

The promise of identity

The intangible cultural heritage of the inhabitants of Upper Silesia in the context of migration

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“Beate, Du musst Deutsch lernen. Das ist deine Heimatsprache” – with these words my grandmother obligated me to keep the promise of remembering and of adherence to the community of German-speaking Catholic Upper Silesians. It seems that she had been aware of the correlation that Reinhart Koselleck and Aleida Assmann mention in their texts about cultural memory, arguing that „memory opens up an approach to the past that focuses on identity”.¹ Intuitively, she understood that by obliging me to preserve the identity (and the language) she was initiating a transfer between generations,

a sharing of memory. At the same time, she was aware that the state in which we lived at that time, the People’s Republic of Poland, tolerated the cultural traces of Upper Silesia’s past only with great difficulty. The prohibition to teach German within the state school curriculum made the transmission of the ancestral language (identified as Muttersprache) a legacy that was difficult to maintain – a promise difficult to keep. By pointing to heritage, especially intangible heritage, the bearers hope that passing it on to the next generation will be successful. Because of its importance, they expect the descendants to treat this transmission as a commitment. Indeed, embedded in the process of passing heritage from one generation to the next is the promise that language, customs, celebrations, and practices will not be forgotten. A further promise is also represented in

1 “Erinnerung eröffnet nach Koselleck einen Zugang zur Vergangenheit, der Identität in den Mittelpunkt stellt”. Assmann: *Między historią*, p. 201. She refers to Koselleck’s epilogue (“Nachwort”) for the book by Charlotte Beradt: *Das Dritte Reich des Traums* [1966], Frankfurt am Main 1994, S. 117.

the expectation that the heritage will be passed on in the future. For many young people born in the second half of the 20th century, it was almost impossible to fulfil the promise of a German-speaking Upper Silesian identity. Thus, living heritage became a memory of ancestors passed on at home. Although both intangible heritage and memory are of great importance in defining and constructing identity, Veyssel Apaydin, an academic of cultural heritage studies, argues that the concept of heritage and memory, together with its importance for groups and communities, results in plural meanings. Yet these two concepts are integral resources for people who are connected through them. These are groups of people who share similar values and develop tangible and intangible heritage and associated memory; ascribing meanings and values to cultural heritage helps them to come together and create a sense of belonging. This, in turn, provides a critical resource for survival in a complex world".²

The complexity of the Upper Silesian world surged from the mid-19th century until the 1980s, as the coal-bearing region attracted and repelled subsequent generations of workers, becoming an arena for migration. Thanks to its coal seams, the region became a place where many different promises were made, economic, social but also identity-related.

The Promised Land

These pledges were made by those who decided on the exploitation of metal and coal deposits, the production of iron and zinc ores, and those who possessed the capital to be multiplied by the physical and intellectual labour of others. The owners of the workplaces and the Prussian, German and Polish states made promises of a prosperous life and partly fulfilled them: establishing workers' housing estates and blocks of flats, kindergartens, allotment gardens, introducing compulsory health insurance or company hospitals and health clinics. Of course, these social amenities were a kind of pact. As Marcel Mauss would say, these gifts appear to have been voluntary, but they were reciprocated under a certain compulsion and were fraught with negative consequences.³ Alcoholism, feelings of alienation and petty crimes, or the loss of cultural practices, were also an everyday reality in Upper Silesia as a direct result of migration. The demand for manpower in heavy industry caused the Prussian/German and later the Polish state to provoke large-scale population movements. They used the economic factor for this, of course – rich coal deposits made it extremely profitable to process it locally into coke and then produce steel.

In the middle of the 19th century, 975.000 tons of coal were mined in Upper Silesia, and workers were needed to achieve such production. Thousands of people responded and thus became immigrants. These included highly skilled workers and engineers from the west of the country,

2 Apaydin: Introduction, p.3.

3 Mauss: The Gift, pp. 100-107.

but the most numerous group (as many as 90%) were villagers who found employment in heavy industry as an escape from overcrowded rural areas. Workers also came to Upper Silesia from outside Prussia, from the Polish lands that were then within the borders of Austria and Russia. At the end of the 19th century, the largest Upper Silesian County, Bytom, was inhabited by 940,000 people. In 1902, around 140,000 workers were employed in the industry in the Upper Silesian Industrial Region, 80,000 of them in coal mines. Thus, with the first wave of industrialisation, Upper Silesia was born as a 'Promised Land'.

Until 1945 the purpose for the mass migration within the region was almost exclusively for political decisions, except for the 'second industrialisation' in the People's Polish Republic (1970–1979). The migration after the division of Upper Silesia between Poland and Germany in 1922 has been omitted because of its relatively small scale.

In 1933, the Upper Silesian Province (Provinz Oberschlesien) was inhabited by almost 1.5 million people, of whom almost 120,000 were forcibly evicted in 1945 (before the Potsdam Conference). The following year, 160,000 were forced to migrate, because the authorities in People's Poland considered them to be undesirable Germans in Upper Silesia.⁴ The verification criteria were usually based solely on language, which in the situation of a population living in a multicultural border region, often nationally indifferent, is a very complicated issue.⁵ By 1950, 309,000

people considered to be Germans had left Upper Silesia, but in the meantime, they had been replaced by around 200,000 immigrants from the pre-war Eastern Borderlands (mainly from present-day Ukraine)⁶ and other parts of Poland. This number was supplemented by re-emigrants from Belgium, France, and Germany, who were brought in mainly to support the mining industry and reinforce the communist regime.⁷ Over the next decade, in the 1950s, 350,000 people arrived in Upper Silesia, primarily from the eastern regions of Poland. Between 1957 and 1958 alone, there were 80,000 – mainly men aged 18-35. Already in 1960, they accounted for 23% of the population. High salaries in mining and metallurgy attracted more people, but at the same time liberalisation of the passport policy caused 63,000 people to leave the Katowice region in the second half of the 1950s.⁸

At the peak of the 'second industrialisation', a term coined by the Polish Communist authorities, coal mining reached the 200 million tonnes desired by the Party leadership. It was mined mainly by people from outside Silesia – during this decade, between 80,000 and 100,000 people came to the region every year. At the same time, by the end of 1979, more than 137,000 people with any connection to Upper Silesia's German past had left. A further 62,000 people, mainly motivated by economic reasons and family ties, left Upper Silesia in the decade of the 1980s. Emigration was counterbalanced by an influx of people: from 1980 until the collapse of

4 Dziuba: W poszukiwaniu lepszego życia.
5 Wanatowicz: Od indyferentnej ludności do śląskiej narodowości?

6 Dziuba: W poszukiwaniu lepszego życia.
7 Szmidtke: Reemigracja polskich górników.
8 Dziuba: W poszukiwaniu lepszego życia.

the People's Republic of Poland, around 20,000 people arrived annually in Upper Silesia.⁹ The collapse of the Communist system in 1989 meant that the situation in Upper Silesia could be defined as an exodus. The closing down of industrial plants and the disappearance of the mines and steelworks' social welfare meant that many people returned to their hometowns in other parts of the country. At the same time, the dismantling of the communist apparatus meant that citizens regained ownership of their passports and took advantage of their freedom and the opportunity to emigrate to Germany. Emigrations were always trips 'to someone' because in 2008 12.8% of students had relatives in Germany (siblings, parents, grandparents), 56.7% distant relatives (aunts, uncles, cousins), and 40.7% friends with whom they kept in touch.¹⁰ Currently, people who declare their identity as Silesian, Silesian/Polish or Silesian/German are the largest minority in Silesian Voivodeship. It is a group of 846,700 thousand people¹¹ out of more than 5 million living in this region.

The Identity

The industrialised part of Upper Silesia should therefore be seen as a space of movement, of constant change. But despite the massive migration, a strong identity was developing at the turn of the 19th and 20th century, one which has a varied background and is complex in

nature. The Upper Silesian identity can be seen as an ethnic identity, a national identity, or an identity of place. Diverse in its essence, it is a living phenomenon that has been surrounded by various elements of cultural heritage. Those who came to the industrialised part of Upper Silesia with the legacy of their ancestors brought the experience of heritage as part of everyday life and festive periods, and a particular memory. The first migrants were mainly Slavic inhabitants from overpopulated villages in Prussia.¹² Farmers from the Opole or Gliwice areas settled in workers' colonies that were not only a place to live, but also a place of formation of a new Prussian society of industrialised regions.¹³ The workers were bound by regulations of the job contract called "Arbeitsordnung"/"Porządek pracy", adopted in each coal mine, (for example "Arbeits-Ordnung für das cons[olidierte]. Steinkohlenbergwerk Donnersmarckhütte bei Mikultschütz O[berschlesien]", Kattowitz 1912) and in the houses, they rented from the mines and steelworks (a late example is "Haus-Ordnung für die Arbeiterwohnhäuser im Bereich des Preußischen Bergwerks- und Hütten-A.G., Zweigniederlassung Bergwerksdirektion zu Hindenburg O[berschlesien], Hindenburg 1931"). This population therefore had to change not only their places of residence, but also to conform to new social and legal norms. The everyday social contracts of the untrained villagers and townspeople were replaced by sets of paragraphs that had to be followed. The daily rhythm of work also changed – it was now regulated by the bell and siren signalling the start of the next

9 Dziuba. W poszukiwaniu lepszego życia.

10 Kijonka: Migracje z Górnego Śląska do Republiki Federalnej Niemiec, p. 44.

11 Wyniki Narodowego Spisu 2011, Warszawa 2012; Geisler, Fenomen, p. 106.

12 Schofer: The Formation, p. 32-34.

13 Schofer: The Formation, p. 39-77.



Figure 1: Children from a Catholic kindergarten in the workers' colony "Borsigwerk" (now Zabrze), 1930s; private property (licence B. Piecha-van Schagen).

shift, rather than by sunrise and sunset. They brought with them customs, ways of celebrating and language to new, unfamiliar spaces. This 'cultural baggage' was confronted with the vision of a new society created both in Berlin and in the region.¹⁴ The industrialists, the aristocracy and other groups of industrial owners and managers offered the newcomers a specific cultural model inscribed in the Christian ethos of work and the Prussian virtues (*Preußische Tugenden*) of determination and a sense of duty. To a large extent it was accepted by the newcomers, which was probably due to the fact that they were inhabitants of Prussia.

Despite belonging to Austria and Prussia, they did not use the German language daily – it

remained a tool of state administration, however, the role of the German language strengthened after 1871. Prussian citizens used a language that today is defined as a dialect of Polish or a distinctive language with its regional dialects. The Silesian tongue, which was used mainly by representatives of the lower social classes (labourers, miners, smelters), differed from the Polish language, as pointed out by Lucjan Malinowski, the first researcher of this phenomenon.¹⁵ This exclusively spoken language was heavily influenced by the education system, which can be seen in the few written testimonies. These texts were often written in the so-called mixed code, and in memoirs or letters written in Silesian/Polish, nouns are

14 Piecha-van Schagen/Störckuhl: *Oberschlesische Arbeitersiedlungen*.

15 Malinowski, *Zarysy życia ludowego na Śląsku*.

written with a capital letter. "The Diary of the Miner" ("Pamiętnik górnika") by Edward Jeleń is one of many examples: *a zaraz sie zbierol na Szychta, boch miol nocnio Szychta [...], ale teraz na drugi Dzień jagech przyszoł, do Dom, tożech se naj przod rozpomniol, coch to porobiel* ("and immediately gathered for the shift, because I had a night shift [...], but now on the second day when I came home, I remembered what I had done").¹⁶ It should also be remembered that after the partition of Upper Silesia between Germany and Poland in 1922 the national languages grew in their dominance and played a major role in shaping the nation states. For example, a growing number of children in Upper Silesia prepared for their First Communion in German. In 1905, in the parish of Saint John the Baptist in Biskupice, now a district of Zabrze, there were 90 children of each language group, but just 20 years later there were no Polish-speaking children attending the First Communion.¹⁷ The German language also underwent processes of developing its Upper Silesian dialect. As research on cultural memory conducted in 2017 showed, that before 1945 the inhabitants of workers' houses in the Borsigwerk housing estate spoke Silesian, Polish, and an Upper Silesian variant of German which was called 'Schlāsisch' or 'Schlāsch'. However, the foremen and engineers living in the same housing estate used Hochdeutsch.¹⁸ Language, as an important constitutive factor for someone's identity, is also an important element of intangible cultural heritage. It was emphasised by Mikhail Bakhtin, who stated,

"that language contributes to their self-image and influences their group identity i. e. the groups to which they feel they inherently belong".¹⁹ This role of language became more pronounced after 1945 when the situation of the Upper Silesian inhabitants who spoke German and the Silesian languages became far more complicated.

Silesian language – promise challenged

Paradoxically, migration also influenced the significance of the Silesian language for identity building. Until World War I it was considered to be the Polish language. The disapproval of the Upper Silesian language was widespread in the interwar period on both sides of the border. Poles regarded it as a Polish dialect contaminated with German and conducted education aimed at excluding it from the consciousness of Upper Silesians. During the Nazi period, the Silesian tongue, called and described as 'Wasserpolnisch', was also depreciated and banned.²⁰ The situation was similar after 1945. Children whose only language had been Silesian as their ancestral tongue or 'Muttersprache', were ridiculed or harassed by their teachers and often received bad grades.²¹ After 1989, the discussion about Silesian as a dialect or language flared up again in the region. Academic disputes and arguments about whether there should be a

16 Jeleń, Pamiętnik górnika, p. 276.

17 Piecha-van Schagen, Język, pp. 138, 141.

18 Piecha-van Schagen, Język, pp. 135-141.

19 Mercuri: Understanding the Interconnectedness, p. 14.

20 Choroś: Język, dialekt, p. 71.

21 Piecha-van Schagen: Język, pp. 337-338.

written form of the Silesian language – more formal and complex – has led to increased public interest. Not only several books had been translated (for example “Winnie-the-Pooh” as “Niedźwiodek Puch”²² or “Christmas Carol” as “Godniö pieśń”,²³ but original literature is being created, for example a series of crime novels “Kōmisorz Hanusiuk” by Marcin Melon.²⁴ The extremely popular website and shop gryfnie.pl advertises itself as a propagator of the Silesian tongue. This is the case at the lexical level of the language – thanks to their T-shirts, many know what ‘hercklekoty’ (palpitation of the heart) is.²⁵ Researchers and activists who work for the preservation of Silesian are giving unequivocal negative prognosis.²⁶ The Silesian language, mainly its lexical richness, is disappearing and this is due, among other things, to an inability to provide systematic teaching in schools. One way of passing on this heritage is informal home education by transmitting Silesian as a spoken language or through groups of enthusiasts like teachers, translators, publishers, who are volunteering or rely on private business.

Obliviated promise – German language

The prohibition of public conversations in the German language, under threat of financial penalty, came into force on the same day that the Soviet Army entered Upper Silesia and was confirmed by the Polish authorities in January 1945.²⁷ The teaching of the German language was also banned in Upper Silesia until 1989.

The lack of any language education meant that three generations of people living in the region did not have a basic knowledge of German unless they had grandmothers, grandfathers, or sometimes mothers who taught them this language as ‘Muttersprache’ (mostly as a spoken language). The consequence of this policy was not only the inability to communicate in German, but above all the cutting off of entire generations from the cultural heritage of their ancestors, which was, after all, associated with a culture to some extent created in the German language. Upper Silesians also lack access to sources and testimonies which would enable us to consciously restore those elements of our heritage that were lost with those inhabitants of Upper Silesia who emigrated to Germany. Using the works and notes of, for example, Alfons Perlick, a Bytomian folklorist associated with Schlesischer Bund für Heimatschutz (Silesian Union for the Protection of Homeland Sites) circle,²⁸ is

22 The publishing house is Media Rodzina, <https://www.mediarodzina.pl/produkt/niedzwio-dek-puch/>.

23 The publishing house is Silesia Progress, <https://www.silesiaprogress.com/pl/p/CSSB-8-Charles-DI-CKENS-Godnio-piesn/1166>.

24 The publishing house is Silesia Progress, <https://www.silesiaprogress.com/pl/p/Komisorz-Hanusik-M.-Melon/655>.

25 The producer is gryfnie.pl, <https://gryfnie.com/sklep/produkty/koszulka-hercklekoty-116>.

26 Tambor: Mowa Górnślązaków.

27 Archiwum Państwowe w Katowicach, Urząd Wojewódzki Śląski, sygn. 26/19, Zarządzenie pełnomocnika Rządu Tymczasowego na województwo śląskie z 29 stycznia 1945 r. [plakat], Linek: Polityka antyniemiecka na Górnym Śląsku, p. 221.

28 Nowosielska-Sobel: Od ziemi rodzinnej, pp. 524-525, 606.

impossible for most Upper Silesians. It must be emphasised, however, that the aversion to the German language had its source not only in the anti-Germanism of the communist state, but also in the memory and post-memory of the war which was brought to Upper Silesia by the immigrants. In such a case coming into contact with German could be a problem, however, exceptions were present in everyday practice. One such example is the story of Stanisław Gruszczyński, an immigrant from a village near Rzeszów, who, as a teenager, took up work in Zabrze. His parents were killed in 1939, which caused his hatred for Germans. Upon arrival at the “Pstrowski” coal mine, his first foreman greeted him with the words “Glück Auf!” to which Gruszczyński responded with “Glück Auf!”, respecting the German heritage.²⁹

A singular example showing an exception to the overall scale of the phenomenon of resentment towards the heritage of German-speaking Upper Silesians.

After the collapse of the communist system, however, one could notice a change of perspective, for instance a renewed interest in the restoration of and access to heritage. Translations of Joseph von Eichendorff’s poetry or August Scholtis’ novels should be linked to the efforts of various circles of the Upper Silesian society to recover the heritage of their German-speaking ancestors and, through translations, to incorporate it into the heritage of contemporary inhabitants.

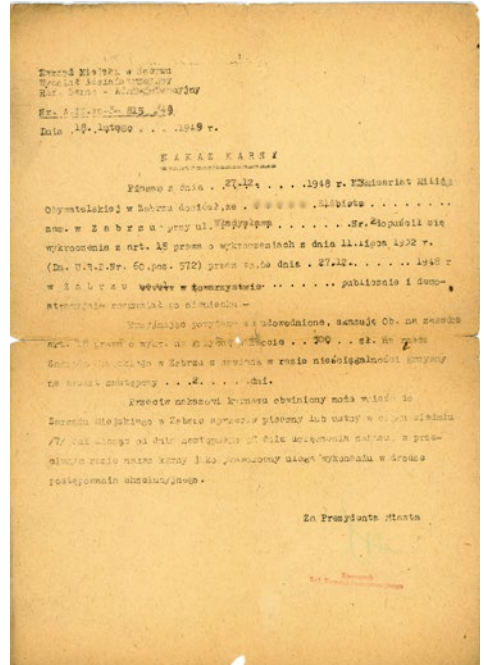


Figure 2: Penalty order for speaking German in public, dated 18.2.1949, imposed on a resident of “Borsigwerk”; private property (licence B. Piecha-van Schagen).

An excellent example of bottom-up actions towards restoring intangible heritage as an identity marker for the local community is the Saint Martin’s Day celebration in Rokitnica. In 2015, a group of inhabitants of this district of Zabrze of various ethnic backgrounds organised for the first time after World War II a march through the neighbourhood. The initiative was well-received and in subsequent years the community of Rokitnica modified the custom to suit its needs because the march is led by a miners’ orchestra, followed by the participants carrying Polish flags, since 11th November is Independence Day

29 Piecha-van Schagen: *Górnictwo pozdrowienie*, p. 214.



Figure 3: St Martin's Day celebrations in Rokitnica (now Zabrze) in 2016, photo by B. Piecha-van Schagen.

in Poland. It is an excellent example of the relationship between heritage and identity, particularly if the motivation for restoring this custom is taken under the consideration. It is rooted in National Socialistic toponomastics. In 1937, during the administrative reform of Gau Oberschlesien, the local names of Slavic origin were eliminated. Rokitnica (Rokittnitz) was renamed for Martinau. Celebrating Saint Martin's Day in Rokitnica has its roots in German culture, but the link with the Polish national holiday is bottom-up and spontaneous. This celebration exemplifies: the lack of awareness of the linguistic heritage, the honest desire to return to



Figure 4: St Martin's Day celebrations in Rokitnica (now Zabrze) in 2016, photo by B. Piecha-van Schagen.

pre-1945 customs, and the essence of the intangible cultural heritage – engaging its bearers.

Language and Religion – difficult promises

In the industrialised part of Upper Silesia, the confessional distinction overlapped with the ethnic, national, or even 'social class' identities. Catholics made up the majority of the population in Upper Silesia – over 80%, however, they prayed in two languages – Polish and German.

The division between Polish and German in the Upper Silesian Catholic Church did not only bear on the language of services and church songs, but also the functioning of Polish and German Catholicism. Notably, understanding the existence of 'national/ethnic Catholicisms' was part of the pastoral care of the diocese of Wrocław. The best examples of this are two prayer books compiled by the parish priest in Bogucice (currently the district of Katowice), Reverend Ludwik Skowronek (1859–1934). He prepared prayer books, the title of which in Polish and German has the same meaning: "The Way to Heaven" ("Droga do nieba" and "Der Weg zum Himmel"), but their content indicates that there are in fact different books containing different sets of songs, prayers.³⁰ Skowronek composed them based on his extensive pastoral experience, which is particularly evident through the directions for moral living different for Polish and German-speaking Catholics.³¹ Sermons preached in both languages, congregations, and confraternities for Polish- and German-speaking parishioners were everyday occurrences in Upper Silesia. The situation changed after 1945. The ban to use German publicly also included Catholic and Protestant services. For many autochthons, this had a profoundly devastating impact. The first Catholic mass for German-speaking believers after World War II was performed in 1989 at the Saint Anne Mountain (Góra świętej Anny; Sankt Annaberg) by the Polish bishop of Silesian origin, Alfons Nossol.

These Catholics were not the only ones who struggled to find their place in the Church in the face of new political realities that were also affecting the functioning of the institution since 1945. The Polish-speaking Catholics in Upper Silesia however were not "Polish" enough for the immigrants from the central and eastern parts of the country. Particularly sensitive to this problem were the inhabitants of the Polish Eastern Borderlands, considered to be the essence of Polish culture. Those coming from the east prayed in 'their' churches with Polish priests. Of course, they did not build their churches – they occupied Protestant churches, which were, after all, mainly German heritage and therefore doomed to oblivion. In Bytom, the Catholic immigrants from the Borderlands, under the leadership of 'their priest' Zygmunt Staniszewski, took over the church, which was given the name of one of the patron saints of Poland, St Adalbert. The newcomers often *treated the Protestant-Augsburg churches as prey. The words were repeated many times: 'We have conquered this church'*.³² The hierarchy governing the Catholic Church in Upper Silesia was aware that the ethnic, confessional, and linguistic composition in many parishes had changed due to massive post-war migrations.³³ To this day, Bytom speaks generally of the church of the borderlands. Even 20, 30 years after the end of the Second World War the idea of 'German Catholicism' was extended to the entire community of Upper Silesians, which caused ethnic conflicts on the local level. The Upper Silesian inhabitants of the workers' estate of Huta Zabrze (Zandka) protested

30 Dylus: Modlitewnik Ślązaków; Tarlinski, „Weg zum Himmel”/„Droga do nieba”.

31 Dylus, Role komunikacyjne.

32 Nitschke: Wyszalenie ludności niemieckiej, p. 211.

33 Myszor, Historia diecezji katowickiej, pp. 398-399.



Figure 5: First Communion commemorative photograph from the beginning of 20th century, Zabrze, private property (licence B. Piecha-van Schagen).

against the singing of songs in honour of Mary Queen of Poland by the immigrants. They felt that this was an appropriation of Catholicism by the Poles, although the Poles used the legend as an argument for the connection. In the vision of the Italian Jesuit Giulio Mancinelli in 1608, Saint Mary declared herself to be a Patron of Poland and this protection became a constitutive factor of Polish national Catholicism. It took the priest of this small parish in Zabrze several years to resolve this conflict expressing reluctance or even aggression. This was achieved through diplomatic pastoral work respecting the traditions of both groups. Both could count on participation in services and on meetings of lay Catholics



Figure 6: Commemorative photograph from the Confirmation ceremony, 1950s, Zabrze, private property (licence B. Piecha-van Schagen).

that respected their differences and supported the unifying process.³⁴

In addition to the Silesian and German languages, other elements of intangible cultural heritage have become promises to be handed down with a hope that the future generations would fulfil them.

Black dresses as a promise not kept

The revival of Protestantism in Upper Silesia took place in the 19th century and was connected with the influx of people from outside,

34 Grabińska-Szcześniak/Piecha-van Schagen: Parafia, p. 372.



Figure 7: Confirmation in the church in Borsigwerk (now Zabrze), 1970s, private property (licence B. Piecha-van Schagen).

attracted by the dynamic development of the mining and metallurgical industry. Since then Protestantism was stereotypically associated with a group of factory owners, clerks, and state administration employees. Of course, the majority of engineers in East Prussia were indeed Protestants, but others (for example one of the most influential Count Franz von Ballestrem) were Catholic or Jewish.

The Protestants and Catholics shared the streets and roads to the mines, the steelworks, and the coking plant, living a consistent daily life, though the religious celebrations and the appearance of their religious life differed. Catholic girls, for example, received their First Communion in white dresses with myrtle garlands on their heads, or white veils (the daughters of re-emigrants from France and Belgium)³⁵ while Protestant girls wore elegant black dresses for Confirmation, according to German, or rather Prussian, tradition.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, girls went to Confirmation dressed "in a black dress, an elegant dress, which was sewed by the mother, because she was a seamstress. I had a very nice black dress" and, in Upper Silesian custom, a myrtle garland on the head. Catholic children noticed the difference: as we were children [...], we went to Communion, and from our class some were Protestants and went to Confirmation. Remember, how did we look like? They were going in long black dresses. And we to Communion in white".³⁶ By the 1970s, the tradition of wearing black dresses to Confirmation had completely disappeared. Protestant girls have since looked like Catholics entering their first communion,³⁷ so the promise to uphold the heritage of the ancestors, and therefore to emphasise Protestant distinctiveness, was not kept. The Upper Silesian Protestant community has also aligned itself with the Catholic majority by changing the traditional time for receiving first communion from Passion Time to Easter.

35 Grabińska-Szczeńsiak: *Święta rodzinne*, p. 386.

36 Grabińska-Szczeńsiak: *Święta rodzinne*, p. 387.

37 Grabińska-Szczeńsiak: *Święta rodzinne*, p. 388.

The tyta as a promise fulfilled but not credited

Currently the young Upper Silesian children start the first day of the new school year with a decorated cardboard cone – tyta in Silesian – in their hands. Thus, contemporary Upper Silesians are keeping their promise to preserve this element of heritage while the true origin of them raises certain problems. School cones (Schul-tüten) or sugar cones (Zuckertüten) were already given to children in Silesia at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. They probably have their origin in Christian and Jewish traditions.³⁸ Filling them with sweets, sultanas and biscuits became a heritage passed down from generation to generation. Granting a cone with sweets became one of very few local, Silesian heritage elements eagerly accepted and practiced also by those who arrived in the region and were not familiar with it. Tyta has become a tool for rooting: “it’s a must! How could I deny my son this! All the children had it. If you enter a community, you have to adapt in some way [...] because it’s a nice tradition”³⁹. However, the Silesian “tyta” (die Tüte), is being recently defined as a “cone of plenty” in the national media⁴⁰ as well as in



Figure 8: The first day of school in 1936, Borsigwerk (now Zabrze), private property (licence B. Piecha-van Schagen).

some of local news sources.⁴¹ Commercialisation, which is of course another issue, apart from the confusion caused by the use of the Silesian and Polish name of the cone actually distort the memory of Upper Silesian identity. In every supermarket in the region at the end of August, you can buy Herlitz-branded “tyta” in various sizes. Quite often, anthropologists

38 Löwe: Schulanfang, pp. 16-17.

39 Grabińska-Szcześniak/Piecha-van Schagen: Przed-szkole, szkoła i tyta, p. 434.

40 For example, the news service of a country-wide radio, b.a., Tyta na 1 września, czyli słodki początek szkolnej przygody, article from 2015, https://www.rmfm24.pl/fakty/polska/news-tyta-na-1-wrzesnia-czyli-slodki-pocatek-szkolnej-przygody,nld,1877282#crp_state=1.

41 News from the website for the local community of Rybnik from 2018, M. Palowska-Trzebuniak, Tyta, czyli najlepsza ośroda pierwszego dnia w szkole, <https://rybnik.dlawas.info/wiadomosci/tyta-czyli-najlepsza-osroda-pierwszego-dnia-w-szkole/cid,9649,a>. Internet service of the local broadcaster „Silesia TV” from 2019, M. Wandzik, Tyta – inaczej róg obfitości, <https://www.slaska.tv/tyta-inaczej-rog-obfitosci/>.

interviewed in the media explain that the “tyta - cone of plenty” is a legacy of Greek mythology: “research shows that the first mention of cone of plenty comes from Germany, in 1817 (...) This was a time of fascination with ancient culture”.⁴² However, a year ago, one of the region’s most popular journals published an article on the popularity of tyta, citing an interview with German anthropologist Christiane Cantauw.⁴³ The text clearly indicated the German origin of the tradition, which could be also emphasised by the residents of Zabrze: “tyta was always there. Under the Germans there were tyty for kids”.⁴⁴ But is it still clearly understood as a heritage? As originally German tradition it was approved and accepted by the Slavic inhabitants. Since then the autochthonous population is certainly consciously passing on this cultural behaviour, but the question is, whether replacing its origin with connotations of Greek mythology is not a strategy for assimilating an element and blur out its origins.

The promise of the identity

Only in recent years it has been possible for the communities of Upper Silesians to openly restore the original meaning of the word tradition – tradere (latin): to hand over, to give for safekeeping. Only since 1989 does the cultural

heritage follow the path marked by its bearers and defined by the Intangible Cultural Heritage UNESCO Convention – from the bottom up. Freed from the former political ties, Upper Silesians have been able to rediscover their identity – allowing them to reach into their post-memory and rework it into a living heritage. However, freedom for heritage means that Upper Silesians must relate their regained identity to those people in the region who came here. The promised identity must, as a result of migration, enter into a relationship with the migrants’ identities. These interactions do not always have a good effect on the Upper Silesian identity promised to past generations.

It seems, then, that in Upper Silesia there is a constant conflict of promises – many of those made to past generations have fallen, and continue to fall prey to political opportunism. The laws which are made do not always support the heritage that is the bearer of identity, but even lead to its degradation and forced disappearance from the social and cultural memory. Political promises often make it impossible to keep the promise of passing on a heritage. An example is the refusal of those in power in Poland to recognise the Silesian language as an official minority language for several decades. Such a change would make it possible to teach it in school in order to maintain its vitality. Also, this identity burst seems to be endangered by commercial simplification. The Silesian language is sold in a package of pretty decent design. The simplified record distorts the phonetic richness and variety of Silesian dialects. The Schultüte (tyta) became the “cone of plenty”.

The research I have carried out over the past few years indicates that there are currently three

42 Semik, Tyta na początek roku szkolnego. Skąd wzięła się na Śląsku i czemu nie przyjęła się w Polsce, <https://www.slazag.pl/tyta-na-dobry-poczatek-roku-szkolnego-pierwszoklasistom-sie-nalezy-dlaczego-tylko-na-slasku-a-nie-w-calej-polsce>.

43 Kuźnik: Tyta.

44 Grabińska-Szczęśniak/Piecha-van Schagen: Przed-szkole, szkoła i tyta, p. 432.

distinctive groups which are sensitive to keep the promise of passing the heritage. The older generations of Germans, of people expelled from the Eastern Borderlands of the Republic of Poland, or of Edward Gierek-era migrants who tend to live in alienation. Before their eyes, the traditions, language and religion of their ancestors are becoming increasingly undesirable, unwanted and sinking into oblivion. They meet in small groups to nurture the remnants of memory – thus keeping the promise made to their parents and grandparents. In turn, the age-diverse group that strongly identifies itself as autochthonous – that is the Upper Silesians, while listening for decades to the promises (not political once) made by states and political groupings, are looking for a mental space to settle their strong identity: unwanted and depreciated. The question still needs to be asked whether the heritage they are cultivating is really what their ancestors practised.

Somewhat in between in Upper Silesia there lives a generation in their Thirties and Forties who have made their own choice based on creating a cultural hybrid. They identify with the place where they live, even though half of their parents were economic immigrants. As Michael Maffesoli believes, they form a neo-tribe.⁴⁵ In this group, many emphasise their choice with a tattoo of a regional theme, but it does not matter to them whether they eat Polish pierogi or Silesian fish soup on Christmas Eve. Those whose ancestors did not come from Silesia still maintain traditions from their places of origin. In doing so, they create a patchwork culture, a

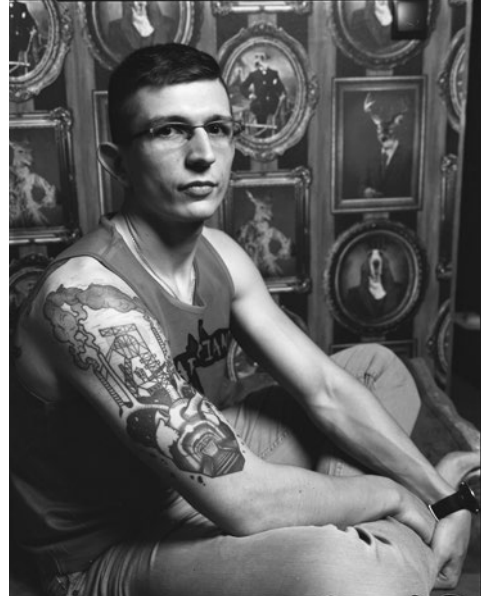


Figure 9: One of the participants of the “Tattooed with Silesia” project, photo by P. Muschalik.

patchwork identity. They keep the promise of preserving the heritage of their grandparents from the Lesser Poland or the Eastern Borderlands, while at the same time rooting themselves in the Upper Silesian industrial space. Migrants usually decide for themselves which process they should undergo – consent or cultural denial, but the case of Upper Silesia seems to indicate that economic and political factors significantly influence the formation of identity and the functioning of one of the ways of expressing it, namely the intangible cultural heritage. In order to know who we are and where we came from, we need big celebrations, edifices that remind us of our inglorious history, but also small cultural gestures and acts of

45 Maffesoli: *Czas plemion*.

remembrance. An important part of identity is also understanding, identifying elements of the heritage of the 'native' or chosen identity.

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