Between East and West: Geographic Metaphors of Identity in Poland

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ABSTRACT *As Poland enters the European Union, questions of national identity relative to wider group loyalties become particularly salient. This study considers how individual life stories contribute to the discourse on what constitutes the Polish nation, and contemplates the implications of respondents' views for the achievement of European integration. I focus on Polish youths' use of metaphors of "betweenness," in which Poland fills the conceptual space between East and West, and "nested identities," based on simultaneous attachments to region, nation, and Europe, and consider how they might provide alternatives to models of identity which assume conflict with outside groups. In postcommunist Poland, more protectionist or conflict-based stances are sometimes taken, not so much because of political threats as in the past, but more in response to economic inequalities within Poland, and between Poland and the West.*

A central question for contemporary Europe is whether the recent trend toward unification will continue, or whether ethnic rivalries will defeat these efforts. At issue is a more basic question about the ways in which group identities are formed, and the functions that they serve. To the extent that conceptions of "who we are" derive from assertions of "who we are not," they have the potential to challenge stable, peaceful alliances across national boundaries. However, in Poland, one of the new members of the European Union, the discourse of some youths points toward alternative models of identity that recognize contrasts between groups without assuming conflict. Specifically, conversations and interviews with young Poles reveal "nested identities" and identities based on "betweenness," as well as models where rivalry

plays a more prominent role. By focusing on characterizations of Poland's place "between East and West," I identify the shifting and varied ways in which young Poles make use of models of Polishness when reflecting on their personal and national identity, and I consider the implications of their views for the achievement of European integration.

In this article, I consider the perspectives of two groups of Poles whom I met when they were high school students in the early 1990s. Respondents from the city of Krakow have mostly become college-educated professionals with the skills and opportunities to thrive in postcommunist Poland. The other group grew up in the rural Bieszczady Mountains; those who did not emigrate or move to cities struggle to make a living in the changing economy. Young Poles from Krakow in particular express the hope that closer contact with Western Europe will pose little threat to their unique identity as Poles but, rather, will provide opportunities for personal, economic, and creative growth that enrich Krakow, Poland, and Europe generally. Thus, their views provide a positive model for identity construction in the new Europe in which an orientation toward integration can take the place of historic rivalries. Everyday talk also reveals the fragility of this optimism, and that divisive nationalism can easily gain prominence if, once again, Poles feel their autonomy threatened. Even more critically, economic inequalities in Europe, as well as growing economic inequalities within Poland, especially between urban and rural residents, pose new challenges to both national stability and international cooperation.

THE NATION IN EVERYDAY LIFE

This study diverges from theories of nationalism developed by Benedict Anderson (1991), Eric Hobsbawm (1990), and Ernest Gellner (1983) in two significant ways: (1) the subjects of my study are not generalized intellectual nationalists but, rather, ordinary citizens I came to know personally, and (2) rather than explain the processes through which institutions and institutional discourse construct nations, I view ways in which young Poles articulate and use ideas about the nation in accounts of their everyday lives. Though this is not his project, Hobsbawm states that further study is needed to see how nation is perceived from below "in terms of the assumptions, hopes, needs, longings and interests of ordinary people, which are not necessarily national and still less nationalist" (1990:10). This is the gap that my study seeks to fill.

Geoffrey White (2000) points to the need for a more developed theory of national identity as a site for the production of personal and emotional meaning. Specifically, White asserts "there is so much to be learned from looking more closely at the stories that make up the imagined communities of nations" (2000:501). He emphasizes that the strength of nationalism

comes from its ability to establish emotional, personally meaningful connections among a large number of people who will probably never have any direct contact with each other. Anderson addresses this in his work as well but seeks explanations in public discourse such as nationalist literature and constructions of history. Nevertheless, just how national sentiments gain significance still needs to be further investigated through close attention to the ways in which individuals talk about their nation in relation to their own experiences, hopes, and expectations. As White, Anthony Cohen (1994), and Daniel Linger (1994) make clear, focus on discourse and symbols independent of minds can only provide a partial answer to this question. Indeed, consideration of thinking, feeling selves who engage these representations is essential because it is through such interaction and reflection that public symbols take on meaning and emotional force.

In recent years, a small but growing number of scholars have studied the interplay between higher-level rhetoric and individual lives. While only some of them are explicitly psychological in their approach, all contribute to a long-standing area of interest for psychological anthropologists about constructions of "self" and "person" in relation to the wider sociocultural context. Dorinne Kondo (1990) views rhetoric that reinforces occupational and gender hierarchies among factory workers in Japan, as well as workers' resistance to those hierarchies. John Borneman (1992) examines the influence of state narratives of the life course on citizens of East and West Berlin just before unification. Nancy Ries (1997) identifies the narrative genres that dominated talk about everyday life in Perestroika Russia. Brian Sutton (1997) analyzes the multiple meanings and uses of historical and family names on the Greek island of Kalymnos. Keiko Matsuki (2000) shows how present-day public discourse about World War II shapes the generational identity of Japanese who experienced the war as children and adolescents. Charlotte Linde (2000) investigates the means by which workers at an American insurance company adopt aspects of institutional narratives when telling their own stories.

Below, I examine a specific kind of story about the Polish nation—one that places Poland conceptually and geographically between East and West—in order to elucidate the active, constructive role individuals, in particular young Poles, play in establishing, legitimizing, or rejecting discourses about the nation. Of particular concern is the place of contrasts with other groups in conceptualizations of personal and national identity and what these conceptualizations suggest about possible conflict or cooperation across national boundaries. Ulf Hannerz (1996), Zdzisław Mach (1993), Anthony Giddens (1991), Benedict Anderson (1991), and Slavoj Žižek (1990) all emphasize that contrasts with other groups are as much a part of identity as are commonalities within groups. Indeed, a perceived

threat from outside can be a powerful means of strengthening feelings of attachment to one©sown group. Anderson (1991) calls the nation an ©imag ined community,©and stresses that the same processes that provide the basis for inclusion also determine what groups are excluded from the nation. Similarly, according to Zdzisław Mach (1993), symbolic differentiation between groups has tended to increase despite growing technological and structural similarities because people tend to want to preserve their separate identities.

Katherine Verdery (1996) explains that before 1989, the dynamics of identity construction in Eastern Europe were characterized by sharp distinctions between "us" and "them" (see also Haraszti 1978; Holy 1996; Lampland 1995; Ries 1997; Wedel 1986). Generally, the state, the Communist Party, or some other institution of power was labeled "them," while "the people" or "the nation" was conceived of as "us." As a result of "their" repressive policies, identities under state socialism were split; state sanctioned actions and values were expected in public realms, in contrast to the "real beliefs" and "true self" that people could only express in private. Thus, "us" and "them" only made sense in relation to each other. Verdery explains:

> Like the second economy worked only in parasitic relation to the first, this "real" self was meaningful and coherent only in relation to the public or official self. In other words, people's sense of identity and personhood was not independent but required the "enemy" Party, the "them" to complete it. Bipolarity, in short, became constitutive of the social person. [1996:94]

Just as Žižek (1990) notes that nations often project onto their rivals the characteristics they most fear or dislike in their own characters, Verdery (1996) identifies associated processes in Romania, where gypsies are associated with the most feared aspects of capitalism and Hungarians are associated with the uncertainty that has accompanied "Westernization."

Polish history is filled with stories of "us" and "them" and periodic conflict with enemies who have threatened Poland's autonomy from inside and from outside (Davies 1982). Mach (1993, 1997) emphasizes the importance of the idea of sovereignty in the formation of Polish national identity, shaped largely by struggles against alien powers that dominated the political realm throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Jan Kubik (1994) outlines the ongoing power of national symbols in the hands of the people to show opposition to the communist state in the 1980s, and the state's failed attempts to coopt these symbols.

Nevertheless, other stories of the Polish nation existed alongside those based in contrasts, including notions of a multiethnic state made strong through alliances with its neighbors, and local or religious allegiances that superceded national ones in significance (Mach 1993). According to Leszek Koczanowicz, because Polish identity has usually been

defined in opposition to nations trying to dissolve Poland, it becomes difficult to characterize the nation when independence is achieved (Fischer 1993). He paraphrases author and essayist Witold Gombrowicz who said that after the World War I, Poles gained passports (i.e., acquired their sovereignty) but lost their souls, not having the adversity of partition to react against. Koczanowicz goes on to say that Poles have usually characterized themselves as more free, more imaginative, less orderly, and more anarchic than the Germans, and more Western than the Russians. Despite such elaborations of contrast among ethnicities, however, most of Poland's nationalistic Romantic poets were also Lithuanian, Jewish, or both. In addition, after World War II, Poles adopted many characteristics associated with the now absent Jews—they traveled to earn money and got involved in trade to improve their standard of living. This kind of borrowing brings into question what makes Poland distinctive, but it also makes it harder to place firm boundaries around "us" and "them." Instead, "being between" becomes a central trope in the construction of identity.

My field research suggests that since 1989, young Poles draw from a wide range of stories when discussing the significance of the Polish nation in their lives. Perhaps most promising for European integration, they make use of metaphors of "betweenness," in which being between East and West is conceived of as a place in and of itself with its own positive and negative attributes, or they demonstrate "nested loyalties," where attachment to region, nation, and Europe do not compete, but rather are important to varying degrees in different contexts. My analysis builds on group interviews in which participants negotiate the significance of contemporary issues, and "life stories"—how individuals tell and retell their experiences. I am interested in the ways that young Poles make use of, or "consume" (see de Certeau 1984), cultural productions in both unique and conventional ways to help them understand their social world. In other words, I consider the extent to which ordinary citizens interpret their own lives by employing official rhetoric produced by the state as well as public rhetoric used in the media, and through this process contribute to the discourse on what constitutes the Polish nation. I take full advantage of the fact that my subjects are self-conscious and, thus, able to reflect on their own circumstances (see Cohen 1994; Giddens 1991).

Person-centered ethnography emphasizes depth of knowledge of a small number of individuals over responses of many people to targeted questions on surveys. Where possible, I show the relationship between respondents in my study to broader trends recorded in the rich survey-based research conducted by Polish agencies such as the Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS), and in popular periodicals such as the weekly magazines *Wprost* and *Polityka*. I selected two fieldsites in southern Poland, Krakow and Lesko, in order to be able to compare urban and rural

perspectives. Because the history of occupation has tended to be so impor-
tant to Polish national identity, both locations are in what was historically
Galicia, the region of Poland under Austrian rule when Poland was parti-
tioned by Austria, Russia, and Prussia from 1795 to 1918. The Austrians
were generally regarded as the least oppressive of the three occupiers,
allowing a flourishing of Polish language and culture despite the lack of
sovereignty during this period.

Krakow, Poland's third largest city with a population of 800,000, is
often characterized as the cultural "heart" of the nation; it was the seat of
the Polish kings until the capitol was moved to Warsaw in 1596, and is the
locale of the Jagiellonian University, Poland's oldest institution of higher
education, as well as numerous other universities. Historic buildings in the
city center, dating back to every century since the tenth, were relatively
undamaged during World War II, making Krakow a draw for domestic and
international tourism. In addition to ongoing events at the numerous thea-
ters, museums, and galleries, the city frequently hosts cultural festivals.
Lesko, a town of about six thousand residents, is located 250 km southeast
of Krakow at the edge of the Bieszczady Mountains near the Ukrainian
border. It, too, is a cultural and historical center, though on a much
smaller scale than Krakow. Most important for my study, four regional high
schools are located in the town, including one college preparatory lyceum
and three "group schools" that include technical programs that teach tech-
nical skills along with general education classes, and trade programs that
provide a three year certificate in a trade specialty.[1]

I conducted group interviews in 1992, and then again in 1993 at six
secondary schools in Krakow (approximately 60 percent of students at-
tended lyceum, and 40 percent technical and trade group schools) and at
all four secondary schools in Lesko (25 percent of students attended ly-
ceum and 75 percent technical and trade group schools). All totaled, I
interviewed over 300 students in groups of eight. Following Linger (1994)
and Theodore Schwartz (1978), group interviews explore the categories of
problems that people negotiate. In other words, rather than seeking to
identify shared characteristics of Poles, or even shared answers to ques-
tions, interviews focused on shared debates, or what Schwartz (1978) calls
the "litigation of culture." Similarly, Linger suggests that identity be re-
conceived "in terms of a congeries of problems rather than a set of as-
sumed attributes or a prototype" (Linger 1994:304). Thus, group
interviews reveal ways in which young Poles negotiate a sense of them-
selves and their nation through shared reflections about political issues,
economic policies, Polish history, relations with other nations, and visions
for the future.

In addition to the group interviews, my article draws from individual
"life story" interviews conducted in 1993 and 1999. I refer here to the

responses of those I interviewed during both of these periods, a total of 16 individuals originally selected because of their inclination to reflect on and articulate their ideas about national identity, and because they attended a range of schools and expressed varied goals and expectations for their future.[2] Thus, this is not a random sample; each respondent must be considered individually in relation to their level of education, the region in which they live, and the career choices they have made. As Geoffrey White (2000) points out, life stories, as opposed to life histories, consider how subjects actively create the past, at least as they understand it. These detailed personal accounts show how respondents communicate and negotiate their sense of self (Linde 1993). They also provide the personal background to locate respondents relative to wider social trends. Because most respondents also became my friends, I am able to supplement accounts from formal interviews with less formal conversations and participant-observation.

"BETWEEN EAST AND WEST" IN POLISH DISCOURSE

Ernest Gellner (1983) and Anderson (1991) explain that a shared story about the nation, contained in patriotic literature and history, and reproduced in school curricula, enabled large groups of people to imagine themselves as a part of the national community even though they would never have face-to-face relationships with most of its members. Typically, the state is at the center of such efforts, using the idea of the nation to solidify the legitimacy of its control. These processes took on a particular form in the construction of Polish national identity, however, because Poland lost its sovereignty at the end of the 18th century, just as the modern concept of nation took hold throughout Europe. Thus, there was no Polish state to promote identification with the nation. Instead, generations of romantic Polish patriots made it their mission to preserve the idea of the nation even though it had no political reality. Correspondingly, Polish sociologists developed theories of nationalism based on cultural factors rather than state political power (Chałasiński 1988, Ossowski 1967, Znaniecki 1990). Particularly relevant to the concept of nested identities is Stanisław Ossowski's distinction between two kinds of national allegiance—little fatherland *(mała ojczyzna)* and ideological fatherland. Little fatherland refers to attachment to place grounded in a specific locality and associated people and experiences, while ideological fatherland is based on ideas developed through more public forms such as literature and political positions. In recent years, school curricula and popular media continue to portray Poland's ideological fatherland in terms of historic fights against foreign occupiers for Polish sovereignty. For instance, the most popular Polish film productions of 1999 and 2000 included lavish adaptations

of *Pan Tadeusz* and *Ogniem i Mieczem,* both central works of Polish pa-
triotic literature in which conflicts with outside groups figure promi-
nently.[3] These portrayals of the past should not be underestimated
because, as White contends, "constructions of history are inevitably dis-
courses of identity" and narratives of the past have the moral and emo-
tional power to create the agenda for future action (White 2000:496).

Reflections on the position of Poland between East and West run
through the work of numerous essays by Polish poets and writers (some
20th-century examples include Gombrowicz 1988, 1989; Miłosz 1990). It
is also an issue addressed in the periodical *Kultura,* which played an im-
portant role in the formulation of the political and social opinions of the
Polish intelligentsia under communism (Kostrzewa 1990). Printed in Paris
to avoid censorship in Poland, copies of *Kultura* were smuggled into Po-
land, passed from hand to hand, and discussed in clandestine meetings in
private residences and churches. The symbolic construction of Poland's
place between East and West may be seen in an article published in *Kul-
tura* in 1984 that described Poland as a lush valley between the steep
slopes of snow-capped mountains—symbolic of Germany and Russia
(Szrett 1990). As a result, the valley that was meant to flow with milk and
honey became a corridor for the nations on either side; no natural barrier
protects this "paradise" from these incursions, and the mountains cast
shadows that cannot be ignored. Again, conflict with other nations figures
prominently in portrayals of the Polish nation.

Such symbolism is often supported by reference to historic invasions.
From the west and north came the Teutonic Knights in the 13th century,
the Swedes in the 17th century, the Prussian Empire at the end of the 18th
century, and the Nazis in 1939. From the East came Tartars, Cossacks,
and Muscovites throughout the Middle Ages and into the 18th century, the
Russian Empire at the end of the 18th century, and the Soviets after 1945
(Davies 1982). Krakow artist Andrzej Mleczko (Figure 1), makes light of
this geographic vulnerability in a cartoon which depicts God pointing to
the globe and saying, "and we'll do a number on the Poles and place them
between Germany and Russia." Geography and politics have also inter-
acted in such a way that the physical borders of Poland have shifted sig-
nificantly over the past 1,000 years (see Figure 2). The united Polish–
Lithuanian kingdom extended from the Baltic to the Black Sea in 1500,
but 300 years later the Polish state disappeared from the map of Europe.
When Poland reappeared as a sovereign country in 1918, its borders were
considerably farther east than they are today. After World War II, Poland
acquired its contemporary borders, including Silesia and territory along
the Baltic Sea coast, and excluding the western parts of Ukraine, Belarus,
and Lithuania. Thus, one outcome of World War II was that, geographi-
cally, Poland moved closer to Western Europe.

Figure 1. "And we'll do a number on the Poles and place them between Germany and Russia." Cartoon by Andrzej Mleczko.

The political divide between East and West, however, grew wider than ever during the Cold War. Poland was grouped together with the Soviet Union and its neighboring countries in what was described as "Eastern Europe." The rhetorical labels "Iron Curtain" and "Eastern Bloc" reinforced the conceptual line between the democratic "West" and the communist "East." Then in 1989, with the end of Soviet power in the region, this political rationale for the sharp division between East and West also ceased to exist, leading some scholars to argue for the reconceptualization of Europe, placing Poland, Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic, and Hungary in "Central Europe" (see, e.g., Purchla 1997). Evidence used to support this categorization includes reference to cultural and religious links to Western Europe and the fact that, geographically, Prague is farther west than Vienna.
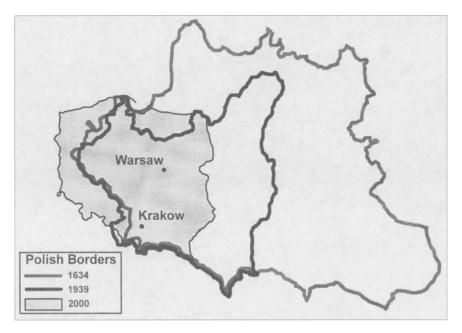
Figure 2. Polish borders in 1634, 1939, and 2000.

In the postcommunist period, where the enemy Poles had defined themselves in opposition to no longer existed, there emerged an opportunity for constructions of Polish identity based less on conflict. Some Polish intellectuals proposed ways of thinking about Poland as a part of Europe, while also maintaining its own distinctiveness as a nation (Bohdanowicz 1992; Fischer 1993; Gabryel 1994; Kot 1993). In 1992, politician Lech Mażewski wrote in *Polityka,* "Poland's retreat from communism is often described as a return to Europe. At the same time, it is said that Poland need not return to Europe because it has always been in it" (1992:4) Furthermore, he advocates the recognition of nested loyalties in which commitments to local region, to the nation-state, and to Europe neither conflict, nor replace each other. His comments emphasize that connections with the rest of Europe strengthen the Polish nation. Similarly, in *Wprost,* Kot poses the challenge for the next generation, "to either trust itself, meaning Polish ways of thinking without fear of rivalry or symbiosis with the West, or separate itself from Europe with a secret feeling that we are not partners with them, and all that we have to offer is a tourist pamphlet with Wawel [Castle] on the cover" (1993:24).[4] Kot urges Poles to recognize that they will be better off if they choose to view the West as a source of opportunity, rather than a threat to Poland's economic and cultural autonomy.

A number of sociological studies suggest that conceptions of identity based in nested loyalties are common in postcommunist Poland. Most significantly, a study of "nested identities," in particular Polish and European identities, conducted in 2001 shows that 65 percent of respondents say they identify both with Poland and Europe, including 41 percent who identify more with Poland, and 23 percent who identify themselves as "equally Polish and European" (McManus-Czubińska et al 2003). Significantly, European identity almost never replaces allegiance to the nation (only 1 percent identify exclusively with Europe), but rather is an "optional add-on" to Polish identity. In addition, slightly more respondents claimed more "sympathy and belonging" to their vovoidship (a regional administrative district) than to the Polish nation, reflecting the strength of local identities. The youngest one-third of respondents (born between 1967 and 1983) who are well educated and whose fathers completed university are most likely to claim equal attachment to Poland and to Europe. The study also found that "dual identifiers" tend to be "cosmopolitans" rather than "Eurofascists"—they subscribe to a wider, more open, more inclusive identity. Those who feel exclusively Polish, by contrast, are more likely to fear the impact of a different culture. Below, I consider the ways in which young Poles made use of various discourses on Poland's place "between East and West," and the degree to which their remarks suggest nested identities, "between" identities, or identities grounded in assumptions of conflict with other groups.

GROUP INTERVIEWS: POLAND'S ECONOMY "BETWEEN EAST AND WEST"

During group interviews in 1992 and 1993, students' generalizations about the East and the West tended to assume a continuum, from bad in the East, to better in Poland, and best in the West. Their comments were in response to open ended questions about recent changes in Poland, hopes and fears of the future, and Poland's position relative to neighboring countries. Key words used by both urban and rural residents to describe differences from west to east include the following:

West		East
developed (*rozwinięty*)		less developed (*mniej rozwinięty*)
civilized (*cywilizowany*)		primitive (*prymitywny*), backward (*zacofany*)
rich (*bogaty*)		poor (*biedny*)
clean (*czysty*)	**POLAND**	dirty (*brudny*)
colorful (*kolorowy*)		gray (*szary*)
happy (*wesoły*), relaxed (*na luzie*)[5]		sad (*smutny*)
order (*porządek*)		mess (*bałagan*)[6]

Respondents from every school in my study—including nondiploma trade programs, technical programs that taught an occupation as well as

general education, or college track lycea—contributed to the discourse on Poland's place "between West and East." The majority of their comments focused upon economic factors such as the standard of living in the various regions, while fewer considered political and cultural factors. Sometimes characterizations remained vague, referring simply to the higher level (*wyższy poziom*) in the West compared with the lower level (*niższy poziom*) in the East. Other comments involved relative comparisons such as: "Poland is to the Soviet Union like the West is to Poland," "for Easterners, Poland is like the West is for Poles," or "those from the East are worse off. Poland is America by comparison."

When describing economic conditions in Poland, respondents commonly made claims such as "we have Western prices, but Eastern salaries," or "economically, we have more than the East, but less than the West." Similarly, many complained, "Now everything is available, but we have no money to buy anything." More specific economic claims included comparisons of the number of monthly salaries a new car would cost Poles in contrast to the cost for Westerners whose salaries are much higher. Of particular concern for some was the availability of part-time employment for students in the West, in contrast to the relative lack of work for students in Poland. Respondents also compared Poles' economically motivated trips to their Western neighbors with the growing numbers of citizens of the former Soviet Union flooding Polish markets: "A few years ago Poles sold kielbasa in Austria, now people from the east come here"; "Russians want to come here just like we want to go to the West." Often contained within these comments were feuding sentiments that these temporary economic migrants were primitive or dirty, on the one hand, or that they should be well treated, just as Poles wish to be treated in the West, on the other.

Discourse tended to center on the issue of relative economic development. A student at a technical school in Krakow remarked, "It's impossible to develop in a few years what took 50 years to develop in the West." A classmate added, "Western countries have developed their higher level of development for many years—maybe not in terms of intelligence, but economically." A third classmate said, "Poland is too backward, too small, too weak [to profit from open borders]." Recognition of economic differences also sometimes suggested for some feelings that they, personally, or their culture was somehow better or worse by comparison. One student who attended lyceum in Krakow explained, "When I travel to less developed countries such as Bulgaria I feel self worth, but when I go to well developed countries it's a completely different situation."

One lyceum student from Krakow compared her impressions of Italy, where there is order, peace, and people are happy, in contrast to Poland, where there is "a complete mess," anarchy, and where people are sad.

Another student who attended the agricultural high school in Lesko contrasted the order of Germany with the complete mess farther east. A classmate responded that in Poland, by contrast, "everything is in the middle, not the best and not the worst." Similarly, students in other classes characterized Poland as more orderly than its Eastern neighbors. After returning from a hiking trip in Ukraine, a group of technical school students in Lesko commented on how wealthy and how fortunate they felt in comparison with the poverty that plagues the region east of the border. One also remarked that he has increased respect for Ukrainians. Although Ukrainians struggle with real poverty at home, they still were glad to help his friends and him without expecting anything in return. As a result, he is no longer so critical of them when he sees them in Poland, unwashed and selling cheap trinkets in outdoor markets. In other words, he distinguished between economic and cultural characteristics—Ukrainians may be poorer, but they display admirable human qualities. Direct personal experience had a strong impact on these students, some of whom expressed more critical views in a group interview just a month earlier, calling the West more "civilized" in contrast to the more "primitive" East.

One of the most visible transformations during the early 1990s was the introduction of colorful packaging on imported goods, bright signs advertising new stores and products, and the renovation of gray, crumbling buildings in city and town centers. Correspondingly, young Poles talked about the presence or absence of color as signs of Poland's membership in the West or the East, respectively, or viewed the process of colorization as reflective of Poland's increased contact with the West. Lyceum students in Krakow said of changes in recent years, "Poland is beginning to look like the West on the outside" and it is "more colorful." A lyceum student in Lesko said she wants to emigrate, at least for a short time, to a Western country where it is "happier and more relaxed." A student who attended technical school in Lesko remarked, "The West is all colorful and pretty. Poles see this and want it but they don't have the basis for getting it." Similarly, a technical school student in Krakow said, "When I was in Austria, it was clean and happy. Here, it's still gray." While the characterization "gray" was often meant literally, it also was used metaphorically to describe Poland or places farther east as depressing and undeveloped. Similarly, even citizens of these countries were sometimes referred to as gray because of their lack of vibrancy, distinctiveness, or cheerfulness.

Respondents expressed attraction and repulsion toward Western imported goods, reflecting their ambivalence about the kind of relationship that was being established as Poland opened up to the West. They commonly contrasted poorly packaged Polish goods to foreign goods in nice, brightly colored packages that were increasingly available in stores. Many also described Western goods as deceptive—despite their appealing appearance,

they were often of inferior quality or they contained harmful ingredients, and they were dumped on the ignorant Eastern market. Polish goods, by contrast, were described as higher quality despite their minimal, gray packaging. Polish agricultural produce, in particular, was defended as healthier because it contained fewer chemical additives. Students expressed concern about the selfish interests of foreign investors. They complained, "We're a big market for the West," and "they're buying Poland." Some spoke specifically about the need to build up Polish industry so that it would be competitive with imported goods. A technical school student from Lesko said, "Poland is being sold to the West. Foreign agricultural products kill the market for local produce." A classmate added, "We need to learn to package our products better. We need to be more patriotic and buy Polish goods." One lyceum student from Krakow urged, "We should take what is best from the West, not everything." A classmate agreed, "Just because something is colorful doesn't mean that it's good."

Just as some expressed skepticism about the quality of foreign material imports, others expressed concern about cultural imports. They criticized other Poles for accepting without discrimination everything that came from the West, including pornography, and drugs. They accused the West of introducing AIDS and crime. A lyceum student from Krakow said, "I'm afraid of the influence Western culture is having on Poland. Their TV, music, and painting—very little is new and valuable." In Lesko, perhaps under the influence of a local priest who gave fiery sermons condemning immoral influences from the West, some students made remarks such as Rafał, who attended technical school:

> Now there's this saying, "Poland aspires to reach Europe." I think it already is a part of Europe. I think the West is not always the best model. Still, we accept everything uncritically, like sex shops. Television shows what life is like there—youth see Rambo, narcotics, weapons, and sex. Is this the Europe we aspire to?[7]

Most youths, despite their preoccupation with economic differences, defended Polish culture as equal to anybody else's.

Many students' comments reveal a fascination with the West and a curiosity about everything that was newly accessible to them. In some cases, the West functioned as an ideal of what life should be like, containing everything they lacked in their own lives (see Galbraith 2003). A lyceum student in Krakow remarked, "In every developed country, even people with a basic office job can live on a [decent] level. Here, you only can if you own your own company, and it still depends on luck. It will be terribly hard for a while longer." However, this idealization was wearing thin with increased contact, as can be seen in disillusionment with Western imports. A number of respondents instead romanticized their connection with Eastern culture, talking about a closer cultural affinity, or even a similar "soul," to other Slavs.

Though far less common than discourse on economic issues, some respondents echoed historic discourse about the political threat posed by acquisitive neighbors. Piotrek, a lyceum student from Lesko, expressed concern that "Ukrainians will take a piece of us here [in the East,] Germans will take a piece of us in the west . . . what will be left? Warsaw?" A few remarked on the continuing threat posed by Russian troops in Poland (the last departed in 1993) or the need to maintain a strong Polish military just in case territorial violence broke out in disputed border regions. In Lesko, some respondents repeated their grandparents' stories about World War II, when German occupiers of the Bieszczady region treated Poles civilly, but Russian and Ukrainian troops treated Bieszczady residents brutally. Some said that Poland is more threatened from the East by "less civilized" nations than by Westerners whose only interest in the region is economic. Others, by contrast, complained that "[political] occupation by the East has been replaced by [economic] occupation by the West."

In sum, comments of young Poles during group interviews clearly demonstrate the richness of discourse around the issue of Poland's place between East and West. They also reflect the period—in the early 1990s, Poles tended to be more preoccupied with economic concerns than with political ones. In addition, idealized perceptions of the West were being challenged by increasing contacts that were not always so positive. Nevertheless, at least among those interviewed, many expressed the desire to "get closer to the West" or "get into Europe," though there was less agreement about how quickly this should or could be done. Thus, the place "between East and West" was not a stable location, but was rather a conceptual category subject to different characterizations and evaluations.

LIFE STORIES: PERSONAL IDENTITY, NATIONAL IDENTITY AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

While group interviews are valuable for revealing the range of discourse about Poland's place between East and West, they do little to show its impact on individuals' constructions of personal and national identity. Below, I consider how the young Poles with whom I conducted individual interviews in 1993 and 1999 make use of conceptions of East and West when reflecting upon their own lives, the Polish nation, and the European Union. Their life stories contain complex reflections about identity, and diverse opinions about European integration. As John Eidson (2000) notes, variable discourses are important because they have different implications for cultural identity. Notably here, respondents' articulation of contrasts "between East and West" does not always assume relationships based on conflict. Two notable alternatives in respondents' life stories include "betweenness" as a viable, and even desirable location in and of itself, and "nested identities," where loyalties to larger or smaller social

groups are held simultaneously, although they may be more or less salient in different contexts.

In June 2003, after five years of negotiation and even longer speculation, the Polish people voted on a referendum to become a member of the European Union. To be valid, over 50 percent of the eligible public had to cast their vote, a majority of whom had to support unification. Despite a tense first day, in which only 17.6 percent went to the poles, by the second day, 59 percent had voted and 77 percent favored Poland's entrance to the European Union (Kublik and Pacewicz 2003). Expressions of triumph dominated in the Polish press (BBC News 2003) and President Aleksander Kwaśniewski proclaimed "We are back! Back to the great European Family. We are back to the place where Poland and Poles deserve after their 1000 year history and the great courage Poles have shown over the past several years" (Gazeta.pl 2003). Despite this show of support for stronger connections with Western Europe, a great deal of ambivalence was expressed about entrance into the EU by my respondents and in surveys conducted in Poland by CBOS, one of several Polish agencies that track opinions about a wide range of social issues.

Already in the early 1990s, young Poles debated Poland's likely place within a united Europe (at the time, it was called the European Community). Group interviews provided a particularly fruitful context for viewing the "litigation of culture." For instance, lyceum students in Lesko had the following discussion:

Rafał: There's this ideal that nations can blend—I don't see it happening . . . if
          Poles were to emigrate and Poland became 60 percent German, what would
          you become?
Elka: A European.
Staszek: The problem is rather that Poland will not be admitted [into the European
          Community].
Marta: We need to work on our economy so that we can be an equal partner.

When asked if there is a place for Poland within the European Community, one responded yes, one responded no, one said "yes, but Poles have to be prepared," and one said "there might be, but not yet." This conversation illustrates the range of opinions on the subject. A united Europe was alternately seen as a source of opportunity for Poles, a threat to Polish autonomy, or something in between.

Respondents in 1993 already articulated the central issues that would shape the negotiations for entrance into the European Union for the next ten years. They were most concerned about economic factors, though they also considered political and cultural implications of unification.[8] The most critical areas of disagreement in future negotiations were anticipated, as well. Specifically, existing EU members were concerned about a flood of economic migrants from Poland to the stronger economies of Western Europe, while Poles feared Poland would be "bought up" by

wealthier Western neighbors, and the market for native agricultural and industrial products would be weakened. A number of students expressed concern about the kind of relationship Poland would have with other members—would Poland be a "parasite" on more powerful nations or would those more powerful economies occupy Poland? Some distinguished between "moving closer" to the West and "mixing" with other nations. Many objected to anything that might compromise Polish cultural uniqueness. Still others saw Poland's entrance into the European Community as a "return to normalcy" or pointed out that Poland has always been a part of Europe.

By the late 1990s, the Polish media was abuzz with news of the expansion of the European Union. Government officials negotiated the details of integration—would Poland succeed in being one of the first postcommunist countries to be admitted? Would the expansion occur in three years, in five years, or at some later date? Would Poland enter as a full member with all the same rights and responsibilities as existing members, or would some sort of alternative status be established? In a radio interview on July 2, 2000, President Kwaśniewski outlined his position. He said that the idea of the expansion of the European Union is already agreed on, but negotiations remain about just how and when it will occur. He also expressed concern about the establishment of two tiered membership, where new members would be allowed in but with a status different from long-standing members. This decision, he emphasized, has implications for the kind of Europe people will live in. He pointed out the danger of institutionalizing divisions rather than promoting unity, making it harder for poorer countries ever to reach the level of wealthier countries.

While the Polish government pushed for full membership as soon as possible, I heard expressions of caution in everyday conversations. Is Poland really ready to join Europe? Is the economy strong enough that it will benefit from membership, or will it just open Polish markets to foreign firms? How much autonomy will be lost, and is it worth the extra security that comes with stronger alliances with the West?

Survey data collected by CBOS help to place the remarks of my small sample into a broader context. From a high of 80 percent in 1996, there has been a steady decrease in support for entrance into the European Union; since 1999 the percentage of Poles who said they would vote in favor of Polish membership has fluctuated between 55 and 61 percent (Roguska 2002; Wenzel 2001). This single figure obscures significant variations in support among various age and occupational groups, however (see Bielasiak 2002; Roguska 1999, 2000a, 2002).[9] Generally, Poles with higher incomes and higher levels of education are more likely to favor integration. The professions that are most supportive include managers, white-collar workers, and private business people while the most critical include farmers

and unskilled workers. Students, and young people in general, show greater support for Poland's entrance into the European Union, as do residents of large cities in contrast to villagers. Just as Poles who are young, urban, educated, and well employed are more likely to support the European Union, they are also more likely to express nested identities to both Poland and Europe (McManus-Czubińska et al. 2003).

Overall, Poles support the idea of integration, but they have found it much harder to agree on the details. Hesitation seems to be fueled largely by uncertainty. They fear that economic cooperation will in fact become economic occupation and the loss of the autonomy they so recently gained. Answers to other survey questions reflect these fears. When asked if they believe that Poland will more easily decrease the distance in economic development by joining the European Union or by staying out of it, 48 percent of those surveyed in 2000 and 49 percent of those surveyed in 2001 said that membership would help decrease that distance. However, in the same study, 63 percent said Poland should only become a member of the European Union when it can benefit from all of the opportunities associated with membership (Roguska 2000b; Wenzel 2001). Similarly, in another survey, 58 percent responded that Poland should first fix its problems and then enter the European Union (Roguska 2000a). Perhaps even more telling, 40 percent of those surveyed said they believe the European Union has more to gain from the expansion and only 25 percent said they believe Poland has more to gain (Roguska 2000b).

Euroadvocates

In the interviews I conducted, respondents most supportive of the European Union tend to believe membership can strengthen Poland. They emphasize that Poland is in the process of economic and political development, and the West provides a model for Poland. They tend to assume European integration does not threaten Polish cultural distinctiveness. Rather, these changes will provide Poles with the material means and with the freedom to fully express their Polishness not only within Poland but also to the world at large. Ewelina, an advocate of EU expansion studying law in Krakow, points out that in 1989, Poland's membership in NATO seemed as difficult to accomplish as membership in the European Union appeared in 1999.

In order to understand Ewelina's support for the European Union, it helps to look at the way she describes herself. She grew up and still lives in a working-class neighborhood of Soviet-style apartments; five people, including her parents, grandmother, and brother, share two rooms. Despite neighborhood and family ties to the working class, Ewelina identifies more with the intelligentsia and Krakow's historic center. She attended lyceum near the city center and now studies at the Jagiellonian University.

She attributes her views, in part, to her father, a strong supporter of democratic and market reform, who was active in the Solidarity Movement when it opposed the state socialist government. Ewelina believes that it is the government's responsibility to provide opportunities for employment and education, but it is up to individuals to take advantage of those opportunities. For instance, she is proud of her own family's tendency to make the most of what they have. She contrasts the improvements they have made on their small apartment, including wood paneling, new bathroom fixtures, and Japanese electronics, with their neighbors who dirty the public staircases and neglect basic maintenance on their apartments. She recognizes that many are unemployed, but she also criticizes their unwillingness to take responsibility for their own fate.

Ewelina characterizes the changes since 1989 as follows:

> What happened is fantastic. What is difficult now will pay off in the future. . . . So much has changed—you can decide for yourself, have a career, start your own firm. You can freely travel abroad. It wasn't like that before. People don't remember what was before and say that communism should return, that it was safer, and everyone had work. But there was nothing then. I think that the price we are paying now is the price of progress. If there hadn't been economic reform, it would have been like it is in Russia, where they pretended reforms in order to get money [i.e., foreign aid].

A self-proclaimed patriot and optimist about Poland's future, she recognizes the difficulties created by economic and political changes since 1989, especially for people who have lost their jobs and are unable to find new ones, but she is confident that these hardships are necessary for the long-term improvement of living conditions in Poland. Ewelina expresses a strong attachment to nation, but she clearly identifies with certain segments of Polish society more than with others.

Ewelina's support for reforms does not mean that she accepts all Western influences uncritically. In 1993 she explained:

> There shouldn't be a Europe without borders, with one language and monetary system forced on everyone . . . I don't want a nationalistic feeling of patriotism either . . . what's more important is to have a feeling that I belong to something, that I am a Pole with a certain culture and history. I feel like a European but it's also necessary to have a feeling of national consciousness and connection, to maintain something of our own. If everything were collective, like during socialist times, it would never work out.

Thus, she identifies herself as a Pole and as a European, and she does not want to see either of these groups supersede the other. Similarly, in 1999, Ewelina said "It's our little fatherland *[mała ojczyzna]*—local society, city, family—that gives us our identity and makes us different from others." She goes on to say that although people fear that open borders with Europe will threaten Poland's uniqueness, "it doesn't mean there won't be a fatherland because it is something we have in our hearts, something immaterial. We'll always be different." Ewelina believes that being a European does not

require giving up one's distinctiveness as a Pole, nor does patriotism require resisting European integration.

Similarly, Staszek, a computer specialist in a Polish firm that does business in a number of European countries, makes the point, "In the European Union, no one commits murder over the fact that a German goes to work in France, or vice versa. The EU can consolidate nations, but that doesn't pose such a danger that we need to separate ourselves. It doesn't threaten our statehood. It just means free flow." Staszek believes the opening to the West has made life in Poland better. He illustrates this by comparing the opportunities he has with the restrictions his father faced under state socialism. His father, for instance, only started building his own house when Staszek was in high school, and until the system changed, he was required to follow state approved plans. Staszek proudly described how his father very cleverly redesigned the interior (out of sight of official controls) so that the placement of doors, rooms, and halls made more sense. Nevertheless, small acts of resistance like this took energy his father might otherwise have spent in more productive ways. Staszek feels that in contrast to the limits his father faced, his world is full of opportunity. His job pays well enough that, by 2000, he bought a house; his son already has a room of his own at age four. Staszek can achieve his dreams—a good job, a stable family life, and his own house—right in Poland. He told me he hopes his younger sister will not be restrained by the communist legacy at all, but will rather be "an open kind of person in the Western European style."

Notably, even euroadvocates express strong sentiments toward their nation. "European" is not a distinct, separate identity for them so much as they consider themselves European because Poland is a part of Europe.

Euroskeptics

Most of my respondents, even those who support European integration, expressed some reservations about the economic and cultural impact of Poland's membership in the European Union.[10] They do not want Polish culture to be diluted by foreign models, and they worry that foreign capital could threaten Poland's weaker economy. Jurek, for instance, says he supports Poland's membership in the European Union only because there is no other option. He explains, "If Poland does not join, we will end up alone. And someone will rule over us. So it is better to be in something bad than outside." Similarly, in a CBOS survey of the motives for supporting integration, 42 percent of the respondents said "there really isn't any other option for Poland besides membership in the European Union" compared with 55 percent who expect that Poland will benefit from membership (Strzeszewski 2003).

Jurek, who is an architect from Krakow, sees tremendous potential in Poland. He told me, "for the time being, there is no war and this gives us

a chance. [Because of war], we never had the opportunity to develop all the way. No one has seen what we are capable of, and now we can show them." He seeks to make use of the benefits of the changing economic system and of increased connections with the West by promoting an architectural style that is distinctly Polish. He believes that the rich regional Górale culture, found in the Tatra Mountains south of Krakow, represents the best Poland has to offer within an integrated Europe. He works with Górale carpenters to incorporate traditional design features into projects that also accommodate contemporary functions.

For Jurek, the nation and an idealized vision of a particular region (significantly, not the region in which he himself grew up) are deeply interwoven. He lives in Krakow, where his family has been for generations, but he says that the future of Poland lies in its villages and towns where communities remain strong, not in the cities that have been corrupted by the increasing commercialization of life. In 1999, his view of Polish identity was based on his experiences with the Górale who maintain and celebrate their cultural distinctiveness. He explains,

> During mass when the Pope [who is a native of the region] was in Zakopane . . . the Górale [who all dressed in their traditional clothing] showed me what we have lost. In the 1990s we took everything that was the worst in the West—like pornography. We started to call these Western models "European," and all the people with faith and national traditions are starting to be called from the Dark Ages.

Jurek's "return" to traditional culture is thus also linked to his "return" to the Catholic faith after several years of rebellion during and after high school. Jurek's orientation toward rural traditions also colors his perception of Poland's place in Europe. He believes Polish family and religious values can provide a model for Europeans whose lack of values is leading in directions that could be destructive to the whole world.

Jurek also told me on a number of occasions that Poland can be a model of what he calls "incorrectness." He explains:

> You can either laugh or cry about life in Poland. I prefer to laugh. Our flaws—nonproductivity, dirt—don't bother me. In our country it's nice that we can act with a certain kind of freedom, even at work. A Polish kind of freedom. The ease you see on Western television isn't real because there, people are controlled by work on all levels. In Poland, if I want, I can accomplish anything, but in another way—by finagling. I can feel unthreatened and reasonably free. It's still possible to shape my own personality. And this is a chance for us. I don't know if it will stay this way. We aspire to correctness. I don't like this. "Incorrectness" is a Polish national trait, as can be seen in both disorder and romanticism.

By way of example, he says Europeans must follow rigid rules at work, in contrast to Poles who tend to have a looser attitude toward rules and regulations and are more likely to see what they can get away with. Jurek clearly considers Poland a part of Europe, but he is more oriented toward the local level of nested identities than the European level.

Wojtek, a doctoral student at the Academy of Agriculture in Krakow, similarly grounds his construction of Polish national identity in a particular rural region. Unlike Jurek, however, he grew up in a tiny mountain village and attended secondary school in Lesko. Because he was raised in the country but now lives in the city, he also has some unique insights into the differences between urban and rural life in Poland. Generally, Wojtek expresses a strong nostalgia for rural life, and romanticizes the distinctiveness of his native region. He says that growing up in an ethnically mixed village near the Ukrainian border, he developed a strong Polish identity because he had to choose it; in many ways, it would have been easier to identify as a Ukrainian in his village. He expresses ambivalence about the opportunities he has found in the city because he also values the slower pace of life he associates with his village. Clearly, contrasts with other ethnic and regional groups are central to the way in which Wojtek constructs his own identity, and, yet, he rejects the necessity of conflict between groups. Indeed, intensifying conflict between Poles and Ukrainians or between urban and rural Poles would require denying part of his own heritage in favor of another. Wojtek prefers to acknowledge and even advertise his multiple allegiances. For instance, he likes to surprise his friends in Krakow by using words from the regional dialect of his native village. He also makes the point that "the middle is essential," thus highlighting the value of Poland's multiple Eastern and Western connections.

Wojtek emphasized that he wants to be sure that Poland will "join Europe" on an equal footing with their Western neighbors. He says, "if a Pole is only going to be a gray worker in Europe, and nothing else, we don't have to crawl into Europe, because we're already there." He also worries that Poland will become a market for the rest of Europe. He describes the situation with the following metaphor:

> It's like giving one person a speed boat and another person a row boat, and then saying they should meet across the bay in 50 minutes. It's clear who will get there on time and who will not. Poland can't compete because they don't have the economic base to do so.

Wojtek underscores the unequal start Poles have in contrast to their Western neighbors. He emphasizes that although Poland's economy may lag behind, there should be no doubt about Poland's cultural equality with other Europeans.

Wojtek is also proud of the distinctive place Poles have among Slavs, between East and West. In 1999, he told me that he had recently done some research about the early history of the Polish language, and he learned that the bible was translated into three languages 1,000 years ago: Latin, Greek, and Old Slavic.[11] He also pointed out that the Poles use the Latin alphabet rather than Cyrillic. For him, these facts show that the vital roots of Polish language and religion lie in Western European culture, not

in the East. Nevertheless, he disapproves of uncritical efforts to join the West, and looks instead for ways that Central Europeans could unite and create a powerful political bloc of their own. He gave an example from his own field of forestry, saying that Ukrainians, Poles, Slovaks, and Czechs should unite and seek region-specific strategies for forest management. In 1999, during the U.S./NATO intervention in Kosovo, Wojtek suggested that Poles might be more successful at negotiating a peaceful compromise than would Western powers. "Serbs are more likely to listen to other Slavs," he said, "because even though they are outsiders, they are closer than Western Europeans." These sentiments suggest that Wojtek is putting into practice a concept of nested identities. His sense of self emerges from the negotiation of multiple subject positions. Sometimes he falls between categories, but from that space emerges a unique and worthy identity.

Viewing the influence of the West as beneficial does not guarantee that individuals feel comfortable with the changes that are occurring. Ania, for instance, graduated from the Academy of Fine Art in Krakow and now teaches art at a primary school while slowly building her reputation as an artist. In response to my question whether things have changed for the better or for the worse, she responded, "Definitely for the better. People are definitely free, first of all, and can do what they want. But you have to pay for that freedom in such a way that there is less time for family, and you have to fight for every grosz [1/100 of a zloty, the rough equivalent of a penny]." In other words, the price they pay for their growing affluence is time.

Ania also expressed her ambivalence about another cultural dimension of the changing economic climate—the need to sell oneself in order to get ahead. She explains:

> Poles are afraid, or they can't think for themselves. Now individualism is coming to Poland. As long as someone is intelligent and has the personality, he can really do something, and the road to success can be very straight. If a person can fight for himself. I didn't have that myself; I was afraid to go to the store and buy bread when I was a child. Now I can do everything.

On another occasion, Ania admitted that it took her a whole year to get up the nerve to bring some of her works to a local gallery. When I asked her where her hesitation came from, she admitted she was not sure, except that in the past she (and Poles in general) were not expected, and, therefore, not taught, to sell themselves. Thus, she explains her difficulty not as an inherent part of her character so much as the product of the particular time and place in which she lives.

Ania describes herself as a patriot who is generally in favor of European integration. The following statement shows how her loyalties shift from level to level of nested identities:

> I love Poland but I hate nationalism. If someone speaks to me about nationalism, at
> once it makes me feel like a citizen of the world. And then I say that I love the whole
> world, and the whole world is my fatherland. It depends what you are talking about.
> Inside, I love Poland, and its traditions, but we also know its negative sides. I love Polish
> land, climate, beauty, but people can be terribly primitive. When I travel and compare
> other societies, Poles aren't even just simple, they are primitive.

Here, Ania expresses her ambivalent feelings toward her own nation. On
one hand, she loves Poland, but on the other, she gets frustrated by what
she calls the nationalism and primitivity of her fellow Poles. This kind of
prideful criticism was often expressed among my respondents. Such di-
vided feelings form the basis for allegiances to higher level groups (in
Ania's case, the world) under some circumstances, or alternately can jus-
tify stronger local allegiances.

Aneta, an independent filmmaker and television producer, speaks
critically of the Polish nation and even more critically of the European
Union, but during her interview in 1999, the patriotic values she learned
as a child emerged as well. She speaks strongly in opposition to integration
even though she has produced television programs that promote entrance
into the European Union. Thus, her position is far from consistent. "The
European Union can only make things worse in this country," she says.
"When they come here, we'll be marionettes. In Poland, there's only kiel-
basa and the Pope. They don't have any respect for us. First, we have to
learn to respect and trust our own government, and then we can get in-
volved in world structures."

Aneta says that she used to want to live in the United States, but not
anymore because she does not need to travel to America to accomplish
her goals. She wants to write and direct "Polish films." When I asked what
she means by this, she responded, "They're sad. In Polish films, you don't
have any money . . . what's important is a document of everyday life. We
don't create fictional events. Everything is based on our experiences, or
the experiences of our friends. Characters cry, smoke cigarettes, drink
vodka." Aneta thus expresses a fierce local identity with Poland, but at the
same time makes use of media-related opportunities that are a direct out-
growth of opening to the West. She explains, "If the system hadn't
changed, I wouldn't have been able to do what I do. I probably would have
been some kind of horribly desperate television journalist. I wouldn't have
been able to work with Americans, nor to do an independent film. I would
have had to escape from here to do these things."

Jurek, Wojtek, Ania, and Aneta's negotiation of local, national, and
transnational allegiances helps to illustrate the way nested identities func-
tion. Allegiances to ever broader groups can be added layer by layer, but
larger groups rarely replace connections based on more immediate con-
tacts. Their stories also show that conflict does not always emerge out of
identities based on contrasts, although the potential for conflict remains.

While most support (to a greater or lesser degree) European integration, all four express concern that Polish distinctiveness not be overrun by European influences. Similar sentiments were expressed by other respondents who said Poland should maintain contacts with other nations and at the same time develop their own distinctiveness, or emphasized the difference between adopting and giving in to foreign influences.

Rural Residents

In 1999, most rural respondents had little to say about the European Union although one issue they tended to discuss was the impact of foreign trade on Polish agriculture. Some expressed concern that foreign products will take away what little domestic market remains for local produce. By and large, young people, even if they live on an active farm, have seasonal or intermittent service or manufacturing jobs. They do not see a future for farming even if Poland stays out of the European Union. For instance, Zosia, who went to the agricultural trade school in Lesko, lives on her family's farm. Her parents raise sheep, but they do not know how much longer it will be worth their while. The only reason they make any profit is because of government subsidies. Zosia and her sister supplement the family income with jobs as a store clerk and a cook, respectively. While expressing concern about the demise of Polish agriculture, Zosia knows too little about the European Union or the national policies affecting farming in Poland to establish any opinion about them.

Both urban and rural residents voice particular concern about foreigners buying up agricultural lands (see Kudzia and Pawelczyk 1999). Wojtek, who grew up in a village but now lives in Krakow, explained this reluctance:

> Poles don't have a phobia against capitalism, but we don't have enough money to compete with it. For example, regarding the sale of land. If we enter the European Union, we will have to make land available to everyone. But our land is cheaper. Everyone will be able to buy it. And this is not such a straightforward matter for us. Because for many people, land is not just a place to work, but also their home, their tree. Because someone else has money, he will be able to buy a piece of that other person's history. It isn't a phobia, but rather uneven starting conditions.[12]

Rural residents agree with their urban counterparts that Poland is becoming more like the West, but whereas the urban residents who participated in my study are confident they can achieve what they want in their native Poland, rural residents feel they are moving progressively farther from the power and opportunity associated with Western Europe. Bogdan, a native of Bieszczady who attends university in Krakow, put it as follows, "Maybe things look pretty on the outside, but inside things remain the same. The outside is for show. But it's necessary to fix what's inside." Economic hardship tends to strengthen rural Poles' perception of a sharp

divide between themselves and the rest of Europe, and even between themselves and urban Poles, thus keeping local identity more salient for them than broader levels of nested identities.

Whereas Wojtek and Staszek, as noted above, had to go to university and settle outside of rural Bieszczady to take full advantage of opportunities associated with stronger ties to the West, Joasia decided she does not like the noise, dirt, and crowds of the city, and only wants to live in her native Bieszczady Mountains. The daughter of teachers, she never intended to become one herself. After finishing technical school in Lesko, however, she studied library science because there was a program not far from home, and then spent three years commuting to Krakow on weekends to earn her masters degree. By chance, an opening for a librarian came up in her former high school, and since school officials remembered her from her student days, they hired her.

Joasia criticizes the Polish government for focusing too much on establishing a good reputation abroad in order to facilitate acceptance into the European Union. For instance, she criticized the country's involvement in Kosovo in 1999. Rather, her sympathies lie with her colleagues who have had to emigrate in order to get a decent job. She told me, "I feel connected to this place and to the fatherland, also. Because that's the kind of Pole I am. But I also have enough of politics. I try not to watch because the more I see, the more I fall into depression. Nevertheless, I'm very connected to the region, and to my family." Joasia recognizes Poland's place within the broader European arena, but her strongest loyalties are local ones—to the Bieszczady Mountains and to friends and family.

Although Polish sociologist Stanisław Ossowski (1967) characterizes "ideological fatherland" and "private fatherland" as complementary dimensions of national loyalty, Joasia's story reveals a tendency among some young Poles to disregard or even reject the broader ideological dimensions of national identity. Nevertheless, private attachments to the place associated with close friends and family ("little fatherland") remain important. The relatively peaceful political situation, in which no outside power threatens Polish autonomy, allows them to choose local loyalties over broader ones. Economic hardship makes rural residents more likely to focus on the material needs of their closest relations, and can thus work counter to the assertion of broader levels of nested identities.

CONCLUSION

The ambivalence expressed by most of my respondents about "getting closer to the West" and membership in the European Union helps to explain the decline in support for the European Union as negotiations proceeded, and, yet, the overwhelming endorsement of the referendum when

it actually came time to vote on Poland's entry. As an ideological goal, "returning to Europe" was considered the restoration of Poland to its rightful place after being artificially held in the East by Soviet domination, and so it was widely supported. However, once negotiations for membership in the European Union began in earnest in the late 1990s, challenges and possible dangers of accession became apparent. Specific conditions of entrance, particularly allowing foreigners to purchase Polish agricultural lands and further opening the Polish market to foreign products, aroused concerns about new forms of foreign domination. Thus, views on membership in the European Union also reflect a shift in perceptions of Poland's place between East and West. Whereas historical discourse situated Poland between Eastern and Western political forces that threatened the nation's autonomy, contemporary discourse tends to emphasize economic factors.

Young Poles' life stories do not discount the concept of nested identities, but they do show its limits. Respondents do not only want to be Europeans. They want Poland to be recognized as a legitimate member of Europe. To be precise, loyalty to Europe rarely replaces lower level loyalties, but rather is sometimes felt *in addition to* local and national loyalties. As such, they allow for contrasts between groups without assuming conflict. However, recent debates suggest that economic insecurity may reinforce regional and class loyalties within Poland, and lead to protectionist policies against foreign investors. Here we see the limits of nested identities and the return to geographic and political divisions. By and large, Poles are not willing to consider a system that threatens their national sovereignty.

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NOTES

1. Since the early 1990s, the Polish education system has undergone considerable reforms leading to a restructuring of schools. Most significantly, there has been a move away from trade education to general education that emphasizes academics. Correspondingly, the

group schools in Lesko, Krakow, and throughout Poland have replaced trade programs with programs that last longer and provide graduates with a high school diploma as well as job training. For instance, the agriculture school introduced a lyceum program of economics and technical programs in new specialties such as agrobusiness, while canceling their trade programs in areas like animal husbandry.

These reforms are consistent with the movement away from an economy dominated by state managed industries toward a more service and consumer-based economy. Rather than learning specialized skills that quickly become obsolete, emphasis has moved toward general education courses that, ideally, provide students with the ability to change careers as professional opportunities shift.

2. My original sample included 21 respondents. Three of the eleven rural respondents were not included in the second round of interviewing for a variety of reasons. One immigrated to Italy, though we remain in contact via letters, e-mails, and phone calls. Another did not want to be recorded but agreed to speak with me informally on a number of occasions, and a third, very sadly, committed suicide. In addition to more extended research trips in 1992–93, 1999, and 2000, I met with some respondents during visits in 1997 and 1998.

3. *Pan Tadeusz* is an epic poem by Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855) written in the mid-1800s about an attempted insurrection during the partitions of Poland. The narrator recalls the events of 1812, when the memory of a free Poland was still strong, and when Polish patriots hoped that Napoleon would help Poland regain its independence. The story takes place in Lithuania. In the poem, one family uses the planned uprising as an opportunity to exact revenge on another, thus contributing to the failure of the insurrection. *Ogniem i Mieczem* (The Fire and the Sword) is an adaptation of the first novel in Henryk Sienkiewicz's patriotic trilogy; films based on the other two novels in the series were made between 1969 and 1974. In these 19th-century novels, historic struggles for Polish sovereignty provide the backdrop against which idealized Polish heroes fight foreign villains.

4. Wawel Castle, located in Krakow, is the historic seat of Polish kings.

5. *Na luzie* refers to lack of constraint, being able to behave freely and to not be serious. The expression is used fairly often to describe life in the West.

6. All of these terms emerged out of taped group interviews. I also heard them all in less formal discussions and everyday conversations.

7. This statement reflects the conflation of European and American influences, both of which were included in general assumptions about "the West."

8. Blazyca (1999) gives a thorough outline of the economic and political factors likely to influence Poland's accession to the European Union.

9. Although 77 percent of those who voted on the referendum supported membership, 39 percent of those who did not plan to participate had no opinion, and 34 percent were opposed (Roguska 2002).

10. The term has been used in the Polish press and by social scientists, both (see Bielasiak 2002 and Kublik and Pacewicz 2003).

11. Wojtek elaborated that the Bible was written in Macedonian, which all Slavs at the time would have understood.

12. Rural residents have told me that there is a Polish saying that a man becomes a man when he has his own house, tree, and son. Wojtek may well have had this in mind.

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