

THE EVERYDAY LIFE OF POLISH-GERMAN MARRIAGES AFTER 1945 – THE CASE OF THE NORTH-WESTERN BORDERLAND OF POLAND

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Mixed marriages, which are one of the deciding factors in the breaking down of historical, cultural, psychological and social distance, do not fit into what is normally fundamental and obligatory in each national group and to what usually separates one group from another. The issue of Polish-German marriages post 1945 on the north-western border of Poland is an essential element in the reconstruction of Polish-German relations after World War II. The way they functioned very much depended on the historical moment in which they existed, therefore I have concentrated on three generations: coinciding with the years 1945–1971, 1972–1989 and from 1990 to 2004. The following article will be devoted to the everyday lives of the participants of these nationally mixed marriages. The contacts which existed with the state authorities are deemed outside the scope of this paper.

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Małżeństwa mieszane, jako jeden z wyznaczników przełamania dystansu historycznego, kulturowego, psychologicznego, jaki i społecznego, przekraczają obowiązujące w danej grupie fundamentalne zasady, które oddzielają ją od „obcego”. Zagadnienie małżeństw polsko-niemieckich po roku 1945 r. na północno-zachodnim pograniczu Polski stanowi istotny element w ukazaniu trudnej drogi odbudowy relacji polsko-niemieckich po II wojnie światowej. Ich codzienne funkcjonowanie uzależnione było od danego momentu historycznego, w którym żyły, dlatego w tego typu związkach wyszczególniłam trzy generacje: I przypadająca na lata 1945–1971, II 1972–1989 oraz III 1990–2004. W niniejszym artykule skupię się na przedstawieniu życia codziennego małżeństw mieszanych narodowo, jednak będzie on pomijał wątek kontaktów z władzami państwowymi, który nie stanowi części tematu tegoż tekstu.

Key words: mixed marriages, Polish-German borderland, family contacts, relations within society, communications

INTRODUCTION

Social attitudes to mixed marriages are either viewed as one of integration or alienation. The marriage takes on the form of being mixed when the differences existing between the spouses is acknowledged as being of importance either by them or by

the local community (Waldis 2006, 1–19). When writing about the everyday lives of the participants of Polish-German marriages in the new north-western borderland of Poland after 1945, one has to take into consideration the events of the Second World War, and the sense of transition which existed until Poland's western border was regulated in 1950. Polish-German marriages after 1945 on the discussed territory were an important element in shaping the image of that borderland and integrating Polish society with those Germans who still lived there. These marriages also impacted upon mutual relations between Poles and Germans from the German Democratic Republic when it became easier to travel between the two countries. Post 1945 it is possible to differentiate between three generations of such marriages. The first one falls between the years of 1945–1971, when they took place only on the Polish side of the border (hermetic marriages), the majority being between German women and Polish men. These marriages usually functioned within Polish culture, in which the women were subordinated to men. The second generation covers the years 1972–1989, when people very often got married as a result of the opening up of the border between Poland and the German Democratic Republic, frequently through work or student exchange programmes, settling on the Polish or the German side of the border. The period 1990–2004 completes the third and last generation of marriages and unofficial relationships which resulted from being able to cross the border freely. These are borderland marriages that most often functioned in two cultures. The following article will be devoted to the everyday life of nationally mixed marriages.

“AT THE BEGINNING I DIDN’T FANCY HIM AT ALL” – THE FIRST STAGE
OF THE RELATIONSHIP

The moving of the Polish borders that occurred under the terms of the Yalta and Potsdam Conferences, led to a mixing of nationalities, including in present Western Pomerania. In the area of the north-western fringes of Poland and Germany, new Polish immigrants came in contact both with people of German identity (ie. recognized Germans), as well as with a population having Polish / Slavic roots (*Volksdeutsch / Baltendeutsch*), defined as indigenous. The number of the former amounted to approximately 840,000 in June 1945 (before deportation and emigration); however in the second quarter of 1951 (after the end of deportations) there were only 30,177 Germans with another 8,318 Germans going to Germany from the Szczecin Province in the years 1951–1959. This emigration contributed to the fact that there were only 600 Germans¹ living in the Szczecin Province at the end of the 50s, and only 420 at the end of the

¹ See: APSz, PWRN, 13895. Information concerning the situation of the German population in the Province of Szczecin. 1960, k. 27.

60s. (Mieczkowski 1999, 69). In 1945, there were no central guidelines in the new Polish state in how to deal with the German population and this meant that their living conditions were dependent on the job or accumulated savings they had. Where these were lacking it led to begging or in the case of women sometimes prostitution. It should be emphasized that in 1945 in Poland – after 6 years of war – in terms of the demographic structure women made up the highest percentage – if the sick, the disabled, children and the elderly – are excluded.

Immediately after the war, how people met played an important role in mixed marriages. Many got to know each other from the period of forced labour in Germany, when it was usually German women who helped and took care of Polish men (this contravened German law at the time and could have resulted in such punishment as having one's head shaved. From 1945, German women often worked for Poles as housekeepers as many of these German women and their children had been abandoned by their husbands and fathers during the war. As a result, Polish men and German women often started cohabiting in an attempt to provide the latter with some necessary security or also as a result of the phenomenon of compensation which came about because of the different limitations imposed on getting married during the war or not being allowed to in the case of mixed marriages; working together on state-owned farms; meeting through education and their mutual social life, especially in the 1950s and 1960s, when the German woman – Polish man schema of the previous years no longer had quite the same meaning.

One of our interviewees met her future Polish husband in August 1945 in Szczecin, from where she was sent to a village in the county of Gryfino where he was *wójt* (the person in charge of the village).

“My husband once came with a policeman and arrived in the yard. My sister didn't go out to them, well she was pregnant. (...) It just somehow happened, we fell in love, and then I went out into the fields. I was sent there as always in the morning as we were given jobs to do and told where to go. At the beginning there weren't many Poles here. And then my husband said: you're not going into the fields any more. You'll stay here with me. And so I started working in his kitchen” (P-S Archives, W.W.1)².

In the autumn of 1945, she decided, together with a friend, to leave for Germany and thus went to the *wójt* for the appropriate document. Her friend received what she wanted while our interviewee heard in reply:

“And you're staying with me. I agreed because I wasn't so much against it myself. When you're young, you don't think what may happen in the future. But I've never, ever regretted it” (Konieczny and Łazowski 2008, 76).

² The letters and numbers in brackets refer to conversations recorded and written down, kept in the Popławska-Sus' Archives (P-S Archives).

His physical appearance also influenced her final decision because her future husband was tall and dark:

“Immediately. Somehow immediately he caught my eye [laughter – P-S.]. ... Yes well, it was the same with him. He was also looking [at me – P-S.]” (P-S Archives, W.W.1).

They started living together that same year, which secured her safety. At first they lived in the building where he worked, then, when her future father-in-law arrived, they moved into their present home which had been left empty by its previous owners. Our interviewee did not take up employment outside the home, instead working on the farm which, with the passing of time, grew significantly in size.

Our second interviewee met her future husband when they were working in a factory in a village called Wysoka in the county of Myślubórz. She insisted she never wanted to marry a German but only a Pole. As she recalled, they started living together very quickly and finally decided to get married about five years later. She said that at the beginning they never spoke very much to each other and their relationship had its ups and downs:

“He was quite a drunk. But he never harmed me. I can’t say he ever harmed me. (...) I remember we had geese in Wysoka, he would help in looking after them, shouting at them that they were German. But no, he was never any different. He’d have a drink too many but was never unpleasant... When we argued he never called me names, never abused me [because I was German – P-S.]. Only two, three words and that would be all” (P-S Archives, W.W.2).

Another interviewee met her husband in 1956 in the village of Cerkwica where they worked together. They both lived in the same palace but in different parts of the building, one being for men, the other for women. They would both go to dances organised in the palace. A visible smile on her face showed us very clearly that knowing how to dance played a significant part in their budding relationship. However, it wasn’t love at first sight but a slow getting used to each other and the building up of mutual respect. They started living together two or three years after they first met.

Another couple met at a dance in 1955, in Stargard Szczeciński where they are still living today. They remember the times when he visited her very often.

“It was here in Stargard that there was a restaurant, it was called ‘Venice’. There’s a park ‘Venice’ there as well. (...) Not far from the River Ina (...). It was there that young people would get together to have a dance, listen to music. (...) Once, I was there with some friends, and my wife was with a friend and her husband. So she went with them, to see what it was like, to have a dance. And I was with some of my friends. We were sitting at a table but we weren’t there just to stare at one another, we started looking round to see which girl we could have a dance with. So I went up to my wife and her friends and asked if they didn’t mind me asking her to join me in a dance. They didn’t. We had one dance together, then one of my friends went up and asked if he could dance with her. She attracted attention. We danced quite a lot together and then afterwards I saw her home. It was late at night. We continued to keep in touch, over the phone and through visits. I lived quite near so I didn’t have far to go” (P-S Archives, W.W.3a).

In one case our German interviewee had had two Polish husbands. She met her first husband at a village dance, after which they had a civil wedding in 1951 in the village of Biebrza. Although they also planned a Catholic church wedding, her baptism certificate, which was one of the requirements, did not arrive from Germany before the unexpected death of her husband. Their marriage, from which she has one son, lasted less than two years with her husband dying tragically in the winter of 1952/53. As she herself admitted, talking with him proved at first to be rather difficult because she did not know any Polish. However, this situation had altered by the time she got to know her second husband at the end of the 1960s as by then her knowledge of the language was significantly better. They met through her work at school:

“I was working here at the school and he had a child attending the same school. I knew his wife, but then she died. We somehow got talking and started going out together” (P-S Archives, W.W.5).

The last example presented here typifies Polish-German relationships immediately following the end of World War II, with the partners being separated – due to displacement – by the Polish authorities. After the Germans were ejected from Poland, they very seldom met up again. Throughout my research on the subject, I only came across one such couple. They met in the winter of 1946 thanks to her aunt. The Polish husband recalls how they met:

“E.’s aunt told her to come to us for some milk. She gave her our name. But E. said: How can I go for milk if I’ve no money? But her aunt told her the people were good and she could get some milk without any money. So E. came with this litre-can. She was shy and rather frightened, especially as there was a young man sitting there. She was afraid of being raped as this often happened then. And when she was leaving she kept looking back to make sure the boy was not going to get up and chase her. That’s what it was like, the second time, the third. Then the fourth time, I knew German well then but now I’ve forgotten everything. I said I would see her home and we could have a chat because I saw she was so scared. We talked about different things. Once, twice and then I kissed her on the forehead. It wasn’t love, no. I was simply sorry the girl had to go begging and that she had no money for food. The next time she came in a much better mood and asked why I’d kissed her. And I told her it was because I felt respect for her. That’s how it started. We respected each other, but there was no love in it. And it was through this respect for each other that we met up again later” (P-S Archives, W.W.4a).

It was not her looks that drew his attention.

“It was friendship that brought us together and not that we’d fallen for each other. It wasn’t love. It was friendship, respect. As far as our characters were concerned, we suited each other in everything. And that’s how it was. Then we parted but she didn’t get married although there was a boy she liked [laughter – P-S.]” (P-S Archives, W.W.4a).

In the view of our German interviewee, on the other hand, her Polish husband was a quiet man and what actually brought them together was the way they perceived reality. She also recalled their parting.

“He thought in the same way as me and it’s like that today as well. This was what attracted me to him. This was very important after all that time in Russia. I finally felt I could trust someone again and this was so very important after being in Siberia. Then we became closer and really got to like each other. F. went to the mayor and said he wanted to marry me. But then they said I was the daughter of capitalists and no way would this be possible. It was then we heard we’d have to part and that was very difficult because we meant a lot to each other (...). I don’t know how to even describe it. Everything he did, the way he behaved suited me. There was nothing strange here. We really came to know each other and our families as well” (P-S Archives, W.W.4b).

The second generation of Polish-German marriages started in 1972 as a result of travelling between Poland and the German Democratic Republic becoming easier. People from both countries were able to meet through student exchange programmes, through work or through mutual friends living, for example, on the German side of the border.

One of our interviewees met her future husband during a summer trip when she was studying German at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań.

“(…) Our university was then able to organise summer trips to the German Democratic Republic where students could practise their German and at the same time earn a little money working as a waiter or selling ice-cream. It wasn’t then that I met my future husband but I did spend time in the place where he lived. I became friends with some people there and then, on a private basis, would sometimes visit them. It was during one of those visits, at a ball, that we actually met” (P-S Archives, W.W.10).

People also met at work or through mutual friends:

“Eric was an old school friend of my employer. He would sometimes come and visit us at work. That’s where we met. I was on my own then. Sometimes I would ask him to do something for me in the flat, hang up a cupboard, etc. I would then make supper. Later we started meeting more often” (P-S Archives, W.W.14).

“I met my partner in Szczecin, at work. He was obviously interested in me. I always used to say that I’d never marry a German but when I met him and I visited him a couple of times, I immediately knew he wasn’t a rich German, as the view in Poland normally was that I’d find myself a rich German. I knew though he was somebody I could live with. And that’s why I decided very quickly. After knowing him only a month I decided to move in with him. I had my own home but decided to do this because it was only then that I could really get to know him by waking up next to him, going to sleep with him and seeing him on an everyday basis. If he came to visit me from time to time, all smiles, dressed up to the nines, with flowers, it just wouldn’t be it” (P-S Archives, W.W.13).

“I met my future husband through friends who lived here in Pampow. There was a Dorffest, a sort of village fair, which is organised every year. Well, I was invited simply to meet him which of course I wasn’t in on. At that time I was on my own and he was as well. We treated it as a joke but that’s how it started, through mutual friends. But in actual fact, we really fancied each other right from the beginning” (P-S Archives, W.W.16).

When asked whether our interviewees would marry a German a second time, I heard various answers, but on the whole it was in the negative. It is worth stressing, however, that these answers usually came from Poles who in the first phase of their binational relationship had negative experiences with their German surroundings.

“We fell in love. One was young then, stupid. Now I wouldn’t want to marry a German. No, I wouldn’t. But then I was 22 years old and they opened up the borders, they did it so quickly” (P-S Archives, W.W.12).

Many of our interviewees stressed the need for compromise on both sides, and also the need to understand a different upbringing in a different culture and religion.

“One meets the needs of the other and we say that today it will be like this, tomorrow like that. A Polish-German way of life, or in fact that of any other dual nationality, always depends on compromise because otherwise there would only be disagreements. You always have to look for that one path” (P-S Archives, W.W.13).

“He’s a German and I understand that. We try not to get in each other’s way but generally it’s not easy living with a German, or any other nationality for that matter. Mixed marriages are not easy. There’s a difference in culture, in eating habits. There are other tastes, other smells, other traditions. If everything is to come together, then there has to be compromise. It won’t work otherwise” (P-S Archives, W.W.17).

FAMILY CONTACTS

Contacts with their respective families are an important element of the life of mixed marriages. The Second World War had a significant impact here. One of our interviewees described it thus:

“His parents were against him marrying a German. And I’m not really surprised. Their elder son was killed during the war. And my husband’s hand was torn away by a grenade. I understand that very well, but how am I to blame? I was a child when the war broke out. But we have to understand all that” (P-S Archives, W.W.1).

She also stated that at the beginning both of her husband’s parents had a similar negative attitude towards her. They were unsurprisingly, angry at him for his choice of wife due to the fact that they had lost one son in the Warsaw Uprising and another son’s hand had been ripped off. In her relations with her mother-in-law, one incident was especially painful and that is why she did not tell me about it till the very end of the interview.

“When my older son was born and I was lying there in bed, my husband’s second brother just happened to be there. It was 5th July and there were such black cherries then. He went and brought me some of these cherries, in a mug that I usually drank tea and coffee from. And he put it down, saying they’d do me good. I just kept looking at the mug. I was thinking: What’s going to happen now? And I kept looking, looking, at the mug he’d put down. Why are you looking at that mug all the time?, he asked. He also came in. He had that look in his eyes so that shivers went down my spine. I kept looking at that mug, but somehow he didn’t say anything. Wait till he gets back from work. Well, he was angry like, because I had given birth at home. And that’s where I had to stay. That’s why he was angry. While the brother said: ‘What do you want, father? You have what he wanted. – My husband,

that is. – You have what you wanted’. And he [brother] started laughing. He was fine, that brother, he sure was. Then I ate those cherries. And then my husband (...) told him what he thought of him. I didn’t understand everything, but he kept on at him. My husband didn’t say a word, nothing. (...) But she [her mother-in-law] was also there when I was giving birth. She had just arrived and I gave birth on Saturday morning. And on Saturday, that aunt with a friend would usually come. Yes, they came in [mother-in-law with a friend], the door was wide open because it was so hot, it was July 5th (...). And that friend said: ‘Why didn’t you take her to hospital?’ You would have got rid of her in that way. She was right. They wouldn’t have let me come back” (P-S Archives, W.W.1).

However, the family of another interviewee had a different attitude towards her Polish husband whom they didn’t perceive through what had happened during the war.

“My family weren’t bothered that he was Polish. (...) As I remember, where we lived in Szczecin there was a butcher and he had a Pole to help him in his work. He was like a Polish slave. And they made sausages and the like. When my father came back from work he would be standing by the door waiting for him. Father always gave him a cigarette” (P-S Archives, W.W.17).

The relationship between another German interviewee and her Polish husband’s family was also positive. Every day she would go to his parents and help them on their farm. In an interview, the Polish husband stressed that there was mutual respect between the families.

“She worked with my father in the fields. He didn’t know how to work a hay-rake because we never had one before, so she drove it. It was the same with the mowing machine, and she also drove the cart laden high with hay. She did everything with my father. They were so surprised that the daughter of a factory owner knew so much. We didn’t know that she had learned all this at the agricultural school she had attended” (P-S Archives, W.W.4a).

“In brief – she in turn related that – our families had the same educational background. This simplified matters greatly. There was no fear on the part of my family. For example, when I had to walk from the Oder to Mieszkowice in 1946 I was scared stiff that a Russian vehicle would come along, a lorry for instance. I would have then had to escape into the forest and I was terribly frightened. With this family I was never afraid, never!” (P-S Archives, W.W.4b).

Some of our interviewees, especially those who had married post 1972, said that their parents wanted to be able to talk with their German sons-in-law and that’s why they learnt German. Sometimes the Polish parents still remembered German from the time of the Second World War.

“My Dad knew a little German, from the War. He could communicate. Mum not to the same extent, but then she was younger. But my Dad knew German because he’d worked for a German farmer, so he could and did communicate with them. One slowly learned the language” (P-S Archives, W.W.17).

Most of the interviewees stressed that the language barrier in family contacts often forced them into the role of translator but also that this barrier and the problems with communication sometimes led to amusing situations:

“Sometimes there were language barriers which lead to funny situations, for example *Schrank* and *Külschrank* – cupboard and fridge. It was last Easter and something was needed for the table. My husband told my brother it was in the fridge but he understood cupboard. He looked through all the cupboards in the kitchen but didn’t find what he was looking for. It was probably something liquid. He came back and said: ‘Look, you’re kidding me, there’s nothing like that there’. My husband got up to get it, saying: ‘*Külschrank*, not *Schrank*’. Such funny linguistic matters” (P-S Archives, W.W.16).

It also sometimes happened – as one of our interviewees stated – that her Polish family were envious of her German husband. They thought she was better off financially, causing conflict within the family.

“My brother and sisters are here in Poland and we don’t talk to one another. I’ve no contact with my sisters at all because they envy me. It’s seven years now. What we have is through our own hard work but they don’t see like that. They think I’m a millionaire. It’s at Christmas and Easter it hurts most. They often have to pass my house. When they see me or I see them, then it’s difficult” (P-S Archives, W.W.18).

Two Polish women emphasised the fact that their mothers-in-law had not looked kindly on them because they saw their Polish-German marriages as a way of improving their financial situation.

“It didn’t matter to my parents that he was German. That was all right. It made no difference. It was normal. But it was a problem for my husband’s family, as was the fact that I was young. I’m twenty years younger than my husband. At first there were problems with my mother-in-law, but now it’s all right. Now we get on very well, actually sometimes much better than with my husband” (P-S Archives, W.W.13).

In one of the cases, the behaviour of a mother-in-law to her son’s wife was connected with using the Polish language at home:

“His mother keeps telling me: speak properly and in a few years’ time nobody will know you’re Polish. And I tell her I want to be Polish. I’ll speak in whatever way I want and nobody’s going to tell me what to do. (...) When my parents come to visit us or we go to see them, everything is all right. My parents are nice to Bruno and they don’t want to interfere. Sometimes I tell them what’s going on in my marriage but I also change the subject quickly. The only true barrier is the language. My parents don’t like it. I live with my in-laws” (P-S Archives, W.W.12).

RELIGION, MARRIAGE AND CHRISTMAS

In bicultural marriages, religious differences may sometimes lead to misunderstandings. However, in my research, the interviewees said quite clearly that their different faiths did not lead to any arguments. Also the religious faith they decided to bring their children up in did not create any negativity as the decision was made to choose the predominant religion in the given territory, which in their case was Catholicism. They

did not try to impose their religion on their partners because they knew that this would have made them feel different and also deprive them of part of their national identity.

One of the interviewees never converted to Catholicism, keeping to her evangelical faith. She would go to church with a friend. Even during Christmas Eve, customs were mixed.

“Yes, Christmas Eve traditions were mixed because Mum would bake cakes her own way. Things were mostly Polish, though, we simply bought what was available. She usually sang Christmas carols in German. Most of them were sung in German because Dad didn’t have the right voice. (...) Also in church. When we went to our church here we would then sing Polish [carols]” (P-S Archives, W.W.19).

Another interviewee admitted that although she had stuck to her own Evangelical faith, she did not avoid Catholicism, which she had brought up her children in.

“When I’m in Germany I sometimes go [to an Evangelical Church – P-S.] but not here in Szczecin. But I sometimes go to church here. I go to weddings. There have been so many weddings., christenings, first communions. Then I go to church. When there’s a mass for my children and husband, I go too. The priest always visits us at Christmas time” (P-S Archives, W.W.1).

There was another couple who did not change their religion. Their differing faiths was never been a problem for them although their church wedding turned out to be highly problematic³. They finally got married on 4th March, 1962.

“The barriers set before us were like tanks. There simply was no way we could get married in any Roman Catholic Church but then there appeared this Polish Catholic Church. (...) I said there was only one baptism and one faith and I was not going to be baptized again. And then we met this priest, a really great guy from the Polish Catholic Church who said there was nothing to hinder us from getting married. There’s one baptism and one God. And that’s what happened. We had our registry-office wedding on Saturday and the church wedding on Sunday” (P-S Archives, W.W.20a).

“He said he would have to be baptized again, saying we could get married in the Evangelical Church in Szczecin. I said, no. Either we live together without getting married or we do something about this. And then finally we met Father Rygusik from the Polish Catholic Church and he told us there was no problem at all” (P-S Archives, W.W.20b).

³ According to the 1917 Code of Canon Law, mixed marriages in reference to religion (*mixta religio*) were illegal (can. 1060–1064). The only solution to this problem was conversion to Catholicism and baptizing the so-called heretic. This Code, however, acknowledged an exception to the rule: if a christened spouse declared in writing that any children born from this marriage would be brought up in the Catholic faith. A change here was finally introduced by the II Vatican Council (1962–1965). From instructions emanating from the Congregation of Faith *matrimonii sacramentum* (1966) this declaration was required only from the Catholic spouse. Whereas in *Matrimonia mixta* (1970), Pope Paul VI gave permission for the archbishop of a province or bishop of a diocese to issue a dispensation from the canonic form of marriage when one of the future spouses was not a Catholic or not even baptized. In the Code of Canon Law from 1983 there were no barriers from such marriages taking place – what remained was the prohibition (*prohibitum est*) present in the canon 1124, of entering such a marriage without the necessary dispensation from the appropriate authorities.

Their children were also baptized in a Polish Catholic Church, which caused a certain problem when their eldest daughter was to have her First Holy Communion. Although the children had been baptized in Polish Catholic Church, they received Roman Catholic religious instruction. Their parents had decided not to have the children baptized in the Evangelical Church because of its minority status.

“There was a problem with our older daughter and her First Communion. The priest told me she was baptized somewhere else. And I said: now tell me, how does baptism differ here and there? Everybody is baptized with water in the name of the Father, the Son in the same way here and there. Then he told us to write to some deanery or something like that to ask for permission. So we wrote and they gave permission, saying there was no problem” (P-S Archives, W.W.20b).

The majority of our interviewees stressed the fact that they remained in the religion they were brought up in. However, one of the interviewees had decided to convert from Roman Catholicism to the New Apostolic Church⁴, to which her partner belonged. As far as the children were concerned, though, the dominant faith in this group is Catholicism because it is more widespread in comparison to the Evangelical faith.

“I’m a Catholic but my husband belongs to the Evangelical Church. (...) Our children are Catholic because that’s regulated by the Catholic Church (...). Although my husband hasn’t changed his religion, we go to a Catholic church. He even laughs at the fact that our sons are altar-boys. At present the Catholic Church in Germany needs support. There are no sacristans so now it is the altar-boys who prepare everything for Mass, and my husband, much to the amusement of all, has become their very faithful helper. We’ve chosen Catholicism but when there’s an opportunity we do go to an Evangelical Church. Once we were in Karpacz and we went to an evangelical service in a former German church so as to see what it is like on the other side. We have no inhibitions here but often it’s necessary – one has to decide on one or the other (P-S Archives, W.W.12).

A few of the interviewees told us that they take turns in going both to a Catholic Church and Evangelical Church because they do not see anything wrong in this. In fact they view it quite the opposite pointing out that it shows mutual respect. In the case of two Catholic couples, the women interviewees stressed that they attended Mass in Polish and in German so that nobody felt disadvantaged.

It was quite customary for the first mixed marriages after the war to have been civil weddings, provided, of course, that the local authorities gave them written permission to get married. This tendency of getting married in a registry office continued among the following two generations of mixed marriages. In recalling her wedding, one of the interviewees told us she did not have any reception whatsoever, not even a family dinner.

⁴ The New Apostolic Church (NAC) dates back to the nineteenth century. The first congregations were created in England and Germany, but already by the 1860s, the church has expanded its activities on all continents. More about the NAC see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Apostolic_Church, access: 15.12.2015; Kościół Nowoapostolski w Polsce, <http://www.nak.org.pl/>, access: 14.08.2011.

“The registrar came to our home, it was really quite funny. I was in the kitchen. I went out to them in my apron, signed what I was supposed to sign. The men had a drink and then he left. That’s how we got married. But it was all valid because everything was correct” (P-S Archives, W.W.1).

We heard another wedding story from one of our older interviewees. She married her Polish husband first in the Registry Office in Trzebiatów and then they had a church wedding in Cerkwica which, she admitted, had been arranged thanks to the fact that her future husband’s brother was the priest in the church there. After having decided to marry a Pole and a Catholic, she converted from her Evangelical faith to Catholicism.

“Before I belonged to the Evangelical Church but when I got married I had to accept my husband’s religion. Actually, I didn’t have to but I did because of the children. There were Germans whose children were members of the Evangelical Church. It was either one or the other. (...) Nobody forced anybody. My husband never did” (P-S Archives, W.W.6).

In my research I came across only one incident when the given couple did not receive permission from the local authorities to get married. This was soon after the war. They finally had a civil ceremony after the political system changed in Poland, in 2005.

“We wanted to get married but it was against the law. I went to the police station to find out whether I could marry a German. I was asked what she was like and what her background was. So I told them: the daughter of *Him from the factory*. Oh, that’s a capitalist, an enemy of the people. She must leave the country. That was what it was like then. When E. was leaving I told her not to write because I’d be suspected of spying. So she didn’t write. Those were the times when it was not allowed to have any contact with Germans. And later, when E.’s mother stayed with us, I was more important to her than her own daughter. She’d be more affectionate towards me than to her. That’s how it was” (P-S Archives, W.W.4a).

Tolerance on both sides and being open towards the culture and traditions of one’s partner can also be seen in Christmas customs which for both Catholics and Evangelists are very similar. For post-war Polish-German couples it was customary to celebrate Christmas in the Polish way. However, in later marriages, where the wife is Polish and Polish cuisine naturally dominates, certain German traditions were to be seen. For some, Polish customs always take precedence and that is why there is the traditional wafer which is shared at the beginning of Christmas Eve supper with wishes of goodwill exchanged to all present. In other homes both traditions are observed, like the singing of Polish and German Christmas carols for example.

“As far as Christmas Eve is concerned – here there are some differences. We have a typical Polish Christmas Eve but that’s what we agreed on while for my husband’s family also living on former German territory, it is often customary to have their *kartofelsalad*, a potato salad, with frankfurters. We typically have this on Christmas Day. It always appears on the table. I think that’s reasonable” (P-S Archives, W.W.13).

“Our Christmas Eve is a little different. We always have *Bescherung*, which is the giving of presents. First we have the feast of the Christmas tree which means that we sing Christmas carols, the German

O Tannen Bau first and then we sing Polish carols. After that, we read the Bible just before supper and then we open the presents” (P-S Archives, W.W.14).

Since we have been discussing food let us tarry a while on the culinary habits that have accompanied Polish-German couples on an everyday basis. In the post-war marriages, the German side was as if forced to learn how to cook in a Polish way. The instructor was often the Polish partner or neighbours.

“My husband taught me. I didn’t know how to make *borsch* or cabbage soup made with sauerkraut, or *bigos*, or sorrel soup. My mother also didn’t make these things. When I think of it, I don’t really know what my mother’s cooking was like. I remember when I first made *kopytka*, small potato dumplings. It was a Saturday and an aunt from Szczecin came to visit us. ‘What are you making for lunch’, she asked. I said: ‘*Kopytka*’. ‘They’re boiling here?’ ‘Well, yes’. ‘Why’ve you covered them? They’ll all stick together’. Well, I didn’t know [laughter – P-S.]. She said: ‘You don’t cover such things when they’re boiling, the steam has to be able to leave the pot’. She was the one who explained this to me” (P-S Archives, W.W.1).

“What are you making for lunch? I don’t know. Make this and that. Well show me. This is what I did a few times. That’s how I learned. (...) My neighbour opposite – she could be my daughter – would call me over when she was making *ruskie pierogi*, those with cheese and potato. Her mother was my age. We’d eat the *pierogi* together. I’d ask, how much cheese, how many potatoes. That’s how I learned” (P-S Archives, W.W.5).

In later cross-border marriages many Polish interviewees stressed that their German partners had their own favourite Polish dishes, such as borsch with dried mushroom ravioli, pancakes, stuffed cabbage, *pierogi* or *bigos*. They also said that before meeting their partner they had not encountered German cuisine so had to learn how to prepare some of the dishes.

“We never made lentil soup, something like pea soup, but made with lentils. I came to like it very much. I learned how to make it and it became one of my staple soups. It so happened it was my mother-in-law’s recipe. My husband still won’t touch buckwheat and tripe. *Pierogi* we eat very often but it’s difficult to say what we like most. There is always *borsch* or Polish *żurek* at all my dinner parties and everybody seems to like them. (...) Clear chicken soup is another favourite but that is also made in Germany. *Borsch*, however, is not. They don’t know the Polish sour soup, *żurek*, either. Also *bigos*. My mother-in-law, for example, makes wonderful beef olives. I also make the German kind and they’re served with red cabbage” (P-S Archives, W.W.14).

“Generally, I eat a lot of meat so I somehow fit into the German standard. As far as Polish cuisine is concerned, it is vodka that Bernard likes best. I like *Schpitzbraten* (a type of roast), *Bratwursts*, they have good cheeses, the so-called smelly ones. It’s hard to say what type of food is most common in our home. I simply make what I like. If I feel like chicken soup and a pork schnitzel, then that’s what I make” (P-S Archives, W.W.11).

“My husband likes *bigos* best (...), all Germans do. He doesn’t like *pierogi*. He loves white *borsch*. He doesn’t like pickled cucumbers but he likes pickled cucumber soup so much so that he says I could make it the whole year round. It’s the same with sorrel soup. He also likes beetroot although he’d never eaten it before. He tried it for the first time in a Polish restaurant” (P-S Archives, W.W.14).

“I’ve my own way of cooking. At first it was only Polish because I didn’t know how to make anything German. My mother-in-law showed me a little and I read a little. But my children prefer Polish dishes and they’re not too happy if I make anything German. German food is simply not what they like best” (P-S Archives, W.W.16).

MUTUAL RELATIONS WITHIN SOCIETY

The end of the war in 1945 and the influx of Polish people into the north-western territories, with its continuing German presence, influenced mutual relations between the society and Polish-German marriages. The exchange of populations that could be observed there as well as the antagonism caused by World War II and by the attitude of German soldiers and German policy had a profound influence on the first generation of Polish-German marriages.

Questions posed regarding their relations with the local community and how it reacted to the first generation of Polish-German marriages were very often received among my interviewees either with silence, by a changing of the subject, or with brief answers like “it varied” or “relations were positive, we didn’t feel any enmity towards us”. About her neighbours one of the German women spoke thus:

“Here the neighbours weren’t too friendly, simply because I was German. But there was one who was very helpful. A friend of mine worked for her. And when the Russians took over here, she said: ‘Run away from here, hide somewhere, get away’. It was necessary, but afterwards the Russians took flight, disappeared, and then it was different. It was better” (P-S Archives, W.W.1).

Later the attitude of her neighbours towards her improved, mainly because she lived among them right from the beginning. Everybody got to know her. However, she did recall one who was a terrible gossip, spreading untruths about her.

“There was one here who, when there was any gossip, said it was me who’d started it. Everybody turned against me. And she lives opposite as well. I decided I wasn’t going to pay any heed, and that I didn’t need them. I stopped noticing them. Then once I was on my way to the shop when my neighbour opposite came out from her home and called me over saying she wanted to have a word with me. I said: ‘What’s the matter?’ ‘Please come in’, she said. ‘I really want to apologize because now I know who’s been spreading all the gossip’. I said: ‘From the beginning I’ve been saying it wasn’t me’. Anyway, what was I to say if she was doing all the talking. I didn’t even know enough Polish then to be able say such things. (...) And then she said: ‘Yes, I know it wasn’t you and I’m very sorry’. And from then on we talked to each other and then others also apologized. I have you now, I thought. But this hurt. I don’t go visiting my neighbours. I don’t need them. I’ve my own family. I don’t need anybody else” (P-S Archives, W.W.1).

As far as the attitude of society towards her children was concerned, it was only her eldest boy who was called names by their neighbour’s son when he first went to primary school. Later – as she recalled – the situation improved thanks to the teachers intervening and talking to the children about this.

Another German woman also had trouble with her Polish neighbours and she spoke without any reservations:

“It varied. Here I had a neighbour who drank a lot and he always insulted me. But I didn’t pay no mind. I didn’t react. I’m not so calm about things today. But when he used to insult me I always said: ‘I’m German and will be German’, so there. I somehow survived” (P-S Archives, W.W.3).

There was a situation that directly concerned the daughter of the same interviewee and this was connected with a German button from an army coat. It caused a lot of unpleasantness amongst the local community:

“I remember it was lying about somewhere but it was my husband’s fault, not mine. He bought a coat with German buttons and he cut off the buttons. He threw them away somewhere but my daughter later found them and sewed one onto her school apron. It was an army button with Hitler’s ensignia on it. There was a terrible row. The children wanted to throw me out of school. And I didn’t know anything about that button. Everybody said: ‘That (...) woman is hiding German buttons and so on. But I didn’t know anything about this button. It was later he admitted that he’d bought a coat with those buttons. I told him ‘You’re a right devil, why didn’t you throw those buttons into the stove and not put them into a box?’ And my daughter didn’t know anything about those buttons and sewed one onto her apron and went to school like that. I thought my heart would break. There was such a row at school. The teacher was so angry” (P-S Archives, W.W.3).

Another of our German interviewees commenting on the local communities’ attitude to her marriage to a Pole, recalled:

“One was pretty awful but now she’s practically on her last legs. Her husband died about a month ago. He was a terrible drunk. Awful people, awful people. (...) I didn’t quarrel with her. It didn’t matter what she said. (...) She was a *Volksdeutsch* and that’s even worse. And she didn’t know that I knew this. And I told her she’d better stop talking because she was worse than a German because she was a *Volksdeutsch*. She’d blurted it out herself. She generally talked a lot, saying that her son once worked as a mechanic for the police. Once she forgot and said: if only he doesn’t blurt out that they’re *Volksdeutsches*. I caught on then. But I didn’t say anything. It was not my business. There was no need to make a fuss about it. What you were, you were but it didn’t bother me. And that’s how it was. But we still talk to each other. I’m not one for quarrelling. I’ll listen, but then I shut the door and say bye-bye. But I’ve also had very good neighbours. Well, that one, she’s quite old now and is in quite a bad way. When she sees me, she acts as if nothing has happened” (P-S Archives, W.W.2).

We have heard about people, stereotypical for the time, being treated worse, from the daughter of a Polish – German couple. She told us that every time anything unpleasant took place, her father talked to her and her siblings about what was happening between them and their peers.

“They simply called me names and said that a German was coming, a Hun. It was their way of insulting me at school. I often came home in tears. It was Dad who would talk to us, tell us not to worry, that people were bad. Then we didn’t bother so much. (...) [Dad would explain – P-S.] that it would pass. When I was nine, Mum was more often absent than present and things slowly quietened down” (P-S Archives, W.W.8).

Nearly all the interviewees from Polish-German marriages from the post-1972 period claimed that their initial contacts with their German environment were difficult, if only because of the language barrier. It sometimes turned out that the German side was none too friendly because of their Polish origins. But with the passing of time, things got better and the atmosphere became quite friendly.

“From the very beginning, my husband’s friends had a positive attitude towards me. At least that’s how I saw it, and see it today as well. Despite being Polish, I never felt discriminated against and never heard anything unpleasant from them. Even if somebody thought I was a madam or something like that. It’s usually the case that when we have a word together everything is all right. I feel fine among Germans. From the very beginning, I’ve really been very well received, including by my husband’s family and his friends. (...) I can say the same about my neighbours. Everybody keeps repeating that I joined them far too late” (P-S Archives, W.W.11).

“My husband told me that at the beginning one of his friends didn’t want him to be with me when he found out I was Polish. I don’t know why. Now when we meet from time to time I still feel this although I try to smile. I can’t help seeing him in a different light. (...) As I said, a friend of A. tried to make him change his mind and not marry me, all because I was Polish. Later, when we met with his friends, they tried to treat me normally but the beginnings were difficult. It was mainly the language barrier. But it was also a certain mistrust on the part of his friends towards me. Now they come to visit us very often or we go to them” (P-S Archives, W.W.13).

“During the time I’ve been here I’ve did a selection of Germans with whom we meet for a barbecue. We may go somewhere together like Szczecin, or we’ll go somewhere here together or they also come and visit us. But they’re Germans who are broad-minded, and not blinkered. We enjoy each other’s company. We have such a group of friends” (P-S Archives, W.W.12).

“I have very good neighbours here. They’re very polite and treat me well. One of them treats me like a daughter but then she’s 85. I also help her and do the shopping for her. She hasn’t got a car” (P-S Archives, W.W.14).

The openness of the border and the tourist and economic traffic which flowed across visible in the 1970s contributed to the gradual formation of a borderline consciousness, which – according to Kwilecki (1974, 26) – led to:

“the formation of a mixed society, whose behaviour, standards of conduct and even evaluation of individuals (...) are formed for the sake of the other side. This factor has a very strong impact on the consciousness of the border and shapes the life on both sides of the border”.

This status changed at a later period especially in the years 1980–1981 (the so-called end to seal the border), when the frontier took on a character similar to that from the period 1945–1950. Undoubtedly Polish-German marriages that began to settle on the German side of the border, become an integrating element in the local community and helped overcome existing initially barriers, mistrust and stereotyping. It can be seen in some of the statements emanating from marriages from this generation. These marriages probably not been seen in terms of an undesired condition, still on their external (social) reception, especially on the side of the GDR (East Germany),

influenced the events immediately ending World War II. The period during which functioned Polish-German marriages of the second generation was undoubtedly time again “taming” of a neighbour from the other bank of the Oder river, which will let the image of a fragment of relationships already mentioned in the introduction:

“Silent crowds of people on both banks of the great river, looking at each other in silence, warily, suspiciously. It was the river that divided rather than united” (Miedziński 1961, 128).

The relations which existed between Polish-German married couples and the general society after 1990 on the border can certainly be connected with the transformations of the 80s in communist Poland and East Germany, but also with the changes which occurred directly on the border, where after the political changes in Poland and the reunification of Germany foundations for regional cooperation began to be created. These changes had a direct impact on the discussed marriages here, both with Polish and German societies, that contained historical and stereotypical perceptions. These changes in terms of the border the following words describe correctly:

“Always annoyed me that this border was so devoid of life. This is about the fact that these people were not interested in coexistence with each other, no one was interested in the culture of the other. As usual in such situations, the beginnings are the hardest. Because, before bridges are built over the Oder, they must first be created in people’s minds” (Kaczmarek 1999, 93).

This statement very clearly indicates the role of Polish-German marriages of third and subsequent generations on the whole border, as those who through the daily bicultural existence and their political neutrality, will become part of “burying” historical feuds, mutual resentment and stereotypes.

COMMUNICATION BETWEEN COUPLES AND THEIR CHILDREN

An integral part of nationally mixed marriages is knowledge of one’s partner’s language. The German spouse’s lack of knowledge of Polish was most often observed in the first marriages after 1945 but it also can be seen after 1972, whereas the Polish spouse knew at least some German from the time of World War II. In the second period, knowledge of German was quite poor – it was treated as the language of the enemy – but this changed in the third generation of mixed marriages. In marriages after 1989, a knowledge of Polish by the German partner very often depended on his/her attitude to Polish culture and to what extent it would pay off to know the language. In marriages after 1945, it was German women who as it were forced to learn the language of their Polish spouses, while after the opening up of the border between Poland and the German Democratic Republic, the opposite took place. Polish women marrying Germans and moving across the border started learning German.

It was possible to deduce quite easily from what was said by one of our German interviewees, whose marriage goes back to the beginnings of the first generation, that she had learnt Polish on her own. Her husband would sometimes joke in front of friends about her insufficient knowledge of the language:

“I had to learn it. I had no choice. My father-in-law didn’t know German at all. And even if he did, I don’t think he would have spoken to me in that language. People here couldn’t speak German, so what was I to do? Then the children came along. I didn’t know how to speak with the children. My oldest son, he was about three when he started saying anything at all. My husband spoke Polish. He knew German though. Maybe not perfectly but he knew it. He was a labourer in Berlin during the war. He started teaching me. Well, tell me something, so I repeated after him. I don’t know if I was repeating it correctly, maybe I was, but they’d start laughing anyway. What am I to tell her? In the end they told me to say what was written [‘I’m stupid’ – P-S.]. And I repeated this so nicely [laughter – P-S.]. But they burst out laughing. (...) [My husband – P-S.] once in 1955, or whenever it was. There was a youth festival in Warsaw. And there was sport there too. He wrote me a letter. I knew how to read by then. I also knew how to speak then. I wrote back. He came back he said I’d written a nice letter. So I said: ‘Good, I’m pleased about that’. But then he said: ‘Look, it’s red, all the underlinings. They’re all mistakes’ [laughter – P-S.]. And I said: ‘You’re a right so and so. I wonder what it would be like if you wrote in German. I’d underline everything in the same way. Don’t be so clever’” (P-S Archives, W.W.1).

Apart from Polish lessons from her husband, living in a Polish community had a positive effect on her knowledge of the language. On the other hand, her lack of contact with Germans and not having the opportunity to speak German resulted in her feeling at a disadvantage when she visited her own parents.

“I think it was in 1958 or 1959, my youngest was born in 1958 and she was still very little when I went to visit them with the three children. You may not believe it, but I was stuttering. I was there for the first time since the war. When I wrote letters, I wrote normally, but when I had to speak (...). My father only sighed: ‘How could you forget like that?’ I said: ‘In a few days it’ll be better’. And it was. You don’t forget how to speak so quickly” (P-S Archives, W.W.1).

The couple who did not get married till 2005, when they were already quite elderly, said that they spoke to each other a little in Polish, a little in German, always with the help of Polish-German and German-Polish dictionaries. Because of their age and their memories not being what they used to be, they were not able to learn each other’s language as they would have liked. The words they learnt from the dictionary one day were usually forgotten the next. The biggest problem for the German spouse is the pronunciation of the Polish: *sz*, *ś*, *ź*, *dź*, *dż* and *rz*.

After 1972 and the opening up of the Polish-German border, it was the Polish side that started migrating, which of course forced it to learn German, be it on the back of the individual’s own endeavours or with the help from the media:

“At first I learnt how to say ‘good morning’ in German. There was a problem with ‘morning’ because in Polish it’s different. And that’s how I learnt. I didn’t write anything down. Then I learnt to tell the time. (...) One word after another. I learnt the words, how to say what” (P-S Archives, W.W.9).

“We watch German films if only because I have to learn the language somehow. Unfortunately, I don’t read German books because the language in them is still too difficult for me. But I’ve started reading newspapers, and out loud, and my husband corrects me. He teaches me on his own, corrects and explains things to me because German grammar is a bit different from Polish grammar. And he explains everything and tells me what things mean. At the moment we’re somehow managing” (P-S Archives, W.W.14).

“Contact with the language – it was mainly with my husband, otherwise I was completely on my own. He corrected me. I didn’t attend any German course, I was simply there. I got married, had to go to work and learn the language at the same time. I had no time for any course or to attend any school. I didn’t have much time but definitely more time before the children were born. I had more time to study and also to be with other people” (P-S Archives, W.W.16).

Some of our Polish interviewees spoke about how open their German partners were to learning Polish and to using the language in everyday situations.

“H. tries to speak Polish. He understands a lot. He somehow manages to communicate with my family. I don’t know how really, but they talk to each other. He tries very hard to speak and when he’s in a shop, there’s really no trouble. When he wants to buy something and doesn’t quite manage to say things correctly, he’s still understood. He has difficulties with *ć*, *ś*, and can’t say *Tomek*. When we’re in a shop in Poland, he behaves so that nobody can tell that he’s German” (P-S Archives, W.W.17).

Before it was possible to travel more freely between Poland and the German Democratic Republic, children of Polish-German couples were brought up in the Polish culture. One of our German interviewees hardly said anything to her children in Polish because she had trouble with the language. She also did not teach her children German because then the foreign language taught at school was Russian and she did not want to make things more difficult for them.

“As far as I remember, Mum spoke very little Polish because she simply didn’t know how. What she knew, she said. Mum spoke in German and Dad would answer her in the same language because she didn’t know the Polish words. (...) She felt it was enough for us to know Polish so that we wouldn’t be called names. Mum often noticed that we’d be crying when on our way back from school because of the children calling us names. She never taught us German but we somehow understood her. I couldn’t tell you now, how Mum spoke to us in Polish. Sometimes a friend would come and ask: ‘What is your Mum saying?’ And I said: ‘Listen carefully’. It was necessary to listen carefully because she really didn’t speak very well” (P-S Archives, W.W.11).

The son of another interviewee from her first marriage spoke mainly in German, whereas the children from her second marriage were brought up solely in the Polish language.

“The son I had with my first husband spoke only in German because he was brought up by my mother. I had to go to work and she only spoke to him in German. When he went to school, he started speaking Polish because he’d play with the children. His teacher, even the headmaster, asked me to speak more Polish with him. Later he spoke more Polish. (...) He learnt his German from my mother because he was with her all day when I had to go to work. When she went home, I spoke to him in Polish, but all day it was German” (P-S Archives, W.W.6).

As far as another German was concerned, her only son spoke to her in German but to his father in Polish. Her husband wanted her to speak to him in her own language but this turned against him in his relationship with his peers:

“He said it would someday come in useful. And at first it was useful in school because he got top grades all the time, and that pleased him. But there were those neighbours I told you about, who were awful. Their children were so set against us that when they heard us speaking in German they would call us Nazis. Later he asked me not to speak to him in German because they kept calling him such awful names. So I stopped. And it has remained like that to today” (P-S Archives, W.W.5).

This situation changed after 1972 when such couples mainly lived on the German side of the border. During this period a certain biculturalism in their children’s upbringing can be observed much more often. Although in some cases the dominance of one culture – that of the German partner – was more visible, stress was placed on the children being bilingual. This was highlighted by many of the interviewees.

“In our family each person’s language is respected. My husband always speaks German, but understanding my Polish makes things easier. I speak only Polish. When we sit at table it’s like a triangle – should anybody observe us – it may appear quite funny because I speak Polish, my husband German, although I speak to him in German. Depending whom the children are addressing, they speak in the given language. It’s terribly mixed but we talk to each other all the time and everybody takes part in the conversation. But we’re used to this. Sometimes when my sons’ friends come to visit us, my boys might speak to me in German and then I also speak German out of politeness, so that the person understands what we’re talking about. My son though may answer in Polish. It was also like this when they were in kindergarten... One of the boys asked his father in a mixture of Polish and German: *Wo sind meine kalesony?* When he was four years old he associated certain words with certain people. As far as getting dressed was concerned, it was mum. When he was little he didn’t know what tomato soup was in German and the same with underpants” (P-S Archives, W.W.14).

“Our younger son has no trouble at all as he is quite the multilinguist knowing Polish, German very well, English, and now also Spanish. All those children whose parents let them learn their native languages, in this case Polish and German, are doing the right thing. This is very important for the child. It’s something natural for him/her. My son K. says: ‘Mum, when I’m in Poland, I feel Polish and when in Germany, I’m German’” (P-S Archives, W.W.8).

“We have two daughters. Both of them are now learning Polish. We had to stop with one language because of our older daughter’s speech problems, which forced us to stop. (...) They’re pleased about it. Polish is a popular language here. Apart from English, Polish is the foreign language people want to learn” (P-S Archives, W.W.16).

As can be seen from the above, the way children are brought up (linguistically) may be a mixture of Polish-German, solely Polish or only German. Some of the interviewees, especially those of the third generation, stressed that for them it was important to bring their children up in two cultures. Although the children’s interest in Poland is not always very great, it is believed that trips to Poland and visits to their relatives there are a very important part of their upbringing. Also the presence of Polish media in the home assists greatly in enhancing their knowledge of the Polish language.

CONCLUSIONS

Of the eight models of marriage proposed by Harmut Kaelbe (2010, 36–39), Polish-German couples can be included in four of them. The first model which, in my opinion, is characteristic of Polish-German relationships from 1945 are those couples without a wedding certificate who have children together but are perceived in legal terms as being single. The second is an older model and applies to people who got married but in whose relationship at the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s the role of the mother was decisive with respect to the children's upbringing. Another model characteristic of people getting married at the end of the 1950s applied to both partners working outside the home. This mainly concerned couples living in small towns or cities. Another model of married couples under discussion were families where the Polish husband would become a stepfather to the children of his German wife from her first marriage. This was quite common right after the end of the war. It has to be said here that these models, especially those from the immediate post-war period, were a reflection of the policies of the Polish state addressed to its German population until their situation was regulated when the German Democratic Republic came into existence.

The everyday life of the first generation of Polish-German marriages, especially in their first phase in 1945, was not easy because they had their own individual experiences from the war and were also brought up differently. There was also the negative attitude of the Polish partner's family as well as that of the local Polish community that still had vivid images of the Germans from the events experienced during the war. For those involved, their German partner's origins did not matter at all, whereas for their families it was of significance. The second and third generation marriages

“took place not as a result of the war but because the couples chose to get married at a time when standards of living had never been so high before, when there was a well developed welfare state and education system, and in a Europe where there was no war” (Kaelbe 2010, 35).

A common phenomenon in marriages of both generations was the decision to marry quite quickly after having met each other for the first time with the maximum time involved being a year. This was probably due to the distance they had to travel to see each other. A disadvantage here was that they often did not really know each other very well. On the other hand, though, a similar educational background proved to be an important factor for integration and good relations between them. People with a higher education adapted much better to their new conditions on the German side of the border.

In reference to mixed marriages being an element of social integration and of assisting in becoming familiar with a new environment, we can recall Stanisław Nowakowski who said:

“A characteristic phenomenon is the breaking down of group prejudice as far as such marriages are concerned (...). The institution of marriage is definitely a factor that has an influence on the disappearance of differences between people and in the creation of social ties. Also the appearance of family ties between the local community and new settlers of different types is probably the most important sign of a new community coming into existence” (Nowakowski 1960, 40).

As far as the first generation of Polish-German marriages are concerned, it is difficult to talk about any improvement in their relations – especially in reference to the German spouses – with the rest of society, particularly in the first ten to fifteen years after the war. Marriages taking place during this period were often the result either of living on the same farm or coming from the same town or village. It also has to be remembered that the Poles who married German women were acting against the prevalent public opinion of the times which, at the beginning, was additionally exacerbated by the provincial authorities not being at all eager to issue permission for such a marriage to take place. However, it must be pointed out that the attitude of the local authorities was usually quite positive. In the post-war years there was also a demographic reason for such marriages taking place. Among the new settlers, the majority were young men, while the inhabitants of these lands were usually young women. The fact that during the Second World War such relationships and marriages were prohibited led to a wish to get married after the war ended (the law of compensation).

It is necessary to perceive Polish-German marriages as one of the important indicators of social integration. In the first period of Polish settlement, such marriages were not unduly common and that is why one cannot exclude the fact that the Polish side of such a marriage was often isolated from his/her own regional group. After 1950, when the situation was no longer perceived as having a temporary character, this gradually changed and people no longer saw such marriages as being inappropriate. People getting married in the '50s and '60s very often had no direct link with the Second World War and were an example of a new society coming into existence that lacked internal group divisions. I agree with the opinion expressed by Kazimierz Żygulski who claimed that

“during the first years, a lack of acceptance and disapproval expressed towards young people wanting to enter a mixed marriage was often observed on the Western Lands (...). The first couples who dared to get married despite the negative attitude of the majority found themselves in a very difficult situation” (Żygulski 1965, 196).

The Polish-German marriages of the '50s and '60s can be perceived differently as both partners had grown up in a different social reality, in which marrying a German was no longer taboo as so often was the case right after the war. This was undoubtedly due to the fact that people became friends more easily and they also very often worked in the same place. Of course, the attitude of society to marriages of this type was different in urban and rural areas. In the former, a growing anonymity made it possible for these changes to take place much more quickly than in the latter.

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