



INTRODUCTION

6

When we hear the term *Ostpreussen*, for us it is associated foremost with German culture and the role that this Prussian land had in it. The emergence and disappearance of East Prussia is associated with two acts of force. The term was introduced at the end of the 18th century, following the infamous first partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth; while the reason for East Prussia vanishing was the Second World War and the geopolitical remaking of East-Central Europe devised by the winners of the war. In the German-speaking world, however, *Ostpreussen* was for a long time associated with anything but images of violence. In the mid-19th century, East Prussians, for instance, felt they lived in the 'Siberia of Germany'.¹ Another image of East Prussia, the area from which the growth of the Prussian state began, was reinforced afterwards. Subsequently, East Prussia was transformed into a stronghold of German culture in the East, with the principal realms of memory representing this culture being Kant, Copernicus, Herder, Dach, Königsberg and Marienburg. In addition, East Prussia represented to Germans a wonderful corner of natural beauty, with shady woods, the lakes of Masuria, and the Curonian Spit. Ultimately, in the period after the Second World War, the very concept of *Ostpreussen* as such evolved into a realm of memory, which, above all, was associated with the lost land and two other concepts, *Flucht* and *Vertreibung*.

East Prussia, however, is not merely a realm of memory for the Germans. In their project 'Polish-German Realms of Memory', the Centre for Historical Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Berlin also portrayed East Prussia as a common German and Polish realm of memory. It is no coincidence, however, that the participants in the project equated the German *Ostpreussen* to the Polish term *Warmia i Mazury*.² It may be said that this term has become the Polish equivalent for East Prussia. By the end of the 19th century, Warmia and Masuria, while being integrated into the German narrative as two ethnographic regions of East Prussia dominated by Polish-speaking German citizens, had emerged into irredentist lands in Polish national culture. The founders of modern Polish national culture saw the continuity of Polish culture in these lands, and dreamed of incorporating the two regions into would-be Poland, no matter how distinctive they were. The differences in the Ger-

¹ *Nachrichten über Leben und Schriften des Herrn Geheimraths Dr. Karl Ernst von Baer*. St. Petersburg, 1866, S. 235, 364.

² ŻYTNYNIEC, R. *Ostpreussen / Ermland und Masuren. Vom Bollwerk zu Borussia*. In *Deutsch-Polnische Erinnerungsorte*. Bd. I: *Geteilt / Gemeinsam*. Hg. von H. H. HAHN, R. TRABA, unter Mitarbeit von M. GÓRNY, K. KOŃCZAL. Paderborn, 2015, S. 97–121 (see also other related to East Prussia essays „Preussen“ and „Danzig“ by Peter Oliver Loew, „Polnischer Korridor“ by Gernot Briesewitz, and „Preussische Ostmark“ by Stefan Dyroff in the same volume).

man and Polish visions of the past and the future of these regions are highlighted by two publications which appeared almost simultaneously: *Geschichte Masurens* by Max Toeppen (1870), and *O Mazurach* by Wojciech Kętrzyński (1872). Whereas Toeppen attempted to portray the past of Masuria in the context of the history of the Teutonic Knights and the state of Prussia, Kętrzyński, on the other hand, was essentially concerned with proving the Polish origins of the region, and its connection with Polish culture. Polish aspirations to two rather different regions, Catholic Warmia and Evangelical Masuria, materialised in the aftermath of the Second World War. The construct *Warmia i Mazury* was intertwined with another construct, *Ziemia Odzyskana*. Two territories that had largely lost their former populations were incorporated into postwar Poland as 'our', 'Polish' regions. Copernicus, Kajka and the Masurian landscape have come to be the most recognisable icons of the region. In the postwar period, Warmia and Masuria were integrated into the 'People's Poland', as an integral part of the state, although in the regions of the former East Prussia, awareness of their distinctiveness grew with each passing year after the war. By the end of the 20th century, this awareness had evolved into various initiatives aimed at consolidating regional distinctiveness, ranging from the activities of the Borussia association to the creation of the Warmian-Masurian Voivodship in 1999 as part of voivodship administrative reform in Poland.

Comparable trends in the appropriation of part of East Prussia are evident in the case of Lithuania.³ By the early 20th century, the part of this province inhabited by Lithuanian-speaking citizens of Germany was identified as *Mažoji Lietuva* (Lithuania Minor) in Lithuanian national culture. *Mažoji Lietuva* evolved into a Lithuanian irredentist land. Its importance to Lithuanian national culture was formed through realms of memory such as Mažvydas, Donelaitis and Rambynas. The need for access to the sea and the necessity to gain possession of the port of Memel (Klaipėda) became compelling stimuli for the modern state of Lithuania to seek the annexation of at least part of East Prussia. The young republic, taking advantage of the propitious geopolitical situation, and thanks to its diplomatic aptitude, succeeded, in that the part of East Prussia north of the River Memel (Neman, Nemunas), the Territory of Memel (or Klaipėda Region), which had the largest population of Lithuanian origin, was conceded to Lithuania in 1923. Nonetheless, Lithuanians entertained far greater claims. Before the Second World War, and for a long time after the war, they dreamt of incorporating all of Lithuania Minor, and the very term *Mažoji Lietuva*, which at the beginning had been equated with the ethnographic region of (Prussian) Lithuania, was increasingly transformed in the minds of Lithuanians into a synonym for the Kaliningrad Oblast. The Klaipėda Region or Memelgebiet, as part of East Prussia

³ For more on this issue, see: SAFRONOVAS, V. *Nacionalinių erdvių konstravimas daugiakultūriame regione. Prūsijos Lietuvos atvejis*. Vilnius, 2015. The English translation is scheduled for publication by Academic Studies Press in 2016.

which belonged to Lithuania in the Soviet period, was integrated into this Soviet Republic as a 'historic land of Lithuanians', one that was again 'recovered' in 1945, was subjected to negation and the levelling out of any specific features of the region. Here we may observe an evident parallel with the case of the postwar integration of Warmia and Masuria. But as in the case of Poland, increasingly vociferous assertions of the distinctiveness of the Klaipeda Region, of this area being different to the rest of Lithuania, appeared in the late Soviet period. The awareness of this distinctiveness, arising through encounters with a different environment and still developing today, is increasingly affecting the minds of people living in the Klaipėda Region.

8 | East Prussia has had a certain impact not only on German, Polish and Lithuanian, but also on Russian national culture. For travellers from the Russian Empire, East Prussia was the 'showcase of the West' for several centuries: on the way to Europe, East Prussia was the first encounter with things that represented Europe. Since the early 19th century, Königsberg had acquired an increasingly important role as a convenient port for the export of Russian goods. It is no coincidence that Russia made very clear claims to at least part of East Prussia, comprising the lower reaches of the Neman, during the First World War. East Prussia, portrayed as the 'lair of the Fascist beast' in Russia during the Second World War, was nevertheless to become a home for Russians following the war, a home which took very long to get hold of, by breaking off almost any ties with the past, seeking to reinforce the image of 'just retribution for Russian blood spilt in the war', or the image of 'the westernmost region of the Soviet Union', its outpost in the West. These images took root; however, the new inhabitants of the Kaliningrad Oblast eventually became increasingly aware of the distinctiveness of the area during the Khrushchev and Brezhnev periods. The question of the extent to which this awareness served as a basis for the formation of an individual 'Kaliningrad identity', which was a subject of heated discussions a decade ago, remains to be answered. One thing is evident: the sense of being in East Prussia is still present in the Kaliningrad Oblast, and East Prussia retains its meaning for the populations of this region.

We should not forget the Jewish component. Jewish communities were established in many towns and cities in the Province of East Prussia prior to the Second World War. Their presence was especially salient in the border areas. In everyday life, Jews played the role of intermediaries between different cultures. What East Prussia meant to the Jews is a question that we may leave for future research. But the rebuilding of the main Jewish synagogue, which was burned down by the Nazis in 1938, recently started in Kaliningrad, evidence to the fact that such Jewish meanings undoubtedly exist.

The above points to one thing: just as the past of the region was formerly ignored, so efforts to recover this past have been at work for several decades now. This recovery should reclaim a due place for East Prussia in academic discourse. We must stop

evading enquiry into East Prussia, for the single reason of running the risk of being blamed for encouraging 'revisionism'. On the other hand, East Prussia should not appeal to us for the only reason of it belonging to one national culture. First and foremost, the area is interesting in that East Prussia was always an arena for meetings and encounters of cultures, a space which held and still holds a meaning not only for Germans, Prussian Lithuanians, Masurians, Warmians and Jews who used to live there, but also for the neighbouring states, Lithuania, Poland and Russia. This space of cultural meetings and encounters calls for curiosity, wonder, attention, analysis, and a search for transnational perspectives on the part of scholars.

We call these spaces of meetings and encounters 'contact zones', thus trying to provide a new approach to the history of East Prussia which would highlight how the region was shaped by the interplay of different parts of the population, but also by its relations with the outside world. Examining such contacts enriches our knowledge of everyday life in East Prussia, but it also goes far beyond this, as one example of the problems the region faced after the First World War shows. In 1921, a concerned representative of the Königsberg Chamber of Commerce complained to the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the insecurity about the territorial future of the Territory of Memel and parts of Masuria severely hampered the mobility of merchants. However, trade relations within East Prussia and abroad, the representative claimed, were almost entirely based on personal relations, which meant that this situation was equal to a complete standstill of the East Prussian economy, thus threatening the very existence of the province.⁴ This situation highlights the crucial significance of contact zones to the history of East Prussia, and also their frequent exposure to European and even global events, and thus their numerous, and increasingly rapid, transformations. This thematic issue thus examines the character and dynamics of such contact zones, the individuals and groups that used and shaped them, and their subjection to broader historical developments.

It is no exaggeration to state that East Prussia was for most of its history shaped in contact with the 'other'. Christopher Clark has highlighted that even in the age of absolutism and the centralisation of rule, Prussian state politics continued to treat settlements in East Prussia as "'colonies" with their own distinctive culture'.⁵ Andreas Kossert argues that this acceptance of 'others' as equals ended only with the notorious politics of Germanisation introduced in the late 19th century.⁶ The changes brought about by the First World War, but of course particularly by the Second World War, changed existing contact zones entirely.

⁴ Bzgl. der Einreisebeschränkungen für Händler nach Ostpreußen, 4 April 1921. *Bundesarchiv (Lichterfelde)*, R 901/25959, unnumbered.

⁵ CLARK, Ch. *Iron Kingdom. The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600–1947*. London, 2006, p. 429.

⁶ KOSSERT, A. *Ostpreußen. Geschichte und Mythos*. München, 2005, S. 177.

How can we define contact zones? The conceptualisation of the linguist Marie Louise Pratt has proven to be durable, productive and adaptable to a variety of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. Contact zones, according to Pratt, are then 'social spaces, where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination.'⁷ The term, she argues, shifts the focus away from imperial centres, thus transcending the stereotypical divide between rulers and colonised, to focus on interaction, improvisational dimensions, intersecting trajectories and interdependence. At the same time, Pratt's conception of contact zones, while highlighting coexistence, acknowledges the power hierarchies at play in these interactional spaces.

10

Pratt's approach has been adopted and expanded to meet the specifics of very different fields of research. We would like to emphasise two that seem particularly suitable for a new methodological framework to write the history of East Prussia as a history of multiple cultures. Ewa Stańczyk, in her study of the poetry of Jerzy Harasymowicz, has further differentiated the spatial and material dimensions of contact zones, by taking into account the co-presence and interaction of objects, materials and topography linked to different cultural traditions and thus recognisable as a representation of otherness.⁸ By highlighting the human interaction with such objects, and the character of contact zones as spatial palimpsests that are inscribed and re-inscribed with symbols of cultural, national and ethnic identification, her framework can enrich research questions regarding the negotiations over spaces and topographies that have been raised over the past decade in East Central European and East European history.⁹

In her study of Jewish-Christian relations in a small town in Switzerland, Alexandra Binnenkade puts the focus differently, adjusting the concept of contact zones to establish a framework that is particularly effective for the analysis of everyday human encounters. While also bearing aspects of power in mind, she emphasises the 'togetherness' in the contact zones in the form of 'co-presence, interactions, overlapping assumptions and practices'.¹⁰ These zones thus become spaces for the negotiation of modes of self-identification and categorisation. This heightened emphasis of reciprocity is not a sugar-coating of multi-ethnic interactions; rather, Binnenkade argues, contact zones are never either peaceful nor conflict-ridden, but usually both at the same time.

⁷ PRATT, M. L. *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation*. 2nd Ed. London, 2007 [1992], p. 7.

⁸ STAŃCZYK, E. *Contact Zone Identities in the Poetry of Jerzy Harasymowicz. A Postcolonial Analysis*. Bern, 2012, p. 22.

⁹ E.g. MUSEKAMP, J. *Zwischen Stettin und Szczecin. Metamorphosen einer Stadt von 1945 bis 2005*. Wiesbaden, 2010; ACKERMANN, F. *Palimpsest Grodno. Nationalisierung, Nivellierung und Sowjetisierung einer mitteleuropäischen Stadt 1919–1991*. Wiesbaden, 2011; particularly on East Prussia: SAFRONOVAS, V. *Kampf um Identität: Die ideologische Auseinandersetzung in Memel/Klaipėda im 20. Jahrhundert*. Wiesbaden, 2015.

¹⁰ BINNENKADE, A. *KontaktZonen. Jüdisch-Christlicher Alltag in Lengnau*. Köln, 2009, S. 24.

What does this mean for the view that this thematic issue casts on East Prussia? The complex character of contact zones outlined here, which includes human interaction, but also the encounter with the material culture, topography, and, in fact, history, allows for a distinct perspective on how both individuals and groups conceive of themselves and others, how they claim spaces for themselves, and how they react to historical developments and ruptures. This can be examined in the form of contact with other cultures in historical or ethnological writing, contact with different ethnic and social groups with differing (but surprisingly often also shared) assumptions, and contact of newcomers with old and often confusing landscapes and cityscapes. Moreover, the structure of the contact zones themselves is an object of research of its own. How are power hierarchies played out in them? How can the borders of such zones be shifted? Is it possible to establish neutral 'third zones' that mitigate power hierarchies?

We would like to lay out briefly three main research questions that the individual papers address, thus forming a complex picture of contact and its significance in East Prussia.

(1) How did the historical space of East Prussia function as a region based on difference, and as a space for cultural contacts? This involves looking critically at elusive concepts such as identities, as well as at strategies of inclusion and exclusion, all of which may help us question historical ruptures and identify continuities. As multi-ethnicity, we understand here not exclusively the coexistence of different groups, but also their reflections in topographies and material culture. Various individuals and groups come into focus, including historians, priests, ethnic entrepreneurs, novelists and businessmen. They communicated, negotiated, acted and formed networks in and across these zones, and thus eventually shaped and changed them. On the example of (Prussian) Lithuanian ethnographic heritage protection, Nijolė Strakauskaitė shows how East Prussia in the late 19th century was perceived as a unique cultural space made up of different ethnic regions. Andreas Kossert highlights in his comprehensive article the entire scope of groups and institutions which form networks, claim spaces and shape contact zones, and thus the larger regions: social groups, ethnic groups, associations, political parties. Kossert highlights the fact that these networks often survived historical ruptures, but also warns against the romanticisation of the region by highlighting the destructive force of nationalism. In his chapter on the plebiscite of 1920, Stefan Thierfelder shows how Polish-German antagonism forced people in Masuria to take sides, and hints at how this zone of contact was later taken to an international level by the associations of expellees (*Vertriebenenverbände*).

(2) How far did zones of contact facilitate East Prussia's function as a window from West to East, and vice versa, and what did this mean for its population? Answering this question requires a deconstruction of national narratives, and a close look at

how the border position of East Prussia structured intercultural communication and social and economic practices. After all, contact zones were transnational: they did not stop at frontiers, but rather facilitated contact across borders. This view thus helps investigate the interaction of the East Prussian centre with its border regions, but also of East Prussia with its neighbours. In his contribution on the de-Germanisation and Polonisation politics of the post-Second World War Polish state, Andrzej Sakson shows how larger national (Polish, German, Lithuanian and Russian) ideas were projected on to this comparatively small territory. Examining the interwar period, Andrzej Kopiczko examines how Albert Dannelautzki, a local priest from Memel (Klaipėda), aimed to tread a fine line between cooperation with Lithuanian priests and an unmediated relationship with the Warmian Diocese.

12

(3) How were contact zones in East Prussia transformed? Here we are particularly interested in rededications and continued use of spaces, and in cultural patterns that transcended historical ruptures. Although this is a region that cannot be interpreted without taking memory into account, the contributions to this volume emphasise historical human agency rather than ex-post constructions. This includes interpreting East Prussia as a palimpsest that is constantly being re-inscribed, but at the same time structured by the visible traces of previous inscriptions. Contact zones constantly adapted to the forces of nationalisation, to shifts in borders, to annexations and initiated processes of mental mapping based on historical arguments as much as on material culture. Looking at late 18th-century East Prussia, Axel E. Walter examines the case of 'Old Prussia' (*Altpreußen*) as a product of mental mapping rather than as a geographical unit. In his contribution on the symbolic appropriation of space, Jörg Hackmann highlights the role of spatial constructs and the increasing overlap of claimed national territories, while at the same time emphasising the significance of regional discourses on identity. Finally, Ilya Dementyev looks at the Kaliningrad Oblast across four decades, highlighting a historical development that started out with a complete change of the material and cultural space, and later moved towards gradual rehabilitation.

This collection of papers offered to the reader will not, of course, reveal all the possible aspects of contact zones in the historical region of East Prussia. Rather, it seeks to demonstrate the opportunities of a changing approach. We encourage the consideration of East Prussia not as someone's exclusive property, but as an area of a combination of multiple contact zones. These contacts are understood in the broadest sense: intergovernmental, intercultural and interpersonal, which both manifested themselves in the region before 1945, and formed, or are forming, in it after the Second World War.