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SUMMARY

A COUNTRY WITH NO EXIT? INTERNATIONAL MIGRATIONS FROM POLAND, 1949–1989

This book presents the history of international migrations from Poland under the communist regime. It analyzes the evolution of migrations and relevant policies of the state from the consolidation of communist rule in the late 1940s and early 1950s, when migrations nearly stopped, to the late 1980s, when millions of Poles traveled abroad to work or trade and hundreds of thousands left the country indefinitely. This interesting change from static immobility to movement on a massive scale and from an initial policy of isolation toward the gradual removal of restrictions and the adoption of policies encouraging labor migrations offers insights into more general changes throughout communist regimes and societies. By 1989, more than two million people migrated from Poland. Theirs was the largest outflow from the Soviet Bloc.

The primary sources for this study include archival documents charting the movement of people and the papers left by the communist police and the dictatorial party delineating how migration policies developed. In addition to documents from the Security Service (SB), which controlled and closely monitored the international mobility of each Polish citizen, archives of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers Party (PZPR) and other government collections, this study analyzes various personal documents, such as the memoirs of migrants and policy makers, statistical data on migrations and the telling results of sociological research conducted before and (retrospectively) after 1989. This monograph benefits from the new, expanding historiography devoted to communist Poland and, finally, draws from migration theories developed over recent decades, which have envisioned migrations from novel economic, social, cultural and political perspectives.

The Sovietization of Poland, which accelerated in the late 1940s, coincided with the end of the great postwar population transfers. By 1952, when Polish Communists changed the country's name to the People's Republic of Poland (PRL) they imposed policies of isolation, creating institutions that gave the state unprecedented control over external mobility. Travel abroad, especially outside the Soviet Bloc, became a rare exception to the non-exit rule. For example**,** in 1951, the total number of trips to all Western countries (almost exclusively business trips by state and party officials) stood at less than two thousand. In 1954 only 52 individuals gained passports for private trips to the West and less than 50 individual emigration permits were issued. Most cross-border mobility consisted of transports of Soviet military personnel, moving to or from their bases in the GDR and Poland.

Chapter 1 presents two distinct pillars that supported this non-exit regime: the Passport Bureau and the border control system. This first chapter explains the intricacies of this office, its rules of operations and procedures that effectively reduced the possibility of receiving a passport to a minimum. The long and exceedingly cumbersome application process was centralized required an in-depth screening of the applicant and at least one personal visit to the Bureau's office in Warsaw. As the Passport Bureau was a part of the frightening Ministry of Public Security few people dared to apply. The second pillar of this isolationist regime was the border control system,

with 1100 kilometers of barbed wire fence and 1314 watch towers; more than 32,000 border guards and thousands of secret agents and informers operated along the border. Both the passport system and the border regime imitated institutions developed in the Soviet Union from the late 1920s onwards. Having abolished articulated discontent and prevented exit, the Communists left Poles no choice but to acquiesce to their regime.

The government made two exceptions to the non-exit rule: for the Germans and the Jews. Communist Poland was to be a homogenous nation-state of ethnic Poles. The governments of the newly established German Democratic Republic and Israel insisted that emigration of Germans and Jews, respectively, be allowed, especially for members of families divided by war. Warsaw eventually agreed to these requests, especially as it desired to rid the country of the elderly, sick or otherwise unproductive Germans in the Western Territories, which up to 1945 had been part of Germany, and the Israelis were ready to pay for every Jewish emigrant. Chapters 2 and 3 explore two secret deals and two resettlement operations which between 1949 and 1951 enabled the emigration of 76,000 Germans and 29,000 Jews.

These exceptions established precedents for larger outflows of Germans and Jews during the process of destalinization, which began in the USSR in 1953 and reached Poland in 1955–1956 (chapters 5 and 6). Moscow not only allowed, but actively encouraged the revision of various policies, including those relating to international mobility. This development coincided with an improvement in East–West relations and facilitated the renewal of international negotiations concerning emigration. West German diplomats skillfully exploited Poland's economic problems to reach a deal on a family reunification program. As economic crises, intra-party strife and decentralization tendencies destabilized the Polish regime in 1956 and 1957, the selection criteria for those applying for emigration on the grounds of familial reunification widened. Up until early 1959, some 275,000 people left Poland for the two German states. Similarly, more than 50,000 Jews left for Israel. Some 28,000 emigrants left for other countries, mainly to concentrations of Polish diaspora overseas.

An overall relaxing of emigration constraints was a necessary but not sufficient condition for this emigration explosion. In addition to collective emigration desires which had accumulated during the years of isolation, new forces pushed and pulled people out of PRL. Particularly in the ethnically mixed and polyvalent communities of the Western Territories, powerful inner dynamics of the migration process drew thousands of Silesians, Masurs and Pomeranians out of their home towns. Networks formed after initial movements helped establish a transnational social space, which connected families, friends and (ex)neighbors in Poland and FRG, thus creating a virtual borderland on two sides of the non-existent PRL–FRG border. The development of this transnational space created problems for Polish leaders similar to those faced by their East German comrades. The chain process of migration, which gradually relocated Silesians from Silesia to the land of Nordrhein-Westfalen in the FRG, essentially moved the border across local communities, recasting social networks within the communities as transnational networks and, finally, as immigrant networks in the FRG. This process impacted more than 1.2 million people who relocated from Poland to the FRG between 1956 and 1989.

Destalinization instigated a general revision of policies concerning international mobility and elicited institutional alterations and destabilization of the passport system. Some migratory phenomena temporarily defied control. Travel abroad expanded, mainly within the Soviet Bloc but also to the West (see Chapter 4 and Annex, table 10). Among the mobile pioneers of the 1950s were thousands of individuals who had been refused passport before as well as those who had previously refrained from applying. The "thaw" decreased terror, destabilized the security apparatus of the PRL and, accordingly, reduced fear throughout the populace. News of opportunities to travel abroad spread via channels of social communication based on informal personal networks.

The re-stabilization of the passport regime after 1956 was not a simple return to the *status quo ante*. As I explore in chapter 7, it was a significant reform and re-construction of relevant rules and institutions. Out of the initial confusion regarding what a non-Stalinist yet socialist policy should entail, there gradually emerged a new, complex set of guidelines that replaced the crude non-exit policy of the past. In the Passport Bureau, the reform altered the balance between the office's regular administrative tasks (i.e. issuing passports for the citizens) and the tasks it carried out as a part of the Security apparatus (screening of applicants, preventing undesirable exit, gathering information for intelligence and counterintelligence departments, selecting candidates for and recruiting secret agents and informers among the applicants, etc.). In the Stalinist era, the Passport Bureau was primarily an arm of the political police. After 1956, the Bureau reduced the intensity of the security operations and paid greater attention to this administrative service.

At this time, the Bureau relocated from the Ministry of Public Security (which had been dissolved) to the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MSW). The Secretariat of the PZPR Central Committee remained the top passport policy-maker but the party no longer made decisions for individual cases. Party leaders set policy guidelines, which the CC Administrative Department forwarded or explained to the MSW or directly to the head of the Passport Bureau. Detailed albeit secret written regulations clarified, simplified and defined relevant rules and procedures. The "Act on Passports" of 1959 introduced into Polish legal code the "right to a passport" and specified conditions regarding passport refusal. The practical application of this law, however, shows that the "socialist rule of law" remained sufficiently flexible to allow for far reaching changes in policies and arbitrary decision. To process higher numbers of applications the Bureau opened branches (Passport Departments) within provincial police headquarters and the staff greatly expanded. In the 1960s, in response to growing international mobility and the increased demand for travel documents, the passport service opened several hundred sections (or offices) in medium-sized towns and gradually decentralized decision making to the provincial departments.

Restrictions on international mobility diversified, depending on the destination, type of mobility and qualities of the applicant. Travel to other Soviet Bloc countries was relatively easy and some of its forms, such as business trips to maintain or expand "socialist cooperation" of enterprises, institutions and social organizations, and group excursions organized by youth organizations and trade unions were even encouraged and subsidized by the government. New types of passports for travel within the Bloc were issued under simplified procedures and at low cost. In the 1960s, the refusal rate for applications for such passports declined to a mere few percent. Travel outside the Bloc remained difficult, as the application process was longer and cumbersome. Most difficult was long-term emigration to the West, normally restricted to narrowly defined family unification. The elderly, disabled or those otherwise a burden for the state had the greatest chance for an emigration permit. On the other hand, special restrictions applied to the young, educated or skilled. In addition to unwelcome destinations and categories of migrants, the Security Service denied passports to thousands of individuals whom for various reasons it classified as suspect or prone to leave indefinitely, as well as to families of defectors.

The two decades 1960 to 1980 were the most stable period of PRL and its passport policy (see chapters 8 and 11). Legal emigration remained limited, usually ranging from 10,000 to 25,000 émigrés each year, largely to the West. In the 1960s, the MSW maintained a 50% refusal rate for emigration permit applications to outside the Bloc. When the numbers of applications grew in mid-1960s, the MSW tightened its grip further and the refusal rate grew to upwards of 90%. In the 1970s, along with a general tendency for modernization, the development of individual consumption and *détente* in East–West relations, travel abroad became massive. During the first half of the decade, the mobility within the Bloc significantly increased, especially to the GDR. Beginning in 1972, Poles and East Germans could cross the border between their countries visa--free, with a regular identity document stamped by a local passport office. This year the number

of Poles' visits abroad increased tenfold, from one million in 1971 to ten million. Five years later a set of agreements similarly facilitated travel to other countries of Eastern Europe. In late 1970s, the tourist movement within the Bloc was restricted mainly by the limited amount of foreign currencies that one could legally exchange. After the Helsinki conference of 1975, travel to the West became easier as well and grew quickly, reaching 695,000 by 1980 (see table 10).

In the years between 1960 and 1980 about half a million people left Poland for good. Return migration was negligible. Emigrants were mostly female, with striking differences in feminization between streams to various countries, and largely urban. The outflow was highly concentrated to a few countries. Germany (mainly West) attracted two thirds of the émigrés; the United States became a destination for about 15%. The popularity of Israel as an emigration goal declined, with the exception of the years 1968–1969 when the "anti-Zionist campaign" pushed out more than 13,000 people (see chapter 9). From the late 1960s onward, the flows towards Canada and Australia declined. Great Britain and France attracted about 1% of emigrants each.

Most of the émigrés came from a handful of regions throughout Poland. Three voyevodships in Western Territories with large native communities (specifically Katowice, Opole and Olsztyn) contributed jointly more than half of all exiters. The voyevodships of Warsaw and Wrocław followed with about 9% of exit permits each. The provinces of Rzeszów and Kraków, which have strong traditions of emigration to North America, constituted about 10% of all emigrants. Emigration was exceptionally high in 1972 and between 1976 and 1979, due to the new "family unification" drive following the PRL–FRG agreement regarding normalization of bilateral relations and a major credit agreement in mid-1975. Chapter 10 analyzes the diplomatic negotiations that led to these new agreements as well as the development, structures and dynamics of the two emigration waves which drew more than 170,000 people. In particular this chapter focuses on the role of transnational networks, FRG's generous and effective programs for the *Aussiedlers'* integration into German society and the relation between the expansion of emigration tendencies and identity changes in the Polish–German virtual borderland.

Chapter 11 envisions temporary migrations, set against the wider background of international mobility from Poland. It offers an extensive definition of migrations, which in addition to temporary migrations longer than three months and movements related to work abroad, includes other forms of mobility for profit, particularly short-term trips of petty traders.

Four groups of migrants held legal work abroad. The first category consisted of pendular cross--border workers, predominantly female, employed under bilateral agreements in Czechoslovakia and GDR. Their circulation developed from the mid-1960s onward and reached a peak employment of some 30,000 in the early 1970s. Poland's two neighbors also attracted a few thousand Polish seasonal workers under agreements for "youth summer camps," internships and student placements. The third group of migrants was predominantly male, employed by Polish firms and contracted to carry out construction abroad, mainly in Czechoslovakia, the GDR, the USSR and several developing countries. By 1980, some 80,000 men held such positions. Finally, individual migrants employed by foreign companies via Polservice, an official recruiting agency, constituted the most diverse category of labor migrants. In 1980, for example, some 10,000 workers, usually highly skilled medical personnel, engineers, researchers, lecturers, worked in various countries ranging from Finland to Senegal.

Illegal migrations, by their nature are more difficult to track. Moreover, the definition of illegality in a communist country proves quite complex.. Many migrations belonged to a gray zone of informal activities that were neither clearly legal nor illegal according to the laws of PRL. Almost all temporary migrants were "false tourists" who applied for a passport as part of a tourist trip or a family visit, but worked or traded despite the declared intentions. If caught, they risked a ban on their passport for two years. Many of them violated relevant regulations in their destination countries too.

Some Poles took unregistered jobs in other communist countries, mostly the GDR. The primary destination of illegal labor flows, however, was the West. Low wages in the PRL's highly redistributive economy and the active black market of strongly overvalued hard currencies (the mechanisms of which are explored in detail in chapter 11) made Western earnings extremely attractive. The average net monthly salary was equivalent to 20–50 dollars (see Annex, table 7). For example, a few weeks of work on a German farm, in a French vineyard or a British bar produced earnings equal to several months or even several years of work at home. Thus, the growth of the labor migrations was most likely faster than the expansion of the overall mobility to the West, especially in the 1970s. Conservative estimates for the end of the decade posit 150,000 to 200,000 of such migrations annually, of which at least 30,000 were for more than three months. Under such conditions Poles who managed to get to the West were eager to take low-paid, low-status jobs in the lower segment of the labor market and maintained extraordinary saving rates.

International petty trade became popular among both the visitors of capitalist and socialist countries. Trips to the "brotherly countries" were much more numerous and the shortage economies of the Soviet Bloc offered plenty of attractive business opportunities. Polish tourists skillfully exploited large disparities in prices and the availability of various consumer goods in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe as well as inconsistencies in their currencies' exchange rates. They developed sophisticated strategies to maximize profits and minimize risks, such as circular trade between several countries. Conservative estimates indicate that between 100,000 and 200,000 trade trips occurred annually in the 1960s and between one and two million by the late 1970s. The size of individual transactions remained small but the phenomenon of the petty trade became large.

The final chapter explores the migrations during the last decade of the PRL. The economic and political crisis of 1980–1982, the emergence of the Solidarity movement and the declaration of Martial Law in December 1981 coalesced to represent the second major turning point in the migration history of the PRL. Initially restrictions on travel abroad declined. Throughout 1981 more than 1.2 million Poles visited the West – more in one year than in all the years between 1949 and 1969 combined. Other communist countries, however, restricted the entry of Poles, which resulted in a dramatic decline of mobility within the Bloc. Compared to figures from late 1970s, the mobility declined by 70%. The proportion of trips within and outside the Bloc changed exponentially. The economic crisis and skyrocketing dollar contributed to a greater intensity of labor migrations and petty trade.

Martial Law effectively sealed the borders and made most passports invalid. At the same time some 150,000 Poles who were in the West decided not to return. Thanks to an international wave of support and sympathy for the Solidarity movement among the Western public, these émigrés easily acquired asylum, *Aussiedler* status or residence permits. With some delay, they caused a large secondary wave of emigration of their families. A special group of the Martial Law period emigrants were activists in the Solidarity movement forced to leave by the regime. General Jaruzelski declared that any political prisoner may leave the country and his officers did their best to encourage such decisions. Under this operation that lasted till 1988, some 4.5 thousand people left Poland.

Martial law strengthened the motives for emigration and contributed to its growth in the last years of the PRL. As living conditions remained bad and prospects for economic or political reforms bleak, the desire for exit became stronger and more widespread than ever. It seemed that Poland could not overcome political, economic, social and ecological declines. Surprisingly, the door for individual exit opened during this period. While restrictions on emigration remained high, the restraints on short-term mobility lessened. This inconsistency resulted in a massive irregular emigration. Most emigrants who left Poland during the 1980s did so with a regular tourist passport and formally remained resident of the country. The census of 1988 discovered more than 600,000 people who were "temporarily absent."

In late 1980s, during Gorbachev-era reforms, the Polish government departed from the policy of the previous decades and made passports available to almost everyone who applied. This coincided with the final stage of the PRL's economic decline, a broader feeling of helplessness, an unprecedented flow of information from the West that contributed to strenuous relative deprivation, the cumulative dynamics of transnational networks and rumors that FRG may withdraw from its generous policy towards the *Aussiedlers* from Poland. Emigration grew from 60,000 in 1985 to 120,000 in 1987 to 260,000 in 1988 and crested at about 400,000 in 1989 (see chart 10).

Even greater was the number of temporary migrations. In late 1980s millions of Poles turned to petty trade or found employment abroad. Migration became a respected strategy by which to cope with the implosion of PRL's economy. People of all social strata mobilized and migration networks took root in localities where migrations had been sparse in the past. Accordingly, local communities that enjoyed a tradition a migration saw mobility for profit increase exponentially. The Polish petty trader became a familiar figure in Central and Eastern Europe. They filled large *Polenmarkt* that emerged in a square of West Berlin, traded in the streets of Austria and Sweden, imported tons of goods from Istanbul. More adventurous tourists penetrated Soviet interior and reached as far as Mongolia, China, Thailand and India. In the 1990s many of these travelers became the pioneers of Poland's new market economy.

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SPIS TREŚCI