Abstract

After the armistice that marked the end of the Great War, the continuing conflict on Germany’s eastern border contributed to the weakened German self-image. Poles, newly confident and militaristic after having witnessed the rebirth of their nation, stood as a perceived, and oftentimes real, threat to the German state and identity. The present work explores how the experience of conflict between Germans and Poles on Germany’s eastern border contributed to a change in inflection of German stereotypes of Poles. Though still bearing the mark of 19th century stereotypes, which cast the Poles as backward and fit to be colonized, interwar propaganda added an image of Poles as an aggressive and militaristic threat to the German identity. The uprising in Posen and the administration of the Upper Silesian plebiscite stood out in Germans’ minds as examples of Germany's weakening sovereignty, not only in the face of its neighbor, but also at the hands of the Allies. When the Nazis came to power, they employed a renewed rhetoric of colonization of the east. Whereas Germany's colonies had been lost after the Great War, the Third Reich hoped to once again colonize the east.
To my parents, Piotr and Izabela. And to my grandmother, Zofia
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Vita

2010.................................................................B.A. with Honors in History and Political
Science, Case Western Reserve University

2012.................................................................M.A. History, The Ohio State University

2010 to present ..............................................Graduate Teaching Associate, Department
of History, The Ohio State University

Fields of Study

Major Field: History
# Table of Contents

Abstract ............................................................................................................................... ii

Dedication .......................................................................................................................... iii

Acknowledgments .............................................................................................................. iv

Vita ...................................................................................................................................... v

Chapter 1: Introduction ....................................................................................................... 1

Chapter 2: Germany’s Gaze toward the East, Self and Other ............................................. 7

Chapter 3: Weimar Germany and the Republic of Poland ............................................... 13

Chapter 4: A Return to Imperialism in Early Nazi Rhetoric ............................................ 36

Chapter 5: Conclusion ....................................................................................................... 52

Bibliography ..................................................................................................................... 55
Chapter 1: Introduction

One year after the armistice that signaled the end of the Great War, the German satirical magazine, *Kladderadatsch*, featured a cartoon that depicted the muse of History surrounded by a handful of clamoring children. Each figure represents a politician or scholar, loudly voicing a different concern. Academics and politicians from each end of the political spectrum tug at her sleeves. Visibly frustrated, she asks, “Children, how should I write history?”¹ As Clio’s demeanor suggests, the interwar years were rife with conflict in both action and interpretation in that they witnessed divisions between the SPD-led government in Berlin and other, more conservative, groups in Germany.² The violent disputes that erupted after the conclusion of the Great War over the German borderlands fostered discontent among nationalists and conservatives in eastern Germany and Prussia, a group that T. Hunt Tooley has termed the “borderlanders.”³ The struggle to make sense of violent aftermath of the Great War remains a burden. Interpretations must carefully straddle competing narratives and the sentiments which fueled them.

The present work explores how, beyond the experience of the Great War, the

¹ *Kladderadatsch*, November, 9, 1919.
² The Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (referred to in the text by its abbreviation, SPD), or Social Democratic Party of Germany, played a central role in coalitions during the years of the Weimar republic. For additional background on the formation of the Weimar Republic, see, for example, Mary Fulbrook, *A History of Germany, 1918-2008: The Divided Nation*. Malden, MA.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.
conflict-ridden postwar years helped to construct a new stereotype of Poles and Poland.\(^4\) Bolstered by the existing momentum of the 19\(^{th}\) century stereotypes, which portrayed the Poles as backward and fit to be colonized, the new militaristic inflection in depictions of Poles and Poland reflected and resonated with the revisionist aims of a defeated Germany, especially among so-called “borderlanders” who saw the lost territory as a crucial blow to German identity. Depictions of Poles as enemies to the German state and German identity in the 1920s and 30s found expression both in the politics of the Weimar Republic and specifically within the apparatus of the Nazi party. The Nazis employed negative stereotypes of Poles in their own campaign, which highlighted Polish racial inferiority and the plight of German minorities under Polish oppression across the border in an effort to revitalize German expansion eastward.

But the memory of the Great War produced domestic divisions not only in Germany; each country involved viewed the conflict through its own lens. Perhaps most surprisingly, the Poles achieved after the Great War what they had hoped for since the end of the 18\(^{th}\) century. After 123 years, Poland once again existed on the map of Europe. But for Poles, as for many of the participants, the armistice of November 11, 1918, did not signal the end of conflict. The task standing before the newly created Polish Republic was the consolidation of its borders, especially in the east. Under the leadership of Jósef Piłsudski, the newly created Republic entered a formative, but conflict-ridden period. After the postwar confusion of 1918 and early 1919, the outbreak of the Polish-Bolshevik

\(^4\) Many authors have traced the development of stereotypes between Poles and Germans as reflective of images of “self” and “other.” Generally, these have been mutually negative images. See, for example, Wojciech Wrzesiński, *Wokół stereotypów Niemców i Polaków*, (Wrocław: Wydawn. Universitetu Wrocławskiego, 1993).
War in 1920 saw Poland’s attempt to create its place in Europe.\(^5\)

Poland’s attempts at securing its borders were met with intense resistance from the German side. It appeared that while the competing factions of the newly created Weimar Republic could agree on very little, most found it essential that the eastern territories remain in German possession. The loss of the economic centers in Upper Silesia would only serve to amplify sentiments linked to the victimization that the Germans felt at the hands of the Allies after the war. The troubles of Article 231, commonly known as the ‘war guilt clause’ of the Treaty of Versailles, would only weigh more heavily if the coal-rich regions around Breslau/Wroclaw fell into Polish hands. These feelings of frustration and victimization found various forms of expression throughout the interwar years. Postwar cartoons, for instance, show soldiers returning to Germany on horses with drooping heads; one particularly vivid representation of the so-called *Dolchstosslegende* shows a soldier returning home greeted by a Jew. It is precisely these sentiments of defeat and “alien” presence that underwrote an important component of the appeal of Nazi aesthetics in the 1920s and early 1930s.\(^6\)

Increasingly attractive to the study of social and cultural history, images like those described above offer a window into the complex sentiments that characterized the German outlook during the aftermath of the Great War. W.J.T. Mitchell points out that in recent decades “visual images have replaced words as the dominant mode of expression

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in our culture.”

Although images did not stand out as the dominant mode through which Germans expressed revisionist attitudes, they do reflect the cultural and political milieu in which they were created. As Mitchell explains, the construction of images is a two-way street. Images are able to effectively illustrate abstract concepts, like desires and fears. Once these elements are present in a society, images can often act as agents of reinforcement, legitimization, or perpetuation. In his most recent monograph, Peter Burke reflects on the usefulness of images as a reliable historical source. Burke outlines a number of ways in which the representation of ideas through visual imagery can inform historical study. Just as portraits reflect images of the self, most images reflect their particular context. Therefore, even if images do not stand as direct evidence of a historical event or the existence of an abstract idea, they help point to historical context and facilitate historical imagination.

The use of images, it should be noted, extends beyond illustrations. The present historical study will include images taken not only from drawings, cartoons, and illustrations, but also images, broadly defined, presented in film, radio, and other media. The use of film, for example, served as a new and innovative way to present images in the postwar period; even General Erich Ludendorff, to note one example, extolled the merit of film. In 1917, Ludendorff wrote that the use of film was “absolutely imperative,” and should be used “in those areas where German intervention is still possible.”

As the proceeding paragraphs will illustrate, the use of film as a means of “propaganda and

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8 See: Peter Burke, Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 12, 30.
9 Friedrich A. Kittler, Gramophone, Film, Typewriter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 129
persuasion,” to borrow from Friedrich A. Kittler, did not end with the signing of the armistice in November of 1918. On the contrary, once the war was over, the dissemination of images by means of film became one of the few avenues that Germans saw for recourse against the postwar settlement.

This is not to say that frustration with the postwar settlement did not find expression in a number of tangible ways. Perhaps the most prominent manifestation of dissatisfaction was the continuation of armed conflict. Demobilized troops that returned to Germany from the front organized themselves into paramilitary units and played an active role in domestic politics immediately after the war. Known as the Freikorps, these groups participated in putting down domestic revolts by force, most famously during the Spartacist rebellion in January, 1919, which led to the murder of German socialist leaders Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. The Freikorps also focused their attention on conflicts around the disputed Polish-German border. As will be discussed below, these and other paramilitary groups took up the call of Grenzschutz (border protection) during the period of the Upper Silesian plebiscite.

The interwar German image of Poland reflects both change and continuity. Nineteenth century tropes resurface; Poles appear as unwashed or bestial. But the new atmosphere of

10 Kittler, 129.
11 For a relevant and in-depth discussion of the specific use of posters as propaganda, see Peter Paret, Beth Irwin Lewis, and Paul Paret, Persuasive Images: Posters of War and Revolution from the Hoover Institution Archives (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992). Paret, et.al, take the reader through various uses of political propaganda posters, beginning with the First World War and ending with the Second. The authors devote a great deal of attention to interwar propaganda, but do not include any images or discussions of Poland or the shared border between Poland and Germany. It is also interesting to note that the political propaganda poster originated in the 19th century.
12 As Annemarie H. Sammartino points out, visions of the east played a crucial role in the formation of Freikorps identity, which looked to the east as a new frontier for the creation of a German community. See: Annemarie H. Sammartino, The Impossible Border: Germany and the East, 1914-1922 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 16.
military conflict also presents aggressive and militaristic Poles greedy for German soil. An examination of these German depictions of the Polish “other” lends valuable insight into the German mindset of the period. An examination of such images also forces us to ask, to borrow from Mitchell: “what do pictures want?” The primary goal of much of the German interwar propaganda was to further revisionist aspirations. “Borderlanders,” members of the Reichswehr, and German nationalists supported a negative press and propaganda campaign to undermine not only the legitimacy of the newly-formed Polish state and the Versailles settlement, but also the new government in Berlin. These sentiments crystallized as stereotypes that helped shape the aesthetics, and therefore the circumstances, of the interwar period. By the time Hitler seized power, he and members of the NSDAP marshaled common stereotypes of Poles to promote a renewed interest in German imperialism.

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The continuation of conflict, especially in the East, is an often overlooked legacy of the Great War. But hostilities between the Germans and the Poles did not arise out of the Versailles settlement. Many Poles can recount the old adage: “As long as the world stands, a Pole and a German will not be brothers!” \(^\text{14}\) Although the origin of this phrase and its various alterations is unclear, it appears regularly by the mid-nineteenth century. \(^\text{15}\) As early as the Polish uprising in 1863, Bismarck remarked that the existence of an independent Polish state would stand as a threat to Prussia. \(^\text{16}\) These types of attitudes crystallized during Bismarck’s *Kulturkampf* of the 1870s. In Prussia, Bismarck’s measures sought to suppress both Catholicism and Polish identity. The increased impetus to Germanize Polish populations in the east would have important repercussions in the administration of the Upper Silesian plebiscite. For Wojciech Korfanty, a Polish nationalist member of the Reichstag and the leader of interwar uprisings, Bismarck’s *Kulturkampf* occurred within living memory.

In the 19\textsuperscript{th} as well as the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, Germany’s experience with its eastern frontier shaped German attitudes and politics. Germany’s relationship with the lands and

\(^{14}\) *Jak swiat swiatem - polak nie bedzie niemcowi bratem!*

\(^{15}\) The regular usage of this idiom is indicated by its appearance in a collection of Polish and German *Sprichwörter* in 1876. See, Hermann Frischbier, *Preussische Sprichwörter und folksthümliche Redensarten, Volume I* (1876).

\(^{16}\) There was a thread of pro-Polish sentiment in Germany that was quite strong up through the Vorparlament in Frankfurt in 1848, but lost support in the latter half of the nineteenth century. This pro-Polish sentiment was especially extoled in the DDR, after WWII. See: Andreas Dorpalen, *German History in Marxist Perspective: The East German Approach* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1985), 195.
people of the East in some ways mimics the famous Turner Frontier Thesis.\textsuperscript{17} Put simply, Frederick Jackson Turner espoused in the 1890s that the American frontier experience had profoundly affected American beliefs and institutions.\textsuperscript{18} Many aspects of the Turner thesis resonate with Germany, and the eastern frontier was seen primarily as a place for “internal colonization.” Political geographer, Friedrich Ratzel, developed the idea of \textit{Lebensraum} during the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century; the notion of eastward expansion on the basis of space became a key theme by the 1920s and 1930s. The theme of colonization characterized much of the way that Germans viewed the lands to the east. German attitudes toward the Poles and the lands inhabited by ethnic Polish populations manifested themselves in travelers’ accounts. Various published accounts helped bolster internal colonization with depictions of Polish “over-population and agrarian problems.”\textsuperscript{19}

Perhaps most illustrative of the attitudes that surrounded conceptions of the German eastern frontier is Gustav Freytag’s characterization of Poles in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century novel, \textit{Soll und Haben}. Jürgen Lieskounig argues that Freytag’s novel “confirms and enshrines all the powerful stereotypes concerning the Poles, justifying…their inability to have a history and a civilization.”\textsuperscript{20} Freytag portrays the Poles as inferior to Germans.

The lack of a Polish middle class is made apparent in contrast to the heavy focus on the

\textsuperscript{17} Alan E. Steinweis, “Eastern Europe and the Notion of the ‘Frontier’ in Germany to 1945,” in \textit{Germany and Eastern Europe: Cultural Identities and Cultural Differences}, ed. Keith Bullivant, et al. (Atlanta: Rodopi, 1999), 56.
\textsuperscript{20} Jürgen Lieskounig, “‘Branntweintrinkende Wilde’ Beyond Civilization and History: The Depiction of the Poles in Gustav Freytag’s Novel “Soll und Haben”,” in \textit{Germany and Eastern Europe: Cultural Identities and Cultural Differences}, 15.
middle-class virtue of the book’s protagonist, Anton Wohlfart. Freytag juxtaposes Wohlfart with the failing aristocracy as well as the childish and depraved Poles. In one representative scene, a Prussian watchman describes a Polish mob that had emerged from the forest. The “border rascals,” or “hungry, and emaciated…creatures,” had to be dispersed with gunfire after they began clamoring loudly for bread. Further on, the reader encounters more subservient Poles, pandering to their German masters, referring to Wohlfart and his companions as “your Grace,” in between “mouthfuls from Anton’s traveling flask.”

Emerging secondary literature has explored how the Great War brought with it a new German experience in the East. Vejas Gabrielle Liulevicius’ monograph, War Land on the Eastern Front, examines how the military and cultural program of the Oberost occupation served to shape postwar attitudes toward Eastern Europe. In short, the military utopia envisioned by Erich Ludendorff had largely been a failure. The Verkehrspolitik aimed at micromanaging transportation and communication only stifled economic activity and led to tensions between the occupiers and local populations. But because Poland was under civilian administration during the Great War, Liulevicius focuses his attention on the military occupation of ethnically Lithuanian lands further east. After the war, however, the boundary of the frontier shifted considerably westward for Germany. Cities, such as Breslau/Wroclaw and Kattowitz/Katowice, which had been under German control for over a century, found themselves on the other side of the German border by 1922. These losses, compared to defeat in the west, remained a very sore point in German

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national memory. Unlike the western front, the war in the east had been characterized by the victory at Tannenberg, the military prowess of Generals Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff, and the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. The notion that the east had been lost stood completely at odds with the German mind-set at the conclusion of the war.

In a recent monograph, Carroll P. Kakel offers a thorough comparison of the conception of the American West and the Nazi East. Early American and Nazi-German national projects of territorial expansion,” Kakel argues, “were strikingly similar projects.” But because Kakel focuses primarily on the view of Lebensraum as espoused by the Nazis, he misses the ways in which certain sentiments toward the east were unmistakably present before the Nazi seizure of power. And while the comparative nature of Kakel’s work highlights interesting parallels between two national stories, it is also important to examine how the complex and changing notion of the east had a unique impact on German identity. For Germans, the east was in flux in a way that waxed and waned. The interwar period saw “German” land reclaimed by the east; the colonizers had been cast back by the colonized.

In The Impossible Border: Germany and the East, 1914-1921, Annemarie H. Sammartino examines the effect that the contested eastern border had on German identity. Her primary focus is on German refugees from lands ceded to Poland after the First World War. This influx of migrants, she argues, highlighted the fragility of Germany’s power as a state. Germany’s weakness, in turn, led to frustrations among the

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German people with regards to the state’s inability to secure its borders. This crisis of sovereignty was primarily a result of developments in the east. As Sammartino explains, over 1 million migrants traveled into Germany from the east after the war. These included Germans, Jews, and Russians. These migrants not only put extra strain on the German nation, they were also a living reminder of the frustrations of the postwar settlement.

Sammartino’s work complements the present study in a number of ways. First, the situations of expelled Germans were of great concern to the German population writ large. These anxieties found expression in a number of ways, which also sought to undermine the legitimacy of the Polish state. This was especially true in the case of the propaganda of the NSDAP. Furthermore, Sammartino’s work highlights the creation of a weak German self-image. Since the German state was not able to assert its own sovereignty in the face of territorial losses, this sense of vulnerability lead to a sense of frustration among the German population, who wished to see their borderlands protected. These frustrations and desires played a significant role in shaping the depiction of the Pole as the “other.” As such, the timbre of interwar relations between Germany and Poland was characterized by Germany’s weak self-perception on the one hand, and Poland’s newly-found confidence on the other.

But the consequences of defeat extended beyond the European continent. In addition to the territory ceded to European powers, Germany was stripped of its colonies after the war. Again, this served as a significant blow to the German self-image. The

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23 Sammartino, 4.
acquisition of colonial territory abroad was a feat associated with the status of a Great Power during the latter half of the nineteenth century. It was during the post-unification period that the policies of Weltpolitik sought to create an overseas German empire. These territorial holdings had a significant influence on the way Germans viewed themselves. As Sebastian Conrad explains, the process of globalization and imperialism that occurred at the end of the nineteenth century was crucially linked to the development of national identity. This was especially true for Germany. One must keep in mind that the size of East Africa alone is about three times larger than the size of Germany today.

The colonization of Africa and the colonization of the east were intimately related in the creation of German identity in the late-nineteenth century. Kristin Kopp reiterates this relationship. She explains that the overseas imperialism and inner-colonization of the east were two simultaneous “colonial projects at the end of the nineteenth century.” Indeed, the acquisition of Germany’s first overseas colonies in Africa coincided with the campaign to Germanize the Polish populations of Prussia. All of this, and more, had been lost after the Great War. Germany was no longer a superpower on the international scene. It was a defeated nation, struggling to come to terms with its own weakness. imperialism.

24 Though beyond the scope of the present work, the influence of imperialism was crucial in shaping the German self-image. Conrad argues that the characteristics of late 19th century nationalism was the demarcation of national lines. Consider, then, how the shifting eastern borders would have wreaked havoc upon Germany’s perception of its own nationhood. See: Sebastian Conrad, *Globalization and the Nation in Imperial Germany* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 23.

Chapter 3: Weimar Germany and the Republic of Poland

The assertiveness of the new Polish Republic likely did not come as a total surprise to the Germans. In 1916, Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany and Franz Joseph of Austria declared their intention to create a Kingdom of Poland as a puppet state in an effort to draw new recruits from Russian-Polish lands for the Eastern Front. Released fourteen days after the so-called Act of 5th November, the cover art for the German satirical publication Kladderadatsch shows the silhouettes of a German and Austrian soldier standing beside an opened cage. Above the two shadowy figures flies a majestic white eagle, a crown of gold upon its head as it soars away from a copula-shaped cage reminiscent of an Orthodox church. The German says to the Austrian, “If only we release him from this Moscovite cage – he will be able to fly.”\textsuperscript{26} The soldiers in this illustration, ironically, appear powerless to reign in the soaring white eagle, whose piercing gaze is both proud and menacing. The following years would reveal the immense difficulty of caging the newly-freed Polish Republic.

The Germans did, in fact, attempt to cage the figurative Polish eagle once it became clear that the Central Powers would not be able to mold a loyal puppet state out of former Russian territory. Having led the Polish Legions on the side of the Central Powers for two years, Jósef Piłsudski was arrested on July 22, 1917, and imprisoned in

\textsuperscript{26} Kladderadatsch, November, 19, 1916.
Magdeburg Castle, where he would spend the remainder of the war.\textsuperscript{27} Piłsudski’s arrest came after the refusal of the Polish Legions to pledge allegiance to the Central Powers. After the Central Powers had dissolved the Legions and dispersed over 3,000 men, Piłsudski met with General von Beseler to discuss future Polish allegiance to the German Reich. Piłsudski told the General that swearing loyalty to Germany would only “gain [Germany] one Pole,” but it would lose Piłsudski “a whole people.”\textsuperscript{28} Shortly after his meeting with von Beseler, two vehicles showed up to apprehend Piłsudski in Warsaw. Piłsudski’s cage, however, would not remain shut for long. The outbreak of revolution in Germany saw Piłsudski freed from his year of imprisonment at Magdeburg and taken by car to Berlin. Unable to return to Warsaw immediately because of the widespread unrest, Piłsudski remained for a short time in Germany. The abdication of the Emperor on November 9 sent Germany into frenzy and made the situation in Poland worse, as well. Already nervous about the state of Poland during the course of the war, Piłsudski learned that after revolution broke out, von Beseler, who had been Governor-General of occupied Poland, fled in a boat and left Poland without a government.\textsuperscript{29}

Indeed, Warsaw was a “capital without a state” when Jósef Piłsudski arrived on November 10, 1918.\textsuperscript{30} The tasks that faced the Marshal were nothing short of enormous. First, a government had to be created to replace the existing Polish National Committee in Paris and what was left of the defunct Regency Council in Warsaw. While Piłsudski was in prison, the leadership of Poland became frustratingly fragmented and

\textsuperscript{29} Reddaway, 101.
\textsuperscript{30} Reddaway, 102.
disorganized, spread not only around Europe, but also across the Atlantic. On the continent it was Roman Dmowski who traveled around and championed the Polish cause to the Allies, while the former member of the Polish National Committee, Ignacy Jan Paderewski, had settled in the United States for the time being. The second task that faced Piłsudski was the creation of a military force. But to the seasoned militarist, the accomplishment of the second task facilitated the completion of the first.31

In order to create a government Piłsudski had to reconcile the existence of his government with the already existing Polish National Committee in Paris. The Poles in Paris not only had a government, but also a well-furnished army under Józef Haller. It was Paderewski that helped to bridge the gap between the two existing Polish governments. Armed with an appeal by Piłsudski to do what was best for Poland, Paderewski worked with Dmowski to prevent Poland from appearing weak and fractured to the Allied governments. While Paderewski and Dmowski worked out an agreement to put together a Polish government, Piłsudski remained interested in the Polish army. Haller’s forces were desperately needed to help Poland against Ukraine in the east, as the Poles in France at this time were better supplied. By the end of 1919, Haller had moved into Poland and received a promotion from Piłsudski, who reorganized and incorporated Haller’s army into the Polish national army.32

After accepting power as the Chief of State and the Commander in Chief of the Republic from the Regency Council, Piłsudski hoped to facilitate at least cordial relations with Poland’s closest western neighbor. As W.F. Reddaway recounts, Piłsudski addressed

32 Jędrzejewicz, 86.
a group of German soldiers before departing for Warsaw. He insisted that the soldiers accept the authority of the new revolutionary regime and move past the wrongdoings of the former government. Speaking on behalf of the Polish people, Piłsudski assured the soldiers that “blood enough has flowed; shed not another drop…they [the Polish people] would not, and will not, avenge the sins of your government.” Furthermore, Piłsudski beseeched both the Poles and Germans to refrain from the unlawful distribution of arms; “a soldier does no traffic in his arms,” he called to the small crowd that was present at his release.

Piłsudski hoped to facilitate the peaceful removal of German troops from the Eastern Kresy, or former Oberost. In a meeting with Hugo Graf von und zu Lerchenfeld a few days after Piłsudski’s return to Poland, the statesmen made an attempt to negotiate the peaceful removal of troops and support all the necessary steps to maintain a neutral relationship between the neighboring countries. Despite Piłsudski’s request that soldiers be allowed to move out of Poland unmolested, the logistics of demilitarization of the Eastern Front proved far more turbulent. According to some reports, Polish paramilitary groups had made attempts to disarm German soldiers, with lives lost on both sides. In Germany, the Weimar government was riven with fissures, with each part of the political spectrum wanting to approach the situation in the east differently. The SPD-led

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33 Quoted in W.F. Reddaway, 103. Reddaway’s study is alarmingly vague with regards to citation of sources; I will do my best to indicate where liberties have been taken by accepting Reddaway’s interpretations. The anecdotal details of his work, however, are useful in reconstructing Piłsudski’s train of thought after release from prison.

34 Reddaway, 103.


36 Jędrzejewicz, 72.
government, for example, wanted to achieve stability in the eastern provinces and saw cooperation with the Poles as the most prudent approach. Conservatives, on the other hand, bemoaned what was perceived as a subsequent lack of support from Berlin. Most importantly, perhaps, the occupying forces in the Oberost had not been defeated. As a result, the early months of the Weimar Republic saw a power struggle between the Soldiers’ Councils, the Auswärtiges Amt (AA, or Foreign Office), and members of the Reichswehr. Soon after von und zu Lerchenfeld’s meeting with Piłsudski, the Supreme Army Command issued a statement to the AA, which called for the annulment of any negotiations between the Soldier’s Councils and the Polish government. Henceforth, the report asserted, German forces would meet intrusions by Poles into occupied areas with force.  

In this regard, the tone of the discussion between Hugo Graf von und zu Lerchenfeld and Piłsudski, as well as the result of the demilitarization of the Oberost, appears to have been exceptional. Von und zu Lerchenfeld had been the Bavarian prime minister and had maintained a good relationship with the SPD. Conversely, as Liulevicious has illustrated, the members of the Supreme Army Command had a vision of the Eastern Kresy shaped by the experience of the Oberost that proved difficult to abandon. While members of the AA insisted that the evacuation of the Oberost should be followed by a final decision between Poland and Lithuania in a Peace Congress, the military stood strongly opposed. Writing in 1919, Erich von Falkenhayn criticized the agreements reached between the AA and the Polish government. In his report, von

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Falkenhayn asserted that such agreements were “inappropriate,” and should be left to the military authorities.  

This is not to say that the Auswärtiges Amt was in support of the newly formed Polish Republic. The primary difference between the attitudes of the Reichswehr and the AA was in their long-term approach to undermining Poland’s legitimacy as a state. Erich Ludendorff and Hans von Seeckt remained committed to maintaining control of the East. Secondary scholarship has outlined the attempts by the Reichswehr at working with the Russians to undermine Poland even before the armistice of 1918. The government in Berlin, however, preferred less overt confrontation with Poland and focused on the possibility of using either political or economic measures. Illustrative of this is the view of Gustav Stresemann, Foreign Minister and head of the AA from 1923 to 1929. In 1926, Stresemann, who had been a strong proponent of German dominance over Mitteleuropa during the course of the Great War, proposed that the question of Germany’s eastern border be handled by “achieving in Poland an extreme economic and financial collapse, which would bring the entire country into a state of powerlessness.” Stresemann supported the removal of German capital from Polish banks, in hopes that its own internal weakness would soon eliminate the Polish state and secure Germany’s position in

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The evacuation of the German troops from the Oberost resulted in limited conflicts and Poland saw itself liberated from occupation by the end of November, 1919. But the demilitarization of the Oberost, though a success from the perspective of Polish-German relations, left the door open for conflict on Poland’s undefined eastern border. In the end, Poland’s boundaries would be decided through the decisive military campaigns led by Piłsudski against the Bolsheviks in the east and the various uprisings that took place in the west. In April of 1920, Piłsudski moved Polish forces into Ukraine and began to wage war against the Bolshevik threat. The conflict was more piecemeal and less well organized in the west; though recent scholarship has suggested that Piłsudksi and the government in Warsaw had closer ties with the paramilitary forces in the west than previously thought. Moreso than the Polish-Bolshevik war, the activities on Germany’s eastern border posed a threat to the immediate interests of German nationalists. As a result, numerous conflicts broke out between the end of the Great War and the completion of the Upper Silesian plebiscite in March of 1921.

Whether or not Piłsudski’s request that defecting soldiers refrain from selling their arms helped curb violence during the demilitarization of the Oberost, his exhortation nevertheless fell on deaf ears on the Polish-German border. By late 1918, Polish nationalists organized the Naczelna Rada Ludowa (NRL, or Supreme National Council) and sought to assert themselves in Posen/Poznań by calling for a Polish-Prussian

\[41\] For more on Stesemann’s economic motives, see Shelley Baranowski, *Nazi Empire: German Colonialism and Imperialism from Bismarck to Hitler* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 149.
parliament, or *sejm*. The sale and confiscation of arms from German units and armories helped in large part to arm the Polish nationalists who supported the provisional government set up by the NRL. Various Polish organizations gave their support to the NRL; these included the Sokół Societies, Harcerzy, and the Polska Organizacja Wojskowa (POW, or Polish Military Organization). These organizations were also complemented by spreading Soldiers’ Councils and their supporters. In Posen/Poznań the Wach- und Sicherheitsdienst boasted nearly 2,000 armed members to add to the 5,800 members of various militia groups.\(^{42}\) Initially, the power politics in Posen/Poznań went relatively smoothly and localized conflicts dissolved without the use of excessive force. As Richard Blanke explains, this stemmed from a relatively weak presence of the German SPD in the area and the organizational skill of the Polish intelligentsia, whose members sat on the Polish national councils as well as the Workers’ and Soldiers’ Councils. With Berlin caught in the midst of its own turmoil, the local populations, seeing no better alternative, cooperated with the Poles.\(^{43}\)

But the delay in response from Berlin did not go unnoticed by German nationalists. While the Poles began to organize elections to a new *sejm*, confident that this would bring Posen/Poznań fully into Polish possession, Prussians began to appeal to the Allies and to President Woodrow Wilson.\(^{44}\) A new dynamic of Polish militarism began to emerge in a deliberate attempt to shape the postwar settlement in Germany’s favor. The fissure between Prussian “borderlander” interests and the interests of the SPD-led

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\(^{43}\) Blanke, 12.

government began to crystalize as the interests of the Prussians began to diverge from that of Berlin. On one hand, representatives of the government in Berlin saw the NRL as an effective stabilizing force in an otherwise turbulent setting. Paul Goehre, Undersecretary of Defense in Berlin, assured the NRL and the Soldiers’ Council in Posen/Poznań that the government would not use force in order to avoid provoking further conflict. The “borderlanders,” on the other hand, looked toward local action after they sensed a lack of support from Berlin. Illustrative of this were the actions of Georg Cleinow, member of the Deutscher Ostmarkenverein and editor of the nationalistic newspaper Die Grenzboten. Cleinow founded the Deutsche Vereinigung in December of 1918 after working in the press office of the German army in Litzmannstadt/Lodz and Warsaw since 1914. The Deutschte Vereinigung worked against the Polish nationalists in Posen/Poznań, as well as against the government in Berlin by denouncing the newly formed German government for neglecting the situation in Posen/Poznań to President Wilson and the Allied powers.

While Piłsudski focused his attention on Poland’s eastern border, Dmowski and Paderewski offered their support for the NRL in Posen/Poznań. In December of 1918, Paderewski visited the province, where he was met by a mixed greeting. The Polish population welcomed him, while local Germans, perhaps influenced by the campaigns of Cleinow’s Deutsche Vereinigung and other Grenzschutz organizations, staged anti-Polish demonstrations. The result was the military occupation of Posen/Poznań by Polish

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45 Blanke, 12.
47 Blanke, 13.
militias. As Richard Blanke explains, the historiographic discourse surrounding the Polish military occupation of Posen/Poznań has yet to be settled. There is certainly a dearth of Anglophone interest in the topic, and much of the work done in Polish and German remains from the first half of the twentieth century. It is unclear whether the Polish militia acted in response to provocations from Grenzschutz units and the “growing assertiveness of the German nationalists,” or as a way to rival the creation of the government in Warsaw. From the German perspective, Blanke asserts that the military occupation appeared as a “well-planned coup,” which took advantage of the “demoralized and disorganized” German population.48

The aftermath of the seizure of Posen/Poznań also demoralized the rest of the German population. The influx of refugees contributed both to the negative image of the Poles, and to the feelings of German victimization. Organizations like the Deutscher Heimatbund Posener Flüchtlinge pressed the German state for monetary assistance for the refugees.49 Beyond the assistance for refugees, the concern for the German minority found expression in the financial assistance given to numerous German organizations in Poland as well as in attempts to undermine the legitimacy of Poland through a negative press propaganda campaign.

It is also in the conflict between those interested in the protection of the former areas of East Prussia and the newly formed socialist government in Berlin that one sees how attitudes towards the east went beyond the experience of the failed military utopia in the east described by Liulevicious. This new constituency was made up of not only

48 Blanke, 15.
49 Sammartino, 102.
military personnel, but also nationalist groups who sought to retain German territories in
the East. One of the oldest nationalistic groups involved in the struggle for Posen/Poznań
was the Deutscher Ostmarkenverein (German Eastern Marches Society). Founded in
1894, the group sought to continue the Germanization of Posen/Poznań following
Bismarck’s Kulturkampf. After the end of the Great War, a number of new societies,
known collectively as Ostverbände (East Organizations), emerged. Cleinow’s Deutsche
Vereinigung was but one example. There also emerged a number of academic institutions
focused on the research of the east, known as Ostforschung (East Research). While
institutes that focused on anti-Polish research existed since the nineteenth century, the
period after the failure of the November 5th, 1916, decree to secure loyalty from Poland
saw a growth in such interest. Institutes for Ostforschung emerged in 1916 at the Institute
for East German Economy in Königsberg, in 1917 at the Institute for Foreign Relations in
Stuttgart and the Institute for Eastern Europe in Breslau/Wrocław, and in 1920 at the
Institute of Domestic and Foreign Studies at Spandau.  

After the uprising in Posen/Poznań, right-wing nationalists and former members
of the military began an especially vocal campaign against the perceived Polish threat.
One of the most vocal on the floor of the Reichstag and among the members of the
Auswärtiges Amt was Rudolf Nadolny. A German diplomat and member of the AA,
Nadolny was born in Groß-Stürlack bei Lötzen in 1873. He entered into the AA in Berlin

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50 The German Society for the Eastern Marches was one of many nationalistic organizations that emerged around the turn of the century, along with the Pan-German League (1891), the Colonial Society (1887), the Navy League (1898). These were part of what David Blackbourn calls, a “heightenend national awareness and nationalist sentiment” that emerged during the prewar years; David Blackbourn, History of Germany 1780-1918: the Long Nineteenth Century (Malden, MA.: Blackwell Publishing, 1997), 321.
51 Król, 62.
in 1902 and served as vice-consul in St. Petersburg until 1907. During the First World
War, Nadolny was first the adjunct to the 5th Grenadier Guards Regiment and later the
director of Sektion P., the German military’s sabotage department. After the uprising in
Posen/Poznań, Nadolny devised a plan to counter Polish demands on Germany’s eastern
territories. He wrote in January of 1919:

“[Polish] claims for the aforementioned areas are all groundless. East Prussian
regions… have only a period of Polish annexation to report, like Russia and the
rule of the Tatars. Only the eastern part of the government district of Posen is
historically Polish soil, but even this area is…not separable from Germany and
should therefore not be abandoned offhand.”

To counteract Polish aggression, Nadolny recommended that Germany engage in a
“systematic anti-Polish press propaganda campaign.” He also supported efforts to
cooperate with Lithuania, Ukraine, and Russia in an effort to “work toward [maintaining]
as small a Poland as possible.”

This attitude resonated not only with members of Reichswehr, but also with
nationalist sentiment throughout Germany as the Polish seizure of Posen/Poznań fanned
German feeling of victimization. An edition of Kladderatasch published three days after
Nadolny’s call for an anti-Polish press campaign already cried out against the bestial
Polish aggressors. The cartoon depicts a sled drawn by a team of horses under attack by a
pack of wolves labeled “Polen.” The driver of the sled, Germania, regaled in studded

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52 “Kurzbiographien Der Personen in Den ‘Akten Der Reichskanzlei, Weimarer Republik’”, n.d.
http://www.bundesarchiv.de/aktenreichskanzlei/1919-1933/0000/adr/adrmr/kap1_2/para2_1.html.
armor, defends her precious cargo, marked Posen, Breslau/Wroclaw, and Danzig, from the wolves’ foray. But as the horses gallop ahead frantically, avoiding the teeth at their hooves, one of the raiders sinks its teeth into the parcel marked Posen.\footnote{“Kladderadatsch,” January, 26, 1919, 5. Henceforth, unless otherwise stated, images referred to in the text are found in Eugeniusz Cezary Król’s extended (over 200 pages) appendix to Polska I Polacy. Copies of many of the images can be found at the Hoover Institute.}

The wolves, however, symbolize more than greedy Poles. The imagery of the wolf emerging from the forest, just as the Polish mobs emerged from the forest from Freytag’s novel, is an image arguably as old as civilization itself. If the Germans saw themselves as the bearers of Kultur, and thus civilization, then the expulsion of Germans from the eastern lands represented a triumph of the forest. “The mythic forests of antiquity,” Robert Pogue Harrison argues, “stand opposed to the city in some fundamental way.” This sentiment is echoed by Vico, who in his New Science, written in 1744, explained the ways in which forests are the antithesis of civilization.\footnote{Robert Pogue Harrison, Forests: The Shadow of Civilization (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 2.} W.J.T. Mitchell’s analysis of imagery provides a useful link between the fears of the forest that Harrison describes and the depiction of Poles as wild, savage creatures that emerge from these places outside of civilization. Simply put, Mitchell argues that images reflect abstract fears of a society. Therefore, what is unknown and dangerous often finds expression in images such as the one described above. If fear of the forest reaches back to the beginning of civilization, it is reasonable to expect that the message of such imagery was not lost on its German audience. The fear of the forest is something imbedded deep within the members of any civilization, just as the fear of protecting German Kultur would have been imbedded in the minds of interwar Germans, especially those with
affiliations to the eastern borderlands.

Among the members of the Reichswehr, the anti-Polish views of General Hans von Seeckt, who had served as the army’s Chief of Staff until 1919, were perhaps the most visible. During the height of the Polish-Bolshevik war in 1920 von Seeckt wrote that “at present [Germany] has no greater enemy [than the Poles].”56 After the Polish acquisition of Posen/Poznań and Upper Silesia, von Seeckt maintained that “Poland’s existence is intolerable, incompatible with the survival of Germany…With Poland will fall one of the strongest pillars of the Treaty of Versailles.”57 To von Seeckt, Poland stood as one of the major obstacles to the revision of the Treaty of Versailles. As Francis Ludwig Carsten recounts in his study of the interwar Reichswehr, von Seeckt’s efforts at undermining Poland and the Treaty of Versailles played a large role in his close relationship with the Russians. That the constitution appointed Ebert as commander-in-chief of the Reichswehr “meant very little in practice;” von Seeckt and other members of the Reichswehr clandestinely discussed the finance of Russian enterprises through Ruhr industry and the exchange of war materials between the two nations throughout the 1920s.58 These plans came to fruition with the signing of the Treaty of Rapallo in 1922 and the subsequent establishment of an officer training school in the Soviet Union, known as Kama. Kama played an important role in the “rearmament and militarization” of Germany by training military elites and developing radio communication technology in

56 Król, 55.
57 Carsten, 141.
58 Carsten, 142.
tanks.\textsuperscript{59} As such, the Treaty of Rapallo was primarily a future plan to “dismember Poland and exact revenge on the Western victors in World War I.”\textsuperscript{60} Even prior to the negotiations of the Treaty of Rapallo, the Reichswehr cooperated with Russia by offering intelligence in an effort to undermine Poland’s success in the Polish-Bolshevik war.

While the Reichswehr worked closely with the Russians in defiance of the Treaty of Versailles, a less covert campaign aimed at undermining the legitimacy of the newly formed Polish Republic centered on conflict surrounding the Upper Silesian plebiscite in 1921. Władysław Zieliński offers an in-depth account of how the Germans and the Poles employed competing stereotypes as a way to sway votes in Upper Silesia. Because Upper Silesia had been part of the German Reich, the German propaganda apparatus enjoyed the upper hand in the dissemination of material. The relative stability of the Weimar Republic compared to Poland also meant easier access to funds for the German propaganda and paramilitary apparatus.\textsuperscript{61} In their campaign, the Germans emphasized politics and economics, arguing that Upper Silesia would continue to prosper only under German control. The Poles, on the other hand had to rely only on “spontaneous, mass patriotic demonstrations…unfortunately not backed up by any real organized campaign.”\textsuperscript{62} The NRL, which had formed at the end of 1918 in Posen/Poznań was unable to effectively extend its support to Upper Silesia and ceased to exist by May of 1919.

\textsuperscript{60} Sammartino, 9.
\textsuperscript{61} Władysław Zieliński, \textit{Polska i Niemiecka Propaganda Plebiscytowa na Górnym Śląsku} (Wrocław: Ossolińskich, 1973), 250
\textsuperscript{62} Zieliński, 175.
The disparity between Poland and German organization in the region led to numerous conflicts, many of which the Allies resolved in favor of the Poles much to the outrage of the Germans. The first insurrections in Upper Silesia occurred in the months following the seizure of Posen/Poznań. Though Germany retained possession of the region, the Allies urged that the insurgents be granted amnesty. Over the following year local elections saw a shift toward Polish administration in numerous communities. After an appeal by the Germans to put an end to what became referred to as “the Posen pattern,” the Allies stepped in to govern the region jointly between France, Italy, and Great Britain. Roughly 20,000 Allied troops occupied Upper Silesia until the vote took place in 1921. The presence of the Allies removed much of the threat of political violence, and while occasional conflicts did break out, the removal of the Grenzschutz organizations and the presence of Allied military forces, primarily headed by the French, curbed violence in the months leading up to the vote. Among the Allied forces, the French had the most influence in Upper Silesia, much to the displeasure of the Germans. This was not, however, simply a matter of unjust bias against the Germans on the part of France. T. Hunt Tooley adduces evidence to show that French control of Upper Silesia resulted primarily from “the failure of the United States to join the Commission and the refusal of Britain and Italy to allot additional funds or men.”

The content of the propaganda that circulated during the time of the conflict over Upper Silesia reflects both the continuation of 19th century stereotypes of Poles and the

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new desire to challenge the Treaty of Versailles by painting the Poles as a military threat. Much of the German propaganda stressed that Poland was politically and economically unfit to ensure a successful and prosperous future for the major industrial centers in Upper Silesia; these included Kattowitz/Katowice and Breslau/Wrocław. One of the earliest posters circulated in 1919 showed groups of Poles, similar to the groups of peasants described by Freytag’s novel, huddled together, hungry, with torn clothes. The caption reads: “This is what the Polish emigrants look like – and you will also look like this if Silesia goes to Poland. Upper Silesians! Stay with the new Germany!”⁶⁵ A later image points more directly to the economic shortcomings of the Polish Republic. The poster circulated in 1921 depicts a grown man with a tiny loaf of bread in his hand. The man figure represents the future facing Silesians in Poland. Next to him stands a child holding a loaf of bread almost too large to carry, signifying the abundant buying power one could hope for under German rule. The caption explains that the Polish currency is weaker than the German Reichsmark due to inflation.⁶⁶

The economic promise did not fall on deaf ears. Indeed, many middle-class Poles living in Upper Silesia associated their economic well-being with the Germanization of the region. To counter these sentiments, Polish propaganda stressed national unity and the promise of freedom for Poland. A piece of Polish propaganda from the same period shows the Polish eagle emerging from the smoke-stack of a dreary and drab industrial

⁶⁵ “So sehen die polnischen Auswanderer aus, und so werdet Ihr auch aussehen, wenn Schlesien zu Polen kommt. Oberschlesier! Bleibt beim neuen Deutschland!” 1919, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.
plant. The eagle is poised to fly away from the influence of Germanization. The caption reads, “Vote for Poland and you will be free.”

Other images pointed more directly to the militaristic nature of the Poles and their support from the French. An illustration in the German satirical publication *Simplicissimus* showed a German tied up with a gun pointed to his head by a member of the Polish militia. The Pole demands that the German relent, or be shot; the caption reads: “The disarmament in Upper Silesia.”

Another image from *Simplicissimus*, this time from early November, 1920, points more directly to the alleged French support of Polish aggression. In a burning city, two Polish militiamen emerge from the window of a German home. Both are dirty and brutish-looking. One holds a hatchet, while the other brandishes a bloodied sword in his mouth as he emerges over the windowsill. A French officer, characterized by the lit cigarette in his gloved hand, asks the soldiers whether they have “silenced a few German votes.”

The result of the plebiscite, which was held on March 20, 1921, was sub-optimal for the Germans. Initially, it appeared as though Germany had taken the day. With a voter turnout of nearly 98 percent, a majority voted to keep Upper Silesia in Germany. Even in areas that allegedly contained a majority of Polish speakers, as many as sixty percent of the votes went to the Germans. Some scholars have marshaled evidence to support the assertion that Poles living in urban centers probably tended to associate material well-being with Germany, whereas the rural and industrial poor based their votes on religious

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67 Provenance of image unknown.
68 “Simplicissimus,” September 26, 1920, 11.
affiliation. In his thorough analysis of voting patterns of the various districts in Upper Silesia, Blanke concludes that, all things considered, the plebiscite vote produced a “fairly accurate reflection of the desires of the populace.”\(^7\) But holding on to claims that German political violence had swayed the plebiscite vote, Polish nationalists, led by the activist and paramilitary organizer Wojciech Korfanty, staged another uprising. As a result of the continued violence, the Allied commission in charge of overseeing the administration of Upper Silesia passed the decision to the League of Nations. The League subsequently ruled to award Poland one third of Upper Silesia, which included two-thirds of the major industrial centers. Among these was the city of Kattowitz/Katowice, the main city in the Upper Silesian industrial region, and Auschwitz.

The loss of Kattowitz/Katowice and the surrounding region became a thorn in the side of borderlanders and German nationalists. And the pain only seemed to grow with time. Over the next decade, negative and militaristic depictions of Poles found their way into other forms of mass media and disseminated into the popular culture of Weimar Germany. Illustrative of this trend is the widely popular film, *Land Unterem Kreuz*, which was released in 1927. A handful of films emerged in the aftermath of the plebiscite dispute, most notably *Brennendes Land*, and *Kampf um die Heimat. Land Unterem Kreuz*, however, enjoyed the most widespread publicity. The film premiered at a local theater in Upper Silesia, in March of 1927. The initial showing included mostly local elites, but the film took off in popularity after its premier in Berlin shortly thereafter. As

Eugeniusz Król recounts, the film enjoyed special screenings at German schools, political gatherings, and among various social and cultural clubs. This upset many Poles, including a Polish representative in Germany, who angrily wrote to the AA denouncing the film as a blow to relations between the two countries.\textsuperscript{71}

It is important to bear in mind that nationalists and militarist did not constitute all of Weimar Germany. A number of pacifists and religious groups made attempts to facilitate friendly exchange between Germany and Poland. Leagues advocating for peace and human rights, namely the International Peace Bureau, held joint Polish and German meetings throughout the early 1920s in Berlin as well as Gdańsk.\textsuperscript{72} In 1926 Hellmut von Gerlach, a board member of the International Peace Bureau, and the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, August Zaleski, even made an attempt to create a joint Polish-German parliamentary group in Prussia.\textsuperscript{73} That von Gerlach would work toward peaceful relations with Poland would come as a surprise to those familiar with his early life. Von Gerlach was the son of a staunchly anti-Semitic and militaristic Junker family. It was not until a visit to Britain in his late twenties that von Gerlach began to associate himself with liberals. Over the next few years, he blossomed into a pacifist. But as a strong supporter of the Weimar Republic, von Gerlach found himself under increasing pressure under the weight of conservatives in the years leading up to the Nazi seizure of power.\textsuperscript{74} But he was not alone in his efforts to bridge the gap between Germany and Poland. The International

\textsuperscript{71} Curiously, the only copy of \textit{Land Unterem Kreuz} in the world appears to be in France. As a result, I have relied largely on descriptions of the film and its reception provided in Król, 77.
\textsuperscript{72} I am currently waiting on some materials that might help me unpack some of what Król touches upon briefly in his discussion of pacifist leagues working toward Polish-German cooperation.
\textsuperscript{73} Król, 64.
\textsuperscript{74} Von Gerlach’s autobiography traces this dramatic change in his political outlook; see: Hellmut von Gerlach, \textit{Von Rechts nach Links} (Zürich: Europa-Verlag, 1937).
League of Women also sponsored peaceful meetings between Germany and Poland. In May of 1927 the League hosted what one Polish scholar has called a “two-day German-Polish frontier conference,” which took place in Bytom and Katowice.\(^75\)

The Weimar period also saw sustained attempts at cross cultural communication and exchange between the neighboring countries in the arts. In the early 1920s, a number of Polish painters received attention in exhibitions across Germany. In May of 1923, Polish Jewish painter Henryk Berlewi moved to Berlin with Russian artist El Lissitzky. Berlewi saw his abstract and constructivist art well received by the Germans. Berlewi took part in a number of German art exhibitions. In 1922 he took part in the socialist Novembergruppe Exhibition, along with Max Pechstein and Otto Dix. A year later Berlewi also took part in the *Grosse Berliner Kunstaustellung*.\(^76\) In 1924, after Berlewi had returned to Warsaw, the German art publication, *Der Sturm*, featured work from Berlewi’s modernist manifesto, “Mechano-faktura.”\(^77\) Other Polish artists also enjoyed attention during the 1920s, as well. The Leipzig Museum of Applied Arts, in particular, featured many Polish artists during the 1920s, including an exhibit of Polish folklore themed art and sculptures by Zofia Stryjeńska and Władysław Skoczylas in November of 1924. The following year a similar exhibition was held in Cologne and another again in Leipzig in 1927.

But even with a positive cultural exchange in the arts, pro-Polish voices found it increasingly difficult to be heard in the Weimar Republic. Despite efforts at censorship

\(^{75}\) Król, 65.  
\(^{77}\) Bartelik, 120.
by the AA, SPD member Albert Falkenberg managed to put together a pro-Polish radio broadcast in 1929; others, however, enjoyed far less success. Only a year later, German author Eli Kern organized a trip to Poland with a group of writers from Baden in 1930 in anticipation of her work, *Vom neuen und alten Polen*. The pro-Polish sentiment of the trip, which included a wreath laying ceremony on the tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Poland, fell largely on deaf ears. The Auswärtiges Amt even banned one of the participant’s accounts of the trip, titled *Ich komme eben aus Polen*, from being broadcast on the radio. The official AA report reads that the report would only serve as a “covert advertisement for Poland and its foreign interests.”\(^{78}\)

The harshness of right-wing German propaganda during the 1920s was itself a subject of satire. While many artists of the Weimar period worked together with Polish artists, like the *Novembergruppe* Exhibition and the *Grosse Berliner Kunstaustellung*, others focused on satirizing right-wing German propaganda. In particular a group of Berlin Dadaists, among them George Grosz, the famed caricature artist, targeted the *Freikorps* recruitment posters in their own works. In a study of domestic and expatriate German Dadaist art, Sherwin Simmons describes a number of cartoons that satirize the fervor of the *Freikorps*. One image in particular depicts a snarling figure in a helmet ironically commanding Germans to “rest assured.” By depicting the members of the *Freikorps* as faceless, snarling helmets, Simmons explains, the Dadaists not only satirized *Freikorps*...

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\(^{78}\) Quoted in Król, 67.
recruitment campaigns targeting the protection of the eastern borderland, but also the
tendency of the nationalistic right-wing to favor the collective over the individual.  

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79 Sherwin Simmons, “Grimaces on the Walls: Anti-Bolshevist Posters and the Debate about Kitsch,”  
Chapter 4: A Return to Imperialism in Early Nazi Rhetoric

Any historian who addresses both the Nazi and Weimar periods must grapple with the question of continuity between the ideas circulated during the Weimar period and the manifestation of those sentiments during the Third Reich. An understanding of the multifarious nature of the NSDAP, especially in its early years, helps to reveal how difficult it is to confirm or disconfirm whether stereotypes formed during the Weimar years contributed to Nazi rhetoric. It is necessary, therefore, to historicize depictions of Poles and Poland during the interwar years. Before the Nazi seizure of power in 1933, anti-Polish sentiments appeared in varying degrees in a number of publications. Magazines such as Kladderadatsch and Simplicissimus continued to publish negative images of Poles into the early 1930s, perhaps even more frequently than did Nazi publications. This is largely because the primary forces behind the propagation of anti-Polish sentiment continued to be the so-called borderlander constituency and Germans born in the former eastern territories. The emergence of the Nazi party took place while the conflicts on the eastern border were still being sorted out; this makes it difficult to draw lines of continuity or discontinuity between the Nazi and Weimar regimes. Hitler’s early writings, along with the views of party members like Alfred Rosenberg, do, however, illustrate a shift in inflection of Nazi views toward the east. Though negative views of Poles and Poland appeared both in Weimar and Nazi propaganda, Hitler and the NSDAP sought to once again return Germany to the position of colonizer.
The Nazi party did not emerge as a coherent entity, but was instead patched together under the direction of Adolf Hitler in the years after WWI. Virtually unnoticed in its early years, the party became linked with Hitler when Anton Drexler, one of the party’s founders, invited Hitler to join. While still in the Reichswehr, Hitler had attended a meeting of the DAP (German Workers’ Party) in 1919 and was later approached by Drexler who saw promise in Hitler’s oratory skills and charisma. After joining the DAP in September of 1919, Hitler’s influence within the party quickly grew. Drexler and Karl Harrer, the DAP’s cofounder, initially withstood Hitler’s attempts to exert influence upon the party’s structure and organization. But Hitler made use of his post as the party’s propaganda chief to recruit new members in order to dilute the “old guard.”

The final blow to the resistance of the old guard of the DAP came when Hitler resigned from the party in July of 1921. In exchange for his return, Hitler demanded that he be granted dictatorial power within the party. Invested in Hitler’s leadership skills, Drexler, in conjunction with a party congress on July 29, ceded control of the party to Hitler.

The party acquired its main voice, the *Völkischer Beobachter* (VB), in 1920, the same year that it switched its name from the DAP to the NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers’ Party). The acquisition of the *Völkischer Beobachter* was a major step in the development of the NSDAP under Hitler's leadership. The magazine became a link, as Dietrich Orlow describes, "between the party's central leadership and its local and, later, provincial membership." This included, of course, the borderlanders. At the time

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81 Orlow, 30.
82 Orlow, 21
of acquisition, the editor-in-chief of the VB was Dietrich Eckhart. Eckhard, however, soon stepped down and was replaced by Alfred Rosenberg, the future architect of Nazi ideology. A Baltic German, born in what is now Tallin, Estonia, Rosenberg had studied in Moscow until 1918. After moving to Munich in 1918, he found acceptance among anti-Semitic and nationalistic right-wing circles. Rosenberg climbed high in the Nazi party; by 1942, he was the Reich Minister for the Occupied Eastern Territories. Like Hans von Seeckt, Rosenberg firmly believed in the need eliminate the Polish state. And like von Seeckt, Rosenberg saw cooperation between Germany and Moscow (and perhaps even Ukraine) as a necessary step in achieving Poland’s destruction. In 1926, an article published in the VB pithily summed up Rosenberg’s attitude toward the newly formed Polish state. The editor of the VB stated that Germany’s closest eastern neighbor stood as its mortal enemy.\(^{83}\)

During the early 1920s Poland was of secondary concern for the Führer. Hitler’s primary targets were the Allied powers and their “fifth column,” which included Marxists, and Jews.\(^{84}\) Hitler approached relations with the Allies pragmatically, with the intention of undermining the Versailles settlement. This foreign policy had mixed results for Poland. Publications in the VB capture the often contradictory attitudes held by the Nazis, as Hitler’s pragmatic attempts at foreign policy met with Rosenberg’s ideological fervor. Perhaps most illustrative of the sometimes incoherent nature of Nazi ideology are Rosenberg’s memoirs. Oscillating between a hatred for Slavs and support of Hitler’s

\(^{83}\) As the early editions of the VB are not digitized or available on microfilm, the referenced VB article comes from Król, 86.
\(^{84}\) Baranowski, 133.
aims, Rosenberg wrote, “Poland resembles a hysterical female who must be hit over the head before she will permit a lifesaver to pull her from the water.”

Hitler, for his part, remained relatively silent on the issue of Poland. But despite the Führer’s silence, images, whether verbal, textual, or graphic, furthered the dual depiction of Poles as inferior to Germans on one hand, and as aggressors as on the other.

Images of Poles and Poland manifested themselves in a variety of ways in Nazi propaganda. It is important to note that Hitler placed greater emphasis on the spoken word for the dissemination of propaganda than posters. As such, many of the “images” of Poles and Poland put forth by the Nazi regime resemble images in that they are meant to convey the same messages and evoke similar sentiments as graphic portrayals. Drawing upon the work of image theorists, Paul Jay explains that the visual and the textual work together in a complex relationship that shapes “cultural experience.” Much work has been put forth in linking the textual and visual representations. Irit Rogoff links oral, visual, and textual images in their ability to “convey information…and mediate power relations.” Images, whatever their form, have the ability to shape not only politics, Rogoff argues, but also ideology. Depictions of Poles that appeared in propaganda posters during the 1920s existed in the same political and social milieu as did the anti-Polish rhetoric espoused by many Nazis.

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87 Paul Jay, “Picture This: Literary Theory and the Study of Visual Culture,” (address delivered at La Sapienza, Rome, Italy, March 2000).
It is also important to note that the Nazi's operated within the same political and social milieu as the rest of Germany; one cannot disentangle the Weimar Republic and the NSDAP, especially with regards to the state of the eastern border. The postwar work on the sociology of knowledge by Paul L. Berger and Thomas Luckman helps to bridge the gap between perspectives of the NSDAP and the Weimar regime by offering a theoretical framework with which it becomes possible to navigate how ideas that developed most prominently in the borderlands found their way into the social and political milieu of the interwar years. Both the Weimar government and the NSDAP offered institutional bases for the dissemination of interests and ideologies. “When a particular definition of reality comes to be attached to a concrete power interest,” Berger and Luckmann explain, “it may be called an ideology.”89 In this sense, the dissatisfaction over the eastern border and the weakening of Germans' self-perception constituted a definite interest of power. As such, anti-Polish sentiment played an important role in right-wing borderlander ideology. The loss of the eastern territories to Poland was seen as an indicator of the weakness of the postwar German state. In the Weimar government, the institutions that channeled the most radical ideologies were the Reichswehr and the associated paramilitary Grenzschutz groups, and to a somewhat lesser extent the AA. The NSDAP offered another institutionalized arena for the expression of anti-Polish sentiments.

Hitler believed, and he was not alone in this, that the best strategy for working against the Treaty of Versailles was to gain the support of the Allies. But relations with

the French posed a difficult question because of the Franco-Polish military alliance. Signed in March of 1921, the treaty between France and Poland included a provision that promised mutual support in the event of an unprovoked attack upon either party. The weight of Poland's agreement with France especially came to bear on Germany during the administration of the Upper Silesian Plebiscite and the occupation of the Ruhr by French troops in 1923. These incidents found expression in German propaganda throughout the following decade. An image published in Kladderadatsch in June of 1923 shows a French waiter asking a bloated caricature of Piłsudski whether he is satisfied with the consumption of Upper Silesia. Other images depicted the Poles and French as bed partners. Hitler was hesitant about relations with Poland and France, but he was careful not to isolate Germany completely. He wrote in Mein Kampf that the benefit of alliances for Germany “is scarcely subject to doubt.”90 But with regards to alliances, Hitler's policy diverged from the foreign policy of Weimar Germany. Though Hitler also viewed Polish-German relations as tense, he did not see a need to isolate Poland in order to secure Germany’s place in Mitteleuropa, as did Weimar statesman Gustav Stresemann. As John Hiden accurately sums up, Hitler viewed relations with Poland “primarily in terms of creating a basis for a policy of future conquest.”91

It cannot be denied that France offered significant support to the Polish state. Two particularly powerful illustrations of France’s relationship with Poland were the two destroyer-class ship built for Poland by France in the 1920s. One of the ships, the Wicher, was used in a display of power by Piłsudski in June of 1932 when the Marshal ordered

that the Polish destroyer enter the Danzig harbor in a display of support for a British squadron that had arrived in port. The Marshal also ordered commander of the *Wicher* to use force “in case the Polish flag was insulted by Danzig.”\(^{92}\) This could have only reinforced Hitler's view that Poland was “completely in French hands.”\(^{93}\) But the relationship between Poland and France was not as solid in the 1920s as the Germans feared. Poland’s Ambassador to Berlin from 1934 to 1939 and member of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the Locarno negotiations, Józef Lipski, recalls the strained relationship between France and Poland after the French elections in 1924 spelled defeat for Raymond Poincaré’s support. This coincided with an increase in “propaganda hostile to Poland” in France.\(^{94}\) Poland thus found itself in a more vulnerable situation than the German led the international scene to believe.

Adding to that, the political climate in Germany by 1925 seemed again to favor not only revision of the Treaty of Versailles, but also colonization of the east. The reasons for this were two-fold. First, the signing of the Treaty of Locarno eased tensions with the Allies and put Germany’s western border at ease. This allowed Germans to once again turn their attention east. The consequences of the Locarno treaty were quickly obvious to the Poles. Present for the negotiations surrounding the Locarno Treaties, Lipski made note of his concern for the Polish-French alliance. After the signing of Locarno, Lipski explains, “the question of revision of frontiers with Poland became the

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\(^{93}\) *Mein Kampf*, 659.
\(^{94}\) Lipski, 6.
watchword… [and] anti-Polish feelings spread like wildfire.” By 1930, the fire reached the floor of the Reichstag. One of the most outspoken supporters of a German imperialistic push eastward was Gottfried Reinhold Treviranus. Treviranus was a member of the German National People’s Party (DNVP), which had cooperated closely with the NSDAP in the 1920s before Hitler had blocked efforts to merge the parties. Both the NSDAP and DNVP shared nationalistic, anti-Semitic, and anti-Polish views. In 1930, Treviranus stated that the revision of the border could not be made with “a mere filing of protests.” Up until Treviranus fled Germany in 1933, he continued to espouse rhetoric calling for a German drive eastward.

Treviranus’ calls for the re-colonization of the east worried the Poles. Lipski found the rhetoric very troubling and hoped to reaffirm bilateral negotiations with the French. The Germans, meanwhile, continued to flaunt their confidence in the wake of the Locarno treaties. An image published in Kladderadatsch in August of 1930 pokes fun at Poland’s unease toward Treviranus’ comments. Titled The Nasty Treviranus, the cartoon depicted France and Poland as outraged females. The French woman cries to “Officer Locarno” that the mean German Treviranus had insulted her friend, Poland. Treviranus stands off to the side, smiling smugly as Officer Locarno glares at the visibly flustered women.

What further troubled Poles about Locarno was that the treaty called for any decision regarding military assistance to be made by the Council of the League, thus

95 Lipski, 22.
further weakening France’s bilateral support of Poland. The Council of the League, however, still retained the power to act in the event of unprovoked aggression in breach of the agreement. Since the approval of military assistance could be made by the signatories of the Locarno pact, the Germans, and the NSDAP in particular, aimed their anti-Polish propaganda abroad. In 1927, Wilhelm Baum, a correspondent of the “Kölnische Zeitung,” authored a book titled *Polens Drang nach dem Westen*. The book appeared in London a year later under the name *Poland’s Westward Trend*. Despite attempts to draw quotes from Polish authors revealing Poland’s intentions to expand further into Germany, the English found the essay “rather unconvincing.”

Locally, propaganda efforts continued to rouse the borderlanders against Poland. A poster circulated by a local NSDAP organization in Upper Silesia in 1930 reiterates fear of Polish aggression less than a decade after the armed conflict that characterized the struggle over the ethnically mixed borderland. The poster reads, “Poland attacks…our brothers on either side of the border” and alleges a “war of extermination.” Sentiments such as these only continued to escalate in the run-up to the 1932 presidential election. As Lars Jockheck recounts, by 1932 many Germans firmly believe that the Polish treaty was imminent. One woman who passed by the Polish embassy in Berlin and saw the Polish ambassador, Wysocki, working in the embassy’s garden asked him why he should put so much cost and effort into a garden if the war with the Poles was to break out at any

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The second factor that underscored the shift from revisionism to imperialism in Germany was the growing influence of Hitler’s imperialistic desires articulated in *Mein Kampf*. Dictated to Rudolf Hess during his prison sentence after the failed putsch in 1923, *Mein Kampf* spelled out Hitler’s ambition to secure *Lebensraum* for the German racial community in the east. Hitler saw the reclamation of land in the east, the “lost territories,” as essential to the strengthening of not only the German state, but also the German racial community. “Oppressed territories are led back to the bosom of a common Reich,” Hitler proclaimed, “not by flaming protests, but by a mighty sword.” Poles appear rather infrequently in *Mein Kampf*, but Hitler’s unpublished Second Book (*Zweites Buch*) captures more anti-Polish sentiment. Some historians have postulated that Poland’s boldness and success in the Polish-Bolshevik War won Poles admiration from Hitler, but the Secret Book reveals that the uprisings along the eastern border did not leave such a favorable mark. Hitler believed, as did many right-wing nationalists, that the Poles “stole” part of Upper Silesia from Germany.

The idea of *Lebensraum* did not first appear in *Mein Kampf*. The term had been used throughout Imperial Germany and was effectively coined by Friedrich Ratzel in 1901. What made Hitler’s conception of *Lebensraum* unique, however, was its radical racial and violent tone. Hitler’s interest in imperialism began well before he moved to Munich. Carroll P. Kakel recounts that Hitler had been interested in the idea of

99 *Mein Kampf*, 611.
100 See Król, 90.
101 *Hitler’s Second Book*, 97.
imperialism since his childhood, inspired particularly by the American west. Hitler was an avid reader of Karl May and later used the American frontier as a model for his vision of German colonization of the east. But whereas previous attempts to take control of the east involved extensive campaigns to Germanize Poles, Hitler simply sought to colonize the east with Germans. To Hitler, Germanization of Slavs was unacceptable. In the Second Book, Hitler wrote that the Germanization of Slavs, especially Poles, would lead only to Germany’s “racial weakening.” In this way, Hitler’s plan not only diverged from pervious German ventures eastward, but also promoted a mindset openly hostile toward Poles.

The consequences of the Nazi depiction of Poles are captured by the events and sentiments surrounding the murder of Konrad Piecuch on September 9, 1932. In Upper Silesia, tensions between Poles and Germans remained high throughout the 1920s and 30s. In many towns on the Polish-German border Poles gave elector support to the communist, which lead to numerous violent outbreaks between Poles and members of the SA (Sturmabteilung). It was indeed the purpose of the SA to carry out acts of political violence on the streets in an effort to further the Nazi cause. Across the border in Poland, independent right-wing groups like the Jungdeutsche Partei expressed similar anti-Polish views. The leader of the Jungdeutsche Partei, Rudolf Wiesner, expressed his opinions in the Kattowitz/Katowice Zeitung. In an article published shortly after Piecuch’s murder, Wiesner explained that if Poles continued to behave like wolves, they would be dealt

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102 Kakel, 35.
with like wolves.\textsuperscript{103} The choice of imagery employed in Wiesner’s language reflects not only his individual fanaticism, but also illustrates the recurring stereotype of Poles as both inferior and aggressive.

Konrad Piecuch was murdered in his home in Potępa, a small village only 7 kilometers from the Polish border. He had served in the Reichswehr during the First World War until 1915, when he returned home for his father’s funeral. He never returned to the front. Shortly after his father’s funeral, Piecuch deserted from the Reichswehr. He went on to support the Communist party and took part in numerous uprisings surrounding the administration of the Upper Silesian Plebiscite. Court testimony describes Piecuch as a man who was friendly to Poles and Germans, but who harbored a strong dislike for “hitlerowców,” or supporters of Hitler.\textsuperscript{104} According to those close to Piecuch, he had had a number of run-ins with the local members of the SA, notably Paul Lachmann, who oversaw the local SA barracks. On the night of September 9, 1932, a group of SA men burst into the Piecuch home. Konrad, his brother Alfons, and his mother Maria were asleep in a small room adjacent to the kitchen. After an altercation, Konrad Piecuch laid shot dead. To both Polish and German Social Democrats and Communistis, Piecuch was a martyr. Police present at Piecuch’s funeral remarked that the crowd cheered for his working class spirit and his hatred of the NSDAP.

The NSDAP mobilized in defense of the five SA members who stood accused of having murdered Piecuch. The defense shifted between claiming that the perpetrators were drunk and unaware of what they were doing to emphasizing the fact that they were

\textsuperscript{104} Kur, 27.
just “following orders” issued by the local SA.¹⁰⁵ But perhaps most strikingly, the accused and their defenders also offered a racialized defense. A lawyer by the name of Lowack from Gleiwitz maintained that the accused should be absolved of guilt because “Konrad Piecuch was only a Pole.”¹⁰⁶ Lowack was not a lone voice. According to the testimony of Paul Golombek, Piecuch was specifically targeted because was a Pole and had participated in the Upper Silesian uprisings during the early 1920s.¹⁰⁷ An article published in the *Hamburger Nachrichten* illustrates the unfortunate consequences of the propagation of anti-Polish sentiment. The newspaper reported that the murder of Piecuch, a person “without value… [a] Polish subhuman [polnischer untermensch],” was not equal to a crime committed against a German.¹⁰⁸ To the dismay of the NSDAP and SA, and the broader anti-Polish sentiment in Germany, the German court sentenced the accused attackers to death for their responsibility behind the planning of Piecuch’s murder.

For Hitler, the incident surrounding the murder of Konrad Piecuch served as a way to attack the von Papen administration. Pointing to the weakness of the von Papen government in obtaining justice for the alleged killers, Hitler proclaimed that the NSDAP would rally for the accused. Hitler’s proclamations were followed by NSDAP threats against the von Papen government. Two members of the Reichstag, both members of the NSDAP, wrote to Franz von Papen urging him to lessen the sentences of the accused, lest internal unrest erupt in Germany.¹⁰⁹ Eventually, the threat of domestic violence (and its realization in the form of street violence in Upper Silesia) eventually led von Papen to

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¹⁰⁵ Quoted in Kur, 66.
¹⁰⁶ Quoted in Kur, 66.
¹⁰⁷ Kur, 76.
¹⁰⁸ Quoted in Kur, 85.
¹⁰⁹ Kur, 84.
sign an order revoking the death sentence for Lachmann, Kottisch, Wolnitza, Gräupner, and Müller. The men, however, would not have to serve out their sentences. Once Hitler secured power following the Reichstag fire on February 27, 1933, Piecuch’s killers were released from prison.

Though the Piecuch incident did not succeed in toppling von Papen’s chancellorship, the fear of a Polish threat played a large role. Following the Berlin transport workers’ strike in November of 1932, Lieutenant-Colonel Eugen Ott devised a simulation that examined the capabilities of the Reichswehr to handle internal unrest. Ott reached the conclusion that in the event of widespread internal unrest the Reichswehr would be overwhelmed. This, Ott maintained, would have dangerous consequences. Particularly threatening was the possibility of a Polish attack from the east if defenses had to be moved away from the border. Ott’s war game speculated that forty-six Polish formations would advance against Germany when only twenty-seven field divisions would be available for defense. Ott presented his troubling conclusions in December of 1932, which resulted in von Hindenburg’s dismissal of von Papen.110 Historians have questioned whether the war game simulation was a political tool devised by Kurt von Schleicher to oust von Papen.111 Regardless of the motivation, the consequences were clear. Less than a year after he was appointed chancellor, von Schleicher, whose government faced a grim future, supported Hitler as chancellor. Von Schleicher was subsequently murdered on June 30, 1934. Hitler, meanwhile, moved forward with plans to sign a non-aggression pact with Poland.

111 See, Conrad Starick, Das Planspiel Ott und seine Vorgeschichte (GRIN Verlag, 2008).
The relaxation of tensions with Poland stemmed not only from the perceived Polish threat on the Germany’s eastern border, but also Hitler’s desire to weaken the Allies, especially France, and position Germany against Soviet Russia. If the relationship between Poland and France had been strained in the early 1920s, Poland's position in the east by 1933 was as strong as ever. After renegotiating the military agreement with France and signing a non-aggression agreement with Russia in 1932, Poland was a formidable barrier against Germany. Almost suddenly, the relationship between German and Poland appeared cordial. A poster circulated in 1934 illustrates the dramatic shift in the relationship between the neighboring countries. The poster shows Józef Piłsudksi, once a prisoner of the Germans, standing next to Hitler. The caption reads, “The Marshall and the Corporal: Fight with us for Peace and Equality.” A comparison between the aforementioned poster and earlier images of the Marshal circulated in Germany illustrates a strikingly stark contrast. Just a few years prior, Piłsudksi appeared in German publications as a power-hungry caricature. The message had changed dramatically by 1934. It is fitting here to return to W.J.T. Mitchell and ask what such an image wants. Instead of an enemy of the German state, the image of Piłsudski was supposed to reinforce mutual goodwill between the neighboring countries. Despite the power of imagery, images do not always get what they want. Perhaps this is because he change in tone of German propaganda toward Poland really only surface deep.

The NSDAP had a difficult time masking anti-Polish rhetoric, especially in its main party organ, the *Volkischer Beobachter*. After Hitler signed the non-aggression

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112 Figure H found in Z.A.B. Zeman, *Nazi Propaganda* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 48.
treaty with Poland in January of 1933, Rosenberg wrote that “given today’s foreign policy position it is completely impossible for the central organ of the NSDAP [the VB] to keep up the same form of external pressure in questions of foreign policy as before the seizure of power.”

Despite continuing to harbor anti-Polish sentiment, Hitler and Rosenberg felt that Germany’s foreign policy would be better served by restraining anti-Polish propaganda in the wake of the non-aggression treaty. The VB, however, employed a number of correspondents who continued to espouse anti-Polish sentiments. Among these were Carl Ario and Heinz Kleiß. Though both men originally came from Poland, they were seen even by the Poles as enemies of the Polish state. In a letter regarding the work Ario and Kleiß were conducting for the VB in Warsaw in December of 1933, Poland’s Foreign Affairs Minister, Emil Reucker, described the men as “anti-Polish agitators.”

Clearly unhappy with the effect that Ario and Kleiß’s presence had on Polish-German relations, the two journalists were removed from their posts in 1935 at the request of Hans Adolf von Moltke, the German ambassador to Poland. German imperialism.

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113 Jockheck, 26.
114 Jockheck, 45.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

The dramatic change in Polish-German relations in 1933 and 1934 was short-lived. As the eve of the Second World War grew closer, more negative images of Poles and Poland appeared in Nazi propaganda. In contrast to the focus on the eastern borderlands, the propaganda of the 1930s focused primarily on the Polish Corridor and the German minorities abroad. After the invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, the propaganda campaign within occupied Poland intensified. The anti-Polish propaganda of the Second World War tells its own story and poses questions of its own, especially relating to how the German minority abroad was used to inflame German public opinion. But perhaps most striking is the degree of similarity between the Poles depicted the propaganda of WWII and the earliest posters that emerged after WWI. Poles still appear as dirty, dangerous, just as they did in the 19th century and the Weimar Republic. Poles were hungry for power at the expense of Germany, a sentiment that emerged after the uprisings on the eastern border further weakened the German state. What’s more, Poland’s strength is always shown as bolstered by the Allies. Images that appeared on the eve of war show just how much staying-power the post-WWI depictions of Poles had. Poles continued to appear as dirty, disheveled, and dangerous. Caricatures of gluttonous Poles continued to appear alongside Chanteclair. England’s support of Poland after 1939 brought with it images of Poland, depicted as a female, in bed with Churchill and covered with an English flag. Images, whether textual or graphic, have a tremendous ability to propagate
and last in people’s imaginations, especially once they become imbedded in the fabric of an individual’s or group’s reality.

The reality facing the Germans in the interwar years was one of defeat. After the Treaty of Versailles, the German self-image was one of weakness and shame. As Sammartino has explained, feelings of defeat and vulnerability characterized the German self-image during the Weimar period. This stemmed not only from defeat, which came as a surprise given the certainty of German victory in the east, but also from the loss of the eastern borderlands, the large-scale migration of Germans from the east, and the militarism of the newly-formed Polish Republic. Whereas Germany in the nineteenth century was a nation of *Kultur* with vast overseas territories and ambitions to colonize and Germanize the east, the Germany of the interwar years was weak and defeated. As a reflection of these sentiments, the image of the Polish “other” was cast as aggressive and threatening. Time and again posters and rhetoric connected Poles with images of wolves emerging from the wilderness, an association linked with fear dating back to time immemorial.

During the short-lived existence of the Weimar Republic, the fears and concerns of those Germans living on the German-Polish border, referred to as borderlanders, found expression in many right-wing circles. The Reichswehr and various paramilitary organizations, along with organizations like the DNVP, saw the new Poland as an illegitimate state. In the wake of the uprisings in Poznań and Upper Silesia, borderlander resentment towards Poles and Poland manifested itself in attempts to undermine Polish legitimacy perhaps in hopes of earning the Allies’ sympathy and working towards a
revision of the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. But by the time Hitler came to power in 1933, the inflection of anti-Polish sentiment became much more radicalized. Fueled by the desire to acquire *Lebensraum* in the east, Hitler sought to move beyond revision of Versailles to a new wave of German Imperialism. As in the 19th century, Poles found themselves depicted as lesser beings. But this time, instead of having to serve their German masters, Hitler believed that they needed to be eliminated to make room for members of the master race to colonize the once-Polish lands to the east.
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