

Personhood in Places: Aging, Memory, and Relatedness in Postsocialist Poland

by

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Figure 1: Map of Poland after World War II. (Map made by and used with permission of Brian Porter-Szücs. To appear in: *Poland in the Modern World: More than Martyrdom*, Wiley/Blackwell, 2014)

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**In memory of my grandparents,
Rovelle Coffman Choate, Pauline Davis Choate,
and Alvin Dolliver Robbins,
and for my grandmother,
Jean West Robbins.**

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Preface

To confuse someone is to Buffalo
To seek favor thru flattery is to fawn
To betray is to rat
To struggle clumsily is to flounder
To treat as an object of importance is lionize

I found these words scribbled in pencil on a small piece of paper on top of a dresser in my grandparents' apartment in the "independent living" wing of a retirement community in northern Virginia in May 2005. My parents and I were there, along with my uncle and aunt, to help my grandparents move into the nursing home wing. They had already "downsized" significantly in the move from their townhouse to this apartment a decade earlier, but there were still too many things—furniture, rugs, linens, cookware, clothes, plants, collections of shells, baskets, coins, miniature zoo animals, safety pins, rubber bands—the things seemed to never end. As I picked up a pile of expired coupons and materials for arts-and-crafts projects that were never to be, this piece of paper fluttered to the ground. Once I had deciphered the handwriting and read the words on the small page, I was taken aback. These words were written in the hand of my father's mother, who in 2005 had had Alzheimer's disease for around ten years, and they were more lucid than much of her speech at that time. At first, I interpreted these words according to their form. The act of defining words seemed to me a struggle to create a tangible reality, something to grasp and thereby remember. The list of animals as verbs gave the list an odd coherence and possible playfulness, although the circumstances of the day were such that I could only interpret the

words as full of tragedy and loss. I was then struck by the content of the words themselves, which describe effort (“to seek favor,” “to struggle clumsily,” “to treat as an object of importance”). Next, the sociality of these words stood out, and it is in this sociality that I see the deepest meaning of these words. They are all definitions that have to do with relating to another person; at stake are feelings of confusion, approval, betrayal, and respect. I have long understood my grandmother’s illness as a failure to relate meaningfully to others, and these words seemed to constitute her own recognition of this failure—or rather, in her words, this floundering, this clumsy struggle. In a sense, this dissertation is an exploration of this gap in sociality, of what lies between “failure” and “floundering.”

I include this story about my grandmother in order to show more fully the varying kinds of experience that have shaped this project. Since anthropologists and other social scientists long ago gave up on the idea of some pure objectivist stance towards data and research—that is, since all arguments are made from a particular position—I see the task of describing one’s particular position and stance as a part of honest scholarship. In other words, since knowledge is always produced under certain conditions, I see the inclusion of such personal history as part of describing the conditions in which this dissertation has been produced. Of course, this honesty is always fragmentary and shifting, depending on the time and place; I would include different information about that piece of paper had I written this the day I found it. Emotions, attachments, and perspectives all shift. But I include it nevertheless, as part of working towards an ideal that must remain imperfect. Additionally, it just seems decent to include such personal information about myself given the personal nature of ethnographic research. As Lawrence Cohen has written, “it seem[s] fair play to invoke one’s grandmother if one is in the business of writing

about everyone else's" (1998:296-297). Thus I include this preface to the dissertation with the goals of honesty and fairness, and attendant dreams of completeness and totality.

Indeed, part of the appeal of anthropology for me has always been the intertwining of personal experience and scholarly analysis. As a first-year college student, I took a January-term course on the art of medicine and healing. Even though I now see that it was hugely biased towards biomedicine—it was taught by a physician and clearly meant to appeal to future physicians—I was totally enthralled, in a way that I sometimes wish I could replicate, by reading doctors' experiences of healing (or not), patients' experiences of different kinds of illnesses, and trying to place my own and my family's recent experiences with illness within these stories. Despite my total engagement with this material, nothing was satisfying. I felt myself grasping at books, articles, and stories for some truth that would explain the complexity of experience that was part of illness and healing, but everything felt disappointing or inadequate in some way. Reading ethnographies over the next years was a sort of slow revelation, as I learned the power of social theory and analysis combined with reflexive ethnography. This revelation has only deepened through graduate coursework, ethnographic fieldwork, and writing the dissertation. For me, the combination of experiential knowledge produced through ethnography, the disciplinary commitment to understanding humanity in all its sociocultural, political economic, historical, and biological diversity, and the engagement with social theory makes anthropology the most honest and rigorous way to understand the complexities of human life.

However, it was partially a desire to escape the personal that led me to study aging in Poland. I had first thought of studying aging and memory in the United States, but I thought that I would somehow be too reminded of my grandparents and I worried it would be too personally difficult. Thus I sought out another place in the world where aging and memory seemed like

salient contemporary topics, where ethnographic and anthropological insights could prove useful. The dramatic large-scale changes experienced by the oldest generations drew me to eastern Europe, where I saw a proliferation of social activity around memory at different scales. Poland seemed to me emblematic of the changes of eastern Europe, and the University of Michigan's excellent Polish studies program made the project seem practical. Since then, Poland has become more personal to me than I could have known, as the home of my affines. Thinking of my grandparents turned out to be unavoidable, although conducting fieldwork in a learned language did provide some degree of emotional distance. But the personal ultimately turned inescapable in another way, as this fieldwork was framed by health problems of my own. The year before and the year after my fieldwork were consumed with pain, confusion, appointments, procedures, surgeries, distress, and care; these experiences were physical, emotional, and always social. These two years of struggle and rehabilitation shaped my experiences of both fieldwork and writing, although I find it difficult to articulate in precisely what ways. I know that these unwished-for insights into (and now memories of) patienthood and biomedical worlds shape my ethnographic and anthropological stance, if only in that I am forever aware of how we are all "struggl[ing] clumsily."

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Glossary

<i>babcia</i>	grandmother
<i>dziadek</i>	grandfather
<i>gościnność</i>	hospitality
<i>harcerski</i>	scouting
<i>kresy</i>	borderlands; used to refer to the contemporary borderlands of Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, and Poland that used to lie within the Polish state.
<i>mieszkaniec (pl. –ńcy)</i>	residents (label used for people at the social welfare home)
<i>moherowy beret (pl. –owe, -ety)</i>	literally, mohair beret; politicized label to refer to an older person (usually a woman or group of women) who supports nationalist Catholic political parties.
<i>obiad</i>	traditional midday meal (now often replaced by lunch, but still observed by many older people, and by many Poles on weekends and holidays)
<i>opiekunka</i>	literally, carer; similar to a nurse’s aide
<i>oplatek (pl. –ki)</i>	Christmas Eve wafer
<i>pacjent (pl. – ci)</i>	patient (designation used for people at the rehab center)
<i>Poznaniak (pl. –cy)</i>	resident of Poznań
<i>sluchacz (f. –ka; pl. –e)</i>	auditor; how attendees of the University of the Third Age refer to themselves
<i>skleroza</i>	literally, “sclerosis;” used colloquially to refer to age-related changes in memory. Similar to colloquial American uses of “senile” before it was stigmatized.
<i>siostra dyrektor</i>	literally sister-director; the term for the director of the rehab center in Wrocław

<i>siostra oddziałowa</i>	ward sister; the nurse manager and day-to-day director of operations and care at the rehab center in Wrocław
<i>starość</i>	old age
<i>starszy</i> (adj.)	older; a polite way to refer to an older person's age.
<i>stary</i> (adj.)	old; this is often interpreted as a rude way to refer to an older person's age. However, there has been a resurgence in this word among some older Poles who are trying to reclaim it as a non-stigmatized word.
<i>Sybirak</i> (pl. –cy)	Siberian; refers to Polish deportees to Siberia in the 19th and 20th centuries
<i>u siebie</i>	at home
<i>Uniwersytet Trzeciego Wieku</i>	University of the Third Age
<i>Wigilia</i>	Christmas Eve
<i>Wrocławianin</i> (pl. –ie)	resident of Wrocław

Abstract

This dissertation explores the practices of relatedness through which the moral personhood of older Poles can be created, transformed, or dismantled. Based on 20 months of ethnographic fieldwork in medical and educational institutions in Wrocław and Poznań, Poland, this dissertation shows how practices of relatedness that link older Poles to certain places and times can sustain, transform, or threaten moral personhood. Connections between older Poles and the Polish nation can diminish their status as moral persons through association with the socialist past, yet can also provide possibilities for inclusion through alignment with the European Union and the mythological national past. These connections between person and nation happen through everyday practices of storytelling, remembering, learning, and commensality. Ethnographic investigation of these practices shows that health, class, education, gender, and place of residence create different possibilities for achieving or sustaining moral personhood, such that some older Poles come to understand themselves and be understood by others as wise, respected, and valued, while other older Poles understand themselves and come to be understood by others as devalued, irrelevant, and marginal.

Analyzing practices of care and relatedness reveals how moral personhood can be sustained in contexts in which it is under threat, thus suggesting ways to ameliorate structural inequality in old age. Processual attention to practices of sociality shows how people with Alzheimer's disease, who are so commonly treated as exceptional within studies of aging, sustain personhood and relatedness through practices of memory—exactly that which they are thought to lack—that are similar to those of older people in other contexts. This dissertation thus

works against marginalization and suggests the need for holistic ethnographic perspectives on old age.

By integrating perspectives from kinship studies, medical anthropology, and postsocialist studies, this dissertation has ramifications for understanding how the wars and dramatic sociocultural and political-economic transformations of the last centuries in Poland have shaped individuals and social relations, and continue to shape generational expectations of the life course.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Personhood in places

On a gray day in November 2008, I walked through the hallway on the third floor of a rehabilitation center run by Catholic nuns in Wrocław, looking for pani Czesia, a woman with whom I had talked the previous day.¹ She had asked me to return, so I was on my way back to her room, when I saw pani Joanna and another older woman sitting in their wheelchairs by the large window that looked out onto the gardens. I had spoken with pani Joanna once before, so I stopped and greeted her. We exchanged pleasantries for a bit—or rather, I expected that we would exchange pleasantries, but we ended up talking—or rather, she did—for about an hour. I asked her how she was feeling. “Better and better,” she said.² I was glad for her, since the first time we had talked, she dissolved into tears talking about the stroke that had brought her to the rehabilitation center. That day she showed me how her right arm was getting better, how she could raise it higher and wiggle her fingers more than previously. Throughout our conversation, she rubbed her right arm (the side affected by stroke) with the left side. Unlike the rest of the patients at the center, who were dressed for the chilly fall weather in sweaters, pani Joanna was wearing an oversized bright yellow t-shirt with a cartoon bumblebee on it. A speech bubble leading from the bee’s mouth read (in English), “Wanna be my bumblebee?”

¹ “*Pani*” is the respectful term of address for women in Polish; “*pan*” is the equivalent for men.

² “Coraz lepiej.”

Pani Joanna then asked me how I was doing. I answered that I was doing well, that my research was going well thanks to the kindness of people at the center. It was a pleasure to hear people's stories. Pani Joanna commented that yes, there were a lot of older people at the center who remember well, and that it is important to talk about the past, to remember. At this point the other woman at the window joined the conversation, so I introduced myself as an American doctoral student in Poland to do research on aging and memory in Wrocław and Poznań. This other women agreed that this is an important topic. Together, the two women talked for half an hour on differing topics: the lack of patriotism in younger generations, the emigration of younger people, and the good qualities of Poles. Pani Joanna talked about a late friend who had lived in the United States, but who missed Poland terribly the entire time she was there. "That's what our nation is like – people miss it."³ She described how Poles were often fighting in other people's wars, but that no one came to help the Poles. Even though Poles have fought around the world for independence, no one helps them. Poland is a "nation chosen by God."⁴ The other woman agreed, saying that Poland was chosen by God to suffer. "Young people now are sick, it's terrible. There aren't many people left" who know what true patriotism is, she said. "I feel bad for my children and grandchildren."⁵ They are leaving Poland, but for what? Poland has everything but money. At least they are starting to return. The two women then remarked that at heart, Poles are good people, with good traits: "Poles are hard-working and hospitable. These are really good national qualities."⁶ With this agreement, the women fell silent. Then the second woman asked me if I would wheel her back to her room down the hallway, which I did. From the

³ "Taki jest nasz naród, że ludzie za nim tęsknią."

⁴ "naród wybrany przez Boga."

⁵ "Teraz, młodzi ludzie chorują, to straszne. Teraz, nie zostało dużo ludzi.... Mi szkoda dzieci i wnuków."

⁶ "Polacy są pracowici i gościnni. To bardzo dobre cechy narodowe."

laminated piece of paper attached to the wall above her bed, I learned that her name was Genowefa, that she was 80 years old, and that she was diabetic.

I then went back out into the hallway, intent on writing up this conversation in my notebook. I sat in a chair on the other side of the hallway from the window and smiled at pani Joanna across the hallway, saying that I was writing notes about what she and pani Genowefa had just discussed. She wheeled herself over to me and kept talking, as if instructing me, with a tone of seriousness and earnestness about what she was saying. After about 15 minutes, the *obiad* (midday meal) cart was wheeled into her room; I pointed this out, but she kept talking, undistracted by the cart, other people walking through the hallway, or the staff member pushing the cart telling her that her food had arrived. After another 10 minutes, pani Joanna ended the conversation, saying that she would go eat after all. Her *obiad* was surely cold by then.

Pani Joanna told me about her family's background: her mother was from Lwów and her father's family was from Przemyśl and then moved to Lwów. She spoke of how beautiful Lwów was and how excellent the air was.⁷ She spoke of violence by Ukrainians towards Poles, saying that her father had to be careful on the streets; if he was heard speaking Polish, he would be attacked. They moved to Wrocław in 1958, after the "boom" in post-war development. It was because Poles are "very hard-working," she repeated, that Wrocław and Warsaw came to be as beautiful as they are today. "My god – Wrocław, Warsaw – nothing but ruins."⁸ She spoke of the generosity of Poles throughout history, of Poles who have always fought on behalf of others, such as in Iraq and Afghanistan—but that no one comes to Poland's aid. She mentioned her son who lived in Ireland, and that Poles were sent to Siberia where they starved and had to forage in the forest for food: mushrooms, fruits, berries. Pani Joanna emphasized that she knows how

⁷ "wspaniałe powietrze"

⁸ "Boże. Same ruiny. Wrocław, Warszawa."

things really were because she is old enough to remember, in contrast to her grandchildren, who say, “Grandma, tell us stories!”⁹ They do not know about her experiences, which, for pani Joanna, is a “tragedy.” Pani Joanna encouraged me to read books about post-war Poland, about Poland’s aid to other nations, and about deportations to Siberia. They have lists of people’s names, she said, which will demonstrate that she speaks the truth. “History wasn’t true in school,” she said. “Now it is documented.”¹⁰

This conversation took me by surprise—although I had heard such repetitions of the standard Polish national narrative before, I had never heard it in such a context. During the previous six weeks that I had been doing fieldwork at this rehabilitation center run by the sisters of St. Elizabeth in the center of Wrocław, other older Poles had told me stories that intertwined personal and national histories—and indeed they would for the duration of the 18 months I spent conducting ethnographic fieldwork in Poland—but until that point, I had only heard these stories during somewhat more formal interview-like settings when I had specifically asked people to tell me about their lives. This day, I had not explicitly asked any questions, turned on a voice recorder, or invoked any of the conventions that I understood to establish the framework of “official research.” The mere fact of my presence and stated interest in memory and old age brought forth these stories from pani Joanna and pani Genowefa. Even after the conversation could have ended, after I brought pani Genowefa back to her room and was sitting quietly in the hallway, pani Joanna was the one who kept the story going for so long that her meal became cold.

Moreover, I was struck by the many connections across time and space that pani Joanna was making: post-World-War-II Wrocław, which until 1945 had been the German city of

⁹ “Babciu, powiedz nas bajki!”

¹⁰ “Historia nie była prawda w szkole. Teraz jest udokumentowana.”

Breslau; pre- and post-war Lwów, a city that was part of the Polish state after World War I but became Soviet L'viv after World War II; the Polish capital of Warsaw, which, even more than Wrocław, was devastated during World War II; Siberia, a place to where Poles had been deported in the 19th and 20th centuries by the Russian tsar and then by the Soviets; Ireland; Iraq; Afghanistan; and Poland itself, as long-suffering, sacred, and fundamentally good. During this conversation, these faraway places and times were all made as present as the garden outside the window.

I also found it remarkable that pani Joanna framed herself as someone who remembers these times and places. When we met in 2008, she was 62 years old; she was born in 1946, meaning that she had not lived through World War II itself. She was, in fact, one of the younger people at the rehab center, and younger than I would expect for someone who framed herself as remembering the old days, as a keeper of memory. In fact, I was struck by the similarity of her story to those of women in their late nineties with whom I had spoken. In these stories about the past, 30 years difference in age seemed almost irrelevant.

The final, and seemingly most transparent, aspect of pani Joanna's story was the degree to which it recapitulated the romantic, messianic national myth of Poland as the Christ of nations. This story, in simplified form, is that Poland has suffered oppression by foreign powers for centuries and has valiantly resisted this oppression. For centuries Poles have fought for their own—and for others'—freedom. These struggles would be in vain, since Poland has often lost such struggles, except that to be Polish is to be Catholic, such that Poles have been defending Catholicism as well as Poland in these fights. Poland is a nation chosen by God to suffer, and in that suffering finds redemption: Poland, the Christ of nations. This messianic myth can take gendered dimensions in the figure of *Matka-Polka*, or Mother-Pole, who both protects the nation

through nurturing its members, and also bears its suffering. The *Matka-Polka*'s suffering is the suffering of the Polish nation.

Like many national myths, this story contains elements of truth. The territory of contemporary Poland has indeed been ruled by many powers over the centuries; most importantly for this mythic formulation, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was partitioned into three by the Russian, Prussian, and Austro-Hungarian empires in the late 18th century. The last partition was in 1795; an independent Polish state did not exist until after World War I in 1918. Poles did indeed fight foreign rule. During the partition period, there were many uprisings (*powstania*) against the foreign rulers, and some Polish insurrectionists did indeed fight in revolutionary movements abroad. Revolutionary movements also characterized Polish political life in the first half of the 20th century, in both World Wars I and II. The control of post-war Poland by the Soviet Union marked another loss of Polish independence, but in labor strikes, most notably in the 1970s and 1980s, Poles fought against Soviet control. Poland's link with Catholicism dates to the acceptance of Latin Christianity by Mieszko I in 966, and Poland and Catholicism have been closely linked by political connections for centuries.¹¹

Like all nationalist myths, however, this is a highly selective reading of history (Hobsbawm 1983; Renan [1892]1996). This understanding of Polish nationalism is a historical construct that draws primarily on 19th century Polish Romantic nationalist ideals, and its creation has more to do with late-19th and early-20th century Polish politics than with how people actually understood themselves during the 19th century (Porter 2000). Erased from this history are centuries of linguistically, ethnically, and religiously diverse populations living in the territory of contemporary Poland. Moreover, in contemporary Polish politics, this narrative is

¹¹ This is a drastically shortened description of centuries of history. For an overview of Polish history, see Lukowski and Zawadzki 2006. For a history of partitioned Poland, see Wandycz 1993[1974]. For a critical and comprehensive history of the relationship between Poland and the Catholic church, see Porter-Szücs 2011.

espoused by far-right political parties and religious leaders as part of isolationist and conservative ideologies.

Crucially, this messianic narrative is also tied to the history of the Polish nobility. In other words, this version of Polish history is an elite history of Poland, made possible by the interwar Polish state's need for a national myth. Since the gentry's version of history was the only available version after partitions—that is, since elites were the ones who could write history—the interwar state, against popular leftist and democratic movements, adopted this narrative as its own (Jakubowska 2012). Polish messianic mythology is thus “coterminously national-political and socioeconomic” (Jakubowska 2012:3-4). It is possible, then, that contemporary manifestations of this messianic narrative still bear traces of this noble history.

I found it remarkable to hear pani Joanna recite this story, relatively unprompted, and in a way that was deeply connected to her life at the rehab center. Why did she begin telling this story when I mentioned age and memory? Why did pani Genowefa join the conversation at the mention of remembering, and not at a different moment? Why did pani Joanna wheel her chair towards me to keep talking? An easy answer to these questions would be to say that pani Joanna and pani Genowefa are lonely old women who like to complain, whether about themselves or about Poland, or that they are followers of political and religious groups that repeat this narrative ad infinitum. And perhaps both these explanations are true. But these answers also feel partial, as neither explains the particularity of *this* story in *this* moment between *this* set of individuals. I seek to articulate an answer to these questions that does not immediately construct these women as stereotypical old voices or as passive receptacles for nationalist messages. Rather, in this dissertation, I aim to answer these questions more ethnographically by more fully taking into

account the experiences, structures, histories, and social relations within which these women—and other older Poles—live.

For indeed, I felt that pani Joanna was telling a story about life, and how to live it. Bound up in pani Joanna's narrative connections between different times and places are concerns for the relationship between persons and places, and the kinds of lives that have been, are, and might be possible in each place. Pani Joanna was both proud that her son had the opportunity to live and work in Ireland, but also worried that he was living so far away from her and their other kin. For pani Joanna and others in her generation who came of age during socialism or before, the chance to travel and work in western Europe is a sign that Poland is free and no longer under Soviet rule. However, the prospect of her son building a life in Ireland is also deeply fraught for pani Joanna, for she feels that living abroad threatens his ability to maintain kin relations in Poland, and weakens his ties to Poland itself. The narrative juxtaposition of her son's life abroad with the past suffering of Poles in Siberia and the destruction of Polish cities during World War II suggests that for pani Joanna, these moments in time are linked. Her lament that her grandchildren do not understand the times in which she lived echoes her lament over younger people leaving Poland for work abroad. The places that have significance for pani Joanna do not carry equal weight for her children and grandchildren, who live with physical distance from Poland and emotional distance from stories about Poland's history.

Pani Joanna understands her own life and that of her children as following a path that is tied to the life of the nation. The possibility that her children and grandchildren could live their lives without such a close connection disrupts the very core of pani Joanna's understanding of how life should proceed. The potential severing of the bond between the life course of her children and grandchildren and that of Poland is a potential severing of the bonds between

persons, places, and temporalities. Pani Joanna's affirmation of the importance of having Polish history written down correctly, in books, can be read as an attempt to pass on knowledge—to me, certainly, but perhaps also to her children and grandchildren, should they want to listen. For pani Joanna, this rupture between life courses, places, and times threatens the very meaning of what it is to be a person and a Pole.

This type of narrative practice occurred again and again throughout my fieldwork in a range of contexts. People ranging in age from 60 to over 90 would describe their lives as inextricable from the history and geography of Poland, and lament their children's lack of interest in such knowledge. Entreaties for me to learn this history were common. These stories were complex, filled with concerns for how one becomes a good person, what kinds of social relations one should have, who has access to the possibilities of creating a good life, and in which places one should live (at which stage in life) in order to be the proper sort of person. Common tropes reappeared throughout my fieldwork, but there were also moments of disagreement and varied opinions on the matters at hand. Older people's complex life histories, social relations, health status, and class positions and aspirations played a role in these debates, which could grow contentious in both private and public spheres. Generational differences were key to interpreting these stories; younger staff at institutions and personal friends often dismissed such stories about Polish history as legacies of the socialist past that were irrelevant to contemporary life, but sometimes valorized the stories of certain individuals they saw as particularly sympathetic or endearing. At risk, then, in such conversations about growing old—about remembering the past, evaluating the present, and hoping for the future—is the dehumanization of older Poles themselves. Whether one could be recognized as a sympathetic, endearing, and lovable elder with wisdom to pass on, or instead is seen as belonging to times that

are long-gone and places that no longer exist, is shaped by a complex intertwining of sociocultural, bodily, political-economic, and historical factors. It is to the elucidation of these factors as a way to understand the connection between the value of persons, times, and places that this dissertation is devoted.

Yet in the midst of such risky situations, some older Poles showed, through stories and other practices, that they could adapt to imperfect bodies, social relations, and places. In other words, some people transformed difficult and potentially dehumanizing circumstances into situations in which they could become more fully human. It is to this set of persons and practices that I pay special attention to in this dissertation, for I contend that attention to such small moments of achievement can lend insight into ameliorating larger structural inequalities that devalue many older Poles in sociocultural, political-economic, and bodily ways.

Throughout my fieldwork, place of residence emerged as a crucial factor that was linked to the thriving or devaluation of older Poles. Many people I met in institutional care were not glad to be there; they would have preferred to be taken care of at home, by kin. Beyond the physical problems that required the care of others, older Poles were dissatisfied with the facts of the places themselves. However, there are key exceptions related to class; for people who had been caregivers their whole lives, being taken care of by others could be a privilege. Still, it is fair to say that institutional care is not where older Poles imagine growing old.¹² Moreover, my research shows that people who live in institutional care were more likely to be seen as examples of the failures of self-care, kin relations, and state services. Older Poles in institutions are not

¹²Indeed, a recent poll shows that, in old age, 64 percent of Poles would like to live in their own home with short-term care from kin, while 15 percent would like to live with children or other relatives. Only five percent preferred living in an institution, and only three percent reported never having considered it. "Polacy wobec własnej starości." http://cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2012/K_094_12.PDF, accessed April 8, 2013.

only dissatisfied with their own experiences, then, but are likely to have these experiences negatively valued by others.

In seemingly stark opposition to medical institutions are educational institutions—Universities of the Third Age (*Uniwersytety Trzeciego Wieku*)—where relatively healthy and mobile older Poles attend lectures, classes, and workshops. In comparing the groups of people I knew who attend these institutions and those who live in institutional care, there are likely to be more people of higher socioeconomic status at the Universities of the Third Age than in institutional care. There are exceptions, of course, and I did meet former bureaucrats and engineers in institutional care, and former manual laborers at educational institutions. Still, it is fair to say that there are differences in class between these institutions, and that these class differences roughly correspond to differences in health. Moreover, my research shows that people who attend educational institutions such as Universities of the Third Age have better access to the current prestigious ideology of *aktywność*, or activity, in which older people are encouraged to fight negative stereotypes of old age. Through recognizing the wisdom they have accumulated throughout their lives and acquiring new skills that align with contemporary ideas of a globalized, capitalist, and democratic Poland, older people in these institutions can improve their standing in Polish society by becoming both a wise, sympathetic elder and a modern, relevant senior. Older Poles who attend educational institutions, then, not only have opportunities to engage in meaningful experiences, but are also likely to have these experiences positively valued by others.

Across this seeming gulf, however, are similarities in practices of storytelling, remembering, learning, and exchange. That is, despite the very real differences among the populations at medical and educational institutions in terms of health, class, and how people are

perceived, I found striking similarities in the ways that people narrate their lives, remember Polish history, learn new skills or cultivate old ones, and share in food and drink. In this dissertation, I will elucidate the similarities in these practices—and the effects of these practices on the possible connections between the value of persons, places, and times.

Before presenting an ethnographic case that illustrates this seeming divide between medical and educational institutions, I will pause to give a sketch of the places where I conducted fieldwork. This overview will be more fully elaborated later in this chapter, but I aim to provide here the ranges of places for which these cases are exemplars. The rehab center where I met pani Joanna and pani Genowefa was one of five key sites where I conducted ethnographic fieldwork for 18 months from September 2008 through April 2010. These institutions can be categorized by their type (medical and educational) and their location (in the cities of Wrocław and Poznań, two cities in western Poland). Because the kinds of institutions they are tended to matter more than in which city they were located, I list them by type here. Besides the rehab center run by the sisters of St. Elizabeth, the other medical institutions included a social welfare home for people with chronic physical illnesses (*Dom Pomocy Społecznej dla osób przewlekle somatycznie chorych*) and a day center for people with Alzheimer's disease (*Środowiskowy Dom Samopomocy dla ludzi z chorobą Alzheimera*). The rehab center and the social welfare home are in Wrocław, and the Alzheimer's center is in Poznań. In each city, the educational institutions were the Universities of the Third Age (*Uniwersytety Trzeciego Wieku*), continuing-education institutions specifically for retirees. It is to these institutions that I now turn.

Roughly a year after the previous conversation with pani Joanna, late on a Tuesday afternoon in November, I found myself on a tram in Poznań on the way to the University of Technology (*Politechnika Poznańska*). I was going to attend the weekly lecture of the University

of the Third Age to introduce myself in the hope of finding people to interview. This was a part of the city that I did not know well, so I was unsure which stop was mine. As we went over the Saint Roch bridge, I prepared to exit the tram. As I moved towards the door, I noticed many older people do the same—I was then sure I was in the right place. I followed the group of mostly older women across the street and up the stairs of a large building, outside of which a group of young students were smoking and chatting. The people from the tram joined a large group of older people filling the hallway outside a ground-floor classroom, which was still full of young students. As the lecture ended, the younger students began leaving the classroom and the older people began to enter, everyone jostling to move forward in the direction they wanted. The hectic movement settled down as people took their seats in the lecture hall, but the noise remained as people chatted with the people around them. The room felt smaller than it was, as almost all seats were full; there were perhaps 100 people. After a staff member from the University of the Third Age asked the crowd to quiet down, she described my project and invited people to talk with me after the lecture to sign up for interview times. I then took my seat in the audience and prepared to listen to the day's lecture, entitled "The rebuilding of the Bishop Jordan bridge" ("*Odbudowa mostu biskupa Jordana*"), given by an emeritus professor of engineering at the *politechnika*. For an hour, the professor described the history of this pedestrian bridge over the Cybina River, a tributary of the Warta River, which is the main river in Poznań and the third-largest in the country. (The Warta itself is a branch of the Oder [*Odra*], which runs through Wrocław.) The bridge connects the oldest district of Poznań, Ostrów Tumski, where the cathedral lies, with the eastern district of the city. The cathedral is one of the oldest churches in Poland, dating to the time of Mieszko I in the 10th century. Some sort of bridge had been in this

location since the middle ages; since the 19th century, the bridge has been built, destroyed, and rebuilt several times, in conjunction with the wars that occurred during these years.

As the professor described these successive destructions and reconstructions of these bridges, showing pictures of old maps, design plans, and more recent construction images, people in the audience listened attentively, if not quietly. As I noticed during many such group gatherings at the University of the Third Age in Wrocław, older Polish people do not sit and listen quietly together, instead keeping a sort of running commentary with their friends or whomever happened to be sitting next to them. This proved true at this lecture, as the woman next to me leaned over to share information she found pertinent, saying out loud the name of a bishop whose name the professor did not remember, commenting on the beauty of maps of Poznań from the 18th century and the relative ugliness of the contemporary Neoclassical cathedral compared to its 14th- and 15th-century Gothic style, and, upon learning that I had also lived in Wrocław, the dirtiness of that city compared to Poznań.

This lecture was of a similar type to those I heard at the University of the Third Age in Wrocław: many retirees crowded into a lecture hall to listen to a distinguished professor give a lecture on a topic of general interest, or at least presumed general interest. The topics could be relatively academic, with seemingly little connection to issues of aging per se, or they could be explicitly about aging, such as one lecture on adaptive strategies for problems in late life from a psychological perspective. Regardless of the topic of these lectures, they were always well-attended, always full of older people engaging with people around them, clamoring to be heard. All the events I attended were held in some university space—the University of Technology in Poznań, the Institute of Pedagogy in Wrocław, the grand University Hall of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań—to which everyone I knew arrived by tram or bus. No one was in a

wheelchair, although some did use canes. People would attend with friends or alone, but they always interacted with people there; after lectures in Wrocław, some people would go downstairs to the student cafeteria and have cups of coffee in little Styrofoam cups and a few cookies, talking with their friends about the lecture or other topics. Other activities at the University of the Third Age, such as English or computer classes, were similarly busy and social. I learned that people saw attending these lectures as part of learning how to age well, as an attempt both to “accept” (“*akceptować*”) old age but also to develop oneself. Women in particular told me they enjoyed time to do something for themselves (“*dla siebie*”) after lifetimes of working and caring for others.

In many ways, these University of the Third Age gatherings were a stark contrast to the intense quiet of some moments at the rehab center or social welfare home, the seeming opposite of pani Joanna and pani Genowefa, in wheelchairs, sitting quietly by the window overlooking the garden. Yet in all these cases, I see older people connecting with others through the telling of stories, be they stories about past and present suffering, that day’s tour of the local brewery, or future travel plans; the learning of skills, be they skills to operate a wheelchair, walk, learn English or use a computer; and the sharing of food and drink, be they Styrofoam cups of coffee in a university cafeteria or afternoon snacks carried in by nurses’ aides. Through remembering, imagining, learning, and commensality, older people across these sites were forming new social relations of friendship and care. These meaningful social relations with non-kin have the power to shape the ways in which older people understand themselves and are understood by others through refashioning the connections between persons, places, and times.

Throughout my fieldwork, the most important place to which older people connected their own lives—and to which their worth as persons was connected by others—was the Polish

nation itself. In order to give a sense of the public and national stakes of such connections between older people and the Polish nation, in the next section I will describe recent moments of tension in which the value of older Poles as persons is linked to the construction of the Polish nation.

“Vote, or else they’ll do it for you!”

Two moments during the last decade demonstrate particularly well this connection between older people and the nation in Poland. In contemporary Poland, talk about older people in both the media and daily life can become evaluative conversations about the state of the Polish nation. These are often deeply gendered discourses (Graff 2009; McClintock 1996; Mosse 1988). In other words, older women become figures of the nation (see Cohen 1998 for related connections between old women and the nation in India). These two historical moments demonstrate the degree to which the figure of the old woman is associated with a nationalist Catholic understanding of the Polish nation.

The first example discusses Polish national elections, which in recent years have shown the extent to which age and generation can index political worldviews. As has been well-documented across eastern Europe (e.g., Verdery 1993), political opposition to the former socialist state sometimes brought about the rise of right-wing nationalism. In postsocialist Poland, denouncing the socialist past is still a common move among far-right politicians, who draw on the historical legacy of partitioned Poland and Soviet rule to champion an independent Polish nation that is ethnically Polish, Catholic, and ardently anti-communist. The strength of this ideology perhaps reached its zenith in Poland in 2005 when the Law and Justice party (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, or PiS), led by the identical twin brothers Lech and Jarosław

Kaczyński, won both presidential and parliamentary elections. PiS came to power on an anti-corruption, anti-communist, and ardently Catholic platform. For PiS, to be a proper Polish citizen is to uphold “traditional” family values, epitomized in the performance of clearly demarcated patriarchal gender roles (Graff 2009). Because PiS did not win a large enough percentage on their own, they had to form a governing coalition; their coalition partners were the League of Polish Families (*Liga Polskich Rodzin*, or LPR) party, an extremist nationalist religious party, and Self-Defense (*Samoobrona*, or SO), the so-called peasants’ party. Support for these parties among older people was extremely high, especially among older women from more rural, eastern regions of Poland. This coalition government ultimately proved unstable, and PiS lost parliamentary elections in 2007 to the more center-right pro-business Civic Platform (*Platforma Obywatelska*, or PO) party.

This political instability manifested in generational terms in the months leading up to the 2007 parliamentary elections. The link between older women and the conservative nationalism of PiS took the figure of the *moherowe berety* (mohair berets). This term refers to the wool caps that many older Polish women wear, and has come to stand for groups of older rural women who support PiS and listen to the conservative nationalist Catholic radio station *Radio Maryja*, the flagship member of a media conglomerate run by the controversial, conservative priest Father Tadeusz Rydzyk.¹³ A widely circulated image from the months before the 2007 parliamentary election depicts a large group of older women wearing these hats attending what is presumably a mass, with the added caption “VOTE, or else they’ll do it for you!”¹⁴ Intended as a get-out-the-vote campaign targeting younger voters, this image demonized elderly women en masse because of their politico-religious views. Another ad urged, “take your grandmother’s identity card!”

¹³ Other media outlets include *Telewizja Trwam* (I Persist Television) and *Nasz Dziennik* (Our Daily; see Chapter 2).

¹⁴ ‘*GŁOSUJ, albo one zrobią to dla Ciebie!*’ “One” is the feminine third-person plural form, indicating that this is specifically directed towards women.

(thereby making it impossible for her to vote).¹⁵ In all these images, it is not merely older people who are seen as threatening here, but specifically older *women*. In other words, in the popular imagination in Poland it is particularly older women who are associated with the conservative nationalist views of PiS and *Radio Maryja*. Significantly, it is when these older women come together as part of a voting bloc that they become dangerous; one individual older woman who listens to *Radio Maryja* is harmless, but hundreds of such women are dangerous.

More recently, the controversies over the placement of a cross following the tragic plane crash in April 2010 that killed 96 people near Smoleńsk, Russia, can also be understood in generational terms. This tragic accident occurred as the president, Lech Kaczyński, and many top governmental officials were traveling to Smoleńsk to mark the 70th anniversary of the massacre of Polish officers in the Katyń forest. It soon became clear that the party of the late president and his supporters understood this as the latest event in Polish national martyrdom. People spoke of a second Katyń and conspiracy theories ran rampant, blaming PO or Russia for the crash (Lech Kaczyński was running for re-election at the time of the crash). The event became cemented as part of the national mythology of suffering when the president and his wife were buried in the crypts of Wawel Cathedral in Kraków, alongside Polish kings. After the crash, public spaces throughout the country were filled with memorials of flowers, candles, pictures, and messages. Outside the presidential palace in Warsaw, girl and boy scouts erected a large wooden cross as a memorial. When the newly elected president (Bronisław Komorowski, from PO) tried to move the cross to a nearby church, people refused to let it be moved. Even though this move had the approval of the Church, people guarded the cross and refused to let it be moved; the deceased president's twin brother, Jarosław Kaczyński, who had just lost the election for president to

¹⁵ See http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/21/world/europe/21poland.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0 for an English-language discussion of this generational conflict and to see a video clip of the ad. The rock band Big Cyc also had a song entitled "*Moherowe berety*"; at the time of writing, there is no working link to the song.

Komorowski, also supported leaving the cross in the current position. These protests sparked a counter-protest by people who wanted the cross moved.¹⁶ Media coverage of the events, which lasted for months, depict those protesting the removal of as older, and those demonstrating for its removal as younger. In August, after a failed attempt at moving the cross to the church, explicit conflict broke out between the two protest groups. Leszek Koczanowicz describes these in generational terms:

One crowd consisted of young people who organized a kind of carnival playing popular songs and performing short scenes that in eyes of the second crowd were on the verge of blasphemy, for instance, making a cross out of beer cans. The second crowd consisted largely of older people praying, listening to priests and speakers, and singing religious songs. [2012:822-823]

Although Koczanowicz (2012:823) finds these groups united in their individualist-based rejection of various authorities, I would like to highlight the generational differences of these groups. Certainly not all who wanted the cross to stay were old, or all who wanted to remove it were young, but given the broader political context of Poland, it seems clear that important national ideological differences have generational fault lines.

In both events, older Poles, and especially older women, are central figures in public discourse about the future of the country. This popular dismissal of older Poles as out-of-touch was echoed in conversations I had with Poles of roughly my own age (in their late twenties or early thirties), who would explain anti-Semitic, racist, or conservative religious comments made by an older person by saying things like, “these older people just need to die off.” “Our society won’t move forward until the older generations are gone.” However, such comments about anonymous older Poles contrast with the same person’s warm feelings towards his or her own

¹⁶ See Porter-Szücs 2011:201-202 for a discussion of these events in terms of the relationship between PiS and the Church. See the 16 December 2011 edition of “This American Life” (<http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/453/transcript>, accessed 25 August 2012) for an English-language popular media description of the controversies after the plane crash in April 2010. See Zubrzycki 2006 for an analysis of a past controversy at Auschwitz about the placement of crosses

grandparents. That is, the animosity towards the anonymous or unknown older person, or the elderly en masse, contrasts with the warmth that people feel for specific older people that they know. In these conversations with Poles of my own age, exactly which part of the past made older people problematic for the national future was not always clear. It was often their association with the nationalist far-right and its exclusionary policies and visions, as described above, but sometimes it was the very fact of their having come of age and worked during the socialist era, leading them to have a socialist-era *mentalność*, or mentality. Regardless, it was always their association with the past that made their future inclusion suspect. This link between older people and the socialist past, and younger people and the capitalist, democratic, and globalized present and future, is one that will recur throughout this dissertation.

That age should be so caught up with politics in Poland is perhaps not surprising, given the large-scale political-economic and sociocultural transformations that have occurred during the lifetimes of the oldest generations. Indeed, two of my research participants were born before World War I; one of these women was married to a man 25 years her senior, meaning that he was born in the late 19th century. This is a vast span of history to experience oneself or through one's spouse. But even my research participants in their sixties had lived through the post-war years, all of state socialism, the postsocialist transformation, and more recent EU membership (see Caldwell 2007 for a related discussion of age in Russia). These are all transformations that have had profound effect on people's daily lives and ways of imagining themselves (Berdahl et al. 2000; Mandel and Humphrey 2002; Verdery 1996). Given that age often becomes an important concern to society during periods of social change (Cole and Durham 2007; Edmunds and Turner 2002), it makes sense that these generational differences are particularly prominent in contemporary Poland and eastern Europe. But what exactly is at stake in discussing aging and

generational transformation in Poland? In a place where collective memory is constantly debated, and where the keepers of that memory—the oldest generations—are increasing in number but decreasing in social importance, how do people actually experience and imagine old age? How do experiences of aging intersect with personal and national memories of the past and visions for the future? As demographic and state fiscal concerns grow, and political life becomes increasingly stratified by age, how do older Poles imagine their place in society? What constitutes—or threatens—a good old age, and where does responsibility for care lie?

Defining moral personhood

Thus far in the dissertation I have largely resisted common anthropological analytic categories, instead trying to describe the phenomena with which this project is concerned in terms that feel closer to the experiences and interactions that I witnessed during fieldwork. However, in order to attempt to answer the above questions, throughout the dissertation I will draw on comparative literature, thus making the use of analytic categories essential. Here I introduce two key terms that I will use throughout the dissertation to refer to the complexity of the phenomena I have just presented. To analyze the variations in how older people understand themselves and can be understood by others, I will use the term *personhood*. I intend for the category of personhood to encompass fundamental anthropological ideas about the person—namely, that personhood is not given but is always created through social relations that occur within meaningful cultural frameworks (see Mauss 1985[1938] for a classic exposition of this concept; see Kaufman and Morgan 2005:320-327 for a more recent insightful overview of ethnographies of the social production and destruction of persons).

To highlight the variations in how ideas of value, worth, and the good are bound up in experiences and understandings of personhood, I use the term *moral* to modify *personhood*. The preceding discussions have shown how personhood in old age in Poland encompasses people's understandings of how to live a good life at all stages, how this ideal matches up with their own experiences and that of their kin, and how such ideals and experiences are inextricable from the sociocultural and political-economic contexts in which they live. In using the term *moral*, then, I am trying to emphasize the ways that personhood is bound up with social relations, political economies, and cosmologies. In this use of *moral*, I am influenced by key strands of anthropological writing that view morality as something that, like personhood, is not given but rather created according to indigenous concepts and practices, and encompasses worlds both lived and imagined. Like authors in the edited volume *The Anthropology of Moralities* (Heintz 2009), who follow the work of T. O. Beidelman (1993[1986]), I understand morality to emerge through a complex and fraught set of social relations. Beidelman characterizes the relationship between sociality and morality thus:

Social life is both rewarding and constricting, our benefits secured at the price of accepting, even embracing limitations and some pain and frustration. These rewards and punishments are epitomized by choices, and in our concomitant expectations that others will make similar choices. These choices of action, in turn, derive from others, from judgments about what the world is and should be. Our morality, then, is embedded in a cosmology as well as in our emotions, and both inform and impel our judgments. This is also true of our awareness and expectations of both ourselves and others. To interact with others we must imagine what their own needs and views may be, often working through a process combining projection and introspection. [1993(1986):2]

The inherent complexity that Beidelman sees in social relations means that moral actions and judgments are inescapable for in social life. The obligations, duties, rewards, and pleasures of social relations are not neatly isolated, but rather inhere in the relations themselves. By framing morality as within cosmologies and as related to emotions, Beidelman's concept spans scales both broad and intimate. I aim to combine this concern for the complexity of social interactions with the perspectives of authors in the edited volume *The Ethnography of Moralities* (Howell

1997), who view moralities as inextricable from categories and hierarchies of personhood, and therefore as related to the production of inequality and difference. The study of moralities thus emerges as a way to integrate people's sense of themselves, others' evaluations of them, and historical political-economic structures that make kinds of personhood available to some and not others.

I intend for the use of *moral personhood*, then, to allow for an investigation of exactly the sorts of imaginative, political-economic, and historical questions that ethnographic investigations of old age in contemporary Poland raise. Studying older Poles' moral personhood thus has ramifications for understanding how the wars and dramatic sociocultural and political-economic transformations of the last centuries have shaped both individual lives and generational expectations of the life course. This dissertation aims to investigate these issues through ethnographic study of the social interactions through which older Poles link themselves to particular times and places, and were linked by others to these times and places. I see these connections of persons to times and places as moral acts that shape the personhood of older Poles. Such relations between age, temporality, and evaluations of past and future can also be seen as moral discourses that are tied to the contemporary political-economic transformations in Poland.

In this dissertation, I aim to integrate literature from kinship studies, medical anthropology, and postsocialist studies to inform my analysis of the range of possibilities for moral personhood for older Poles. I aim for this focus on social relations in place and time to mediate tension between structural and phenomenological perspectives, incorporate central perspectives from both, while also working to maintain a historical perspective. Ultimately, I aim for this research to provide a perspective on aging in Poland that is theoretically capacious

enough to allow for ethnographic complexity yet rigorous enough to show patterns of meaning and power. In the next section, I will review key anthropological literature on personhood as a way of drawing out methodological approaches to studying how moral personhood can be created, transformed, or dismantled.

Moral personhood in its social, temporal, and spatial dimensions: exchange and embodiment

The concept of the person has long been central to anthropological thought, and is fundamental to theories that attempt to understand the relationship between individuals and collectives (Durkheim 1995[1912]; Mauss 1985[1938]; van Gennep 1960[1908]). I will consider foundational approaches in the study of the person that emphasize the social processes through which persons are created, transformed, and dismantled, in order to further specify the theoretical underpinnings of the ethnographic data that will follow. In focusing on the social dimensions of personhood, I aim to elucidate the sense of disconnect that I feel between contemporary works that study personhood and social relations and those that study subjectivity. In so doing I hope to work towards a theory of moral personhood that can help to explain how forms of personhood can be bound up with particular places and temporalities. I contend that it is through the study of these spatiotemporal dimensions of an always-social personhood that these relations of power appear. Through ethnographic examples, I suggest that this kind of analysis can contribute to a social theory that encompasses both personhood and power.

In this section, I am heavily influenced by the work of Marcel Mauss, who, in his classic essay (1985[1935]), distinguishes different forms of personhood that vary across space and time. Here, I aim to integrate the perspective from both this essay and his earlier work (1990[1925]) on

the gift to draw out the precise social processes through which persons are variously created, shaped, and destroyed.

In *A Category of the Human Mind: The Notion of Person; The Notion of Self* (1985[1938]) Mauss identifies and analyzes the categories of *personnage* (role, character), *personne* (person), and *moi* (self) that appear in diverse societies across space and time. Mauss's analysis focuses on the comparative and historical nature of the categories that societies use to conceive of individuals. He describes native North American and Australian societies as characterized by having a stock set of *personnages* (roles, characters) that individuals inhabit (Mauss 1985[1938]:4-12). However, as N. J. Allen notes, not all individuals must inhabit these stock roles, meaning that there can exist individuals or even classes of individuals who do not inhabit these roles, thus "impl[y]ing the possibility of gradations of personhood" (1985:33). Moreover, within the *personnages* there are also distinctions between characters and roles. Thus, these "gradations" suggest a heterogeneity, a hierarchy of kinds of personhood. Mauss argues that Roman and Greek legal systems, Christianity, and 17th- and 18th-century philosophy have shaped contemporary Euro-American understanding of the *personne* (person), which includes legal, moral, and psychological dimensions (1985[1938]:18-22). Specifically, Mauss dates the psychological aspect of the *personne* (person), or the modern Euro-American equation of *personne* (person) to *moi* (self), to the influence of sectarian Protestant movements of the 17th and 18th centuries, in which thinkers were concerned with the relationship between individuals and God (1985[1938]:21). It was their search for communication with the divine, "regarding the individual conscience and the right to communicate directly with God, to be one's own priest, to have an inner God" (1985[1938]:21), that Mauss sees as fundamental to European philosophy and Euro-American ideas about the sacred nature of individual persons, both *personne* and *moi*.

As Michael Jackson and Ivan Karp write, Mauss distinguishes the “ideological definition of personhood in terms of rules, roles and representations,” or *la personne morale*, from an awareness of self (*moi*) (1990:15). Following Meyer Fortes (1973), Jackson and Karp argue that “any enquiry into personhood should give equal value to culturally objectified *and* subjectively apprehended aspects of social life” (1990:15). It is crucial to note here that both kinds of personhood—the “culturally objectified” *personne* and the “subjectively apprehended” *moi*—are inextricably social. This argument finds resonance in the work of Emile Durkheim, who writes, “[a]s part of society, the individual naturally transcends himself, both when he thinks and when he acts” (1995[1912]:16). In other words, no human thought or action occurs outside of society (even if it may appear that way to the thinker or actor). For social scientists, this means that both kinds of personhood can be empirically studied in their social manifestations. Without assuming the a priori existence of society or the social, the empirical question then becomes: what are the social processes through which these two kinds of personhood can be created, transformed, or dismantled? In other words, because personhood itself is fundamentally social in its creation, transformation, and destruction, studying social relations is fundamental to the study of personhood.

It is again in the work of Mauss that a foundational empirical and analytic point of entry into the study of personhood emerges. In his earlier work, *The Gift* (1990[1925]), Mauss argues that practices of exchange are fundamental to the production of social relations and society itself. The three obligations that Mauss identifies as part of all gift systems—to give, to receive, and to reciprocate—are the imperatives and processes through which social life and society are created (1990[1925]:13-14, 39-42). Through his comparative ethnographic and historical analysis of societies across time and space, Mauss shows how the enactment of these obligations to give,

receive, and reciprocate creates social relations and collectivities that are shot through with the prestige, honor, status, class and value of the persons and groups between whom the exchange takes place. That is, Mauss shows how gift exchanges create particular social relations that are inseparable from political economies and belief systems. This integrative perspective, which links specific social actions to entire belief systems, means that studying gifts given, received, and reciprocated can illuminate key dimensions to understanding societies as a whole. And indeed, a massive body of ethnographic work has demonstrated the complexities of social life inherent in gift exchange. When applied to Mauss's later work on personhood, the generativity of gift exchanges can help to explain how both the "culturally objectified" *personne* and the "subjectively apprehended" *moi* are created, transformed, or dismantled. Only certain kinds of people can give certain kinds of gifts; how one receives and interprets a gift depends on one's understanding of the category of person from whom one has received it, and one's understanding of how well that person matches up to the ideals of that category; how one reciprocates a gift depends upon one's evaluation of all of the above. These exchanges transform the social relations between those involved in the exchange, but also constitute the very persons themselves, in both the *personne* and *moi* sense.

In all these exchanges, the possibility that something can go awry is always lurking. A failure to give, receive, or reciprocate can transform or even destroy the relations involved in the exchange. "To refuse to give, to fail to invite, just as to refuse to accept, is tantamount to declaring war; it is to reject the bond of alliance and commonality" (Mauss 1990[1925]:13). At stake in gift exchanges, then, is the very continuity of society itself.

Or gifts could be given at the wrong time, or reciprocated too soon; Mauss identifies the temporal dimension of gifts as key to the enactment of a successful exchange (1990[1925]:35-

36). Bound up in these exchanges, then, are all the complexities and tensions of social life, as identified by Beidelman (1993[1986]) and described above. Indeed, the theory of personhood that emerges from *The Gift* is moral in a way that it is not in *A Category of the Human Mind: The Notion of Person; The Notion of Self*.

From Mauss (1985[1938], 1990[1925]), then, I take an abiding concern for the ways in which both persons and social relations are created through processes of exchange that can be studied empirically. The entanglement of moral personhood and social relations with systems of belief, class hierarchies, and gendered structures of power means that studying such relations are key to understanding the production, maintenance, and transformation in social inequality.

Next, I would like to address key ethnographic works that exemplify the integrated study of the production of persons and social relations. However, I must first pause to elaborate on my understanding of the “culturally objectified” *personne* and the “subjectively apprehended” *moi* described above in order to more fully explain the ways that power relations are part of moral personhood and social relations. I do not see the boundary between subjective and objective kinds of personhood as an impermeable one; rather, after Pierre Bourdieu (1977), I see these in a dialectic relationship. In his explication of this dialectic between objective knowledge and subjective experience, Bourdieu draws on the notion of habitus, “the durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations,” or “history turned into nature,” that mediates between “structuring structures” and the subjective experience of what is possible (1977:78). Because habitus only operates in practice—that is, actions, or “improvisations,” only occur through bodies located in time and space—it is through studying practice that we can see the interaction of objective conditions and subjective experience. To state this dialectic relationship in terms of personhood: Bourdieu’s theory of power incorporates personhood at the level of both *personne*

and *moi*, where *personne* corresponds to the categories of personhood that are continually being reproduced (e.g., the figure or ideal of grandmother, which is based on knowledge of grandmothers past and imaginings of grandmothers future), and *moi* corresponds to the subjective experience of being a person of that category (e.g., what is it like to be a grandmother). Building on the definition of moral personhood from the previous section, it is in this relationship of *moi* to *personne* that I see particular moral components of personhood (Beidelman 1993[1986]:1-10; Carrithers 1985:249; Taylor 1985:263-275). As people experience themselves as living within a particular category, their understandings of it will necessarily reflect on their own understanding of that category. I see this comparison of self to category, and of self to others, as a moral act. The imaginative, historical, and political-economic dimensions of moral personhood discussed above are thus inherent in the relationship between the “culturally objectified” *personne* and the “subjectively apprehended” *moi*. Throughout the dissertation I will be tacking back and forth between this *personne* and *moi*, as indeed did the older Poles with whom I spent my time.

In addition to Mauss’s theory of the gift, Bourdieu’s theory of the habitus suggests an answer to the analytic question posed above: what are the social processes through which these two kinds of personhood can be created, transformed, or dismantled? Considering the inherently social embodied practices in time and space suggests another analytic path into studying personhood ethnographically.

Indeed, concern for embodied practices in time and space has deep roots in the social sciences, as is especially evident in another work of Mauss (1973[1935]) as well as that of Arnold van Gennep (1960[1908]). Bourdieu’s concept of the habitus draws on Mauss’s (1973[1935]) work on the techniques of the body, in which Mauss demonstrates the social nature

of the “habitus,” or learned bodily “habits,” that vary by individual but “especially between societies, educations, proprieties and fashions, prestiges. In them we should see the techniques and work of collective and individual practical reason rather than, in the ordinary way, merely the soul and its repetitive faculties” (1973[1935]:73). In this explanation of bodily learning, Mauss (1973[1935]:76-78) finds categorizations by sex, age, “efficiency” (related to training), and transmission. These categories are fundamental to the experience of learning these techniques; that is, one always learns from the position of the category within which one is already situated. This always-present differentiation recalls Durkheim’s (1995[1915]:9-12) argument that time and space are intrinsically social and differentiated. Concern for differentiation is central to the work of Van Gennep (1960[1908]), who shows how persons and groups are transformed into different categories of beings through rites of passage. These transformations occur through movements through times and places, suggesting that types of personhood can be intrinsically linked to times and places. Central to these works is a concern for the ways that persons and groups grow and change through processes that are fundamentally embodied and occur in particular times and places. All these processes are deeply social, in at least two meanings of the word; they have to do with people’s social interactions as well as with the production and imagination of society.

Much ethnographic work has followed Mauss and van Gennep by demonstrating the social processes through which persons (both the *personne* and *moi*) are created. South Asian and Melanesian ethnography (Daniel 1984; Dumont 1980; Marriott 1976; Strathern 1988) shows that the Euro-American idea of the bounded individual is not universal by demonstrating the local existence of “dividuals,” “fluid selves,” or “relational persons” that are created in the context of particular belief systems, social hierarchies, symbolic and constitutive interaction with

particular substances, and processes of exchange. Here, Mauss's work on the gift has been particularly influential. Taken together, these analytic perspectives demonstrate the power of examining the places and temporalities through which persons are created, and the hierarchies that both create and are created by the making of social persons. In these differing systems of personhood, it is impossible to think of the person as ever outside of social relations; from the perspective of this literature, the Euro-American universalist idea of the individual as internally based (Taylor 1985, 1989) does not hold.

However, even though the idea of the individual is not universal, it still has local relevance in contexts in which it is an ideal. That is, the ideal of the individual exists as a local category within which people understand their own experience. Ethnographic work on aging in North America (Buch 2010; Marcoux 2001; Perry 2012) shows particularly well how this ideal of the individual matters in older persons' experiences of home care or in moving from their homes to institutional care. In all cases, it is through the place of the home and the exchange of things in the home that people strive to maintain their sense of independent personhood. These strivings towards an ideal are fundamentally social and caught up in relations of power; in the case of home care in Chicago, "sustaining older adults' independent personhood depends in part on hiding the intimate, sensorial labor through which [home care] workers sustain older adults' social relations and ways of life" (Buch 2010:24). These ethnographic works (especially Buch 2010) show that the moral personhood of older persons can be transformed or dismantled through practices of exchanges and embodied practices in the home. These practices, which occur in the intimate, morally loaded space of the home, are inextricable from broader political-economic structures and cultural ideals. Comparative research on the person and ethnographic studies of exchange and embodiment among older North Americans in the home all show how

the production of moral personhood is bound up with particular practices, the significance of which is constituted through the times and places in which they occur.

A different strand of contemporary anthropological scholarship also concerns itself with individual experience, morality, and broader cultural and political-economic systems; however, rather than using the concept of personhood as an analytic category, these works frame their studies in terms of subjectivity (e.g., Biehl et al. 2007; Das et al. 2000; Mahmood 2005; Ong 1996). Personhood is certainly part of the analysis, but the category which analysts seek to explain is subjectivity than personhood. For example, João Biehl, Byron Good, and Arthur Kleinman frame their comprehensive edited volume on subjectivity and ethnography thus:

This book is an extended conversation about contemporary forms of human experience and subjectivity. It examines the genealogy of what we consider to be the modern subject, and it inquires into the continuity and diversity of personhood across greatly diverse societies, including the ways in which inner processes are reshaped amid economic and political reforms, violence, and social suffering. [2007:1]

At first, this statement of the project seems to have much in common with the work of Michael Carrithers (1985) in providing a social analysis of the self, or in Jackson and Karp's (1990) terms, the "subjectively apprehended" *moi*. That is, these scholars aim to show how persons come to understand their experience in relation to social, economic, and political formations. I interpret the "continuity and diversity of personhood" across time and space to which Biehl, Good, and Kleinman refer as the "culturally objectified" *personne*, to use Jackson and Karp's terms again.

Despite this concern for *personne*, however, the description of the project then shifts to a focus on how "inner processes" are affected by political economy, violence, and suffering. In this move from "continuity and diversity of personhood" to "inner processes," the *personne* is lost. Thus, the dialectical relationship between *moi* and *personne* that is constitutive of both, in a moral sense, is also lost. In other words, I see this focus on inner processes as limited because it

skips over the social relations through which subjectivity is constituted, and rather connects subjectivity to large-scale political economic and sociocultural forms. This gap is evident in a restatement of Biehl, Good, and Kleinman's project later in the introduction:

This volume offers an interdisciplinary exploration of *the inner lives of subjects*. It also examines the interconnections among changing modes of subjectivation and transformations of social organization, modes of production, knowledge structures, and symbolic forms. The writers in this book treat subjectivity as both an empirical reality and an analytic category: the agonistic and practical activity of engaging identity and fate, patterned and felt in historically contingent settings and mediated by institutional processes and cultural forms. The book explores the ideas that subjectivity constitutes the material and the means of contemporary value systems and that capital accumulation and governance occur through the remaking of culture as well as *the inner transformations of the human subject*. The essays probe the nature and reach of *these interior processes* and new value systems. [2007:5; emphasis added]

Here, the goal of the project has explicitly become to understand the “inner lives of subjects”; the language of personhood has disappeared from this formulation. Subjects’ “inner lives” are social in their relation to “contemporary value systems” and “capital accumulation and governance”; this connection across scales is mediated by “institutional processes and cultural forms.” This is surely true, as the works of theorists as diverse as Michel Foucault (1972, 1995[1977]) and Clifford Geertz (1973) have shown, and much excellent ethnographic work has shown (e.g. Comaroff 1985; Lock and Kaufert 1998). I fully support the authors’ claims (after Geertz 1973; Fischer 2003) as to the importance of culture to subjectivity (Biehl et al. 2007:6-8). But what else might connect “these interior processes” and “new value systems” other than “institutional processes and cultural forms”? As João Biehl and Amy Moran-Thomas ask in their *Annual Review* article on the anthropology of subjectivity, specifically speaking to the transformation of subjectivity through the incorporation of technology, how might:

such complex human stories...speak to (or diverge from) major critical trends in sociocultural studies of health—in particular, influential analytics that explain the subject as fundamentally determined by structural violence, history, biopolitics, and/or the unconscious[?] What can the unique capacities of ethnography add to the task of capturing the active embroilment of reason, life, and ethics as human lives are reshaped and lost? [2009:273-274]

I attempt to answer this question by following Mauss, van Gennep, and Bourdieu in focusing on the sociality that ethnography is so well-poised to address. As Veena Das observes, “life was

recovered not through some grand gestures in the realm of the transcendent but through a descent into the ordinary” (2006:7). The tendency of work on subjectivity to slip towards interior-based perspectives obscures key dimensions of sociality. Thus I aim to shift the object of analysis from subjectivity to moral personhood to illuminate this sociality in more complexity.

In order to make this discussion more concrete and to continue to work towards an understanding of moral personhood that encompasses power, I will now examine one ethnographic case in detail in relation to Foucault’s theory of power. Foucault’s (1984[1977], 1978) theory of power is at once totalizing and individualizing, and results in control that is at once abstract and individual. The rise of disciplinary practices (observation, writing, examination) in institutions (prisons, hospitals) in western Europe in the 17th century created an individual who is not merely distinguished from others, but is marked by “his own aptitudes or abilities” (1984[1977]:202). The individual can be controlled through these minute spatial exercises of knowledge-creating power, and when amassed into groups or “populations,” these individuals can be further managed (1984[1977]:197-204). This power works through the body and is at once personal, social, and political (1978:139-140). As distinct from a notion of power that is rooted in repression or the law, power is not uniform at all levels (1978:84-85), nor is it a simple a dyad between “rulers and ruled” (1978:94). Rather, Foucault’s power is “immanent” in all social relations and always entails resistance (1978:94-95).

In part because this theory of power originates in Western history, it does not necessarily apply comparatively (Feeley-Harnik 1991b:135), as Lawrence Cohen (1998) finds in his research on aging in India. In an old age home in Calcutta, Cohen observes that the institution’s model of total self-governance and independence seems to be an exemplar of “the productive power of the welfare regime of Foucauldian modernity” (1998:116-117). However, Cohen argues that to

see this institution as an example of Foucault's theory of power is to omit "the sense of absence that permeates both the narratives of inmates and the interpretations of outsiders" (1998:117).¹⁷ For both the "inmates" and those outside the institution, this sense of absence stems from exactly this independence of institutional life, which they see as a sign of failed *sevā*, or the ideal of being taken care of and respected by kin in old age (Cohen 1998:113-120). The moral obligations of *sevā* are especially strong between children and their parents; in popular discourse, these obligations (and their failures) can be seen in the figure of the old mother. The moral obligations of *sevā* are less clear with more distant kin relations; in popular discourse, the old childless aunt is portrayed as needy, but it is not clear whose moral obligation it is to meet these needs. These cultural figures of the old mother and aunt map on to the ways that varying groups conceive of the needs of the women in the old age home in Calcutta. Outsiders who see institutionalization as instances of failed *sevā* imagine the women as mothers, thus indicting specific parent-child relations, while those who created the institution imagine the women as aunts, thus taking a more ambiguous position about the place of older people within the family (Cohen 1998:117-119). The complexity of the situation that Cohen analyzes, both the lived experience of the residents and outsiders and the moral ideals of kinship against which people compare themselves, does not become evident in an analysis of power in Foucault's sense. The entanglement of emotions, ideals of kinship, and the meanings growing old in certain kinds of places do not emerge through an analysis of power and resistance, no matter how flexible. Cohen performs this analysis by connecting the dissatisfaction of the residents to ideals of kin relations and the figures of the old mother and aunt. In Biehl, Good, and Kleinman's terms, one might say that he connects "inner lives" to "value systems." Yet I would argue that the residents'

¹⁷ Cohen notes that this old age home also seemed to meet gerontological ideals of independence in old age, but he finds this explanation insufficient too (1998:116-117).

dissatisfaction cannot be satisfactorily classified as “inner lives,” since this interior dissatisfaction only exists through a set of specific kin relations and cultural ideals about what kin relations should be. Moreover, it is not clear to me that the term “subjectivity” captures residents’ experiences. Do they understand themselves to be subjects—or does “person” better capture local categories?

With this analysis, I have tried to show that the analytic category of personhood has greater possibilities for illuminating the complex entanglements of persons, places, and times than does the category of subjectivity. By understanding personhood as socially produced through practices of exchange and embodiment, analysis can thus connect interactions at the level of experience, kin relations, communities, nation-states, transnational formations, and discursive representations of the same. I do not intend to stake out a position that is overly structural to the detriment of individual action, or to frame this position as social to the extent of cultural. Rather, I aim to elucidate the theoretical underpinnings of this dissertation by showing that understanding practices of exchange and the spatiotemporal and embodied dimensions of social life are at the heart of understanding the social creation, transformation, and destruction of moral persons. In other words, both persons and relations are formed through practices of exchange and through embodied spatiotemporal practices. However, the spatial and temporal dimensions of these practices still need further elaboration. It is in the field of kinship studies that I see the most helpful investigations of the relationship between persons, places, and temporalities.

Transforming relations through memory, place, and care

Foundational to the discipline of anthropology, the study of kinship concerns how people come to be related to one another—and how these relations can dissolve. My approach to studying kinship follows recent scholarship (Carsten 2000b, 2004; Franklin and McKinnon 2001b; also Collier and Yanagisako 1987) that critiques earlier research (Evans-Pritchard 1940; Lévi-Strauss 1969[1949]; Malinowski 1984[1922]; Schneider 1980, 1984) for being caught up in synchronic worldviews and for failing to question the categories of the biological (or the natural) and the social (or cultural), and thus reproducing gender and class inequality. Rather, I follow Janet Carsten’s processual approach to studying kinship by focusing on “everyday intimacies” (2004:56) that create, sustain, or dismantle relatedness. This processual approach seeks to understand what constitutes relatedness in particular contexts, rather than assuming relations as given (Carsten 2000b:4). These everyday embodied acts through which relatedness is constituted are inextricably linked to memories of past relations and imaginings of future ones (Carsten 2007b; Lambek 2007). These temporal dimensions of kin relations are grounded in particular places, thus resonating with the body of literature on houses and kinship.

Carsten (2004:31-56) describes several key strands of anthropological research on houses and kinship. Claude Lévi-Strauss’s (1982[1975]) analysis of European noble houses shows how they “do not cease to exist when their members die, but are enduring social institutions perpetuated by both descent and marriage” (Carsten 2004:42), thus overcoming debates that opposed descent to alliance (Evans-Pritchard 1940; Malinowski 1984[1922]; Lévi-Strauss 1969[1949]) and furthering an evolutionary understanding of societies’ dominant forms of relations (Carsten 2004:42). Pierre Bourdieu’s (1977) analysis of the Kabyle house shows how the physical structures of the house correspond to social hierarchies, symbolic meaning, and embodied practices, thus showing how broader social distinctions mirror those of the home.

Rather than these evolutionary or structural concerns, in this dissertation I instead draw upon the work of Carsten (1997), who shows how practices that occur in houses, and especially hearths, can create both persons and relations, and Joëlle Bahloul (1996, 1999), who shows how houses contain memories of specific relations and entire worlds. Especially significant for the ethnographic context of this dissertation, Bahloul's analysis concerns the relations and memories of people who have been displaced, thus having relevance both for older Poles who live in institutional care and for older Poles in general who remember homes, villages, and towns lost in the upheaval and redrawn borders that characterize Polish history. As French Jews remember their former family home in Algeria, they tell stories of their lost house in a spatial idiom; crucially, these memories of the house reveal the gendered, ethnic, religious, and political tensions of the worlds within the homes are situated (Bahloul 1996: 53-61, 81-101). In the analyses of both Bahloul and Carsten, the construction of persons and social relations is inextricable from the processes of commensality and remembering that occur in and through homes. And as Bahloul's work shows so well, everyday intimate acts of relatedness are deeply related to political life, thus suggesting the study of relatedness as lens through which to study political economic transformations at an intimate scale.

This intertwining of persons, places, and times is also expressed in Carsten's (2007a) edited volume *Ghosts of Memory*. As Carsten writes in the introduction, the essays in that volume show "how, cumulatively and over time, small everyday processes of relatedness – such as narrating stories of past kinship, tracing family histories, constituting small ceremonies of commemoration, making medical histories, creating or storing material objects – have a larger-scale political important" (2007b:4). In this dissertation, practices of narration, remembering,

learning, and commensality emerge as the key practices through which moral personhood and social relations are created and transformed for older people in Poland.

Building on the perspective of Bahloul (1996, 1999) and Carsten (2007a, 2007b), which take places and pasts as central to relatedness, I seek to understand exactly which places and pasts are central to the relations that create personhood for older Poles. How far does personhood extend, both temporally and spatially? Which patterns of gender or class exist in these spatiotemporally delimited worlds? Which pasts and futures, which kinds of places matter, and for whom? I see the study of relatedness as central to understanding how moral personhood is created, transformed, and dismantled. In order to make this discussion more concrete, I will present two ethnographic cases from the ethnographic literature on aging as a way to show how moral personhood can be better understood through studying relatedness—and its ghosts.

For the rural Bengalis with whom Sarah Lamb (2000) worked, it is exactly the temporality of kin relations that poses a problem in late life. There, the local idiom of relatedness is called *maya*, which Lamb defines as the “web of attachments, affections, jealousies, and love that in Bengalis’ eyes make up social relations” (2000:28). As Bengalis age, they aim to sever these ties of *maya* as part of preparing for death, but it is exactly in old age that the ties of *maya* are the strongest (Lamb 2000:115, 118-121). As a kind of relatedness that is intensely bodily and emotional and extends to non-humans like trees and houses, *maya* seems inviting to those with Euro-American ideals of kinship as warm and positive (cf. Edwards and Strathern 2001); however, for Bengalis, the ties of *maya* are deeply fraught and involve much pain and suffering when those related by *maya* are separated by migration, uprooting, or death (Lamb 2000:116-117). Some older Bengalis thus try to “loosen” these ties through modifying daily practices that sustain *maya*, such as eating at different times than other family members and spending more

time outside the house (Lamb 2000:124-128). It is partially the fear of becoming a ghost (*bhūt*) after death that motivates people to dismantle these ties of maya. Such ghosts remain in the houses where they lived, bothering the living; the living can also contribute to the ghosts' persistence by having too-intense feelings of mourning (Lamb 2000:121-124). Although Lamb does not analyze this in terms of memory, one could do so equally well, for to mourn is to remember. Here, excessive remembering can lead to problematic kin ties in both this life and after.

The political import of such intertwinings of memory and relatedness are evident in the work of Julie Livingston (2003), who shows how shifting meanings of local bio-social categories of old age (*botsofe*) in Botswana are caught up with epidemiological transitions, pension policies, and caregiving. Improvements in public health have led to both increasing numbers of older persons and increasing rates of chronic illness among older persons. Through illness, people are thus entering the category of *botsofe* earlier than before (Livingston 2003:208-214). A new pension program in which people are eligible to receive a small pension at age 65 has added a chronological age marker to old age where it did not previously exist, thus making explicit industrial-labor visions of the life course (Livingston 2003:214). Intergenerational conflicts over care emerge as people struggle over labels for bodily frailty: *bolwetsi* (illness) and *bogole* (disability) impose care obligations on parents, while *botsofe* (old age) imposes care obligations on children. In the context of the AIDS epidemic in Botswana where families are already providing a great deal of medical care, some older women attempt to label their adult children's condition as *botsofe* (old age), while some daughters attempt to label their mothers' condition as *bolwetsi* (illness) in attempts to avoid additional obligations of care (Livingston 2003:219-220). All these negotiations occur in the context of nostalgic conversations about *botsofe* in the past

(Livingston 2003:225). For older people in Botswana, ties of relatedness are inextricable from understandings of past relations and epidemiological and political-economic changes, which all merge in intergenerational relations of care.

Livingston's emphasis on the study of care as part of historical political-economic relations resonates with Carsten's (2007b) analysis of kinship as part of broader political frameworks. Michael Lambek (2007) makes this link between care and kinship explicit by arguing that practices and ideologies of kinship are always caught up in practices and ideologies of care and memory. This broad understanding of care that Lambek describes—"to care for and to care about; but also to take care of someone; to take care, as in to be careful; to have cares, as to be full of care; and to be vulnerable, to care what others say and do" (2007:220)—encompasses many of the varying strands in more classical and recent works on care spanning both medical and non-medical worlds (e.g., Block 2012; Borneman 1997; Buch 2010; Heinemann 2011; Hochschild 1983; Klaitz 2010; Kleinman 2009; Mol 2008; Taylor 2008; Tronto 1993). By understanding care, memory, and kinship together, Lambek suggests that we should analyze practices of a care as a way of understanding the nature and complexity of kinship. In a more explicit statement of the link between care, memory, and kinship, Lambek writes, "Caring is the form of remembering generally characteristic of the ethos and practice of kinship everywhere" (2007:220). Implicit in this understanding of care is an understanding of moral personhood.

In Lambek's earlier work (1996), he shows that "remembering can be seen as a moral practice and that it occurs in the space, or movement, between the stream of embodied experience and objectified narrative" (2007:220). Here, the morality of remembering is linked to both subjective experience and experience as objectified in narrative in a way that recalls earlier

discussions of *moi* and *personne*. It is this integrative, holistic, and processual approach to kinship, this understanding of the formation of moral personhood and social relations through emplaced practices of care and memory, that I employ throughout this dissertation (Feeley-Harnik 2012). In order to suggest what this framework might contribute to the study of old age in Poland, I will now consider emplaced relations of kin, care, and memory in the sociocultural and political-economic context of eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

Relatedness, memory, place, and care in postsocialism

Memory, remembering, and nostalgia have been crucial ongoing topics of study for anthropologists of eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, forming the basis of at least two edited volumes (Pine et al. 2004; Watson 1994) and appearing as a key topic of study in ethnographic work (e.g., Ballinger 2003; de Soto 2000; Lemon 2000; Paxson 2005; Platz 2000; Rausing 2004; Skultans 1998; Ten Dyke 2000; Uehling 2004). Much of the fieldwork for these studies was conducted in the 1990s (that is, in the immediate postsocialist years), suggesting both a broad ethnographic relevance for the topic at that time (and perhaps reflecting structures of knowledge production). The topics of kinship and care have generally received less attention, although recent works suggest that this is changing (e.g., Caldwell 2004, 2007; Petryna 2002; Phillips 2011; Read and Thelen 2007; Rivkin-Fish 2005, 2011; Stillo 2012; Zalewska 2009). Although the study of kinship and care can be closely related to the study of personhood (see above), in postsocialist eastern Europe, the study of personhood is more closely connected to the study of labor than to the study of kinship.

The topic of personhood has been central to regional work concerned with the effect of labor in shaping personhood. Ethnographic research in Hungary shows that individual

personhood existed during socialism due to pre-socialist capitalist labor practices (Lampland 1995), while research in postsocialist Poland demonstrates how people use relational personhood to resist the individualization of neoliberal labor management (Dunn 2004). Drawing on work from South Asian and Melanesian contexts discussed above (e.g., Daniel 1984; Dumont 1980; Marriott 1976; Strathern 1988), this research relies on a binary framework that juxtaposes individual to relational models of personhood. Although these categories are shown not to easily map on to capitalist and socialist world orders (cf. Kharkhordin 1999), the categories themselves remain analytically pure. Because the analytic goal of understanding personhood is secondary to understanding labor relations, the category of personhood remains part of the binary framework that this research aims to complicate. Moreover, because personhood is understood as shaped primarily by labor relations, other domains of life receive less analytical attention. This dissertation thus contributes to the study of personhood in eastern Europe by shifting the focus to people who are largely outside the labor force.

The intersection of kinship, memory, place, and care thus suggests a fruitful field of research for ethnographies of eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. As part of discussions about post-socialism, research on kinship, care, and memory contributes to shifting frameworks of study for eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union (cf. Buchowski 2012; Chari and Verdery 2009). I will consider two ethnographic studies from Russia and briefly consider several ethnographic studies of eastern Europe that point towards useful directions for regional analyses of kinship, care, and memory.

Although the older Russians with whom Melissa Caldwell (2004, 2007) worked have symbolic value for the Russian nation in their embodiment of past struggles and successes, their material and social conditions do not reflect this status. Shifting residence patterns in which

younger generations seek to live apart from older kin, inaccessible public spaces (cf. Phillips 2011) and the movement of urban commerce from center to periphery, and declining state support mean that many older Russians are socially marginalized and rely on charitable organizations for support (Caldwell 2004, 2007:71-74). Some people experience receiving such support in terms of failed state obligations of care and failed social relations (Caldwell 2004:191-193), thus highlighting the inextricability of memory and emotion from practices of care. Through these charitable organizations, older Russians enter into relations of care with strangers rather than kin; often, these strangers are non-Russians from religious charities. As older Russians and foreign aid workers form intimate bonds through practices of care (Caldwell 2004: 184-188; 2007:74-76), possibilities for compassion shift too: “what is most important is the dislocation of sentiment and affection, which are no longer seen as purely Russian qualities” (Caldwell 2007:76). That is, these changing practices of care, which are themselves intimately tied to the political-economic and sociocultural context of contemporary postsocialist Russia, are creating new possibilities for compassion and social relations. Although Caldwell does not use the framework of relatedness to explain this phenomenon, her analysis shows how practices of relatedness—especially gift-giving—are connected to transformations of political economy and affect.

Memory permeates all aspects of life for the middle-aged and elderly villagers of Solovyovo in northern Russia with whom Margaret Paxson (2005) lived and worked. Drawing on key works in collective, social, embodied, and emplaced memory (Bachelard 1994[1958]; Connerton 1989; Fentress and Wickham 1992; Halbwachs 1992[1925]), Paxson uses an extended metaphor of “memory’s landscape” to draw out the complex and shifting ways that social memory is reproduced and experienced. Her beautifully lyrical and ethnographically rich

portrayal of villagers and the village shows that memory is inextricable from morality, the past, and always connected to places and social relations. However, her analysis defies any easy identification of morality with any particular place and time; these are always shifting depending on the context and company within which people remember. Her complex analysis relates to Lambek's (1996) formulation of memory in its social context:

Memory in this model is less a completely private yet potentially objective phenomenon stores *within* the mind and capable of remaining there than it is activated implicitly or explicitly *between* people, a confirmation of the sense of continuity (caring) and discontinuity (mourning) that each person experiences in their relations with others, and likely acknowledged by additional parties. [1996:239]

Through grounding this continuity and caring, this discontinuity and mourning, within particular social relations and their connections to particular times and places, Paxson's holistic analysis shows how persons, relations, memories, and places are inextricable from each other.

Resonating with the previous discussion of Bahloul (1996, 1999), other regional studies of memory and place consider how memory is produced in and through houses and framed in terms of historical political transformations. That is, it is in houses and homes that people engage in particular practices of memory that create or sever their connections to pre-socialism, socialism, or postsocialism. Indeed, much work shows that during socialism the domestic sphere was experienced as a haven from the intrusion of the state (e.g., Dunn 2004; Gal and Kligman 2000; Pine 2002; Verdery 1996). Krisztina Féhervary (2002:370-371) argues that Hungarians renovate and refurbish their homes partially in order to reassert their continuity with a pre-socialist bourgeois Hungarian past. The home (or desired home) is a site of connection to the socialist past in the work of Liviu Chelcea (2003), who shows how Romanian ex-property-owners try to reclaim apartments lost during socialism by demonstrating connections to ancestors. Since people can find previously unknown ancestors through this process,

postsocialist property restitution can become bound up with transformations in memory and kinship (Chelcea 2003:733-735). Frances Pine (1996:449, 456) argues that Górale, in rural Poland, continue to feel a strong connection to the house and land, regardless of political transformations, although the function and meaning of the household economy shifts during and after socialism. For old Romanians (but not younger generations), the act of cleaning a home with new products and methods can represent a break with the socialist past, or the act of cleaning can itself be meaningful and create “social or personal renovation” (Drazin 2002:121-122).

In her analysis of the persistence of the noble class in contemporary Poland, Longina Jakubowska (2012) shows the narrative and material ways through which the gentry have maintained, and continue to maintain, their identity as nobles. A key dimension of the noble habitus, she finds, is the interior of homes:

The gentry surround themselves with objects from the past, a bricolage of anything and everything that is reminiscent of life in a manor. The manor provides them with a rich symbolic repertoire, a powerful idiom, through which they continue to articulate themselves and their world. [Jakubowska 2012:14]

Jakubowska finds that contemporary Polish gentry try to bring their lost and much-mourned noble past into the present through the objects in their homes. Through living in a house filled with old things, the nobility themselves become linked to the past, and to past places. This finding about the practices of Polish nobility has crucial implications for this study, inasmuch as many of the practices that Jakubowska describes actually bridge social classes. In other words, I observed similar domestic practices and narrative styles across social class, encompassing both those who felt they had some claim to the noble past, and others who came from peasant backgrounds—or indeed were working as farmers themselves. These connections to the Polish noble past, in other words, reach across social class among older people in contemporary Poland.

While all these examples demonstrate the importance of political transformations to practices of memory, they do so in such richly varying ways to suggest that pre/post/socialism need not be the dominant framework for understanding home, memory, and social relations in eastern Europe. In order that these homes become analytically dynamic places where relations of kinship, care, memory, and politics can be more fully explored, in this dissertation I aim to draw out the ways in which kinds of moral personhood are created in and through the very places of the institutions themselves.

The political economy of moral personhood: social suffering and care

Thus far in this introduction, I have shown how the creation, transformation, and dismantling of moral persons is related to the processual creation and destruction of social relations through practices of remembering, imagining, learning, and commensality. Through these practices, moral personhood becomes linked with certain places and times. However, I have not yet fully engaged with the political economic dimensions of these formations. In order to elucidate how personhood relates to political economy, I will draw upon medical anthropological literature on social suffering and structural violence.

The topics of social suffering and structural violence have been crucial to medical anthropological research for the last two decades. Transformative research on these topics has shown how historical structural inequalities in global political economy have devastating impacts on the health, personhood, and subjectivities of particular groups and individuals (e.g., Biehl 2005; Bourgois 2003; Das et al. 2001; Farmer 2004; Kleinman et al. 1997; Scheper-Hughes

1992).¹⁸ Broadly speaking, there is a strong moral aspect to research on suffering and violence, whether implicit or explicit, that compels the reader/ethnographer/ anthropologist not to ignore or explain away human suffering.¹⁹ This research tends to tack back and forth between structural forces and individual experiences, echoing longstanding debates in the social sciences about the relationship between structure and agency, and showing how inequality in global political economy becomes manifest in embodied inequality for particular groups and individuals. Some strands of this research have shown in excruciating detail what everyday life is like in dire conditions through phenomenological attention to experience itself (e.g., Desjarlais 1997).

Yet for all this focus on subjectivity, intersubjectivity, and experience, there is a striking lack of attention to the processes of relatedness through which persons are sustained. In other words, I would like to reframe our understandings of “social” in “social suffering” by focusing on the formation, maintenance, and dissolution of relations for people who live in conditions of abandonment. Perhaps it is, in fact, the very success of perspectives that place structural violence and social suffering at the center of analysis that can account for this absence of attention to social relations. That is, the structural perspective that powerfully shows how and why dramatic inequality has been (re)produced can lead the anthropologist to see *only* this inequality. I contend that this is related to earlier discussions of personhood and subjectivity, in which the social processes that create, sustain, or dismantle personhood disappear in the face of concerns about inner processes, on the one hand, and political economy, on the other.

¹⁸ The literature on social suffering, structural violence, life on the margins, and abandonment is vast, and citing all, or even most, works on this topic would be impossible. Indeed, the oeuvre of some of these individual scholars is impressively large. Rather, I have tried to include here perspectives that I see as foundational or particularly influential in the field of medical anthropology.

¹⁹ This moral dimension is underpinned by a range of theoretical perspectives, including various strands of theology, philosophy, and psychoanalysis, and is distinct from my use of the word *moral* as explained earlier.

In order to analyze the strands of this research that I see as contributing to this omission of how people maintain personhood and relatedness in the face of social suffering, I will focus here on the motivating research questions of several key perspectives, including ethnographic cases as appropriate, as a way of moving towards integrating the spatiotemporal processes of relatedness through which personhood can be maintained or transformed. It is not my intention here to provide a comprehensive critique of anthropological literature on social suffering, structural violence, life on the margins, or abandonment, but rather to suggest ways of integrating this literature with perspectives from kinship studies.

One aim of research on structural violence is to break down disciplinary boundaries that delineate certain kinds of questions for certain kinds of researchers or practitioners, thus preventing anyone from having a systemic and holistic view of the social world. Paul Farmer (2003:11-13, n.25) describes how development and human rights workers were blindsided by genocide in Rwanda, despite seeing some individual factors leading up to it. Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das, and Margaret Lock (1997) write against disciplinary boundaries that separate the interconnected domains of health, political economy, and culture, and against overly individualist perspectives within biomedicine and psychology that locate the cause of suffering within the person who is suffering rather than interpersonal, institutional, and societal structures. Without accounting for the role of “political, economic, and institutional power” (Kleinman et al. 1997:ix), such suffering cannot be fully explained or ameliorated. Yet as Das and Kleinman (2001) argue, reconciliation for such large-scale violence cannot only occur at the level of the nation or state, but rather must include everyday lived experience. Despite their claim that “in the midst of the worst horrors, people continue to live, to survive, and to cope” (Das and Kleinman

2001:1), the thrust of the analysis is still on the connections between individuals and collectives, rather than processes of relatedness.

A particular stance on anthropological cultural relativism also undergirds these theoretical approaches. Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1992) argues that the practices of mothers in northeastern Brazil who allow and even encourage the deaths of their infant children cannot be explained by cultural explanations alone. Arguing against a more relativist analysis that shows the internal logic of another culture to be rational and coherent (e.g., Evans-Pritchard 1937), Scheper-Hughes creates a moral, social historical, and political-economic analysis that better accounts for these complex practices (1992:21-23). These disturbing practices, this “mortal neglect” (Scheper-Hughes 1992:20, 340-399), cannot be attributed to a different Brazilian cultural logic, but rather must be seen as the product of varied, interconnected institutions and histories operating at many scales that are “*geographically broad*” and “*historically deep*” (Farmer 2003:42, emphasis in original). Farmer shows how the privileging of “culture” in human-rights discourse has actually fostered the perpetration of more human-rights abuses in Haiti (2003:13-15). “‘Culture’ does not explain suffering; it may at worst furnish an alibi” (Farmer 2003:49). The task of the anthropologist, then, is to show the connections between these large-scale historical and political-economic forces, and individual lives.

It does not deny the importance of such historical large-scale processes to take seriously smaller-scale social relations in conditions of structural violence. For instance, despite Scheper-Hughes’s focus on the roots, experiences, and consequences of abject social suffering, she is also deeply attentive to the moments of connection that exist. “What draws me back to these people are just those small spaces of convergence, recognition, and empathy that we do share” (Scheper-Hughes 1992:29). Here Scheper-Hughes is explaining her long-term ethnographic and

anthropological engagement in such a “sad contemporary context” (1992:27); the connections she feels with her research participants that cannot “be dissolved into the vapor of absolute cultural difference and radical otherness” (1992:29), along with the conviction that ethnography can be “a tool for human liberation” (1992:28), compel her to return again and again to Bom Jesus de Mata. She documents her closeness and participation in the community as part of a methodological argument that ethnography is an always-personal, never-objective enterprise (1992:23-30). However, I also want to emphasize her recognition of the moments of joy, laughter, and connection that occur among people (including her) in Bom Jesus de Mata. The tragedy of mothers withholding nourishment and support for their children coexists with beliefs that these children live on in other spatiotemporal worlds. “[M]ortal selective neglect *and* intense maternal attachment coexist” (Scheper-Hughes 1992:356). Such complexity is central to the holistic strivings of ethnographic research. It is this holistic principle that partially motivates my attention to moments of connection within contexts of structural violence and abandonment, as well as my conviction that paying close attention to how particular individuals sustain moral personhood in the context of such abandonment might contain possibilities for social change.

For even in seemingly hopeless situations, some people attempt to create lives for themselves that can overcome such abandonment. For example, throughout João Biehl’s ethnography of Vita, a failed institution in Brazil for a group of people made “ex-human” (2005:24) through failures of both state and kinship—the socially dead—he describes people who are trying to form social relations despite their abandonment. Indeed, his ethnographic devotion to Catarina, the woman whose life he chronicles through detective-like investigation, stems from his view of her “as an abandoned person who, against all odds, was claiming experience on her own terms” (Biehl 2005:5). In other words, Catarina resisted abandonment in

the connections she attempted to make with others. In the poetic diary, or “dictionary,” she kept in Vita, Catarina wrote of deeply social experiences: familial, sexual, and religious. Although she was isolated from her kin, she formed connections with staff and volunteers at Vita. And she was not the only one. Lauro, a relatively capable new arrival at Vita, took care of Lucas, a resident of the infirmary, the place for those in the worst condition, the most dehumanized at Vita. Lauro washed, fed, and sat with Lucas. This was a fundamentally disturbing and unequal relationship, since Lucas and others in the infirmary partially functioned as warnings to those who were better off. Lauro felt better about himself because he saw Lucas in worse shape than himself; Lucas existed only to sustain others (Biehl 2005:64-65). Yet despite this hierarchy of personhood, Biehl notes that “there was a warmth to their relationship” (2005:65). It is key to note here that Lauro maintains his personhood through the giving of care to another. Indeed, this ability to give was crucial for Catarina as well, who said, “Here in Vita, at least I can transmit something to people, that they are somebody. I try to treat everybody with simplicity” (Biehl 2005:95). Although it is not clear exactly *what* she saw herself as transmitting—perhaps herself, through her dictionary?—it is notable that it is this capability to pass something on, to give as well as receive, that makes Vita meaningful for her.

People at Vita also maintain their personhood through placing themselves in known spatiotemporal worlds. Iraci notes that he and others at Vita mark time for each other: “We tell each other which day of the month and which year it is, the year that passed and that year will be. One reminds the other” (Biehl 2005:76). Catarina’s diary is filled with references to places and times: hospitals where she was taken, homes where she lived, distant lands of her ancestry; her past life, her children’s lives, her imagined future with her lover (Biehl 2005:321-350). When Biehl met Catarina, he found her riding a stationary bike; this motion, directionless

though it was, set her apart at Vita (2005:1-4). Indeed, in trying to label her illness while speaking with Biehl, she said “Mine is an illness of time... Time has no cure” (Biehl 2005:107). The web of social relations that led Catarina to Vita also left her lost, searching, in time and space.

It is the great tragedy of Catarina’s story that, despite the help she received from Biehl and others in reconstructing her medical and familial past, thus leading to a correct diagnosis of the illness that led to her physical debility, she could not receive the treatment and care she needed to save her life. If she could not live, then what chance is there for others whose stories do not circulate to those with the knowledge and connections to help? Yet there is still something to be learned from the ways that Catarina—and others at Vita—were attempting to form social ties. Such analysis, although it may not address the overall structural causes of such forms of violence, can help to explain how people who experience such violence can also have experiences other than violence. Although Vita may be “beyond kinship” (Biehl 2005:24) in that previous ties have been severed or eroded, residents’ efforts in creating new relations, keeping time, and making places—however imperfectly they may do so—suggest that, from their perspective, kinship is not impossible.

In fact, as Cheryl Mattingly (2010) shows, the maintenance of hope can be inextricable from chronic suffering. For people with chronic disability, the production of hope in particular clinical encounters contained possibilities for futures that extended past those moments. “[T]urning pages of a magazine with a mouth-stick when one could no longer use one’s hands... suggested that there might be some way to create a worthy life even with a body diminished by disability” (Mattingly 2010:19). In her ethnography of African American families with seriously and chronically ill children in Los Angeles, Mattingly shows through narrative-based analysis

how people foster hope in situations that seem hopeless. For instance, moments of joking between a oncologist and a child, Belinda, with a brain tumor create sentiments of attachment and connection that last beyond the clinical encounter, sustaining the mother's, Andrena's, sense that she is facilitating good care for her child, despite racial and economic barriers to doing so (Mattingly 2010:147-157). This moment was fleeting in time, but the meaning endures. The strength and persistence of this connection are evident when Andrena is then devastated that Belinda's terminal condition is revealed to her not by this doctor, who she knew and trusted, but rather by a more distant case manager. To Andrena this disappearance of the doctor upon Belinda's terminal state was a betrayal of the trust the oncologist had built with Belinda through joking, playful clinical encounters (Mattingly 2010:202-206). By taking these small but transformative moments seriously, Mattingly reveals "life as imaginatively constructed, as hoped for, as dreaded, a vulnerable thing" (2010:217). Focusing on practices of hope emphasizes the possible, undetermined nature of the future for people in marginal positions. While from a broader perspective, the children and families Mattingly describes are victims of structural violence, from their perspectives they are living, dreaming, and imagining their lives.

Hope, anxiety, and worries about possible and foreclosed futures also run through Julie Livingston's (2012) ethnography of Botswana's sole oncology ward. Indeed, hope is central to the world of oncology, in both Botswana and elsewhere (Livingston 2012:167-173). In both Los Angeles and Botswana, trust between patients and relatives, and oncologists can occur through brief moments of sociality. For patients and relatives in Botswana, treatment is a deeply social process that is contingent on trust in the doctor (difficult to establish in the hurried environment of this short-staffed clinic) and involves imagined or foreclosed futures.²⁰ Because of the

²⁰ See also Gerrits 2009 for a discussion of trust between doctors and patients in a very different medical context: a Dutch infertility clinic.

advanced stage of disease when cancer appears and is treated in Botswana, many patients face amputations as the only hope for survival. But making the decision to amputate is a process fraught with the uncertainties of post-amputation life. People sometimes refuse amputation either on the basis of uncertainty of diagnosis, or out of deep worry for what it will mean for familial relations of care after the surgery (Livingston 2012:85-92). For the people making these decisions, they do not appear as clear-cut choices between “[l]eg or life!” as the oncologist Dr. P put it (Livingston 2012:88). For “if cancer is about life and death, it is also about gradations of such, about the deaths of parts that sustain life” (Livingston 2012:92). People lose parts of their bodies in order to survive; so also do they endure pain in order to heal.

Through incredibly close ethnographic description of what it is like to have cancer in Botswana, Livingston shows that extreme suffering and pain also entail moral, intimate acts of care, and can even provoke laughter. As part of their professional ethics, nurses who clean necrotic, maggot-filled wounds cultivate an empathetic distance that allows them to proceed gently, mindful of the patients’ pain and the horror of the wounds, but not so mindful of the horror that they cannot do the work. Through time and practice, this ethic prevents the physical revulsion that they first experienced upon seeing such wounds (Livingston 2012:104-112). These nurses “reaffirm the humanity of patients who are decomposing” (Livingston 2012:112) in providing “a crucial moment of respite on the arduous journey to death” (Livingston 2012:110). Even after death, this intimate care continues as nurses wash, clean, and arrange dead bodies (Livingston 2012:117-118). In another case, a small child must have a lymph node in his neck aspirated. The doctor hands him a banana to distract him, but the procedure is excruciating and the child thrashes and wails. Afterwards, the child asks for the banana, sneaks up behind the doctor, and throws it at him. Everyone there bursts into laughter. This laughter happens exactly

because of excruciating pain; the child threw the banana because he was angry at the doctor for causing the pain (Livingston 2012:145-146). Through this and other moments of laughter between patients and caregivers (and the ethnographer), the social nature of pain becomes evident (Livingston 2012:148). As Livingston notes, “[i]n none of these scenarios does anyone laugh alone” (2012:148). At stake in these moments is not only the immediate relief of pain or cleaning of a wound, but the maintenance of moral personhood, made precarious by illness.

In emphasizing the sociality of these moments, I do not mean to romanticize social relations or kinship ties as unequivocally positive (cf. Edwards and Strathern 2000, Livingston 2012:166); indeed, the work of Beidelman (1993[1986]) reminds us that all social interactions are inherently ambiguous, fraught, and complex. Rather, I suggest that an understanding of the political economic dimensions of personhood cannot be complete without considering the processes through which social relations and personhood are created, transformed, and destroyed. Paying attention to intimate moments of care through social phenomenology (Livingston 2012) and “narrative phenomenology” (Mattingly 2010:41) is an empirical way to understand the meanings and stakes of experiences of suffering and hope. Such methods can help to work towards an understanding of life on the margins that shows the mutual imbrication of the personal, social, and (trans)national. In this dissertation, I try to follow their lead in keeping the focus of analysis on social interactions, while maintaining a focus on historical political economy. Thus, I will now provide a brief overview of the demographic and political economic context of aging in Poland.

Demographic and political economic histories of aging in Poland

In the first comprehensive sociological study of aging in Poland, Jerzy Piotrowski (1973) notes that one of the motivations of the study is Poland's changing demographic structure. From 1950 to 1970, the percentage of people over the age of 65 grew from 5.2 to 8.5 percent, while the percentage of people over the age of 75 grew from 1.6 to 2.5 percent (Piotrowski 1973:7). The goal of the book is to achieve a "diagnoza" ("diagnosis") of the state of older people in Poland to learn to what extent they are dependent and to what extent they are independent in order to make policy recommendations (Piotrowski 1973:8). Inherent in the analytic structure of the research, then, is a juxtaposition between independent and dependent persons. In this context, taking care of oneself becomes a triumph.

Like other countries in the EU, Poland has a population that is growing proportionally older. The average life expectancy is predicted to rise to 77.1 years for men and 82.9 years for women in 2035 (from 71.0 for men and 79.7 for women in 2007).²¹ In 2007, 13.5 percent of the Polish population was aged sixty-five years or older; this is predicted to rise to 23.2 percent of the population in 2035.²² Moreover, the percentage of the population over the age of 80 is predicted to rise from 3.0 percent in 2007 to 7.2 percent in 2035.²³ At the same time, the fertility rate is low, so the population is predicted to shrink over time.²⁴ In 2003, Poland's total fertility rate was at its lowest since World War II (1.222); though it has risen since then, it does so slowly.²⁵ The "old age dependency ratio" is predicted to increase from 19 in 2010 to 36 in 2030; that is, in 2010 there were 100 working persons for every 19 persons over age 65, and this is predicted to

²¹ Data from *Prognoza ludności na lata 2008-2035*, published by the *Główny Urząd Statystyczny* (Main Statistical Office), (http://www.stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/PUBL_L_prognoza_ludnosci_na_lata2008_2035.pdf , accessed 14 October 2011. Pp. 144. See also http://www.stat.gov.pl/PI_gus/ludnosc_piramida/start.htm for an interactive population pyramid for Poland from 1975 through 2035.

²² *Ibid.* Pp. 219.

²³ *Ibid.* Pp. 219.

²⁴ *Ibid.* Pp. 189. GUS predicts the Polish population will fall to around 36 million in 2035, from just over 38 million in 2008.

²⁵ *Ibid.* Pp. 88.

increase to 100 working persons for every 36 persons over age 65 in 2030.²⁶ This increase is one of the highest in Europe and signals increased stress on the social welfare system (e.g., pensions, disability payments). The “old age dependency ratio” is a key way of framing old age from demographic and welfare perspectives, figuring them only as needy and dependent.

However, as sociologists Toni Calasanti and Anna Zajicek (1997) show, this dependence is socially constructed through a complex relationship of state policy, shifting political economic conditions, and gendered histories of labor. Moreover, Calasanti and Zajicek point out that such a focus on the dependence of older people ignores the participation of older people in the informal market, which is left out of such official calculations. Such statistical measures of the role of older people in society must therefore be closely scrutinized.

This demographic shift is occurring in the political-economic context of Poland’s postsocialist transformation into a market economy, its membership in NATO (1999), and in the European Union (2004). Much scholarly work in eastern Europe has been devoted to documenting the varying ways that such political-economic changes are experienced and understood throughout the population, differing by age, occupation, gender, place of residence, and other socioeconomic factors. In particular, age and generation have come to the fore as particularly salient markers of attitudes towards contemporary postsocialist transformations (e.g., Caldwell 2007; Dunn 2004; Thelen 2003). For this discussion, the most salient shift in political economy was the erosion of guaranteed state provisions, such as visits to the doctor, medicines, education, and childcare. For people who grew up with this system—that is, the current oldest generations in Poland—the increased costs associated with these services were a moral affront.

²⁶ Data from *Statistics in Focus*, published by Eurostat, the primary statistical office of the European Commission. http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-SF-10-001/EN/KS-SF-10-001-EN.PDF, accessed 14 October 2011. Pp. 6, 11.

During state socialism, in order to maintain full employment of the population, which was central to state socialist ideology, the state encouraged early retirement through such mechanisms as not penalizing pension benefits if people continued to work in retirement and offering early retirement options to those in dangerous occupations (e.g., miners). Additionally, both during and after socialism, early retirement was possible regardless of profession based on years of work. In 1997, men could retire at age 60 after 35 years of work (instead of at age 65 after 20 years of work) and women could retire at age 55 after 30 years of work (instead of at age 60 after 20 years of work) (Calasanti and Zajicek 1997:454-456). This is not to suggest that pensioners became rich during socialism—indeed, sociological research shows the opposite—but rather that encouraging early retirement was in the interest of the state. And indeed, many people took advantage of this (Calasanti and Zajicek 1997).

The first few years after 1989 brought rapid political and economic changes that had particularly negative effects on the oldest generations. Due to a combination of rising prices and shifting pension indexing, people living on pensions had, in real costs, higher expenses and less income (Calasanti and Zajicek 1997; Synak 1992:91). In 1990, welfare became the responsibility of local rather than the central government (Rybka 1998:255; Synak 1992). In 1995, “aid was given to 1.8 million households including more than 6.7 million people. This means that 18 percent of the population were not able to meet their basic social and living needs without outside help” (Rybka 1998:257).

Along with these political and economic shifts, the social and cultural role of older people in Polish society changed (Mucha and Krzyżowski 2010). The Polish sociologist Brunon Synak has written that older people were “rivals of the younger generation” (1992:90) as everyone struggled for scarce resources in the immediate postsocialist years. Because older

people had grown up and worked during the socialist years, as the socialist times were devalued, so was the experiential knowledge of these generations (Synak 1992:92-93).

A historical sketch of old age care in Poland: health care, pedagogy, and policy

Because the history of old age care is part of a broader history of social work (*praca społeczna*), social care (*opieka społeczna*), social pedagogy (*pedagogika społeczna*), in this section I aim to give a brief overview of old age care as related to the growth of these fields. Because the state plays a key role in regulating such care, I present a chronological view of this development, highlighting important changes in social policy (*polityka społeczna*). This intertwining of health care, pedagogy and education, and welfare still has relevance in contemporary Poland today, as indeed this dissertation demonstrates. Throughout my fieldwork and across institutional contexts, I kept meeting pedagogues, social workers, and health care workers.

From medieval times, like in much of Europe, older people remained part of the households, unless they were too sick or poor. With the exception of mutual-aid societies run through guilds, charity was managed through the Church, which would collect donations from landowners and distribute them to the poor, thus establishing a dyadic relationship of charity. Care institutions began to grow in the 16th century under the leadership of the counterreformation priest Piotr Skarga, who opened secular charitable institutions. These came under state regulation during the reign of Poland's last king, Stanisław August Poniatowski, in the late 18th century, but this state supervision ended during the partition era (Rybka 1998:245-247). During the partition era, policies varied by empire; the Prussian empire had more state-run welfare institutions, administered by cities and provinces, while the scope of services in the

Austro-Hungarian empire was limited and secondary to non-public sources, and in the Russian empire, “the situation was also difficult,” as some assistance organizations were transformed into russification programs (Rybka 1998:247).²⁷ Non-state charity, however, was still present, although as the pedagogue Wanda Bobrowska-Nowak (1988) notes, these organizations were often in antagonistic relationships with the ruling powers (Małek and Szczepianek-Wiecha 2005:25-26).

In the early 20th century, with Poland’s regained independence and the growth of the fields of social work, the idea of “community care” developed in contrast to previous ideas of “individual care,” which located the cause of problems in the individual (Rybka 1998:248; see Krzeczowski 1936, 1938). This was part of a European trend described by François Ewald (1986) as a move from individual to collective responsibility, and from responsibility to risk (Baldwin 1992:697-698). These collective values were codified in the 1923 Act on Social Care, which promised to provide assistance to those who could not provide for themselves either permanently or temporarily (Małek and Szczepianiak-Wiecha 2005:27), but it was not ultimately successful because of its funding structures; local governments were supposed to provide the services, but could not raise taxes or other revenue to pay for them (Rybka 1998:250-251). In 1989, the Polish gerontologist and sociologist Brunon Synak wrote that the 1923 act was technically still in effect, although the bureaucratic structure was too “haphazard” (1989:110) to allow for any real comprehensive system.

Professions specializing in the fields of social care began in the interwar this time as well; in Warsaw, the Polish Free University (*Wolna Wszechnica Polska*) provided education in social work and pedagogy thanks to the influential pedagogue Helena Radlińska, while the Institute of Social Economy (*Instytut Gospodarstwa Społecznego*) conducted research on marginalized

²⁷ For a detailed study of hospitals and welfare in Wielkopolska in the 17th and 18th centuries, see Surdacki 1992.

groups (Małek and Szczepaniak-Wiecha 2005:28-29; Rybka 1998:251).²⁸ Polish scholars were in contact with other European scholars and traveled to conferences in France, Germany, and Switzerland (Szczepaniak-Wiecha 2005:29, 33).

Agnieszka Małek and Izabela Szczepaniak-Wiecha (2005) describe several key women educators and workers who were instrumental in the growth of the fields of social work and pedagogy, suggesting that these fields have been feminized from early on. Dagmar Schulte (2005:277-280) argues that these fields in eastern Europe are deeply connected to women's movements of the 19th and 20th centuries, and in Poland, with patriotic movements during World Wars I and II. The specialties of social care focused on child care and health care, and especially on "social diseases" like tuberculosis and venereal disease (Schulte 2005:286-288).

Synak (1989:111) writes that in post-war Poland, the state did not have any systematic social care system until after the Stalinist period, since it was believed that political changes would solve all other social problems. Additionally, in state socialism there were not supposed to be any disadvantaged or marginalized groups, so the field of social work itself was a challenge to the state; "rehabilitation," however, was less of a direct challenge, so the term was thus used to include both medical rehabilitation, such as after an accident, as well as work with populations that could pose a challenge to state authority (Lorenz 2006:53). The fields of health care and social work were united through the integration of both health care and social welfare into the Ministry of Health in 1960 (rather than the Ministry of Labor), and through the creation in 1973 of "health care teams" composed of doctors, public health nurses, and social workers (Rybka 1998:253). Institutional care was rare during state socialism; Synak (1989:111) reports that just

²⁸ For information in English about IGS, see http://www.sgh.waw.pl/instituty/igs-kes-en?set_language=en (accessed 29 January 2013)

1.4 percent of all older people lived in care institutions in 1989, and it was viewed as a last resort, only for the sickest people (1989:119).

The decentralization and privatization that were features of postsocialist society more generally had a particularly devastating impact on health care, such that health outcomes have been adversely affected, especially for those older Poles without economic or familial resources. Health reforms of 1999 transformed the health care system from central state funding to a social insurance system that was funded at a lower percentage than would be sufficient in order to encourage the private sector. State spending on health care dropped to levels lower than during state socialism. Recently, surveys have found that only one quarter of pensioners can afford the medicines they need (Watson 2010; see also Ostrowska 2001, 2010; Watson 2006a). Peggy Watson characterizes the postsocialist reform as one “where health care has been desocialized. This has been achieved by redefining responsibility for health in terms of the individual – thereby detaching responsibility from power, by framing reform in terms of abstract fiscal discourse, and eliding questions of social justice, need and equality” (2006b:1084). Watson (2006b:1087-1091) cites several retirees whose pensions do not cover their medicines and their bills—a problem that was unthinkable during socialism.

Social and family life of older people in Poland: historical ethnographic perspectives

The historical ethnographic record in Poland shows evidence of multigenerational rural families in which older people continued to contribute to the household economy (Zalewska 2009:20-22). The ethnographer Kazimiera Zawistowicz-Adamska (1948) found during her fieldwork in a village in Lesser Poland in the 1930s that people would work in any capacity they could, even through various illnesses, because of the common perception that “inactivity is a

harbinger of death” (Zalewska 2009:21). Her conversations with the oldest resident of that village reveal that for him, the most difficult part of aging was seeing the changes in clothing, food, and interior decorations coming from the cities. Joanna Zalewska points out that changes in the village were not so radical, that children were still socialized into farm life from a very early age, with new tasks given each year (2009:22). Rather, as Zawistowicz-Adamska argues, this older man felt inextricably connected to the village (Zalewska 2009:22). Even dress, food, and decorations from elsewhere, then, can be threats to this integration of person and place.

Describing the urbanization of the mid-20th century, the ethnologist Marcin Czerwinski (1968) found that the social position of older people was changing, as the new labor system valued newness and youth over tradition and old age. He contrasts this with the “traditional” system of value in the labor system, in which terms like “old craftsman” are laden with respect and signify authority (Zalewska 2009:23). Additionally, both children and women spent more time away from the home, strengthening collegial ties at the expense of family ties (Zalewska 2009:23-24). This tension between kin and non-kin ties is also evident today, as some aging activists encourage older Poles both to keep more money for themselves, rather than giving it all to children or grandchildren (see Caldwell 2007 for similar examples from Russia), and to loosen their ties with kin in order to form new social relations based on skill.

However, what Michał Buchowski and Agata Stanisiz identify as “*the institution of the grandparents*” (2010:346; emphasis in original), in which grandparents and especially grandmothers provide childcare so that both fathers and mothers can work, suggests that kin ties are maintained through practices of intergenerational care. This is true for both urban and rural locations (Buchowski et al. 2010). Moreover, they point out that intergenerational financial support also serves to reproduce class interests—especially of the upper-class and wealthy—as

parents and grandparents want to help their children and grandchildren maintain their class status through activities like music lessons and trips abroad (Buchowski and Stanisiz 2010:348-349). Relatively constant through this brief historical sketch is the central role of older Poles as providers of care to grandchildren; this intergenerational dynamic has its counterpart when older people receive care from family. The ethnographic record suggests, then, that moral personhood in old age is bound up in ideals of intergenerational care within families.

Studying old age in Wrocław and Poznań

Wrocław and Poznań are the fourth- and fifth-largest cities in Poland, respectively, with populations of over 600,000 and 500,000. Located in western Poland around 100 miles apart from each other, it takes about three hours to drive between the cities or under three hours on the train. Despite their proximity, the two are differently positioned historically with respect to the Polish state. Although both Wrocław and Poznań were ruled by the Piasts (the first rulers of Poland) beginning in the 10th century, by the 14th century the population around Wrocław was becoming German, while Poznań was more ethnically Polish. Wrocław remained the German Breslau until 1945, when it became Polish territory at the end of World War II. Poles were an ethnic minority in Breslau and were not the majority until post-war resettlement. In other words, Wrocław's Polish history has around a 600-year gap. During the time of partitions from the late 18th to early 20th centuries, Poznań was part of the Prussian empire and thus more a part of the romantic Polish national imaginary. However, Wrocław has claimed the legacy of Lwów (now L'viv, Ukraine) and Galicia in part through the transfer of cultural institutions like the Ossolineum Library, in part due to the number of people who moved from Lwów to Wrocław (although see Kenney 1997), and in part due to contemporary politics, in which Wrocław is

trying to recreate itself as the heir to Poland's multicultural past. The city now markets itself as "Wroclove" (pronounced like the English "love"). In contrast, Poznań markets itself as the "Miasto Know-How," or "the Know-How City," drawing on its legacy of business and trade fairs. This is in keeping with Wrocław residents' views of Poznań as Germanified, stuffy, closed, and efficient, thus mapping on to stereotypes of Germans. Poznań residents, for their part, imagine Wrocław residents as outgoing people who are always late. These stereotypes were generally not obvious to me as an ethnographer (although the public transportation in Poznań is indeed many times more efficient and reliable); indeed, to a large degree the cities are quite similar in geography and appearance. However, people of all ages in both cities spoke to me of these differences. These are two of the wealthier cities in Poland, in keeping with the longstanding East-West, rural-urban divide characterizes Poland's socioeconomic map. However, this does not mean that older people in Wrocław and Poznań are wealthy, keeping in mind the effect of health care privatization discussed above.

Fieldwork and analysis

In designing this project, I have tried to follow Cohen's (1998) study of aging in India by considering the widest possible meanings of aging and the categories of old age. Although my research began with personal and then anthropological interest in Alzheimer's disease and dementia, I did not want to presume that Alzheimer's or dementia would be equally significant in Poland as it is in the U.S., that there was a meaningful category known as "Alzheimer's" that matters in old age, or that the "local biology" of aging would include dementia or memory loss (Lock 1993). Following Kleinman (1977), Cohen frames this in terms of a "category fallacy" (1998:34-35): that is, the unproblematic transposition of a category from one sociocultural

historical context to another in conducting cross-cultural analysis. I did not want to assume that there would be a locally relevant category of “dementia” or “Alzheimer’s” in Poland that I could then ethnographically study. Thus, I tried to create many ethnographic situations in which I could learn about Poles’ experiences and ideals of aging. During my fieldwork and while writing the dissertation, I have tried to follow Cohen’s practice of “listen[ing] to the ways in which old age *mattered* to people” (1998:36) in Poland, and to follow his and Kleinman’s question, “*what is at stake* in asking about old age?” (Cohen 1998:37).

Thus I sought a diversity of field sites: I chose to conduct research in two cities with differing histories and in institutions with varying relationships to the state. Through ethnographic, historical, and media studies methods, this fieldwork thus research integrates micro- and macro-level data that together create a nuanced understanding of links between individual experiences and broader social change. During a preliminary fieldwork trip to Poland in the summer of 2006, I made contact with staff at the rehabilitation center in Wrocław and faculty at the University of Wrocław, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, and at medical schools in both cities. I met these people through personal friends and colleagues whom I had asked for assistance in putting together this research project, describing my interests as learning about experiences of aging and memory in Poland. Once I was in Wrocław, I sought out connection with the University of the Third Age through my colleague at the University of Wrocław, and with the state-run home through staff at the medical institutions. A colleague at the medical school in Wrocław recommended the Alzheimer’s center in Poznań. I contacted the University of the Third Age in Poznań on my own.

The long-term period of research occurred over an 18-month period from September 2008 through April 2010. I returned in the summer of 2012 for a brief follow-up trip; thus, this

dissertation is based on a total of 20 months of fieldwork. I conducted all research in Polish. In total, over 100 people participated in this research project; most were older Poles themselves (ranging in age from the early sixties to the late nineties), but some were staff or volunteers of all ages who were some way involved with these institutions or projects related to old age. Across institutions, I found variation in socioeconomic status. At the rehab center and Social Welfare Home, most people were less well-educated, having worked as farmers, manual laborers, or odd jobs. This was particularly true at the Social Welfare Home, where some people had previously been homeless or had lived in institutional care their entire lives. People at the rehab center came from a wider class background, including former teachers, engineers, and priests. At the Universities of the Third Age, people were more highly educated; there, the population included retired teachers, accountants, and office workers, as well as factory workers. At @ktywny Senior, the NGO program where I did a small interview project, and the Alzheimer's center, people came from more diverse class backgrounds.

Almost all the older people I came to know were women; across field sites, over 90 percent of research participants were women. This gives my data a heavy bias towards women's experiences and imaginings of old age. When I asked staff and older Poles alike about the predominance of older women at these institutions, I heard varying explanations. Although some people explained these proportions in demographic terms, since women live longer than men, others provided different explanations. At the rehab center, people told me that men do not need rehab because they just die—of heart attacks, of strokes. And if they do need rehab, they often do not survive because rehab is difficult work, and older men are weak. Moreover, men who do live through rehab are more often taken care of at home by women; when women need rehab, however, there is no one to take care of them. At the Universities of the Third Age, people told

me that it is only natural that men do not attend, since women are “*aktywne*” throughout their lives. From helping out with household chores, to running households of their own, all while working, women are always engaged in the social world. The Universities of the Third Age are thus a place for women. Men, however, are more attached to the world of nature and objects rather than people, two men told me; this is why men have hobbies such as fishing, gardening, and tinkering. These perceptions were confirmed in conversations with both men and women.

I spent the first year of the 18-month period in Wrocław and the last six months in Poznań. During the first four months in Wrocław, I spent my days primarily at the rehab center, with a couple exploratory visits to the Social Welfare Home and the University of the Third Age. But I felt I needed to understand the rehab center before I could go elsewhere. During my time at the rehab center, I spent my days mostly talking with patients in their rooms, although I also spent time with medical and administrative staff in their office and observing group physical therapy and occupational therapy (*terapia zajęciowa*) sessions. At the beginning of my time there, the staff introduced me to a few patients as a way to welcome me into the institution; after time I became known in the institution and I felt comfortable approaching people myself in the hallways or striking up conversation at occupational therapy. These conversations tended to be quite informal, as formalized interview questions would have been inappropriate in this setting. I also conducted more formal interviews with financial and therapeutic staff. After describing my project in compliance with IRB requirements, I would ask them if I could record the conversation, assuring people of anonymity. Some people had a tendency to forget that the recorder was there or mistook it later for a cell phone, so I tried to remind them during the conversation that it was being recorded. Some people preferred not to be recorded, so I tried to take especially accurate notes in these cases. Generally, I tried to let the other person guide the

direction of conversation (Briggs 1986), especially when it was the first time I was meeting someone.

I began trying to conduct research at the Social Welfare Home in early 2009, but for administrative reasons it was not until June 2009 that I was able to begin research there. Experiences of recruitment and interviewing were quite similar to the rehab center. Staff introduced me to some residents as a welcoming gesture, and through these residents I then met others, most often in hallways, although sometimes through occupational therapy. I interviewed several medical and therapeutic staff, but with the exception of the primary manager, the administrative staff were largely inaccessible to me. I infer that this was due to both regulatory protections and issues of limited time. Significantly, the Social Welfare Home was under renovation for the entire time that I was there, meaning that only half the residents were there. As I will show in Chapter 4, this institution, while allegedly more home-like in many ways, was never quite as open to me as the rehab center.

In early 2009, I was invited to the main weekly lecture at the University of the Third Age to give an announcement about my research, after which I posted a recruitment notice on their main bulletin board. I also picked out a few classes from their diverse schedule (“Intergenerational dialogue,” “memory training,” and occasional other classes) and attended weekly general lectures. At their request, I also began teaching weekly conversational English classes at the University of the Third Age as a way to contribute something to the institution. These classes proved excellent ways to meet new people who had not seen the previous recruitment materials, and also a sense of satisfaction at being in a reciprocal relationship with people from whom I was learning so much. Interviews with people at the University of the Third Age were much more structured; people there were used to participating in students’ research

projects and were prepared for formal interviewing requirements. As at the rehab center, I had a core set of questions about life history, daily life, experiences of aging, and opinions on politics in Poland, but I tried to be as quiet in these conversations as well, except when the research participants expected formality. Their academic year ran through May, but I continued to hold my English class during the summer.

I began my fieldwork in Poznań in the fall of 2009 and divided my time between the Alzheimer's center and the University of the Third Age. Because I spent a year in Wrocław and only six months in Poznań, the data that I have from Wrocław was much richer. Research at the University of the Third Age in Poznań proceeded in much the same way as at the University of the Third Age in Wrocław; I recruited participants through announcements at two lectures, and secondarily through the conversational English classes that I taught. There, I attended meetings of the "grupa turystyczna," or "touristic group," that toured various sites of local interest in and around Poznań. Expectations regarding interview structure was much the same in Poznań as in Wrocław. As in Wrocław, I interviewed the head of the University of the Third Age as well as the leader of the smaller groups I attended.

In some ways, fieldwork at the Alzheimer's center stands out for what I was and was not able to do. Because of IRB regulations regarding informed consent, I did not conduct interviews with anyone of the participants at the Alzheimer's center. Rather, I observed and participated in the daily activities, and followed the lead of staff and of participants themselves in conversing. This means that I do not have the kinds of life history stories from people at the Alzheimer's center as I do with people whom I met at the other institutions. However, it is possible that such interview-based methodology would not be the most appropriate form of interaction anyway.

Everyone there knew that I was conducting research, and I took care to mention it as I could. As with the other institutions, there were staff members in people's space every day, such that my presence was not an intrusion. If I ever thought it was, I would leave the room.

In both cities, I tried to compensate for the institutional lens of this project by meeting with other older Poles and community leaders that I met through these institutions. In Wrocław, one of these offshoot projects turned into a mini-interview project with participants and organizers of a NGO program called *@ktywny Senior* (*@ctive Senior*). I also met with staff at the Wrocław Senior Center. In Poznań, I met several times with the director of a home hospice program and once with a local aging activist. I attended three conferences on aging (two in Wrocław, one in Poznań) where presenters included medical professionals, social science researchers, policy-makers, and community and religious leaders.

Because this research is grounded in particular institutions that are themselves exceptional, this study does not include the experiences of large segments of the Polish population—that is, with older people who do not interact with any of these institutions. However, given the importance of these institutions in the ideological world of aging, these institutions are still valid places from which to learn. That is, because *aktywność* and institutional care in old age are seen as polar opposites, ethnographic study of moral personhood in these institutions is useful for understanding old age across a range of contexts. I had planned to add a more explicitly intergenerational and medical perspective to this research by conducting interviews at the medical and nursing schools in Wrocław to learn how medical professionals are taught to conceive of older persons, but unfortunately this was not feasible due to scheduling difficulties. Additionally, there were benefits to working in institutions; I had somewhere to

show up every day. Rather than discussing these institutions in more detail here, I will let the details of these places emerge throughout the dissertation.

I took comprehensive notes by hand throughout each day, and would write these up into more coherent documents in the evenings. At times I found it difficult to force the events, information, and emotions of the day into a linear narrative, leaving me with some expanded bullet-point notes. Many useful insights came through writing emails to my friends and colleagues during fieldwork, and through regular field reports to my committee. I consider these documents part of my body of data upon which I draw as well. Additionally, I have collected, photographs (e.g., institutional and domestic interiors, institutional and public events, photo displays), documents (e.g., archive of journals and publications from the University of the Third Age in Wrocław, memoirs, institutional publicity materials, newspaper clippings), and objects (e.g., gifts, examples of arts-and-crafts projects).

The transcription and working-through of interviews was collaborative in all senses. I worked with two “transcription” assistants (with additional help from two others), although given the hours of recordings, I asked them instead to provide detailed timed guides to each recording with more detailed descriptions of key themes. All are native speakers of Polish. I had lengthy meetings with each assistant beforehand and occasionally during this process, thus trying to ensure that we had the same (or at least similar) understanding of the project. In some cases the guides created by one assistant were so detailed as to be almost a precise transcription. I began this working with transcription assistants around halfway through the fieldwork, after I had already taken field notes and listened to recordings myself to gain a grounded sense of key topics. I constructed similar guides for myself for interviews that I did not feel comfortable sharing with others. Based on these guides and my notes, I then went back and listened to key

sections, including several minutes before and after, and transcribed the desired sections myself. I have checked particular moments and translations with native Polish speakers in the case of confusion on my part. In other cases parts of conversations are unintelligible due to background noise or quality of voice of the speaker; this unintelligibility was confirmed by my native-speaker assistants. In the text of the dissertation, I have indicated when portions of recordings were unintelligible. Throughout the dissertation, I include the Polish translations only when these reflect verbatim speech as recorded by the recorder or in my field notes. When I use only the English phrasing, it is because these are phrases that were either jotted down in English or somehow did not make it into my field notes.

The interpretive work of this project thus began long before the official “write-up” phase of the dissertation and was grounded in fieldwork experiences. Additionally, throughout my research I had institutional affiliations with local anthropology departments and talked through my fieldwork observations with colleagues and friends both inside and outside the academy. In Wrocław, I formed a research affiliation with the Department of Cultural Anthropology at the University of Lower Silesia, where I was invited to give a colloquium. In Poznań, I was officially affiliated with the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at the Adam Mickiewicz University. During and soon after fieldwork I gave several papers at conferences at both these universities as well as in the U.S. that served as beginning points for working through issues of personhood, place, and memory among older people in Poland.

In writing about older people, I am wary of reproducing familiar tropes of old age (Cohen 1994). I try to avoid presenting people as either simply wise, respected elders or suffering elderly people in need of sympathy. I also try to avoid presenting old age as being fundamentally about ambivalence or ambiguity. Although I do discuss how people are seen as wise, respected,

suffering, or in need of pity, and how growing old can be filled with ambiguity, I do so because this is what I observed ethnographically, rather than because I think these are useful frameworks for old age in particular.

Doing this fieldwork was an emotional and intense experience, especially in the medical institutions where I often witnessed suffering and pain. The educational institutions were not always an escape from this emotional intensity, however, as people would sometimes weep as they told stories about difficult wartime memories and present-day distant kin. I am reminded of Vieda Skultans's (1998) work, in which she studied narrative and memory in postsocialist Latvia. Herself part of the group that she was studying—her family escaped Soviet Latvia in 1944 for London—Skultans writes that this research helped her to understand her own family's experience of exile. As a young child in London, Skultans and her family went to church services, during which her family and the whole congregation would weep. Her grandmother would remain physically affected for hours. Skultans writes that “the narratives [in this book] explain my grandmother's tears and blotchy face” (1998:13). I sensed a similar emotional intensity in many of my encounters with my research participants; it is my hope that some of this experience comes through on these pages.

A note on terminology and names

Throughout the dissertation I use the term “older” (“*starszy*”) to refer to actual people as a way of preserving local conventions of talking about old age. It is generally impolite to refer to someone as old (*stary*), although there are some people at the University of the Third Age who use this terminology as a way of embracing old age. Additionally, “older” gives a better sense of the wide range of ages included in this term: newspaper sections targeted at older people

advertise themselves as “for 50+,” and many Poles consider themselves old at 50; one woman I know referred to herself as old at 35. This lack of popular differentiation of life stages after age 50 is something that I will discuss further in Chapter 3 in relation to the “third age” (and the invisible “fourth age”). Usage of the term “senior” (“*senior*”) was limited to people at the University of the Third Age and Active Senior, although it also appears in popular media. I cannot find in my notes nor can I recall hearing “senior” used by any of the patients, residents, participants, or staff at the medical institutions. No one could tell me exactly when the term came into popular usage, but people tended to date it to the last decade. “Retiree” (“*emeryt*”) was less popular than “senior,” and also tended to be limited to people at the University of the Third Age. “Pensioner” (“*rencisty*”) was generally used to people who received disability pensions and was thus generally limited to people at the medical institutions.

Throughout this work, I use pseudonyms for all of my research participants except for those who serve as public figures. My usage of the terms of address “pan” and “pani” plus a first name reflects ethnographic usage; that is, when I refer to someone as pan Jan or pani Anna in this text, it is because that is how we interacted in person. Using “pan” or “pani” indicates respect and social distance, but there are varying degrees. It is standard to use only “pan” or “pani” (without a first name or last name) to refer to strangers, although sometimes younger people use “ty” (the informal address). “Pan” or “pani” on its own can also be used in a conversation with someone whom you are getting to know. “Pan” or “pani” can be used with someone’s title, such as “pani doktor,” “pan profesor,” or, as I was called several times, “pani magisterka”—a term for which there is no equivalent usage in English, but would translate to “Ms. Master” (after *magister*, or master’s degree). “Pan” or “pani” can also be combined with someone’s first name, last name, or both. Using both first and last names is quite formal, a style I

only encountered during official presentations. Using just the last name with “pan” or “pani” is also quite formal, and occurs at places like doctor’s offices. The use of first names with “pan” or “pani” signals a middle degree of distance, closer than with a last name, title, or on its own. This is the form that I use most often throughout the dissertation, as was the case during my fieldwork. Diminutives are very common in Polish first names (and indeed in many words), indicating closeness and a degree of affection. People also combine “pan” or “pani” with the diminutive forms of first names (e.g., pan Radek instead of pan Radosław).

In my time with older people, I always used “pan” or “pani” unless specifically invited to go by “ty,” which happened quite rarely. As the person of lower status, I had to wait for their signal. I was almost always addressed as “pani Jessica,” although some people would drop the “pani” and call me “Jessica” and use the “ty” form—but without inviting me to do the same. “Jessica” has no diminutive as it is not a Polish name; the nickname “Jess” does not work as female name in Polish (female names should end with “-a”). People would sometimes ask what the diminutive of my name is, but I had no response. However, one woman at the social welfare home in Wrocław, pani Władzia (see Chapter 4), created one for me: she took to calling me “pani Jessiczka.” After pani Władzia started calling me “pani Jessiczka,” I began sharing this with people who would ask about diminutives. Without fail, “pani Jessiczka” elicited smiles and chuckles, acknowledging the creative and affectionate connotation of the name.

After several coffee dates in her room, pani Władzia suggested that we switch from formal to informal address (i.e., to use “ty” instead of “pan/pani”). I was surprised, given everything I had learned about their hesitancy to trust, and the general patterns of using formal address among older people in Poland. None of my research participants at any medical institution had made this suggestion—only people from the Universities of the Third Age. After

that, there were two weeks when I did not visit the Social Welfare Home due to commitments at other field sites. When I returned to the Social Welfare Home, I saw pani Władzia and her fiancé, pan Bogusław, outside on the landing, and greeted them, saying “Cześć!” (“Hi!”). I noticed that pani Władzia seemed quieter and more distant that day; this continued during coffee in their room. Rather than calling me “Jessiczka,” as she had at the end of the previous conversation, or even “pani Jessiczka,” she had returned to calling me “pani Jessika.” Finally, after over an hour, pani Władzia told me that she was offended that I had said “Cześć!” to greet them earlier; “Dzień dobry!” (“Good day!”) would have shown respect, unlike “Cześć.” I felt badly and apologized profusely, begging American ignorance as a way around such a breach of etiquette, and an assumption that going “po imieniu” meant that I could use “Cześć” to greet them. This encounter made clear to me how observant pani Władzia was of social graces and boundaries, and led me to be extra conscious of how I used greetings and terms of address. Additionally, it points to an interesting lack of durability of social closeness (cf. Munn 1986). I had assumed that going by “ty” was a permanent category, but perhaps my failure to return as quickly as expected did not make this possible. However, when I returned in 2012, I immediately became “pani Jessiczka” again, although not “ty.”

Plan of the dissertation

In Chapter 2, I aim to show the contours of the discursive framework within which conversations on aging in Poland take place. I accomplish this through an analysis of portrayals of aging in two newspapers that represent opposite ends of the dominant ideological spectrum in Poland. Data comes from a two-week long series of articles entitled “Poland Is No Country for Old People” that appeared in Poland’s newspaper of record, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, in 2008, and from

Nasz Dziennik, a conservative Catholic daily newspaper. As portrayed in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Poland is an inhospitable place for one to grow old—unless one engages in *aktywność* (activity) that keeps one healthy, fit, and happy. As portrayed in *Nasz Dziennik*, growing old in Poland is as a largely positive experience, in which even experiences of suffering and pain are part of a meaningful religious life cycle. In other words, this chapter shows that it is key differences in ideals of moral personhood and the nation that differentiate these discursive worlds. This chapter aims to describe the discursive space within which my ethnographic fieldwork took place, thus providing one way to understand the forms of personhood that are possible in contemporary Poland.

In Chapter 3, I investigate the concept of *aktywność*, an ideal of old age towards which many Poles strive—and towards which they are encouraged to strive by local and (trans)national organizations. Through an ethnographic and historical consideration of the Universities of the Third Age in Wrocław and Poznań, I analyze the ideologies and intellectual histories of the institutions themselves and the experiences of people who attend these institutions. Institutional leaders and participants alike seek to transform moral personhood through *aktywność*. Such transformations from stigmatized, isolated older adults to engaged, embedded, and productive citizens come about through bodily, social, and mental practices. Institutional leaders and participants themselves associate these practices with Poland's membership in the EU and transition from socialism to capitalism; in other words, *aktywność* become part of a national political-economic shift in which the socialist past is seen as fundamentally backwards and the capitalist present is seen as morally desirable, thus recapitulating tropes of the idealized West located in western Europe or North America and the backwards East of eastern Europe. Yet the first University of the Third Age was founded in Poland in 1975, only three years after the first-

ever University of the Third Age in France, suggesting both a deeper historical connection with western Europe than such talk of newness indicates, and a continuity rather than a sharp break with the socialist past. I suggest that *aktywność* encourages a form of moral personhood that is produced through practices of learning, remembering, and commensality, but that these possibilities are not available for all older Poles.

In Chapter 4, I consider the experiences of those who are excluded from discourses of *aktywność* by illness and ask what possibilities for moral personhood exist for those who live in institutional care. Structural perspectives show that people in these institutions are those who have not benefited from postsocialist changes in Poland, yet this does not mean that their experiences are dominated by social suffering. In order to counter theoretical perspectives focusing on pain and suffering to the exclusion of hope and joy, in this chapter I show how some older people sustain moral personhood despite sociocultural and political-economic conditions that would prevent them from doing so. By combining experiential with structural perspectives, and focusing on relationships rather than individuals, this chapter provides a grounded ethnographic account of aging in institutional care that aims to overcome binary frames of independence and dependence, and illness and health.

In Chapter 5, I analyze the common practice in which older Poles connect their own lives to the history of the Polish nation as a way that older Poles seek to restore moral personhood in old age. I show how narrative links between individual and national histories that incorporate key historical and geographic references can create moral personhood, relatedness, and generational continuity. I suggest that these story-telling practices are common across eastern Europe and are related to regional histories of displacement and radical social change. Through these embodied stories, which are always social and involve relations of power, I argue that older

Poles are attempting to place themselves within a spatiotemporally coherent and meaningful set of social relations, including relatives (past, present, and future), roommates, caregivers, and fellow citizens. This analysis is relevant to understanding old age in comparative contexts, in which continuity is often threatened by the possibility of rupture and the loss of memory.

In Chapter 6, I show how the persistence of embodied social and cognitive memory among people in an Alzheimer's center defies expectations about the destructive effects of the disease on personhood. Although anthropological and clinical research treat dementia as distinct among experiences of old age, this chapter shows that at this day center, there were many similarities to my other field sites on the level of moral personhood, relatedness, and even memory. By taking a processual approach that focuses on interactions among people at the center, this chapter argues that memory is fostered through the use of collective national frameworks in ways that are fundamentally about sociality. This processual approach allows for a more fully social understanding of personhood in dementia to emerge, and suggests a more holistic understanding of dementia that does not treat it as distinct from all other experiences of old age. I close the chapter with remarks on memory and houses as a way of thinking through the relations between persons, places, and memories.

In Chapter 7, I draw connections across field sites on both ethnographic and analytic level. At the ethnographic level, I highlight similarities in practices through which older Poles constitute themselves as moral persons within a set of relations in certain times and places. Key practices are telling stories, singing, gardening, eating, and remembering. At the analytic level, I highlight several binary categories across fields of study that I see my research contributing to overcoming. Moral personhood among people with Alzheimer's disease is not necessarily best understood in terms of the pre- and post-Alzheimer's self, nor is personhood in old age best

understood in terms of independent and dependent personhood. So too are histories of Europe perhaps not best understood by chronologies divided into before and after 1989, and experiences of life in eastern Europe perhaps not best understood through frameworks of socialism and capitalism. I draw conclusions about the implications of this study for the fields of sociocultural and medical anthropology, postsocialist studies, and interdisciplinary studies of old age. Finally, I comment on what I see as the seeds of an analytic approach that can have practical application for those who are living in situations outside their ideals of moral personhood.

Chapter 2

“No Country for Old People”: Moral Exemplars of Aging

Is Poland a country for old people?

The series “*Polska to nie jest kraj dla starych ludzi*,” or ‘Poland is no country for old people,’ ran for ten days in *Gazeta Wyborcza* (Electoral Gazette), Poland’s largest-circulating non-tabloid daily newspaper, in November 2008, less than two months after I began my long-term fieldwork in Poland.¹ The title evoked the popular Coen brothers movie *No Country for Old Men*, which was released in Poland earlier that year. Death, hopelessness, and chaos run through the film and novel by Cormac McCarthy on which it was based. How could a conversation about aging be relevant to a story about fugitives and murder? What is it about Poland, I wondered, that warrants a comparison to the film’s harsh climate, where mere survival is a triumph?

The title provokes the reader to ask, “*Is Poland a country for old people?*” Implicitly comparative—for if Poland is not a country for old people, then where is?—this question suggests a connection between the nation-state and its elderly citizens. But this link is not explicit, nor does the series ever answer it as such, despite the plethora of journalists, scholars, and individuals who engage in conversations about Polish politics, economics, history, and

¹ <http://www.zkdp.pl/>, accessed 14 October 2011. The tabloid *Fakt* has been outselling *Gazeta Wyborcza* since at least January 2010. The formulation “Poland is no country for...” seems to be catching on as a way to describe social problems: see <http://www.rp.pl/artykul/17,975487-Polskie-biedadzieci.html> (Poland is no country for young people); http://wroclaw.gazeta.pl/wroclaw/1,35771,9234964,Polska_to_nie_jest_kraj_dla_singli_i_singielek.html (Poland is no country for singles); <http://blogi.newsweek.pl/Tekst/spoleczenstwo/598246,to-nie-jest-kraj-dla-biednych-ludzi.html> (Poland is no country for poor people); <http://www.rp.pl/artykul/755674.html> (Poland is no country for scientists).

society that suggest possible answers. Their explanations reveal complexly layered moral perspectives involving politics, religion, and worldviews. Amidst these explanations, particular forms of personhood in old age emerge that taken on a moral valence; that is, there are good and bad ways to grow old. Understanding what these forms of personhood are, and how they are connected to the broader political-economic order, is the central task of this chapter.

Discrimination, negative stereotypes, and responses to these phenomena are the dominant threads running throughout the *Gazeta Wyborcza* series. This chapter attempts to understand the moral ambivalence surrounding old age in Poland, in which older people are paradoxically both central and marginal to public life, alternately valorized, demonized, or excluded (cf. Caldwell 2007). By grounding this analysis in these two influential newspapers, *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Nasz Dziennik* (Our Daily), this chapter maps out the connections between experiences of and attitudes towards aging, and transformations in personhood in contemporary Poland. By holding this material from opposite ends of the ideological spectrum up to the same analytic lens, I aim to show the contours of the discursive framework within which conversations on aging in Poland take place. At the heart of these issues are two sets of questions: First, what are the precise links between old age and the Polish nation and state? How is Poland understood in relation to other countries, and what kind of Poland is being imagined in each newspaper? And second, what kinds of aging persons are represented? What is the moral valence attributed to these older Poles, and whose responsibility is it to care for older people?

This chapter demonstrates that each newspaper presents its own set of incomplete answers to these questions, in which gendered social relations, political economy, and health and illness are central. Analyzing these sets of articles on aging provides a better understanding of the stakes of contemporary conflicts in Polish public life by elucidating the relationship among

postsocialism, neoliberalism, and social welfare, and the forms of personhood that are possible in contemporary Poland. This chapter aims to describe the discursive space within which my ethnographic fieldwork took place.

Gazeta Wyborcza, Nasz Dziennik, and the vocabulary of aging

Presenting the broader sociocultural and political context of these particular Polish newspapers is necessary in order to understand the particular significance of articles on aging. The paper of record in Poland since 1989, *Gazeta Wyborcza* emerged out of the Solidarity movement in the 1980s as the major independent daily newspaper. Now part of a major media conglomerate, Agora, *Gazeta Wyborcza* is printed six days a week across the country, with local editions for every metropolitan area in the country, and has a major online presence through the websites www.wyborcza.pl and www.gazeta.pl. Agora's website states its values for its readers as the following:

- to remain an independent newspaper, mindful that a free press is integral to a healthy society, and to the ongoing dialog between the government and the governed,
- to speak to them in the language of common human decency,
- to provide a safe harbor for those who seek shelter from onslaughts of hatred,
- for 'Gazeta Wyborcza' to be the newspaper of Poland which is part of a new world order, democratic and sensible, enterprising and outgoing, tolerant and open.²

Gazeta Wyborcza is an independent paper without any connections to a particular political party, and indeed, it is hard to identify any one editorial slant of the paper. Though some journalists are clearly pro-market, pro-European Union, and supportive of *Platforma Obywatelska* (PO, or Civic Platform), the centrist political party of current Prime Minister Donald Tusk, others are more left-leaning and criticize free-market reforms and their effects.

² http://www.agora.pl/agora_eng/1,66653,2409836.html accessed 30 July 2011.

The series “Poland is no country for old people” emerged out of a single provocative interview with social psychologist Wiesław Łukaszewski on the topic of aging and is one of many such occasional topical reports that *Gazeta Wyborcza* publishes.³ The series consisted of 17 articles and 33 letters from readers, published on weekdays for two consecutive weeks. Beginning with a survey on perceptions of old people and an extended interview with Professor Łukaszewski, the articles in the first week focused on the discrimination common to many Poles’ experiences of aging, taken to the extreme in a terrifying story about an abandoned old woman, Władysława Baranowska, left to die alone in her apartment. Also including articles about upcoming changes in the social security system, discrimination in the media, an economic comparison of old age today and in the 1970s, recommendations for being healthy in old age, and a manifesto called “Old age is beautiful,” the first week presented aging as a largely negative experience, and made clear the newspaper’s attempts to change this. The second week, which included fewer articles and more letters from readers, reported on the dire demographic changes and state of medical care for the elderly in Poland, and described the relationship between elderly people and new technology (e.g., computers, cell phones). Ending with two stories about older people’s experiences of discrimination in the workplace, the series seemed to conclude in the same place it started: namely, discrimination. The series seemed to emphatically confirm its title, that indeed, Poland is not a country for old people. By covering such a wide range of topics and encouraging readers to share their experiences (many articles end with the provocation, “Is Poland a country for old people? Write in about your own old age”), the newspaper attempted to create a national dialogue on old age in Poland.⁴

³June 2011, Marzena Kasperska, personal communication.

⁴ “Czy Polska to jest kraj dla starych ludzi? Napisz o swojej starości”

This attempt at an open dialogue is quite distinct from the goals and content of *Nasz Dziennik*. Like the other branches of the Redemptorist priest Father Tadeusz Rydzyk's media conglomerate, since 1998 *Nasz Dziennik* has explicitly promoted a conservative Catholic, nationalist, and right-wing agenda. The newspaper describes itself on its homepage by writing:

Nasz Dziennik is a Poland-wide daily paper. We take up subject matter related to social, cultural, political, and religious life. We put forth Christian values and the many-centuries-old Polish culture and tradition. We present information about which other media are silent. We explain the mechanisms that others hide. For over thirteen years we have cultivated our legion of faithful readers, to whose voice we constantly give our columns.⁵

The articles in *Nasz Dziennik* regularly and explicitly criticize *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Tusk's government, and the EU, while supporting what is now the main opposition party, PiS. Though I could not find any coverage of aging that parallels the series from *Gazeta Wyborcza*, the topic of old age recurs throughout the newspaper in two primary ways.⁶ The first, which I found using the search terms "starość" ("old age") and "starzenie się" ("aging"), addresses aging on the macro-scale. In these articles, aging is described in terms of a national demographic crisis that is linked to the other dangers of the contemporary world, such as the rise of secularism, neoliberal capitalism, and the growth of multi-national corporations. Primarily attributed to the low birth rate, this type of article suggests raising the birth rate through policies that are "pro-family," such as payments for each child, especially for the third child and beyond, and by reducing pension

⁵ „Nasz Dziennik jest ogólnopolską gazetą codzienną. Podejmujemy tematykę dotyczącą życia społecznego, kulturalnego, politycznego i religijnego. Propagujemy wartości chrześcijańskie oraz wielowiekową tradycję i kulturę polską. Przekazujemy informacje, o których inne media milczą. Tłumaczymy mechanizmy, które inni ukrywają. Przez ponad trzynaście lat dochowaliśmy się rzeszy wiernych Czytelników, których głosowi oddajemy stale nasze łamy.” <http://www.naszdziennik.pl/redakcja.php?typ=ii&dat=20110708&id=main> , accessed 7 July 2011.

⁶ The date range for these searches was from April 2008 through June 2011, or approximately eighteen months longer than the time I was in Poland conducting long-term fieldwork. The search terms used were "starość" ("old age"), "starzenie się" ("aging"), "senior" ("senior") and "dziad" (the stem for "grandfather" and "grandparents").

payments for families with many children. Immigration is not seen as a possible solution because this would erode the traditional cultural values of the Polish nation,⁷ and indeed, all of Europe.⁸

The second type of article, which I found using the search terms “*senior*” (“senior”) and “*dziad-*” (the stem for “grandparents” and “grandfather”) focuses on older people themselves. In these articles, older people are valorized for their role as grandparents, bearers of both family and national tradition. Caregiving is a topic that runs throughout these articles; older women are either valorized for being the good *babcia* (grandmother) who takes care of her grandchildren, or for nobly enduring suffering as objects of care. A one-day supplemental section on health devoted to aging appeared in January 2009, consisting of nine articles addressing old age from a primarily medical point of view. There is nothing resembling either the detailed descriptions of particular older people’s experiences or the dialogue between journalists and readers in *Gazeta Wyborcza*.

Throughout the articles on aging in both *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Nasz Dziennik*, a vivid vocabulary emerges to describe aging. In *Gazeta Wyborcza*, these words are often negative, as when, in the interview that inspired the series, Professor Łukaszewski claimed that Polish society treats older people as “*Untermenschen*,” recalling Nazi race science, or described his own experience of feeling “*przeroczysty*” (“transparent”) on the street.⁹ In another article, a scholar lists some of the negative words used to refer to older women, including “*megiera*,” a word for a nasty, ill-tempered old woman derived from *Magaera*, one of the Greek Furies, and “mother-in-

⁷ Goss, Małgorzata interviews Cezary Mech. ‘*Rząd Tuska nie dba o polskie rodziny i dzieci.*’ [‘Tusk’s government does not take care of Polish families or children.’] *Nasz Dziennik*. 28 September 2009.

⁸ “*W rzeczywistości masowy napływ ‘integrujących się’ imigrantów wymazuje tożsamość kulturową i religijną Europy.*” [“In reality, the mass influx of ‘integrating’ immigrants erases the cultural and religious identity of Europe.”] Franciszek L. Ćwik interviews Father Michel Schooyans. ‘*Proroctwo Pawła VI.*’ [‘The prophecy of Paul VI.’] *Nasz Dziennik*. 10-11 November 2008.

⁹ Wodecka, Dorota. ‘*Kiedy jeżdżę na rolkach, smarkaczy krzyczą: dziadek do piachu!*’ *Gazeta Wyborcza*. 17 November 2008.

law,” which one Polish friend equated with *megiera*.¹⁰ The use of the word “still” (*jeszcze*) in survey questions (e.g., “Do I still earn money?” or “What do you still want to do in your life?”¹¹) signals an expected end to a particular activity or dream; in other words, asking if one is “still” doing something in old age reveals an expectation that activity might have ceased. Taken together, these words evoke painful histories, problematic everyday social encounters, and difficult positions within families, all shaded by expectations of decline in old age. This vocabulary is overwhelmingly negative and depressing.

In *Nasz Dziennik*, a different yet equally vivid vocabulary emerges. Almost every article is explicitly influenced by the paper’s conservative nationalist Catholic vision, in which “tradition” (*tradycja*), “family” (*rodzina*), “Nation” (*Naród*), and “faith” (*wiara*) are valorized, and “liberal” (*liberalny*), “capitalist” (*kapitalistyczny*), and “political correctness” (*poprawność polityczna*) are demonized. In this dangerous world, the EU and demographic changes are particular threats to Polish national sovereignty. A number of articles with titles such as “Demographic tsunami approaches”¹² and “Here comes the demographic winter”¹³ describe the crisis that Poland’s aging society presents. The only viable solutions, according to *Nasz Dziennik*, are policies that are “pro-family” (*prorodzinny*), by which they mean pro-natalist. Yet when articles discuss aging in contexts outside demography and economics, such as the family, old people are warmly described as the “treasure” (*skarb*) of the family and the nation, as those who (along with mothers) can best raise young children. In their relational role as grandparents, old people are to be treasured, valued, and honored. In addition to providing care for grandchildren, they are also positioned as receivers of care in illness—something that, in contrast

¹⁰ Zawadzka, Anna. ‘Dyktatura młodych twarzy.’ *Gazeta Wyborcza*. 20 November 2008.

¹¹ „Czy jeszcze dorabiam?” “Co chce pani/pan jeszcze w życiu zrobić?” Klimowicz, Joanna and Ewa Sokólska, ‘40 starych ludzi.’ *Gazeta Wyborcza*. 18 November 2008.

¹² Mech, Cezary. ‘Nadchodzi demograficzne tsunami.’ *Nasz Dziennik*. 24 February 2011.

¹³ Piłka, Marian. ‘Idzie zima demograficzna.’ *Nasz Dziennik*. 3-4 July 2010.

to *Gazeta Wyborcza*, is not stigmatized, but rather treated as a valuable experience of suffering. In sum, in *Nasz Dziennik* older persons as such are overwhelmingly positively evaluated, yet as a group, the aging population, combined with the low fertility rate, represent a danger to the Polish nation.

Next, I will compare this special supplementary section, along with selected other articles from *Nasz Dziennik*, to the *Gazeta Wyborcza* series. First, I will demonstrate that each newspaper creates links between older persons and the Polish nation-state that represent their own particular worldview. Then I will argue that the different kinds of aging persons represented in each newspaper have an ever-present moral valence, in which some classes of persons are valued and desired and others are excluded. Throughout this analysis, I will specify the connections between the ever-present gendered moral underpinnings of conversations about aging and older people, and link these moral judgments to the types of personhood created.

Poland's place in the imagined moral world of aging

In the *Gazeta Wyborcza* series, France, Greece, Scandinavia, and the US are all cited by Poles as places in which older people are treated better than in Poland. Rather than treating older people as unable to participate in everyday social life, as *Untermenschen*, in these other countries, chronological age poses no barrier to activity and social life. That is, old age is seen as better elsewhere because one can continue to be the same sort of person as in previous years of life; personhood is continuous. One pithy letter to *Gazeta Wyborcza* makes this particularly clear: "In Paris, London, or New York no one would ever think of me as OLD. But in Poland, I'm an old lady. So what that I work, that I'm thriving. They're already packing me up in a

hearse.”¹⁴ Here, a woman named Jolanta directly speaks to the discrimination described by the professor in the interview that motivated the whole series. Saying that she is not transparent but “fabulously colorful,”¹⁵ sixty-year-old Jolanta writes that she has sex every day, gets speeding tickets when driving, and loves traveling long distances. She claims that in other countries—France, England, the US—she would not be considered old, but that “in this foolish country”¹⁶ her life is already treated as over.

Other parts of the *Gazeta Wyborcza* series compare Poland to other countries on the basis of care. In one detailed article, a doctor tries to explain the horrible state in which one elderly woman, Władysława Baranowska, is brought to the hospital. In a manner that suggests he has given up on Poland, the doctor says that he plans to move to Greece when he grows old, for such abominations never happen there.¹⁷ Somehow, Ms. Baranowska’s miserable condition is a function of her living in Poland. In Greece, in other countries, the frail elderly are properly cared for. So in the world of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, both Polish kin relations and public life are portrayed as inhospitable to aging Poles; there are other, better places in which to grow old.

In *Nasz Dziennik*, Poland is portrayed as both better and worse than other countries. On the national scale, Poland fares poorly because the current government’s policies do not adequately address the demographic crisis. Poland’s decades of low birth rates mean that what demographers call the “replacement rate” is not being met, so there is fear that the population will decline. Writers for *Nasz Dziennik* claim that the low birth rates can be attributed to the

¹⁴ “W Paryżu, Londynie czy Nowego Jorku nikomu nie przyjdzie do głowy pomyśleć o mnie STARA. A w Polsce - jestem staruszką. Co z tego że pracuję, że kwitnę. Już się mnie pakuje na katafalk.” Letters. Już mnie pakują na katafalk. *Gazeta Wyborcza*. 19 November 2008.

¹⁵ “bajecznie kolorowa” Letters. Już mnie pakują na katafalk. *Gazeta Wyborcza*. 19 November 2008.

¹⁶ „w tym durnym kraju” Letters. Już mnie pakują na katafalk. *Gazeta Wyborcza*. 19 November 2008.

¹⁷ „Na starość wyprowadzę się do Grecji. Tam nikomu nie przyjdzie do głowy, by wyrzucić umierającą babcię lub dziadka do szpitala. W Polsce nie ma szacunku dla starych ludzi.” Kasperska, Marzena. ‘Koniec miała, jakby śmieciem była.’ *Gazeta Wyborcza*. 19 November 2008.

current government's "anti-family" ("*antyrodzinny*") policies and urge "pro-family" policies, such as increasing payments to families for each additional child born, and reducing payments into the pension system for families with multiple children, since these children are working on behalf of childless pensioners.¹⁸ In response to a question about immigration as a possible solution, an economist and former vice-minister of finance remarked that "Poland would lose its national character" due to the number of immigrants necessary to ameliorate the replacement rate; the high birth rate in "Arab countries" means that these children will need jobs, and some will find them in Europe.¹⁹ Spain is cited here as a negative example of the consequences of large waves of immigration. Yet later in the same interview, the economist uses Spain as a favorable comparison to Poland, for despite a deficit, Spain was able to increase their one-time payment to families for the birth of each child to €2,500.²⁰ According to this economist, unless Tusk's government supports such policies, the Polish nation will continue to be threatened by both the large aging population and its negative place relative to its European neighbors. Throughout *Nasz Dziennik*, Poland is imagined as a nation threatened by both its current government (PO) and by outside influence (e.g., immigrants, secular neighbors).

Older people are presented as a refuge from these negative influences. As the bearers of religious tradition and patriotism, they are essential to the cultivation of future generations of religious patriotic Poles. In an interview with Bishop Józef Wysocki, Małgorzata Jędrzejczyk

¹⁸ Piłka, Marian. 'Idzie zima demograficzna.' *Nasz Dziennik*. 3-4 July 2010.

¹⁹ "Polska utraciłaby swój narodowy charakter." Goss, Małgorzata interviews Cezary Mech. 'Rząd Tuska nie dba o polskie rodziny i dzieci.' [*Tusk's government does not take care of Polish families or children.*] *Nasz Dziennik*. 28 September 2009.

²⁰ There is currently a 1,000 PLN one-time payment ('*becikowe*') for each child born, passed with the support of PiS and even more socially conservative political parties (*Liga Polskich Rodzin, Samoobrony*).

asks “What is the role of older people in the family in the transmittance of faith and patriotic tradition?”²¹ The bishop replies:

Between a child and his parents, and even more between him and his grandparents, is a natural emotional tie that allows the child to absorb everything shown to him by his parents. The soul of a small child is like a tabula rasa, a blank slate, unwritten. So it is necessary to begin to write on it in a beautiful way that is fundamental and timeless, as the truth about God and man was revealed by Himself. In agreement with the psychological law of first attachments, the first and most beautiful experiences are connected with faith in God, linked with beautiful customs and rituals: with the flames of candles, with a song, with a prayer, and with the telling of biblical stories, they will fall deep into the children’s hearts and from this, no one will be able to erase this slate. The same also happens with love for the Fatherland. Children learn this on the laps of their own father and mother. So one cannot miss the Christmas Eve evening of prayer for our Fatherland and for those who perished in its defense. Thanks to the sacrifice of their lives, today we can calmly celebrate and enjoy freedom.²²

So older people, in their role as grandparents, are crucial for the role they play in transmitting the faith, traditions, and patriotic history that *Nasz Dziennik* sees as crucial to the Polish nation. The question that opens this interview demonstrates the defensive position from which *Nasz Dziennik* begins its analysis:

Recently it can be observed that there is an increasing loss of tradition. In many contemporary families contact between its members is diminishing, parents don’t talk with their children as often as is necessary. And after all, tradition is an oral transmission of customs, values, and perspectives – both religious and ethical, as well as patriotic or simply customary... Why is this transmission so important?²³

²¹ “Jaka jest rola starszych osób w rodzinie w przekazie wiary, tradycji patriotycznych?” ‘Współczesna rodzina a tradycje.’ [‘The contemporary family and traditions.’] *Nasz Dziennik*. 25 November 2008.

²² “Między dzieckiem a rodzicami, a jeszcze bardziej dziadkami jest naturalna więź emocjonalna umożliwiająca dzieciom przyjmowanie wszystkich treści przekazywanych im przez rodziców. Dusza małego dziecka jest jak tabula rasa – czysta tablica, niezapisana. Należy więc na niej zacząć zapisywać pięknym charakterem zasadnicze i ponadczasowe, przez Niego samego objawione prawdy o Bogu i o człowieku. Zgodnie również z prawem psychologicznym pierwszych połączeń, pierwsze i najpiękniejsze przeżycia związane z wiarą w Boga, połączone z pięknymi zwyczajami i obrzędami: płomykami świec, śpiewem, modlitwą i opowiadaniem historii biblijnej zapadną dzieciom głęboko w ich serce i z tej tablicy już nikt nie zdoła im ich wymazać. To samo dzieje się również z miłością do Ojczyzny. Uczą się jej dzieci na kolanach własnego ojca i matki. Nie może więc zabraknąć w wigilijnym wieczór modlitwy w intencji naszej Ojczyzny i tych, którzy zginęli w jej obronie. Dzięki ofierze ich życia my dzisiaj możemy spokojnie świętować i cieszyć się wolnością.” ‘Współczesna rodzina a tradycje.’ [‘The contemporary family and traditions.’] *Nasz Dziennik*. 25 November 2008.

²³ „Ostatnio daje się zauważyć coraz większy zanik tradycji. W dużej części współczesnych rodzin zanika kontakt między jej członkami, rodzice nie rozmawiają z dziećmi tak często, jak jest to potrzebne. A przecież tradycja to ustne przekazywanie zwyczajów, wartości oraz poglądów – zarówno religijnych i etycznych, jak i patriotycznych czy po prostu zwyczajowych... Dlaczego ten przekaz jest tak ważny?” ‘Współczesna rodzina a tradycje.’ [‘The contemporary family and traditions.’] *Nasz Dziennik*. 25 November 2008.

The bishop's answer includes a comparison to the US, in which Americans "look with admiration" on traditional Polish customs on All Saints' Day.²⁴ So despite the grave threats to the Polish nation that *Nasz Dziennik* sees, it is through the maintenance of Polish tradition—more precisely, though Catholic and patriotic tradition—that Poland can become strong. However, this linkage of Catholicism and patriotism is not timeless in the way that *Nasz Dziennik* claims; rather, it is an early-twentieth-century construction.²⁵

The Poland that appears in *Nasz Dziennik*, then, is a very different one than from what appears in *Gazeta Wyborcza*. *Nasz Dziennik*'s Poland is under threat from its own government, neighboring countries, and the secularizing influence of capitalism; only through cultivating Polish Catholic 'traditions,' in which older people are fundamentally important, is there hope for the survival of the nation. This nation is explicitly exclusionary, with no place for non-Poles or even Poles who disagree with *Nasz Dziennik*'s understanding of history and worldview. *Gazeta Wyborcza*'s Poland is a much more cacophonous place, with a multitude of voices, opinions, and experiences clamoring to be heard. The near-constant refrain of complaint and the stories of stereotypes and marginalization demonstrate that for many older people, Poland is faring poorly in comparison to other parts of the world. Despite the broad alignment of *Gazeta Wyborcza*'s politics with the current political-economic situation in Poland, the voices of the older people in this series reveal an unease with and disorder within contemporary Poland.

Personhood in old age: moral, medical, and religious dimensions

²⁴ "z podziwem patrzę" 'Współczesna rodzina a tradycje.' ['The contemporary family and traditions.'] *Nasz Dziennik*. 25 November 2008.

²⁵ For a thorough explanation of the links between Polish-ness and Catholicism, see Porter-Szücs, B. 2011. *Faith and Fatherland: Catholicism, Modernity, and Poland*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Gazeta Wyborcza presents aging persons in two morally distinct categories. Who is responsible for creating such good, bad, or non-persons, however, remains ambiguous throughout the series. The major difference between these moral categories examples is determined by levels of activity or social engagement; the many older people portrayed as isolated, lonely, depressed, poor, and ill, are the typical negative examples of growing old, while the few people who are described as active, sporty, and socially engaged are the positive examples of growing old. The primary distinguishing characteristic between negatively- and positively-presented old person is whether one is the same or different person than when one was younger; what counts as sameness and difference in personhood is imagined on the basis of activity. If one has the same degree and quality of (mental, physical, and social) activity as when one was younger, one can maintain a continuous personhood. If, however, one's engagement with the world diminishes, shrinking and dwindling until the end of life, then one becomes a different sort of person in old age. This different sort of personhood is a *lesser* sort of personhood; that is, being less active makes one less fully human than their more active peers and those younger than them.

This moral ideology produces and reflects different classes of persons and bodies. It is impossible to imagine the retired professors and engineers of this series, so vibrant, busy, and healthy, in the position of Władysława Baranowska. This older woman was brought to the hospital “in a state of extreme emaciation, neglected, with bedsores, with white worms in her wounds.”²⁶ The admitting doctor remarked, “Only homeless people come to us in such a state.”²⁷ The article describes a failed network of care that led to this end; despite a daughter living

²⁶ “*Przywieziona w stanie skrajnego wyniszczenia, zaniedbana, z odleżynami, w ranach białe robaki.*” Kasperska, Marzena. ‘*Koniec miała, jakby śmieciem była.*’ [‘She came to such an end as if she were trash.’] *Gazeta Wyborcza*. 19 November 2008.

²⁷ “*W takim stanie trafiali do nas tylko ludzie bezdomni.*” *Ibid.*

nearby, paid caregivers, and multiple trips to the hospital, nothing prevented Ms. Baranowska from “[coming] to such an end as if she were trash,”²⁸ in the words of her neighbor. This neighbor blamed Ms. Baranowska’s daughter for neglecting her mother, while also recognizing that their shared apartment building was not a suitable or caring environment for an older person living alone. Ms. Baranowska’s son-in-law, meanwhile, blamed three different government institutions (the city social aid department, the hospital, and long-term care institutions) for failing his mother-in-law. There was no clear way for Ms. Baranowska to receive adequate care.

This damning article presents a jumbled and confusing maze of institutions and individuals that are supposed to provide care, in which meager personal, familial, institutional, and systemic resources do not add up to a dignified life or death for Władysława Baranowska.²⁹ As a reader, it is hard to know where responsibility should lie; one sees genuine efforts and missteps made by each actor. Each health-care institution ultimately blames Ms. Baranowska’s daughter and family for the abominable state of her health, while the family blames the institutions. The health-care system appears fragmented and poor, with no one doctor or institution assuming ultimate responsibility for the patient’s care. The diagnosis of “old age” in Ms. Baranowska’s chart suggests that at least some medical personnel consider old age itself a disease, raising the question of how earnest any medical treatment of an older person can be, since they will still have the disease of “old age.” The doctor’s comment that he only sees homeless people arrive at the hospital in such a state is presented without comment, suggesting the existence of a group of people for whom such a bodily state is expected. How can adequate care be provided when the assumption is that old age is a disease, or that homeless people will have worms crawling in their wounds?

²⁸ “*Koniec miała, jakby śmieciem była.*” Ibid.

²⁹ See Cohen 1998:81-82 on the trope of abandonment of older people.

Indeed, throughout the articles and letters, persons of different classes appear, yet socioeconomic status is rarely included in the moralizing discussions on successful and active aging. That is, those who brag about their own successes or encourage such successes in others do not address the financial or social conditions that play a role in their own successes, and in the ‘failures’ of others. Those who share financial and social hardships rarely voice concerns about active aging. The conversations do intersect in a couple of instances, but in general the picture is fragmented and opaque. While these disjunctions are less overtly dramatic than the shocking details of Ms. Baranowska’s life and death, they all skirt the same issues: namely, the ideals of a successful, active, old age are incompatible with the everyday lives of many older Poles, who, for reasons having to do with their finances, social relations, and bodies do not have such active lives. These older people can be ignored as objects of care, as indicated by the surgeon’s comment about the homeless, fall through the cracks of a broken system of relations, as in the case of Ms. Baranowska, or be discriminated against by their peers, families, and society, as in the examples of the many lonely and sad old people who wrote letters. All become less fully human in their deviations from the ideals of active aging.

This fragmented system, in which aging can be dehumanizing unless one has adequate socioeconomic resources, could be related to ideals of independent personhood and the decentralization of care in contemporary Poland. But the experiences of Prof. Łukaszewski suggest otherwise. As a professional older man who is still working, according to the ideals of active aging, he should be satisfied and fulfilled. Yet he still experiences intense discrimination. How can independent ideals of self-fulfillment, self-reliance, and flexibility explain his situation? Perhaps the case of Prof. Łukaszewski is (another) example of the failure of neoliberal ideals when applied to individual lives.

In *Nasz Dziennik*, which so often criticizes neoliberalism, different examples of elder personhood exist. Older people as such most often appear as embedded within a network of social relations—as grandparents, bearers of tradition and care-givers for their grandchildren, or as receivers of care, serving as an example of the value of human life through their suffering. For example, in an article describing the benefits of multi-children families, grandparents are described as ideal care-givers for children whose mothers work,³⁰ while receiving care and suffering in old age allows one to teach others by example. In addition to sharing a lifetime of wisdom, a hospice director and priest answers a question about what older people still have to offer by saying this:

“Older people are also able to offer up their prayer, their suffering, to those who need it; they are testimony to the fact that human life is equally important from the moment of conception until natural death. They show the young that, despite toil and suffering one can always enjoy life that is given from God.”³¹

This is a sharp contrast from depictions of suffering in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, which tend to be presented in harshly negative terms, as in the exemplary story about Ms. Baranowska.

Categorized as a supplemental section on health, the one-day section on old age published in *Nasz Dziennik* in January 2009 is an anomaly when compared to these other articles featuring care-giving grandparents or nobly suffering older people. While older people are still presented as being within a network of relations, the dominant mode is of the medicalized subject. The introduction to the supplemental section lists Grandmother’s and Grandfather’s Day, a holiday that occurred the previous week, as the motivation for the series. And even though the introduction begins with a quote from Pope John Paul II—older people are “witnesses

³⁰ Rapała, Bogusław. ‘Nie można się po prostu zatrzymać.’ *Nasz Dziennik*. 20-21 November 2010.

³¹ “Ludzie starsi potrafią ponadto ofiarować swoją modlitwę, swoje cierpienie tym, którzy tego potrzebują, są takim świadectwem, że życie ludzkie jest tak samo ważne od samego poczęcia aż do naturalnej śmierci. Pokazują młodym, jak pomimo trudu i cierpienia zawsze cieszyć się życiem danym od Boga.” ‘Pomimo trudu i cierpienia – cieszyć się życiem.’ [‘Despite toil and suffering, enjoying life’]. *Nasz Dziennik*. 29 January 2009.

of the past and promoters of wisdom for the young and for the future”³²—the articles in the series focus on how to maintain health in the face of inevitable decline in old age. This medicalization of aging is evident in the titles of the articles in the series:

- ‘Old age is not a disease’
- ‘People who accept old age get sick less’
- ‘University for seniors’
- ‘Accepting the autumn of life’
- ‘Diseases that attack older people’
- ‘Seniors according to statistics’
- ‘Depression among older people’
- ‘How to help an older person who appears to be suffering from depression?’
- ‘Despite toil and suffering, enjoying life’³³

Despite the first article’s title, ‘Old age is not a disease,’ it goes on to describe changes—and, crucially—the decline of various bodily functions in old age. Skin loses its elasticity, hair follicles stop releasing pigment, bones contain less calcium, the brain functions worse, the heart slowly weakens, and the list continues. Though all these are normal parts of aging, they can be slowed down with a particular lifestyle, according to the article. The article encourages the reader to accept this as a “stage of life like any other, having its own joys and problems.”³⁴ Growing old should be seen as a natural process, then, but the threat of disease is always present. The call for readers to “accept” old age runs throughout these articles, but it is accompanied by urging from medical professionals, either in the form of an interview or as anonymous medical wisdom, to work against these natural processes of decline through remaining active—physically, mentally, and socially. Even the article about Universities of the Third Age posits participating in the University as a way to stave off illness. Moreover, it is

³² ‘świadkowie przeszłości i inspiratorzy mądrości dla młodych i dla przyszłości.’ No title, introduction to ‘Szlachetne zdrowie’ [‘Precious health’]. *Nasz Dziennik*. 29 January 2009.

³³ ‘Starość to nie choroba,’ ‘Osoby, które akceptują starość, mniej chorują,’ ‘Uniwersytet dla seniorów,’ ‘Zaakceptować jesień życia,’ ‘Choroby atakujące ludzi starszych,’ ‘Seniorzy w statystykach,’ ‘Depresje u ludzi starszych,’ ‘Jak pomóc osobie starszej, u której podejrzewamy depresję?’ ‘Pomimo trudu i cierpienia – cieszyć się życiem.’ ‘Szlachetne zdrowie’ [‘Precious health’]. *Nasz Dziennik*. 29 January 2009.

³⁴ „taki sam etap życia jak inne, posiadający swoje radości i problemy.” ‘Starość to nie choroba.’ [‘Old age is not a disease.’] *Nasz Dziennik*. 29 January 2009.

never explicitly stated what, exactly, is to be “accepted” about old age. Do teenagers need to be exhorted to “accept” their teenage years, or middle-aged adults to “accept” their working years? This emphasis on “accepting” old age belies the emphatic claims that aging is not a disease, that old age is a natural stage of life.

This medicalization of old age is also prevalent in *Gazeta Wyborcza*. For example, one article, ‘The atlas of aging,’³⁵ describes in even greater detail the decline of various bodily functions throughout old age. The imagery accompanying the article is even stranger; an older woman with gray hair in colorful sweatpants strides forward with a determined look on her face, yet all around her are illustrations of various organs and short descriptions of their typical decline in function with age.³⁶

Yet in *Nasz Dziennik*, the medicalization of old age is always framed in religious terms. The introduction to the one-day supplement encourages the reader to be inspired and motivated by both Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI:

Outstanding examples of this, of how much good one can do while already being in old age, are Servant of God John Paul II, as well as Benedykt XVI, who became Pope when he was... 78 years old. Let this be an encouragement for seniors to use all the time given to them, and for the young – testimony that human life is equally important and holy in every stage of life.³⁷

Even when medicalized, then, elderly personhood continues to be part of the natural religious order.

The polarized moral categories of *Gazeta Wyborcza* have no place in *Nasz Dziennik*, for aging in *Nasz Dziennik* is presented as part of the Catholic life course, with older people firmly

³⁵ ‘Atlas starzenia się’ *Gazeta Wyborcza*. 21 November 2008.

³⁶ http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,5973137,Atlas_starzenia_sie.html 21 November 2008.

³⁷ “Wybitnym przykładem tego, ile można dobrego zdziałać, będąc już w podeszłym wieku, są Sługa Boży Jan Paweł II, a także Benedykt XVI, który został Papieżem, mając...78 lat. Niech to będzie zachęta dla seniorów, aby w pełni wykorzystali dany im czas, a dla młodszych – świadectwem, że życie ludzkie jest tak samo ważne i święte na każdym etapie życia.” No title, introduction to ‘Szlachetne zdrowie’ [‘Precious health’]. *Nasz Dziennik*. 29 January 2009.

embedded in their familial relations. An article about abandoned elders, such as the story of Ms. Baranowska in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, would be unthinkable in *Nasz Dziennik*, unless it were accompanied by explicit condemnation of the current government and the influence of secular neoliberalism. Indeed, in some ways the article about Ms. Baranowska is more suited to the moralizing universe of *Nasz Dziennik*, yet as it is told in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, there is no clear villain.

“She came to such an end as if she were trash”

“Arrived in a state of extreme emaciation, neglected, with bedsores, with white worms in her wounds.” (from report to prosecutor, filed by the Provincial Hospital for Specialties in Legnica on August 20).

Surgeon Jacek Mikołajków, director of admittances at the Legnica hospital: “I remember. Only homeless people come to us in such a state.”

Grażyna Sokołowska, hospital spokesperson for patients’ rights: “It was a macabre sight. Horribly emaciated, bones and prosthesis on the outside. “

77-year-old Władysława Baranowska was brought by ambulance to the hospital on August 19th. She died three days later.

“The case seemed unambiguous: the negligence of a social worker. But in the process of gathering further information, nothing was that simple,” said Liliana Łukasiewicz, from the District Prosecutor’s Office in Legnica. “We have enough work for a few months.”

From the autopsy: “The reason for death was circulatory-respiratory failure of an emaciated body. Signs of extreme emaciation in the form of muscle atrophy, subcutaneous tissue atrophy...”³⁸

In this shocking article, the journalist, Marzena Kasperska, tries to explain the events leading up to this tragic end to the life of Władysława Baranowska, a 77-year-old woman in the city of Legnica, near Wrocław in southwestern Poland. Looking for the explanation for how a life could

³⁸ “Przywieziona w stanie skrajnego wyniszczenia, zaniedbana, z odleżynami, w ranach białe robaki.” (z doniesienia do prokuratury, które 20 sierpnia złożył Wojewodzki Szpital Specjalistyczny w Legnicy).

Chirurg Jacek Mikołajków, kierownik izby przyjęć legnickiego szpitala: - Pamiętam. W takim stanie trafiali do nas tylko ludzie bezdomni.

Grażyna Sokołowska, rzeczniczka praw pacjenta w szpitalu: - Widok był makabryczny. Strasznie wychudzona, kości i endoproteza na wierzchu.

77-letnią Władysławę Baranowską karetka przywiozła do szpitala we wtorek 19 sierpnia. Zmarła trzy dni później.

-Z pozoru sprawa wydawała się jednoznaczna: zaniedbania opieki społecznej. Ale w miarę zdobywania kolejnych informacji nic nie było już proste – mówi Liliana Łukasiewicz z Prokuratury Okręgowej w Legnicy. – Mamy pracy na kilka miesięcy.

Z sekcji zwłok: „Zmarła z powodu niewydolności krążeniowo-oddechowej na tle wyniszczenia organizmu. Cechy skrajnego wzniszczenia w postaci zaników mięśni, zaniku tkanki podskórnej...”.

end in these inhumane conditions, Kasperska leads the reader through the sparse yet confusing network of care that failed Ms. Baranowska.

The investigation leads Kasperska to Ms. Baranowska's neighborhood, vividly described as a run-down area with "old townhouses, older people, and every few hundred meters a pawnshop."³⁹ There, she speaks with a shopkeeper down the street, who says that for the last five years ever since the death of her husband, Ms. Baranowska always came in alone. The mail carrier remarks that he used to bring her pension check, but that it stopped arriving in the last six months, since Ms. Baranowska was bed-ridden. For the first time, Ms. Baranowska's daughter is mentioned, as the mail carrier wonders if perhaps the daughter had been receiving her mother's check.

A neighbor describes how he once brought Ms. Baranowska back to her apartment after some "shitheads"⁴⁰ attacked her outside their apartment building. Another time, the neighbor helped Ms. Baranowska find her way to her daughter's apartment, and would bring her chopped wood, coal, sandwiches, and soup. He stopped once she could no longer get up to answer the door. The neighbor describes their apartment stairwell as full of older lonely people who do not take an interest in one another. He seems to be an exception, as he called the fire department once after hearing a cry from Ms. Baranowska's apartment. They found her lying on the floor and moaning. The neighbor admonished Ms. Baranowska's daughter that "she needs to better look after her mother."⁴¹ A caregiver from the private company Gwarant was Ms. Baranowska's most frequent visitor. The neighbor remarks that at Ms. Baranowska's funeral, there were ten people.

³⁹ „Stare kamienice, starzy ludzie, co kilkaset metrów lombard.”

⁴⁰ „gówniarzy”

⁴¹ „...że music się lepiej matką zająć.”

“The daughter cried a bit, but there was no tragedy. Now everyone is crying: ‘I visited her, I took care of her.’ And where were they earlier? The daughter should pull back the quilt to see if her mother is dressed and washed, to see if her diapers are clean. She came to such an end as if she were trash.”⁴²

The neighbor places blame squarely on Ms. Baranowska’s daughter for neglecting her mother, while also recognizing that their shared apartment building was not a suitable or caring environment for an older person living alone.

Kasperska visits the home of Ms. Baranowska’s daughter and son-in-law, Danuta and Irek, a 20-minute walk from where Ms. Baranowska lived. By contrast to her apartment, Ms. Baranowska’s daughter has a large (180-square-meter) apartment in a renovated townhouse in an “elegant” part of town, where she lives with her husband, two adult children, one ten-year-old child, and grandchild. After her mother’s funeral, Danuta went up to the sea, where all summer, her neighbors report, she had been selling small wares from a tent. Kasperska learned from Irek that Danuta could not properly take care of her mother, for she herself was sick with psoriasis and joint inflammation, and did not have a car to get to her mother. This is why Danuta hired a caregiver from Gwarant to be with her mother. Irek says that he blames either MOPS (*Miejski Ośrodek Pomocy Społecznej*, or the city social aid department) or Gwarant for his mother-in-law’s state. MOPS would not pay for more than six hours a day of care and the hospital would not admit his mother-in-law because they do not treat bedsores, discharging her after a week. The hospital is actually part of a different branch of government, so although Irek singles out MOPS as blame-worthy, he actually lays blame with three different government-run institutions that failed his mother-in-law: MOPS, for not providing enough hours of care to keep his mother-in-law safely at home; the hospital, for discharging her when she was not well; and the long-

⁴² “Córka trochę płakała, ale tragedii nie było. Teraz wszyscy krzyczą: Odwiedziałam, dbałam. A gdzie byli wcześniej? Córka powinna odchylić kołdrę, zobaczyć, czy matka jest przebrana, umyta, czy pampers czysty. Koniec miała, jakby śmieciem była.”

term-care institutions, for being too expensive for his mother-in-law's meager pension (600 złoty, or about 200 USD per month).

Irek last saw his mother-in-law a month and a half before she died. But before Danuta left for the sea, Irek says,

“she went twice a week [to her mother's] or even more often,” he adds quickly. “When they called to say that she had died, Danuta was devastated. Maybe my wife is a little guilty, but what could she do? Sit and wait until her mother died? And who really knows when anyone will die? She was supposed to leave three kids? It was vacation season, she wanted to go somewhere.”⁴³

Irek acknowledges that his wife could have done more to take care of her mother, but ultimately places the blame on MOPS, Gwarant, and the hospital. Additionally, a stronger imperative to care for children instead of for elderly parents led Irek and Danuta to live frantic lives focused on providing for their children. “Each of us lives in a rush, each wants to provide for his children. If we had known that the situation was so bad, we would have given up that trip,”⁴⁴ Irek said. So in everyday non-crisis situations, the needs of Irek and Danuta's children take priority over Danuta's mother, but in a critical situation, Irek and Danuta would prioritize their mother. Yet it appears that the everyday structure of care around Danuta's mother prevented Danuta and Irek from learning about crises and their developments.

The institutions that Irek blames—MOPS, Gwarant, and the hospital—all refuse responsibility for the state in which Danuta's mother was brought to the hospital. The caregiver from Gwarant was on sick leave and unable to speak with the reporter, but was described as a conscientious worker by the supervisor at Gwarant. As a caregiver, she did not have medical training so she was not qualified to assess the severity of someone's illness. The supervisor said

⁴³ “chodziła dwa razy w tygodniu albo nawet częściej—dodaje szybko. Jak zadzwonili, że zmarła, była załamana. Żona może jest trochę winna, ale co miała robić? Siedzieć i czekać, aż matka umrze? A kto to wiedział, kiedy umrze? Miała opuścić troje dzieci? Był sezon urlopowy, chciała gdzieś wyjechać..”

⁴⁴ “Każdy żyje w pędzie, chce zapewnić byt dzieciom. Gdybyśmy wiedzieli, że jest tak źle, odpuścilibyśmy ten pobyt.”

that when necessary, the caregiver called the doctor's clinic and ambulance, though they did not always come when called. The supervisor also denied responsibility for Ms. Baranowska's bedsores, saying that she already suffered from bedsores when she began to receive care from Gwarant, and that she belonged in a long-term care institution, which her daughter should have arranged. A vice-director at MOPS assured the reporter that MOPS checked up on the quality of care people receive. When the reporter conveyed the message that the family was dissatisfied with the care that Danuta's mother received, the vice-director of MOPS suggested that Danuta became her mother's legal guardian in order to gain access to her mother's pension. So both MOPS and Gwarant assume a limited responsibility for the care of Władysława Baranowska, placing the full responsibility on her family—that is, daughter.

The files of the local medical clinic where Ms. Baranowska was a patient reflect another level of problematic care. Between March 2007 and August 2008, Ms. Baranowska's file showed that there were 26 clinic visits regarding her health—but the documents did not indicate whether Ms. Baranowska was actually seen by the doctor or if a family member visited the doctor on her behalf. She was prescribed diapers and an anti-bedsores mattress in the course of those 17 months, and was sent to the hospital three times in the six weeks prior to her death. The “environmental” nurse went to Ms. Baranowska's apartment on July 23, after receiving a call from the Gwarant caregiver the previous day. The nurse found Ms. Baranowska unresponsive and covered in bedsores, even on her palms. The worst of the bedsores were on her hips, where there were deep holes with black on the rims. The environmental nurse said that a patient needs to be turned and cared for every two hours, so that having a caregiver for six hours a day would be inadequate care to prevent bedsores. The nurse showed the caregiver how to properly care for bedsores and feed Ms. Baranowska through a bottle. Though Ms. Baranowska had clean diapers,

the nurse said she thought this was because the caregiver specially prepared for the nurse's visit. When the reporter asked why the nurse had not been to Ms. Baranowska's earlier, the director of the clinic replied that no one had previously asked for help. Danuta would come to the clinic smiling, asking only for prescriptions or official documents certifying her mother's state of health. The nurse said that she tried to help as best she could, by informing Ms. Baranowska's doctor, who sent her to the hospital, by attempting to arrange a place for Ms. Baranowska in a long-term care home, where the wait was nine months to two years, and by showing the caregiver how to care for Ms. Baranowska. Her conscience was clean, she told the reporter. The director said that "life should end in dignified conditions, with one's family. The whole effort of the health service isn't necessary for this."⁴⁵ A regional government health consultant described a lack of cooperation between the caregiver, hospital, and clinic, which she attributed to being common to all of Poland since caregivers cannot indicate that someone should be sent to a long-term care institution. The case of Władysława Baranowska should be required learning for all nursing students, the government consultant said, and caregivers should not be afraid to call the police if necessary.

The article ends with the reporter's visit to the hospital where Władysława Baranowska died. In looking through her files there, the reporter finds the diagnosis "old age" written in her chart at least once. Explaining that the hospital in Legnica until very recently had the most debt of any hospital in Poland, a doctor there spoke anonymously to the reporter, saying that they routinely discharge patients generate debts instead of revenue. The hospital spokesperson for patients' rights also spoke to the difficulty and undesirability of finding a place in a long-term care home for patients who have a very low pension, since staying in such an institution will

⁴⁵ "życie powinno się kończyć w godnych warunkach, przy rodzinie. Do tego nie jest potrzebny cały zrzut służby zdrowia."

consume their entire pension costs. The doctor in charge of admitting patients to the hospital said that it is not the responsibility of the hospital to care for patients with bedsores, dehydration, or muscle contractures, since they have to do with everyday nursing care. “Could someone not have straightened and bent her limbs every few hours? It’s not necessary to do that in a hospital.”⁴⁶ When they admitted her on August 19, it was due to the worms in the wounds in her hips—“the flies had already flown away”⁴⁷—that qualified her to be sent to the orthopedic trauma unit. The doctor said that he only sees homeless patients in such a state. When the reporter asks him if he would like to die with worms crawling in his wounds, the doctor replies, “In old age I’ll move to Greece. There it would never enter anyone’s mind to throw a dying grandma or grandpa in a hospital. In Poland there is no respect of old people.”⁴⁸

This damning article presents a jumbled and confusing maze of institutions and individuals that are supposed to provide care, in which meager personal, familial, institutional, and systemic resources do not add up to a dignified life or death for Władysława Baranowska. As a reader, it is hard to know where responsibility should lie; one sees genuine efforts and missteps made by each actor. Each health-care institution ultimately blames Ms. Baranowska’s daughter and family for the abominable state of her health, while the family blames the institutions. The health-care system appears fragmented and poor, with no one doctor or institution assuming ultimate responsibility for the patient’s care. The diagnosis of “old age” in Ms. Baranowska’s chart suggests that at least some medical personnel consider old age itself a disease, raising the question of how earnest any medical treatment of an older person can be, since they will still have the ‘disease’ of “old age.” The doctor’s comment that he only sees

⁴⁶ “Czy ktoś nie mógł co kilka godzin prostować i zginać jej kończyn? Nie trzeba robić tego w szpitalu.”

⁴⁷ „muchy już odleciały”

⁴⁸ „Na starość wyprowadzę się do Grecji. Tam nikomu nie przyjdzie do głowy, by wyrzucić umierającą babcinę lub dziadka do szpitala. W Polsce nie ma szacunku dla starych ludzi.”

homeless people arrive at the hospital in such a state is presented without comment, suggesting the existence of a group of people for whom such a bodily state is expected. How can adequate care be provided when the assumption is that old age is a disease state, or that homeless people will have worms crawling in their wounds? The doctor's comments about moving to Greece implicitly suggest that the blame for a death like Ms. Baranowska's partially rests with the country of Poland, and though he does not explicitly say what it is about Poland that leads to such inhumane deaths, he seems to implicate Polish families, following the pattern of the other institutional caregivers. It is impossible to know from this article the details of Ms. Baranowska's kin relations, but the article leads one to assume that Danuta and Irek were more interested in their own welfare than Władysława's health. Though the article makes clear the gaps in institutional networks of care, ultimate responsibility is placed on the daughter. Therein lies the horror of this article, for however despicable institutional neglect is, neglect by one's own daughter is infinitely worse. The gendered moral imperative for a daughter to care for her parents (or for a daughter-in-law to care for her in-laws) seems to be at the heart of this story. How has Poland become a place in which children do not care for their parents in old age? I wonder what the backstory is, what relations were like between Danuta and her mother before her mother could not take care of herself, and what Danuta and Irek's financial situation is. How might their financial limitations, historical relationships with Władysława, and dreams for their children shape their understandings of appropriate care? How is one to begin to see the complete picture of such a fragmented story?

And, stepping back, how does this article function within the series 'Poland is no country for old people'? Does it serve as a manifestation of common fears? As a morality tale to instruct

middle-aged Poles to maintain their familial responsibilities? As an expose of a broken and poor health-care system? As a damnation of contemporary family life in Poland?

Untermenschen

The next article in the series, appearing the same day, ‘When I go rollerblading, the brats yell: to the grave, grandpa!’⁴⁹ seems to prove the above author’s suspicion that most Poles do not have a positive view of old people. In this interview with Wiesław Łukaszewski, a professor of social psychology in Warsaw, he describes various instances in which he has experienced discrimination as an older person. For example, he feels “*przezroczysty*” (“transparent”) on the street, where younger people look through him as if he were not there, and in other public spaces (clubs, stores, parks), ads, and on internet forums. He attributes this to a contemporary culture that privileges a quick pace over a slow one, and in particular, blames Poland’s “monopolistic” culture for encouraging discrimination.

“Besides, Polish culture is monopolistic, meaning that we have one language, one faith, one system of values. Such cultures are very dogmatic and prone to discrimination. Even in the Polish village there is no respect for the old. In the past, they were the main source of knowledge, but now the television has taken the role of wise old people. The elderly have lost their basic function as carriers of culture. They’ve become second-class citizens. They’ve become *Untermenschen* (sub-human). It seems to me that in the opinion of many young people, an old person belongs to a completely different species. Neither homo nor sapiens.”⁵⁰

Łukaszewski’s use of the word ‘*Untermenschen*’ is striking; meaning ‘sub-human’ in German, the term is associated with Nazi race science and was used to label Slavs (including Poles) and Jews as inferior types of persons, appropriate for extermination. As an older Pole, he was

⁴⁹ ‘Kiedy jeżdżę na rolkach, smarkaczy krzyczą: dziadek do piachu!’

⁵⁰ “Poza tym polska kultura jest monopolistyczna , to znaczy, że mamz jeden język, jedno wyznanie, jeden system wartości. Takie kultury są bardzo dogmatyczne i skłonne do dyskryminacji. Nawet na wsi polskiej nie ma azacunku dla starych. W przeszłości to oni byli głównym źródłem wiedzy, ale teraz rolę mądrych starców przejął telewizor. Starzy utracili podstawową funkcję nosicieli kultury. Stali się drugorzędnymi obywatelami. Stali się *Untermenschen*. Mam wrażenie, że zdaniem wielu młodych ludzi człowiek stary należy do zupełnie innego gatunku. Ani homo, ani sapiens.” **Kiedy jeżdżę na rolkach, smarkacze krzyczą: Dziadek do piachu!**

certainly aware of this word's history, and was most likely using it consciously and deliberately. It is hard to imagine a stronger or more damning word for a Pole to use to describe experiences of discrimination, making Łukaszewski's characterization of old age emphatically and unequivocally negative.

The interviewer's response is to suggest not consenting to practices of discrimination, to which the professor says that he himself does not, but that as a group, "old people are socially and economically poor"⁵¹ and therefore afraid. He attributes this fear to Poles' lack of trust in others, reflected in the lack of trust that dominates the whole of Polish social life. Because older people are afraid, he says, they want to remain anonymous, which is why so many older people are active within the church and in Universities of the Third Age. Neither the church nor Universities of the Third Age expect "acts of personalization"⁵² from its participants, Łukaszewski claims. "Instead the opposite, [they] expect anonymity, depersonalization. That's an excellent niche for old frightened people."⁵³ He describes Universities of the Third Age as places that aim to fill up the endless empty hours of "unfortunate old folks,"⁵⁴ having nothing to do with actual universities or learning. He instead suggests that the government fund the education of a few old people at undergraduate universities, where they could study alongside their younger peers, rather than spending their time at so-called universities making pots or tapestries, just so they can feel needed.

The professor emphasizes older people's desire to feel needed in his comments regarding relationships with adult children. The interviewer describes older people that she knows who claim to support their children and grandchildren financially "so that my kids will have it

⁵¹ "są to ludzie biedni ekonomicznie i społecznie"

⁵² "aktów personalizacji"

⁵³ "Wręcz przeciwnie, oczekuje anonimowości, depersonalizacji. To jest doskonała nisza dla starych przestraszonych ludzi."

⁵⁴ "nieszczęśni starcy"

better,”⁵⁵ but are really afraid that if they stop caring about their offspring, they will cease being necessary. The professor responds that such care provides proof of their importance,⁵⁶ but that old people are providing such care out of a sense of duty, rather than real desire. “It’s the language of necessity: I have to be at home because Stefan is coming with the kids and I have to make crepes. They don’t say that it’s fun or a blessing. The word ‘I have to’ is the key, it’s the testimony to continuous duty, the fulfillment of which is the reason for their usefulness.”⁵⁷ Presumably, it is the discrimination and dehumanization that older Poles experience that they seek to remedy through remaining or becoming necessary to their kin, though according to Łukaszewski, this does not appear to be desirable either.

Łukaszewski thus gives an authoritative voice, as both a professor and a man, to experiences of discrimination in old age. Not easily dismissed or ignored, as a woman or less-educated person might be, by including his perspective so early in the series the newspaper reinforces the strength of such negative understandings of old age. Intentionally provocative, Łukaszewski’s words prompted several angry letters of response from those who support Universities of the Third Age, and people at the University of the Third Age in Wrocław were so outraged that they held a special meeting to discuss the professor’s incendiary remarks.

“Active” aging as continuity

In order to counter the negative stereotypes of old people as useless, transparent, and isolated, in some letters older people write in to describe themselves as active, busy, and socially engaged. These descriptions of old people who are vibrantly alive sharply contrast with the

⁵⁵ “by dzieci miały lepiej”

⁵⁶ “Ta troska to dokumentowanie swojej ważności.”

⁵⁷ “To jest język konieczności: ja muszę być w domu, bo przyjdzie Stefan z dziećmi i ja muszę zrobić naleśniki. Nie mówią, że to frajda, że szczęście. Słowo ‘muszę’ jest kluczem, jest świadectwem nieustannej powinności, których spełnianie jest dowodem użyteczności.”

experiences of discrimination presented above, and often make claims of sameness—that old people are fundamentally the same as younger people. Stressing experiences of continuity throughout the life-course, these people give examples in bodily, social, professional, and intellectual realms to demonstrate sameness.

For example, Jacek writes that sex is the greatest pleasure of his life over age 80: “For the last 30 years, I’ve had a partner who’s younger than me only by four years. We still go skiing. But our greatest joy is a satisfying sex life. We know each other perfectly, we feel each other’s needs. Even if they aren’t too firm, we are happy with our own dearest bodies.”⁵⁸

Though he acknowledges that their bodies have changed, he describes the activities themselves—skiing, sex—as being the same as when he was younger.

In a letter, Teresa R. boasts of her busy schedule filled with educational, recreational, and family activities:

Fortunately, I was already a grandmother [when I retired] so I busied myself with taking care of my grandson. I remember this time well, because I was needed, and I’m still in good touch with him. After a few years, when my grandson went to school, I also took up education-- I went to the University of the Third Age. I attend lectures, I’m learning Japanese calligraphy, I’m getting to know Japanese culture, I exercise, I sing in the choir, I go on outings to places both near and far, I’m on the board of the UTW [University of the Third Age], I edit the University Bulletin, I’m taking part in the program ‘Seniors in action’ as part of the Citizenship Initiative Foundation.

Furthermore: I go to the movies and symphony concerts, I read books (in English too), I go to various exhibits, and for walks in the Łagiewnicki Forest. And I take my youngest grandson, a preschooler, to the symphony’s workshop “Music Explorers.” And that’s not all. I was part of the Community Apartment Board, as its chairwoman. I don’t have a community garden plot, but I like them, so I set up a flower bed next to my apartment bloc and I take care of it. For my 70th birthday, I gave myself the present of internet at home, and I learned how to pay my bills directly from my bank account.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ *“Od blisko trzydziestu lat mam partnerkę młodszą tylko o cztery lata. Jeszcze jeździmy na nartach. A naszą największą radością jest udany seks. Znamy siebie doskonale, wyczuwamy swoje potrzeby. Cieszymy się naszymi, już może niezbyt jędrnymi, ale wciąż najdroższymi ciałami.” Seks - największa radość ośiemdziesięciolatka*

⁵⁹ *„Na szczęście, byłam już babcią więc zajęłam się opieką nad wnuczką i miło wspominam ten czas, bo byłam potrzebna i mam dotąd dobry z nią kontakt. Po kilku latach, kiedy wnuczek poszedł do szkoły, ja też zajęłam się edukacją, tzn poszłam na uniwersytet trzeciego wieku.... Słucham wykładów, uczę się kaligrafii japońskiej, poznaję kulturę japońską, gimnastykuję się, śpiewam w chórze, jeżdżę na wycieczki dalsze i bliższe, pracuję w zarządzie UTW, redaguję Biuletyn Uniwersytetu, biorę udział w programie “Seniorzy w akcji” Fundacji Inicjatyw Obywatelskich.*

Ponadto: chodzę do kina i na koncerty do filharmonii, czytam książki (także po angielsku), chodzę na różne wystawy i na spacer po lesie Łagiewnickim. A mojego młodszego wnuczka, przedszkolaka, prowadzę na warsztaty

Teresa writes that this flurry of activities keeps her busy, but not stressed, and that old age is a time to continue to develop one's interests. Though she is no longer active in her profession (she was an engineer), she continues to take part in activities that are intellectually interesting to her. While the particular activities in which she is now engaged are different than they used to be, the fact of being active is constant.

Like Jacek, the activities that Teresa describes are social, though for Teresa, they seem to be more focused on her personal growth than in Jacek's emphasis on his relationship with his wife. Both Jacek and Teresa try to dispel stereotypes of aging by describing activities in which they participate; it is these activities that demonstrate they are the same kind of persons as when they were younger. It is also significant to note that neither Jacek nor Teresa mentions financial worries; this lack of financial concern is common to this type of letter, yet quite present in many other letters that do not include such boasting. In other words, these letters idealizing old age as a time filled with sports, hobbies, families, friends, and travel represent a certain upper-middle-class ideal that is unattainable to many older people in Poland, where the average monthly pension is 1200 złoty (about 400 USD).

Divergent models of personhood in old age

In Poland, then, the religious far-right critiques neoliberal reforms and posits a view of personhood in old age that is deeply relational, in which older persons are securely embedded in networks of kin and other relations. Despite the exclusionary aspects of *Nasz Dziennik* (e.g.,

*"Odkrywczy Muzyki" do Filharmonii. Ale to nie wszystko. Działam w Zarządzie Wspólnoty Mieszkaniowej, jako jego przewodnicząca. Nie mam działki, a lubię, więc założyłam rabatki wokół bloku i je pielęgnuję. Na 70 urodziny sprezentowałam sobie internet w domu i nauczyłam się płacić moje rachunki bezpośrednio z konta." **Od kiedy nie pasjonuję się polityką, żyję bez stresów***

articles that are explicitly anti-immigrant or anti-feminist), aging persons are explicitly valued for their humanity, wisdom, role in the family, and as exemplars of suffering. This attribution of value to the older person is exactly what is missing in most of the articles in the *Gazeta Wyborcza* series, except for those promoting value through activity. There, breakdowns in the social fabric are exemplified in the story about pani Baranowska, and even the person with the greatest chance of a successful old age, Prof. Łukaszewski, experiences dehumanizing discrimination in old age. Two key points emerge from the *Gazeta Wyborcza* series: first, that access to the ‘good’ old age to be achieved through the continuous personhood of active aging is limited to those with adequate financial means; and second, that these financial means are not enough to guarantee an old age free of discrimination. Rather, Łukaszewski’s experiences seem to suggest a shift in the role of the older person in Polish society. The deeply embedded relational older person presented in *Nasz Dziennik* is absent from the experiences described in *Gazeta Wyborcza*.

The differing ways that aging persons are morally constituted in these newspapers, either through activity or social relations, are connected to particular visions of Poland and of Poland’s place in the world. The alignment of the religious far-right with socially connected and valued aging persons is particular to the Polish case, and unexpected from a comparative perspective; for example, neoliberal individuals and conservative Christianity are aligned in American politics. The complexity of experience, of active yet stigmatized elders, described in *Gazeta Wyborcza* better represents ambiguous realities, in which ideals and experiences do not match up. These contesting modes of personhood in old age are bound up in politico-religious worldviews, and have relevance not only for understanding the Polish case, but for understanding other contexts in which populations are rapidly aging.

In the next chapter, I will use ethnographic data from my fieldwork at Universities of the Third Age and NGO programs to analyze precisely how some institutions promote activity in old age, with the goal of creating exactly the active older people described in *Gazeta Wyborcza*. By analyzing continuing education organizations' and NGOs' ideologies and practices, alongside regional, national, and transnational structural linkages, the next chapter will elucidate the precise connections between these moral ideals of aging and the nation.

Chapter 3

“Seniors Are People Too!” Transforming Moral Personhood

Making Poland a country for old people

The interview with Łukaszewski in the *Gazeta Wyborcza* series “No Country for Old People” struck a nerve with University of the Third Age *sluchacze* (attendees) in Wrocław.¹ His denunciation of Universities of the Third Age as old-age ghettos deeply upset many *sluchacze*, who felt that they had been misunderstood and misrepresented. On a Thursday afternoon in December 2008, master’s-level students studying for their degree in *andragogika* (adult education) moderated a two-hour discussion with *sluchacze* in the main meeting room of the University of the Third Age, at the Institute of Pedagogy at the University of Wrocław. Around 30 people attended, mostly *sluchacze* but also a few students in *andragogika*. Throughout the discussion, *sluchacze* and students alike extolled the virtues of Universities of the Third Age for the opportunities it provides to create a good old age.

People spoke passionately about their participation in the University of the Third Age, and said that Łukaszewski did not really understand what went on there, for if he did, he could never have categorized it thus. One woman, who is involved in the administrative work of the University of the Third Age, criticized Łukaszewski for not having a better understanding of what happens at Universities of the Third Age. In her view, *sluchacze* are “crossing certain

¹ Following local usage, I will use *sluchacze* throughout this chapter to refer to participants of the University of the Third Age. Its English translation would be “auditors,” which shares the connotation of listening (the Polish term could also be translated as “listeners,” but the Polish term does not share the English meaning of inspection).

barriers” that are not expected of older people; the very act of learning itself, going up the stairs at the university (she said she had only recently come to see this as a barrier), and being artistic.² Through these activities, *sluchacze* are defying expectations of their role as older people in society. Despite her critique of Łukaszewski, he redeemed himself in her eyes in his discussion of the importance of spending time with younger people. She has greatly enjoyed her time in classes and workshops with younger people; these gatherings leave her smiling. Moreover, she thinks that *sluchacze* can show students how to age. She attributes the rudeness towards older people in public as a result of a lack of contact between older and younger people. Through breaking these boundaries of what is expected of them, *sluchacze* can encourage younger people to think that “this age isn’t so terrible,” and that “one would like to experience this old age and would like to be old.”³ An older man also saw part of his role in old age as teaching younger people how to grow old, which he did by encouraging the younger people in the room to read Deepak Chopra’s (1993) *Aging Body, Timeless Mind*, and to cultivate a “strategia” (“strategy”) for growing old, in which one should have “aktywność maksymalna” (“maximum activity”) in all spheres of life: intellectual, physical, psychological, and moral.⁴ Through such strategies, people can learn to approach old age “with the hope of a life that could be even better and more interesting.”⁵ His comments were met with a loud round of applause.

Throughout this discussion, older and younger people alike reiterated the moral aspect of Universities of the Third Age. One student spoke of how inspiring it was for her to see older people participating in such a diverse range of activities; from this she has learned that how one grows old is one’s choice. “I am really glad that you are showing us, especially young people,

² “przekraczamy pewne bariery.”

³ “ten wiek nie jest taki straszny, i chciałoby się przeżywać ta starość, i chciałoby się być starą.”

⁴ The Polish edition of *Aging Body, Timeless Mind* was published in 1995 as *Życie bez starości*, which, back-translated into English, would be *A Life Without Old Age*.

⁵ “...z taką nadzieją na może jeszcze ciekawsze lepsze życie.”

that everything depends on us. And that it's really our decision what this phase of our life will be like."⁶ Another student critiqued Łukaszewski for his positive portrayal of the West because he spent time as a child in the U.S., where his friends did not even know their grandparent's first names. He took this as a sign of the weakness of kin ties in the West, and contrasted it to the strength of kin ties in Poland. Here, he said, "these ties exist between the young and old generation – this is also our capital, on which we can work for the future."⁷ This comment was also met with applause.⁸

This discussion crystallizes much of what I see as key to how *sluchacze* in both Wrocław and Poznań understand their participation in the University of the Third Age. Through practices of *aktywność*, older people no longer have to be the stigmatized, isolated adults described in *Gazeta Wyborcza*. Rather, through the lectures and classes at the University of the Third Age, people can transform themselves into moral exemplars for the younger generation. Becoming such a moral exemplar occurs through the practice of *aktywność* across domains of life: physical, mental, spiritual, and social. This ideal of setting an example for younger people is accompanied by the intense determination of *sluchacze* to make aging a positive experience, in ways that contrast with their lives until this time. Mostly well-educated upper-class women who had retired from jobs as teachers, accountants, or medical workers, *sluchacze* described their lives before

⁶ "Bardzo cieszę się, że państwo pokazują nam, szczególnie osobom młodym, że wszystko zależy od nas. I tak na prawdę jest naszą decyzją jaki będzie ten etap w naszym życiu."

⁷ "Istnieją te więzi, między młodym i starym pokoleniem – to też jest jakiś nasz kapitał, na którym możemy pracować na przyszłość."

⁸ Another key topic of discussion was terminology used to refer to older people, a topic that resonates with the discussion in Chapter 2 of terminology used for older people in the media. The group was divided on the use of labels for older people: some felt that *stary* (old) was offensive and that *starszy* (older) signified respect; however, others wanted to refer to themselves as *stary* as a way of showing that there is nothing inherently wrong with old age. However, the use of *stary* by strangers was seen as offensive, as were the terms *babcia* (grandmother) or *dziadek* (grandfather) in the public sphere. The most commonly mentioned situation when people spoke of disrespect in the public sphere was on public transit. Some in the group felt that young people who do not give up their seats for older people (as signs in trams and buses encourage one to do) are disrespecting their older fellow riders, but others felt that an assumption of physical ailments only furthered negative stereotypes of older people as debilitated and in need of pity. Throughout my fieldwork, older people mentioned the first time they were offered a seat on public transportation as a sign of becoming old.

their participation in the University of the Third Age as busy with work and family. At the University of the Third Age, these women told me that they can finally *robić coś dla siebie*, or do something for oneself.

In other words, somehow the activities with which they had been filling their days until then were not *dla siebie*, or “for oneself,” in the same way as at the University of the Third Age. What is it about attending English classes, lectures on gerontology, and musical performances that were so qualitatively different from other experiences of these older people? Although some *sluchacze* cultivate skills that they already have (e.g., embroidery, singing), others begin activities with which they have no prior experience (e.g., learning English, using a computer, physics); it is the latter, the learning of new skills, that has ideological weight at the Universities of the Third Age. Indeed, these kinds of classes in foreign languages or academic subjects are what distinguish Universities of the Third Age from senior clubs (*kluby seniorów*), which are more about spending time together, rather than focused on learning a new skill. *Sluchacze* sometimes speak negatively about such senior clubs, denigrating them as gossipy and trivial, as opposed to the enlightening pursuits of the Universities of the Third Age.

Certainly, the popularity of computer and foreign-language classes (especially English) supports this idea that *aktywność* is associated with particular features of the contemporary world. Many *sluchacze* spoke of these classes as providing opportunities to connect with children who live abroad (e.g., via email and Skype) and their children’s non-Polish-speaking spouses and children. In other words, *sluchacze* aim to learn how to use computers and to speak English as ways to maintain ties of relatedness with geographically distant kin. In addition to their practical use in everyday life, however, learning English and using computers are also icons of Poland’s place in the world economy. Ads for learning English (and “business English”) were common in

public transportation, and as a native-speaker of English, I was often spoken to in English by Poles who wanted to practice their English. In contrast to the Russian that *sluchacze* grew up learning in school (and often claimed to entirely forget), English is now commonly taught in schools and is a prerequisite for many jobs. The growth and allure of business fields like sales, marketing, and public relations gives knowledge of English and computers a symbolic weight that is linked to Poland as a capitalist, democratic state. Computer use is popular in many segments of the population in Poland; as one indicator, during the time of my fieldwork, the number of internet users grew from over 50 percent to over sixty percent of the population.⁹ The popular computer program Skype has become a verb in colloquial Polish: *skajpować* (to Skype). Both learning English and using computers, then, not only help *sluchacze* to maintain kin ties, but also carry social status and prestige in ways that are associated with Poland's contemporary status within the EU and the world.

However, institutional histories of the Universities of the Third Age in Poland suggest that this idea of newness is rather more complex. The first University of the Third Age was founded in Poland in 1975, only three years after the first-ever University of the Third Age in France, suggesting a deeper historical connection with western Europe than such talk of newness suggests, and a continuity with the socialist past. Moreover, the particular forms of learning that occur at Universities of the Third Age in Poland suggest a highly classed dimension to these institutions. The effort that some *sluchacze* make to distinguish themselves from other older people who do not attend these universities can be seen as a practice of marking themselves off from other groups. Although this classed dimension is not limited to Poland (e.g., Formosa 2006), the popularity of foreign-language classes resonates with the longstanding practice of the land-owning Polish class speaking French and German (Jakubowska 2012:184-185). Given the

⁹ World Bank, http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.P2?cid=GPD_44 (accessed 1 April 2013).

continuity through the socialist era of the Polish nobility's symbolic power in the realm of culture (Jakubowska 2012), *sluchacze* learning foreign languages can be seen as a cultivation of a particular kind of moral personhood that is tied to the history of the nobility and, perhaps paradoxically, to being a Polish patriot. Other groups at the Universities of the Third Age, such as academic classes and performing musical groups, also have a highly classed distinction to them.

Institutional leaders suggest that learning these new skills are ways for older people to belong to contemporary Polish society, which is contrasted with the socialist past. Practices of *aktywność*, then, are related to Poland's membership in the EU and transition from socialism to capitalism. This national political-economic shift is a moral one, in which the socialist past is seen as fundamentally backwards and the capitalist present is seen as desirable. The common trope of the idealized "West" located in western Europe or North America reappears, in contrast to the backwards "East" of eastern Europe. In short, *aktywność* in old age is often presented as new, as a break with the past.

In this chapter, I will begin to try to untangle these claims of newness by first explaining more fully the kinds of claims of newness that these institutional leaders make. In addition to discussing the Universities of the Third Age, I will also include interview materials from my work with a program for older people, *@ktywny Senior* (@ctive Senior), which was run by a non-governmental organization. Next, I will provide a brief history of *aktywność* in Poland by situating these Universities of the Third Age within the broader gerontological construct of the "third age." I will then consider the histories of the Universities of the Third Age in Poznań and Wrocław. I aim for this section to contribute to developing a historiography of the region that does not center around 1989. It is crucial here to note that this historiographical question is not just an academic one—and indeed, the critique of "transitology" is already well-established—but

an ethnographic one, as some Poles still assume differences between the socialist past and capitalist present (and future), and these can become concrete through talk about age differences. Thus addressing the meanings and histories of *aktywność* could have implications for how organizational leaders and older Poles themselves conceive of their practices.

Finally, I will return to the Universities of the Third Age (and *@ktywny Senior*) and the experiences of the *sluchacze* themselves to try to understand more fully what constitutes these changes in moral personhood that they find so central to *aktywność*. Here, I will highlight the spatiotemporal components of moral personhood as a way of contributing to regional studies of personhood that move beyond the in/dependent binary. Drawing on perspectives from kinship studies (Carsten 2000a, 2007; Franklin and McKinnon 2001a) showing that politics, history, memory, and lived experiences of relatedness must be analyzed together, I argue that these institutions foster new forms of relatedness and personhood that are gendered and historically contingent, but not easily identifiable with either socialist or capitalist world orders.

Creating Euro-seniors

The practice of *aktywność* is explicitly theorized and promoted by the leaders of Universities of the Third Age and other “active” aging programs. In the words of Walentyna Wnuk, a former director of the University of the Third Age in Wrocław, “we have to learn how to age well” (2009:5).¹⁰ A current adviser to the mayor on seniors’ affairs, she also participates in an international coalition of Universities of the Third Age. She is trained as a “cultural organizer” (“*kulturalny animator*”) and sees herself as skilled in helping people achieve their potential. She organized trips to Brussels and Strasbourg for UTW students to meet their

¹⁰ “dobrego starzenia musimy się uczyć,” Wnuk, Walentyna. 2009. „Późna dorosłość to czas pomyślny.” *Kurier UTW: nieregularnik Uniwersytetu Trzeciego Wieku*. Wrocław: Uniwersytet Trzeciego Wieku. 16:5.

European Parliament representative and described these as transformative, because they changed the minds of people who opposed Poland's EU membership. Older Poles need to learn to be "open," she said, in direct contrast to the socialist past, when society, and therefore persons, were "closed." Through the University of the Third Age she aims to create a new model of aging and a new type of person—a "*Eurosenior*," or "Euro-senior"—who is appropriate to the current world order. A binary Cold War logic underpins this comments, in which a closed, socialist Poland is opposed to an open, capitalist, free Western Europe. The chance for Polish retirees to meet with their European Parliament representative or travel to Brussels is part of a teleology in which the West remains the ultimate goal.

She is active in EFOS (European Federation of Older Students at Universities), an international coalition of Universities of the Third Age. This group's goals, as described on their English-language brochure, are to "activate elderly people, integrate them in the learning society and stimulate the intercultural dialogue as a transfer medium. In this way we will contribute to an active citizenship of the elderly people." Pani Dr. Wnuk used similar vocabulary when describing her work, such as organized trips for students of the UTW to meet with their representative in the European Parliament in Brussels and Strasbourg. These trips were transformative, she said, because they changed the minds of people who were against Poland's EU membership. Older Poles need to learn to be "open," she said, in direct contrast to the socialist past, when society, and presumably persons, were "closed." Through educational programming and social organizing, she aims to create a new model of aging and a new type of person—a "Euro-senior" ("*Eurosenior*")—who is appropriate to the current world order.

This conversation occurred at Sektor 3, an *incubator* (incubator) for non-profit organizations housed in a former tram and bus depot and repair facility in Wrocław. Located

west of the city center and set back from the road in an enclosed area with an adjacent parking lot, the building also housed a skateboard park and a gymnastics training facility. Walking through a parking lot, the adjacent wall of which was covered with elaborate cartoonish graffiti, Sektor 3 was at the far end of the building, behind which was an old dilapidated tram sitting on tracks that were no longer used.



Figure 2: Graffiti outside Sektor 3

Formally named *Centrum Wspierania Organizacji Pozarządowych Sektor 3* (Sector 3: Center for the Support of Non-Governmental Organizations), Sektor 3 provides training (e.g., publicity, fundraising) and institutional resources for non-profit organizations of various types (e.g., a Polish-Lithuanian cultural exchange, a group on mentoring). Although they receive funding from the city of Wrocław, the programs that they facilitate are independent from the government. Pani Dr. Wnuk had a meeting at Sektor 3 related to her work as the advisor to the mayor on seniors' affairs.

After Dr. Wnuk and I spoke, she introduced me to staff at the center. Her colleague on the advisory board for seniors for the *województwo* (province) had created and run a program the previous year called *@ktywny Senior*, or *@ctive Senior*. Marek Ferenc, a former manager of a health clinic, was inspired to start this program after visiting a friend in a retirement community

in British Columbia, where he was struck by the contrast to the isolated lives of retirees in his own neighborhood in Wrocław. He learned about Sun City, Arizona, and wanted to bring similar principles to Poland; the *@ktywny Senior* program was his first attempt to change the ways that older people experience and understand aging.¹¹ The program was targeted at seniors living in the surrounding 1970s-era *blokowisko*, or housing development. Marek later told me that he chose this neighborhood, Popowice, because 22 percent of inhabitants were above 60, as compared to a citywide average of 13 percent.¹² In conjunction with a local medical clinic, he recruited people by offering free ongoing medical screenings to retirees, on the condition that they attend this program, consisting of classes on healthy aging, communication, and computer skills. The primary goal was to create “aktywność,” or “activity,” through teaching such concepts and practices as “odpowiedzialny styl życia” (“a responsible lifestyle”) and “negatywny konsekwencje życia nieodpowiedzialnego” (“the negative consequences of an irresponsible lifestyle”); and “integracja społeczna” (“social integration”). Responsibility is needed, he said, because older people in Poland expect the doctor to have full responsibility for their health, and for pills to fix all their problems.

These people are convinced -- that is, there is this habit with us, that when, that you yourself are not responsible for your health, that only the doctor is responsible. This is a mistaken attitude, isn't it? Because I myself am responsible for my health. It's not the result of one day, it's my behavior throughout my whole life... hygiene... food, exercise... lots and lots and lots of factors, right? And it's... there is this belief among us, that if I'm sick, I will go to the doctor, the doctor will give me a golden pill... [laughter] you know, I'm showing.. I'm joking, you know? All this is to

¹¹ Though interestingly, one of the major goals of *@ktywny Senior* is social integration, including intergenerationally; this seems to run contrary to the enforced age segregation of communities like Sun City (see <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/29/us/29children.html>). See also http://www.wysokieobcasy.pl/wysokie-obcasy/1,98083,13259625,Sun_City___miasto_szczesliwych_emerytow.html (accessed 18 January 2013) for recent coverage of Sun City in the Polish press. See also Cohen 1998 for a comparative context in which “admiration for the Other leads to the perception of not measuring up at home” (1998:107).

¹² The Popowice apartment buildings were the first in Wrocław built with the pre-fabricated materials that became a hallmark of the Eastern European urban landscape in the 1970s and 1980s (Thum 2011:165-166).

say that this attitude that people have... doctor, doctor, doctor. One, another, the third, the fifth. Tests. One, another. Yeah and these tests... what results from these tests? Nothing.¹³

Later in the conversation, Marek went on to talk about the importance of teaching preventive care to stay healthier. Social integration is necessary, he said, because there are many older people who were forced to retire early after 1989, and who were not part of the “computerization” of work and society that took place in the 1990s. Older people feel “niepotrzebny,” or “unnecessary,” he said, and it is necessary to find a way for them to become part of society, through learning communication skills and volunteering.

In addition to hosting lectures on preventive health behaviors such as proper diet and fitness, the *@ktywny Senior* program also included classes teaching computer skills and workshops on communication, to teach people how to communicate in the “new”—that is, post-socialist, transnational, technology-focused—world. The changes in social relations that occur through this program are intended to have economic effect; an implicit goal of the program was to return retirees to the capitalist workforce.

Indeed, one of the sponsors of the ‘Local Activation Centers’ (the result of the pilot program *@ktywny Senior*) in Wrocław is ‘*Kapitał Ludzki*,’ or ‘Human Capital,’ part of the European Social Fund. Among its goals are:

improving the level of professional activity and ability of finding employment by persons who are unemployed and professionally passive, reducing areas of social exclusion, enhancing the adaptability of employees and enterprises to changes that take place in the economy, and popularisation of education in the society at all educational levels with concurrent improvement of the quality of educational services and a stronger correlation between them and the needs of the knowledge economy.¹⁴

¹³ Ci ludzie są przekonani, czyli u nas taki jest zwyczaj, że jak, za zdrowie nie jesteś sama odpowiedzialna, tylko lekarz jest odpowiedzialny. To jest błędny podejścia, prawda? Bo za zdrowia jestem ja odpowiedzialny, sam. Potem nie jest wydarzeń jednego dnia, tylko to jest moje postępowanie przez cały życie... higiena życia ja... Jedzenia, sportu... wielu wielu wielu czynnika, prawda?... I to... U nas jest taki przekonany, żeby jestem chory, pójdę do lekarzy, lekarz mi da złotą tabletkę. daja... . wiesz. Przekazam. Żartuję, nie? Przez to powiedzieć że taki postawienie ludzi -- lekarz, lekarz, lekarz. Jeden, drugi, trzeci, piąty. Badanie. Jedne, drugie. No badanie... co z tego wynika z tego badania? Nic.

¹⁴ <http://www.efs.gov.pl/English/Strony/Introduction.aspx>, accessed 10 August 2011.

In particular, the @ctive Senior program was intended for people who were forced into early retirement after 1989, most of whom were women. In an interview, Marek Ferenc, the director of the @ktywny Senior program said that these people were marginalized because they were not part of the “computerization” of society that happened in the 1990s and 2000s.

Throughout our conversation, Marek would occasionally point out the business potential of what he was saying. That is, he would make sure that I understood that he himself was not an andragogue nor an expert on seniors’ affairs; rather, his role in creating @ktywny Senior was that of an organizer, facilitator, consultant, and manager, related to his previous professional experience working in a health clinic, running his own private health clinic, and being an entrepreneur (in the early 1990s, with the help of an American group encouraging entrepreneurship (*przedsiębiorstwo*), he ran a small business in selling oil lamps/candles. “In my life, what haven’t I done?” [“Co ja w życiu nie robiłem?”] He said that he was thinking of “activation of seniors as a product. That’s what I would call it.” [“aktywizacja seniorów jako produkt. Tak by to nazywałem”] And later in the conversation he again emphasized his thinking: “seniors as a product. In the economic sense.” [“seniorzy jako produkt. W sensie ekonomicznym.”] These were the aspects that were interesting to him – let others take up the social aspects of this program, but his experience leads him to care about the economic dimensions. And indeed, it was about the finances of aging that he became most animated when speaking. Although people tend to think of seniors as poor, he said, this is not entirely true, for there are some who spend money on non-necessities:

Well, there are those, you know... You know, they can have more, they buy those golden pills, right? You know, whatever is shown to them on TV ads. And others... others, for example, walk

with Nordic walking poles, right? Others buy pills for 100 zloty, they give money for lotion, maybe... you know... and golden pills. And they walk with poles.¹⁵

Later, he comments that although people claim they were done wrong by the changes in 1989, they should move on and adapt to current realities. Although it is possible to read Marek's motivations as harsh, given the economic origin of his interest in this project, it is also crucial to note that he sees himself as bringing about positive social change. Additionally, the deeply social nature of the @ctive Senior program belies any easy understanding of Marek's goals or this program as strictly neoliberal.

“Active” aging and the “third age”

This focus on “activity” is part of a broader European trend of encouraging “active aging,” meant to address demographic shifts towards older populations in Europe, which threaten the solvency of social welfare systems.¹⁶ “Aktywność” can be seen as a way to keep the aging population healthier for longer. While “aktywność” often refers to physical activity, it also suggest “activity” in broader spheres of life as well (cf. van Berkel and Moller 2002).¹⁷

According to interviews and popular media, the ideal “aktywny” person still works or volunteers, has a vibrant social life that involves non-kinship-based relations, pursues hobbies, speaks at least one foreign language, travels internationally, and has basic computer skills. Key components of “aktywność” are independence, openness (to new skills and new social

¹⁵ Są tacy którzy, wiesz, ... Mogą mieć więcej, wiesz, kupują złote tabletki, wiesz, nie? Co im w telewizji tam pokazują w reklamach, nie? A inni... A inni chodzą z kijami nordic walking, na przykład, nie? Inni kupują tabletki za 100 zł, dają pieniądze na krem, może, wiesz, no, i złote tabletki. I chodzą z kijami.

¹⁶ Data from *Statistics in Focus*, published by Eurostat, the primary statistical office of the European Commission. http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-SF-10-001/EN/KS-SF-10-001-EN.PDF, accessed 14 October 2011. Pp. 6, 11.

¹⁷ Thanks to Karolina Szmagańska-Follis for this reference, and to Karolina, Elżbieta Goździak, and Aleksander Kobylarek for discussions of *aktywność*.

connections), self-reliance, and self-care. Significantly, care-giving rather than receiving is valued, which has serious implications for those who experience illness and disability in old age.

Additionally, the popularity of the third age in Poland could be seen as being related to Poland's EU membership when one considers gerontology and geriatrics as fields of comparison against the West. As European populations age, institutions (e.g., long-term care facilities, hospices) and disciplines (e.g., gerontology, geriatrics) that specialize in caring for the old are becoming more common. In postsocialist Eastern Europe, such institutions and disciplines often look to Western Europe and the US for (medicalized) models of successful aging. Medical professionals and community leaders claim a westward gaze is necessary both because their society lacks expertise to care for an aging population, and because older people themselves do not know how to age properly. In this light, then, the popularity of *aktywność* seems to be related to Poland's EU membership and desires for the West.

However, this concern for *aktywność* in old age is part of the gerontological movement that promotes "active," "successful," and "healthy" aging against previous narratives of decline (Cohen 1998:93-100; Lamb 2009:137-139). "Active" (or "successful" or "healthy") aging has been an important concept in gerontological thought since the 1960s (see Rowe and Kahn 1997 for an influential overview), and the institutionalization of Polish gerontology dates to the 1970s (the Polish Gerontological Society was founded in 1973). Therefore, one cannot assume that *aktywność* is unproblematically related to Poland's EU membership and status as a capitalist democracy. Moreover, the concept of the third age, characterized by health, activity, and "self-achievement" is juxtaposed to the fourth age of "dependence and decrepitude" (Laslett 1996:192), thus showing how concepts of *aktywność* are part of ideologies that have deeper histories. Indeed, as Jessica Greenberg and Andrea Muehlebach (2007) show, the recent

popularity of the “third age” in western Europe has to do with the changing nature of intergenerational obligations in the political economy of the welfare state. A full understanding of *aktywność*, then, must take into consideration the intellectual and political-economic histories that underpin the concept.

Origins of the University of the Third Age in Poland

The first University of the Third Age in Poland was founded in 1975 in Warsaw by Halina Szwarc, a professor and rector of the Academy of Physical Education in Warsaw, only two years after the creation of the first University of the Third Age in Toulouse, France, by Pierre Vellas, a professor on the faculty of Law and Economics at the University of Toulouse.¹⁸ The original goals of the first University of the Third Age were to “contribute to raise the level of physical, mental, social health and the quality of life of older people,” to “realize a permanent educational program for older people in close relation with the other age groups (the active, the young),” to “realize gerontological research programs,” and to “realize initial and permanent education programmes in gerontology” (Vellas 1997). Originally associated with the University of Toulouse, the earliest Universities of the Third Age were all affiliated with local universities, giving them an academic character in which the university faculty, rather than the retirees, were in charge of the programming. Although the classes included physical fitness as well as lectures, the emphasis of the programs was on the academic content (Formosa 2012:3). This university-focused approach was modified by Universities of the Third Age in the UK, which grew during the 1980s and took a “self-help” approach to educational programming for retirees in which the retirees themselves were part of the planning and educational efforts (Formosa 2012:4-5). A mix

¹⁸ International Association of Universities of the Third Age, <http://www.aiu3a.com/origins.html> (accessed 1 April 2013).

of these models has developed in Poland, where some organizations are stand-alone groups and others are officially associated with local universities.

Three years after Vellas founded the first University of the Third Age in Toulouse, Universities of the Third Age were established in Belgium, Switzerland, Italy, Spain, Quebec, and Poland (Formosa 2012:3). When considered from the perspective of Cold-War-era Europe, this connection between France and Poland may seem strange. However, Aleksander Kobylarek, the current director of the University of the Third Age in Wrocław, finds nothing strange in this, since after all, there was a long history of Polish intellectuals traveling to other European countries—especially France. According to Lidia Wrocińska-Sławska, who founded the University of the Third Age in Poznań and directs it to this day, Szwarc organized biannual conferences for leaders of all the Universities of the Third Age in Poland, which served as opportunities for the leaders to “recharge their batteries” (“doładować akumulatory”). Szwarc insisted on maintaining the quality of all Universities of the Third Age in Poland. According to an article in the Polish popular press on the occasion of a biographical movie made about her, Szwarc met Pierre Vellas, the founder of the first University of the Third Age in France, at a social work conference in Milan in 1975. During a conversation in the hallway, he suggested that she begin a University of the Third Age in Poland (Górecka-Czuryłło 2010). In the fall of 1975, the University of the Third Age in Warsaw began its first academic year. Wrocław’s University of the Third Age was founded in 1975, and Poznań’s in 1979. Szwarc also served as the president of the *Association Internationale des Universités du Troisième Âge* (AIUTA), or the International Association of Universities of the Third Age. Almost-annual conferences of AIUTA took place in Belgium, France, Canada, Spain, Italy, and Switzerland, as well as Poland, during the 1980s. In other words, Universities of the Third Age in Poland have always been

characterized by international connections. Indeed, foreign languages (namely English, French, and German) have always been part of the curricula of these institutions.

Currently, the Universities of the Third Age in both Wrocław and Poznań serve as leaders and models for other such institutions, both in the city, in the region, and internationally. The University of the Third Age in Wrocław helped to organize a University of the Third Age in L'viv, Ukraine (formerly the Polish Lwów), and the University of the Third Age in Poznań cooperates with a University of the Third Age in Dortmund, Germany. Although the leaders of the Universities of the Third Age say that there is nothing especially important about having contact with Universities of the Third Age in these particular geographic places, it is worth noting that these connections resonate with a deeper history legacy of connections (e.g., Polish exiles in France during partitions). There are currently 30 Universities of the Third Age in the voivodeship of Wielkopolska (Greater Poland), and 10 Universities of the Third Age within the city of Wrocław. There is a current “boom” of UTWs, with over 200 in the whole country (Zych 2011).

In the Universities of the Third Age in Poznań and Wrocław, there is a great deal of historical continuity through particular members of the organizations. In Poznań, the original director still runs the University of the Third Age, and the same instructor has been teaching French classes for 34 years. In Wrocław, the long-time director is still involved as an advisor and in other organizations in the city. In both places, there are *sluchacze* who have been attending for over ten years themselves. Szwarc herself worked on behalf of the Universities of the Third Age until the end of her life. This fact of personal continuity also belies any easy understanding of these organizations in terms of socialism and postsocialism. Rather, these nongovernmental organizations (*organizacji pozarządowe*) show that there is institutional individual solidarity

across these lines. These organizations also support Michał Buchowski's (2001) claim that civil society did exist during socialism.¹⁹

History of the University of the Third Age in Wrocław

The University of the Third Age in Wrocław was founded in 1976, only three years after the first-ever University of the Third Age in France. There are now over 200 such universities in Poland and around 80 percent of participants are women. In Wrocław, approximately 750 people attend the University of the Third Age, which is affiliated with the College of Pedagogy at the University of Wrocław, and has a permanent space in the basement of that building. Open to all retirees over age 60 at an annual cost of 70 złoty (about 25 USD, or about the cost of a second-class one-way train ticket from Wrocław to Warsaw), the institution offers a wide range of lecture series, seminars, classes, and workshops on a variety of topics, such as physics, languages, computers, dance, and sailing. Through lectures and published materials, the University of the Third Age encourages attendees to make aging a positive, active, and creative time through learning new disciplines and skills, and forming new friendships. Though this goal is individual, the process through which this self-fulfillment occurs is fundamentally social.

The people who attend the University of the Third Age in Wrocław and Poznań are those one might expect: retired teachers, engineers, accountants, health-care workers, and other professionals. They tend to be quite healthy, with few visible disabilities or impairments. These women describe their lives as active, busy, and fulfilling. They say that the organization creates opportunities for them “to do something for themselves” (“*robić coś dla siebie*”) for the first time in their lives, now that they do not have to work, take care of elderly parents, or raise their

¹⁹ The continuity of particular organizations seems so often to be based on the activity and leadership of certain individuals. Perhaps I observed such strength of leadership because I was directed towards particularly successful institutions, and that such leaders are characteristic of successful institutions.

own young children. Retired women who attend the University of the Third Age consciously strive towards an ideal of elder personhood that is distinct from their past lives in which they focused on kin and professional obligations. This shift in emphasis away from maintaining traditional kin ties and towards building new relations echoes the experiences of participants in *@ktywny Senior*.

In a historical chronicle of the University of the Third Age in Wrocław, Aleksandra Bilewicz writes that “research shows the importance of the University’s role for both the local and broader aging society – the city, country, and even world” (2001:5).²⁰ The University of the Third Age in Wrocław identifies three periods in its own history: the first, from 1976-1979, as the *Studium Trzeciego Wieku*, under the auspices of the *Wojewódzkiej Rady Związków Zawodowych*, or Provincial Council of Trade Unions; the second, from 1979-1997, as the University of the Third Age, under the auspices of the *Wydziału Zdrowia i Opieki Społecznej oraz Zarządu Miasta*, or Department of Health and Social Welfare and the City Council; and finally, from 1997 to the present, still as the University of the Third Age, under the auspices of University of Wrocław (Bilewicz 2001). Within these three periods, there are two shifts: the first, from a *Studium Trzeciego Wieku* to a *Uniwersytet Trzeciego Wieku*, and the second, from affiliation with trade unions, then the city and health department, and lastly, the university. In other words, their affiliation shifted from labor, to medicine, to education. Although this official shift of institutional affiliation suggests an orderly progression of an ideology of old age wherein the older person is primarily a worker, to a patient, to a student, studying changes in the curriculum, personnel, and literature of the University of the Third Age reveals a more nuanced and entangled history.

²⁰ “badania te ukazują, jak ważna jest rola UTW wobec starszej społeczności lokalnej i szerszej – miasta, kraju, a nawet świata”

First, the medical aspect of the University of the Third Age has been present since the beginning of the institution. In other words, older Poles at the University of the Third Age have always been conceived of in terms of their physical bodies, which need to be monitored. As noted above, Halina Szwarc, the founder of the University of the Third Age in Warsaw, was a medical doctor.²¹ In the same year, the *Polskie Towarzystwo Gerontologiczne* (Polish Gerontological Society) was established.²² In Wrocław, the association of the University of the Third Age with gerontology and medicine is evident in the longstanding appointment of medical doctors in the position of *opiekun naukowy*, or scientific advisor. The first scientific advisor of the UTW, Czesław Kempisty, was a medical doctor and the director of the Geriatric Clinic at the Regional Hospital in Wrocław (Bilewicz 2001:7). During the first few years of the University's existence, Kempisty met with all *sluchacze* once a month for individual conversations, along with medical check-ups (Bilewicz 2001:10). The scientific advisor from 1984-1989 was also a medical doctor, Franciszek Bielicki, who worked at the Medical Academy and the Department of Surgery (Bilewicz 2001:16). Upon Bielicki's retirement in 1989, Wanda Lubczyńska-Kowalska, a doctor at the Red Cross Hospital and the Medical Academy, took the position (Bilewicz 2001:16). Because the University was located in the Medyczny Studium Zawodowy, *sluchacze* had close contact with nurses and students, who had office hours where *sluchacze* could get advice on *higieny życia* [life hygiene, or daily hygiene] and have their blood pressure checked (Bilewicz 2001:19). The Clinical Hospital of the Medical Academy in Wrocław offered free check-ups, including cholesterol, ultrasounds, *gastroskopia*, and *rektoskopia* (Bilewicz 2001:20).

²¹ Halina Szwarc was also a member of the *Armia Krajowa*, or Home Army, the Polish resistance organization during World War II (Szwarc 2008). According to a recent biographical film about her life (*Doktor Halina*, 2007, <http://filmpolski.pl/fp/index.php/525082>), which aired on state television in 2007, her work as a spy helped the Allies' destruction of key sites in Hamburg. After the war she worked as a doctor in Poznań.

²² http://www.gerontologia.org.pl/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2&Itemid=4 (accessed 25 May 2012).

There were also rehabilitation exercises for persons with spinal and joint issues, made possible through affiliation with the Akademia Wychowania Fizycznego (Bilewicz 2001:20-21). Many of my research participants mentioned an interest in health as a reason for their participation in the University of the Third Age.

Second, the social aspects of the University of the Third Age have also been fundamental throughout its history. Data from all three periods emphasizes the importance of social relations for *słuchacze*, and in particular, forming new friendships. The first *słuchacze* to complete the year-long program of study at the STW received the honorary title of “*środowiskowy opiekun społeczny*,” or “local social caretaker” (Bilewicz 2001:8).

Moreover, people’s motivations for joining the group were often as much social as they were academic. This desire for social contact can be seen in other contexts: as Bronwyn Ellis and Michael Leahy write about Universities of the Third Age in Australia, people who join often do so as much for social as for academic reasons (Formosa 2012:9). This holds true for people in Poland as well, as the chronicle of the University of the Third Age in Wrocław shows:

Among the reasons given for signing up for the STW were health and intellectual needs, but also emotional. They expected that in this institution they would find relief from problems, that it could lessen their uncertainty and fear about loneliness and death, anxiety, sadness, joylessness, and being lost. Participation in classes helped students in forming new friendships and lessened feelings of loneliness/isolation. Additionally participation improved and developed their psychophysical health through rehabilitation, sports, and rational recreation. (Bilewicz 2001:11)²³

The meetings that occurred here above all served to strengthen individual values and sympathies with interpersonal contacts and a feeling of joy in life. They were also a useful form of group therapy. Participants in these groups started to help each other to solve personal problems, related to, for instance, problems with apartments, doing the shopping, and jointly planned holiday trips or sanatorium visits. (Bilewicz 2001:9-10)²⁴

²³ “Wśród powodów zgłaszania się do STW wymieniali oni zarówno potrzeby zdrowotne i poznawcze, jak też emocjonalne. Oczekiwali, że w tej instytucji znajdą ulgę w trapiących ich kłopotach, że zmniejszy się ich niepewność, lęk przed samotnością czy śmiercią, niepokój, smutek, bezradność i zagubienie. Udział w zajęciach pomagał studentom w nawiązaniu nowych przyjaźni oraz zmniejszał poczucie osamotnienia. Nadto poprawiał i rozwijał sprawność psychofizyczną poprzez rehabilitację, sport i racjonalny wypoczynek” (Bilewicz 2001:11).

²⁴ “Odbywające się tu spotkania służyły przede wszystkim wzmocnieniu indywidualnych wartości i wrażliwości w kontaktach międzyludzkich oraz poczucia radości życia. Okazały się one też bardzo korzystną formą terapii grupowej. Uczestnicy zajęć zaczęli okazywać sobie wzajemną pomoc w rozwiązywaniu osobistych problemów,

According to official language of the institution, “The University is a social organization, directing engagement in the sphere of culture, education, and preservation of health of people in the older age, independent of their formal level of education” (Woźnicka, A. Regulamin UTW 1979-1997, p. 1, in Bilewicz 2001:15).²⁵ The council of the UTW also served a social function; during weekly office hours, *sluchacze* could “voice requests for help, for example with cleaning, reading aloud, shared walks, or little repairs” (Bilewicz 2001:20).²⁶

In the official records of the institution, it seems relatively unchanged in its core mission and activities over the years:

Just as before, the UTW still promotes activity in prophylactic gerontology and in the sphere of education, culture, and health of retirees. The goal of this work is “...taking care of and increasing intellectual and physical capability of older people, the social activation of such persons, and helping older persons towards this realization through the University” (Regulamin UTW 1997, cited in Bilewicz 2001:30).²⁷

Perhaps because of the influence of gerontology and geriatrics and their connection to the universalizing perspective of biomedicine, there is very little mention of Poland. Aging is presented as a universal phenomena, not one specific to Poland. However, more informal historical documents such as *kroniki* (scrapbooks) suggest that there is continuity in the kinds of activities and groups, and that these practices (e.g., embroidery, cabaret) are tied up with particular dimensions of Polish life that have to do with class and gender.

związanych na przykład ze sprawami mieszkaniowymi, dokonywaniem zakupów, wspólnym planowaniem wyjazdów na wczasy czy do sanatorium” (Bilewicz 2001:9-10).

²⁵ “Uniwersytet jest organizacją społeczną, prowadzącą działalność w dziedzinie kultury, oświaty i ochrony zdrowia obejmującą osoby w starszym wieku niezależnie od ich formalnego poziomu wykształcenia” (Woźnicka, A. Regulamin UTW 1979-1997, p. 1, in Bilewicz 2001:15).

²⁶ “Słuchacze w tym dniu mogli zgłaszać się z prośbą o pomoc, np. w sprzątanii, głośnym czytaniu, wspólnym spacerze czy drobnych naprawach” (Bilewicz 2001:20).

²⁷ “Tak jak i wcześniej UTW nadal prowadzi działalność w zakresie profilaktyki gerontologicznej oraz w dziedzinie oświaty, kultury i zdrowia na rzecz emerytów i rencistów. Celem pracy jest ‘...dbanie o zachowanie i zwiększenie intelektualnej i fizycznej sprawności osób starszych, aktywizacja społeczna tych osób oraz pomoc osobom starszym w zakresach możliwych do realizacji przez Uniwersytet’” (Regulamin UTW 1997, cited in Bilewicz 2001:30).

Moreover, the connection between the University of the Third Age and the discipline of *andragogika* could be important for understanding the Polish, or perhaps local, dimensions of the institution. The University of the Third Age in Wrocław is officially located within the Institute of Pedagogy. I noticed that students of andragogy, a field of specialization within pedagogy, often led classes or activities at the University of the Third Age. During the time of my long-term fieldwork, I was so preoccupied with scheduling interviews, attending classes, and getting to know participants, that I failed to reflect on the discipline of andragogy itself. During the writing process, however, I began to wonder about this discipline that was new to me. Why did I keep meeting students of andragogy when studying aging in Poland? What is the history of this discipline? What is the connection to other fields of study?

I learned from a conversation with a professor of andragogy in Wrocław that the term “andragogy” has a regional usage that is limited to former countries of the socialist bloc and Germany. The use of this term is to distinguish the field from “*pedagogika dorosłych*,” or “pedagogy of adults,” which was used during socialist times. This professor describes the difference as a shift from teaching to learning. The term “*andragogika*,” or “andragogy,” comes from the work of Malcolm Knowles, an American psychologist and educator who popularized the term in the 1970s. Its usage was a form of resistance to the socialist discipline of adult education/training. This is also a regional dimension of the institution; that is, scholars in Wrocław emphasized how particular is their vision of *andragogika* and its connection to Universities of the Third Age. It might not be this way were I to conduct interviews in Łódź, Warsaw, or Białystok.

History of the University of the Third Age in Poznań

The University of the Third Age in Poznań was founded in 1979 by Lidia Wrocińska-Sławska, who was trained as a social worker and worked for the government. She still serves as the vice-president of the institution, though she has now also joined its ranks as a *sluchaczka*, whereas earlier she was still working. She describes the goals of the institution as unchanged from the beginning to this day. A flyer that I received from them in 2009 states their goals as the following: “the continual education of seniors, the stimulation of their personal growth, the development of seniors’ intellectual and physical fitness, and the dissemination of gerontological prophylaxis.”²⁸

During the academic year 2011-2012, the University of the Third Age in Poznań had approximately 1,300 *sluchacze*, a huge growth from the 50 students during the inaugural year 1979-1980. Then, it was originally organized as part of the *Towarzystwo Wolnej Wszechnicy Polskiej* (TWWP, or Society of the Free Polish University), which was established in 1918, upon Poland’s independence at the end of World War I. The organization sees itself as the continuation of educational organizations (*Uniwersytet Latający*, or Traveling University, and *Towarzystwo Kursów Naukowych*, or Society of Science Courses) that promoted Polish-language and historical education during the official suppression of Polish culture during the partitions, especially in the Russian and Prussian empires.²⁹

Because Wrocińska-Sławska worked in the *sz służba socjalna* (social service), which was then administered as part of the health department, it was easy for the University of the Third Age to find partners in the health field, such as the geriatrist Stanisława Jankowska. Thus, the

²⁸“ustawiczne kształcenie seniorów, stymulowanie ich rozwoju osobowego, rozwijanie sprawności intelektualnej i fizycznej seniorów, i upowszechniania profilaktyki gerontologicznej.”

²⁹“*Historia powstania TWWP*” (“History of the establishment of TWWP”). *Towarzystwo Wolnej Powszechnej Polskiej we Wrocławiu*.

http://www.twwp.wroclaw.pl/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=26&Itemid=36, accessed 2 July 2012. The *Uniwersytet Latający* boasts of its famous participants, such as Marie Skłodowska-Curie and Janusz Korczak.

first lectures took place on the fourth floor of a building that housed a medical clinic next the Mercure Hotel in the center of Poznań, not far from the main train station and exhibition halls for the *targi*, or international trade fairs, for which Poznań has long been known.³⁰ The *sluchacze* did not have to pay to participate. The beginning curriculum consisted of weekly lectures, foreign-language classes (English, French, German), exercise classes, and *radiestezja* (radiesthesia, similar to dowsing). Wrocińska-Sławska advertised the University of the Third Age during radio and TV programs, and after four years, the number of *sluchacze* grew too large for the room so the institution had to seek new spaces. Wrocińska-Sławska recalled that she would keep the topic of the lectures a surprise until the lecture itself, for she suspected that if she announced a schedule ahead of time, people might not attend if the topic did not sound immediately engaging.

Throughout the years, Wrocińska-Sławska has sought out official connections with other higher-education institutions in Poznań. Each year, the inauguration of the academic year is celebrated in the main auditorium of Adam Mickiewicz University, and currently the classes take place in dozens of locations throughout the city, at both public and private institutions. As higher education itself has grown, so has the UTW, making it harder and harder to find places to hold their classes.

Local institutions

My meetings with the staff of the University of the Third Age reflected regional stereotypes of behavior, but also the differences in institutional structure. In Wrocław, my appointments were rarely scheduled for a particular time; for instance, I was told to stop by after 10, or around 3:30 pm. The director or a *sluchaczka* would make me a cup of coffee, and put out

³⁰ During the time of my fieldwork in Wrocław in December 2008, the Poznań trade fairgrounds made international headlines as the site of the UN climate change talks. Since 2010, there have been trade fairs directed at retirees, called “Aktywni 50+!” [Active 50+!]. See <http://50plus.mtp.pl/pl/>, accessed 1 April 2013, for more information.

a tray of wrapped candies. There is one administrative staff member who works part-time, and *sluchacze* volunteer for the rest of the administrative duty (e.g., accounting). The administrative staff member has her own office, as does the director, though there are often *sluchacze* working and talking in there. The entranceway to the University of the Third Age's space has three small tables alongside the informational bulletin boards, where *sluchacze* often meet (and where I occasionally conducted interviews). The volunteers refer to each other in the informal register of address, notable among retirees, who tend to stay within the formal register. The atmosphere is often busy, but feels relaxed and informal. When I began my fieldwork in Wrocław, I was given the semester's course offerings, and invited just to show up at any of them that I liked. When setting up the conversational English class that I volunteered to teach during fieldwork, I coordinated with the director, who instructed me to set up the class however I like.



Figure 3: Sitting area at the University of the Third Age, Wrocław



Figure 4: Corner of classroom at University of the Third Age, Wrocław. Text on poster reads “UTW: our little homeland.”

The University of the Third Age's offices in Poznań are located on the second floor of a centrally-located city-owned building, across the street from the Adam Mickiewicz University library, and a block away from plac Wolności. These offices are primarily administrative, with no designated social space. Whenever I had an appointment either to discuss my research, organize conversational English classes, or interview a staff member, the appointments were always scheduled for an exact time (e.g., 1:30 p.m.). I would be led to a table appointed with white- and cream-colored lace doilies, a plate of cookies and cakes, and offered a cup of coffee or tea. The administrative space has three rooms that function to receive guests or hold meetings. The two accountants have their own office, and there is a separate cashier's booth with a plate-glass window, like at a museum. Everyone refers to each other in the formal register, and it has the feeling of an office workplace.



Figure 5: Lobby of the University of the Third Age, Poznań

In contrast to Wrocław, in Poznań, *sluchacze* pay by the course that they attend. This means that people are more likely to select just one course at a time, whereas in Wrocław, I met

people who spent part of every day in some organized activity through the UTW. Moreover, there was no designated social space for the *sluchacze* in Poznań, nor was there classroom space that was theirs to control, so they held classes at universities across the city.

Because they are located in the same building as the School of Pedagogy, the halls of the University of the Third Age in Wrocław are filled with college students and *sluchacze* alike, creating a bustling academic atmosphere that starkly differed from the more business-like offices in Poznań. However, it is important to note that many classes through the University in Poznań are held at other universities in the city, so the same hectic academic climate remains there.

These differences in the spatial organization and social behavior align with Polish stereotypes of these two cities: namely, that Wrocławianie are laidback, relaxed, and informal, while Poznaniacy are more organized, business-like, conservative, and distant. Poles attribute these differences to the legacy of the partitions and the history of population movement (or not). That is, the Prussian influence in Poznań is thought to bring about a proclivity for organization, business, and rationality that Poles also associate with Germans, while the post-war relocation of people from western Galicia to Wrocław is thought to give its residents an “eastern” laidback openness and warmth that Poles associate with Ukrainians. When I described the differences in the Universities of the Third Age to *sluchacze* at each place, they nodded their heads in affirmation, as if expecting such an answer.

Learning how to age well

My introduction to the University of the Third Age came through a friend, who is a professor of psychology in the school of pedagogy at the University of Wrocław. She had given guest lectures there and thought it would be a good place for me to learn about aging in Poland

and meet research participants. I went to meet her at a University of the Third Age event on a bright October afternoon in 2008. Leaving my apartment in the center of Wrocław, I walked down ul. Świdnicka, across a small bridge over the Odra River, past the imposing statue of Bolesław I Chrobry on horseback (Bolesław I the Brave, crowned the first king of Poland in 1025 and credited with expanding the Polish lands) next to the renovations of the early 20th century German Wertheim department store (this renovation opened in 2009 as an upscale mall, Renoma, one of five new shopping malls in Wrocław), and through the main train station (*Dworzec Główny*, recently renovated for Wrocław's hosting of the Euro soccer tournament in the summer of 2012). Walking alongside the bus station, next to the main railroad administrative offices on ul. Joannitów, I saw the large building housing the University of the Third Age on ul. Dawida: the Institute of Pedagogy at the University of Wrocław.

After meeting my friend at her office, she took me to the auditorium, where *sluchacze* were on stage performing a cabaret, singing songs and playing piano. At least one hundred people were in the audience, a sea of gray and white hair above formal jackets and collared blouses. I was unsure what the performance was about, as my language skills were not good enough at that time to understand song, but it was clear the mood was upbeat. After the cabaret performance, my friend introduced me to the director of the University of the Third Age, Aleksander Kobylarek, a professor of andragogy at the University of Wrocław, who offered logistical and institutional assistance. She also introduced me to pani Cecylia, a *sluchaczka* who became one of my most helpful research participants.

My friend left me to talk with pani Cecylia, who, upon learning that I was interested in learning about the lives of older people in Poland, promptly invited me to a nearby café to share stories of her life (see Chapter 5). I was overwhelmed by the intensity and vivacity with which

pani Cecylia spoke, not stopping for two hours. For the first month of fieldwork, and indeed that very morning, I had been doing research at the rehab center among people who were in rehabilitation after major surgeries or illnesses and were unable to take care of themselves. Although they were also eager to share their experiences, bodily suffering and physical limitations often limited the length of our conversations; pain muted their energy. Pani Cecylia spoke with a passion and energy that was new to me during my fieldwork. That day was the beginning of the warm hospitality and openness that characterized all my subsequent interactions with people at the University. Even a month into fieldwork, I was struck by this warmth, having been taught in language classes and conversations with Polish friends that Poles can be hard to get to know, although I was also conscious that my status as an American played a significant role in such easy access to research sites and participants (cf. Wedel 1986; see Chapters 1 and 5 for more extensive discussions of the role of my identity during fieldwork).

Over the coming months, I began to attend classes started to teach a weekly conversational English class. People responded to my bulletin board posting asking for interviews; over several months, I interviewed 14 people. I attended some of the weekly lecture series, classes on *trening pamięci*, or “memory training,” and “*spotkania w czasoprzestrzeni – dialog między generacjami*,” or “meetings in space-time: an intergenerational dialogue.” Through the bulletin board posting, these classes, and my English classes, I got to know a core group of *sluchaczes*; I will draw most of my data from my interviews and observations with them. I also met several masters and doctoral students in andragogy who were particularly helpful in teaching me about the University.



Figure 6: “Intergenerational dialogue” group during a walk in the botanical gardens

Overall, I was most struck by the determination of the *sluchacze* to make aging a positive experience and the degree to which their experiences at this institution contrasted with their lives until this time. Mostly women who had retired from jobs as teachers, accountants, or medical workers, students of the University of the Third Age tend to come from well-educated and relatively well-off backgrounds. They described their lives up before their participation in the University of the Third Ages busy with work and family, in contrast to the University of the Third Age, where they can finally *robić coś dla siebie*, or do something for oneself. In other words, somehow the activities with which they had been filling their days until then were not *dla siebie*, or “for oneself,” in the same way as the University of the Third Age. What is it about attending English classes, lectures on gerontology, and musical performances that were so qualitatively different from other experiences of these older people? And what could account for the consistently high percentage of women at these institutions?

It was not until later in my fieldwork during an interview project I did with a NGO program called *@ktywny Senior* that I began to be able to answer these questions. There I realized the significance of the word “*aktywny*,” or “active,” as an attribute of desirable practices

of aging—and that this was implicitly contrasted with an old age characterized by illness and disability, exemplified by those living in institutional care. In fact, I began to notice *sluchacze* making offhand remarks blaming those who live in institutional care for not properly taking care of themselves. And as shown in the previous chapter describing representations of aging in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Poland’s newspaper of record, *aktywność* is associated with proper “western” modes of aging (recall the woman who compared her experience as an old woman in Paris to Poland); the opposite of *aktywność* is epitomized by the story of pani Baranowska, who was left alone to die in her apartment.

At the end of the program, participants were encouraged to come up with “*hasła*” (“slogans”) to represent aging; starred and circled in my notes is one slogan in particular, “*seniorzy też ludzie*” (“seniors are people too”). This stark declaration of personhood raised similar questions for me as did claims of the *sluchacze* at the University of the Third Age who saw old age as a time to take care of one’s self. Why did people feel a need to assert their personhood? What was it about their prior lives that made them dehumanized; was it the *zmiana ustrojowe* (political changes) that Marek described (above), or does this social isolation lie outside the political sphere? What did they gain at @ktywny Senior that helped them learn this? Are these the same sorts of skills and practices as at the University of the Third Age, or are these programs doing something different?

Since people saw these practices of aging as related to Poland’s place in the world, and in particular, to its membership in the EU, how exactly does working towards achieving a good old age through *aktywność* relate to changes in personhood? Do differences between socialism and capitalism matter, or do other aspects of life matter to the changes in moral personhood of the *sluchacze*? In what follows in this chapter, I will use ethnographic data from the University of

the Third Age in Wrocław to elucidate what I saw as the key dimensions of social life at the Universities of the Third Age: learning new skills and remembering in the company of others.



Figure 7: Trip to the Poznań Aeroklub with the University of the Third Age tour group

Ethnographic perspectives on “active” aging in Poland

Yet the retirees who participate in these programs do not always evaluate them in terms of dreams of the West. Rather, the University of the Third Age provides participants a way to form new kin ties that create a more local kind of personhood.

Jolanta

One retired teacher, Jolanta, who has attended the University of the Third Age for over eight years, describes her experience as providing her with a “*druga rodzina*,” or “second family.” This “family” gives her support, companionship, and above all, she says, advice for coping with health problems. Jolanta began attending the University of the Third Age after she had been retired for ten years and both her children moved away. Widowed, Jolanta became lonely and sought out the University of the Third Age as a way to overcome this loneliness. Her strategy for aging is to fill in what she has missed out on during her life; for example, she learned

to swim at age 70. Jolanta's "second family" now takes up her time in a way that prevents her from seeing her kin; she regrets that she can only visit her daughter in England during breaks in the University of the Third Age's school year, and that she does not often visit her husband's or parents' graves because of the time she spends at the University of the Third Age.

Jolanta is similar to many women with whom I spoke who sought out the University of the Third Age as a way to form new social relations to overcome the loneliness accompanying retirement, and often, widowhood. They describe retirement and aging as negative experiences that have been improved through participating in the University of the Third Age. Yet these improvements have come through cultivating new relations that can supplant old kin ties, rather than through greater engagement with international cultural groups, such as those led by former director, or through the new skills and hobbies themselves. Jolanta's experience shows that changes in personhood are best characterized not through an opposition of individualist to relational persons, but through understanding practices of relatedness through which these relational persons emerge.

Learning to remember, wishing to forget

One morning in late May 2009, I attended a session of a "memory training" ("*trening pamięci*") class. All six *sluchacze* were unknown to me, as I had been unable to coordinate my schedule to attend other class meetings. The young woman leading the class, a master's student in *andragogika*, asked the *sluchacze* to write down ten nouns beginning with the prefix "anti-" ("*anty-*"). Some began to write, some stared at the page, and others asked a few clarifying questions. "Does the word have to begin with anti-? Can anti- be in the middle of the word?" "Nouns, right?" After a few minutes, the instructor called time, and asked "How did it go? Were

there problems?”³¹ A man confirmed that there were problems, that “there was a block.”³² Others agreed, saying that they were stuck on the prefix and unable to finish the word. Others, however, eagerly shared the lists of words that they created, talking over each other in an effort to be heard. “Antiterrorist, antique shop, antiseptic, antagonist, antipodes, antique, anticommunist, antimatter.”³³ At anti-communist, the class laughed; at antimatter, the teacher responded or “really phenomenal.”³⁴ Moving on to another prefix, *przed-* (meaning “before,” “in front of”), the teacher asked the *sluchacze* to write down fifteen nouns beginning with this prefix. Even more eagerly than with *anty-*, after a few minutes *sluchacze* interrupted each other in reading off their lists, repeating words that others have said, as if to prove they had them too: “preschool, entranceway, subject, company, preface, performance.” “Preschool, entranceway,” another voice joined in.³⁵ The teacher explained that such exercises are good not only because they “stimulate your nerve cells,”³⁶ but because they “mobilize thought.” The teacher asked if the *sluchacze* saw the words as they were writing them, stating that they probably saw *their* preschools, *their* entranceways, thus encouraging the *sluchacze* to think about these exercises as personal.

The teacher then moved to a visualization exercise, in which she encouraged them to imagine their elementary schools in as much detail as possible.

Teacher: We’re closing our eyes, we’re imagining that in this moment, we are transported to our elementary school [laughter from woman in class]. And now your task, for the next minute, is to enter the corridor of your elementary school. Yes. Notice specifically what there is in the corridor [more laughter]. Maybe you see some friends, a teacher. What did they look like? What was the women’s makeup like, what was their hair like... you notice the weather – is it as beautiful as today? And after a minute of this imagining a virtual stroll around our old elementary schools, you all will take a pen in your hands and write

³¹ “jak poszło? Były problemy?”

³² “Był blok.”

³³ Antyterrorysta, antykwariat, antyseptyka, antagonist, antypody, antyk, antykomunista, antimateria.

³⁴ “naprawdę fenomenalne,”

³⁵ Przedszkola, przedpokój, przedmiot, przedsiębiorstwo, przedmowa, przedstawienie... These words have different prefixes in English, but the same in Polish.

³⁶ “nie tylko stymulują państwo komórki nerwowe.... uruchomić myślenia.”

everything that you saw. Ok? We're closing our eyes... and we're opening the door of our elementary school. We're going inside and starting to look around.³⁷

Her voice had the sing-songy modulation that one uses to speak to a child. After a few seconds, she reminded everyone to keep their eyes closed. Very quickly, the visualization exercise broke down:

Teacher:	We're closing our eyes.
Sluchaczka 1:	This is torturous.
Teacher:	Maybe something outside the school, you go outside to PE, that's ok too. Everyone, I see there are problems with focusing.
Sluchaczka 1:	I don't have the strength to focus! For this, I dream.
Sluchaczka 2:	Me too. I have a macabre image.
Sluchaczka 1:	I have a macabre image as well.
Teacher:	Just another moment.
Sluchaczka 1:	I don't want to think about this topic. ³⁸

During the above interaction, the teacher reminded one woman to close her eyes. This same woman is the one who spoke up, saying that this was a torturous exercise. After this *sluchaczka* said she did not want to think about elementary school, the second *sluchaczka* volunteered to tell her story, saying “Well, I can tell about my horrors that I lived through, exactly in elementary school.”³⁹ The first *sluchaczka* said that she could also speak to the horrors she experienced, but the second *sluchaczka* continued with her story. She launched forth into what was sounded like a well-rehearsed story about being deported to Siberia, and on her return to Poland as a 12-year-old, being placed into a class with students much younger than her. The woman who first

³⁷ Teacher: Zamykamy oczy, wyobrażamy sobie, że w tej chwili, jesteśmy przeniesieni (deliberately) do naszej szkoły podstawowej. [laughter from woman in the class] I teraz państwa zadanie jest przez minut czas, przejście do korytarzy państwa szkoły podstawowej. Tak. Dokładnie obejrzyć co tam jest w korytarze. [more laughter] Może zobaczysz jakieś koleżanki, kolegów, jakiś nauczycielka. Jak wtedy wyglądali. Jakie mieli makijaże panie, jakie miały fryzjera. Zobaczysz jaka jest pogoda, taka ładna jak dzisiaj, i po minucie takiego wyobrażania, takiego spaceru wirtualnego po naszej szkoły podstawowej dawnej, wezmą państwo długopis do rączki i zapiszą wszystko co tam zobaczyli. Dobrze? Zamykamy oczy, i... otwieramy drzwi od naszej szkoły podstawowej. Chodzimy do środka i zaczynamy patrzeć.

³⁸ Teacher: Zamykamy oczy. Student 1: Ale mecze tej szkoły. Tak mecze. Teacher: Może cos na zewnątrz. Wychodzi na pani na wuef. Tez może być. Państwo widzi, że są problemy (do) skupienie się. Student: Boże, nie mam moc skupiać! Do tego się snie. Student 2: Ja tez. Ja mam obraz makabryczny. Student 1: Ja mam obraz makabryczny też. Teacher: Jeszcze chwileczkę. Student 1: Ja nie chce na ten temat myśleć.

³⁹ Ja mogę akurat powiedzieć o moich makabrach, które przeżyłam właśnie w szkoły podstawowej.

mentioned her “macabre image” then told her story, beginning, “I have a terrible *przeżycie*.”⁴⁰ She saw the Gestapo enter her elementary school, round up 22 partisans hiding in the school, and beat and kill them. The whole school saw everything. Another *sluchaczka* asked her where this occurred, and she said in a village near Kielce, where she mentioned the many partisans in the forests.

The teacher interrupted this conversation, saying, “Everyone, it’s very good that these women spoke about this, right? Because, um, such an experience is your life’s baggage.”⁴¹ The two women who had told their stories agreed; the one who spoke of the Gestapo said, “This is my trauma. I awake in the night from fear,” and thinks “it’s good that this was only a dream.”⁴² The teacher went on to praise the *sluchaczka* on their vivid, living memories, saying, “please look, uh, how vivid is your memory, right?” A man interrupted, saying “*very vivid!*” The teacher continued, “Such a simple exercise, which theoretically, hm, which shouldn’t build such great emotion, builds wildly a lot of emotion. That’s why I want to calm you all down. I propose a relaxing...” The man interrupts again, saying “it won’t work.”⁴³ A few people then told stories about positive memories of elementary school. The woman who spoke of her traumatic experience after returning from Siberia read two poems that she wrote to mark the end of the academic year, one about *seniorzy* and one about *młodzieży* (youth).

The rest of the class was taken up with the same sort of word games and exercises as the beginning. The teacher closed the class with a visualization exercise, asking the *sluchacze* to

⁴⁰ “ja mam straszne przeżycie,” See Tucker 2011 for a discussion of the use of *przeżycie* among her research participants.

⁴¹ „Drodze państwo, to bardzo dobrze, że panie o tym powiedziały, tak? Dlatego, że, eh, że, takie doświadczenia są państwa bagażem życiowym.”

⁴² “To jest moja trauma. Ja się budzę w nocy przez strachem.” „To dobrze, że był tylko sen.”

⁴³ Teacher: Proszę zobaczyć, mm, jak żywe jest państwa wspomnienie, prawda? Male student interrupts: bardzo żywy! Teacher: Takie proste zadanie, które teoretycznie, hm, które nie powinno zbudać aż tak ogromnej emocji, buduje szalenie dużo emocji. Dlatego chciałabym państwo uspokoić. Proponuję relaksujące ... Same male student interrupts: nie da się!

imagine holding an apple in their hands, and then to eat it. The teacher described very slowly all the qualities of the apple they were supposed to notice: the color, the weight, the smell, the taste. Throughout these instructions, she encouraged the *sluchacze* to take deep breaths. At the end, she asked them if they could taste the apple, and everyone, even the women who had shared their traumatic stories, agreed that they could—and that the apple was delicious. The teacher encouraged the *sluchacze* to take this exercise as a lesson that they can have control over their thoughts, that their thoughts do not have to control them. She said that so much depends on us, that whether we smile or not is our decision.⁴⁴ Although it is to interpret the events of this class that way, instead what I find notable is the way that these women found it unbearable to sit alone with their eyes closed and recall horrific or traumatic scenes, but wanted to share these stories with each other. Despite the teacher's attempt to keep the class focused on various cognitive memory exercises, it was the interaction with each other that the *sluchacze* kept seeking.

This class highlights both the ways that childhood memory seems to reside just below the surface, but also the ways in which this can be sidestepped through conversation and sharing with one another.

The limits of “active” aging

Both *@ktywny Senior* and the Universities of the Third Age in Poznań and Wrocław encourage the fundamentally social practices of “*aktywność*” among its participants, thereby undermining a binary framework of capitalist and socialist personhood. The explicit goal of transforming personhood in old age reveals the temporal life-course dimension of personhood. Whether explicitly trying to address the sociocultural and political-economic marginalization of the elderly, like *@ktywny Senior*, or by providing new social worlds for people like Jolanta at the

⁴⁴ Jak wielu zależy od naszej woli... uśmiech zależy tylko od nas.

University of the Third Age, these cases reveal that personhood in old age can be malleable and ever-contingent. The analytic lens of relatedness keeps social relations in the foreground, and shows that the hierarchy of value of social relations might be shifting in contemporary Poland. That is, non-kin ties are increasingly encouraged and valued in certain contexts. That this move towards non-kin ties is occurring in places dominated by older women is especially significant. Culturally understood to be the practical and spiritual care-takers and moral center of the family, older women at the Universities of the Third Age and programs like *@ktywny Senior* explicitly cultivate relations that can be equally, or possibly more, meaningful than their traditional kin ties. This suggests a weakening of the figure of the *Matka-Polka* among the segment of the population who attends these Universities and programs. Moreover, the memory-keeping practices of these universities, in both classes like the one described above and in the encouraging of writing memoirs, suggest that these are key social institutions through which the memories of older Poles are recorded.

However, in practice these institutions are not open to everyone, meaning that not everyone can gain access to the prestige that comes with these new skills, and not everyone's memories become documented in memoirs. In this world that idealizes vibrant, energetic, and independent elders, how do those who live in institutionalized care fit in? How does needing care change one's personhood? The logic of self-care and taking responsibility for one's health leads to blaming those who fall ill and rely upon care-givers. Indeed, many who subscribe to the philosophies of *aktywność* and participate in groups such as Universities of the Third Age and *@ktywny Senior* either indirectly or directly blame the individuals themselves. One woman who attended the University of the Third Age commented to me that older people who stay at home and watch serials on TV are bound to end up in institutional care. Such comments ignore the

facts that people who are in institutional care may have previously led very active lives, and that many people do not feel comfortable in a scholastic environment for a variety of social, economic, cultural, and personal reasons. Moreover, these remarks are belied by the ways that some people whom I met during my fieldwork can create satisfactory and fulfilling lives for themselves in long-term institutional care. In the next chapter, I show how older people living in institutional care in Wrocław live meaningful lives in the face of social suffering and structural violence. What kinds of moral personhood are possible other than *aktywność*?

Chapter 4

“Old age is no joy”? Institutional care beyond social suffering

Of cappuccinos and pickles

When I returned to Poland in 2012, I was glad to be able to meet with five of the *sluchacze* from the English class that I taught at the University of the Third Age in Wrocław.¹ On an unseasonably chilly July afternoon, we met in the restaurant of the John Paul II Hotel, a four-star hotel in the historic religious district of the city, where we had cappuccino and dessert and chatted for two hours or so. The conversation was generally light, as women told me about the latest news at the University of the Third Age, talked about memory training classes in which they learned to memorize long sequences of numbers and words, and tried to show off their English skills to me (and to outdo their friends). The tone grew more serious, as one woman shared news about a mutual friend’s illness, but it was generally a light-hearted afternoon. The cappuccinos and cheesecake were delicious, although everyone pronounced the fruit and ice cream dish a bit odd—why was it full of grapefruit rather than local berries that were in season? I let the women treat me to coffee and dessert, at their insistence, and felt glad to be welcomed back so warmly.

In many ways, this afternoon felt like another world from where I had been that morning, at the Social Welfare Home, where I was also reconnecting with people whom I had met three years earlier. Pani Bożena told me that costs for medicine have risen a lot since then, leaving her

¹ The Polish idiom of the title phrase is “Starość nie radość.” See Caldwell 2007:71 for a discussion of the same idiom in Russian.

with only 90 PLN (30 USD) for pocket money each month instead of the 140 PLN (47 USD) she used to have. Without assistance from her large family, she would not have enough to eat, she said, pointing to the jars of pickles that her son had brought her. Despite not having feeling in her only leg, a recent accident in which her bed railing had fallen on her leg brought pain to her knee when she lay in one position. The brace that would keep her leg in the proper position was not covered by insurance, she said, so she had to endure the pain. This economic contrast to the restaurant at the John Paul II hotel was stark; there our cappuccinos were 8 PLN (3 USD), our slices of cheesecake 12 PLN (4 USD) each, and unsavory grapefruit and ice cream were 15 PLN (5 USD).

Yet these were not two worlds—in fact, I rode the bus from the Social Welfare Home to the city center and walked a few minutes to the John Paul II hotel. Although pani Bożena spoke of injustice and pain, she also smiled and laughed with her daughter when she called, showed me pictures of her grandchildren and great-grandchildren, took out her latest knitting project, and asked me about my sister in Arizona. (Pani Bożena loved the Grand Canyon.) In some ways, this was not so different than the conversation at the hotel restaurant, where women also spoke of kin, friends, and travel. Despite stark contrasts in class, education, and health between pani Bożena, who relied on gifts of pickles from her son, and the women from the University of the Third Age, who purchased expensive cappuccinos in luxury hotels, the practices through which these women sustain moral personhood do not differ radically. In emphasizing these similarities, in no way do I intend to romanticize the poverty of pani Bożena or present a rose-colored view of her as nobly suffering (which, in the Polish context, would fit within nationalist Catholic discourses of old age). Rather, in this chapter, I try to explain the surprising connections between these women's sustenance of moral personhood through an analysis of social relations.

The rehab hospital and Social Welfare Home are places where the rhetoric and logic of *aktywność* seem not to extend. Indeed, the logic of *aktywność* implicitly discriminates against those who live in institutional care for not properly cultivating healthy, able bodies. Many people in Poland told me that they did not want to live in institutional care; these are stigmatized, marginal sorts of institutions. To some extent, these negative expectations for institutional care were borne out during my fieldwork in these institutions; these were often trying places to be. My days at both places were often difficult, as I witnessed tears, pain, and exhaustion. Patients and residents missed their families, longed for home, and endured pain. Staff worked long hours, struggled with difficult patients, and cared for failing bodies. The loud hurried footsteps of a nurse walking to the next patient's room contrasted with the slow laborious movement of a patient with a walker or a resident in a non-motorized wheelchair. The halls smelled of powerful cleaners, at times barely masking the smell of soiled diapers.

Yet allowing this suffering to dominate representations of these institutions would both replicate the marginal status of such institutions within Polish society and ignore the (albeit exceptional) people there who felt that they were living good, moral lives. Moreover, such an analytic focus on suffering can come at the expense of attention to hope, joy, and beauty (Livingston 2012, Mattingly 2010), doing violence to the complexity of our research participants' lives. In other words, people who are suffering are rarely *only* or *always* suffering (see also Das and Kleinman 2001:1-2). Pain subsides, a roommate tells a joke, a staff member brings hot water for tea, a nun performs mass at chapel. People form new social relations even as others unravel. Indeed, it is exactly through practices such as joking and making tea that social relations are formed. By closely analyzing such aspects of daily life in these institutions, a more complex understanding of the personhood of these older Poles can emerge in which they are not

presented merely as marginalized elders deserving of pity or blame, but more complex and full persons. Thus in this chapter I focus on the social and relational aspects of institutional life as a way to describe the moral personhood of those who live in institutional care. This analysis builds on an emerging theoretical perspective (Livingston 2012, Mattingly 2010, Smith-Morris 2011, Stillo 2012) that shows how people maintain and strengthen relatedness and personhood despite sociocultural and political-economic barriers to doing so.

By combining experiential with structural analysis, and focusing on relationships rather than individuals, this chapter provides a grounded ethnographic account of aging in institutional care that aims to overcome binary frames of independence and dependence, and illness and health. Over the course of this chapter, I aim to answer the following questions: How do people who live in these institutions understand their own lives? What are the key components of their moral personhood? Which social relations foster development or maintenance of a good life, and which relations hinder a good life? How do practices and ideals of care intersect with or diverge from the *aktywność* described in the previous chapter? Are there other possibilities for personhood besides *Gazeta Wyborcza*'s polarized binary models of "good" and "bad" aging, and *Nasz Dziennik*'s embedded tradition-bearing grandparent or nobly suffering elder (see chapter 2)? How are key ideals of moral personhood, related to kinship, respect, class, and distinction, practiced in these places where people are living outside their ideals of normative aging?

Despite their shared goals of rehabilitation and medical care, the rehab center and social welfare home differ in key ways. At the Catholic rehab center, people have become ill primarily due to strokes or major surgeries, while at the social welfare home for the chronically physical ill, most people have lost function through long-term illness. Over half the people with whom I spoke at the rehab center moved there because of sudden medical events (most often strokes or

recovering from surgeries), while almost everyone at the social welfare home was there due to chronic illness. These differing temporalities of illness are crucial in determining possible futures of older persons in institutional care, and possibilities for personhood in old age. The swift and radical change brought on by an event like a stroke transforms someone differently than the slower debility of an illness like arthritis or multiple sclerosis (c.f. Becker and Kaufman 1995; Kaufman 1988). Therefore, I will pay special attention to the temporal dimensions of both illness and social relations within these institutions. In order to prevent a limited focus on an individual or set of individuals, I aim to incorporate the spatiotemporal worlds of these institutions into my analysis as well. How do the temporalities of these swift or slow debilities co-exist within differing institutions? How does the place-ness of each institution become part of people's experiences? How do the institutions themselves foster or discourage the temporalities of certain illnesses or social relations?

In order to answer these questions, I will describe each institution in turn, focusing first on the rehab center and then the social welfare home. In these descriptions, I will focus especially on the spatiotemporal and social aspects of the institutions themselves, and the social relations between patients or residents, staff, kin, and visitors. Then I will present case studies for each institution to show how people create, or fail to create, moral lives for themselves in these institutions. Even though what follows focuses on particular individuals, I resist the label of "person-centered analysis" (Mattingly 2010:47) since this can sometimes recreate overly individualistic approaches; rather, I would prefer to think of this as a relations-centered analysis.

I see this chapter as complementing the anthropological literature on structural violence, social suffering, and abandonment, which has proliferated over the last two decades, as scholars have utilized structural perspectives showing how political, economic, and historical forces

marginalize and exclude certain groups of people. Medical anthropologists have shown how these processes have become inseparable from regimes of health and illness (e.g., Farmer 2003), and how some classes of bodies are kept healthy at the expense of others (e.g., Scheper-Hughes and Wacquant 2002). Anthropologists have combined these structural, systemic perspectives with fine-grained ethnographic analysis that examines what life is like for those living on the margins, in “zones of abandonment” (Biehl 2005). These ethnographies show very well the effects of such structural violence on individual lives, and detail the ways in which individuals are caught up in these broader social processes. Suffering is indeed social (as well as physical and mental) and violence is indeed structural (as well as personal). Yet all who live on the margins are not suffering all of the time. In other words, people are not only experiencing abjectness in these abject places. Even those people who are suffering the most have moments of joy, laughter, and love. In this chapter, which ethnographically investigates lives of Polish elderly people who are living outside their moral ideals, I focus on these moments of laughter and care, and these people who are able to create moral worlds for themselves despite the abject conditions in which they find themselves. Biehl partially addresses these experiences by asking, “how to account for the unexpected relations and care emerging here? What is their potential, and how is it exhausted time and again?” (2005:36). In this chapter, however, I focus on the ways that such potential for relatedness is *not* exhausted, on the ways that people sustain moral personhood and social relations despite the multitude of obstacles to doing so.

In this chapter, I aim to follow the narrative phenomenology of Mattingly (2010) and the social phenomenology of Livingston (2012) as a way to draw out the particular moments that have transformative potential. In this ethnography of institutional care, I look for moments of

connection and possibility, and try to ask how these moments can contribute to the literature on social suffering and structural violence.

The horizon of rehabilitation: life at a Catholic rehabilitation center

Run by Catholic nuns in the order of St. Elizabeth, this 80-bed rehabilitation center is populated by people who have had major medical events that have left them dependent on the care of others.² Although people are supposed to be in this institution for a temporary period of only a few months, in reality, many people remain for a year or longer as their physical conditions fail to improve or as they wait for openings in institutions intended for long-term care. There are a few beds set aside for people to remain there permanently. Almost all patients are over the age of 60, and consistently, about 70 percent are women.³ Most everyone uses a wheelchair, though some can walk for short distances with assistance of a cane or walker.

Patients must contribute 70 percent of their pension to stay in the institution, and if this 70 percent is less than 800 PLN (about 260 USD in 2008-2009) per month, they must supplement it up to 800. The center is reimbursed by the *Narodowy Fundusz Zdrowia* (NFZ, or National Health Fund), the public national health care fund, which pays for accommodation in a room, usually with one to three roommates; medical care by the institution's doctors, nurses, *opiekunki* (literally "carers;" roughly equivalent to nurses' aides), and *rehabilitantki*

² The nuns who run the rehab center are part of the order of St. Elizabeth, established in 1842 in Nysy (then the Prussian Neisse). The order is named after St. Elizabeth of Hungary, who lived during the early 13th century, and was the daughter of King Andrew II of and Queen Gertrude of Hungary; after being widowed at age 20, she donated her money to build hospitals and took care of patients herself (Lang 2005). Her name day is celebrated by nuns at the rehab center with the giving of roses and rose-themed gifts (e.g., rose-shaped and rose-scented candles, greeting cards printed with roses), after the miracle in which St. Elizabeth turned bread into roses to hide her charity from her disapproving family. According to the sisters who work at the rehab center, the *Siostry Elzbietanki* (sisters of St. Elizabeth) are one of the smaller orders of nuns in Poland.

³ Following the terminology of the staff and the patients themselves, I refer to the persons being cared for in this institution as "patients" (*pacjenci*). See chapter 1 for a discussion of the overwhelming majority of women in the ZOL, and for a discussion of the gendered nature of the life course in Poland.

(rehabilitation therapists); participation in *terapia zajęciowa* (occupational therapy, most often art and music therapy) and daily chapel services as desired; three meals and two snacks daily; and, if needed, two adult diapers daily. Because the quota of two adult diapers daily is not enough for most patients, and they and their families must pay for extras, nurses and nurses' aides have come up with the solution of placing a small child's diaper inside the adult diaper as a liner. Children's diapers are cheaper and adequate for urine, so nurses' aides change these liners instead. Additional medical services, such as massage and ultrasound treatments, are an extra out-of-pocket cost, as are medicines (though the NFZ refunds the costs of certain medicines).⁴ Families often bring in fruit, cookies, juices, and tea, as well as supplemental personal care products, such as deodorant, shampoos, and lotions. Some people have books, magazines, or booklets of Sudoku games or crossword puzzles. Patients keep these items in small rolling metal cabinets next to their beds that have a fold-out leaf, which serves as table for meals. These cabinets also display clocks, radio, seasonal trinkets or flowers, devotional items, and family pictures. Patients store their clothes in several shelves, a hanging rack, and drawers in a shared wardrobe in the room, often across from the bathroom. The rooms have high ceilings and large windows with gauzy curtains that look out towards the convent building or, on the other side, onto the gardens and an empty lot where a new hotel will be built. Rooms towards one end of the hallway have a view of the Odra River. The windowsills in all the shared spaces and offices are full of beautifully maintained plants, cared for by the *siostra oddziałowa* (ward sister).

The building that currently houses the rehabilitation center was built in 1901 and was originally used as housing for the novitiates of the order. Almost entirely destroyed in 1945

⁴ Not all medicines are refunded by the NFZ. For instance, the best drug to treat certain kinds of multiple sclerosis (MS) is not covered, meaning that the disease often progresses much more quickly and severely than among patients who have the means to pay for the best drugs (interferons). NFZ policies were the subject of complaint among my research participants and are echoed in the media.

during the siege of the city, the nuns began to use the building as a hospital in 1946. During state socialism, the building was taken from the nuns and used as a city hospital; after 1989, it was returned to the sisters of St. Elizabeth as part of the agreement between the Catholic Church and the new Polish state.⁵ The building's distinctive brick exterior, large, heavy wooden doors, and high ceilings immediately date the building to the pre-war period.

Patients' rooms are on the top three floors of the four-story building, which consists of one long corridor. At one end of the top floor is the chapel, renovated in 2009, where there is a daily afternoon service with communion (performed by a Sister) and a mass every Sunday. Approximately one-third of the patients attend daily chapel. About thirty minutes before chapel begins, patients start to leave their rooms and line up in the hallways to wait for the elevator. Moving four wheelchairs in and out of the one patient elevator, which itself moves quite slowly, takes time. At the other end of the top floor is the *świątlica*, or common room, where people gather for holiday meals and for visits with family. Occasionally, occupational therapy groups will meet there, though they more often use a smaller room next door, where there is a TV tuned to *Telewizja Trwam* (I Persist Television). This TV channel is part of the media conglomerate as *Radio Maryja* and the newspaper *Nasz Dziennik*, run by the Redemptorist priest Tadeusz Rydzyk, adding another religious dimension to the physical space of the institution.⁶ The windows of these rooms look out onto the Odra River and the Cathedral of St. John. Seasonal decorations that patients make in occupational therapy, which reference the religious calendar, often hang on the walls of the corridor and bulletin boards on all floors.

⁵ This historical information comes from a website maintained by the staff of the rehabilitation center. In order to maintain the anonymity of my research participants, I am choosing not to provide the link to the website, since it would immediately identify the institution, staff, and patients. This data was also confirmed via conversations with the administrative staff who compiled this historical material.

⁶ See Chapter 2 for more on the far-right nationalist conservative media conglomerate and private university operated by Tadeusz Rydzyk and their connection to national politics.

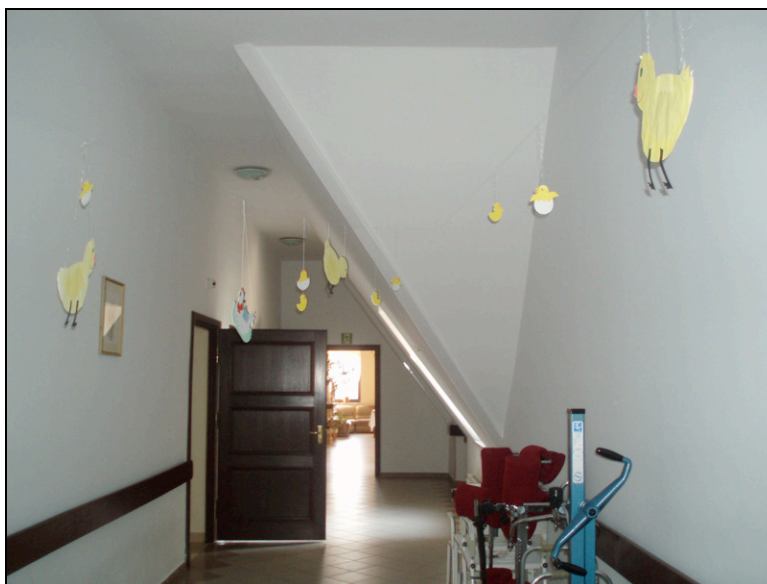


Figure 8: Easter decorations in hallway



Figure 9: Flower-themed decorations made by patients to hang in hallway

Nurses and nurses' aides gather in the *dyżurka* (nurses' station, or shift room) on each of the top three floors, consisting of two rooms and a bathroom. On the ground floor, the left side of the corridor houses some therapy rooms (massage, ultrasound), doctors' examination rooms for specialists' visits and private practice, and the office of the Ward Sister, shared by the Sister in charge of admissions and discharges, the two staff doctors, and a sleepy black-and-white cat. A small dog, Funia, often trots in and out of the office, following the *siostra dyrektor* (literally,

sister-director) around the building. This is the room that I was invited to share, where I stored my coat and purse, and to which I was given a key. Sitting on the small sofa at the back of that office provided me with chances for casual conversation with staff, opportunities to meet occasional visitors, and moments of respite from and reflection upon conversations with patients.

Indeed, having a place in this office was crucial to the sense of belonging that I came to have at the rehabilitation center. The receptionists, medical, and administrative staff came to associate me with the doctors and Ward Sister through my presence in that office, since that was where I often first met them. (Occasionally I would meet medical staff as they visited patients' rooms, and in those cases they first assumed I was a relative of the patient.) Over time, I became integrated into their practices of reciprocal joking and gift-giving. The Sisters would often relax by looking at images on PowerPoint slideshows: of beautiful scenery, sometimes with sentimental text (both religious and secular) superimposed over the images; of nostalgic socialist-era pictures, fashion, and consumer goods; and of extended (sometimes off-color) jokes. Soon, I started receiving these as email forwards from the Ward Sister. At Christmas and Easter, the Sisters gave me gifts of chocolates, handmade beeswax candles in seasonal shapes (e.g., a tree, a bunny), devotional and greeting cards, and books (e.g., poems by Czesław Miłosz and Jan Twardowski, a priest and poet). Several years later, the books still smell faintly of sweet incense. One year at Christmas I received the same bag of gifts that the administration gave out to all the sisters, including scented toilet paper, maxi pads, and deodorant. On my birthday, they made an *oltarzek*, or little altar, for me, as they did for each other on their birthdays. Consisting of the same sorts of gifts, along with cut flowers, the display was set up on a table in the corner of the room next to one of the large amaryllis plants. I gave similar gifts (e.g., chocolates, flowers, stationery) in return, although I am not sure how much expectation of reciprocity there was from

me, since I always remained an “other,” not being bound by the local structures of work, church, or kinship. I see these kind, generous gifts as the processes through which I was incorporated into the social life of the institution and as evidence of the efforts the staff made more broadly to create a warm, positive atmosphere amidst sickness, sorrow, and the ever-present aura of death.



Figure 10: Easter flower decorations with gift bags

Soon, my outward appearance—specifically, my footwear—also began to mark me as someone who belonged at the rehab center. I was initially asked to purchase disposable shoe coverings for 1 PLN (or about .3 USD) like all visitors to the center. This is a common practice for hospitals and some museums. After a few months of fieldwork, I was encouraged by the staff to leave a pair of shoes in the office as they do. For the duration of my time there, I then left a pair of shoes in the office at the rehab center that I donned after arriving at the center. This distinction between footwear for inside and outside is quite practical in the winter, when boots drip with slush, salt, and dirt. I also see meaning here that extends beyond a desire for clean floors; rather, I argue that these practices mark a boundary between the inside and outside of the institution. The delineation of these boundaries, and traveling across them, are ways that relationships are created, maintained, and defined.⁷

⁷ See Chapter 6 for another example of indoor-outdoor footwear distinctions.

The right side of the ground-floor hallway has rooms for physical therapy and separate elevators for staff and patients. At the end of the corridor are the offices of the financial administrators and the *siostra dyrektor*. The entrance to the building, from a brick-paved courtyard that wraps around to a small garden with cultivated flower beds and paths, leads towards a reception desk. To the right of the reception desk are the radiology technician's office and the office where admission interviews are held. A ramp leads from behind the reception desk up to the elevated ground floor. On the left side is the stairwell, used only by the staff and visitors, with windowsills full of plants.



Figure 11: Plants in a group activity room

Both staff and patients circulated among the ground floor and top three floors, but only staff were present in the basement, where the kitchen, laundry, and cleaning facilities were located. The basement was primarily composed of the kitchen and custodial workers, but the staff members whose offices were on the ground floor went down to the basement every day to

eat *obiad* (the main meal, served at mid-day) in the kitchen. Because I shared the office on the ground floor, my presence was expected at *obiad* with the staff. Indeed, if I was upstairs visiting with a patient, one of the doctors or the *siostra oddziałowa* would call the nurses' station on each floor to locate me. If I did not appear in the kitchen within approximately ten minutes, I would be summoned again. Although I sometimes felt frustrated by the interruption of conversations with patients, I was also deeply grateful to the staff for including me in their mealtimes; along with giving me a place in their office, sharing *obiad* with the staff marked me as someone who belonged in the institution. *Obiad* cost 4 PLN (approximately 1.33 USD), for which I paid once a week or every other week, although no one was keeping track of whether I paid or not.

Although it occurs during mid-day or early afternoon, many Poles distinguish between the traditional *obiad* and the more contemporary Western lunch (Polish: *lunch*). The fact that everyone at the rehab center refers to *obiad* as such signals both the traditional form of the meal itself (two dishes, consisting first of a soup and then a main course of meat, potatoes, and vegetables) as well as the “traditional” orientation of many at the rehab center. My friends in their twenties and thirties would use both *obiad* and *lunch*, sometimes without distinguishing between these two types of meals, but older people would almost always use *obiad*. In this way, food practices serve as a marker of generational difference.

At the rehab center, the *obiad* always consisted of two dishes: first a soup (e.g., *grochówka*, or pea soup; *zupa ogórkowa*, or pickle soup; *barszcz*, or beet soup), followed by a main course, usually consisting of a meat dish (e.g., pork cutlet, pork stew with beans or vegetables, fried chicken), mashed or boiled potatoes, and a side of vegetables (either cooked vegetables, most often beets or carrots, or *surówki*, meaning literally “little raw things,” or various raw vegetable salads). A pitcher of fruit compote and juice was always on the table.

Exceptions to these standard meals were notable, as on Fridays, when no meat would be served; instead, the main dish would be fish; *kotlet jajeczny*, a breaded cutlet made of chopped boiled eggs, onions, and herbs; *placki ziemniaczane*, or potato pancakes, with kefir; or pasta with a sweet creamy strawberry sauce. Potato pancakes were especially beloved by the staff, and the quickness with which they must be served (they cool rapidly and can only be prepared in separate batches) lent the timing of *obiad* a certain urgency on those days. The staff and the patients all ate the same food, and were generally satisfied with the high quality of the food itself.

Located in the historic religious district in the center of Wrocław, the inside of the institution sharply contrasts with the world outside it, where tourists lazily wander and nuns walk from convent to church to soup kitchen. The rehab center bustles with its daily clinical and religious rhythms, marked by meals, changes of clothes and diapers, medications, chapel services, and rehabilitation appointments. As mentioned above, many residents of this institution are deeply sad to be away from their kin; it was not uncommon for patients to break down crying. This was especially true for those who were there temporarily, as I will show later.

Yet despite the pervasive sadness and hospital-type setting, I often noticed a sense of lightness and good cheer among the patients and staff. The staff who shared the office of the *siostra oddziałowa* would make tea and coffee, and pour juice and water for each other throughout the day. The nurses and *opiekunki* would do the same in their stations. During my days at the center, I circulated among the ground-floor office, patients' rooms, and occupational therapy room. I would occasionally visit group physical therapy sessions, daily chapel, or spend time chatting with the receptionist, but my locus of gravity in the institution was with patients and with the staff in the ground-floor office. Some days I would spend more time in the ground-

floor office, whereas other days I would spend more time with the patients. I spent one day shadowing the *siostra oddzialowa* and one day shadowing an *opiekunka*, in order to try to see institutional life from their perspectives, and conducted shorter interviews with other staff (psychiatrist, financial administrative staff).

Imagining the future and feeling “u siebie”

While conducting fieldwork at the rehab center, one person came to exemplify for me the difficulties that patients had with life in this center. Pani Alicja, a widowed farmer of seventy-two, moved to the center after a stroke paralyzed the left side of her body. She would welcome me into her room, saying “kochana Jessiko,” or “darling Jessica,” asking me where I had been. Our time together was filled with stories of her granddaughter working abroad in England and her son who lived nearby but visited not frequently enough, her tears as she implored me to feel the weight of her lifeless arm, and attempts to engage her roommates in conversation by discussing Polish history. However, pani Alicja’s tears and sadness would often overwhelm the conversation. For the fourteen months that I knew her, pani Alicja told me that she was about to leave the center for a more permanent institutional home. Her stay at the rehab center totaled two years, rather than the initially planned three months, but during those two years she could only imagine three months into the future. She was not making progress in physical therapy, so she could not return home—her home was not wheelchair-accessible and she needed help in and out of the chair and with using the bathroom. So pani Alicja remained on a waiting list for a state-run long-term care institution. In her room at the center, she would often try to reach out to her roommates and the staff by beginning conversations with them; however, her roommates were often too weak for conversation or had difficulties speaking. Pani Alicja’s experience was

common; the pace of rehabilitation is slow, and the lines for state-run care equally so. I will return to pani Alicja in the next chapter; however, for now it was enough to say that she best exemplified the anxiety, frustrated hope, and isolation that was common to many with whom I spoke at the rehab center. For analytic reasons, however, I will now turn my attention to two people who were able to find relief from suffering through forging new relations.

Pani Alicja's experience contrasts to that of the two people who stayed at the center permanently, who are the only people I met there who say that they feel "*u siebie*," or "at home." Living with the slow debility of multiple sclerosis and arthritis, and knowing that they will live out their days at this institution, these women have been able to create new lives for themselves at the center. Their days are filled with the same bodily routines as the other patients. Yet these women have also developed closer relationships with other patients and staff. Despite the widespread longing for home, some people at this rehabilitation institution have overcome the physical, emotional, and structural barriers to creating a home.

Pani Dorota is one such example. Ninety-eight years old when I first met her, pani Dorota had lived in the rehabilitation hospital for over a year. She moved there after her daughter and son-in-law both passed away within a year's time, and arthritis in her knees made it increasingly difficult for her to walk on her own. She also noticed that she was beginning to get quite dizzy and worried that she would fall; the cane she was using at home was not enough to keep her on her feet. During the beginning of my fieldwork, she walked the short distance from her bed to the bathroom with a walker, but a year and a half later, found it necessary to use a wheelchair for all activity. Though a paid caregiver briefly cooked for her and her son after her daughter died, pani Dorota felt she could not trust her—even worrying that she might be poisoned—so decided that

it would be safer to move to institutional care.⁸ Her only grandson, who was in his mid-thirties, lived nearby in Wrocław, but his apartment was too small for both of them. He lived alone, and pani Dorota worried greatly about whether he would find a wife. However, he did help her find a place in the rehab center by asking his friends and colleagues where would be the best place in the city for his grandmother. He would bring medicine and various personal care items for pani Dorota. She needed medicine for her eyes, she said, because her eyes were ruined from reading by the moonlight as a child.

Moreover, the memories of her deceased daughter throughout her home compelled pani Dorota to move to the rehabilitation center. Pani Dorota described the material reminders of her loss thus: “And there [at her home].... I probably would have been injured and died. I couldn’t have borne it. There, all my daughter’s clothes that she wore, her shoes, everything.”⁹ In the time we spent together, pani Dorota often spoke of the tragedy of her daughter’s early death at age sixty-eight. Pani Dorota missed her greatly, once remarking that she was not afraid of dying, for she would be reunited with her daughter, husband, and mother. Two vivid dreams, in which her deceased mother and then deceased husband visited her, reassured her that she need not fear death and that the rehabilitation center was the best place for her to live¹⁰. Indeed, pani Dorota was happy to be living at the rehabilitation center, where everything was clean, the food was good (enough), and the staff took good care of the patients. She emphasized that the staff were always busy and that their work was difficult, but that they made time to take care of the

⁸ Pani Dorota mentioned that she thought this woman was Ukrainian, implying that this was a further reason not to trust her. Such negative attitudes towards Ukrainians were not uncommon among older people in Wrocław, as a result of atrocities in what is now western Ukraine during and after World War II. Older Poles referred to the Ukrainian nationalists as *bandyci*, or thugs. See Snyder 2004:133-201 and Brown 2004 for more on this geographical region and period.

⁹ „a tam... ja chyba bym poszła (do ranne) i umarła. I nie mogłam tam nie wytrzymać. Tam córki ubranie w której chodziła... buty, wszystko.” Robbins interview 14 April 2009.

¹⁰ See Pine 2007:118-122 for an analysis of dreams about the dead as a way of maintaining relatedness after death among Górale in the highlands of Poland. See Bear 2007 for a fascinating exploration of ghosts, memory, kinship, and the uncanny.

patients; the one nurse on her floor at night, pani Dorota, even brings tea if someone needs it. She was glad to attend chapel, which she did every day. Confident that she was receiving the best care she could, pani Dorota said that she felt “*u siebie*,” or “at home,” at the center. For pani Dorota, the clinical space of the rehabilitation center was therapeutic not only physically, but mentally, spiritually, and socially. Rather than being at home among the memories of her deceased kin, pani Dorota found solace in this new clinical world.

During much of the time that we spent together, however, pani Dorota would tell stories reminiscing about her husband and daughter, and life in Zaleszczyki, where she was born. Pani Dorota was born in 1910 in a small town near Zaleszczyki on the Dniester River in what is now southwestern Ukraine; at the time of her birth, it was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Her parents and grandparents worked for the countesses as administrators of their land. Before World War I, Pani Dorota’s mother’s siblings left for the US, leaving only Dorota’s mother in Zaleszczyki with her parents. Pani Dorota’s husband was from Lwów (now L’viv, Ukraine) and spoke several languages, including Latin, Greek, German, and French. Pani Dorota recalled that he could speak Greek until the day he died (the doctor caring for him in the hospital was Greek). He worked as a postal clerk and pani Dorota as a merchant, selling various goods (e.g., ink, hair dye, cigarettes), and then maintaining the grounds and gardens of a white zinc factory. More of her stories came from her time as a saleswoman; pani Dorota boasted of her skills, saying that she “had a knack for selling” (“miałam żyłkę handlowca”). Pani Dorota would not often speak of World War II, but she did tell me the same few stories, mostly centering on food (acquiring and sharing it in times of need), which demonstrated her resourcefulness, honesty, and generosity. After the war, although pani Dorota’s husband wanted to move to Wrocław (he preferred cities to towns), they moved to Oława, a town in Lower Silesia to the southeast of Wrocław by about

fifteen miles, because it was less devastated by the war and there was more housing. Dorota's husband, who was 25 years older than her, died when he was 85 years old, in 1972 or 1973. Pani Dorota lived in their house in Oława with her daughter until her death in 2006, followed by the death of her son-in-law, whom she told me she treated as a son, later that year. As she summed up her life, pani Dorota would often say with pride, "Well, listen [formal address]—I never had anything so wonderful, but never in my life have I been hungry."¹¹ In these moments, pani Dorota seemed to be evaluating her present situation in the rehab center in the context of struggles for survival in her earlier life. For pani Dorota, having someone to bring her tea was indeed something remarkable and a sign of comfort.

Although pani Dorota could not bear to live among the physical reminders of her deceased daughter, it was to the topic of her kin that she turned again and again in her conversations—not only with me, but also with her roommates and staff. Pani Dorota was always melancholy at the mention of her daughter's death, and she mentioned the subject during each of our conversations. She would often share with me her explanation for her death—smoking three packs of cigarettes daily—and her regret at not preventing her daughter from quitting. If only she had not smoked, she would sigh, her daughter might be here with her today. Pani Dorota regretted that she did not know how dangerous cigarettes were in order to warn her to avoid them; however, she cites the fashions and habits of the times as being the main reason for her daughter's smoking.

Yet pani Dorota told other stories as well: about her daughter's master's thesis on the churches of Wrocław, about her family's survival and lack of hunger during the war, about the man who proposed marriage to her as she was visiting her husband's grave. How does the telling of these stories differ from living among her daughter's belongings? For these are both ways of

¹¹ "Ja, proszę pani, nic cudnego nie miałam, ale głodna w życiu nie byłam."

being reminded of the past—one through narrating stories and the other through living in a certain material world. It seems that there is a level of immediacy that is removed by living in the institution. Her daughter's belongings no longer compel pani Dorota to remember. Or perhaps it is the fact of telling the stories to another person that makes the memories and pain bearable. For pani Dorota was rarely alone, as she would have been in her house; she had one or two roommates, and with one, who was also there permanently, pani Dorota had a close relationship. On the way to chapel, pani Dorota helped to move her roommate's wheelchair into the hallway by sitting behind her roommate, leaning forward with her arm on the back of her roommate's wheelchair, and pushing. The two of them sang devotional songs together every morning and evening; pani Dorota sang these for me when I asked.

The staff would often linger when bringing pani Dorota her meals and medicine, and volunteers (and the ethnographer) were often sent to her room to chat. Indeed, pani Dorota was one of the staff's favorite patients; they often remarked to me on her optimism, good humor, and warm demeanor, and her advanced age seemed to lend her an extra air of authority and respect. Additionally, pani Dorota's speech marked her as a former resident of the *kresy*, or borderlands of eastern Poland; she would pronounce 'ł' (equivalent to 'w' in English) as 'l' (equivalent to English 'l'). So "*kiedy bylam mala*" ("when I was small") would become "*kiedy bylam mala.*" Many Poles I know consider this sound to be a sweet and old-fashioned way to speak, calling up a nostalgic romantic Polish past. However, pani Dorota's neighbor in the room next door, pani Kryisia, also spoke with the same linguistic patterns as pani Dorota, and was only two months her junior. Pani Kryisia's bodily state, however, was much worse; she could not walk, and could barely speak by the end of my fieldwork. She spent much of her time asleep, and

when awake, would cry with confusion and fear. The medical staff referred to her as “*bez kontaktu*,” meaning literally “without contact,” or “nonresponsive.” Pani Dorota, on the other hand, was generally upbeat and rarely complained. So it was pani Dorota’s advanced age, good humor, *and* her good health that made her a favorite of the staff in the institution.

Perhaps pani Dorota’s ability to evoke a romantic Polish past through particular linguistic markers, as well as through the content of the stories she told, made it possible for the staff to imagine her as an archetypal Polish grandmother. Pani Dorota’s personal past is part of the story that Wrocław likes to tell about itself as a new homeland, as the “recovered territories” (“*ziemie odzyskane*”) that connect Poland to its medieval Piast past, and a rightful heir to the memories and culture of Lwów and the *kresy*. Through the stories she tells, both the voice in which they are spoken and the content of the stories themselves, pani Dorota embodies and encourages nostalgic relations with the staff.

The other woman who lives permanently at the rehab center, pani Marta, moved to this institution because her multiple sclerosis made her unable to walk, severely limited the use of her arms, and rendered her incontinent.¹² Sixty-seven years old and widowed at the time I met her, pani Marta worked as a farmer in a village near Wrocław until her multiple sclerosis prevented her from doing so. She has a large family who lives in Wrocław and visit her frequently, bringing her food, coffee, and personal care products. Especially welcome visitors are her young grandchildren. One of her brothers, a hairdresser, cuts the hair of many residents. Pani Marta thrills to the gossip of the institution, always informing me who had passed away, whose condition had worsened, or whose daughter just returned from vacation in Spain. She closely

¹² Pani Marta was uncomfortable with both recording and note-taking during our conversations, so I would try to recall our conversations and my observations later that day. Because of this, I have very few direct quotations from pani Marta.

follows the news on Radio Maryja, the very conservative nationalist Catholic radio station, and shares what she learns there with other patients, often trying to engage them and me in political discussions.¹³ Once, she gave me a *moherowy berecik* (little mohair beret) pin—that is, a miniature knit red wool beret with a safety pin on the back, with a slip of paper inside on which is written “I love God, the church, the homeland, and people.”¹⁴



Figure 12: Moherowy berecik from Radio Maryja pilgrimage

Her sister brought this back for her from a Radio Maryja pilgrimage in Częstochowa, the home of a deeply symbolic Polish shrine to the Virgin Mary. Pani Marta would join the voices on Radio Maryja in reciting the rosaries and prayers throughout the day. In chapel each afternoon, pani Marta would sing; in fact, the first time I met her, she was showing off her singing talent to the receptionist at the front desk.

When I asked pani Marta how she felt about living at the rehab center, she would always boast that she made coffee for her roommates, other patients, and me, as proof that she is at home and still able to be hospitable. “*Polacy są gościnni*,” or “Poles are hospitable,” she would

¹³The first time we saw each other after the US presidential election in 2008, pani Marta asked me if I was worried that a “*muryzn*” (“Negro”; use of this word can be considered offensive) would be leading our country, and if it was really true that Obama wanted to kill African babies. It took a few minutes of conversation for me to understand that she was referring to Obama’s lifting of a ban that would thus allow US federal aid to fund organizations in Africa that provided abortion, although the money could not directly fund abortions.

¹⁴“Kocham Pana boga, Kościół, Ojczyzny, ludzi.”

say, a refrain that I came to recognize. Indeed, it was nearly impossible for me to visit pani Marta *without* having a cup of Nescafé in a gray glass mug—with a lot of sugar. Occasionally, she offered me a special packet of instant cappuccino (milk and sugar already included); she kept these in the wardrobe with her clothes. Gesturing for me to bring the jar of Nescafé on her nightstand, pani Marta and I would go down the hallway to the small kitchen where we would make the coffee together; I filled and heated the tea kettle as she spooned the instant coffee into my mug. I always asked to carry the mugs and supplies back to the room, but pani Marta demonstrated how many things she could balance and hold in her lap while wheeling herself down the hallway. Still, though, I carried my own mug of hot coffee. On my recent trip in 2012, there were new water coolers on each floor that had both cold and hot water taps, one of which was right outside pani Marta's room.

Pani Marta made one close friend at the center, who was in a room down the hall from her. Each day after *obiad*, her friend would come down to her room, they would drink coffee together, and then attend chapel together. Pani Marta knew in great detail about her friend's medical conditions and life history. Unlike that of other patients, the shared table in pani Marta's room is decorated with a rotating collection trinkets, candles, and seasonal items, which to her are another sign of being *u siebie*. At holidays, pani Marta visits her old home, where her son's family now lives, but she is always relieved to return to the peace, quiet, and stability of the institution. She told me repeatedly that she prefers to live at the rehab institution, where her bodily needs are adequately met and, crucially, where her everyday life matches with her moral ideals.

Although pani Marta was similar to pani Dorota in her permanent residence and belonging to the community of institutional life, the staff did not seem to share the same

sentimental feelings about pani Marta. She was younger and did not represent the Polish nostalgic past; pani Marta was born during World War II and grew up in Kielce, in central Poland, whereas pani Dorota's past reached back into the days of partition. To the staff, pani Marta was a gossipy old woman, evoking the socialist days, while pani Dorota was a darling, sweet grandmother who evoked romantic visions of the past. Their personalities and personal histories contributed to these impressions among the staff. Notably, the one staff member who seemed most affectionate towards pani Marta was the one closest to her in age.

All these women—pani Alicja, pani Dorota, and pani Marta—had been in the institution for roughly the same amount of time, yet only pani Dorota and pani Marta were able to successfully create homes for themselves. Part of pani Alicja's suffering stemmed from her self-understanding as living outside her ideals of a moral life, primarily marked by the absence of kin. She felt herself to have a failure of intimate, small-scale relations, and was not able to create new social ties at the institution. Pani Alicja's uncertainty about her future was one obstacle to forming connections with others in the institution, which might otherwise ameliorate her anguish at being away from home. Pani Dorota's and pani Maria's sense of security about the future allowed them to create new social relations. Extending the temporal horizon to a lifetime allowed these women to *live* more fully than patients like Pani Alicja. This temporality, in which people can feel a certainty about their future, creates the possibility of more complete personhood in old age.¹⁵ The temporal scale of pani Marta's illness itself—the slow debilitation of multiple sclerosis, rather than the sudden violent disability of pani Alicja's major stroke—affects her

¹⁵ By making a distinction between chronic illness and stroke, I am careful to avoid reproducing the false dichotomy between acute and chronic illnesses that Lenore Manderson and Carolyn Smith-Morris so rightly critique for overly relying on biomedical categories (2010:3). Rather, I am attempting to elucidate categories based on my ethnographic data and the experiences of older people in Poland. Pani Alicja and others' experiences of the uncertainty of rehabilitation recall others' experiences of rehabilitation after stroke, documented and analyzed in North America by Gay Becker and Sharon Kaufman (1995:172-180).

ability to create a satisfactory moral world for herself in institutional care, despite the broader cultural imperatives against such a life. This emphasis on permanence reveals the fundamental role of temporality in how personhood and social relations can be created, transformed, or unmade in later life (Buch 2010; Carsten 2007b; Lynch and Danely 2013; Kaufman 1986; Lamb 1997).

Indeed, there is little in either pani Dorota's or pani Marta's experiences or stories that remind me of the ideals of *aktywność* or the experiences of people I knew through the University of the Third Age or the *@ktywny Senior* program. Seemingly satisfied with her long life, Dorota's days at the rehabilitation center were filled with what she most valued at this time in her life—safe and trustworthy care, the opportunity to attend mass daily (which was more often than she was able to do at home), rehabilitation exercises, and social interactions. While physical and social activities were part of Dorota's life in institutional care, there was nothing of the self-aware, self-conscious, self-actualizing attitudes of improvement that I found in the Universities of the Third Age or NGO programs. Rather than taking pride in one's independence, Dorota, who relied upon the care of others, took comfort in the trustworthy care of this religious clinical environment. Pani Marta primarily took comfort in being firmly established in a religious setting and was able to maintain a social life.

Diapers and feeding: the intimacy of caregiving

In order to gain a new perspective on the ZOL, after I had been there for almost six months, I asked the *siostra oddziałowa* if I could shadow one of the nurses or *opiekunki* for a day. From my regular location with either the patients or the head medical staff, the nurses and caregivers were rather inaccessible. When I was in a patient's room, I would see them bringing

medicines, responding to patient calls, or moving quickly through the hallways; when sitting in the ground-floor office, I would occasionally observe a nurse or *opiekunka* come in to discuss a patient. Their duties were elsewhere. After discussing with the two staff doctors who would be best for me to observe, the *siostra oddziałowa* indicated that I could follow one of the more experienced *opiekunki*, pani Kasia, for a day. I had seen pani Kasia during my time there, but as with the other *opiekunki* and nurses, we had not developed more than a polite superficial relationships. The *siostra oddziałowa* officially introduced me to pani Kasia, who was surprised that I wanted to observe her, and we settled on a date in late April.¹⁶

On the agreed-upon date, I arrived at the ZOL a couple hours earlier than usual so I could be there when pani Kasia's twelve-hour shift started at 7 a.m. Like other days when I awoke on an earlier schedule, I was struck by the brightness of the early-morning sunlight, as I walked around a shopping center built in 2001, through a park, and across the Odra River on my way to the ZOL. After placing my purse in the ground floor office, I went upstairs to the second floor to meet pani Kasia, where we immediately went to a patient's room to help a woman use the toilet. Pani Kasia lifted the woman off her wheelchair, onto the high toilet seat, and closed the door. Pani Kasia walked across the room to where the woman had been sleeping, made the bed, folding the blanket just so on the side of the bed, and placed some dirty clothes into a bag. When pani Kasia had finished straightening the bed, she asked the patient, pani Ewelina, if she had finished. When pani Ewelina remarked that she had, pani Kasia went in to flush the toilet and clean her, saying at the end, "you have a clean bottom" ("czystą pupę ma pani"), and pani Ewelina thanked her. Taking a sponge from pani Ewelina's own plastic basket of personal care products and wetting it, pani Kasia gave Ewelina a sponge bath and then wrapped her in a towel,

¹⁶ I took scratch notes throughout my day and captured particular phrases as I could. This account is based on notes that I wrote up from these scratch notes as well as the scratch notes themselves.

saying “so you won’t freeze [formal address]” (“żeby pani nie zmarzła”) and calling her “kochanie,” or “darling.” As pani Kasia helped pani Ewelina into her diapers, pani Ewelina remarked “just like a small child” (“tak jak małe dziecko”). Pani Kasia selected a pair of thick tights for pani Ewelina to wear and helped her into them. Pani Kasia then went to awaken pani Ewelina’s two roommates, inquiring about the cleanliness of a diaper and then changing it, before giving that woman, pani Teresa, a sponge bath in her bed. After drying off pani Teresa, pani Kasia applied a thick, oily-looking white cream to pani Teresa’s bottom. Noticing a new deodorant on her bedside cart, pani Kasia sprayed it, saying “it smells beautiful” (“pięknie pachnie”). The flowery odor was thick and sweet, almost cloyingly artificial. Pani Kasia chose a sweater and pants from pani Teresa’s wardrobe and helped her into her clothes.

Pani Kasia then returned to the third roommate, pani Miecza, who was still dozing, and succeeded in waking her up. After pani Kasia took pani Miecza to the bathroom, she straightened up her bed, just as she had pani Ewelina’s and pani Teresa’s. A *sprzątaczką* (cleaning lady) stopped by with her supplies to clean the bathroom, inquiring “who is sitting here?” (“kto tu siedzi?”); pani Miecza responded “just a little longer” (“jeszcze troszeczkę”). The cleaning lady left with her things. Pani Kasia brushed pani Teresa’s hair, saying “so there won’t be a tuft of hair sticking out” (“żeby nie było kukuryku”). Pani Kasia then called in to the bathroom to pani Miecza, saying “Have you pooped [informal address] or not? Have you managed [formal address] or not?” (“robiłaś kupę, czy nie? Załatwiła pani czy nie?”). Pani Ewelina remarked that she did not like wearing her tights, but pani Kasia told her she could not find another pair of pants. Not hearing a response, pani Kasia went in to the bathroom to check on pani Miecza, saying “clean bottom. Were you doing something? [informal address]” (“pupa czysta. Robiłaś coś?”). Halting her cleaning, pani Kasia helped pani Miecza into her diaper in the bathroom, and

then moved into the bedroom, asking pani Mieczka which sweater she would rather wear, “crewneck or turtleneck?” (“sweter czy golf?”). Pani Kasia showed me how best to put on pani Mieczka’s sweater, first inserting the arm that is in pain, since it is easier to wiggle the healthy arm into the second sleeve. In the next room down the hallway, pani Kasia began to dress pani Alicja, whom I knew well by this point. As pani Kasia was helping pani Alicja out of her pajamas and into her characteristic bright red sweater, pani Alicja laughed as she said “boobs like tripe” (“cycki jak flaki”), and then sighed, saying “old age is no joy” (“starość nie radość”).

The first part of this morning routine took over an hour. Pani Kasia was in near-constant motion, moving women into and out of wheelchairs, onto and off toilets, in and out of clothes. The patients were in motion too, as much as they were able, though this motion was punctuated by stillness when pani Kasia was with others. Interestingly, for this was the first time I had met these three women, I never learned what precisely was wrong with them. It seemed like pani Mieczka had had a stroke, since one side of her body moved less well than the other, while pani Ewelina had problems with her legs. All women were in wheelchairs, though pani Teresa could stand on her own.¹⁷ In these moments, it did not need to be articulated what was wrong, for as the sole *opiekunka* on the floor, pani Kasia knew these women and their bodies.

After waking and dressing another room of patients, pani Kasia went to feed two bedridden women who could not feed themselves.¹⁸ The first woman, pani Ola, would only open her mouth when Pani Kasia said “open [your] mouth” (“otwórz buźkę”) or “we’re opening [our] mouth” (“otwieramy buźkę”); pani Ola would repeat after Pani Kasia and open her mouth. Pani Kasia would then say “say ‘aaaaa’” (“powiedz ‘aaaaa’”), pani Ola would say “aaaaa,” necessarily keeping her mouth open, and Pani Kasia would place a spoonful of yogurt in her

¹⁷ Though a rather petite woman, pani Kasia was strong enough to move these women physically. I noticed when patients were too large for one *opiekunka*, another nurse was called in for help.

¹⁸ Insert note about ‘mixte’ food, special foods designations.

mouth. Pani Kasia explained that you have to find a different way to feed each person.¹⁹ Pani Kasia and pani Ola repeated this sequence with every bite, so that when we left the room, the words “otwórz buzkę” were echoing in my head like a refrain. In the next room across the hallway, Pani Kasia fed the second patient who could not feed herself, an almost impossibly thin woman made of skin and bones, who was silent throughout. This woman’s roommate, also bedridden but able to feed herself, was weeping and repeating “nu nu nu nu nu nu” over and over. Pani Kasia attributed her tears to the inability to express herself due to a stroke that left her unable to speak.

With all patients ready for the day, pani Kasia and I sat down in the *dyżurka* with the floor nurse, pani Maria, for a breakfast of bread, ham, cheese, and instant coffee. When we had finished, pani Kasia and I were enlisted by the *siostra oddziałowa* to clean the wheelchairs of the patients on the third floor. The handyman for the center brought the chairs down to the basement level, the *siostra oddziałowa* hosed down the chairs, pani Kasia and I dried them, and the handyman brought them back up. Pani Kasia then went back up to the floor, while I finished the drying. I went back up the second floor, but was soon called down for lunch with the *siostra oddziałowa*, who expressed surprise that I was still shadowing pani Kasia; she had expected the work to be too difficult for me, and for me to return to the safe haven of the office. “Horrible, isn’t it?” (“Straszne, nie?”), she said, referring to the work of changing diapers and feeding. The morning’s routine of changing diapers, moving patients from bed to wheelchair to toilet to wheelchair, and feeding those who needed to be fed, was repeated in the afternoon, in reverse, beginning around 4 p.m. and ending around 6:30 p.m.

¹⁹ Elana Buch has written in great detail on how caregivers shape their work to match the personalities and attributes of their patients. See Buch 2010:262-311.

This was a long, tiring day full of repetitive, difficult physical tasks: turning patients to prevent bedsores, changing diapers that sometimes even became soiled during the changing process. There were intense and often unpleasant odors, and intimate contact with disabled bodies. Pani Kasia was not paid well for her work; several staff I knew at the center would work extra hours to make ends meet. Despite these long hours and low pay, pani Kasia expressed a satisfaction in her job that came from helping others. She took pride in being able to connect with patients that others might dismiss. In fact, it is exactly the repetitive nature of her work that allows her to connect to patients, to know the best way to put on someone's sweater or to encourage someone to eat. In these repeated cyclical processes of maintaining and renewing bodies—of fastidiously making up a bed when it will be undone in only a few hours, of changing diapers even as they are being soiled, of styling hair that will soon be matted on a pillow—pani Kasia and her patients are also forming relationships of care with one another. There are indeed moments of frustration, sadness, shame, and pain, but there are also moments of connection, empathy, tenderness, and humor. Many interactions are about suffering, but some are equally about hope. I point this out not to minimize the very real suffering that these patients endure, nor to defend the difficult working conditions of medical personnel in Poland, but rather to highlight the moments of intimacy in which patients and staff engage. Such intimacy can be difficult or disgusting, but also personal and constitutive. These older people are not being taken care of by their families, but they are not abandoned. Patients become part of the small-scale sociality and daily rhythms of the institution. Rather than a totalizing, nightmarish institution, I see this rehabilitation center as a site for the production of intimate, small-scale relations, made possible through a cyclical temporality.

Permanence and care: creating a life at a social welfare home

Unlike the rehabilitation center, the Social Welfare Home in Wrocław is intended for long-term care. The people who live there are not *pacjenci* (patients) but *mieszkańcy* (residents), the managing nurse quickly corrected as I misspoke. This designation is meant to distinguish the institution from places like the rehab center and hospitals, where people are undoubtedly patients. Rather, at the Social Welfare Home, people are supposed to *live*. However, this place is clearly not an ideal or normative home. Given both the permanent and less-medicalized nature of this institution, when compared with the rehabilitation center, I expected this institution to feel more like a home and for people to have closer social ties and have a sense of community. Rather, I found that the residents were more isolated than in the rehabilitation center. With flat-screen televisions in each room and almost everyone with limited mobility, people tended to stay in their rooms. While they had the choice between taking meals in their rooms or communal dining rooms on their floor, most everyone chose to eat alone in their rooms.

The institution is located on the outskirts of the city, surrounded by construction supply companies, a company selling gravestones, and newer housing developments. Residents and staff described the location as calm, quiet, and surrounded by green. A large yard surrounded the building on three sides, with patches and tufts of grass mostly covering the dirt. One bus line ends about a half-mile from the institution, and another bus line stops about a half-mile away in the other direction. The building is large, housing over 200 residents on three floors of individual or shared rooms, which are arranged in three hallways that form the shape of the letter H. Most people have individual rooms with shared entranceways and bathrooms, or one roommate and a shared bathroom. There are some rooms, however, in which three or four people live. Before the renovation, there were up to six people sharing a room, one resident told me. Built in 1981, when

I started research there the building was showing its age. Made of grey slab concrete painted in patches of dull blue, it very much looked the part of a structure built and maintained during socialism. During my fieldwork, the building was undergoing interior renovation for the first time since it had been built. Half the renovation was completed, but the other half was empty for months—those residents had been moved to a hospital in Wrocław—as they completed the renovations. The front entranceway, located in the unrenovated section, had a brown vinyl sofa, a table, and a pay phone. A fish tank held a dozen small, brightly colored fish that darted around. Several men would often be sitting in the lobby when I arrived; they rarely talked to each other, occasionally flipping through a magazine, doing a crossword puzzle, or dozing. From time to time, someone would go outside to smoke a cigarette. The long hallway with many residents' rooms beginning in the left of the front lobby, which would normally be full of residents, was empty, giving the building a ghostly feel. The short corridor leading off the lobby to the other long hallway of residents' rooms had already been renovated, along with this second long hallway. The paint was fresh, in contemporary warm shades of peach and ochre. Purple handrails about waist-high ran along all the hallways. Bulletin boards hung on the wall, on which were posted weekly menus, various staff hours, seasonal crafts made by residents, and nature images cut from magazines and calendars. There is a small general store in the basement, a hair salon, and a recreational room for *terapia zajęciowa* (occupational therapy). Greenery and plants fill the windows. During my long-term fieldwork, the chapel was under renovation and not in operation, but upon my return in 2012 I was able to see the newly renovated space. Centrally located on the ground floor just off the lobby, the chapel seats around twenty people, with empty space next to the rows of chairs for people in wheelchairs. A portrait of Jesus, painted by a resident with advanced multiple sclerosis who held the paintbrush with his teeth, hangs near the entrance.



Figure 13: Painting done by resident of social welfare home

As at the rehab center, patients must contribute 70 percent of their pension to stay in the institution, and if this seventy percent is less than 800 PLN (about 260 USD in 2008-2009) per month, they must supplement it up to 800. I interviewed 10 people at this home, three men and seven women, ranging in age from mid-fifties to late seventies. Many people had lived in the institution for decades, since the very beginning. Some staff had also worked there for decades, and one nurse told me that the children of some staff referred to residents by kinship terms. Other staff boasted that residents went on field trips, citing annual trips to the zoo, botanical gardens, and *rynek* (market square; the focal point of downtown Wrocław, like many other Polish cities and towns). In general, it was difficult to conduct interviews with administrative staff, as they were often extremely busy with bureaucratic matters (e.g., preparations for state health service inspections). I was able to interview with the staff psychologist and *pedagog*, and to have informal conversations with nurses and the *kaowiec* (*kaowiec* is shorthand for *instruktor kulturalno-oświatowy*, or cultural-educational instructor, and was common position during state socialism).

There are four types of Social Welfare Home run by the government in Wrocław: for the chronically physically ill, for the mentally ill, for older people (*dla osób w podeszłym wieku*, or “for people of advanced age”), and for daytime stays. Despite these clear administrative distinctions between categories, in practice there are obviously people who fall into more than one division (e.g., one person can be both physically and mentally ill). Indeed, at the Social Welfare Home where I did fieldwork staff confirmed that there were certainly people who had mental illness as well as physical disabilities. Decisions about admitting people to the institutions are made at the level of city government (*Miejskie Centrum Usług Socjalnych*, MCUS, or Municipal Social Services Center, rather than at the institutions themselves. However, one staff member said that older people cannot be admitted to the institution for the elderly if they already have health problems. This distinction between the healthy and sick old becomes muddled, however, as people who fall ill after they are admitted are not moved to a different institution. In other words, the neat categories defined by the state are much messier in practice.²⁰

Based on my conversations with residents and staff, I noted two distinct categories of residents based on their histories of illness: those who have been ill since childhood (e.g. polio, cerebral palsy) and lived most of their life in institutions, and those who developed health problems later in life (e.g., multiple sclerosis, stroke, complications from diabetes). Generally, residents were quite poor; some were homeless before coming to the Social Welfare Home. A local charity, *Towarzystwo Pomocy im. św. Alberta* (St. Brother Albert’s Aid Society), often refers many of the formerly homeless to the DPS. Among this group and other residents, both residents and staff complained to me, there are a large number of people with problems with

²⁰ Interestingly, Alzheimer’s disease is considered a physical ailment, not mental, and (in theory) people with Alzheimer’s end up in institutions for the physically ill. (The only people with Alzheimer’s whom I encountered at the Social Welfare Home were very ill and unable to talk or feed themselves.)

alcohol abuse. One staff member estimated that as many as one-third of the residents are alcoholics. Although alcohol is not formally allowed, residents could and did leave the premises at any time, making it possible to purchase alcohol on their own. I was also told that some staff would purchase alcohol for residents. Drinking seemed to function as an open secret; residents who drank would throw empty bottles out the windows of their rooms, leaving a pile of discarded bottles and cans for all to see in the common middle courtyard.

As at the rehab center, I was welcomed by the staff and given a space to store my purse and to write notes; however, unlike the shared office in the rehab center, I had this room all to myself. This was a spare room that was sometimes used as a guest room if residents had family visiting overnight, although to my knowledge it was never used for this purpose during the five months I was there. Located across in the short connecting hallway across from a rarely used sitting room, this space felt more isolating than connecting. Residents and staff occasionally passed through the hallway and looked in, sometimes with curiosity, but kept moving on their way. In short, this space proved to be more of a hindrance than a help to meeting residents. In writing this, I do not mean to fault the staff in any way—indeed, quite the opposite, for they were unfailingly generous and kind in welcoming me into institutional life. Rather, I see the institution itself as somehow promoting isolation and preventing integration into life there. For the methodological difficulties that I faced at this institution were not due to the actions of any individuals, but rather the combined effects of spatiotemporal institutional factors.

However, there are places where people congregate – lobby, benches near sidewalk, benches in front of building. These are threshold kind of spaces, on the border between the outside and inside.

Despite my methodological difficulties, residents' and staff members' complaints about alcoholism, and my observations of physical isolation and loneliness, many people with whom I spoke seemed content with their lives at this institution, perhaps because they had such difficulties in their lives before this institution. One woman told me that she is happy to have three full meals a day, each different from the previous one and almost every meal containing meat, since she could never afford such a diet on her own. Another woman who has cerebral palsy told me of the shame she brought upon her family when she was a teenager, citing her stepfather's regular practice of hiding her behind a closed door when guests came to visit. One man told me that he had difficulties finding a place to live, moving from workers' hotels (*hotel robotniczy*) to shelters, and was glad to have a stable residence. He liked all the food at the institution, he said, and had gained weight since arriving. For people with such precarious and difficult pasts, life at this institution provides stability and real relief.

However, this satisfaction was not uniform: one woman complained about the quantity of food, saying that if her family did not supplement it she would go hungry. Another woman in a wheelchair told me that the renovations improved life at the institution for those could walk, but not for those in wheelchairs. One woman told me that she needed a new brace to stop a pain in her knee, but that this cost was not refunded. And like many people in the rehab center, two women roommates who had each had strokes and were then bed-ridden were deeply upset by being in this institution, away from family. If she had only had children, one woman said, things would be different and someone would care for her. But she had only a niece, and she could not rely on her for such care in the same way. An aunt is not a mother, she said (cf. Cohen 1998:119). She clutched my arm or hand as we spoke, embodying the loneliness and desire for human contact about which she spoke. The man who told me that he was relieved to have a

stable residence also told me that he had no close friends, and that he could never marry because he was the youngest of his siblings, so could not have an apartment. He had no contact with his family, and was not sure where they lived.²¹ Isolation was a pervasive problem. Indeed, given my expectation that residents of this institution would have close social ties because of the institution's permanent nature, I was then surprised to learn that most people do not have close friends at the institution, and describe the other residents very negatively. Residents told me of being unable to trust other residents, of some residents being generally "*niedobry*" ("bad"). Although permanence and imagining futures can be helpful in creating moral lives, as for pani Dorota and pani Marta, it is not the sole factor. Rather, the ability to imagine one's life extending into the future in a place that is meaningful, where one can create or maintain social relations, that allows people to live moral lives. It is this combination of temporality, spatiality, and social relations through which moral personhood can endure.

In this next section, I will describe the case of a couple who met and married at the Social Welfare Home. Their relationship and love for each other has transformed their lives, creating possibilities for personhood that did not exist when they first moved to the institution. I see as particularly important to creating such possibilities for personhood the ability to both give *and* receive care. Through helping each other, through actions that are directed towards another, each person becomes part of a generative sociality.

Giving and receiving care

On summer days when the weather was warm, a handful of people would congregate outside, sitting just outside the front entrance on the landing, or sometimes farther down the

²¹ This man had had a stroke and had very few teeth, making it extremely difficult to understand his speech. I tried to ask follow-up questions about the connection between being the youngest of his siblings, not having an apartment, and not having a wife, but neither I nor my transcription assistant was able to parse his speech.

ramp off to the side. They would chat or sit quietly, enjoying the sun. It was here that I often saw pani Władysława and pan Bogusław, who would sometimes play with a local cat that wandered by. Pan Bogusław was in his late 60s and pani Władzia (nickname for “Władysława”) in her early 70s. A former truck driver, Bogusław came to the Social Welfare Home after a severe stroke rendered his left side mostly paralyzed. His wife left him, and needing full-time care, he applied for and quickly received a place in the Social Welfare Home, thanks to personal connections. Now able to walk with the assistance of a walker and to speak intelligibly, pan Bogusław prides himself in being able to assist pani Władysława when she needs his help, though at times she will help him. Pani Władysława, a widowed former accountant, has diabetes that has affected her vision. Her eyesight varies from day to day, and at times she is fully reliant upon pan Bogusław for help around their room.

I had first met the couple at *muzykoterapia* (music therapy) sessions earlier in the summer. Six people and the staff member leading the group sang along with music playing on a portable stereo; then the staff member played the same tune on his guitar and the group would provide the melody and lyrics. The music included folk (e.g., *Hej sokoły*, *My cyganie*), World-War-I-era (e.g., *Wojenko*, *wojenko*), and World-War-II-era (e.g., *Serce w plecaku*) songs that I came to know well from singing with various groups of older people during my fieldwork (Adrjański 1973). During the second session that I attended, after people grew tired of singing and the group started to disperse, pani Władzia began to speak with me, asking questions that I had learned to expect by this point in my fieldwork: whether it is really true that Americans are always so happy in comparison with Poles; comments about Polish *gościnnność* (hospitality); whether I had Polish heritage and if not, what attracted me to Poland; what American cities are like. About a week later, I saw pani Władzia on the landing outside. After a brief chat about the

weather, she invited me to have coffee in her room. After getting her husband's attention by saying "Bogusiu" (an affectionate diminutive for "Bogusław"), pan Bogusław led the way to their room on the third floor.²²

Although at this time they were engaged, not married, pan Bogusław and pani Władzia shared a room. (The wedding was planned for after the renovations were finished so that the institution could publicize both the renovations and the wedding.) They were the only couple who lived together at the Social Welfare Home. They had known each other for three years at the time I first met them, and got to know each other because pan Bogusław would help pani Władzia move around as she was recovering from operations on her eyes. Their room was more decorated than most others I saw at the institution, with a few shelves holding artificial flowers, photos of themselves, photos of Pope John Paul II, and other trinkets. The table on which they ate had vinyl placemats, salt and pepper shakers, and a bottle of seasoning sauce for soups (*przyprawa do zup*). They were also the only couple allowed to have a cat. They follow local, national, and international politics on TV, unlike some other residents, who told me that politics is irrelevant to their lives. As if to demonstrate her point about the *gościnność* of Poles, that day pani Władzia asked for an extra meal for me from the staff when their *obiad* was delivered. (This was the only occasion that I would eat *obiad* at the institution; the rest of the time I ate snacks that I brought with me in my purse.)

Despite this *gościnność* and their friendliness with me and the staff, pani Władzia and pan Bogusław did not act this way with their fellow residents, describing them as untrustworthy and only looking out for themselves. "If he could, one would happily strangle the other," pani

²² Pani Władzia is the person mentioned in Chapter 1 who took to calling me "pani Jessiczko," a creative and affectionate-sounding diminutive form of my name. She is the only person who came up with an appropriate Polonized diminutive of my name. See Chapter 1 for more on terms of address.

Władzia said.²³ They had a few close friends (*przyjacieli*) at the Social Welfare Home, but learned through experience not to trust people there. After repeatedly being too generous (e.g., by lending people “*parę groszy*” [“a few cents”], or buying cigarettes for someone), pani Władzia felt that her kindness was being taken advantage of, and that people were mocking her behind her back. Other residents were jealous of them, they agreed, since they were the only ones living together.

In fact, they attributed this untrustworthiness to Poles in general, claiming that foreigners are justified in having poor perceptions of Poles. Pani Władzia attributed this to the socialist era, during which “*zawsze musieli kombinować*” (“[people] always had to [figure something out]²⁴”). Referring to shortages of building materials during socialist times, pani Władzia explained that people would take materials from their workplace to use at home. This logic still applies; she gave the example that if I accidentally left my cell phone somewhere at the institution, it would surely disappear.

Preferring their own company to that of other residents, pani Władysława and pan Bogusław spent their days together, taking care of their cat and conversing with the staff when the staff had time. The pair boasted of their comfortable conditions at the Social Welfare Home, where they could eat three full meals daily, and were thrilled to have found each other and have someone with whom to share their days and nights. They both described their lives at the institution before they met each other as bleak, lonely, and sometimes even filled with suicidal thoughts. But since they have been together, it has transformed their lives, they say. As was

²³ “Jeden drugiego, jakby mógł, to by w łyżce wody utopił.” Interview, 24 July 2009.

²⁴ Interview, 24 July 2009. The word *kombinować* has no easy English translation. It can be variously translated as “to arrange,” “to put something together,” “to contrive,” “to scheme,” and often has connotations of sneakiness, or getting around official rules. It is similar to *zalatwić*, although the connotation is often sneakier than *zalatwić* implies. *Kombinować* is often accomplished *po znajomości*, or “through acquaintances,” referring to an informal network of acquaintances. See Wedel 1986 for a more detailed discussion of these words as used during the socialist era, and Dunn 2004 on the postsocialist era.

common throughout our conversations, pani Władzia tended to speak for both of them about this topic, while pan Bogusław interjected agreements, clarifications, or occasional brief stories of his own. On the occasions when he did speak of their relationship, his voice would become so choked with emotion that he could barely speak. By means of explaining what keeps their relationship together, pani Władzia said, “I love him more than life itself...mm, more than life itself. Really. That is, I have a kind of hierarchy: God, Boguś, and the cat.”²⁵ They often declared their love for one another, and pani Władzia described the pleasure they each took in helping each other. “We need each other. One of us helps the other, according to our capabilities. We live together in love, in harmony, like two gray doves.”²⁶ For instance, as they walked and wheeled through the hallways together, she would push his wheelchair while he would give her directions. I observed similar interactions as they made me coffee. Pani Władzia carefully measured out a spoonful of instant coffee into a gray glass mug, filled the electric tea kettle with water from the bathroom sink, and put it on the base to boil; once the kettle was ready, pan Bogusław removed it from the stand, put it in the basket of his walker, pushed it over to the table, and poured the boiling water into the mugs, since pani Władzia might spill it.

Rather than the pride in independent action and ability prized in *aktywność*, Władysława and Bogusław became more fully human through their abilities and desires to help each other. Though each suffered greatly prior to their move to long-term care, they were content both to live in an institution with material comforts better than they could afford themselves, and to have found a trustworthy partner in a society they see as full of untrustworthy people. The hospitality that Pani Władzia and Pan Bogusław showed me was remarkable, especially for the Social

²⁵ “Ja go kocham nad życie. Iii...nad życie. Naprawdę. To znaczy, ja mam taką kolejność: Pan Bóg, Boguś, i kot.” Robbins interview, 24 July 2009.

²⁶ “Jesteśmy sobie potrzebni. Jedno drugiemu pomaga, na miarę swoich możliwości. W miłości sobie żyjemy, w zgodzie, jak dwa siwe gołębie.” Robbins interview, 31 July 2009.

Welfare Home, but not wholly unusual during my fieldwork in Poland; as a foreigner and a guest, I was often the recipient of generosity. What was far more noticeable was their kindness towards each other. In falling in love, they overcame physical and affective barriers to friendship at the state-run institution, creating intimate bonds of trust that extended only to their small, mostly-closed circle. Unlike the temporalities of the rehab center that were past- or future-oriented, theirs seems to be a present-focused kinship.²⁷ These present-focused kin relations, however, constitute the necessary grounds on which they can build a shared, safe future together.

Sustaining moral personhood through care

In this chapter, I have tried to tell the stories of several people who are excluded from the moral world of *aktywność*, the increasingly popular rhetoric and discourse surrounding old age that is linked to the EU. With its emphasis on health, independence, and physical activity, *aktywność* seems to be decidedly absent in the lives of all these people. According to the logic of *aktywność* and “successful aging,” these lives could be interpreted as failures. Yet rather than the total marginalization that such discourse implies, pani Dorota, pani Marta, pan Bogusław, and pani Władysława live in worlds that meet their needs and are in accord with their values. Rather than exemplars of hyper-active age-defying seniors, the moral ideals here are more pragmatic and relational. Predictability rather than exploration is valued. Through repeated, cyclical practices of care, people maintain moral personhood.

Moreover, acts of caregiving strengthen such personhood. Pani Marta makes coffee and her brother cuts the hair of people at the rehab center. Pani Dorota reminisces about her own life, thus transforming her memories of the *kresy* into gifts for fellow Poles. Pan Bogusław and pani

²⁷ This focus on the present and elision of the past recalls Haim Hazan’s (1987) work on the “time universe” of elderly Jewish Londoners who attend a day center.

Władzia take care of each other through daily embodied, emotional practices. Supported through these intimate, small-scale acts of caregiving, personhood can then expand to encompass more distant moral imaginaries.²⁸ In a place where she can maintain her kin relations and form new social relations, pani Marta can comfortably live in her ideal religious world and imagine her future. In a place where she can share stories of her past kin relations, pani Dorota can imagine her future reunion with her deceased mother, husband, and daughter. In a place where they can mutually help each other, pan Bogusław and pani Władzia can imagine a safe, trustworthy, and shared future against the isolation of an untrustworthy society. These spatiotemporal worlds are marked by an intersection of small-scale, cyclical relations with expansive, knowable futures and places. This differs from the spatiotemporal world of *aktywność*, which is marked by exploration and the unknown at both small and large scales.

It is true that these persons are exceptional, and that many people at each institution struggled much more than these individuals. Indeed, all four are among the most favored patients and residents by staff, volunteers, and other patients and residents, for their good humor and conversational skill. Probably for the same reason, they are also the people with whom I was able to spend the most time as an ethnographer. Yet despite their exceptional status, the experiences of these individuals constitute an important challenge to the ideals of *aktywność*. Rather than a world full of individuals taking responsibility for their own health and well-being, these case studies show that different local moral worlds are possible, in which receiving care is both valued and allows for older Poles to be more fully human. Significantly, all the people that I described are deeply Catholic, and in Poland, Catholic imagery and rhetoric depicts suffering and

²⁸ Similarly, Elana Buch (2010:237-261) has shown how older adults in Chicago maintain their sense of moral worlds through giving gifts to home-care workers, thus working to preserve an ethic of kinship and a sense independent personhood.

receiving care in old age as exemplifying the value of human life in all stages.²⁹ Of course, many equally devout Catholics lived in these institutions, but less contentedly than these people. The logic of independence in *aktywność* can fall apart in the face of disability, while the satisfaction in receiving good care can fall apart in the face of isolation from kin and bodily suffering.

I have tried to highlight the temporal and spatial aspects of personhood and social relations that older Poles experience in varying kinds of institutional care. Focusing on the more phenomenological dimensions of personhood and relatedness allows a more complex and holistic picture of people's lives to emerge, thus complementing structural accounts that highlight inequality and suffering (Mattingly 2010:39-41). Yet this spatiotemporal approach need not be divorced from a study of power; indeed, rhythms, habits, horizons, and memories prove useful for thinking about who can be included or excluded from full personhood in old age. Which kinds of pasts and futures can personhood include, and which are foreclosed? Which kinds of people are potential kin or friends, and who can better form these connections? By addressing such political-economic questions through ethnographic spatiotemporal-focused analysis, we can develop a theoretical perspective that accounts for suffering *and* joy, abandonment *and* care, pain *and* love.

In the next chapter, I focus more explicitly on one key spatiotemporal framework in which people frame their lives: the historical Polish nation. I will return to the case of pani Alicja from the Catholic rehab center, and introduce other individuals from across medical and educational institutions, to investigate the moments in which connections between personal and national lives become important. The next chapter will deepen the analysis on the relationship of contemporary older people to certain Polish pasts and futures by looking closely at how older Poles narrate these personal and (trans)national links.

²⁹ Pictures of John Paul II at the end of his life have become iconic in Poland.

Chapter 5

The taste of Polish apples: embodied and emplaced stories

Asking about the individual, learning about the nation

Many older Poles understand their own life experiences as intimately connected to national history, frequently weaving together personal stories and national narratives. A particularly striking example of reading the personal through the national was offered by Zbigniew, an older man who I met while he was a patient at the rehab center in Wrocław. A retired engineer and recent widower, Zbigniew had come to the institution to recover after an operation left him unable to take care of himself. When we first started talking, he was very shy, saying that he would happily talk with me, but that he did not have anything interesting to say. He was weak, he said, and was unsure what I wanted to learn. After a few minutes of trying to explain my general interests to him, he asked what, specifically, I wanted to know. As I often did when people were reticent, I asked if he could begin by telling me a bit about his biography—for instance, where he was born. He answered that he was born near Kraków before the war. Almost an hour later, during which time I was primarily listening and only making encouraging follow-up comments as appropriate, he ended his story with some of the most personal details of our conversation: his wife passed away three months ago, and he was grieving. “It was a terrible

blow,” he whispered.¹ Soon after this revelation, he asked if he could rest; he was visibly tired and laid his head back on the pillow.

Yet except for framing his story with his birth and his wife’s death, he told me more about the history of Poland in the twentieth century, including the difficulty of the wartime years and the oppression he and his family felt during socialist times, than about the details of his own life.² He did mention some kin—siblings who had passed away, a nephew who had made bad financial decisions, his son and grandson who had recently visited him in the center—but the emotional gravity of his story lay in his telling of national history and especially his wife’s death. What he called his “*życiorys*” (life story; literally “life-outline”) was punctuated by geopolitical transfers of power, not marriages, births, or graduations. After our conversation, I realized that I had not learned the profession of his children, why or when he had moved from Kraków to Wrocław, or other seemingly basic personal details (e.g., information about his health, past employment, or education). Because he was so fatigued by our conversation, I could not learn more that day, and he was discharged soon after our conversation.³

There is more that could be added here—for instance, that because I am a young American woman, perhaps older Poles felt a need to teach me about Polish history. It is also possible that Zbigniew’s grief was too painful for him to bear, leading him to avoid the details of his life in favor of more impersonal topics, but this does not seem likely, given both his openness and his intertwining of political history and personal lives. Or perhaps this was his way of keeping me at a distance in the process of building rapport, since we were just getting to know

¹ “To był straszny cios.” Robbins interview, 16 January 2009.

² His brother fought for the *Armia Krajowa* (Home Army) during World War II, and like other former Home Army members, faced severe discrimination by the post-war Polish government.

³ Soon after we spoke, I became ill with a virus that was sickening both patients and staff at the rehab center, so I could not return for over a week (I was worried about spreading germs to vulnerable patients). See Chapter 1 for a discussion of research methodology.

each other. However, given the consistency with which I heard such stories from others whom I came to know very well over a period of many months, I see Zbigniew's story as part of a larger pattern of meaningful and intimate connections that older Poles make between their personal lives and Polish national history (see Jakubowska 2012:22-23 for a related analysis of the connection between narrations of personal lives and national history). Close analysis of this ethnographic data elucidates the nature of the links between personal lives and national narratives.

The ways that people talk about their own lives in relation to national history demonstrate that older Poles attempt to restore moral personhood through spatiotemporal scaling practices. That is, I interpret connections to different temporalities as ways to expand the temporal and spatial dimensions of older Poles' personhood (cf. Munn 1986; Myerhoff 2007), which has become lessened through retirement, discrimination, illness, or a loss of kin ties. Understanding how older Poles can regain personhood is key to combatting popular negative stereotypes of elders, as well as presenting possibilities for older Poles themselves to cope with such a loss of personhood. For anthropologists, this analysis suggests a reconsideration of the study of personhood in explicitly temporal and spatial terms.

In the previous chapter, I showed how institutional care can make possible small-scale, cyclical relations that intersect with expansive, knowable futures to create and sustain moral personhood. Here, I show how narrative links between individual and national scales that incorporate key historical and geographic references can create moral personhood, relatedness, and generational continuity. Through these embodied stories, which are always social and involve relations of power (Ochs and Capps 1996), I argue that older Poles are attempting to place themselves within a spatiotemporally coherent and meaningful set of social relations,

including relatives (past, present, and future), roommates, caregivers, and fellow citizens. I see these personal and national tales as more than recapitulations of the narrative of Poland as the Christ of nations, since for those who tell these stories, suffering is *not* redemptive (see Chapter 1 for a discussion of this mythical narrative). Rather, through these stories of suffering people are trying to forge meaningful connections with others. It is through these connections, rather than through suffering for the sake of redemption, through which people create moral worlds.

Moreover, the people who tell these stories have more diverse life histories and perspectives on contemporary Polish politics than an analysis based on the Christ-of-nations narrative suggests. From the perspective of popular discourse, some of the people I describe below could be labeled as “*moherowe berety*” and thereby dismissed as out of touch, outdated, or irrelevant. Indeed, it is through the use of the very temporalities I describe below that older Poles can be denied coevalness (cf. Fabian 1983). Thus I have tried to keep at a distance contemporary popular categories of older people like “*moherowy beret*” or “*aktywny senior*” that seem to explain someone’s actions, stories, or moral personhood. Instead, I have tried to show the complexity and contradictions in people’s stories and experiences that make such categories ultimately unsatisfying. This chapter thus contributes to the dissertation’s project of showing the constructed nature of the social distance between the medical and educational institutions where I did my fieldwork, since research participants at both institutions made these connections between personal and national histories.

Similarly, I have tried to hold at arm’s length postsocialist analytic categories of “identity” and “nostalgia” that can describe diverse phenomena before examining their relevance in particular situations. Across disciplines in scholarly literature on postsocialist eastern Europe, the themes of memory and nostalgia (e.g., Pine et al. 2004; Ten Dyke 2000; Todorova and Gille

2010; Watson 1994), and identity and nationality (e.g., Bringa 1995; Brubaker et al. 2006; Rausing 2004; Wanner 1998), have become so common as to be taken for granted. Rather than assuming that my ethnographic data must fit into one of these analytic categories (cf. Brubaker and Cooper 2000), I have tried to suspend these categories by staying close to the ethnographic material itself and by working to portray the deeply social moral worlds of my research participants, as I have understood them through their stories. Of course, these stories do, in fact, concern memory, nostalgia, identity, and nationality—and certainly an analysis along any of those categories would be worthwhile. However, it is my hope that suspending these analytic categories might suggest other possibilities for understanding the relationship of individual lives to national histories.

When analyzing these stories, rather than looking for something that I could label as “identity” or “nostalgia,” I have looked for the moments that people make connections between their own lives and those of differently scaled groups like families or nations. I see these stories as generative, partial, social processes that are deeply linked to both past and present experiences (Mattingly 1998; Mattingly and Garro 2000; Ochs and Capps 1996). More specifically, I interpret these stories as creating personhood through the social process of sharing past experiences in the present; such stories, persons, and memories are always partial. I use the word “person” here rather than the more common “self” (e.g., Mattingly 1998; Ochs and Capps 1996) because of my concern for the sociality of these stories, rather than some sense of interiority that is often suggested by the use of the word “self” (see Chapter 1; Lambek 1996; Wikan 1995, 2000).⁴ I use “story” and “narrative” interchangeably, preferring “story” for its experience-near and colloquial qualities (Wikan 1995, 2000). This sensibility comes from the ethnographic

⁴ I do not mean to suggest that Mattingly (1998) and Ochs and Capps (1996) see the self as devoid of sociality—far from it. Rather, I aim to avoid the connotations of interiority as distinct from sociality that can go along with “self.” See discussion of subjectivity in Chapter 1.

material itself, since I cannot say with any degree of certainty whether I was hearing stories or narratives, or what the distinguishing characteristic of these would be (cf. Wikan 2000:227). Therefore, when I use “narrative” it is because it makes that particular phrase “[sound] better” (often in its adjectival form), not “to create an impression of something fancy” (Wikan 2000:228). Because these stories are only part of what was going on in those particular moments, I have tried to include ethnographic context for all the stories below to indicate that telling stories is a spatial as well as temporal practice (Dreier 2000; Feeley-Harnik 1991a, 1991b; Lambek 1996), and that stories do not give exclusive access to what really matters (Wikan 1995, 2000; cf. Ochs and Capps 1996:23). Rather, given the sociality of remembering (Lambek 1996; Carsten 2007b), I see these stories as one among many practices through which personhood, social relations, and memory are created together. I aim for this analysis to contribute to “comparative ethnography of both loss and restoration that binds together memory, kinship, and nation” (Carsten 2007b:21). These stories are thus “part of the very fabric of national identity-making as much as they constitute more intimate narratives of personal familial history” (2007b:26). Such a processual, social, and spatiotemporal approach holds promise for deeper understandings of categories like identity and nationality in everyday practice.

In this chapter, I focus on stories told to me by two people from the rehab center and two people whom I met through the University of the Third Age in Wrocław. In the first example, I analyze an exchange with pani Wanda, an older woman at the rehab center who aimed to teach me about Polish history. In so doing, she was trying to teach me not mere facts, but a morally inflected history that valued the interwar Polish nation-state and employed the trope of the suffering nation. In the second example, I analyze two excerpts from a conversation with pani Alicja, another woman at the rehab center (introduced in Chapter 4), in which she laments the

current suffering of the Polish nation as a way to create relatedness and to index personal troubles. She compared her own bodily and economic suffering to better times as a farmer during socialism, centering her stories on food and natural resources. In the third example, I analyze two excerpts from a conversation with pani Cecylia, an older woman who I met through the University of the Third Age, who spun long, complex stories of individual and national suffering that were at once mystifying and predictable in the connections she made across times and places. She compared the current influx of foreign capital and the emigration of young Poles abroad to the oppression of the partitions, World War II, and state socialism. Her Galician roots and noble ancestry ground her moral world in Poland, such that even living a successful life abroad could never be complete. In the fourth and final example, I analyze a story about *wigilia* (Christmas Eve) in Siberia written by pan Florian as part of a class at the University of Third Age. In narrating his experience of deportation, privation, and comfort, pan Florian described fellowship with fellow Poles through embodied moments of eating, crying, and praying. In all these stories, the connections between person and place emerge as the moral centers of these stories. The condensation of disparate persons, times, and events into the place of Poland gives these stories a chronotopic quality (Bakhtin 1981). More specifically, it is the romanticized pre-World-War-II Poland that matters most.

The temporal scales of morality in these stories vary. The time of partitions, from the late 18th to early 20th century, is seen as a time of moral patriotic struggle in the face of oppression, while interwar Poland is seen as unequivocally good. World War II is seen as another time of great struggle but great patriotism, while state socialism is seen as a time that is deeply conflicted: negatively viewed from the perspective of interwar independence and postsocialist freedoms, but positively viewed from the perspective of postsocialist difficulties. EU

membership is also fraught, presenting both increased opportunities and dangers for older Poles and their kin. In other words, it is post-World-War-II Poland that is morally fraught. For these older Poles, times before World War II exist in a stable moral teleology culminating in the interwar Polish state. This moral temporality suggests that labels of socialism and postsocialism may not be the most appropriate for representing these older Poles' moral personhood. Perhaps this complex moral temporality even suggests that these macro-scale chronologies are not the most ethnographically relevant. Caught up in all these temporalities are the relationship of Poland to other nation-states, the content of Polishness itself, and the continuity of Polishness across generations.

Each case study reveals a particular connection to a particular time and place; when taken together, they reveal common themes. In all these narratives, it is Poland as a place that figures most prominently. These older Poles index Poland and Polishness through talk of national and religious holidays, military leaders, songs, poems, natural resources, and produce. It is crucial to note that none of these people was born in Wrocław; all but pani Wanda had experienced wartime or post-war deportation, dislocation, or resettlement. Their lives are part of European histories of politically, ethnically, and religiously motivated movements of populations, the violence of which has had devastating effects on persons, memories, and worlds. The legacies of these events are evident in the stories these people now tell, and shape the stakes of their telling.

First, I will situate these narratives in their regional context through a discussion of narratives of home, exile, and memory in the ethnographic literatures on eastern Europe. Rather than immediately relate this ethnographic material to discussions of memory and nostalgia in the region (e.g., Boym 2001; Huyssen 1995; Todorova and Gille 2010), I aim to stay closer to the ethnographic material itself to highlight the connection of people to places, and the narrative

practices in which these connections emerge. By analyzing the moral temporalities that link persons to places in eastern Europe, I aim for this review to provide ethnographic context for the chronotopic worlds of older Poles. Following my analysis of the stories themselves, I close the chapter with a discussion of continuity and coherence in stories told by older people.

Moral connections between persons and places in eastern Europeans' stories

Narrative connections between individual and national lives have been documented and analyzed by anthropologists working in eastern Europe (e.g., Ballinger 2003; Brown 2004; Paxson 2005; Pine 2007; Skultans 1998; Tucker 2011; Uehling 2004). Here, I will analyze the moral and spatiotemporal dimensions of narratives as evident in these ethnographies of eastern Europe. Throughout this discussion, I aim to highlight the ways that moral personhood encompasses both time and place, through discussions of land, homelands, and homes.⁵

In the immediate post-Soviet years of 1992 and 1993, Latvians in their newly independent state made intimate connections between personal and national lives that were surprising to Vieda Skultans (1998), who set out to student study neurasthenia and its symbolic meanings (cf. Kleinman 1986). However, she found that people wanted to tell her about the past, about their experiences during and after World War II, about deportations, famines, and forced labor (1998:xi). They would not stay within the bounds of the research project that Skultans had defined. Skultans describes being “stunned by the force and fluency with which people spoke,” consisting of “long monologues” that lasted for hours (1998:xi; see Chapter 1). In these life

⁵ In this dissertation, I have not explicitly considered memories of the Holocaust, obviously the most dramatic and totalizing of these violent population transfers, since this constitutes a massive body of literature on its own, and the topic itself was rarely explicitly raised by my participants. However, there are clearly crucial questions for the study of moral personhood, time, and place in eastern Europe: How did the attempted destruction of an entire people affect the connection of persons to places? How are lost persons, relations, places, and worlds narrated? How is continuity created in the face of such loss?

histories, Skultans finds that links between personal and national lives are common, and are grounded in ideas of home, exile, and return. A particularly dramatic case, excerpted here, exemplifies the sort of connection that I also heard in the narratives of pan Zbigniew and other Poles. Skultans writes:

Lidija recounted her life history to me punctuated by the deaths of her close male relatives: her brothers during the First World War, her first husband arrested and killed in June 1941 and her only son dying prematurely of a heart attack ten years ago. This litany of deaths produced a kind of numbness in me until I awoke to the horror of one particular account and incidentally the only death whose retelling made Lidija cry:

“When the big battles took place with the Germans they laid him out on a white cloth because he was bleeding. He died and when they carried him away they found that the cloth was stained red, white and red with his blood.”

Who was he? I asked, guiltily aware that my attention had lapsed. It turned out that Lidija was describing the death of Namejs, the thirteenth-century Latvian chieftain who resisted the invasion of the German crusaders and whose death she links with the colours of the Latvian flag. Lidija’s narrative draws no temporal distinctions between the deaths of husband, brother, and the medieval chieftain. [Skultans 1998:18]

In addition to displaying remarkable ethnographic honesty about the practice of listening to hours and hours of stories, Skultans shows how her interlocutors condensed centuries of time by moving seamlessly between personal and national tragedy. Although I did not hear anyone directly link the death of a kin member to the death of a historical figure, the lack of explanatory connection between scales is remarkably similar. Like Skultans (1998:19), I seek to understand the sociocultural contexts that make such narrations possible and meaningful.

Because Skultans conducted fieldwork in the immediate post-Soviet years, she was hearing stories that had been repressed for decades (1998:12). She writes that “personal narrative also has a special importance in societies which fail to secure the moral allegiance of their members. Where social values and meanings are not accepted, individuals may engage in a personal search for meaning within a narrative past” (Skultans 1998:25, cf. Passerini 1987). This need to be heard speaks to both the power relations that inherent to narrative interactions, and to

the sociality of the narrative process itself (cf. Ochs and Capps 1996). Such an analysis also suggests some innate need for narration, a topic to which I will return at the end of this section.

Many of the stories that Skultans heard centered on the forest, a place that has a host of complex meanings for Latvians. Beginning with the revolution against the Russian empire in 1905 and continuing during times of upheaval until the early 1950s, the forest harbored the “forest brothers” (*meža brali*), or political refugees (Skultans 1998:83-84,167-173). The forests were places of fighting, then, as Soviets tried to eliminate the forest brothers (Skultans 1998:84). Stories about being a political refugee in the forest are full of fear, danger, and suspicion of the natural environment, since the forest could also be concealing enemies (Skultans 1998:87-89). The forest as a dangerous place was all the more traumatic for Latvians given its important role in folklore and literature. In these narratives, descriptions of danger alternate with symbols of unity with the animals of the forest in what Skultans calls, after Bakhtin, the pastoral idyllic chronotope (1998:83-86). Condensing not only time but social relations into place, making these narratives of the forest are deeply moral and social. In narratives of deportations to Siberia, people described their alienation in moral, social, and geographic terms, contrasting the wide steppes of Siberia to the forested landscape of Latvia (1998:32-33). In telling stories of remembered life in the forest, Latvians were placing themselves in a moral world delineated by opposition to Russian and Soviet domination, in connection to the land and animals, and within a moral chronology of what it means to be Latvian.

For the Górale in the Podhale region of Poland with whom Frances Pine (2007) has worked for decades, the forests, along with streams, mountains, and fields, condense personal, national, and historical memories and relations. Górale have a deep history of movement, from transhumance until the 19th century, followed by economic migration that continues to this day,

as Górale who migrate to Chicago generally do not do so permanently, but rather on cyclical bases to generate income to bring back home to Podhale. Pine sees this legacy of movement as generative of “a particular aesthetic of kinship memory, linked to stories and genealogies of people which are often articulated in relation to place, space, and land” (2007:107). The case of Marta, who tries to leave Podhale permanently for Chicago but is ultimately brought back by her mother, proves the normative ideal status of this connection to land in the scandal that she caused in the village (Pine 2007:114-118). The intertwining of personal and national history is also evident, as when Jola described her father’s death from an illness in conjunction with the imposition of martial law in 1981; in her story, the safe place of the village is threatened by the urban dangers of Kraków, where her father died, and Warsaw, where martial law was imposed (Pine 2007:120-121). Kinship is created through memory that is at once personal and national, and always grounded in place.

For elderly ethnic Poles from the *kresy* deported in the 1930s to what is now Kazakhstan from whom Kate Brown (2004) collected stories, the exiled landscape of the steppe also has deeply negative associations. It is the qualities of the land—blustery, dry, “‘naked’ steppe”—that defines people’s memories of arrival in Kazakhstan (Brown 2004:173-176), in contrast to the forested, flowered, and honeyed landscape of Ukraine they remember (2004:142-143). Brown claims that deportees still find Kazakhstan “alien” since they refer to settlements with numbers assigned by the Soviets rather than the existing toponyms based on places in the *kresy* (2004:176).⁶ Yet this claim contradicts the words of the deportees themselves about their present lives. The pride with which people tell Brown of their work to bring socialism and “civilization” to Kazakhstan, pointing to tall block apartments as proof (2004:186-187) demonstrates that

⁶ This echoes Padraic Kenney’s claim that Poles from many regions, including the *kresy*, who settled in Wrocław following World War II did not feel connection to their new home; indeed, they did not understand it to be home at all (1997:156-157).

deportees still in Kazakhstan feel strongly and even positively about their lives there, and that the transformations in land in some way parallel transformations in their lives. In other words, Brown's evidence suggests that, with time and through work, people can develop connections with radically different places even in undesirable and oppressive conditions. Indeed, this should not be surprising, after decades of living, decades of creating relatedness and memories, in this "new" land.⁷

Emotional connections to the land itself can occur even in instances when people have never actually been to the place, Greta Uehling (2004) shows in her study of Crimean Tatars who return to Crimea from Uzbekistan where they were exiled in 1944 by Stalin, despite the poverty they face there and the younger generation's lack of personal experience of Crimea. Uehling finds that deeply held affective attachments to the land of Crimea itself compel Crimean Tatars to return. By describing both the content of these emotions and the contexts in which they are socially produced, Uehling demonstrates how Crimean Tatars come to feel such strong connections to their land—in other words, how they create a homeland. She finds that it is through generationally marked practices of memory within families that this intense sentiment develops (Uehling 2004:109-134). Although the oldest deportees are the only ones with personal knowledge of deportation to share, it is primarily second-generation Crimean Tatars in Uzbekistan (the first generation to be born there) who most dramatically and intensely display and experience the retelling of stories of deportation (Uehling 2004:111-114). The ways that families tell (or do not tell) their stories of exile has to do with emotions that are created through

⁷ Interestingly, this evidence of change in attachments suggests the accuracy of the Soviet method of changing people by removing them from their land. Brown provocatively argues that Soviet planners saw a fundamental connection between place and personhood in their deportation of people from the *kresy* to the steppes: "if ghosts, tradition, economic practice, and belief are closely linked to a place, to certain buildings or elements of geography—a swampy gravesite, a miraculous spring, a sagging bathhouse—then the answer to dislodging the old and backward ways is to uproot them" (2004:82). In other words, they attempted to transform "backwards" persons into Soviets by removing them from their land.

the stories (2004:133). The narrative styles and their attendant emotional qualities create possibilities for particular political affiliations and involvements, including nationalism (2004:115-116).⁸

Despite the largely uncontested status of Crimea as a homeland for Crimean Tatars, they do encounter difficulties in returning to Crimea that stem from disputes over land and property, and must resort to squatting on empty land or abandoned properties. Thus, it is through the contested creation of houses that Crimean Tatars make claims on their homeland (Uehling 2004:206-223). Following Gaston Bachelard (1994[1958]), Uehling argues that the force of embodied memories that occur in houses make houses centrally important to creating and experiencing memory. This becomes evident through her description of how a returnee could recognize his old house only by feeling a familiar burned spot on the floor by the fireplace. The floor becomes explicitly part of how people create ties to Crimea as a homeland for two men in Uzbekistan, who interpret their deceased uncle's canceling of plans to repair the floorboards of his house as an unwillingness to express connection or to "tak[e] root" in Uzbekistan, thereby remembering their homeland (2004:223-225). In contrast, Uehling finds that Crimean Tatars in Crimea constantly and actively work upon their homes. She argues that "historicizing territory and territorializing memory is accomplished not only through laying claim to the land within republican borders, but also through specific places of dwelling" (2004:227).

The house also becomes a metonym for homeland for the ethnic Italians with whom Pamela Ballinger (2003) worked. Removed from the Istrian Peninsula after World War II, these exiles imagine their homeland in terms of the houses of their parents and the tombs of their grandparents. Exiles remember their lives in Istria by recreating them through placing pictures or

⁸ Family transmission of memories is not the only process through which a desire for the homeland is created. Uehling argues that the post-Soviet political and social sanctioning of talk about ethnic nationality made legitimate what could only be "whisper[ed]" during Soviet times (2004:124).

pieces of Istria (stones, seawater) in their new homes (Ballinger 2003:171-173). Some imagine Istria through the graves and cemeteries where their ancestors are buried, which connects to the words of an exiled priest, who writes that the very land of Istria contains “the roots of our people” (Ballinger 2003:173). This emphasis on connections between people and place through roots echoes the underground location of the mass graves of Istrian Italians killed by Slavs during and after World War II, known as the *foibe*, named after the caves where bodies were dumped. The subterranean earthiness of roots and caves connects exiles’ homes and homeland (Ballinger 2003:167). Through commemorating and exhuming those killed in the *foibe* to reveal “the truth” about their past, Istrian Italians’ sense of themselves as victims of genocide gives meaning to their understanding of Istrianness and Italianness. In other words, their commemorative practices reveal an archeological historiosophy where the past is something to be recovered and “exhumed” (Ballinger 2003:12-13).

Although not all who live in eastern Europe have experienced such mass population movement, the proximity and scale of such movements as well as the popularity of ethnonational idioms that match peoples to places makes tropes of stability and movement common and powerful in eastern Europe. For instance, in writing about the concept of “home” in Polish literature, Bożena Shallcross (2002:3) claims that Poles are a relatively stationary people despite the historic mobility of the boundaries of Poland. This claim is meant as a way to emphasize the point about the movement of the territory of Poland, but it nevertheless obscures population movements within Poland (e.g., Kenney 1997) and, moreover, opposes Poles to Jews, a “diasporic” nation, and Roma, a “nomadic nation,” thereby reinforcing an exclusivist understanding of Polishness (Porter 2000). The “rootlessness” of Roma is a mystifying trope that helps to maintain the marginal status of Roma in Russia by denying them attachments to places

and pasts (Lemon 2000). However, Roma *do* feel connected to nation-states, regions, homes, and pasts, and moreover, that the authenticity of memory can be judged by references to particular places (Lemon 2000:109-110, 226-228, 235). It is home and kin networks that matter most to Roma (2000:227) and it is in the home and through these networks that memories are created (2000:155, 182-187). Through these “emplaced” memories (Casey 1987), Roma-ness emerges, always relationally. The trope of movement and stability thus emerges as one not only of connection between persons and places, but also of exclusion of others from places and belonging.

In her study of stories of World War II among elderly Warsawians in the neighborhood of Żoliborz, conducted during the late 1990s, Tucker (2011) finds a continuation of 19th century Polish romanticism and a deep pride in the interwar independent Polish nation-state. In addition to the occupations of “body,” “mind,” “spirit,” and “memory,” Tucker’s research participants lived through (or, as they said, “*przeżyli*”) the “occupation of place,” or extreme control over the physical space that characterized Nazi-occupied Warsaw: restrictions on movement, banning and destruction of Polish symbols, registration regimes and repossessions of buildings and homes, and most dramatically, the ghettos (2011:75-109). This all-encompassing occupation contrasts sharply with the domestic worlds of her research participants, some of which were filled with deeply personal and familial patriotic symbols. The living room of one of her research participants, pan Olgierd Z, was decorated with “family photos, including one of his father dressed in military uniform on horseback with Piłsudski’s Legions. This and other family photographs were clustered around an icon of the Black Madonna of Częstochowa” (Tucker 2011:27). Another of her research participants, pani Sławka, decorated her room with pre-World-War-II family photos, photographs of portraits of her parents painted by Witkacy, a recent photo

of her and her sister in front of a manor house that their family used to own, and a replica of a *pas szlachecki* (nobleman's sash) (Tucker 2011:27-28).⁹ Tucker writes that "Sławka's décor is a statement about herself that delineates a genealogy both personal and culture, one that links her literally and symbolically to definitions of Polishness that are inflected by class, ethnicity, and political affiliation" (Tucker 2011:27). This material instantiation of Polishness is strikingly similar to the home of pani Cecylia, described below, and of others of my research participants. For pan Olgierd, pani Sławka, and pani Cecylia, their homes and stories together create a moral world in which partition-era patriotic struggles are part of everyday life.

Despite the intense suffering of the wartime years, Tucker's research participants also told stories about moments of care and connection. It was particularly those people who worked in education or health care whose stories of resistance were about sociality (Tucker 2011:134). One of these health care workers, pan Olgierd (whose home displayed the picture of his father with Piłsudski's Legions), told a story of a memorable *Wigilia* (Christmas Eve) during the war. He described the evening he spent at the hospital thus: "Pani, we had *Wigilia* there: there was a Christmas tree, everyone sang carols, and we shared Christmas wafer [*opłatki*] with all the patients. So, for me as a young, beginning doctor that was a great, great *przeżycie*" (in Tucker 2011:137). He goes on to describe an act of collective kindness that occurred after his shift at the hospital, in which a drunk man on the tram took up a collection for the poorly-paid conductor (Tucker 2011:137-138). For pan Olgierd, the great difficulties of the war years were punctuated by these moment of connection, kindness, and Polishness. Tucker writes that "by cultivating and practicing ordinary virtues," Poles in Nazi-occupied Warsaw sought to preserve their culture (2011:138). These moral practices are deeply social, and connected to a cyclical religious

⁹ Witkacy, or Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, was an artist, writer, and major figure in early-20th-century Polish cultural life.

temporality, in which this *Wigilia* can be compared to others, as the story of pan Florian, below, will demonstrate. Indeed, their very return to Warsaw after the war is part of this moral practice. Tucker writes that “attachment to place and identification with the city as co-victim is what drew them back” (2011:224). In other words, the place of Warsaw itself is part of the healing process, is part of the way that people reconstruct lives. Warsaw was the place of extreme suffering, but also life—of death and life together. These intertwinings of death and life, of loss and regeneration, of despair and hope, are crucial to the links between persons and places in stories that eastern Europeans tell.

“My dear leader!” Narrating morality in Polish history

Sometimes people made these connections between personal and national lives as a way of teaching me, a young American woman, about Polish history.¹⁰ One woman at the rehab center particularly exemplified the didactic style of some of my research participants. Upon meeting me in the corridor while I was sitting with pani Alicja, pani Wanda heard my accent and started correcting my Polish. She suggested that I come talk with her, telling me that she spoke very clearly and had excellent pronunciation (perhaps distinguishing herself from others, like pani Alicja, who had had strokes and were difficult to understand). She recited Polish tongue-twisters and asked me to repeat after her. Pani Wanda then gave a brief lecture on the gender of nouns in the Polish language, invited me again to stop by to talk sometime, and entered the elevator to go downstairs for her physical therapy session.

Later that week, I stopped by pani Wanda’s room, where she and her roommate, pani Małgorzata, were sitting quietly on their beds, waiting for *obiad*. They welcomed me in and said they would be happy to talk with me. Pani Wanda was much more talkative than pani

¹⁰ In Polish, the quote in the subheading is: “Miły wodzu mój!”

Małgorzata, although pani Małgorzata was happy to chime in occasionally. For almost an hour, pani Wanda told me about her life history, describing the recent accident in which she had broken her leg, leading her to need care at the rehab center, and her decades of work *w konfekcji* (in a garment factory). First, she worked in a factory sewing suits and outerwear, and then in another sewing athletic clothing. After 30 years, she retired at age 55 in 1979. She went back to work as a secretary in a construction design office for few years, but then left to take care of her grandchildren. She had been widowed for 33 years since her husband's heart attack. She told a story about her husband's weeklong arrest by the *milicja* (military police) for his role in organizing opposition activities, saying that this would make a good story for people in America. Pani Wanda and pani Małgorzata then discussed how much better it is now that communism has ended and they no longer had to wait in long lines to receive rationed goods and fulfill ever-increasing quotas at work.

After a pause, and without my asking, pani Wanda began to tell me about Poland's regaining of independence after World War I. This conversation occurred on November 12, the day after Independence Day, so there was a temporal logic to raising this topic. Slowly and deliberately, pani Wanda then told me about the partitions of Poland, which began in the 18th century.

Pani Wanda (PW): And now independence. Independence. This was Piłsudski, wasn't it?

Jessica (J): Yes.

PW: He, in the year 1918, it was 1918 that Poland re...regained independence. Because Poland was under partitions for 123 years. 123 years.

J: Yes.

PW: Of captivity.¹¹ Are you recording everything?

J: Yes, yes.

PW: Poland was divided into three partitions, into three parts. The east was part of Russia. Russia occupied the east of Poland. The Germans occupied the west. And here...the mountains...Zakopane, was Austria. Kraków, Zakopane was Austria. 123 years. And later there were always uprisings. They fought, the Poles, and there were uprisings. Uprisings. The January

¹¹ Pani Wanda used the words *w niewoli*, which could also be translated as bondage or imprisonment.

uprising, the November uprising, like right now – they regained, the November one, and then independence.

J: Yeah, yes.

PW: So many years of captivity. Dreadful. Because Poland, as a country, is located – it’s not a big area – but it’s located... Russia is a huge country, and Germany is too.

J: Yeah.

PW: And they always want to eliminate the little one, this country.

J: Yeah, yeah.

PW: Oh my goodness! Already? [to a staff member bringing in drinks and silverware for obiad.]

Staff member (SM): Like I say, time’s up.

PW: Yes, but we’re talking seriously.

SM: What do you mean, serious?

PW: Ah, it’s serious. Serious.

SM: Ah, whatever, yeah right, it’s serious.

PW: No, but it’s interesting, interesting. And Piłsudski, he was the leader.¹² He held on. And it was Piłsudski, when he died, the year was 1935, on the 12th of May. Piłsudski died.

J: You remember well.

PW: Yes. And I was already going to school, and, uh, we went to the holy mass, with gray banner flags, and I recited a poem:

It can’t be true, that you’re already gone.
 It can’t be true, that you’re already in the grave.
 Although today, the entire Polish land is crying.
 The entire Polish land is in mourning.
 For us, you were a statue of steel.
 For us, you were of an excellent order.
 You who lifted up and saved Poland.
 And lifted [us] up to the summit and the glory.

Oh my, what an interesting conversation you will have [for your research].

J: Oh yes, it’s good. Thank you for this conversation.

PW: I even know this song about Piłsudski, a patriotic song. Ri... [starts to sing] I know it. Should I sing a little?

J: Please, go ahead, please.

PW: Really?

J: Please.

PW: [singing] He’s riding, riding, on Kasztanka, on Kasztanka,
 Gray rifleman’s attire!¹³
 Hey, hey, commandant! My dear leader!
 Hey, hey, commandant! My dear leader!

Where is your saber, made of steel, made of steel,
 Even in going to battle,
 Even in going to battle,

¹² Józef Piłsudski was a Polish military leader during World War I, the first leader of the Second Polish Republic (the interwar Polish state), and the first Marshal of the Polish Army. As a military figure who fought for independence and then served as the first leader of post-partition Poland, he has enormous symbolic importance in collective Polish memory. As Tucker notes, this contemporary heroic perspective of Piłsudski is selective, glossing over his time as an authoritarian leader (2011:35 n.9). See Törnquist Plewa 1992:172-174, 202-205 for discussions of the growth of what she calls the “cult of Marshal Piłsudski” (1992:202-203) in conjunction with oppositional activities in the 1970s and early 1980s. See Sokolewicz 1991 for discussion of Piłsudski’s life in universalist mythical terms and an image of a folk sculpture of Piłsudski.

¹³ Kasztanka was the name of Piłsudski’s favorite horse (Rothstein 2011) and also lives on in popular memory, often appearing in portraits of Piłsudski. See, for example, Mackiewicz 2012.

Hey, hey, commandant! My dear leader!
Hey, hey, commandant! My dear leader!

Where's your uniform of a general, of a general,
Sewn with golden thread,
Sewn with golden thread,
Hey, hey, commandant! Beloved leader!
Hey, hey, commandant! Beloved leader!¹⁴

That's about Piłsudski. It's about Piłsudski, because he rode on Kasztanka. About Piłsudski. This holiday is good, it's good it exists, it's important, this independence.¹⁵

We discussed the parade and fireworks that occurred the previous day in Wrocław, and pani Małgorzata sighed that now they would have to wait another year to celebrate Independence Day.

As she recited this poem about Piłsudski, pani Wanda's voice took on characteristics of a dramatic reading—slowing down and speeding up, modulating the pitch more deliberately. The song that pani Wanda sang had an upbeat, lilting, and catchy melody. At first, she sang with some hesitation, searching a bit for the melody, but her voice grew more confident and joyful

¹⁴ This song dates from 1915. Lyrics were written by Waclaw Biernacki and the melody is a folk tune (Rothstein 2011:16).

¹⁵ *Pani Wanda*: A teraz ta niepodległość. Niepodległość. To Piłsudski, nie? *Jessica*: Tak. *PW*: On, w 1918ym roku, to.. 1918.. Polska od... odzyskała niepodległość. Bo Polska była po 123 latach –123 lat. *J*: Tak. *PW*: W niewoli. To wszystko nagrywa pani? *J*: Tak, tak, to czerwone... *PW*: Polska była podzielona na trzy rozbiory, na trzy części. Wschód pod Rosją. Wschód Polski zajęła Rosja. Zachód zajęli Niemcy. A tu jaka eh, tu, góry, Zakopane, Austria. Kraków, Zakopane, to Austria. 123 lat. I później były zawsze powstania. Bo się buntowali, Polacy, i powstania były. Powstania. Powstanie styczniowe, powstanie listopadowe, tak, tak jak teraz, odzyskali, to listopadowe, a niepodległość. *J*: No tak. *PW*: Tyle lat niewoli. Okropne. Bo kraj Polska, leży pod – nie jest duży obszarem – ale leży, ehh, bo Rosja jest wielkie państwo, Niemcy tak samo. *J*: No. *PW*: I oni zawsze chcą zlikwidować tego małego, ten kraj. *J*: No, no. *PW*: O matko święta. Już? To dziękuję. *Staff member*: [Brings drinks and silverware for obiad.] No mówię, czas minął. *PW*: Tak, ale my to poważnie mówimy. *Staff member*: Jak tam poważny? *PW*: Ah, poważny, to nie. Poważny. *Staff member*: Gdzie tam to poważne... *PW*: No ale ciekawe, ciekawe. A Piłsudski, to był wódz. On wytrwał. To był Piłsudski, kiedy zmarł, to było 1935 roku, 12ego maja. Zmarł Piłsudski. *J*: Dobrze pamięta. *PW*: Tak. I ja chodziłam już do szkoły, i szliśmy, eh, na msze święto, szarymi chorągiewkami, i wiersz mówiłam o Piłsudskim: To nieprawda, że Ciebie już nie ma./ To nieprawda, że jesteś już w grobie./ Chociaż płacze dziś cała Polska ziemia./ Cała Polska ziemia w żałobie./ Byłeś dla nas posągiem ze stali./ Byłeś nam i orderem wspaniałym./ Ty coś Polskę wydzwignął i ocalił, / I wydzwignął na szczyt i chwały. Ojej, jak to będzie pani miała to ciekawa rozmowę. *J*: No, tak, to dobrze. Ja pani dziękuję za rozmowę. *PW*: Nawet taka piosenkę znam, o Piłsudskim, to patriotyczną. Je... [starts to sing] Znam. Zaśpiewać ja tak krótko? *J*: Proszę, proszę. *PW*: Tak? *J*: Proszę. *PW*: Jedzie, jedzie, na Kasztance, na Kasztance,/ Siwy strzelca strój./ Hej, hej, komendancie! Miły wodzu mój!/ Hej, hej, komendancie! Miły wodzu mój!/ Gdzie szabelka Twa ze stali, Twa ze stali, / Przecież idzie w bój./ Przecież idzie w bój,/ Hej, hej, komendancie! Miły wodzu mój!/ Hej, hej, komendancie! Miły wodzu mój!/ Gdzie Twój mundur generalski, generalski./ Złotym zszywany,/ Złotym zszywany./ Hej, hej, komendancie! Wodzu ukochany!/ Hej, hej, komendancie! Wodzu ukochany! To jest o Piłsudskim. To jest o Piłsudskim, bo on jeździł na Kasztance. O Piłsudskim. To święto jest dobrze, że jest, to ważne, ta niepodległość. Robbins interview, 12 November 2008.

with each verse. She lingered over the line “sewn with golden thread,” perhaps resonating with the decades she herself worked at sewing factories.¹⁶ The lyrics of both the poem that pani Wanda recited and the song that she sang are addressed to Piłsudski himself using the vocative case, giving the poem and song an intimate, heartfelt character.¹⁷ As she spoke of the partitions, there was emotion in her voice, evident in dramatic pauses and searching for words. And indeed, her comment to the staff member who brought utensils for *obiad* indicated that she found these topics to be important and meaningful. The slow, enunciated syllables and repeated words suggested not only that she saw me as an interlocutor who might not fully understand her, but that *these* were the points she wanted to convey.

Indeed, when compared to the preceding stories about more recent history, pani Wanda’s narration suggests that Poland’s independence in 1918 was a more significant moment. The only moments explicitly marked as important, or topics explicitly marked as serious, were the conversations about the partitions and independence. In other words, it is significant that *this* is the story that pani Wanda told me slowly and didactically. It is significant that *this* historical period is what called up emotional songs and poetry. The question then becomes, what differentiates this period from others? The story that she told is the fundamental narrative of Polish nationalism, reaching back to the partitions of the 18th century. It is this *niewola*, or enslavement, by foreign powers that forms the backbone of the Polish national myth of the suffering nation. In pani Wanda’s recitation of this stock narrative, I see her as teaching me not only a particular chronology of Polish history, but of showing me where and when Polish

¹⁶ Robert Rothstein (2011:16) notes that this song and another about Piłsudski present him as humble in his wearing of a rifleman’s uniform instead of a general’s.

¹⁷ Pani Wanda was the only person during my fieldwork who sang this song and recited this poem. Rothstein(2011:16-18) writes that many songs about Piłsudski address him using the vocative case; terms include *wódz* (leader), *komendant* (commandant), *brygadier* (brigadier), *naczelnik* (chief), *bohater* (hero), and *dziadek* (grandfather). Although these terms are mostly military titles, the vocative indicates a direct relationship between the singer and Piłsudski.

morality lies. Pani Wanda and pani Małgorzata spoke of everyday suffering during communism, and were glad that it had passed, but the moral center of the narrative lay in this music and poetry, in this interwar time. They did not have much to say about the present.

After the song about the “dear leader,” Pani Wanda changed the topic to American history, praising the hard work of Americans who built the country from nothing into riches. She then sang the following verse:

This is America!
The famous USA!
What a rich country, heaven on earth!

Oh, if one wants to have four wives,
One must have millions!

This is America!
The famous USA!
What a rich country, heaven on earth!¹⁸

A bouncy, quick, cabaret-style melody, this song prompted pani Małgorzata to sing along, and they both smiled while singing. Twice more during our conversation, the women began to sing this song, joking about how hard it must be to satisfy four wives.¹⁹ As I took my leave of pani Wanda and pani Małgorzata to join the administrative staff for *obiad* in the kitchen, pani Małgorzata thanked me for my company, saying how enjoyable it was to talk and remember. Otherwise, she said, one just sits silently.

“We losers don’t have anything”: Narrating loss, creating relatedness

¹⁸ To jest Ameryka!/ To słynne USA!/ To jest bogaty kraj, na ziemi raj!/ Ach, to chce mieć cztery żony,/ Ten musi mieć mi-li-on-y!/ To jest Ameryka!/ To słynne USA!/ To jest bogaty kraj, na ziemi raj! Robbins interview, 12 November 2008.

¹⁹ The full text of this song, according to one Polish music website, includes references to exotic luxuries of the US, apparently including four wives. http://bibliotekapiosenki.pl/Ameryka_%28Opowiedzcie_mi_panowie_%29 accessed 17 January 2013.

The moral world of pani Wanda and pani Małgorzata has distinct spatiotemporal contours, focusing on the early 20th century and reaching back to the days of partition in the 18th and 19th centuries, and located within the boundaries of interwar Poland.²⁰ These were fairly common spatiotemporal markers among my research participants, especially those in their seventies and eighties, but they were not the only times and places that mattered to people. For instance, pani Alicja, a patient at the rehab center introduced in Chapter 4, more commonly understood her present life in relation to the state socialist past, thus grounding her moral world in a shallower time-scale, although pre-World-War-II Poland was also her geographical scale of reference.

When I met her in 2008, pani Alicja was 72 but looked older than pani Wanda and pani Małgorzata, who were in their eighties. Born in a village in the southeast of Poland before World War II, pani Alicja moved to a village outside Wrocław after the end of the war in 1945.²¹ She had the deep wrinkles and thick limbs of someone who had worked outside for decades. Pani Alicja had worked as a farmer up until the moment she had a stroke, five months before we met, which left her reliant upon a wheelchair and rendered her legs and entire left side paralyzed. She attributed the severity of her medical problems to the three hours that passed between the moment of her stroke and the arrival of the ambulance to take her to the hospital, believing that her rehabilitation would be less complicated if she had received medical attention sooner. Asking me, “are there such diseases in America?” pani Alicja was surprised to learn that Americans do suffer strokes, saying that in Poland “they don’t treat high blood pressure, they don’t treat this

²⁰ In Polish, the quote in the subheading is: “My dziady nie mamy nic.”

²¹ Pani Alicja described where she was born as: “w rzeszowskim, na Podkarpaciu... tam jak się jedzie na Lwów.” Interview 16 October 2008.

and that...”.²² I asked her whether she was in pain, and she responded affirmatively, telling me about her heavy, paralyzed left side. As we spoke, she stroked and pulled on her gnarled and clenched left first, trying unsuccessfully to overcome the severe contractures. She showed me how difficult it was to move, asking me to hold her left arm and hand to feel the weight of her paralyzed limb. If it fell over the bed at night, she said, she was unable to lift it back onto the bed.

Pani Alicja stayed at the rehab center for over a year while waiting for a place in a long-term care institution; during this time, she did not know when she would be leaving or where exactly she would be going. At one point, she was planning to move to a *Dom Pomocy Społecznej*, where she said she would save 100 PLN (just over 30 USD) per month, but this move was delayed more than once. This 100 PLN was a significant sum for pani Alicja, who received 500 PLN (around 170 USD) per month as *renta* (pension). Although I sometimes saw pani Alicja’s granddaughter and son there, and pani Alicja mentioned the help they provided in the form of financial assistance and material goods (e.g., by bringing her fruit, coffee, personal care products), she often complained to her roommates, staff, and me about being abandoned by her family. Almost every time that I said goodbye, she began to weep while wishing good health for my family and me, and asked me when we would next see each other. It was never soon enough.

At her request, several times I helped pani Alicja use the rehab center’s pay phone to call her granddaughter to ask when her next visit would be, and to ask her to bring specific items. Although some patients had cell phones, pani Alicja did not, so relied upon the pay phone in the stairwell on the ground floor. To get to the pay phone, I wheeled pani Alicja from her second-

²² Pani Alicja: W Ameryce też takie choroby są? Jessica: Tak, oczywiście, tak. Pani Alicja: Tak? Ja myślałam że nie ma, że tylko w Polsce te udary są. To nadciśnienie nie się leczy, tego się nie leczy. Robbins interview 16 October 2008.

floor room to the patient elevator across the hallway, where we waited for the slow, clunky trip down to the ground floor. At the pay phone, she would fish around in her change purse for her calling card and the scrap of paper with her granddaughter's number. I dialed, held, and hung up the phone for her. Twice, pani Alicja cried with gratitude that I helped her make this phone call, since the staff did not have time to help her and she could not wheel herself even the short distance across the hallway to the elevator. I often felt that these teary complaints, laments, and favors were part of attempts to bring me—or anyone who would genuinely listen—into her world, to make her suffering recognized and known. Her moral distress was palpable.

Beginning the first day we met, pani Alicja called me “*kochana*” or “darling,” as other older women did (especially if they had trouble remembering my name, which is uncommon in Poland).²³ When I would enter her room, she would exclaim “*kochana Jessiko!*” and begin telling me stories of her day, often lamenting her poor physical state.²⁴ On that first day, I asked pani Alicja if she would tell me about her family. She answered by telling me that her husband had a large family and that he was one of nine children. He passed away in 1995, and a year after that, her daughter died at age 49.²⁵ Then pani Alicja began to cry. “I am such an orphan,” she said. “In Poland, they say that you’re an orphan if you don’t have a mother or father, but also if you don’t have kids. Hand me a tissue.”²⁶ After a few moments of silence and deep breaths, pani Alicja then spoke of her granddaughter who moved to England for work.

²³ Polish first names are generally either Slavic (e.g., Bogusława, Lech) or Christian (either Biblical or after saints) (e.g., Anna, Piotr) in origin, meaning that foreign first names can be difficult for Poles to grasp. I found that this was especially true for older people of lower socioeconomic status, though see chapter 4 for the diminutive name I was given at the DPS (Pani Jessiczko).

²⁴ “*Jessiko*” is the improvised vocative form of my first name.

²⁵ This day, pani Alicja said first that he had passed away in 2005, and then 1995. In a later conversation she commented that she had been a widow for 13 years, suggesting that her husband passed away in 1995, not 2005.

²⁶ “*Taka sierotą jestem. Tak się mówi w Polsce, jak nie ma ojca ani matki, to sierota, jak nie ma dzieci też jest sierota. Daj mi chusteczkę.*” Robbins interview 16 October 2008. It is also notable that pani Alicja’s son was still alive, suggesting the importance of daughters for older women.

Pani Alicja (PA): But my grandson finished school – he is a surveyor. My granddaughter also studied surveying, geodesic engineering, and left for England. They have their own firm [...] Her husband also went to school for geodesics, and finished. Construction was really growing there, it's going along, they're putting the *wianki* on the construction.²⁷ [...] They're earning good money. My granddaughter was here, and she's glad that she is earning good money. But she says, "Grandma, I'm not coming back because I don't see myself here. What am I going to earn here – pennies. There, I make in a month what it would take three months to make in Wrocław."

Jessica (J): Aha.

PA: She went there and is staying put there because it's better for them there. More money.

J: Mm, yeah, I understand.

PA: And here there's no money. [...] Poland is different, it doesn't pay, you know. And now since they got rid of communism, from that a lot of thieves have sprung up. During communism there weren't so many thieves. The politics were different, the Russians took everything, but there were contributions of petroleum, gas.²⁸ And now, Russia is taking gas from us, and we losers don't have anything.²⁹ No petroleum, no gasoline, no gas – there's nothing in Poland. They have everything. They have gas, they have petroleum, they have everything, gasoline—now they have everything that one needs.

J: Mm.

PA: Once, a car cost a lot of money in Poland. Now, it's the upkeep that's expensive. The car doesn't cost that much, there are cheap cars now. But it's really difficult to maintain the car. Gasoline, buying insurance, paying for everything, it's difficult, you have to have a lot, be rich. You really have to earn a lot.

J: Yes, right.

PA: If you haven't gone to school, finished school, you earn very little. Probably [the same] in America?

J: Yes, the same... but everyone has credit.

PA: Yeah, the percentages [interest rates] are high for loans.³⁰

²⁷ *Wianki* are garlands or wreaths. Here I think pani Alicja was referring to *wiecha*, or a bunch of greenery placed on a construction site during construction. Thanks to Mateusz Ruszkowski for clarifying this meaning.

²⁸ Pani Alicja used the term *Ruski* to refer to Russians (and Russia, although this was non-standard). This is an impolite term for Russians that I heard not infrequently from my research participants.

²⁹ Here pani Alicja used the word "*dziady*," which I have translated here as "losers." Its meaning changes based on context: it can mean "geezer" or "beggars" and is related to "*dziad*," ("grandfather" or "forefather"), although in those cases the plural is the more grammatically correct "*dziadowie*" rather than "*dziady*." See the next section in this chapter for another use of the word in the title of Mickiewicz's play, *Dziady*.

³⁰ It was occasionally difficult to understand pani Alicja's speech; she spoke in a low, quiet voice and it sounded as if the stroke had affected her speech. I have indicated with [...] when speech was unintelligible, as determined by both native speakers of Polish and me. The Polish text follows: *Pani Alicja*: Ale wnuczek ukończył studia, geodetę, wnuczka też robiła geodetę, inżyniera geodetę, i pojechała do Anglii, tam mają swój zakład [...] mąż zrobił studia geodezyjne, pokończyli. Tam budowa strasznie ruszyła, idzie, i robią wianki pod budowę [...] Mają tak że zarabiają dobrze. Wnuczka była, cieszy się że dobrze zarabia, ale mówi tu, „babciu, nie wrócę, bo tu nie widzę się. Co ja tu zarobię. Grosze. Tam za miesiąc zarobię za to musiała trzy miesiące na to pracować do ile tak we Wrocławiu.”

Jessica: Aha. *PA*: Pojechała tam i tam siedzi bo im tam lepiej. Więcej pieniędzy. *J*: Mmm, no, rozumiem. *PA*: A tu nie ma pieniążku[...] Inna ta Polska nie płacą, nie tego. A teraz jak tę komunę wyrzucili, stąd to strasznie się naległo dużo złodziei. Za komuny nie było tyle złodziei. Była polityka inna, Ruskie brały, ale wkład dla ropy, gaz. A teraz jak nam gaz zachęcił Ruski, to my dziady nie mamy nic. Ani ropy, ani benzyny, ani gazu, nie ma nic w Polsce. Oni mają wszystko. Mają gaz, mają ropę, mają wszystko, benzyny, wszystko mają w tej chwili, co najbardziej potrzeba. *J*: Mmm. *PA*: Kiedyś samochód w Polsce to kosztował bardzo dużo pieniędzy, a teraz nie, bo drogie utrzymanie. To nie kosztuje tak, już są tanie samochody. Bo utrzymać samochód to jest bardzo ciężko. Benzyny, kupić ubezpieczenie, to wszystko płacić, to ciężko, to trzeba dużo, być bogatym. Trzeba bardzo dużo zarabiać. *J*: No, ma rację. *PA*: Jak się nie ma studiów, wykończonej szkoły, to się mało zarabia. A tam chyba w Ameryce? *J*: Tak jest, samo...ale wszyscy, ma kredyt. Robbins interview 16 October 2008.

The conversation then turned to the high interest rates on loans for cars and apartments, and the long duration of mortgages.

In this brief exchange, pani Alicja linked the fate of her grandchildren with that of contemporary Poland. Even though goods and produce created in Poland were taken by the Soviet Union, pani Alicja still sees this past relationship as better than the current one, in which she understands Russia to have no obligation to contribute any energy to Poland. For pani Alicja, a question about her family prompted tears and a lament of abandonment, which then moved to stories about Poland's economy and natural resources, and comparisons to the socialist past. The personal and national appear morally inextricable.

Twice more during that conversation, pani Alicja made comparisons to the socialist past, first saying in response to my question about working on the farm, that it paid better to be a farmer then, before Germans bought the sugar factories. Now no one wants to buy the beets from her farm, she said. Later, pani Alicja engaged with her roommate's daughter in a discussion of Polish versus foreign produce, and the relative quality and health of each. The roommate's daughter, who looked to be in her late fifties, had overheard pani Alicja telling me about the better quality of life during socialism. Here, she tried to share with pani Alicja her differing understanding of state socialism.

Roommate's daughter (RD): Pani Alicja, it was the case then, that they managed things so that there was vinegar and mustard on the shelves. And there wasn't anything else to eat. You don't know because you lived in the countryside. How many cows and pigs were you keeping, and there was nothing on the shelves to eat.

Pani Alicja (PA): Everything went to Russia.

RD: Yes, exactly.

PA: Because they needed everything.

RD: Ok, fine, they needed it, but what did we have. You had food because you lived in the countryside. But we didn't have food.

PA: And now there's too much of everything, they don't pay for anything. It used to be free [...]

RD: You know, I'm not saying that everything then was bad. Hello [to a staff member who entered the room.] But you can't say that things, that things were good, and that everything was wonderful, because, um, you weren't going hungry. But listen, we received...

PA: [something about bringing goods to Wrocław]

- RD: We didn't even see ham for entire years. At our workplace, at Christmas we received a kilo of ham per worker, and at Easter there was a kilo of ham per worker. Besides that, we never even saw it. And as white-collar workers, we had two and a half kilos of meat on our [ration] cards. Uh, that included everything—with bones, with everything. Two and a half or two-seventy. For the whole month. And you know, well, flour was rationed, sugar, everything—butter.
- PA: Everything went to Russia.
- RD: Yeah. So you know, you can't say that...
- PA: [something about the hard work of post-war reconstruction, picking up on an earlier theme in our conversation]
- RD: Things were built because people had to work somewhere. They had to.
- PA: [something about farmers working too]
- RD: Yes, and after the war, if a farmer didn't pay he went to jail, pani Alicja. My mom worked in the statistics office, and she had to write [noise from corridor]. The peasants didn't know anything, and they took them to jail because they didn't hand over a cow, or meat, or, or, or...
- PA: [...hectares.] [They took] the meat, so many potatoes, one and a half tons of wheat for free. We had to produce everything for free. [...] They took everything. But here for us, in our country, it wasn't necessary. Everything [went] to Russia.
- RD: It was also necessary for us, because we also had to eat. So you see...
- PA: And now there's too much of everything [...] Instead of to Wrocław, no one asks, the potatoes are so dirty, the carrots are so dirty. Everything Dutch...
- RD: Oh, people are wising up, pani Alicja. Only idiots choose those. People are wising up.
- PA: They're learning.
- RD: They're learning, they're learning. They know about sprays and such... I look at everything now to see if it's Polish. If it's not Polish, I don't get it. For example, [...] on the PLUS code it's written where the product is from: Spain, Poland, Holland. Of course I won't buy a banana from Poland because there aren't any bananas from Poland.
- PA: There aren't any.
- RD: So I'll buy the [foreign] bananas. But potatoes – I won't buy anything but the ones from Poland. You know, sometimes there are dumb people, but you know, the majority want Polish potatoes, Polish carrots, Polish dairy products, because they're better.
- PA: There aren't as many chemicals.
- RD: Yeah, they don't have so many preservatives, so...
- PA: The Dutch [produce] really has a lot of chemicals. They bought land from us, they're sowing it, giving it fertilizer. [...] Carrots, mushrooms, vegetables. [A farmer once said] I won't eat it because it stinks of fertilizer/manure.
- RD: It's all for the good that the guys now aren't... better food.
- PA: The sprays [...] I don't buy [that kind].
- RD: Because you used to do it in the garden, for yourself, but for sale [it's different]... It's healthier to do everything without fertilizers.
- PA: [...]The gardener [...] And not artificial fertilizer, only natural fertilizer.
- RD: So you see, pani Alicja, history is more complicated that it can seem to us. There were good moments and bad, but more of the bad ones than good.³¹

³¹ *Roommate's daughter (RD)*: Pani Alicjo, wtedy to było tak, że także gospodarzyli ze na półkach był ocet i musztarda. I nic więcej nie było do jedzenia. Pani nie wie bo pani na wsi mieszkała. ...ile pani trzymało świń, krów, i wszystkiego na półkach nie było w ogóle jedzenia. *Pani Alicja*: Wszystko szło do Rosja. *RD*: No właśnie. *PA*: Bo wszystko potrzebowali. *RD*: No dobrze że potrzebowali ale myśmy mieli co. Pani miała jedzenie bo pani była na wsi. Ale myśmy nie mieli jedzenia. *PA*: Ale teraz wszystkiego maja za dużo, za nic nie płacą, była za darmo. ... *RD*: Także, ja nie stwierdzę że wszystko wtedy było złe. (dzień dobry) Ale nie można mówić, że było, że było, dobrze, i że było wszystko wspaniale, bo, eh, Pani głodna nie chodziła. Ale myśmy, wie pani, dostali -- *PA*: do Wrocławia [...]. *RD*: Myśmy szynki przez całą latach nie widzieli. Na Boże Narodzenie dostaliśmy w zakładzie pracy kilogram szynki na pracownika i na Wielkanoc był kilogram szynki na pracownika. A tak to się nie widziało. A mieliśmy kartkę, dwa i pół kilo mięsa, bo pracownicy umysłowi. Eh, to wszystko razem, że kośćmi, że wszystkim. Dwa i pół albo dwa siedemdziesiąt. Na cały miesiąc. Także wie pani, no, i mąka była wyliczona, i cukier, i wszystko, i masło, *PA*: Wszystko szła do Rosji.*RD*: No. Także, wie pani, to nie można tak powiedzieć. *PA*: [...] *RD*: Budowało się bo ludzie gdzieś pracowali.Musieli. *PA*: [...] *RD*: A jak powojnie rolnik nie zapłacił to szedł do więzienia, pani Alicjo.

With this, the roommate's daughter changed the topic and began to ask me more about my research and my stay in Wrocław. The disagreement over understandings of the socialist past had been temporarily smoothed over by a shared appreciation of the quality of Polish produce, although over the year that I knew her, pani Alicja returned to the topic of the difficult contemporary condition of Polish farmers. Indeed, such laments about the poor quality of life in contemporary Poland were common for pani Alicja, who fondly remembered the socialist past and the better provisions for small farmers. In this moment, however, the conflicting memories of the past stemming from differing experiences during socialism were resolved by affirming the quality of Polish produce. Pani Alicja would often share food with me and ask me to distribute it to her roommates (see Chapter 4), and once gave me an apple that her granddaughter had brought her, entreating me to eat it because "Polish apples are the best." Her roommate's daughter was there that day too, and she, pani Alicja's roommate, and pani Alicja all affirmed the excellent taste of Polish apples.

Divisions between rural and urban life, between people of different socioeconomic status, and between people of different ages, were overcome by an assertion of shared national pride in

Moja mama pracowała w urzędzie stanu cywilnego... To cały czas, pisała [...] chłopci nic nie wiedzieli, do więzienia brali bo krowy nie oddał, nie oddał mięsa, czy czy czy ... PA: [...hektarów.] [Zebrali] mięsa, tyle ziemniaków, półtorej tony zboża za darmo. Trzeba było wyprodukować za darmo [...] Zebrali wszystko. A nam w kraju nie to było potrzebny. Wszystko do Rosji. RD: Nam też było potrzebny, bo myśmy też musieli jeść. Ale widzi pani... PA: Ale teraz wszystkiego za dużo [...] zamiast do Wrocławia nikt się nie pyta, ziemniaki takie brudne, a marchewka taka brudna. Wszystko holenderskie...RD: Eeehh, już mądrzej ludzie, pani Alicjo. To głupi tylko tak biorą. Mądrzej ludzie. Na... PA: Uczą się. RD: Uczą się, uczą się. Wiedzą że opryskane i takie... Ja teraz wszystko patrzę czy polskie. Jak nie polskie, to nie biorę. Jak gdzieś, na przykład...na PLUSie jest napisana produkt, tam, czy Hiszpania, czy Polska, czy Holandia. Pewnie że banana, nie kupię z Polski bo w Polsce banany nie ma. PA: Nie ma. RD: To kupuje banany. Ale kartofla, nie kupię innego jak polski. Wie pani, są czasem durni ludzie ale większość, wie pani, chce polskie ziemniaki, chce polską marchew, polskie produkty mleczne, bo są lepsze. PA: Nie ma tyle chemii. RD: No, nie są tak konserwowane, także... PA: Holenderskie, to jest bardzo dużo chemii. Oni od nas kupili ziemię, sięją, tak dają nawozu [...] marchewka, pietruszka, jarzyny [...]nie będę jadł bo to śmierdzi nawozu [...]RD: I całe szczęście że chłopów teraz nie jest tak na nawozu, lepsze żywność.PA: Opryski...To nie kupuje. RD: Bo kiedyś dla siebie się robił w ogrodzie po swoje, a na sprzedaż [...] to robić wszystko bez nawozu i przynajmniej jest zdrowsze. PA: [...] ogrodnikiem [...] a nie nawozami sztucznymi tylko, swoimi nawozami. RD: Także pani Alicjo, historia jest bardziej skomplikowany niż nam się wydaje. Były dobre momenty i było bardzo dużo złych, a więcej tych złych niż dobrych.

which Polishness is positively associated with ideas of the natural (cf. Caldwell 2011). In their conversation, the naturalness of Polish produce is juxtaposed with negative views of foreign capital, although the roommate's daughter noted the complexity of the situation in her acknowledgement of the need for foreign produce if one wants to eat bananas in Poland.

I read these conversations and stories as evidence of connections between individual and national scales. Pani Alicja made quick transitions between her own bodily suffering and that of the Polish nation, in one breath commenting on the difficulty of that day's physical therapy session, and in the next, on the sad state of today's Poland, where the grocery stores are full of "dirty" foreign produce and farmers have no one to whom to sell their crops.³² Deeply upset by both her bodily changes and her move to institutional care, and lacking certainty about her future, pani Alicja's world was in flux. During this time of uncertainty, pani Alicja sought to place herself in a known world, seeking connections with others by telling stories about the past. For pani Alicja, a moral life was in the past, in a time in which she and her family could make a living on the land, and in which people were honest. These broader spatiotemporal horizons, however, could not substitute for the loss of living in her own home, among family, in the village.

“How is it possible without Chopin? How?” A Polish chronotope

I see pani Alicja's laments about contemporary Poland as ways of seeking out connections with others, and indeed, complaint is a common cultural form in Poland (e.g.,

³² The ethnographic record shows that other rural Poles expressed similar concerns about the decline of Polish agriculture (Galbraith 2004:75-76; see Dunn 2004:28-57 for a case study of the capitalist logic and practices that eliminated the market for local produce).

Wojciszke 2004-5).³³ Yet while pani Alicja was deeply critical of her present situation, there was also a sense of pride in her voice as she told me about her grandchildren's success abroad. Like many Poles, she was glad for the educational opportunities for her grandchildren in today's Poland. These complex feelings about socialism and postsocialism were shared by people at both the medical and educational institutions, although I tended to hear more about the benefits of EU membership at the Universities of the Third Age. As shown in Chapter 3, the *aktywność* of University of the Third Age *sluchacze* encompasses not only the physical and cognitive self-improvement, but also the broader geographic scales of the EU and extended future worlds. The EU is not always an unambiguous good for this group, however, as I learned during my time with pani Cecylia, a widowed woman of 67 when I met her in 2008.

In every conversation we had, pani Cecylia consistently connected her own life to national and geopolitical events. The stories she told spanned in time from the Piast dynasty of the 10th century, to the partitions of the 18th and 19th centuries, to the travails of contemporary Poland, and were punctuated by connections to traumatic events that loom large in Polish national memory: deportations to Siberia, the concentration camp of Auschwitz, the massacre at Katyń. Members of pani Cecylia's family died in all these places. In describing her kin who had died in these places and elsewhere, pani Cecylia would emphasize their education and profession as evidence of their morality, and the loss of family fortunes and exile as the material proof of historical and contemporary injustice. Despite remarking that material things are not important since they can be lost at any time, and that health and family are what matter most, during my

³³ In Polish, the quote in the subheading is: "Bo jak bez Chopina? No jak?" Thanks to Michael Kennedy (via the Polish Studies Association listserv) for this reference on complaining. There is an upcoming conference on the social, cultural, historical, and public nature of complaining in eastern Europe and Eurasia ("Complaints: Cultures of Grievance in East Europe and Eurasia") at Princeton University in March 2013. See <http://culturesofgrievance.wordpress.com/>, accessed 21 January 2013.

time with her it felt as if pani Cecylia was seeking to demonstrate materially the world that she lost.

Outgoing, talkative, and opinionated, pani Cecylia shared many details of her life with me; our meetings often lasted over four hours and at times felt like lectures. We first met on a bright October day at the University of the Third Age in Wrocław. A friend of mine who had lectured there occasionally introduced me to pani Cecylia; after I explained my research interests, pani Cecylia invited me for a coffee. We left the University of the Third Age and walked back towards the center of town, through the train station, to pl. Kościuszki, where she led me into the *Klub Muzyki i Literatury*, or Music and Literature Club, a dark musty-feeling place on the ground floor of one of the buildings lining the square. Pani Cecylia introduced me to the director, a formally dressed older man who gave the appearance that we were disturbing him. She explained that I was an American doctoral student who wanted to learn about Poland, and that she thought I could help out the club with English-language translations and perhaps even teach there. Confused, since I had thought we were going straight to a café, and not sure that I wanted my fieldwork to involve another organization, I began describing my research to the man as he showed us the club's rooms and explained the musical performances and literary readings that occur there. The main concert room was a small hall with high ceilings, with dozens of wooden instruments and sepia-toned portraits hanging on the wall. There were about forty high-backed wooden chairs and a grand piano. Despite my discomfort at the prospect of recruiting for research this person who clearly was keen on getting back to his work, I was able to be struck by the contrast between this dark, ancient-feeling space and the bright fall day outside. I allowed the director to escort us out of the building and thanked him for his time.

Pani Cecylia led us to a self-service café across the square, where we ordered pastries, but before the cashier could ring up our order, pani Cecylia decided she would rather go to a different café with more comfortable seats instead of hard plastic chairs. We walked back across the square to a different café with table service, where the waitress sat us at a table in the window. Pani Cecylia and I ordered cappuccinos and began to talk.

Pani Cecylia spoke for two hours with such energy that I could not get a word in edgewise even to read my oral consent form, let alone take notes or record the conversation; the only pauses were for rhetorical effect or during difficult moments, as she mentioned her family's wartime losses: relatives killed in Katyń and the gas chambers, another who was deported to Siberia, and the loss of land (*majątek ziemski*) and property (*majątek*).³⁴ Her family came from an area south of Lwów and her husband's family was from Kraków; in each family, people were highly educated and some owned land.³⁵ Without a notebook, I could not keep track of all the kin she mentioned, though her pride in their accomplishments was evident as she listed off their professions (doctors, lawyers, architects). Her stories focused on her family and on the state of today's Poland, which she complained has become an international laughingstock because the country's leaders, since socialist times, have had only elementary school education. Yet with pride she said that "Poland has always been in Europe; it's exactly in the center."³⁶ These themes, of familial suffering and national decline, became familiar during our long conversations over the next year and a half.

³⁴ Despite not having oral consent, I include information from this first conversation for two reasons: first, during a later meeting she gave me permission to include this information, and second, she repeated all this information during conversations that followed.

³⁵ In later conversations, she mentioned distant kin relations to the Czartoryski and Lubomirski families, both influential and famous noble families with centuries-long ancestry in the Polish lands.

³⁶ "Polska zawsze była w Europie. Jest dokładnie w centrum." Cf. Galbraith 2004, 2011.

During the rest of my fieldwork, as I was moving between the various institutional sites of fieldwork, I met with pani Cecylia five more times at her home. Each conversation lasted from two to seven hours, depending mostly on how many other commitments I had that day. In other words, our conversations only ended because I drew them to a close; pani Cecylia would have preferred to keep talking. Recurring themes in these conversations were the loss of her family's property during the war and her savings after 1989, and the terrible state of today's Poland, as evident in the rise of foreign-owned companies, the closing of schools and hospitals, and the state of the national health care service, in contrast to Poland's noble past. She moved back and forth between these and daily struggles: she was taking driving classes to get her driver's license, but like many people, had failed the exam multiple times; arthritis in her knees was painful; and she quarreled with her daughter and son-in-law who lived with her.

Pani Cecylia lives in a neighborhood in the southern part of Wrocław, Krzyki, on the ground floor of a 100-year-old three-story house. (I often passed by her house on the bus on the way to and from the state-run rehabilitation home.) She shares the apartment with her daughter, son-in-law, and two grandsons; each generation has its own bedroom, which also functions as a living room. The only rooms they share are the kitchen, bathroom, and long hallway, which has high shelves overfilled with books and boxes. The wooden doorjambs of pani Cecylia's room and the bathroom are stripped of paint, as if during renovations. The floors creak, the kitchen appliances and cookware look well used, and the bathroom fixtures feel fragile. Although the apartment feels crowded, pani Cecylia compares it with when she and her husband moved in after the war and had to share it with another couple to whom they were not related. That, she said, was worse.

In the hallway, the apartment feels crowded and dark, but in pani Cecylia's room, with large windows that let the light stream in, there is a sense of peace. The objects in her room marked the space as one decorated by an older person: the lace curtains; the heavy woven wall hanging of the black Madonna of Częstochowa; the painted portraits of well-dressed individuals with serious expressions; the socialist-era display cabinet overflowing with old china, newspapers, and knick-knacks, with juice bottles and pictures of grandchildren on top; the large boxy TV with antennas; the folded-up *tapczan* (convertible sofa). The style of these objects conveyed their age, suggesting that the inhabitant of the room was similarly aged.



Figure 14: Pani Cecylia showing me pictures of unknown kin

As we sat in her room one hot July day, the phone rang and interrupted our conversation. Pani Cecylia went to the kitchen to answer it, and after she returned, said that it was her sister, inviting her on a trip to Duszniki Zdrój, a nearby spa town. But pani Cecylia could not accompany her because she had an appointment the next day with the stone masons to repair her mother-in-law's grave. Pani Cecylia then explained that her mother-in-law saved money her whole life for her gravestone, but did not earn much because she worked as a teacher and then a social worker. Pani Cecylia herself worked as a physical therapist and specialized in children

with developmental disabilities. During socialist times, she was indignant about having a boss who was less educated than her—“bo takie czasy były, po prostu” (“because that’s just what the times were like/because it was just like that”), she said.³⁷ Pani Cecylia’s strident anti-communist sentiments—she was deeply Catholic, attending mass at the parish church down the road nearly daily, and was active in *Solidarność* (Solidarity) in 1980 and 1981—were matched by her sharp critique of post-1989 Poland. During this conversation, rather than continuing to talk about her mother-in-law’s grave, pani Cecylia discussed her mother-in-law’s savings, and how much she and her husband had saved—and then lost in the *wymiany* (exchanges, meaning currency exchanges). Pani Cecylia then spoke of the foreign companies that are now buying up Polish land and property, so therefore one should never become too attached to material things. One should travel and find a passion in life, she said.

Pani Cecylia then began speaking about patriotism, although the connection to traveling was not evident to me. Perhaps it was an emotional connection, for her voice conveyed passion and sadness together in discussing the practices and meanings of what it is to be Polish:

Pani Cecylia (PC): There are some bad people, those who are jealous of one another. They want everything dishonestly, walking all over everybody, to get to their goal for themselves. Once the power, even the, the important power, was service for the nation, service for society. One’s own country, one’s own... things were valued differently. There was patriotism, and the children were raised in this spirit. [sigh] Now... “This? Poland? Now there’s Europe!” Ok, what about Europe? I’m telling you – what Europe? Europe, Europe... we’ve been in Europe, we are located such that we’ve been in Europe for a thousand years. Europe never gave anything to us. But, if I have my own country, my own language, my own religion, my own currency, right? It’s really important to have one’s own. It’s something totally different – one’s own *Sejm*, one’s own parliament, one’s own judiciary, one’s own education, one’s own whatever, everything – one’s own culture. Well, for example, after the war, there was this case that Mickiewicz’s *Dziady* [*Forefather’s Eve*] was banned.³⁸

³⁷ Robbins interview 22 July 2009.

³⁸ *Dziady*, a play by Adam Mickiewicz, the 19th-century Polish Romantic poet, depicts Polish life under Russian rule (Wandycz 1993[1974]:180-182). Here, pani Cecylia was likely referring to the student protests that broke out after a performance of *Dziady* in 1968, catalyzing the political crisis and anti-Semitic expulsions of that year (Kubik 1994:193, n.19). During state socialism, performing *Dziady* was itself a political act. Quotes from *Dziady* were used in Solidarity leaflets and monuments to those who died in the uprisings of 1970 (Törnquist Plewa 1992:225-226). (However, see Kubik 1994:75-102 for an analysis of the incorporation of characters from *Dziady*, along with other legendary and historical figures, into a public spectacle in the 1970s that reinforced party rule.)

Jessica (J): Mm.

PC: Well. How can one forbid Mickiewicz's *Dziady*?

J: Mm.

PC: The entire – the students, professors, everyone – the entire nation rebelled. And Chopin – Chopin's music was banned at the music academy. So, no one at all ever heard that the Poles had Chopin [no one ever knew that Chopin was Polish]. So our professors, our conservators of the fine arts, they thought of [having] a Chopin competition. A Chopin competition, so that this music would remain for the next generations. Because – how is it possible, without Chopin? How? And even here in our Park Południowy, there was [name], one of these important people, who managed to erect a monument of Chopin here in Park Południowy. And it was cast in bronze, and [now] there is a beautiful monument. These Chopin competitions are held in Duszniki and Krynica, and are very nice, aren't they?³⁹

J: Indeed.⁴⁰

Here, pani Cecylia contrasts the current dishonesty of some in politics with a time in which Polishness was valued. She links this current dishonesty to wartime bans on Chopin and Mickiewicz (cf. Tucker 2011:91-101) and rebellious post-war performances of *Dziady*. In this excerpt, morality lies in times of independent Polish political formations, and in times in which people strive for independence. For pani Cecylia, patriotism consists of living in—or valuing—a world in full of governmental structures, linguistic and religious practices, and art forms that are *Polish*. Since these statements come after her dismissive comments about Europe, “what about

³⁹ Fryderyk Chopin grew up in Warsaw and left for Paris at age 20, where he was a contemporary of Mickiewicz. He has long been hailed in Poland as a great national artist. He supported nationalist movements, although it is debated to what extent he intended his music to be heard along nationalist lines (see Bellman 2010, Pekacz 2000, Trochimczyk 2000 for more information). The International Chopin Festival was first held in Duszniki Zdrój, a spa town near the Czech border, in August 1946 and occurs annually. See <http://festival.pl/> for more information (accessed 24 January 2013). There is also the more prestigious International Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competition that is held in Warsaw every five years, and began in January 1927. See <http://konkurs.chopin.pl/> for more information (accessed 24 January 2013).

⁴⁰ *Pani Cecylia*: Są niektórzy ludzie tacy jacy źli, tak innym zazdroszą, chcą wszystko nieuczciwie, po trupach, dojść do celu, byle jemu, Kiedyś ta władza, nawet ta ta ważna władza, to była służbą dla narodu, służbą dla społeczeństwa. Swoją kraj, swoje, to się cenilo inaczej. Był ten patriotyzm. I te dzieci się wychowały w tym duchu. [sigh] Teraz... „ta? Polska? Teraz jest Europa!” No jak Europa? Ja mówię, co za Europa? Europa, Europa, bo byliśmy w Europie, jesteście tak usytuowani, że jesteście w Europie od tysięcy lat. Nikt nam Europy nie dał! Ale jak mam swoje państwo, swój język, swoją religię, swój pieniądz, prawda? Ważna jest bardzo swoja, mieć swoją. To zupełnie coś innego – swój Sejm, swój parlament, to swoje sądownictwo, swoje oświatę, swoje dodatki, inne, wszystko, swoją kulturę. No u nas na przykład, po wojnie, była taka sytuacja, że zakazano lektury w szkoły Dziadów Mickiewicza. *Jessica*: Mmm. *PC*: No. Jak można zabronić Dziadów Mickiewicza? *J*: Mmm. *PC*: To cała, studenci, profesorowie wszystko, się...cały naród się zbuntował. Szopena. Zakazaną uczelnia wyższy szkoły muzyczny muzyki Szopena. ..No i w ogóle nikt nie słyszał że Polacy mieli Szopena. To wymyślił nasi profesorowie, nasi konserwatorzy sztuki, to oni wymyślili konkurs szopenowski. Konkurs szopenowski, żeby ta muzyka została za następnych pokoleń. Bo jak, bez Szopena, no jak? I nawet tutaj w tym parku naszym południowym, [name] był jednym, z takich ważnych, którzy, który dążył do postawienia pomnika Szopena tu w tym parku południowym i został odlany z brązu i jest piękny pomnik. W Dusznikach, w Krynicy, odbywają się te konkursy szopenowskie, i to jest bardzo przyjemne, tak? *J*: Tak. (Robbins interview, 22 July 2009).

Europe?”, they suggest that pani Cecylia is against Poland’s membership in the EU. However, further remarks later in this conversation clarified her position. After she again lamented the closing of state-supported institutions after 1989 and the purchasing of Polish factories by foreign companies, I tried to ask her to connect these changes to Poland’s EU membership.

Jessica (J): Does this mean that you’re not glad that Poland is in the EU?

Pani Cecylia (J): Darling, I was very glad about this. And I would be very happy, for example, that, that my grandchildren will be able to choose their own college, that they will be able to choose for themselves where they want to live. But I would like them to feel that *here* is their country, their homeland, their roots, you know? That they would feel that they are Polish, and that they would strive to make things work well in Poland.

J: Mm.

PC: That there would never be this second or third category of people who are more poorly paid in a foreign country, or more poorly treated, or... Well, supposedly racism doesn’t exist, but apparently it does exist. After all when there is a crisis like this, it’s only then that these things become visible. Because in another country, they first think about their fellow countrymen, and not about the foreigners who came there to earn a living or make some extra money, right?

J: Right.

PC: And the first thing is to fire the foreigners. So why should they not have their country, their homeland, their heroes. After all that Poland has suffered, after so many wars and attacks and however many people murdered. How many of these are still unknown? Thousands of people perished and fought because... the partitions, the wars of resettlement, there were various events. But the whole time there was this love that was instilled for the homeland, the national hymns, weren’t there? They sang “Rota”: “We won’t let”... “We won’t let our faith be buried,/ We are the Polish nation, the Polish people,” and so on.⁴¹ Or... well, there are a lot of these patriotic songs, from books, etcetera. However, not all Poles are the same. Some are very honest and very conscientious, and it’s hard for them right now. Because there are these con men, these wheelers and dealers – a few of them get together and take over. They establish bonuses for themselves, these colossal rewards. Well, even in the government there were bonuses of 400,000, now 3 million, before these were bonuses for three or four people from the government, from the parliament. Even before a crisis like the one now, this is a disgrace. How can others have 600 zloty, or some others have only 400 zloty from their pension, or others don’t have work, or... I wouldn’t know how to take such money without thinking of these people, of what’s happening with these people, who have been deprived of everything. Tell me, Jessica, would you be able to put 500,000 zloty in your pocket, for example, or maybe 400,000, knowing that this lays people

⁴¹ “Rota” (“The Oath”) is a well-known patriotic Polish song from the early 20th century that was written as a protest against the de-Polonization and Germanization under the Prussian partitions. It was a candidate to be the national anthem. Since pani Cecylia was active in Solidarity, perhaps she remembers the song from that context. Barbara Törnquist Plewa describes the resurgence of political and patriotic songs as part of the social movements of the early 1980s: “Community singing of hymns and songs was a public manifestation of society’s attitudes and aspirations at that time. People returned to those old hymns, bound by tradition to the independence issue. As previously mentioned, “Dabrowski’s Mazurka,” “O God who through the Ages” or “The Oath” were sung in various versions with great emotion and feeling. The song of Piłsudski’s Legions, “The March of the First Brigade,” and many other insurgent songs previously unknown to young people of the post-war generations were revived, appearing in duplicated songbooks distributed by Solidarity organisations during the celebration of national anniversaries” (1992:227).

off, closes a workplace, and fires thousands of people? Thousands of hectares of land, because first, it was the same thing with these farmers...⁴²

Pani Cecylia went on to describe the injustices that have been perpetrated against small farmers by the influx of foreign capital.

For pani Cecylia, the topic of Poland's European-ness and EU membership is bound up with historical and contemporary Polish suffering. The EU may provide increased opportunities for her grandchildren, but these opportunities themselves are fraught since once abroad, her grandchildren would have to live under a non-Polish government. She directly links this danger to the oppression, suffering, and death of partitioned Poland and World War II, and then to current economic disparities, moving seamlessly between time periods. However, the moral center of her stories is always Poland.⁴³

This moral geography is also shaped by the experiences of pani Cecylia's daughter and other kin. Her daughter lived and worked in Germany for as a rehabilitation therapist, but has

⁴² *Jessica*: Czy to znaczy, że teraz pani nie cieszy się że Polska jest w Unii? *Pani Cecylia*: Kochana, ja się z tym bardzo cieszyłam. I bardzo bym się cieszyła, tym że, na przykład, moje wnuki będą mogły sobie wybrać uczelnię. Będą mogły sobie wybrać kraj gdzie będą chciały żyć i pojechać. Ale chciałabym, żeby one czuły, że tu jest ich kraj, ich ojczyzna, ich korzenie, prawda? Żeby oni się czuli Polakami. I żeby jednak dążyli do tego, że w Polsce działa się dobrze. *J*: Mm. *PC*: Żeby nigdy nie byli tą drugą czy trzecią kategorią ludzi, którzy są gorzej opłacani w obcym kraju, czy gorzej traktowani, czy... no niby rasizm nie istnieje ale jednak istnieje. Jednak jak jest jakiś kryzys to dopiero w ten czas to się tak bardzo uwidacznia. Bo najpierw w takim kraju oni myślą o swoich rodakach, a nie o obcokrajowcach, którzy przyjechali tam zarobić czy dorobić, prawda? *J*: Tak. *PC*: I w pierwszej kolejności zwalniają obcokrajowców. Ale dlaczego nie mają mieć swojego kraju, swojej ojczyzny, swoich bohaterów. Przecież tyle co Polska wycierpiała i tyle co było wojen i napadów i ile ludzi wymordowanych. Ile jest mogił takich nie znanych jeszcze. Jest tysiącach ludzi ginęło i walczyli, bo... to rozbiory, to wojny przesiedlenia, to różne rzeczy były. Ale cały czas była ta miłość wpajana do ojczyzny, hymny narodowe, prawda? Roty śpiewali „nie damy, damy... pogrześć wiary, polski my naród polski lud” i tak dalej. Albo... no, bardzo dużo jest tych pieśni różnych patriotycznych z książek i tak dalej. Ale Polak Polakowi nie jest równy. Jedni są bardzo uczciwi i bardzo sumienni i w tej chwili im jest ciężko. Bo tacy cwaniacy, kombinatorzy tacy, właśnie, kilku się zbierze, przejmują za darmo. Ustalają sobie premie, nagrody jakieś kosmiczne. Jak właśnie w rządzie były premie po 400 000, teraz 3 000 000 przed tym na nagrody tak dla 3 czy 4 osób z rządu z sejmu. No to nawet przed takim kryzysie jak w tej chwili jest to wstyd. Jak różnie mają po 600 zł i niektórzy tam z tej renciny czy 400 zł czy nie mają pracy, czy... To ja bym nie potrafiła wziąć takich pieniędzy i nie myśleć o tych co się dzieje z tymi ludźmi którzy tak pozbawili wszystkiego. No powiedz Jessika, czy ty byś mogła wziąć na przykład 500 000 do kieszeni czy tam 400 000, wiedząc że się zwalnia, zamyka zakład pracy i wyrzucać się tysiącach ludzi? Tysiący hektarów ziemi, bo najpierw, to, tak samo z tymi rolnikami... (Robbins interview, 22 July 2009).

⁴³ However, pani Cecylia's stories did not reveal judgments about degrees of Polishness based on class status, as Tucker describes (2011:28, 28, n.1). Rather, her stories seem to oppose all Poles—former landed gentry, farmers, and industrialists alike—to foreigners (primarily Germans).

since returned home to Wrocław because she missed her family. Unable to find work as a therapist, her daughter now works in accounting for a large supermarket chain. She dislikes her job and complains that she cannot earn enough to have a life that would be middle-class in Germany. Pani Cecylia is thrilled that her daughter has returned, not understanding how one could live so far away from one's family. Abroad, she said, one can meet acquaintances (*znajomi*) and colleagues (*koledzy*), but not true friends (*przyjaciele*) or family (*rodzina*). She asked: If something were to go wrong, on whom could one count? Being away from family and away from Poland creates deep instability and uncertainty for pani Cecylia.

Implicit in pani Cecylia's comments is the idea that building close relationships takes time, an impossibility in light of her daughter's short stay in Germany. Yet more than time is required, as another story shows. Her cousin moved to Canada with her husband and small children, leaving Poland on the eve of martial law in 1981. She tells pani Cecylia that she still longs for Poland, crying into her pillow at night as she dreams of her true home. For pani Cecylia, this is further evidence that Poles should not move abroad because there they lack true friendships and kin relations. Yet her cousin has family in Canada: though her husband has passed away, her children and now grandchildren live there. This is why she will not move back, despite tears on her pillowcase for almost thirty years. Pani Cecylia's cousin's sadness, her daughter's return to Poland, and pani Cecylia's own feelings all privilege physical closeness to kin relations and ancestral connections, both of which suggest a strong desire for continuity with the past.

Pani Cecylia sees it as a historical fact that Poland belongs to Europe, and therefore the EU. The EU represents an external moral validation of Poland's geography, but it simultaneously heralds yet another threat to Polish patriotism for future generations because of increased

possibilities for working abroad. That is, the very act of living outside the Polish state threatens one's Polishness. For pani Cecylia, it is through both the physical location of kin in Poland and performances of partition-era artistic works, within the bounds of Poland itself, that Polishness can continue. For pani Cecylia, whose sense of what it is to be a good person is so tightly bound up with this Polish patriotic ideal, the stakes of performing Mickiewicz and Chopin are the extension her personhood into the future and the survival of morality itself.

When I described these conversations with pani Cecylia to my Polish friends in their twenties and thirties, these stories were often met with a rolling of the eyes, a deep sigh, and likely a choice word or two. For my younger friends, this type of narrative that recapitulates the story of Polish suffering through the figures of Mickiewicz and Chopin feels like a stale, limited, and backwards understanding of what it is to be Polish. The exclusionary nature of pani Cecylia's patriotism is at odds with more inclusive understandings of Polishness and genuine desire for multiculturalism by many of my friends.⁴⁴ (And indeed, with nationalist ideas of Mickiewicz, Chopin, and other Polish exiles of the 19th century, Porter 2000). Yet for pani Cecylia, this narrative presents her contemporary struggles as having the same moral stakes of great Polish struggles of the past. Her current suffering and that of her kin is inextricable from her family's aristocratic Galician past. For pani Cecylia, at stake in the continued performance of *Dziady* and Chopin means are the continuation of this noble legacy and the survival of her kin. For pani Cecylia, whose sense of what it is to be a good person is so tightly bound up with this Polish patriotic ideal, these performances extend her personhood into the future.

⁴⁴ A representative example of this multicultural vision comes from a university student in Kraków, Ewelina, who told Marysia Galbraith in 1993: "There shouldn't be a Europe without borders, with one language and monetary system forced on everyone . . . I don't want a nationalistic feeling of patriotism either . . . what's more important is to have a feeling that I belong to something, that I am a Pole with a certain culture and history. I feel like a European but it's also necessary to have a feeling of national consciousness and connection, to maintain something of our own. If everything were collective, like during socialist times, it would never work out" (Galbraith 2004:69).

“We share oplatki and tears”: Remembering Christmas in Siberia

This concern for continuity was evident in other stories that intertwined the personal and nation.⁴⁵ Pan Florian, a retired doctor whom I knew through the University of the Third Age in Wrocław, was similar to pani Cecylia in his seeming need to share his experiences. He spoke for hours on end, weaving together personal and national histories. Together with his wife, pani Ania, who worked at the Agricultural University in Wrocław and later in environmental protection, they attended the conversational English class that I led and invited me over for *obiad* several times. I soon learned that these meals were really daylong events, as pan Florian would regale me with stories of his life. As with pan Zbigniew and pani Cecylia, I barely had to ask any questions, and pan Florian would talk for hours. Pani Ania would serve food and listen in, but when she was not there, pan Florian would serve the food himself. One day, after I had been there for over seven hours, during which he had fried up *pierogi*, served two plates of dessert, and poured countless mugs of tea, he asked if I was getting tired, and if I would perhaps like to return another day. I admitted that I was in fact tired, that my hand was cramping, and that my recorder would soon run out of batteries. Throughout this conversation, whenever he would come to a pause in his story, he would say, “what else would you like to know?” I would ask a follow-up question, and he would speak for another two hours.

Born in 1927 near Wilno (Vilnius), pan Florian’s stories often centered on his six and a half years in Siberia as a teenager.⁴⁶ Together with his mother and sister, at 5 a.m. on April 13,

⁴⁵ In Polish, the quote in the subheading is: “Dzielimy się oplatkami i łzami.”

⁴⁶ Pan Florian identified the place where he was born as part of what was then the *województwo wileńskie*, or Wilno voivodeship, designating its proximity to what is currently the Lithuanian city of Vilnius. This fell within the interwar borders of Poland. The area where he grew up is now part of Belarus. He and his mother and sister were deported to a region that now belongs to Kazakhstan. In order to reflect ethnographic usage, I will follow pan Florian and others’ designation of this location as Siberia.

1940, he was forced out of his home and sent on a train to Siberia. His father, who worked as a civil servant, was murdered in Katyń, although pan Florian never had proof of this. In Siberia, they survived in part thanks to the talents of pan Florian's mother who was an excellent knitter, so they had goods to barter for food. Pan Florian described the difficulties of life there, of manual labor, food shortages, and illness. Upon going through his uncle's belongings after his death in 1962, pan Florian learned that his grandfather or great-grandfather (he could not remember which) was also deported to Siberia for participating in the uprising of January 1863 against the Russian tsar.⁴⁷

This time in Siberia shaped his social relations and morality after the war. According to pan Florian, *Sybiracy*, or people who had been deported to Siberia, understood what Stalin's rule truly meant.⁴⁸ This gave him a different perspective than some of his peers. As a student in postwar Poland, pan Florian refused to join the *Związek Młodzieży Polskiej* (Union of Polish Youth) in order to receive a stipend, saying to an acquaintance, "I'm not selling myself for money."⁴⁹ Indeed, he remembers his student years as very difficult because he felt scared and was "ostrożny" ("wary," "cautious") in relationships with his fellow students. He had no true friends ("nie miałem przyjaciół"), he said, because of this. Pani Ania and others, he said, could have fond memories of their youth because they did not live with the fear of living under Soviet rule that he and other *Sybiracy* did.

His experience in Siberia also shaped his understandings of regional differences in Poland. When pan Florian and pani Ania learned of my research in Poznań, they wanted to know

⁴⁷ Carsten (2007:21-22) describes how she and her brothers found official state documents of their parents after cleaning their father's desk after his death. Her discussion shows well the role of the state in kinship and memory, and differential knowledge of the past distributed among kin relations,

⁴⁸ People deported to Siberia are called *Sybiracy*, a term that includes people sent to Siberia during the deportations of the 19th as well as 20th centuries.

⁴⁹ "Ja się na pieniądze nie sprzedaję." Robbins interview, 12 May 2009.

what differences I saw in people there. I tried to turn the question back to them to see what they thought. Pan Florian said that people everywhere are the same, but that there are differences between people in Poznań and people in Wrocław. “They didn’t feel the taste of the USSR, the real one. Because here we had a muffled, unoriginal [version]. But we [*Sybiracy*] had the authentic one, we lived through it. And they didn’t live through it. But they lived through the Germans, and the Germans weren’t any better.”⁵⁰ *Poznaniacy* (residents of Poznań) and *Ślązacy* (Silesians) “had no idea, for example, what Siberia was.”⁵¹ He said that people who did not know Soviet rule first-hand thought that if one was deported to Siberia, one must have been a thief or committed a crime. “They didn’t know that it was because you were a Pole. They didn’t know that.”⁵² For pan Florian, his exile in Siberia had a profound effect not only on his intimate relations and his understandings of his peers, but also on his sense of what it means to be Polish.

It was this time in his life to which pan Florian would return and return during our conversations. However, I learned that these stories were not reserved for the American ethnographer; indeed, pan Florian was rather famous among the master’s and doctoral students who led classes and workshops at the University of the Third Age. Pan Florian and pani Ania participated in the workshop, *Spotkanie w czasoprzestrzeni - grupa dialog między generacjami* (Meeting in space-time: the group for dialogue between generations; see Chapter 3), which consisted of both master’s and doctoral students in pedagogy as well as *sluchacze* from the University of the Third Age. Students led guided creative exercises that often involved remembering and story-telling. One such activity was to describe one *Wigilia* that one had experienced. *Wigilia*, or Christmas Eve, is the most important holiday of the year for most Poles,

⁵⁰ “Oni nie poczuli smaku ZSSR, takiego prawdziwego. Bo tutaj mieliśmy już ściszony, nie... nie... nieoryginalny. Ale myśmy mieli oryginalni, przeżyliśmy. A oni tego nie przeżyli. Ale oni przezywali Niemców. Niemcy też nie lepsi.” Robbins interview, 14 April 2010.

⁵¹ “Nie mieli pojęcia, na przykład, co to Sybir.” Robbins interview, 14 April 2010.

⁵² “Oni nie wiedzieli, że za to że Polakiem jest. Oni tego nie wiedzieli.” Robbins interview, 14 April 2010.

and is generally celebrated with a large family meal in the evening. The *stuchacze* and students alike were to compose a story about one *Wigilia* in their life, which they then shared with the group. A year after this activity, pani Ania fetched from their bedroom a folder overflowing with papers and pulled out pan Florian's *Wigilia* story. Pan Florian read this story out loud to me during our conversation.

It's not as simple as it seems, for after all, there have been so many *wigilie*. Which to choose out of these over 80 holidays that I have lived through? The first few I can reject, for I can't remember anything from this period. And the rest? How to choose just one? Looking at the past, they all seem identical. Maybe only in childhood they felt and seemed different, than this way in adulthood. A cheerful life without problems. A beautiful Christmas tree with lit candles and sparklers, also called "Bengali flames." Family – mom, dad, sister, aunt and uncle with daughter and son, who, every Christmas, rode to our place on a sleigh pulled by a horse, or rather a mare, whose name was Rzenka. In the following years, there was less delight. No more Santa Claus. The Christmas tree was like last year. And it was like that each year. In the next years, already fully grown up—again great joy. This joy comes from seeing how much pleasure our children taken in this. Ok. But what came between these times of our childhood and the childhood of our children? Is it possible there's a gap, a break, a blank? Unfortunately not, although one could perhaps call it that. Now, after this longish introduction, I'm arriving at the topic. For sure this will be brief, since after all a gap cannot be large.

This break began in September 1939. I'll describe only one *Wigilia* – *Wigilia* in 1940. Why have I chosen this year? I think because this was the most wonderful *Wigilia* of the following five years. We were far from our country, in a tiny village and a tiny little house, on the enormous steppes of Siberia. Deep, white snow. On the horizon you can't see a thing – not even a little bush or tree. Like in the desert or at sea.

Preparing for Christmas began ahead of time. It consisted of stocking up on food, and so we had a loaf of bread, barley, a bit of *kasza jedlana*, milk, and probably a few eggs.⁵³ Outside it appeared to be very cold. It was around -20 degrees. (Why "appeared to be"? Because in the following months it was -40 degrees.) It was snowing. The first star would soon appear. We were preparing for Christmas Eve dinner. Suddenly pani Jadzia appeared. She lived about 600 meters from us. She invited us to spend *Wigilia* together. I don't remember if we took our "treats" with us. (Pani Jadzia was a lot better off and helped us a lot, but that's off-topic.) We took a shortcut across the field. The snow was soft and we walked with thick snow up to our knees. I remember that I didn't have shoes; on my feet I had slippers wrapped in rags.

When we got there, it was already dusk. It was snowing, so you couldn't see the star. We went into the hut, shaking off the snow. I had it the best because the slippers covered with rags didn't let in the snow. The others had to empty the snow out of their shoes. In the cabin there was a table covered with a sheet and two benches. In the window, a kerosene lamp. A Christmas tree – don't even think about it. The forest is far. There's not a twig or even a flower that could have substituted as a Christmas tree. Mom and pani Jadzia started to set the table. I don't remember if there was a bunch of hay under the sheet.⁵⁴ If pani Jadzia hadn't thought of it earlier, then now it

⁵³ I have not been able to find a translation for *kasza jedlana*, but I think it is a variation on *kasza jaglana* (millet), about which Sybiracy have written in memoirs.

⁵⁴ Placing a bunch of hay under the tablecloth at Christmas Eve dinner is a Polish custom (see Bigda 2012 for a recent popular-media discussion of Polish Christmas Eve customs).

wasn't possible to get it. But pani Jadzia was very resourceful, so surely there was a bunch of hay. On the table they're serving a loaf of real bread, a real roll sprinkled with poppy seeds and sugar.⁵⁵ Peeled hard-boiled eggs, salt, and probably hot dumplings. I'm writing "probably" because I'm not sure. Maybe these dumplings were only in my dreams. Pani Jadzia gives out the *oplatki*.⁵⁶ We share *oplatki* and tears. Everyone had tears in their eyes. Everyone tried to hide them, and especially our moms tried to, so that we wouldn't see them. It was hard to hold them off. After all, this is already the second year and second holiday without a father, without a husband. There are six of us. Two moms and four kids. There's me, around 14 years old, my sister Marysia, around 17 years old, pani Jadzia's son Tomek, around six years old, and his sister, whose name I don't remember, around 8 years old. (Now I know her name – Antonina.) Pani Jadzia suggests a joint prayer. On our knees, we pray out loud for our fathers and our quickest possible return to Poland, full of faith that she would recover independence. We sit down at the table, which pretty quickly was ravaged. We sang a few carols. Outside it's completely dark. The snow is falling. I don't remember how we got back to our cabin. Maybe I don't remember a lot of things, but it's probably because that real poppy-seed roll was too strongly held in my memory.

Maybe you'll ask why I've chosen this Christmas Eve. After all, there have been 80 others, maybe more interesting and happier. I'll tell you – because this is a "dialogue between generations." So that the youth would have at least minimal knowledge about the events of our generation, and maybe also so that they'll understand that it's necessary to value our homeland before it is lost.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Baked goods with poppy seeds are customarily served on Christmas Eve in Poland.

⁵⁶ *Oplatki* are wafers (similar to communion wafers, but not consecrated) that people break off and share with one another on Christmas Eve, while exchanging wishes for the coming year. People also place *oplatki* in Christmas greeting cards.

⁵⁷ Nie jest to takie proste, jak się wydaje. Przecież było tyle wigilii. Którą wybrać z wszystkich przeżytych (ponad 80 świąt)? Kilka pierwszych można odrzucić. Bo przecież nic z tego okresu nie mogę pamiętać. Ale reszta? Jak to wybrać tę jedną jedyną? Patrząc w przeszłość, wydają się wszystkie jednakowe. Może tylko w dzieciństwie odczuwało się i przeżywało inaczej, niż w wieku dorosłym. Życie radosne, bez kłopotów. Piękna choinka z zapalonymi świeczkami i zimnymi ogniami nazywanymi również „Ogień Bengalskie”. Rodzina – mama, tata, siostra, ciocia, wujek z córeczką i synkiem, którzy na wszystkie święta przyjeżdżali do nas saniami zaprzęgniętymi koniem a raczej kłaczą, która nazywała się Rzęka (Rzenka). W latach następnych mniej zachwyty. Nie ma Mikołaja. Choina jak przed rokiem. I tak co rok. W następnych latach, już całkiem dorosłych, znów wielka radość. Radość z tego, że widzimy, jak bardzo cieszą się nasze dzieci. Tak. Ale co między naszymi, naszym dzieciństwem i dzieciństwem naszych dzieci? Czy może być luka, przerwa, dziura? Niestety nie. Można jednak tak to nazywać. Tu, po przydługim wstępie, przechodzę do tematu. Na pewno będzie krótki, bo przecież dziura nie może być duża. Ta przerwa rozpoczęła się od września 1939 roku. Opiszę jednak tylko jedną wigilię. Wigilię w 1940 roku. Dlaczego ten rok wybrałem? Myślę dlatego, że była to najwspanialsza wigilia spośród następnych pięciu lat. Byliśmy daleko od kraju, w małej wiosce i małym domku, na olbrzymich stepach Syberii. Głęboki, biały śnieg. Na widnokręgu nie widać nic – ani krzaczka, ani drzewka. Jak na pustyni lub na morzu. Przygotowanie do świąt trwało już wcześniej. Polegało na gromadzeniu żywności i dlatego mieliśmy bochenek chleba, pęczak, trochę kaszy jęczmiennej, mleka i chyba kilka jajek. Na dworze wydawało się, że bardzo zimno. Było około -20 stopni. (Dlatego wydawało się? Dlatego, bo w następnych miesiącach zimno było -40 i więcej.). Padał śnieg. Zbliża się pierwsza gwiazda. Szykowaliśmy się do kolacji wigilijnej. Wtem przychodzi pani Jadzia. Mieszkała około 600 metrów od nas. Zaprasza nas na wspólną wigilię. Nie pamiętam, czy wzięliśmy ze sobą swoich „smakołyków” (pani Jadzia miała się znacznie lepiej i wiele nam pomagała, ale to nie na temat). Poszliśmy na skrót przez pola. Śnieg był miękki i maszerowaliśmy gęsiego w śniegu po kolana. Pamiętam, że ja nie miałem butów, miałem na nogach kaptcie owinięte szmatami. Gdy doszliśmy, była już szarówka. Gwiazdy nie było widać, bo padał śnieg. Przychodzimy do chaty, otrzepujemy się ze śniegu. Ja przy tym miałem najlepiej, bo owinięte szmatami kaptcie nie wpuściły do środka śniegu. Pozostali musieli wysypywać śnieg z obuwi. W chacie stał stół przykryty prześcieradłem, dwie ławki. Na oknie lampa naftowa. O choince nie ma co myśleć. Do lasu daleko. Nie ma ani gałązki ani żadnego kwiatka, który mógłby zastąpić choinkę. Mama i pani Jadzia zaczęły zastawiać stół. Nie pamiętam, czy było pod prześcieradłem sianko. Jeśli wcześniej nie pomyślała o tym pani Jadzia, to teraz sianko jest nie do zdobycia. Ale pani Jadzia bardzo zaradna, na pewno sianko miała. Na stole podają bochenek prawdziwego chleba, prawdziwą bułkę posypaną makiem i cukrem. Obrane jajeczka na twardo, sól i chyba gorące kluseczki. Piszę chyba, bo nie jestem pewien.

After he read his story out loud at the meeting, he said, everyone else in the group hid theirs away, presumably too embarrassed by the poignancy and emotion of his story. Pani Ania said that her story had been nothing special, nothing like pan Florian's story; she just described a regular Polish Christmas, she said. The humble food that pan Florian described—the bread, boiled eggs and salt, dumplings (or perhaps just dreams of dumplings)—contrasts with the more elaborate meals, the 12 dishes, that customarily constitute the *stół wigilijny*, or Christmas Eve table. Yet there is much in this story that is familiar to a Polish audience—the memorable poppy-seed roll, the hay under the tablecloth, the *opłatki*. These customs, on this day, in this faraway place, constitute the Polishness that pan Florian wished to convey to the students, to the younger generation. His closing remark that he wanted to convey “minimal knowledge” about the experiences of his generation suggest that this story lies at the core of what he takes to be essential about being Polish. During this time of extreme suffering for himself, his family, and the Polish nation, comfort for pan Florian was in sharing prayers, *opłatki*, and a poppy-seed roll.

Closer analysis of the language itself also supports this perspective on what pan Florian finds important in this narrative. Throughout the narrative, his writing switches between past and present tenses. Since this use of the historical present gives events immediacy for both the speaker and audience (Ochs and Capps 1996:25), it is worth investigating in which sentences pan

Może te kluseczki były tylko moim marzeniem. Pani Jadzia podaje opłatki. Dzielimy się opłatkami i łzami. Wszyscy mieli lzy w oczach. Wszyscy starali się je zatrzymać, a zwłaszcza nasze mamy starały się, żebyśmy nie mogli tego zobaczyć. Trudno było się wstrzymać. Przecież to już drugi rok i drugie święto bez ojca i bez męża. Jest nas 6 osób. Dwie mamy i czworo dzieci. To ja – około czternastolatek, moja siostra Marysia – około siedemnastolatka, synek pani Jadzi – Tomek – około 6 lat i siostra (nie pamiętam imienia) – około 8 lat. (Już teraz wiem, jak miała ona na imię – Antonina). Pani Jadzia proponuje wspólną modlitwę. Modlimy się głośno, na kolanach w intencji naszych ojców i najszybszego powrotu do Polski pełni wiary, że odzyska ona niepodległość. Zasiadamy do stołu, który dość szybko został spustoszony. Zaśpiewaliśmy kilka kolęd. Na dworze już pełna ciemność. Śnieg tylko prószy. Nie pamiętam, jak wróciliśmy do swojej chaty. Nie pamiętam może wiele więcej, ale to chyba dlatego, że zbyt mocno zatrzymała się w mojej pamięci ta prawdziwa bułka z makiem. Może spytacie, dlaczego wybrałam właśnie tę wigilię. Przecież było 80 innych. Może ciekawszych i weselszych. Odpowiem – dlatego, że jest to dialog między generacjami. Żeby młodzież zdobyła choć minimalną wiedzę o dziejach naszego pokolenia, a może i dlatego, żeby zrozumieć, że ojczyznę swoją należy cenić, zanim się ją straci. Robbins interview, 14 April 2010.

Florian uses the historical present. Focusing just on the Christmas Eve scene itself (the fourth paragraph in the above excerpt), pan Florian used the past tense to describe the physical setting and of pani Jadzia setting the table, and the present to describe serving the food, sharing the *oplatki*, praying, and sitting down at the table.⁵⁸ The food, the *oplatki*, the prayers, and the community are all brought temporally closer through pan Florian's use of tense. In other words, the verb forms and the content combine to convey the key moral elements of this Polish Christmas Eve story.

Sluchacze and students alike were moved by pan Florian's tale. The students selected his story to include in the poster displays that hung in the entranceway of University of the Third Age at the end of that year. With his permission and encouragement, they also scanned, enlarged, and copied by hand letters that pan Florian's sister had written in Siberia and sent to family in Poland; they later used the letters in their own research. Pan Florian and pani Ania praised both the style and content of his sister's letters, saying that they were truly patriotic and exemplified "*piękna polszczyzna*" ("beautiful Polish language").⁵⁹ I never heard anyone refer to pan Florian's

⁵⁸ In my translation, it also appears that pan Florian used the present tense to describe the distance to the forest ("The forest is far"), but in Polish this is actually a sentence without a verb ("Do lasu daleko"). The present-tense translation feels like the most accurate English-language equivalent, but I have excluded it from the past v. present tense contrast above in order to try to stay more faithful to the original Polish.

⁵⁹ "*Polszczyzna*" is generally used to refer to the use of the Polish language that is meticulously grammatically correct, according to literary standards. People who appreciate *piękna polszczyzna* often do so with a sense of respecting the history of the Polish language, and contrast this historical integrity with contemporary (often spoken) errors. The following examples from a lecture at the University of the Third Age in Poznań (Piotrowicz, Anna, November 21, 2009) illustrate this point. 1) Words with Latin origin do not have stress on the penultimate syllable, as is the general rule, but instead on the third-to-last syllable. Therefore, when saying words like "*opera*" and "*logika*," the stress must be placed on the first syllable. There is a trend in contemporary spoken Polish to put the stress on the penultimate syllable. 2) When using the second-person plural (formal address), the verb form must agree with "*państwo*," which follows third-person plural conjugation rules. Therefore, proper usage would be "Jak państwo widzą," not "Jak państwo widzicie." There is a trend in contemporary spoken Polish to replace the second-person plural (formal address) verb form with the second-person plural (informal address) verb form, but to retain "*państwo*" as a marker of formal address. During this lecture, such lack of *polszczyzna* was attributed to younger generations and a lack of respect for the language, suggesting that discourse around *polszczyzna* constitutes a linguistic ideology (Irvine 1989). I did not read the letters from pan Florian's sister, so I am not sure if this type of *polszczyzna* was evident in the letters, but the use of *polszczyzna* in other contexts suggests that it could be true for these letters as well. I should also note that pan Florian emphasized that his sister should receive full credit for these

speech as *piękna polszczyzna*, but pan Florian's speech marked him as a former resident of the *kresy* (eastern borderlands). As with pani Dorota (described in Chapter 4), younger people made affectionate comments about the distinctiveness of pan Florian's speech, remarking on his use of "l" instead of "ł," pronunciations of certain vowels, and cadence of his speech. Such distinctions are not evident in only reading the text in print. Pan Florian himself needs to voice this story in order to convey its fullest possible meaning to his younger interlocutors. For the students, then, it was not just the story he told, but how he told it that carried meaning.

Through this embodied storytelling, pan Florian attempted to create continuity between his own experience and that of the younger generations. Deeply critical of present religious and political regimes as well as ones past, pan Florian found patriotism in simple, embodied acts that created continuity. Against the ruptures in which he framed his story, I see pan Florian's desire to tell these stories as a desire for continuity across generations. Through both his own story of Christmas Eve in Siberia and his sister's *piękna polszczyzna*, pan Florian is trying to teach younger Poles how to live, as Poles.

The promise of continuity: narrating moral personhood in old age

Pani Wanda and pani Małgorzata sang patriotic songs, thus remembering the past and passing the time. Pani Alicja lamented the quality of Polish produce, wishing for security in her future and her kin relations. Pani Cecylia railed against injustices, dreaming of proper kin relations and a noble Polish past. Pan Florian wrote of poppy seeds and *opłatki*, sharing his suffering in order to transmit patriotism. In all these narratives, it is Poland itself that grounds the narrators as moral persons. It is within the bounds of Poland, variously invoked as a land,

letters, but I have not included her real name here in order to protect the anonymity of pan Florian and pani Ania, especially since I have not seen the actual letters.

homeland, and home, that these people locate their relations and memories. I argue that these embodied practices should not be dismissed as the nostalgic or dated ramblings of older people who cannot adapt to a new reality, but rather seen as deeply moral practices meant to extend personhood into the future.

For indeed, despite the focus on the past in all these narratives, I see these practices as deeply future-oriented. Through these stories, pani Alicja, pani Cecylia, and pan Florian all share concerns about their own bodily, familial, national, and existential futures. Indeed, this is a common feature of narratives cross-culturally; their very coherence has also been shown to have therapeutic effect (Ochs and Capps 1996).

Additionally, the trope of continuity is one that matters cross-culturally in old age (e.g., Myerhoff 1979, 2007). Research on rebuilding royal tombs in Madagascar shows that “[p]eople with ancestors thrive; people who lose or become lost to their ancestors dwindle and die” (Feeley-Harnik 1991a:138). I see an analogous process occurring through these narratives. Through these embodied story-telling practices, these older Poles are reaffirming their link to their ancestors and trying to ensure links to future generations—one could say that they are trying to achieve ancestorhood—although these links may be fragile, if the older/ senile/ moherowy beret voice cannot be heard. These older Poles’ stories and memories are caught up in the politics of memory in Poland, for these very memories can both confer status on older people as guardians of tradition (cf. Caldwell 2007), but can also form the basis of their own political marginalization (e.g., the links between nationalist views and moherowe berety). I will now turn to the case of the Alzheimer’s center, where forgetting is seemingly always present.

Chapter 6

Rhythms of Memory at an Alzheimer's Center

Familiarity in a place of dementia

As I rode the *Pestka* (*Poznański Szybki Tramwaj*, or Poznań Fast Tram) out of the city center and towards the Alzheimer's center on a gray day in late June 2012, I was feeling apprehensive. It had been over two years since I finished my long-term fieldwork, and I was worried about potential changes among the center's participants. I was eager to see the staff and the participants, but I worried that I would only hear stories of decline—of someone's worsening physical condition, increasingly severe Alzheimer's, or death. Although I recognized this nervous feeling from my other return visits that summer, it was especially heightened as I approached the center, where all the participants had Alzheimer's disease. As I looked out the window, I recognized this sense of trepidation from visits to my grandmother in the nursing home where she lives in northern Virginia: would she still recognize me? Would she recognize anyone? Would we still be able to have a conversation, share a smile, be together in the present—if not the past?

Emerging from the underground passageway by the tram stop, I was again struck by the large *blokowiska* that fill the horizon in this district of Poznań. Walking towards the center through a mostly residential neighborhood of older, lower buildings, I ran through the list of participants whom I had come to know well. How was pani Weronika, who always welcomed me with a warm smile and invited me to sit with her during activities? Was pan Piotr still flirting with his two lady friends who attended the center on different days—one on Mondays,

Wednesdays, and Fridays, and the other on Tuesdays and Thursdays? Did pan Marcin still play with the center's guinea pig, in between sneaking cigarettes with his brother, pan Adam? Would pan Ryszard tell me stories in English about the "nice American boys," or soldiers, whom he met during World War II? Was pan Czesław vigorously leading the group in the same *harcerskie* (scouting) songs? Was pani Izabela still shooting disapproving looks across the room at the playful, attention-seeking antics of pan Wojtek, pan Marcin, and pan Czesław?

I rang the buzzer at the front door, locked from both the inside and outside, and Agata, a rehabilitation therapist, came to let me in. With a warm embrace, she welcomed me in and led me to the room at the back of the small building where staff members were chatting between activities. As we walked down the hallway, I peeked in to the main sitting room on the right, where I recognized a few faces and voices, as people drank juice, quietly read, or chatted in low tones. From behind the closed door on the left side of the hallway, I heard the familiar sound of Kasia leading the group in physical exercises. "One! Two! Three! Higher! Now, the other side..." When we entered the office, the manager and two *terapeutki*, or therapists, greeted me, and we shared news of our lives over the last two years. They told me about plans to build a new center, with a large donation from a Polish family in Chicago with origins in Poznań. They told me that I should recognize many of the people who attended daily: Marcin, Adam, Weronika, Wojtek, and Ola. Pan Czesław and pan Mieczysław, two men who had stopped attending the center by the time I finished my long-term fieldwork, had passed away. Pan Ryszard stayed at home, no longer able to participate in activities. In fact, the staff told me that they had trouble filling the open slots at the center, unlike the other center on ul. Zagórze, which is for people with more advanced Alzheimer's, who have a "mini-mental" (Polish shorthand for Mini-Mental State Examination, one of the diagnostic tests for dementia) score of less than 15. Because

Alzheimer's is not recognized until it is more advanced, they told me, doctors and families only refer people to the programs when problems are severe and disruptive. The only available option, then, is the center on Zagórze. Staff told me that family doctors label the less severe problems of people like those at this center on Owsiana Street as "*starość*," or old age. Perhaps as many as half the people at the center on Owsiana should instead be at the center on Zagórze.

As the staff were catching me up on the news of the center, pan Marcin entered the director's office carrying a fistful of grass and leaves in one hand and a cigarette lighter in the other. The smell of cigarette smoke wafted in. He was surprised to see me and asked me where I had been for so long, if I had finished my studies, and kissed my hand in the typical way of some older Polish men.¹ He then handed the lighter to a staff member, thanking her, and waved the grass around, inquiring if the guinea pig was hungry. The staff laughed and said of course, inviting pan Marcin into the office for a moment to drop the food for the guinea pig into its cage on the floor of the office.

As I smiled with the staff and pan Marcin at the eagerly-squeaking guinea pig, the tension that I had felt all morning began to subside. I felt myself relax into familiar patterns of conversation and behavior among people at the center. As Kasia's exercise class finished, people strolled across the hallway from the physical recreation room to the main dining room, taking their usual seats. Kasia congratulated people on a good session. "You exercised well, pani Hanka [diminutive]. Really, you did." "I'm glad," responded pani Hanna.² A man who I did not recognize walked down the hallway towards the office where I was sitting with the staff, opened the door to the men's bathroom and entered, only to immediately walk out, check the sign on the door, and walk back in. As the people who had been exercising settled into their seats, I heard a

¹ See chapter 5 (story about Zbigniew) for another example of the practice of hand-kissing.

² "Fajnie pani ćwiczyła, pani Hanka. Na prawdę." "Cieszę się."

man whose voice I did not recognize start singing *harcerskie* (scouting) songs. Unlike pan Czesław, who had a repertoire of three songs that he would repeat over and over again, this singer began nine different songs, repeating only one of them. Other voices joined his, fading in and out depending on the song. I recognized almost all of them, as they were the same songs I heard sung during music therapy at the social welfare home in Wrocław.

Recognizing the patterns and habits of the participants at the day-care center reminded me of how exceptional this institution was for institutional care in Poland. Unlike the social welfare home and rehab center in Wrocław, where the maintenance of individual bodies (dressing, changing diapers, physical therapy) structured daily rhythms, at the day-care center the days' rhythms were based on group activities: cognitive games, physical exercise, structured conversations, meals in a dining room. These shared activities created a communal rhythm that differed from the social welfare home or rehab center, where even activities that occurred during the same time, such as meals, were carried out in different locations—meals took place in individual rooms, and different food was served according to a range of individual dietary restrictions (e.g., diabetic, blended). The small space of the day-care center and the better physical health of participants meant that there was more shared experience than at the rehab center or social welfare home.

These shared daily rhythms serve to maintain and even strengthen ties of relatedness and personhood. In the morning, people with Alzheimer's and their caregivers separate from each other with a sigh of relief; in the afternoon, they greet each other with warmth. These habitual separations and reunions seem to maintain difficult kin ties that are otherwise strained by the short memories and tempers of people with Alzheimer's and their kin and caregivers. Through the relations of care that form between staff and people with Alzheimer's, people with

Alzheimer's largely experience their days at the center as safe, social, and productive. I see this short-term repeated separation as a suspension of kinship, a creation of a different mode of being, in which the present, not the past, dominates. Connections to the past that hinge on aspects of regional and national history, rather than personal biographies, allow people to create a comfortable community. Here, separation from the intimate sphere of kin relations makes daily life at the center possible; instead of families, it is the shared community, and sometimes the nation, that matter. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, regional or national history provides a shared framework within which these older Poles can comfortably live. Again, large-scale relations provide comfort when small-scale, intimate relations break down or become difficult.

This comfort was unexpected. My own ethnographic knowledge of experiences of aging in Poland and the significance of (individual and national) memory to many Poles led me to imagine a Polish old-age institution for people with dementia as a depressing and difficult place to be. Personal experience and knowledge of anthropological literature on Alzheimer's disease led me to expect an institution in which both tempers and memories were short. The ethnographic record on dementia (not to mention the health sciences literature and popular North American imagination) is rife with descriptions of strained social relations full of anger, misunderstanding, frustration, and fatigue (e.g. Chatterji 1998; Cohen 1995, 1998; Kontos 2006; Leibing 2002, 2006; McLean 2006, 2007). People with Alzheimer's experience de-personing by others in their social worlds; they are belittled. Therefore, I was expecting to find an institution that was a "zone of abandonment" (Biehl 2005), populated by persons who were no longer fully human. It has been well documented (especially in North America and western Europe) that a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease can bring about social death (or what Annette Leibing, after Paul Rabinow, calls "biosocial death" [2006:248]) and an erasure of personhood. As a

sociocultural anthropologist, I follow the line of reasoning that “it is not the biological processes of dementia as much as the social processes of its construction that deprive the demented elder of selfhood” (Cohen 1998:7). I am not arguing against the reality of these biological processes, but rather that the outcome of social death and non-personhood is not inherently linked to these changes.

The center itself, staff, and activities that occur within it work to foster memory among those with dementia, and in doing so, encourage productive changes in relatedness and personhood among its participants. Personhood becomes less about linear temporalities of past, present, and future, and more focused on the present, with occasional shared elements of the past, evident in songs, games, and jokes. Sociality persists in ways that include, but also exceed, the cognitive. Rules of decorum remain or are violated; some seek attention by acting out, while others judge such behaviors and persons. This chapter shows how memory persists in persons who are defined by their very inability to remember. Among non-kin, a sociality emerges in which people share forgetting; staff allow some kinds of forgetting and encourage others. This chapter builds on insights from ethnographic analysis in chapters 4 and 5 to show how, even in the places one would least expect, people sustain social relations—in this case, through repeated short-term separation from kin and habitual activities with peers. This is a different sort of activity than the *aktywność* of the people in *Gazeta Wyborcza* and the Universities of the Third Age (chapters 2 and 3). This chapter contributes to anthropological literature on aging and dementia by showing the social (rather than internal) processes that sustain personhood, thus working against the always-exceptional status of dementia and Alzheimer’s disease that pervades scholarly literature and shapes ethnographic experience.

First, in order to give the reader an understanding of the social complexities through which dementia leads to social death, I will describe and analyze cases from the ethnographic record of experiences of this erasure of personhood, along with recent clinical and scholarly work documenting how selfhood persists. This will also serve as an overview of what I take to be the key issues in experiences and anthropological study of dementia, thus situating my ethnographic findings in wider context. It is this discursive scholarly framework of loss and decline, on the one hand, and persistence and coherence, on the other hand, that I aim to move beyond by means of an ethnographic analysis of the temporal and spatial dimensions of sociality among people in an Alzheimer's day-care center.

Experiential and analytical perspectives on social death and loss of self in dementia

Following ethnographic sensibilities, I will first present experiences of someone living with the experience of Alzheimer's disease before moving to descriptions from scholars and clinicians who study the disease. Richard Taylor, a retired psychology professor in Texas who has been diagnosed with dementia “‘probably’ of the Alzheimer's type” (2007:7), has become an eloquent advocate for people with dementia and Alzheimer's disease.³ He writes that his family began to treat him differently after the diagnosis, despite the fact that there was no measurable difference in his behavior. His adult children began to speak to his wife as if he were not present. Others, upon learning that he has Alzheimer's, avert their eyes and direct their questions to his companions; the title of the chapter from which this is taken, “*Hello? I'm Still Here,*” represents

³ Taylor writes of having dementia “probably” of the Alzheimer's type due to the uncertainty of diagnoses of Alzheimer's disease. Definitive diagnosis requires that a brain slice is taken during an autopsy. Because autopsies are rarely performed on older people, and because they obviously cannot be performed until after death, it is quite possible that many more people may be diagnosed with Alzheimer's than “actually” have the disease. See, for example, Baldwin and Capstick 2007:8-9, Cohen 1998, Cohen and Leibling 2006, and Graham 2006 for more in-depth discussions of the complexities of diagnosing Alzheimer's disease.

clearly his feelings of being ignored, belittled, and dehumanized (Taylor 2007:152). Drawing on Martin Buber, Taylor describes this as the difference as being treated as a “Thou” versus an “It,” pleading with the reader to have his “personhood recognized. Please understand,” he writes, “I am still here” (Taylor 2007:148-149; cf. Kitwood 1997:10-12). This description of what it is like to be treated as a non-person is deeply moving, leading the reader to take an empathetic perspective towards people with Alzheimer’s, thus overcoming the social death that Taylor describes. Part of the phenomenon that has been called the “personhood turn” (Cohen 2006:3) and the “personhood movement” (Leibing 2006:242) in treatment and analysis of dementia, Taylor’s writings present a powerful challenge to contemporary American understandings of Alzheimer’s disease.

Richard Taylor’s plea for recognition is echoed in the anthropological literature. The medical anthropologist Janelle Taylor (2008) implores her readers to imagine how we might recognize the personhood of people with dementia through her sensitive autoethnographic exploration of her mother’s experience with dementia. Beginning with the question about her mother that she frequently hears—“does she still recognize you?”—Taylor suggests that instead we ask ourselves “do you, do we, recognize *her*?” (2008:313-315). For Taylor, the social death of dementia and Alzheimer’s can be explained through a failure to grant recognition to the person with dementia; this is a failure of sociality and politics at an intimate scale. By recognizing her mother’s personhood despite her mother’s failure to use her name, Taylor works to restore personhood through acts of care.

Such failure to recognize the personhood of people with dementia is widespread and deeply shared throughout much of biomedicine, as Athena McLean’s (2007) ethnography of institutionalized dementia care shows. The poignant case of Vicki and Carl, two people who

seem to fall in love while living in a dementia ward, shows how the biomedical focus on cognition over emotions and sociality leads staff to break apart Vicki and Carl's relationship (McLean 2007:104-113; cf. Cohen 1998:27-29). While concern over institutional liability and consent certainly plays a role in this decision, "the dominance of the medical model in the facility" makes such a decision easier (McLean 2007:110). Indeed, biomedical practitioners tend to read all behavioral signs through the prism of the diagnosis of dementia, refracting the complexity of symptoms into a path of inevitable decline (McLean 2007:33-34).

Yet there is no clear understanding of the extent to which the decline of dementia differs from "normal" age-related decline (Cohen 1998:8, 60-70; Gubrium 1986; Herskovits 1995:148-149; Kaufman 2006), despite anti-ageist gerontological projects aiming to destigmatize old age by diagnosing Alzheimer's disease (Ballenger 2006b:112-114; Cohen 1998:60-70). This uncertainty produces tremendous moral anxiety over treatment of people with dementia, particularly at the end of life. As Sharon Kaufman writes, "dementia is a condition both of death-in-life and of life-in-death. This ambiguity becomes more profound as the disease progresses, and it lies at the heart of the anguish about what to do" (2006:23). What kind of rights, respect, and treatment should be accorded those whose personhood is uncertain? Kaufman shows that for families and medical caregivers of people with advanced dementia who are nearing death in hospitals, differing answers to these questions reveal differing moral logics. For family members, any evidence of personality can be enough to continue life-prolonging treatment; personhood remains through their will. For medical caregivers, technological and institutional knowledge of brain death, feeding tubes, and ventilators leads to a clinical picture of life that will never become fully human; personhood is impossible (Kaufman 2006:30-38).

Although the extreme near-death cases that Kaufman describes highlight this conflict over recognition and personhood, the specter of the non-person haunts all contemporary North American understandings of Alzheimer's. After a person is diagnosed, the life course gains a new chronology; time is divided into the periods before and after Alzheimer's disease. Personhood and selfhood are similarly split; the person and the self are fragmented into the pre- and post-Alzheimer's self. Cohen shows through an analysis of popular media that this split comes about through an attribution of the suffering of the disease to the caregiver, rather than to the person who has been diagnosed (1998:53-60). Although much of what he describes is actually more fluid than the pre-/post-diagnosis distinction, Richard Taylor often describes the changes he notices in himself in terms of before and after the diagnosis (e.g., 2007:79-80, 118, 121-122). It is this disjuncture, this discontinuity between pre- and post-diagnosis selves that is so devastating to personhood. This expectation of discontinuity is evident in Janelle Taylor's discussion of what Elinor Fuchs calls the "stills," or the moments in which caregivers of people with Alzheimer's are asked if the person with Alzheimer's can "still" do activities associated with the pre-Alzheimer's self (2008:315-316).⁴ The "stills"—which I engaged in myself in the story that opens this chapter—point to ruptures in both self and time, and reinforce expectations and narratives of decline.⁵

In ethnographic accounts of Alzheimer's in North America, horror is a fundamental quality of this split self. Taking a headline from an American tabloid, Cohen describes the "Alzheimer's hell" that people with Alzheimer's and their caregivers experience and the American public imagines (1998:47-84). The story about a grandmother who had gone missing and was assumed to have wandered away but was found—mummified—five years later in a

⁴ See Chapter 2 for a discussion of the related use of the word "jeszcze" ("still") in the *Gazeta Wyborcza* series, "No Country for Old People."

⁵ Many thanks to Aaron Seaman for this observation.

Murphy bed in her own home exemplifies the horrors associated with senility (Cohen 1998:51-53). By placing tabloid headlines alongside experiences of actual people, Cohen shows the relevance of this trope to many levels of experience. Indeed, Richard Taylor describes his own and his family's horror and fear when the label of "Alzheimer's" was applied to him (2007:113-115). These horror stories, in both their "gothic and zombie variants," are the narrative mode through which people with Alzheimer's cease to exist (Taylor 2008:322-323). The word or diagnosis "Alzheimer's" evokes the horror of the disease, the horror of caring for a loved one who is no longer that same loved one (cf. Ballenger 2006b:115; Herskovits 1995). Ethnographic studies show how this frame of horror contributes to social death, thus eclipsing elements of personhood that remain.

However, scholarly work that shows the historical, sociocultural, and political-economic processes through which Alzheimer's has come to stand for this erasure of personhood has done much to suggest possibilities for ameliorating social death. One way that this has been done is through the classic historical-anthropological project of comparison across time and space. Much excellent work in the social history of medicine has shown that the high prevalence of the diagnostic category of Alzheimer's in the US is itself a recent phenomenon (Ballenger 2006a, Cohen 1998). As geriatrics and gerontology sought to normalize the aging process in the post-World War II years, therein creating potential markets among the "normal" old, the category of Alzheimer's hardened into a firmly pathological diagnosis, thus further stigmatizing those who received its label (Cohen 1998:69-71). Historical and critical gerontological research (e.g., Cole 1992; Estes 1979, 1993; Luborsky and Sankar 1993) has made important connections between modernist capitalist state projects and the rise of scientific concern over aging and senility. Yet, following Cohen's argument to engage a "hermeneutic of suspicion" when studying old age

(1994:140), it is crucial to note that this very research arises at the same time as state support for older people is decreasing (1998:71).

Research done in other cultural contexts also denaturalizes present-day North American understandings of Alzheimer's. Cohen (1995, 1998) analyzes senility in India, finding that Alzheimer's, dementia, and memory loss do not carry the same significance (horror, social death, loss of self). Rather, older people in India can be seen as problematic not because of symptoms of memory loss but rather because of the affective problem of anger that was attributed to the supposed decline of multigenerational households in which older people happily lived (Cohen 1998). Commenting on the senility of an older person, then, is to comment on the state of the family, in what Cohen calls the "familial body" (1995:326). The local idiom of "going sixtyish" means increased anger but also increased intergenerational power, although with the knowledge that this power is waning (Cohen 1995:324-326). In other contexts, the older voice can become heard as meaningful by belonging to a set of norms other than those defined by ideals of kinship, such as the singing of religious hymns (*bhajan*) in an ashram for upper-caste women or the enactment of states of possession for lower-caste women (Cohen 1995:323-324). The medicalized category of Alzheimer's, however, offers no relational framework for the problem, only a biomedical categorization that at the time of research did not hold promise as a therapeutic path, but indexed progress through globalization (Cohen 1998:331). In the Indian context, the diagnosis of Alzheimer's does not split selves in two, but rather removes the person from the familial frame.

In Brazil in the late 1990s, Alzheimer's was also as understood as related to the world order: too much stress and work, characteristics of many contemporary lives, or too little activity, could lead to sickness and Alzheimer's (Leibing 2002). Having "flexible hips," or the

ability to manage such stress, can prevent such conditions, such that the presence of Alzheimer's can then be interpreted as a moral failure of the afflicted (Leibing 2002:216). This non-medical view of Alzheimer's etiology, in which past actions explain the present condition, shows that the diagnosis does not bring about a split self; rather, the diagnosis serves as an explanatory tool, as something connecting past to present (Leibing 2002:226).

Research in Japan also shows the connection of past to present in which past inactivity, especially a failure to fulfill social obligations, can lead to the non-medicalized category of senility known as *boke* (Traphagan 2000). This is a fundamentally moral category of social death, in which one is "a liminal being who has lost control over the values that make one a moral person" (Traphagan 2000:5). Staying active in old age, then, is an attempt to remain not only physically, but also socially, well.

Second, research in North American contexts from phenomenological, narrative, and clinical perspectives works to overcome this split in selfhood by showing that the person with dementia remains. A phenomenological approach can show how selfhood is embodied; as a corrective to the biomedical Cartesian approach that locates the self in the mind, Pia Kontos (2004, 2006) shows the bodily practices through which selfhood becomes manifest in people with Alzheimer's in a North American Jewish long-term care facility. By paying attention to how people with Alzheimer's dress, engage in activities, and communicate verbally in the absence of language, Kontos shows that selfhood need not be contingent upon mental cognition. Rather, drawing on Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu, Kontos locates selfhood in "the primordial unity of the body" and "the embodiment of culture-specific conditions of primary socialization" (2006:211). The coherence of behaviors within an individual, despite a lack of cognition, is taken as evidence of the self. Evidence of class background can be seen in Molly's string of pearls,

demure crossing of her legs, and delicate table manners, and in Edna's louder jewelry, suggestive walk, and unrefined tastes in food (Kontos 2006:213-214). The shared sociocultural histories of the residents also matter (2006:211-214). Against the fragmented self posed by the diagnosis, Kontos shows the embodied self to be temporally coherent.

An analytic approach focused on narrative also reveals coherence, if not factual truth, in the stories told by people with Alzheimer's (McLean 2006). Despite differences in the facts of her stories (who did what and at what time), Mrs. Fine, a woman frequently identified as "disruptive" by the staff in the long-term care facility in the U.S. where she lived (McLean 2006:161), would tell stories that were otherwise coherent according to the how the story was emplotted; that is, her stories had a beginning, middle, and end, with an organizing logic connecting them (Mattingly 1998; McLean 2006:167-172; see Chapter 5). McLean argues, then, that Mrs. Fine's story coheres both as a text and "within the person," or appears as emotionally whole to Mrs. Fine herself. McLean does not so much find temporal coherence of Mrs. Fine as a person, but rather as a present unity in her emotional experience.

Rather than either temporal or emotional coherence, Roma Chatterji (1998) combines institutional and familial perspectives on the experience of Mr. Rijder, an older man with Alzheimer's disease, who moves in and out of institutional care in the Netherlands. The combination of these different perspectives reveals varying moral logics, such as the institution's desire to minimize disorder and his wife's desire to preserve emotional intimacy that does not involve bodily care (Chatterji 1998:368-372). However, after Mr. Rijder's death, Mrs. Rijder cannot bear to discard the material objects that remind her of this bodily care (Chatterji 1998:372), suggesting a transformation in the meaning of these intimate acts after death—perhaps as a ghost of memory (Carsten 2007a). Chatterji's analytic strategy allows the reader to

put together many limited but coherent-seeming perspectives, thus emphasizing the importance of holding up differing perspectives to the same lens. This strategy also suggests a way around the debate about pre-/post-Alzheimer's self and coherence through discussions of institutional and relational constructs of knowledge.

Influenced by the work of British psychologist Thomas Kitwood (1997), clinicians have tried to overcome the social death of dementia by finding practical ways to maintain continuity in self despite the pre-/post diagnostic split. Such "person-oriented" care can maintain or restore selfhood; indeed, McLean shows that such care can maintain or improve the conditions of people with dementia better than treatment with a "biomedical and instrumental" approach (McLean 2007:4-5). Kitwood, who was an ordained Anglican minister (who later left the ministry and renounced Christianity for humanism and Buddhist and Taoist philosophy), a psychotherapist, and academic psychologist, argued for a model of caring for people with Alzheimer's and dementia that is based on the recognition of their moral personhood (Baldwin and Capstick 2007, Kitwood 1997).⁶ He thus critiqued biomedical models of dementia for excluding the personal and social (Baldwin and Capstick 2007:3-20; Kitwood 1987). Kitwood's view of personhood incorporates what he calls transcendence, ethics, and social psychology, leading him to define personhood as "a standing or status that is bestowed upon one human being, by others, in the context of relationship and social being. It implies recognition, respect and trust" (1997:8). By integrating theological and humanist perspectives about the nature of the self and Kantian ideals of inherent respect for individuals with social psychological perspectives, Kitwood (1997:8) aims to create an understanding of personhood that is interdependent and social.

⁶ Leibling (2006:254-255) notes that the movement to recognize the personhood of people with Alzheimer's was contemporaneous with the development of palliative care, which recognizes the personhood and interiority of people near death.

The sociality he aims to restore through a focus on personhood builds on Martin Buber's I-Thou mode of interaction, which "implies going out towards the other[,] self-disclosure, spontaneity – a journey into uncharted territory," and is opposed to the I-It relationship, that "implies coolness, detachment, [and] instrumentality" (Kitwood 1997:10). Rather, the I-Thou relationship is premised on the idea of individuals meeting with "no ulterior purpose, no hidden agenda" (Kitwood 1997:11). Kitwood writes that Buber's I-Thou relationship is still possible "[e]ven when cognitive impairment is very severe" (1997:12). It is this idealized, hopeful stance, in which persons themselves have some irreducible quality, which underpins dementia care based on his approach.

Clinicians have tried to use Kitwood's methods to overcome the common experience of social death in dementia by finding practical ways to maintain continuity of personhood. Indeed, staff at the center in Poznań have worked with the European Reminiscence Network, led by Pam Schweitzer, a British theater educator who also collaborates with the organization that Kitwood founded, the Bradford Dementia Group at the University of Bradford in England. In their book *Remembering Yesterday, Caring Today*, recommended to me by center staff and an academic psychologist who consults with the center in Poznań, Schweitzer and Errollyn Bruce draw on Kitwood's theories to recommend particular kinds of interactions so as "people with dementia feel valued and included" (2008:22). They suggest avoiding what Kitwood calls "personal detractions," such as "going too fast for someone" or "being patronizing" (Schweitzer and Bruce 2008:20-21). "Going too fast for someone" is meant literally, as in pulling along someone who is walking too slowly from the perspective of the caregiver. Instead, the caregiver should "celebrate [by] recognising and taking delight in past and present achievements." A suggested comment to a woman who is eating her pudding too slowly is to say, "It's nice to see you eating up your

pudding. I like to see people enjoying their food” (Schweitzer and Bruce 2008:21). Schweitzer and Bruce also suggest what they call “reminiscence work,” or activities that encourage people with dementia to remember times from their youth, “when they were fitter and more independent. Bringing the relative competence of their youth to mind in the present can be beneficial by putting physical ageing into perspective as just one phase in a long life” (2008:24). Suggested methods are recreating past events, like weddings, or creative story-telling, musical, and theatrical performances.

These accounts and this type of therapy do much to resolve the ontological split between the pre- and post-Alzheimer’s self. Accounts of “person-centered” care in practice—in Euro-American contexts—do indeed indicate that persons with Alzheimer’s better retain their dignity, self-worth, and self-respect through these person-centered approaches. However, as summarized in Baldwin and Capstick 2007:181, Kitwood’s approach has been critiqued for focusing too much on the personhood of the person with dementia, rather than the personhood of the people doing the caring (Nolan et al. 2002), for creating a burden on caregivers to do the work of sustaining personhood (Davis 2004), for leaving out any conception of politics (Bartlett and O’Connor 2007), and for not including enough data to support his theories (Adams 1996; Adams and Bartlett 2003). To these Clive Baldwin and Andrea Capstick (2007:181-187) add the necessity of revising the concept of personhood as processual, embodied, emplaced, and related to citizenship. These critiques come from clinical health fields and gerontology, but to my knowledge this perspective has not yet been critiqued from a cross-cultural perspective that would challenge the very idea of personhood itself that lies at the heart of Kitwood’s theories.

Despite the considerable contributions that the “person-centered” approach brings to dementia care, I see these descriptions as having to do with selves more than with persons, in all

their social complexity. That is, in these works there is still an implicit privileging of the individual over the social. Person-centered care is useful inasmuch as it can preserve the pre-Alzheimer's self, or adapt and accept the post-Alzheimer's self as different. Yet to me it does not seem that these works consider the social as such, as inextricable from the self. Rather, there seems to be an overreliance on Euro-American psychological ideas of a "true" self (or even personality types; see Kitwood 1997: 71-73). In her discussion of what she calls the "personhood movement," Annette Leibing writes that "[p]ersonhood, in general, refers to the person within—the reflexive, immaterial, communicable essence of a person that is located deep within the body, but that is sometimes veiled by symptoms" (2006:243). And Kontos (2006) relies on a primordial pre-cognitive, pre-interactional self. I think there is room here for a more social and processual understanding of personhood that draws on recent kinship studies in anthropology (Carsten 2000, 2004, 2007; Franklin and McKinnon 2001a; see Chapter 1). Moreover, I wonder if it would be possible to imagine relating to the person with dementia without the qualification "with dementia."⁷

One challenge to the "personhood turn" comes from Cohen, who asks in response to Taylor (2008), "might the person with dementia have claims on us whether or not his or her alternately configured presence allows a recovery of personhood?" (2008:338).⁸ That is, is it only possible to restore personhood to those who exhibit behaviors and words in which their interlocutors (kin, friends, anthropologists) can find meaning? Is personhood impossible for those who, for reasons of biology, economics, kinship, or personality, cannot enter into the relations of care through which personhood is maintained, restored, or recognized? Must we first label someone as "incomprehensible" (Cohen 1998:33) in order to thus grant her

⁷ Many thanks to Aaron Seaman for ongoing productive ethnographic and theoretical conversations about "person-centered care" among people with Alzheimer's disease.

⁸ This question is equally applicable to Kontos 2006 and McLean 2006, 2007.

comprehensibility? This discussion recalls for me Cohen's earlier critique of the epistemological ground of geroanthropology: following the lead of geriatrists and gerontologists, anthropologists demarcate their object of study, the old person, as "other" so that they can know it (1994:141-142). Indeed, the "personhood turn" seems to recapitulate historical gerontological narratives of decline and recuperation in "successful aging." Moreover, what kind of personhood is possible if, as in the case of Mrs. Fine (McLean 2006), it is interior-focused and only the anthropologist recognizes it? Can we as anthropologists see a social personhood among people who are thought to lack it?

Rather than try to provide new sociocultural contexts for discussions of the split self or social death, in this chapter I follow the lead of Cohen, Kontos, McLean, and Taylor, in closely analyzing the interactions among people with Alzheimer's. Yet rather than showing the limits of biomedical knowledge by showing other facets of life that are omitted from the biomedical gaze, my ethnographic data reveals that it is exactly through cognition and memory that people at the center in Poznań form social connections and avoid social death. That is, the very behaviors and capacities that are supposed to mark these bodies and persons as other are the behaviors through which their personhood remains. This is distinct from other person-centered perspectives. This ethnographic approach reveals people with Alzheimer's to be deeply social and embedded in their environments. I want to take seriously the vitality of the sociality that occurs here—not explaining it in terms of primordial embodiment combined with bodily hexus, or "coherence without facticity." Rather, I want to expand upon Leibing's insight, who wrote of her own observation of a person with Alzheimer's, that she "saw in front of her a disabled person who somehow, despite having difficulties, still shared a common reality with the people around her"

(2006:242). By foregrounding this “common reality,” I aim to move beyond the often-told stories of split selves, decline, and restoration.

Moreover, there is a way in which, in anthropological research, Alzheimer’s and dementia stand out from other experiences of old age as distinct, perhaps serving to retain the horror of the disease. This, however, does not align with my experiences and observations at the Alzheimer’s day-care center. It was indeed exceptional among my field sites in its institutional qualities, in that it was an institution characterized by comfort and ease rather than sadness, trauma, or isolation. However, within social interactions, there were many similarities to other field sites on the level of personhood, relatedness, and even memory. Alzheimer’s itself was *not* horrible within the bounds of this institution. There, people with dementia have social roles that were premised on memory—if not the intimate memory of kin relations, then the shared memories of national history, reinforced through daily emplaced and embodied routines. Based on ethnographic observations of social life within the center, and aligning with other anthropological studies of dementia (Taylor 2008), this chapter shows that embodied social memory persists among people who are defined by their inability to remember. By taking a processual approach that focuses on interactions among people at the center, this chapter argues that memory is fostered through the use of collective national frameworks in ways that are fundamentally about sociality. This processual approach allows for a more fully social understanding of personhood in dementia to emerge, and suggests a more holistic understanding of dementia that does not treat it as distinct from all other experiences of old age.

The Greater Poland Alzheimer’s Association

Before moving to an analysis of how personhood and memory are jointly maintained and co-constructed, I will describe the Alzheimer's center where I did fieldwork in Poznań. I will begin by describing the organization that runs the center, taking care to emphasize the understandings of Alzheimer's and its treatment. Next, I will describe the center itself. By describing the organization's and center's goals, I aim to provide a basis for a discussion of how these goals work in practice through an analysis of daily life at the center.

The Greater Poland Alzheimer's Association was founded by Andrzej Rossa, a former social worker and artist with an entrepreneurial spirit. He had cared for his mother, who passed away from Alzheimer's disease. This personal experience motivated him to try to provide some of the services that he wished he and his mother had had. He has amassed a team of experts, both paid staff and volunteers, who provide online information and run an advice center and two day-care centers. The association is active and visible within the non-profit health-care sector in Poznań.

Here, I will give a brief sketch of the state of knowledge about Alzheimer's disease and dementia in Poland, as drawn from sources for non-experts that I encountered during the course of my fieldwork. These guides, written for organizations, caregivers, and older people themselves, better fit the purposes of this project than more technical scientific publications; by presenting medical information in a way that is meant to be accessible to the public, these texts allow me to better analyze how Alzheimer's is imagined in contemporary Polish society.

These two guides, comprising over 100 pages of information, suggestions, and resources for people with dementia and their families, show that Alzheimer's in Poland is a category about which people feel a sense of dread: in the words of the Greater Poland Alzheimer's Association, "We are striving to create an awareness of the disease so that it will cease being a topic of taboo"

(2008:7).⁹ Such a taboo is seen as a problem in Poland, where the population is aging and the numbers of people with dementia are predicted to increase. In 2008, there were estimated to be 500,000 people in Poland with some sort of dementia, and about one-half of these people are thought to have Alzheimer's disease (Przedpelska-Ober 2008:9). Age is the most important risk factor; estimates suggest that 3-11 percent of people between the ages of 60 and 65 have dementia, while 20-50 percent of people between the ages of 80 and 85 are thought to have dementia (Trypka 2008:27). Known risk factors for dementia that are listed include hypertension, diabetes, high cholesterol, high levels of the amino acid homocysteine, arteriosclerosis, head injuries, genetic predisposition, exposure to certain toxins, lower levels of education, and smoking (Przedpelska-Ober 2008:11; Trypka 2008:28-30). Diagnosing dementia and Alzheimer's disease is presented as a multi-stage process involving consultations and testing with neurologists, psychiatrists, psychologists, and *lekarze rodzinne* ("family doctors," or primary-care doctors) (Trypka 2008:33). However, these publications do note that some symptoms of dementia can be caused by other factors, such as side effects of certain medicines often prescribed in old age, as well as by the social and mental processes that occur as people grow older (Trypka 2008:31-33). Retirement is presented as a particularly important cause of problems for older people.

Throughout these publications, Alzheimer's and dementia appear as conditions with biological, social, and mental components and causes. Treatment for these conditions is similarly multi-faceted, involving drugs of differing types, as well as social and cognitive exercises. Exercises at the center are aimed to ameliorate the symptoms of the disease, and the staff at the center have both practical and expert knowledge on the disease.

⁹ "Dążymy także do tego, aby sama choroba istniała w świadomości i przestała być tematem tabu."

Daily life at the Alzheimer's center

Designed for people with the first stage of Alzheimer's disease, the center is located in a residential neighborhood on a quiet street near a main traffic artery and occupies the ground floor of a building that also houses a hair salon and private residences. The front door of the center is always locked from the inside to prevent people from wandering out. The inside of the center feels small and relatively homely. There are two activity rooms where the attendees spend almost all of their time. The room to the right of the entrance hallway is where participants spend most of their time: here they eat meals, have cognitive therapy sessions, socialize, and have holiday events. The other activity room, on the left side of the entrance hallway, is generally used for physical exercise. A few steps farther down the hallway reveals the coatroom area on the left, where some attendees spend a lot of time (several people spend the afternoon getting dressed in their winter coats and shoes to go home, well before it is time, and then un-dressed at the urging of staff members). Off the coatroom area is a small office where a neurologist occasionally has consultations with attendees or family members. Further down the hallway to the left is a very small kitchen where the staff, and occasionally some participants, prepare hot drinks or snacks. Across from the kitchen is the manager's office, where the staff often gather informally to chat, and where family members can meet with the manager. This is also where the guinea pig lives in a cage on the floor. On either side of the kitchen are the restrooms for attendees, one designated for men and one for women, though the signs do not correspond to how people actually use them. There is a separate small restroom for staff. At the very back of the center is a small utility room. The walls of the center are covered in seasonal decorations made by the staff from colored construction paper: snowflakes and Christmas-themed items in the winter, flowers and Easter-themed items in the spring, flowers in the summer, and leaves in the fall. In the hallway, there

are also photographs of participants (those whose families have allowed their pictures to be taken) on previous center trips: walks, museum outings, holiday celebrations. These decorations and crafts personalize the space and contribute to the warm, cozy atmosphere at the center.



Figure 15: Main room at the Alzheimer's center

Some people have been attending the center since it opened in 2007, while others have started coming more recently. Although it fluctuates as people join or leave the center, the proportion of men and women are about equal. When I began fieldwork, *uczestnicy*, or participants, ranged in age from 75 to 90; a woman in her sixties joined the center during the time I was there. At the beginning of my fieldwork, there was a waiting list of six people, although there was one open space at the center due to administrative delays. Admission to the center is run through *Miejski Ośrodek Pomocy Rodzinie (MOPS*, or Municipal Center for Family Aid), which coordinates both the medical and financial aspects of admission. Payment varies by person, depending on their pension and their family resources. During my return visit in 2012 staff lamented that there were plenty of open spaces at their center, but that the center for people with Alzheimer's in the second stage was full. They attributed this to a lack of awareness of the

disease; that is, family members or doctors only sought help when problems had become more noticeable and difficult. Several people at this day-care center, they said, should perhaps be at the other center for people with Alzheimer's in the second stage.

There are eight people who work at the center: the manager, three *terapeutki* (therapists), three *rehabilitantki* (physical therapists), and one *opiekun* (caregiver).¹⁰ Additionally, a psychiatrist and social worker make weekly visits for appointments with patients. The therapists run cognitive exercise sessions, while the physical therapists run physical activity and exercise sessions. The *opiekun* assists in running these sessions as needed, serves meals, and fills in whenever extra help is needed. The center is open from Monday through Friday from 8:45 in the morning until 4 in the afternoon. Most people attend five days a week, although some attend only two or three days. Participants are dropped off at the center in the morning by their caregivers. These are usually family members—I noted wives, husbands, daughters, sons, and a son-in-law—although there were a few non-kin paid caregivers. Participants enter into the small, ground-level building and head down the narrow corridor to the large wardrobes on the left, where they remove and hang up their coats and replace their shoes with their indoor slippers that they leave at the center.¹¹ In keeping with the general fashion of older people in Poland in public, most people dress quite formally—several men wear ties, while one always wears the same light blue three-piece suit that is at least two sizes too large for him (presumably because he has become smaller with age). Most women wear skirts, blouses, and sweaters. Having bid goodbye to their caregivers and changed into their indoor attire, participants walk into the main sitting

¹⁰ *Terapeutki* and *rehabilitantki* are the feminine plural forms of these words, indicating that all these staff are women. The *opiekun* was also a woman.

¹¹ It is common in Poland to remove one's shoes inside the house and instead to wear slippers. I also noticed a distinction between clothing that people would wear at home and outside; people often wear comfortable, casual clothing at home, but dress much more formally in public. The day-care center was an interesting combination of these two dimensions: people tended to be dressed quite formally, but wore footwear that marked this place as a home-like environment. See Chapter 4 for a discussion of indoor/outdoor footwear at the rehab center in Wrocław.

room on the opposite side of the hallway where they take their usual seats at one of four rectangular tables, each of which seats six to eight people.

This activity room is the center of gravity for participants. Here, they eat, drink, chat, sing, dance, remember, and forget. In addition to seasonal decorations, the walls are covered with some arts and crafts projects made by participants. The walls are painted a cheery light green color and large windows along two walls that run almost floor to ceiling let in light, even on the darkest winter days. Bookshelves filled with exercise, activity, and craft books—some designed for children—line one wall and a corner of the room. There are containers of pens, pencils, and markers. A clock hangs above a portable stereo that rests on a bookshelf. Over the door, there is a small wooden crucifix. Each table is covered by a tablecloth that can be wiped clean. There is usually a newspaper or magazine lying on it.

Meals are served here, beginning with breakfast at 10 a.m., once everyone has settled in to their seats, and consisting of a pastry and coffee or tea. The first therapy session of the day begins at 10:30. The group is generally divided in two according to cognitive ability. One group stays in this room to do cognitive exercises with a *terapeutka*, while the other group goes across the hallway to the exercise room, where a *rehabilitantka* leads physical activities. After an hour or so, the groups switch rooms and activities so that everyone participates in both physical and cognitive exercises. In the warmer months, if the weather is nice, they sometimes go for a walk in the surrounding neighborhood. During these walks, Pan Marcin often holds Pani Emilia's hand, guiding her along the sidewalks and dirt paths through the forested area nearby.

The room where the *rehabilitantki* lead physical exercises is also a cheery place, though less decorated than the main sitting room. Its walls are painted a soft yellow and a large window at the front of the room covered in seasonal decorations lets in light, though it is often noticeably

darker in this room than in the main sitting room. A ballet bar along one long wall and a stack of exercise mats against the back wall make it clear that this room is meant for physical exercise. There is also a portable stereo, which is often plays a local pop radio station or sometimes music of the *rehabilitantka*'s choice. Against the window in front, there are balls of varying sizes. There is a velcro dartboard on the wall with small balls rather than darts sticking to it, although I never saw anyone playing. Sometimes there is a faint smell of body odor in the room that lingers after exercise sessions.

By around 1:00 p.m., both groups have finished their exercises and return to the main dining room, again taking their seats at the table. People returning from the exercise room are sometimes visibly sweaty and bring with them an odor of having physically exerted themselves. During this unstructured time, some sit quietly and read the newspaper or do crossword puzzles, while others talk with their neighbors; some sit quietly, neither reading nor talking. Some read the same thing repeatedly; I saw one man spend over twenty minutes reading the same advertisement. Some wander through the center. A few people have also had strokes, making it harder for them to interact with others due to speech problems. Occasionally someone will start singing *harcerskie* songs, especially if the radio is not on, and encourage others to sing along. There is sustained flirtation between two participants, or rather three. Pan Piotr has two ladies with whom he flirts—with Pani Ola on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, and with Pani Ela on Tuesdays and Thursdays. They sit close to each other, and Pani Ola in particular tries to encourage more physical closeness, often saying affectionately “chodź tu do mnie” (“come here to me”) if Pan Piotr happens to sit across the table from her rather than next to her. However, for the most part the women sit with and talk with other women, and the men with other men.

By 1:30 p.m., the catering service drops off the day's *obiad*, taking the typical Polish form of a soup and a main meat dish with a side of potatoes and another vegetable (typically cooked beets, carrots, or cabbage). A jug of artificially sweetened red juice or fruit compote is included. Some form of pork is the standard main dish, although Fridays are an exception; the main dish is fish or vegetable rather than meat, according to the expectations of the Catholic participants. The food arrives in huge cafeteria-sized pots that take two people to carry. One staff member ladles the soup from the metal vat into shallow white bowls with ruffled edges. Another walks around the small room, distributing the full bowls and spoons. Participants begin eating as soon as they receive the soup, commenting on the type and quality. As soon as the staff members finish distributing the soup to the last person, they collect bowls from those who first received the soup. Next, one staff member scoops out portions of meat and passes the plate to the next staff person, who scoops out the vegetables and passes the plate to another staff person, who distributes the full plates to all participants. One staff member distributes medicines to those who need them. One staff member cuts the meat into bite-size pieces for participants who cannot see well enough to cut their own food or who no longer remember how to cut it themselves. When needed, a staff member sits next to a participant with very poor eyesight, guiding her spoon to the bowl and her fork to the plate. As soon as a participant had finished eating, the staff collected the plates, scraping the uneaten food into a plastic container specifically for this purpose and stacking the dirty dishes in a large plastic tub. When all this is done, the staff divides up the remaining food for their own lunch, going into the exercise room to sit on the floor, mats, or chairs to eat and chat while the participants resumed their reading, chatting, or singing.



Figure 16: A walk on an early spring day in a park near the Alzheimer's center

After participants finish lunch, they generally move into the exercise room across the hallway, where the last session of the day gets underway around 2:40. The manager of the center explained to me that the post-*obiad* activities are meant to be more relaxing and less vigorous than the morning sessions. In the afternoon, staff lead games involving tossing a ball (e.g., catch, modified volleyball) that are sometimes combined with cognitive exercises (e.g., the person with the ball must say a word beginning with a designated letter). There is often music playing on the stereo in the afternoon. Sometimes people remain in the main dining room doing other cognitive activities, or everyone might watch a movie in the exercise room. Families begin to pick up participants from around 3 p.m. onwards, so these activities are meant to be easy for people to leave. There are several participants who, almost immediately after lunch ends, walk to the wardrobes to rummage around for their outerwear in preparation for going home. Staff members encourage them to return to the group and wait until their family arrives to gather these belongings and change shoes, although sometimes they are not quick enough or able to convince participants to stay, meaning that a couple people occasionally sit on the benches in the hallway waiting expectantly.

Relations at home and at the center

Indeed, it is exactly the social aspect of intimate relationships that so often become problematic when someone has Alzheimer's disease. Interactions with people outside the center confirmed the difficult nature of social relations in Alzheimer's disease. When I returned to Wrocław in the summer of 2012, I had *obiad* at the home of a couple whom I knew through the University of the Third Age. As we were catching up, both the husband and wife emphasized the problems caused by the husband's Alzheimer's and *skleroza* (they used the terms interchangeably). When I had left in 2010, he occasionally made a few comments about his memory, but in 2012, the problems were evident even without his remarking on them. He forgot words, started a sentence and then lost his train of thought, and asked many unrelated questions. Formerly talkative, even garrulous (more than once, our conversations ended after eight hours only because I was saturated and exhausted), in 2012 he struggled to carry on a conversation that lasted more than a few minutes. He and his wife, who previously had carried on an almost-constant light-hearted banter, now lapsed into silence quite frequently, their words trailing off, as they then cited Alzheimer's as the culprit. They were both more easily irritated than before and looked as if they had aged by more than two years.

At the center, my direct observations of kin relationships were limited to the daily arrivals and departures of people with Alzheimer's and their caregivers. Mornings were characterized by caregivers saying quick goodbyes to participants and quick greetings to staff, as caregivers dropped off center attendees and hurried off to work, errands, or other duties. Afternoons were marked by caregivers' admonitions for center attendees to find their shoes, to put them on quickly, and, in the colder months, to zip up their coats. In this light, it makes sense

that some would seek out their outerwear right after lunch, despite staff members directing them to wait until they were picked up. Occasionally, caregivers would talk with the directors about worrisome new symptoms, or how time was spent at the center. On Thursdays, caregivers would wait for appointments with the psychiatrist. The pace of interactions among kin felt rushed, tempers were occasionally short, and relations often seemed tense. In these moments, social relations came across as strained and difficult. Such sentiments were confirmed for me in conversations with four of these caregivers, who spoke of various difficulties at home that they attributed to their relatives' Alzheimer's disease. Because of the constraints of my IRB approval, I could not directly ask participants about their experiences at home.¹² Thus, the stories I relate here are from the perspective of the caregiver. I have tried, where possible, to interpret how situations might seem from the perspective of the person with Alzheimer's, but this is unfortunately limited.

I interviewed four women who served as caregivers; two were wives whose husbands attended the center and two were daughters whose parents (one mother, one father) attended.¹³ All spoke to the difficulties of caring for their kin with dementia, noting that their kin would make more demands of them, especially centering on food. They were all exhausted. Notably, the one daughter who took care of her mother seemed less stressed and difficult than the others, citing mostly the increased attention her mother needed. One woman, pani Maria, spoke of the contraction of their social world since her husband, pan Marek, had developed Alzheimer's disease.¹⁴ After she retired as a tour guide, she attended the University of the Third Age for six

¹² See Chapter 1 for a discussion of fieldwork methodology and IRB.

¹³ There was also a sizable minority of caregivers who were men, but I found it more difficult to approach them. They seemed more harried and I found that they did not enter easily into conversation with me the way that women did. I am not sure to what I should attribute this, if anything – the sample size is perhaps too small to make generalizations. Yet this falls into the pattern throughout my fieldwork in which it was much easier for me to speak with older women rather than men.

¹⁴ Robbins interview, 3 February 2010.

years, where she studied astronomy and Italian. “It was...it was pleasant, that old age.”¹⁵ For the last three years since her husband has had Alzheimer’s, she can no longer attend the University of the Third Age—or maintain other kin or non-kin relationships. In response to a question I asked about whether pani Maria saw friends of her own, she responded: “Darling, now I have no personal life, nothing—only taking care of my husband.”¹⁶ They were invited to attend his sister’s ninetieth birthday party that weekend in Leszno, a town not far from Poznań, but pani Maria decided against attending, after first saying that they would attend. Although it was an important event—his sister’s daughter was making a family tree (*drzewo genealogiczne*) to which she wanted the whole family to contribute at this party—pani Maria thought it would be too much trouble to take care of pan Marek there. The season made it difficult, she explained. Since it was winter, the party would be indoors and pan Marek would be wearing heavy clothing. If he wet himself, this would be problematic. Moreover, the young, healthy family members would not understand pan Marek’s problems. But maybe if it were summer, when the weather would be nicer and he would be wearing lightweight clothes that could dry easily, they could go. So pani Maria declined the invitation.

Pani Maria described changes in pan Marek’s behaviors since having Alzheimer’s disease. She noticed there was something wrong when he started to act strangely with regards to money. At the time of the interview, he no longer wanted to shower and would sometimes wet himself. She described a new “aggression” in his personality. “Aggression. Aggression. [Everything] has to be just how he likes it.”¹⁷ He had some problems with memory, although these seemed less important to pani Maria than the behavioral problems. In a doctor’s appointment early in the diagnostic process, pani Maria was surprised to see that he could not tell

¹⁵ “To była... była przyjemna, ta starość.”

¹⁶ “Kochana, ja już życia osobistego nie mam, nic, tylko opieka nad mężem.”

¹⁷ “Agresja. Agresja. Musi być tak jak on uważa.”

time. She said that he did know who he was and when he was born, although he had some difficulties with remembering names. To remedy this, pani Maria quizzed him at home on their grandchildren's and other relatives' names, and this has helped him to remember. She also thinks attending the center has "slowed down"¹⁸ the progression of his disease, which she attributes to the cognitive exercises at the center. He was also taking medication for Alzheimer's: Exelon (rivastigmine). Pan Marek used to take it in pill form, but switched to the patch at the doctor's suggestion because it had less effect on his liver and stomach; however, pani Maria noticed that pan Marek would rip off the patch, so was planning to ask the doctor to switch back to the pill. Even though it takes over six hours each day for her to drop off and pick up pan Marek from the center, pani Maria was grateful for the care, since it allowed her to run errands.¹⁹ She could not run errands with pan Marek, since he once wandered away from her, boarded a bus, and disappeared: pani Maria found him near their home eating apples from a wild apple tree.

However, it is notable that not all these hardships were entirely new. Pani Maria saw her husband, a retired tailor, as newly arrogant after developing Alzheimer's, but described his personality more as an intensification of behaviors that she had always noticed. Somewhat hesitatingly, she referred to him as being selfish (*samolubny*) throughout their life together, citing an example in which he selected the best pieces of fruit for himself, rather than saving them for their children. This made her heart hurt, pani Maria said. She explained such selfishness as a failure on her part, which she was trying to remedy:

I'm a tour guide. So, I had unpredictable work hours. It varied – sometimes I'd come home later, sometimes earlier. So when I returned [from work], it's possible that I raised my husband and kids poorly. Because it's also necessary to raise a husband. Listen – I've been doing everything from the beginning. Even—would you believe it— my husband told me “when you sweeten my tea for me, it tastes better.” And I was young, so I sweetened it. And he got used to it. But not anymore.

¹⁸ “Tu trochę się zahamowało.”

¹⁹ She used the phrasing “załatwienie różne sprawy.”

Now I put out honey, because he drinks tea with honey. Despite everything, he... well, I'm trying [to do this]: his head is sick, but his hands are strong. So after all, maybe he can do a little bit.²⁰

Despite having sweetened pan Marek's tea for decades, pani Maria decided that she would no longer do this.²¹ Perhaps because his Alzheimer's now requires her to do so many things for him, she could no longer do the small things to which he had grown accustomed. I failed to ask how pan Marek responded to his new task of sweetening his own tea—pani Maria spoke rapidly, as if she needed to tell these stories—but I could imagine that pan Marek might be irritated or confused by her refusal to sweeten the tea. From pani Maria's perspective, this seems like a largely symbolic act: surely putting honey in his tea is among the least difficult or time-consuming of the tasks that she performs for him, since she said he needed almost constant supervision and attention. She spoke of being worn out and exhausted. This change in their relationship seems to be a response not only to Alzheimer's, but to a lifetime of managing a relationship with a husband she saw as selfish.

In my observations at the center, pan Marek did not seem selfish or aggressive; in fact, he was among the quieter participants. He always greeted me with a warm smile and was generally engaged in activities, although he would at times fall asleep during the cognitive exercises. He and pan Czesław seemed to become friends: they would often sit next to each other and pan Marek would often be among the first to follow pan Czesław's lead in singing songs. In short, he seemed quite different than the person pani Maria described at home.

²⁰ "Ja jestem przewodnik turystyczny. Także, ja miałam takie niewyznaczone wymiar godzin. Różno to bywało. I raz późno wracałam i raz wcześniej. Więc jak wracałam, może ja źle wychowałam i męża i dzieci. Bo męża też trzeba wychować. Proszę panią, od początku wszystko ja robiłam. Nawet, wie pani, mąż mi powiedział, 'jak słodzisz mi herbatę to lepiej mi smakuje.' Ale ja młoda, słodziłam. On się przyzwyczaił. A teraz już nie. Już postawię miód bo z miodem pije herbatę. Musi sam jednak, staram się jak mógłby tak. Głowa chora. Ale ręce ma silne. No przecież co, może trochę robić." Robbins interview 3 February 2010.

²¹ The practice of wives sweetening their husbands' tea is perhaps a cultural pattern. A recent news article quoted Lech Wałęsa as having to "to sweeten his own tea and slice his own bread" when his wife was on a book tour. He wouldn't have minded if he had been doing it all along, he said, but it was difficult to learn how to do so after 50 years of marriage.
http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,114883,13062044,Walesa__Nie_zgadzam_sie_z_zona__ale_nie_na_tyle__zeby.html (accessed 10 January 2013). Thanks to Brian Porter-Szücs for this reference.

Throughout our conversation, pani Maria referred to her difficulties to pan Marek's illness and longstanding difficulties between them. At the end of our conversation, however, pani Maria told me that she too had significant health problems. She is in "pierwsza grupa inwalidstwa," or "disabled – first level," the category used by the Polish state to label the most severely disabled, meaning that she is not qualified for work. Eleven years earlier, she had a routine diagnostic procedure that went wrong; since then, she has had a colostomy bag, which she says is also causing severe nerve pain. She needs an operation, she said, but has no time to get it done because she had to take care of pan Marek. Sighing, she said that one must be grateful and thank God for each day: "clearly, it's necessary to suffer on this earth."²² I was surprised to learn of her health troubles; although visibly tired and harried, pani Maria looked younger than her 80 years and had a certain energy and vitality around her. It is also worth noting that this description of suffering fits well with the figure of *Matka-Polka*, yet pani Maria's insistence that pan Marek now sweeten his own tea suggests that this category does not entirely fit—or perhaps it indicates exactly her struggle against it.²³

As described above, these difficult changes in social relationships are also emphasized in both clinical and ethnographic literature on Alzheimer's. Yet I see the exhaustion of pani Maria and the other women not only as the difficulties of taking care of a person with dementia who does not fully understand the work being done on his behalf, but also as the exhaustion of a lifetime of effort, a lifetime of care, a lifetime of tea-sweetening. Notably, it was not only pan Marek's Alzheimer's and incontinence that prevented them from attending his sister's birthday party, but also pani Maria's perception that others would not understand; such strained relations took on generational stakes in the omission of pan Marek and pani Maria from the creation of the

²² "widocznie trzeba na tej ziemi cierpieć."

²³ Thanks to Brian Porter-Szücs for pointing out the connection to the *Matka-Polka* here.

family tree that was to take place at the party. For these women, Alzheimer's has seemed to exacerbate situations that were already difficult, rather than precipitate a fall from some previous state of grace. In this light, then, the relatively peaceful, harmonious social environment of the center appears remarkable. Indeed, rather than tense interactions, the atmosphere at the center felt relaxed and calm. The staff helped to keep the stakes low; interactions among attendees, who lack the deep intimate and shared histories that define kin relations, did not matter in the same way that interactions with kin did. Being in a group of people who cannot remember the president's name is different than being with a spouse and forgetting a child's name. The lack of tension within this group marked a significant change from difficult relations at home.

This comment on the peaceful nature of the center is not made to suggest that there was never any interpersonal conflict or discord; as with any group of people, there were quarrels between particular individuals. Pan Marcin regularly amused *and* annoyed fellow attendees; pan Czesław's songs alternately entertained *and* irritated people; pani Weronika became close with pani Teresa, but slighted pani Marysia by one day sitting at a different table from her. In fact, this is part of the point in this chapter. As in any other group that habitually spends time together, friendships and cliques formed, excluding some, while others expressed no interest in such friendships, preferring instead to sit quietly by themselves. Relations within the group of attendees at the Alzheimer's center were in some ways quite similar to those among the *sluchacze* of the University of the Third Age. Similar gendered patterns of sociality existed, wherein men and women tended to self-segregate; the women chatted more between themselves, while men were more often engaged in solitary activities like reading or crossword puzzles or sought attention from the group through loud behavior. Paradoxically, at the center, Alzheimer's was no longer the defining feature of group interactions. Although the diagnosis structured the

daily routines of cognitive and physical exercises, it was not the most important part of people's interactions. Rather, people at the center engaged in behaviors that align with gendered patterns of sociality throughout the life course, suggesting that memory is social as well as cognitive. The next sections will show how shared national frameworks foster memory and the embodied ways in which memory persists.

Memory in an Alzheimer's center: shared national frameworks

On the day I returned in the summer of 2012, I spent almost an hour catching up with staff members. Then, the group started to disperse: one rehabilitation therapist left for another job as her shift ended, an occupational therapist went out for a cigarette, and the director made a phone call. The attendees at the center seemed to be getting restless, as one older man walked into the office to ask if the group could go for a walk. Taking this as a sign to begin the next hour's activities, a *terapeutka*, Asia, began a session with half the group in the main dining room. After finishing my conversation with another *terapeutka*, I joined the group in the dining room to observe the day's sessions. Everyone was writing in a workbook; Asia reminded everyone to work on exercise 8, since they had completed exercise 7 yesterday. After a few minutes, she reviewed the exercises with the group.

Asia: Which flows from a faucet: water or milk?
Pan Bogdan: Water.
Asia: What grows on pine trees?
Pan Bogdan: Pinecones.
Asia: Pan Bogdan! It's pan Adam's turn! Which is a musical instrument: a guitar or a fork?
Pan Adam: Guitar.
(other questions that I missed while chatting with several participants)
Asia: What does a member of parliament do?
Pan Marcin: He hangs out with his friends and goes to the bar.
Pan Adam: He parliaments.²⁴ *(laughter)*
Asia: And what does the president do?
(man): Nothing!

²⁴ The word

(woman): He governs our whole nation! It's a sin what you're saying.
 (man): In general, he doesn't do anything.
 Asia: And what is the name of the President of Poland?
 Pan Marcin: Bierut! (*Bolesław Bierut was the Stalinist leader of Poland from 1947-1952; from the twinkle in his eye, Marcin clearly intended this answer to be a joke. His comment was followed by much laughter from the whole group.*)
 (woman): No, Komorowski!
 Asia: And the prime minister? (silence) Come on, Poles!
 (man): Buzek. (*Jerzy Buzek was the prime minister from 1997-2001, and more recently, the head of the European Parliament.*)
 (other): Komorowski.
 Asia: That's the president – the prime minister is Tusk.²⁵

As Asia read out the questions, only a few people contributed answers. The rest of the group sat quietly, looking at their workbooks and other people in the room. As I was observing the room from my seat in the corner, my eyes met pani Hanna's in a look that seemed as if she recognized me. A slight smile passed across her face as she looked at me inquisitively. I remembered other such encounters with pani Hanna during my fieldwork two years earlier. Pani Hanna rarely spoke, yet often seemed to be monitoring the activity of others with a vaguely suspicious look. It was clear she was an engaged member of the group; her raised eyebrows and narrowed stare conveyed as much as others' words. Pani Hanna seemed to have great difficulties with the workbook activities, often leaving entire sections blank. When I was there in 2010, I learned from a staff member that pani Hanna once arrived at the center on a Saturday morning; the center was closed, as it always was on weekends, but pani Hanna waited for hours. A neighbor saw her and eventually guided her home. I heard from staff that she was on a list for a place in a state-run long-term care institution, but her presence there two years later indicated that she was still waiting for the place. A staff member once mentioned to me that she had lived through very

²⁵ Asia: "Woda czy mleko płynie z krany?" Bogdan: "Woda." Asia: "Co rośnie na sośnie?" Bogdan: "Szyszki." "Panie Bogdanie! Pan Adam teraz! Gitara czy widelec jest instrumentem muzycznym?" Adam: "Gitara." Asia: "Czym się zajmuje poseł?" Marcin: "Siedzi z kolegami i idzie do baru." Adam: "Posłuje." Asia: "A co robi prezydent?" (man): "Nic!" (woman): "Rządzi nasz cały naród! Jest grzech, co mówisz." (man): "Generalnie nic nie robi." Asia: "A jak się nazywa nasz prezydent Polski?" Marcin: "Bierut!" (woman): "Nie, Komorowski!" Asia: "A premier?" (silence) "No, Polacy!" (man): "Buzek." (man): "Komorowski." Asia: "To prezydent.... Tusk."

difficult experiences in her life, but I never learned what these were, or indeed any personal details about her life. She seemed a private and cautious person, maintaining eye contact across the room, but lowering her eyes in moments when I (or someone else) would try to speak with her. On this day, pani Hanna seemed as she had two years earlier: quiet, skeptical, attentive.

Asia then led the group in the next workbook exercise: the task was to match the first half with the last half of first names that had been scrambled. Pan Bogdan, seemingly displeased with this activity, cursed under his breath just loud enough for others to hear.

<i>Jad</i>	<i>wiga</i>
<i>Honor</i>	<i>ata</i>
<i>Win</i>	<i>centy</i>
<i>Iwo</i>	<i>na</i>
<i>Ze</i>	<i>non</i>
<i>Bartło</i>	<i>miej</i>
<i>An</i>	<i>drzej</i>
<i>Ger</i>	<i>truda</i>
<i>Jan</i>	<i>usz</i>

Many people in the group answered these questions with seeming ease, calling out the second halves of the names almost immediately after Asia called out the first halves. The only name that people did not answer right away was “Gertruda,” which Asia then prompted them to recall with the hint “a rare name, popular during wartime, German.”²⁶ With this clue, a few people volunteered “Gertruda.” After this exercise, Asia encouraged the group to work on the next exercise, involving filling in halves of incomplete shapes. Pan Marcin offered to help pani Hanna, saying “can I help you, Hanka [diminutive]?”²⁷ After a few minutes, Asia led the group in a conversation about the ongoing EURO 2012, or the European soccer championship, which was hosted in Poland during that month. The games in Poznań had just finished a few days earlier. Asia asked if people had watched the games, if they knew who would be in the semifinal match, if they knew the name of Poland’s goalkeeper, Przemysław Tytoń, the star of the Polish

²⁶ “Rzadko, popularnie w czasie wojny, niemieckie.”

²⁷ “Pomóc Ci Hanka?”

team during that tournament. People could not recall his name, instead listing names of goalkeepers who played in decades past.

As I sat in the corner of the room watching the interactions and activities, I was struck by the way that memory persists in this space where people are defined by their lack of memory. People found the comment about Bierut being the current prime minister hilarious; although they might not distinguish between Buzek, Komorowski, and Tusk (Polish political leaders of the last decade or fifteen years), people knew that “Bierut” was most certainly not the correct answer. It could be 1998 or 2005, but it is definitely *not* 1950. The joke about parliament members drinking at the bar spoke to a shared sense of the ineffectiveness of government; the woman’s retort that a comment harshly criticizing the president was sinful recalled nationalist sentiments that heroize certain political leaders (even though the current president, Bronisław Komorowski, is from the party that is not supported by the far right, supporters of which would be most likely to call such a comment a “sin”). People could recall many first names; in this moment, the regularity of Polish names constituted a shared knowledge base upon which everyone could draw.

A cognitive exercise on Polish geography that I observed in 2010 similarly drew upon shared knowledge. One afternoon, Kasia asked the group to list names of Polish cities, as many as they could recall. She stood at the front of the room next to an easel; on the gray-white paper pad, she wrote in thick black marker the letters of the alphabet. She then asked the group to think of Polish cities beginning with the letter A, and then B, and so on. This is the list the group generated:

- A – Augustów
- B – Białystok, Bydgoszcz, Bielsko Białe
- C – Ciechocinek, Częstochowa, Chełm, Cieszyn
- D –
- E – Elk, Elbląg
- F – Frombork
- G – Gdańsk, Gdynia, Gniezno, Gliwice
- H – Hel, Hajnówka

I – Iława, Inowrocław
J – Jarocin, Jelenia Góra
K – Konin, Kutno, Kraków, Katowice, Kamienna Góra, Karpacz
L – Lublin, Lwów, Lubin, Luboń
M – Malbork, Międzychód, Mogilno
N – Nowy Sącz
O – Olsztyn, Ostrów, Opole, Opalenica
P – Poznań, Pniewy, Piotrów, Płock
R – Radom, Rawicz, Rogalin
S – Suwałki
T –
U – Ustka, Ustrzyki
W – Warszawa, Wrocław, Włocławek, Wałbrzych, Wilno
Z – Zakopane, Zagłębie, Zamość, Zgórzelec
Ż – Żury, Żagań
Ż – Zielona Góra

This list is quite comprehensive, with cities from all regions of Poland included, although there are slightly more from the area around Poznań. (Notably, they group included Lwów, although this has not been part of the territory of Poland since 1945; it is now the Ukrainian city of L'viv.)

Many people contributed answers. A similar quizzing activity was done, naming the neighborhoods of Poznań. I see these geographical exercises as ways to create known spatiotemporal worlds for the center participants. In this light, pani Hanna's wandering to the center on the weekend can be seen as less the action of a demented woman roaming the streets, but rather that of someone who feels lost and is seeking out a place where she knows she belongs.

These exercises contrasted to other more personal biographical exercises in which *terapeutki* would ask participants to recall particular times in their past. (These are of the type suggested by Kitwood [1997] and others in the "person-centered" movement.) During those sessions, which I observed less frequently than those focusing on the more shared national past, the mood became heavier and people joked less frequently. It became harder to keep a group conversation going. A *terapeutka* would ask about the happiest moment in participants' lives, and individuals would volunteer expected answers: weddings, births of children and

grandchildren, graduating from high school (*matura*) or college. But people rarely developed these stories; these somewhat formulaic answers seemed to hang in the air. I found it difficult to follow these types of conversations: my handwritten fieldnotes from these days are a jumble of questions and assorted comments.

One day, during an afternoon conversation session led by a *terapeutka* about everyday topics—what kind of cuisine do you prefer, what do you like to read—Pani Emilia volunteered that her father had an accident—he had fallen and died. The *terapeutka* took this as a moment to ask the group how they deal with difficult moments. Pani Emilia said that she prayed to God, and another woman said she finds it necessary to cry. Pan Piotr, the man who was friendly with two women depending on the day of the week, said that he too finds it necessary to cry. Generally, he said, men cry less, but he cries more than any woman. The *terapeutka* then asked the group what they find amusing or enjoyable. The group had a hard time responding, but the *terapeutka* suggested Charlie Chaplin, mimicking his funny walk, which elicited a chuckle from several people. Someone else said they liked Chopin. Pan Piotr spoke up again, saying “nothing. I live alone, so what do I have to be glad about. Dear,” he said, addressing the *terapeutka*, “I have a lot of passion in me.”²⁸ Another person volunteered that she liked cats and dogs. The *terapeutka* steered the conversation back to films and television shows, mentioning Mr. Bean (*Jaś Fasola*) and *Sami Swoi* (a popular Polish comedy from the late 1960s). A man mentioned *Czterdziestolatek* (The Forty-Year-Old), a popular Polish sitcom from the 1970s.

During these conversations, although the intention of the *terapeutka* was to elicit more personal memories, in practice it was difficult to sustain the exercise around these more personal recollections. Discussing intimate moments—weddings, births, graduations—requires

²⁸ “Nic. Mieszkam sam – co ja mam się cieszyć. Droga pani, mam dużo żaru w sobie.” The word he used for “passion” also means “embers,” a smoldering fire.

knowledge and narrative confidence on the part of the storyteller, which is exactly what people with Alzheimer's less commonly have. Moreover, people did not seem to engage with the fragments or moments that others told. There was a sort of self-focus that these conversations suggested, rather than the community-focused direction of conversations about movies, films, names or history. Perhaps this is why the conversation kept veering back towards less personal shared experiences of pop culture. This is notable, given that one of the goals of person-centered care is to elicit exactly these deeply personal recollections (cf. Schweitzer and Bruce 2008). It is also notable that the elements of the national past that are elicited were not controversial—the *terapeutki* did not ask what the war was like for their families or what sort of difficulties they faced during socialism. Rather, the topics remained rather light (movies, television, soccer) and uncontroversial (first names, geography). Although the discussion of political leaders could have become controversial, the conversation stayed on a superficial level; people did not then ask what Bierut (the Stalinist leader) was like. When difficult memories arose, the *terapeutki* tended to steer the conversation back towards these less difficult topics.

These exercises, which draw on elements of a shared national past, are an example of processes that contribute to the warm, familiar environment of the center. Through producing and reinforcing knowledge to which all Poles have access, Asia created opportunities for people to joke, laugh, show off, and assert themselves. People could be together not only physically, but socially, emotionally, and cognitively. Like the older Poles discussed in chapter 5, who draw upon the shared national past as a resource for giving meaning to lives that have become inadequate, people at the Alzheimer's center have opportunities for meaningful social interaction within this national framework. I argue that these national references create opportunities for social personhood, exactly what is so often erased by Alzheimer's disease and lamented by kin.

Through repeated references to shared times and places, the staff and participants together define for themselves a world that is spatiotemporally coherent and in which they can live, together.

Memory in an Alzheimer's center: the persistence of the social

Cognitive memory, then, remains among those who are defined by their lack of exactly this. In this section, I argue that memory also persists in ways that are socially embodied. Clinical writings on Alzheimer's would explain the aforementioned answer about Bierut (the Stalinist leader) being the president of Poland by categorizing this as an example of the common symptom of forgetting the recent past but remembering the distant past. However, the *joking* dimension of that comment cannot fully be explained through clinical writing. Rather, clinical descriptions omit the social dimension and lessen our ability to perceive what cognition remains. There is a great deal more sociality and daily experience to both cognitive and social memory that goes unrecognized in such clinical accounts. Here, I will show that even the more cultural phenomenological or narrative accounts of dementia (e.g., Kontos 2006, McLean 2006) omit some of this sociality through a use of personhood that is less than fully social. People with Alzheimer's maintain personhood through both shared cognition *and* sociality. It is to the social dimension of how memory persists that I now turn.

During the cognitive exercises, there were always several people who never contributed answers, and in fact, rarely spoke. Yet these people were visibly participating in the group in other ways. Especially notable were pan Ryszard, pani Hanna, and pani Izabela. Pan Ryszard was a quiet, demure man whose Alzheimer's, the staff told me, was among the most advanced of the group. He had great difficulty completing workbook exercises; I sat next to him one day at his usual seat near the door at one of the men's tables and observed that he could not complete a

drawing of a square. (Many exercises presented participants with one half of a shape and required them to complete the drawing by mimicking the lines in mirror-image.) He rarely answered questions from the *terapeutka* or spoke to the other participants, but would politely pass the juice or a pencil when asked. When he learned that I was American, however, he began speaking English to me, asking me how I liked Poland and how long I would stay there, and often repeated the phrase, “East, west, home is best!” He told me that he liked practicing speaking English, and that he would read books in English at home each evening. He learned English, he said, from American soldiers during World War II (or as he would say, “World War the Second”). Pan Ryszard walked through the hallway frequently, seeking out the bathroom, and each time he would see me, his face would light up and he would ask, “How are you enjoying your stay in Poland?” If I was away from the center for a few days, when I returned he would ask, “Where have you been for so long? I am glad you are back. I like speaking English with you.” I learned to respond in short sentences and to give him time to respond after every sentence or two because he had difficulty responding to longer stretches of speech. Once, he asked, “You live in Poznań? Forever? You will be a teacher?” “A professor of anthropology,” I responded. “That is a very hard subject,” pan Ryszard said. “You are still young, the world is open to you. I think you will think of us when you are back home. I will think of you very much.” His daughter told me that he would sometimes talk about me in the evenings.

I share these stories not as a way of boasting about my closeness to my research participants, but rather as evidence of the significance of social relationships for people with Alzheimer’s, and of certain kind of pasts. Even though pan Ryszard received significant attention from the staff (who were also young women in their late twenties and early thirties), somehow the interactions with me were different for him. For pan Ryszard, the possibility of speaking

English was something that clearly mattered deeply to him—this mode of interaction allowed him to create new relationships in a way that speaking in Polish did not.

Pani Izabela and pani Hanna were two women who also did not participate verbally in group conversations. In fact, I rarely heard them speak at all. Like pan Ryszard, however, they each sat in the same seat every day. Pani Hanna, the woman described earlier in this chapter who one weekend wandered to the day-care center and waited to be let in, sat one of the women's tables in the corner of the room, and pani Izabela, the woman mentioned earlier in this chapter who would shoot disapproving looks across the room, sat at the women's table in the other corner of the room. Pani Hanna seemed to be able to complete the workbook activities to some extent, while pani Izabela could barely complete them at all. Pani Hanna, who often wore a heavy green sweater and gray skirt, would often sit with her arms on the table and her head resting on her hands, following the conversations that went around the room. Pani Izabela, who often wore a fine-knit sky blue sweater over a silky blouse with a heavy wool skirt, would sit ramrod straight at the table, following the conversation and seeming to judge others' actions through a raise of her eyebrows. Both pani Hanna and pani Izabela seemed to be irritated by pan Czesław's loud singing—when he would begin one of the World-War-I-era or folk songs, pan Wojtek would often join in loudly, sometimes clapping or shouting. Pani Izabela would look at me, look at the singing men, and look back at me and shake her head. Pani Hanna would look at the men, narrow her eyes, and stare intently at them.

Rather than seeing these actions as the limited behaviors of demented elders, I see pani Hanna and pani Izabela's judgmental glances and stares as part of the social life of this group. This is embodied personhood, to be sure, but I do not think that these actions are best understood as manifestation of primordial selfhood shaped by class histories (Kontos 2006). I also do not see

these actions as evidence of a continuous, coherent self (McLean 2006). It is most likely the case that pani Hanna and pani Izabela had long histories of judging men who were behaving badly and that what counts as “behaving badly” is shaped by class (and gender), but I am not convinced that this is the best lens through which to explain such behavior. Rather, I see these actions as part of the daily practices of the center, as part of new habits and relations that people create in this spatiotemporally bounded world.

Another example of embodied sociality and relations will better make this point. Perhaps the one activity at the center in which the greatest number of people actively participated was volleyball—or rather, “volleyball.” In the exercise room, a *terapeutka* would set up six rows of chairs, three rows facing each other, and after participants had filed into the room, she would explain the rules of the game. The goal was not to score points, like in volleyball, but rather to see how many times in a row the two sides could hit the ball back and forth to each other. It was collaborative rather than competitive. Instead of a volleyball, they used a large, light beach ball. Sitting in their chairs, participants hit the ball back and forth as the *terapeutka* would count out loud each successful pass. Another *terapeutka* stood behind one participant with poor eyesight, guiding her hands towards the ball. The participants were evidently enjoying the game and clamored to hit the ball. Inevitably, the ball would knock off someone’s glasses or hit someone on the head; these were funny moments, prompting everyone to laugh. A few participants’ enthusiasm was notable: pan Michał would hit the ball with all his strength, sending it hurtling across the room, while pan Wojtek would often catch the ball rather than hitting it back to the other side, with a look of triumph as he did so. This would always make the *terapeutki* laugh; it was unclear if others noticed this breach of the rule, although I did see pani Izabela make her characteristic disapproving expression as pan Wojtek gloated over his great catch. Indeed, this

was the most notably engaged I saw pani Izabela; normally reticent, during volleyball she would quickly reach up out of her seat for the ball, lean out to the side so that she could hit it rather than the person next to her. There was something about this physical sociality that enlivened the group in a way other activities did not. It would last into the next part of the day, as people tended to be chattier after volleyball, though it faded within an hour.

Memory houses

These embodied, shared experiences cannot be fully explained by models of person-centered practice or analyses of it. Because such research aims to create or reveal the pre-Alzheimer's self—or alternately to find ways of accepting the post-Alzheimer's self—they cannot account for experiences that are not themselves defined by diagnosis. In other words, there can be places in which the disease category of Alzheimer's is not the only distinction that matters. Rather, social relations within coherent spatiotemporal worlds matter more. The known spaces of the exercise room and dining room structured the daily activities. The people who attended the Alzheimer's center learned these patterns of activity in these particular places; I argue that both the temporal and spatial nature of these actions fosters the embodied sociality that occurred during volleyball games. Practices of commensality dominate life at the center, whether in volleyball games, dances, daily meals, or group discussions of individual worksheets.

Perhaps this is why the Alzheimer's center seems similar to the University of the Third Age. Although these are different experiences, to be sure, they are not so radically different as to render Alzheimer's some absolute "other." Rather, there are commonalities across institutions in the processes of forming social ties. Food, drink, humor, shared goals, and familiarity unite these

places as much as they divide them. Shifting the lens to the spatiotemporal dimensions of moral personhood and relatedness demonstrates similarities across what seem to be vast divides.

At the Alzheimer's center, people also learned the patterns of conversations in which staff evoked shared national frameworks. These activities seemed less problematic and more enjoyable for participants than did questions about personal lives. In the Alzheimer's center, evocations of standard, relatively uncontroversial elements of local geographies and national histories were more generative of social relations than questions about the fraught ambiguities of daily life. However, national history and individual lives are not as tightly connected as in other contexts throughout the dissertation since people at the Alzheimer's center more often had trouble engaging with their own personal histories. Even as the Alzheimer's center itself becomes a home-like place, with its near-constant attempts at commensality, the homes—and kin relations—of participants remain bounded off from the world of the center. Rather, it is meaningful places and temporalities at scales larger than the home through which these older Poles create social relations.

However, what kind of moral personhood is possible for older Poles who cannot maintain this tight link between person and nation that appears so fundamental to people of their generation? That is, what kinds of personhood are possible when the national is foregrounded? What kinds of knowledge can be passed on to future generations if older Poles with Alzheimer's have trouble engaging the complexity of kin relations? Might people with Alzheimer's try to pass on knowledge in ways that are not immediately recognizable to kin or staff at the center? If Alzheimer's inhibits people's ability to maintain kin relations, how might kin foster relations that do not depend on their status as kin? Are there ways in which insights having to do with the

connections between kin, memory, and home (Bahloul 1996, 1999), and between person, place, and time, could transform the moral personhood of older Poles with Alzheimer's?

Conclusion

A day in the garden

The passing of time between fieldwork trips is felt acutely by many anthropologists returning to the field, and is perhaps heightened among those who spend time with older people. Although I do not aim to reproduce the geroanthropological objectification and distancing of my research participants as the “other” (Cohen 1994), as I took leave of older people in Poland with whom I worked, especially those who were ill or particularly advanced in years, I was always aware that this could be the last time we were together. In those moments of leave-taking, I felt the fragility of ethnographic fieldwork and the finite nature of human interaction more broadly. So when I returned to Poland in the summer of 2012 after two years away to conduct follow-up research and to reconnect with people, I was expecting to learn of the deaths of many older people that I knew. And indeed, I did learn that some had passed away, or were assumed by institutional staff to have passed away after leaving particular institutions. Yet I also learned that several people who were unwell when I had left in 2010 were thriving in 2012. Notably, pani Dorota, who was approaching her 100th birthday when I had left and was quite ill at that time, had recovered, survived pneumonia and the flu, and was approaching her 102nd birthday. She relayed this to me with a laugh and a sense of amazement in her voice. At the time of this writing, she is approaching 103. Spending time in the presence of those of extremely advanced years gives me pause, bringing to the fore the passing of individuals and generations. As people

of pani Dorota's generation pass away, what is left from that generation's experiences? What endures, what is lost, and what are the processes through which this happens?

A day I spent that summer with women from the University of the Third Age in Wrocław suggests a partial answer. I was invited to a gathering at an allotment garden (*na działce*) of a friend of a woman I knew through the English class that I taught. I had mentioned to pani Dominika that I was curious to learn about the *działki* (allotment gardens), which were key non-institutional sites of sociality for older people, as well as flashpoints in contemporary conflicts over the public good and the rights of marginalized groups. I met pani Dominika on a sunny July morning at the statues of the lions (symbols of Lwów) at the John Paul II Square. We took the tram out past the new stadium that had been built that summer for the European soccer championship, past the neighborhood of apartment blocks where Active Senior was held, past Park Zachodni (which shows no signs of its past as a German cemetery), past the one active Jewish cemetery in town, and past the new highway (also built for the soccer championship). We crossed the tram tracks and walked parallel to the highway on-ramp on a grassy path with little alleys off to the right side. After a bit of wandering, we found the right grassy alley and walked down the path, surrounded by gardens in varying degrees of upkeep.



Figure 17: Walking between rows of allotment gardens

Finding pani Dominika's friend's garden, we walked through the gate and joined the group of four women sitting at a picnic table under a canopy of grapevines and eating, drinking, and chatting. Some people knew each other through the University of the Third Age, others were sisters-in-law, and others had worked together for decades. A few more people joined the group an hour later.

We spent the day chatting, eating, drinking; everyone had brought food to share, and the hosts served it constantly throughout the five or six hours we were there. Mayonnaise-based salads, apple pudding cake (this was especially popular), grilled cheese, pickles, cookies, pretzels, apples (*papierówki*) picked from a tree on the *działka*. Tea, coffee, water, beer, both flavored and regular. The women chatted about their children and grandchildren and joked about the difficulties of relationships with daughters-in-law. When a thunderstorm broke out, all eight of us crammed into the small shed on the *działka*. It was in this crowded space that people started singing. For an hour, the women egged each other on, singing 20 different songs: folk tunes, World-War-I-era songs, songs about post-war Wrocław, and wedding songs. The women told me they had just always known these songs, singing them at camps as children and as weddings as adults, and were surprised that I did not have a similar American repertoire ready to perform. After the rain had stopped, we stayed inside the shed for a bit longer, and eventually took our leave, all walking back to the tram together, most of us with bags of *papierówki* and white string beans (*fasolki szparagowe*) from the host.

In many ways, this was a different form of sociality than I had experienced during my long-term fieldwork. We were outside, there was no one institution structuring social interaction, and there was a sense of leisure that was absent from both the medical and educational institutions. Yet these practices and their practices also felt deeply familiar—telling stories about

kin, sharing food and drink, singing songs, caring for plants, flowers, fruits, and vegetables. In these practices, I see the construction and enactment of moral personhood through the concrete practices of sharing food and tending gardens, as well as the more expansive imaginative practices of remembering and imagining past and future kin, past and future songs, past and future apple cakes. In these practices, I see the beginning of an answer to the question of generational continuity and rupture, as seen from the perspective of the everyday. Following Bahloul (1996, 1999), Carsten (2007b), and Lambek (1996, 2007), these practices are not just creating relations in the present, but creating relations that extend into the realm of memory, politics, and care, forging links between persons, times, and places.

Contributions of the dissertation

This dissertation contributes to several key areas of study in sociocultural and medical anthropology, postsocialist studies, and interdisciplinary studies of old age. First, this dissertation shows how sustained ethnographic attention to moral personhood, as created through certain social practices, can elucidate connections between persons, times, and places. This method, which integrates often-separated phenomenological and political-economic perspectives has implications for anthropological studies of personhood, kinship, and inequality. The analytic category of moral personhood, through a focus on exchange and embodiment, highlights the complexity of social interactions and their potential for transforming the value, worth, status, and emotions of individuals. Studying ways that non-kin form meaningful social ties through practices of relatedness extends the reach of kinship studies into understanding relations of friendship and care. By studying moral personhood as bound up with political economy, this dissertation highlights the social practices through which social inequality can be reinforced,

reproduced, or ameliorated. Ethnographic analysis on the locally meaningful practices of storytelling, remembering, learning, and commensality shows how the creation and destruction of social persons is tied up with (trans)national historical political-economic transformations. This approach shows how a focus on structural inequality can sometimes obscure the practices of relatedness, such as storytelling, remembering, learning, and commensality, through which experiences and ideals of personhood are transformed.

Second, this dissertation contributes to a growing body of ethnographic work in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union that studies aspects of life not primarily characterized by labor relations. Through studying people who are largely outside the labor market, this dissertation contributes ethnographic data on an understudied population in the region. Having research sites in two different cities with differing histories and relations to the state shows variability within national frameworks that can be homogenized. The dissertation's historical approach to studying educational institution reveals both continuities and discontinuities with the socialist and pre-socialist past, suggesting alternate regional historiographies. Moreover, the analytic focus on kinship, care, memory, and place suggests a way out of a still-lurking Cold-War ideological framework of socialism and capitalism. Instead, frameworks of home, memory, and care emerge as salient ways to understand regional transformations in both moral personhood and political economy.

Third, this dissertation contributes to the anthropological study of aging by providing a long-term ethnographic study of a range of institutions for older people. This combination of medical and educational institutions sets this work apart from other anthropological studies of aging and suggests that moral personhood in old age is more complex than dominant frameworks of dependence and independence would suggest. Rather, moral personhood in old age has more

to do with the particular links between older persons and certain times and places. This finding suggests that studies of aging should more closely focus on the spatiotemporal and political-economic contexts in which older personhood is created.

Fourth, this study of aging contributes to medical anthropology in its integrative approach to studying old age. Rather than treating Alzheimer's disease as cordoned-off from other experiences of old age, this dissertation integrates ethnographic study of an Alzheimer's center with ethnographic study of other kinds of institutions, thus critiquing understandings of old age dominated by biomedicine. By pushing back against disease categories and diagnoses as dominant frames of analysis, this study suggests a more holistic approach to studying dementia and other biomedically-defined conditions through an approach focused on moral personhood and relatedness. This integrative approach can also work against the stigmatization of Alzheimer's disease as a separate category of old age.

Finally, this dissertation contributes an ethnographically-grounded approach to ameliorating experiences of people negatively affected by conditions of structural inequality. Meaningful practices of storytelling, remembering, learning, and commensality appear across different kinds of institutions as ways that people can sometimes sustain personhood. In other words, in this dissertation I see the seeds of an analytic approach that can have practical application for those who are living in situations outside their ideals of moral personhood. As the experiences of people who sustained moral personhood in institutional care show, these processes of relatedness can help to sustain moral personhood for people who are living outside normative ideals of old age. How might an explicit focus on tea-making and tea-drinking, storytelling and listening, or singing and gardening open possibilities for new forms of sociality? How might a focus on cultivating relations rather than working on selves shape practices of

aktywność? In pushing these ethnographic and historical findings towards practical applications, I am arguing for an ethnographic approach that keeps the concerns of our research participants primary; it is through such an empathetic approach that I see the deepest potential of ethnography and social theory to illuminate our understanding of the social world.

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