "Memory work is a method and a practice of unearthing and making public untold stories." Kuhn, *Family Secrets,* 9.

19 Examples of major public events and publications include the exhibition *De Hongaartjes,* from March 7 to June 5, 2016, KADOC, Leuven, Belgium and the publication by Vera Hajtó, *De Hongaartjes.* Opening of the MigratieMuseumMigration in Brussels, which dedicated one vitrine out of the 50 to the Belgian-Hungarian child relief project about the history of twentieth-century migration to Belgium, October 19, 2019, Exhibition *Úti cél: Remény. A nemzetközi gyermekvonat-akció a két világháború között*, from December 9 to March 27, Budapesti Történeti Múzeum, Budapest, with published catalogue, *Úti cél: Remény. A nemzetközi gyermekvonat-akció a két világháború között* (Budapest: BTM Vármúzeum, 2022). There was an exhibition in the Netherlands as well, *Bestemming: Hoop*, from June 18 to October 1, 2023, Van 't Lindenhout Museum, Nijmegen. While the first exhibition in Leuven was exclusively about the Belgian-Hungarian project, the other two exhibitions were more comprehensive and showed the story and involvement of the other participating countries. The play *Een bijzondere vrouw* was staged for the first time on March 14, 2018 in Houthalen-Helchteren, Belgium and also on November 8, 2018 in Budapest, Hungary. There is also a documentary film about a Hungarian girl who participated in the Belgian project: *Emmi néni csodálatos élete / The Extraordinary Life of Emma Nemeskéri*, director and screenwriter, Eszter Száraz, 2020.

with their efforts. Their active memory work is being shared with the public through their publications, performances, and social media activities, so one can follow how family memories are gradually being transferred to the public sphere.

The Hermans Family

The members of the Hermans family are among the most ardent participants in the public memory work. They have been recreating and recontextualizing the story of their mother, Magda Horváth. Magda was the mother of ten children from two marriages. She was thirteen when she arrived in Belgium as part of the Belgian-Hungarian child relief project on March 14, 1927. She was not lucky with her Belgian host family. They did not treat her well. When she first went back to Hungary in 1929 and decided a year later to return to Belgium for good, she was only sixteen years old and did not know what a hard and emotionally lonely life was waiting for her. According to her son Edgar Hermans, his mother had "a very tough and at times tragic, but also a very courageous and meaningful life."[20] When she was only 23 and pregnant with her second child, she was tragically widowed. For eight long years, including the years of World War II, Magda supported her two young children entirely on her own, as well as her elderly parents-in-laws and her young sister, who arrived from Hungary to stay with her. As she wrote in one of her letters to her family, "I tried to earn some money: I sewed, I knitted stockings, and sheared sheep so that we would have enough to eat."[21] In 1945, she made another life-altering decision. At the recommendation of the local priest, she married the local baker Eugène Hermans, who "was also widowed and had three children, while I had two. It was very difficult to start afresh, but we promised each other to be good for the children's sake."[22] It became a difficult and complicated marriage, and Eugène and Magda had five children of their own. They thus formed a household of twelve people, in which the mother and father ran their own bakery downstairs. Eugène showed little interest in or concern for Magda's Hungarian roots, so she had to deal with the traumas and painful memories of migration and homesickness on her own.

The events of her life had a significant influence on her children, more specifically, her two youngest sons, Edgar and Rudi, who were the most

20 Hermans, *Kedves Magda*, 9.

21 Ibid., 29.

22 Ibid., 30.

receptive to their mother's difficulties with her private memories of migration and integration and are still processing her legacy. Rudi Hermans is a well-known Flemish writer. His oeuvre is inspired by and touches closely on his knowledge and experience of his mother's story.[23] His narratives are fictionalized versions of her story. These works are part of the public canon, as they are available to the general public in print by well-known publishers.[24] These widely disseminated literary works thus offer an opportunity for rereading and re-interpretation, which are fundamental conditions for cultural memory creation.[25] Rudi's brother Edgar also wrote a book about Magda. He too took a strong interest in her history and the nature of his connection to her and to her painful past. As Judit Gera states, while Rudi's writings are widely disseminated and thus form part of the public canon, Edgar's book is a non-fiction story based on historical facts which was privately published as part of an archive.[26] However, Edgar's publication, which resembles a detective story[27] and intertwines the story of his own research and the biographical facts he discovered about his mother's life, was just the beginning of his process of joining Rudi in bringing the story of Magda and with it the story of the relief project into the public canon. This is how Edgar describes the beginning of his research:

> Initially, the book was intended for my family. My mother was 100 years old in 2014 and I stood there at that grave, and I thought, my children remember that she is from Hungary and that's it. My brothers, some know something, some nothing. I thought, I'm going to write down what I know. Just like that, short. I thought five pages will be enough. By chance, I ended up with you [Vera Hajtó] through an ad in the newspaper […]. And that is how it started to come to life. That was unbelievable. And that search took almost two years, a year and a half and it was something different every week.[28]

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23 Hermans, *Terug naar Törökbálint;* Hermans, *De Troonpretendent;* Hermans, *Liefdesverklaringen*; Hermans, *Levenswerk*.

24 A very interesting and most inspiring study was written by Judit Gera, who analyzed four literary works by Rudi Hermans and uncovered the traces of postmemory in them. She also demonstrated how the writings of Rudi Hermans have contributed to the process of transfer from the family archive to the public canon. Gera, *Postmemory és kulturális emlékezet mint a tények és a fikció kötőelemei Rudi Hermans műveiben*.

25 Erll and Rigney, *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*.

26 Gera, *Postmemory és kulturális emlékezet mint a tények és a fikció kötőelemei Rudi Hermans műveiben*, 119.

27 Expression used by Judit Gera, ibid.

28 Interview with Edgar Hermans, June 17, 2022, Houthalen, Belgium. All interviews in this article were conducted in Flemish by Vera Hajtó.

Edgar started a journey to collect everything in the family archive:

> I started talking to my brothers, who knew a bit, but that wasn't really much. Then you [Vera Hajtó] found everything for me in Brussels. Then I accidentally came into contact with Zsuzsanna Bálint [a historian in Törökbálint]. I sent a message to the municipality in German, French, and English asking if someone would speak to me. […] One thing led to another. Then I started talking to old people, etc., etc.[29]

Edgar describes how, while he was collecting information within the family (i.e. as part of the private archive), he also started to build connections with the public sphere. He contacted me, a professional historian, and also the aforementioned Zsuzsanna Bálint, who is a local historian in Törökbálint, Hungary, the town from which Edgar's mother Magda had come. That also proves that the archive of family memories is not entirely separated from the public canon.[30] They are close to each other and feed off each other. Transfer between the two can take place at almost any point.

Edgar's research and writing had an influence on the family across generations, as he himself mentioned. "After my book was published, one of Rudi's sons, who was 30–35 years old, called me, I have had little contact with him. [He said,] I just called to thank you for making that book. […] the idea of what is in Rudi's book. That is very heavy stuff.... […] When they read my book, it became completely different."[31] And at a certain moment, some of them joined Edgar's efforts to share the story of the mother and grandmother with the public in the form of a play: "Then came my brother Jean Pierre, who is an actor, and he said to Rudi, the writer, couldn't you do anything with that [Edgar's book], couldn't you write a play out of that."[32] Through the cooperative efforts of the different members of the second generation, the self-published book, which was meant for the limited circle of the family, became the source on which the script of the theater play *Een bijzondere vrouw* (A special woman) was based. The play was first staged during the annual Heritage Day of the Flemish community in the small church Kerkje van Laak in Houthalen-Helchteren on March 14, 2018. The Hermans brothers also organized a small exhibition dedicated to their mother in

29 Interview with Edgar Hermans, June 17, 2022, Houthalen, Belgium.

30 According to Kuhn, private memories could not exist without the outside world. They are "at the center of a radiating web of associations, reflections and interpretations. But if the memories are one individual's their associations extend far beyond the personal […] in all memory texts, personal and collective remembering emerge again and again." Kuhn, *Family Secrets*. 5.

31 Interview with Edgar Hermans, June 17, 2022, Houthalen, Belgium.

32 Interview with Edgar Hermans, June 17, 2022, Houthalen, Belgium.

the church, which helped them establish many contacts with other families who shared similar memories of the parents' histories.

There are often silences in painful family stories, and there is one such silenced memory in the case of the Hermans family as well.[33] Magda's return to Hungary as a young girl in 1929 and her own choice to live her life in Belgium remained hidden from her children for decades. The decision to return was a crucial choice for her, since it altered her future. It also clearly had significant consequences for her children. Edgar and Rudi believed that their mother could not return to Hungary before 1964. They thought that her troubled family circumstances had not allowed her to return earlier and that these circumstances had decided her future and that she herself had been helpless in this matter. However, in the course of his research, Edgar discovered that she had had a choice. This came as a shock to Magda's sons. This key fact stands in the middle of the story of the play. Magda has to answer this question, posed by Saint Peter at the gates of Heaven, who was played by her actor son Jean Pierre. Curiously, the play was staged in a church. Magda speaks with Saint Peter about her wonderous journey, much as her son, Edgar, spoke about his ongoing journey in his interview:

> And just keep going. Moreover, I have discovered so much in the meantime, I am still busy. […] Moreover, the last time in Budapest, the two cineastes, I find that unbelievable. When I showed my first book to my cousin in Hasselt, he said Edgar that should be made into a movie. […] And now those people just come up to us and say, we want to make a movie. Unimaginable![34]

Alongside the books, the play, and the plans for a film, the activities of Edgar and his family in the public sphere also extend to a place of remembrance in Belgium. As it so happens, Magda Horváth has a *lieux de memoire* in Belgium. In 1956, the old farmhouse where she lived as a young widow with her small children and her parents-in-laws was dismantled and placed in the Flemish openair folklore museum of Bokrijk due to its architectural value. Edgar and his family are currently working with the heritage experts at the museum on making the family story publicly visible in the museum.

33 Leydesdorff, *Oral History;* and Thomson and Perks, *The Oral History Reader.*

34 Interview with Edgar Hermans, June 17, 2022, Houthalen, Belgium.

Une Petite Hongroise

Like the Hermans brothers, Betty Leruitte also wrote a biographical book about her mother, Teréz or Terry Beck.[35] Betty's book is a narrative of Terry's life story. As she puts it, "what I told in my book, everything is true, down to the smallest anecdotes, everything is true. She told me it all, and it seems a bit like a novel."[36]

Betty describes the chain of events that led to her discovery of her mother's childhood home in Belgium, but compared to Edgar's book, she brings a new dimension to her writing. She intentionally goes into dialogue mostly with her mother and, at the end of the book, with her father as well. Betty Leruitte is concerned not simply with learning more about her mother's past, including how and why she came to Belgium, how she grew up there, how she found work, and when she got married, had a child, and faced many difficult choices. Betty also seems eager to learn more about her own place in her mother's life. She confronts her own fears and childhood traumas in the dialogues in her text, which she puts in italics. In certain cases, she also uses photos as a gateway to her mother's past.[37] Betty does not always provide the information that one would usually expect from a photo in her captions, such as the names of the people depicted or the occasion of the picture. Instead, she shares her own impressions or memories, and by doing so she brings past, present and future into a very close relationship. She also interrupts her narrative at times to make comments situated in the moment of narration rather than the narrated moment:

> Freeze frame: I am looking at this photo where you are looking at me. I want to tell you that much later, in eighty years exactly, your daughter will find this photo at the neighbors'. But you're there with your doll, you don't know yet that you'll have a girl. Many peripeteias await you before I show up. So I can only shut up, and let you live.[38]

Above this text we see a group photo of nine people. The photo was made on the occasion of a trip made by Terry's Hungarian father to Habay-la-Neuve, a small Walloon village where Terry was placed by the relief project. She lived

35 Leruitte, *Une Petite Hongroise*.

36 Interview with Betty Leruitte, December 2, 2022, Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium.

37 According to Susan Sontag, "Any photograph has multiple meanings; indeed, to see something in the form of a photograph is to encounter a potential object of fascination. The ultimate wisdom of the photographic image is to say: 'There is the surface. Now think – or rather feel, intuit – what is beyond it, what the reality must be like if it looks this way.' Photographs, which cannot themselves explain anything, are inexhaustible invitations to deduction, speculation, and fantasy." Sontag, *On Photography*, 23.

38 Leruitte, *Une Petite Hongroise*, 44. Italics in the original.

with two sisters in the Belgian Ardennes. Unlike Magda Horváth, she had a very happy, idyllic childhood with them. The picture, at least, gives this idyllic impression. Everybody and everything that presumably was dear to the little girl can be seen on the photo. Terry is sitting in the middle of the group with her doll in her hand, and the family dog is at her feet. Her father is next to her, as is her elder sister, who was also staying with a family in the neighborhood. Next to her Hungarian relatives, we see her Belgian family as well. They are all sitting in a line in front of the house in Habay. Sometimes Betty makes mention in her narrative of memories she has of a photograph that no longer exists, or a "memory of a memory," to borrow a phrase from poet Maria Stepanova.[39]

Figure 1. Terry Beck with her father, her sister and her Belgian foster family around 1930, Habay-la-Neuve (Private collection of Betty Leruitte, Louvain-la-Neuve)

The main narrative of the book is written in the second person, which emphasizes the intimate relationship between the mother and daughter. In the excerpts attached to the photograph's, on the other hand, Betty addresses her mother directly in the first-person. She asks her questions and pleads with her, especially in the second part of the book, in which these discussions and arguments are increasingly intense due to the childhood traumas Betty suffered because of her parents' stormy relationship:

39 See Stepanova, *In Memory of Memory*. "This book about my family is not about my family at all, but something quite different: the way memory works, and what memory wants from me," 51.

> A comedy? I don't understand what I'm hearing, but I've learned everything, and the day will come when I'll ask you questions. I know it's none of my business, but you shouldn't tear yourself apart in front of me. What comedy is he talking about, mom? Tell me, you didn't play comedy to make him believe that... no! ... Yes?[40]

Another important feature of Betty Leruitte's book is how she incorporates the kaleidoscopic images and impressions of the many different national and regional identities of her family. Betty is Hungarian on her mother's side and Belgian on her father's side. Her father had a Dutch mother and a Belgian father. Moreover, Terry grew up in the French speaking part of Belgium, in Wallonia, and she acquired from her host family a strong sense of regional Walloon identity, which she passed on to her daughter. The folklore, legends, and habits of the region are prominent features of her story. And she notes, with a specific reference to place, "among the Ardennes, the pain is discreet, feelings do not spread out in the public square, one keeps one's grief for oneself."[41] She also mentions how her mother, "an incorrigible romantic, told me more than once the story of Louise de Lambertye, last Marquise du Pont d'Oye where, according to legend, Voltaire sometimes came to rest."[42]

Betty Leruitte's use of imaginary dialogues with her mother and her references to Walloon identity suggest a great deal about her possible intentions. After the death of her own son, Betty wrote a book about his life, which was followed by *Une Petite Hongroise*, the book about her mother. She contended in *Une Petite Hongroise* that "those two books have been like therapy for me, I felt so good after writing those two books, […] I didn't expect it to do so much good."[43]

In an interview, Betty spoke about her intention to write a story of a Hungarian girl who ended up in Wallonia and not in Flanders:

> I searched for information for five years before I could write my book, and it is thanks to your [Vera Hajtó's] book that I could find my information, […] so I wrote my book and my intention was to make the case of the Hungarian children known because no one knew anything about it among the French speakers (Walloons)."[44]

40 Leruitte, *Une Petite Hongroise*, 112.

41 Leruitte, *Une Petite Hongroise*, 47.

42 Leruitte, *Une Petite Hongroise*, 149. The story of the marquise Louise de Lambertye (1720–1773) and her domain in Habay-la-Neuve with Castle Pont d'Oye form a prominent part of the Walloon cultural memory and heritage.

43 Interview with Betty Leruitte, December 2, 2022, Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium.

44 Interview with Betty Leruitte, December 2, 2022, Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium.

Indeed, due to the smaller influence of the Catholic Church in Wallonia, far more Hungarian children were placed in Flanders during the relief project. The story of the child relief project is thus also more forgotten in Wallonia than in Flanders. Betty Leruitte's book is the first attempt in this region to make the story part of public memory. As it was published by L'Harmattan (a well-known publishing house), the book is widely available to the public, which will increase its chances of becoming part of the public canon. It is also on permanent display in the MigratieMuseumMigration in Brussels. Betty is currently working with the cultural center of Habay-le-Neuve on a play based on the story of her mother and the other fourteen Hungarian children who were welcomed in the village in the 1920s. While Betty and the Herman brothers were authors of their creative endeavors, others choose social media to share, process, re-imagine and contextualize their family memories.

Facebook – Forming an Online Community

"Dear members of this group. This group is especially intended for (grand) children and those involved with children from Hungary who went to the Netherlands after World War I. Much is still unknown. With this group, I hope to collect stories and information, which may benefit everyone in his or her own way." – These were the first welcoming words of the founder of the Facebook group Hongaarse Kindertreinen bestemming Nederland en België. The group was formed in October 2018, and it now has 181 members. It was established by a Dutch woman whose grandmother participated in the Dutch part of the Hungarian child relief project and who remained in the host country for the rest of her life. Although in her introductory words she only mentions the Netherlands and indicates that the group is meant to be open to the descendants of the children who went there, the group was from the outset open to people whose parents or grandparents had come to Belgium. By organizing an online community, they became publicly visible, even if this Facebook group is a closed group, which means that if someone wants to join, he or she needs the permission of the host. One can only post to the page and read the comments posted by others after having obtained the permission of the host. The group is supposed to provide a safe place to share private information. Still, it remains a relatively small community the members of which are sporadically active. There are very different expectations regarding the purpose of the group among its members. For many of them, it is a forum to which they come primarily for

information. They are looking for information on experts, books, genealogical sites, and other sources on the history of the relief projects. Some of them share photos and stories, but in spite of the organizers repeated requests that every new member share the history of their family and the relatively safe, private environment, many members remain reluctant. Willem Suys is the most active member of the group. He often coordinates among members and helps them find information, and he also shares his own family history as well as his own private quest for information.

> I think there is still a lot of interest in the group in getting information and that people are also willing to comment in the group if the subject is not too private, but it is a bit of a difficult group. I am also in a number of other groups, mostly public, sometimes private, and there I see, if I compare it with the children's trains, […] that this group also has a little information that would be of interest to others, or the information is too personal and they feel they cannot even share it with a private group.[45]

With the information he provides, Willem often triggers members to react and share more private experiences. Sometimes there are dialogues through which members of the group confront experiences of painful unresolved family memories. Anne Marie Himpe is one of the few members who very openly shares her struggles to come to terms with her mother's past. For her, the Facebook group is a platform where she can join discussions and compare her experiences with the experiences of others who might share her struggles. She uses this public sphere to post her private family memories and confront them. In October 2016, Willem shared a Swiss online article on new research about the biological transmission of family traumas from parent to child.[46] Eleven people posted comments concerning the article, including Anne Marie: “Interesting, but what can we do about it now? I really believe that acceptance of our body and those of our descendants sends good signals. Lett -ing- go.” She adds, “We cannot change or undo what happened, although we so often wish we could. I

45 Interview with Willem Suys, Kluisbergen, December 10, 2022. I conducted two separate interviews with the two most active members of the group. I did one interview with Willem Suys and one with Anne Marie Himpe. The daughter of Anne Marie, Lieselotte Maertens, joined us during the interview. Lieselotte is also member of the group, but she is not as active as her mother.

46 https://www.swissinfo.ch/ger/kindheitstraumata-koennen-an-nachkommen-vererbt-werden/46100764?fbclid=IwAR3DUC1FSEzBiG_-Q2nm9PyKUhPO8pSwVTMM_O12pM1Pslavkz-doCZs-tY

would like to believe that what was possible then would be unthinkable today. I consider it one big learning process."

Anne Marie's daughter Lieselotte, who is a member of the third generation, is part of the group but is not very active. She seems also to struggle with the memories of the migration experience of her mother and grandmother, but she tries to distance herself from the painful, ongoing memory reconstruction process. As she said in the course of an interview,

> I understand that the past has happened and that this must be given a place […] You have been given a life, you must move forward. And I do think that people like me read messages on the Facebook page about the children's trains. You cannot solve the pains of your mother, grandmother. You can't, you can't heal those wounds. I don't want them to become my wounds.[47]

The Facebook group also offers Anne Marie a chance not only to see her memories echoed in other people's work but at the same time to distance herself in order better to understand what particular memories might mean to her. As she commented in a post to the page,

> Nice weather, ideal for retreating with Rudi Hermans' De Troonpretendent. Not reading it at once, it came too close to me for that, too recognizable, which was pleasant on the one hand and quite difficult at times on the other. […] Because mother is always silent, the son interviews the mother. Come on, I did exactly the same thing, and when mother prompts him not to share her experience with strangers, then I know better than anyone what possesses the mother, but also what the son wants and needs to know. [48]

Both Anne Marie and Liselotte testify that with the creation of the Facebook group, the history of the Belgian-Hungarian child relief project gained more visibility in the public space. There is one more source to which they can turn and where they have an opportunity to be heard, because, as Anne Marie commented, "that story, that story never comes up. There is no information about it. That is like it never happened."[49] And as Lieselotte puts it,

> That [Facebook group] is indeed, together with you [Vera Hajtó], one of the two pillars on which we can finally relax a bit. Yes... Otherwise that's exactly the same, I'm not going to say a secret, but an unknown

47 Lieselotte Maertens, Interview with Anne Marie Himpe and Lieselotte Maertens, July 16, 2022, Bruges.

48 Anne Marie Himpe, Facebook post, July 25, 2019.

49 Anne Marie Himpe, Interview with Anne Marie Himpe and Lieselotte Maertens, July 16, 2022, Bruges.

> piece of something that you couldn't talk about with other people, or didn't want to because you were convinced that no one knew anything about it anymore. [...] to us that's just a piece of family history, but it turns out to be a piece of family history for many other people as well.[50]

It is a family history that is being shared by many Belgian-Hungarian families so that the larger community of the country in which they live and to which they belong can acknowledge their existence and history: "I think that would be a great relief to many people. Somewhere an official recognition."[51]

Conclusion

Memories of migration experiences, even if sometimes second-hand memories, are still very much part of the identities of the people who belong to the Belgian families whose parents or grandparents participated in the Belgian-Hungarian child relief project between 1923 and 1927. The transgenerational transfer of memories of migration and of the integration process and painful but healing memory work is actively being pursued by the children and grandchildren. While these children were born in and grew up in Belgium, their complete integration into Belgian society as people who identify exclusively as Belgians is an ongoing process from generation to generation. Their family stories and family heritages have found their way into the collective public memory of Belgian society as a result of the intense public activity of the descendants who belong to the second and third generations. One might think that these personal histories or elements of family heritage are relevant only in private circles, but in some cases they can become important for or interesting to the larger public as responses to external pressures. The histories and thus cultural identities of migrant communities are based on individual or family stories, and they are formed in the host society in symbiosis with mainstream histories. However, the story of migration seems to remain alive in different social forms and interactions, and it can resurface in public or in private unexpectedly. Migrant heritage, which is easily seen as fading with the arrival of younger generations, suddenly becomes visible with every new attempt to define, whether individually or collectively, who we are and where we come from.

50 Lieselotte Maertens, Interview with Anne Marie Himpe and Lieselotte Maertens, July 16, 2022, Bruges.

51 Lieselotte Maertens, Interview with Anne Marie Himpe and Lieselotte Maertens, July 16, 2022, Bruges.

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Challenging Systematization in Romania: Human Rights, Transnationalism, and Dissidents in Campaigns by Opérations Villages Roumains (OVR), 1989–1990*

Manuel Herrera Crespo
KADOC Documentation and Research Centre on Religion, Culture and Society, KU Leuven
manuel.herreracrespo@kuleuven.be

Accounts of popular opposition to the systematization project in Romania have predominantly focused on organizations concerned with cultural heritage preservation and the plight of Hungarian minorities in Transylvania. As a result, the Belgian-born initiative Opérations Villages Roumains (OVR) has been largely overlooked, despite growing into the largest transnational opposition movement against systematization by 1989. Unlike other organizations, OVR primarily denounced Ceauşescu's totalitarian grip on society, with systematization being its most significant manifestation. This article investigates OVR's philosophy, methods, and objectives during its formative period from 1988 to 1990. OVR's challenge to systematization reveals how human rights were strategically implemented at chosen moments, the emergence of several transnational dimensions, and the unique roles played by exiles and dissidents. Through this case study, OVR's approach uncovers the evolving notions of human rights and transnationalism in the 1980s and highlights how these differed from other well-known Western European challenges to the practices of State Socialist regimes.

Keywords: Opérations Villages Roumains (OVR), cultural heritage preservation, human rights, transnationalism, dissidents, exiles

In the second half of the 1980s, the favorable reputation of Romania's leader Nicolae Ceauşescu in Western Europe as an idiosyncratic leader who defied Soviet policy steadily crumbled. Notably, the juxtaposition between Mikhail Gorbachev's reformist aura and Ceauşescu's pertinacity accentuated the authoritarian character of the Romanian regime.[1] Although international condemnation of Romanian repressive state policy steadily increased following the dispersal of

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1 Deletant, *Romania under Communism*, 462.

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worker demonstrations in Brasov by Romanian military forces in 1987, the country only became front-page news in Western media after the so-called project of systematization entered a new phase in March 1988.[2] Systematization was a project by the Romanian state which had been launched in 1974. The aim of the project was to transform the rural areas of the country into large agro-industrial sites, while the urban centers underwent serious infrastructural changes. The project's international and domestic notoriety stemmed from the destructive measures accompanying the restructuring. Historical centers in Bucharest were demolished, and rural villages were essentially demolished to make way for the industrialization of the local economy.[3] Additionally, Hungarian minority groups in the Western part of the country (principally Transylvania) felt that the measures and the demolition campaigns were specifically targeted against them.[4] Given the ecological, cultural, and humanitarian repercussions of systematization, Romanian critics (including some Romanians living in exile) dubbed it the "ghettoization of the Romanian countryside" or "Ceaushima."[5]

As the pace of demolition steadily increased in Bucharest and Ceauşescu announced the restructuring of almost 8,000 villages,[6] organizations concerned with the preservation of cultural heritage, such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) started to raise awareness in Western Europe of the events taking place in Romania. Both UNESCO and ICOMOS had been alerted of these events by the Association for the Protection of Historic and Artistic Monuments and members of La Ligue pour la défense de Droits de l'Homme en Roumanie (LDHR), two Romanian exile organizations based in Paris. In spring 1988, the first demonstrations against the destruction of historic buildings and neighborhoods in Bucharest were held in Paris. In parallel, with the support of the Hungarian Human Rights Foundation based in New York, Hungarian dissidents from Transylvania organized protests abroad, lobbied the United Nations, and even held a march in Budapest.[7] As the news of demolished cultural heritage and violations of minority rights spread across Western Europe,

2 Petrescu, *From Robin Hood to Don Quixote*, 95.

3 Ibid., 94.

4 Partie II Textes adoptés par le Parlement européen. Mundaneum, CC OVR 0028; The correspondence of Susana Szabo to Opérations Villages Roumains, March 2, 1989. Mundaneum, CC OVR 0004; Petrescu, *From Robin Hood to Don Quixote*, 94.

5 Tiu, "Ceausescu si problema sistematizarii rurale," 2.

6 Deletant, *Romania under Communism*, 462.

7 Demeter, "Transnational activism against heritage destruction."

a group of Belgians who were active in the media sector became dissatisfied with the lack of interest their government and international bodies had shown in the situation. They decided to take action, and they established an organization that campaigned against the project of systematization. In February 1989, they organized their first press conference in Brussels as Opérations Villages Roumains (OVR) was born. OVR was founded in a basement in Brussels, but it rapidly grew into the most important voice against systematization. By the end of 1989, more than 2,000 local committees had been established in Belgium, France, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and the UK.[8]

OVR differed from other organizations condemning the project of systematization in its scope, methods, and objectives. Whereas UNESCO, ICOMOS, and the Hungarian Human Rights Foundation focused on certain aspects of systematization (cultural heritage preservation in Bucharest or minority rights in Transylvania), OVR called attention to a myriad of distressing cultural, humanitarian, and ecological repercussions of the project. In particular, OVR sought to defy Ceauşescu's totalitarian grip on society by mobilizing a multitude of local actors in its endeavors. Hence, OVR's operations, initially coordinated out of a small basement in Brussels, were an outspoken challenge to state socialism that developed during the last months of the Cold War.[9] OVR quickly grew into a transnational organization which drew support from groups residing in countries as far as Hungary, Canada, Finland, and Poland.[10] The Fédération Internationale des Droits Humains (FIDH) played a key role in this process and provided OVR with what scholars have referred to as the infrastructure of solidarity.[11] For example, the FIDH mediated OVR's first contacts with the Romanian dissidents and exiles with whom it cooperated since its inception. Most importantly, OVR did not merely differ from the other organizations condemning systematization policy but significantly stood out from earlier campaigns denouncing state socialism in Western Europe.[12]

The literature on Western European opposition to state socialist regimes in the 1980s has tended to focus on the development and instrumentalization of a human rights discourse entangled with the rise of dissident opposition and

8 Molitor et al., *Une Utopie Citoyenne*, 102–3.

9 Interview with Paul Hermant, 10 December 2020.

10 Molitor et al., *Une Utopie Citoyenne*, 101–9.

11 Christiaens et al., "Introduction," 10.

12 Demeter, "Transnational activism against heritage destruction"; Christiaens and Herrera Crespo, "Failures, Limits and Competition."

transnational links.[13] Much scholarly attention has been devoted to Poland and Czechoslovakia, where the emergence of an internationally acclaimed human rights discourse played a determining role in Western support for Solidarity and Charter 77 members. Academics have claimed that, following the fiercely debated Helsinki Accords, human rights were established as a lingua franca that provided a basis for denouncing the repression of Solidarity and Charter 77.[14] How Western activists perceived and sought to assert these human rights has fueled academic debate ever since. While some authors stressed the apolitical nature of human rights, as if these notions were derived from some broad moral consensus, others have been keen to describe Western support for Solidarity or Charter 77 and the human rights vernacular in which this support was expressed and interpreted it as a vessel for domestic or international political objectives.[15] Whatever the case, Western support for the Czechoslovak and Polish opposition seems to have played an instrumental role in the historiography on human rights. Furthermore, scholars have highlighted the transnational character of support for the highly divergent Central and Eastern European oppositions, who fostered close contacts across the Iron Curtain.[16] During this period, human rights became entrenched in the operations and discourse of transnational activism. Alongside a set of (apolitical) moral values, human rights offered Western activists the necessary pieces to build a global puzzle of activism in which the East was connected to the South.[17] In this regard, the "transnational" was trans-European and global at the same time. Finally, scholars have underlined how dissidents and exiles benefited, if in some cases quite unevenly, from these transnational links, which were simultaneously strengthened by the incorporation of a human rights discourse. These developments went hand in hand with the attention they received in the Western media.[18]

This burgeoning scholarship has played a key role in shaping notions of human rights, transnationalism, and dissident and exile activity in the East-West

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13 Miedema, "The Transnationality of Dutch Solidarity with the Polish opposition 1980–1989"; Brier, *Entangled Protest*; Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War*; Szulecki, *Dissidents in Communist Central Europe;* Goddeeris, *Solidarity with Solidarity.*

14 Richardson-little, Dietz, and Mark, "New perspectives on Socialism and Human Rights"; Brier, *Poland's Solidarity movement and the Global politics Human Rights*, 201; Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect.*

15 Brier, *Poland's Solidarity movement and the Global politics Human Rights*; Eckel, and Moyn, *The Breakthrough.*

16 Brier, *Entangled Protest;* Demeter, "Transnational activism against heritage destruction"; Badalassi and Snyder, *CSCE and the end of the Cold War*; Kenney and Horner, *Transnational Moments of Change.*

17 Christiaens, "European Reconfigurations of Transnational Activism," 414; Christiaens, and Goddeeris, "The East versus the South," 174–75; Brier, *Poland's Solidarity movement and the Global politics Human Rights*, 190–91.

18 Szulecki, *Dissidents in Communist Central Europe.*

encounters of the late Cold War period. Nevertheless, it is the product of Western attention to a few *causes célèbres* situated in Central Europe. This contrasts with the heterogenic nature of Central and Eastern Europe.[19] Additionally, the focus on Poland and Czechoslovakia has led to analyses of events which took place within a limited timeframe, principally between 1976 and 1982. Therefore, this article focuses on the Brussels-born challenge to the project of systematization in Romania issued by OVR in 1988–1990, while also assessing the infrastructure provided by the FIDH. The Romanian case differs in several ways from the circumstances in Central Europe. Ceauşescu's plans to transform both the urban and rural environments of Romania received plenty of criticism from the West, but systematization never appeared on the global stage with the same prominence as Solidarity or Charter 77.[20] Similarly, Romania's authoritarian regime was not immune to the rise of dissident protest, although the actual number of dissidents never grew substantially and received little media coverage in the West. According to Dragoş Petrescu, many of the Romanian dissidents, such as Doina Cornea, Gabriel Andreescu, and Dan Petrescu, experienced the loneliness of radical dissidence.[21] Furthermore, Romania enjoyed comparatively friendly relations with Western European governments which were characterized by détente efforts, continuous dialogue, and reciprocal state visits.[22] Many of these contacts were of an economic nature, through which the Ceauşescu regime hoped to gain more independence from the Soviet Union and thus bolster its domestic legitimacy.[23] Indeed, Romania and its Conductor, had a very different place in East-West relations than the Central European countries. Hence, the question: how does the Romanian case alter our understanding of Western European challenges to the practices related to state socialism?

By investigating OVR's philosophy, objectives, and methods of mobilization, I argue that campaigns on behalf of Romania in the late 1980s reveal the flexibility and instrumentality of human rights, the extent and limits of transnational contacts, and the varying degree to which dissidents and exiles were integrated. Moreover, the case of OVR also explores how European imaginations and anti-totalitarian ideology interconnected with a multitude of Western European *Ostpolitiks* in the last decade of the Cold War and shaped

19 Siefert "East European Cold War Culture(s)," 28–30.

20 Tiu, "Ceausescu si problema sistematizarii rurale," 2.

21 Petrescu, "One Bloody Regime Change," 125.

22 Dragomir, "Romania Turns West"; Gonzalez Aldea, "The Identity," 24.

23 Dragomir, "Assymetric Cold War Trade."

the organization's political activism.[24] Finally, an inspection of OVR's operations reveals how opposition to the project of systematization evolved and gathered strength over the course of the 1980s and was co-created by the networks of the FIDH, which in its turn accentuates the importance of the so-called Helsinki effect.[25] Laura Demeter has already indicated the emergence and importance of transnational networks in campaigns on behalf of Romania. She has demonstrated how organizations such as UNESCO, ICOMOS, and the Hungarian Human Rights Foundation were often informed by Romanian and Hungarian dissidents, voiced opposition against systematization, and framed the destruction of cultural heritage as a human rights violation.[26] While Demeter convincingly sketched the first traces of transnational resistance, this article offers insights into the proliferation of international condemnation produced by OVR, which in contrast with earlier voices of denouncement, vociferously challenged Ceaușescu's totalitarian grip on society, of which systematization was the most prominent symptom.[27] This also strengthens Demeter's argument that the transnational networks concerned with cultural heritage preservation laid the foundations for international delegitimization of the Ceaușescu regime. All in all, this research perspective contributes to a broader understanding of the opposition that emerged against the project of systematization.

In the discussion below, I analyze OVR's philosophy, objectives, and methods on the basis of its archival documents held at the Mundaneum in Mons. These materials have been supplemented by interviews with the founder of the organization, Paul Hermant, and the organization's international coordinator, Daniel Wathelet. I focus explicitly on the period beginning with OVR's establishment in December 1988 and concluding with the accomplishment of its founding goal: the abolishment of the project of systematization in Romania, one of the first decisions taken by Petre Roman in 1989–1990.[28] This period has been referred to as the "adoption phase" by OVR members, and stands in contrast with the so-called "humanitarian phase," which began shortly after the country's 1989 transition.[29] This humanitarian phase, which was characterized by Western European aid for Romania, has received the bulk of historiographical

24 Westad, and Villaume, *Perforating the Iron Curtain*.

25 Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*.

26 Demeter, "Transnational activism against heritage destruction," 127–28.

27 Lambru, "Opération Villages roumains"; Interview with Paul Hermant December 10, 2020.

28 Pirotte, *L'épisode Humanitaire roumain*.

29 Exposé 6 mai 1990. Mundaneum, CC OVR 0028.

and societal attention due to the resonance it created across Western Europe, while the period before the implosion of the Ceauşescu regime has been largely overlooked.[30]

The article is divided into three parts. The first part focuses on OVR's strategies, objectives, and methods. It assesses the role and incorporation of human rights into the organization's communication and discourse by examining how OVR framed the project of systematization as well as the challenge to it. The second part investigates the transnational dimension of OVR's undertaking by taking a closer look at the self-proclaimed philosophy of the organization. It reveals how trans-European connections stood at the heart of OVR, which explicitly distanced itself from other global causes. Finally, the third part assesses the integration of Romanian dissidents and exiles who interacted with one another and within the organization. This framework reveals how a focus on Romania during the final Cold War years contributes to our understanding of human rights, transnational dimensions, and dissident and exile activities and how the incorporation of these three key elements differed from earlier protest campaigns against state socialist regimes.

Opérations Villages Roumains and the Evolving Role of Notions of Human Rights

Apart from the denunciations by UNESCO, ICOMOS, and the Hungarian Human Rights Foundation, West European reactions to the project of systematization were fairly limited. Notably, West European governments remained awkwardly silent. Many West European politicians had continued to prioritize East-West dialogue throughout the 1980s and identified Ceauşescu as a partner in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE).[31] In Belgium, for example, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reasoned that an untimely condemnation of systematization could hinder the diplomatic talks at the CSCE in Vienna between 1986 and 1989.[32] Indeed, for several years, organizations concerned with cultural heritage preservation and minority rights in Transylvania

30 De Vogelaere, "Wallonie : l'opération Villages roumains ou 30 ans de solidarité"; "Opération Villages Roumains: 20 ans d'aide et d'amitié"; Pirotte, *L'épisode Humanitaire roumain*; Pirotte, "L'influence Belge,"113–15.

31 Graf, "European Détente and the CSCE."

32 Projet de systematisation en Roumanie, September 14, 1988. FOD Foreign Affairs, Archives Diplomatique, 18.370, Correspondance diplomatique 1984–1985.

were the only voices condemning the plans of the Romanian state. This steadily changed as rural systematization plans entered a new phase in March 1988 and Ceauşescu proclaimed, "We must radically reduce the number of villages from 13,000 at present to about 5000–6000 at most."[33] When he made this statement, a few Belgian journalists and television producers, who felt indignant at the lack of any appropriate international response, decided to take matters into their own hands.[34] Paul Hermant and Eric Masquellier, two Belgians who were active in the media sector, launched their own initiative in December 1988.[35] Together with ten other founding members, they established Opérations Villages Roumains (OVR). What all twelve had in common was their leftist, anti-totalitarian, anti-communist, and even anarchist inspirations.[36] Their initiative emerged independently from the other organizations condemning systematization. UNESCO, ICOMOS, and the Hungarian Human Rights Foundation provided key information, however. The most important difference between earlier challenges to systematization and OVR was the fact that OVR was not merely concerned with the preservation of cultural heritage in Bucharest or violations of minority rights in Transylvania, but rather unambiguously condemned urban and rural systematization across the whole country. According to the founders, OVR was an anti-totalitarian political activist movement concerned with a myriad of cultural, ecological, and humanitarian causes in Europe.[37]

The very practical objective of the organization was to "save all Romanian villages under threat of destruction." Given the state of European politics, the opaque positioning of the Ceauşescu regime, and the limited societal knowledge in Belgium about humanitarian problems in Romania (at least in comparison with knowledge concerning humanitarian causes in what was then called the third world), the OVR founders came up with the idea of disseminated opposition reinforced with permanent anti-totalitarian education.[38] Practically, disseminated opposition meant that the agency of opposition was installed at the level of the local community (municipality) and the citizen. Inspired by Amnesty International's methods of adopting a prisoner, the organization set up a framework in which Western European villages or towns could adopt a

33 Deletant, *Romania under Communism*, 462.

34 Interview with Paul Hermant, December 10, 2020.

35 Interview with Paul Hermant, December 10, 2020; Toespraak door de heer L. Van Velthoven. Mundaneum, CC OVR 0001.

36 Hermant, Au Temps Pour Moi, 11.

37 Interview with Paul Hermant, December 10, 2020.

38 La coordination, "Opérations Villages Roumains, philosophie d'une action," 9.

Romanian village.[39] Adoption installed a symbolic bond between a Western European and Romanian village. The symbolic relation between the two villages would principally be represented by the local (Western European) committees founded on behalf of the Romanian villages. These committees included aldermen, representatives of the local center for public welfare, and engaged citizens. Their main task was to raise awareness concerning the project of systematization by organizing events, exhibitions, and fundraisers. These local committees were guided by the coordination team, which consisted of the twelve founding members. They encouraged the multitude of local OVR committees to write letters to the authorities in Romania in which they condemned systematization.[40] Several committees also addressed Ceauşescu, and some even wrote to international politicians like Gorbachev.[41]

Because the organization initially had little information concerning which of the 13,000 villages would be demolished, they decided to adopt them all. This meant they had to find an equal number of villages willing to adopt a Romanian one. Hence, during the first months of 1989, the OVR coordination team had to raise awareness about the project of systematization and its sense of urgency. In order to do this, they framed their own initiative as an "urgent intervention on a European level" against what was seen as "a crime against memory, cultural genocide and a human scandal."[42] Moreover, systematization was framed as a plan "that eradicated all traces of the Romanian past, to root out culture and tradition, to rewrite history in order to fit the coming of 'the new man.'" The plan was described in some detail:

> Most of the time, the inhabitants are warned only the day before the arrival of bulldozers. A real cultural genocide is hidden behind the official justification (a gain of 3.3 percent farming land). Trees, churches, schools, houses, historic edifices, even graveyards must disappear. An important part of the European inheritance will disappear simultaneously.[43]

Indeed, the severity of systematization was illustrated first and foremost by the destruction of Romanian villages. Moreover, the destruction of these

39 Emsellem, "L'opération village Roumains, une coopération locale transeuropéenne," 118.

40 Interview with Daniel Wathelet, April 12, 2023.

41 Correspondance OVR-commitee Belmont-sur-Lausanne to Paul Hermant. Mundaneum, CC OVR 002.

42 La coordination, "Opérations Villages Roumains, philosophie d'une action," 9.

43 Correspondence Paul Hermant and Vincent Magos to Yolanda Stanescu March 14, 1989, 1. Mundaneum, CC OVR 001.

villages was presented as an attack on European cultural heritage, due to the fact that "Most of these villages are older than several hundred years, they bear the markings of successive invasions that swept through the country, they are proud of a 'Baroque' style architecture very often decorated with fresco paintings."[44] Incorporating cultural heritage preservation as a motive and concern made sense, since systematization had always been framed in these terms by its earliest denouncers.[45] This attracted the support of architectural, rural, and cultural heritage groups such as ICOMOS, Ecovast, and Europa Nostra, which had already been challenging systematization in Romania.[46] Somewhat striking, in comparison, was the absence of any appeals to human and minority rights, nor was there mention of Transylvania or German Saxons. This corresponds with Demeter's conclusions, according to which a narrative touching on human rights concerns was only gradually incorporated into the appeals based on fears concerning the destruction of the built environment. It was only in late 1988, under the impetus of human rights activists focusing on Transylvania, that human rights gradually became part of the discourse used in the campaigns.[47]

When OVR attempted to convince local municipalities to support their efforts during their first months of operations, they often made a few suggestions concerning how letters could be sent to Ceaușescu and other Romanian authorities. For instance, they suggested the following phrasing: "I ask you to register my vigorous opposition to the projected annihilation of the village and the thousands of others considered. I intend to do anything possible to contribute to the preservation of the rural European inheritance and to the defense of the inhabitants." Again, the emphasis was placed on the destruction of the village and the protection of European cultural heritage.[48] The framing of systematization and communication with Belgian municipalities contained no real appeals to human rights issues. This also translated to the way Belgian municipalities framed their own solidarity. The town of Mons, for example, stated that "in Hainaut and due to our recent history we know the fragility of local agriculture." They added that their initiative contributed to "the springtime of European relations", referring to the self-perceived watershed momentum

44 Correspondence Paul Hermant & Vincent Magos to Yolanda Stanescu March 14, 1989, 1. Mundaneum, CC OVR 001.

45 Demeter, "Transnational activism against heritage destruction."

46 Campaign for the Protection of Villages in Romania, Hans de Koster and Michael Dower. Mundaneum, CC OVR 001.

47 Demeter, "Transnational activism against heritage destruction," 138.

48 Roemeense Dorpen Operatie, flyer voor gemeenten 3. Mundaneum, CC OVR 001.

of pan-European affairs.[49] Wathelet also observed that the image of a village on the verge of destruction had a tremendous effect on the public opinion.[50] Only one month after the launch of the initiative, 220 Belgian villages had adopted a Romanian village.[51] Indeed, the image of a village on the verge of destruction successfully encouraged a remarkably high percentage of Belgian, notably French-speaking municipalities to adopt a Romanian village.

Nonetheless, human rights were given a prominent role when the OVR coordination team addressed the European Parliament in March 1989. In order to gain support from the European Commission (EC), OVR contended that "the Romanian government aims to annihilate the societal tissue of the Romanian population, which is a major violation of human rights and the Helsinki Accords."[52] Along with the incorporation of references to human rights in its appeals, the OVR coordination team underlined the real reason behind the project of systematization, i.e. the restructuring of rural society with the ambition of dismantling the socio-cultural networks that could possibly harbor pockets of opposition.[53] This was a very different discourse than encountered in the flyers and campaign letters directed to the Belgian municipalities.

Moreover, the international success of the organization prompted it to rethink and recraft its discourse. From the beginning, OVR's initiative, objectives, and methods attracted a lot of international attention. Notably, in France and Switzerland, two countries particularly interested in the plight of Romanian villages for several reasons, curiosity swiftly transformed into mobilization, as national branches were established during the first half of March 1989. For OVR, the question remained how to internationalize their initiative without creating an unmanageable network of towns and villages all over Europe. In order to do this, the coordination team decided to cooperate with the FIDH, which functioned as an international umbrella organization for national human rights initiatives. The OVR executive committee decided that the establishment of a national OVR branch had to be in cooperation with a national human rights organization affiliated with the FIDH. Cooperation with the FIDH boosted and coordinated the proliferation of interested towns and villages all over Europe,

49 Correspondance Cabinet de l'echevin de la famille et de la jeunesse du village de Mons to OVR coordination team. Mundaneum, CC OVR 002.

50 Interview with Daniel Wathelet, April 12, 2023.

51 Correspondence Paul Hermant & Vincent Magos to Yolanda Stanescu March 14, 1989, 4. Mundaneum, CC OVR 001.

52 Compte 001/Villages Roumains/Ligue des Droits de l'Homme. Mundaneum, CC OVR 004.

53 Emsellem, "L'opération village Roumains, une coopération locale transeuropéenne," 117.

but it also meant a more prominent role for appeals to human rights in the discourse. A wide range of members from national human rights organizations and Helsinki committees were increasingly incorporated, and they framed the project of systematization first and foremost as a violation of human rights and the principles of the Helsinki Accords.[54] For example, an OVR committee from Switzerland argued that they felt a duty to make sure human rights were respected, especially by CSCE member states.[55] Their emphasis on human rights was no coincidence, since the Swiss branch had been established and supported by Le Comité d'Appui, L'union genevoise contre l'intolérence and La Ligue Suisse de Droits de l'homme.[56] OVR's connections with these kinds of organizations and its modification of its own discourse better to echo the discourses of these organizations were a result of its integration in the networks of the FIDH. The latter became a key partner for the internationalization of OVR, but it also influenced the way in which systematization was framed, perceived, and denounced.

Partly as a consequence of OVR's cooperation with the FIDH, human rights became more visible and increasingly instrumental. Yet, the cooperation also underlined the importance and existence of human rights networks established in the aftermath of the Helsinki Accords. Over the following months, national branches were established in the United Kingdom, Flanders, Norway, and the Netherlands, and contacts were also formed with human rights organizations and social movements, peace organizations, and activists in Hungary, Canada, Spain, the USA, Italy, Poland, Denmark, the Federal Republic of Germany, and Luxemburg. By late 1989, over 2,000 Western European towns and villages had adopted a Romanian village.[57] In retrospect, Romanian dissidents claimed this was a pivotal moment in which the opposition against the Ceauşescu regime finally broke its traditional boundaries delineated by the critical Romanian diaspora.[58]

In sum, appeals to human rights were used unevenly in OVR's communication during the first months of operations. While systematization was strategically framed as a violation of human rights when addressing international institutions

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54 Helsinki committee in Poland. Mundaneum, CC OVR 004.

55 Correspondence OVR-committee Belmont-sur-Lausanne to Paul Hermant. Mundaneum, CC OVR 002.

56 Rapport general de l'opération Villages Roumains Suisse. Mundaneum, CC OVR 004.

57 Molitor et al., *Une Utopie Citoyenne*, 102–3.

58 Lambru, "Opération Villages roumains."

such as the European parliament, Belgian municipalities were more moved by images of villages on the verge of destruction. Here, the language of human rights was conspicuously absent. Framing systematization as a threat to European cultural heritage seemed to make more sense because it stressed the European dimension of the project and corresponded with the interests and worries of rural villagers in Belgium. Only after OVR had expanded through the networks of the FIDH and human rights activists had lobbied the networks of cultural heritage groups did the OVR coordination team frame the repercussions of systematization as a violation of human rights. The emphasis on the European scale and context of the issue, which was present in many of OVR's promotional materials, underlined Romania's European character and its geographical proximity. What happened in Romania, OVR proclaimed, "belonged to all of us, Europeans."[59]

Local, Romanian, European, but not Global Activism

As the organization gained traction all over Europe, Paul Hermant was often asked by journalists and fellow activists, "why Romania, and not Chile or South Africa?"[60] He repeatedly replied by asking "why not Romania, Czechoslovakia, or Bulgaria?"[61] To the OVR founding committee this question depicted the stalemate of European relations characterized by what they called "peur de la proximité." In other words, Western Europeans were eager to intervene in human rights affairs all over the world but refrained from doing so when humanitarian problems emerged in their neighboring countries.[62] OVR was an explicitly European project. It differed in this significantly from the Western supporters of Solidarity or Charter 77, who sought to globalize their support by creating connections with causes in the global south.[63] Conversely, OVR did not connect with the opposition against the Pinochet regime, nor was it allied with the anti-apartheid movement. OVR rejected these global transnational connections altogether and reasoned that Western Europe should be more concerned about the state of its own geographical sphere.[64] OVR was a European movement.[65]

59 Correspondence OVR-committee Belmont-sur-Lausanne to Paul Hermant. Mundaneum, CC OVR 002.

60 La coordination, "Opérations Villages Roumains, philosophie d'une action," 10.

61 Ibid.

62 Ibid.

63 Christiaens and Goddeeris, "Competing Solidarities"; Christiaens et al., "Connecting the East to the South."

64 La coordination, "Opérations Villages Roumains, philosophie d'une action," 11.

65 Rapport general de l'opération Villages Roumains Suisse. Mundaneum, CC OVR 004.

For the OVR coordination team, European identity was linked to the notion of "Europe of the Regions." According to this ideologically divergent interpretation of European structures, which geographers and political thinkers from the French speaking world found particularly entertaining in the early 1990s, regions should replace nation states as the primary political units.[66] OVR also held that European identity blossomed because of its regional diversity and local specificities. Romania and the rest of Central and Eastern Europe were unambiguously incorporated in OVR's "Europe of the Regions."[67] The safeguarding of Romanian cultural heritage, which was always described as part of European cultural heritage, was part of these visions of European structure. The inclusion of Romania in this "Europe of the Regions" not only defied Cold War logic and détente mentalities but also drew attention to the precarious conditions of minority groups in Romania. Because the notion of "Europe of the Regions" was often linked to the ideas of ideologically separatist regions, such as Brest, Corsica, Sardinia, or Catalonia, it highlighted the political impact systematization would have on the two million Hungarians living in the northwestern part of the country, around the city of Cluj, and in the so-called Székely Land, roughly in the middle of Romania. Hence, Hungarian human rights organizations were extremely eager to adopt a (Hungarian) Romanian village.[68]

As different branches were established in several Western European countries, the OVR founders believed that the adoption of a Romanian village should also have a reciprocal transnational dimension. They therefore came up with what they called the aller-retour principle. The logo of OVR contained two arrows. One arrow pointed to the right and represented the mobilization of Western European activists on behalf of Romania. The other arrow pointed to the left and represented the reciprocal effect of the activism. The founders of the organization aimed to achieve a kind of boomerang effect through mobilization. In this regard, a Western European municipality's commitment to a Romanian village was at the same time a tool with which local citizens or opposition figures could contest domestic deforestation projects, the demolition of cultural heritage, or anything endangering minority interests.[69] It was an instrument designed for local (opposition) groups who could argue that their

66 Cepaz, "Europe of the Regions."

67 La coordination, "Opérations Villages Roumains, philosophie d'une action," 11.

68 Correspondence Susana Szabo to Opérations Villages Roumains March 2, 1989. Mundaneum, CC OVR 001.

69 Interview with Paul Hermant, December 11.

local governments had spoken out against the wide range of repercussions of the project of systematization in Romania but at the same time had neglected the values within this mobilization in their actions in Belgium or France. When a local government would chop down a local forest, demolish local cultural heritage, or endanger minority interests, these groups were equipped with a tool with which to challenge these acts.[70] Indeed, the adoption of a Romanian village had a practical reciprocal dimension. The OVR founders also hoped, however, that the adoption of a Romanian village would enhance critical thinking on the level of policy making and democratic structures in Western Europe.[71] Challenging systematization became a means with which the political ideas of the OVR founders resonated across a multitude of local branches across Western Europe. This corresponds with Brier's analysis of American Labor's support for Solidarity, in which the wider instrumentality did not jeopardize the sincerity of the initiative.[72]

In the words of the OVR founders, the adoption of a village consisted of three levels of activism: local, Romanian, and European. Firstly, the local level of activism was introduced by the aller-retour principle. Secondly, the letter-writing campaigns fueled the Romanian level of activism. And finally, the European level of activism was created by two elements, the unambiguous inclusion of Romania in any notion of Europe and cooperation among Western European towns and villages. Romanian municipalities often consisted of four or five different villages. Each village nevertheless had to be adopted by a municipality from a different country. This means that in one Romanian municipality you would have different Western European adopters who could cooperate, share experiences, and exchange information.[73] OVR founders believed this cooperation would create a stronger sense of connectedness across Western Europe. Obviously, they also wanted to include Romanian villages in these cooperative efforts, but this was not possible, since the most of the country was still isolated and the Securitate had been Argus-eyeing the OVR founders ever since the letter-writing campaigns had begun.[74] Before the revolution, in the case of Romania, the only real exchanges taking place across the Iron Curtain consisted of a few Western European activists who had traveled to Romania. After the revolution, which had not been anticipated

70 Molitor et al., *Une Utopie Citoyenne*, 33.

71 La coordination, "Opérations Villages Roumains, philosophie d'une action," 12.

72 Brier, *Poland's Solidarity movement,* 145–46.

73 La coordination, "Opérations Villages Roumains, philosophie d'une action," 15–16.

74 Interview with Paul Hermant, December 10, 2020.

by the OVR founders, contacts proliferated as a result of the tremendous wave of solidarity and humanitarian aid with which the dramatic changes were met. Western European towns and villages sent trucks filled with humanitarian goods to the village they had adopted. In a later stage, OVR members even attempted to set up tourist networks to continue contacts with Romania.[75] In this regard, one of the remarkable achievements of OVR is that, despite its reorientation towards Yugoslavia from 1992 onwards, contacts have survived to the present day. In the Belgian town of Geel, for example, the activists involved in OVR still meet with their Romanian counterparts every two years.

Configuring the Roles of Exiles and Dissidents

Through its cooperation with the FIDH, OVR came into contact with La Ligue pour la défense de Droits de l'Homme en Roumanie (LDHR). This organization, which was based in Paris, had been founded in 1977 by Romanian exiles who saw new possibilities in the political infrastructure provided by the Helsinki Accords.[76] The organization raised awareness concerning human rights violations in Romania.[77] Their biggest challenge was to close and condemn the gap between the positive image Romania enjoyed in the West and the actual experiences of Romanian citizens.[78] The vice-president and cofounder of the LDHR, Mihnea Berindei joined the OVR coordination team in January 1989. More importantly, Berindei had been a vocal critic of systematization since the early 1980s. He predominantly focused on the infrastructural changes in Bucharest.[79] His role proved essential. Berindei's exile and dissident networks provided OVR with important information on the situation in Romania. By skimming through the official Romanian press and other propaganda materials, the team at LDHR continuously provided the latest updates on the project of systematization. Translation work, which was essential for the functioning of OVR, was done by the LDHR team. To get the job done, they even took out advertisements in a Transylvanian newspaper calling on Romanians in France to help them. They also decided which villages would be up for adoption. Each of these villages needed a designated file containing information on the location of the village,

75 Interview with Daniel Wathelet, April 12, 2023.
76 Badalassi and Snyder, *CSCE and the end of the Cold War*.
77 Berindei, "Operation Villages Roumains 1989–2005."
78 Scutaru, "La Roumanie à Paris."
79 Demeter, "Transnational activism against heritage destruction," 132.

the source that mentioned its imminent destruction, details concerning churches and monuments, demographic information, and information concerning local agricultural practices.[80]

The second part of their job was to inform the rural villages in Romania about the moral support they had been receiving from OVR. Again, LDHR's network was immensely useful, as OVR's operations were announced on Radio Free Europe. To what extent these radio emissions reached their destination remains unclear. However, Radio Free Europe received one letter in the summer 1989 from a group of farmers living in Iaşi County expressing their gratitude.[81] In general, while the Iron Curtain was still intact, OVR's endeavor was largely politically symbolic. Most of the villagers in Romania had no clue they were being adopted by West European towns and villages. Moreover, during the adoption phase, the lack of a Romanian response created uncertainties about the real value of the initiative. Exiles, however, helped explain the isolation and limited infrastructure in rural Romania, which was one of the main causes of the lack of responses.[82] Furthermore, the writings of exiles were frequently published by OVR. Their accounts attempted to link the experiences of Romanians with the actions of OVR. For example, someone writing under the pseudonym Dinu Flamand authored a chapter titled "Un people adopté." Someone using the pseudonym Pe(t)re Stroïca, wrote about how OVR offered new possibilities to oppose Ceauşescu.[83]

Some less established exiles, such as Dan Alexe, who had only recently fled Romania, were quickly integrated into OVR's organizational practices. Alexe became the Romanian Brussels correspondent for Radio free Europe shortly after his arrival. In retrospect, Berindei's team was small and certainly did not represent a large group of Romanian migrants. Yet those who wanted to be involved were given a crucial task in OVR's functioning. Moreover, the unambiguous involvement in OVR's practices of Berindei and other exiles, such as Ariadna Combes (the daughter of Doina Cornea who lived in Paris), Mariana Celac, Dinu Zamfirescu, Lia Constantinescu, Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine, Dan Alexe, and many others, is remarkable and shows the importance of exiles and their networks when challenging the Ceauşescu regime. This ties in with the important roles other scholars have attributed to Romanian exiles. Not only did

80 Berindei, "Operation Villages Roumains 1989–2005."

81 Ibid.

82 Berindei, "La naufrage planifié," 41–43.

83 Flamand, "un peuple adopté," 68–71. Stroïca, "Dés-espoirs d'un exile," 72–79.

Romanian and Hungarian exiles contribute to the incorporation of a human rights narrative into OVR's discourses, they also filled in key positions in the organization and helped coordinate initiatives. This suggests that perhaps OVR should not be conceptualized as a solely Western initiative. Among the twelve founders, two had a Romanian background.

Unsurprisingly dissidents had a very different role in OVR's campaigns. The writings by and interviews with dissidents were predominantly used and spread to underscore the severity of the situation in Romania. By providing a rostrum for dissidents such as Doina Cornea, Gabriel Andreescu, and Dan Petrescu, OVR furthered the struggle to destroy Ceaușescu's positive image in the West once and for all. The British embassy in Bucharest, for example, persistently denied that villages were being demolished.[84] The local branches in Belgium, France, and the UK managed to get the testimonies of dissidents broadcasted on national television.[85] According to the president of OVR France, these broadcasts had an enormous impact on mobilization in France.[86] Television coverage and recognition across Western Europe helped transform Doina Cornea and others into dissidents, as scholars have argued this was one of three prerequisites to be labeled a dissident.[87]

All in all, OVR's relations with dissidents weren't always easy. In the interview, Hermant clarified this by affirming that OVR was not just an organization that supported dissidents or trade unionists. What OVR envisaged was more complex, provocative, and effective. It aimed to rearrange European relations and connections starting at the most local level.[88] When Ariadna Combes approached them in January 1989 and asked for humanitarian aid and financial support for Romanian dissidents, the OVR coordination team rejected this proposal and explained this was not OVR's main objective.[89] After the revolution, OVR had established contacts with Petre Roman to discuss OVR's plans for the future. This infuriated Doina Cornea, because she felt Roman had always belonged to the Ceaușescu regime. Once again, Hermant and others explained that they had not been converted into puppets of Roman and continued to work on the local

84 "The bulldozing of Romania's past," *The Times*. Mundaneum, CC OVR 002.

85 Communiqué de presse hebdomaire de la Coordination de l'Opération Villages Roumain, paraissant exceptionellement le lundi. Mundaneum, CC OVR 002.

86 Berindei, "Operation Villages Roumains 1989–2005."

87 Szulecki, *Dissidents in Communist Central Europe.*

88 Interview with Paul Hermant, December 10, 2020.

89 Interview with Daniel Wathelet, April 12, 2023.

and rural level. This is remarkable, especially when juxtaposed with the ways in which exiles were incorporated into the organization.

Conclusion

By steering away from the more conventional Western European challenges to state socialism, both in chronological and geographical terms, this article highlights the very late integration and conscious incorporation of a human rights language, transnational perspectives, and dissident and exile perspectives into the opposition discourses crafted by OVR. The OVR coordination team was aware of the strategic uses of these three indispensable elements of any challenge to Ceauşescu's totalitarian grip on society, but it also recognized their limits. Appeals to human rights were used strategically to condemn systematization in communications with the European parliament. Systematization was portrayed as the annihilation of small peaceful villages that were sites of European cultural heritage. These kinds of narratives corresponded with earlier denunciations coming from heritage preservation groups. Romanian villages were portrayed as part of a shared Europe and similar to their West European adopters. During its first months of operations, OVR specifically targeted rural Belgian villages with less than 15,000 inhabitants, or in other words, communities that could relate to the Romanian villages. Hence, a great deal of effort was put in by the LDHR to provide reliable, detailed information concerning the Romanian villages.

Secondly, the transnational dimension of OVR's philosophy allows one to interpret the organization as a challenge to the stalemate in East-West relations characterized by détente mentalities. By decisively building links across Europe, that unambiguously included the world behind the Iron Curtain, and by not developing its support through centralized channels, OVR confronted the status quo of European relations, which had been epitomized by the persistently friendly ties towards the Ceauşescu regime. It is thus hardly surprising that OVR collided with the Belgian détente-prone government. In this sense, OVR was explicitly trans-European, but it declined to connect with causes in the global south. The OVR leaderships reasoned that the global south was already taken care of by numerous organizations with a north-south orientation. Moreover, OVR's successful transnational development was clearly supported by a multitude of organizations that had been established in the aftermath of the Helsinki Accords. This contrasts with the tendency to deny the so-called Helsinki effect in the secondary literature. The accounts of OVR underlined

how the Helsinki Accords created opportunities for activists, dissidents, and exiles who increasingly organized themselves. Notably, the crucial role played by the FIDH and its infrastructure clearly reveal the importance of these networks. Although organizations varied in size, their networks, operations, and willingness to participate all contributed to the success of OVR. Notably the unambiguous incorporation of the LDHR was remarkable. In contrast with many Western supporters of Solidarity and their exile offices abroad, OVR did not merely support or financially supply LDHR. They were given a precise task and even included at the decision making level. OVR's relations with dissidents and exiles reveals how challenges to systematization were not merely driven by actors in the West but were also issued by Romanians themselves, which problematizes OVR's conceptualization as Western-led.

OVR's first year of operations reveals an unconventional challenge to a state socialist regime that was shaped by the Cold War logic of the late 1980s and characterized by elements researchers have only recently started to uncover, such as the long détente, the limited apolitical nature of human rights, and the importance of exile and dissident networks.

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Czech Anesthesiologists on Their Way to the Netherlands: Motives, Expectations, and (Dis)Engagement (1968–1970)*

Michaela Šmidrkalová
Charles University, Prague
michaela.smidrkalova@gmail.com

Miroslav Michela
Charles University, Prague
miroslav.michela@ff.cuni.cz

In 1970, the Third European Congress of Anaesthesiology was held in Prague. Paradoxically, many leading Czech and Slovak representatives of the field were absent, having emigrated to the West, predominantly to the Netherlands, following the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. This emigration, however, did not result in Czechoslovak anaesthesiologists being entirely disconnected from their former colleagues or losing touch with the domestic development of medicine. Despite the Cold War and the Iron Curtain, medical knowledge continued to be exchanged between the West and the East. The congress exemplified how Western anaesthesiologists could meet their Soviet bloc counterparts. Informal contacts, crucial for Czechoslovak (future) migrants, facilitated knowledge dissemination. These contacts with Dutch anaesthesiologists, who became a 'window to the world,' enabled them to join European or global medical-scientific networks. The study probes why a significant number of anaesthesiologists emigrated from Czechoslovakia to the Netherlands post-1968, their integration into Dutch society, and their recognition. It questions whether they engaged with the Czechoslovak expatriate community or primarily focused on their profession and relationships with Dutch colleagues. Using anaesthesiology as a lens, the study illustrates how these doctors, having emigrated during 1968–1970, established themselves professionally in Dutch society. They shared a strong professional identity, which assumed a transnational and partly denationalized form. Their medical vocation, along with the experience of living in socialist Czechoslovakia for twenty years, led to a reluctance to partake in exile activities for the 'homeland cause,' a sentiment not fully understood by some of the 1948 migrants.

Keywords: Czechoslovakia, Netherlands, migration, exile, anaesthesiology

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Introduction

At the turn of August and September, 1970, leading European experts in the field of anesthesiology met in Prague for the Third European Congress of Anaesthesiology. Paradoxically, many important Czech and Slovak representatives of the field were absent. After the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, they emigrated to the West, specifically to the Netherlands, thus committing the crime of fleeing the republic from the point of view of the Czechoslovak state. This did not mean, however, that these anesthesiologists from Czechoslovakia were completely cut off from their former colleagues and lost contact with developments in medicine back home. Despite the Cold War and the Iron Curtain, there was transfer of medical knowledge between the West and the East, and this congress was one example of an occasion when anesthesiologists from the West could meet colleagues from the Soviet bloc. In addition to these official events, knowledge was also spread through informal contacts, which were crucial for Czechoslovak citizens who would later leave the country. Through their contacts with the Dutch anesthesiologists, who became a "window to the world" for them, they were able to connect to European and global medical scientific networks.[1] However, being part of a global community of doctors with a particular specialization also influenced the behavior of these migrants within the Czechoslovak exile community.

Why did so many anesthesiologists from Czechoslovakia emigrate to the Netherlands after 1968? How did these doctors assimilate into Dutch society and gain recognition? Did they become involved in Czechoslovak emigrant society life, or did they concentrate rather on their profession and relations with Dutch colleagues? For this category of migrants (doctors who continued their professional work in the Netherlands), the phenomenon of "double engagement" played an important role. This term refers to the lifestyles of migrants who on the one hand were involved in activities among the community that were related to the status of this group as national exiles but who on the other hand remained active members of their professions. Thus, social and political life in the host country created a kind of "double engagement" in a national environment and a transnational one.[2] How can we characterize the "double engagement" among

1 On the history of medical science transfers during the Cold War see, for example, Vargha, *Polio Across the Iron Curtain*; Loeckx, *Cold War Triangle*; on the phenomenon of migration of doctors see, for example, Connell, *Migration and the Globalisation of Health Care*.

2 See, for example, Mazzucato, "The Double Engagement."

anesthesiologists from Czechoslovakia? These are the questions that we examine in this study.

Using anesthesiology as an example, the study shows the trajectories by which doctors who left Czechoslovakia in 1968–1970 arrived in the Netherlands and how they managed to establish themselves professionally in Dutch society. First, we offer a brief overview of the general context of Czechoslovak migration to the Netherlands after 1968. The study then focuses on the migration of students and doctors to the Netherlands, with emphasis on the period after the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. Finally, the third part centers on a specific group of Czech physicians (anesthesiologists) in the Netherlands and their life stories from the perspective of their experiences as emigrants and exiles. The study argues that anesthesiologists shared a strong professional engagement and identity which took a transnational and partly de-nationalized, form. Their medical vocation and the experience of living in socialist Czechoslovakia made them reluctant to engage in activities in the exile community that were motivated by or centered around some attachment to the beleaguered "homeland," and some of the migrants who had fled the country in 1948 found this difficult to understand.

Little research has been done on the Czechoslovak exiles in the Netherlands after 1948, with the exception of several publications by Sylva Sklenářová.[3] However, Sklenářová's works focus primarily on the interwar period and the diplomatic and political context of Czechoslovak-Dutch relations,[4] as well as relations with the other countries of today's Benelux (Belgium and Luxembourg).[5] Émigré psychiatrist Miroslav (Mirek) Kabela (1938–2011) has offered important insights into the Czech émigré community in the Netherlands.[6] The emigration of physicians is closely intertwined and has many parallels with the emigration of scientists (and in the case of medical scientists, the two topics overlap

3 See, for example, Sklenářová, "Osudy exilu z roku 1948 v Nizozemí"; Sklenářová, "Nizozemská špionážní aféra."

4 See, for example, Sklenářová, "Čechoslováci v Nizozemsku v první polovině 20. století"; Sklenářová, *Diplomatické vztahy Československa a Nizozemska*; Sklenářová, "Kulturní vztahy mezi Československem a Nizozemskem."

5 See, for example, Sklenářová. *Čechoslováci v zemích dnešního Beneluxu*; Sklenářová. "Krajané v belgické hornické obci Winterslag."

6 Kabela et al., *Holandsko a my*; Kabela, "Český exil 1948 a 1968 v Nizozemsku"; Miroslav Kabela, "Přehled historických česko-nizozemských kontaktů a vztahů a historie českých emigrantů v Nizozemí." Unpublished manuscript. Libri Prohibiti Library, Prague.

considerably).[7] The materials on Czechoslovak migrants in the Netherlands, collected by Miroslav Kabela and currently held in the Libri Prohibiti Library in Prague, are also valuable. The written testimonies of the Czechoslovak migrants interviewed by Kabela are particularly useful,[8] for instance, as are his experiences in psychiatric practice, during which he also helped migrants from Czechoslovakia (and which he mentions in some of his publications).[9] Finally, archival sources stored in the Security Services Archives (SSA) in Prague and the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic (AMFA) are also relevant to the topic. The files originating from the activities of the communist security services stored at SSA in many cases contain information on the careers, family backgrounds, and (alleged) motivations of the emigrants. It is of course necessary, however, to remain aware of the context in which these materials were created the purposes which they served (for example, strategies in witness statements made by relatives during interrogations).

Czechoslovak Migration to the Netherlands after 1968

The composition of the Czechoslovak community in the Netherlands changed after World War II and especially after 1948, when the communists seized power in Czechoslovakia and established an authoritarian regime that persecuted its opponents. The communist coup in February 1948 was condemned by the majority of the Dutch, and soon the first Czech and Slovak refugees began to arrive. One of the first refugee groups consisted of about twenty Czech and Slovak students.[10] In November 1949, the estimated number of Czechs and Slovaks in the Netherlands was about 200.[11]

The new migrants of the late 1960s and 1970s completely changed the composition and structure of the Czechoslovak community in the Netherlands. Moreover, the new wave of migrants from Czechoslovakia had a different experience of emigration and assimilation in their new homeland. The situation in the Netherlands in 1968 and afterwards was quite different from that just

7 See, for example Kostlán and Velková, *Wissenschaft im Exil*; Štrbáňová and Kostlán, *Sto českých vědců v exilu*; Hálek, *Ve znamení "bdělosti a ostražitosti."*

8 These interviews are part of an extensive manuscript titled "Přehled historických česko-nizozemských kontaktů a vztahů a historie českých emigrantů v Nizozemí." Libri Prohibiti Library, Prague.

9 See, for example, Kabela, "Vliv emigrace na psychické problémy."

10 Kabela, "Český exil 1948 a 1968 v Nizozemsku," 2.

11 AMFA, Nizozemsko [Netherlands] TO-O, 1945–1959, Letter from the Ambassador of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic in Haag, November 18, 1949.

after the war. The Netherlands was no longer a country recovering from war. It was, rather, a country participating in and benefiting from the economic growth of Western Europe as well as a country in need of a workforce. Thus, the composition of the general migrant community in the Netherlands changed significantly. In addition to migrants from the former Dutch East Indies (today's Indonesia), the number of economic migrants (guest workers) from the Mediterranean, especially Turkey and Morocco, began to increase from the early 1960s. However, in the attitude of the Dutch towards the Czechoslovaks, some features were common. As had been the case in 1948 after the communists seized power in Czechoslovakia, there was outrage in the Netherlands over the brutal intervention by Warsaw Pact troops in Czechoslovakia twenty years later.

The influx of Czechoslovak migrants from the post-1968 wave was reflected in the numerical increase of the Czech and Slovak diaspora in the Netherlands. From June 1968 to June 1970, a total of 1,203 asylum seekers applied for asylum in the Netherlands, the majority of whom (938) came from Czechoslovakia. The second most numerous group was consisted of people from Portugal, but this group was almost ten times smaller (97 people). In comparison, 49 Poles and 32 Hungarians applied for asylum during this period.[12] In 1973, the estimated number of Czechs and Slovaks in the Netherlands, according to the data of the Czechoslovak embassy in the Netherlands, was about 900 persons.[13] Seven years later, this number reached 1,000.[14] This was a very small number compared to, for example, the 200,000 migrants from Suriname who emigrated to the Netherlands during the migration wave related to Suriname's declaration of independence in 1975.[15] Thus, although Czechoslovakia was significant in terms of asylum requests in 1968–1970, from a numerical point of view, the Czechoslovak migrant community was not a very significant minority in the Netherlands. In the 1970s, almost half of the immigrants to the Netherlands came from either Turkey, Morocco, Suriname, the Netherlands Antilles, or Indonesia.[16]

12 Walaardt, "New Refugees?," 80.

13 AMFA, Nizozemsko TO-T, 1970–74, Czechoslovak emigration in the Netherlands and its activities in 1973. Political Report No. 13, September 11, 1973, 1.

14 AMFA, Nizozemsko TO-T, 1980–89, Political Report No. 53 – Operation of anti-communist centers and propaganda against the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and evaluation of the activities of the Czechoslovak emigration in the Netherlands, November 27, 1980, 3.

15 Müggem, *Beyond Dutch Borders*, 42.

16 Engbersen, "Migration transitions," 93.

The new wave of migrants, however, created rifts within the Czechoslovak exile community. The post-1968 emigrants did not have much confidence in the Czech and Slovak migrants who had come to the Netherlands after 1948. The differences were not only "generational," but also political. While most of the migrants from the post-February wave were anti-communist, in the case of those who emigrated from Czechoslovakia in 1968–1970, anti-communism did not play such a fundamental role. Some of these migrants were even former members of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia.[17] Many of the older émigrés criticized the new ones, complaining that the new wave of Czechoslovak immigrants did not have to grapple with the same material and financial challenges that they had faced in the immediate postwar years. The post-1948 emigrants had arrived in the Netherlands at a time when the country was still struggling with reconstruction after the war, whereas the "post-1968" arrivals were coming to a prosperous country with a high standard of living. The post-1968 migrants envied the "older" generation of émigrés, however, particularly their good professional positions and material standards. Some from the "new" migrant community also hoped that they would soon return home, to Czechoslovakia, and were therefore reluctant to become politically involved in exile. Many had suffered disillusionment and felt a sense of resignation after they experienced the suppression of the liberalization process in Czechoslovakia, and they therefore did not want to take an active part in social or political life abroad. They were looking for a peaceful life in a new environment.[18]

Kabela, for example, later recalled meeting a married couple who had emigrated to the Netherlands after 1968:

> The couple (the man was a psychologist) talked only about what they had already bought and acquired, they focused only on economic matters and prosperity. I even remember that this compatriot told me that in those chaotic days right after the Soviet invasion, he still quickly returned to the Czechoslovakia to get his books or other things. Understandably, the "post-February" [post-1948] refugees did not have much confidence in these new "refugees."[19]

Ivan Gaďourek, a Dutch sociologist of Czech origin who emigrated in 1948, also noted the differences between the two Czechoslovak waves of migration

17 On the broader context of the two Czechoslovak migration waves from 1948 and 1968 in general see Brouček, "Emigrace 1948 a 1968 ze svědectví účastníků."

18 Kabela, "Český exil 1948 a 1968 v Nizozemsku," 6–7.

19 Kabela, *Přehled historických česko-nizozemských kontaktů*, 259.

and saw the new generation of migrants as "motivated more by economics than by ideas."[20] According to Gaďourek, the more recent arrivals did not assimilate as much, which was why some of them, anti-communists, maintained more contact with dissent groups back home than with similarly oriented exile circles.[21]

Miroslav Kabela, however, also noted the view from the other side, i.e. that of an emigrant who came to the Netherlands after August 1968. The more recent emigrants complained that the older emigrants resented the newcomers because the "post-August" arrivals enjoyed more favorable material conditions. The more recent emigrant explained the differences and tensions between the generations by the changed economic situation of the Netherlands. He described the Netherlands in the 1960s as a "prosperous system during the conjuncture, where poverty no longer existed." He also dealt with the question of unfulfilled expectations concerning the involvement of new migrants in the fight against the communist regime in Czechoslovakia. He explained that it wasn't just that the new arrivals were afraid of being compromised were they to return to Czechoslovakia. According to him, the prevailing feelings were disappointment with life and a sense of resignation. The issue of consumerism and financial matters also played a significant role, because, as he said, "most people have always limited themselves to consuming what is presented to them and don't do much activity in that which doesn't fill the wallet."[22] A similar explanation for the disengagement of the 1968–1970 migrants was given to Kabela by another member of this "generation," who claimed that people in communist Czechoslovakia were tired of all kinds of organizing and engagement.[23]

Finally, when monitoring the situation among the Czechoslovak emigrants, the Czechoslovak embassy in The Hague also registered the discord between the two waves and stated that "only a small part of the post-August emigrants passively participates in emigration actions." And here again we find an economic explanation, because according to the aforementioned report, "the desire to save money for a new car, home furnishings and other household necessities" was particularly strong among the new migrants.[24] In justifying the non-engagement of migrants, the embassy materials also include references to concerns over

20 Gaďourek, *Cestou Komenského*, 174.

21 Ibid.

22 Kabela, "Češi a Slováci uvízlí," 183.

23 Kabela, *Přehled historických česko-nizozemských kontaktů*, 443.

24 AMFA, Nizozemsko TO-T, 1970–74, Czechoslovak emigration in the Netherlands and its activities in 1973. Political Report No. 13, September 11, 1973, 1.

"side doors," i.e. the anxiety over speaking out too vociferously against the ruling communist regime in Czechoslovakia, which could then make it impossible for them to legalize their residency abroad and thus also impossible for them to return to Czechoslovakia to visit family and friends (emigrants were prosecuted in Czechoslovakia for illegally leaving the Republic and given prison sentences by the courts in absentia). The embassy, however, interpreted the efforts to legalize their stays, which occurred in many cases, as evidence of the will of the emigrants to "return" to Czechoslovakia.[25] During interrogations by the State Security Service, relatives often made similar statements, expressing their belief that their emigrant family members wanted to return. On the other hand, however, the argument that someone emigrated for professional reasons and was considering returning was more acceptable to the Czechoslovak authorities than any mention of political motives for emigration. Moreover, non-political or non-ideological explanations could prompt the courts to give more lenient sentences. The question is thus whether any of the statements made in the course of such an interrogation can be considered reliable or revealing.[26]

Although the testimonies of contemporaries and archival materials clearly point to the division of the Czechoslovak exile community in the Netherlands, it is also necessary to mention the efforts made to unite the community. An attempt to unite the Czechoslovak exile community in the Netherlands was made through the launch of the periodical *Okno dokořán* (Window Wide Open), which was intended as an open democratic platform that would appeal to the whole community. This magazine was founded in February 1969, and members of both generations of migrants contributed to it (both as authors and editors), including Miroslav Kabela, who initially headed the editorial staff.[27] Another example of joint activities of both generations of Czechoslovak migrants was the establishment of the association *Nederlandse Stichting Comenius* in April 1969. This association was recognized by the Federation of Refugee Organizations (Federatie van Organisaties van Vluchtelingen, FOVIN) as the central organization for Czechoslovak refugees in the Netherlands.[28] There were also efforts to cooperate with other emigrants from Central Europe. For example, Czechoslovak embassy staff noted the cooperation of Czechoslovak exiles with

25 AMFA, Nizozemsko TO-T, 1970–74, Czechoslovak emigration in the Netherlands and its activities in 1973. Political Report No. 13, September 11, 1973, 1–2.

26 See the testimonies of relatives of emigrating anesthesiologists quoted below.

27 Formanová, Gruntorád and Přibáň, *Exilová periodika*, 194–95.

28 Kabela, "Češi a Slováci uvízlí," 184.

Polish and Hungarian emigrants. The latter, for example, offered the premises of the Hungarian Cultural House in Amsterdam to other exiled national groups.[29]

One of the ways of meeting members of the Czechoslovak exile community was through activities and events associated with the exile branch of the Sokol organization.[30] The exile branch of Sokol in the Netherlands was short-lived, however. Several Czechoslovak emigrants who settled in the Netherlands after August 1968 founded the first Sokol unit in Delft in October 1973.[31] But by 1982, the Sokol Delft no longer existed due to loss of members and little activity.[32] Even earlier, at the beginning of 1980s, the smaller section of Sokol Utrecht, which had been established five years earlier, was also dissolved.[33]

Other associations played important roles in connecting Czechoslovak migrants, such as the scouts. In 1975, the "Czechoslovak Exile Scouts Holland District" was established, which was divided into three smaller sections (North, Center, and South).[34] However, in 1987, this branch of exiled scouts was forced to suspend its activities due to the lack of active members.[35] The main reason was the fact that the children of emigrants, mostly of those from the second wave of migration after 1968, had "grown up." But even before that, it was already apparent that the Czechoslovak exile scouts in the Netherlands, which were nationality-oriented, were no longer appealing to the children, who had already assimilated into Dutch society. This is confirmed by the words of one daughter of post-1968 Czechoslovak emigrants, who as a child went to exile scout camps and later, as an adult, shared her feelings with Kabela:

> I did not like their overly Czech feelings and often unkind attitude towards everything Dutch. These scout leaders lived perhaps mostly in a closed Czech environment and did not realize that we were already mostly Dutch children, accustomed to the Dutch way of way of life.[36]

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29 AMFA, Nizozemsko TO-T, 1970–74, Czechoslovak emigration in the Netherlands and its influence on the labor and communist movement, November 2, 1970, 1.

30 Sokol was a physical education organization founded in Prague in 1862. Sokol events were associated with Czech nationalism and patriotism. After the communists took power in Czechoslovakia in 1948, Sokol was suppressed, some of its members were imprisoned, and some emigrated from Czechoslovakia. Exile Sokol units were then founded all over the world, especially in countries with a large Czechoslovak community.

31 Waldauf, *Sokol,* vol. 2, 578.

32 Waldauf, *Sokol,* vol. 3, 187.

33 Ibid., 133.

34 Břečka, *Kronika čs. skautského hnutí*, 266.

35 Ibid., 274.

36 Kabela, "Češi a Slováci uvízlí," 186.

The Netherlands as a Center of Czechoslovak Students and Doctors

In the first years after World War II, Dutch migration policy was characterized by a rather conservative approach and a reluctance on the part of the government and authorities to accept large numbers of refugees. The postwar economic recovery of the Netherlands was still underway, and the country was faced with an influx of migrants from former Dutch colonies.[37]

The exception to this approach and a key moment for future Dutch students (and future doctors) from Czechoslovakia was the founding of the University Asylum Fund (Universitair Asiel Fonds, UAF) in the Netherlands in the spring of 1948.[38] The creation of the UAF was a reaction to the events of February 1948 in Czechoslovakia and the takeover of power by the communists. However, the path to establishing this fund was not easy. Although representatives of the Dutch government expressed their outrage about the developments in Czechoslovakia, they nevertheless refused to accept Czechoslovak refugees and returned illegal immigrants to West Germany. Eventually, the Dutch administration agreed to accept 100 students from Czechoslovakia at most on the condition that an organization be set up to guarantee that "undesirable persons shall be obliged to leave and to arrange for sufficient funds for the asylum seekers to actualize their stay." Therefore, on April 9, 1948, the Dutch universities founded the UAF, the first refugee organization in the Netherlands dedicated to supporting émigré students at universities.[39] In May of the same year, a committee consisting of representatives of the Dutch Student Council and the Dutch Refugee Aid Federation visited refugee camps in West Germany and selected Czechoslovak students to receive scholarships.[40]

Thanks to UAF scholarships, the Netherlands became one of the centers of Czechoslovak émigré students. UAF statistics show the predominance of students from Czechoslovakia in the first year of the fund's existence. In November 1948, 56 scholarship recipient were registered, 43 of whom came from Czechoslovakia. The second largest group (Hungarians) were represented by "only" ten scholarship holders. The other students came from Poland (three), Latvia (three), and Bulgaria (two). In the early years after the UAF was

37 On Dutsch asylum policy in this period, see, for example: Berghuis, *Geheel ontdaan van onbaatzuchtigheid*. On refugees in the Netherlands in general, see Bronkhorst, *Een tijd van komen*.

38 On the history of the UAF see Van Esterik, *Het zout der aarde*.

39 Goedhart, *Spolu "alejí Evropy,"* 49.

40 Van Esterik, *Het zout der aarde*, 30. Quoted by Van Rooi, *De opvang van vluchteling-studenten*, 15.

founded, around 400 students applied for the few available scholarships each year. By the mid-1950s, however, the fund's budget (which consisted mainly of donations from the Dutch) had declined significantly, as had the number of scholarships awarded. For example, in 1953, only 26 people were still studying on UAF scholarships. This trend changed after the Hungarian Revolution in 1956. Thanks to the UAF, more than 100 Hungarian students were given the opportunity to study at Dutch universities. This was made possible by an extra budget from the Dutch government, which was responding to the support that Hungarian refugees enjoyed in Dutch society. This was also reflected in the fact that the Netherlands accepted a total of more than 3,000 Hungarian refugees at the time.[41]

After the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact troops in August 1968, like after the coup of February 1948, the Netherlands again offered Czechoslovak students the opportunity to attend Dutch universities on UAF scholarships.[42] According to Miroslav Kabela, in the 1970/1971 academic year, there were 97 Czechoslovak students (58 male and 39 female) enrolled at Dutch universities. Most of them studied in Amsterdam (22), followed by Nijmegen (19), Utrecht (16), Delft (eight), Eindhoven (eight), and in smaller numbers in other university towns as well.[43] In the aftermath of 1968, however, students did not make up as high a proportion of Czechoslovak émigrés as they had in the post-February emigration wave. The language barrier, especially in the case of students, seems to have played a more significant role for this generation of migrants. According to Kabela, many students choose Slavic languages as their field of study precisely because they did not know Dutch. He even recorded the story of a student who initially decided to study medicine in the Netherlands but ended up switching to Slavic languages because of the language barrier.[44]

In some cases, the offers of scholarships and university educational opportunities for migrants brought students to the Netherlands who otherwise would not have chosen the country as their place of exile. This was the case for one young university student from Czechoslovakia who shared his feelings with Kabela:

41 UAF. Oprichtingsverhaal. Accessible online at: https://www.uaf.nl/over-ons/oprichtingsverhaal/ (Accessed May 1, 2023)

42 On the asylum policy of the Netherlands after 1968 see, for example, Doesschate. *Asielbeleid en belangen*.

43 Kabela, *Přehled historických česko-nizozemských kontaktů*, 289.

44 Ibid., 363.

> I'm miserable here, but as I have a scholarship here, I am condemned to live in the Netherlands for three more years. To me, this country is unfamiliar, I feel somehow distant from everything, even objectively nice things don't appeal to me, and nothing touches me emotionally. (...) I know that I will not find what I have lost here and that I cannot live here. Once I graduate, I will go to France or Germany. I am convinced that a Czech feels better there.[45]

One of the reasons the student gave for his dissatisfaction with the Netherlands was the local landscape. According to him, it was a "flat, empty, hollow country, cut into geometric rectangles by straight canals."[46]

Other migrants from Czechoslovakia also found it difficult to get used to Dutch culture and habits. For example, for one young woman, Czechoslovakia remained her home and country because it was "a picturesque landscape, hills and forests, meadows and little fields where potatoes, onions, and all sorts of things grew; roads lined with fruit trees with juicy apples, plums and pears—just pick them, little villages, old houses, churches, people mowing the grass." In the Netherlands, on the other hand, nature was understood as "a cow in a meadow," and the last remains of "real nature" became "reserves surrounded by fences with 'no entry' signs."[47] This was probably a more general trend, or at least this was suggested by the results of a survey of 105 Czech and Slovak migrants conducted by Kabela in March 1970. According to the results, 69 percent of the respondents missed the landscapes of Czechoslovakia. In this context, it is noteworthy that "only" 32 percent of the respondents mentioned a problem with the Dutch language.[48]

In addition to students emigrating to the Netherlands, the 1968 migration wave was also characterized by many qualified middle-aged emigrants, including doctors. As of 1977, for example, there were 108 physicians of Czechoslovak origin (or physicians who had studied medicine in Czechoslovakia) working in the Netherlands. This was the third largest number of physicians of foreign origin, after Belgians (183 physicians) and Indonesians (142).[49] The proportion

45 Kabela, "Vliv emigrace na psychické problémy," 33–35.

46 Ibid., 34.

47 Mulder, "Jak jsem se skoro stal vlastizrádcem," 132–33.

48 Kabela, *Přehled historických česko-nizozemských kontaktů*, 281. After arriving in the Netherlands, the Czechs and Slovaks had the opportunity to attend an intensive language course at the Language Centre for Foreigners in Berkenhoven. Not all of them took advantage of it.

49 The fourth largest group (West Germans) was almost half the number of Czechs and Slovaks, with 61 working in the Netherlands. In comparison, the statistics reported 50 Polish doctors (corresponding to fifth

of doctors and particularly anesthesiologists Czechoslovak origin becomes even more remarkable given the relatively small size of the Czechoslovak exile community in the Netherlands. If we look at specializations, we find that, in addition to anesthesiologists, many psychiatrists of Czech and Slovak origin worked in the Netherlands after 1968.[50] The doctors from Czechoslovakia working in the Netherlands also included surgeons, gynecologists, and other specialists.[51]

In the 1960s, at the time of the partial liberalization process in Czechoslovakia, many of these people in the medical profession traveled to Western countries, including the Netherlands, for internships or at least conferences. They thus became involved in international networks of their medical specialization.[52] For some doctors, the foreign internship or congress, for which they left Czechoslovakia legally, then became the beginning of life as an émigré (and they were abroad illegally the moment when their permitted period of stay expired).[53] This involved not only Western countries, but also Third World countries, especially Africa.[54] However, some doctors also emigrated in a more common way, i.e. by not returning from permitted vacations abroad.[55]

Doctors usually had no problem finding employment in the Netherlands. Indeed, they often emigrated at the invitation of Dutch colleagues, having already been promised a job. As doctors, they also enjoyed social prestige, as reflected by the many Dutch newspaper articles about their fate and work in Dutch hospitals.

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place) and 19 Hungarian doctors (eleventh place). Kabela, *Zdravotnictví v Holandsku*, 51.

50 Among them was psychiatrist Jiří Diamant (b. 1930), a Holocaust survivor and author of a book on the psychological problems of emigration. See Diamant, *Psychologické problémy emigrace*.

51 Kabela, *Zdravotnictví v Holandsku*.

52 In Utrecht, for example, surgeon Arnošt Axler (1931–?) worked as a trainee in 1967. At the end of August 1968, he emigrated to the Netherlands (he didn't return to Czechoslovakia from vacation).

53 For example, Jiří Diamant did not return from the psychological congress in Amsterdam in 1968. František Křivka (1925–?), who had worked in the radiology department of the Utrecht hospital since October 1968, also decided not to return to Czechoslovakia. Similarly, Jiří Rádl (1930–?) did not return from his internship at the Institute for Rheumatism Research University Hospital in Leiden, where he had also been (first legally) since October 1968.

54 As shown below, this was particularly true in the case of anesthesiologists. However, this was also the case for other doctors, for example the general practitioner Ctirad Kučera (1931–?), who emigrated to the Netherlands at the beginning of the 1970s from Algeria. Kučera was then engaged in the Czechoslovak exiled Scout movement and also contributed to the emigrant magazine *Okno dokořán*.

55 This is how, for example, gynecologist Jaromír Špinka (1923–2016) emigrated to the Netherlands: he visited friends in Amsterdam during his vacations. Špinka used to visit the Netherlands frequently in the 1960s (every year). The aforementioned Arnošt Axler also emigrated in this way, i.e. by not returning from vacation.

Miroslav Kabela collected many of these articles and published some of them in the book *Zdravotnictví v Holandsku* (Medical Care in Netherlands).[56] Not knowing Dutch was probably not a major problem for the doctors who had graduated in Czechoslovakia and were already experienced practitioners. Most of them spoke English, and knowledge of German was also widespread among them. Language skills were naturally also related to foreign experiences and stays.

Czech Anesthesiologists in the Netherlands after 1968

The Third European Congress of Anaesthesiology, mentioned in the introduction to this article, took place in Prague from August 31 to September 4, 1970 and was attended by more than 1,500 people. The decision to hold the congress in Prague was taken by the World Federation of Societies of Anesthesiologists (WFSA), which was established in the Netherlands in 1955.[57] The Czechoslovak press of the time described this decision as "a great recognition of the work of Czechoslovak anesthesiologists."[58] The importance of the Congress was also underlined by the fact that its representatives were received by the then Czechoslovak President Ludvík Svoboda at Prague Castle.[59] One of the anesthesiologists who contributed to the organization of the congress was prominent anaesthesiologist Bořivoj Dvořáček (1920–2014). However, at the time of the congress, Dvořáček was already living in Rotterdam.

After the suppression of the Prague Spring, when many doctors emigrated from Czechoslovakia, the Netherlands was struggling with a shortage of anesthesiologists.[60] Thus, many Czechoslovak anesthesiologists emigrated to the country, knowing that they would be able to work in their field there. In several cases, these émigrés already had contacts in the Netherlands, i.e. they knew local doctors who had arranged jobs for them. The aforementioned Bořivoj Dvořáček,[61] for example, who emigrated simply by not returning from his internship in a Rotterdam hospital,[62] maintained contacts with Dutch

56 Kabela, *Zdravotnictví v Holandsku*, 90–95.

57 Czechoslovakia was from the beginning an "observing country."

58 "III. evropský anesteziologický kongres," 2.

59 Šmíd, "Mimořádný úspěch," 2.

60 However, this was no longer the case 15–20 years later, as noted in the early 1990s by B. Dvořáček: "University hospitals did not have any vacant (unfilled) places at that time. The domestic supply of graduated doctors is more than redundant." Dworacek, "Anesteziologie," 36.

61 He changed his name to Dworacek in the Netherlands.

62 Málek, "Doc. MUDr. Bořivoj Dvořáček, CSc.," 46.

anesthesiologists, including D. H. G. Keuskamp (1915–1992), who not only made Dvořáček's internship in Rotterdam possible, but also arranged internships for other anesthesiologists from Czechoslovakia in Nijmegen and Amsterdam. This was happening before August 1968, when travel from Czechoslovakia was still relatively free.[63]

Zdeněk Kalenda (1927–2010), another prominent Czech anesthesiologist, was also connected to international medical networks before 1968. He maintained contact with Bob Smalhout (1927–2015), a Dutch anesthesiologist from Utrecht. After 1968, Kalenda and Smalhout continued their collaboration in Utrecht, focusing mainly on research on capnometry, and together they became "recognized worldwide as the founders of the use of capnometry in a variety of clinical settings."[64] In the field of capnography Smalhout also collaborated with other Czechoslovak experts who, unlike Kalenda, did not emigrate after 1968. One example was anesthesiologist Václav Trávníček (1924–2010), who worked at the Military University Hospital in Prague.[65] Smalhout also traveled to Czechoslovakia on various occasions after 1968, and in some cases, he served as a messenger, carrying the suitcases and letters of Czechoslovak emigrants across the Iron Curtain from the Netherlands to Prague. However, he seems not to have been happy about playing this role. As Václav Trávníček reportedly said in 1970, "Professor Smalhout would very much like to visit Czechoslovakia next year, and he certainly does not want to do anything that might endanger this visit."[66] Smalhout's involvement in the Czechoslovak exile networks thus probably had its limits, which were largely due to the connection of the Czechoslovak environment to the security services.

Something the anesthesiologists shared, as was true of doctors in general, was their experiences as recipients of foreign internships. Zdeněk Kalenda had lived in Guinea in the early 1960s, and he also traveled to France, Belgium, Austria, and Switzerland. He had numerous professional contacts in an array of countries. He was in contact with the leaders of clinics in Vienna, Munich, Paris, Brussels, Montreal, and New York.[67] Foreign internships were also important for the career of Bořivoj Dvořáček. He spent a year in Copenhagen at the WHO training center in the late 1950s. In Prague, he then tried to apply the Danish

63 Dvořáček, "Postavení a rozvoj anesteziologie."

64 Málek, "Kdo byl prof. Zdeněk Kalenda," 300.

65 Trávníček, *Kapnografie*, 15.

66 Sbírka svazky kontrarozvědného rozpracování. SSA file KR-742297MV.

67 Sbírka Svazky tajných spolupracovníků [Informer Files Group]. SSA TS-838065MV.

experience in creating the concept of anesthesiology-resuscitation departments.[68] Two others Czech anesthesiologists emigrating to the Netherlands after 1968, Květoslava Malínská (1923–?) and Karel Otruba (1918–1997), had worked in Africa for some time through programs run by the Czechoslovak government.[69] Květoslava Malínská, who emigrated to the Netherlands with her husband, surgeon Ladislav Malínský (1918–2005), worked in Kenya in the mid-1960s. Their friend Karel Otruba, a pediatrician and later an anesthesiologist, worked in Morocco before emigrating to the Netherlands.[70]

However, some anesthesiologists from Czechoslovakia came to the Netherlands without prior acquaintanceship with Dutch anesthesiologists and also without the experience of stays abroad. Miroslav Květ (1934–), for instance, reached the Netherlands by being approached by Dutch officials in an Austrian refugee camp with the offer of a job in the Netherlands. In fact, Dutch officials were deliberately looking for qualified people in the West German and Austrian camps, and anesthesiologists were in great demand at the time. As in the case of some Czechoslovak students in 1948, an offer received during a stay in a refugee camp led the emigrant to choose the Netherlands as his or her new home. The aforementioned Bob Smalhout was allegedly behind the efforts to recruit Czechoslovak anesthesiologists. Smalhout asked the Dutch embassies to conduct a survey in West Germany and Austria to find out whether there were any emigrant anesthesiologists in those countries. At least one of them (Miroslav Květ) ended up coming to the Utrecht hospital this way.[71] Květ later worked in Delft, and at the end of the 1980s, he married a Polish student who was in the Netherlands on a study stay.[72]

68 Málek, "Doc. MUDr. Bořivoj Dvořáček, CSc.," 46.

69 Health service was one of the areas in which Czechoslovakia was significantly involved as part of its aid to developing countries. The aid was mainly focused on "primary health problems in the developing countries concerned, particularly medical science and research, the improvement of curative and preventive treatment, health service organization and management, additional training of medical personnel, all-round exchange of information and exchange on experts." Párová and Vašíček, *The Medicine of Friendship*, 16. As far as Czechoslovak assistance to developing countries in general is concerned, by 1982 there were 7,000 Czechoslovak experts working in developing countries. Ibid., 77. See also: Iacob, "Paradoxes of Socialist Solidarity;" Iacob, "Health;" Vargha, "Technical Assistance."

70 More Czechoslovak experts (not exclusively doctors) emigrated from Morocco in 1968–1970. Sbírka Správa vyšetřování StB – vyšetřovací spisy [Investigation Directorate of the StB – Investigation Files]. SSA V-27901MV.

71 Sbírka svazky kontrarozvědného rozpracování [Counterintelligence Files Group]. SSA KR-742297MV.

72 Sbírka Objektové svazky [Subject Files Group]. SSA OB-370ČB.

The fact that anesthesiologists were in high demand in the Netherlands is evidenced by the case of Karel Otruba. He was originally a pediatrician who, before emigrating, had worked in Prague as a trainer in infectious diseases at the Institute for the Further Training of Physicians. As already mentioned, he emigrated to the Netherlands from Morocco, where he had been sent by the Czechoslovak Ministry of Health at the beginning of 1968 on condition that he return to Czechoslovakia in mid-January 1971, which he did not do.[73] As Otruba's colleague from Utrecht, the surgeon Ladislav Malínský later recalled, Otruba, as a specialist in pediatric medicine, was at first unable to find employment in Utrecht. Zdeněk Kalenda, who was already working in the anesthesiology center of the Utrecht hospital, came with an offer to Otruba to specialize in anesthesiology, with which he helped him. Thus, Karel Otruba became an anesthesiologist and continued to practice this specialty until his retirement in 1983.[74] Otruba's story is thus a case of mutual aid between Czechoslovak migrants and doctors, both of whom emigrated after 1968. However, there was also cooperation across migration waves in the Czechoslovak exile community (i.e., the earlier migrants helped the new migrants after 1968).[75]

Ladislav Malínský later recalled that as a surgeon it took him longer to find employment in Utrecht. His wife, anesthesiologist Květoslava Malínská, with whom he had also emigrated to the Netherlands from Africa (Kenya), got a job in Utrecht immediately.[76] Thus, a large Czechoslovak anesthesiology group was formed in Utrecht.[77] Malínský later recalled his colleagues and their visits: "Our flat was occupied by a group of complementary anesthesiologists, and I was condemned to the role of a non-participating listener. My attempt to return the conversation to a more general level was not even helped by a signboard that said, 'talking about anesthesiology is forbidden in this apartment and punishable during meals.'"[78] However, it should be remembered that the large group of Czechoslovak anesthesiologists worked in Utrecht only for a limited time, and the doctors gradually moved to other Dutch cities. For example, Malínský and his

73 Sbírka Správa vyšetřování StB – vyšetřovací spisy. SSA V-27901MV.

74 Malínský, "Vzpomínka na Karla Otrubu," 13.

75 Michela, Scheibner and Šmidrkalová, "Projekt "Émigré Europe," 39.

76 Malínský, "Vzpomínka na Karla Otrubu," 13.

77 In addition to Květoslava Malínská, the aforementioned Zdeněk Kalenda, Karel Otruba, and Miroslav Květ. Other Czech doctors also worked at the Utrecht hospital after 1968, for example gynecologist Jaromír Špinka. He later settled in Delft. Together with his wife Marie, they were active in the Czechoslovak exile Sokol organization.

78 Ibid.

wife moved to Achtenhoek after about two years.[79] Miroslav Květ, as mentioned above, eventually moved and worked in Delft.[80]

The fate of Miloš Zvonař (1937–) offers a somewhat distinctive case. Although Zvonař was younger than the anesthesiologists mentioned above, he managed to complete a foreign internship before his emigration, or rather he emigrated from this internship to the Netherlands. He first traveled to the Austrian Institute of Anesthesiology in Innsbruck in 1967 for a fellowship and then received an invitation from the University of Leiden. He thus worked there after his arrival in the Netherlands and completed his postgraduate education, which he had begun in Prague. After some time, he settled with his wife, also an anesthesiologist whom he had met during his studies in Prague, in Raamsdonksveer. For Miroslav Kabela, Miloš Zvonař was an example of a doctor who did not want to get used to the Dutch way of working. According to Kabela, some doctors exaggerated their social status as doctors and did not respect the rules at their workplaces. This was allegedly true Zvonař, who wanted to continue working according to the habits he had acquired in Czechoslovakia. This concerned, for instance, working hours. In Czechoslovakia he went skiing or shopping at three o'clock in the afternoon in the winter, but in the Netherlands, he was expected to work until six o'clock in the evening. He didn't want to join the coffee and tea breaks with his colleagues and other employees; he preferred to go home earlier.[81]

Miloš Zvonař eventually made a career also in another field, however. He became a Dutch politician. He was elected to the Dutch House of Representatives in 2002 as a member of the Pim Fortuyn List.[82] Zvonař retired from Dutch politics in 2003 and moved back to the Czech Republic. When he was a member of the Dutch Parliament, his past caught the interest of the Dutch media. As Kabela stated later, the media comments were not "favorable" to Zvonař in this regard. Dutch journalists, for example, described Zvonař as "a man of conflict who did not stop arguing even at the operating table."[83] The media also recalled Zvonař's conflicts with coworkers, which had led to his firing. In December 1974, for example, thirteen of his colleagues asked the director of the hospital where Zvonař was working to dismiss him, and he was asked to leave the following

79 Ibid.

80 Sbírka svazky kontrarozvědného rozpracování. SSA KR-742297MV.

81 Kabela, *Přehled historických česko-nizozemských kontaktů*, 342.

82 Bob Smalhout also ran for this party for the Dutch Senate elections in 2003.

83 Kabela, *Přehled historických česko-nizozemských kontaktů*, 342.

June. The media also quoted the hospital's lawyer (Zvonař unsuccessfully sued the hospital after his dismissal). According to the attorney,

> he treated his colleagues in a very unpleasant manner, did not attend weekly medical conferences, not even when it came to important analyses of deceased patients, did not take enough interest in the pre-operative examination, did not know where the medical records were, did not actively participate in the post-operative treatment, did not maintain sufficient contact and cooperation with other specialists, etc.[84]

It seems that Zvonař had problems with other coworkers even before his emigration from Czechoslovakia, and this was not merely a problem of "adaptation" to work habits in a foreign country. In fact, his mother stated during an interrogation by the Czechoslovak State Security in 1977 that her son emigrated not only because of his desire to complete his medical education abroad and the opportunity to work in research in the field of anesthesiology and heart transplantation, but also because of "the poor working conditions at his last workplace, where he had many enemies among his co-workers—doctors—because of his political views and open behavior."[85]

According to Zvonař's mother, neither he nor his wife maintained contact with Czechoslovak emigrants in the Netherlands, and he was not active in any compatriot association. He continued to express "progressive views" abroad and did not change his beliefs as a "communist-functionary." Zvonař and his wife expressed themselves in similar language in their application to the Czechoslovak authorities to have their residence legalized, which they eventually achieved in 1980. Thus, their prosecution for the crime of leaving the Republic was postponed.[86]

However, it was not true that Miloš Zvonař was not involved in emigrant associations. As Kabela later recalled, it was Zvonař who came up with the initiative to establish an association through which Czechoslovak emigrants in the Netherlands could meet regularly. Thus, he was at the foundation of the Comenius association in 1969 and even became its first chairman, if only for a short time. Zvonař was allegedly afraid of "empty politicking" and thus of creating contradictions among his compatriots. Therefore, he wanted "to keep the management of the association firmly in his own hands and only use the help of others when organizing a compatriot meeting." That is why many people did

84 Ibid.

85 Sbírka Správa vyšetřování StB – vyšetřovací spisy. SSA V-30941MV.

86 Ibid.

not like his "undemocratic attitude" and therefore soon, on February 27, 1970, a new leadership of the association was formed which did not include Zvonař.[87] His relatively short involvement in this association was probably also based on the fact that he was trying to legalize his stay in the Netherlands. It should also be noted that Zvonař did not see the association as politically oriented. To him, it was merely a means of socializing. In any case, Zvonař's file from the Security Services Archives did not mention this involvement, although contemporary documents from the Czechoslovak embassy in The Hague mentioned Zvonař as the chairman of the Comenius association (or rather mentioned his replacement by Theodor Vondráček in 1970).[88]

In the case of anesthesiologists from Czechoslovakia, the sources reveal little about their involvement in "association life" or the Czechoslovak exile movement. It cannot be said that they were not engaged at all, however, but professional motives again seem to have prevailed. For example, Bořivoj Dvořáček maintained contacts with his colleagues in Czechoslovakia even after his emigration. He helped organize a fundraising campaign which made it possible to bring professional publications to Czechoslovakia and thus keep Czechoslovak anesthesiology at a high professional level. Moreover, thanks to his support, the Third European Congress of Anaesthesiology was held in Prague in 1970.[89] Doctors also socialized and met informally, especially among themselves. However, the sources indicate no significant involvement in exile activities among members of this community. Ladislav Malínský, for example, contributed literary articles to *Okno dokořán* (and his texts were reportedly popular among readers),[90] but this was a matter of literary activity rather than political engagement. What one can say about the post-1968 wave in general was true of doctors and anesthesiologists in particular: its involvement in the fight against the communist regime in Czechoslovakia was very small, especially compared to the generation which had emigrated after 1948. Zvonař's involvement in the aforementioned exile association could not have been very significant, given that this involvement was not noted by the State Security and thus apparently not perceived as a threat to the communist regime in Czechoslovakia. And it probably wasn't really a threat, since it was more a meeting of compatriots

87 Kabela, *Přehled historických česko-nizozemských kontaktů*, 257; Kabela, "Češi a Slováci uvízlí," 184.

88 AMFA, Nizozemsko TO-T, 1970–74, Post-August emigration in the Netherlands from January 1 to July 31, 1970, 2.

89 Málek, "Doc. MUDr. Bořivoj Dvořáček, CSc.," 46.

90 Kabela, *Přehled historických česko-nizozemských kontaktů*, 449.

than "politicking." In other words, it was something that was commonly and informally happening among emigrant doctors.

Conclusion

The story of the Czechoslovak anesthesiologists who emigrated to the Netherlands in 1968–1970 was the story of the intersection of the histories of two countries divided by the Iron Curtain. On the one hand, there was a significant milestone in Czechoslovak history, namely 1968 and the suppression of the Prague Spring by the invasion of Warsaw Pact troops and the resulting migration wave, which included a large number of experts, scientists, and doctors. On the other hand, there was the situation in the Dutch health sector, which suffered from a shortage of doctors in certain fields in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Anesthesiologists were members of a sought-after profession in the Netherlands, and this probably explains in no small part why migrants from Czechoslovakia, who probably would have ended up in another country, eventually settled in the Netherlands. The decisive moment for them was the offer of employment in their field of specialization. Many of these migrants had already had experiences with foreign internships or had established contacts with Dutch doctors. It was certainly no coincidence that many Czechoslovak anesthesiologists emigrated to the Netherlands from Africa, where they had been on missions for several years.

However, history is influenced by people, and in the case of the path of Czech anesthesiologists to the Netherlands, anesthesiologist Bob Smalhout was an important figure. He maintained contacts and helped not only Czechoslovak emigrants (doctors and specifically anesthesiologists) in the Netherlands, and he also maintained contacts with doctors in Czechoslovakia. This position between Czechoslovak experts in exile and those who did not emigrate placed him (probably unintentionally) in the role of an intermediary between Czechoslovak exiles in the Netherlands and their families and acquaintances back home.

The stories and experiences of the anesthesiologists showed that in the case of doctors, we can talk about a certain professional identity, not only in relation to other doctors in the Netherlands, but also within the expatriate community. Czech and Slovak doctors in the Netherlands formed informal networks, especially if they shared the same workplace. Thus, in terms of the concept of "double engagement" mentioned in the introduction, there was a considerable overlap of professional and national identities in this case.

The existence of a certain professional identity (shared with their Dutch colleagues) was a prerequisite for Czechoslovak doctors to integrate more easily into society in the Netherlands. In this case, however, although this may not have been the rule, political engagement as members of the exile community was usually more marginalized. If we add to this the efforts of some emigrants to avoid definitively "closing the door" to returning to or at least visiting Czechoslovakia, we can see why the migrants of 1968–1970 could not meet the expectations of those who had emigrated from Czechoslovakia 20 years earlier and who expected the new migrants to be more politically involved (more anti-communist) in the migrant community. Each generation of migrants was specific in this respect, although in some cases it was impossible to speak of two different generations in terms of age (while the time of emigration separated the two "generations" by more than 20 years, the age difference between the migrants was generally much smaller). However, belonging to the post-1968 migrant community was also a certain status that was attached to doctors from this migration wave, whether they wanted it or not.

Anesthesiologists who emigrated to the Netherlands after 1968 continued to work there. Thus, as was true for doctors from Czechoslovakia in general, the Netherlands was not a "transfer station" for them to other countries, and they did not return to Czechoslovakia (before 1989). From this point of view, we can assume that their lives in the Netherlands met their expectations or at least were such that they had no need to return or travel elsewhere. The unfulfilled vision of life in the Netherlands after 1968 concerned younger people and students more. For Czechoslovak doctors who had employment and a certain economic level in the Netherlands, further migration abroad was not on the agenda. However, as the example of anesthesiologists shows, internal migration within the Netherlands was not rare. Their professions, jobs, specializations, and work contacts all seemed to act as a kind of safety net on which they could rely to overcome the widespread mood of post-1968 migrants from Czechoslovakia, which one of them, whom we have already quoted above, defined as "life's disappointment and resignation."

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The Question of God in Émigré Ghent: Religious Heritage, Émigré Politics, and Dialogical Negotiation among Migrants and Hosts during the Cold War*

Luke Dodds
KADOC Documentation and Research Centre on Religion, Culture and Society, KU Leuven
luke.dodds@kuleuven.be

This article explores the influence of various factors on the formation of identity among the community of World War II Polish veterans which formed in the Flemish city of Ghent after the rise of a socialist regime in their home country. Challenging popular perceptions of the term "émigré," the article highlights the diverse ways in which the members of this community promoted their heritage within their host society. Particular attention is given to the role of religious and cultural heritage, the émigré community's engagement with anti-communist politics, and the evolution of this political engagement over time. Interactions with the local Catholic Diocese of Ghent are examined through a framework of Polish Catholicism as a "lived religion" which facilitated the formation of a hybrid identity. In particular, the role of Carlos Bressers, a Belgian priest and chaplain on whose personal archive the research is based, is analyzed. Through his position and contacts, Bressers served as a mediating figure in the negotiation of hybrid identity and helped the community of Polish veterans carve out a place for itself in the city of Ghent.

Keywords: Polish migration, émigrés, lived religion, dialogical identity, anti-communism

The presence of a Polish exile community in Belgium dates back as far as the country's independence in 1830. Polish refugees arrived after having fled the failed November Uprising of the same year and settled in areas across Western Europe throughout the rest of the century in the *Wielka Emigracja* (Great Emigration).[1] Students, Polish Jews, and eventually economic migrants would continue to migrate westward in the interwar period,[2] but World War II led to a significant and distinct swell in the Central and Eastern European migrant populations of Belgium. Some 20,000 Displaced Persons (DPs) arrived in the

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1 Goddeeris, *La Grande Emigration,* 13–23.

2 Goddeeris, *De Poolse Migratie*, 13–50.

country either as a result of military activities or as forced laborers who had been dragged across Europe by the German occupation. Though the DPs had originally come from several of the countries that now found themselves on the far side of the Iron Curtain, among them were around 350 Polish soldiers who had fought for General Stanisław Maczek's 1st Armored Division, which engaged in the liberation of northern France, Belgium, and the Netherlands under Allied command. The soldiers who remained in Belgium at war's end were unwilling to return home with the rise of a socialist regime in Poland, and most settled down and married local women.[3]

The history and heritage of these Polish veterans in the Low Countries has recently been commemorated in Johannes Van de Voorde and Dirk Verbeke's 2020 popular history book *Vergeten Helden* (Forgotten Heroes), which features interviews regaling their brave testimonies of combat and their attachments to both their homeland and their adopted nations.[4] Machteld Venken, a Belgian scholar of immigration who has conducted extensive research on these veterans in the context of their activities in Flanders, remains somewhat skeptical of this triumphant narrative, describing the veterans' popular valorization as a "successful cult … which combined heroism and political victimisation."[5] Of particular interest is the veterans' use of military ceremonies and symbolism to "construct their own vision of the past," which "equated Catholicism with anti-communism."[6] This combined their imagined conception of inextricably Catholic *Polishness* with their military experience and the political atmosphere of the Cold War, standing firmly at odds with the narrative pushed by the Polish People's Republic Consulate in Brussels, which argued that the communist government was the final result of a "centuries-long struggle for the Polish motherland."[7]

Émigrés: What's in a Name?

Whether heroes, victims, or both, the Polish veterans who settled in postwar Belgium were just one group of "émigrés" among many who either refused to return to or escaped the "captive nations" of Central and Eastern Europe and

3 Venken, "Migration and War Memory," 17.

4 Van de Voorde and Verbeke, *Vergeten Helden.*

5 Venken, *Straddling the Iron Curtain?,* 166.

6 Ibid.

7 Venken, *Straddling the Iron Curtain*, 130.

sought refuge in the "Free World" of the West. At least, that is how the narrative of East–West migration during the Cold War has popularly been recounted in the Western world, often with a few carefully selected examples of émigrés who seem to have had a significant degree of agency in shaping their own fates.[8] The research on Polish and broader Eastern Bloc emigration during the Cold War in particular is extensive, with Polish authors such as Dariusz Stola exploring the means of exit and the politics of mobility or Sławomir Łukasiewicz and Anna Mazurkiewicz chronicling the spread of politically-minded émigrés across Western Europe and the US.[9] Among these destinations, Belgium became a base for prominent refugees, dissidents, and émigrés of various political persuasions, with many among them Polish in origin, whose histories have been covered by Belgian historians such as Idesbald Goddeeris and the aforementioned Venken.[10] Among the most well-known is perhaps Jan Kułakowski, the lauded trade unionist and secretary-general of the Christian Democratic World Confederation of Labor in the latter half of the Cold War.[11]

A figure like Kułakowski arguably represents the popular understanding of the term "émigré," a politically oriented actor calling for overarching change in the Eastern Bloc while safely stationed on the Western side of the Iron Curtain. Yet Kułakowski and his politicized peers made up only a small number of the Poles living in Belgium, and they were by far the most politically engaged. In his study of Solidarność-era migration, Patryk Pleskot remarks that a "critical attitude toward the communist regime […] is not sufficient to define someone as a political emigrant."[12] Indeed, many who may fall under the "émigré" label had varying and fluctuating relationships with political engagement, which suggests the limitations of the term. Less understood are the everyday ways in which the wider Polish community, displaced by the communist project, behaved as "émigrés" or otherwise as they sought to recapture, safeguard, and even reshape the national cultural identities that had been repurposed or distorted in their homeland, and also the importance (or lack thereof) of their political outlook.

This article seeks to complement existing research on migration and heritage by subjectifying the lives of Polish veterans, taking their community in

8 Mazurkiewicz, "Political Emigration from East Central Europe during the Cold War," 68.

9 See for example Stola, "Patterns of the Evolution of the Communist Regime"; Łukasiewicz, "The Polish Political System in Exile"; Mazurkiewicz, *East Central European Migrations During the Cold War*.

10 For studies of Polish political activities in Belgium, see Dumoulin and Goddeeris, *Intégration ou représentation?*; Venken, "The Communist 'Polonia' Society."

11 On Kułakowski, see Jesień, "The Social Virtues of Christian Democracy."

12 Pleskot, "Polish Political Emigration in the 1980s," 61.

the Flemish city of Ghent as its subject of analysis, particularly with reference to the significance of the Catholic and anti-communist vision alluded to in Venken's quote above. However, it will also investigate the diversity of their civic engagement and challenge assumptions that their sole motivation for mobilization was political. Inspired by Robert Anthony Orsi's landmark text *The Madonna of 115th Street,* the first section of this article will analyze how a "lived religion" could anchor the collective identity, civic engagement, and cultural heritage of migrant communities. [13] The second section explores how members of the Polish community of Ghent engaged or did not engage with ideas of anti-communism related to their country of origin. The article will also track how these developments were shaped and formed over time. Inspired by the concept of "dialogical" identity formation (developed through negotiation between in- and out-groups), the final section of the article investigates how a religiously oriented host society actor (the Belgian priest Carlos Bressers) served as a broker and mediator of Polish-Belgian hybrid identity and heritage.[14] This incorporation of Belgian agency avoids the pitfall of treating host society agency as an abstract and static monolith by looking instead at a dynamic social actor who engaged actively with the migrant community in the identity negotiation process.[15] By offering an analysis of Bressers' personal archives, this article aims to consider the agency of the migrants themselves in identity formation processes, while also giving attention to the role of representatives of the host society in influencing the "lived religion" and construction of imagined identities through shared heritage among members of the migrant community.

The Poles and Chaplain Bressers

The case study of the Polish community of Ghent presents interesting particularities. As one of the Flemish cities liberated by the Polish 1st Armored Division, Ghent became home to a community of veterans after the war. Ghent's distinctiveness lies in the presence of the Belgian priest Carlos Bressers, a dedicated Polish community chaplain appointed within the Catholic city diocese.

13 Robert Anthony Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880–1950 3rd Edition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p. xxxix.

14 Yuval-Davis, "Theorizing identity: beyond the 'us' and 'them' dichotomy."

15 On dialogical identity formation, see for example the study of Yugoslav Muslim migrants in Luxembourg by Lucie Waltzer, "Negotiating Identity."

Carlos Bressers was born in Ghent on September 6, 1912 into a prominent family of religious mural painters and church architects who had established an atelier in the city in 1860.[16] Bressers' brothers Jozef and Leopold served as pastors and religious teachers at the seminary of Sint-Niklaas, a small city roughly 40 kilometers away.[17] In 1926, the Bressers family hosted a young Hungarian girl, Sára (or "Sari") Gáspárdy at their home, whom Bressers would refer to in later life as his "sister." Sari arrived during the "Hungarian child relief" effort of the mid-1920s, one of thousands of Hungarian children hosted by Belgian families with Church support in the wake of the tumultuous breakup of Austria-Hungary.[18] This encounter likely sparked Bressers' lifelong interest in Central and Eastern Europe, and he remained in contact with his "sister" years after her return to Hungary.[19]

Bressers was ordained as a priest at St. Bavo's, the towering Gothic cathedral and seat of the Diocese of Ghent, in 1942.[20] The arrival of the Polish soldiers during the liberation warranted attention from the Catholic Church as they began to settle down, and the Diocese of Ghent was significant for these migrants as a receiving structure or familiar point of localization in their new country. The city's chapels became a spatial and social hub for the devoutly religious members of the community. The Church sought to serve as a constituent part of these colonies, and Ghent's Bishop Mgr. Karel Justinus Calewaert, observing the growing Central European presence among church congregations, appointed Bressers to serve as chaplain of the Polish and Hungarian communities of Ghent in 1944.[21] Though also recognized by the church, the Hungarian community was much smaller and did not explicitly engage in the civic sphere to the same extent as the Poles. For this reason, the focus here is solely on the latter group.

16 Adriaan Bressers. Online Database for Intermediary Structures (ODIS), last modified July 8, 2022. [http://www.odis.be/lnk/PS_60440]. Accessed April 18, 2023; Atelier Bressers-Blanchaert. ODIS, last modified October 29, 2021. [http://www.odis.be/lnk/OR_13739]. Accessed April 20, 2023.

17 Archief Familie Bressers, BE/942855/1925/129: Pieces concerning priesthood (Holy Orders, first Mass, jubilee, cuttings), 1927–1984. KADOC, Leuven.

18 For further reading on the Hungarian child relief programs that were organised in Belgium, see Hajtó, *Milk Sauce and Paprika*.

19 Archief Familie Bressers, BE/942855/1925/202: Postcard from Sára Gáspárdy, Budapest, August 30, 1977. KADOC, Leuven.

20 Carlos Bressers. ODIS, last modified August 22, 2022. [http://www.odis.be/lnk/PS_54968]. Accessed April 21, 2023.

21 Archief Familie Bressers, BE/942855/1925/187/1: letter to the Lord Substitute, April 24, 1981. KADOC, Leuven.

Catholicism as a Lived Religion in Polish Ghent

Nira Yuval-Davis' analysis of religion and identity politics notes how migrant communities use socially accepted discourses which draw on historical and cultural contexts in their formation of identity, and religion serves in this process as a means for individuals and collective groups to "perform" identity by acting with reference to their own experiences and interactions with the wider world. Religious practices (the endorsement of a faith, church attendance, acknowledgement of symbols, and demonstrable piety) therefore can be used to draw boundaries between what an individual or a community is or is not.[22] This section of the article will demonstrate how Catholicism served among the Polish community of Ghent as a lived religion which was integrated into their wider sense of national heritage and civic engagement, alongside their tangible means and practices of reshaping their collective identity into a hybrid of Belgian and Polish culture grounded through their experience of faith. It will highlight Bressers' role as a key contact and dialogue point for the organization and performance of events championing the religious heritage of the Polish community, which is further discussed in the final section.

At the core of almost all the activities coordinated by Ghent's Polish community were two small and distinct but often overlapping organizations: the "Belgian-Polish Committee" and the "Polish Catholic Colony and Polish Veterans," the latter of which was later divided into the "Polish Catholic Union of Ghent" and the "Polish Veterans' Association." Despite the multitude of monikers, these groups often had no more than a few hundred members (some of whom were members of more than one of the groups). The first group was honorarily chaired by local aristocrat Count Henri de Hemptinne and initially led by Colonel Joseph Casimir Oborski, a Belgian veteran of both World Wars born in Aalst to Polish parents, as the functional chairman. The Union was formed with the aim of integrating the new Polish arrivals into Ghent's wider society, while the "Polish Catholic Colony and Polish Veterans" organized the "activities properly Polish."[23] Catholicism would be a central theme to many of the events overseen by these groups, and crucially, Bressers served in key organizational positions, such as treasurer, in the Polish community organizations. He worked closely with the president of the latter group, veteran Ryszard Łuczak. Bressers

22 Yuval-Davis, *The Politics of Belonging,* 114–15.

23 Archief Familie Bressers, BE/942855/1925/188/3: Newspaper clipping "La colonie polonaise à Gand," January 28, 1966. KADOC, Leuven.

warmly referred to Łuczak as "our diligent and exemplary President" in 1981 in a letter recommending him for Belgian citizenship.[24] The two organizations worked closely to host Christmas and Easter parties along with other religious celebrations in the city's churches, drawing on Polish traditions such as eggpainting.[25] Through Bressers, they also made contact with and invited members of Brussels' Polish Catholic Mission and the Belgian Episcopate, alongside Polish priests from across Europe, to their various masses and celebrations. One Polish missionary attending the ceremony came to visit from as far away as Rwanda.[26]

As early as 1951, Bressers and the Polish community arranged for the bishop of Ghent, Mgr. Calewaert, to consecrate the banner of Ghent's Polish Catholic Union, led by Łuczak. Oborski, de Hemptinne, and the Polish Catholic Mission rector were all present for the ceremony, which drew 300 Polish attendees and featured art, music, and gifts for the bishop.[27] The banner itself, designed by the members of Łuczak's Catholic Union and warmly received by Ghent's newspapers as a "fine work of art,"[28] symbolized the negotiation of a shared identity between Belgians and Poles. On one side, the Black Madonna of Częstochowa, a symbol of Polish Catholicism's resilience against foreign threats, was flanked by both the Polish eagle and the Lion of the City of Ghent. The reverse side had the eagle surrounded by symbols representing the Polish airmen.[29] The decision to include both their homeland and host city's coat of arms in the banner emphasized the emergence of a dual affinity to both Poland and Belgium, with a clear dedication to their religious heritage placed at the very center of their identity. After all, Catholicism was a natural bridge

24 Archief Familie Bressers, BE/942855/1925/187/1: letter to the Lord Substitute, April 24, 1981. KADOC, Leuven.

25 Archief Familie Bressers, BE/942855/1925/188/2: Newspaper clipping "Kerstfeest bij de Polen," 1959; Archief Familie Bressers, BE/942855/1925/190/1: Newspaper clipping "Polen vierden pasen," S.D.; Archief Familie Bressers, BE/942855/1925/188/1: Newspaper clipping "Fête de Paques chez les Polonais," La Metropole, April 5, 1972. KADOC, Leuven.

26 Archief Familie Bressers, BE/942855/1925/188/2: Program of "Academic Festive Season" event, Ghent, May 29, 1977; Archief Familie Bressers, BE/942855/1925/187/1: Invitations to "Solemn Mass" commemorating Polish war dead, December 1985. KADOC, Leuven.

27 Archief Familie Bressers, BE/942855/1925/188/2: Newspaper clipping "Poolse missie huldigt Z.H. Exc. Mgr Calewaert," Het Volk, November 22, 1951. KADOC, Leuven.

28 Ibid.

29 The banner can be viewed here [https://kadocheritage.be/exhibits/show/emigreeurope/bressers/madonna] Accessed May 2, 2023.

across boundaries for the migrants and Belgians alike, a shared faith that was a prominent element of Belgian (particularly Flemish) identity.[30]

The 1960s were incredibly significant years for Polish Catholics worldwide, as they marked the millennial anniversary of the Christianization of Poland under Duke Mieszko I. The event, known as the "Polish millennium," was celebrated throughout the diaspora, including in Belgium.[31] In 1966, the Archbishop of Warsaw and Gniezno (the most prominent clergy position in Poland) was Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, who had been imprisoned by the state socialist government over ten years earlier.[32] According to the Belgian press, Wyszyński partly attributed his release during the reforms of the 1956 Polish October to "more than a million Polish pilgrims" across the diaspora, and he sought to thank them by sending replicas of the Black Madonna of Częstochowa, an icon of Polish Catholic art, to their host countries.[33] The copy that arrived in Belgium in late January was exhibited in Brussels, Liège, Hainaut, and Antwerp before being brought to Ghent. Upon arrival in the city, it was not taken immediately to the central St. Bavo's Cathedral but instead was placed in the tiny Schreiboom Chapel, the church in which Bressers conducted his biweekly Polish mass. This recognition may have been facilitated by the personal relationship between Bressers and the Cardinal. They had exchanged letters in the 1950s, and Wyszyński had sent his personal condolences to Bressers and his brothers when a member of their family had died in 1959.[34] The arrival of the Madonna was greeted by the congregation with flowers and local women in traditional Polish dress.[35] Three days later, when it was moved to the Cathedral, the Bishop of Ghent and Bressers' superior, Mgr. Léonce-Albert van Peteghem, sought to emphasize the importance of Ghent's Polish Catholics to the wider city's religious body through a large mass with song.[36] The bishop followed up by presiding over an academic discussion on Polish history and religion and then opened a weeklong exhibition called "Poland through the centuries." Surrounded

30 Cook, *Belgium: A History,* 83.

31 Goddeeris, "Exilpolitik of Identiteitsvorming?, 290.

32 Kosicki, "Vatican II and Poland," 137.

33 Archief Familie Bressers, BE/942855/1925/188/2: Newspaper clipping "Arrivée à Anvers de l'icône de N.D. de Czestochowa," January 18, 1966. KADOC, Leuven.

34 Archief Familie Bressers, BE/942855/1925/193/1: Letter from Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński to the Bressers family, December 12, 1959. KADOC, Leuven.

35 Archief Familie Bressers, BE/942855/1925/188/3: Newspaper clipping "Kopie van Zwarte Madonna van Częstochowa te Gent aangekomen," January 26, 1966. KADOC, Leuven.

36 Ibid.

by prominent members of the Polish community, van Peteghem thanked the Polish nation for its contributions to the history of the Catholic Church, and he spoke of the "the spiritual bond between our two lands."[37] For the few hundred Polish Catholics who attended the small masses held in Bressers' chapel, the public acknowledgement of Poland's "spiritual bond" with Belgium on such a significant occasion would no doubt have been welcome. Indeed, van Peteghem's reception indicates that the devotion of the Polish community was recognized by the host society's religious authorities, which clearly shows the potential of Catholicism to facilitate the integration of the members of this community into this society.

In sum, Catholicism exemplified the concept of a lived religion in the identity construction of Ghent's Polish community. Catholicism's centrality to Polish civic engagement is highlighted by its incorporation into rhetoric, symbols, and celebrations and the discursive precedence it eventually gained over the community's interactions with the Diocese of Ghent.

Anti-Communism in Polish Ghent

As Venken has shown, the Polish veterans living in Belgium also sought to equate their Catholic faith with an explicitly anti-communist political stance in defiance of the socialist Polish Consulate in Brussels.[38] This was particularly apparent in the early years of Ghent's community. In these early activities, Bressers seems not to have been a prominent figure. He is mentioned as an attendee to the events covered in this section, but there is no further allusion to his involvement in their planning or programs. Up until the 1960s, there were evident anti-communist sentiments at Polish cultural events. In 1966, the Belgian-Polish Committee's effective chairman Colonel Joseph Casimir Oborski emphasized commitment to "faith, fatherland, Polish traditions and freedom" during a speech celebrating the Committee's fifteenth anniversary.[39] Present at the event was Józef Rzemieniewski, who served as a leader of the Belgian wing of the agrarian Polish People's Party (PSL). Members of the PSL who returned from exile or remained in Poland during the communist era after 1945 felt that

37 Archief Familie Bressers, BE/942855/1925/188/3: Newspaper clipping "Monseigneur Van Peteghem opent tentoonstelling – Polen door de eeuwen heen," January 1966. KADOC, Leuven.

38 Machteld Venken, *Straddling the Iron Curtain?,* pp. 165–66.

39 Archief Familie Bressers, BE/942855/1925/188/2: Newspaper clipping "Poolse dag te Gent: 15-jarig bestaan van de kolonie," September 26, 1966. KADOC, Leuven.

they had been deceived by outcomes of the Yalta Conference and were subject to intimidation by the communist government. As Sławomir Łukasiewicz has explained, the PSL and other "exile parties" enjoyed modest support from the Polish émigré community in the West, and therefore their presence at the celebration could serve to further their legitimization in the eyes of the diaspora, as well as associating the Belgian-Polish Committee with support for dissidents who experienced the abuses of communism firsthand.[40]

Oborski's invocation of faith and freedom and Rzemieniewski's presence suggest a posturing by the community as standard-bearers for the historical Polish nation and its values in opposition to the socialist government, solidifying the significance of their heritage as a means of expressing their collective political identity. Additionally, the banner of the Polish Union also constituted a performative example of anti-communism by the community. The banner's central Madonna icon was flanked by the following prayer: "Heavenly Queen of the Crown of Poland, return us to our free land."[41] The selected words stressed an imagined link between the Virgin Mary and the "Crown of Poland," an allusion to the country's pre-partition history and an assertion of the notion that their nation and community could only "return" to freedom with the reinstatement of traditional religious devotion. Here, as Venken argues, the veterans' vision of the past, which fused religious heritage with a romanticized historical perception of Poland and a tacit acknowledgement that under communism the country was not free, reflects the creative ways in which these migrants constructed new and imagined interpretations of their heritage and equated faith with freedom in defiance of the state atheism of the Polish People's Republic.[42]

Over time, the expectations these Poles had of themselves to protect a romanticized conception of a traditional, Catholic Poland began to take precedence over active anti-communist mobilization and rhetoric. The shift was visible beyond Ghent, and it impacted Polish communities across Belgium, as Goddeeris' research into the intellectual Brussels-based émigré organization, the Union of Free Poles in Belgium, has shown. Goddeeris concludes that this group grew to prioritize the preservation of an imagined Polish identity in their

40 Łukasiewicz, "A Shadow Party System," 51–53. For further reading on the PSL, see Goddeeris and Pleskot, "Polska migracja w Belgii," 230–33; Wasilewski, "Pospolici zbrodniarze," *Tygodnik Przegląd*, August 17, 2015. [https://www.tygodnikprzeglad.pl/pospolici-zbrodniarze/] Accessed May 2, 2023.

41 Archief Familie Bressers, BE/942855/1925/188/2: Newspaper clipping "Poolse missie huldigt Z.H. Exc. Mgr Calewaert," Het Volk, November 22, 1951. KADOC, Leuven.

42 Venken, *Straddling the Iron Curtain?,* pp. 165–66.

new country over anti-communist "exile politics," and their mission in Belgium gradually evolved into a quest to bring their cultural heritage "to the attention of their Belgian hosts."[43] In Bressers' archive, an invitation to the celebrations of May 3 as Constitution Day by the Polish Catholic Mission in Brussels supports the idea that such changes were taking place. As a commemoration of the signing of the 1791 constitution, a symbol of "enlightened patriotism," independence, and modernity in Poland, the holiday was banned by the state socialist government in the late 1940s and became a symbol of opposition to communism.[44] In the 1970s and early 1980s, the Polish Catholic Mission, which organized educational, cultural, and religious initiatives across the country, sent invitations to the Polish community of Ghent for their May 3 celebrations. Bressers apparently enjoyed a close relationship with Henryk Repka, the Rector of the Mission, as he was present at many of the community's events in Ghent. In the 1975 invitation that was sent to Bressers, Repka called Constitution Day a remembrance of "one of the most important days of our history."[45] Furthermore, in their brochure from the 1980 celebration, the Mission used the event to connect the Belgian Revolution of 1830 to Poland's November Uprising of the same year and to promote the countries' bilateral friendship.[46] The day thus served as an occasion to negotiate commonalities between the host and migrant communities, with the 1830 revolutions serving as historical evidence of the two states' resistance to foreign tyranny. For the Polish communities in Belgium, the day had clear symbolic value. It was a ceremonial means of emphasizing their continuity with pre-communist Poland, and Repka's centrality to the celebration emphasized the religious aspects, which centered around a holy mass. However, the Catholic Mission makes no mention of the anti-communist significance of the holiday in their brochures, suggesting a reluctance to engage in exile politics. Instead, the event offered an occasion to celebrate Polish history, heritage, culture, and religion and explicitly to highlight the common historical struggle faced by both countries, thus drawing Polish and Belgian identities together.

43 Goddeeris, "Exilpolitik of Identiteitsvorming?, 292.

44 Kożuchowski, "Jak to było z Konstytucją 3 Maja," *Polityka*, May 3, 2017. [https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/historia/1515182,2,jak-to-bylo-z-konstytucja-3-maja.read#ixzz1LGlZ7s4Q] Accessed April 28, 2023.

45 Archief Familie Bressers, BE/942855/1925/190/1: Invitation to Constitution Day from Henryk Repka, May 4, 1975. KADOC, Leuven.

46 Archief Familie Bressers, BE/942855/1925/190/1: Brochure for May 3, Constitution Day, 1980. KADOC, Leuven.

While Colonel Oborski declared Catholicism and anti-communist freedom to be inextricably interlinked in the early years of Ghent's Polish community, as was true in the case of other groups of émigrés in Belgium, the commitment of the members of the Polish community in Ghent to solidarity with their homeland appeared increasingly ambivalent as time passed. By the 1980s, the declaration of martial law in Poland sparked renewed Western interest in Central and Eastern European dissidents, with the Polish trade union NSZZ Solidarność serving as the posterchild for the wider protest movements. Solidarność was popular among both Catholic and secular activist movements in Belgium. The earliest solidarity initiatives formed before December 1981 "all had a Christian profile," but as the crisis grew, Solidarność received aid from a wide range of solidarity committees and both of Belgium's main trade unions, albeit to varying extents.[47] The Solidarność Co-ordinating Office Abroad was even provided an office space in Brussels by the Christian Democratic World Confederation of Labour, led by the Polish trade unionist and émigré one-time refugee Jan Kułakowski.[48] The Solidarność cause had a marked resonance among Catholics both in Poland and abroad. As historian Magdalena Waligórska has noted, in Poland, "hanging crucifixes in public schools and factories became a way of voicing support for the burgeoning opposition movement."[49] Internationally, one of the movement's most prominent champions was Pope John Paul II, himself a Pole. According to historian Michael Sporzer, Poland, "the oppressed land [w]as the 'Christ of Nations' resisting 'atheistic Communism.'"[50]

Bressers was among those who felt the impact of the movement. His interest in the Polish crisis was clear. He had gathered a selection of material on Solidarność, including issues of Brussels-based émigré magazines and various pamphlets that mentioned them, and he rallied the different Polish organizations in Ghent to raise money for aid through a postcard appeal, "Oost-Vlaanderen helpt Oost-Polen" (East Flanders helps East Poland).[51] However, this seems to have been a largely humanitarian initiative, and Bressers' work with Central Europe typically blended humanitarian intent with an implicitly political slant. This can be seen in his diverse activity, serving as a board member of the

47 Christiaens and Goddeeris, "Beyond Western European Idealism," 644.

48 Goddeeris, "Solidarity or Indifference?," 378.

49 Waligórska, *Cross Purposes,* 148.

50 Szporer, "Managing Religion in Communist-Era Poland," 115.

51 Archief Familie Bressers, BE/942855/1925/190/2: Copy of *Wolne Słowo,* May 1988; Archief Familie Bressers, BE/942855/1925/191: Support card "Mensen helpen Mensen: Oost-Vlaanderen helpt Oost-Polen," 1980s. KADOC, Leuven.

obscure "Inter-committee for Assistance to the Refugees of Central Europe" in the late 1970s and 1980s, alongside his support for the anti-communist Catholic *Oostpriesterhulp* organization in its Polish activities, suggesting he had a longstanding interest in developments in the Eastern Bloc.[52] He also maintained contact throughout the Cold War with high-profile members of the Polish clergy, such as Bishop of Poznań Antoni Baraniak, who was imprisoned and tortured by the communist authorities in the 1950s.[53] Baraniak sent Bressers a portrait of himself in 1960 and expressed his "profound gratitude," and he also signed a letter of condolence after the death of a relative in 1962. He also exchanged religious and holiday greetings with Bishop Karol Józef Wojtyła, the future Pope John Paul II.[54]

Bressers' focus on the upheavals in the Eastern Bloc could arguably be seen as a means of engaging his congregation in the wider political context and opening them to Belgian initiatives surrounding Solidarność. His interest is comparable to the endeavors of other Belgian priests active in Polish political engagements at the time, such as the Catholic University of Leuven's Canon Jozef de Smet, the university's resident "advocate of Poland." De Smet, in his position as professor, hosted numerous Polish figures (including future Polish prime minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki) for lectures and study at his constituent college in order to foster dialogue and understanding between Belgians and Poles.[55] However, while it cannot be said that the Polish community in Ghent did not support the Solidarność cause, his archives contain no persuasive indications that interest in Solidarność went beyond Bressers. This would corroborate Goddeeris' contention that many longer-term Polish migrants in Belgium "paid strikingly little attention to events in Poland," and it suggests that the hybrid identity that had developed in this émigré community left little space for contemporary Polish politics.[56] As late as 1988, when the winds of change were blowing in Poland, Bronislaw Recki, the veteran who led the "Friends of the Polish Air Force" charity and was considered the "leader of Ghent's Poles," professed

52 Archief Familie Bressers, BE/942855/1925/199: Correspondence between Carlos Bressers and "Inter-committee for Assistance to the Refugees of Central Europe," 1975–1985; BE/942855/1925/193/1: Documents concerning Cardinal Wyszynski and the Eastern European church, Kerk in Nood – Oostpriesterhulp, 1974. KADOC, Leuven.

53 Wąsowicz, "Troska salezjanów o abpa Antoniego Baraniaka SDB," 159.

54 Archief Familie Bressers, BE/942855/1925/193/3: letters from Bishop Antoni Baraniak, 1960–1962; BE/942855/1925/193/3: letters from Bishop Karol Wojtyła, 1973–1978. KADOC, Leuven.

55 Vos, "Leuven, Louvain and Poland," 25.

56 Goddeeris, "Solidarity or Indifference?," 384.

in a newspaper interview that the "Free Polish […] have sworn allegiance to the Polish government-in-exile" in London, which had long since ceased to be the main representative of anti-communist Poland and had itself thrown its weight behind Solidarność. Recki went on to criticize the Polish Consulate for appearing at veterans' commemorations, but not attending Bressers' biweekly Polish mass. "I have stayed in Ghent," he said, "precisely because I can continue to protest against […] the deal Churchill and Roosevelt made with Stalin on Poland [in Yalta]."[57] Though Bressers personally kept his finger on the pulse with regards to the Solidarność movement, his congregation remained attached to the immediate postwar political milieu, having apparently undergone a stasis of political attitudes, firmly grounded in the veterans' combined military and Catholic heritage, and Recki remained silent on the changes that were underway in Poland, which enjoyed the support of more recently exiled dissidents.

Religion as Dialogue: Carlos Bressers and Negotiating Identity

A dialogically constructed identity does not draw on predetermined narratives or historical context. It represents, rather, a "perpetual state of becoming" through which one group (migrants) identifies and interacts with other groups around it (the host society).[58] Representatives of both in-groups and out-groups are active agents in the process of negotiating a dialogically constructed identity. The figure of Carlos Bressers as chaplain of the Polish community in Ghent provided this community with privileged access to a host society actor who was positioned to serve as a mediator between migrants and hosts. Through his role as a priest and connections to wider Catholic society in Belgium and beyond, he provided essential opportunities for dialogical encounters between the two groups, and he centered their religious and military heritage in his efforts.

Throughout his chaplaincy, Bressers worked to foster encounters between his migrant congregations and wider Belgian society. In his involvement with the Polish community of Ghent, he explicitly fused the importance of Catholicism with their military heritage through an annual solemn mass held to commemorate five Polish airmen who perished during the battle of Ghent (and for the losses of Polish soldiers in both World Wars more generally), a service he led well into the post-Cold War period. Bressers' memorial services emphasized the Polish

57 Archief Familie Bressers, BE/942855/1925/187/3: Newspaper clipping "2 Regio Gent: Bevrijders van Gent afwezig op 1 november?," November 1, 1988. KADOC, Leuven.

58 Yuval-Davis, "Theorizing identity: beyond the 'us' and 'them' dichotomy," 271.

veterans' religious devotion, which was repeatedly brought to the attention of the city's public and covered by the Belgian media.[59] Bressers would typically lead a church service in the city and then lead a procession to the King Albert Memorial in one of Ghent's city parks for a wreath-laying ceremony. The masses were organized in collaboration with the "Belgian-Polish Committee" of Count Henri de Hemptinne, the "Polish Veterans' Association," and the "Friends of the Polish Air Force" charity, which was led by the aforementioned veteran Bronislaw Recki. The guests of honor at these masses furthered an understanding of the Polish community among prominent Belgian actors, and Polish priests and missionaries living in the West were also often invited.[60] Among the invitees to the solemn mass over the years were Count de Hemptinne (replaced by his son François after 1978), Mgr. Emile Dujardin, representative of the Belgian Episcopate for émigrés and refugees, members of the Brussels-based Polish Catholic Mission, and both Polish army-in-exile and Belgian military representatives.[61] A similar service at Villers-la-Ville, a village in Belgium's French-speaking Wallonia region and home to the historic ruins of a Cistercian abbey, was organized in 1994 "to consecrate a great day of Polish-Belgian brotherhood." The service, led by guest chaplains from Poland and with Bressers in attendance, saw the mingling of Polish, Belgian, and wider European veterans' associations.[62] Through his role in participating in, organizing and often leading these ceremonies, Bressers connected the religious and military identities of the Polish community to the wider Belgian Catholic landscape.

Sint-Denijs-Westrem, the barracks and former airfield where the Polish veterans living in Ghent had been stationed during the war, was of key symbolic significance to the community and replaced the King Albert Memorial as the destination of the procession in the 1970s. However, the site saw considerable redevelopment from the 1950s up to the 1980s, when the airfield was finally paved over. With the tangible heritage of the Polish veterans' legacy under threat, Bressers sought permanently to codify their contributions to Belgium

59 Archief Familie Bressers, BE/942855/1925/187/3: Newspaper clipping "2 Regio Gent: Bevrijders van Gent afwezig op 1 november?," November 1, 1988; Newspaper clipping "Inhuldiging Pools monument te St-Denijs-Westrem," De Gentenaar, September 25, 1974; Newspaper clipping "1 januari 1945: luchtslag boven Sint-Denijs-Westrem en Gent," September 26, 1974. KADOC, Leuven.

60 Ibid.

61 Archief Familie Bressers, BE/942855/1925/187/1: Invitations to "Solemn Mass" commemorating Polish war dead, December 1973–2001. KADOC, Leuven.

62 Archief Familie Bressers, BE/942855/1925/187/1: Newspaper clipping "Villers-La-Ville: La Pologne se souvient", May 6, 1994. KADOC, Leuven.

with a public monument. He worked with Recki, who was also the sculptor who led "Friends of the Polish Air Force" and who was described as the "leader" of Ghent's Poles.[63] Recki designed and installed a sculpture, complete with a World War II-era propeller replica, on the small Poolse Winglaan (Polish Wing Lane) street near the airfield site.[64] Its unveiling on September 21, 1974 was sponsored by the city of Ghent and steeped in Catholic ceremony. The preceding mass that year had been overseen by Bressers' superior, Mgr. van Peteghem, and the event attracted a number of prominent delegates, including a representative of the Belgian monarchy.[65]

1976, two years after the dedication of the monument and a decade before the pope's visit, marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Polish Catholic Union of Ghent, and Bressers worked to involve the Polish clergy in the celebrations. Specifically, he wrote letters to the Diocese of Kraków in an attempt to invite Archbishop Karol Wojtyła (later Pope John Paul II) to Belgium. The invitation outlined an "academic session," followed by gifts of flowers for the attendees by Polish children and a classical music concert. Bressers hoped that the archbishop would be able to conduct a Catholic mass attended by representatives of the Polish community and concluding with a "democratic banquet of Poles and guests." Notably, here Bressers brought the Poles into contact with prominent members of Belgian society. He invited important figures, such as the former Minister of State August De Schryver and the Mayor of Ghent. Bressers also expected the aforementioned Henryk Repka (the rector of the Polish Catholic Mission in Brussels) to attend, which would bring together his congregation and the nationwide Belgo-Polish Catholic community.[66] Despite the effort, in a follow-up letter, Bressers noted that he had waited "in vain" for a response and lightheartedly expressed his disappointment that Mgr. Wojtyła could not attend with the Polish word *szkoda* (pity), expressing his hopes for a future visit.[67]

63 Archief Familie Bressers, BE/942855/1925/187/3: Newspaper clipping "2 Regio Gent: Bevrijders van Gent afwezig op 1 november?," November 1, 1988. KADOC, Leuven.

64 Archief Familie Bressers, BE/942855/1925/187/3: Annotated schematic "Monument voor de Poolse Piloten gesneuveld te St. Denijs-Westrem – 1945," S.D. KADOC, Leuven.

65 Archief Familie Bressers, BE/942855/1925/187/3: Newspaper clipping "Gent-LW: Poolse monument onthuld te Sint-Denijs-Westrem; Aandenken aan gevallen Poolse vliegeniers," September 23, 1974. KADOC, Leuven.

66 Archief Familie Bressers, BE/942855/1925/188/1: Letter from Bressers to Kraków Diocese, September 11, 1976. KADOC, Leuven.

67 Archief Familie Bressers, BE/942855/1925/188/1: Letter from Bressers to Kraków Diocese, October 21, 1976. KADOC, Leuven.

Despite the unfortunate no-show, Bressers' intentions showed a desire to use Catholicism as a bridge between his congregation, the upper echelons of Belgian society, and the native Polish clergy. The request, however, would eventually meet with a positive response, as Recki's sculpture further underpinned the commemorative significance of the Polish community heritage. Indeed, the site took on a new religious meaning in 1985, when Bressers, Łuczak, Recki, and François de Hemptinne wrote a letter petitioning Pope John Paul II to make a brief stop at the site on the occasion of his official visit to Belgium that year. Their request was honored with an open-air mass which was "preceded by a grand spectacle" and attended by 150,000 people.[68]

Conclusion

As the Cold War gradually wound to a close, Bressers received commendation from Poland's most prominent clergy for his work as a valuable bridge for dialogue between the migrants and their Belgian neighbors. For his work with the Polish veterans, he was commended with the title of honorary canon of the Archdiocese of Gniezno by Cardinal Józef Glemp in 1987 (he also received a similar honor from the clergy of Hungary).[69] In his speech thanking Glemp and the Archdiocese, he closed with a simple message describing his decades of chaplaincy: "this spiritual debt of gratitude for the good received I try to pay by prayer and by a dedicated ministry, so that the Poles who live in Belgium transmit the heritage of their faith to future generations."[70] Notwithstanding the specific limitations he may have faced surrounding Solidarność in the 1980s, overall Bressers' dialogical mediation between migrants and hosts was essential in the identity formation processes which preserved and shaped the religious and secular heritage of the communities, with the Church acting as a bilateral partner, situating itself and revolving around church settings, practices, and

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68 Archief Familie Bressers, BE/942855/1925/187/3: Letter from "Friends of the Polish Air Force" to "Honorary Registrar Paul" and "Juffrouw van Kemseke," November 9, 1984. KADOC, Leuven; the pope's visit to Sint-Denijs-Westrem is recorded here [https://www.tijdvoor80.be/de-paus-in-belgie/] Accessed November 15, 2022.

69 In 1984, the Archbishop of Esztergom, Cardinal László Lékai, made Bressers an honorary canon of that diocese in recognition of his services to the Hungarian community in Ghent. See Archief Familie Bressers, BE/942855/1925/204: Certificate of honorary canonship of the Diocese of Esztergom, February 18, 1987. KADOC, Leuven.

70 Archief Familie Bressers, BE/942855/1925/194: Certificate of honorary canonship of the Diocese of Gniezno, February 18, 1987. KADOC, Leuven.

networks. Perhaps the highest endorsement of Bressers' efforts came on the occasion of his fiftieth year of priesthood in 1992, when he received the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland from the country's first non-communist leader since the Second World War, President Lech Wałęsa.[71]

The different methods and practices with which the members of the Polish community of Ghent expressed their identity were heavily influenced by their cultural and historical heritage and connections to their home country, but also by the time they spent in the host society, which shaped the evolution of their political attitudes and their relationship with Carlos Bressers, the Catholic Church, and the Diocese of Ghent. The formation and evolution of this identity and the interaction between members of this community and wider Belgian society suggest a number of conclusions and areas for further speculation.

The Poles of Ghent perhaps fit the popular definitions of "émigré" in the very broadest sense due to their early engagements with anti-communism. They were loyal to the anti-communist Polish government-in-exile, and as Allied military veterans, they took an anti-communist stance. However, this was limited by prolonged exposure to the host society or other factors unseen in the archives of Bressers (a perception of the futility of any efforts to further change, perhaps, but more likely the erosion of personal connections to Poland and increased assimilation.) The members of this community also differed significantly from the prominent "exiles" of the 1970s and 1980s. They behaved more as cultural custodians, safeguarding a Polish identity and heritage heavily influenced by their Catholic lived religion. Though, they remained nominally anti-communist, with the passage of time, their identities shifted from "Poles in Belgium" to "Belgian Poles." This was not the case everywhere. For example, in Goddeeris' studies of the Polish trade unionists active within the Belgian syndicalist arena, Solidarność served to reignite solidarity, albeit short-lived, with the home country after long periods of dormancy, though the actions of these groups were not always necessarily politically motivated and often took humanitarian forms.[72]

The role of Bressers as a mediator between home and host resonates with Yuval-Davis' emphasis on dialogical identity formation, particularly the "importance of the communal context" and the conversations, contestations, and authorizations that take place between two groups between which there are

71 Archief Familie Bressers, BE/942855/1925/197: Letter to Jacek, Beata, and Peter Barfuss, December 11, 1992. KADOC, Leuven.

72 Goddeeris, "The Polish Section of the Belgian Christian Trade Union ACV/CSC," 265; Goddeeris, "Solidarity or Indifference? Polish Migrants in Belgium and Solidarność," 80.

inherent imbalances in power.[73] In the case of migrants, this imbalance is the result of many considerations, from language to cultural difference and social norms. For the members of the Polish community in Ghent, their negotiation of collective identity was greatly facilitated by contact with a dynamic host society actor, the in-between figure of Bressers, and the religion and wartime heritage they shared with their hosts. Ghent's Catholic Church was willing to act as a receiving structure to increase the visibility of Polish Catholicism among the people of the city, and it granted the Poles access to high rungs on the ladder of the Belgian societal hierarchy, perhaps best embodied by their successful petition to have Pope John Paul II, an icon among Catholics worldwide, visit their humble monument in Sint-Denijs-Westrem.

The experiences of these communities support the argument that the tireless exiles well remembered in popular conceptions of the Cold War were a significant but small population, and that Central and Eastern European migrant communities were equally likely instead to remain attached to pre-socialist visions and culture of their homelands. Far from being an abstract or passive host society influence, the work of Carlos Bressers outlines the flexible exchange in which local actors can engage in shaping the collective identity and notions of belonging among migrant communities. The processes in which both the migrants and the host society engaged with each other at their own initiatives and in the common interests of each were dynamic, bilateral, and subject to both internal and external influences.

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73 Yuval-Davis, "Theorizing identity: beyond the 'us' and 'them' dichotomy," 271.

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BE/942855/1925/187/3: Letter from "Friends of the Polish Air Force" to "Honorary Registrar Paul" and "Juffrouw van Kemseke," November 9, 1984.

BE/942855/1925/187/3: Newspaper clipping "1 januari 1945: luchtslag boven Sint-Denijs-Westrem en Gent," September 26, 1974.

BE/942855/1925/187/3: Newspaper clipping "2 Regio Gent: Bevrijders van Gent afwezig op 1 november?," November 1, 1988.

BE/942855/1925/187/3: Newspaper clipping "Gent-LW: Poolse monument onthuld te Sint-Denijs-Westrem; Aandenken aan gevallen Poolse vliegeniers," September 23, 1974.

BE/942855/1925/187/3: Newspaper clipping "Inhuldiging Pools monument te St-Denijs-Westrem," De Gentenaar, September 25, 1974.

BE/942855/1925/188/1: Newspaper clipping "Fête de Paques chez les Polonais," La Metropole, April 5, 1972.

BE/942855/1925/188/1: Letter from Bressers to Kraków Diocese, September 11, 1976.

BE/942855/1925/188/1: Letter from Bressers to Kraków Diocese, October 21, 1976.

BE/942855/1925/188/2: Newspaper clipping "Arrivée à Anvers de l'icône de N.D. de Czestochowa," January 18, 1966.

BE/942855/1925/188/2: Newspaper clipping "Kerstfeest bij de Polen," 1959.

BE/942855/1925/188/2: Newspaper clipping "Poolse dag te Gent: 15-jarig bestaan van de kolonie," September 26, 1966.

BE/942855/1925/188/2: Newspaper clipping "Poolse missie huldigt Z.H. Exc. Mgr Calewaert," Het Volk, November 22, 1951.

BE/942855/1925/188/2: Program of "Academic Festive Season" event, Ghent, May 29, 1977.

BE/942855/1925/188/3: Newspaper clipping "Kopie van Zwarte Madonna van Częstochowa te Gent aangekomen," January 26, 1966.

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Migration as Mission: Alojz-Alexis Strýček SJ in Belgium (1938–1945)

Wim Coudenys
KU Leuven
wim.coudenys@kuleuven.be

This article presents a case study of Alojz-Alexis Strýček SJ, a Slovak Jesuit in Belgium during World War II, to examine the complexities of migration, identity, and religious mission within turbulent historical contexts. Strýček's experiences challenge conventional categorizations in migration studies, demonstrating how individual narratives can intersect with and transcend national and religious boundaries. The study employs social network analysis and philological-historical methods, offering insights into the dynamic roles migrants play in the circulation of knowledge and in shaping transnational connections. Strýček's case highlights the importance of considering non-national factors, such as religious affiliations, in understanding migration patterns and migrant identities. This research contributes to the emerging field of "migrant knowledge," which focuses on the role of migrants in global knowledge exchange and the redefinition of identities in times of crisis, thereby enriching our understanding of the multifaceted nature of migration.

Keywords: Jesuit mission, World War II, Belgium, migration, identity, transnationalism, religious mission, Russian emigration, Soviet Union

Introduction

The emergence of new independent nation states in Central and Eastern Europe after World War I challenged the categorization of the inhabitants of the region. People who were born in Warsaw or Prague before 1918 and had been registered as Russian or Austrian citizens all of a sudden became Poles or Czechoslovaks. This was not only reflected in the paperwork documenting individual identities[1] but also in official statistics. Whether a person identified with his or her new categorization was of little or no concern to the administration managing the documents or to the statisticians who processed data on behalf of governments.[2] This has serious consequences for migration studies, which usually build on these individual and collective data to define their object of study. These

1 See Caplan and Torpey, *Documenting Individual Identity.*

2 See, for example, *Annuaire statistique de la Belgique et du Congo Belge,* 66. Cf also Coudenys and Rappoye, *Fallen far from the Fatherland,* 8.

categories often fail to capture identifying features or circumstances that drive individuals to migrate, and individuals do not necessary identify with the migrant community to which they are documentarily and statistically assigned.[3] Nor does this paperwork take into account non-national, e.g. religious or transnational migrant communities, the non-binary character of individuals who play different roles in different (migrant) settings, or the possibility that an individual, through his or her actions, may change the outlook of a migrant community (e.g. among nationals without a fatherland) or serve as a catalyst for the emergence of hitherto unknown (migrant) constellations.

This contribution focuses on an individual who at the time of his arrival in Belgium in 1938 was registered as a Czechoslovak citizen but who himself did not identify with that country's migrant community (if one existed at all). Moreover, his time spent as a migrant in Belgium was guided by a religious mission that barely acknowledged national identities.[4] However, the fact that this individual did not fit the existing (formal) categories does not mean that he was not a migrant. He effectively built his own network, which constantly shifted and grew and which was religious and transnational by definition, and he ignored the (politically) imposed barriers between local and foreign. Not only do the circumstances of this individual's life challenge the usual categories of migration history, but the shift of focus to an individual is also unlikely to provide direct insights into the concerns or cultural identity of the migrant community as a whole. On the contrary, this case risks being downplayed as a case study, biography, microhistory, or, even worse, hagiography or *petite histoire*. Last but not least, there is the additional peril of blind spots, as the absence or elusiveness of sources cannot be papered over by massive data and general tendencies.

To tackle these challenges, I use a methodology that has proven effective in my previous biographical and prosopographical research.[5] It essentially combines social network analysis with the philological-historical method, with texts (sources) themselves as evidence and products of networks of authors, readers (addressees), themes and topics (hi-stories), references, and forms of intertextuality. Texts can always be read as 1) products and tools of the social networks from which they emerge and 2) references to other texts.

3 See Beyers et al., "Families, foreignness, migration." For a problematization on the basis of the Ukrainian community in Belgium, see Venken and Goddeeris, "The Nationalization of Identities."

4 Kennedy, "Religion, Nation, and European Representations of the Past."

5 E.g. Coudenys, "A life between fact and fiction"; Coudenys, "A. V. Amfiteatrov's Stena plača i stena nerušimaja"; Coudenys, "Fictional, but Truthful"; Coudenys, "A Failed Apostolat de Press."

The lack of sources imposes limits on what can be known, but insights into textual interconnections may yield additional information concerning social interconnections. This approach is particularly appropriate within the field of *Migrant knowledge*, a new paradigm on the crossroads of migrant studies and the history of knowledge that focuses on the roles of migrants in the circulation of knowledge.[6] This is exemplified by the present case of Alojz or Alexis (Aleksei) Strýček in Belgium.

Alojz Strýček

In 2009, Alexis (Alozj) Strýček (1916–2013), a French Jesuit of Slovak origin, committed his memories to paper. For ages, he had been entertaining friends, colleagues, and visitors with numerous stories about his adventurous life, and he finally gave in to their urgings to put the story of his life in writing. His autobiography in Russian (his Russian was allegedly better than his native Slovak, even if it was not his first language)[7] opens with a passage in which he identifies himself: he was born to a Slovak-speaking family in the Austrian-Hungarian village of Cserne (now Čierne, on the Slovak-Polish border), but only after the creation of Czechoslovakia in 1918 and the ousting of the Hungarian administration did the Strýčeks acknowledge their Slavic, i.e. Slovak identity. First and foremost, the Strýčeks were Roman Catholics. Alojz was named after the saint of his birthday (Aloysius Gonzaga, June 21), and he regularly attended mass, served as an altar boy, said his bedtime prayers, read religious literature, and saw how his (well-to-do) parents engaged in charity.[8] In the French (adapted) edition of his memoirs (2013), however, the stress is on Strýček being multilingual (Slovak, Czech, German, Latin, French) and well-travelled from a very young age.[9] The differences between the two editions can be explained by the difference in the target readership: the Russian version addressed the tiny community of Catholics in Novosibirsk, where Strýček was living at the time of publication, whereas the French version, edited by Strýček's former language teaching assistant after his

6 Westermann and Erdur, "Migrant Knowledge." Cf. also Warditz and Coudenys, "Slavic Studies as Migrant Knowledge."

7 Simon, *Pro Russia,* 469; Simon, "Slováci v Russicu: 1929–1940" (unpublished article, with thanks to Dr. D. Černý, Director of the Slovak Institute in Rome).

8 Strichek, *Avtobiografiia riadovogo iezuita ottsa Alekseia Stricheka,* 4.

9 Strycek, *Souvenirs*, 20–22.

death, was meant for a larger, non-religious French readership. Both editions agree that languages, mobility, and Catholicism indeed defined Strýček's life.

In 1926, at the age of ten, Alojz was sent to the gymnasium in Trnava and later to the schools in Nitra and Trenčin, where he graduated in 1934. As he noted in his autobiography,

> During his last class, the priest read us a letter from the Pope. It said that the Soviets were destroying the Catholic clergy, and that we had to prepare for the moment "when Russia would open up," and that in Rome a seminary had been founded, the "Russicum," to train future priests. In Slovakia, we were "panslavists" and saw in Russia the future of the Slavs.
> During the graduation party, I declared that I would go to Rome. To give it a try. If I didn't like it, I'd come back. To non-Catholics, you have to explain that priesthood is considered the ideal in the life of a Catholic. In Sunday homilies there was always talk about "vocation," i.e. the call to follow Jesus Christ. Celibacy, the unmarried status, is obligatory if you want to take up the priestly status, but at the same time it also gives it its aura. Five of my classmates ended up becoming priests.[10]

The Russicum, a preparatory college for Catholic priests destined for missionary work in Russia and among Russians abroad, had been established in 1929 by the papal encyclical *Quam curam*, the very "letter" the priest had read to his pupils in the gymnasium in Trenčin.[11] It was the latest instalment in the "Russia policy" of the Holy See.[12] This policy was part of the Church's battle against modernism, which found form, for instance, in the secular nation state as the nucleus of international relations. To counter the demise of religion in public life as of the end of the nineteenth century the Catholic Church increasingly stressed its divine and universal character, which was epitomized by a steep increase in missionary work and the idea that Christians should unite against secularism.[13] From the Roman Catholic point of view, the latter implied the "reunion" of the Christian Churches, notably the Oriental ones, with Catholicism, i.e. their conversion and submission to the Church of Rome.[14]

10 Strichek, *Avtobiografiia*, 7; Cf. Strycek, *Souvenirs*, 24.

11 *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 21, no. 13 (1929): 577–81. [d.d. 15/8/1929]

12 Pettinaroli, *La politique russe.*

13 Green and Viaene, *Religious Internationals*; Lamberts, *The struggle with Leviathan*; De Maeyer and Viaene, *World Views and Worldly Wisdom.*

14 Cf. Lease, "Vatican foreign policy and the origins of Modernism."

The first step in this process had been Leo XIII's papal encyclical *Orientalium Dignitas* (1893), which proclaimed that the Oriental rites of the Eastern Catholic Churches and the Latin rite were equally valid and should be maintained. The latter implied the prohibition of Latinization, the creation of Eastern rite seminaries, and the study of Eastern theology.[15] To further this eastern policy, on May 1, 1917, Benedict XV created the Congregation for the Eastern Church and on October 15, 1917 the Pontifical Oriental Institute. With regards to Russia, the Vatican seized the opportunity offered by the freedom of religion in the Russian Empire (1905–1906, reconfirmed after the February revolution of 1917)[16] to (re-)establish Catholic dioceses in Russia, both of the Latin and Eastern rite (Greek Catholics, i.e. Uniates). Even after the Bolshevik takeover, the Holy See attempted to secure Catholic interests in Soviet Russia. Its efforts were in vain, however. As an alternative, the Catholic Church heavily invested in charity to gain sympathy among the (traditionally hostile) Russian Orthodox, either in Russia itself through food relief during the famine of 1921–22 or among Russian refugees (émigrés) by providing material, educational, and spiritual support. Especially during the pontificate of Pius XI (1922–1939), Russia and the relationship with Russian Orthodoxy became a hot topic, with the creation of the Pontifical Commission Pro Russia (1925) within the Congregation for the Eastern Church and further encyclicals stressing the importance of unity among the Christian Churches and the primacy of the Catholic Church therein (*Mortalium Animos*, 1928), as well as the importance of the teaching of Oriental liturgy and culture in Catholic universities and seminars (*Rerum Orientalium*, 1928). The latter led to the creation of the Collegium Russicum, the management of which was entrusted to the Jesuit Order.[17]

The 18-year old Alojz Strýček arrived in Rome on October 17, 1934. By that time, the Russicum had more or less established itself. It provided lodging for some 30 students and trained them in Russian culture and the Eastern rite, as these were considered the shortest way to the hearts of the Russians. Moreover, the Russicum's first rector, the Slovak Vendelín Javorka (1882–1966), who probably had been responsible for the promotion of the Russicum in Slovakia, had been succeeded by the Frenchman Philippe de Régis (1897–1954). Notwithstanding

15 https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/la/apost_letters/documents/hf_l-xiii_apl_18941130_orientalium-dignitas.html. On the history of Unionism, see Aubert, *Le Saint-Siège et l'union des Églises*; Fouilloux, *Les catholiques et l'unité chrétienne*; Baumer, *Von der Unio zur Communio.*

16 Pettinaroli, *La politique russe*, 52–55, 257. Cf. Strycek, "La révolution de 1905 et les libertés religieuses."

17 Simon, *Pro Russia*; Pettinaroli, *La politique russe du Saint-Siège.*

his good relationship with the Slovak Jesuit Province (Provincial Rudolf Mikuš, 1884–1972) and the Slovak dioceses (Bishop Karel Kmetko of Nitra, 1875–1948), de Régis was not keen on "too large a group of Slovaks (or for that matter any group of non-Russian foreigners gaining a majority)."[18] Strýček became one of the twelve Slovaks who studied at the Russicum in the interwar period,[19] and he liked it there: "I never returned home. However much I loved my father, mother, and sister and however much I was loved by them, I followed the often repeated words of Christ that I now heard inside me: 'follow thou me' (Matthew 8:22)."[20] On September 8, 1936, after two years in the Russicum (and two years of philosophy at the Gregorian University), Strýček entered the Jesuit Order.[21] De Régis was delighted:

> Regarding the religious spirit [in the college], we thank God that everything seems to be going well. On the occasion of F. Wetter [Gustav Wetter, 1911–1991] and F. Strýček entering the novitiate, we could note how well and sympathetically the students were disposed towards the Society. Certainly nothing remained of the former distrust which could be observed in the first students. The silent student A. Strýček will enter the Society. Two others, however, leave the college this year; one, a Frenchman, is destined for the Capuchin novitiate for missionary work among the negroes, while the other, a German, having experienced difficulties in the Eastern rite, wanted to join a seminary in his own country.[22]

Strýček was sent to the Eastern rite novitiate of Zagreb, but a year later the Yugoslav government stopped granting visas to Catholic seminarists of the Eastern rite. Strýček returned to Italy, to the novitiate of Ariccia, where on September 8, 1938 he took his first vows.[23]

For the next phase of his training period (the so-called Regency, which was an internship which lasted two to three years), the young Jesuit was sent to the Russian Collège Saint-Georges in Namur to serve as a *praefectus disciplinae* (discipline

18 ARSI Russicum.

19 Simon, "Slováci v Russicu: 1929–1940."

20 Strichek, *Avtobiografiia*, 8.

21 Strichek, *Avtobiografiia*, 11–13; Personal file Aloisius Stryček, ASPEMCG.

22 De Régis to Anton Prešeren, 1/8/1936, ARSI Russicum, Folder "Pont. Inst. Orient. 1935–36 Ex Officio Corr. Particulare."

23 Strichek, *Avtobiografiia*, 13–14; Personal file Aloisius Stryček, ASPEMCG.

master) and "to study Russian."[24] According to his personal file, his performance as a *praefectus* was "cum mediocri satisfactione." As a language teacher, however, he qualified "cum optima satisfactione."[25] The Collège Saint-Georges had been founded in 1921 in Constantinople by French Jesuits to provide schooling for the sons of the thousands of Russian families that had fled Russia after the defeat of the White Armies at the end of 1920. In March 1923, the institute, its staff, and 38 pupils were transferred to Namur, where it was attached to the Jesuit Collège Notre-Dame de la Paix. During the day, the children went to school at the Jesuit Collège or other Catholic institutions in the neighborhood. Saint-Georges itself provided boarding, effectively creating an entirely Russian environment with Russian as the language of communication, Russian language classes, and Russian culture and religious instruction (Catholicism of the Eastern rite). It thus served as a model for the future Russicum. Saint-Georges was also directly funded by the Vatican and run by the Jesuits. Although some of its graduates would later enter the Russicum, the conversion of Russians was not the primary goal of the Jesuits. Gaining sympathy among Russia's future elites (or the people who, it was believed at the time, would later emerge as the elites) was much higher on their agenda. And many Russians who were also Orthodox were happy to send their children to Namur. Unlike in other Catholic countries, the Catholic Church in Belgium and especially its primate, Cardinal Mercier (1851–1926), were reputed to refrain from proselytism.[26] In reality, however, conversion was part of the deal. In exchange for a good education at a moderate cost, many parents turned a blind eye to Catholic pressure as long as it did not affect the family's standing in the Russian émigré community. The children themselves wanted to fit in with their Catholic environment (and please their teachers), and as many of them even spent their holidays at the college at the behest of the Jesuits, few parents were in a position to counter Catholic pressure.[27] Meanwhile, the sponsors of the *collège* measured their return on investment on the basis of the number of conversions. In his report to Rome of April 20, 1939, Paul Mailleux (1905–

24 Le Cocq (Provincial) to Mailleux (St. Georges), 28/7/1938. AFSI, Institut Saint-Georges Meudon (E-Me), Box 3; Le Cocq to Nilis (Sûreté publique), 12/9/1938. BSA F 1650 (Police des Etrangérs), Personal File A313533 Strycek L.

25 Personal file Aloisius Stryček, ASPEMCG.

26 Coudenys, *Leven voor de tsaar,* 52–59; Coudenys, Wim. "Cardinal Mercier and the Russian Emigration" (forthcoming); Elens and Rouleau, "L'histoire de Saint-Georges. De Constantinople à Meudon"; Emond, "Le problème religieux chez les émigrés russes"; Tamigneaux, "Le Cardinal Mercier et l' 'Aide belge aux Russes'"; Bieliavsky, "Le cardinal Mercier et l'émigration russe en Belgique."

27 Coudenys, "Between Them and Us"; Coudenys, "Proselytism, charity, imperialism."

1983), the director of Saint-Georges, stressed that he himself refrained from converting pupils under his care to avoid direct conflicts with the Orthodox community, but he was adamant that his little Russians were so well-embedded in their Belgian Catholic environment that as many as half of them eventually converted.[28] This met with the approval of Włodzimierz Ledóchowski (1868–1942), the superior general of the Society of Jesus in Rome.[29] In his memoirs, Strýček describes Saint-Georges as an experiment on the fringes of what was achievable within the Catholic Church at that time:

> For the pupils of the college [Notre-Dame de la Paix] attending mass was obligatory. There could be no exception for the boarders at Saint-Georges! Let them pray according to their own rite! It goes without saying that at that time inviting an Orthodox priest for that purpose was out of the question. Some of the boys were Russian Catholics, and in the *collège* there were Catholic priests of the Eastern rite.[30]
> Every day, Father Victor [Richter, 1899–1976] and Father Dimitri [Kuz'min-Karavaev, 1886–1959] celebrated liturgy for the pupils of Saint-Georges. Usually, a [Eastern rite] liturgy is sung and lasts longer than a Latin mass. To gain time before the beginning of the classes at the college, the pupils attended a spoken liturgy, which is completely unacceptable for Russians. Like it or not, the Orthodox children had to accept the order of things.[31]

In April 1939, Strýček took his protégés to the Easter service in the Russian Orthodox Church in Charleroi,[32] where he encouraged them to participate in the liturgy and sing along with the choir: "I had neglected the ban on *communicatio in sacris* [participation in a non-Catholic service]. Back in Namur, I got an earful."[33] This, perhaps, gained him the qualification of being a mediocre praefectus, but there is no concrete reference to this incident either in the archives of Saint-Georges, or in Strýček's personal file in the Jesuit archives. As a matter of fact, apart from some administrative notes, there are no references at all to Strýček during that period, let alone sources that corroborate his memoirs. This is probably due to Strýček's extremely young age. He was only 22 when he arrived in Namur in late September 1938, and he was still in the early stages of his *probatio*. Moreover,

28 Mailleux to Card. Tisserant, 20/4/1939. AFSI, E-Me, Box 7.

29 Ledóchowski to Le Cocq, 31/5/1939. AFSI, E-Me, Box 3.

30 Strichek, *Avtobiografiia*, 16.

31 Strycek, *Souvenirs*, 48.

32 Nedosekin, "Istoriia Sviato-Troitskogo prikhoda."

33 Strycek, *Souvenirs*, 49; cf. Strichek, *Avtobiografiia*, 16.

one can wonder about the accuracy of Strýček's memoirs. They largely coincide with and sometimes almost seem to be based on the official history of Saint-Georges, published in 1993. Did Strýček use this account as a source, or did the authors of this history build on his stories? And last but not least, Strýček's memories were probably colored by the more ecumenical attitudes that Saint-Georges and, for that matter, the whole of the Catholic Church would adopt in later years and of which Strýček himself was an adept.[34]

When Strýček arrived in Namur in September 1938, Saint-Georges was more or less regaining momentum after years of financial and organizational turmoil.[35] It was now led by a dynamic, Russian-speaking director (Paul Mailleux) and was part of a broader Jesuit structure, which also included the Foyer Universitaire Slave, the Russian student home at the University of Louvain (Leuven).[36] Moreover, thanks to the new influx of financial means and personnel from Rome ("I wish all my colleges were as well provided for by Rome as yours is," the Provincial wrote to Mailleux[37]), there were even plans to diversify the trajectories offered to Saint-Georges' boarders. As the materially and psychologically deprived Russian émigrés were not always up to the high academic standards of Notre-Dame de la Paix, it was considered potentially worthwhile to send them to technical or vocational schools as well.[38] And thanks to the arrival of the English Jesuit Paul Dickinson (1914–2002) and a flaw in the Belgian legislation, the (obligatory) Flemish classes at Notre-Dame de la Paix ("many parents feel (correctly) that too much emphasis is put on the study of a language of primarily local interest"), were replaced by English classes in Saint-Georges itself.[39] A year later, however, things were changing dramatically as events on the international political stage were becoming increasingly ominous. In August 1939, part of the *collège*'s premises at Namur were requisitioned by the Belgian army in view of the threat of war.[40] In September, F. Mailleux was mobilized. On October 31, the Sœurs de la Charité de Namur announced that they would not be able to provide bread for free anymore.[41] Meanwhile, developments in the East, notably the Soviet-Finnish war, put the Russian apostolate in a new,

34 Elens and Rouleau, "L'histoire de Saint-Georges. De Constantinople à Meudon."
35 Cf. the annual reports of Saint-Georges in AFSI, E-Me, Box 7.
36 Coudenys, *Leven voor de tsaar*, 70–80; Coudenys, "A Good Cause?"
37 Le Cocq to Mailleux, 28/7/1938. AFSI, E-Me, Box 3.
38 Mailleux to Le Cocq, 8/9/1938. AFSI, E-Me, Box 3.
39 Mailleux to Tisserant, 20/4/1939. AFSI, E-Me, Box 7.
40 Mailleux to Le Cocq, 27/8/1939. AFSI, E-Me, Box 3.
41 Mère Saint François de Sales Michaux to Mailleux, 31/10/1939. AFSI, E-Me, Box 4.

complicated perspective. Who would sympathize with the Russians now that the Soviets had attacked a neighboring country?[42] When war broke out in Belgium on May 10, 1940, 45 of the 60 pupils returned to their parents in Brussels and Paris. The other 15 fled to France under the guidance of Victor Richter. Alojz Strýček, Dmitrii Kuzmin-Karavaev, and Frantiszek Przewlekły (1884–1957) stayed behind in Namur. Unlike the rest of the (garrison) town, Saint-Georges remained relatively unscathed by the bombardments of May 1940. Within days, the refugees returned to Namur.[43] Soon afterwards, however, it was decided to move the college to Paris, as most of the pupils were living in the French capital.[44] In 1941, Mailleux, Kuzmin-Karavaev, and Przewlekły were permitted to leave Belgium, and Richter was allowed to leave in 1942. Strýček remained in Belgium to pursue his Jesuit training.[45]

In 1940, Strýček had resumed his philosophy studies (he was in his third year) at the Jesuit Robert Bellarmine Novitiate of Wépion, just outside of Namur, but he failed his exams. In his memoirs, he acknowledged that his Roman training had not prepared him for the exacting standards of Belgian higher education, but he also blamed his professors for being too rigid and blind to the social concerns of the younger generation.[46] The following year, he enrolled in the "minor" theology program at the Jesuit Collegium Maximum in Louvain, destined for future missionaries and priests without degrees in philosophy. This Jesuit institution in the rue des Récollets (Minderbroederstraat), which should not be confounded with the Faculty of Theology at the University of Louvain, was renowned for its internationalism and modern spirit ("the spirit of Louvain", as one author put it).[47]

In his memoirs, Strýček claims that in Louvain, he took his Russian interests to a new level. The Louvain library provided plenty of reading materials, and there was ample opportunity to connect with Russian émigrés, either students at

42 Mailleu to Jourdain, 28/1/1940. AFSI, E-Me, Box 4; P. Pavani (DeIegazione Apostolica nell'Iran) to Mailleux, 7/2/1940. AFSI, E-Me, Box 4.

43 Mailleux to Richter, 13/5/1940. AFSI, EMe 4, foto 4875; Mailleux to Tisserant, 23/6. AFSI, E-Me, Box 3; Strycek, *Souvenirs*, 51–53; Strichek, *Avtobiografiia*, 17–18; Elens and Rouleau, "L'histoire de Saint-Georges. De Constantinople à Meudon," 22–23.

44 Cf. Mailleux to A. Kulik (Paris), 20/7/1940. AFSI, E-Me, Box 4.

45 Javorka to Strýček, 19/6/1941. AFSI, Personal File A. Strycek (DP), Folder 2; Elens nd Rouleau, "L'histoire de Saint-Georges. De Constantinople à Meudon," 25–26; Strycek, *Souvenirs*, 56; Strichek, *Avtobiografiia*, 19.

46 Strycek, *Souvenirs*, 56–57.

47 Salas Fernández, "Alberto Hurtado: a biographical study," 3, 199–239. Cf. also Dumont, "Vie et destinée d'un Collège Jésuite"; De Maeyer et al., "Louvain. IV. Couvents. XIXe–XXe siècle."

the Foyer Universitaire Slave in de rue de Malines (Mechelsestraat) or Russians living in Louvain.[48] Many of them had become Catholics. Irina Posnova (1914–1997), a Louvain graduate and future founder of the Russian Catholic publishing house Zhizn' s Bogom (La Vie avec Dieu);[49] Ilia Denisov (1893–1971), who in 1943 defended a groundbreaking dissertation on Maximus the Greek (Maksim Grek, 1470–1556);[50] Vera Naryshkina-Witte (1883–1963), the adopted daughter of the former Russian Prime Minister Sergei Witte (1849–1915) and a sponsor of schooling programs for Russian émigré children.[51] But he allegedly was also in touch with Orthodox émigrés, such as F. Georgii Tarasov (1893–1963), the priest of the Russian Orthodox churches in Brussels, Louvain, and Ghent and the future archbishop of the Patriarchal Exarchate for Orthodox Parishes in Western Europe (Paris).[52] However, as the Nazis only recognized the authority of the competing (and collaborating) Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, Tarasov (and many émigrés) was rather restricted in his movements.[53] This was the context (described vaguely and misleadingly in Strýček's memoirs)[54] in which a new (and adventurous) phase began in the life of the young Jesuit.

Alexis Strýček

In 1942, the Germans started to transfer labor force from the Eastern Front to the coal mines in Belgium. Initially, these forced laborers were (Ukrainian) civilians *(Ostarbeiter)*, but as of the summer of 1942, the supply consisted mainly of Soviet prisoners of war. This was particularly the case in the province of Limburg, where the first POWs arrived in September 1942.[55] Many of these POWs fled when they got a chance. By the spring of 1943, the number of

48 Strycek, *Souvenirs*, 59–60.

49 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irina_Posnova.

50 Denissoff, *Maxime le Grec et l'Occident*; cf. Olmsted, "Two Exiles: the Roots and Fortunes of Elie Denissoff."

51 Coudenys, *Leven voor de tsaar*, passim. There is no proof, however, that Naryshkina-Witte ever lived in Louvain (BSA, F 1650, Personal File 1171591 Naryschkine C.), and neither that she had become a Catholic. This also suggests that Strýček's memoirs may not be totally reliable.

52 Niv'er, *Pravoslavnye sviashchenosluzhiteli*, 148–49.

53 Coudenys, *Leven voor de tsaar*, 254–56. On the history of the Russian Orthodox Church during World War II, see Model, "L'église orthodoxe russe."

54 Strycek, *Souvenirs*, 59–61; Strichek, *Avtobiografiia*, 20.

55 Put, *Russische krijgsgevangenen* 31–78; cf. also Wollants and Bouveroux, *Russische partizanen*; Kohlbacher et al., *Het Russisch kamp*.

Soviet POWs had risen to some 250, about 5 percent of the total.[56] According to Strýček, in late 1942, he was approached by Limburg youngsters on behalf of the Resistance. A Russian refugee was hiding in their barn, and they needed an interpreter. They did not trust the Russian translators in the coal mines, as they had been recruited from among (collaborating) Russian émigrés.[57] Whatever the case, in November 1942 the Louvain seminarian established contacts at the camp hospital of Waterschei. His first "protégé" was the Ukrainian *Ostarbeiter* Arsen' Feshchenko, who was a regular patient of the camp hospital. Together with his comrades Adam and Nikola, Feshchenko complained about the working conditions (they had not been miners back home), the lack of food, and the cold. And they were happy to receive cigarettes, bread, fruit, clothing, and books (including a Bible) from the future priest.[58] By the end of December, Strýček had made arrangements to visit the Waterschei patients,[59] and he had even found others who delivered parcels on his behalf.[60] Strýček's superiors gave their blessing to this "fruitful work among the prisoners," and they reckoned that through Strýček, "the Lord will increasingly show mercy for these poor people."[61] The visits and the parcel service served as an ideal cover to rove the area between Louvain and the Limburg coal basin and even further afield, in the Ardennes.[62] By the summer of 1943, Strýček's services extended to the escaped prisoners who had gone into hiding in the woods of East-Brabant and Limburg.[63] One of the escapees was Anton Osip, a medical student at the University of Kiev who in July 1943 had been put in charge of the Waterschei camp hospital, two months before he himself had fled.[64] Osip's fate was often the subject of letters by Maria Indestege (1912–1975), a nurse at the hospital who was at the heart of the escape

56 Put, *Russische krijgsgevangenen*, 225; Wollants and Bouveroux, *Russische partizanen*, 19.

57 Strycek, *Souvenirs*, 61; Strichek, *Avtobiografiia*, 20; Wollants and Bouveroux, *Russische partizanen*, 138. Cf. also Put, *Russische krijgsgevangenen*, 79–80.

58 Feshchenko to Strýček, 20/10/1942, 25/11/1942, 2/12/1942, 6/12/1942, 15/12/1942, 21/12/1942, 27/12/1942; 5/1/1943, 9/1/1943, 23/1/1943, 6/2/1943, 7/3/1943; Nikola Sobol to Strýček, 14/4/1943. AFSI, DP, Folder 2.

59 J. Thoelen (parish priest of Waterschei) to Strýček, 23/12/1942. AFSI, DP, Folder 2.

60 A. Godin SJ (Liège) to Strýček, 31/12/1942 & 23/2/1943. AFSI, DP, Folder 2.

61 E. Gessler SJ to Strýček, 13/4/1943 & 26/6/1943. AFSI, DP, Folder 2.

62 Cf. Edm. Pol [illegible] (Boussoit) to Strýček, 18/3/1943 and H. De Visscher (Châtelineau) to Strýček, 22/2/1944. AFSI, DP, Folder 2.

63 M. Semënov and G. Leont'ev (Waanrode) to Strýček, 15/7/1943, 25/9/1943 and s.d.; Soviet POW to Strýček, 22/8/1943. AFSI, DP, Folder 2.

64 A. Osip to Strýček, 20/7/1943, 29/7/1943, 28/8/1943, 8/9/1943. AFSI, DP, Folder 2.Cf. Put, *Russische krijgsgevangenen*, 300–1.

network. More than once, she had to urge Strýček to keep a low profile so as not to give away the network.[65] A similar warning was issued by Anatolii Khrustalov, a friend of Osip's, who worried that too many of the prisoners knew Strýček: "It would be better if you stopped coming, because we are suspicious of the émigrés [the interpreters]."[66] Strýček's reputation eventually reached a group of Russian émigrés who themselves were organizing a Russian resistance group, "Partisans Russes en Belgique," with strong links to the Limburg coal mines.[67] Although these émigrés would later claim that the Limburg escape route was an integral part of their network,[68] there are strong indications that this was not exactly the case.[69] The escaped Soviet POWs created their own ring "For the Motherland" *(Za rodinu)*, which was organized as a Soviet partisan division and consisted by the end of the war of some 400 fighters. There was not much love lost between these two movements, and Strýček himself did not really warm to the émigrés. He preferred the company of the Soviets.[70]

His contacts with Soviet citizens and POWs also offered the aspiring missionary an opportunity to gain second-hand information about Soviet Russia. Some inmates seem to have been happy to oblige Father Aleksei (Alexis), the name they used for him, as it was far easier to pronounce and remember than Alojz. *Ostarbeiter* Andrei Netripailo, for instance, eagerly received parcels and visits by Alojz, and in exchange, he tried to convince his benefactor of his religious zeal. He made inquiries about Orthodox émigrés who might help and wrote about a visit of an Orthodox priest to the camp, icons, Easter, the danger of atheist co-prisoners, and Jews (allegedly Feshchenko was one). "Thank you for your concern," he wrote in a letter to Alojz, "you are a well-loved man and a good soul who does not forget us Orthodox; for these good deeds, the merciful Lord will remember you."[71] The religious theme would surface in many a letter, and this was clearly the kind of information Strýček was seeking. Some three

65 M. Indestege to Strýček, 4/10/1943, 22/10/1943, 26/11/1943, 6/12/1943, 31/12/1943, 27/3/1944, 3/6/1944, 24/7/1944; cf. also T. (Smeets?)(Peer) to Strýček, 11/10/1943. AFSI, DP, Folder 2.

66 A. Khrustalev to Strýček, 3/1/1944. AFSI, DP, Folder 2.

67 M. De Roover to Strýček, 13/1/1944; Feshchenko to Strýček15/2/1944. AFSI, DP, Folder 2.

68 E. P. Wittouck (Shcherbatova) to Strýček, 29/4/1947 & 25/5/1947. AFSI, DP, Folder 2.Cf. Partisans russes en Belgique, BSA / CegeSoma (Brussels), Fonds Leo Lejeune, Folder 126; Put, *Russische krijgsgevangenen*, 288–302; Bieliavsky, Nicolas. "La résistance anti-allemande."

69 Wollants and Bouveroux, *Russische partizanen*, 134–43; Coudenys, *Leven voor de tsaar*, 270–273.

70 Strycek, *Souvenirs*, 67–69; Strichek, *Avtobiografiia*, 21–22; Wollants and Bouveroux, *Russische partizanen*, 138–39.

71 Netripailo to Strýček, 10/2/1943, 21/2/1943, 23/2/1943, 1/3/1943, 18/4/1943, 15/2/1944, s.d. AFSI, DP, Folder 2.

weeks after their first meeting, presumably in late 1943, another refugee, the 20-year old chemistry student and second lieutenant Pavel, wrote the following in a letter to Strýček:

> I thought that after our first meeting, you must have thought that this is a man with Soviet schooling and is therefore no comrade *(tovarishch)* of mine, but you are mistaken, I have always prayed and gone to church with my grandmother, admittedly not often, and when I finished school and went for my lieutenant's training, the last words of my grandmother were: "Pray, and god [sic] will always assist." And I always prayed and honored her will.[72]

In other letters, Pavel gave in to Strýček's probing and further expanded on his religious upbringing. He stressed that, the anti-religious propaganda in the Soviet Union notwithstanding, many people had kept their faith, wore crosses, had their children baptized, and many young people still knew the Lord's Prayer and dodged anti-religious courses. "Foreigners, as well as Russians," he claimed, "exaggerate the importance of atheism among Russians."[73] Pavel increasingly saw Strýček as a "friend to whom I can write everything and [from whom] I receive true instruction and good advice." And he continued:

> I would like to know your opinion about Russia, how such a deeply religious people has a government that rejects god [sic]; I think that this cannot continue for much longer. Because only the biggest idiot can say that he was born without a father. For that reason, my grandfather called Stalin a "wise donkey," but please don't tell this to anyone.[74]

Pavel asked Strýček not to share his contentions with other Soviets and even to burn his letters. As his letters reveal, not all his comrades shared his religious interests. Many of them radiated the skepticism of their Soviet upbringing and commented on the apparent contradictions in the Bible. One anonymous letter writer claimed that, "There is no truth there, deceit upon deception, everywhere slaughtering of children and adults, all done with the blessing of God," and the author agreed with Marx that religion is "the opium of the people."[75] On March

72 Pavel to Štrýček, s.d. AFSI, DP, Folder 2.

73 Pavel to Štrýček, s.d. AFSI, DP, Folder 2.

74 Pavel to Štrýček, s.d. AFSI, DP, Folder 2.

75 Anonymous to Strýček, s.d. AFSI, DP, Folder 2.

21, 1944, one of them openly countered Strýček, who three months previously had been (secretly) ordained as a deacon in Paris:[76]

> I will be frank. In my previous letter, I consciously did not congratulate you on your ecclesiastical promotion. There is no need to pretend in front of you, share niceties, when it is not sincere, or as they say, "from the heart." You have sown confusion in my head. Until now, I have rejected God's existence on the basis of the evidence I had, but since I met you, it proved insufficient; the question of whether God exists, is far deeper than I imagined. I had to reconsider everything and ponder again. […] And meanwhile I remain an atheist.[77]

The author of the letter repeated traditional arguments: the contradictions in the Holy Scripture (how could an educated man like Strýček put his faith in texts riddled with contradictions?), Strýček's alleged disrespect for Russia (how dare he call the Russian people "poor"?), the notion of papal infallibility (why was the head of the Catholic Church infallible and not the head of the Orthodox Church?), the (Catholic) allegorical interpretation of the Bible versus the literal interpretation widespread among Orthodox émigrés, the claims of both Catholics and Orthodox to primacy among the Churches, and the notion of a perfect God as creator of an imperfect world. The letter left its mark, as Strýček copied it several times.

Strýček's religious zeal and growing expertise on Russia also affected his Belgian surroundings. In the summer of 1943, F. Etienne (Stefaan) Gervais (1912–1982) of the Franciscans in Rekem (Limburg) made inquiries about a Russian language course.[78] Were the Rekem Fransciscans also dealing with Russian escapees? In February 1944, Henri De Visscher (1913–1994), a former student at the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome who had been forced to return to Belgium at the outbreak of war and was now biding his time in Châtelineau (Hainaut), had heard from a Limburg seminarian about Strýček's Russian interests and confessed that he also wanted to dedicate his life to the Russian cause.[79] As of late spring or early summer 1944, *Soeur* Cecilia (Evgeniia Morozova, 1912–2011), a Russian Catholic nun of the Eastern rite who was working as a nurse in the civilian hospital in Nivelles, started to brief him about

76 Strycek, *Souvenirs*, 63–64.

77 A. to Strýček, 21/3/1944. AFSI, DP, Folder 2.

78 E. Gervais to Strýček, 19/8/1943 & 29/8/1943. AFSI, DP, Folder 2.

79 De Visscher (Châtelineau) to Strýček, 22/2/1944. AFSI, DP, Folder 2. Cf. Rigaux, "De Visscher, Charles." With thanks to Prof. F. Ost, De Visscher's nephew.

the fate of Russian prisoners in her region (first POWs and, as of September 1944, Russian collaborators) and her strained relationship with the Russian Orthodox community. She also asked for advice on the publication of Catholic literature in Russian (the life of St. Vincent de Paul).[80] In early 1945, by which time the Belgian territory had been completely liberated, Strýček advised a Russian friend of his (a woman) about the publication of a modest Russian-language catechism, as all the available religious literature had been seized by the Russian collaborators. Strýček advised her to contact Irina Posnova.[81] Around the same time, Maria Indestege, the *resistant* and nurse with whom he had closely collaborated in Waterschei, complained about the quiet. "Strange," she wrote, "after all the time we lived in danger." She also complained about the boredom of the newly regained freedom: "Can I not be of any help in one of your undertakings? I'd do it with all my heart, even if it means going to Russia."[82]

The latter was precisely what Strýček had in mind in the spring of 1945. Since the liberation of the larger part of the Belgian territory in September 1944, his "Russian career" had taken a sharp turn. The Soviet partisans of For the Motherland had assisted the Allies in cleansing Limburg of German stay-behinds and collaborators and in return had received some sort of (informal) recognition.[83] By mid-September, the Belgian authorities had started to take control of the situation, which also implied that (uncontrolled) resistance groups were to be disarmed and disbanded. The Soviet partisans were instructed to assemble in Hasselt, but for political reasons (Belgium did not want to offend the Soviet ally) did not have to surrender their arms.[84] All of a sudden, Father Strýček became the official liaison between For the Motherland and the Belgian

80 E. Morozova to Strýček, s.d. AFSI, DP, Folder 2. On E. Morozova, see Elena Maria (Sr). "In ricordo di Madre Ekaterina." *Lettera dal monastero della Dormizione di Maria*, no. 45 (2010). http://www.dormizione.it/?p=1.

81 A. Tugarinova to Strýček, 3/2/1945, 25/2/1945, 5/3/1945, s.d. AFSI, DP, Folder 2. Turganinova was a zealous convert who in 1939 had encouraged the Jesuits to create a boarding school for girls, using Saint-Georges as a model. C. Micara (Nuncio to Belgium) to D. Tardini (Congregazione per gli affari ecclesiastici straordinari, Rome), 15/6/1934 (Dicasterio per le Chiese Orientale, Pontificia Commissione pro Russia, 205/28 fasc. 2: Comité Robyn de Sécours aux enfants russes 1930–1935); Projet d'un Internat pour filles en 1939. AFSI, E-Me, Box 4.

82 M. Indestege to Strýček, 31/3/1945. AFSI, DP, Folder 2.

83 Strycek, *Souvenirs*, 66–70.

84 Commander of the "Secret Army Limburg" to the "Russian commander" (I. Diadkin), 16/9/1944 (Russian translation by Strýček); cf. also B. Ghyselinck (commander of the communist resistance organization Onafhankelijkheidsfront) to "Chères Kamerades" [sic] about his return to civil life,11/10/1944. AFSI, DP, Folder 2; Strycek, *Souvenirs*, 70–73.

and Allied authorities. He translated documents into Russian on behalf of the local authorities and also informed them on who had been assisting the Russian partisans and thus merited recognition as a Belgian patriot.[85] And although the partisans had come to consider Strýček one of their own, the fact that he was a priest (he had been ordained in Louvain on June 27, 1944) complicated things. When he had been an intermediary between individuals and underground groups during the war, Strýček's position as a member of the clergy had been of little importance (and an excellent cover). However, after the liberation, For the Motherland was organized and perceived as a military brigade, and a Catholic priest among Soviet soldiers was inconceivable, especially for Moscow. In late September, a Soviet military delegation had landed in Brussels to keep an eye on Soviet citizens in Belgium and organize their repatriation, if necessary with force.[86] For the time being, however, Strýček was needed as an interpreter and a fixer, and it was agreed that he would accompany the brigade to Marseilles via Saint-Amand-les-Bains (in the French Department of Nord) and Mailly-le-Camp (in the Department of Aube). Strýček was walking a thin line. As a Catholic priest, he was supposed to keep away from military and political affairs, but his Russian friends expected him to join them in the euphoria of victory, which of course was presented in Soviet propaganda as a triumph of the new world power and its ideology.[87] This ranged from a welcome to the US troops ("we are very happy to see our Allies in our home") in early September 1944[88] to the organization of a Soviet dance and sing-along spectacle in Valenciennes in late 1944:

> You have come here tonight to hear our songs and watch our dances; you have come to show your sympathy for that great people that has contributed so much to the liberation of Europe. You also have to come tonight to see the Red soldiers, to get to know the citizens of the new Russia. Watch and listen to our soldiers; the Soviet man is the spitting image of the land of the Soviets.[89]

85 Models of Russian documents for the communalities of Meldert (17/9/1944), Neeroeteren (23/10/1944), Ophoven (25/10/1944), Grote Brogel (s.d.); G. Couplet to Strýček, 24/3/1945 and testimony Strýček on behalf of Couplet, 6/4/1945. AFSI, DP, Folder 2.

86 Cf. Pauwels, "Sovjetkampen in België. Een ongekend verhaal?"; Luyckx, "Russische krijgsgevangenen van de nazi's."

87 Strycek, *Souvenirs*, 74–93.

88 Address to the US military, s.d. AFSI, DP, Folder 2.

89 Address Valenciennes, s.d. AFSI, DP, Folder 2.

The brigade was to embark from Marseille for Odessa on April 29, 1945, and apparently Strýček had planned to accompany them home. His hope to continue his mission in Soviet Russia, however, was thwarted by Cardinal Eugène Tisserant (1884–1972), head of the Congregation for the Eastern Church in Rome. In his memoirs, Strýček ascribed the interdiction to go to Soviet Russia to the emerging Cold War (a rather antedated concept) and the growing hostility between Moscow and Rome. And he admitted that it probably had saved him from being persecuted (and executed) as a "spy from the Vatican."[90] A short assessment in his Roman file, dating from 1950, characterized him as "religiously in unity with God, burning with the zeal of souls, energetic, sociable, and pleasant but nervous and therefore amiable and at times rough and implacable. Sometimes even a little vulgar in his manner of dealing with the ruder."[91] Was this the same Strýček whom de Régis had called "a silent student"?

In an (anonymous) report on wartime events in Limburg, it was stressed that the inhabitants of the region were "good Catholics" who

> were happy to be of service to the unfortunates fleeing the Gestapo. To make themselves understood, they found help in the person of Jesuit Father A.S., who with the approval of his superiors abandoned his studies and followed his dear friends into the woods of Limburg. […] Some months later, the Brigade embarked with its wartime trophies to return to their fatherland. The heart of the Father was with his men on the boat, but Providence did not want him to accompany his friends to Russia. "Lord, thy will be done."[92]

Antonina (Tonia) Ivanova, a female member of the Brigade and a fierce communist, wrote a farewell letter to Strýček:

> Dear Father Aleksei, before I have to return to the Motherland, I have to say a few words to you. What's done is done and won't come back. But what has been, will never be forgotten. Personally, I'll never forget the man with the little beard and moustache who so often helped me and who during all the time we've known each other was exclusively well-disposed towards me and tried to help me in every way he could. […] You probably won't believe what I want to say, but I'll tell you the truth: I'm saying farewell to you, dear Father Aleksei, with pain in my heart and tears in my eyes.[93]

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90 Strycek, *Souvenirs*, 89–90.

91 Personal file Aloisius Stryček, 1950. ASPEMCG.

92 Report, s.d. AFSI, DP, Folder 2.

93 T. Ivanova to Strýček, [29/4/1944]. AFSI, DP, Folder 2.

Ivanova's description of Strýček, it seems, was picked up in the 1960 Soviet documentary novel *In a Foreign Country* (V chuzhoi strane) about the Russian partisans in Limburg, in which Father Aleksei was presented as a Czech priest who "with his ginger goatee and pince-nez on a black cord very much resembled Chekhov."[94] The author of this novel, the military journalist Abram Vol'f (1916–1989), consciously downplayed the role Strýček had played, reducing him to an accomplice of white Russian émigrés.

Strýček remained in France, where he rejoined the Collège Saint-Georges, now established in Paris. He resumed his teaching and supervising position and continued to deepen his knowledge of Russia, "attaining a rare proficiency in the language, which he spoke and wrote like a native."[95] He wrote a manual on the nightmare of every student of Russian, the Russian accentuation (1966), a dissertation on the eighteenth-century Russian author Denis Fonvizin (1976), and a Russian textbook (1992).[96] In 1993, at the advanced age of 78, he finally got the opportunity to accomplish his Russian mission. He traveled to the city of Novosobirsk. It was during this period that his wartime feats were recognized, first by the Russian authorities and then by the Belgian government, which in 2010 gave him the Order of Leopold.[97] In 2011, Stýček returned to France, where shortly before his death in 2013, immobilized and losing his linguistic capacities, he dictated his *Souvenirs* (in French).[98]

Conclusion

In March 1993, Arthur Wollants and Jos Bouveroux interviewed Strýček, or Father Alexis, as he was known in France, for their book on the Russian partisans in Limburg. Having been misled by their main source, Vol'f's aforementioned novel *In a Foreign Country*, they addressed Strýček as a Czech. An offended Strýček immediately put them right: "I'm Slovak, not Czech!"[99] Undoubtedly, his

94 Vol'f, Abram. *V chuzhoi strane*. Saratov: Privolzh'e, 1960; cf. Wollants and Bouveroux, *Russische partizanen*, 134.

95 Simon, *Pro Russia*, 469.

96 Strichek, *Rukovodstvo po russkomu udareniiu*; Strycek, *La Russie des Lumières*; Strycek and Lubouchkine, *Pratique du russe parlé*.

97 "Nagrada Nashla geroia." *Sibirskaia katolicheskaia gazeta*, June 1, 2010. https://sib-catholic.ru/nagrada-nashla-geroya-2/

98 [Koch-Loubouchine, Marina]. "Avant-propos"; [Maréchal], "In memoriam: le Père Alexis Strycek"; "Umer otets Aleksei Strichek."

99 Wollants and Bouveroux, *Russische partizanen*, 138.

insistence on his identity as a Slovak was influenced at least in part by the split, three months earlier, of Czechoslovakia into two independent nation states (or least better approximations of nation states). There are no indications, however, that during his stay in Belgium Strýček or his Belgian contacts ever identified him(self) as Slovak. He was a Jesuit novice with a vocation in the Russian apostolate who had come to Belgium to fulfill his "regency" (at Saint-Georges) and who, forced by the circumstances of war, continued his theological training in Louvain, where he eventually also received his ordination in June 1944. It was thanks to this religious identity that he was able to pursue activities as part of the resistance in Limburg, remain under the radar of the Gestapo, and effectively become part of the Catholic community. In Strýček's case, this amounted to "blending in." Everyone knew him, but they knew hardly anything about him, except, perhaps, that he had knowledge of Russian language and culture. He was hardly the only person to possess such knowledge. On the eve of World War II, some 10,000 Russian émigrés were living in Belgium, but they had remained foreign, not only as a (national) migrant community, but also as belonging to a different religion, i.e. (Russian) Orthodoxy. During his period at Saint-Georges in Namur, Strýček had come to know this Russian émigré community rather well, but as a Catholic, he had always remained on its fringes. And while some of these émigrés collaborated with the Germans (notably as interpreters in the POW-camps), Strýček remained unaffected by the collaborationist stain of being a Russian émigré or, for that matter, a Slovak national (the Germans had created a client Slovak State in 1939, led by clerical fascist and priest Jozef Tiso).[100]

Because of these unique qualities (his lack of any close connection with the Russian émigré community , his proficiency in Russian, and his knowledge of local languages, including French, German, and some Flemish), Strýček became the interlocutor for the *Ostarbeiter*, Soviet POWs, escapees, and partisans in the area between Louvain and the Limburg coal basin. His Catholic identity was taken for granted, for there was (probably) no alternative. And by the time of the liberation, which implied the return of Soviet discipline among the partisans, only trust (the trust of the partisans, the Belgians, and the Allies) and Strýček's deep empathy with his Soviet protegees made it possible for him to accompany the Soviet brigade to Marseilles. It took a Roman interdiction to stop Strýček from departing for the Soviet Union and ultimately to save him from a fateful end as a "spy from the Vatican."

100 Kamenec, "The Slovak state, 1939–1945."

Key to Strýček's position, however, is his being an individual who occupied different positions or played different roles in different communities: as a Catholic cleric in his Belgian environment, as a Russianist among the Soviet partisans, all the while driven by his mission for the Russian apostolate. As such, the case of Alojz-Aleksei-Alexis Strýček challenges (traditional) migrant history, which builds on the category of nationality to map migration and describe the migrant communities that result from it. His example suggests that religion as an identity marker can be at least as powerful as nationality, thereby imposing borders between "them" and "us" that do not coincide with those implied by national or nation state identities. Strýček's case therefore better fits in with the paradigm of "migrant knowledge," which focuses on the circulation of knowledge in and through migration and on the intermediaries in this process. Strýček possessed a unique knowledge of Russia and Russian, first received at home (e.g. his claim that, "In Slovakia, we were 'panslavists' and saw in Russia the future of the Slavs"), as a Catholic of the Eastern rite (at the Russicum), a *praefectus* and teacher of Russian émigré children (in Saint-Georges), during the war (as a translator and fixer for the Russian partisans), and after the war in France (in Saint-Georges as an academic) and in Russia (as a missionary). Strýček's case is also distinctive because his knowledge of Russian was not born of necessity but of chance. After all, as a Catholic novice and priest, he had direct access to Italy, Belgium, and France. The 1929 papal encyclical *Quam curam*, allegedly, had given him a Russian mission, and with that, a thirst for knowledge of Russian culture and the Russian language, in which he would excel.

From this point of view, Strýček can be seen as a catalyst figure whose specific competencies set a process in motion but who was not consumed by that process himself. Conversely, the same applies to his Slovak identity. Strýček was first and foremost a missionary of the Russian apostolate. That he was of Slovak (or Austro-Hungarian or Czechoslovak) origin was merely a coincidence.

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The Evolution of Migrant Mobilization in One Polish Diaspora Community: A Case Study of the Polish Catholic Society Eindhoven*

Adam Żaliński
Institute of Intercultural Studies, Jagiellonian University Kraków
adam.zalinski@uj.edu.pl

This research concerns the transformation of one migrant community. It is based on an analysis of selected documents presenting Polish migrant associations in the Netherlands from the beginning of 1950s until the 1990s. The study offers an analysis of the minority mobilization process, with a focus on migrant organizational agency. It is a case study devoted to the Polish community in Eindhoven and its association, which was a local branch of migrant organization operating at a national level. The main sources used in the study are archival records, including organizational statute, circulars, information leaflets, press releases, official and private correspondence, bulletins, protocols, organizational reports, official declarations, and minutes from meetings. In addition, interviews and biographical data are taken into account. Most of the written sources were obtained from the archive of Franciszek Łyskawa, a Polish migrant soldier who settled in Eindhoven shortly after World War II. Over the course of the following decades, he remained an active member of the diaspora while also integrating into the host society, and he became a Dutch citizen. The study shows the evolution of this Polish migrant community from the precarious situation of the early postwar years through the development of immigrants' associations and institutions which emerged in parallel to efforts to integrate into the multicultural society in the 1960s and 1970s and eventually the gradual decline of activity among the members of this community as immigrants.

Keywords: migrants, refugees, Polish Catholic Society, Franciszek Łyskawa, the Netherlands, mobilization, immigrant community

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Introduction

Historically, Belgium was the primary destination country for Polish migrants heading to the Benelux region. This topic has been addressed in the secondary literature.[1] Therefore, in this study, the aim is to shift the focus to a case from the history of the Polish immigration center in the Netherlands. This paper highlights selected aspects of the organizational experiences of Polish migrants in the latter half of the twentieth century, a period marked by their settlement in the Low Countries which commenced in the late 1940s. According to the studies on the Polish diaspora in Belgium and Netherlands,[2] this wave was triggered by wartime migration, including soldiers and displaced persons (DPs). Many Poles who belonged to this cohort ventured to distant shores, predominantly seeking opportunities overseas, particularly in the United States, Canada, Australia, and Brazil. In the history of Polish immigration, they formed an important wave of migration to the region.[3] Earlier, from 1908 to 1939, a significant number of Polish migrants arrived seeking employment opportunities, including indirect or intermediate Polish migration movements via Germany and France and a group of irregular immigrants. At the time, immigrants were mainly employed in the coal mines of Limburg province, and they remained focused on daily issues and were not politically active.[4] Still, even with this movement into some areas of the Netherlands, Belgium was the main destination for Poles who were heading to this part of Europe. In the 1980s, yet another wave of Polish refugees emerged, again primarily seeking refuge in Belgium. This wave was inextricably linked with the "Solidarity" social movement and consisted of individuals who often sought only temporary sanctuary in the country against the backdrop of the tumultuous events unfolding in their homeland.[5] Taking into consideration the migration movements described above, it should be highlighted that in the second half of the 1940s (the initial point when considering the case study), the Polish diaspora in the Netherlands was not a big one, consisting of some 5,000 to 6,000 people.[6]

Excluding the post-accession migration of the 2000s, the Polish diaspora residing in Belgium and the Netherlands until the 1990s can be described as

1 Eder, *Dzieje Polonii belgijskiej (w zarysie)*; Eder, "Polska diaspora w Belgii i Holandii"; Goddeeris, *Polonia belgijska w pierwszych latach po II wojnie światowej.*

2 Eder, "Polska diaspora w Belgii i Holandii."

3 Ibid.

4 Kołodziejak, "Polacy w Królestwie Niderlandów – przeszłość i teraźniejszość," 48–49.

5 Eder, "Polska diaspora w Belgii i Holandii."

6 Gul-Rechlewicz, "Immigrants in the Netherlands: Second-class Citizens? The Polish Case," 110.

relatively diverse in terms of its socioeconomic profile.[7] In addition to the wartime migrants, the diaspora also included pensioners who had previously worked in coal mining and industry. As a result of this heterogeneity, there was a notable absence of firm organizational structures.[8] Since the 1960s, the Polish diaspora had become more and more geographically dispersed, with some of its members successfully climbing the social ladder.[9] It is worth noting that some wartime immigrants, mainly soldiers and their children, were active members of various religious and veterans' organizations.[10]

The history of Polish immigration to the Netherlands has not been studied extensively, resulting in limited attention to the development of Polish migrant organizations in the latter half of the twentieth century. While there have been a few exceptions, such as a brief overview by Willems and Verbeek (originally in Dutch and later translated into Polish),[11] there are no truly comprehensive studies on this subject.[12] Moreover, relations between Polish and Dutch miners in the interwar period were ambivalent at best, as was the situation of former Polish soldiers who migrated to the Netherlands in the immediate aftermath of the war and the postwar period. It would be fruitful to begin by analyzing a case of organized community life in this setting. In particular, it is important to consider experiences of agency in the organized community life of these immigrants,[13] especially "the everyday ways in which their fellow countrymen and women sought to recapture, safeguard, and even reshape the national cultural identities."[14] The role of religion in these efforts also merits particular attention,[15] as religion was often an integral element of Polish cultural identity in the diaspora community.

7 Kaczmarczyk et al., *Polacy przebywający czasowo w Królestwie Niderlandów – stan wiedzy, wyzwania i możliwe działania publiczne*, 21.

8 Eder, "Polska diaspora w Belgii i Holandii"; Goddeeris, *Polonia belgijska w pierwszych latach po II wojnie światowej.*

9 Eder, "Polska diaspora w Belgii i Holandii," 203.

10 Kołodziejak, "Polacy w Królestwie Niderlandów – przeszłość i teraźniejszość," 51.

11 Willems and Verbeek, *Sto lat tęsknoty: Historia Polaków w Holandii.*

12 Gul-Rechlewicz, "Immigrants in the Netherlands: Second-class Citizens? The Polish Case," 110.

13 Dodds, "The Question of God in Émigré Ghent: Religious Identity as Performance and Dialogue Among Migrants and Hosts During the Cold War."

14 Ibid, 1.

15 Ibid, 4.

Migrants' Community Organizations, Mobilization Processes and Civic Engagement

The phenomenon of organized community life among migrants is universal, meaning that various migrant communities around the world have consistently tended to establish the necessary institutional infrastructures to ensure organized community life in the past and today.[16] Several cases indicate that migrant community organizations are especially active among the first generation of immigrants. The diversity and sheer number of migrant organizations make it difficult to venture generalizations about their universal characteristics and changing patterns of functioning. Numerous studies[17] have shed light on intriguing patterns observed in the evolution of migrant community organizations. One notable change is the process of institutionalization and continuing specialization. Initially, these organizations primarily served affiliative functions, helping to establish social bonds among their members (for instance, the notion of bonding social capital introduced by Putnam[18]). However, as time progresses, these institutions grow into more structured entities, catering to the diverse needs of their communities by offering a myriad of services. Another compelling aspect is the emergence of power struggles and succession issues within these organizations. As the organizations mature, internal dynamics come into play, resulting in the pursuit of leadership positions and potential challenges in ensuring smooth transitions of authority. Moreover, reorientation in terms of areas and methods of operation becomes apparent as these organizations broaden their scope of engagement. Beyond exclusively serving their own community, they can increasingly establish connections with members of other minority groups and seek meaningful interactions with the host society (as reflected in the conception of bridging social capital).[19] Cultural issues emerge as a prominent focus for migrant community organizations. Understanding the significance of cultural identity for their group members, they actively invest in preserving and promoting their rich cultural heritage, recognizing it as a vital bond that empowers their community. Moreover, some organizations may experience marginalization, witnessing a decline in active participation among their members. Additionally, subsequent generations assimilate into

16 Moya, "Immigrants and Associations: A Global and Historical Perspective."

17 Żaliński, *Organizacje polskiej diaspory: Stan i perspektywy rozwoju*, 39–43.

18 Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community.*

19 Ibid.

the host society over time, thus shaping the composition and dynamics of these organizations. A comprehensive exploration of the abovementioned processes illuminates the dynamic nature of migrant community organizations and their integral role in the lives of immigrants as the immigrants navigate the complexities of adaptation and transformation in their adopted homelands. Finally, in many contexts, the issues evolving around competition and conflict between organizations representing various waves of migrants as well as political and social stances can be observed. Survival and prosperity are dependent in part on the availability of funding for organizational activities, but they also depend on the skills and persistence of organizational leaders and other engaged members of the community.

The establishment of migrant associations is one of the first activities in the process of immigrant community building, and often the first institutions launched by immigrants are places of religious worship, such as churches and other religious organizations.[20] This can range from attempts to replicate practices familiar in the homeland to efforts to adapt to the patterns popular in the new place of residence, though of course in most cases, the organizational initiatives launched by migrant communities fall somewhere between these two extremes. The presence of other religious denominations and ethnic groups may introduce a heightened sense of self-awareness among immigrants based on the feeling of being minority "others."[21] Moreover, exposure to a predominantly irreligious society can prompt immigrants to become more aware of their religion. This could deepen attachment (and thus commitment) to some aspects of religious practice and beliefs held in the immigrant community. Still, changes in a migrant community can be observed in the shifting priorities of its members, from putting an emphasis on maintaining its ethnic and religious identity to an openness to the mainstream in the host society. Acknowledging the need to be open to other ethnic and religious groups does not mean losing or weakening an existing identity. Rather, it reflects the need to engage with people who represent diverse ethnic and religious identities. On the other hand, it can be a phase in the process of assimilation.

Concern for a notion of ethnic cultural continuity (no matter how chimerical) becomes apparent in ethnic mobilization processes, including mobilization

20 Vertovec, *Transnationalism*, 137–38.

21 Ibid., 140.

among diaspora communities.[22] Ethnic mobilization, as an example of social movement, can be understood as a collective action driven by interests shared by at least part of an ethnic or migrant group and organized around some features of ethnic identity, or broadly speaking, their distinctive cultural characteristics, and aimed at achieving an important group goal. Ethnic mobilization has been an increasingly salient part of cultural and political processes in the modern world, especially since the 1980s,[23] which has much to do with the development of parallel processes: globalization (including increasing international migration) and regionalization/ethnicization. Within this context, the evolution of complex relationships in civil society is crucial.[24] Migrant mobilization contributes significantly to these changes. It must be noted that self-help organizations play an important role in this process. In describing these processes, Però and Solomos use the term "ethnicity era,"[25] which followed the former "era of collective action" and marked two important developments of the organizing of social groups and immigrants in Europe in the previous century. These activities could originally be of a material justice character. Furthermore, they included securing legal status, tackling discrimination issues, and enhancing migrant participation in structures of representation, especially political ones. The cultural distinctiveness of the ethnic collective, separatist tendencies, organizational cohesion, and a sense of economic and political injustice are also significant for ethnic mobilization.[26] Nevertheless, mobilization processes at the level of immigrant organizations[27] boil down to two objectives: preserving identity and nurturing the political representation of migrant communities, thus increasing the chances of survival for these communities as distinctive groups. Migrant organizations can thus be seen as fulfilling an identity function for their members, as they create spaces for socialization as part of a small group as well as in wider society, including both the majority society and among fellow minorities.[28] Cohen[29] points to religion as

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22 Cohen, *Global Diasporas. An Introduction*, 141–55; Nagel, "Constructing Ethnicity: Creating and Recreating Ethnic Identity and Culture," 165–67; Olzak, "Contemporary Ethnic Mobilization"; Tsutsui, "Global Civil Society and Ethnic Social Movements in the Contemporary World."

23 Tsutsui, "Global Civil Society and Ethnic Social Movements in the Contemporary World," 63–64.

24 Van Hear, "Theories of Migration and Social Change."

25 Però and Solomos, "Introduction: Migrant Politics and Mobilization: Exclusion, Engagements, Incorporation."

26 Tsutsui, "Global Civil Society and Ethnic Social Movements in the Contemporary World," 72–74.

27 Sardinha, *Immigrant Associations, Integration and Identity*, 84.

28 Ibid., 68–69.

29 Cohen, *Global Diasporas. An Introduction*, 150–54.

a major mobilization factor in a diaspora. The Polish community discussed in this article investigates offers a clear example of a case in which there is a strong intersection of faith and ethnicity. As Cohen notes, "Such an overlap between faith and ethnicity is likely to enhance overlapping forms of social cohesion and to create situations where it is difficult to decide whether one is describing a faith or an ethnicity."[30] The case under study supports Cohen's contention. Religion and the protection of ethnic identity might be so intricately interlined that it would be difficult or impossible to separate them.

Migrant mobilization activities were usually understood as determined either by working class situation (violation of labor law) or the reflection of their ethnicity that is "specific cultural traits of a given ethnic group."[31] More recently, this understanding has been supplemented with the political opportunity structure (POS) approach,[32] "the opportunities for mobilizing provided to migrants by the institutional setup of the receiving context."[33] Però and Solomos[34] contend that one must also take migrants' feelings and emotions into account "to balance the rational choice approach that underpins prevalent theories on migrant mobilizations."[35] The rationale for this is sound:

> In fact, migrants, like the rest of the population, may at times mobilize in partial or total disregard of the chances of success and the achievement of concrete goals and material rewards, and they can be substantially driven by their values, affection, sense of self and of group membership, need to feel well and realize themselves, and so forth, all significant elements that are overlooked in the 'rational actor' decision-making model.[36]

These processes can be identified as emotional and "hot" in nature, and in many cases not instrumental but rather based on what is understood as part of ethnic identity and flowing from what could be axiological motives. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of social capital may also help further a more subtle

30 Ibid., 153.

31 Però and Solomos, "Introduction: Migrant Politics and Mobilization: Exclusion, Engagements, Incorporation," 8.

32 Meyer and Staggenborg, "Movements, Countermovements, and the Structure of Political Opportunity"; Meyer, "Protest and Political Opportunities"; Meyer and Minkoff, "Conceptualizing Political Opportunity."

33 Però and Solomos, "Introduction: Migrant Politics and Mobilization: Exclusion, Engagements, Incorporation," 9.

34 Ibid., 8.

35 Ibid., 10.

36 Ibid.

understanding of the state of a migrant community.[37] In particular, when considering two forms of social capital—bonding and bridging—an interplay of internal and external group processes can become clear. Bonding social capital is a form of social capital that gives the members of the community a sense of security flowing from the intensity of these relations. The concept of a bridging form of social capital could be helpful to understand the importance of migrant community actions directed outside of the group. Engagement among migrants in relations with social actors representing the wider society as well as other migrant communities helps them interact in a wider social sphere. It should be noted that in the case of ethnic and migrant communities, social capital is sometimes considered a cornerstone of political engagement among the members of the given community, as social capital is essential to the creation of social and political trust.[38] Some research suggests that there is a positive relation between both forms of social capital in migrant settings, which would mean that building ties within a minority group does not hinder the establishment of fruitful relations with the wider society.[39]

From a broad perspective, civil activities can be understood as the promotion of civil rights, participation in civil society, defense of equal opportunity, and combating discrimination. However, it is worth remembering that the very involvement of migrants in the activities of organizations is indicative of grassroots activity among them and is a manifestation of the exercise of civil liberties, but also a manifestation of agency among organization members where their reach their full potential. Minority political activism can take the form of lobbying aimed primarily at initiating counter-marginalization.[40] The quality of these activities can influenced by the availability of various resources, such as financial support and social capital.[41] Mobilization and social capital could thus be used to understand civil engagement transfers, which are exchanges of practices of self-organization and engagement between migrant and host communities. Ethnic and migration studies can adopt a bottom-up approach and in this way highlight the roles of individuals and organizations and their agency

37 Putnam, "Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community"; Nannestad et al., "Bridge Over Troubled Water? Migration and Social Capital."

38 Jacobs and Tillie, "Introduction: Social Capital and Political Integration of Migrants."

39 Nannestad et al., "Bridge Over Troubled Water? Migration and Social Capital."

40 Sardinha, *Immigrant Associations, Integration and Identity*, 83.

41 Van Hear and Cohen, "Diasporas and Conflict: Distance, Contiguity and Spheres of Engagement."

in the mobilization activities of the immigrant community and participation in the construction and maintenance of a modern democratic society.

The Aim and Scope of the Current Study

The study focuses on a migrant community formed around a local branch of a national level organization which was thriving in the second part of the twentieth century in and around the Dutch city of Eindhoven. It offers insights into some of the wider processes taking place at the time in the Polish diaspora in the Netherlands and across Benelux. The main research question is explanatory in nature and points to one of the main characteristics of mobilization processes: What are the directions of actions (e.g., internal vs. external) undertaken by the migrant community to maintain its identity? An additional question concerning the research project is: Are civic engagement actions identifiable among the mobilization processes? As the source material spans approximately four decades, it makes it possible to track change occurring over time.

The sources examined in this research are drawn from the Franciszek Łyskawa archive and are publicly available at the International Institute of Social History (IISH) in Amsterdam. The source material, which consists of digitalized versions of 98 loose pages forming seven packages, was obtained from Łyskawa's daughter, Ludka. The materials were preselected by the donor from the sources deposited by her at the IISH. They include circulars, information leaflets, organizational statutes, press releases, official and private correspondence, accounting reports, and other documents (overall 109 pages). The folders were not ordered formally. In addition, the statute of the Polish Catholic Society (Polskie Towarzystwo Katolickie or PTK) is used to provide basic information about this migrant organization (10 pages; also provided by the main donor). An outline of Franciszek Łyskawa's life[42] and some of the existing secondary literature are also used to present the story of Polish war migrants who settled in the Netherlands after postwar demobilization. Alongside the sources described above, face-to-face interviews and email communication with Ludka Łyskawa were used to clarify some of the details concerning the materials she provided.

42 "Franciszek Łyskawa – pancernym szlakiem z Gorzykowa do Holandii." Biography outline authorized by Ludka Lyskawa and written down by Mariusz Zborowski. Manuscript, in possession of the author.

Franciszek Łyskawa – A Migrant's Life Story[43]

For decades, numerous Polish veterans in the Low Countries were living in the villages and towns that had been freed by them during World War II. After the war, the establishment of a Soviet satellite communist state in Poland created a new reality, one that many Polish soldiers fighting in the West were not willing to accept. Often, it was not tempting or even possible for them to return home, because they fundamentally rejected the new sociopolitical reality in postwar Poland. In some cases, the demobilization of Polish soldiers, which left them stranded in Western Europe, put them in the most difficult circumstances of their lives.[44] In addition, in the case of Franciszek Łyskawa, the decision not to return home after the war was also based on family reasons. The rationale to reintroduce his case to the wider public is based on his rich experiences as a soldier who was forced to roam around Europe and North Africa from the outset of the war and who had a chance to be an active member of his immigrant community after he settled in the Netherlands.

Franciszek Łyskawa was born on November 27, 1912 in Gorzykowo, which at the time was part of the German Empire.[45] He attended grade school in his hometown and later studied at the grammar school in Gniezno. He joined the Polish military in 1933 in Lviv (then Lwów) to become a non-commissioned officer. The army allowed him to acquire new skills and get promoted. As a result of the September 1939 campaign, Łyskawa and numerous other members of the defeated Polish armed forces pushed through to Bucharest. The invasion of Poland by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union ended in a German-Soviet victory. The evacuation to Romania was one of the endpoints of 1939 defensive war, and for Łyskawa, it marked the beginning of a life of a soldier migrant who entered the Polish Armed Forces in the West. In January 1940, Łyskawa embarked on a trip to Paris, where he joined the formation of Polish forces. Stanisław Maczek was another Polish soldier who managed to break free to one of the Allied or neutral countries. He escaped the Soviets and found safe haven in Hungary, later moving to France, where his troops took part in the

43 This section includes parts published before in Żaliński, "Franciszek Łyskawa: A Life of a Veteran Migrant in the Netherlands" as well, as it is based on "Franciszek Łyskawa – pancernym szlakiem z Gorzykowa do Holandii."

44 Venken and Zalewski, "Powojenne losy żołnierzy 1. Dywizji Pancernej dowodzonej przez Generała Stanisława Maczka w Polsce. Wstępna analiza porównawcza," 168.

45 Willems and Verbeek, *Sto lat tęsknoty. Historia Polaków w Holandii*, 108–9.

defense of the country.[46] In early 1940, Franciszek Łyskawa was training Polish emigrants who had joined the nascent Polish forces being assembled in France. In June 1940, around Paris near the Marne River, Łyskawa was injured while fighting against the German forces. In the aftermath of the French defeat, the only way for Łyskawa and his accompanying party of soldiers to escape was to push south to the port of Marseille and then go by sea to Oran, Algeria and further by train to Casablanca and by boat to Rabat, Morocco. From there, he traveled to Gibraltar and finally to England. Two years later, during Operation Overlord, Łyskawa landed in continental Europe and took part in the liberation of France, Belgium, and the Netherlands.[47] With the end of the war, Łyskawa became one of the Polish soldiers who decided to start a new life in one of the freed countries of Western Europe. On September 18, 1946, he married Maria Heijligers, a Breda citizen, with whom he had three daughters: Marysia, Ludka, and Lieke. Łyskawa was demobilized on March 12, 1948 in Bury St Edmunds. Shortly thereafter, he and his family moved to Eindhoven, where Łyskawa worked as a radio technician in the Philips factory.

War trauma, grim perspectives in the home country, and the challenges of living in an unfamiliar social and geographical environment created a challenging life situation, especially considering the sense of rejection felt by war veterans of Eastern European origin who found themselves in Western Europe after World War II.[48] These circumstances led to various existential conditions, including psychological crises, as well as sometimes situations in which veterans developed transnational ties and conflicting loyalties and, as migrants, felt that they had to take stands concerning the sociopolitical circumstances of the time.

One of the ways to face the challenges of cultural shock and war trauma was to take an active role in the immigrant community. This is exactly what Franciszek Łyskawa did. He acted as both initiator and leader in various postwar Polish diaspora associations in the Netherlands. Many of these organizations

46 Ibid., 110–15.

47 The Polish war effort could be channelled in United Kingdom, where the Polish forces were formed. In 1942, Franciszek Łyskawa joined the 1st Polish Armoured Division, which was under the command of Lieutenant General Stanisław Maczek. He took part in the fight for Caen, Falaise, Ypres, Baarle-Nassau, the Kusten Canal, and, in late October 1944, Breda. In early 1945, he and his military unit moved towards Germany and reached Wilhelmshaven and Löningen, where he stayed as member of the occupying forces (ibid., 119). Later, Łyskawa was awarded numerous medals for his services in the war.

48 Palka et al., *Żołnierze generała Maczka. Doświadczenie i pamięć wojny*. For examples of ghettoization and the effects of harmful legal regulations concerning migrants see also the interviews with Zbigniew Mieczkowski (ibid., 312–13), and Stefan Jezierski (ibid., 317–21).

were Catholic in nature, a characteristic that was, and in many cases still is, a defining feature of Polish diaspora life the world over. For decades, the Łyskawa family was actively engaged in the Polish community and its organizations in the Netherlands, simultaneously trying to maintain ties with Poland on the institutional and personal level. Łyskawa was the treasurer of the PTK in the Netherlands and secretary of the branch in Eindhoven. Łyskawa also belonged to the song and dance group "Cracovia" in Eindhoven (initially affiliated with the PTK Eindhoven, later an independent organization, currently known as Zespół "Cracovia") and supported charitable organizations, for example the Catholic Akcja Miłosierdzia (Action of Mercy). He also organized holiday camps for Polish diaspora children in the Netherlands and participated in patriotic and religious events, for example the celebration of Constitution Day, which honored the declaration of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth's constitution on May 3, 1791. This particular event was an occasion for anti-government and anti-communist protests in the Polish diaspora, as the constitution is considered a national symbol of the Polish struggle to reform the country, as well as one of the political and social traditions disdained by the communists.

Łyskawa took part in other activities, such as annual meetings to commemorate the liberation of Breda and veteran events in Normandy, Scotland, and Poland. These efforts were noteworthy contributions to the construction of social bridges between the Polish diaspora and the wider society, as the war effort of Polish soldiers was not well known in the Netherlands, with the city of Breda being an exception. In addition to this kind of institutional activity, Łyskawa built strong personal ties with numerous migrants and was involved in various forms of charity actions. He also offered his services as a sort of consultant. He thus managed to build substantial (bonding) social capital that strengthened the immigrant community as an ethnically homogenous group of people, especially in challenging times for the diaspora. While working in the Eindhoven Philips factory, Łyskawa became fully integrated into the working team and benefited from various social programs introduced by the company. In other words, he exhibited remarkable proficiency in acclimating to an unfamiliar social environment. His marriage to a woman who was not Polish and his notable accomplishments on the local labor market exemplify the process of acquiring social capital, and he effectively forged connections between the immigrant community and the host society.

In the summer of 1961, Franciszek Łyskawa embarked on a journey to Poland accompanied by his family, his first since having fled the country

during the war. The primary intent of this expedition was to visit their Polish relatives. Grappling with the status of statelessness, Łyskawa relied on a passport specifically designated for stateless individuals. One year later, he gained Dutch citizenship, which allowed him more easily to solve the formalities associated with travelling to Poland. The abovementioned journey was described by his relatives as a stimulus for change in Łyskawa's behavior, as if he were taking on a role as an older brother of sorts among the members of the Polish family who had remained in Poland and an interpreter of the Polish language and Polish culture for his Dutch family. Over the course of the following decades, Łyskawa led a rich and ceaselessly active life as a Polish migrant and Dutch citizen. He adeptly cultivated and sustained transnational connections with his relatives and colleagues across various countries, including Poland, Belgium, Great Britain, France, Canada, and beyond.

Franciszek Łyskawa passed away on February 5, 1997 and was buried in the cemetery of Saint Theresia in Eindhoven. His death was noted in the newspapers, and a commemorative exhibition was opened in Witkowo, near his hometown of Gorzykowo in Poland. The exhibition was titled "Franciszek Łyskawa – pancernym szlakiem z Gorzykowa do Holandii" (Franciszek Łyskawa: On the armored route from Gorzykowo to the Netherlands). In the exhibition, emphasis was put on his war achievements. Łyskawa's legacy lives on thanks to his daughters and grandchildren. Archival material related to him was donated by the family and is publicly available at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam. In the discussion below, I present the case of the Polish Catholic Society in Eindhoven, which was one of the organizations in the Polish diaspora in which Łyskawa was particularly active. I present the Polish Catholic Society against the backdrop of the activity of the Polish Catholic Mission (Polska Misja Katolicka or PMK).[49]

The Polish Catholic Society and Its Statute

The intersection of religious[50] and ethnic activity can be traced in many Polish organizations operating in the Netherlands. As Leska-Ślęzak observes, "[n]ewly arrived emigrants from Poland began their Polish lives with a visit to the

49 Leska-Ślęzak, "Działalność i funkcjonowanie Polskiej Misji Katolickiej w Holandii."

50 Religious organisations were very popular among various Polish migrant communities around the world, and religious devotion was in many cases a cornerstone of Polish diaspora life. These organisations are still influential today, forming a significant share among the overall number of entities available in an

Polish church in the Netherlands."[51] The profound Catholic dimension of their national identity fostered the belief among Poles that a loss of faith meant a loss of identity. Consequently, priests responsible for immigrants took on the duty of nurturing a sense of belonging to the Polish nation. The Polish pastoral ministry in the Netherlands was founded in 1910 in Rotterdam and was initially part of the Polish Catholic Mission in Belgium from 1928 to 1946. Subsequently, in 1947, a distinct rectorate was established in Breda, sealing its importance as a point on the map of the Polish diaspora. In 1973, a Polish Catholic Mission was founded for the Benelux region, encompassing the Netherlands among its areas of focus. Around 2009, the ministry in the Netherlands was organized into three districts: Limburg and Brabant, the northeastern areas, and the western areas. In addition to their pastoral duties, the priests actively engaged in social, educational, and journalistic endeavors, as well as commemorations of significant Polish national events.

One of the main organizations associated with the Polish migrant community in general and with the life of Franciszek Łyskawa in particular was the aforementioned PTK, especially its branch in Eindhoven. The PTK was established on December 28, 1946, originally for a period of 29 years (until December 27, 1975), and on September 17, 1975, it was extended for another 29 years. The main goal of the PTK was defined as "supporting the religious-spiritual, cultural, social and financial needs of the members of the Society" (article 3, point 1; PTK statute 1). The organization was non-political in nature (article 3, point 2; PTK statute 1). In article 3, point 3, a handwritten amendment by Franciszek Łyskawa was made that erased the statement, "[i]n its actions, the Society will be guided by Catholic principles" and changed it to, "[i]n addition, the Society commits itself as far as possible [to] the cooperation with the Polish pastoral workers of the Polish Catholic Mission in the Netherlands" (article 3, point 3; PTK statute 1). The reason for this change is unclear, but it may simply reflect changes in the community outlook. It could be considered an attempt to initiate or confirm changes occurring in the migrant community, such as growing inclusiveness, while still safeguarding the community's relations with the Church.

official register (GUS, *Baza organizacji i instytucji polskich i polonijnych za granicą*). In this register, numerous religious organisations and institutions are listed. 1,286 of the 8,872 entities (around 14.5 percent) can be considered religious organisations, and if various organisations and institutions traditionally not considered migrant organisations in the secondary literature are excluded from the list, the overall share of denominational organisations and institutions is larger.

51 Leska-Ślęzak, "Działalność i funkcjonowanie Polskiej Misji Katolickiej w Holandii," 113.

On the other hand, the status and authority of priests among the diaspora also changed over time, as further sources will reveal.

Changing Organizational Structures and Changing Community: Main Sources Analysis

Below, I present migrant community activities and their evolution in the light of the archival records. One of the oldest sources in the collection dates from 1954.[52] It can be classified as a general annual report of the PTK Eindhoven issued by the leadership and addressed to the members. The source reveals changes in attitudes within the migrant community. According to it, repeated celebrations of national and religious holidays for about a decade caused a sense of increased reluctance to organize the community around these occasions and reduced enthusiasm for them. Moreover, the author of the report contends that some members of the Polish community were less able to take active part in the life of the migrant organizations because they were living as members of mixed marriages. Some statements concerning this issue are presented in a rather harsh manner, for instance, "[t]here are some among us who have a wife, a fiancée, or a Dutch husband and who shamefully neglect their moral duties in relation to compatriots."[53] The author claims that the remedy for the revival of the immigrant community and its organizational life was a balance between private involvement (life as a member of a binational family or plans to establish one[54]) and public involvement (sociopolitical actions). These comments about visible changes in the private lives of migrants coincide with the crisis faced by various organizations across the country, which manifested itself in reduced organizational activity. Acknowledgment of these difficulties was a stimulus for change in organizational activity and an occasion to modify methods of operation. This can be viewed as an important reflection from the perspective of social change and the adaptation to more settled and integrative circumstances

52 IISG archief 5, p. 1, 2. The source is a typescript with no title and no author. If offers insights into the mood of the community gathered around the PTK Eindhoven at the end of the first post-war decade. The date is handwritten in green on the upper right side of the first of two pages; another dating possibility is that the document was issued in 1953 due to the claim in the source that preparations were underway to celebrate the thirty-fifth anniversary of Poland's independence in 1928. IISG archief 5, p. 2.

53 IISG archief, 5, p. 2.

54 Assuming that many Polish soldier migrants were single, it is perhaps hardly surprising that many new binational families were formed when these men married women from the local communities. This may have led to some loosening of ties with the larger Polish community.

after nearly a decade of migrant life in the Netherlands. The PTK board was fully aware of everyday dynamics in the migrant community and tried to adjust to the new situation.

Adaptation to the new reality unfolded gradually, and with the passage of time, the community members began to have a grim view of the prevailing circumstances: "Probably no one saw this coming, and yet we are still here, with no sign of any change that this state of affairs will end any time soon."[55] The document cited,[56] which was signed by the head of the PTK (K. W. Szczubiałko), provides an interesting comment on organizational and community affairs. The author stated that there was a need to give up unrealistic hopes among the Polish migrant community. This meant that the priorities of the community were shifting from the needs of the first generation of migrants to the needs of the second. This is understood as a need to make efforts to introduce the younger generation to the culture of their parents by organizing and supporting the celebration of Polish national holidays and various cultural activities. The document pointed to the main problems of the organization's functioning, namely a lack of sufficient financial resources and a small group of members. In terms of membership, there had been a slight increase, and a firm statement had been made that the acquisition of Dutch citizenship did not preclude PTK membership. In other words, all were welcome as members of the organization.

In general, cooperation among Polish organizations in the Benelux countries was common, albeit in some cases turbulent. In preparation for the Polish Millennium commemoration in 1966, the main Polish organizations in the Netherlands were able to find common ground, and they established the Council of the United Polish Diaspora in the Netherlands.[57] The Council was formed by the chairmen of the PTK, the Union of Catholic-Polish Societies (Zjednoczenie Katolicko-Polskich Towarzystw or ZKPT), the (noncommunist) Polish People's Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe or PSL), the Polish Veterans' Association (Stowarzyszenie Polskich Kombatantów or SPK), and a delegate from the Polish Catholic Mission. It was declared that the Council and its activities should be democratic, respecting the independence of each association and the apolitical nature of the union. This can be seen as an example of unity finding expression in the preparations for a symbolic occasion for the Polish migrant community.

55 IISG archief 4, p. 5, 6.

56 PTK Eindhoven document titled "Basic remarks about the work of the Board of the PTK in Eindhoven from reporting year 1957/58," dated October 4, 1958.

57 Rada Zjednoczonej Polonii Holenderskiej was formed in Eindhoven. IISG archief 2, p. 23.

However, fruitful and long-term cooperation was often difficult to achieve. A circular issued probably around 1972 and authored by Franciszek Łyskawa dealt with the question of the younger generation of migrants.[58] The head of the PTK Eindhoven presented the issue of a proposed meeting organized for the migrants' children in Jeugdherberg, Ockenburg te 's-Gravenhage (The Hague) in the middle of October 1972. The goals of this event were as follows: "a) establishing contact between Polish youths and youths of other nationalities; b) exchange of views and discussions; c) learning about the cultures of other nationalities." While not erasing the previous goals of maintaining attachment to and continuity with Polish cultural identity, this constituted a visible change of attitudes in relation to the aforementioned document of 1958, in which the goal of cultural unity was clearly outlined. More than two decades after the war, the orientation had shifted, and the mobilization process took another (external) goal: to represent the community outside in a multicultural environment.

The next document under scrutiny is the PTK Eindhoven Christmas circular issued in December 1979.[59] In the initial part, the author expresses the community's concern about the decreasing number of Poles in Eindhoven. This was part of the demographic process caused by the deaths of older members of the migrant community, both from the prewar migration wave and war refugees. A typical circular of the time reported the death of one or more members of the local migrant community. Other records show that the PTK meetings took place just once or twice a year in the middle of the 1980s.[60] Nevertheless, the "Cracovia" song and dance ensemble, formally part of the PTK, remained more active in that period, and it had both senior and junior performers. The pessimistic conclusions were counterbalanced by the election of the Polish citizen Karol Wojtyła to the Papal throne in the Vatican in 1978. When the circular was issued (December 1979), the election still resonated in the community and inspired pride among Polish migrants, whom the PTK encouraged to call attention to the fact that a fellow citizen had become the new pope. The author used this fact to strengthen the call on fellow migrants to participate in religious events as an opportunity to preserve and maybe even revive strong ethnonational ties and identity. It should be noted that this was the only document regarding the PTK Eindhoven, apart from occasional Christmas or Easter addresses, in which religious piety was strongly and straightforwardly encouraged. It also marked a

58 IISG archief, 4, p. 7, 8.

59 IISG archief, 6, p. 2.

60 E.g. the circular of December 1986, IISG archief, 6, p. 4.

change of orientation, as it placed emphasis on issues related to factors external to the community in the home country.

Some actions undertaken by the PTK clearly correspond to the challenges and economic and sociopolitical hardships of the situation back in Poland, especially in the 1970s and 1980s. A noteworthy form of activity among the Polish migrant community in the Netherlands was the establishment of the aforementioned Action of Mercy. This was a charity organization which addressed needs and concerns in the old country. The charity work involved collecting donations, and these efforts were coordinated by the PTK. The main aim of the Action of Mercy was to provide medications to the people of Poland at a time when many medicines were not widely available in the country. The activity required mobilization in the immigrant community, as the numbers of requests for medication were significant. The extent of this need became particularly clear in times of economic collapse in Poland, when shortages in medical and other supplies soared. It is an example of a group mobilizing for two different purposes, for purposes related to the immigrant community itself and the host country, but also to the country of origin. In the Netherlands, the action helped strengthen the local immigrant community, which meant contributing to the creation of bonding social capital. Activities focused on Poland helped create a lasting transnational space where particular goods were transferred as well as personal ties involving particular people were established. One of the documents related to the mission is the official thanks from Archbishop Stefan Wyszyński, a cardinal and primate of Poland at the time (the thanks was issued on December 17, 1973).[61] This expression of gratitude was addressed to Dr. Narcyz W. Komar, vice-chair of the PTK and an active member of the Polish community. The letter noted the charity's fifteenth anniversary. This means that charity work was a long-term and successful venture and met with great interest in Poland. After the death of Dr. Komar, Franciszek Łyskawa coordinated the charity. The funds to buy medications were provided by the PTK.[62] Around 1983, the charity suffered from a lack of financial resources, which was particularly acute in the time of crisis in the early 1980s in Poland.[63] The very

61 IISG archief 7, p. 1.

62 More details about this initiative are found in the letter dated June 1, 1982. IISG archief 7, p. 10.

63 IISG archief, 7, p. 20, 21. See "Skrócone sprawozdanie Protokołu Zebrania Zarządu Gł. PTK w Holandii z dnia 29 stycznia br. w miejscowości Utrecht" (Summary report of the minutes of the PTK General Board Meeting in the Netherlands on January 29 of the current year in Utrecht), dated February 2, 1983.

same document offers information about internal conflicts in the wider Polish immigrant community in the Netherlands. We learn from it that the Dutch Polish Council (Rada Polonii Holenderskiej)[64] was dissolved, which meant the disintegration of national organizational structures among Polish migrants in the Netherlands. The immediate cause has not been revealed, with the only direct indication being the contention that "we do not yet share a common language."[65] One may speculate that the turbulent political situation in the home country had spread to the diaspora. It was a difficult time (the Solidarity movement, the introduction of martial law) of conflicting loyalties and competing aid programs for the anticommunist opposition in Poland. This also shows that attempts to build bonding social capital were not always successful.

Another crisis related to the relationships and activities of some Polish priests working within the Polish diaspora in the Netherlands was added to the general, rather gloomy picture reflected in the files.[66] This is probably the same crisis that is described in the official correspondence from the Church authorities in Rome sent by Bishop Szczepan Wesoły (dated June 27, 1982).[67] Bishop Wesoły, "the chaplain of Polish emigres," stated that the problems mentioned by the Polish community members were of a minor character. He also stated that personal problems related to the priestly ministry reported to him by the Polish migrants were exaggerated. In response, he contended that the activities of the PTK differed in quality from the activities of similar organizations in Belgium, France, and England, and, in general, are not sufficient.

It is worth mentioning that a Dutch priest, Rijk, who held an official position related to the pastoral care[68] of Catholic minorities, was asked to mediate in this

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64 It is not clear whether this was the same entity as the one mentioned before, the Council of the United Polish Diaspora in the Netherlands. IISG archief 2, p. 23.

65 IISG archief 7, p. 20.

66 IISG archief 7, p. 14, 20. See "Protokół Zebrania Zarządu Głównego PTK w Holandii w dniu 7 lutego 1981 roku w miejscowości Utrecht" (Minutes of the Meeting of the General Board of the PTK in the Netherlands on February 7, 1981 in Utrecht; IISG archief 7, p. 14), and "Skrócone sprawozdanie Protokołu Zebrania Zarządu Gł. PTK…" (Summary report of the minutes of the PTK General Board Meeting…; IISG archief 7, p. 20). The crisis concerned the actions of young priests in particular, who allegedly were disregarding the opinions and needs of the older members of the diaspora. The sources also point to the absence of priests during important organizational meetings.

67 IISG archief 7, p. 28.

68 Broadly understood, pastoral care in this case could include leading a church service, taking part in an important commemoration among the immigrant community, sharing informing about the religious devotion of the group with the wider society, and involving local officials in various relations with the minority community (Dodds, "The Question of God in Émigré Ghent: Religious Identity as Performance

matter.[69] This situation demonstrates how the functioning within the broader structures of the host society proceeded (the local structures of the Roman Catholic Church). In cases of internal misunderstanding or dissatisfaction, there was an instance offering a positive solution. In addition, acceptance of an outsider as a mediator was a sign of good relations with Dutch society and reflected the general trust placed in the Dutch Catholic Church. It was also an example of a civic engagement procedure aimed at relieving tensions and alleviating problems inside the migrant community, especially when internal conflicts could have been detrimental to it. Unfortunately, the available documents do not provide information on the course and outcome of this mediation or on the exact formal or informal status of this attempt. It should be added that in many cases, immigrants used the local religious infrastructure of the host society, such as a church or a gathering room.

Sources from the 1980s also focus on the economic situation in Poland and the need to help fellow citizens in the home country (the PTK Eindhoven Easter circular dated April 12, 1981).[70] This attitude persisted into the early 1990s (PTK Eindhoven Easter circular dated April 8, 1990),[71] when the newly elected first non-communist government of Tadeusz Mazowiecki was named as the beneficiary of the donations (Mazowiecki Fonds). Moreover, notable initiatives, such as the launch of the Polish Shipping House (Polski Dom Wysyłkowy), which specialized in the sale of a wide range of Polish books, aimed to draw attention to Polish issues at home by increasing the number of readers abroad (PTK Eindhoven Easter circular dated April 8, 1990).[72]

Conclusions

The case presented above shows the evolution of a migrant organization in the postwar decades. The main issues raised in the documents are dilemmas surrounding integration, the issue of the cultural identity of the younger generation, cooperation among organizations, manners of dealing with crises, actions aimed at Poland, the decreasing number of members of the migrant

and Dialogue Among Migrants and Hosts During the Cold War"),. In general, it was supposed to "[connect] the religious and military identities of the Polish community to the wider […] Catholic milieu."

69 IISG archief 7, p. 20.

70 IISG archief 6, p. 6.

71 IISG archief 6, p. 5.

72 IISG archief 6, p. 5.

community, and accounts of religious life. The case also offers a clear example of the importance of the contributions made by a committed member of the migrant community to the community itself, who was both a witness to and active part of the organizational changes which took place in the postwar era. Mobilization efforts among the local Polish migrant community in Eindhoven manifested itself in various forms. First, they included activities directed towards the sense of belonging among members of the community itself (i.e. the function of the mobilization process as an internal affair). Second, they placed emphasis on the importance of creating an image of the immigrant community and presenting this image to the host society (mainly indirect evidence; actions directed to the external environment). Last, but not least, they consider the situation in the country of origin and changes taking place in it (i.e. actions targeted at the home country and fellow citizens there). Thus, the social network links were internal and uni-cultural on the one hand and external and cross-cultural on the other. They embodied two forms of social capital: bonding and bridging. The general transformation of the immigrant community led from the initial state of provisional existence in the host country to being a part of a multicultural society and gradually withdrawing from organized diaspora life, which eventually meant the cessation of community activities. Taking into consideration the importance of religion as a mobilization factor, the case of the PTK offers clear support for the notion of the vital role of religion in safeguarding ethnic identity. Many of the efforts described in the sources explicitly use religious devotion as a cornerstone for the activities of the members of the community, alongside the celebration of Polish national symbols, holidays, etc. Descriptions of internal and external affairs (e.g. the situation back in Poland) are at times expressed in terms which suggest concern about the future. Moreover, there are instances where the diaspora engages in both bottom-up and "hot" models of decision-making. These approaches, however, did not always lead to successful outcomes.

The example of the PTK demonstrates that the formation of cross-cultural bonds can prevent the tendency towards one-sided, intra-group exclusivity among immigrants. This refers to situations where members of the migrant community engage solely within their distinct, isolated diaspora group. From the perspective of mobilization and civil engagement transfers, it is useful to point out that there are circumstances in which the community was more ready to engage in this form of activity. Cooperation with a Dutch Catholic priest was only possible when the outlook of the community formed around the PTK became more cross-cultural. His role was to mediate and mitigate an internal

crisis within the migrant community. Based on the case study presented here, one can formulate a working hypothesis which would require additional evidence for validation. According to this hypothesis, the migrant community would benefit from an external orientation if it sought to facilitate successful transfers. Within the organizational sources examined here, discernible indications of civic engagement activities can be observed. This particular case serves as an illustrative example of cooperation within the immigrant community. However, an overarching perspective that emerges from these sources emphasizes the significance of engagement and agency among proactive members as the fundamental bedrock of organizational life within the immigrant community.

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Polish Immigrant Community Building in Brussels: The Role of the Polish Catholic Mission*

Elżbieta Kuźma
Université Libre de Bruxelles
elzbieta.kuzma@ulb.be

Dorota Praszałowicz
Jagiellonian University in Kraków
dorota.praszalowicz@uj.edu.pl

This paper provides the first outline of the history of the Polish Catholic Mission (PCM) in Belgium, focusing on its role in the Polish immigrant community from 1926 to 2023. It examines the transformation of the PCM and its impact on the Polish diaspora, considering the broader context of secularization and social changes. The study utilizes primary sources, interviews, and participant observations to explore the PCM's influence on community building, cultural preservation, and social capital formation within the Polish immigrant population in Belgium.

Keywords: Polish diaspora, immigration, Catholic Mission, pastoral care, catholic community, history.

The text offers a sketch of the Polish Catholic Mission (hereinafter PCM) in Belgium and its transformation over the course of a century (more precisely, between 1926 and 2023).[1] Although a great deal of research has been done on the Polish diaspora in Belgium,[2] no systematic history has been written about this institution, which became a center of leadership for both the Polish-speaking pastoral ministry and the Polish immigrant community in Belgium.[3] We show that, while it was a conservative institution, the Polish Catholic Mission maintained its role as one of the key places of Polish activity in Belgium, despite an ongoing process of secularization.

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1 The Polish Catholic Mission changed its name in 2018 to the Polish Catholic Community.

2 Eder, *Dzieje Polonii belgijskiej*; Goddeeris, *De Poolse migratie in België;* Goddeeris, *Polonia belgijska*; Goddeeris, *La Grande emigration polonaise*; Caestecker, "Polish Migrants' Children."

3 Szymański, "Obraz duszpasterstwa polskojęzycznego," 361.

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The study is based on a critical analysis of the literature, including primary sources (newsletters, memoirs, immigrant press, webpages), and participant observation and interviews. The primary sources which were examined are stored at the KADOC center at the Catholic University in Leuven and at the archive of the Polish Catholic Mission. The interviews were conducted in a recent study with Polish immigrants and Polish priests, but citations from interviews conducted in previous studies are also used here.[4]

The process of organizing and changing the Mission is shown in the context of the local Polish immigrant community and in the broader context of the receiving society. Launched in Brussels in 1926, the Polish Catholic Mission initially addressed the needs of Polish Catholics in Belgium, and in 1927, it extended its activities to the Netherlands, Luxemburg, and Denmark.[5] The text focuses on the Belgian part of the story. It provides a brief information of the Polish group in Belgium (part one), a basic chronology and data on the Polish Catholic Mission (part two), and an analysis of the changing functions of the PCM within the context of the Polish group in Belgium (part three).

Due to limited space, the text is devoted to the history of ethnic Poles, but it is worth keeping in mind that the influx from Polish lands also brought Polish Jews in the early twentieth century and the interwar period, as well as members of the Belarusian minority from the region of Podlasie since the late 1980s.

Polish immigrants in Belgium managed to build their own world in the new *milieu*. In migration studies, this process is theorized as immigrant community building.[6] In the case of this community, this process began in the nineteenth century, with each stream of Polish immigrants both contributing to and benefiting from the community. A network of institutions and relationships that comprised an immigrant community/immigrant communities embraced many newcomers.[7] An ethnic institutional completeness[8] has never been achieved, but the communities made it possible for newcomers to find their anchor in a new surroundings.[9] In general, Poles oriented themselves towards their home country, their host society, and their immigrant community, which bridged the

4 Kuźma, "Życie codzienne imigrantów polskich"; Grzymała-Kazlowska, "Sieci społeczne i kapitał migrancki"; Leszczyńska et al., *Poza granicami.*

5 Szymański, "Początki Polskiej Misji Katolickiej w Belgii."

6 Sanders and Morawska, *Polish-American Community Life*; Bruneau, "Diasporas, transnational spaces and communities"; Boyd, "How 'Ethnic' Were White Ethnic Neighborhoods?"

7 Sardinha, *Immigrant associations, integration and identity.*

8 Breton, "Institutional Completeness of Ethnic Communities."

9 Grzymała-Kazłowska, *Rethinking settlement and integration.*

two. Today, researchers refer to this ability to create a new space in which migrants function on a daily basis across ethnic and state borders as transnationalism.[10] Another concept that is useful in interpreting the findings of our study is social capital,[11] which is produced in immigrant communities in a dense net of daily interactions. Bonding social capital is inward-oriented and contributes to internal social cohesion, while bridging social capital is produced in interactions with the new environment and with other immigrant groups.[12]

The Polish community in Belgium was made and remade, invented and reinvented by the successive streams of immigrants.[13] The process of immigrants' integration and their participation in cultural life of the host society was eased by the fact that the ethnic community helped them overcome the cultural shock that they experienced upon arrival.[14] The community structures initiated by the first generation of each wave of immigrants often served the immigrants who arrived later.

The study challenges the traditional paradigms of the ethnic studies developed in the 1960s and 1970s, which portrayed ethnicity as "an insider identity generated in largely closed minority communities whose members struggle in the interaction with society at large."[15] The case of Poles in Belgium makes such an understanding of ethnicity inadequate, which is why one of the concepts underlying the study presented here is the New Architecture of Ethnic Studies (NAES). This new approach shows that ethnicity, as practiced or experienced by recent immigrants, allows and even facilitates the crossing of ethnic boundaries.[16]

There are many studies on the role of religion in the lives of immigrants.[17] As Yang and Ebaugh observe, "Historically, religious institutions were among the most important resources that immigrant groups used to reproduce their ethno-religious identity in a new surrounding and to help them adjust to the challenges of surviving in a demanding and often threating environment."[18]

10 Faist, "Diaspora and transnationalism."

11 Putnam, *Bowling Alone*.

12 Ibid.

13 Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*; Neils et al., "The Invention of Ethnicity."

14 Levrau et al., "Polish Immigration in Belgium since 2004," 316.

15 Lesser, "Remaking Ethnic Studies," 7.

16 Barth, "Introduction."

17 Foley and Hoge, *Religion and the New Immigrants*; Foner and Alba, "Immigrant Religion"; Beckford, "Religions and migrations – old and new."

18 Yang and Ebaugh, "Transformations in New Immigrant Religions," 269.

This is certainly the case with the Polish Catholic Mission, which underwent significant evolution, changing its name to the Polish Catholic Community in 2018 and retaining its role as one of the key places of Polish activity in Belgium.

Polish Immigration to Belgium

Poland, a country with a population of about thirty-eight million (2022), has been left by at least seven million inhabitants over the course of the last two centuries.[19] Massive outflow began in the mid-nineteenth century, reached its peak in the early twentieth century, and continues to this day with a few interruptions. Emigration produced several centers of Polish diaspora, the largest in the United States but also in Germany, France, and Great Britain. Other popular destinations include Brazil, Canada, Argentina, Australia, and Sweden.[20] Belgium and the Netherlands received only a small portion of the Polish outflow, yet Poles built visible immigrant communities there.[21] In the 1830s these communities, began to be formed by successive streams of newcomers from the Polish lands. The influx included both political refugees and migrants who came in search of work.

The Polish diaspora communities in Belgium consisted of various groups of immigrants and their descendants: political refugees of the failed uprisings (who arrived in the 1830s and 1860s), Polish students at the postsecondary schools (Antwerpen, Liege, Glon near Liege, Leuven), migrants who came in search of work in the early twentieth century and the interwar period, World War II refugees, political and economic immigrants from communist Poland, including Solidarity refugees, migrants in search of work in the period of political transition (since 1989), and migrants who were and are taking advantage of greater mobility following Poland's accession to the EU. Each wave of immigration stream had its particular social profile and contributed to the internal diversity of the immigrant group. While discussing its past and present, historians often tend to oversimplify the situation, usually focusing on working class communities because immigrants who come in search of work were and are the most numerous. As migration research shows, economic migration prevails in international flows, and this has been true in the case of waves of Polish

19 Walaszek, *Polska diaspora,* 9.

20 Praszalowicz, "Poland."

21 Eder, *Dzieje Polonii belgijskiej*; Eder, "Diaspora polska w Belgii i Holandii"; Goddeeris, *De Poolse migratie in België.*

migration. However, political motivations to migrate were usually intertwined with economic considerations. As Norman Davies has noted, in the nineteenth century, when Poland was partitioned, "The émigrés who stayed abroad because their lands and property had been sequestrated, or because they lost their source of livelihood in a home district annexed by a foreign power, were reacting as much to economic as to political factors."[22] The same interplay between political and economic factors in the decision to migrate can be found in the case of the outflow from communist Poland as well.[23]

It should be noted that this outflow did not stop with the fall of communism (1989), when Poland embarked down the path towards political transition and the free market. In fact, economic reforms of the 1990s (which initially resulted in high unemployment rates) and Polish accession to the EU in 2004 brought new streams of migration to the West, and Belgium became a popular destination for Poles. In 1991, Polish citizens were given an exemption from visa requirements in Belgium, and in 2009, Belgium opened its labor market to Poles. The influx that started in 1990s initially resulted in the undocumented employment of many Poles. At the time, circular migration became common, especially with Polish women working in Belgium for a few months, returning to Poland for a few months, and then coming to Belgium again.[24] After 2009, most immigrants were able to legalize their status.

It is very difficult to determine precisely the actual size of migration flows, so we quote various estimates here. Currently, the estimated size of the Polish group in Belgium fluctuates around 60,000, including more than 43,000 Polish citizens.[25] This number includes not only members of the first generation of Polish immigrants, but also members of the second and third generations. According to the population census conducted in Belgium in 1930, 48,840 Polish citizens resided in the country, including around 23,000 Polish Jews.[26] In 1935, PCM rector Fr. Ryszard Moskwa estimated the group of Polish Catholics in Belgium at 24,000.[27] In 1939, it was estimated that there were around 60,000

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22 Davies, *Heart of Europe*, 223.

23 Stola, *Kraj bez wyjścia?*

24 Grzymała-Kazłowska, "Polscy nielegalni pracownicy"; Levrau et al., "Polish Immigration in Belgium since 2004."

25 Goddeeris, *Fabryka plotek;* Levrau et al., "Polish Immigration in Belgium since 2004," 310.

26 Szymański, "Życie organizacyjne wychodźstwa polskiego," 30.

27 Szymański, "Obraz duszpasterstwa polskojęzycznego," 372.

immigrants from Poland in Belgium, half of whom were Polish Catholics and half of whom were Polish Jews.[28]

The main Polish communities were found in the industrial regions of Liege, Limburg, and Hainaut (Charleroi, Mons, and the central area between them).[29] During World War II, many Polish men who fought alongside the Western Allies ended up in the Benelux countries and took part in the fighting against the Nazi forces.[30] After the war, there was a chaotic migration reshuffle. Poles who did not want to return to the communist country stayed in Belgium. This group included earlier immigrants and Polish Displaced Persons, many Polish soldiers among them.[31] On the other hand, several thousand Poles left, deciding simply to return home.[32]

In the Polish collective memory,[33] it is believed that the outflow of people from the country was the result of political oppression. In other words, the political dimension of the outflow is overestimated and the economic dimension is underestimated. In a sense, the heroic narrative of Polish émigré streams dominates Polish historiography.[34] As nineteenth-century Polish publicist and independence agitator Maurycy Mochnacki famously contended, Polish emigration "has its own separate, historical character, not similar to the emigration of any other contemporary people […]. We are soldiers of the independence of our country, citizens of the future Poland."[35]

This perception was shaped by the nineteenth-century Polish refugees who became diaspora leaders and understood their situation in exile as a continuation of the fight for the Polish cause. According to their speeches, memoirs, personal letters, and publications, the refugees believed that, while living abroad, they had a national mission to fulfill, i.e., they felt responsible for Polish cultural continuity, including Polish Catholicism. Indeed, many exiles in the nineteenth century were well-known figures who became symbols of Polish patriotism. Among the refugees from the uprisings there were several dozen officers and representatives of culture and science, among them Joachim Lelewel, an outstanding Polish historian and spiritual guide in a diaspora democratic camp who spent almost

28 Dzwonkowski, "Polacy w Belgii."

29 Goddeeris, *Polonia belgijska w pierwszych latach*, 15–26; Dzwonkowski, "Polacy w Belgii," 12.

30 Goddeeris, *Polonia belgijska w pierwszych latach*; Venken, *Straddling the Iron Curtain?*

31 Caestecker, "Polish Migrants' Children"; Venken, "Międzynarodowe i lokalne próby."

32 Kulesa and Nisiobęcka, "The Migration of Poles to Belgium."

33 Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory.*

34 Goddeeris, *Polonia belgijska w pierwszych latach.*

35 Maurycy Mochnacki cited in Gul-Rechlewicz, "Poles in Belgium," 648.

three decades in Belgium (1833–1861), and Stanisław Worcell, thinker and social activist of the Great Emigration.[36] Another important element of the heroic history is related to Polish involvement in the Allied Forces and the anti-Nazi underground movement during World War II.[37] The focus on heroism and martyrdom in Polish history, both on Polish soil and in the diaspora, is evident in the profile of patriotic activities organized by the Polish Catholic Mission in Belgium. Examples are given later in this discussion.

The Polish group in Belgium was often compared to the Polish diaspora center in France.[38] This comparison is important because in the nineteenth century, Paris became the main center of Polish (unsuccessful) patriotic mobilization for the reestablishment of an independent Polish state. However, life in the diaspora could not focus solely on the old country. Everyday challenges prompted and compelled members of the émigré community to orient themselves towards the host society. Therefore, on the one hand side, there was a narrative about Polish refugees and their patriotic mission, while on the other, there was a more complex reality. The reality of the diaspora included both the integration process and ethnic community building. Subsequent generations of Polish immigrants integrated and dispersed in the host society, especially in the case of those born into binational families.[39] Moreover, hope for social advancement was usually an incentive for immigrants to go beyond the (symbolic) boundaries of their ethnic group.[40]

The migration path that led Poles to Belgium in the twentieth century is an interesting and little researched topic. Many Polish migrants who traveled to Belgium in search of work came directly from Polish lands before and after World War I, but a significant group came from Germany and France during this period. A priest who ministered to Poles in the interwar period estimated that only one third of the Poles in Belgium came from Poland, while one third came from Germany and another third from France.[41] We are dealing here with multiple migrations that involved living and working in the diaspora prior to arrival in Belgium. These migrants moved to Belgium in search of better

36 Ibid., 639.

37 Panecki, *Polonia w belgijskim ruchu oporu*; Venken, "The Communist 'Polonia' Society"; Venken, *Straddling the Iron Curtain?*

38 Gul-Rechlewicz, "Poles in Belgium," 639; Dzwonkowski, "Polacy w Belgii," 7.

39 Levrau et al., "Polish Immigration in Belgium since 2004," 313; Dzwonkowski, "Polacy w Belgii," 10–11, 15.

40 Barth, "Introduction"; Grzymała-Kazłowska, "Introduction: Rethinking integration."

41 Szymański, "Życie organizacyjne wychodźstwa polskiego," 32.

opportunities from industrial regions in Germany (Westphalia) and France (Pas de Calais and Nord), where Polish men were employed in coal mines. In the case of Westphalian Poles, another major push factor was the requirement to take the German citizenship if the migrant wanted to remain in the country after World War I.[42] This push factor, rooted in the migrants' attachment to their identity as Poles (the decision not to accept German citizenship), can be seen as cultural and political rather than economic. However, the labor market in Belgium (coal mines and work that Polish men were used to) proved a strong pulling force. This shows the interplay of various incentives in the decision to migrate.

Polish families brought with them from Germany and France a tradition of establishing ethnic institutions and associations, which during their stay in Belgium proved helpful in the process of building new immigrant communities.[43] The experiences of working-class immigrant communities were thus added to the nineteenth-century traditions of refugee activities. The spiritual connection between waves of immigration, old and new, working-class and intellectual, is exemplified in the name of the (Polish student) Lelewel Society in Brussels.[44]

From the perspective of gender, in the refugee streams in the nineteenth century, men predominated. In turn, the Polish economic migrations involved primarily single men and families.[45] World War II brought soldiers to Belgium, meaning men, but the group of people referred to as Displaced Persons consisted of both men and women. Emigration from communist Poland involved both sexes, including the Solidarity refugees: families, single men, and single women. Polish immigration to Belgium in recent decades, however, has been dominated by women.[46] Many of these Polish women have decided to stay, however, and they brought their nuclear families to Belgium, while earlier they had perceived migration as a short term solution or circular move.[47]

Today, the migration process has slowed or halted shifts in gender roles on the labor market. Most men are employed in traditionally male occupations, for instance the construction and renovation of buildings and as truck drivers, and most women are employed in typically female jobs, for instance as caretakers, nannies and babysitters, and cleaning staff.[48] However, "in a recent study on female

42 Praszałowicz, "Polish Berlin."

43 Szymański, "Życie organizacyjne wychodźstwa polskiego," 34; Dzwonkowski, "Polacy w Belgii," 16.

44 Szymański, "Życie organizacyjne wychodźstwa polskiego," 32.

45 Goddeeris, *Polonia belgijska w pierwszych latach,* 15–26.

46 Grzymała-Kazłowska, "Polscy nielegalni pracownicy"; Bałuk, "Integracja polskich rodzin w Belgii."

47 Levrau et al., "Polish Immigration in Belgium since 2004," 311.

48 Grzymała-Kazłowska, "Polscy nielegalni pracownicy"; Bałuk, "Integracja polskich rodzin w Belgii."

migration in Belgium […] it was found that women often perceived migration as an empowering experience: it not only strengthened their economic situations but also changed their intra-familial and gender positions for the better."[49] The most recent study which analyzes changes in the PCM focuses entirely on gender roles within this group.[50] Its authors closely examine the intersection of class, gender, and ethnicity (minority status), and they demonstrate that Polish women must fight if they want to exercise agency. In this context, it should be noted that Polish migrants often have been working below their skill level. This situation is gradually changing, with more and more Polish men and women finding jobs in Belgium that are compatible with their education and/or getting education in Belgium to improve their position on the labor market.[51]

Polish Catholic Mission – Basic Information

In the case of waves of Polish migration, the religious dimension of the diaspora experience is clear. In most diaspora centers, Poles established their churches and developed an immigrant community around them.[52] The initiative usually came from the bottom up, with immigrants raising funds to start their own churches and cover maintenance costs. They sent petitions to the Church hierarchy to get Polish clergy. It was a grass-roots activity, but a Polish priest often became the leader of a local group. However, the Polish group in Belgium differed significantly from that in countries with the largest Polish diasporas. Unlike in the religiously pluralistic United States, where Catholics were in minority, or France, where the process of secularization was already well underway, in Belgium, Polish immigrants joined the religious majority. Nevertheless, their religiosity, strongly associated with Polish national and folk culture, differed from the religious patterns they encountered in Belgium. They tried to exert some control over the situation by setting up their own structures. In Belgium, the initiative came from above.

Another important aspect was the existence of several pillars on which the social engagement of the Catholic Church in Belgium rested. From its foundation in 1830 in the wake of the Belgian Revolution, Belgium was a Catholic state,

49 Levrau et al., "Polish Immigration in Belgium since 2004," 305.

50 Leszczyńska et al., *Poza granicami.*

51 Levrau et al., "Polish Immigration in Belgium since 2004"; Baluk, "Integracja polskich rodzin w Belgii," 87.

52 Walaszek, *Polska diaspora.*

and the Catholic Church controlled education, culture, and charity. Thus, the endeavors of immigrants in these fields necessarily took place within the existing Church structures. Cooperatives, sick funds, trade unions, volunteer associations, the school system, and a Catholic party (from 1921) were the pillars of the institutionalized Catholic system.[53] Ironically, however, it was more difficult for Poles in Belgium to become part of this established system than it was for Poles in the religiously diverse but nonetheless predominantly Protestant United States to establish ethnic parishes and schools.

On January 1, 1926, through the efforts of August Hlond, primate of the Roman Catholic Church in Poland, and with the approval of Cardinal Désiré Joseph Mercier, the Polish Catholic Mission in Belgium was established.[54] Its purpose was to provide pastoral care for Polish immigrants. A year later, the scope of activity was expanded to the Netherlands, Luxemburg, and Denmark. The Mission, which is a church organizational unit, was responsible for the organization and development of the religious life of the Polish immigrants. The pastoral activities of the Mission were the same as those of any parish in Poland and included celebrating services, administering the sacraments, receiving confessions, granting absolution, and providing religious instruction. The main task of the PCM rector was to organize pastoral care so that every Polish local community would have access to a Polish priest. This was difficult since the communities were numerous and dispersed. Another crucial challenge was to organize religious instruction in Polish. Due to the lack of priests, the first PCM rector, Fr. Kotowski, trained a group of parishioners representing scattered communities and supplied them with catechisms and songbooks.[55]

Pastoral care by Polish clergy was and still is essential, as many Polish workers in Belgium either spoke neither French nor Flemish or had difficulty with the languages. Until the Second Vatican Council (1962–65), Catholic masses were celebrated in Latin, to which Poles were accustomed, but listening to sermons, singing hymns, and giving confession in French or Flemish seemed alien to immigrants. As diaspora studies indicate, it was often difficult for immigrants to give confession in a foreign language, so they avoided doing do, even though the Roman Catholic Church requires one to give confession at least once a year.[56] The Polish Episcopate was aware of this, and in 1921, it issued a decree

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53 Dobbelaere and Voye, "From Pillar to Postmodernity," 2.

54 Szymański, "Początki Polskiej Misji Katolickiej w Belgii."

55 Rosowski, "Ksiądz Dr Tadeusz Kotowski," 158.

56 Dziedzic, "Zjawisko migracji Polaków."

recognizing pastoral care for Poles living abroad as necessary. In 1969, the legal situation of churches in the diaspora was regulated by the papal decree *Pastorialis Migratorum Cura*.[57]

The first PCM rector Fr. Tadeusz Kotowski (1926–28) established eight places of Polish pastoral care in Belgium and one in the Netherlands.[58] Before coming to Belgium, he studied in France (Lyon, Nancy) and worked in Polish communities in the industrial regions of France, so he was accustomed to ministering among working-class immigrants.[59] The second rector, Fr. Ludwik Kudłacik (1928–1935), also spent several years in France before being assigned to the PCM in Belgium. Both had official contacts with the Belgian Church hierarchy, as well as with the Polish bishops of their home dioceses, where they had worked before their departure. Both left rich correspondence with their Polish bishops, through which we gain some insight into the challenges they faced in their daily activities.[60] Their actions were financially supported by Polish Roman Catholic Church and by the Polish Consulates (Brussels, Antwerpen). Thus, in addition to being subjects of the Belgian and Polish bishops, PCM rectors had to know how to navigate the world of diplomats and politicians. There was one more influential actor in the puzzle: the workplace. The owners of the coal mines where the immigrants were employed supported the Polish pastoral ministry. They offered places of worship and education and funded libraries, and in return, they expected the Mission to provide priests.[61] This, however, was extremely difficult and caused frustration, and the PCM rectors expressed their dissatisfaction with the situation. In addition, the material support from all sides proved insufficient. The Mission rectors struggled financially, especially during the Great Depression.

In 1939, the Polish Catholic Mission was entrusted to the (Polish) Society of Christ Fathers, a community established in 1932 that has directed its service to Poles in the diaspora. In 1948, the Christ Fathers were succeeded by the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, a community originally established in 1816 in Aix en Provence. This French community decided in 1921 to establish a Polish Province, which consisted of Polish priests dedicated to caring for Polish

57 Mraczek, "Troska o migrantów."

58 Szymański, *Duszpasterze Polonii,* 72–73; Rosowski, "Ksiądz Dr Tadeusz Kotowski."

59 Rosowski, "Ksiądz Dr Tadeusz Kotowski," 151–53.

60 Rosowski, "Ksiądz Dr Tadeusz Kotowski"; Rosowski, "Polska Misja Katolicka"; Szymański, "Początki Polskiej Misji Katolickiej w Belgii."

61 Rosowski, "Polska Misja Katolicka," 184.

immigrants. Both Polish communities had been trained to serve migrants and help them keep their faith. The first Oblate in Brussels was Fr. Karol Kubsz, who, like the first rectors, had experience ministering in Polish communities in France (during WWII).[62] He became the PCM rector in 1948 and remained in that position until 1961. The Oblates continue to look after the Mission today.

In 2018 the Mission changed its name to the Polish Catholic Community, and its leader, Fr. Damian Kopytto OMI, became (instead of rector) a coordinator of Polish Pastoral Care in Belgium.[63]

Until 1925, there was no Polish Catholic parish, mission, or any other type of religious center in Belgium. Several Polish communities were served occasionally by Polish priests who studied in Leuven. In the 1930s, the situation improved a little. There were four Polish priests and two Belgian Capuchin Fathers who had learned Polish, and Polish priests who studied in Leuven still helped on occasion. In 1974, there were 14 priests taking full care of the Poles and three more assisting them. There were also roughly 15 students from the Catholic University of Leuven available.[64] In 2023, two Polish priests (Oblates) resided in the Mission house at the Rue Jourdan, one at the St. Elisabeth in Schaerbeek and four Missionary Sisters of Christ the King for Polish Emigrants who helped them.

In Belgian society, where overall religiosity was and is diminishing[65] and the Roman Catholic Church has been struggling with declining membership,[66] the Polish Catholic Mission appears to have been a unique case of success. It has played and plays a crucial role in the local Polish group. There are currently four places in Brussels metropolis where services are held in Polish: Chapel of the Polish Catholic Community, St. Gilles; Sainte-Elisabeth, Schaerbeek; Notre Dame de la Chapelle, downtown; Saint-Joseph, Anderlecht. To this day, there is no Polish parish in Belgium, though Belgian parishes with large or significant numbers of Polish members try to provide Polish language services. The Polish Catholic Mission coordinates the pastoral care and orchestrates activities that are going on around churches. As already mentioned, Polish churches have always been centers of immigrant community life in the diaspora. Ethnic parishes were

62 Szymański, *Duszpasterze Polonii,* 80–81.

63 In order to avoid confusion, we use the earlier name, Polish Catholic Mission, in most of the text, especially since migrants also use it at the moment.

64 Dzwonkowski, "Polacy w Belgii," 20–21.

65 Dobbelaere and Voye, "From Pillar to Postmodernity."

66 2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Belgium. https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/ Accessed May 3, 2023.

entwined with a network of associations. In Belgium, the institutionalization of the pillar system of Church life has made it more than natural for the local Catholic Church to go far beyond pastoral care. In these two contexts, the PCM developed its agenda. From the very beginning in the 1920s, the role of Polish priests was never limited to pastoral ministry. Fr. Kotowski, the first PCM rector, initiated social meetings at the Mission which took place once a month.[67] He initiated the establishment of Polish Academic Youth Circles (Koła Polskiej Młodzieży Akademickiej) in localities where Polish students lived. In 1927, he opened at the PCM a kind of tourist branch to facilitate Polish student travel and enable Polish students to visit neighboring countries.[68]

While many decades have passed in the meantime, the situation has remained very similar. In the 1970s, the Rector of the Polish Catholic Mission stated that Polish priests devoted only 25 percent of their time to religious services, while 75 percent was devoted to counseling, teaching, and organizing social life.[69] The same was said by a Polish priest in an interview that he gave in 1990s,[70] and a similar claim was made in the recent study conducted in 2021–23.

Polish priests became not only spiritual guides for their compatriots but also teachers, translators, and social workers. Indeed, the religious life of immigrants was woven into a network of ethnic associations and institutions: schools, choirs, societies, clubs, and media organs. Catholic societies included women's, men's, and youth units, and many of them published newsletters, calendars, and/or regular magazines.[71] Together with the PMC, the role of coordinating Polish activities was initially played by the Committee of Cultural and Social Welfare for Polish Emigration in Belgium (Komitet Opieki Kulturalno-Społecznej dla Wychodźstwa Polskiego w Belgii). The Committee published a bulletin, which is now a valuable source of detailed information on activities held in local communities. It should be noted that the editor of the Bulletin was the rector of the PCM.[72]

In 1923, the Catholic Men's Association was established (Stowarzyszenie Mężów Katolickich).[73] Another example of men's societies was the (Polish) Association of St. Barbara, launched in coalmining towns. In several places,

67 Rosowski, "Ksiądz Dr Tadeusz Kotowski," 159.

68 Ibid.

69 Dzwonkowski, "Polacy w Belgii," 21.

70 Kuźma and Brandeleer, "The Polish Community in Belgium."

71 Brakowiecki, "Czasopiśmiennictwo polonijne."

72 Rosowski, "Ksiądz Dr Tadeusz Kotowski," 160.

73 Kępa, *Ocalić od zapomnienia,* 384.

the local units gathered all Polish coalminers. They worked with mutual aid funds to help families cover the costs of accidents, health crises, and funerals.[74] Polish women's societies had a different range of interests. The Community of Living Rosary (Bractwo Żywego Różańca 1933), which brought together Polish women, was a prayer association, but its purpose was also to remind women of their patriotic mission in raising children. It emphasized the traditional role of the "Mother-Pole" and reinforced the gendered patterns of the family, in which men were breadwinners and women were bread-bakers. Baking bread is used here in its metaphoric sense, including the tasks of managing the daily life of a family, but also caring for the spiritual needs of the young generation.

In 1948, the Oblates founded a (Polish) Catholic Action in Belgium, a religious association modeled on the Catholic Action operating in Poland in the interwar period and banned during the communist period. At the same time, the (aforementioned) Catholic Men's Association was active, and the local units of the Living Rosary of Ladies fell under the control of an umbrella organization, the Association of Confraternities of the Living Rosary of Ladies. This consolidation was necessary because the number of local Rosary groups had gradually increased.[75] In addition, there was a Polish Catholic youth organization that dated back to 1947 (Workers Catholic Youth, Robotnicza Młodzież Katolicka) and later operated under the name Polish Catholic Youth Association (Katolickie Stowarzyszenie Młodzieży Polskiej). Polish (Girls' and Boys') Scout Teams, another type of immigrant youth association, were not directly affiliated with the Catholic Church, but scouts in their uniforms participated in Polish religious ceremonies.[76]

Educational activities focused on religious instruction and Polish courses, language, history, geography, and literature. In 1952, the Polish Educational Society (Macierz Szkolna Wolnych Polaków) was established. This Society worked closely with the Polish Catholic Mission.[77] Currently, Polish language, history and geography lessons are held on Saturdays in buildings owned by the Polish Catholic Community. An important part of the program is the teaching of Catholic religion, now conducted by Polish nuns. After the political changes in 1989, Polish classes are supported by the Polish state. In a 2012–13 survey of

74 Szymański, "Życie organizacyjne wychodźstwa polskiego," 35.

75 Kępa, *Ocalić od zapomnienia*, 45.

76 Kitowska 1992, Kołodziej 1999, Kukla and Miszczuk, *Harcerska działalność.*

77 Dzwonkowski, "Polacy w Belgii."

Polish women in Antwerp, half of the respondents reported that their children attended both Belgian schools and Polish supplementary schools.[78]

In the 1980s, the PCM actively supported Solidarity, a trade union in Poland, independent of the communist state. In December 1981, when martial law was declared in Poland, Solidarity was suspended and later outlawed. At the time, Fr. Bolesław Kurzawa, rector of the PCM (1981–1984), collected funds for the families of imprisoned (in Poland) Solidarity activists, and he cooperated with the head of the Solidarity office in Brussels, Jan Kułakowski, and sent secret literature to Poland and provided care for Solidarity refugees who had managed to leave Poland. Thanks to this initiative, a few days after Martial Law was declared, Cardinal Goodfried Danneels celebrated a solemn mass for Poland in the Brussels Cathedral.[79] This part of the PCM's achievements has contributed to the emergence, in Poland and in the diaspora, of a legend of heroic national history and has become an important part of the collective memory of the Belgian Polish community.

Before and after the Solidarity period, the PCM organized Polish cultural events that focused on Polish heroic history. These events aimed to reinforce Polish national feelings by commemorating the Polish uprisings (1794, 1830–31, 1863–64, and the Warsaw Uprising in 1944) and the legacy of Solidarity (1980–81). Another reason for celebration was the anniversary of the May 3 Constitution of 1791, a failed attempt to reform the Polish monarchy. Polish priests were also involved in the ceremonies that were held annually at the Polish war cemetery in Lommel. An interesting detail relates to Fr. Bolesław Kurzawa, who studied philosophy in Leuven between 1951 and 1954 and served during this time as chaplain to Polish war veterans in Ghent. Fr. Kurzawa purchased a plot in Ressaix and initiated the establishment of the St. Maximilian Kolbe Church, named to commemorate a Polish priest who had saved the life of his fellow Auschwitz prisoner by offering himself for execution.[80] According to the records, Fr. Kurzawa managed to build a rectory, but there is no trace of the church today.

Polish pilgrimages to the Banneux shrine in Belgium and the shrine of Lourdes in France are an important element of Polish religious life which helps increase bonding social capital in the immigrant group. These events bring together Poles representing various local groups. Moreover, Poles meet

78 Baluk, "Integracja polskich rodzin w Belgii," 99.

79 Szymański, *Duszpasterze Polonii,* 86.

80 Ibid., 85–87.

occasionally in the Millennium Center opened in 1961 in Comblain-la-Tour in Ardennes, a province of Liege, Wallonia. This holiday center for Polish youth still operates today, and it hosts summer camps for Polish youths from Belgium, the Netherlands, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom. The Millennium Center thus has served as a bridge among Polish Catholic communities scattered around these countries. In the 1970s, some 400 Polish children spent part of their holidays there every year.[81] Another place for trips and youth camps was Stella Maris, located in Pas de Calais, France, on the coast. Like the Millennium Center, Stella Maris brought together Polish migrants from several countries and served as a bridge among members of the Polish diaspora from France, Britain, and Benelux. In both cases, the centers were launched by the Polish Catholic Mission (in the case of Stella Maris, it was the Polish Catholic Mission in France), and over time, they opened to serve a wider range of guests. The Millennium Center is now managed by the Polish Educational Society, and it cooperates with the PCM.

Most records indicate that Polish migrants gathered around the church. In fact, the Polish Catholic Mission became a "miniature Poland" and a kind of "small homeland" where people sought assistance and guidance in difficult moments of life. As the sources suggest, a parallel was even drawn between the experiences of the Polish refugees and the plight of Christ: "it is not unusual for migrants to hear during Mass that they are the same refugees that Christ once was, that they are refugees from communism, the consequences of which they still have to deal with".[82] This message reinforces the narrative of the heroism, although the sermon was mainly aimed at labor immigrants. To those who felt humiliated or exploited, however, it may well have given some consolation.

At the moment, Poles in Brussels celebrate anniversaries of the reestablishment of the Polish state (November 11, 1918), with the central ceremony being a holy mass in Notre Damme de La Chappelle. During the Mass in 2019, the dedication of the banner of the 24th regiment of lancers of the Reconstruction Group of the First Armored Division "Antwerp" was held.[83] The event proves that reconstructions of heroic events have become an important part of Polish patriotic celebrations, and the PCM plays an important role in this.

81 Dzwonkowski, "Polacy w Belgii," 20.

82 Leman, "Religions, Modulators in Pluri-Ethnic Cities"; Grzymała-Kazłowska, "Polscy nielegalni pracownicy," 31.

83 "Obchody w Brukseli 101. rocznicy odzyskania przez Polskę niepodległości.

The Polish Catholic Mission continues to serve as something of a substitute for the homeland for Polish emigrants, despite their integration into the host society. In addition, thanks to the size of the Polish émigré community and their attachment to religion and the significant participation in Sunday and holiday services, which is incomparably greater than that of the local community, arguably, the PCM activities have revitalized Brussels' deserted churches. With more and more services in Polish attended by hundreds of worshippers, the church of Notre-Dame de la Chapelle in the center of Brussels, the church of Sainte-Elisabeth in the Schaerbeek district, and, more recently, the church of Saint-Joseph in Anderlecht have regained their former character, are more readily visited, and parishioners help cover the costs of utilities and building maintenance through contributions and donations. Thanks to the Polish émigré community, some churches in Brussels have been saved from total neglect or even closure.

Polish migrants involved in religious activities confirm that the Polish Catholic Mission is important to them:[84] "The Mission is our home" ("Misja to nasz dom"); "I feel at home in the Mission" ("Na Misji czuję się jak w domu"); "The church is a substitute for the motherland ("Kościół to namiastka Ojczyzny"); "The church is Poland in miniature" ("Kościół to Polska w miniaturze"); "The Polish church is important to me for religious reasons; without it, life would be more difficult. Besides, it has a tradition here. It is a place to meet other Poles, although sometimes it turns into a big gossip forum." ("Polski kościół jest dla mnie ważny ze względów religijnych, bez niego byłoby trudniej. Poza tym ma tu swoją tradycję. Jest miejscem do spotkania z innymi Polakami, chociaż czasami zamienia się w wielkie obgadywanie, jeden drugiego.")[85]

The Polish Catholic Mission did not shield immigrants from the host society, however. On the contrary, it helped create bridging social capital between them and the local population. It was anchored in the Belgian structures of the Roman Catholic Church, and despite some tensions in the first decades, it was fully endorsed by the local Church hierarchy.[86] Polish priests have cooperated with Belgian clergy in the local parishes, and Polish societies and choirs functioned alongside the parochial Belgian societies. Polish cultural events are attended, moreover, by members of the non-Polish community. Belgian bishops celebrated masses on Polish holidays, especially on the occasions of visits by Polish

84 Kuźma, "Emergence d'une communaute transnationale."

85 Bałuk, "Integracja polskich rodzin w Belgii," 91.

86 Szymański, "Początki Polskiej Misji Katolickiej w Belgii."

bishops. As mentioned earlier, they also celebrate Polish patriotic masses in cooperation with the PCM. Polish students at the Catholic University in Leuven have belonged to the Belgian academic world and have been ready to help in the Polish Catholic Mission. Moreover, the Mission supported the (Polish) Workers Catholic Youth (1947), which was born out of inspiration coming from two sides: the French movement (Économie et Humanisme) and the Belgian JOC, or Jeunesse Ouvriere Catholique. This is another example of the creation of bridging social capital, in this case in the transnational Catholic space.

Polish involvement in the Polish Catholic Mission has not diminished, despite the ongoing process of secularization, with Poland following trends initiated in the West. Today, the PCM is present in eleven places: Antwerp, Brussels, Charleroi, Ghent, Genk, Leopoldsburg, Liege, Maasmechelen, Mons (Tetre), Namur, and Ressaix.[87] Many migrants declare that they did not go to church in Poland, but as members of the diaspora, they remain in regular contact with the PCM. The community gives them a sense of belonging and security. This is especially the case of Polish Catholic women from Podlasie, who appreciate the social ties that function within the immigrant community. They do not question gender roles in the immigrant church, where women are denied both leadership positions and the right to assist in services. The relatively new rule allowing women in the Catholic Church to give Holy Communion and serve at the altar ("altar servers") is not recognized in Poland, so Polish immigrants are not pursuing it.[88] It seems that labor migrants are more involved in the PCM than Poles who managed to integrate into the Belgian social structure and who found jobs appropriate to their skills. Indeed, many educated and accomplished women declare that they do not participate in the PCM activities.[89] On the other hand, church involvement depends on the migrants' stage of life. Young couples want to have church weddings, baptize their children, and send them to Polish schools, at least until their first Holy Communion.[90] Most of them hold their weddings in their hometowns in Poland, but pre-marriage courses are organized by the PCM.

The religious life of Polish immigrants is becoming diverse, however. In 2000, the Polish Section of the European Catholic Center in Brussels was established, offering services at the Dominican Church (Avenue de la Renaissance). The

87 Leszczyńska et al., *Poza granicami*, 78.

88 Ibid.

89 Ibid.

90 Grzymala-Kazlowska, "The Challenge of Transition."

Polish Catholic Community Coordinator admits that the Section has little in common with the PCM/PCC (2023). As the group of Poles involved in EU structures increases (members of the European Parliament, employees in EU offices and their families), it seems that its role will grow. In addition, a Polish Orthodox Parish has been operating in Brussels since 2015. It was founded by immigrants from Podlasie who belonged to the Belarusian minority. Previously, all immigrants from Podlasie were seen as ethnic Poles, which is a typically ethnocentric/polonocentric approach. Research on the Belarusian minority in Belgium, its relations with other immigrants from Podlasie, and with immigrants/refugees from Belarus would be welcome.

The activities of the Polish Section of the European Catholic Center and the Polish Orthodox Parish contribute to the internal diversification of the Polish community in Belgium and may one day challenge the dominance of the PCM/PCC. On the other hand, their emergence demonstrates the importance of church attendance for many migrants: Catholic and Orthodox, PCM/PCC participants, and outsiders.

The PCM is conservative in every possible way. It preserves a heroic version of Polish history and conducts patriotic missions. It reinforces traditional Catholicism with its folk culture (for example the Corpus Christi processions). It provides religious instruction (led by Polish nuns) which is based on the teachings of Pope John Paul II. It reinforces traditional gender roles, with Polish women seen primarily as mothers. However, to this day, the PCM/PCC is an extremely thriving center of religious, cultural, educational, and social life which unites Poles living in the Kingdom of Belgium.

To sum up this brief overview of the Polish Catholic Mission/Community in Belgium, the initiative to establish the Polish Catholic Mission sprang from the conviction that faith and national identity are strongly connected. At the time, the Polish diaspora leaders tried to prevent the dispersal of immigrants in the host societies, and their countermeasure was to promote Polish cultural continuity and preserve their understanding of "Polishness." In this case, cultural continuity meant preserving the Catholic tradition and the heroic narrative of the Polish past and present. The Church hierarchy, in turn, feared losing members or loosening ties with the Catholic Church.[91] Both sides wanted the immigrants to stay within the immigrant community, which was to be organized around the

91 Szymański, "Początki Polskiej Misji Katolickiej w Belgii."

religious institution. The migrant communities have proven an enduring entity and continue to function today.

To put the achievements of the PCMs in a broader perspective, it is worth returning to research on religion in the lives of immigrants. Most of this research has been conducted in the United States, and it has tended to highlight the positive role of religion in easing and facilitating the adaptation process. As Nancy Foner and Richard Alba have suggested, however, this is an oversimplification at best. In some instances, "[i]n contrast (…), religion is seen in Europe as the marker of a fundamental social divide. (…) The focus of scholarly commentaries on immigrant religion [in Europe] is almost exclusively on Islam." Muslims in Europe, it has been noted, struggle to practice their religion and build up their institutions, and this has triggered conflicts (or been used as a pretext for conflicts) with long-established residents and institutions. Moreover, the incorporation of Muslims into European societies is viewed by some as very problematic.[92] Looking from this perspective, the welcome enjoyed by Poles (who are EU citizens) in Belgium should be understood as something of a privilege in comparison with the response shown to Muslim immigrants. In other words, racism and Islamophobia create additional fault lines, alongside the fault lines of class, gender, and ethnicity. However, in the first half of the twentieth century, Poles were seen as mere a labor force and were not expected to integrate. Their Catholicism was perceived as an element that helped the host community exert a degree of control over them but did not bring them closer to the mainstream.

The Polish Catholic Mission at the Center of a Network of Migrant Associations and Institutions

Within the process of immigrant community building, Poles in Belgium supported Polish language ministry, raised funds to secure some form of Polish education, established and maintained publishing houses and libraries, published press materials, newsletters, and books, founded several societies,[93] and in the course of time managed to have their own ethnic services: shops, workshops, counseling, medical services, gastronomy, etc.[94] The list that gives names and data of many Polish immigrant institutions and societies in Belgium

92 Foner and Alba, "Immigrant Religion," 360–61, 368–75.

93 Kępa, *Ocalić od zapomnienia*; Brakowiecki, "Czasopiśmiennictwo polonijne."

94 Grzymała Kazłowska, "Polscy nielegalni pracownicy w Belgii."

was compiled two decades ago and needs to be updated.[95] Here, we provide the most illustrious examples of Polish structures in Belgium. The process of their establishment can be conceptualized as an attempt to achieve ethnic institutional completeness.[96] However, nowhere was full "completeness" ever reached. In Belgium, there were no Polish parishes, and at the beginning, church services in Polish were irregular.

Still, in the network of Polish societies on a local level, the Church was very visible. According to detailed data provided by the rector of the PCM in 1936, after the rector's visitation to the Polish community in Winterslag in Limburg, most of the local societies were connected to the church or directly supported by it (see the table below).[97] Among the network of societies were men's, women's, and youth organizations, a cultural unit (church choir), and a parents' association. All were directly controlled by the PCM. The sport units (the Falcons, the Riffle Association, the scouts) and the women's association seemed to be independent. But the scout teams, established by Polish consulates and formally not under the control of the PCM, were actively involved in Polish church celebrations animated by the PCM.[98] And the veteran society had a chaplain who cooperated with the PCM on a daily basis. In the case of the Eucharistic Crusade, it was initiated in the Polish local community by the Belgian Catholic Church and operated outside the influence of the PCM. However, it belonged to the network of Polish immigrant structures and contributed to its dynamic. Moreover, this case shows that the process of immigrant integration was advanced, and bridging social capital between the immigrant and the Belgian Church was generated.[99]

95 Kępa, *Ocalić od zapomnienia.*

96 Breton, "Institutional Completeness of Ethnic Communities."

97 Szymański, "Życie organizacyjne wychodźstwa polskiego," 64.

98 Kitowska, "Z działalności harcerstwa"; Kołodziej, "Harcerstwo polskie"; Kukla and Miszczuk, *Harcerska działalność.*

99 Putnam, *Bowling Alone.*

Table 1. Polish associations in Winterslag, (Belgian) Limburg, 1936.

Organization	Polish name	Supported by	Number of participants
Committee of Local Societies	Komitet Miejscowych Towarzystw		
St. Adalbert Mining Society	Towarzystwo Górnicze Św. Wojciecha	Church*	50
Polish Union	Związek Polaków	Neutral (no church affiliation)	70
Sport Society FALCONS	Towarzystwo Gimnastyczne "Sokól"	Indirect Westphalen pattern	40
Rifle Association	Związek Strzelecki	the Polish government	20–30
Church choir	Chór kościelny	Church	30
Confraternity of the Living Rosary (women's organization)	Bractwo Żywego Różańca	Church	115
Polish Women's Society	Towarzystwo Polek	Independent	120
Polish Parental Care	Polska Opieka Rodzicielska	Church	30
Union of Former Military	Związek Byłych Wojskowych		25
Scouting	Harcerstwo	the Polish government	50 + 50**
Eucharistic Crusade	Krucjata Eucharystyczna	Belgian Church organization***	20 + 20**

* Polish Catholic Mission, Roman Catholic Church
**Boys and girls
***La Croisade Eucharistique: https://fsspx.org/en/the-eucharistic-crusade
Source: Szymański, "Życie organizacyjne wychodźstwa polskiego," 64.

Data similar to that for Winterslag was provided following visits by the PCM rector to Polish communities in Limburg's industrial cities: Waterschei, Zwartberg, Eysden, and Hensen.[100] Moreover, Polish newspapers were received regularly from France, and one should note the impressive Polish editorial and publishing achievements in Belgium.[101]

Another factor particular to the Polish diaspora in Belgium relates to the working-class movement, which (both Christian oriented and secular/ anticlerical) proved to be quite strong among Polish immigrants and led them to cross the ethnic boundary in their activity.[102] On the other hand, it must be noted that there were Polish sections of the local trade unions, and the Polish

100 Szymański, "Życie organizacyjne wychodźstwa polskiego," 65–68.

101 Kłossowski, "Polskie firmy wydawnicze i księgarskie w Belgii"; Kępa, *Ocalić od zapomnienia;* Brakowiecki, "Czasopiśmiennictwo polonijne."

102 Goddeeris, *De Poolse migratie in België.*

Socialist Party (Polska Partia Socjalistyczna – PPS) was quite visible both before and after World War II.[103] This means that the Poles' participation in working-class activity was accepted in Belgium. Immigrants were welcome to launch their ethnic organizations within the broader structures, and they knew how to take advantage of these opportunities. Being active, whether in the structures of the Catholic Church or in the labor movement, Poles gradually integrated into the host society. Immigrants who joined the Belgian labor movement were simple workers, but there were some well-known figures among them. Edward Gierek worked as a teenager in the Arenberg coal mine in France, and around 1930, he joined the Polish Section of the French Communist Party, which caused him to be deported to Poland. In 1936, he arrived in Belgium, where he was employed as a coal miner in Limburg. He joined the local (Belgian) and Polish units of the labor movement. In this case, we again see a direct link between the Polish immigrant experience in France and Belgium and the advantages that knowledge of the language provided in the French-speaking regions of Belgium. After World War II, Gierek returned to Poland, and he eventually became a leading figure in the Polish United Workers Party, which gave him the highest position in the communist state (1970–1980).[104] His participation in the left-wing parts of the anti-Nazi movement during World War II was probably exaggerated, since the research was done under the communist regime.[105] Another key figure was Jan Kułakowski (1930–2011), a World War II refugee and graduate of the Catholic University of Leuven, who became a high-ranking official in international Christian trade unions and the International Labor Organization. Kułakowski is also an example of return migration. He settled in Poland after the fall of communism, reclaimed Polish citizenship, successfully led the process of Poland's accession to the EU, and was elected to serve as a member of the European Parliament in 2005.[106] As already noted, alongside these well-known figures were hundreds of anonymous Polish members of the labor movement who contributed significantly to the dynamics of the host society.

As shown above, Poles established a wide variety of associations and institutions in Belgium. In the late 1920s the leaders of the Polish group presented a typology of these structures: church societies, educational societies, mutual aid

103 Błażejczyk, Ludwik. Recorded interview, 2005. *Archiwum Historii Mówionej.* https://www.1944.pl/archiwum-historii-mowionej/ludwik-blazejczyk,412.html

104 Leszkowicz, "Edward Gierek: aparatczyk czy reformator?

105 Panecki, *Polonia w belgijskim ruchu oporu.*

106 Niedźwiedzki, "The contribution of former exiles to the Polish integration in Europe."

societies, and sports societies. At the same time, Polish consuls distinguished three types of associations: social, cultural, and sport.[107] As for the labor movement, Polish leaders distinguished three branches: communist groups that were hostile to the Polish state at the time (Seraing near Liege); a radical group which questioned the role of the Church; and a Christian group which included Polish immigrants from Westphalia and the province of Poznan/Poznan. All typologies show that ethnic associations and institutions formed a very dense fabric within the immigrant communities.

After eight decades, a 2001 research report revealed information about *Little Poland* in Brussels. The list of the entities and activities in this community included Polish-language church services at two locations in the city, several associations, Polish language schools, choirs, small business (hairdressing, car repair shops, medical and legal services) and markets (South Market, Butchers' Market), discos, and gastronomy.[108] The religious activities (in Polish) were listed first in the report, which indicated the key role played by the Polish Catholic Mission.

However, it should be noted that formal membership in Polish societies in Belgium is rather low. This situation is similar to the situations in other centers of the Polish diaspora, and generally it indicates a decreasing level of social capital in the modern/postmodern world.[109] It is estimated that about 20 percent of immigrants are somehow involved in community life. This is probably an overestimate, since the typical level of Polish immigrants' involvement does not exceed 10 percent.[110] It is estimated that in Antwerp 14 percent of Poles belong to an immigrant organization.[111] Still, migrants feel that they belong to an ethnic community. Many young Polish couples send their children to Polish schools, and they attend the events organized by the school communities. Many Polish children in Belgium attend Polish religious instruction, at least until the First Holy Communion. Whole families are eager to participate in the most important Polish holidays, such as Christmas Service and Easter ceremonies (blessing food on Good Saturday), but they avoid involvement in other activities. Moreover, ethnicity that is practiced or felt by the recent immigrants is often observed

107 Szymanski, "Życie organizacyjne wychodźstwa polskiego w Belgii," 42-43.

108 Grzymała-Kazłowska, "Polscy nielegalni pracownicy," 29.

109 Putnam, *Bowling Alone.*

110 Praszałowicz, *Polacy w Berlinie.*

111 Vancluysen et al., *Vanuit Pools perspectief;* Levrau et al., "Polish Immigration in Belgium since 2004," 316.

among those who do not engage much in ethnic institutions.[112] Indeed, while Poles in Belgium have managed to produce high levels of bonding social capital,[113] many still construct their identities outside the traditional structures of the diaspora.

Despite a certain level of social anomie, subsequent streams of Polish immigrants and geographical dispersion produced not just one but many local communities.[114] These communities are comprised in part of people who belonged to various immigration streams, and they are diverse in terms of class and region of origin. Because the Polish Catholic Community operates in very traditional ways, which include reinforcing conservative gender roles,[115] competing forces are gaining members, such as the Polish Section at the European Catholic Center and the Polish Orthodox Parish. However, these are religious institutions, and there is no secular body strong enough to take over the leadership of the Polish Catholic Community.

Living together and apart, over the course of the last half century, Poles in Belgium met for patriotic holidays and /or in the Millenium Center, and quite often they competed with one another. The main dividing line both before and after World War II was politics. Before the War, there was a division between groups that identified with the Roman Catholic Church on the one hand and groups that were involved in the working-class movement on the other. However, the strong position of Christian trade unions in Belgium has kept many labor activists in the Catholic Church. There was also a division between the groups that supported the Polish government after 1926 and groups that decided to remain neutral. After World War II, the division between pro-communist and anti-communist Poles was the most visible and rigid fault line. This division led to two separate celebrations in Lommel at the cemetery where Polish soldiers who died in World War II are buried.[116] Admittedly, conflicts always attract attention and make headlines in the media. In other words, conflicts produce many records, which is why many researchers who examine organs of the Polish media emphasize disagreements within the Polish diaspora, both in Belgium and

112 Lesser, "Remaking Ethnic Studies," 7.

113 Putnam, *Bowling Alone.*

114 Goddeeris, *De Poolse migratie in België,* 10, 63, 68–69.

115 Leszczyńska et al., *Poza granicami.*

116 Venken, "The Communist 'Polonia' Society."

elsewhere.[117] Daily cooperation and harmony are undervalued because they take place quietly and leave little trace.

There is another interesting and disturbing aspect of diaspora studies. In traditional Polish historiography, the diaspora is characterized as a group that is an immanent part of the nation.[118] From this perspective, researchers have focused on documenting the process of immigrant community building, highlighting the community's successes in promoting Polish culture, and they have paid a lot of attention to outstanding individuals (Polish immigrants) with whom average immigrants wanted to identify. This is true in part simply because these outstanding individuals produced a lot of records, such as memoirs, letters, interviews, and other publications. The main sources for Polish studies on the diaspora were the files of Polish institutions and associations abroad and personal records. These files highlighted all Polish patriotic efforts in Belgium and usually contained little or no information about how Poles had integrated into the host society and culture. Therefore, the researchers' perception of the diaspora reality was biased. Subtle indications of the integration process are often implicit, except for lamentations about members of the younger generation, which (according to these lamentations) preferred not to speak their native language (especially in public, but also with their siblings) and tried to avoid ethnic events.

The other side of the coin (the integration process) is usually overlooked by Polish researchers. However, studies on the integration of immigrants are being conducted by Belgian scholars and have yielded interesting findings. A new perspective was introduced by Idesbald Goddeeris, who noticed the interconnectedness of the political and economic causes of migration and has pushed for the de-heroization of the Polish experience in Belgium. Goddeeris later joined a group of researchers from Antwerp, and the whole group skillfully showed that Poles gradually integrated into their host society.[119] Immigrants' integration was a slow and quiet process that has been going on in daily life, e.g. children at school, adults at work, and in regular contacts with neighbors representing the host society. Such a process is usually not documented, except on rare occasions, for example celebrations of Polish religious holidays in Belgian churches (as reported sometimes by local media). However, one can examine the process by taking into consideration several key indicators of integration. These

117 Praszałowicz, "Old Neighbors in the New World"; Kula, *Historia w teraźniejszości, teraźniejszość w historii.*

118 Kula, *Historia w teraźniejszości, teraźniejszość w historii*, 124–26.

119 Levrau et al., "Polish Immigration in Belgium since 2004."

key indicators are markers and means (employment, housing, education), social connections (within an immigrant group, with the host society), factors that facilitate integration (language and cultural knowledge, safety and stability), and rights and citizenship.[120]

On the Polish side, we have studies on immigrant integration by Aleksandra Grzymała-Kazłowska and Kamil Bałuk. Their works are unique in the sense that both authors understand the significance of the integration process and use some indicators of integration. Grzymała-Kazłowska has analyzed Polish women's migration experiences in liminal time of their lives, and she has found connections between "doing family" and the integration process.[121] Bałuk also noted a connection between migrant family life and the integration process, and he demonstrated that members of the second generation of recent immigrants feel at home in Antwerp (where the study was conducted) and motivate their parents to stay in Belgium. The decision to stay (instead of to live as circular or short-term migrants), in turn, results in participation in language and vocational courses in Belgium, which leads immigrants to integrate into the host society.[122]

Conclusion

The history of the Polish diaspora in Belgium began in the 1830s and continues to the present day. It included various migration streams and counter-streams: emigration from Poland to Belgium; return migrations from Belgium to Poland (especially after World War I and World War II); multiple migrations, such as the arrival of Poles from Germany and France to Belgium, and the emigration of Poles (mostly DPs) from Belgium to the USA, Canada, and Australia (1950–55);[123] and circular migrations in recent decades. At the moment, we witness each of these phenomena at the same time. Many Poles arrive in Belgium and settle there, while others move between Poland and Belgium on a regular basis. Migrants who seemed to be well established in Belgium decide to return to Poland, while seasonal migrants prolong their stay and change their status (in documented or undocumented ways) from temporary to permanent residents.

120 Ager and Strang, "Understanding Integration," 170.

121 Grzymała-Kazłowska, "The Challenge of Transition"; Grzymała-Kazłowska, "Introduction: Rethinking integration."

122 Levrau et al., "Polish Immigration in Belgium since 2004"; Bałuk, "Integracja polskich rodzin w Belgii."

123 Dzwonkowski, "Polacy w Belgii," 10.

After having spent several years in Belgium, many Poles decide to move on and they go to France or Quebec. Moreover, young people born in Polish families (or mixed families) in Belgium often decide to spend a longer time in Poland, and sometimes, they stay. At the same time, Polish students at the Belgian universities often marry Belgian classmates, and the couples move between Belgium and Poland. On the top of that, the number of Poles employed in EU institutions is increasing, and many of them live their everyday lives in Brussels. Almost all Poles representing these groups are or have been in touch with the Polish Catholic Mission/Community. There is a group of people who are connected with the PCM on a regular basis, but they are a minority among the local Polish diaspora. A larger group appears typically on Polish holidays and celebrates Polish traditions of Christmas carols and Christmas meetings (sharing wafers or *opłatek*), Easter traditions *(pisanki)*, Corpus Christi processions, etc. Many Poles show up in the community when they engage in ceremonies involving rites de passage, which they want to celebrate in accordance with Polish traditions. These rites of passage include First Holy Communion, confirmation, weddings, and sometimes funerals. An even larger group has contacts with the PCM that have little to do with religious life but are related, rather, to teaching children the language or getting a job.

Nevertheless, studying the evolution of the PCM/PCC over the century, we found evidence that this institution, which had to struggle since its early years, managed to overcome the various difficulties it encountered. It has played a leadership role in the Polish community in Belgium and has contributed to the survival of this community to the present day.

In the age of online communication, it seemed that the traditional community was obsolete and would be replaced by online groups. The experience of the Polish immigrant group in Belgium shows that these expectations were premature. The diversity of Polish groups and the central role played by the Polish Catholic Community are indisputable. The immigrant church and school in their traditional form, with buildings, meetings, and celebrations in person, are still central in the lives of many immigrants.

The question that researchers have not asked so far is whether Poles moved within Belgium and/or the Benelux countries. It would be important to know whether Poles, if they changed their region of residence, moved between Polish communities or (what seems much more likely) whether they left their communities and settled in places where there was no ethnic infrastructure. One must consider that today it is possible to participate in many forms of ethnic

activity without residing in an ethnic neighborhood. However, as shown above, traditional forms of immigrant activity, with in-person meetings and a degree of religious decorum, have proven attractive.

The history of Poles in Belgium resembles the history of Poles in other destination countries and generally resembles the history of any diaspora center. In examining this history, we have focused on general trends that are common to all large diaspora centers (founded by immigrants from different countries), as well as on the characteristics of Polish immigration to Belgium. Each migration stream and each local immigrant community has its own unique set of experiences, but common patterns can always be identified.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Klasszikus és modern republikanizmusok: Eszmetörténeti tanulmányok [Classical and modern republicanisms: Studies in intellectual history]. By Ágoston Nagy and Milán Pap. Budapest: Ráció Kiadó, 2021. 275 pp.

It may sound like a bit of a cliché to begin a review with the contention that the work in question fills a lacuna in the relevant literature, but in the case of the collection of essays in *Klasszikus és modern republikanizmusok: Eszmetörténeti tanulmányok* [Classical and modern republicanisms: Studies in the intellectual history], one cannot really avoid this admittedly trite phrase. With a few refreshing exceptions, Hungarian scholarship has tended to treat the various aspects of republicanism rather narrowly, both in Hungary and on the international political stage. A single collection of studies cannot resolve this problem entirely, of course, but the volume edited by Ágoston Nagy and Milán Pap, which contains the papers presented at the conference "Res publica – pro patria – virtus: Conference on the History of Classical and Modern Republicanism and Patriotism," which was held in Budapest in 2015, points out the by its very existence shortcomings of the literature on republicanism in Hungary. It strives to address these shortcomings with the means at its disposal and to the extent possible for a single volume, and it does a very impressive job and meets high academic standards.

The volume is divided into a preface ("From the grand narratives to the multifariousness of republicanism") and three major groups of essays ("Hungarian republicanisms," "Euro-Atlantic perspectives," "Republicanism and political theory"). In the preface, the editors offer a summary of the international historiography of republicanism. They concentrate particularly on the conceptions of "classical republicanism" and "civic humanism" *(Bürgerhumanismus)* developed by Zera Fink and Hans Baron respectively and their later adaptations. They then turn to the contributions of Anglophone "intellectual history" to the reinterpretation of the republican tradition, discussing the significance of the work of figures such as John G. A. Pocock and Quentin Skinner. Finally, they note that in the image of republicanism as tradition and discursive mode that has emerged in the scholarship published in recent decades one finds differentiations in several dimensions, which have led to the disintegration of the early grand narratives. This process has been accompanied by a spatial expansion of the interpretative framework of

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republicanism, including the discovery of the republicanisms of Central and Eastern Europe, and by increased and deepening attention to the history of these republicanisms. The volume itself is to a large extent the fruit of this. The foreword makes references to the developments in the research in Hungary so far, and it then concludes with a brief introduction to the essays included in the volume.

The relative proportions of the three major sections of the volume give a good impression of the thematic, temporal, and geographical points of emphasis in the collection. The first section, which consists of six studies, is the largest. It offers a look at some of the layers of the history of early modern and modern republicanism in Hungary and Transylvania. This is followed by a unit consisting of four essays on certain aspects of French and American republicanisms in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The volume concludes with two studies reflecting on republicanism primarily from the perspective of political theory.

In the first section, the chronological framework of which is the period from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth, we find discussions of how certain problems related to the republican tradition appeared (or sometimes did not appear) in Hungarian political thought, understood broadly. An essay by Gábor Petneházi ("Philosophers at the Wheel: The Prospects of Republicanism in Transylvania in the Báthory Era") examines the degree and depth to which the idea of republicanism was present at the end of the sixteenth century, whether with positive or negative connotations, in the political discourses in Transylvania, which had existed as a separate political entity since the late Middle Ages. Petneházi concludes that there can be little talk of any serious enthusiasm for republicanism in Transylvania at the time or for that matter of any deep reflection on its theoretical foundations. References to republicanism remained predominantly at the surface level of political rhetoric, and they functioned primarily as a stigmatizing slogan for the opposing party. Even when positive statements were made, they were always carefully hidden or "coded" in the discourse.

Zsófia Köllő offers an essay which adopts a strictly text-centered approach. Her discussion, "Republicanism and Patriotism in the Nádasdy Mausoleum," focuses on a highly influential work, the so-called Nádasdy Mausoleum (a series of engravings of prominent Hungarian leaders followed by elogia in Latin and German translation), first published in 1664. Köllő demonstrates the prevalence of republican-patriotic conceptual frameworks and values in seventeenth-century Hungarian political discourse on the basis of the use of the terms and

concepts of *patria, rex-regnum,* and *res publica* in the Nádasdy Mausoleum, showing their complex semantic interrelations. The contribution by Ágoston Nagy ("The Experience of the Festival Culture of the 'Thermidorian Republic' in the Diary of Sándor Kisfaludy) focuses on elements of the republican ethos as expressed in the French festival culture of the late eighteenth century and in children's martial games and public contests in the period. Nagy offers an exemplary mix of methods from intellectual and cultural history more broadly in his discussion of how the "cultural adaptation" and "productive reception" (p.109) of these elements are found in the diary of Sándor Kisfaludy, a renowned writer of the first half of the nineteenth century who was taken prisoner of war in France as a young military officer in 1796. Nagy analyzes and contextualizes the narratives Kisfaludy wrote on his experiences upon his return home, which he later reinterpreted and applied to the political framework in Hungary. On the basis of this discussion, details emerge concerning the cultural transfer processes of republican values of the time, which have hardly been discussed so far in the secondary literature.

Three studies in the volume deal with the manifestations of republicanism in Hungary in the nineteenth century. The essay by György Miru ("Republican Freedom and Democratic Self-Government: The Example of Kossuth") focuses on the political thought of Lajos Kossuth, one of the most prominent and influential politicians of the first decisive period of Hungarian nation-building, the so-called Reform Era, and the 1848–49 Revolution and War of Independence. Miru persuasively argues that Kossuth ultimately expressed and espoused views which were progressively democratic by the standards of his time by bringing to the foreground and venturing distinctive (re)interpretations of motifs linked usually to the republican tradition, such as the concept of freedom as a matter of political participation, the crucial, anti-tyrannical role of local self-government (in the case of Hungary, primarily the counties), the strengths of the republic as a political system, and the importance of community morality. In "Republican Norm and Verse Novel," which offers a discussion of *Rombányi*, a long narrative written in verse by nineteenth-century literary historian and author Pál Gyulai, József Takáts argues that Gyulai's poem presents the 1848–49 Revolution and War of Independence as "a unique moment of the republican ideal" (p.142), in the course of which two core values of the republican ethos, soldierly virtues and the "passion for equality," were increasingly asserted.

The first larger unit of the volume on the history of republicanism in Hungary concludes with Attila M. Demeter's study. Demeter focuses on József Eötvös,

one of the most important politicians and political thinkers of the nineteenth century in Hungary, and particularly on his most important work of political theory, "The Influence of the Ruling Ideas of the Nineteenth Century on the State." As Demeter persuasively shows, Eötvös recognized the importance of ethnolinguistic nationalism(s), which he saw as particularly dangerous for the future of the political unity of multi-ethnic Hungary. Drawing on Tocqueville, Eötvös proposes a certain degree of "administrative decentralization" as a solution that would not compromise the prerogatives of the strong central government in issues that were essential to the integrity of the state. The strengthening of local self-government, Eötvös contended, would offer citizens a genuine experience of political freedom. It would also foster a stronger sense of patriotism by increasing the number of circles in which "the individual can move freely" and to which he thus can become emotionally attached (p.157). According to Eötvös, the adoption in political practice of these basic elements of the classical republican ethos would help hinder (stronger) nations in their attempts to usurp state sovereignty and crush other national communities.

In an essay titled "Hereditary Monarchy and Patriotic Civic Virtue: The Figure of the Minister of State in the Seventeenth Century" in the second section of the collection (the section on "Euro-Atlantic perspectives"), Gábor Förköli offers an array of engaging examples of how, in the era of French absolutism, the minister of state was often portrayed as a guardian of old republican, classical civic values which had been corrupted in the intricate milieu of court life and the custodian of an alternative role in the political elite to that of the courtier. The two other contributions in the second part take the reader back to the early period of US history with discussions of the debates over the maintenance of patriotic civic virtue. In "The Differentiation of the Concept of Republican Virtue in a New World Context: The Case of the Anti-Federalists and the American Constitution of 1787," Zoltán Vajda analyses the debates on the Constitution of 1787. He begins with an examination of the anti-federalist arguments, pausing to note that the concept of virtue at the time was hardly a matter of clear consensus. It consisted of several layers, reflecting and also shaped by the social and regional heterogeneity of the United States. Vajda also calls attention to the doubts expressed by the anti-federalist authors about the "natural aristocracy." The anti-federalist authors considered it necessary to maintain the virtue of this "aristocracy" with certain institutional guarantees (frequent elections, the recall of representatives). Csaba Lévai, in his essay "How to Ensure the Survival of a Virtuous Republic? The Intertwining of Classical

Republicanism, the Scottish Enlightenment, and Physiocratism in the Economic and Foreign Policy thought of Thomas Jefferson," also focuses on debates at the time concerning the question of how to prevent the erosion of republican virtues in a state as large as the United States. By separating the different strata of Thomas Jefferson's views on this subject, Vajda shows the fundamental heterogeneity of this system of views, reconstructing the main influences (classical republicanism, stadial history, physiocracy) and their interrelationships.

In the first essay in the section of the volume on political theory ("The Republic of Actors: On Hannah Arendt's Republicanism), László Levente Balogh outlines the role of the concepts of power, (political) action, violence, and the masses in Hannah Arendt's thought and their complex interrelationships. Balogh also touches on their theoretical relationship to the structures of totalitarianism, democracy, and the republic as postulated by Arendt. In the final essay in the collection ("Post-Communist Republicanism? A Program for the Rectification of Liberalism in Post-Communist Hungary), Milán Pap presents the republican argument and alternative political-community model that emerged in opposition to liberalism, which gradually gained ground after the regime change and came to dominate Hungary in the 1990s.

As I suggested at the beginning of this review, this collection of essays really does fill a lacuna in the secondary literature. I would hazard only one critical remark. One could argue that the essays are too thematically divergent. However, this is largely offset by the fact that the authors discuss issues and problems related to the history of republicanism with a level of detail and depth that can serve as a reference point for further scholarship on republicanism in Hungary.

Henrik Hőnich
honich.henrik@uni-nke.hu
National University of Public Service

Die Protokolle des Cisleithanischen Ministerrates 1867–1918. Vol. 1, 1867. February 19, 1867–December 15, 1867. Edited by Stefan Malfèr. With an introduction by Thomas Kletečka, Stefan Malfèr, and Anatol Schmied-Kowarzik. Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2018; Die Protokolle des cisleithanischen Ministerrates 1867–1918. Vol. II, 1868–1871. January 1–November 21, 1871. Edited by Thomas Kletečka and Reichard Lein. Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2022; Die Protokolle des cisleithanischen Ministerrates 1867–1918. Vol. III, 1871–1879. Part 1, November 25, 1871–April 23, 1872. Edited by Klaus Koch. Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2022.

A few years ago, a project involving the publication of the minutes of the Austrian Council of Ministers between 1848 and 1867 wound to a close. This was a major undertaking which spanned several decades and gave considerable impetus to research on the history of the Habsburg Monarchy in the two decades after 1848, both inside and outside the borders of Austria. Stefan Malfèr, who has been organizing the series for the last few years, and Thomas Kletečka and Anatol Schmied-Kowarzik, the editors of the concluding volumes, have now embarked with several new colleagues on a new venture which will give them a good opportunity to draw on their experience in publishing and their knowledge of sources. They have undertaken the publication of the Austrian or, more precisely, the Cisleithanian Council of Ministers' minutes from 1867 to 1918, which will come, according to the original plans, to eleven volumes.

The leaders of the project have adopted the structure of the previous series. The precise texts of the minutes are supplemented by concise, informative notes concerning antecedents to any given issue and the ways in which the issue later played out. Each volume opens with a useful introduction touching on the main items on the Council of Ministers' agenda and providing background information concerning the various issues. This is followed by a bibliography, an index of abbreviations, an explanatory list of archaic terms and expressions, and a list of the people who took part in the deliberations of the Council of Ministers as permanent members or invited deputies or experts. The appendix contains a list of agendas for the meetings of the Council of Ministers and a combined index of subjects and persons.

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This series poses an unusual challenge to the editors, despite the knowledge they have garnered over the decades and their experience in the world of source publications. The minutes are both incomplete and damaged as a consequence of the July Revolt of 1927, in the course of which the Vienna Palace of Justice was set aflame. There are other sources on the deliberations of the Council of Ministers, but for the most part they contain only the agenda items and the decisions made by the monarch. It is therefore important that these sources be properly annotated, supplemented with the necessary indexes, and published as soon as possible. Digital versions are being published as well, which will make it possible to attach additional documents and do searches for specific items of content, while the printed versions of the texts will make them more easily accessible and will ensure their long-term survival.

Three volumes in the series have been published so far. The 1867 minutes were completely destroyed, so all texts in the first volume have been published on the basis of copies made before 1927 by Josef Redlich. The second volume contains, for the most part, only the agenda items and the imperial decisions, as only 73 of the 618 minutes have survived, but fortunately, the minutes of meetings held under the chairmanship of Franz Joseph I at which important political questions were addressed could be partially replaced with other sources. With a few exceptions, the minutes from the period between April and August 1869 have survived, as have the minutes of meetings held in the autumn months of 1871. The latter are particularly important from the perspective of the government deliberations led by the conservative Count Karl Sigmund Hohenwart. The third volume, in contrast, for the most part contains minutes that have survived in their entirety, even if in a badly damaged state and thus with some missing passages. In only one case is the proceedings of a sitting missing entirely.

The first volume provides important information first and foremost on the background events in Austria of the Compromise of 1867. The record also shed light on how the politicians of the Austro-German liberal Constitutional Party were able to use their otherwise limited room for maneuver to push through some of their political demands for the further development of a constitutional state, which in the preceding years had been effectively hindered by the stubborn resistance of the ruler and his narrow circle of advisers.

The second volume shows how, within the legal framework created by the so-called December Constitution of 1867, the liberal state institutions of the new dual state were created by the so-called "Bürgerministerium", the only

government in the history of the Monarchy that could call itself the government of the parliamentary majority. We also see how the opposing political parties tried to make the framework of the constitution more precise and also to expand it. The Austro-German liberal "constitutionalist" group pushed for more centralization, while the federalist camp, which in the center of the empire was largely conservative-aristocratic but had a much more diverse political profile in the provinces, sought to broaden provincial autonomy. The December Constitution contained both centralist and federalist elements, which gave both camps hope for further development. One can see very clearly how this led to fluctuations in the positions adopted by the imperial government. The minutes also make it possible to trace the history of the efforts to achieve a Bohemian compromise in the summer and autumn of 1871, which were initiated by and had the support of Emperor Franz Joseph, but which ultimately foundered. The arguments made by Austrian politicians, financiers, the Imperial Chancellor Count Beust, and Hungarian politicians both for and against the Bohemian Compromise are discussed in detail.

The third volume marks a return to a policy of centralization after the failure of this last great experiment in constitutional law. This move to achieve stabilization proved successful in the short term, but the fundamental political fault lines remained unchanged beneath the surface of daily political practice.

In addition to the discussions of the major political breaking points of the time, the royal statements found in the minutes are also very important, since they are virtually the only contemporary sources from which we can learn about Emperor Franz Joseph's personal political positions. We see, for example, how he interpreted his role as a constitutional monarch and how he continued to play a decisive role in crucial political issues. He treated the legislature and the executive as centers of power that were independent of each other and had different responsibilities and prerogatives. He also consistently rejected the notion that the government was a political body subordinate to the will of parliament. On the contrary, he saw the relationship between the two as quite the reverse. For instance, when, in early 1872, at the start of the new session of the Cisleithanian parliament, the Reichsrat, the pro-government majority in the lower house of parliament included questions in its submissions that were not part of the announced government program, Franz Joseph declared that the Reichsrat majority, if it wanted to dictate the direction the government would take, misunderstood entirely what it meant to be a "government party." The emperor also expected his ministers to ensure that, on an important political issue (such

as the Galician compromise), members of the government could guarantee in advance the adoption of a government bill in both houses of the Reichsrat. During the period of the "Bürgerministerium", however, he saw himself as being held in the crosshairs by parliament and a government that consisted for the most part of politicians who relied on the parliamentary majority, whereas in his assessment, the government, as the executive power, should have regarded him as its primary point of orientation. He was thus compelled to sanction bills with which he did not agree, first and foremost legislation concerning the relationship between the Catholic Church and the state. As he stated in January 1872, he was determined to prevent a repetition of this, and beginning in April 1870, he consistently appointed a government of bureaucrats and experts who were far removed from parliamentary party politics. Francis Joseph's conception of the constitutional role of the monarch would in the long term be a determining factor in domestic political processes in Cisleithania.

Franz Joseph also considered the rigid centralism of the Austro-German liberal camp an obstacle. As the minutes clearly show, in the case of Hungary, the Compromise of 1867 consolidated political relations for a time, if perhaps with minor changes, but in the other half of the empire, it took years to achieve comparable consolidation. Before the summer of 1867, the political forces in Austria had had no opportunity to exert any real influence on the transformation of public law in the empire, so the discussion of political conflicts, now within the framework of the constitutional compromise reached by the emperor and the Hungarian political elite, took part in parallel with the enactment of the December Constitution. It was a personal matter for Franz Joseph to force the Austro-German liberal camp to compromise, even at the cost of "reconciliation" *(Versöhnung)* with the Polish nationalist movement in Galicia and the Czech nationalist movement in Bohemia, which meant extending provincial autonomy. But he was not willing to repeat the way he had forced the agreement he had reached with the Hungarian political elite on Austrian politicians. Presumably, he saw the limits that had been placed on his power as too high a price to pay. The Czech politicians clearly would have expected this of him, as they overestimated their political weight, unlike the Polish leaders in Galicia, who, by limiting their demands, eventually won significant concessions on state rights and language use and thus contributed significantly to political consolidation that lasted for nearly a decade.

The new series thus makes available indispensable sources on the political conditions of the early years of the Dualist Era and, indeed, the entire history

of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Hopefully, it will give a similar boost to research on the history of the Habsburg Monarchy in the last half century of its existence as the publication of documents from 1849 to 1867 did for research on the post-1848 decades a few years ago.

Ágnes Deák
University of Szeged
deakagnes@yahoo.com

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Nationalism and Populism: Expressions of Fear or Political Strategies. Edited by Carsten Schapkow and Frank Jacob. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2022. 301 pp.

Although I was overwhelmed by obligations, I was pleased in the end to have accepted the offer to write a review of *Nationalism and Populism*, which I found to be an extraordinary volume. Not so much because of the topic itself, which is very current and highly important, but also because of the ways in which the authors have addressed it. The editors have not only chosen the appropriate dramaturgy of thematizations to structure the contributions by the invited authors into meaningful thematic clusters but have also ensured an intergenerational and geographical multi-perspective approach to the discussion of nationalism and populism.

Laudably, the editors included one of the currently best-known authors of discussions on populism, Jan-Werner Müller, whose chapter ("The Politics of Fear Revisited") is a compelling deliberation on the current situation, offering several important highlights. The editors' bold sequencing of the sections and the arrangement of the chapters within them is also worth mentioning. For example, they have placed the thematic focus on the situation in Russia and the Republic of South Africa in the first section. Thus, at the point where Western-oriented readers expect a discussion of Trumpism, the Front National, or the AfD, we encounter a description and analysis of "sovereign democracy," electoral authoritarianism, and the conservatism of "disparate post-Soviet elites" (p.65) in Russia and the "politicization of immigration by the ruling ANC" in South Africa. If you are not an expert on Russia and are not familiar with the specifics of post-Soviet social development, you may find it difficult to understand the consequences of the lack of a "public language that was emotionally neutral and moderately abstract capable of attaining generalizable qualities" (p.56). Those of us who point to the importance of catachresis in terms of "sociosemantic misuse of conventional concepts as well as a practice in which political identifications blur the distinctions defining established political activity" (p.57) are well aware of this problem.

It is important to highlight the language of consumerism, which has replaced political language in the division of various institutions into "good" and "bad." Like most former communist and socialist countries, Russia is confronted with "culturalized disagreements" which have developed into a kind of "culture war between 'cosmopolitan liberals' on the one hand and uniform, authentic, and

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homogeneous people whose identity is sharply juxtaposed to that of outsiders on the other." Linked to this is the labeling of opposition of all kinds as Western and liberal. The result, according to Kashirskikh and Tsetsura, is an authoritarian election campaign "that reduces the electoral process solely to a plebiscite-voting without discussion" (p.65).

This account is followed by the best-structured chapter, which could also be considered a textbook example of how to write a short scientific text; it has a clear structure and offers balanced and sufficient context. My only point of contention with the author is his assertion that Bernie Sanders' political campaigns have a "populist appeal," so it is safe to claim that "populism can exist on both the left and right wings of the political spectrum" (p.78). This is certainly true, but I would not choose Sanders as the primary example of this. On the other hand, let me reiterate that the chapter "Populism in the ANC and the 2019 Xenophobic Violence in South Africa" (pp.71–95) is anything but a "modest contribution" to this volume, as it offers important insights into the South African political landscape, including an introduction to the incubation stage of xenophobic tensions. And unsurprisingly, we find that here too the responsibility lies with the traditional parties and their leaders, who tapped into "populist rhetoric" (p.82).

I am glad that Maximilian Kreter decided to start his chapter on White Power Music in Germany (pp.99–134) with a list of festivals with concerts and accompanying (e.g., militant) events, followed by a useful definition of right-wing extremism (p.103). This is the best way to start the text, even though he has borrowed it (Decker et. Al. ed., Die Mitte in der Krise, 2010). I also appreciate the two tables provided: Functions of White Power Music (p. 106) and Development of White Power Music in Germany from 1977 until 2017 (p.123). The second in particular one helps us understand what has been taking place on the White Power Music scene over the last forty years: the rapid increase in the number of active bands.

The seventh chapter, by Vladimír Naxera, "The Germans as a Threat to 'Us'? The Use of History and Othering of Germans in the Speeches of the Czech President Miloš Zeman" (pp.135–156), begins with a very useful warning against labeling something as populist without "providing empirical evidence and argumentation." Naxera also cautions against ignoring the previous comparative research and above all against the insufficient effort to link the study of populism with the study of other subjects and similar processes in other parts of Europe. Admittedly, authors from Europe's periphery tend to reflect, quote, and consult

the established Western authorities (from Müller to Marcus Morgan) while overlooking colleagues from their neighborhood. On the other hand, I have to praise Naxera's interest in how "historical references play a role in the process of populist othering" (p.136), the division between populism and nativism, and the excessive use of empty signifiers like "the pure people" and "the corrupt elite."

The next chapter, "Dog-Whistle Politics as a Strategy of American Nationalists and Populists: George Soros, The Rothschilds, and Other Conspiracy Theories," (pp.157–187) by Armin Langer, touches on similar questions. Here, the empty signifiers take on an antisemitic tone. Langer begins with the image of the "laughing Jew" from the fourteenth century, then moves on to the notion of the Jew as a Christ killer and the "Judeo-Bolshevik Jews" and their alleged "Jewish-communist takeover of the Western World" (pp.171–73). The only thing that changes is the manner of disqualifying the selected Jewish "traffickers in evil" and their "whores," both signifiers usually attributed to George Soros and his plan for "mass migration to Europe" (p.179). Soros was also a favorite of the Charlottesville branch of the white supremacist movement in Virginia in 2017. I particularly like the section in which Langer shows that dog-whistle politics can actually motivate maniacs to kill people (p.179) and discusses accusations brought against people like Trump supporter Cesar Sayoc, for instance, according to which Sayoc sent pipe bombs to the homes of George Soros, Barack Obama, and Bill and Hillary Clinton (accusations to which Sayoc pleaded guilty). Langer also points out the role of mass and social media in spreading antisemitic canards and radicalizing far-right adherents and terrorists (p.182).

From here, I would encourage the reader to proceed directly to "Henry Luce's Nationalist-Populist Crusade." I only propose this sequence because it is much easier to understand "Dog-Whistle Politics" if one reads Henry Luce's story immediately afterward. By personalizing the entire process in his chapter, "For the Sake of His Country: Henry Luce's Nationalist-Populist Crusade to Forge 'The American Century,'" Murat İplikçi has managed to present us with the rise of Americanism as a result of liberal democratic internationalism. What started as Wilsonianism grew with the help of people like Henry Luce into a systematic promotion of "American virtues to the world." After this idealistic approach was "crushed by cunning [...] isolationists in Congress" and following the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, the U.S. was forced to withdraw from its isolationism and began to embrace the idea of promoting its foreign policy in an "American way" (p.211).

As the cofounder of *Time* magazine and the founder of *Fortune*, Henry Luce was in more of a position than any other "internationalist" to promote Americanism on a daily basis and within popular culture. The final push in that direction was the launch of the weekly image-based *Life* magazine, which aimed to "bring the world to its readers" (p.213). İplikçi also provides interesting details from Luce's life, including his project "Keep Yale together," based on which "one-third of the students at Yale had left to be drafted for WWI" (p.215). Luce was in a position not only to "sell American business culture and capitalism" to entrepreneurs around the world and train them with American standards but also repeatedly to put the smiling faces of Al Capone, Stalin, Mussolini, and even Adolf Hitler on the front page of *Time*.

Compared to the chapter on Henry Luce's aggressive Americanization of the world, "Nationalism and Populism in Norwegian Historiography" by Steinar Aas feels like a pastoral. It is an extremely interesting one at that, especially for readers like me, who know little about methodological nationalism used among Norwegian historians. Starting with an intriguing introduction to the "poetics of Norwegian historiography," where "the nation was a foundation for the greater national narratives" (p.192), Aas moves on to discuss the distinctive "'social democratic order' cementing the social, political, and cultural structure of Norway" (p.193). He presents the narrative of the nineteenth-century struggle for independence, as well as the social and political development after industrialization, up to the discussion on "What do people consider as Norwegian?." It's fascinating to see how Aas balances the interpretation of the revitalization of Sami identity, coupled with the discovery of local and women's history, and the rising narrative of "democracy, people and populism, and populism and history writing." It's also interesting to see how historians help create the national master narrative about the Norwegian "pure people" and the Swedish "corrupt elite," which would later be adopted in the postmodern populist approach to the narrative of "the people as a cornerstone of the nation-state" (p.209).

Readers from Central European University will be particularly interested in and challenged by Jonah Robertson's "Catholicism, Polish Victimhood, and Nationalist Histories in Partitioned and Contemporary Poland," although it is clear from the outset that the chapter is not only about Catholic nationalists tying Catholicism to the very origins of the nation. It starts with a brief introduction to the partitions of the country. After two major uprisings (1830 and 1836), a de-Polonization campaign (with the closing of the University of Warsaw) culminated

in a harsh Russian "attack on Polish culture," where many towns and places were Russified and Russia ceased to use the name "The Kingdom of Poland" (pp.239–240). In addition to providing chronological and factual details, Robertson writes about the Poles' introverted nationalism, which serves as the foundation for a "somewhat idealized version of Polish history." Here, introverted nationalism—the definition is borrowed from Mayer Resnede's *Catholicism and Nationalism*—is also defined by framing the nation as superior to others and by seeing others as enemies (p.246). Finally, Robertson also successfully shows that "[t]he very ideas that allowed for the creation and preservation of a Polish national identity during the partitioned years continue to serve as key elements of contemporary Polish national identity." And even more importantly, he demonstrates how the ideas that were once used as methods of resistance and to prevent erasure are now employed to "erase diverse identities in favor of a homogenous national image" (p.251).

The analysis in Bjørn P. Müller-Bohn's "Populist Politics and the Rise of the AfD in Germany" of the AfD's descriptions of itself is particularly insightful: "We are neither left nor right [...] We only need healthy common sense [...] to regain national sovereignty" (pp.255–256). Müller-Bohn reconstructs the party's priorities and main accusations. He touches on the notion of "broken promises," a mix of aggressive anti-intellectualism, victimhood, and a claim for Lebensraum. In attempting to explain the rise of the AfD, Müller-Bohn turns to "neoliberalism turning market economy into market society" and the consequences of business-friendly labor market reform (Hartz IV) in 2003–2006. The prognosis is ominous. "By depicting themselves as victims of persecution [by the Altparteien], the New Right has adopted a defensive posture. By introducing a conservative-revolutionary habitus through platforms like Junge Freiheit and Sezession, the New Right has intellectualized right-wing extremism." And crucially, "By introducing their vocabulary in public, which then translates into a significant presence on the streets, given the right circumstances, the New Right has gained cultural ground" (p.261). Müller-Bohn is hardly mistaken in predicting that the AfD is well-positioned to capture even more votes than in the 2021 election. The recent regional election (Landtagswahlen, 2023) in Hessen, where the AfD (almost reaching the 20 percent mark) emerged as the second-strongest party, unfortunately, proves him right.

A similar trend is apparent in India, where Prime Minister Modi is systematically dismantling and destroying the emancipatory legacy of Jawaharlal Nehru. This legacy, articulated in Nehru's book *The Discovery of India*, is the starting

point for Britt Leake's last chapter in this volume, "The Positive Role of Islam in Indian History and Nehru's *The Discovery of India*." After reading this chapter, many (myself included) will be compelled at least to skim Nehru's book. It is crucial to any subtle understanding of today's India, which Nehru characterized as marked by a syncretic culture of tolerance and openness, embracing diverse influences—peoples, cultures, languages, and faiths—that seem vastly different on the surface" (p.276). Nehru underscored the critical role Muslims have played in an inclusive Indian nationalism, a particularly poignant message at a time "when populist Hindu nationalist forces seek to undo Indian secularism and reduce Indian Muslims to second-class citizens in their own country" (p.277).

Like any edited volume, *Nationalism and Populism* is an eclectic collection of texts. However, in this instance, it is a fortuitous mix of contributions and a well-conceived combination of works by authors of different generations using interdisciplinary approaches. Readers will learn a great deal, especially about Norway, India, Russia, and South Africa, areas about which many readers in Europe and the U.S. know very little. One only wishes that the editors had invited experts on Latin America or other parts of Asia and Africa, or on Southeastern Europe, with their variants of populist and nationalist narratives and rhetoric. Figures like Janez Janša, Viktor Orbán, and Aleksandar Vučić could serve as excellent case studies of small-scale, high-impact populism, particularly the latter, in the wake of contemporary Russian imperialism.

One should also mention Giorgia Meloni, who, according to David Broder, has "already [made it] clear [...] that post-fascism is not just a matter of 'returning to the past'" (p.176), but about writing a new (regional) history. Perhaps this volume will inspire someone to follow Schapkow's and Jacob's project and fill this gap.

In the meantime, I plan to use some of the chapters in my classes. I will also add it to my literature package. The contributing authors have provided basic knowledge about the current situations in various countries, and many of their findings are applicable to geographical contexts that are not explicitly covered in the volume.

Oto Luthar
Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts
oto.luthar@zrc-sazu.si

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Experimental Cinemas in State Socialist Eastern Europe. Edited by Ksenya Gurshtein and Sonja Simonyi. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2022. 334 pp.

Two things stood out for me in the process of working on this review. First, I was pleased to note that the secondary literature on Eastern European experimental cinema was not limited to what I was finding in the book. Interest in the topic can be traced back to a large exhibition and film series at the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. which was held in 2013–2014 and was curated by the two editors, Ksenya Gurshtein and Sonja Simonyi, who at the time were junior entrants to the field of film studies. There had been a seminar, and some of the scholarship it generated had appeared in a special issue of *Studies in Eastern European Cinema* in 2016.[1] Also, the list of researchers actively working on experimental cinema today includes an array of names beyond the authors who belong to this circle. It includes Pavle Levi (*Cinema by Other Means*, Oxford UP, 2012), Alice Lovejoy (*Army Film and the Avant Garde: Cinema and Experiment in the Czechoslovak Military*, Indiana UP, 2014), Lukas Brasiskis, Eva Näripea, Mina Radovic, and others. In short, three decades after the scholarship on Eastern European film started taking shape, there is a new generation of scholars whose research tackles new ground, offering comprehensiveness and depth.

Second, alongside my reading, I was able to watch several of the films discussed in the book. Again, times have changed dramatically in this respect. When I started researching Eastern European film back in the 1990s, we were limited to what we could acquire through personal networks on VHS. Today, most of the films that the authors write about are available on DVD, can be found in online vaults, or are accessible on YouTube. It is possible not only to read about them but also to see them. And I was delighted to do so, filling gaps in my knowledge of Józef Robakowski, Vukica Đilas, and *kinema-ikon*. Previously, we only had access to scholarship on Czech artist and filmmaker Jan

1 This issue includes also the lands of the former Soviet Union and opens with Gurshtein and Simonyi's introduction, "Experimenta cinema in State Socialist Eastern Europe." A further five articles include: Mark Allen Svede's "Selfie, sex tape, "snuff" film: Andris Grinberg's *Passporters*," (on Soviet Latvia), Cristian Nae's "Reality Unbound: The Politics of Fragmentation in the Experimental Productions of *knema ikon,*" (on the Timisoara group), Maria Vinogradova's "Scientists, Punks, Engineers and Gurus: Soviet Experimental Film Culture in the 1960s-1990s," (on Soviet Russia), Aida Vidan's "Irresistible Irreverence: Dusan Makavejev's Amateur Films and the Yugoslav Cine-club Scene," and Sonia Simonyi "Second Looks: Archival Aesthetics and Historical Representation in American Postcard (1975)," p. 68–82 (on Hungary's Gábor Bódy). All in *Studies in Eastern European Cinema*, Vol. 7, Issue 1–3, November 2016.

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Svankmajer and Polish filmmaker, director, screenwriter, and multimedia artist Zbig Rybczyński. They were also the only figures in this field of the arts on whom any scholarship had been published in English.[2]

Turning to the book, I would say two things about the context. One thing to keep in mind is that, when it comes to experimental film, the region of state socialist Eastern Europe offers an uneven and disparate picture which varies from country to country. What we find in Czechoslovakia, with filmmakers whose work can easily be qualified as experimental (I am thinking of figures such as Jan Němec, Juraj Jakubisko, Ester Krumbachová, etc.), is profoundly different from what one finds in Albania, for example. The other thing is that, unlike the officially sanctioned cinematic output which was a subject of intense exchanges between the countries under state socialist regimes, experimental film had only a low-key presence, and for the most part there were no meaningful creative exchanges among the cineastes working in the different countries. This lack of interaction among them means there were very few cases of mutual influence. It is thus no surprise that most of the influences that have been identified in secondary literature are from well-known figures of Western film and not from colleagues nearby.

If we keep these specifics in mind, the volume's effort to cover as many of the countries in the region as possible is particularly impressive. It does this mainly through case studies. I admire this approach, as it is both politically correct and equitable. Clearly, the context of filmmaking in some countries has been more conducive to experimental cinema, and Poland,[3] Hungary, and Yugoslavia undoubtedly have the most to show for it. Czechoslovakia was so advanced that much of what would qualify as experimental was, in fact, part of the mainstream, at least before 1968.

Against this backdrop, it was nice to see a chapter related to Bulgaria, one of the less active or less well-known countries in terms of film experimentation. The text resurrects the legacy of Russe-based filmmaker Vladimir Iliev, who passed away while the book was in preparation for publication. The notes written by scholar Katherina Lambrinova offer a nice complement to his memoir. In this instance, however, the desire to be comprehensive may have prompted the

2 I ought to mention Peter Hames' pioneering collection, *Dark Alchemy: The Films of Jan Svankmajer* (Praeger, 1995), which was a leading light at the time.

3 I cannot help thinking of some scenes in Krzysztof Kieślowski's feature *Camera Buff* (1979) which includes semi-documentary moments, revealing that even the national television in Poland at the time had departments charged with encouraging amateur and experimental filmmaking. A situation that is light years away from other places in the Eastern bloc.

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editors to be a bit loose with their criteria or perhaps to confuse their concepts. While the work of Iliev and his collaborators is of an amateur nature, it would be too much of a stretch to qualify it as "experimental."

Structurally, the collection is divided into four parts. It follows an unconventional approach, with a focus which ranges from individual directors to more general topics. The first part contains essays dedicated to high profile figures of the experimental scene, such as Hungarian Gábor Bódy (by Gábor Gelencsér), Croat/Yugoslav Tomislav Gotovac (by Greg de Cuir Jr.), and the Polish Workshop of the Film Form, represented by Pawel Kwiek and Józef Robakowski (by Łukasz Mojsak). These three case studies may well have seemed more substantial to the editors than the essays that explore context, and this consideration may lie behind the decision to place them first. I do not think this worked well, however, as this creates from the outset the feeling of a piecemeal approach where interesting works are discussed but not adequately contextualized.

I understand the difficulties behind this decision, however, and I sympathize. Due to the lack of interaction among the filmmakers, most of the secondary literature is limited to the case study format. It takes courage to make connections and venture generalizations, and I can see how scholars in the earlier stages of their careers are hesitant to do this, as they may fall victim to rebuke from some critical peer reviewer.

This is perhaps why the three subsequent parts continue, safely, in the same vein. The texts in the second section examine the production and distribution conditions. The essays deal with Bulgaria, Poland, and Yugoslavia, and they each explore a different corner of the experimental cinema map. Masha Shpolberg's contribution centers on the activities of the Łódź film school and specifically on the work of Wojciech Wiszniewski (1946–1981) and his Educational Film Studio. Petra Belc's essay casts the spotlight on the forgotten female filmmakers Vukica Đilas[4] and Tatjana Ivančić. All three essays in this section highlight, in part, the conditions of production and circulation of such material, and yet they are also case studies of sorts, not hugely different in structure and approach from what we saw in the first section.

Part three aims to integrate the contexts, theories, and reception. I particularly liked Aleksandar Bošković's text on an early experimental strip produced by

4 In my opinion, it would have been better to use the Westernised and phonetically true spelling of 'Djilas'. This is how her name is referenced at the IMDB. The Serbian language is now mainly using Cyrillic alphabet, and the rules of transliteration would have this appear as Djilas.

director Slobodan Šijan, who, even if operating more into the mainstream, was and remains a key inspiration and driving force behind experimental film in the lands of former Yugoslavia. The essay on the Timisoara-based group *kinema icon* by Ileana L. Selejan introduces this little-known but still active group, which is now gaining traction. There is also an essay on East German experimental film by Sean Howes, though at this point I question the wisdom of continuing to include East Germany, as so much of it has been appropriated by Germanists and so much has been written about it anyhow. The volume would have gained more from an essay on the status of experimental filmmaking in the Ukraine than from yet another piece on East Germany.

The last section, "Intersection of the Arts," brings together several disparate but highly satisfactory essays that finally broaden the horizon. Though they too take the form of the case study, they look at matters transnationally. There are texts on the Wrocław Art Scene (Marika Kuzmic), the Béla Balázs studio (Ksenya Gurshtein), and Czech experimentalist Čaroděj (Tomáš Glanc). Of these, I found the text by Sonja Simonyi on the 1979 exhibition of state socialist experimental film in Amsterdam the most interesting. A project pulled up by Franck Gribling, an Indonesian-born American experimental filmmaker based in Amsterdam,[5] is linked to similar efforts by some of the big European film festivals and often involving struggles that were just short of heroic to consolidate and present work from behind the Iron Curtain in a shared and convivial setting.

In conclusion, this is a highly relevant book that broadens and deepens the secondary literature on East European film. It also shifts the generational landscape by introducing a new generation of scholars. I am truly pleased to see it all grow and evolve into a new community, one that is not only more populous but also has a significantly wider geographical spread. Given the fact that many of the experimental films discussed can now be found on the internet, educators could consider including this material in their syllabi and could plan screenings accompanied by one of the essays in the book. This would be a fitting strategy for those teaching in area studies programs, as well as cultural history, film, or languages.

Dina Iordanova, Emeritus Professor in Global Cinema
University of St Andrews
dina.iordanova@st-andrews.ac.uk

5 His work is catalogued at the Amsterdam's Eye Filmmuseum today.

Corresponding Authors

Coudenys, Wim wim.coudenys@kuleuven.be	KU Leuven
Deák, Ágnes deakagnes@yahoo.com	University of Szeged
Dodds, Luke luke.dodds@kuleuven.be	KU Leuven
Hajtó, Vera	HUN-REN Research Centre for the Humanities
Herrera Crespo, Manuel manuel.herreracrespo@kuleuven.be	KU Leuven
Hőnich, Henrik honich.henrik@uni-nke.hu	National University of Public Service
Iordanova, Dina dina.iordanova@st-andrews.ac.uk	University of St Andrews
Kuźma, Elżbieta elzbieta.kuzma@ulb.be	Université Libre de Bruxelles
Luthar, Oto oto.luthar@zrc-sazu.si	Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts
Michela, Miroslav michaela.smidrkalova@gmail.com	Charles University, Prague
Praszałowicz, Dorota dorota.praszalowicz@uj.edu.pl	Jagiellonian University in Kraków
Scheibner, Tamás scheibner.tamas@abtk.hu	HUN-REN Research Centre for the Humanities
Šmidrkalová, Michaela smidrkalova@mua.cas.cz	Charles University, Prague
Żaliński, Adam adam.zalinski@uj.edu.pl	Jagiellonian University in Kraków

The

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The Hungarian Historical Review is a peer-reviewed international journal of the social sciences and humanities with a focus on Hungarian history. The journal's geographical scope—Hungary and East-Central Europe—makes it unique: the Hungarian Historical Review explores historical events in Hungary, but also raises broader questions in a transnational context. The articles and book reviews cover topics regarding Hungarian and East-Central European History. The journal aims to stimulate dialogue on Hungarian and East-Central European History in a transnational context. The journal fills lacuna, as it provides a forum for articles and reviews in English on Hungarian and East-Central European history, making Hungarian historiography accessible to the international reading public and part of the larger international scholarly discourse.

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East Central European Émigré Communities in the Low Countries

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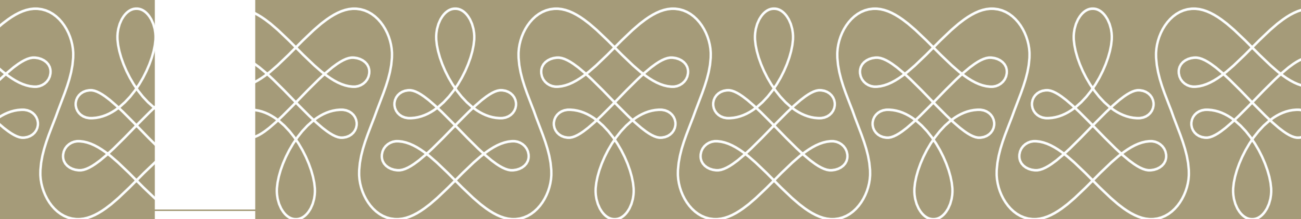

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