

Introduction

THIS BOOK COMPLICATES the notion we have about colonial and imperial subjects by analyzing the role that medicine and scientific knowledge play in modern global history. It aims to recast Polish agency in the German Empire in the period of scientific transformations, mass migration, and heightened colonial expansion that largely characterized the second half of the nineteenth century. One of the chief contributions that this work provides to the field is the incorporation of Polish views into general debates about management of diseases, race science, and civilizing projects. It analyzes Polish encounters with colonizing practices in Africa and South America and adds to the history of medicine and public health in the Polish lands—two areas that until recently had not received the deserved attention of historians outside Poland.¹ The book also explores the scientific works and cultural mission of Prussian-Polish physicians in the German Empire and the networks they cultivated throughout the Polish partitions.

The questions analyzed in this work are grounded in debates about the (post)colonial turn that German studies and Polish studies have taken in the past few decades. In the recent literature of German colonial studies, the Prussian-Polish provinces and eastern Europe more generally have become an analytical terrain for scholars to examine Germany's colonial discourse and the effects of colonial systems in Europe. Many of these works address the colonial question in the Polish lands to foreground connections between the anti-Polish movements of the *Kaiserreich* period and the radicalization of politics against eastern Europe during World War I and Nazi Germany.² Similar to approaches regarding the German overseas world, the question of historical continuity with the atrocities of the two wars, particularly with

Nazi imperial expansion, remains a central one.³ According to Róisín Healy, “the Windhuk to Auschwitz thesis has focused attention on Poland as a site of colonialism. Up to this [*sic*], the historiography of Prussian-Polish relations, even when critical of Prussian policy, did not frame the conflict in terms of colonialism.”⁴ Equally important in producing this shift, I would argue, were the works of Edward Said, colonial studies, and postcolonial critique at the end of the 1990s.⁵ Most of the literature proposing a colonial framework for Poland and the Prussian-Polish provinces provides insightful correlations in terms of continental and overseas forms of expansion and cultural differentiation, but tends to leave out Polish concerns and perspectives. One of the main problems that this approach presents is that we end up not knowing much about how Poles were reacting to German colonial views, including their main points of agreement and contention.

Studies that approach the German borderlands from a (post)colonial perspective generally place too much emphasis on German fantasies of domination without effectively integrating the political activities and desires of the “colonized.” Local dynamics and Polish agency, so central in analyses that look at Polish national questions under the partitions, are often downplayed or ignored.⁶ Scholars concerned with the Polish nation and nationalizing efforts can be criticized, in turn, for grounding their studies too narrowly in domestic forces and structures of power without considering global dimensions and cultural exchanges that could have influenced political struggles and identification process in the region.⁷ The national paradigm, despite its crucial role in central and east European history, limits our understanding of larger cultural dynamics that took place in the Prussian-Polish provinces during periods of rapid transformation in German history. This is especially true when considering that, for a great part of the nineteenth century, many Polish nationalists were contesting Germanization, appealing to the recognition of their cultural forms and civil rights as members of a multiethnic German Empire.

Studying Polish-German relations in broader global and colonial terms has allowed scholars to draw significant discursive parallels between the Polish territories and overseas colonies and to place race at the forefront of their analytical inquiries. Comparing the two areas in order to understand not only race relations and categorizations but also the extents of imperial power and political imaginations can help us illuminate specific exchanges and interactions of “colonial entanglements” not easily incorporated into

narratives that privilege the modern nation-state. The purpose here is not to equate Polish experience with that of non-European colonial subjects, but to analyze, as postcolonial scholars have argued should be done, the cultural reverberations of colonial systems in the eastern borderlands and the effect cultural relations in the eastern borderlands had on overseas colonial projects.

It is important to stress that, although German rhetoric and policies against Poles were at times violent and extreme, particularly the ones promoted by Pan-German League members, the 1904 mass killings of colonial subjects occurred in German Southwest Africa and not in any of the Polish provinces.⁸ Moreover, nineteenth-century Poles were represented in the central and local administration of the German government and, albeit as a minority voice, could influence the course of empire through political alliances and voting rights. At the very least, the presence of Polish delegates in parliament served as a means to denounce anti-Polish measures and colonizing efforts.⁹ When confronted with oppressive policies and images, Poznanian Poles could refer back to the days of the Grand Duchy of Posen, the brief period of autonomy that Poles enjoyed in the province following the Congress of Vienna in 1815. Subjects in German Africa did not have these recourses and memories in Imperial Germany. Therefore, there are significant limits to the colonial comparisons outside the discursive realm. There are also important differences in political strategies and racial understandings that imperial administrators employed in the territories.¹⁰

Despite the differences in discourse and practice among the territories under analysis in this book, the study of Polish and German subjectivities from a (post)colonial perspective is still meaningful because it permits us to examine the transfer of ideas, narratives, and peoples that traveled to, from, and through empire and how they were changed in the process. Instead of seeing German imperialism as a result of internal conflicts led by conservative forces, as the historiography of the 1960s and 1970s in Germany did in order to explain imperial expansion, cultural historians and scholars exhort us to examine the impact that Germans had on the colonial world and the influences that colonies had in shaping German society and culture.¹¹ As Geoff Eley argues, “rather than show interest mainly in *origins* (in colonial policy as an expression of conflicts and pressures coming from inside German society), recent work focuses on *consequences* and the impact of the colonial encounter.”¹² A colonial encounter that, as many now believe, started

not with the colonial debates of the 1870s and 1880s, but with Germans' own informal incursions in colonies and the circulation of knowledge from "exotic" places in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹³

Cultural historians in German studies are particularly interested in understanding how German colonial experiences made a fundamental impact on developing discourses of gender, race, and sexuality and how these cultural exchanges were reflected back into projects of modernization and social transformation. If earlier historians were emphasizing Germany's particular path to modernity, the new trend is to show the connections shared with other countries and study colonialism as a pan-European project.¹⁴ Therefore, more attention is currently being given to international collaborations, transnational ideologies, and comparative approaches.¹⁵

This normalization of German history is in part a reaction against optimistic views of theories of modernization that for a long time considered British and French models as the norm from which Germany had diverted since early on in modern history. This *Sonderweg* (special path) theory of Germany's past, which was a popular view even in the nineteenth century, was highly influential in the analysis of German colonialism from the perspective of social imperialism. In this approach, colonialism was significant to German history merely for helping to bring popular consent to conservative policies that went against the interests of most of the German population in the metropole and for helping to explain the aggressive German international politics of the early twentieth century. Lora Wildenthal has argued that "as a result, colonialism, by way of social imperialism, became a central part of German history—but in a way that obviated reference to actual colonial affairs or to any people besides white German speakers living in Central Europe."¹⁶ If, in analyzing the internal formation of policies, social imperialists were too critical of the German modernization process, they were also too optimistic about liberalism and the process of modernization in other west European countries.¹⁷ The current use of postcolonial views in German studies is both a reflection and an integration of the criticisms that the process of decolonization and the civil rights movement brought to the fore when scholars were identifying the paradoxes of liberal and bourgeois ideals in a colonial setting. Rather than considering liberalism and the bourgeoisie as weak forces of the German Empire, recent studies have analyzed precisely how powerful these elements were in shaping the politics of the German state.¹⁸

Uncovering Polish encounters with the colonial world is also significant for a Polish historiography that for decades has limited its study to Poles within the realms of the European borders. Although the emigration movement was quite strong in the Polish lands during the nineteenth century for political and socioeconomic reasons, Polish endeavors in the colonies have not been carefully examined by scholars, apart from a few monographs in history and survey books that ethnologists and anthropologists in Poland have published in the last decades about Polish travels to the Americas, Africa, and Asia.¹⁹ Most historians have entirely dismissed the question of Polish colonial imagination because for a long time Poland was considered the victim of imperial aggressions, and, consequently, their works have been mainly guided by ideas of “national revival” and nation-building. Studying the relationship with overseas colonies makes no sense without the constitution of the nation-state. Therefore, the few historical analyses of Poles and the colonies that we have are those regarding the interwar years, when Poles achieved their independence and the Maritime and Colonial League (*Liga Morska i Kolonialna*) was founded.²⁰ Even then, the colonial movement is considered a weak one, because Poles were just beginning to reconstruct their own state and because the development of the movement was interrupted by Nazi advances in 1939.

The colonial archives and the sanitization of Polish complicity with colonial movements during the Communist period have also posed great challenges to the study of the Polish colonial imagination. When Poles were traveling to overseas colonies, they were mainly using the networks of imperial powers such as Germany, Great Britain, and France to go abroad, and on many occasions were identified not as Poles, but by their citizenship or other affiliation with these countries. To recover Polish experiences in the colonies one would need to retrieve the sources from these state archives (including the Vatican’s, for missionary works) and see how these subjects were identifying themselves and what contacts they had with the Polish lands. Travel accounts published in Polish newspapers and journals are also helpful in reconstructing this history, as is the nationalist literature of the interwar period. In trying to legitimize their own colonial projects, nationalists of the Second Polish Republic left a valuable archive documenting nineteenth-century Polish endeavors in different regions of the world.²¹ The main problem with the nationalist literature is that members of the Maritime and Colonial League tended to overemphasize the colonial

question: according to their account, every Pole who ventured out into the world was a colonialist and dreamt of founding an independent Poland.

In the Communist period, Polish scholars were successful in marginalizing Polish involvement in the colonies by bracketing these experiences into the interwar years and by pointing out, during the decolonization process of the 1950s and 1960s, that Poles did not have anything to do with European colonial oppression. If colonialism was at all engaged, it was mainly to show how Poles themselves had a long history of subalternity, having been colonized by Germans, Austrians, and Russians. Certainly, the experience of World War II had an enormous influence on postwar memory and interpretations of the past. An example of this is the statement that Ryszard Kapuściński makes in his travel account, *The Soccer War*, which takes place during the decolonization years:

“My country has no colonies” . . . “and there was a time when my country was a colony. I respect what you’ve suffered, but, we too, have suffered horrible things: there were streetcars, restaurants, districts *nur für Deutsch*. There were camps, war, executions. . . . That was what we called fascism. It’s the worst colonialism.”²²

Through the experience of fascism Poles could identify with the suffering of the colonized, but not on equal terms. For some, whites colonizing whites was not just another form of colonialism, but the “worst colonialism.” Still today, there is a romanticized notion of otherness in which many Poles feel that they are the leading brothers of the oppressed. Although after the 1990s more scholars began to explore Polish relationships with the colonial world to understand Polish identity, there is no critical history that interrogates Polish racial views and images of non-Europeans.²³

The present book has been written in response to this gap in Polish historiography. It analyzes how Poles in the German Empire were both objects and subjects of colonial agendas and how they positioned themselves in relation to other Germans and local populations in German Africa and Brazil. It also studies the projects and ideas that traveled from colonies to the German metropole, and vice versa, which were influential in the racialization of Slavic populations and in bringing scientific conceptions of race to the everydayness of the German Empire. By recovering Polish experiences with overseas colonialism and addressing projects of internal colonization at home, the book argues that fantasies of colonial conquest and an

imperial past, conflated with the German sense of civilizing missions in Prussian Poland, engendered a Polish need for decolonizing Polish culture under German dominion. Polish nationality was thus strongly shaped by colonizing and “civilizing” experiences in the borderlands.

The word “fantasies” has been borrowed from psychoanalytic and literary studies to indicate Polish and German dreams of colonial dominance throughout the nineteenth century.²⁴ Some of the texts analyzed in this work narrate stories from the unconscious, abounding in desires, anxieties, and imaginary identifications. In the German case, these colonial fantasies are the work of imagination on account of the colonial projections German officials made onto Polish-speaking Prussian citizens. In the Polish case, the constant identification with the plight of natives in overseas colonies served not only to criticize German power at home but also to work through cultural fears present at the time. The African colonies and settlement projects in Brazil gave Poles a sense of cultural superiority that many Polish intellectuals felt missing in Europe when compared with Germans and western Europeans. It is common to find in Polish sources fantasies of colonial mastery and a desire to rewrite the history of European colonialism according to imagined Polish “benevolent” colonial views. In many significant ways, these colonial fantasies allow us to understand subject formation in the German Empire.

The notion of subjectivity used throughout this book has been influenced by cultural and post-structuralist studies. Rather than presenting a coherent essence of the subject, this book studies the constant making and remaking of the self in relation to what Lacan deems the symbolic and imaginary orders. These orders represent the realms of identification. According to Slavoj Žižek, “imaginary identification is identification with the image in which we appear likeable to ourselves, with the image representing ‘what we would like to be,’ and symbolic identification, identification with the very place *from where* we are being observed, *from where* we look at ourselves so that we appear to ourselves likeable, worthy of love.”²⁵ Therefore, the identifications that Poles and Germans formed in relationship to others tended to reflect anxieties about power struggles and fears of cultural extinction back home. The purpose of this book is precisely to bring to the fore these tensions.

In the analysis, medicine and science serve as points of entry in the study of colonialism. By examining the emerging techniques aimed at transforming

behaviors labeled as “dangerous,” “traditional,” and “unhealthy,” this work seeks to uncover critical reflections about power relations and to assess how the German government tried to define biologically and culturally the borderlands of the German Empire. It looks at debates about medicine, hygiene, and population control because of the central place these had in the modernizing projects of the time.²⁶ The establishment of the medical profession in the nineteenth century was led by experts in the field and by an ongoing process of negotiations, defined at one level through the day-to-day encounters physicians and scientists had with patients and cultural otherness, and, at another, through scientific networks established in the international arena. Medicine was also a tool that many empires used to advance colonial agendas in “exotic” lands.

Given that the mobility of ideas and subjects from different geographical areas is a central element throughout the different chapters, the book can be also considered as a constitutive part of the study of imperial travel writing and transnational exchanges.²⁷ The travel accounts examined in this work underline the fact that the disciplinary boundaries of medicine and anthropology in the nineteenth century were far more blurred than what we think of today, and that many German and Polish physicians were not only medical practitioners and scientific researchers but also ethnographers and producers of colonial knowledge. Many of them contributed to the political expansion of empires and national agendas in overseas colonies and the Prussian-Polish provinces.

An Overview of Prussian Poland and the Polish Partitions

The term Prussian Poland is used in this book to refer to the territories acquired by the Kingdom of Prussia during the partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, carried out in agreement with the Russian Empire and the Habsburg monarchy at the end of the eighteenth century. It also includes Upper Silesia, which was acquired from Habsburg rule during the First Silesian War in 1742, but “rediscovered” and reimagined as a Polish and Slavic land by Poles (and Germans) in the mid-nineteenth century.²⁸ During the first Polish partition, which took place in 1772, the Kingdom of Prussia was able to annex Ermland and Royal Prussia—excluding the cities of Danzig (Gdańsk) and Thorn (Toruń), which remained



MAP I.1. The Partitions of Poland, 1772–1795. Reproduced with permission from Paul Robert Magocsi, *Historical Atlas of Central Europe*, 3rd revised and expanded ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 71.

under Polish dominance. Prussia also took the northern parts of Great Poland (Wielkopolska) (map I.1, highlighted in yellow). These territories formed the new province of West Prussia. In the second partition of 1793, which resulted from the Polish Great Senate's (Sejm Wielki) adoption of the May Constitution (1791), Prussians ended up taking hold of both Danzig and Thorn. In addition, they acquired the rest of Great Poland and parts of Mazovia, which were organized under the new province of South Prussia with Posen as its capital city (map I.1, highlighted in light brown). The third and final partition, in 1795, followed the uprising that Tadeusz Kościuszko (1746–1817), the famous military leader who had fought in the American Revolution, led to liberate the Polish lands from Russian influence. During this partition, Prussia took over Warsaw, the rest of Mazovia, Podlasie, and parts of Little Poland (Małopolska). Warsaw became the new capital of South Prussia. The annexed parts of Mazovia and Podlasie formed the province of New East Prussia and the incorporated territories from Little Poland became the province of New Silesia (map I.1, highlighted in dark brown).

From 1772 to 1795, Prussia acquired a territorial extension of 141,400 square kilometers and almost three million Polish-speaking subjects—ethnic Poles and Jews.²⁹ The Prussian legal system was introduced in the newly incorporated lands. It guaranteed many privileges for the Polish nobility, but it also protected serfs against seigniorial exploitation. In addition, the Polish secondary school system was dismantled and German-language education was largely promoted. As in the Polish territories belonging to Russia and Austria, serfs now had to serve in the military for a period of twenty years, a statute that had no precedence in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.³⁰

The Kingdom of Prussia was able to hold the Polish territories until the outbreak of the Napoleonic Wars, which led to the uprising of Poles in South Prussia in 1806. Following the Peace of Tilsit, Napoleon Bonaparte ordered the creation of the Duchy of Warsaw. The duchy was a constitutional monarchy under the political administration of the Saxon king Frederick Augustus III, who officially became the Duke of Warsaw. It included the majority of the lands that Prussia had acquired through the partitions, except Danzig, which was once again declared a free city, and other territories in the northern parts of West Prussia that remained under Prussian control. After the victorious campaign that the Polish troops led against Austrians in 1809, the duchy was enlarged to include half of the territories the Habsburg monarchy had gained with the partitions, covering the cities of Lublin and Cracow. The new Polish state was governed by a constitution fashioned after Napoleon's centralized administrative system and the Napoleonic legal code. The code abolished serfdom and introduced freedom of worship for all religions.³¹ It also provided legal equality for all the inhabitants, but with great restrictions upon unassimilated Jews, who had to wait a period of ten years before they could obtain full citizenship rights. The minister of education expanded elementary schooling, a move that contributed to the professional growth of the middle class. All of these measures would eventually contribute to the narrowing of the social gap between the nobility and other classes.

Although the Duchy of Warsaw was in every term a dependence that France created to support Napoleon's campaigns in central Europe, many Poles fought for the resurrection of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The state contained only one-fifth of the territories and thirty percent of the population that once belonged to the commonwealth. Following

Napoleon's failed invasion of Russia, the lands were partitioned in the Congress of Vienna of 1815. Russia reorganized its part of the duchy into an area of limited autonomy under the political authority of the Russian emperor until his death in 1825, which throughout the nineteenth century was known as Congress Poland or the Kingdom of Poland. Prussia received the territories it had lost from West Prussia and the Great Poland parts of former South Prussia. The latter was organized as a semiautonomous province called the Grand Duchy of Posen. In the Prussian constitution of 1848, the duchy came to be known the Province of Posen. At the Congress of Vienna, Austria also regained Galicia and Cracow was declared a republic under the protection of the three partitioning powers. The Cracovian Republic was a free city state until the Polish uprising of 1846.

Both the Napoleonic conflict and the ensuing Congress of Vienna represented two fundamental moments in the history of Polish-German relations in the nineteenth century. The Napoleonic Wars brought to the fore the fact that Prussians had failed in their cultural project of transforming Poles into loyal subjects of the kingdom.³² Poles in general showed no interest in stopping the French and defending the Prussian state. Many Prussians became convinced that Poles would eagerly work for the restoration of the Polish state each time the government proved to be politically weak. Some Prussian officials recommended several of the Germanizing projects that would be implanted decades later. They even demanded expatriation of the clergy and nobility, whom they viewed as main supporters of the insurrection. However, the approach that the Prussian government took after 1815 was conciliatory, as a series of political and cultural concessions were granted to Polish-speaking subjects of the Grand Duchy of Posen. The Prussian king, Frederick William III, pledged to respect Polish nationality, religion, and private property. He also promised the use of the Polish language alongside German in all public functions. Poles were allowed to participate in the civil service and many worked directly in the central administration of the duchy. In addition, Antoni Radziwiłł, a Polish prince, was declared governor (Statthalter) of the lands, and a liberal Prussian official, Joseph von Zerboni di Sposetti, who was sympathetic to Poles, was appointed as provincial president (Oberpräsident). With these appeasing methods and softening of its colonization policies, the government hoped to win over the Polish population and develop its loyalty to the Prussian state.

Many of these concessions were not implemented in West Prussia, where half of the population in 1815 was Polish. Beyond the borders of the Grand Duchy, Polish-speaking subjects continued to be submitted to Germanization policies. In 1824, the province of West Prussia disappeared and was administratively merged with East Prussia until 1878. The land reforms passed in the early 1800s adversely affected the Polish nobility in the region, where a significant number of them ended up selling their landed estates to the German upper class.

In the 1820s, Polish dreams of self-government in the Grand Duchy failed to concretize. Local officials persisted in giving priority to the German language in schools and continued their cultural efforts to Germanize the population. It was clear that the Polish question had turned into a major concern for the Prussian government and that it intended to secure the product of several decades of political conquests and territorial expansion. The Grand Duchy of Posen was reorganized into the Province of Posen shortly after the 1848 uprising and the adoption of the new Prussian constitution, which curtailed significantly Polish political power in the region.

In general, ambivalent German feelings towards Polish subjects were prominent until 1848. Up to this point, many German liberals still saw a continuation between Polish desires for political independence and their own efforts to democratize their government.³³ Even Prussian anti-Polish sentiments were usually directed against the Polish gentry and clergy, whom Prussians identified as their main enemies. The majority of Polish-speaking subjects were still regarded as possible future German subjects. The medical discourse, as shown in the first chapter, proved to be fundamental in establishing notions of Polish otherness and in differentiating this Polish majority from their German neighbors.

Throughout the book, the word “Germanization” is used to signify a series of colonizing strategies that Prussia, and then the German Empire, adopted throughout the nineteenth century to control Polish subjects and the eastern borderlands. In his work on Germans in Posen, Bolesław Grzeń delineated three ways in which the term was used at the time, with this delineation characterized by Mark Tilse as “first, to refer to measures directed against the Poles; second, [to] a process of change (of people and institutions); and third, [to] the denationalization of the Polish population.”³⁴ Germanization, in my view, also reflected a colonial ideology that ranged from paternalistic cultural assimilation to outright cultural annihilation,

depending largely on local, regional, and transnational circumstances. Over the course of the nineteenth century, Prussian and German officials in the region vacillated between the desire to convert Poles to German culture and turn them into loyal subjects and the desire to eradicate Polish cultural existence and political influence from the territories. However, in the reality of empire, Germanizing efforts quite often generated the opposite effect, that of Polonization—the strengthening of Polish cultural elements and national sentiments that followed the same colonial logic. Germanness and Polishness are used in the book to denote changing ideas of national and community belonging defined on cultural and biological terms.

An Empire of Scientific Experts

During the second half of the nineteenth century, medicine and science became fundamentally intertwined in the process of nation-building and colonial expansion in Germany. Having produced the first modern welfare state and the latest discoveries in experimental science, the country was internationally recognized as an authority in matters concerning disease control, public health, and social reforms. In overseas colonies, the works of German physicians and scientific explorers were central to the effective control of colonial populations and territories. Science became even more important in the early twentieth century when German colonial officials proposed to carry out a kind of scientific colonialism to preserve their colonial power. However, as Andrew Zimmerman has shown, this type of colonialism was already guiding the principles of colonial sovereignty in the Berlin Conference that partitioned the lands of Africa among European powers and established the foundation of the German colonial administration in the 1880s.³⁵

Medicine had an instrumental role in shaping the parameters of Germanness and securing the imperial borders against ethnic Poles, Jews, and others. The limits of inclusion were interpreted both scientifically and culturally. With the assistance of new technological developments in the medical field, Prussian Poland and German Africa came to be connected, particularly from 1890 on, by organizations and medical institutions established to fight diseases and secure German interests in the region. Furthermore, Poles, especially those belonging to the medical profession, became avid observers of

German activity in other parts of the Empire. In the colonies, they were both ardent critics of and eager participants in colonial agendas.

The topics analyzed in *Colonial Fantasies, Imperial Realities* span the years between 1840 and 1920. The study starts in the 1840s because that decade represents a turning point in Polish-German relations. The chain of revolutions that swept across Europe in 1848 was characterized by widespread opposition to old regimes, popular demands for greater political participation, and ideas of national self-determination. The liberal reforms that aimed to bring national unity in the German lands ended in major disappointments, with the rejection of the constitution drafted at the Frankfurt parliament and the political persecution of revolutionary leaders. The constitution turned Jews into full citizens and guaranteed equal rights for ethnic minorities. Article XIII promised support for their “national development” and “equal standing for their languages . . . in the church, schools, domestic administration and justice.”³⁶ The constitution did not give up territorial claims over the Polish lands, but included measures aimed at protecting Poles’ civil rights and culture.

This study pays particular attention to the post-1848 years, because it was the period when Germany began to experience a series of political, economic, and social transformations that made Germans, especially national liberals, reconsider the sympathetic views many shared towards Poles in the eastern provinces. This change in attitude was part of an overall process of forgetting and misremembering of 1848 events that was characteristic of the German nationalist movement around the years of national unification.³⁷ The 1860s and 1870s were also the years in which the bourgeoisie consolidated itself as a powerful force, exerting major influence on the politics of the state and national agendas. Responding to anti-Polish proposals, the Poznanian Society of the Friends of Arts and Sciences (Poznańskie Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk), founded in 1857, took the mission of keeping Polish culture alive in the area of Posen and in neighboring provinces.

This book analyzes these transformations in Polish-German relations from the point of view of colonial encounters and population mobility. The following chapters study the sense of cultural mission many Germans felt towards the Polish territories through changing discourses of diseases that greatly affected the borderlands in the first half of the nineteenth century. Medical reports describing the cholera and typhus epidemics contributed to the construction of the eastern borderlands as a colonial space that begged

for German sanitary intervention. They also echoed earlier ethnographic discourses that underlined uncivilized and unhealthy Polish practices. Additionally, the book examines how scientific knowledge in nineteenth-century Germany was closely related to social and political struggles in Prussian Poland and the colonial world. The analysis of German colonial views of Poles in the eastern borderlands, presented in the first chapters of the book, is further complicated by the study of Polish colonial fantasies and Polish positioning vis-à-vis colonial subjects in overseas colonies. Similar to German nationalists in Prussian Poland, the colonial context became a crucial realm for Poles and the Polish nationalist movement. The colonies came to represent the place where Poles could overcome their subaltern condition and show other European powers their skills in colonialist activities.

Understanding the history of Prussian Poland and the partitioned Polish lands in colonial terms is useful for studying political imaginations and for challenging the neat dichotomies scholars have used in the past to approach European and colonial societies. The “in-betweenness” of Prussian Poles (being part of Germany, but not quite) puts into evidence the tensions underpinning scientific discourses, national agendas, and imperial projects in the nineteenth century. Moreover, approaching the eastern borderlands as a “civilizing frontier” has opened the door for comparative analyses within and beyond the realm of the German Empire. Focusing on colonial ruptures and continuities, the following chapters move the analysis of Polish and German subjectivities past the colonizer/colonized divide by bringing attention to the pervasiveness of colonial discourse and racial thinking and their political effectiveness.