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Westerners, Western Power and Polish Society in the Mid-Twentieth Century: The Poznań International Trade Fair as a Complex Frontier

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Drawing on Polish, US, French, British and German archival documents, this article examines the encounters between Western and Polish participants at the International Trade Fair in the Polish city of Poznań in the 1950s and 1960s. Challenging the predominant Cold War framework, it shows that Westerners who came to Poznań drew on power and privilege while pursuing personal interests. Consequently, the author both highlights the self-indulgence of the well-known story about the largely emancipatory motivations of Westerners who became involved with Eastern European affairs in the second half of the twentieth century and demonstrates that the resulting patterns of interactions are only tangentially related to Cold War political struggles. Instead, the article shows that these encounters are best seen in the context of a relationship between Westerners and East Europeans that spans decades, and even centuries, and that involved encounters fraught with contestation over economic power and cultural dominance.

The US diplomat John P. Harrod told his interviewer in 1999:

Poland was, as I described at the time and I still believe, the most pro-American country I'd ever worked in, including the United States. You could do no wrong. We had exhibits in Poland like we did in the Soviet Union, but you never got questions about Vietnam or race relations or anything else because most people believed the United States was perfect.¹

Versions of this neat image of US engagement with Polish society during the Cold War persist in scholarship and popular imagination, and echo in the historiography of Western–East European relations during the Cold War.² The received wisdom in the West has been that Western governments fought the Cold War with their authoritarian communist counterparts; to the extent they engaged with the East European societies, it was largely through partnerships designed to promote these societies' pursuit of their own welfare, freedom, self-determination and democracy. This article examines patterns of East–West interactions at the Poznań International Trade Fair in

¹ Charles Stuart Kennedy's interview with John P. Harrod, 1 Mar. 1999, 35, available at <https://cdn.loc.gov/service/mss/mfdip/2004/2004har11/2004har11.pdf> (last visited 25 Feb. 2023).

² More critical accounts include Igor Lukes, *On the Edge of the Cold War: American Diplomats and Spies in Postwar Prague* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015); Charles Gati, *Failed Illusions: Moscow, Washington, Budapest, and the 1956 Hungarian Revolt* (Stanford, CA/Washington, DC: Stanford University Press/Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2006); Laszlo Borhi, *Dealing with Dictators: The United States, Hungary, and East Central Europe, 1942–1989* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016); Gregory Domber, *Empowering Revolution: America, Poland, and the End of the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

the mid-twentieth century that belie such idealistic narratives. Driven by a sense of superiority, many Westerners who came to Poland regularly promoted their own personal agendas and interests in ways that had little to do with the Cold War ideological struggle. They often leveraged their own privilege vis-à-vis the people in these poorer, more isolated societies, activating regional resentments and insecurities that long predated the Cold War.³ These Western visitors effectively perpetuated longstanding power asymmetries between East and West, I suggest, defining the Second World around the notion of second-class citizenship.

Challenges to idealistic assessments such as Harrod's have been mostly oblique. The most powerful of those critiques have been self-consciously framed by the ostensible divisions between capitalism and communism that animated key aspects of Cold War politics.⁴ Cultural historians and anthropologists have pushed back against the binary visions we inherited from the Cold War as they refocused the conversation from contrasting ideologies to international entanglements, exchanges, appropriations and similarities, ultimately showing how East Europeans actively shaped the world of socialism through exchanges, inventiveness and selective borrowings.⁵ Many did so in the contexts of

³ See Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994).

⁴ As noted in Mary Nolan, *The Transatlantic Century: Europe and America, 1890–2010* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press), 265; Gregory F. Domber, 'US–Eastern Europe Relations', *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019); 'Introduction', in James Mark, Bogdan C. Iacob, Tobias Rupprecht and Ljubica Spaskovska, 1989: *A Global History of Eastern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 1. For scholarly works that highlight effective US policies in Eastern Europe see, e.g., Bennett Kovrig, *Of Walls and Bridges: The United States and Eastern Europe* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1991); Walter Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945–1961* (Chichester: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997); Jakub Tyszkiewicz, *Rozbijanie monolitu. Polityka Stanów Zjednoczonych wobec Polski 1945–1988* (Warsaw: PWN, 2015); Piotr S. Wandycz, *The United States and Poland* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 307–413; Yale Richmond, *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War: Raising the Iron Curtain* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003); Wilson P. Dizard Jr., *Inventing Public Diplomacy: The Story of the U.S. Information Agency* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004); Daniel Fried, 'Poland, America, and the Arc of History', *The Polish Review*, LIV, 2 (2009), 141–6; Gregory Mitrovich, *Undermining the Kremlin: America's Strategy to Subvert the Soviet Bloc, 1947–1955* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000); Peter Grose, *Operation Rollback: America's Secret War Behind the Iron Curtain* (New York, NY: Mariner Books, 2000); Scott Lucas, *Freedom's War: The American Crusade against the Soviet Union* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1999); Penny M. von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); Lisa E. Davenport, *Jazz Diplomacy: Promoting America in the Cold War Era* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009); Alfred A. Reisch, *Hot Books in the Cold War: The CIA-Funded Secret Western Book Distribution Program behind the Iron Curtain* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2013); Sarah B. Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War: A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Timothy Ryback, *Rock Around the Bloc: A History of Rock Music in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1990); David Caute, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy During the Cold War* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁵ Paulina Bren and Mary Neuburger, 'Introduction', in Bren and Neuburger, eds., *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012); Theodora Dragostinova and Malgorzata Fidelis, 'Introduction', to a thematic issue on 'Beyond the Iron Curtain: Eastern Europe and the Global Cold War', *Slavic Review*, 77, 3 (2018), 577–87; Fidelis, 'Pleasures and Perils of Socialist Modernity: New Scholarship on Post-War Eastern Europe', *Contemporary European History*, 26, 3 (2017), 533–44; Patryk Babiracki and Austin Jersild, 'Introduction', in Babiracki and Jersild, eds., *Socialist Internationalism in the Cold War: Exploring the Second World* (New York, NY: Palgrave, 2016), 1–14; Patryk Babiracki, 'Interfacing the Soviet Bloc: Recent Literature and New Paradigms', *Ab Imperio*, 4 (2011), 376–407; Péteri, ed., *Imagining the West*; Robert Haddow, *Pavilions of Plenty: Exhibiting American Culture Abroad in the 1950s* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997); Greg Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front: The Soft Power of Mid-Century Design* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); see also Nick Rutter, 'The Western Wall: The Iron Curtain Recast in Midsummer 1951', in Patryk Babiracki and Kenyon Zimmer, eds., *Cold War Crossings: International Travel and Exchange across the Soviet Bloc, 1940s–1960s* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2014), 78–106; Peter Romijn, Giles Scott-Smith and Joe Segal, eds., *Divided Dreamworlds? The Cultural Cold War in East and West* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012); Sari Autio-Sarasma and Katalin Miklóssy, eds., *Reassessing Cold War Europe* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011); Anne E. Gorsuch and Diane P. Koenker, *The Socialist Sixties: Crossing Borders in the Second World*

international exhibitions and fairs.⁶ Yet, concomitant with these groundbreaking efforts to restore East European agency has been a noticeable shift of attention away from Western institutions and actors. Scholars continue to recognise the multiple Western sources of ideas, but increasingly they treat them also as residues of Western complacency, as distant spheres, productively mediated by East European

- (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013); Melissa Feinberg, *Curtain of Lies: The Battle over Truth in Stalinist Eastern Europe* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017); Simo Mikkonen and Pia Koivunen, *Beyond the Divide: Entangled Histories of Cold War Europe* (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2015); Simo Mikkonen, Jari Parkkinen and Giles Scott-Smith, 'Exploring Culture in and of the Cold War', in Mikkonen, Parkkinen and Scott-Smith, eds., *Entangled East and West: Cultural Diplomacy and Artistic Interaction during the Cold War* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019); Bren, 'Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall . . . Is the West the Fairest of Them All? Czechoslovak Normalization and Its (Dis)Contents', *Kritika* 9, 4 (2008), 831–54; Theodora Dragostinova, 'The East in the West: Bulgarian Culture in the United States of America during the Global 1970s', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 53, 1 (2018), 212–39; Włodzimierz Borodziej and Jerzy Kochanowski, *Bocznymi drogami. Nieoficjalne kontakty społeczeństw socjalistycznych, 1956–1989* (Warsaw: Trio, 2010); Alexander Badenoch, Andreas Fickers and Christian Henrich-Franke, *Airy Curtains in the European Ether: Broadcasting and the Cold War* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2013); Sari Autio-Sarasmo and Brendan Humphreys, eds., *Winter Kept Us Warm: Cold War Interactions Reconsidered* (Helsinki: Aleksanteri Institute, 2010); Irme Bazin, Pascal Dubourg Glatigny and Piotr Piotrowski, eds., *Art beyond Borders: Artistic Exchange in Communist Europe (1945–1989)* (New York, NY: Central European University Press, 2016); Sune Bechmann Pedersen and Christian Noack, eds., *Tourism and Travel during the Cold War* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019); Krisztina Fehérvári, *Politics in Color and Concrete: Socialist Materialities and the Middle Class in Hungary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014); Emanuela Grama, *Socialist Heritage: The Politics of Past and Place in Romania* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019); Susan E. Reid and David Crowley, eds., *Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe* (Oxford: Berg, 2000); Jaroslav Švelch, *Gaming the Iron Curtain: How Teenagers and Amateurs in Communist Czechoslovakia Claimed the Medium of Computer Games* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018); Evgeny Dobrenko and Natalia Jonsson-Skradol, *Socialist Realism in Central and Eastern European Literatures: Institutions, Dynamics, Discourses* (New York, NY: Anthem Press, 2018). Critical 'revisionist' accounts of US institutions also contributed to this reframing. See, e.g., Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War*, trans. A. Goldhammer (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Frances Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London: Granta, 1999); Victoria De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).
- ⁶ György Péteri, 'Sites of Convergence: The USSR and Communist Eastern Europe at International Fairs Abroad and at Home', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 47, 1 (2012), 3–12; Katherine Pence, '“A World in Miniature”: The Leipzig Trade Fairs in the 1950s and East German Consumer Citizenship', in David F. Crew, ed., *Consuming Germany in the Cold War* (New York, NY: Berg, 2003), 21–50; Mary Neuberger, 'Kebabche, Caviar or Hot Dogs? Consuming the Cold War at the Plovdiv Fair 1947–72', *Contemporary European History*, 47, 1 (2012), 48–68; Cathleen M. Giustino, 'Industrial Design and the Czechoslovak Pavilion at EXPO '58: Artistic Autonomy, Party Control and Cold War Common Ground', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 47, 1 (2012), 185–212; Tomas Tolvaisas, 'America on Display: U.S. Commercial and Cultural Exhibitions in the Soviet Bloc Countries, 1961–1968', unpublished PhD dissertation, Rutgers University–New Brunswick, 2007; Haddow, *Pavilions of Plenty*; Tanja Scheffler, 'Die Leipziger Messe während der DDR-Zeit. Franz Ehrlichs Perspektivplanungen', *Leipziger Blätter*, Sonderausgabe: 100 Jahre Alte Messe (2013), 42–6; Shane Hamilton, 'Supermarket USA Confronts State Socialism: Airlifting the Technopolitics of Industrial Food Distribution into Cold War Yugoslavia', in Ruth Oldenziel and Karin Zachmann, eds., *Cold War Kitchen: Americanization, Technology, and European Users* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 2009), 137–62; Radina Vučetić, *Coca-Cola Socialism: Americanization of Yugoslav Culture in the Sixties*, trans. John K. Cox (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2018), 260–9; Susan Reid, 'The Soviet Pavilion at Brussels '58: Convergence, Conversion, Critical Assimilation, or Transculturation?', *Cold War International History Project #62* (Dec. 2010), available at: https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/WP62_Reid_web_V3sm.pdf (last accessed 6 Jan. 2020); Kimberly Elman Zarecor and Vladimir Kulić, 'Socialism on Display: The Czechoslovak and Yugoslav Pavilions at the 1958 Brussels World's Fair', in Laura Hollengreen et al., eds., *Meet Me at the Fair: A World's Fair Reader* (Pittsburgh, PA: Carnegie Mellon University Press, 2014), 225–39; David Crowley, 'Humanity Rearranged: The Polish and Czechoslovak Pavilions at Expo 58', *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture*, 19, 1 (2012), 88–105. See also Izabella Agárdi, 'Socialist Work on Display: Visualizing the Political at the 1948 Budapest International Fair', in Yannis Yannitsiotis, Dimitra Lampropoulou and Carla Salvaterra, eds., *Rhetorics of Work* (Pisa: Pisa University Press, 2008), 1–26; Katarzyna Jeżowska, 'Zmagania z ideologią. Pierwsza Polska Wystawa Przemysłu Lekkiego w Moskwie (1949)', *Miejsce. Studia nad sztuką i architekturą polską XX i XXI wieku*, 2 (2016), 128–46; idem., 'Imagined Poland. Representations of the Nation State at the Exhibitions of Industry, Craft and Design, 1948–1974', unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Oxford, 2018; Borhi, *Dealing with Dictators*, 167, 203.

possibilities, needs, institutions and practices. Mary C. Neuburger effectively captured this shift in interest when she noted that ‘the West was not the only point on the Bulgarian compass when it came to the making of modernity’.⁷ Between the subtle reiterations of Cold War mappings and understandable reactions to them, questions about distinct individual and national experiences sometimes displace questions about power. In many accounts, the West often figures either as a benevolent or a background force.

The relative neglect of power in the relations between Westerners and East European societies during the Cold War may be the result of our excessive focus on Cold War paradigms. To the extent that scholars of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union engage with longer timelines, they often do so with Cold War problems in mind, tracing the ideological tensions of the twentieth century within the shared possibilities of Enlightenment modernity or the agonistic potential of Russian and US messianisms.⁸ The Cold War certainly defined vast areas of international interactions in the second half of the twentieth century, and especially East–West relations. But it cannot explain everything.⁹ Those studies that examine power relations between the West and Eastern Europe through postcolonial theory focus on the periods before and after communism.¹⁰

Western emancipatory impulses, East European agency and the importance of Cold War politics must be duly acknowledged. Yet the relatively narrow focus on culture and ideology during the Cold War has also created a blind spot, where the scope of Western power in Eastern Europe has been minimised and its nature has been misunderstood. I wish to broaden the perspective on East–West relations in the mid-twentieth century by situating them in a wider geographical context and in a longer timeline. Attentive to questions of historical layering, I take seriously the local and the global, the short term and the *longue durée*, discourses and practices, production and reception of meanings, in order to bring out those patterns that may help connect real individuals with global trends, and pre-1945 with post-1989. I show that bringing together business elites, politicians and masses of visitors for weeks on end, at least once a year, the Poznań fair invited global actors to reproduce and renegotiate centuries-long economic and cultural hierarchies rooted in longstanding patterns of knowledge production, social relations and economic exchange. I examine these interactions based on recently declassified Polish documents (mostly files of the communist security police), as well as German, French, UK and US ones, many of which illuminate the roles of both Westerners and East Europeans in forging tangled relationships.

One of several East European fairs re-activated after the Second World War, Poznań became a unique Polish organisation that mixed business with propaganda, while connecting countless institutions with scores of individuals, simultaneously linking the state and the Polish people to the wider

⁷ Mary C. Neuburger, *Balkan Smoke: Tobacco and the Making of Modern Bulgaria* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 2013), 5; see also Katherine Pence and Paul Betts, *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008).

⁸ E.g. György Péteri, ‘Introduction’, in *Nylon Curtain – Transnational and Transsystemic Tendencies in the Cultural Life of State-Socialist Russia and East-Central Europe* (Trondheim: Program on East European Cultures and Societies, 2006), 1–13; Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

⁹ As noted by Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 4; Federico Romero ‘Cold War Historiography at the Crossroads’, *Cold War History*, 14, 4 (2014), 694; David Caute, ‘Foreword’, in Giles Scott-Smith and H. Hrabbenham, eds., *The Cultural Cold War in Western Europe, 1945–1960* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), vii; Simo Mikkonen and Pia Koivunen, ‘Introduction: Beyond the Divide’, in *Beyond the Divide*, 1–19; György Péteri, ed., *Imagining the West in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010); Katrin Schreiter, *Designing One Nation: The Politics of Economic Culture and Trade in Divided Germany* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020), 5.

¹⁰ Marta Grzechnik, ‘The Missing Second World: On Poland (and Eastern Europe) and Postcolonial Studies’, available at: https://history.fas.harvard.edu/files/history/files/grzechnik_wigh_global_history_seminar.pdf (last visited 9 Jan. 2020). Among the exceptions are Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009); Sharad Chari and Katherine Verdery, ‘Thinking between the Posts: Postcolonialism, Postsocialism, and Ethnography after the Cold War’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 51, 1 (2009), 6–34.

world. The relaxation of the Cold War after Stalin's death in 1953 made possible a gradual political, cultural and commercial rapprochement between Eastern Europe and the West.¹¹ Eager to re-engage, several East European governments established or revived international fairs at that time, notably East Germany (Leipzig), Bulgaria (Plovdiv), Czechoslovakia (Brno) and Hungary (Budapest). These fairs evolved in terms of area size, numbers of participating countries or firms, and numbers of guests. Out of the East European fairs, Poznań was the friendliest to foreigners: it was the first to host the United States (1957), the only one to allow for a permanent US pavilion, the most likely to welcome US consumer displays, and one of the most likely to privilege Western displays over those from socialist states.¹² The United States considered Poland the most 'pragmatic' and strategically, as well as commercially important, 'satellite'.¹³ The Cold War shaped the fair; but the fair also mediated contestations between Eastern Europe and the West that both preceded and sidestepped the global conflict of the second half of the twentieth century.

A cauldron of multiple national projects and interests, Poznań was exceptional as a regular mass international gathering in the world of restrictive border regimes. It also underscored continuities with the great nineteenth-century exhibitions and fairs whose 'comprehensiveness' was amazing.¹⁴ At Poznań, democratic leaders engaged with authoritarians and capitalists talked to managers of planned economies, while visitors scrutinised competing forms of modernity embodied by products on display. I rely on two clusters of ideas to tackle the complexity of the international encounters at the fair. The first relates to the concept of the frontier, a fluid space of danger and promise, hardships and potential rewards, a space that not only pulsed with its own unpredictable energy generated by the clash of differences, but also pushed back, remaking the travellers and possibly even rejuvenating the places they called home.¹⁵ Alfred Rieber has written of a 'complex frontier' to denote the multiple vectors of contestation between states and societies in the Eurasian borderlands.¹⁶ I will use it to highlight the simultaneous, historically fraught power contestations at Poznań, which included Cold War contestations as well as longstanding cultural and economic tensions between East and West. Through Poznań, I suggest, the visitors from the West shaped Poland and the 'Second World'. They did so in multiple modalities, responding not only to the realities of socialism, but also to ideas that shaped Western thinking about the world in the recent and distant past.

I think about the Poznań frontier as an intersection of local and global histories, in line with scholars who have abandoned the sole focus on transnational flows and explored how distinct cultures in 'very small places' meshed with worldly affairs.¹⁷ Furthermore, as historian Karl Schlögel recognised,

¹¹ Laszlo Görgy, *Bonn's Eastern Policy 1964–1971* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books 1972), 12–28; Jeremy Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Detente* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 216–26; Lucia Coppolaro, 'East–West Trade, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), and the Cold War: Poland's Accession to GATT, 1957–1967', in Jari Eloranta and Jari Ojala, eds., *East–West Trade and the Cold War* (Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä, 2005), 77–92.

¹² Tolvaisas, 'America on Display', 157, n. 43, 246; Scheffler, 'Die Leipziger Messe', 42. In terms of size, in 1965 the fairs ranked as follows: Brno (total: 640,000 sq. m; exhibit space: 125,000 sq. m.); Leipzig (spring total: 320,000 sq. m.); Budapest (total: 260,000 sq. m.); Poznań (total: 225,000 sq. m.). See *International Directory of Fairs and Exhibitions, 1965* (Athens, 1966).

¹³ Borhi, *Dealing with Dictators*, 151, 239.

¹⁴ Peter H. Hoffenberg, *An Empire on Display: English, Indian, and Australian Exhibitions from the Crystal Palace to the Great War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), xx.

¹⁵ Paul Kramer, 'Reflex Actions: Colonialism, Corruption and the Politics of Technocracy in the Early Twentieth Century United States', in Bevan Sewell and Scott Lucas, eds., *Challenging US Foreign Policy: America and the World in the Long Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011), 19.

¹⁶ Alfred Rieber, 'The Comparative Ecology of Complex Frontiers', in Alexei I. Miller and Alfred J. Rieber, *Imperial Rule* (New York, NY: Central European University Press, 2004), 177–208; Rieber, *The Struggle for the Eurasian Borderlands: From the Rise of Early Modern Empires to the End of the First World War* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 293.

¹⁷ Jeffrey Engel, *Local Consequences of Global Cold War* (Stanford, CA/Washington, DC: Stanford University Press and Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2008); Donald R. Wright, *The World and a Very Small Place in Africa: A History of Globalization in Niimi, The Gambia* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018); Michael Kwass, *Contraband: Louis Mandrin*

‘the tacit coercion’ of tying a history to ‘a particular time or space’ also enables us to assume greater control over recalcitrant narratives: it ‘implicitly acknowledges the synchronicity of the non-synchronous, the coexistence and co-presence of the disparate’. For Schlögel, the ‘stereoscopic all-round view . . . designed to bring events together . . . is better suited to the disparate nature of the world than is a strenuous, concentrated tunnel vision.’¹⁸ This approach lends itself to examining the Poznań fair, which, for two weeks every year, condensed global power relations to an area of about twenty Manhattan blocks. Thinking of Poznań as a complex frontier brings out what the focus on the Cold War obscures: the fact that the West played a far more ambiguous role in Eastern Europe in the second half of the twentieth century than had been previously assumed, challenging the communist regimes while simultaneously perpetuating longstanding cultural and economic asymmetries between East and West.

Business and Contraband: Poznań as a Place of Profits

Revisionist scholars of US and Soviet foreign trade have long stressed that business frequently trumped the political imperatives of the Cold War.¹⁹ While Poznań became a Cold War battleground, it was often the desire to make a profit that drove many Western entrepreneurs to the fair. In 1956, 2,768 foreigners came to Poznań (as exhibitors, visitors, government officials and construction staff); in 1957, the number rose to 4,722; in 1961, Poznań was visited by 8,019 foreigners, and 1966 saw a record of 11,330 guests from abroad, more than half of whom (5,968) hailed from capitalist countries. The Western countries came to dominate the space at the fair: if the exhibition surface allotted to socialist and non-socialist countries in 1950 was 86 per cent and 14 per cent of the total, by 1960 the proportions were nearly inverted, 30 per cent to 70 per cent. The US government began warming up slowly to relaxing the restriction on trade with Eastern Europe from the mid-1950s on. As the country’s ‘private businesses began to cast covetous glances at Eastern markets where the West Europeans were busily establishing beachheads’, they began to pressure the US government even more, and ‘by the early 1960s the domestic consensus on the merits of the strategic embargo was beginning to fray’.²⁰

‘Trade and commercial power cannot be understood by only examining state-to-state interactions or the intentions of political leaders’, wrote Stephen G. Gross, because ‘at its core, trade is about private transactions, about buyers finding sellers.’²¹ Likewise, early Western reports beamed with a sense of excited anticipation about the fair and where it could lead. In 1955, Tory politician Jack Osbourn penned an urgent report from Poznań to his government. In dramatic terms, he wrote that ‘Apart from the battle of ideas, there was a battle of the markets to be remembered.’²² He mused: ‘These Eastern countries will become increasingly large buyers and despite their present lack of currency . . . their influence will I believe become decisive in world trade. The potential is tremendous.’ Osbourn was especially concerned with the competition between the United Kingdom and the United States: ‘When the Americans enter these markets – as any moment now they will – our approach will appear even more pathetic’, he wrote.²³ Polish secret police reports suggest that envy

and the Making of a Global Underground (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); Charles Piot, *Remotely Global: Village Modernity in West Africa* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Matthias Middell, ‘From Universal History to Transregional Perspectives: The Challenge of the Cultural and Spatial Turn to World and Global History in the 1970s and Today’, *Cultural History*, 9, 2 (2020), 241–64.

¹⁸ Karl Schlögel, *Moscow, 1937*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), 29.

¹⁹ William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York, NY: Norton, 2009 [1962]); for the Soviet Union see Oscar Sanchez-Sibony, *Red Globalization: The Political Economy of the Soviet Cold War from Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

²⁰ Kovrig, *Of Walls and Bridges*, 233; on Poland, see Tyszkiewicz, *Otwarte okno*, 225–36; Jacqueline McGlade, ‘COCOM and the Containment of Western Trade and Relations’, in Eloranta and Ojala, eds., *East–West Trade and the Cold War*, 47–62.

²¹ Stephen G. Gross, *Export Empire: German Soft Power in Southeastern Europe, 1890–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 15.

²² The National Archives (Kew, UK), henceforth NA FO 371-116569, unpaginated file, 2 of document.

²³ *Ibid.*

and competition were palpable between businessmen from the United States and West Germany.²⁴ Osbourn expected revolutionary changes; based on conversations with numerous Polish officials, he surmised that ‘East/West trade will soon be entering the realms of the normal business approach.’²⁵ The British (and other) governments seemed more cautious, but Osbourn’s optimism was by no means an isolated view.²⁶

Poznań welcomed new waves of Westerners, but immediate business opportunities that many visitors hoped for were limited. Socialist Poland continued to suffer from the constraints of a planned economy and could not suddenly start to trade in a ‘normal’ way. But the fair-going Westerners remained hopeful and adjusted to the Polish realities in multivalent ways. Some lucky companies may have signed a contract, but the Western governments regularly cooled off the enthusiasm of individual businessmen by explaining that trade was a gamble and the odds of striking a deal were low. For the Western governments, participation in the fair became more complicated. Most showed up though because, as a *New York Times* correspondent in Warsaw observed in a 1972 dispatch intercepted by Polish security police, coming to the fair was necessary in order to do business with Poland at all.²⁷ This was certainly true of Poland’s biggest trade partners such as the United Kingdom and West Germany, but also France. The US government from the outset relegated business to the background at the fair, and instead focused on promoting ‘the American way of life’ through historically popular ‘prestige’ shows.²⁸ Concerns about profits and access to the Polish market frequently resurfaced in conversations between US agency officials and diplomats. The US government responded to the pressure from private companies and sent trade delegations to the Poznań fair.²⁹ The Cold War mattered but US financial interests often relativised its significance.³⁰

The communists also wanted to trade with the capitalists. While Western governments and firms competed with one another for markets, East European peripheries competed for attention and resources from outside of the Bloc. One British chemist visiting the fair in 1955 pointed out that ‘in the West, intense competition is taking place between Poland, Czechoslovakia and Romania for export markets for chemical products.’³¹ Interested in hard currency, the Poles preferred to lure Western exhibitors by giving them the space previously allotted to the People’s Democracies. In 1960, the French surmised that this marginalisation was the reason why countries such as the Soviet Union and East Germany had not even made an effort in putting up a quality show.³² The East Germans, in particular, were increasingly worried that, by signing all their trade deals at the Poznań fair, they were diminishing the significance of the Leipzig fair in Western eyes.³³ West

²⁴ Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Poland (Institute of National Remembrance, henceforth IPN) Po 06-71 tom 53 (1957), karta 101; see also Görgy, *Bonn’s Eastern Policy*, 21.

²⁵ NA FO 371-116569, unpaginated file, 3–4 of document.

²⁶ IPN Po 06-71 tom 55 (1957), k. 14; Nicholas J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945–1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 140–1.

²⁷ IPN BU 0664-62, k. 12.

²⁸ Andrew James Wulf, *U.S. International Exhibitions during the Cold War: Winning Hearts and Minds through Cultural Diplomacy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), chs 1 and 2; Haddow, *Pavilions of Plenty*, intro and ch. 2.

²⁹ Tyszkiewicz, *Otwarte okno*, 306.

³⁰ The US approach to the Poznań fair resonates with ‘moderate revisionist’ interpretations of US foreign policy during the Cold War, such as Michael J. Hogan’s *The Marshall Plan: America, Britain, and the Reconstruction of Western Europe, 1947–1952* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); for a useful overview, see Odd Arne Westad, ‘The Cold War and the International History of the Twentieth Century’, in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, eds., *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Vol. 1: Origins (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1–19; see also Haddow, *Pavilions of Plenty*, 2–5, 13.

³¹ IPN Po 06-71, tom 53, k. 166.

³² French Embassy in Warsaw to French Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs, 7 Jul. 1960, Centre des archives économiques et financières, Savigny-le-Temple (henceforth: CAEF), B-44071, 3 of document; CAEF, B-0066680, 18 Jun. 1959; ‘Einige Probleme Zur Internationale Messe Poznan’, Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv (henceforth: SAPMO), DE1-48824, 2 of document.

³³ ‘Bericht über die XXXII. Internationale Messe Poznan’, 29 Jun. 1963, SAPMO, DK1-10919, 13 of document; IPN Po 06-71 tom 58, k. 54.

German businessmen complained privately in 1959 about the East German border guards who mounted no obstacles when the West German exhibitors travelled to Leipzig, but ‘for those arriving to the Poznań Fair’, they ‘do everything to extend the control times as much as possible.’³⁴ Such practices reflected the extensive but little studied commercial (and ultimately cultural) linkages between the two Germanies, and acute tensions over trade in Polish–East German relations at that time, which the communist officials were eager to hide.³⁵ What mattered more than Cold War ideological divisions were economic relations that stimulated competition *within* the two blocs, while enabling a return to the centuries-old pattern of trade between the advanced West and underdeveloped East.³⁶

The black market offered more immediate business opportunities and smugglers saw Poznań as a chance to make extra cash. In a typical example, on 11 June 1957, the security police reported that ‘individuals arriving from abroad . . . bring with them serious amounts of merchandise for trade. So far contraband of sizeable quantities of razors, nylon stockings, silver automatic pencils, stones for lighters and lighters, nine rings, three gold watches, two knitting machines, etc’. In their turn, Westerners, ‘and especially Germans’, purchased on the black market dollars, other hard currencies and gold, as well as diamonds and antiques.³⁷ Poles used hard currency to purchase contraband goods, much to the dismay of the authorities, who resented the funnelling of the precious resource abroad.³⁸ Illegal economic opportunities beckoned to Polish citizens who acted as intermediaries between foreigners and Polish officials, or who controlled the flow of goods as customs officers.³⁹ Some Western entrepreneurs tried bribing Polish officials directly, often at the fair.⁴⁰ Poznań was where Western contraband connected with corruption on the Polish side. Michael Kwass has shown how contraband developed in response to global, national and local forces in eighteenth-century France, highlighting the illegal and often violent onset of Western consumer modernity.⁴¹ Poznań underscores how these three forces continued to converge, defying formal borders and undermining political regimes whose stability rested on control over hard currency and distribution of consumer goods.

Sex and Romance: Poznań as a Place of Pleasure

Poznań provided opportunities for romantic and sexual pursuits. A tightly gendered space, the fair resembled its Western counterparts: unlike in the Soviet Union, where women worked, in Poznań, men largely took care of business while most women decorated the stands. In their own way, therefore, gender relations dissolved the binaries of the Cold War.⁴² The Polish authorities encouraged this

³⁴ IPN Po 06-71 tom 58, k. 54.

³⁵ Sheldon Anderson, *A Cold War in the Soviet Bloc: Polish–East German Relations, 1945–1962* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001), esp. 231; Schreiter, *Designing One Nation*, esp. ch. 3.

³⁶ Marian Małowist, ‘Poland, Russia and Western Trade in the 15th and 16th Centuries’, in Jean Batou and Henryk Szlajfer, eds., *Western Europe, Eastern Europe and World Development, 13th–18th Centuries: Collection of Essays of Marian Małowist* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 143–60. Specifically on Poland, see Jacek Kochanowicz, ‘The Curse of Discontinuity: Poland’s Economy in a Global Context, 1820–2000’, *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte/Economic History Yearbook*, vol. 1 (2014), 129–47. On the structure of trade between Eastern and Western Europe, see Paul Marer, *Soviet and East European Foreign Trade, 1946–1969* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), 9, 250, 266; Janusz Skodlarski, ‘Stosunki handlowe Polski z krajami kapitalistycznymi (1945–1949)’, *Kwartalnik historyczny*, 94, 3 (1987), 125–43; Derek H. Aldcroft, *Europe’s Third World: The European Periphery in the Interwar Years* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006).

³⁷ IPN Po 06-71, tom 53, kk. 71, 153.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, k. 130.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, tom 123, k. 12; Leszek Gronowicz: ‘Organizacja operacyjnej ochrony Międzynarodowych Targów Poznańskich na przykładzie działań prowadzonych przez wydział “A” KW MO w Poznaniu’ (Legionowo, 1979), available at IPN BU 1509-990, k. 6.

⁴⁰ IPN Po 06-71 tom 53, k. 267; see also IPN Po 06-71 tom 53, k. 130.

⁴¹ Kwass, *Contraband*.

⁴² Robert W. Rydell, *World of Fairs: The Century-of-Progress Expositions* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 139–46; Susan E. Reid, ‘Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and the De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev’, *Slavic Review*, 61, 2 (2002), 211–52; Haddow, *Pavilions of Plenty*, 211–12.

understanding of the event by alluding to the romantic opportunities in Poznań. Thus, a 1959 English-language promotional video, replete with images of automobiles, construction hardware, cigarettes and Krakus hams, also featured up-skirt views of 'Maria', the Polish woman who climbs atop a combine tractor as she shows a Western gentleman around the fair. The narrator tells us that he comes to Poznań for two reasons: first, he wanted 'to see the beautiful city of old historic traditions and visit the famous international fair, pulsating with life, crowded with people from all parts of the world'; second, to see Maria.⁴³ At Poznań, Poland's powerful men winked at their Western counterparts: the fair was about business, but it could be about pleasure as well.

'The Westerner came to Eastern Europe, she could not go to him, and that was freedom too, freedom from reciprocity', observed Dubravka Ugrešić, adding that 'Eastern Europe was always there, waiting for him, like a harem captive.'⁴⁴ To Poznań, Western men brought the allure of the imaginary West, exoticism, mystery, hard currency and the freedom to come and go, recreating certain asymmetries that characterised colonial relationships.⁴⁵ They met Polish women through families that provided lodging, through work at the fair, or Polish or foreign contacts. For friendship and more, Poznań offered opportunities galore. Westerners sought out attractive Polish women to accompany them as lovers, prostitutes, teachers and networking agents.⁴⁶ In 1957, one such example was 'Stefania I, who was employed by Germans whom she'd met at the fair the year before', and who accompanied several Germans to Katowice with the alleged goal of establishing trade links and, upon their request, introduced them to the director of the Polish National Bank . . . 'Said Stefania had "widespread contacts among American and FRG exhibitors, for whom she organizes parties at home"; in exchange, she received from the Germans a gold watch and 500 marks, among other things.'⁴⁷

Some Polish women looked for serious relationships, though. At Poznań, they were looking for a dashing prince who would be both wealthy and charming. As one woman revealed in her 1957 letter to a confidante in Wrocław: 'We have Swiss guests, they came to the fair. So far there's one gentlemen, our good acquaintance. I live in great friendship with him, we go together everywhere. He is a representative of Swiss watch [companies] . . . he is showering me with presents, is taking me everywhere for dinner, coffee, etc. The guy is loaded', she wrote, adding that he had invited her to Switzerland and a vacation in Sopot, a resort town on the Baltic sea.⁴⁸ That same year, another woman, Irena, mused about a 'handsome', 'sweet' and 'loaded' French guy from Orleans, who took her address and 'promised to send packages'.⁴⁹

Polish women shaped the relationships with Westerners towards their own objectives, as women in Western colonies did.⁵⁰ They also formulated their goals in response to the real and imagined opportunities that Western men offered them. Power asymmetries came into relief when women stayed in Poznań, while the men had the freedom to go back to the West. This was the case when Ryszarda T. fell for an employee of the US pavilion in 1959, who then tried to get rid of her.⁵¹ Liaisons between Westerners and Polish women inflected gender relations between Polish women and Polish men, as in 1957, when West Germans came to restaurants with Polish females, drank alcohol and 'arrogantly talk [ed] down to and laugh[ed] at the Polish population'.⁵² Historically, sex often complicated imperial

⁴³ Film available in Archiwum MTP.

⁴⁴ Dubravka Ugrešić, 'Nice People Don't Mention Such Things', *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 5 (1998), 301.

⁴⁵ Jennifer Ruth Hosek, *Sun, Sex, and Socialism: Cuba in the German Imaginary* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012); Annie Coombes, *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 97–8; Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1991); Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

⁴⁶ On prostitution, see IPN BU 0664-62, k. 286.

⁴⁷ IPN Po 06-71 tom 53 (1957), 38.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, k. 28.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, tom 55 (1957), k. 29.

⁵⁰ Julie Peakman, *Licentious Worlds: Sex and Exploitation in Global Empires* (London: Reaktion Books, 2019), 13.

⁵¹ IPN Po 06-67 tom 123 (1959), k. 38.

⁵² IPN Po 06-71 tom 55 (1957), k. 10.

relationships defined by racial hierarchies.⁵³ At Poznań, it redefined the binaries of the Cold War. The Polish state regularly made use of sex to spy on the foreign guests. Yet most foreigners were rarely aware that they were subjects of police surveillance as they pursued their courtships, friendships and affairs. The communists technically recouped power and agency in this area, perhaps more so than in any other in their quest to challenge the West. But they thus also reaffirmed the notion of local women as just another raw resource easily available to Western men, playing on Westerners' longstanding assumptions about the non-Western world.⁵⁴

Posen-Poznań as an Imperial Periphery

The fact that the Poznań region lived an afterlife of the German imperial periphery further complicated Cold War contrasts and affected longstanding power relationships. The Poznań fair itself dated back to the 1911 East German Exhibition in Posen, an ethnically Polish city under Prussian rule.⁵⁵ Its chief goals were to show the superiority of the achievements of the Prussian economy in the empire's hinterlands and also to demonstrate that Prussian political power in the ethnically Polish lands was alive and well – thus creating a positive image of the area to potential settlers, who were reluctant to move to these remote, economically underdeveloped and still very Polish lands. In the German imaginary, the Polish lands constituted a 'wild East', and theories of race and conquest connected Germany's eastward expansion to its imperial projects in Southwest Africa.⁵⁶ Indeed, visitors to the 1911 exhibition could admire an African village, a typical feature of such events at that time, but one that also reinforced the place of Poles in German global plans and hierarchies.⁵⁷ To assert dominance, organisers also set up a miniature copy of the city's old town fashioned in the German style.⁵⁸ Between the wars, Poland depended on trade with Germany but not vice versa, as Germans shunned the lands they considered barbarous and commercially hopeless.⁵⁹ During the Second World War, the Nazis renamed Poznań 'Posen' and incorporated it into the Reich, while transforming the fairgrounds into an aircraft factory. But, in the 1950s, West Germany was becoming Poland's chief trade partner and a preminent Western presence at the fair. History and memory conspired in a way that, even to those Germans who had never been to Poland, a business trip to Poznań was like a return – one often fraught with memories and expectations of privilege.

During the fairs, memories of the recent war regularly intervened. When a foreman of a West German fitting crew hit a Polish employee in the face in 1957, other West German company reps pounced on him: 'you could hit under Hitler, but not now', they said, adding: 'and especially not

⁵³ Peakman, *Licentious Worlds*, 12; Maren Röger, 'The Sexual Policies and Sexual Realities of the German Occupiers in Poland in the Second World War', *Contemporary European History*, 23, 1 (2014), 1–21.

⁵⁴ Mary Neuburger, 'Fair Encounters: Bulgaria and the "West" at International Exhibitions from Plovdiv to St. Louis', *Slavic Review*, 69, 3 (2010), 559; Isabel Morais, "'Little Black Rose" at the 1934 "Exposição Colonial Portuguesa"', in Tracey Jean Boisseau and Abigail M. Markwyn, eds., *Gendering the Fair: Histories of Women and Gender at World's Fairs* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 19; Coombes, *Reinventing Africa*.

⁵⁵ Beate Störckuhl, 'Architektura wystawowa jako metoda narodowej prezentacji. Wystawa Wschodnioniemiecka (1911) i Powszechna Wystawa Krajowa (1929) w Poznaniu', trans. Joanna Czudec, in Jacek Purchla and Wolf Tegethoff, eds., *Naród, Styl, Modernizm* (Kraków: Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury, 2006), 241–2.

⁵⁶ Lenny A. Ureña Valerio, *Colonial Fantasies, Imperial Realities: Race Science and the Making of Polishness on the Fringes of the German Empire, 1840–1920* (Athens: Ohio University Press 2019); Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *The German Myth of the East: 1800 to the Present* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), 51; Kristin Kopp, *Germany's Wild East: Constructing Poland as Colonial Space* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 13; Hubert Orłowski, *'Polnische Wirtschaft': Zum deutschen Polendiskurs der Neuzeit* (Wiesbaden: Harassowitz, 1996).

⁵⁷ Alexander C. T. Geppert, *Fleeting Cities: Imperial Expositions in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013), 117–28.

⁵⁸ Störckuhl, 'Architektura wystawowa', 243; Jan Skuratowicz, 'Architektura Targów Poznańskich przed 1920 rokiem', *Kronika Miasta Poznania*, 64, 2 (1996), 96–108. See also *Ostdeutsche Ausstellung für Industrie, Gewerbe und Landwirtschaft, Posen 1911. Offizieller Katalog* (Posen: Verlag der Ausstellung, 1911).

⁵⁹ Gross, *Export Empire*, 3; Józef Misala, 'Polish–German Trade in the Interwar Period (1919–39) and after 1989', *Russian and East European Finance and Trade*, 31, 4 (1995), 74–93.

abroad'.⁶⁰ Former Nazis participated in West German institutions and some came to do business at the Poznań fair. 'If that idiot Hitler had me, he wouldn't have lost the war, and German tanks wouldn't have halted on their way to Moscow due to lack of fuel', said one of them in 1957, according to a secret police report.⁶¹ Nazis or not, the optics were suggestive as other Westerners also found West Germans publicly overbearing, entitled and rude.⁶² In one incident in 1959, security police reported that four 'intoxicated' West Germans dining out provoked the restaurant's personnel by addressing them with the fraught expression 'you Pole' (Nazis had used it as an insult). Startled, some Polish guests remarked that, 'the behavior of these Germans resembles the period of the occupation'.⁶³ East Germans, including 'many SED members', expressed similar contempt during their visits to Poznań, revealing how much the enduring historical trends trumped present political imperatives.⁶⁴ But Westerners were largely the ones spending hard cash in hotels and restaurants and, in their private letters, even those Poznań residents who enthused about the fair complained about being excluded, just like during the war. As one woman wrote in 1958: 'Imagine that in the city in which you live, of which you are an integral part, during the fair is not for you . . . Poznań, during the fair, is only for foreigners. The best restaurants, hotels [and] many other things are only for foreign guests.' Most of them were German, she noted, so 'it resembles the era of the occupation, when all the best things were "Nur für Deutsche [for Germans only]"'. She added that visitors from other parts of Poland might not notice this, but Poznanians do, which is why, during the fair, 'we often go out of town'.⁶⁵

Another friction resulted from West Germany's refusal, before 1970, to recognise Poland's western frontiers agreed upon by the great powers after the war. Of all nationalities, West Germans most often travelled out of town, usually to inspect their lost land and property.⁶⁶ In 1957, a certain Freimann bragged that, before 1939, he used to own a factory of mining lamps in Katowice and was hoping to get reparations for it.⁶⁷ Others travelled around Poland and requested that locals sign petitions for former German property owners to return.⁶⁸ Such activities worried the Polish authorities, especially since some West German exhibitors openly flaunted at the Poznań fair maps that showed Polish territories to be part of Germany.⁶⁹

These Polish–German tensions at the fair may seem unsurprising in the war's aftermath. But recent memories and Polish propaganda notwithstanding, mutual antagonisms were subsiding within the Polish and West German societies. In the 1950s and 1960s, prominent Polish intellectuals travelled to West Germany and shared their good impressions publicly upon coming back. They talked of a society in transition in which 'the older generation were suppressing their memories of the Hitler period', while 'amongst the young people serious questions were being asked and there was even a sense of guilt'.⁷⁰ Ambiguities also defined the Polish–German relationship locally. The brutalities of war and

⁶⁰ IPN Po 06-71 tom 53 (1957), k. 148.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, k. 165. On this, see Norbert Frei, *Adenauer's Germany and the Nazi Past*, trans. Joel Golb (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2002); on the attitudes, see Ian Kershaw, *The 'Hitler Myth': Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2001), 264–6; Sarah Ann Gordon, *Hitler, Germans, and the Jewish Question* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 202–5.

⁶² British Foreign Office to British Embassy in Warsaw, 21 June 1957, NA FO 371-128884 (1957), 2 of document.

⁶³ IPN Po 06-67, tom 123 (1959), kk. 4–5.

⁶⁴ Anderson, *A Cold War*, 62; see also Jonathan Zatlin, "'Polnische Wirtschaft, deutsche Ordnung'? Der Umgang mit den Polen in der DDR unter Honecker", in Christian T. Müller and Patrice G. Poutrus, eds., *Ankunft-Alltag-Ausreise. Migration und interkulturelle Begegnungen in der DDR-Gesellschaft* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2005), 295–315, esp. 315.

⁶⁵ 'Notatka informacyjna nr. 2', Poznań, 4 Jun. 1958, IPN Po 06-71-57-1(1958), k. 72.

⁶⁶ IPN BU 0664-62, k. 95.

⁶⁷ IPN Po 06-71, tom 53, k. 102.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, k. 165.

⁶⁹ W. W. Kulski, *Germany and Poland: From War to Peaceful Relations* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1976), 102; IPN Po 06-71 tom 53 (1957), k. 200.

⁷⁰ Hansjakob Stehle, *The Independent Satellite: Society and Politics in Poland since 1945* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1965), 243–4.

colonisation made a lasting imprint on the memories of Poznań residents. But many Poznanians also contrasted favourably the periods of German rule and their own work ethic that developed in response to Prussian colonialism, with the chaos that accompanied the Soviet liberation of the region and with Warsaw's perceived disorganised and inefficient economic management. Well into the twentieth century, Poznań's robust regional identity struck and surprised outsiders with the contradictory mixture of Germanophilia and Germanophobia, patriotism and anti-Warsaw sentiment.⁷¹ The farmers at the state farm near Poznań eagerly obliged when asked in 1957 to sign a petition for the return of German owners, preferring these fraught interethnic relations to the management style of Polish communists.⁷² At the fair, these historical contradictions continued to shape the relationships between the First and Second Worlds.

Poznań as a Frontier of Modernity

Most broadly, Poznań channelled longstanding contestations over the form and meaning of modernity – the cultural, political, economic and technological changes that once emanated from Europe's north-west but were now reshaping the capitalist and socialist worlds at varied paces, in different forms and through fraught exchanges. 'The communist experiment', historian Ivan Berend wrote, 'was part of a twentieth-century rebellion of the unsuccessful peripheries, which were humiliated by economic backwardness and the increasing gap which separated them from the advanced Western core'.⁷³ As business and propaganda events, the East European trade fairs such as the one in Poznań became important elements in the historically underdeveloped region's challenge to the West. Poland had an additional stake in the fair because it allowed local and central authorities to reinvent Poland's identity around business and trade, and away from the Romantic ethos of armed struggle and resistance, which defined the country for many people at home and abroad.⁷⁴

At Poznań, Westerners responded to this challenge in several ways. Leftist journalists predictably delighted in the offerings of the socialist countries, but many others remained underwhelmed by their discoveries. In 1955, Jack Osbourn described to the Foreign Office his experience of eating out. 'In restaurants . . .', he noted with dry humour, 'prices were high, quality of meat good, fresh vegetables almost non-existent, potatoes were served in vast quantities, bread was of poor quality, pepper was rare, salt was crude, service was hopeless'.⁷⁵ Westerners generally defined the socialist Second World by the absences of features typical of market-based, consumer economies, mainly the availability of choice.

Quality and originality mattered. And compliments implied contrasts, as those the French often issued in regard to Polish textile displays or pavilions, which 'easily withstood comparisons' with the Western ones, and about East European effort, progress, and taste.⁷⁶ In 1959, the French found

⁷¹ Barbara Wysocka, *Regionalizm wielkopolski w II Rzeczypospolitej 1919–1939* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu, 1981); Anna Moskal, *Im Spannungsfeld von Region und Nation: Die Polonisierung der Stadt Posen nach 1918 und 1945* (Wiesbaden: Harassowitz, 2013); Florian Znaniecki and Janusz Ziółkowski, *Czym jest dla Ciebie miasto Poznań? Dwa Konkursy: 1928/1964* (Warsaw: PWN, 1984).

⁷² IPN Po 06-71, tom 53, k. 165.

⁷³ Ivan Berend, *Central and Eastern Europe: Detour from the Periphery to the Periphery* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1996), x; Austin Jersild, 'Socialist Exhibits and Sino-Soviet Relations, 1950–60', *Cold War History*, 18, 3 (2018), 275–89.

⁷⁴ On the Romantic myth, see Jerzy Jedlicki, *A Suburb of Europe: Nineteenth-Century Polish Approaches to Western Civilization* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1999); Marcin Król, *Romantyzm – piekło i niebo Polaków* (Warsaw: Fundacja ResPublica, 1998); Andrzej Walicki, *Philosophy and Romantic Nationalism: The Case of Poland* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994); Maria Janion, *Niesamowita słowiańszczyzna. Fantazmaty literatury* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2016), 12.

⁷⁵ NA FO 371-116569, unpaginated file, 1 of document.

⁷⁶ French Embassy in Warsaw to Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs, 4 Jul. 1962, CAEF, B-44071, 4 of report; French Embassy in Warsaw to French Ministry of Finance, 4 Jul. 1962 in CAEF, B-44071, 4 of report; French Embassy in Warsaw to French State Secretary for Economic Affairs on the 1959 Poznań Fair, 9 Jul. 1959, CAEF, B-00666680, 5

the Czechoslovak displays of machinery, automobiles, consumer goods (fabrics, glassware, etc. . .) ‘incontestably the most successful’; they gave ‘the impression of a higher technological level that one didn’t always find on the exhibits of other countries from the Eastern Bloc’.⁷⁷ Czechoslovakia always impressed with superior technology and attractive designs, while East Germany showcased top-notch photographic equipment and precision tools.⁷⁸ Immediately after the war, the USSR intrigued even the sceptical observers with their grand-scale steel machinery on display. But, by the mid-1950s, perhaps because Western economic recovery generated better products, in the eyes of Osbourn and others, Soviet exhibits were losing their allure.⁷⁹ Overarching chasms between capitalism and socialism mattered in these evaluations. What counted just as much, however, were the differences between the countries within the socialist and capitalist blocs. Revealing contrasts characterized the evaluations of Western observers: while US reports focus on technological advancement of exhibits and their entertainment value, the French and British ones stand out in their concern about the aesthetics of design and display. The conservative British politician John Tilney may have voiced exceptional praise of the Soviet pavilion, but his criteria confirm the trend: he liked its ‘quiet taste . . . with its furs, caviar, smoked salmon (he said it looked like a selection of the best that Harrods and Fortnum & Mason could offer)’.⁸⁰ These cultural differences between West European and US observers also failed to align with the strictly ideological divisions of the Cold War.

These immersive discussions at Poznań about modernity and backwardness resonated strongly with centuries-long conversations about global cultural hierarchies and power relations between East and West. Larry Wolff has argued that the eighteenth-century Western philosophes and socialites ‘invented’ Eastern Europe through their writings, finding significance in the cultural differences and economic disparities between the continent’s East and West. They re-forged their impressions, judgments and generalisations into a deceptively stable cultural construct of ‘Eastern Europe’, a place that was economically backward and culturally semi-barbaric, poor and passive, dirty and derivative, confusing and coarse. In doing so, they reified the idea of the superior, cultured ‘West’ while simultaneously claiming the mandate to shape East European affairs.⁸¹ Wendy Bracewell further showed that East European writers actively adopted these Western discourses in order to improve their own societies through criticism. East Europeans co-defined ‘the limits of Europe’ to pursue their own ends, and they did so on West European terms because ‘the alternative to an imitative Occidentalism could only with difficulty involve any sort of rejection of Europe as such’. As Bracewell noted, ‘geography implied that these were European societies; it followed that they should be judged by European norms’, even as these norms derived from experiences of a small fragment of European society.⁸² Wolff and Bracewell’s insights can help to situate the encounters at Poznań in three ways. They enable us to see the Cold War as a moment in longstanding, more fraught exchanges between East and West. They underscore the enduring economic and cultural dilemmas within Polish society. And they also bring out the dual process of cognition and construction, on which Westerners relied in co-creating the socialist Second World. Jack Osbourn’s comments to his government were filled with disdain about the country he visited and thus amplified the longstanding

of document; French Embassy in Warsaw to French State Secretary for Economic Affairs on the 1959 Poznań Fair, 9 Jul. 1959, CAEF, B-00666680, 1 of the document.

⁷⁷ French Embassy to the Secretary of State for Economic Affairs, 24 Jun. 1959, CAEF, B-00666680, 3 of document.

⁷⁸ British Embassy to Foreign Office, 5 Jul. 1955, NA FO 371-116569, 2 of document.

⁷⁹ NA FO 371-116569, 2 of document; British Embassy, Warsaw, to the Foreign Office, 5 Jul. 1955, NA FO 371-116569 (1955), 1 of document; French Embassy in Warsaw to French State Secretary for Economic Affairs on the 1959 Poznań Fair, 9 Jul. 1959, CAEF, B-00666680, 9–10 of the document.

⁸⁰ British Foreign Office to British Embassy in Warsaw, 21 Jun. 1957, NA FO 371-128884 (1957), 1 of document.

⁸¹ Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, 359.

⁸² Wendy Bracewell, ‘The Limits of Europe in East European Travel Writing’, in Wendy Bracewell and Alex Drace-Francis, eds., *Under Eastern Eyes: A Comparative Introduction to East European Travel Writing on Europe* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2008), 67.

image of Eastern Europe as different from the West. But to the extent that communist restaurants served lousy food, his experience of East European backwardness was real.

In practice, these cognitive and constructive processes were entwined. In their 1958 letters home intercepted by the Polish security police, Westerners tended to ‘state that life is very expensive in Poland, that salaries are very low, that the quality of goods is low and conditions are primitive. They talk about the striking alcoholism’, informed one police report.⁸³ A letter to the United States described Poznań as a city that’s ‘big but unattractive’; one that ‘subsists, rather than lives, and the same is true of the people’. Others expressed pity: based on conversations with ‘dozens of Poles’, one author found them despondent, as ‘first the Germans tried to oppress them, and now the Russians are leading them to their slow death. They say that they don’t know freedom, and it is just so.’⁸⁴ In 1957, a security police informant reported that “‘foreign exhibitors . . . state that we are poorly dressed and live modestly’”, though he also added that ‘they praise the weaving machines and machine tools.’⁸⁵ Such glimpses of personal correspondence illuminate what Westerners saw in Poland at the time. But they also suggest how Poznań helped Westerners shape the understanding of themselves. In Ugrešić’s words, Eastern Europe ‘confirmed the *Westerner’s* conviction that he lived in a better world’.⁸⁶

The US Pavilion and the Pushback of the Frontier

US participants in the fair generally saw themselves as purveyors of freedom and fun, shaping their prestige shows to contrast with the ‘lifeless rows of machine tools and tractors exhibited by other countries’.⁸⁷ But the cultural emphasis of US shows also opened up a Pandora’s box of awkwardness, causing frictions with Poles that other countries could avoid. The United States made its East European premiere in Poznań in 1957. City residents watched Buckminster Fuller’s rising geodesic dome with anticipation. It rose quickly in comparison with the sluggish construction tempo of the Soviet pavilion. Structurally based on the first geodesic domes, it consisted of a triangulated plastic frame covered with cotton fabric and represented the cutting edge of architectural modernism.⁸⁸ It has been argued that Western institutions such as museums, panoramas and expositions ‘ordered knowledge’ and ‘organized citizenry’ through arrangements of visual displays.⁸⁹ For some, Fuller’s dome epitomised these functions perfectly. Admired earlier at the 1956 Kabul fair and in Milan, it is said to have represented America’s ‘declaration of sovereignty’ and might, in which audiences acted as ‘witnesses whose presence was just as essential to a display of power’.⁹⁰ Fuller’s dome, argued Andrew James Wulf, had the power to seduce foreign visitors because it could be ‘understood both as a structural and cultural marvel’ and ‘another structural descendant of the great Crystal Palace’.⁹¹ Although East German officials dismissed the US pavilion as ‘the circus tent’, the dome captivated the Poles’ imagination with its modern looks, further amplified by the anticipatory atmosphere of novelty, colour and exoticism that surrounded the preparations for the fair.⁹² In his letter sent to someone out of town, ‘W.Z.’ described

⁸³ IPN Po 06-71-57-1, k. 109; IPN Po 06-71-57-1(1958), k. 109.

⁸⁴ Ibid., k.110.

⁸⁵ IPN Po 06-71 tom 53 (1957), k. 265.

⁸⁶ Ugrešić, ‘Nice People’, 300 (emphasis is in the original text).

⁸⁷ US Embassy in Warsaw to the State Department, 20 Jul. 1961, NARA, RG 306-P36-3, unpaginated file, 2 of document.

⁸⁸ Piotr Marciniak, *Doświadczenia modernizmu. Architektura i urbanistyka Poznania w czasach PRL* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Miejskie, 2010), 270–1.

⁸⁹ Tony Bennett, ‘The Exhibitionary Complex’, *New Formations*, 4 (Spring 1988), 73–6 [73–102].

⁹⁰ Wulf, *U.S. International Exhibitions*, 7; Marciniak, *Doświadczenia modernizmu*, 270–1; Jack Masey and Conway Lloyd Morgan, *Cold War Confrontations: US Exhibitions and Their Role in the Cultural Cold War* (Baden, Switzerland: Lars Müller, 2008).

⁹¹ Wulf, *U.S. International Exhibitions*, 81; quoting Donald Preziosi, *Brain of the Earth’s Body: Art, Museums, and the Phantasms of Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 134.

⁹² IPN Po 06-71 tom 54, k. 26; ‘Bericht über die Pressearbeit auf der XXVI. Internationalen Messe in Poznań’, undated document, SAPMO, DL2-590, 1 of document; Wulf, *U.S. International Exhibitions*, 69–83.

the US pavilion as an embodiment of the new possibilities of the future, unlike the Soviet hall, 'built with enormous cost and opulence'. But today, he added, 'these no longer define modernity'.⁹³

The US exhibitors expected to impress Polish visitors, especially anticipating the textiles to be a hit. 'U.S. Fashions Go to Poland for Exhibit: Spring Tints Are Muted in Flowering Cottons', ran *The New York Times* headline on 5 April 1957. The author, Nan Robertson, predicted optimistically that 'This spring, even the Poles may be saying, "I can get it for less at Ohrbach's"', referring to the inexpensive garment chain, which was chosen as 'the average American store' to deliver all the fashion items for the US pavilion that year.⁹⁴ Such hopes hinged on Americans' knowledge of notoriously expensive clothing in Poland coupled with confidence in the power of Ohrbach's prices, and perhaps US marketing prowess as well. 'We don't want to give them glamour. We want to show them practical, attractive fashions at down-to-earth prices', reported the chain's spokesman in the *New York Times*.⁹⁵ The Americans banked especially on synthetics. The company's stylist said that 'we take these "miracle fabrics" for granted here, but most Poles would consider them truly miraculous.'⁹⁶ The Department of Commerce is said to have opted for inexpensive garments in order to differentiate the Americans from the Soviets, who were expected to be showing furs.⁹⁷ Ohrbach's vowed to save Poles from socialism with affordability and choice. But, to many Poles, the company's language and its offerings also broadcast assumptions about poverty, class and taste. In so doing, it raised uncomfortable questions about Poland's peripheral place in the world, which long preceded the Cold War.

Based on 1950s US periodicals, scholars have argued that the show was a great success.⁹⁸ But Polish secret police reports reveal that, once inside Fuller's dome, many Poles felt profoundly let down. While crowds stormed the building when it opened (images that dominated the US coverage of the event), many found the exhibits not to their taste. Zygfryd W. wrote from Poznań to Stefania W. in the village of Pyzdry: 'they made so much noise about the American pavilion, and I went there and saw that the Polish one is better and richer, and the prettiest and richest one is the Soviet one.'⁹⁹ Another visitor thought Polish exhibits were the best: 'The famed American pavilion is a huge letdown. There's nothing in there. Our Polish one is the prettiest one, America wouldn't be ashamed of such beautiful fabrics.'¹⁰⁰ The pavilion, he added, 'is distinctly propagandistic, as opposed to commercial in nature, which is evidenced by distributing special brochures about life in the USA'.¹⁰¹ And from a letter to Gdynia: 'US showed only ugly stuff: ugly fabrics and faux jewelry. I was cursing as I was trying to get in, because there was a crowd of people who expect miracles, but it's an exhibition for Africans [dla murzynów].'¹⁰² Others also used racialised language. 'American pavilion was especially a flop. All visitors leave it with disappointed faces. Apparently they brought a few fabulously colourful chif-fons, extremely tasteless, gaudy. As though for savage Africans [dzikich murzynów]. There was so much interest around the nylon pavilion, but except for the plastic roof, there was nothing interesting', someone wrote.¹⁰³

There are several ways to read the crowd's critical reaction to the highly anticipated US show. It revealed American misreading of the Polish context, where the textile industry was strong. Designers carried the momentum of the interwar era by reinventing original patterns within the broadly understood official doctrine of 'socialist realism', while production also proved less dependent

⁹³ IPN Po 06-71 tom 54, k. 26.

⁹⁴ *New York Times*, 5 Apr. 1957, 39.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Haddow, *Pavilions*, 63.

⁹⁸ Ibid.; Castillo, *Cold War*, 141–2.

⁹⁹ IPN Po 06-71 tom 54, k. 91.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., k. 135.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid., k. 139.

¹⁰³ Ibid., k. 136.

on regular factory retooling and reorganisation than other branches of industry.¹⁰⁴ Garments and fabrics were scarce, but women managed to dress well – for instance, by making their own clothes from private dressmakers who had obtained materials from relatives abroad. This, reported a UK Embassy official in 1961, made Polish women more elegant than in any other ‘satellite capital’.¹⁰⁵

Polish reactions further spoke to the US understanding of Poznań solely as a Cold War battleground, a frontier between the abundant West and poor, isolated East. Mary Nolan drew attention to the different ways in which US and European notions of modernity failed to mesh, juxtaposing the US ‘consumer republic’ grounded in ‘family-centered mass consumption and consumer choice’ with European (including East European) “consumer citizenship” [that] involved not only choice but state regulation and extensive state social benefits’. These separate transatlantic trajectories translated into contrasting conditions of domesticity, tastes and approaches to usage of consumer goods, and often rejections and re-appropriations of American products in Europe. As a result, Nolan noted, ‘everyday modernity was national and European more than Americanized’, while ‘intra-European circuits were more important than transatlantic ones.’¹⁰⁶ At Poznań, US exhibitors assumed that the consumer goods on display would dazzle the local visitors because they were diverse and affordable. But, reaching over the iron curtain for the first time, Americans downplayed the linkages between the shared European context of Polish preferences and tastes.

The indignant, racialised language of the Polish fairgoers revealed their longstanding national complex of inhabitants of the Western periphery, which would become manifest at other international shows.¹⁰⁷ At Poznań in 1962, an exasperated Polish visitor expressed admiration for the US pavilion, but also noted: ‘It’s a pity only that we here must look at all this as “white slaves”’.¹⁰⁸ As in other precarious European states, elites in Poland embraced whiteness in subtle, often appealing, ways through ethnography or adventure novels for teenagers and even children’s comic books, as a way of resolving potential ambiguities about Poland’s place in the world. Social anthropologist Ulla Vuorela called this ‘complicity’ a process whereby semi-peripheral communities try to approach the centre by promoting hegemonic discourses.¹⁰⁹ Historically, whiteness mitigated the stigma of Poland’s marginality vis-à-vis the developed world and helped to reaffirm a national presence in the absence of a formal state. A short-lived Polish overseas colonies project developed between the wars.¹¹⁰ At Poznań, falling back on whiteness in response to the American exhibit filled with inexpensive and flashy goods echoed these complexes and compensatory mechanisms. Throughout the Soviet bloc, racism predated state socialism that stressed solidarity with the formerly colonised. Officially at odds, both coexisted after

¹⁰⁴ David Crowley, ‘“Beauty, Everyday and For All”: The Social Vision of Design in Stalinist Poland’, in Judy Attfield, ed., *Utility Reassessed: The Role of Ethics in the Practice of Design* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1999), 68; David Crowley, ‘Building the World Anew: Design in Stalinist and Post-Stalinist Poland’, *Journal of Design History*, 7, 3 (1994), 194; Jeżowska, ‘Imagined Poland’, esp. ch. 1.

¹⁰⁵ British Embassy in Warsaw in Warsaw Foreign Office, 23 June 1961, NA FO 1110-1399, 1 of the document; also Daniel Logemann, *Das polnische Fenster. Deutsch-polnische Kontakte im staatssozialistischen Alltag Leipzigs 1972–1989* (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2012), 27.

¹⁰⁶ Mary Nolan, *The Transatlantic Century: Europe and the United States, 1890–2010* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 262; Oldenziel and Zachmann, ‘Kitchens as Technology and Politics’, 8.

¹⁰⁷ Susan E. Reid, ‘“Our Kitchen Is Just as Good”: Soviet Responses to the American Kitchen’, in Oldenziel and Zachmann, *Cold War Kitchen*, 113; Jeżowska, ‘Imagined Poland’, 80.

¹⁰⁸ ‘Translations from Comment Book’, at the 1962 Poznań Fair, NARA, RG 306-P36-3, 3 of document.

¹⁰⁹ Ulla Vuorela, ‘Colonial Complicity: The “Postcolonial” in a Nordic Context’, in Suvi Keskinen, Salla Tuori, Sari Irni and Diana Mulinari, eds., *Complying with Colonialism: Gender, Race and Ethnicity in the Nordic Region* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009), 19–33. Marta Grzechnik relies on Vuorela’s work in ‘The Missing Second World’.

¹¹⁰ Andrzej Nowak, ‘Tajemnicze zniknięcie Drugiego Świata. O trudnym losie półperyferii’, in Tomasz Zarycki, ed., *Polska jako peryferie* (Warsaw: Scholar, 2016), 86–104. Marek Arpad Kowalski, *Dyskurs kolonialny w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej* (Warsaw: DiG, 2010); Anna Nadolska-Styczyńska, *Ludy zamorskich łądów. Kultury pozaeuropejskie a działalność popularyzatorska Ligi Morskiej i Kolonialnej* (Wrocław: PTL, 2005); Ureña Valerio, *Colonial Fantasies*; Marta Grzechnik, ‘“Ad Maiorem Poloniae Gloriam!” Polish Inter-Colonial Encounters in Africa in the Interwar Period’, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 48, 5 (2020), 793–804.

1945, reflecting longer, unique patterns of the countries' national and imperial histories, and the newfound need to maintain difference in newly reconfigured power relationships.¹¹¹

US exhibitors objectified the visitors in a way that helped to activate the deep-seated Polish insecurities. In a letter written in 1957, the author recounted how 'the American pavilion is besieged (even though there's nothing special inside besides cars)', noting that:

Americans use that interest in a particular way, namely they close the door, then they let a small crowd inside, and people storm inside with the clanking of the windows. [The Americans] film the crowd, and then they distribute photos, which creates an even greater curiosity, but for a self-respected person these are distasteful things.¹¹²

'To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed', wrote Susan Sontag in her classic essay *On Photography*. 'It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge – and therefore, like power'.¹¹³ Consistently with the model that Mary Nolan aptly characterised as 'America came, Western Europe succumbed, and Eastern Europe envied', the US exhibitors appropriated those images, inaccurately depicting Polish visitors as uncritical recipients of US modernity.¹¹⁴

Some Poles felt further humiliated by being co-opted into a show that involved US giveaways of frozen potato pancakes. One witness wrote to his family in the countryside: 'The Polish boys who worked there went on telling people "aren't you ashamed, don't you have potatoes in Poland, this stuff isn't good at all"'.¹¹⁵ Potato pancakes, Poland's traditional meal, were being promoted in a frozen form at a time when only 0.6 per cent of all Poles owned a fridge.¹¹⁶ (Barbara Sampson, a home economist who distributed individual frozen peas to perplexed onlookers in Poznań, realised as much after she visited some homes: 'refrigerators are as rare in Poznan as they are at the South Pole', she said.)¹¹⁷ Westerners, mostly Americans and West Germans, often staged such scenes, sometimes driving around Poland and distributing food to people and filming them.¹¹⁸ Clearly, local responses to the US shows were diverse and unpredictable, but US editors chose the images to suggest that the public unanimously admired the vision of capitalist America, often with captions such as: 'Starved for consumer goods, the visitors often tried to buy the displays'.¹¹⁹ Differences between East and West existed but, as they were not always clear or self-explanatory, they needed to be regularly amplified and maintained.

To compare these interactions to racially charged, violent encounters in the imperial colonies would be to exaggerate. Yet there were certain resonances about the extent to which nativism and

¹¹¹ Austin Jersild, *The Sino-Soviet Alliance: An International History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Young-Sun Hong, 'The Benefits of Health Must Spread Among All': International Solidarity, Health and Race in the German Encounter with the Third World', in Pence and Betts, *Socialist Modern*, 183–210; James Mark, Péter Apor, Radina Vučetić and Piotr Oseka, 'We Are with You, Vietnam': Transnational Solidarities in Socialist Hungary, Poland and Yugoslavia', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 50, 3 (2015), 439–64; Małgorzata Mazurek, 'Polish Economists in Nehru's India: Making Science for the Third World in an Era of De-Stalinization and Decolonization', *Slavic Review*, 77, 3 (2018), 588–610; Bracewell, 'The Limits of Europe', 67; also Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, esp. chapter 6; and a special issue of *East European Politics and Societies*, 31, 1 (2017) devoted to East European peripheries.

¹¹² IPN Po 06-71 tom 54, k. 137.

¹¹³ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2008 [1977]), 4.

¹¹⁴ Nolan, *The Transatlantic Century*, 265.

¹¹⁵ IPN Po 06-71 tom 54, k. 136.

¹¹⁶ Berend, *Central and Eastern Europe*, 219. The figures are for 1960.

¹¹⁷ Quoted in Castillo, *Cold War*, 142.

¹¹⁸ IPN Po 06-71 tom 61 (1955), kk. 14–16; IPN BU 0664-62, k. 40.

¹¹⁹ Castillo, *Cold War*, 142; see also Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2008), 217, 222; IPN Po 06-71 tom 53 (1957), k. 197.

imperialism, having shaped the US culture of exhibitions and world fairs, also informed the practices at Poznań and throughout the communist world.¹²⁰ Ann Stoler usefully problematised power and citizenship as a dynamic spectrum of possibilities often negotiated on the micro-level, rather than defined around legal boundaries. She saw ‘imperial formations’ to be informal devices of domination, ‘graded forms of sovereignty’ and ‘sliding and contested scales of differential rights’.¹²¹ The US trade fair project aimed primarily to befriend East Europeans and promote US business and political interests, and it sometimes succeeded. But to the extent it also held a promise of participation in a Western version of modernity, it proved to be more ambiguous because it packaged emancipatory ideals with practices that assigned roles and imposed hierarchies that reminded many visitors about Poland’s perpetual failure to leave the Western periphery.

Conclusion

The Cold War has shaped the Western imaginary so much that it is difficult to think about the second half of the twentieth century without falling back on the global conflict between the superpowers as the default trope. But the story of the Poznań fair highlights the extent to which the Cold War served as a backdrop to even more enduring contestations over power and privilege between groups of Westerners and sections of the Polish society under socialism. The iron curtain existed, but the fair exposed cultural boundaries between the First and Second Worlds that were simultaneously less stable and more layered than those staked out by the Cold War. Poznań represented a resource, a place where Western men could make profits and meet women away from home. It was an echo chamber of Poland’s past, entangled in the histories of Soviet expansionism, German imperialism, Western colonialism and Polish exceptionalism. Thinking about Poznań as a complex frontier brings out these many faces of Poland. Two historians argued recently that ‘the revolutions of 1989 came to mean different things in different settings: they were always refracted through the prism of long-term trends, local conditions, and political concerns’.¹²² Poznań shows how centuries-long processes shaped the Cold War, and also how some mid-century tensions were hardly about the Cold War at all.

The fair can be understood as part of Eastern Europe’s broader challenge to the West, designed to contest the country’s peripheral position in the world. In Poland, the fair helped reframe Polish national identity around pragmatic ideals such as good organisation, efficiency and hard work. The Western response to this double challenge was far more ambiguous than the strictly political story we know so well. Westerners came to Poland with diverse agendas and attitudes. Most wanted to do business, take care of personal affairs or genuinely empower Polish society through their clandestine support for anti-communism. Yet the way in which some of them also engaged with the world behind the Iron Curtain – how they approached, understood, interacted with and described it to the audiences back home – relied on longstanding assumptions about global power asymmetries, hierarchies and notions about what Eastern Europe was or should be. In that sense, these Westerners re-invented Eastern Europe, to borrow from Larry Wolff, but did so within the conventions of mid-century modernity. Recent scholarship has emphasised how the authorities behind the ‘iron curtain’ used political, economic, scientific and cultural institutions to create the ‘socialist Second World’. Its unique modes of governance, blueprints of economic development, cycles of industrial production and cultural exchange, it is suggested, evolved into a distinct civilisation shaped by alternative globalising trends.¹²³ This important, fascinating story is incomplete unless we also recognise that Westerners

¹²⁰ Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Geppert, *Fleeting Cities*; Rydell, *World of Fairs*.

¹²¹ Ann Laura Stoler, ‘Imperial Debris: Reflections on Ruins and Ruination’, *Cultural Anthropology*, 23, 2 (2008), 193–4.

¹²² Piotr Kosicki and Kyrill Kunakhovich, ‘Introduction’, in Kosicki and Kunakhovich, eds., *The Long 1989: Decades of Global Revolution* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2019), 6.

¹²³ Stephen Kotkin, ‘Mongol Commonwealth?: Exchange and Governance across the Post-Mongol Space’, *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 8, 3 (2007), 487–531; Elidor Mèhilli, *From Stalin to Mao: Albania and the Socialist World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017); Daria Bocharnikova and Steven E. Harris,

co-created the socialist Second World by defining it around absences of certain freedoms, practices, technologies and possibilities. Many Westerners, against the grain of emancipatory rhetoric, helped redefine the Second World around the notion of second-class citizenship. This is not to say that most Westerners meant ill in some way. But to the extent that Poland gave them access to markets, women and flattering visions of self and self-redemption, it gave them certain freedoms that were denied to them at home.

If these contradictions are hard to reconcile, it is perhaps because we have yet to address fully the longer histories that connected the different local contexts and international realities in the second half of the twentieth century. The Cold War continues to be understood as a clash between distinct versions of modernity; reflective of this assumption are discussions about the ‘convergence’ between the two systems in the context of exhibitions and fairs.¹²⁴ But what if we’re looking for a coherence that simply isn’t there? Historian Paul Kramer observed that Western colonial empires and fairs – and expositions that represented them – were less coordinated and more contradictory than has been assumed.¹²⁵ Western visitors behind the ‘iron curtain’ likewise followed multiple impulses and the promise of material gain, privilege and pleasure mattered as much as, if not more than, the political and ideological imperatives of the Cold War.¹²⁶ As agents of capitalism and democracy at Poznań, they challenged Poland’s communist dictatorship. But these Westerners also eagerly took advantage of centuries-long power asymmetries between the First and Second World, enabling practices and narratives that naturalised these asymmetries, effectively rekindling the resentments that had shaped the emancipatory visions of socialism in the first place.

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‘Second World Urbanity: Infrastructures of Utopia and Really Existing Socialism’, *Journal of Urban History*, 44, 1 (2017), 3–8; Rachel Applebaum, *Empire of Friends Soviet Power and Socialist Internationalism in Cold War Czechoslovakia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019); see also the 2011 thematic issues of *Ab Imperio: Studies of New Imperial History and Nationalism in the Post-Soviet Space*.

¹²⁴ Péteri, ‘Sites of Convergence’; Reid, ‘The Soviet Pavilion’.

¹²⁵ Kramer, ‘Making Concessions: Race and Empire Revisited at the Philippine Exposition, St. Louis, 1901–1905’, *Radical History Review*, 73 (1999), 76.

¹²⁶ See also Hamilton, ‘Supermarket USA’, 142–3.

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