Dirty Coal: Industrial Populism as Purification in Poland’s Mining Heartland

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In memory of my father  
George Patrick Allen  
(April 17th 1931 – July 29th 2020)
## Contents

Summary .......................................................................................................................................... vii  
Sammanfattning ................................................................................................................................ix  
Streszczenie ....................................................................................................................................... xi  
Acknowledgements ......................................................................................................................... xiii  
Chapter one. Introduction: A tale of two Europes ............................................................................... 1  
Chapter two. Research methods, approaches and ethics .................................................................57  
Chapter three. A coal-eyed view of history: From heroes to villains and victims ....................... 83  
Chapter four. Anti-populist atmospheres: Smog and the toxic East-West civilizational slope .... 161  
Chapter five. Breathing in Silesia, being Silesian: Smog denial and populist (anti)environmentalism as industrial ecological intimacy ..................................................................................... 209  
Chapter six. The heated domestics of coal: Industrial breadwinning petro-masculinities and coal-based heating in the Silesian home ................................................................................. 265  
Chapter seven. Desire for dignity: Dirt, labour, and the embodied moral economy of ‘normality’ 295  
Chapter eight. Home is ‘our backwardness’: Coal, class, masculinity and anti-refugee sentiment at the Polish barbecue ......................................................................................................... 349  
Conclusion ..................................................................................................................................... 401  
Postscript: The end of Polish coal? ................................................................................................. 407  
Bibliography: .................................................................................................................................. 439
Summary.

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In the second half of the 2010s, far-right populist parties gained increasing power and influence across Europe, and around the world. Core to their ethnonationalist, anti-elite agenda, and their emotive politics, has often been a defense of fossil fuels, threatening action to address the climate crisis and raising the spectre of fascism. Increasingly-perceived-as-‘dirty’ coal, the raw material that made the industrial modern world order possible and contributed most to its mounting contradictions, has acquired a special status in contemporary far-right ideology. What is the emotional intersection between them at a time of far-reaching economic, environmental and energy instability and change, when coal has not only been losing its material value and its symbolic link to modernity, but is increasingly widely deemed immoral too?

To date, studies of far-right populism have largely overlooked how energy and environmental change feature in their present rise. This reflects how these issues have been largely treated as technical matters, and therefore relegated to the domain of scientific expertise, rather than recognized as inherently social, cultural and political concerns. Tending to adopt a macro-level approach, far-right studies have also not yet fully addressed the historically, geographically, and culturally-situated reasons for this success, particularly among the (white, male) industrial working-class. From a bottom-up, ethnographic perspective, the role of intersectional (class-based, occupational, gendered, racialized regional and national) ecologically-positioned embodied subjectivities and identities and their emotional lived experience remains to be considered.

This PhD thesis, set within the concerns of a transdisciplinary environmental and energy humanities framework, addresses this lacunae in the context of Poland; the most coal-dependent country in the European Union where a pro-coal platform unexpectedly helped the far-right populist party Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) into majority government in 2015. It is primarily based on a years’ ethnographic research conducted in 2017 with both residents and particularly coal miners and their families in a minescape in Upper Silesia, the nation’s, and one of Europe’s, last remaining mining heartlands. Adopting a postcolonial postsocialist perspective, and drawing on rare empirical data from participant observation and qualitative interviews, the thesis explores the politics of increasingly ‘dirty’ coal expressed in localized conflicts over air pollution, domestic heating, and the meaning of work, dignity, respectable personhood, the economy and community, setting them within their historical context. The rapidly shifting material and symbolic meaning of coal within the context of Silesia’s long-standing troubled history is particularly studied in light of European integration, a post-industrial, neoliberal, ‘green’-cosmopolitan project that links East and West in an unequal relationship. The naming of coal and its way of life as increasingly ‘dirty’ in newly stigmatizing senses from ‘outside’, is found to be experienced by the mining community as an elite-imposed process of ecological dispossession. This generates a toxic intersectionally-and ecologically-mediated shame in the bodies of those that particularly labour intimately with its material touch; a shame that resonates with what this thesis terms industrial populist politics and its emotive charge as a felt common sense. In the postsocialist context of the marginalization and devaluation of industrial working-class lives, and pervasive and normalized orientalist classism experienced as an attack on one’s ecologically-enmeshed Silesian-Polishness, the relational longing for a sense of a purified home, that can cleanse dirt’s discomforting and shame-induced stigmas in overlapping economic, social, cultural and environmental terms by refusing and reversing its designation, is proposed as lying at the heart of industrial populism’s visceral draw.
The first part of the thesis outlines key concepts, positions it within relevant literature, and provides a background coal-eyed historical context to the contemporary scene. In the second part, five empirical chapters each outline a localized strategy of purification deployed to cope with the shame of coal’s dirt and its uneven impacts and how it entangles with industrial populism. Firstly by residents actively concerned about smog, who unconsciously deploy a depoliticized shame-inducing nativist classism to make sense of its presence, and then by the mining community, whose strategies appear in the form of smog denial; gendered resistance to abandoning coal as a home-heating fuel; a moral economy of “normality” that upholds coal as the Polish path to the Good Life; and anti-refugee sentiment. The concluding chapters, particularly the postscript, reflect on the emotional effects of Covid-19 on the Polish coal industry and its community, as well as how this might shape debates on Just Transition to a post-coal future in Silesia.
Sammanfattning

Smutsigt kol: Industriell populism som rening i Polens centrala gruvdistrikt

Under andra halvan av 2010-talet fick högerextrema populistiska parter allt större makt och inflytande runt om i Europa så väl som i världen. Den kärnpunkt i deras etnonationalistiska, anti-elitära agenda och känslomässiga politik har ofta varit ett forsvar av fossila bränslen vilket utgjort ett hot mot åtgärder för att ta itu med klimatkrisen och även väckt fascismsens spöke till liv. I allt högre grad uppfattas kol som 'smutsigt'. Denna råvara, som möjliggjorde den moderna industriella världorden och bidrog mest till dess växande motsättningar, har fått en särskild status i samtida högerextrem ideologi. Vilka känslomässiga samband finns mellan kol och politik i en tid av långtgående ekonomisk, miljömässig och energimässig instabilitet och förändring då kolet inte bara håller på att förlova sitt materiella värde och sin symboliska koppling till moderniteten, utan också alltmer anses vara rent av omoraliskt?

Hittills har studier av den högerextrema populismens uppgång till stor del förbisett betydelsen av förändringar inom energi och miljö. Det återspeglar att dessa frågor övervägande har behandlats som tekniska, och därför inriktats på vetenskaplig expertis, snarare än att erkänna som i grunden sociala, kulturella och politiska. Studier av extremhögern har vanligen fokuserat på en makronivå och har inte till fullo behandlat de historiskt, geografiskt och kulturellt platsbetingade faktorerna bakom denna framgång, särskilt bland den (vita, manliga) industriarbetarklassen. Från ett etnografiskt perspektiv återstår att beakta den roll som spelas av intersektionella (klassbaserade, yrkesmässiga, könsrelaterade, rasifierade, regionala och nationella) och ekologiskt placerad förkroppsligade subjektiviteter, identiteter och deras känslomässigt erfarna förhållanden.


Avhandlingen tillämpar ett postkolonialt och postsocialistiskt perspektiv för att undersöka det 'smutsiga kolets' politik. Denna tar sig uttryck i lokala konflikter om luftföroreningar, uppvärmning av bostäder och innebörden av begrepp som arbete, värdighet, respekt, person, ekonomi och samhälle. Med hjälp av information från deltagande observation och kvalitativa intervjuer beskriver avhandlingen kolets skiftande materiella och symboliska betydelse under Schlesiens oroliga moderna historia. Kolet studeras särskilt i ljuset av den europeiska integrationen, ett postindustriellt, nyliberald – och ”grönt” - kosmopolitiskt projekt som förbinder öst och väst i ett ojämlikt förhållande. Av gruvarbetarna uppfattas detta som en av eliten påtvingad process av ekologiskt motiverad nedmontering av deras ursprungliga livsbetingelser. Att kalla kol och därmed gruvsamhällets traditionella levnadssätt ’smutsiga’ och att ’utifrån’ tillföra kol nya stigmatiserande betydelser har skapat en känslomässig laddning av intersektionellt förmedlad skam hos dem som arbetar med kol. Denna kroppsligt burna och erfarna skam står i samklang med det som i denna avhandling kallas en industriipopulistisk politik, som av dessa grupper upplevs som den rimliga. I det postsocialistiska sammanhanget, nedvärderas och marginaliseras industriarbetarklassens liv på detta sätt och socialt utbredda, normaliserade och orientalistiskt klassgrundade fördomar upplevs som angrepp på ens ekologiskt placerade Schlesiisk-polska identitet. Därmed uppstår längtan efter...
en känsla av ett förädlat (purified) hem, som kan befria människorna från smutsens skamframkallande stigmatisering vad gäller ekonomiska, sociala,kulturella och miljömässiga perspektiv. Gruvsamhällenas avvisande av kolets föregivna 'smutsighet' och deras omedfiniering av kolets innebörd står på så sätt i nära förbindelse med den industriella populismens dragningskraft.

De tre första kapitlern beskriver avhandlingens nyckelbegrepp och positionerar den inom ramen för relevanta forskningsfält och deras litteratur samt ger en historisk bakgrund till samtida förhållanden. Därefter beskrivs i vart och ett av fem empiriska kapitel en lokal 'reningsstrategi' (strategy of purification) som tillämpas för att hantera skammen från kolets 'smuts', samt dess ojämlik inverkningar och dess sammanflätning med industriell populism. Allra först beskrivs hur enskilda medborgare oroar sig för smog och omedvetet tolkar dess närvaro med stöd i en avpolitiserad, skamframkallande och klassbaserad nativism. Därefter beskrivs hur gruvsamhällenas strategi framträder, i form av smogförnekelse, i form av ett manligt kodat motstånd mot att övertyge kolet som bränsle, i form av en moralisk ekonomi av 'normalitet' för att upprätthålla kol som den polska vägen till det goda livet samt i form av en flyktingfientlig hållning som tycks dämpa medborgarnas undertryckta oro för ekonomisk, social och kulturell utsatthet. Avhandlingen avslutas med en reflektion över de känslomässiga effekterna av Covid-19 på den polska kolindustrin och dess samhällen samt hur dessa kan påverka debatterna om en rättvis övergång (Just Transition) till ett postfossilt samhälle i Schlesien.
Streszczenie.

Brudny węgiel: Przemysłowy populism jako oczyszczanie w górniczym sercu Polski

W drugiej połowie lat 2010tych wzrosły znacznie zarówno moc jak i wpływy skrajnie prawicowych partii populistycznych w Europie i na całym świecie. Kluczowym elementem ich etnonacjonalistycznego, antyelitarnego programu i emocjonalnej polityki była często obrona paliw kopalnych, zagrażając w ten sposób działaniom, mającym na celu rozwiązanie kryzysu klimatycznego i podnosząc widmo faszyzmu. Coraz częściej postrzegany jako ‘brudny’, węgiel, surowiec, który umożliwił powstanie przemysłowego porządku nowoczesnego świata i przyczynił się najwięcej do jego narastających sprzeczności, zyskał szczególny status we współczesnej ideologii skrajnej prawicy. Jak krzyżują się one emocjonalnie w czasach daleko posuniętego braku stabilności oraz zmian w sferach ekonomicznej, środowiskowej oraz energetycznej, gdy węgiel nie tylko traci swoją wartość materialną i symboliczny związek z nowoczesnością, ale jest jeszcze dodatkowo coraz powszechniej uważany także za niemoralny?

Dotychczasowe badania nad skrajnie prawicowym populizmem w dużej mierze pomijały to jak energia i zmiany środowiskowe wpływają na ich obecny wzrost. To pokazuje, że kwestie te były w dużej mierze traktowane jako sprawy techniczne, a zaś jako domena naukowych ekspertów, a nie rozpoznane jako problemy z natury rzeczy społeczne, kulturowe i polityczne. Skłaniając się w kierunku podejścia makro-ekonomicznego, badania nad skrajną prawicą nie zajęły się dotychczas w pełni historycznymi, geograficznymi oraz kulturowymi przyczynami tego sukcesu, szczególnie wśród (białej, męskiej) przemysłowej klasy robotniczej. Z oddolnej, etnograficznej perspektywy, rolą intersekcjonalnych (klasowych, zawodowych, genderowych, rasowych, regionalnych i narodowych), ekologicznie umiejscowionych, ucieleśnionych podmiotowości i tożsamości oraz ich emocjonalnych doświadczeń, pozostaje nadal do rozważenia.

Niniejsza praca doktorska, osadzona w ramach transdyscyplinarną humanistykę środowiskową i energetyczną ma wypełnić tę lukę w kontekście Polski, najbardziej uzależnionego od węgla kraju Unii Europejskiej, w którym pro-węglowa platforma niespodziewanie pomogła skrajnie prawicowej populistycznej partii Prawo i Sprawiedliwość wygrać wybory i utworzyć większościowy rząd w 2015 roku. Praca ta oparta jest przede wszystkim na rocznym badaniu etnograficznym przeprowadzonym w 2017 roku z mieszkańcami, a zwłaszcza z górnikami i ich rodzinami w jednym regionie kopalnym na Górnym Śląsku, ostatnim zachowanym w kraju i Europie zagłębiu górnym. Przyjmując post-kolonialną, postsocjalistyczną perspektywę i czerpiąc z unikalnych danych empirycznych, pochodzących z obserwacji opartych na aktywnym uczestnictwie w życiu obserwowanych oraz na wywiadach jakościowych z nimi, niniejsza praca bada politykę coraz bardziej ‘brudnego’ węgla, wyrażającą się w lokalnych konfliktach, dotyczących zanieczyszczenia powietrza, ogrzewania domowego oraz znaczenia pracy, godności, osobistego poszanowania, gospodarki i wspólnoty, osadzając je w ich historycznym kontekście. Gwałtownie zmieniające się materialne i symboliczne znaczenie węgla na kanwie długoletniej, burzliwej historii Śląska jest analizowane szczególnie w świetle integracji europejskiej, projektu postindustrialnego, neoliberalnego, ‘zielonego’ i kosmopolitycznego, który łączy Wschód i Zachód w nierównym związku. Określanie węgla i przemysłowego sposobu życia z nim związanego jako coraz bardziej ‘brudnego’, a więc nowo wyczuwalne poczucie napiętnowania z ‘zewnątrz’ jest widziane i doświadczane przez społeczność górniczą jako narzucony przez elity proces ekologicznego wywłaszczenia. Stwarza to toksyczne, intersekcjonalne i ekologicznie zapośredniczone poczucie wstydu wśród tych, którzy szczególnie blisko pracują z węglem, bo go materialnie dotykają; wstyd ten rezonuje z tym, co niniejsza praca doktorska nazywa przemysłową polityką populistyczną i jej...
emocjonalnym ładunkiem jako odczuwalny zdrowy rozsądek. Praca ta sugeruje, że w postsocjalistycznym kontekście marginalizacji i dewaluacji życia przemysłowej klasy robotniczej oraz wszechobecnego i znormalizowanego orientalistycznego klasizmu, doświadczanego jako atak na własną ekologicznie zintegrowaną śląsko-polskość, relacyjna tęsknota za poczuciem oczyszczonego domu, który może zniwelować niewygodne i wywołujące wstyd piętno brudu w nakładających się na siebie kategoriach ekonomicznych, społecznych, kulturowych i środowiskowych poprzez odrzucenie i odwrócenie jego nazwy, leży u podstaw trzewnego przyciągania populizmu przemysłowego.

Pierwsza połowa pracy przedstawia zarys kluczowych pojęć, umiejscawia je w odnośnej literaturze i dostarcza podstawowy, z punktu widzenia węgla, kontekst historyczny obecnej sytuacji. W drugiej połowie pracy, każdy z pięciu rozdziałów opartych na badaniach empirycznych, przedstawia lokalną strategię oczyszczania, zastosowaną w celu uporania się ze wstydem, że węgiel jest widziany za brudny i wywiera nierówne oddziaływania oraz jak splata się to z populizmem przemysłowym. Najpierw przez mieszkańców aktywnie zaniepokojonych smogiem, którzy nieświadomie stosują odpolityczniony, wywołujący wstyd natywistyczny klasizm, aby nadać sens jego obecności, a następnie przez społeczność górniczą, której strategie polegają na zaprzeczaniu istnieniu smogu, genderowym oporze wobec porzucenia węgla jako paliwa do ogrzewania domów, moralnej ekonomii ‚normalności’, która utrzymuje, że węgiel to polska droga do dobrego życia oraz na nastrojach antyuchodźczych. Końcowe rozdziały, a zwłaszcza postscriptum, zawierają refleksję na temat emocjonalanego wpływu pandemii Covid-19 na polski przemysł węglowy oraz jego społeczność, jak również jak to ukształtuje debatę o Sprawiedliwej Transformacji na po-węglową przyszłość Śląska.
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Irma Kinga Allen

Ramsgate, August 2021

xv
Chapter one. Introduction: A tale of two Europes

‘Coal is dirty. There is no escaping that.’
- Erwin, retired coal miner, aged 67

‘Let’s be glad that we have something, rather than torture it. Coal is our wealth.’

‘The Polish People’s Republic-brand of Communism saved us from a far more radical brand of world Communisms – namely ecologism. Ecologism, just like genderism, is a strand of neo-Marxist thought. For that, we are paying the price of humiliation of our national pride today, as we are being looked down on by the European Union.’

In December 2018, two months after the International Panel on Climate Change published a landmark report warning the world we had twelve years to limit global warming to 1.5°C or face climate catastrophe (Watts, 2018), the 24th United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP24) was held in Poland. It was not the first time the country had played host to international climate change talks. Five years earlier COP19 had taken place in the capital city, Warsaw. This time, however, under the far-right populist, climate-sceptic and pro-coal Law and Justice Party (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość – PiS), who had swept into power in October 2015 in an

1 Jan Szyszko was here speaking at a conference on Polish smog in 2017.
2 Here Prof. Tadeusz Guz was presenting at a 2017 conference about the Białowieża Forest conflict, in which the Law and Justice Party (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość – PiS) was coming under increasing fire from the EU, this time for its logging in the UNESCO-protected world heritage site, Europe’s last remaining ‘pristine’ primeval forest. Guz, a Catholic presbyter and professor of legal and economic sciences at the Catholic University of Lublin, is a well known outspoken Catholic-right commentator on social and moral issues in Poland. Here he encapsulates PiS’s far-right populist perspective on ‘ecologism’ and ‘genderism’ (aka. feminist and LGBTQIA+ discourse), infused by cultural-marxist conspiracy tropes, as immoral (contra to Catholic Christian teaching putting the (hu)man in control of nature and women), polluting, culturally alien colonizing forces that are unjustly heaping shame on Poland and its inherent traditional moral values in international eyes.
unanticipated landslide victory, it was held in Katowice, the capital of the Upper Silesian region; the nation’s industrial and coal-mining heartland, (the second largest remaining in Europe), where coal has been mined for well over two centuries. This was of course no coincidence. PiS sought to demonstrate to an international audience increasingly hostile to Polish coal that, unlike previous governments who had played a Janus-faced game of capitulating to EU ‘elite’ demands while half-heartedly and inconsistently backing a floundering coal industry, they stood firmly behind it.

Flaunting this intention, delegates at the COP, sponsored by the country’s leading coal and fossil fuel companies (Corporate Europe Observatory, 2018), were treated to displays of Poland’s glistening ‘black gold’, in the form of raw lumps, artisanal crafts and jewelry made from coal, even soap (Malm and the Zetkin Collective, 2021: 110-111). PiS emphasized the ‘clean coal’ technology that they were busy investing into, including visions of turning Silesia into a modernized research and development hub (Kuchler and Bridge, 2018), while declaring solidarity with, and respect for, the c.100,000 (predominantly male) workers still employed in the industry (Sauer and Stefanini, 2020: 36). Others, however, point to new emerging and dominant industries such as the automobile and digital

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3 In Silesia alone in 2015, with record voter turn out that year in Poland (51.6%) since 1989, the Voivodeship went from PO to PiS. PiS won 36% of the vote, while two other populist parties with far-right leanings, Kukiz’15 and KORWiN won 11.1% and 5.15% respectively (Cichy and Domagała, 2015).

4 Despite the fact that Poland is presently home to three coal mining areas – the Lubelskie Region in the east (home to one privately-owned mine company), the Belchatów lignite coal mining complex (the largest in Europe) in the south-central Polish Łódzkie region, and Upper Silesia (with 18 active mines in 2017), it is Upper Silesia, by far the largest and oldest, that is therefore most intimately connected to ‘coal’ in the national imaginary. With predominantly state-owned deep-pit mines employing the lion’s share of Polish coal workers (c. 10,000 people work in lignite versus c. 100,000 in hard coal), it is hard coal, not lignite, that is key to coal’s Polish nationalist mythology garnering greatest political support (Schwartzkopff and Schulz, 2017: 5). Thus when referring to ‘coal’ in this thesis, it is this Silesian black substance that is predominantly referred to. Likewise, while ‘Silesia’ is located in the south of today’s Poland and is divided into three distinct regions with unique histories – Upper Silesia, Lower Silesia, and Opolian Silesia, the designation ‘Silesia’, particularly in the national imaginary as connected to coal, refers predominantly to today’s Upper Silesia, where 80% of coal reserves and Poland’s remaining mines are concentrated (coal mining used to take place in Lower Silesia but this ended in the 1990s). In the remaining thesis I will use ‘Silesia’ as a shorthand to refer to Upper Silesia, where I conducted fieldwork.

5 While economic and political support for coal in Poland has not been confined solely to PiS, as others have pointed out (Jeffries, 2017; Kuchler and Bridge, 2018: 144), nevertheless, PiS arguably elevated and entrenched coal in far deeper symbolic terms into its party agenda and ideology than those before them had, as expressed in the choice of host location here, while simultaneously actively delegitimizing renewables and openly stoking up populist anti-EU climate skepticism (Malm and the Zetkin Collective, 2021: 108-110; Żuk et al., 2021: 2).

6 Around 75% of this number are those who work below ground, and around 72,000 are those in Silesia (Anczewska et al., 2020: 36). In everyday discourse, when discussing the economic and social impacts of closing the coal industry in Silesia, the 100,000 figure however is often magnified by a multiple of four to factor in dependent families organised around a single male breadwinner – more typical in Silesian mining families, aimed at highlighting the region’s structural reliance on coal for economic livelihoods. The exact number of people employed in subsidiary industries is unknown – estimates vary between 200,000 and 280,000, though ‘the topic has not been thoroughly analysed’, states one WWF report (Anczewska et al., 2020: 36). Others, however, point to new emerging and dominant industries such as the automobile and digital
Indeed, since coal still powered over 80% of the country’s electricity needs, fueled around 70% of domestic heating in single-family households, and employed around half of Europe’s remaining coal workers in its 18 functioning deep-pit mines, PiS-loyal President, Andrzej Duda, used the opportunity to tell the Silesian coal community that Poland would not give in to ‘political correctness dictated by foreign interests… As long as I am President, I will not let anyone murder Polish mining’ (Wiech, 2020). Re-appropriating the popular Communist-era slogan, the message was indeed that ‘Poland stands on coal’, and, thanks to PiS’s heroic efforts, would continue to do so for the foreseeable future. The Silesian mythology would be upheld: ‘coal was, is, and will be’. Thus, to the consternation of committed climate activists and international policymakers alike, they were showing Europe and its core electorate too that, as one miner tellingly put it to me almost two years earlier, they were ‘not ashamed of coal’. Rather, publicly purifying coal (and thus its people) to a clean and sparkly shine, they felt thoroughly at home with it, and, in turn, it would be thoroughly at home with them.

In Poland, PiS’s pro-coal platform has been highlighted as core to its winning populist strategy (Reuters, 2019). Often considered an increasingly errant Eastern neighbour, this troubling convergence, however, was unfortunately not an anomaly (Malm and the Zetkin Collective, 2021). Across Europe and America other far-right populist parties that gained in power and influence over the second half of the last decade proudly championed their support for fossil fuels, notably coal, as a key part of their election platforms. ‘Trump digs coal’ was a favourite slogan of the former US Republican President in his 2016 campaign trail in key mining states, perceived as a direct counteroffensive to Obama’s so-called ‘War on Coal’ (Smith, 2019). In the UK, Nigel Farage and the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) had vowed to ‘keep the lights on’ (UKIP, 2014) by ‘restoring the UK coal industry’ and scrapping the country’s 2008 Climate Change Act, offering an

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7 In fact, one month before the COP, they had revealed a draft of Poland’s new energy strategy to 2040 putting coal at its centre: it would still contribute 60% of Polish energy needs by 2030 (Ministry of Energy, 2018). Standing by their promise, a year later in December 2019, to much international dismay, Poland opted out of EU-wide binding 2050 targets on net-zero carbon emissions, saying Poland would ‘reach climate neutrality at its own pace’ (Rankin, 2019). Yet the Covid-19 pandemic which swept across the world in 2020 would hasten this pace in unforeseen ways, after which PiS would concede to announcing the phased closure of its coal industry by 2049, thus betraying a key electorate. This fact is reflected on in the post-script of the thesis.

8 It was also at this COP that the NSZZ Solidarity mining trade union notoriously signed a declaration of collaboration with the American-based Heartland Institute to work together to promote ‘healthy’ climate scepticism and the ‘rejection of the ideological dogma of the United Nations’ (wnp.pl, 2018).
attractive form of ‘coal nationalism’ for struggling (post)industrial communities long before the 2016 Brexit referendum, which itself was notably popular in these areas (Thorleifsson, 2016; Evans, 2017a; Winlow et al., 2017). In Germany, the pro-coal and anti-climate outfit, Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), received its highest support base in the 2017 and 2019 elections in the remaining East German coal heartland (Wilkes et al., 2019). In the Netherlands, in 2017, similarly the former coal mining region of Limburg was the stronghold of Geert Wilders (Robinson, 2017), the far-right nativist populist leader of the Dutch Freedom Party, a known climate denier who has spoken in favour of clean coal and against ‘the sinister green-windmill subsidy complex’ (Coates, 2015). In Finland, the Finns Party warmly endorsed the country’s peat industry (a semi-fossil substance produced at an earlier stage in coal formation) – receiving most of its backing in 2015 in its heartlands too while opposing bills to ban coal imports as ‘unrealistic’ (Malm and the Zetkin Collective, 2021: 95-96).

Though liberal-democratic business-as-usual has been dragging its heels on meaningful climate action for decades, indeed has got us into this mess, as the world moves deeper into the climate crisis, far-right populists are emerging as an unpredictable spanner in the works. As they have recently gained growing support in country after country, their rhetoric becoming more and more acceptably mainstreamed, what has become apparent, though under-specified, is their near-unified ardent support for fossil fuels (Malm and the Zetkin Collective, 2021). Despite representing a relatively small percentage of those employed in Western national economies today⁹, symbolically, it is coal and its (particularly male) miners that have occupied a disproportionate ‘iconic role’ in far-right populist narratives and mythologies (Lockwood, 2018; see also Hultgren, 2018) suggesting a deeper symbolic, affective and ideological appeal to their importance than socioeconomic factors alone can explain. This has most often been combined with climate denial, and a general anti-(mainstream) environmentalist, including anti-renewables, stance. Almost every European far-right populist party refuses to accept the scientific consensus on anthropogenic global warming to a more or less explicit extent¹⁰ (Anshelm and Hultman, 2014; Farand, 2019; Forchtner, 2019).

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⁹ Even in Poland it is only 0.5% (Lockwood, 2018). However, in Silesia, due to the spatial concentration of mines located here, at the regional level, the figure is 4.9%, and when considered in terms of male employment it is 8% (Baran et al., 2018: 28). At the same time, the World Bank (2018: 16) states that ‘While job losses from coal mining may be small in comparison to the total labor force, a downsizing can result in a disproportionately high impact locally’, including inevitable shocks and disruption. This points to coal mine regions as occupying ‘heartland’ status in national economic, cultural and social imaginaries and economies.

¹⁰ Even where far-right parties, such as Front Nationale under Marine Le Pen with their eco-nationalist New Ecology movement, do acknowledge climate change is human-induced, as Malm and the Zetkin Collective (2021) argue, it tends to feed into a politics of fossil-fuelled business-as-usual and a focus on anti-immigration – which is its own form of denial, in the sense of mis-locating the root of the problem and avoiding action (see...
an increasingly marked political polarization on environmental and energy issues in general (Fisher, 2019; Fraune and Knodt, 2018; Gemenis et al., 2012; Hess and Renner, 2019; Nawrotzki, 2012). The ‘post-political’ (Swyngedouw, 2011; Rancière, 2004; Žižek, 1999; Mouffe, 2005; Swyngedouw, 2010) nature of technocratic climate change governance and the green energy transition that perhaps imagined a growing science-based consensus regarding coal’s irrationality would be enough to see it off has been punctured by a return of politics (Mouffe, 2005), whether one likes the form it takes or not (Furedi, 2016). Such politics has been noted too for its heightened ‘negative’ emotional charge (Bangstad et al., 2019; Nguyen, 2019; Roose, 2020: 7), mobilization of which has been identified as a key strategy contributing to global populist success in general (Hochschild, 2016: 225; Rico et al., 2017; Mazzarella, 2019).

In Poland, not long ago a poster-child of ‘success’ regarding steady European liberal democratic integration, coal’s ongoing hegemony supported by an elected far-right populist government, popular also among the coal community, must now here be understood as not about simple technical lag or inertia, but active political choice (Brauer and Oei, 2020: 2). This not only puts climate action in further jeopardy, but portends the troubling prospect of fossil or eco-fascist futures as temperatures rise and polarizing friction over energy transition intensifies (HOPE not hate, 2019; Klein, 2019; Malm and the Zetkin Collective, 2021). As a result, this phenomenon has often been met with little more than indiscriminately targeted contempt, condemnation and moral outrage, by liberal-progressive-minded commentators and observers (Cox, 2018; Furedi, 2016), who tend to regard the supposedly ‘blind utopian passions’ of populism as irrational and dangerous (Žižek, 2006: 553). Yet as Frank Furedi (2016) has argued, might there be legitimate grievances and
perspectives beneath this that such attitudes dismiss, foreclosing real political conversation and contributing to further emotive polarization and resistance to climate action?

This thesis, adopting that enquiring attitude, asks: what can a micro-perspective from the critical vantage point of Poland tell us about the understudied intersection between fossil fuels, particularly here coal, and the rise of far-right populism, what might be termed ‘energy populism’ (Huber, 2013), ‘extractive populism’ (Kojola, 2019), more provocatively, ‘fossil fascism’ (Daggett, 2018; Malm and the Zetkin Collective, 2021) or what I pinpoint as ‘industrial populism’? And, if we should understand the present as ‘energy soaked moments in history’ (Bellamy, 2016: 9), what is the salience of this intersection at a time of coal’s not only economic but entwined symbolic decline across the liberal Western world? Particularly within the geographic and imaginary space of ‘Europe’, where, in relation to its dominant environmental discourse, coal has been receding not just as a material base for livelihoods, becoming dirty in the sense of backward (un-modern) and worthless (without value) in multiple ways, but has also been recently increasingly hegemonically understood as dirty in the sense of immoral – inevitably, its remaining people, cultures, and places by association – too? Intending to banish coal from history by shaming individuals, corporations and states into climate mobilization (Collier and Venables, 2014; The Economist, 2019), specifying certain people and practices as beyond the pale, I came to uncomfortably wonder, what if such inevitably stigmatizing, even dehumanizing, labels, stuck to coal’s material dirt which in turn stuck to bodies in locations like Poland where coal is still mined, were unintentionally contributing to the opposite, fuelling far-right industrial populist emotional foment with its promise of a purified homeland with its pure coal in the process? Only an ethnographic perspective, a coal-eyed view of the world, from the margins could have led me to ask such a thorny question. Understanding how and why in locally specific contexts with complex histories of shame and its uses seems in the present political conjuncture an urgent matter if we are to still have a chance at shaping just, democratic and sustainable futures. This thesis primarily focuses on the lived experience of those ‘at the coal face’ of this energy transition to explore the politicized embodied, emotional implications that might impede it.

12 This is not to condemn or question the integrity or purpose of such narratives, only to highlight that, as Hannah Della Bosca and Josephine Gillespie (2018) note in the context of coal mining in Australia, there are unintended consequences that we are in part reaping today.
The changing materiality and meaning of coal in a ‘tale of two Europes’:

Despite always being riven with potential ambivalence, for much of the previous 200 years, coal’s ever-expanding use, even its smoke, has been predominantly synonymous with ‘prosperity, civilization and progress’ (Eriksen, 2016a: 41; Thorsheim, 2006). From the 19th century onwards, coal radically transformed the world. It fueled the building of colonial empires, accelerating global population growth, and enabling humans to transcend the organic limits of nature for the first time, marking the metabolic shift into a fossil-fueled economy with its consumptive, energy intensive freedoms (Chakrabarty, 2009; see also Barak, 2020; Malm, 2015; Mitchell, 2009). This process had moral overtones, for coal was to be the resource that would lift humanity out of the misery of poverty, providing domestic warmth, and stoking the engines of national wealth production, development and its ever-upward addictive promises of The Good Life (Strauss et al., 2013: 13; see also Freese, 2006; Goodman, 2020; Thorsheim, 2006). In many ways, though only for a highly unequal proportion of that humanity, and through gross exploitation too, this has been the case; ‘coal and modernity’ have been ‘two sides of the same coin’ (Eriksen, 2014; see also Freese, 2006; Szeman and Boyer, 2017: 1), true of both capitalist and socialist varieties. After all, it was Lenin (2015 [1920]) who famously stated that ‘Communism is Soviet power plus [coal-fired] electrification’. Yet, if ‘Fossil fuels have been a blessing for humanity... creat[ing] the foundations for modern life’, they are now ‘becoming a damnation, a threat to civilization’ (Thomas Hylland Eriksen in Lisen, 2016), with spatially and socially uneven effects.

Today, as the reader is likely all too aware, in the context of the Anthropocene, or more incisively, Capitalocene\(^\text{13}\) (Malm, 2015; Moore, 2017), coal in particular is deemed increasingly dirty, or backward, worthless, and now even evil and sinister.\(^\text{14}\) Internationally, environmentalists, civil society movements, scientists, policymakers, politicians, experts, academics, and investors alike line up to communicate ever loudly that coal is old-fashioned filth that needs to disappear and

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13 See Andreas Malm’s (2015) *Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam Power and the Roots of Global Warming* for a critique of the idea that coal-based industrialization was inexorable – rather, the shift from water to steam power was the outcome of protracted class conflict and decisions made by industrial capitalists to enable them to control their workers better. Thus Malm critiques the notion of the ‘Anthropocene’ as a sort of inevitable linear trajectory that holds an unspecified, singular ‘humanity’ responsible. Specific capitalist interests and agencies were at work behind the rise of fossil fuelled economies – hence, his preference for the term ‘Capitalocene’.

14 Kuntala Lahiri Dutt (2016: 1), in the context of India, writes that the growing images that surround coal – as a ‘dirty, old-fashioned, cheap industrial raw material’, conjuring up images of grim poverty and degradation are ‘as important as the material itself’ in determining its contemporary meaning. Relatedly, David Kideckel (2018: 68) argues that ‘coal today is condemned in a more generalized way than other aspects of industrialism’, including nuclear.
fast. And for good reason. Coal powers nearly 40% of global energy usage today, releasing 25% of all greenhouse gas emissions worldwide\textsuperscript{15}, contributing the single biggest source to accelerating and cumulative climate catastrophe. For that reason alone it is becoming ‘unburnable’, posing both ecological and financial risk (Carbon Tracker Initiative, 2011).\textsuperscript{16} If that wasn’t enough, it is also responsible for a slew of additional environmental and health hazards, such as air pollution, acid rain, toxic tailings, land degradation, destruction of wildlife habitats and soil and water contamination (Finkelman et al., 2021). Combined with its deteriorating material standing as poorer quality coals are dug, ‘peak coal’ is overshot and the price of renewables cheapens, global divestment from the coal industry has reached record levels\textsuperscript{17}. Political alliances are being formed to ‘power past coal’\textsuperscript{18}, and civil society movements are increasingly mobilizing against it (Temper et al., 2020) as a broadly defined ecological consciousness (that makes increasing business sense too\textsuperscript{19}) comes to be internalized as a new personal and societal globalized norm (Jamison, 2008: 17). The narrative arc of coal’s shifting meaning appears to be following the classic tragic fall from hero to villain; from precious national resource to toxic dirt. Coal’s global reputation has thus steadily tarnished; it is now widely deemed not only un-modern, and economically worthless, but crucially also a ‘moral pariah’ (Ayling and Gunningham, 2017: 140; see also Schneider et al., 2016). Yet, despite being teleologically consigned to becoming a ‘relic of a bygone era’ (Goodell, 2007), coal’s days are still far from over. Not only is global coal capacity still increasing\textsuperscript{20}, but as Barbara Freese (2006: 166) in her history of coal presciently forewarned, and as we are seeing, as it comes ‘Increasingly under attack... [a] loud, messy, and painful collision’ between competing interests and imaginaries seems ‘inevitable’\textsuperscript{21}. But was it indeed so? Notions of ‘inevitability’ might mask more

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{15} This is nearly twice those of natural gas and 30-40% more than oil.
  \item \textsuperscript{16} According to research published in Nature in 2015, more than 80% of global coal reserves alone must now remain in the ground if we are to have a chance of keeping within the 2 degree limit on global warming (McGlade and Ekins, 2015).
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Over 100 globally significant financial institutions, including the World Bank, have restricted backing of coal developments around the world so far (Buckley, 2019). This has only been accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic – see conclusion.
  \item \textsuperscript{18} See the Powering Past Coal Alliance – 104 countries, cities, regions and organisations led by the UK and Canada aiming to accelerate the fossil-fuel phase out of coal-fired power stations and established in 2017. https://www.poweringpastcoal.org/
  \item \textsuperscript{19} Even the front cover of a recent edition of The Economist was headlined ‘making coal history’ with an image of coal displayed as a museum relic (The Economist, 2020). By contrast, renewable energy is being considered the new frontier for green capitalist modernization (The Economist, 2021).
  \item \textsuperscript{20} As Carbon Brief report, globally coal capacity grew every year between 2000 and 2019, almost doubling from 1,066GW to 2,045GW, with now 80 countries using coal as opposed to 66 in 2000, China representing around half. However, the rate of this growth has slowed dramatically in recent years, while retirements are also accelerating, reaching a cumulative 268GW between 2010 and 2019 (Evans and Pearce, 2020).
  \item \textsuperscript{21} See also Richard Martin (2015) who characterizes this global collision as the ‘Coal Wars’.
\end{itemize}
complex, power-laden dynamics at work. And what gives rise to its 'painful', or emotional, intensity, and for whom, that then attaches to specifically far-right, or industrial, populism? Is this straightforwardly about jobs as is often assumed?

In Europe, despite dissension in the ranks as coal’s glory fades elsewhere, the collision over its continued role and its contemporary meaning has been played out most vociferously across the former Iron Curtain. Bucking the trends, as one by one the lights have gone out on the coal mining industry across Western Europe over the last decades – (the UK\textsuperscript{22}, Belgium\textsuperscript{23}, the Netherlands\textsuperscript{24}, Germany\textsuperscript{25}, France\textsuperscript{26}, and Spain\textsuperscript{27} have all shut down, or pledged to shut down, their coal mines while numerous other countries have announced plans to phase out coal power by 2030\textsuperscript{28}) – in the East, it is postsocialist Poland that clings on most adamantly (Schwartzkopff and Schulz, 2017), the largest economy standing on coal in an unevenly post-industrializing, liberal-cosmopolitan European Union increasingly concerned with decarbonization. While over 80% of Poland’s electricity comes from coal as we saw, in the rest of Europe the average is around 25%; indeed, Poland burns more coal than any European country other than Germany (Kuchler and Bridge 2018: 2).\textsuperscript{29} It is also here where 86% of the EU’s remaining coal is mined – 63.4 million tonnes (Zuk et al., 2021: 2).\textsuperscript{30} The International Energy Agency (2018) has dubbed this material schism the ‘tale of two

\textsuperscript{22} In December 2015, the last deep pit mine in the UK closed, with government plans to shut all coal-fired power stations by 2025 too (Musariri, 2020). There are still around 26 open-cast mines operating in the UK, though employing only around 620 workers, a decline of over 2000% on the peak of 1.2 million employees in the 1920s (Ritchie, 2019). However, spearheaded by a Conservative MP, in November 2019, the opening of a new open-cast coal mine in Cumbria was approved – the first time a new mine would be sunk in over 30 years – signaling the shift in mood around coal under the Conservative, Brexiteering government (Bounds, 2019). Yet by early 2021, in response to protest from activists and criticism that this would be damaging for UK climate leadership, the decision is now being reviewed (Harrabin, 2021).

\textsuperscript{23} Coal mines in Belgium were phased out in 1986 (Baeten et al., 1999), and in March 2016 it became a coal-power free country (CAN Europe, 2016).

\textsuperscript{24} Coal mines in the Netherlands were closed in 1965 (Gales and Hölsgens, 2017).

\textsuperscript{25} Germany’s last hard coal mine closed in December 2018. Even though Germany still has openpit lignite mines, they have announced plans to phase out coal-fired power stations by 2038 (dw.com, 2019). Likewise, Germany’s lignite mines are located in the former GDR, the postsocialist East.

\textsuperscript{26} France closed its last coal mine in 2004 and in November 2018 announced plans to phase out coal by 2022 (Worrall and Runkel, 2017).

\textsuperscript{27} In 2016 Spain announced an EU-backed plan to close all its coal mines by 2021 with 26 unprofitable and state-subsidised mines closing that year (Keeley, 2020).

\textsuperscript{28} In addition to the UK, France, Germany, Spain and the Netherlands (which all had coal industries of their own), within the EU, by 2019, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Italy, Ireland, and Portugal had announced goals to phase out coal in the energy mix by 2030 or before (Europe Beyond Coal, 2021).

\textsuperscript{29} Lignite (the most polluting variety of coal) also plays a key role in Central and Eastern European energy systems, including in Poland, its second biggest EU producer (Kuchler and Bridge, 2018: 7; Brauers and Oei, 2020: 2). Lignite coal constituted 11.6% of primary energy consumed in Poland in 2015 (Kuchler and Bridge, 2018:7).

\textsuperscript{30} The remaining 10.3 million tonnes, based on 2018 Eurostat data, were mined by just four other countries – the Czech Republic, Germany, the UK, and Spain. This is in comparison to 1990, when as many as 14 EU
Indeed, it is Central and East European countries in general, Poland the most powerful and vocal, that have been most against EU energy and climate policy (Ćetković and Buzogány, 2019). Thus, while coal has ‘lost much of its shine in the West’ (Lahiri-Dutt, 2016: xviii), becoming dirty in the mainstream, a fact increasingly dominating EU and national policies, in the East, particularly as far as PiS and its supporters were concerned, ‘coal is still king; coal is still modernity’ (Eriksen, 2016a: 57). It is also moral too. As we saw earlier, it is still clean.

Within this tale, often simplistically attributed to the ongoing legacies of Communist history and Poland’s comparative economic poverty, the growing EU-backed green-economic consensus around ‘dirty’ coal is thus finding itself caught up in the still ongoing unequally contested politics and imaginaries of what it means to be a civilized European, or ‘of value’, ‘modern’, and ‘moral’ in a post-Cold War order. It thus unfortunately imbricates with the historic orientalist, and classist, symbolic bifurcation based on a triumphant modernization paradigm, of an apparently ‘clean’ and advanced (Capitalist) West versus a ‘dirty’, backward (Communist) East (Gille, 2002), pointing up Poland’s, and indeed Silesia’s, ongoing precarious and peripheral position as ‘Europe but not quite Europe’ (Wolff, 1994) decades after Communism’s collapse. As such, the designation ‘dirty’ fuses with broader experiences of processes of marginalization feeding into a peculiar postcolonial postsocialist sensibility and sensitivity that I will later outline framing its emotional resistance here from below. This messy, painful collision over coal’s contemporary meaning plays out unevenly across additional overlapping internal fault-lines that further contextualize its cascading politicized emotive implications – mediated not only by ecologically-positioned racialized national (Eastern European, Polish) but also by regional (Silesian), class (working-class) and gender (masculine) identities and subjectivities, intersecting with and destabilizing historic place-based narratives and...
values that since postsocialist transition into postindustrial, neoliberal globalization were already on shaky terrain. This was also without engaging them in meaningful dialogue or alternative scenarios, rather treating them with contempt and even disgust. This was precisely the overlooked rub. The EU-endorsed universal-scale label ‘dirty’, presented as a neutral, technical, scientific designation, does not fall on a blank canvas or on unmarked bodies, but rather collides with the particularities of a rather different localized industrial energy culture and economy that have been forged in close proximity to its dirt (Latour, 1993), generating inherent tensions.

This thesis, set within a transdisciplinary environmental humanities frame (which I explain in my research methods, chapter two), is based on a year’s ethnographic fieldwork conducted in 2017 with both residents and moreover (predominantly male) working-class coal miners and their families in an anonymised Upper Silesian minescape.34. Adopting what I outline as an embodied emotional ecology of politics approach (in chapter two), it contributes a (postcolonial) postsocialist perspective on how the shifting entwined materiality and meaning of the ‘dirt’ of coal, in its emotional entanglements with historically-rooted intersectional class-based, occupational, gender, and racialized national and regional identities within the context of Europe as a sociopolitical-environmental project, plays a key role in fuelling industrial populist validity among Poland’s coal workers. This is not to say that national level, ideological politics maps perfectly onto this localized morphology, nor that the people in my study can readily be said to ‘belong’ to the far right, but that such politics finds resonance with what Raymond Williams (1961) termed local ‘structures of feeling’ that vibrate to its frequency and reverberate and resound with it to enable recruitment.35 For while it has always

34 The specific location is here anonymised in order to protect the identities of participants as far as possible.
35 By resonance I mean ‘latent’ and ‘pre-existing’ attitudes that lend tacit or material legitimacy, and/or become attached/ attracted, to far-right populist ‘discursive frames’ (Bonikowski, 2017: 181) as emergent, not simply imposed, phenomena. Alcida Assmann’s (2015: 42–44) use of the notion of ‘resonance’ to speak of emotions in cultural memory is useful here - the term ‘resonance’, coming from the Latin resonantia, meaning ‘to echo’, and from resonare, ‘to sound’, implies the energetic, affective force of the emotive as the stickiness that generates attraction or ‘fusion’ between stimulus and earlier experience. As such, I am not interested in members or ‘voters’ of far-right populist parties as such – but the ‘common sense’ ways such ideologies gain currency and ground through everyday practices and experiences while shaping them too. Bart Bonikowski (2017: 181) likewise argues that ‘resonance’ is what scholars should focus on as a way to make sense of the shifting success of populist parties. As Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser (2017: 109; 99) write, while many reduce populist success down to ‘an elite-driven process, centred on charismatic leaders, who have the ability to enchant (or ‘trick’) the masses’, populist worldviews, attitudes and sentiments exist in society as lenses for interpreting political realities ‘regardless of populist actors’ and are ‘widespread’. These are often ‘latent’, i.e. ‘lying dormant or hidden until circumstances are suitable for their development or manifestation’, thus requiring ‘activation’ to produce political outcomes. Similarly, Nitzan Shoshan (in Bangstad et al., 2019: 102–103) refutes the widely held ‘encroachment story’ myth, whereby right-wing ‘extremist arguments penetrate mainstream, respectable discourses and introduce malignant ideas that find
been the case that ‘coal is dirty, there is no escaping that’, as miners put it, today, in the highly unequal postsocialist present, that dirt takes on newly stigmatizing, externally-generated meanings that touch embodied lives in political presents in potent and charged emotional ways looking for outlets and affirmation. This is experienced as what I will outline as an ecological dispossession.

Resultant intersectionally-mediated shame, here a toxic, visceral sense of not-being-at-home-in-the-world, thus of being incongruent, ‘matter out of place’ (Douglas 2001 [1966]), designated dirt by proximity to the coal they mined, and a concomitant search for home, defined as the embodied feeling of congruence, of being at-home-in-the-world or, ‘u siebie’ (‘at home with yourself’), matter in place, or clean, I propose can be understood as the key emotional and affective grounds through which I found micro-populism, what I call ‘industrial’ populism, flourishes with its redemptive promise of emotional purification, thus gathering force for its politics in coal country. While such shame indexes a felt sense of marginalization, social exclusion, and societal disconnection, industrial populism in turn offers to purify this shame away through longed-for social re-integration and connection – a repossession of morality, modernity and value – thus it becomes viscerally appealing.

From the situated perspective of micro-politics, I therefore show how far-right industrial populist politics gains appeal, or resonance, by aligning with, shaping and bolstering emergent working-class strategies of purification – locally-embedded means of coping with the stigmatizing stress of contemporary postindustrial (postcolonial) postsocialist environmental and energy change by cleansing one’s self, and the industrial order miners are embedded in, of material dirt’s contemporary symbolic stigma and shame, thereby re-asserting their morally pure, or virtuous, worth, their modernity and societal value once again. Of trying to feel at-home at home – particularly by the industrial male working-class whose lives are most intimately entangled with coal’s physical dirt, often through lack of meaningful, acceptable alternatives. As I outline in a later section, ‘populism’ has been defined in its simplest form as a kind of thin-centred ideology that pits ‘the pure people’ against ‘the corrupt elite’ (Mudde, 2004; Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017). Yet as Pierre Ostiguy and María Esperanza Casullo (2017) note, while this definition of populism is widely used, the concept of ‘purity’ and its salience is never defined. The language of ‘purity’ versus ‘pollution’ saturates far-right populist rhetoric and politics, particularly in drawing the boundaries of a traditionally gendered and ethnically their way into electoral campaigns, legislations, policy, and the worldviews of ‘ordinary people’. Rather, from an anthropological perspective, he argues that such ideas instead ‘emerge from ideological (under)currents that elsewhere pass as innocently moderate’ - i.e. normalized and banal. In this way, the extreme ‘emerges from’ and is ‘rooted in’ the ever-shifting mainstream (and vice versa in dialectical relationship).
homogenous nation and its body politic that is in need of protection and defence from deviant, impure and/or polluting Others, including ‘corrupt elites’, racialized immigrants, and sexual ‘deviants’. Fascism after all is based, according to Roger Griffins (1993), on the utopian myth of ‘palingenetic ultranationalism’ in which a degenerate society contaminated by the corrupting forces of present modernity is reborn through a process of purification. Yet purity-pollution discourse also permeates coal discourse and practice too. What are the situated, micro-political reasons why ‘purity’ becomes sought after in the first place? What is its everyday, ‘banal’ salience (Billig, 1995)? Why and how do people desire to be(come) ‘pure’? Were they dirty or contaminated, tainted or polluted beforehand? In what kinds of ways and through what processes did they become so? And what are the means by which redemption through purification is potentially offered via such populist discourse, policy and fervour? For in the time of the Anthropocene, just as purity becomes increasingly impossible (if ever it were otherwise), environmental and national purity politics is intensifying (Cielemęcka, 2020; Shotwell, 2016). These trends appear to be entangled, with tensions over the legacy and meaning of industrialism central, and those on the ground caught navigating their contradictions, desires, risks and draws.

To the surprise perhaps of some readers, this thesis is not directly about climate change, nor is it about coal mining as such. It is instead about the substance and symbolism of coal and its dirt, and its locally situated meaning and mattering, expressed in the more ‘immediate’ issues and frictions over smog, domestic heating, coal mine work, social life and identity, even as climate operates as the fundamental overarching issue that shapes and contextualizes these everyday encounters in increasingly global, politicizing terms. For in the 21st century, there is no issue that is not about the climate – particularly when it comes to fossil fuels (Malm and the Zetkin Collective, 2021). But, as I found, climate change as discourse and experience, from the perspective of Silesia’s coal miners and inhabitants in general, though bearing down and opaqueely causing havoc in the coal industry, was far more abstract, (located in the distant and exclusive realms of international spaces such as the COP), than air pollution and the more localized economic, sociocultural and political changes occurring to the centuries-old industry and its workers that were mediating how climate change was being perceived and responded to, and how the bumpy ride of energy transition itself has been unfolding.

Ethically-speaking, the thesis aims to be faithful to showing how the world looks from the literal ground up, keeping participants and places anonymized where relevant and possible to protect their interests. This does not mean personal agreement with such perspectives, only an
ethnographically-grounded attempt to build channels of understanding across difference. Neither is it a claim to being representative at the macro-scale – rather, counterposing to top-down national accounts, my research offers a window onto the embodied, ecologically-embedded, placed-based micro-politics of far-right populist, coal-fuelled sentiment at the everyday scale, in order to glean suggestive insights. However, this is coupled with an attempt to relate this to macro-scale processes.

Researching far-right populism was not what I explicitly set out to do. Initially, as a British-born and based, half-English, half-Polish, raised bilingual, EU-funded PhD researcher, with a background in activism and working in the environmental NGO and think tank sector particularly on climate and energy issues, I began this PhD research in 2015 originally motivated by the desire to try to understand the barriers to energy transition in Poland from an up-close-and-personal perspective. Yet getting intimate with coal and its dirt, especially at a time with PiS in power, drew me into its webs of significance whether I liked it or not. I invite readers to, for now, suspend their own worldview, as I attempted to, in order to take a 180 degree turn to see the world from the ground up and practice a politics, not of disdain or distant sympathy, but of radical empathy and compassion. I invite readers to, for now, let go of a desire for purity and clean lines, for moral superiority and comfort, and risk ‘contamination’. I invite readers to get intimate with coal’s dirt. For as Arlie Hochshild (2016: xi) has written, it is through intimacy and empathy, not without it, that the most important and ‘clear-headed’ analysis can begin.

Poland is the sixth largest country in the EU by area and population, the seventh biggest economy, and the largest coal-powered one at that. It nevertheless, as a postsocialist state, still occupies a peripheral position on Europe’s margins, both in material and imaginary terms. The eminent historian Norman Davies (1986, 2005a, 2005b) has done much to argue that Poland should be historically considered the beating heart of Europe. Long before Brexit, fuelled in significant part by backlash against Eastern European, Polish, working-class migrants, and rising Euroscepticism in the wake of the financial and ‘refugee’ crises, he stated that Poland’s fate would be of ongoing concern to the fate of the European project more broadly, its conflicts acutely revealing the ideological tensions that might pull it apart. This surely must include those connected to environmental and energy futures. As he and Dipesh Chakrabarty (2007) have both suggested, ‘European’ and global history is likely to be re-written from the margins and not from its centres

36 The impact of my personal positionality on conducting my ethnographic research I reflect on in chapter two, my research methods section.
37 This is particularly as the European Union’s latest flagship project, the ‘Energy Union’, together with the European Green Deal announced in 2019, have been touted as cornerstone to the bloc’s attempts to mitigate its crisis of legitimacy (Kamlage and Nanz, 2017).
And yet, in the global hierarchy of academic knowledge production, too often the postsocialist space is treated as particular, never speaking to broader, universal concerns (Buchowski, 2004, 2012, 2019; Pasieka, 2015). Thus while this thesis explores a postsocialist micro-context, it is not aimed at being a narrowly 'postsocialist' piece of scholarship speaking to 'postsocialist' (Eastern) concerns alone. For in many respects, as Zsuzsa Gille (2010: 15) proposes, we might consider us all to inhabit a 'global postsocialist condition', in which in Europe, the East has always existed, and been constructed, in mutual dialectical relation with the West – so that it is not only that the West affects the East, but that the East also affects the West, and has always done so. Thus this thesis invites readers to think from the margins of the margins, in order to perhaps make sense of broader currents too, charting the contours of a highly uncertain, turbulent future in which rising temperatures and a rising far-right are converging around the world (Malm and the Zetkin Collective, 2021).

The ‘smear-campaign against coal’ and ecological dispossession:

If you had attended COP24 in Katowice, and driven, say, from the airport through Silesia directly into the city centre venue and gone no further, you might have been forgiven for accepting PiS’s confident propaganda that ‘Poland stands on good clean coal’ as representing the full picture with a superficial glance. Silesia, a region of 12,300km² located in the south of Poland on the border with Czechia and Slovakia is home to over 4.5 million (c.12% of the national population), and is Poland’s most densely-inhabited and industrialized corner, indeed Europe’s. The silhouettes of mine shafts and chimneys, the socialist-era tower blocks that were built to house the workers who flocked here in the Communist period, and the characteristic ‘hałdas’ or spoil heaps that have piled up in layers over the centuries dominate the jumbled landscape of this agglomeration where 80% of Poland’s documented coal reserves lie buried (Popkiewicz, 2015: 73-74). Contributing 12.2% gross domestic product (57.2 billion EUR) to the national economy, the second biggest contribution after Warsaw, Silesia has long been a crucial engine of prosperity, and to this day, as since the 19th

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Dipesh Chakrabarty’s (2007) text Provincializing Europe examines the enduring power of the European imaginary in determining the defining features of capitalist modernity against whose standards all are measured, and explores whether it is possible to de-centre European categories of thought in a postcolonial context like India. Though undoubtedly the postsocialist East is not what Chakrabarty had in mind (it is very much obscured by reference to its notion of ‘Europe’, a Cold War legacy of the Global North and South – First and Third World – division), rather he was referring to the (post)colonial global South, his arguments could be extended to Europe’s internal periphery too.
but almost two years earlier, when I arrived in Katowice to begin my ethnographic fieldwork, in January 2017, I quickly discovered firsthand that, contrary to PiS’s rhetoric and Silesia’s synonymous relation to coal in the national imaginary and economy, all was not well for its treasure. Behind the polished-up facade, the increasingly contested politics of ‘dirty’ coal in the tale of two Europes were well underway and had been for decades. Coal, and the way of life it was entwined with, were in a deep process of ‘patchy’ (Tsing et al., 2019) and ‘uneven’ (Smith, 1984) dislocation linked to Poland’s ongoing neoliberal capitalist ‘EUropeanization’ that had begun with the collapse of Communism in 1989 (Knudsen, 2012: 28), before which, as I go into detail in the next chapter, coal had been the steadfast bedrock of the socialist state’s modernization project. The global politics of environment and climate change were largely invisibly fuelling and intersecting ongoing local problems that shaped the way it would be received. Three initial clues gave me my first insight into the unhomely localized present of coal’s stuttering and stumbling entangled material and symbolic decline, trends that PiS and its supporters were forcefully pushing back against. They also gave me an insight into the everyday sense of opacity and confusion as to ‘who’ was behind such events, for a distinct lack of transparency on the part of the industry, as well as conflicting messaging from government and media, combined with a distant shadowy ‘EU’ pulling levers, shrouded it all in constant perplexity. Not only for me as a newly-arrived researcher, but also for participants. This only heightened the emotional intensity of its felt experience.

My first clue came when, through the help of a friend’s coal-connected relatives, and a scoping trip conducted in 2016, I had arranged to begin year-long fieldwork with participant observation at a century-old active coal mine located in an adjacent town: the KWK Makoszowy mine. On January 3rd 2017, a few weeks before my arrival, however, I received a letter from the Polish state’s Mine Restructuring Company (Spółka Restrukturyzacji Kopalń S.A.), set up in the year 2000 to oversee the accelerating process of mine ‘liquidation’, that unfortunately the mine had ceased activities on December 31st 2016 and was now in its hands. Though there had been rumours

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39 Industry contributes 35.1% of regional gross value added (GVA) with coal mining an additional 6.9% GVA (European Commission, 2020).
that it was slated for closure, nobody had predicted it would happen so fast. The mine’s reserves were still intact, there was plenty more coal in the ground. Only twelve months earlier, the Prime Minister herself, Beata Szydło, had promised that the mine would not close. Despite repeated reassurances, and PiS’s own promise to defend coal, the decision was announced abruptly without explanation (Januszewska, 2020). It was ‘purely political’ my initial gatekeeper informed me. I was instructed by the company to look elsewhere, no further help could be offered, while my shocked gatekeeper, a retired coal worker himself, had also run out of warm leads.

What actually happened, was that in a competitive global market economy with falling coal prices, rising productivity costs, declining coal quality (Popkiewicz, 2015: 79–81), compounded by increasing EU-imposed environmental regulations that were hitting coal demand⁴⁰, the state-owned mine company, *Katowicki Holding Węglowy* that had previously owned it, had run into serious financial trouble. This had been exacerbated by ongoing governmental neglect of the ailing industry that had been treated like a political hot potato for decades (Popkiewicz, 2015). In April 2017, PiS now came to the rescue – it would be bailed out through a merger with new PiS-established, state-backed Polish Mining Group (*Polska Grupa Górnicza* - *PGG*)⁴¹, that could now claim to be Europe’s single biggest mining company, and the largest by far in the country and region.⁴² Public opinion was divided – with more liberal-minded anti-PiS media outlets and citizens decrying the squandering of public money literally ‘down a black hole’ destined for history. Yet another round of

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⁴⁰ Increasing emphasis on decarbonization in the EU has meant that the share of coal in providing European energy needs decreased from more than 26% in 1990 to 17% in 2013, while the percentage share of gas and renewables increased significantly in the same period. In Poland, the share of coal in the overall energy balance decreased from 79% to 57% between 1990–2013, substituted by crude oil and natural gas, while renewables only represent 4% of energy resources (Jonek Kowalska, 2015: 139).

⁴¹ *Polska Grupa Górnicza* (PGG – Polish Mining Group) was set up under PiS in April 2016 (though this was a continuation of the previous government under Platforma Obywatelska’s (PO – Civic Platform) policy) to bail out then bankrupt state company *Kompania Węglowa* (which itself was set up in 2003 on the back of five other bankrupting coal companies through a process of consolidation), which at that time was in 4 billion PLN of debt. PGG was established with a clean slate, and a capital injection worth 1.5 billion PLN from other state-owned enterprises, which acquired shares in it. This was in order to get around the so-called EU ‘Coal Decision’ competition rules, that limits state aid only to coal mines slated for definite closure. PGG took over KW’s former 11 mines (consolidated to 5), 4 mining firms, and 35,000 workers, before then, in April 2017, also taking over *Katowicki Holding Węglowy*’s assets – a further 11 mines (long consolidated to 4) and another 12,500 workers, as well as its debts - 2.5billion PLN. It was now able to proudly claim it was Europe’s biggest coal company (Barteczko and Koper, 2017; Dziaduł, 2017).

⁴² In Upper Silesia itself, there are two main mining companies in operation. In addition to state-backed PGG, which employs the lions share of miners (c. 42,000) *Jastrzębska Spółka Węglowa* (in which the Polish state has over 50% shareholding stake too), located in and around the southern Upper Silesian town of Jastrzębie Zdrój, purpose-built as a company mining town under socialism, is the largest producer of higher quality coking coal in the EU, and the second biggest employer (c. 22,000). There is also Tauron Wydobycie, owning one mine, Węglolokoks, and a few privately owned mines, of which KWK Silesia is the largest – bought by a Czech company in 2010 (European Commission, 2020).
restructuring ensued – a permanent feature of coal mining life since the 1990s. My fieldwork and I were being initiated into the pervasive contemporary atmospherics of coal – permanent instability, threat of closure and uncertainty hanging in the air, with an added dose of public frustration. As economic and social pressure on dirty coal was mounting, fuelled by EU environmental concern, it was no longer the stable ground it once was – more literally becoming dirt, or valueless earth. As for me, in this way I came to know what anthropologist Michael Jackson (2000: 21) meant when he wrote ‘fieldwork cannot be willed into happening. Inevitably, it proceeds with fits and starts’. I had to start again almost from scratch.

Spending the first two months of fieldwork re-orientating myself in Katowice, diving into local history and daily life to develop local ‘cognitive skills’ (Rakowski 2016: 22), scoping out my next steps, building connections, and trying to adopt a ‘coal-eyed’ view of the world, I also quickly discovered the second clue regarding coal’s unhomely contemporary situation. The regional capital’s visions for Silesia, although maintaining coal as core to its foundational mythology, was fast moving on from it as a material and cultural way of life. Coal was making way for leisure and consumerism and becoming cleaned-up ‘heritage’ instead; part of a wider trend of tourist-friendly museumification sweeping across Europe’s former industrial sites (Berger et al., 2018; Pasieka and Filipkowsk, 2015). Katowice, a historic mining site since the 19th century that once boasted more than 50 mines, was no longer a mining place. Still home to fourteen coal mines in the 1980s, the city by this point hosted only three, (with rumours of their closure in circulation too). Now, only a short walk from the (‘eco-friendly’) International Congress Hall in which COP24 would take place, was the Polish Radio’s National Symphony Orchestra concert hall, and next to that, the brand new headquarters of the Silesian Museum, which opened in 2015. Together these architecturally award-winning buildings formed a new designated ‘cultural zone’ at the heart of the region’s capital.

43 Transformation of the Polish coal industry began in 1989 with the collapse of Communism. This led to multiple rounds of restructuring in a country that has seen 15 governments since that time. The first decade 1989-1999 was the most unstable. Between 1993 and 1998 alone, five different governmental programs to rescue the sector were adopted. From 1998, as the preparatory phase for EU accession ‘accelerated’, coal mine restructuring became more urgent, particularly reducing state subsidies in order to comply with EU competition laws (Szpor and Ziolkowska, 2018: 8, 12). See also Izabela Jonek Kowalska’s (2015: 145) paper on the history of coal industry restructuring in Poland and its overall ‘abysmal’ failure.

44 Indeed, Upper Silesia finds itself on the European Route of Industrial Heritage, a tourist initiative set up in 1999 aimed at presenting the notion of a European ‘common heritage’ based on the industrial revolution and its ‘most important’ sites. See https://www.erih.net.

45 By the time of writing, one of these, ‘Janów/Wieżorek’ went into liquidation in March 2018. Another, the historically famous ‘Wujek’ mine, known as the site of a massacre of striking miners by Communist forces in the 1980s, was, in January 2021, announced for liquidation, while its underground reserves would be merged with Murcki-Staszic mine, the youngest, last operating mine in Katowice, to form the Staszic-Wujek mine.
funded to the tune of a billion EU-backed zloties (c. 2.2 million EUR) – by far the country’s biggest regenerative venture financed by the public sector on a post-industrial site (Sobala-Gwosdz and Gwosdz, 2018: 27). All three had been constructed on the site of the former Katowice Mine, which had dominated the city centre for nearly 200 years, from 1823-1999. Nearby on the site of the former ‘Gottwald’ mine, was the Silesian Shopping Centre too. Languishing in postindustrial ruin for some time, such cultural regenerations signaled the ‘staging’ of a ‘history fading into oblivion’ (Debary, 2004) and a city in the middle of a massive rebranding exercise involving ‘civilizing the city centre’ from its dark industrial past (Ter-Ghazaryan, 2016; see also Czepczynski, 2008; Diener and Hagen, 2013, 2016; Vanolo, 2017). Seeing the colour of the future as green rather than black, and with ambitions as a European Capital of Culture, Katowice was now promoting itself as a postindustrial cultural, new-technology, and business services hub. Indeed, as the ‘city of gardens’, as its new logo declared⁴⁷, it was now purporting to be the greenest, rather than dirtiest (as its coal-ties had long designated it), town in Poland. The designation ‘industrial’ no longer rang with civic pride except as history (Short et al., 1993).

Tellingly, in its exhibition about Silesia’s tumultuous history and its entanglement with coal, the museum was notably silent about the region’s postindustrial traumas from the 1990s, when postsocialism ushered in mass unemployment, new forms of poverty and social deprivation that shook the region to its core (see chapter three). Instead, symbolically ‘ending’ in 1989 on a microprocessor designed by engineers in a post-mine town, the museum’s own postindustrial aesthetic – minimal, clean, sleek, concrete-steel-and-glass, an exemplary ‘manicured landscape’ (Edensor, 2005) – spoke volumes about the envisioned future instead. It stood in direct contrast to the messy, rough, dusty and dirty space of the former coal mine upon which it stands, epitomizing the deep symbolic and economic dislocation of the formerly glorified working classes of the Communist era from the region’s new identity; indeed perhaps even their postsocialist erasure.⁴⁸ Was this a kind of ‘violence of organized forgetting’? (Giroux in Roller and Shackel, 2018: 204) As one former worker

⁴⁶ See http://www.mckkatowice.pl/pl/strefa-kultury/24/. This investment can be interpreted ‘in terms of growing metropolitan aspirations and a rise in the perception of the role of culture and creativity as the leading drivers of socio-economic change’ in the region (Sobala-Gwosdz and Gwosdz, 2018: 27–28).

⁴⁷ See http://cityofgardens.eu/. Regional government ambitions to develop Silesia economically as, no longer a coal region, but a creative, professional and innovation hub, based on flexible and specialized labour and enterprise, are clear in its strategic development plan – Silesia 2030+ (Województwo Śląskie, 2013). By 2020, the 5th update to this document, ‘Silesia 2030’, would explicitly spell out its Green vision for Silesia (Województwo Śląskie, 2020). Yet this contrasts notably with the national vision for Silesia, set out in 2017 in the Programme for Silesia, which has remained one of energy and resource production – an industrial heartland – for Poland (Ministerstwo Rozwoju, 2017).

⁴⁸ This mirrors other locations where the story of labour has been marginalized and sidelined in sites of industrial national memory (see Roller and Shackel, 2018: 204).
at the Katowice Mine had said to me, while taking a seemingly alienating stroll together around the museum, ‘it’s so clean – where is the dirt?’ Indeed most actual subsurface miners that I met had never visited the museum. They did not even know about the now highly sort-after naive art hanging on its walls painted by Communist-era miner-artists. On the city’s outskirts, the former red-brick workers’ housing estates, or familoki, the Nikiszowiec and Giszowiec complexes, built in the early 20th century by forward-thinking German industrialists, were themselves becoming trendy gentrified residences and tourist attractions. As had occurred in the West, indeed a sign of Westernization itself, labour and its (predominantly masculine) dirty bodily work was being replaced most visibly by tourists and the cognitive culture of lattes and cleaned-up, booted-and-suited internationally-connected business, cultural, educational and political elites (Cowie and Heathcott, 2003).

People, in a sense, like me. It was they who now consumed and owned coal’s story, increasingly narrating as a historic ‘relic of a bygone era’ (Goodell, 2007). Coal as hard fact was being replaced by coal as sentimental folklore, the ‘myth’ of which Silesia’s long-standing cultural mining traditions contributed nicely to. Shorn of its material basis, smart and proud uniforms with plumed feathers, culinary treats cooked up by miners’ wives, annual celebrations and galas, like St. Barbara’s Day, the patron saint of miners, and the miners’ orchestra, all were symbolic cultural capital that retained cache as the region’s calling card.

The third trend that highlighted the increasingly frictional local politics of coal and its dirt in Silesia in a climate-changing, post-industrializing world was the ubiquitous presence of smog. Due to an exceptionally cold and dry winter (Dunstone et al., 2018; Rawlinson, 2017), I was greeted with a Silesian speciality – lungfuls of distinctly toxic winter air, as participants at COP24 ironically would have been too. This was accompanied by a growing anti-smog environmental movement that prompted controversy. As I outline in chapter four, Polish air pollution, historically largely backgrounded in Silesia as a paradoxical ‘sign of life’ (Reno, 2014) and ‘prosperity’ (Jovanović, 2016), hit the national and international headlines in an unprecedented way in January 2017, just as I arrived, and the fact that 33 of 50 of the most polluted towns in Europe were located in the country became a well-known sore point – 13 concentrated in Upper Silesia itself. The most significant

49 As Polish journalist and academic Edwin Bendyk (2015: 62; 14) writes, this is not simply a case of clever PR, in today’s Silesia, the number of people connected to the educational and new technology sectors is double that of coal, reflecting the new ‘green-digital order’, in which brains are more valued than brawn. Coal as folklore and symbolic capital, however, remains – though only when in historic terms.

50 Elsewhere in the region, Special Economic Zones and a burgeoning automotive industry, attracting significant multinational (mostly German) investment, signaled the deeper penetration of the flexibilized postindustrial economy that had taken root. Solid coal, with its socialist-era values of ‘autonomy, solidarity, paternalism and local loyalty’, was giving way to liquid mobility and its transnational fluidity (Morris 2016: 40).
contributing factor to this was not centralized coal-fired power stations (though there were plenty of those around), but coal-fired domestic heating systems at the household level that generated so-called ‘low emissions’ based on, in large part, traditional and inefficient coal stoves often burning cheaper and lower quality coal and its derivatives, as well as household waste. Shifts in lifestyles, values and aspirations meant this was increasingly becoming less socially acceptable. In fact it was becoming a moral matter, dividing ‘good’ from ‘bad’ people in absolute terms. Repeated and excessive breaches of EU air quality norms, and a PiS government that prioritized coal and downplayed the matter, meant that local environmental activists strategically turned to the European Commission to bear down on Poland for failing to meet its international environmental obligations; under its scrutiny, Poland with its coal-tied energy mix, was to be shamed and disciplined into action\footnote{In 2018, the The European Commission took Poland to court over its slow response to poor air quality (Koester and Barteczko, 2018). The EU is often turned to as a prime source of legitimacy and legal support for environmental struggles (REFS).}, stirring PiS’s narrative appropriation of ‘colonial’ takeover.

Taken together, these three entwined shifts – economic, sociocultural and ecological – revealed how the tale of two Europes was manifesting in Silesia. Coal was in the process of becoming increasingly backward, of questionable worth and now immoral too in intensifying and accelerating global, local, multiple and overlapping ways. Climate change discourse, with its universal, planetary-scale concerns, seeping in, it often seemed, from a distant, external world too (Eriksen, 2016b), the world at COP24, was pouring salt in a gaping wound. In reality it was part and parcel of all I was witnessing, though in fuzzy, intangible form. This was what Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2016a: viii) has called a ‘clash of scales’ – where ‘the tangibly lived life at the small scale… clashes with large-scale decisions’, actions, ideas and discourses in global-scale neoliberal ‘overheating’. Only this ecologically-mediated clash had under-examined and unevenly distributed felt, emotional effects converging in particular intersectionally-positioned bodies. This is what I would come to learn about in my fieldwork.

Much of the literature on coal’s decline, primarily concentrated in the West, defines the somewhat euphemistic notion of ‘decline’ in terms of mine closure – either after the fact or in impending certainty (see Strambo et al., 2019 for a review). This phenomenon has led to substantial interdisciplinary, including ethnographic, research on postindustrial communities worldwide and how they navigate the afterlives of coal or other industrial economies and their material, historic, and sociocultural legacy, often in contexts of painful economic ruin, described as a process of ‘deindustrialization’ (Beer, 2018; Bell and York, 2010; Bennett et al., 2000; Cowie and Heathcott,
2003; Culter, 1999; Dawson, 2011, 2018; Dawson and Goodwin-Hawkins, 2018; Dublin and Licht, 2005; Edensor, 2005, 2008, 2016; Emery, 2018; Evans, 2017b; Finkelstein Maura, 2016; Horschelmann and Stenning, 2008; Linkon, 2018, 2018; MacGaffey, 2013; Meier, 2013; Pasicka and Filipkowski, 2015; Pini et al., 2010; Rakowski, 2016; Roller and Shackel, 2018; Stenning, 2003, 2005a, 2005b; Stenning et al., 2011; Strangleman et al., 2013, 2013; Thorleifsson, 2016, 2016; Vaccaro et al., 2015, 2015; Walkerdinge, 2010; Walkerdinge and Jimenez, 2012). This has more recently included ethnographic work that directly connects this process to the phenomenon of contemporary populism within Europe (Dawson, 2018; Evans, 2012, 2017a; Hann and Parry, 2018; Kalb and Halmai, 2011; Thorleifsson, 2016). In many parts of Silesia, (especially in the kin region of Lower Silesia to the West – see Rakowski, 2016), mining had already ceased activity abruptly in the 1990s creating local geographies of erasure. Some of these were still imaginary ‘no-go zones’ – the mere mention of ‘Bytom’, for example, a nearby town struggling with postindustrial stagnation and poverty, was enough to bring grim shadows over people’s faces. For 30 years later, people there were still struggling – it has the worst labour market conditions and highest unemployment rates in the region (9.7% in 2018) and is marred by brownfield sites and population shrinkage (Kantor-Pietraga, 2021: 6).

Increasingly fascinated by what I was witnessing, however, I became interested in understanding a different, though interconnected, kind of ‘decline’ – the highly non-linear, uneven environmental material-symbolic one, under the sign, and material touch, of which the lives of those living near, and working in, the remaining active deep-pit mines of a Poland intending to hold on unfolded in real time.52 For, most acutely, miners were living through not only uneven economic decline that felt like it was closing in (loss of jobs, the closure of mines, growing precarity) but the

52 Memory, nostalgia, loss, and spatial hauntings here dominate. In a recent literature on ‘post-Fordist affect’, precarity and affective attachments to the stabilities and certainties of past mass production capitalism are the focus (Amin, 2011; Berlant, 2007; Dawson and Goodwin-Hawkins, 2018; Molé, 2012; Muehlebach and Shoshan, 2012). These all have resonance in my own research, though unfolding even as industrialism ostensibly continues in its half-life, leading to a pervasive sense of alienation and detachment from a reality that is set to crumble. For, unlike the exuberant ‘energy optimism’ of residents in coal town’s in Gillette, Wyoming, USA (Goodell, 2007: 3) or in Gladstone, Australia (Eriksen, 2018), coal-linked residents of Silesia were decisively pessimistic and downbeat about their future. ‘Coal’s days were numbered’ - miners gave the industry a maximum of 20, 30 years before it folded completely. It was a question of when, not if, the mines would eventually close. A pervasive sense of precarity and uncertainty thus coloured daily mining life, and a sense of making the most of what you have in the here and now. Their predictions would soon be met with confirmation as Poland would announce closure of all mines by 2049 post-Covid (see postscript).

53 Some studies of working-class (post)industrial life mention in passing the rise of environmental discourses highlighting pollution, ruin and toxicity that stigmatize those most closely associated to coal but do not explore it in depth (Charlesworth, 2000: 61; Kesküla, 2012: 16). Other studies explore environmental stigma in terms of place (Broto et al., 2010; Colocousis, 2012; Zhuang et al., 2016).
ongoing existential-emotional effects of energy and environmental change all around them related to the interconnected seismic wrenching of coal and its materiality and meaning since postsocialist transition in a capitalist climate-changing world – a meaning that for them was being degraded by a threatening and alien outside with increasingly nearer, local inflections.\textsuperscript{54} I wanted to know what they felt and thought about this change and how they were navigating it, even resisting it. Having spoken to many residents in Katowice, and participated in numerous anti-smog meetings and activities there, I was itching to get closer to miners, who were not to be found dwelling in the spruced-up city centre where I was initially based. I wanted to get closer to the literal ground, while staying in touch too with the smoggy air (not something I or anyone in Silesia could in any case escape). This is what I would end up doing, as I outline in my research methods section in chapter two.

As I would discover, for miners working below ground some kilometres where COP24 would take place in the mine around which I carried out my research, with whom, as I found, PiS’s messages (if not always the Party and its leaders itself) found favour, knew coal as an embodied material reality rather than an abstract entity, like those back at COP24. It was not that they were ignorant of coal’s dirt – they’d long known it, intimately, they’d staked their lives upon it, and born the bodily costs. Talking to Erwin, for example, in the comfort of his self-built house, a short, slender, wiry-haired retired Silesian miner in his late 60s with undocumented black lung disease, he had told me with a knowing laugh, the kind of laugh that comes from close, bodily proximity: ‘If you haven’t touched it, you can’t understand it! Coal is dirty – there is no escaping that! It’s part of the job, it just is. In Silesia, we are used to it. There is no Silesia, no Poland, without coal! Everything round here was built from it.’ Working-class people like Erwin, who had spent their life touched by coal, had long made their pact with its inevitable dirtiness, accepted it as part and parcel of coal’s ‘double bind’ (Eriksen and Schober, 2018) (the tension between livelihoods and health and sustainability) – a central necessity of making oneself at home with coal. But today, Erwin continued, having barely drank from the cup of coffee on the table between us: ‘When I drive past a closed mine, my heart bleeds. So much life and labour is lost down there. Coal used to be Poland’s black gold, but now it’s an unwanted treasure. They don’t want it anymore – it pollutes, it’s ‘dirty’.

\textsuperscript{54} Surveys show that public opinion is increasingly hostile towards coal, though there is a marked split. In a number of referendums, for example, in villages in which new mines were proposed to open, the majority of citizens voted against them, yet in other areas support was high. At the same time, coal-based energy is not the preferred source for the majority – rather most indicate a preference for renewables and nuclear; what is of most concern is energy affordability and security (Brauers and Oei, 2020: 4). See also Zuk et al., 2021.
Intuitively, through this prism, coal miners like Erwin thus knew as a felt reality what anthropologists and sociologists, like Elizabeth Shove (2003: 88), have long noted theoretically: that ‘describing people, things or practices as clean or dirty is not a socially neutral enterprise’ but is tangled up with power and value hierarchies. It was Mary Douglas (2001 [1966]) who in her book *Purity and Danger* famously called attention to the fact that naming something ‘dirty’ or ‘pure’ was central to the maintenance and expression of a moral social order. Defining dirt as ‘matter out of place’, she particularly underscored its social construction as being centrally about processes of boundary-drawing via classification. Keeping the ‘good society’ in check, what is deemed ‘dirty’ is perceived as immoral and requires banishment or purging, while what is ‘pure’ is upheld as good and worthy. In this way the ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ of who and what belongs to society are delineated. These concepts map onto their related synonyms ‘waste’ and ‘value’, where what is designated ‘waste’ is considered worthless trash requiring banishment, while what is ‘valued’ is to be respected and cherished (Alexander and Sanchez, 2018; Bauman, 2003; Eriksen and Schober, 2017; Hawkins and Muecke, 2003; Keskiä, 2018; Moore, 2012; Strasser, 2003; Thompson, 1979). This includes people as well as places and things. Furthermore, ‘clean’ and ‘dirty’ are also terms that have long established conceptions of ‘modernity’ and ‘backwardness’ with often hierarchical colonial, racialized, and classist connotations (Anderson, 1995; Bashford, 2003; Kelley, 2010; Luna, 2018; Newell, 2019; Skeggs, 1997; Walther, 2017). Poland, as an Eastern European and postsocialist country, was not new to such designation. The relation between Communism and Capitalism, East and West, had itself been created through these categories as earlier mentioned, which I will return to. As PiS alone appeared to therefore understand, as demonstrated at COP24, therefore, the collision over ‘dirty’ coal was thus not only about jobs, it was a contestation of competing versions of modernity, value, and morality in the tale of two Europes. Questions of who or what is recognized as clean and pure in these terms, and therefore what modes of knowing and being were legitimate in the postsocialist, postindustrializing present, and who gets to decide were central (Alexander and Sanchez, 2018; Brnčíková, 2017; Cráciun, 2015; Eriksen and Schober, 2017; Hawkins and Muecke, 2003; Keskiä, 2018; Rakowski, 2016: 149–162; Verdery, 2003). Who was to blame?

In the coal-mining industry, employees are divided into those who do the hard, physical labour of ‘dirty work’ below ground (physiczni) like Erwin once did – and the ‘brains’ who make the decisions, and do cerebral computer-and-admin based work above ground in ‘clean’ bright and airy offices – (umysłowi). This coal-mine-eyed view of the world extends outwards to Warsaw and...
beyond. For in Poland the relation between ‘intelligentsia’ and ‘labour’, or ‘above’ and ‘below’ (góra and dół), is a long-standing historical social division (Lebow, 2012; Słomczyński, 1998). The social contract is such that the brains are meant to take care of the bodies, the hard-working people. When that fails, as it often did under Communism too, anger is provoked (Lebow, 2012) – or here, I propose, shame. And under conditions of postsocialism, labour has indeed been violently ‘decapitated’ (Gille, 2010: 22), as chapter three will lay out in detail. Poland is no longer a country for workers, as another miner put it. To miners, those ‘above’, the ‘brains’, used coal for their economic and domestic benefit and increasingly sneered at and abandoned the people who worked so hard, and risked their health and lives, to produce it. ‘Europe’, a concept with feminized agency too, (referred to as ‘ona’, she), did the same. Nobody cared or listened. Mines and miners were being thrown into the dustbin of history, and had been for some time. It was blatant hypocrisy. The ‘They’ Erwin was referring to, as I learnt, was a word deployed often as a handy empty signifier, an ambivalent and hazy medley of political, cultural and European outsider and insider ‘elites’ – the Brussels entourage, the Warsowian lot, profiteering ‘ecoterrorists’ or scientists, or some kind of (probably German) business ‘interest’ facilitated by corrupt and untrustworthy Polish politicians to fleece the Polish people. All those at COP24. It increasingly referred to the Polish general public and media too. With few real alternative explanations or pathways on offer that spoke to miners’ concerns directly, conspiracy theories abounded. PiS’s pro-industrial purifying populist politics resonated. There was a sense that an invisible net was closing in; for in reality, it was.

The sense of disorientated victimhood has been compounded by the fact that global-scale discourses have been largely absent from the Polish and especially Silesian public sphere. Indeed, until very recently (driven largely by the issue of smog) in Poland, politicians and media of all political stripes (particularly under PiS’s rule but before too), acting as a platform for status quo industry-supportive perspectives rather than representing any alternative viewpoints or stimulating discussion about a post-coal future, have for decades promoted a hegemonic ‘coal-continuity narrative’ (Osička et al., 2020; Kuchler and Bridge, 2018; Świątkiewicz-Mośny and Wagner, 2012; Żuk and Szulecki, 2020; Brahers and Oei, 2020). Despite the climate science and the European trajectory, coal, Poles had been repeatedly told, not only by PiS either, could be contemporary and clean, and could be revived through reconstruction and modernization. This project would often be backed by EU funds itself. Furthermore climate change had rarely been covered by the press, TV or

55 In turn, renewable technologies had been predominantly referred to by elites as a European economic, not environmental, or domestic, homegrown Polish, agenda, obscuring any benefits for the Polish economy and society, and preventing meaningful investment (Kundzewicz et al., 2019; Osička et al., 2020; Schwartzkopff and Schulz, 2017: 16; Świątkiewicz-Mośny and Wagner, 2012; Wagner et al., 2016; Żuk and Szulecki, 2020).
radio\textsuperscript{56}, while its ‘international’ science was largely the product of non-Polish experts (Kundzewicz et al., 2019). This was perhaps because, when climate was discussed in the public sphere, Polish scientists, geologists and economists largely promoted climate scepticism (Kundzewicz et al., 2019). An additional ‘revolving door’ between government and industry has kept the monocultural hegemony of coal intact too (Szulecki, 2018; Dańkowska and Sadura, 2021). Meanwhile Polish environmental NGOs themselves, largely Western-funded and disconnected from local concerns, as has been widely documented (Herrschel and Forsyth, 2001; Smith and Jehlička, 2012), have been persistently under-represented in the media and, lacking political and widespread grassroots support and legitimacy (Świątkiewicz-Mosny and Wagner, 2012), have often rather reached for international EU legislation as a prime strategy for winning their struggles. Furthermore, no long-term post-coal vision at time of my fieldwork for Silesia existed or was being discussed (Ślimko, 2019). In such a context, where coal has been continually touted as the ongoing future, despite the reality long contradicting such promises, I started to realise that it is perhaps not surprising that the designation ‘dirty’ applied to coal is not perceived by miners I spoke with as neutral terminology, nor ‘homegrown’. Rather, it is experienced as a foreign notion with political motives ‘disguised’ as fact. This is relevant to ‘smog’ too, an English-neologism that tumbled into this scenario rather abruptly (see chapter four). Though the dominant narrative was still ‘coal is king’ – by the time I arrived in Silesia, it thus had started to ring fearfully hollow against this backdrop. Precisely the issue. Coal’s people felt under attack – blamed and shamed for coal’s dilemmas they had long personally, and intimately, known.

In the context of the tale of two Europes and the dominant green consensus miners largely did not recognise themselves in, attempts to fix coal as ‘dirty’ once and for all in Douglas’s terms as ‘matter out of place’ for increasingly absolute moral banishment, were therefore largely bundled up together by the coal miners who would become my participants as a politically-motivated ‘smear-campaign against coal’ (‘nagonka na węgiel’) - a smear campaign tied to Europe’s suspicious, and ‘colonial’, cognitive-liberal project of ‘ecologism’ – code for an apparent smokescreen for business interests and ongoing elite capitalist dispossession of workers (of bodies by brains) that the term ‘dirty’ implied. As Don Kalb (2009: 210) put it, it felt like a deliberate process of ongoing ‘liberal

\textsuperscript{56} Climate change has not been historically high on the public agenda in Poland with general awareness within the context of the EU until recently relatively low and climate scepticism considerable (Kundzewicz et al., 2019: 4–5). Research has revealed that it has been covered far less as a topic in the Polish media, for example, than in other EU countries, while politicians of all spectrums speak less about the issue and often downplay or overlook the coal and climate link, due to energy security concerns, resulting in reported public concern about climate change being less strong than in other EU countries (Ceglarz et al., 2018; Kundzewicz et al., 2019; Marcinkiewicz and Tosun, 2015), though that is changing.
disenfranchisement’, not just from their work and livelihood, but from ‘their whole habitat’ (Kalb, 2009: 210) and its modes of being and knowing too. This notion of ‘habitat’, however, Kalb refers to in the sense of industrial life more narrowly, while here I adopt it to reference the literal ecological habitat too of coal and its material properties, particularly its physical dirt. From the perspective of coal miners they were thus the victims not villains in this unfolding postsocialist Anthropocenic story, which they experienced in embodied emotional terms. ‘Dirty’ was a designation pressing down on them as judgment they increasingly needed to contest. Yet, behind this defensiveness, miners themselves particularly the younger generation, harboured ambivalent and contradictory feelings towards coal’s postsocialist dirt. With rising aspirations in a post-industrializing world, they were joining the ‘global quest for middle class respectability’ (Wilce, 2009: 130) through which they could achieve respectable moral worth, its promise of social integration, and finally arrive into a clean capitalist abundant modernity too. They would like to leave coal behind if they could too. But, paradoxically, in Silesia, coal seemed to offer the only perceived route, while it also took it away through ongoing proximity to its dirt (see chapter seven). The resultant tensions could be paradoxically understood as a kind of ‘solastalgia’ (Albrecht, 2005) – the emotional, existential pain of environmental change lived, not as is usually considered, as a direct disappearance or violence rendered through natural or climate-changing biophysical disaster, but as a loss of meaning and of recognition, of congruence and affirmation – a violation of one’s sense of emplaced, ecologically-entwined industrial personhood. More than just ‘the homesickness you have when you are still at home’ (Albrecht, 2005), it was a home that was becoming hostile and demeaning, prompting existential shame and a longing for a restoration of that sense of at-home-ness. It was, in other words, experienced as an ecological dispossession – the oikos still present and yet now degrading to one’s person. Industrial populism would offer a resolution of this contradiction by offering to smooth it away.

Chris Hann (2011) has called the experience of the return to Europe of the East in the context of postsocialist Hungary a kind of ‘moral dispossession’. Hann (2011: 15) notes that the concept of ‘dispossession’ usually has ‘brute material referents’ in Marxist terms. David Harvey (2003) pioneered the concept of ‘accumulation by dispossession’ pointing to the phenomenon of neoliberal capitalist economic appropriation that as chapter three will show have real and deep effects in postsocialist Poland. Don Kalb (2009), has extended this notion to symbolic ‘cultural dispossessions’ of the working-class by the state and elites, which will be outlined as pertinent too, while anthropologist Gerald Creed (2011) has described the way relationships and ways of being
were abruptly reordered under Westernization as a required passport to forms of economic and social belonging at the European level, also relevant to the Upper Silesian case. What Chris Hann (2011: 17) adds to this is the recognition that the end of state socialism meant ‘the termination of practical ways of life and the sudden calling into question… of most people’s taken-for-granted knowledge of the world in which they lived’, in other words, their common sense and moral compass, their entire notion of what it is to be a good, respectable, worthy person. This dispossession displaced them from anchoring in the moral order of the securities of the socialist past, tipping them out into the large-scale disorientations of the uncertainties and insecurities, and ‘moral vacuum’, of the capitalist present (Hann, 2011). Building on and incorporating Chris Hann’s insights, my thesis outlines how coal miners felt they were emically experiencing the changing meaning of coal, not just as an economic, cultural and moral dispossession from the past, but also one preventing them from fully arriving into the value hierarchy of a ‘modern’ present, from feeling at-home as morally worthy and valued persons in a postindustrializing capitalist world. This was, as I propose, an entangled ‘ecological dispossession’.

As David Kideckel (2008: 10) also notes, in the context of postsocialist industrial Romania, the collapse of Communism meant that society’s former ‘key economic and symbolic resources [were] severely eroded’, especially for the working-classes. While he focused on economic and social capital, here I suggest an erosion of a kind of ecological capital – access to the then socially meaningful material ecology of coal and its dirt that afforded one a certain position in industrial society, and generated a certain kind of respectable personhood. Whereas under socialism, as I will outline in more detail throughout the thesis, coal not only underpinned national and regional development and progress, its materiality, particularly its dirt in embodied form, was a thoroughly moral, modern and valued resource for securing economic and social standing and security, dignified and worthy intersectional national, regional, gendered, and classed identities, national and local belonging, and a sense of civic pride in one’s hard, physical work. Today, however, coal and the dirt it inevitably engenders, was now not only a precarious livelihood and anachronistic fuel, but was in the uneven process of being downgraded to a mark of intersectional stigma and shame on the skin, its way of life too, a signifier of backwardness, worthlessness and now immorality too – as an Eastern European, Polish, Silesian, and working-class male labourer and person. What was more, the ways of being and knowing that this embodied ecological positionality had engendered was also being threatened with shame – one could not even ‘know’ coal’s dirt anymore. Scientists, outsiders, experts (‘brains’) knew better, while their own embodied knowledge was disregarded (see
especially chapter five). Miners were increasingly socially excluded, and looked down upon, at European, national and local scales. Their nature (coal) too. The experience of shame engendered by connection to that coal let them know their new downgraded place in this new social order. Meanwhile their bodily personhood over time was being stripped of anchoring and holding in the dignity, certainty and clarity of even their material environment, which was in the process of becoming undignified. A kind of ecological home-lessness experienced as deeply visceral shame. This was not only set within the context of postsocialism, the meeting of East and West, but also the meeting of an industrial life with an increasingly postindustrial world. Where the arrow of ‘hope’ points for many to decarbonized, non-industrial futures (Wodak, 2016: 1). But not for all.

PiS’s pro-industrial populist politics alone, therefore, appeared to understand this, offering rare explanation, meaning, and salvation through purification, as I will explain, in turn strengthening its own narratives, a kind of ecological repossession. Having got rid of Communism, PiS perceived the project of ‘ecologism’ to be yet another imposed instrument of a foreign ‘colonial’ normative project of domination, this time designed to destroy what remains of ‘Polish’ black gold, and the ‘Polish’ values it materializes too. Traditional gender roles and family values, Catholicism, and homogenous ethnic national and place-based solidarity, these were features of Polish life embodied in Polish coal that a cognitive-class of liberal cosmopolitan EU, and its internal Polish recruits, increasingly ‘look down upon’ – and in national terms too. This sentiment of feeling ‘looked down upon’ and thus humiliated, or shamed, in both international and national eyes that ‘dirty coal’ designates, was a persistent part of my ethnographic encounters. It intersected with longer histories and uses of shame in postcolonial postsocialist terms to raise defences and prompt ongoing local re-evaluations of what mattered, including local strategies of purification, a reassertion of a felt sense of a modern, moral, valued home in industrial shape that cleansed the emotion of shame, that I will also outline.

It can be tempting to dismiss such narratives of victimization ‘as purely subjective or perhaps simply nostalgic’ (Stenning, 2005c: 993). And often this is precisely what occurs. But, if we are to make sense of far-right populist appeal in a climate-changing, energy-transitioning world, and perhaps even do something to change it, it is important to attend to such emotional experiences, the pain of struggle and change (Lüse and Lázár, 2007), particularly the pain that results when one’s material world, and source of livelihood and identity, loses its meaning and comes to mark the self in intersectional newly discomfiting, stigmatizing ways. For when the environment one inhabits and labours in, indeed embodies, becomes degrading to one’s person in the context of the meeting of
differing energy cultures within uneven power hierarchies (at glocal scales), particularly as the
effects of the material ‘dirt’ or pollution becomes harder to ignore or deny, an increased obsession
with ‘purity’ is one outcome – with desires to ‘shore up bodies and the state’ (Daggett, 2018) a
growing impulse with a negative feedback loop.

Anna Tsing (2004: 1) calls the clash of scales or, for her, the point at which global narratives
and forms rub up against locally lived worlds to produce cultural specificity, the moment of
‘friction’. It seems an apt phrase applied to a combustible rock with explosive effects. As she
observes, science, and, in the contemporary world, its close cousins, capitalism and politics too are
spread through ‘aspirations to fulfil universal dreams and schemes’ often in the name of progress.
Nowhere is this perhaps more vivid than in the attempt to engage global action to limit climate
change and banish ‘dirty’ coal. Yet as she points out universals, while being at the heart of humanist
projects in the name of social justice and empowerment, can only come into being ‘in the grip of
encounter’ across difference, in other words, by travelling through and engaging the ‘sticky
materiality’ of the particular, thus doing the work of making ‘global connections’ (Tsing, 2005: 1).
Too often however, universals are posited as if a united world already exists and therefore in which
the ‘work of connection is unnecessary’ (Tsing, 2005: 7; see also Latour, 2004). Too often, in the
absence of this work, whether intentionally or not, they also can appear as imperial projects, and
have indeed been part of colonial histories, and been produced in colonial encounters (Tsing, 2005:
1). For despite hopes to the contrary, ‘globalisation does not [automatically] create global persons’
(Eriksem, 2016a: 24). Through ethnographic research, in the absence of such work, or meaningful,
respectful negotiation, I highlight how actual, embodied lives situate themselves in relation to such
an ascription, ‘dirty’, in economic, cultural and ecological senses, that thus often appears to come
from distant and untrustworthy sources ‘outside’ (at both global and local scales) their own
lifeworld – an ecological dispossession fuelling shame and a longing for at-home-ness. This is the
broader sociopolitical landscape coal’s dirt is caught up in – the point where the embodied
ecological emotional appeal of industrial populism and its purifying promise steps in.

**Industrial populism:**

‘Populism is one of the main political buzzwords of the 21st century’, write experts Cas Mudde and
Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser (2017). But what is it?57 It has become popular to begin all discussions

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57 See the following literature for in-depth discussions of populism as a concept (Brubaker, 2017b, 2017b;
Canovan, 1999; Ionescu and Gellner, 1969; Laclau, 2005; Mouffe, 2018; Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017;
on populism with the notion that it is an ill-defined, imprecise, vague and inherently contested term (Bale et al., 2011; Brubaker, 2017b; Gusterson, 2017; Müller, 2017). At one time scholars even dismissed the concept as so baggy as to be irrelevant or misleading (Andor, 2020; Ionescu and Gellner, 1969; Mammono, 2009; Samet and Schiller, 2017). More recently, some have proposed that it should be understood as a ‘creed, style, political strategy’ or ‘marketing ploy’ (Gusterson, 2017; see also Brubaker, 2017b; de Vreese et al., 2018; Garrido, 2017; Jagers and Walgrave, 2007; Moffitt, 2016; Rueda, 2020). Others have proposed it should be considered a kind of spectacle, an entertaining and mobilizing performance of charismatic and refreshingly irreverent leaders that emerge as ‘outsiders’ (Hall et al., 2016; Moffitt, 2016). Yet, in response to the empirical phenomena of what is commonly referred to as a recent ‘populist explosion’ (Judis, 2016) on the world stage, reflecting a broad disenchantment with politics as usual, scholarship, mostly within the political sciences, has arrived at a consensus definition that recognizes that populism is more than a type of rhetoric or sales pitch but remains broad enough to capture its inchoate multiplicity, identifying that populist parties tend to share not so much a coherent ideology, but a set of core values and worldviews. The most widely accepted definition of populism is offered by Cas Mudde (2004), who proposes that it is a ‘thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous yet antagonistic camps, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonte generale* (general will) of the people’. Populists thus claim that they alone represent the ‘true’, or ‘pure’, will of the ‘whole people’, in the most unmediated, direct, uncontaminated form, while the ‘elite’ are captured by immoral ‘special interests’ (Molyneux and Osborne, 2017: 3). Anybody who opposes this will furthermore is by definition not ‘one of us’, not pure, and so intrinsically corrupt. In this way, populism is a distinctly *moral* way to imagine the political world in which opponents and compromise are delegitimized based on their innate corruption. Of course, ‘the people’ and the ‘elites’ are empty signifiers that are left open to be constructed in numerous ways (Badiou et al., 2016; Canovan, 1999; Laclau, 2005). As a result, being a ‘thin-centred’ ideology, populism can cross the traditional political spectrum of left and right by allying itself with other kinds of ‘host’ ideologies, and indeed can blur such neat distinctions (Kapferer and Theodossopoulos, 2019). Yet as Roger Brubaker (2017a: 1) writes, particularly within Europe, ‘The present conjuncture is not simply populist; it is (with a few exceptions) national-populist’. National populism, is populism attached to authoritarian nativism,
usually combining dominant concern with xenophobic, ethnonationalist exclusionism, rhetorical anti-establishmentism, law and order, masculinism, conservative values, and welfare chauvinism, and it is this phenomenon that is most prevalent today.

Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin (2018: ix, my emphasis) define ‘national populism’ as a politics that ‘prioritizes the culture and interests of the nation, and promises to give voice to a people who feel that they have been neglected, even held in contempt, by distant and often corrupt elites’. As Roger Brubaker (2020) outlines, national populism can thus be understood as operating on the basis of a polarized opposition of ‘us’ and ‘them’ on a ‘tightly interwoven’ vertical and horizontal axis. On the vertical axis of power (the space of ‘inequality’) are located ‘the pure people’ versus the internal ‘corrupt elite’; on the horizontal axis (the space of ‘difference’) are ‘insiders’, or ‘people like us’, defined usually in ethnic, territorial and nation-centric terms, and ‘outsiders’, those who threaten ‘our’ way of life – which includes internal and external ‘aliens’ or ‘foreign’ bodies (e.g. ‘immigrants’, ‘Muslims’, ‘Jews’, and other rejected or ‘deviant’ ethnic or cultural groups) as much as impersonal and distant forces, such as those emanating from international institutions, like the EU. For national populists, states Brubaker, the economic, political and cultural ‘elite’ are thus both ‘on top’ and ‘outside’ simultaneously. This is certainly the case in Poland.

While many other designations have been used other than ‘national populist’ - including ‘authoritarian populist’ (Hall, 1985; Makovicky, 2013; Morelock, 2018), ‘neoauthoritarian’ (Gdula, 2018), ‘neo-nationalist’ (Banks et al., 2006), ‘ethno-nationalist populism’ (Bonikowski, 2017), and ‘right-wing populist’ (Lockwood, 2018; Mamonova and Franquesa, 2020), in my thesis, I prefer to use the term ‘far-right populist’ because it politically designates the potential risks, implications and

58 The conflation of ‘populism’ and ‘nationalism’, however, has been criticized – with some arguing for a sharp distinction (Bonikowski et al., 2019; De Cleen and Stavrakakis, 2017). Informed by a situated ethnographic perspective, however, I concur with Roger Brubaker’s (2020: 44) argument for treating nationalism and populism simultaneously, for a ‘strict conceptual separation cannot capture the productive ambiguity of populist appeals to ‘the people’, evoking at once plebs, sovereign demos, and bounded community… a constitutive feature of populism itself, a practical resource that can be exploited in constructing political identities and defining lines of political opposition and conflict.’ It is this ambiguity and its slippage zones within the context of postsocialist Poland and the importance of ‘Europe’ as a key ‘Other’ tied up in the politics of humiliation and marginalization, that I and my participants waded around in. This is particularly in terms of the mass emotional, affective intensity and appeal, which today’s populism is often characterized as displaying, that draws on combinations of nationalist and populist sentiment (Kapferer and Theodosopoulou, 2019).

59 For Pierre Ostiguy and María Esperanza Casullo (2017) this simply becomes a tripartite definition of populism – the pure people, the corrupt elite and the nefarious, social other they stand in antagonism to.
ongoing and still-emerging trajectories of such a moment more immediately and explicitly. I interchangeably, in the context of my thesis, also refer to ‘industrial populism’, the meaning of which I will specify below. As such, due to its authoritarian and anti-pluralist-democratic tendencies, it is often decried as an inherent threat to the liberal democratic order and indeed poses a profound challenge. Yet its origins must be understood not so much as anti-democratic by nature, but democracy’s ‘shadow’ (Canovan, 1999: 3), its ‘internal periphery’ (Arditi, 2007) ‘mirror’ (Panizza, 2005), the shout from its margins, or the outside inside (see also Kapferer and Theo ossopoulos, 2019; Laclau, 2005; Mouffe, 2005; Ranciere, 2007), often feeding paradoxical anti-democratic effects (Gagnon et al., 2018).

The departure point for making sense of contemporary populism lies in its highlighting of a growing crisis of legitimacy and efficacy of liberal democracy (Appadurai, 2017; Markoff, 2011) due to its increasingly contradictory and unfulfilled promise – rule by the people (Cayla, 2021). This has been exacerbated by the growing distance between citizens and the scales at which decisions are made and how – through technocratic methods to deal with growing complexity. Such methods remove certain topics from the public sphere – environmental and energy issues are a key example. Chantal Mouffe (2005) has most incisively positioned populism in relation to liberal democracy’s contemporary weaknesses, arguing that true democracy is predicated on inherently

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60 In the literature ‘far right’ tends to be an umbrella term for the ‘radical right’ (those respecting democratic principles) and ‘extreme right’ (those openly opposed to democracy – more deserving of the label neofascist) (Mudde, 2019). I use this broader term both to speak in widely politically identifiable terms and also to highlight how the slippage between radical and extreme may not be a far leap. For as David Ost (2018: 116–117) writes, in Poland, tracing historic connections to the ‘left fascist’ European tradition of rejecting liberalism in the past, PiS is ‘embracing a project that really deserve the name it is impossible to apply: national socialism’, for, through its combination of traditionally left economics and right nationalist socially conservative politics, PiS is ‘embracing a fascist style’ (while denying such connections); thus Ost argues that answering the question ‘is PiS fascist?’ is impossible, and not the right question, rather, PiS ‘plays with fascism’ and this is what to watch for as things could change. While there is lack of consensus on a full definition of fascism, Geoff Eley (in Malm and Zetkin Collective, 2021: 236; emphasis in original) writes it should be understood as more a process than arrival point: ‘We should concern ourselves with the production of fascist potentials’ and be alert to ‘the kind of crisis where a politics that begins to look like fascism can coalesce’ Timothy Snyder (in Malm and the Zetkin Collective, 2021: 239) indeed points to the climate crisis as being precisely the kind of crisis that could result in a return of fascism: ‘When an apocalypse is on the horizon… demagogues of blood and soil come to the fore’. This may not be history repeating itself, but morphing into something entirely different yet still recognizable – what Enzo Traverso (2019) calls ‘post-fascism’ or what Douglas Holmes (in Bangstad et al., 2019: 108) has called ‘dispersed or distributed’ fascism, including online variants. This is not to undermine the democratic potency of the populist message as a legitimate response to multiple crises, but to see that the ideological direction it travels in the hands of powerful actors who cynically capture and shape its energies, as in Poland, can be troubling for those who care about cosmopolitan notions of social justice (Gagnon et al., 2018). Yet, despite limitations, as scholars have argued, populist sentiment can retain emancipatory potential, at this critical juncture, it must (Laclau, 2005; Mouffe, 2018).
agonistic debate and conflict, but when that agonistic conflict is delegitimized, denied or suppressed, politics returns in an antagonistic and destabilizing manner, where adversaries are increasingly expelled and excluded in absolute, moral terms. This has been talked about as the ‘return of the repressed’ (Žižek, 2006: 571), or in popular parlance, ‘the left behind’. But how have people been ‘left behind’ and excluded? And why does this result in far-right populist success? To date, despite a growing literature, understanding the success of contemporary far-right populists among supporters, particularly its ‘visceral’, emotional or affective appeal, (Bangstad et al., 2019; Nguyen, 2019; Roose, 2020: 7), remains a ‘largely unresolved task’, (Salmele and von Scheve, 2017: 567). Existing studies explaining far-right populist popularity across Europe and America, concentrated mostly in the political sciences, psychology and sociology, tending to take macro, national-level perspectives, broadly refer either to a structural economic account or to a ‘cultural backlash’ thesis (Bangstad et al., 2019; Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018; Inglehart and Norris, 2016).

The first, the most widely accepted, posits its rise as an outcome of extensive and rapid neoliberal globalization of the post-1970s and post-Cold War world (Appel and Orenstein, 2018; Berezin, 2009; Brown, 2018; Coles, 2017; Piketty, 2020). According to this approach, the rise of austerity economics and financialization, the shrinking of social security, the decline of living standards, intensifying social inequalities, the offshoring of manufacturing and traditional working-class jobs in uneven processes of deindustrialization, the reduced political capital of disenfranchised workers, increases in labour mobility and hyper-individualization, and the increased power of transnational corporations vis-a-vis declining state power, coupled with the decline of the traditional Left, has created widespread disenchantment, anger and a political vacuum that the far-right has filled. The pervasive sense of increasing inequality, insecurity and precarity is perceived to have been particularly accelerated and intensified by the Great Recession of 2008, in which elites that had claimed to be confidently steering world affairs revealed themselves to be inept, distrustful and hubristic (Passari, 2020). Furthermore, in this context, political-economic decision-making has been operating at increasingly distant scales of political and institutional activity (Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018) via technocratic mechanisms largely removed from the purview of true democratic participation and engagement. This is what Erik Swyngedouw (2011), echoing Mouffe (2005), has labelled the ‘post-political’ regime. Despite emerging from top-down analyses, Hugh Gusterson (2017) states that anthropologists also ‘take it as a truism that nationalist populist movements should be understood as a reaction to a neoliberal political and economic order’. Likewise, Agnieszka Pasieka (2019), although calling these arguments ‘slightly worn out’, states that they are...
indeed the ‘main culprits of current developments’. At the same time, these changes alone cannot account for the rise of far-right populism as scholars have pointed out (Eatwell, 2003; Mudde, 2007; Norris, 2005). Not all who have lived through them support or endorse far-right populists, while supporters often include those who have benefitted from such changes, thus there is no direct, immediate correlation (Salmela and von Scheve, 2017: 3-4). Furthermore, there is also no clear translation of economic into emotional experience that might explain the tenor of far-right populist resonance, for as Chris Hann (2019b: 2) writes in relation to populism, ‘emotion and interest are tightly intertwined in practice, but the links are by no means straightforward’. They require deeper explanation.

The second view, the ‘cultural backlash’ thesis (Inglehart and Norris, 2016; Norris and Inglehart, 2019; see also Cramer, 2016; Fitzgerald, 2018; Furedi, 2016; Goodhart, 2017; Hewitt, 2005), therefore explains far-right populist popularity as rooted in an increasing clash of values, or a ‘culture war’, between a progressive liberal cosmopolitan elite class that champions post-materialist interests, such as transnationalism, multiculturalism, feminism and environmentalism, represented in university-educated, creative and cultural sectors and political, policy and technocratic circles, versus a traditional conservative communitarian worldview, that values rooted, family-oriented, nationally-bounded and homogenous communities and who feel increasingly shunned, rejected and their concerns politically marginalized by that hegemonic culture, institutionalized most powerfully in the European Union (McLaren, 2002). This has been called a ‘subaltern resentment towards global cosmopolitics’ (Kapferer and Theodossopoulos, 2019: 16). Such accounts, however, tend to dismiss economic and structural arguments as irrelevant, fetishizing culture, while harbouring a thinly-veiled condescending, elitist attitude towards ‘the masses’ (Moran and Littler, 2020). At the same time, this views culture as a distinct and separate realm from material, economic arrangements, not understanding that any apparent ‘culture war’ cannot be understood apart from the neoliberalized context it has become part and parcel of in what Nancy Fraser (2016) has termed the paradoxical ‘progressive neoliberal consensus’. As Eatwell and Goodwin (2018), argue, therefore, it is not a case of viewing these explanations as dichotomies – but that both economic and cultural issues are key to understanding the rise of far-right populism in contextually specific variations. Likewise, Matthew Lockwood (2018: 727) writes that while structural factors are not by themselves enough of an explanation, ideological factors ‘mediate’ their relevance. At the same
time, again, the role of lived embodied, emotional experience of such trends and how this connects to the far right, are under-examined and explained.\textsuperscript{61}

The so-termed ‘negative’ emotional charge of populism has been commented on fairly extensively. Emotions most commonly named in relation to the contemporary populist phenomenon are ‘anger’, ‘fear’, ‘resentment’, ‘rage’, ‘hatred’ and ‘anxiety’ (Appadurai, 2006; Banks et al., 2006; Betz, 1993; Bonikowski, 2017; Busher et al., 2018; Cramer, 2016; Gale, 2004; Goździak and Mártón, 2018; Hochschild, 2016; Jackson and Shekhovtsov, 2014; Mishra, 2016; Ost, 2005; Petersen, 2002; Rico et al., 2017). Yet the relationship between emotion and populism has rarely been investigated empirically (Nguyen, 2019; Salmele and von Scheve, 2017).\textsuperscript{62} In existing studies of far-right populism, in particular shame, including repressed shame, understood as a broader bundle of affective presences including anger, resentment, even grief, write Mikko Salmela and Christian von Scheve (2017: 18), is a central but ‘invisible emotion’. My fieldwork however highlighted its acute presence. What is its under-explored salience? And how do environments, emotion and far-right populism in times of Anthropocenic energy transition intersect?

Current studies of far-right populism, concentrated in Europe (especially Western Europe) and America, have by far and large left out consideration of how energy and environment feature in their contemporary rise (Batel and Devine-Wright, 2018; Malm and the Zetkin Collective, 2021; McCarthy, 2019).\textsuperscript{63} In the recent and authoritative Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right (Rydgren, 2018) Jan-Werner Müllers (Müller, 2017: 10–17) has critiqued and dismissed emotion-based explanations for the popularity of populism, arguing that they are ‘condescending’, unhelpful and ‘paternalistic’, and that referring to the emotional basis of populist support is tantamount to gesturing to the inarticulateness and psychological abnormality of voters. Yet such dismissal rests on a strange, out-of-date and false dichotomy pitting ‘mere emotion’, against ‘thought’ and ‘reason’. He states, rather irately: ‘The simple fact is that ‘anger’ and ‘frustration’ might not always be very articulate - but they are also not ‘just emotions’ in the sense of being completely divorced from thought. There are REASONS for anger and frustration, which most people can actually spell out in some form or other.’ He is absolutely correct. It is unclear who Müllers is referring to that would argue anything different. Feminist scholars in particular have long debunked the reason/emotion dichotomy. Likewise, numerous scholars have pointed out that populism’s rise demonstrates that the long-established idea that liberal democracies are founded on rational actors and deliberation is a false illusion (Davies, 2018). Emotions have always been central to the social lives and processes of decision-making, action and being in the world. They are forms of reason and knowing in themselves – or as feminist anthropologist Michelle Rosaldo (1984) puts it - kinds of ‘embodied thought’. Thus emotions are not individual psychological states, but fundamentally social and collective – socially constructed, embodied, experienced, organized and made sense of.

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62 The post socialist context has been noted by many scholars for its highly emotionally charged structures of feeling (see e.g. Patrick and Miller, 2006; Svašek, 2006), where ‘politicized emotions have become a powerful source of power’ (Golanska-Ryan, 2006: 160). Yet as Maruska Svašek (2006:2) noted in a key study, attention to the emotional dynamics of post socialist change in general have been especially minimal.

63 More studies seem to have explored the politics of left or progressive populisms of energy transition and green growth discourse – perhaps because of their more appealing and hopeful potentials (Abraham, 2019; Knuth, 2019; MacArthur and Matthewman, 2018; Stegemann and Ossewaarde, 2018). This lacunae was
2018), for example, chapters covered a range of themes such as media, gender, youth, violence, Euroscepticism and globalization – yet the topics of energy and ecology were absent. Likewise, in expert Cas Mudde’s (2019) recent survey of ‘The Far-Right Today’ they were also invisible (Malm and the Zetkin Collective, 2021: ix-x). The lack of attention to energy and environments has led Andreas Malm and the Zetkin Collective⁶⁴ (2021: ix) to point out that although the far-right itself has been extensively analysed, this has rarely been ‘as a trend rooted in a certain material base and growing into the atmosphere’. This creates the impression that the far right is rising ‘somewhere else than in a rapidly warming world’ and, I would further add, somewhere other than a world in which that material base is increasingly threatened and on shaky material and symbolic ground with uneven emotional implications. For as this thesis argues, we cannot understand the rise of contemporary far-right, or industrial, populism without situating it within broader dynamics of environmental and energy change – particularly here shifting energy environments, in a rapidly postindustrializing, climate-changing Europe, and their intersectional, emotionally-experienced embodied e/a-effect.

Where the environment has been analysed, such research has mostly focused on environmental discourse, ideology and communications of far-right political parties at the national level, and on pre-defined environmental ‘issues’, such as climate change (expressly recently its denial, addressing its hitherto ‘surprising dearth’ (Lockwood, 2018: 713)) (see Anshelm and Hultman, 2014; Forchtner, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c; Forchtner et al., 2018; Forchtner and Kolvraa, 2015; Hess and Renner, 2019; Lockwood, 2018; Lubarda, 2020; Malm and Zetkin Collective, 2021; Martin and Anshelm, 2017).⁶⁶ Arlie Hochschild’s (2016) rare ethnography of Tea Party supporters in the USA, explores participants’ sentiments and emotional responses to their environment and its implications for their ideological worldviews. But the question of how and why material natures,

Acknowledged by the Political Ecologies of the Far Right conference held in Lund University in November 2019, of which I was a key organiser, together with Andreas Malm at the Human Ecology division, the Zetkin Collective, Centre for Studies of Climate Change Denialism (CEFORCED) centre at Chalmers University, under Martin Hultman, and social action group AG Hedwig. Attracting 400 scholars and activists to this three-day event, its popularity was testimony to the emergent interest in the troubling convergence of environmental and far-right politics.

⁶⁴ This trend continues in other notable publications, such as the Routledge 49-title series on Fascism and the Global Far right, of which only two are on the topics of environment (Routledge, 2020). In their most recent anthology Global Resurgence of the Right: Conceptual and Regional Perspectives, edited by Gisela Pereyra Doval and Gastón Souroujon (2021), there is barely mention of the environment, and none of fossil fuels.

⁶⁵ I was a contributor to this book as part of the Zetkin Collective, an interdisciplinary group of scholars and activists studying the intersection of the far right and environment.

⁶⁶ Of course, there is a substantial body of literature on the histories of ecology and fascism (see Armiero, 2014; Biehl and Staudenmaier, 1996; Brüggemeier et al., 2005; Coupland, 2016; Olsen, 2000; Uekötter, 2006).
especially here shifting energy natures within the context of planetary-scale climate change, (here the ‘dirt’ of coal), become part of far-right hegemonic struggle and its popular resonance more broadly is under-examined (Ekers et al., 2009).

Energy humanities scholar, Matt Huber (2013) offers one rare exception based on historical and cultural analysis, outlining an account of how the materialities of oil and the American way of life became fused, and how under conditions of neoliberal dispossession oil became a matter of survival fuelling ‘energy populism’. Building on pioneering work by Cara Daggett (2018) on the notion of ‘fossil fascism’, most recently, Andreas Malm and the Zetkin Collective (2021) also offer what is the first dedicated survey of how fossil fuels, race, anti-environmentalist sentiment and far-right agendas interlink at the national and ideological-Party level in key countries, though absent a focus on the ‘populist’ element. However, again, in both accounts, the lived experiences of material energy or ‘resource environments’ (Bakker and Bridge, 2006; Weszkalnys and Richardson, 2014), including the ‘embodied, emotional and experiential’ (Hall et al. in Della Bosca and Gillespie, 2018: 5) ‘everyday lives of energy transitions’ (Smith and Tidwell, 2016), and their shaping influence on the situated, place-based, intersectional embodied, emotional resonance of the far-right, from a bottom-up point of view too, remains open for deeper exploration (see Kojola, 2019).

This is not to ‘reduce’ politics to emotions or vice versa, but to highlight how emotions are always structural, cultural, historical, as well as ecological, forming a ‘bridge’ between the individual and social (Svašek 2006: 6–7), as well as between the human and more-than-human, and actual and desirable worlds (Pawlak, 2018: 11), and thus can become vibrant political embodied forces. Close-up examination of how emotions and affects come to ‘stick’ to, and move through, people and their environments, including their bodies, as an ‘affective economy’ (Ahmed, 2004), and thus stick them together as ‘the people’ in deeply embodied, viscerally-felt ways, including how changing environments mediate and prompt this, is therefore required. This is what I refer to as the embodied emotional ecology of labour’s politics, an approach I outline in chapter two.

This emotional-ecological affect is particularly relevant in relation to coal and its shifting meaning, which has so thoroughly underpinned the industrial world order and liberal democracy in the Western world, that its decline must be treated as a particularly acute case of economic, social and cultural destabilization for that particular political constellation which it threatens. Timothy Mitchell (2013) has outlined how coal was central to the establishment and rise of liberal democracy in the West, underpinning the emergence of the European Union itself as an integrated common market and as a political formation based on liberal democratic principles and ideals...
through the European Coal and Steel Community. This argument I will return to in more depth in chapter three. In the context of the European Union, the very idea and ideals of ‘Europe’ as a peaceful common market based on liberal democratic rule were originally founded upon the basis of integration through the European Coal and Steel Community. Is it therefore a mere coincidence that this Union and liberal democracy, which began life centred around coal, are now coming undone at the seams just as coal disappears from the European map? While hopes have been articulated that a shift away from coal towards decentralized and renewable energies could rejuvenate democracy, in this constellation it is arguably now be contributing to its opposite.

Yet this confluence should not be understood as solely about numbers of ‘jobs’, or the ‘body count’, as we have seen (Della Bosca and Gillespie, 2018: 6; Cowie and Heathcott, 2003: 12). Coal, and the industrial order it gave rise to, has underpinned not only contemporary political and economic structures, but, social and cultural ones too. Coal-based life, as numerous scholars have outlined (Cowie and Heathcott, 2003; Freese, 2006; Linkon, 2018), is deeply imbricated with a particular organization of social life and its forms of value and moral worth, generating their own relevant emotional and affective attachments and geographies (Davidson et al., 2007; Ey et al., 2017; Graybill, 2019; LeMenager, 2014a; Rohse et al., 2020), that the postindustrial, post-traditional, and postsocialist, world order, increasingly based on other energies (oil, gas, renewables), is busy rapidly dismantling and disaggregating. David Kideckel (2018: 68) acknowledges that ‘Coal’s decline is analogous to deindustrialization, though foundational and further reaching’. While deindustrialization has locally specific impacts that are important to assess, coal and its mining are the ur futures of industrialization, historically preliminary, and enabling the factory system itself. Thus coal’s decline is transformative not only to regional industrial structures, but to industrialism’s philosophical underpinnings and its core energy system. The reach of the coal industry into every niche of the industrial system also ramifies coal’s decline beyond deindustrialization.

This change is especially acute in contemporary Silesia, where coal and an industrial order are still hegemonic, though that hegemony is breaking apart as we see.

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67 Indeed Mitchell (2013: 141-143) himself, together with Matt Huber’s (2013) account of oil and American culture, outlines how the shift to oil democracies facilitated the rise of neoliberal economic governance. 68 Barbara Freese (2006: 244-245), for example, writes that moving from the concentrated power of coal to the more widely dispersed power that nature provides on the surface could prompt a parallel dispersal of political and economic power that is more democratic. See also Jeremy Rifkin (2013) on the democratizing promises of a solar-powered Third Industrial Revolution.
For a start, coal life has been bound up with a very specific notion of personhood, work and social status attached to class in the form of productive labour (Stenning 2005: 985). As scholars have noted in various postindustrial societies experiencing dislocation (Charlesworth, 2000; Kideckel, 2008; Muehlebach, 2017; Walkerdine, 2010; Walkerdine and Jimenez, 2012), the sense of self has become thoroughly disembedded from a collective form of personhood in which labour and production was valued and valorized, replaced by a flexibilized, consumer-orientated, individualistic, and mobile personhood instead. This has also been noted as a critical facet of the postsocialist sphere (Dunn 2004; Humphrey and Mandel, 2002; Makovicky, 2016). In addition the meaning of ‘work’ itself and labour as connected to (masculinized) physical, bodily exertion, often in contexts of material ‘dirt’ (farming, manufacturing, mining), has radically shifted and is being decoupled from this base, while the distribution of societal respect and esteem has become lopsided, shifting away from industrialism’s relatively even spread (Goodhart, 2020). So too, has the notion that appears like ‘common sense’ for those who labour, that the material benefits of this production should be distributed most generously to those who produced it in order to enhance their advancement, and within a notion of organic unity, those who labour amidst its soil, has been overturned. In this context, labour and its industrial concerns are seen increasingly as ‘of questionable relevance’ to the new world order (Kideckel 2008: 45). With the decline of coal, as important as it was to the development of definitions and social theorizations of class (Burrell, 2017; Metcalfe, 1990), has come the notable decline, too, of the salience of class in both social theorizing and wider politics (Evans, 2017b; Jones, 2012; Kalb and Halmai, 2011; Kideckel, 2003; Stenning, 2005c). Class politics is perceived to have been replaced by neoliberalized identity politics. Cas Mudde (2019: 6) writes that since the industrial revolution, the classic left/ride divide has been defined in terms of socioeconomic policies; more recently this divide is now characterized in socio-cultural terms – nationalism and authoritarianism vs internationalism.

In addition, coal gave rise to a highly traditional heteronormative gender order. The ‘industrial breadwinner’ (Anshelm and Hultman, 2014; Hultman, 2017) model, in which the man of the household was responsible for earning a ‘family wage’ was intimately correlated to the ways that coal’s labours were gendered masculine, while household work was relegated to feminine unpaid caring labour. This included sexual norms that underpinned patriarchal forms of control. Indeed, the conservative masculinist ideals of far-right populists around the world have been noted by scholars (Coffé, 2018; Graff et al., 2019; Hall, 2019). Cara Daggett (2018) poses that fossil fuels

69 See Daniel Bell (1976) and Alain Tourraine (1971) who predicted the demise of organised labour and rise of technocratic elites in a postindustrial world order.

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and masculinity have been deeply culturally interwoven, creating identity and privilege loss under climate-changing futures. While Martin Hultman and Jonas Anshelm (2014; 2018) show that this imbrication is core to resistance to climate science too. Lauren Berlant (2007: 275) calls the leftover aspiration for the hegemonic heteronormative (industrially-rooted, here post-Fordist) good life the ‘affects of aspirational normativity’. She writes ‘the desire to feel normal and to feel normalcy as a ground of dependable life, a life that does not have to keep being reinvented’ depends on the ability to ‘find resting places’ which is ‘imagined nostalgically’ through ‘traditional forms of social reciprocity’ such as gendered identities and attachments (Berlant, 2007: 281; 291; 282). The nostalgic ‘reproduction of normativity’ becomes a ballast, she suggests, against the destabilising socioeconomic conditions one finds oneself in (Berlant, 2007: 291). Similarly, David Harvey (1991: 292) writes that the ‘revival of interest in basic institutions (such as the family and community), and the search for historical roots are all signs of a search for more secure moorings and longer-lasting values in a shifting world’. Yet the role of coal, or energy regimes, is underspecified in this picture.

An additional aspect of social organisation entrenched through coal-based industrialism has been the idea of man’s dominion over nature – a patriarchal relation to the natural world based on a right to extract, control and dominate in the name of progress and based on increasingly rationalized instruments of scientific technology (Merchant, 1990). In turn this promised a world that was controllable and under the purview of human understanding and order (Bauman, 1991). Part of this was the entrenchment of the ‘metabolic rift’ between nature and culture, or the ‘environment’ and the city. Spaces and zones of production, or dirt and pollution, were distinctly segregated from spaces of leisure and purity. Indeed, under Communism, such entrenched spatial zoning of cleanliness and dirt, nature and industry, have historically informed the ways that possibilities for dwelling and ideas of ‘civilization’ have evolved especially for the working classes due to the socialist state’s massification of nature (see chapter five). As Stefania Barca and Gavin Bridge (2015: 371–2) write, this generalized industrial ‘eco-geographical logic’ (Moore in Barca and Bridge, 2015: 371), gave rise to ‘new forms of environmental consciousness and politics’, particularly ‘purifying urges’ towards ‘wild nature’ by elites and the denigration of labour deemed to despoil it (Cronon, 1996; White, 1995). But for the industrial working classes, who depend on ‘dirty’ work, rather different conceptions of nature, and the body too, emerged, with such an environmentalism perceived as costly and alien (Bell, 2020b). This calls for a consideration of the ‘subjectivities, rationalities and habits of mind to which industrial activity gives rise’ (Barca and
A final aspect of coal-based industrialism is how it contributed to forging homogenous nationalist identities, erasing multicultural, plural and folk identities, a process in Silesia chapter three will outline. Ernst Gellner (1983) has theorized nationalism as enabled by industrialization. He posited it as a cultural elite project of assimilation aided by mass formal education, the uprooting caused by industrialism, linguistic standardisation and urbanization, and a national labour market. It was also aided in Silesia, as I will outline, by the labour of subterranean dirty work of coal mining, which acted as a kind of ecological levelling melting pot. Furthermore, the materialities of coal itself as a subterranean substance lend it to a particular kind of ‘resource nationalism’. As Andreas Malm and the Zetkin Collective (2021: 274-275) point out, fossil fuels, formed as a solid ‘autochthonous stock’ beneath a particular location in the earth’s surface within borders, offer a far more ready supply of symbolic capital to fuel resource nationalism than renewable forms of energy which are nobody’s and everywhere, uncaprturable as a ‘fugative flow’. Coal in particular as an ‘ultra-deep material inheritance’ easily sticks to nationalism’s ‘mystique’, especially perhaps when it is under threat. Ernest Gellner (1983) also posited that the transformation from agrarian to industrial society and rise of nationalism went hand in hand. Echoing Karl Polanyi’s (1944) notion of The Great Transformation, Barbara Freese (2006: 80) in her history of coal describes how industrialization disembedded vast swathes of agrarian society into the rapidly expanding cities of urbanizing Britain. This ‘new working class’ was ‘severed from [its] traditions, communities, domestic comforts, and independence’. Nationalism, according to Gellner, filled the void that the demise of the agrarian society and feudalism left behind. Similarly, while populism was originally an agrarian movement in the US and Russia ostensibly against the impacts of capitalist industrialization (Brass, 1997; Goodwyn, 1976; Pollack, 1976), with the now demise of industrial society under postindustrial neoliberalism, is far-right industrial populism filling this new void? In a similar sense, we are undergoing another process of disembedding, where this time it is the industrial working-class’s subjectivities, traditions and communities, as much as broader domestic comforts and freedoms that fossil fuels, especially coal, have afforded that are coming undone or being most directly challenged (Anshelm and Hultman, 2014; Chakrabarty, 2009).

The move away from coal can be characterized as the shift from an imagined rooted, solid or durable modernity that coal, particularly under Communism, encapsulated, to what Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (2000b) calls ‘liquid modernity’ that has gained speed with the rise of...
oil since the 1970s, and then more so, following the end of the Cold War in the 1990s – otherwise articulated as the shift to postindustrialism, postmodernity, neoliberal globalization, ‘time-space compression’ (Harvey, 1991), ‘network society’ (Castells, 2000), ‘risk society’ (Beck, 1992) or ‘overheating’ (Eriksen, 2016a). Likewise, and not un-coincidentally then, it maps onto a far-right populist cultural divide between ‘rooted’ traditional conservative communitarianism and ‘rootless’ cosmopolitanism, or what Don Kalb (2011: 5) calls the ‘dialectics of local communal cultural particularity versus abstract liberal cosmopolitanism’ that ‘increasingly characterizes the intra-state conditions of the new era of the ‘One World’’ with their contrasting views of ‘home’ or ‘heimat’.

Furthermore, the remnants of coal’s order is increasingly relegated to the past and rejected, and, crucially, ‘looked down upon’, by the latter, while its promises (security, stability, belonging, personhood dignity and status) are increasingly sought after, or symbolically harnessed, by the former. Coal as home becomes coal as shame, and being caught between these in an ambivalent and ongoing state of disorientation and negotiation I found to be a pervasive ongoing postsocialist condition among my participants. Yet it was not so much ‘petro-melancholia’ (LeMenager, 2014a) or nostalgia that pervaded accounts of the present – a longing to return to a past home – but a longing to finally arrive into the present and be granted inclusion into the modern future. A longing to finally be granted access to the European promise of upward mobility – The Western-style Good Life with its dignities and comforts – but a Polish Good Life.

Defining coal as a ‘religious, class-inflected fetish’ in the Romanian Jiu Valley and in the American West Virginian coalfields, provoking the contradictory feelings of devotional joy and abject fear, David Kideckel (2018: 71) proposes that ‘when fetishes decline, this provokes fear, uncertainty, and economic social, political, and emotional conflicts. World and world-view crumble as the fetish’s paradigm disaggregates, producing dissonance in key relationships; family, community, social organisation, natural phenomena. Most critically, failure of the fetish especially lays bare the class relations on which the fetish was predicated.’ In Upper Silesia, as the moral, modern, valued bounty of coal’s labour and its seemingly-forever rooted values have been stripped away, its detractions, and class relations, have indeed been increasingly laid bare. What remains of life on coal increasingly is its brute dirt - for ‘there is no escaping that’. It has become dirty in unmodern, worthless and immoral ways. And in today’s world, ‘stigma attached to dirt adheres to...
the body, reinforcing class-based devaluation’ (Simpson et al., 2016: 18) in intensely emotional
terms. For reasons not of their own making or choosing, the material dislocation away from coal
had rendered those embodied subjectivities (gender, class, ethnicity, region) and persons most
invested and attached to its ontological containment and durable promises unmoored, un-housed.
Shame is tagged onto ways of life that were the bedrock of a previously elevated and celebrated
industrialist moral social order, now in decline – working-class masculinist, traditional conservative,
and (geologically) embedded in place, family and community, while new indexes of social status
around particular kinds of personhood, despite promises, remain far off. Increasingly unhomely,
coal’s people try to find ways to make themselves at-home with coal.

The complexity and cultural specificity of this human-nature interrelationship can be best
grasped from an ethnographic perspective. However, qualitative, immersed research that gets up
close to far-right supporters to show them as ‘real people, worthy of a good argument rather than
reduced to a facile parody, heroic or demonic’ (Darling, 2009: 26) are also ‘embryonic’ (Gusterson,
2017: 210; see also Bangstad et al., 2019; Kapferer and Theodossopoulos, 2019; and see however
Banks et al., 2006; Szombati, 2018; Maskovský, 2017; Thorleifsson, 2016, 2017; Dawson, 2018;
Hochschild, 2016; Shoshan, 2016; Hage, 2003 for related studies also on neo-nationalism). This is
especially so within Eastern Europe, where such research is highly limited (Gusterson, 2017; Kalb,
2009; Pankowski, 2010; Pasieka, 2019). This general lacunae is largely, it has been suggested,
because of anthropology’s own progressive leanings and commitments (Bangstad et al., 2019). As
Mabel Berezin (in Roose, 2020: 7) points out, doing such research can itself be stigmatized in the
academy – if you empathise with Them, perhaps you are one of Them (see also Pasieka, 2019). The
ethics and fraught terrain of such research I briefly explore in chapter two. It is also because of a
healthy scepticism of applying the term ‘populist’ as a top-down concept from political science
(Kapferer and Theodossopoulos, 2019). From an ethnographic perspective one should never impose
categories from the outside onto the phenomenon studied, and people rarely ascribe to the label
‘populist’ (Kapferer and Theodossopoulos, 2019: 12). Yet ‘populism’ as we see is an increasingly
prevalent and widely accepted trend or ‘social reality’ (Kapferer and Theodossopoulos, 2019: 25). It
speaks to a moment, something genuinely in the ether, nevertheless with deep historical and
geographically and culturally particular roots, that require careful examination (Kapferer and
Theodossopoulos, 2019; Laclau, 2005). In turn, populist politics is ‘deeply reliant on local meaning’
and its sense-making (Kapferer and Theodossopoulos, 2019: 5; 25). Thus calls for ethnographic
scholarship in order to inform its as yet under-accounted for causes, social meaning and
implications are growing (Gusterson, 2017; Hann, 2019a; Pasieka, 2017; Roose, 2020). This includes reinstating class in its actual lived relationship into analysis too (Bangstad et al., 2019; Morris, 2017).

Indeed, despite forming the prime ‘collateral damage in the transition to greener energy futures’ (Smith and Tidwell, 2016: 332) and the (white) working-class ‘core’ of far-right populist support (Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018: 17; Ost, 2018; Roose, 2020: 11; Rydgren, 2012) (a contested phenomenon I will return to in chapter three) particularly further embroiling (working-class) masculinities (a yet additional understudied facet) (Coffé, 2018, 2019; Greig, 2019; Mudde, 2019: 71; 147–162; Roose, 2020; Spierings and Zaslove, 2015; Worth, 2020), the industrial working-classes have rarely been the object of study either, neither within relevant areas such as energy anthropology (Smith, 2019: 2), political ecology (Barca and Leonardi, 2018; Broto, 2013; Huber, 2019), postsocialist anthropology and sociology (Ashwin, 1999; Crowley, 1997; Crowley and Ost, 2001; Dunn, 2004; Hann and Parry, 2018; Kalb, 2009, 2014; Kalb and Halmai, 2011; Keskiöla, 2012; Kideckel, 2008; Mrozowicki, 2011; Ost, 2005, 2018; Rakowski, 2016; Stenning, 2005c), or environmental (Barca, 2018) and energy humanities (Szeman and Boyer, 2017), reflecting the broader decline of class analysis in social research in the last decades. Class (the meaning of which I adopt I describe in chapter two) in its lived emotive positionality, especially from an intersectional perspective, offering empirically-based, ‘careful, nuanced and revealing analyses’ (Wilson et al, 2017b: 200), and particularly set within an explicitly ecological relationship, is also as yet under-explored within far-right populist studies (Bornschier et al., 2013; Dawson, 2018; Kalb, 2009; Rydgren, 2012; see however Evans, 2017b; Gest, 2016; Gilfillan, 2011; Kalb and Halmai, 2011; Kerrissey et al., 2020; Mondon and Winter, 2019; Pied, 2018; Winlow et al., 2017). Studying working-class lives, however, is important, as Michele Lamont (2000: 2) argued back in the year 2000 in her seminal study on the ‘dignity of working men’, particularly at a time when inequality has grown, and where the ruling and educated classes (including academics), the apparent ‘brains’, are increasingly far removed from the concerns and lives of ‘ordinary’ people (Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018: 81 – 127; Winlow et al., 2017: 199) – in Silesia, the ‘bodies’. Today, this feeds into one of the main charges of populists who claim to be the true representatives of the latter (while paradoxically often emerging themselves from the former). This division, with bottom-up relevance for my study, Val Plumwood (2008) has characterized as the growing gap between ‘mind’ people

While industrial working-class lives have of course been studied in relation to coal communities (Bell and Braun, 2010; Della Bosca and Gillespie, 2018; Kozlowski and Perkins, 2016; Lewin, 2019; Maggard, 1994; Scott, 2007, 2009, 2010; Shepherd-Powell, 2017; Smith Rolston, 2014), this has not usually in direct or explicit correlation to the politics of contemporary far-right populism.
and ‘body’ people or what David Goodhart (2020) has termed the friction between ‘heads’ vs ‘hands’ and ‘hearts’.72

Key to working-class industrial populist emotive resonance among my participants, is, therefore, what Jan-Werner Müller (2017: 23) calls a moral ideology of ‘producerism’. This ideology, widespread in far-right populist politics though again under-examined (Ivaldi and Mazzoleni, 2019), revives what I pinpoint as coal-based industrial fantasies of The Good Life, its narratives of material progress and nationalist resource distribution, its highly gendered and classed meting out of respect and dignity, its moral take on labour, in order to allay these fears, splits society into productive and parasitic members, the pure and the dirty on these terms (Grdešić, 2019; Grdešić, 2017). This ideology rests on a labour theory of value, in which ‘producers’, the ‘hard working people’, (a core populist refrain), those who, as I highlight, often work primarily with their bodies as their prime asset to generate wealth73, are perceived to be increasingly overlooked by political and economic elites, and their status and dignity undermined. This contains a strong cultural and moral component, in that it is these people who become ‘the people’ – those who are held up as the true and pure bearers of traditional morality, culture and values as an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 2006), and are morally superior and deserving precisely because they labour, as a bodily rather than cognitive (elite) effort. They are contrasted to ‘parasitic’ members who threaten from both above and below – elite actors (‘brains’) and ‘inferior’ Others, such as immigrants, ethnic and sexual minorities, the poor or underclass, who do not ‘labour’ while seemingly are ‘favoured’ with recognition by those same elites (Ivaldi and Mazzoleni, 2019). Thus their expulsion from the body politic as the supposedly true pollutants offers apparent remedy. In this sense the populist ideology of producerism fuses economic and cultural concerns, channelled into a nationalist welfare chauvinism. It also, as I highlight, bridges the human and more-than-human worlds, in the sense of highlighting the make up of good, worthy, valuable persons as connected to the earth, and validating their bodily, sensual, emotional experience, in connection to material ecologies.

Where (neo)liberal selfhood, and citizenship, champions dis-me-bodied/abstract rational individualism, autonomy, self-expression, private property, entrepreneurialism etc, as freeing from the constrictions of tradition, custom, habit, authority and collective identities based on rights discourse (Fairfield, 2000; Skeggs, 1997, 2011) emerging from embodied, ecologically-mediated

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72 This has also been referred to as a polarization between ‘abstraction’ and ‘production’ (Skogen, 1996; see also Eckersley, 1989).
73 But not only – it also includes small-scale business people and individual entrepreneurs according to Ivaldi and Mazzoleni (2019).
‘skin-close modes of dispossession’ (Bangstad et al., 2019: 105), or from the ‘conscience of the skin’ (Lebow, 2012), especially by those embedded in a coal order, are other kinds of notions of selfhood, and claims to citizenship, entirely. Shaped by cultural and social processes too (such as experiences of work), these do not find purchase within that framework – deeply felt and emotive, collective, concerned with material need, social rights and the sense of ‘contradiction between liberal notions of citizenship and embodied experiences of oppression and want’ (Lebow, 2012: 299). Industrial populism, however, especially in the postsocialist East, is increasingly adept at targeting these longings, and producerism is a key enabling frame. This is what I refer to as an industrial populist purification – its re-defining, re-embodying of morality, modernity and value hierarchies within the shape of the bodily-producer once more, through also the expulsion of various types of pollutants and impurities, which will become clearer. The politics of dirty coal in shifting environmental and energy regimes is key to this phenomenon.

From black gold to dirt:

Under Communism, as the mythology goes, and as the next chapter will describe in more detail, coal miners were national heroes. The deeply embedded economic, social, cultural and ecological coal mining community that Erwin had once known, and that still furnished the hegemonic imaginary that dominates as a kind of regional ‘folklore’, was encapsulated by two friezes on the facade of the community centre, built in the 1960s, that sat a stone’s throw from the gate to the coal mine around which my research would eventually be based (see chapter two). On the left, two bare-chested, muscular men wearing helmets and wielding pick-axes stand next to a cart loaded with coal. On the right, a woman has her arm around a small child who is pointing upwards towards an oil lamp, a covert Christian symbol, while a white eagle, symbol of the Polish nation, flies just above. Here coal is tightly woven into a dense social and symbolic fabric – the male coal miner’s labour, and the ‘black gold’ he digs up, directly powers his family, community, nation and God too. ‘Poland stands on coal’, and the coal miner lifts her up – his physical energy and exertion generating the energy that fuelled the nation’s modernization efforts. His labour is dignified, valorized and heroic. It has a clear purpose, and significant meaning – he knows what his efforts are for, who he is, what his place is in the world and is dignified by them. Working-class masculinity, a
traditional gender order, patriotic duty, and sense of belonging to a national community and its
destiny. Such was the narrated mythology at least.74

Erwin was a classic example of a miner of this generation. He had had a good innings at the
coal mine, working his way up to being a foreman, and remembered coal mining life as stressful
and physically tough, but also jolly (wesoło) and filled with the thickness of social meaning. Work
had been a social occasion, afterwork too. He had retired around two decades ago, and lived
comfortably in his three-storey, self-built house na wsi (in a village 2 miles from the mine), on land
formerly belonging to his forebears, with his wife, one of his daughters, and his daughter’s family
too, providing two grandchildren. A multigenerational household was until relatively recently a
standard norm of Silesian social life. His other daughter had emigrated to Germany for good and
worked there as a nurse – a common story. While he had worked down the pit, his wife, as a true
Silesian woman, had looked after the household, raised the children, cooked the meals and looked
after the land. During our conversations she would wait on us, as was Silesian tradition, serving
endless teas in a glass with lemon, laying out copious home-baked cakes and open canapes, and
demonstrating her prowess and standing as hostess, something I experienced in Silesian households
as almost a mini-potlatch. The living room was filled with knick-knacks from travels abroad, small
family photographs, an obligatory (it seemed) cabinet of porcelain and crystal glass ornaments, a
portrait of Jesus and a cross, and some mining-related items – including a small statute of St.
Barbara carved from coal.

Despite suffering from a minor level of black lung disease (though this had not been verified
medically for he was below the ‘official’ threshold), which left him breathless at times, Erwin had a
full state-employee miner’s pension and a comfortable life. A house he had built with his own
hands, a wife, a family, memories of dense sociality, material satisfaction, self-respect – such were
the ingredients that made dirty work worthwhile; that imbued it with deep meaning. Indeed, Erwin

74 As Adam Mrozowicki (2011: 109) finds, the biographical ‘construction of the past through ‘unity’ and the
present through ‘fragmentation’ is pervasive in workers’ accounts of post/socialist change in Poland. This, he
writes ‘should not be surprising’ as it mirrors and affirms numerous other studies of workers in both Poland
and elsewhere (Bloklant, 2005; Charlesworth, 2000; Dawson, 2003; Kesküla, 2012; Kideckel, 2008; Morris,
2016; Steenning, 2005b). However it does contradict evidence from actually-existing socialism that working
class life was highly atomized even then. Such narratives, as with all memories and oral histories, speak most
pignantly about failed expectations of the present, rather than offering a ‘real’ portrait of the past. That is
their scholarly merit (Kideckel 2008: 38). Tomasz Rakowski (2016: 33) calls such narratives ‘mythologized
rendering’ which is, as he points out is ‘not the same as inauthentic’. What the ethnographic perspective offers
is the lived view from below and the past as a social fact that is continually in the making, where collective
memory is, as Talja Bloklant (2005: 125) writes, an ongoing navigational ‘process of social identification’
and meaning-making. This is particularly acute for working-class lives where the past is connected to loss,
generating an ongoing lived social trauma (Morris, 2016: 152; Walkerdine, 2010).
told me how much he used to like ‘getting dirty’ whilst working the mines. He, like many others of
his generation, also tended to fields at home. He was one of the hybrid chłopo-robotnicy – or
‘peasant-workers’. Agricultural labour would thus follow a day-long shift at the mine– tending to
animals, maintaining the crops, repairing machinery. Given this schedule, his hands would remain
dirty all day. There was not much categorical difference between the dirt of the soil and the dust of
coal. Both were Silesia’s black earth. Back then, in fact, one could discern a ‘man’s’ hands precisely
by their blackness, stained by the earth. That coal was now ‘dirty’ in newly moral and backward
ways was an insult to his lived experience and life’s work. It was an insult to the memory of his
peers too, and a gross forgetting of Silesia’s history and national contribution. A smearing of it.

Leszek, a Polish-Silesian miner in his late 20s, was also bitter about coal’s contemporary
standing. But it was something he had to contend with as a daily reality rather than memory alone.
He usually worked six days a week, and his wife worked five, also at the mine in an administrative
role, in order to make ends meet, which meant on the few times I visited to interview Leszek in
between shifts, I rarely saw her. With a three-year-old child to look after, they relied a lot on his
parents who lived a 20 minute drive away to provide free childcare – one of the main draws of
staying in the region. His father and grandfather had both been miners, but he told me he wasn’t so
interested in their stories of the past. He was focused on the present. They hadn’t saved up enough
yet to build their own house, like Erwin had – a much-coveted tradition within the mining
community that became popular in the Gierek years in the 1970s – and so they were renting an
apartment, something that, together with bills, ate up as much as half his monthly earnings. The
apartment was typically white on the inside, and unlike Erwin’s house, there were barely any
objects in sight (there wasn’t much time for cleaning – that’s how it was explained), I came
accustomed to such ultra-modern, stripped-back ‘pure’ interiors among the younger generation, with
large framed professional family portraits often the only thing on display, or the word ‘F-a-m-i-l-y’
hung in one of those kitschy spelled-out lettersets on the wall. Friends had bought a house on credit,
but such a practice was still frowned upon by many as alien to Polish custom – they did not wish to
be in so much debt. At the same time, however, they had bought their two new cars with credit cards
– as I also discovered, it was impossible to get around the disparate, chaotic urbanized region
without one. The majority of his school friends had migrated abroad (he had done a short stint too)
and not come back, following the great post-2004 exodus. He had ended up working in coal mining
because that’s all he could find that paid relatively ok and was a stable job. But this, he told me,
meant coping with the harshness of contemporary mining life – physical strain, routine health and
safety violations, competitiveness at work, and a declining pay packet with dwindling social benefits, now the accusations of smog too. With the workforce slashed by half since the late 1990s, productivity pressure on individual miners had intensified. At the same time, responsibility for his own health, well-being and physical fitness to maintain his job was personalized – social reproduction had been intensely privatized too.

For Leszek, a miner’s body was a tough thing to inhabit, with little respite. Doing dirty work, then, for such impoverished rewards, was a bitter pill to swallow (see chapter seven). On top of that, he could not understand why people still thought miners were a wealthy elite ‘caste’, an accusation internet fora and media were replete with. He wished they could see what his life was really like, but then voices and lifeworlds like his rarely made it into the mainstream media (Świątkiewicz-Mośny and Wagner, 2012). Dirt carried intensifying classist social stigma too. Thus for Leszek, echoing Erwin, what he had to say about coal’s shifting meaning was ‘Coal used to be the holy cow, now it is a necessary evil. But we are doomed to coal, whether we like it or not, it’s what we have – for at least another 20-30 years’. Poland stood on coal – but it was no longer something to be easily proud of, but something to make do, or put up, with, in the hope of a better future in a highly contingent present and in the face of growing public acridity. Solid gold seemed to have been turned into unstable dirt in material and symbolic senses. As a result, it, and people like Erwin and Leszek, were no longer ‘held in the arms of society’ (Keane, 2016) like the miner in the Communist frieze – rather economically, socially, culturally and epistemologically they were increasingly cast aside. Ecologically and somatically too. Through the simple label ‘dirty’ that clung to coal’s material bodily stains, both coal and miners were being made to feel not-at-home-in-the-world, in a process of shaming banishment, with deep visceral, emotive implications. The taboo on naming coal’s dirt had been broken (see chapter five).

Coal had always been unhomely in many ways – a dangerous, dirty job that polluted and harmed one’s health. But, according to collective memory and narrative, it used to provide the material and symbolic means to at least make oneself at home with and through it. That was precisely its appeal. It had also underpinned the national homeland too. Today, however, coal’s capacity to sustain and underpin ‘home’, or normative ideals of the good life and a felt sense of ease or ‘comfort’, were on increasingly shaky ground, as this thesis will outline, even as desires for that sense of home live on.75 Likewise, in his ethnographic work among industrial workers in Poland, Don Kalb (2009: 25) finds that ‘People complain that what they got from socialism – the chance to make and sustain a family, build a career around honest work, and maintain a house of one’s own – can’t so easily be gained today. The stories of decline are also about a keenly felt erosion of solidarity and communal life.’ (See chapters seven and eight).
the earth – was increasingly difficult to relate to; rather there was a sense of alienation from this ideal – a kind of ‘cruel optimism’ (Berlant, 2011), a residual desire for ‘normality’. On top of that, now coal was increasingly thought and spoken of accusingly as ecologically ‘dirty’ in Silesia too, in overlapping social, cultural and environmental senses with a morally weighty load. Smog was bearing down – climate change more hazily and distantly it felt too, though with real consequences. The toxic experience of shame filtered in with the toxic air, rendering a sense of at-homeness increasingly difficult. Unease lingered.

The conditions of postsocialism are such that the condition of dislocation, of not-feeling-at-home-at-home, is fundamentally a central part of everyday life, as numerous scholars of the region have alluded to. Often characterized in the more conventional and reductive terms of ‘nostalgia’ (or nOstalgie in the East German case) (Berdahl, 1999; Hann, 2012; Todorova and Gille, 2012), it has been more precisely summed up as a condition of ‘in-betweenness’ (Oushakine, 2000), ‘indeterminacy’ (Kesküla, 2018), or also ‘unhomeliness’ (Morris, 2016) – a feeling of caught ‘between posts’ (Chari and Verdery, 2009) - post-socialism, post-industrialism, post-traditional, post-trauma (Sztompka, 2016), even postcolonial, which I will elucidate in chapter three. An uncertain, hesitant state, with nothing to hold on to and nothing holding you, can be characterized as a groundless state, one that lacks solidity. Shame, I argue, an experience of being unacceptably out-of-place, insecure and unrecognized, not at-home, emerges in its interstices, in its material markings. Precisely the embodied, visceral, emotional atmosphere in which industrial populism, with its promises of national purification and purging, becomes attractive as a means to re-embed and resurrect a sense of that solidity and order – and sense of congruent wellbeing and holding – that is felt lacking. It is here in the condition of non-solidity or ‘liminality’ where the designation ‘dirty’ latches on and becomes toxic. For as Mary Douglas defined it, dirt is defined as disorder – as ‘matter out of place’ with all its ambiguity, unfixity and thus threatening categorical confusion and stigma. Likewise, Bruno Latour (1993) defines the ideal of modernity in terms of purity – with the non-modern, or not-yet-modern, as a hybrid, ‘fuzzy’ kind of existence. Zygmunt Bauman (1991) too highlights how in actual fact modernity has delivered the latter – ambivalence, opacity and confusion. Or impurity.

As coal’s fruits have been stripped back, in participants’ own accounts what remains are its increasingly apparent attritions and detractions – in fact, awareness of coal’s dark sides was only growing leaving ample room for desire and longing. As Polish author Bendyk (2015: 7) writes, today, ‘Coal is public enemy number one’. How did coal fall from such grace? What processes and
mechanisms had turned Poland’s black treasure, and its people, to dirt? Through a triple demotion – what Buchowski (2006) calls ‘postsocialist, postindustrial, postmodern’ – with an Orientalist twist and, I add, a neoliberalized ecological flourish – ecological dispossession in process. This I will outline in the historical context chapter, chapter three. First, I provide an overview of my thesis as a whole, before turning to an outline of my research methods, approaches and ethics in chapter two.

Thesis outline and overview:

In the next chapter, I outline my research methods, approaches and ethics. In chapter three, I provide a necessarily in-depth coal-eyed view of the historical context to the present situation in. I then turn to the empirical chapters (though of course my entire thesis is based on insights from empirical ethnographic work, so this distinction is a little rigid and inaccurate). In them, I outline strategies of emotional purification that coal workers are themselves involved in under processes of perceived ecological dispossession – practices, discourses, means and methods by which they seek to cleanse themselves of stigma and shame, establish and assert themselves, and their coal, as morally pure, dignified subjects, and assert their own visions, ideals, imaginaries, values and ways of being, their lifeworld, as modern, as of value, as home. In this way they attempt to scale-down a world that has become ‘overheated’ (Eriksen, 2016a), too big and abstracted, back to the shape of their own bodies and its realm of common sense. Such practices of purification delineate a ‘pure Us’ from a ‘corrupt Them’ in ways that imbricate, correspond, resonate with, and legitimate far-right industrial populist politics that in turn amplifies and shapes it.

Each empirical chapter is organized around a particular experience of ecological dispossession and practice of emotional purification that it engenders, and that PiS’s policies speak to. The first two empirical chapters (four and five) are about smog, but from two relational perspectives. In chapter four, I introduce the relatively-recently politicized issue of ‘smog’ which exploded onto the scene in Silesia just as I began my fieldwork in January 2017. With the pro-coal PiS government actively belittling the issue, this chapter explores the perspective of local residents worried and frustrated about both ‘Polish smog’ and ‘Polish populism’ and how these concerns intertwine. Poor air quality becomes a materialization of residents’ fear for the poor quality of the nation and its future trajectory as a whole. I show how narratives about smog, linked in large part to ‘primitive’ usage of coal for domestic heating purposes, and to domestic support for PiS, thus fuse with long-standing class-laden discourses regarding Polish civilizational backwardness, poor
mentality’, and failed European belonging, thereby constructing ‘the people’ who are held responsible for all three in classist-nativist self-colonizing, simplistically stigmatizing, Othering and denigrating terms. The chapter serves to set the ethnographic scene with regards to how coal is becoming increasingly perceived as dirty at the local level, and how this feeds into a long-standing anti-populist/populist frontier, a relational toxic atmosphere, that needs to be interrogated as a contributing factor in current populist backlash in Polish coal country.

In chapter five, I make a 180 degree turn, and consider the issue of smog from the perspective of Silesia’s particularly older (50+) coal mining residents among whom there is a tendency to publicly deny the smog-activist notion that it is harmful. For this generation, for whom memories of, and intimate experience with, pollution connected to coal have long normalized its presence, ‘smog’ is an outsider discourse that seeks to stigmatize and undermine their insider sense of embodied subjectivity, identity, self-worth, belonging and knowledge. Contributing to understandings of everyday populist anti-environmentalism, the chapter outlines the region’s environmental history of pollution and its emerging postsocialist stigmatizing ecological discourse, before examining the practices and narratives through which Silesia’s dirt has long been enrolled into constructing the ‘Silesian people’ - their embodied class-, gender- and place-based self-understanding and mythology – over time, thus rendering ‘smog’ a form of ecological dispossession that generates counter-defensiveness in industrial populist form. I use the concept of industrial ecological intimacy to highlight the way in which ‘rueful self-recognition’ however, lies beneath this defensive posturing – so that outsider defensiveness is also coupled with insider wistfulness and shame too. Coal’s increasing stigmas and tensions continually eat away at Silesian self-understanding, making the task of reconciling contemporary desires for moral and ‘modern’ living increasingly difficult, especially for the younger generations. PiS-style industrial populism offers an enticing, emotionally-relieving means.

Chapter six shifts into the space of the literal Silesian household. It argues that the role of historically and culturally sedimented traditional gendered subjectivities, particularly hegemonic masculinities and their embodied entanglements with coal-based home-heating, have been overlooked in understanding the phenomenon of smog and the reluctance to part with the fuel. In Silesian intergenerational coal mining families, home heating structurally oriented around coal is traditionally the responsibility of the male breadwinner. In turn doing its dirty work has long been a primary route for attaining domestic masculinity; securing its patriarchic authority and integrity and acceptably expressing its familial love.
and care. Encroaching trends towards post-traditionalism and ecological identities, however, increasingly threaten such arrangements, particularly for retired miners who are most explicitly invested in their payoffs. Drawing together Cara Daggett’s concept of ‘petro-masculinity’, and Martin Hultman and Paul Pulé’s notion of ‘industrial/breadwinning masculinities’, refusal of smog discourse and attachment to coal in the home is thus proposed as an attempt to hold onto dwindling resources for achieving a regional, Silesian, working-class variation of hegemonic industrial breadwinning petro-masculinity precisely at a time when such positionality is increasingly feared to be marginalized. Holding onto coal can thereby be understood as holding onto a sense of self that is ontologically at risk, resonating with an empowered far-right, fossil-fuelled, anti-ecological, masculinist populism.

In chapter seven, I focus on the contemporary generation of working-class miners and how they feel about doing coal mining’s increasingly ‘dirty’ work in the postsocialist present. Whereas for the older generation of miners under socialism, coal’s dirt secured livelihoods, self-esteem and gendered ideals of working-class masculine integrity, for younger miners, for whom such ready-made resources are no longer accessible and who are long alienated from the iconic socialist working-class hero, it serves to continuously remind them of a second-class and demoralized European citizenship, frustrating their desires for a dignified, respectable ‘normal’ life. Coal’s dirt has become re-signified and symbolically manifests a feeling of being treated like dirt in today’s harsh capitalist, and working-class-coal-bashing, reality. In this way, the chapter proposes that coal miner’s embodied engagement with the material environment of the coal mine, particularly coal’s dirt, serves to make their frustrations and feelings of shame extremely visceral. Using a moral economy approach, it proposes that this embodiment of dirt generates an intensely enfleshed and vitalized sense of indignity, injustice, and desire for a world otherwise, making the resonance with industrial populist sentiment and its promise of aesthetic immediacy and moral reclamation forcefully appealing.

In this final empirical chapter, I explore the sentiment and causes behind widespread anti-(Muslim) refugee sentiment amongst coal workers, juxtaposing this with the banal context of the Polish barbecue, a ubiquitous popular national summer pastime. Situating this in the context of coal miners’ degraded embodied masculine working-class postsocialist identity, integrity and sense of communal belonging, generated by perceived ecological dispossession, the pervasive insecurity and
fragmentation of contemporary life leaves individualized senses of shame without a home to cleanse it away. The refugee becomes an emotional scapegoat, and shame is projected outwards, so that it is transferred onto the threatening Other. Coal, and the particular Polish national values that are interconnected with it – the traditional family model, the notion of hard work and self-sacrifice, masculine pride – are reclaimed as a morally purified defensive shield against the encroachment of perceived corrupting European values imported from an invasive, polluting West – feminism, or ‘gender ideology’, post-traditional values, environmentalism and multiculturalism. Dirt is inverted from its liberal order so that coal and the industrial lifeworld, what is ‘Ours’ becomes clean, and the true pollution is Othered, rendered invasive. Poland’s so-called ‘backwardness’ becomes a value to be protected - ‘our backwardness’.

In the conclusion I briefly summarise the main arguments of the thesis, before turning to the postscript where I outline key events that have occurred since the covid-19 pandemic and their unpredicted impacts on the politics and emotions of Polish coal. Here I reflect on contemporary debates concerning Just Transition and look to the possible future.
Chapter two. Research methods, approaches and ethics

This PhD thesis forms part of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Environmental Humanities for a Concerned Europe (ENHANCE) Innovative Training Network (ITN) generously funded by EU Horizon 2020. The first network of its kind, it aimed to establish the 12 participating PhD students across three EU universities at the forefront of an emerging environmental humanities transdisciplinary field, focusing research on practical environmental challenges facing Europe (Huggan et al., 2015: 112). My thesis sits within the Work Package on ‘Environing Technologies’ based at KTH, Royal Institute of Technology’s Environmental Humanities Laboratory, which champions an ‘undisciplined’ or ‘post-disciplinary intellectual environment’ (Huggan et al., 2015: 115). The Work Package aimed to focus on two of Europe’s most pressing problems: the co-creation of wastelands and ‘waste people’ that are considered surplus to society’s needs’ and ‘the relationship between those who perceive themselves as ‘native’ and those who are held to be ‘alien’ (Huggan et al., 2015: 114). In focusing on environmentally dispossessed working-class coal workers and the intersection of their embodied ecologies with far-right populism, my thesis seeks to contribute to both by integrating them.

Environmental Humanities (EH), (which also here incorporates what has been described as the sub-field of Energy Humanities), is a rapidly proliferating global plane of new enquiry (see Nye et al., 2013; Boyer and Szeman, 2014; Szeman and Boyer, 2017) into the ‘human dimensions of the environmental crisis’ (Bergthaller et al 2014), including our energy challenges. It emerged out of the recognition that too often environmental issues, particularly energy transition from fossil fuels to address the climate crisis, have been framed as primarily about scientific knowledge, finance, technology and jobs (Szulecki and Overland, 2020: 1; see also Healy and Barry, 2017; Heffron and McCauley, 2018; Welton, 2018; Thombs, 2019). This has resulted in top-down, technocratic

1 Though this is usually in separate spheres. Despite their inherent overlap and mutual interest, environmental and energy humanities scholarship have as yet not had much interaction. This in large part mirrors the way that ‘environmental’ and ‘energy’ matters are treated separately in social and political contexts. Somehow ‘energy’ is abstracted from ‘environment’ even though when it comes to the fuels themselves, they are of course a part of what might be termed Nature in deep time manifestation. It also relates to their genealogies – while energy humanities emerged from scholars working in the oil-rich regions of Alberta, Canada (Boyer and Szeman, 2014), environmental humanities emerged earlier from centres in Australia and Sweden (Nye et al., 2013) My thesis sits at the meeting point between the two spheres and I perceive ‘energy’ humanities to be a subset of ‘environmental’ humanities as a broader agenda. Indeed, Imre Szeman and Dominic Boyer (2017:39) in the foundational ‘Energy Humanities: An Anthology’ say that energy humanities retains a ‘deep kinship and intimate conversation’ with environmental humanities, particularly its emphasis on the more-than-human focus.
solutions implemented through market mechanisms often championed by politicians, scientists, policymakers, think-tanks and civil society alike (Knox-Hayes and Hayes, 2014; Swyngedouw, 2010). Yet, as the broader environmental humanities field has drawn much needed attention to, ‘Nature’, including environmental and energy histories and trajectories, is not just physical and material but, as citizens are increasingly voicing, also cultural, social and political all the way down (Buell, 2012; Diamanti and Bellamy, 2016; Heise, 2016; Hutchings, 2014; Rose et al., 2012; Sörlin, 2012; Szeman, 2015; Szeman and Boyer, 2017a; Wilson, Carlson, et al., 2017). This means that, as the introductory chapter spoke to, our entwined environmental and energy challenges are deeply interwoven with questions that the humanities (here including the social sciences, such as anthropology), rather than the hard sciences or economics, are equipped to investigate; matters to do with emotion, cultures, values, moralities, ethics, identities, beliefs, ideologies, power, habits, practices and ways of organising our social selves (Boyer and Szeman, 2014: 40; Neimanis et al., 2015; Rose et al. 2012, 1; Sörlin, 2012).

As also demonstrated in the introductory chapter, energy is therefore not just an abstract physical input to society, it’s ‘engine’ (Szeman and Boyer, 2017b: 3), that can simply be abandoned and replaced without further ado or alteration to the social fabric. Rather, since it shapes uneven power structures, while moulding both ‘infrastructures and subjectivities’ (Szeman and Boyer, 2017b: 2; see also Bloom, 2015), our ways of ‘being, behaving and belonging’ (Wilson, Szeman, et al., 2017: 13), and our subconscious too (Yaeger, 2011) and vice versa, whether we are aware of it or not, energy transition involves nothing less than ‘reimagining modernity’ and ‘figuring ourselves as different kinds of beings’ entirely than the ones fossil fuels – particularly here coal – have helped fashion (Szeman and Boyer, 2017b: 3; see also LeMenager, 2014; Huber, 2013). Who gets to do that reimagining and re-figuring and who is excluded, how it is implemented, and who wins and loses, are therefore central emotionally-loaded matters that will determine how, and indeed whether, such a shift will transpire.

2 Eric Neumayer and Charles Joly (2021) argue that the overlooking of the crucial role of the humanities (including the social sciences) in enabling the energy transition has slowed it down.

3 While much energy humanities literature focuses on oil as the prime substrata of the ‘petro-culture’ of Western modernity (Barrett et al., 2014; Buell, 2012; Huber, 2013; Hughes, 2017; LeMenager, 2014a; Szeman, 2015; Wilson, Carlson, et al., 2017), seemingly relegating and invisibilizing coal to a pre-modern past, what Christopher F. Jones (2016) has termed a peculiarly Americas-centric ‘petro-myopia’, this thesis focuses on coal as the understudied contemporary terrain of fossil politics, particularly industrial populism, in its most potently symbolic terms. The contestation over coal’s changing materialities and meanings is the crucial site where the deep, largely unearthed, subterranean entwined political, economic and cultural potency of such an intersection is being laid bare most visibly.
In addition to drawing attention to the importance of humanities’ approaches to understanding and solving environmental challenges, EH also highlights that such challenges are transboundary in nature. Thus EH has been described as an inherently ‘interdisciplinary’ (Bergthaller et al., 2014: 264; Adamson and Davis, 2018), ‘transdisciplinary’ (Robin, 2018: 1), or even ‘post-disciplinary’ (Neimanis et al., 2015: 86–7) endeavor. As such, the disciplinary and methodological influences within EH have been presented in diverse and prolific ways. Thus having ‘persistent resistance to being pinned down’ has in many ways been EH’s defining quality (Hutchings, 2014: 213). Being in this fairly amorphous, not-yet clearly-defined, emergent and impure space, which is both its strength and weakness, has been challenging as an emerging scholar, and not without risks (see also Peterson, 2019). This has led me eventually to follow Rob Nixon’s (quoted in LeMenager, 2014: 2) advice – not to get bogged down in ‘defining’ what EH ‘is’ but become interested in what it ‘does’.

What is clear, is that the aims are to ‘jolt’ academics ‘out of disciplinary ruts and mindsets’ (Bergthaller et al 2014: 263), to ‘think flexibly across disciplinary borders’ as the ENHANCE ITN Grant Agreement states (Huggan et al., 2015: 114), in the service of making sense of complex environmental problems in an increasingly entangled, unbounded world that can no longer fit within neat, and in many ways arbitrary, academic disciplinary borders. This has given me freedom to work in a ‘spirit of experimentation’ (Bergthaller et al 2014: 267) of not so much mixed methods in my practice, but mixed ideas and concepts as tools for transdisciplinary engagement.

While contributing to far-right populist studies in their understudied intersection with the environment and its emotional experience through a postcolonial postsocialist ethnographic perspective, grounded in history in an EH frame, I thus deliberately, and by necessity, since my project sits at the intersection of largely understudied terrain, adopt a transdisciplinary approach. This means that literatures from anthropology, the political sciences, sociology, history, geography, gender studies, literary studies, psychology, cultural and environmental studies animate my thinking, yet always filtered through and mediated by the lived experience of my ethnographic fieldwork. The ethnography therefore perpetually grounds this study, while environmental (and energy) humanities orientates, though does not pre-determine, its line of questioning. The specifics

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4 One Environmental Humanities ‘manifesto’ (Holm et al., 2015) includes ‘philosophy, history, religious studies, gender studies, language and literary studies, psychology, and pedagogics’ in its list of candidates. Another foundational text from the Environmental Humanities’ first journal includes ‘environmental history, environmental philosophy, environmental anthropology and sociology, political ecology, posthuman geographies and eco-criticism (among others)’ (Rose et al., 2012: 1). A third overview of the origins of environmental humanities notes it came out of ‘literature, philosophy, history, geography, gender studies and anthropology’ (Nye et al., 2013: 3). While a final ‘state of the art’ article writes, ‘it is difficult to think of a single academic discipline that has not become engaged with the Environmental Humanities’ (Nye et al., 2013: 6).
of this orientation I will outline in my ‘embodied emotional ecology of labour’s politics’ approach in the next section.

Eric Wolff defined anthropology together with its hallmark method, ethnography, as ‘the most scientific of humanities, the most humanistic of sciences’ (Heyman, 2005: 14). Despite this, and even though anthropology has been listed as core to EH, and that core queries within EH, related to, for example, ‘social practices of environing’ (Bergthaller et al 2014: 266), ‘environmental imaginaries’ and ‘everyday practice’ (Neimanis et al., 2015: 81-2), as well as embodied ‘situated knowledge’ (Haraway, 2008) of environments as culturally and historically located, together with questions of values, meaning, customs etc. are textbook anthropological questions, ethnographic methods and qualitative, empirically-grounded studies are thus far less represented within EH scholarship, which is dominated more by ecocriticism and environmental history (Nye et al., 2013: 5), where ‘reading and writing… define the process of discovery’ (Bergthaller et al., 2014: 265). Ethnographic research, on the other hand, is defined by a practice of deeply immersive embodied inquiry (as well as of course reading and writing (Clifford and Marcus, 2008)). The lack of ethnographic and empirical studies within EH may be because, as Anna Tsing (2005: 4) notes, research within the narrowly defined ‘humanities’ and that of the ‘social sciences’ (a distinction which within EH is elided) can tend towards opposite poles. While the ‘humanities’ tends towards ‘universalist’ narratives and analysis, the social sciences tend towards the particular. This can create, however, a productive tension, prompting ethnographic enquiry to look up from its microscope and engage with macro-scale processes, including history (Eriksen, 2016a). This is what I attempt to also engage in. For to understand the broader currents and relevance, looking down and up are both required.

Robert M. Emerson (2011: 1) describes ethnographic research as involving ‘the study of groups and people as they go about their everyday lives… The ethnographer participates in the daily routines of this setting, develops ongoing relations with the people in it, and observes all the while what is going on (‘participant observation’). At the same time she ‘writes down in regular, systematic ways what she observes and learns while participating in the daily rounds of life of others’. It takes time to learn to see and experience differently. The production of knowledge of this social group is a ‘gradual process’, like the process of water boiling, as Falzon (2009: 7) describes it.

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5 In this way I join calls by two fellow anthropologically-trained PhD students in the ENHANCE ITN PhD network – Claire Lagier (2020) and Sarah Yoho (2020) – who both state the same in their ethnographically-based EH theses. Where ethnographic methods have been applied within EH, this has largely been within an explicitly more-than-human frame – eg multi-species ethnography (De Wolff, 2017; Kirksey, 2014; Tsing et al., 2019; Van Dooren et al., 2012).
– one I conceive of as a practice of radical compassion, of de-centring the self and its certainties as far as possible, shifting worldviews, and groping towards knowing through embodied social engagement. The aim, as far as possible, is to see the world through another’s eyes, by trying on that life on one’s own skin, so-to-speak, making the strange familiar, and the familiar strange. Echoing this, Lisa Stevenson (in Borneman and Hammoudi, 2009: 56) defines ethnographic research as a ‘practice of the self in which, in the interest of understanding another, we allow ourselves to be shaken, displaced from our customary dispositions and beliefs, even from our familiar ways of loving’. This is often short-handed in the notion of ‘being there’ (Borneman and Hammoudi, 2009; Hannerz, 2003). And as I experienced it, it can be a deeply existentially reordering process – indeed a shaking, a displacing.

As a result of this, ethnographic research is frequently referred to as ‘messy conceptual labour’ (Marcus, 2009: 11). It’s lack of neat and orderly structure and linearity for some constitute its primary fallacy, while its outputs – ‘tales of the field’ (Maanen, 1988) – can often be dismissed by more quantitative or survey-minded researchers as ‘mere anecdote’ (Herzfeld, 1987: 96) or ‘detail’ (Herzfeld, 2015). Yet, the primary worth of ethnographic data, whose material becomes ‘knowledge’ through a process of cultural initiation via one’s own being, lies precisely in its unique openness, responsiveness and precise attention to detail in the inchoate intricacies of life as it is lived, detail that can often be relegated as inconsequential by hidden systems of power, as Michael Herzfeld (2015) points out, detail that, in this way wrested into illumination, can then precisely unsettle that power and its modes of legitimate knowing. It is a method grounded deeply within everyday, banal, situated, lived experience, involving the creativity, experimentation and ongoing ‘figuring out’ (Fortun, 2009) of the researcher as an active constituent in its shaping and unfolding. As a result, as Kim Fortun (2009: 171) writes, research design in ethnography is ‘conceived as preparatory without being deterministic’ and this is ‘particularly important in ethnography since openness to what one encounters ‘in the field’ (however ‘the field’ is defined) is part of what makes ethnography a distinctive approach’, and is its core strength. In the words of Vered Amit (2000: 17) ‘To overdetermine fieldwork practices is […] to undermine the very strength of ethnography, the way in which it deliberately leaves openings for unanticipated discoveries and directions.’ As James Clifford (2008: 3) proposes, ethnographic research is thus always inherently inter (or trans-) disciplinary – a craft and art as science.

How did my fieldwork unfold? How did I come to fulfil the key hallmarks of ethnographic research – immersion and presence (Amit, 2000: 5) – in the everyday lives and practices of a
distinct set of people? On arriving in ‘the field’, I began the necessary process of actively co-
constructing it. As earlier alluded to, my personal interests shaped this fieldwork from the start – I
am a left-leaning, environmentally-minded, female, Western European raised and educated, half-
English, half-Polish, middle-class, EU-funded PhD scholar in an environmental humanities
programme. How did these ‘particular sensitivities’ and commitments (Emerson et al., 2011) affect
my choices and what I paid attention to? For a start, it made me wish to direct my research towards
giving visibility to those most marginalized and to scale ‘empathy walls’ (Hochschild, 2016) as
described. It also made me curious about the masculine world and sensitive to the embodied
relationality between East and West, nature and culture.

My initial line of enquiry – participant observation at a coal mine which I had arranged
through a prior scoping trip the year before – fell through, as I outline in the next chapter. This led
me to new openings and pathways, a rethinking based already on immersion. Spending the first
couple of months in Katowice, my starting point, the regional capital, I tried to make inroads into
coal miners’ worlds, while exploring the issue of smog. I wrote to a number of trade unions based at
various active coal mines owned by the main mining company, Polska Grupa Górnicza, introducing
myself and my research, which I explained was an EU-funded project about everyday life with coal,
and waited to see if anyone would respond. From around 15 initial emails, I received one reply.
Michał, a 31-year-old subsurface coal miner who was active in his union, was happy to help and
would become one of my main gatekeepers. One week later, in early April 2017, with the help of
my mother’s cousin’s wife’s brother-in-law (such are the networks of mutual aid and trust in
Poland), I had moved into a 4th-floor apartment with a miner’s ex-wife (a ‘suitably modern woman’
I was told, which I took to refer to her divorce and my own unmarried status as a 32-year-old
myself), in one of the socialist-era mine-built complexes which was directly attached to another
connected mine, but of the same style and form as those nearer to the mine I came to treat as my
base, and within the geographic minescape that would form my core research hub. From there, I
developed relations with Michał, a highly networked social character who was a trade union
volunteer, and Ryszard, a retired senior miner in his early 70s who was active as the head of one of
the local mine’s pensioner’s association, and who I had contacted through the group’s online
website. Although he was a mining engineer, so part of the ‘upstairs’ brains of the mine, he would
facilitate contacts for me with underground retirees. They would open the doors for me to further
contacts through their networks, which I explain in more detail below.
While the reader might imagine that living amongst and researching a coal mining ‘community’, I might have entered into a sort of timeless ‘close-knit’ and tightly geographically bound setting, so that ‘fieldwork’ might just be a matter of ‘getting there’ and simply ‘showing up’, this was far from the case. For ‘fieldwork is not what it used to be’ (Faubion and Marcus, 2009) (if ever it were otherwise) – as I discovered firsthand. Rather, I found myself right where I needed to be – in the fragmented, disjointed, disparate, loose jumble of reality, what I would come to make sense of through my participants’ eyes as the homely-unhomely postsocialist present. As I came to hear in countless reports, social networks were not as dense as they once were. Many did not live in closed-off communities right next to the coal mine as they once did under Communism (and before), though many workers still dwelt in the adjacent housing estates living increasingly privatized lives, like in the one I lived in. Increasingly mobility aided by private car ownership meant individuals drove to and from work from all manner of locations scattered near and far. While the coal mine acted as the central fixed locus point around which coal life, and my research, revolved, it did so in what participants increasingly reported to me, and I too experienced, in a disjointed and uneven way where privatized lives and schedules meant miners acted more like independent units that at times knotted together, rather than a once more spatially and temporally bound ‘group’ with a life in-common. Yet what embedded its location as a ‘place’ amidst segmented and dispersed lives was the social orientation towards it as a shared site of work (Hannerz, 2003: 209). As a result, and also because of the way that towns and villages spilled into one another in the Silesian agglomeration with very limited public transport or pavements to walk on, I too needed a car – and rented an early 1990s red Astra (which handily tempered ideas of my being a ‘wealthy’ Westerner – it was often spattered with filth) from the same mother’s cousin’s wife’s brother. This was not going to be a ‘classic ethnographic’ experience on foot or in a ‘village’.

6 Anthropologists and ethnographers have at least since the 1980s troubled the notion that ‘the field’, or ‘culture’ / ‘community’ is a bounded, given, pre-determined site of ‘natural’ investigation (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997; Marcus and Fischer, 1999). Based on the ‘Malinowski paradigm’ or ‘complex’, as George Marcus (2011: 26) calls it, the idea that ethnographic research takes place in a bounded, single, given setting, with holistic ambitions has been challenged and discredited. As Matei Candea (in Falzon 2009: 197) writes ‘Even when they thought they were studying geographically bounded sites, anthropologists were in fact studying and contributing to processes of siting’ - or ‘locality as process’ (Appadurai, 1996). In practice ‘fields are always made, are never ‘natural’, and never exist outside of our engagement with them: there is a process of active ‘choosing and constituting’ that takes place to construct ‘communities’ and places, which are always ‘in development – displaced, recombined and hybrid’ (Coleman and Von Hellermann, 2011: 3). More so, as Vered Amit (2000: 34-5) writes, ‘any local context is always intrinsically multi-sited’ - even in a ‘village’. 

63
As had always been the case, but more so in a globalized, overheated world (Eriksen, 2016a),
‘the field’ therefore required intensely active construction (Amit, 2000). As a result, I came to
conceptualise my research as not taking place in an apparently pre-laid bounded setting, such as a
‘town’, or specific neighbourhood, which never seemed the right designation, nor as ‘multi-sited’
(Marcus, 1999, 2011), which, with its referral to spatially and temporally dispersed locations did not
capture it either, but across and through a ‘minescape’. Arjun Appadurai (1990: 29–30) first coined
the use of ‘scapes’ as a mode of investigating the ‘complex overlapping, disjunctive order’ of
contemporary global cultural flows. Drawing on photographer Ed Burtynsky’s use of the term,
Melina Ey and Meg Sherval (2016) propose the concept of the ‘minescape’, as opposed to the ‘mine
site’. Whereas the latter determines a purely technical or economic designation, and bounded in a
closed off setting, the former draws attention to the ‘ways in which extractive processes are imbued
with complex socio-cultural dynamics, and powerful material and discursive elements’ (Ey and
Sherval, 2016: 176), that I would emphasise shift beyond the ‘site’ itself. Following from this
Jessica K. Graybill (2019) has used the concept of ‘minescape’ to explore the ‘emotional
environments of energy extraction’ in Russia. Likewise, Della Bosca and Gillespie (2018) deploy
the ‘minescape’ concept to call for ‘greater acknowledgement’ of the role of emotion in extractive
processes in Australia. Similarly, I paid attention to material-discursive, embodied emotional
ecologies of the minescape in my research setting, as I return to in the next section.

The coal mine I based myself around was itself over a century old. For purposes of trying to
protect the anonymity of my participants, I do not name it or the local town it lay on the peripheries
of, once an important industrial centre under Communism. Its security-gated territory formed the
off-limits centre of its own jumbled spatial geography of old-style red-brick housing, out-houses,
administrative buildings, car parks, kiosks, convenience store, cafeteria, bar, a leisure centre,
medical centre, and community centre a few hundred metres away. A tall blue mine shaft, red and
white painted chimney and zig-zagging slopes of the processing plant, and various gray box-shaped
administrative buildings on the surface were what was visible to the eye from the outside. Most of
the mining activity of course took place below. This was to be one of my main challenges – how

7 Mark-Anthony Falzon (2009: 6) refers to the ‘conventional idea of a fieldwork site’ as a ‘walking one.. a
place (a village or urban neighbourhood) across which one could walk comfortably in a day’s work...[but] this
accepted practice became increasingly problematic’ in a mobile, complex world. Likewise Ulf Hannerz (2009:
197; 273) writes that ‘Once upon a time... anthropological fieldwork was basically pedestrian’ i.e. carried out
on foot. But with the rise of concepts like ‘globalization’ and ‘world system’ etc in 1990s, the ‘long march of
anthropology’ shifted the practice, which should be seen not as a discontinuity but an adaptation to the times.
was I, a female, and without direct access to the masculine subterranean world of work, going to carry out research about coal mine labour with male miners?

This was largely thanks to both Michał and Ryszard. Michał introduced me to his trade union team, and my fieldwork thus began as initially regular visits to the trade union office, where I would sit listening in on conversations and talk to the reps and miners who would frequently drop in to resolve an issue, sign up for an activity, or simply to vent spleen and complain – a core function of the union that I came to appreciate as paramount. I did not get involved in ‘official’ trade union business – this world was barred to me both as a woman and a foreigner. Such conversations would take place behind closed doors. I was more interested in the social life of the trade union office and its members in any case. At the trade union office, and through participating in a number of holiday trips, I forged connections that then would take me into homes and social spaces and started to insert myself into the everyday lives of workers, current and retired, as much as I could, I also carried on researching the smog issue from mine-adjacent residents’ perspectives, as I will later describe. Ryszard also introduced me to people, understanding I was keen to speak mostly with subsurface miners.

My networks were aided along by my, early on, accompanying outings organised by the trade union I had attached myself to, including in total three week-long holidays to the seaside and the mountains. This gave me a chance to spend time with both retired and current miners and their families in a relaxed setting, and through this I developed relations with participants who, on return, I would visit in their homes too, opening up broader networks and contacts. Every day I showed up and took part in one or more kinds of social activities, when not working with the issue of smog (which I will return to). I wrote daily field notes of my numerous conversations, interactions and observations – resulting in around a thousand pages of typed field notes, and 3 notebooks of handwritten text. I went to the gym, went swimming, and went food shopping with miner participants and their families. I took part in recreational activities such as football with their kids and running challenges. I drank tea, helped prepare meals and pickled cabbage, and ate a lot of cake and sausages. In return, with some participants, I helped their children with English language learning, and even gave a presentation at their school on English culture. I shovelled coal and helped light coal stoves in multiple homes, and helped one retired coal miner deliver coal to his clients in his pick-up truck. Additional activities I took part in were traditional mining galas, ceremonies (such as December 4th St Barbara’s Day, the patron saint of miners), informal and trade-union led social gatherings, May Day celebrations, numerous barbecues, mushroom picking, and even one miner’s
funeral. At the end of my fieldwork, at the St. Barbara’s day event, I was ceremonially awarded a medal by the trade union for my ‘services’ – which I took as a sign of my successful integration into the fold as ‘one of us’, but also a double-edged gift – one that reminded me that in return, as ethnographic fieldwork always entails, I owed my reciprocity of representing their plight. For a core theme that resounded was the dissatisfaction, anger, shame of the contemporary coal scene.

I presented myself always as a researcher with EU funding, who was interested in everyday life with coal. I chose to approach people with this open question, not to put my interest in pollution, or issues like smog or climate change, upfront so as not to alienate myself or impose categories. Instead the more relevant language of labour, the body, health in living and working with coal became key entry points. I also did not explicitly ‘reveal’ my personal leanings towards environmentalism. This was not a form of duplicity, for if they asked me I was always open and honest. But I knew that such ideas would prevent access and rapport. I made sure to gain ongoing consent for participation at all times. My participants had their suspicions as to my ‘green’ insides, as a result of the conversations about smog and climate change I might bring up or pursue, but I stressed that my interest was in their perspective and learning what they had to say about these matters. As a result of my openness, and willingness to listen, and engage, as well as thanks to my own background as a half-Polish Westener on my mother’s side, I developed trusting relations with participants, and through the social networked approach I took to finding participants, for example, for interviews, through my gatekeepers, I came sealed with a pre-approved stamp of trust.

This was also how I managed to get around the fact that I am an unmarried female and wanted to research male perspectives – both Michał and Ryszard, helped enormously by introducing me to their contacts as a sort of extended member of family – a kind of cousin/sister/niece/family friend (which in the Polish language is possible). This meant I was less ‘threatening’ to wives or girlfriends, who at times viewed me with suspicion or skepticism, and was more ‘safe’ as a non-sexualized subject who was ‘protected’ under a man’s wing. Although initially I was nervous about going to unknown men’s houses alone to conduct conversations and interviews, as I would in any context, I never felt unsafe. There was a high degree of codes of honour, respectability and hospitality instead. Although I spent time with women and female workers too, I primarily focus on the male experience. This can be regarded as a weakness- but my decision was based on the fact that being a highly masculinist industry, holding male working-class labour as deeply historically economically, culturally and symbolically central, and given its entanglement with rising far-right populism with its own masculinist agenda, I was particularly interested in how
male workers were navigating this terrain. Of course the perspectives of women are critically important, also as a way to challenge the invisibility of women in mining worlds, which my study unfortunately does not do – that would be a further line of inquiry to pursue and way to put some of my materials to use, for I spent time with women too. But fundamentally that would also be a different study.

In my fieldwork experience, choices were both made by serendipity – pushing on doors that opened, such as when Michał responded to my email and I moved down to live near the mine, or when I happened on the idea of joining trade union excursions to the seaside or mountains – and by continued ‘looping’ reflexive choices in the field – a process whereby ‘observation’, and so decisions, lines of questioning, ‘proceeds iteratively’ (Fortun, 2009: 74). For example, in speaking to both residents and workers I noticed how ubiquitous were the notions of dirt, dust and micro-particles of coal’s presence, both in accounts of regional history and present politics and lifeworld. Being in Silesia, and breathing in Silesia, initially led me to follow where and when the bodily act of breathing brought humans and coals into contact, into touch. These defined the spaces which first drew my interest – the subterranean coal mine world, the home, the air. Initially through the lens of breathing, and through my environmental humanities frame, I came to a focus on the materiality of dirt and dust – I followed the dirt. This was both because dirt was a highly salient social object for my participants, and because my eyes were trained for thinking through embodied naturecultures. But I also opened up space to simply follow the social life of my participants and their relation to coal more broadly. I learnt about the resonance of PiS’s kind of populist politics not primarily from asking people directly what they thought ‘about’ them or whether they voted for them, although I did that too. I spent time with them. I listened to them. I heard what they did and did not say. I also observed what they did and did not do, taking part in social life in ways that were available to me.

In this way it was a backwards-and-forwards navigation of the emic and etic, the insider and outsider view. Dirt, however, was a crucial element of coal mining life – as Tomasz Rakowski (2016: 22) in his work with Lower Silesian bootleg miners also discovered. He describes how initially he felt it impossible to ‘discern what should really be of interest’ to him, yet gradually, where initially he failed to pay attention to things like dirty clothes, or dust, the cleanliness of social order, he developed the ability to ‘see’ anew – only later, did he start to pay attention to these matters. Seeing the dirt as socially salient enabled him to realise he was acquiring skills, developing local knowledge. For me, one of the first such moments, was when I accompanied miners and their families on a trade-union organised trip to the Baltic coast, learning that breathing and escaping dirt...
were central to such practices (see chapter five). Through this experience I learnt just how central coal’s pollutions, understood emically as dust and dirt, were to shaping subjectivities, lifeworlds, social organisation, and cultural means of learning to live in Silesia. I started to ‘see’ it anew. Cleanliness and dirt expressed a repeating central tension of Silesian life, outlined again in more detail in my embodied emotional ecology of labour’s politics approach in the next section. Comparison and complaint were also key themes. The constant act of comparison between now and then (past and present), here and there (East and West) accompanied my research experience. This drew my attention to the ambivalence and disorientation of contemporary postsocialist life, themes that had also been part of my masters research on rural change in southern Poland (Allen, 2014). These started to be threads I would pull upon to see further,

Many miners I spoke to preferred to remain anonymous – after all they were often telling me about issues related to health and safety and its reported lack, matters that could cost them their jobs. This was a core theme. All names are changed in this text as a result, and key identifying factors altered while maintaining integrity to the experience. Conducting formal ‘interviews’ was a challenge – not everyone liked the idea of being recorded and considering it needed to be arranged in a private context, aligning with busy constantly changing schedules that were often concerned with childcare too in a pre-set way was difficult. As ethnographers know, people often also cancel, or postpone, or fail to show up, or half way through need to leave. Despite this, I conducted a total of 15 semi-structured full-length interviews about working life with coal at people’s houses, resulting in around 50 hours of audio recording, which was later transcribed and hand-coded. I found that this was enough to reach saturation point (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 61; Namey, 2017), for coal stories do carry a certain hegemonic and homogenizing structure to them. This is particularly so as these interviews supplement my findings from my participant observation, rather than are treated as stand-alone or ‘core’ ‘data’. They are thus ethnographic interviews – deeply woven and embedded into the context of my long-term immersion.

My insights are indeed built fundamentally on the many conversations and participant observations in the social and family life of mining. Unable to participate in coal mining labour itself directly, again as a female and as an untrained outsider, I listened to countless hours of narratives and descriptions of it, becoming interested primarily in how miners felt about doing the

8 See Emily Namey’s (2017) online article ‘Riddle me this: How many interviews (or focus groups) are enough?’ for an insightful review of attempts to answer this precise question within qualitative scholarship. Drawing on this literature review, she finds that ‘6-12 interviews seem to be a sweet spot for the number of qualitative interviews needed to reach saturation’.
kind of work they did, how they narrated it, and how work shaped the way they saw their wider lives. Thus I rely a lot on discursive representation here, but I ground that within a phenomenologically-inflected enquiry by paying attention to the body and its non-verbal cues and affects during interviews, conversations and encounters, as much as pursuing lines of enquiry that focused on bodily aspects of mine work, especially health, which was a key area of concern for miners. It was also supplemented by my own physical access to the mine eventually—which I refer to below. I held this within an EH orientation towards how coal’s material presence showed up—but I did not need to force the matter; coal’s labours were deeply ecologically entangled, and dirt’s ubiquity and presence was a key symbolic, cultural and social index as my thesis will show.

It would take me nine months to negotiate access to the mine itself once again—which I did eventually do, through Ryszard’s help and connections. Towards the end of my fieldwork experience, in October 2017, I spent a month rotating through different surface-departments (processing plant, laundry and washrooms, lamp-room (equipment distribution centre), health and safety trainings, geology department, administration etc.), and participated in three trips below ground where I walked through the subterranean landscape and rode the underground train accompanied by a health and safety inspector, visited the coal face, saw the combine machines and miners working and witnessed coal being excavated. I had to sign a disclaimer form with the mining company, who appeared nervous about my EU connections, however, that I would not write about this period explicitly in my thesis. They were anxious that I wanted to write negative things about coal. This itself highlighted the fraught relation to an ‘EU’ gaze. As a result, I do not directly write about this experience, though, again, it of course informed my understanding of working life with coal, and since it took place almost at the end of my field experience, vividly enacted for me many of the things I had been told by miners in my prior conversations. At the same time, by this point I was in any case wary of getting too ‘close’ to coal mine management, since I had aligned my research more centrally with sub-surface workers and their concerns.

Interested in following coal’s dirt as a socioecological object through the minescape, I also carried out research with nearby residents who were concerned about smog. This included attending local smog information meetings organised by the town council, as well as local actors, spending time in their homes, accompanying people in their anti-smog activities (such as leafletting and educating on efficient methods of coal-burning) and also spending time online on Facebook groups about the issue, where most of the activism and activity was taking place. This part of my research I started already in Katowice, as mentioned. In this way I carried out ‘relational ethnography’
(Desmond, 2014) - across two groups who are related in terms of the social field, and positioned antagonistically, but not necessarily spatially coterminous though in my case they lived cheek by jowl. I spent around a third of my total time with ‘smog’ people, and two-thirds within the mining community. On the topic of smog, I conducted around 12 in-depth semi-structured interviews with self-selected residents ‘actively concerned’ about the matter, who I recruited through call out on a local smog-related Facebook groups. Again, I found that this was enough to reach saturation point. It generated another 50 hours or so of audio material which was transcribed, and I later hand-coded multiple times for themes. While originally I had intended to divide my time, attention and loyalties equally, I grew disorientated by this perpetual ethical and social tension, including afterwords while writing up, and, increasingly drawn to understand working-class coal life as a less researched matter, came more to make sense of my encounters with smog residents as framing the context through which class itself, populism, coal and pollution, are co-constructed as the background ‘atmosphere’ of everyday life.

On return from ‘the field’, a new kind of work awaited. Processing and shifting through the substantial amount of materials I had gathered. I began by re-reading my fieldnotes as a whole corpus, before coding them using NVivo software, primarily as a way to organise them in a manageable form. Coding involved an inductive process of line-by-line reading, generating emerging codes, or thematic categories that referred to the significance of events or descriptions to the social scene (Emerson et al., 2011: 175). This led to a proliferation of themes, ‘leading in many different directions’, suggesting a ‘myriad of possible issues and questions’ standard to qualitative coding (Emerson et al., 2011: 185). I had my interviews (over 100 hours’ worth in total) transcribed – and these I coded by hand too. This whole process took around 7 months. I went through an emergent and iterative process of choosing core themes constantly reflecting back on my embodied experiences, memories and issues that had struck me as significant while correlating those with core emerging concepts. In this way the coding experience was an intuitive, interpretative and iterative ‘dialectical interplay between theory and data’ (Emerson et al., 2011: 198). I used the Swedish seminar structure as a place to start generating initial ideas around chapters, and wrote multiple theses outlines – always coming back to recurring issues. The process of reflecting, digesting, and analysing has been an ongoing cumulative and evolving process.

It became clear to me that I needed to find a way to write about how coal life and far-right populism intersected early on. It was a constant backdrop and context of my fieldwork experience and encounter. And yet, looking back, I see how I hesitated. I worried about fuelling anti-coal miner
sentiment. I worried that it would show them in a stereotypical or negative light or that the reverse, my work would be taken out of context or misread to bolster far-right narratives. Truth be told, I also worried about myself. What would my social and professional world make of an empathic engagement? What would anti-PiS, anti-coal friends and contacts in Poland think? Would this expel me from any senses of my own belonging? I also felt I lacked tools with which to think these things together. The environmental-energy humanities did not offer them at the time. But there was a nagging sense that I was de-centring the obvious. As fieldwork tends to, it caught up with me.

I was also aided by the fact that these themes were starting to be looked at by others I came into contact with. Any anxieties about contributing to stereotypes, or of confronting my own political views more forcefully, were allayed by a number of key activities I participated in in 2019 that helped my thinking along. Firstly, the scholar Andreas Malm invited me to participate in a co-authored journal article on the intersections of far-right party politics and climate change in Europe. This turned into a collective book project, though led by Andreas Malm, which became, as part of the Zetkin Collective (an emerging network of researchers working on the far-right environment intersection) the title *White Skin, Black Fuel* (Malm and the Zetkin Collective, 2021). For this I contributed texts on the cultural marxist conspiracy theory and on Poland, though not of the ethnographic kind. In June 2019, by chance, while a visiting student at the Rachel Carson Centre at Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich, Germany, I participated in a workshop I stumbled across on ‘Anthropologists struggling with neo-nationalism and authoritarianism: Challenges for ethnography in turbulent times’. This gave me a much needed exposure to peers of ethnographers working in relatable, though often even more ‘extreme’ settings, and helped me make connections and join dots I had not previously been able to. Then, together with the Zetkin Collective, Andreas Malm at the Human Ecology division of Lund University, and also Martin Hultman at the Centre for Studies of Climate Change Denial (CEFORCED) at Chalmers University, I also helped co-organize a conference on the Political Ecologies of the Far Right held in Lund, Sweden in November 2019, which attracted 400 scholars and activists too to discuss this emerging terrain. An edited volume I am a co-editor of with the same title will be published by Manchester University Press next year. During that year, and since, a number of papers and special journal issues were published that helped provide further conceptual tools to think through this under-studied

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9 This workshop, which took place 27-28th June 2019, was organized by Alexandra Schwell (LMU Munich), Patrick Wielowiejski (HU Berlin) and Stefan Wellgraf (Hamburg University) within the framework of the dgworking group ‘Europeanization Globalization. Ethnographies of the Political’, in cooperation with the Department of Intercultural Communication at LMU Munich and the Petra Kelly Foundation. See: https://www.ikk.uni-muenchen.de/download/call-for-participation.pdf
intersection. I was enabled to make sense of my fieldwork data anew once again, putting it in conversation with theoretical engagements and transdisciplinary texts that had formed the basis of my EH training and beyond to shape the chapters you read today. Having had more distance between myself and the fieldwork, and my participants, was also productive, because it enabled me to see with broader macro-scale vision too. In this way, the thesis has been a constantly evolving, living, breathing document.

**The embodied emotional ecology of labour’s politics:**

If Environmental Humanities emerged out of a recognition that environmental issues are thoroughly social, cultural and political, not just technical and scientific, and that they also require transdisciplinary modes of enquiry to address, the third key contribution that Environmental Humanities as a research field offers is the insight that what is considered ‘human’ and what is considered ‘nature’ can no longer be regarded as separate, but, in the time of the Anthropocene, if not always, they are deeply entangled and enmeshed. Thus a further key starting point, or orientation, for environmental humanities research is a recognition that ‘things other than humans make a difference in the way social relations unfold’ (Bakker and Bridge, 2006: 17-18); that the human is ‘constitute[d] through and with other species’ (Heise et al., 2016: 5) as well as minerals, geologies and matters. Thus it refers to paying particular attention to the ‘posthuman’ way that nature and culture are not separate entities but entangle with one another to generate an emergent world, informed particularly by materialist feminist thinking (Alaimo and Hekman, 2008).

My thesis explores what I call the embodied emotional ecology of labour’s micro-politics to make sense of the situated sociocultures of far-right populist ascendency (Kojola, 2019) As such, it draws inspiration from energy humanities scholar Matt Huber’s (2015) ‘ecology of politics’, and environmental humanities scholar Stefania Barca’s (2018, see also 2012, 2014) ‘ecology of labour’ approaches, within an environmental-energy humanities frame. Taking a relational posthuman-informed approach to naturecultures, in which the sensuous and physical properties of coal’s substance in its ‘resource environment’ participate in the making of human subjectivities, identities and worldviews, rather than staying passive and inert (Weszkalnys and Richardson, 2014), I specifically pay attention to its embodiment, or ‘how subjectivities are shaped by the experience of acting in, on and through the physical body’ (Bakker and Bridge, 2006: 6).

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10 I would like to particularly acknowledge the Mistra SEED Box Environmental Humanities programme based at Linköping University for shaping my thinking on posthuman approaches.
The posthumanism I engage with is, however, ‘light touch’. Due to ethnographic engagement with participants whose concerns are acutely pressing, I have remained humanist to a large degree – but with a re-centred attention to matters of matter because they were appropriate, relevant and important for my participants own sense of their world. Posthumanism and anthropological ethnographic enquiry can be awkward companions. Anthropology has the anthros, the human, at the root of its object of study. Posthumanism, on the other hand, seeks to overcome anthropocentric modes of understanding the world, and de-centre the human into its rightful and humble place in a lively more-than-human world (Neimanis et al., 2015). Yet, Christopher Howard (2017), quoting Serres, argues that ‘A posthuman world does not imply abandoning anthropology’s principle subject, but rather resituating the human in a ‘logic of relations”. In this way the anthros becomes ‘re’, if not fully ‘de’-centred. Similarly, Alan and Josephine Smart’s (2017) overview of posthumanism and anthropology, proposes that what posthumanism can do for anthropology, which has always been interested in the human-more-than-human relation, is provide a corrective to any unrelexive anthropocentrism, by highlighting how ‘being human ’has always entailed being ‘more than human’.

Likewise energy humanities scholar Dominic Boyer (2014: 191–3), retaining caution with regards to the extent that anthropology and posthumanism should and can fuse, dubs posthumanism the ‘anti-anthropocentric turn’. However, he fears that such an emphasis could ‘dismiss inquiry into human reason and agency’ at a time when, in the Anthropocene, ‘the more pressing need’ may be to ‘acknowledge the new magnitudes of [human] agency and demand responsibility for them’. At the same time he acknowledges that in the history of anthropology’s patchy engagement with energy, the recent posthuman turn has been the electric current that has revived it as a central object of study. It has spotlighted that ‘to do anthropology today means to be more attentive to matters of force, flow, matter, and charge alongside its more traditional coordinates’. In the context of my research, this informed my focus on how coal-and-humans interact, particularly through the body.

Starting then from this light-touch relational perspective too, Matt Huber (2015: 487) makes the case for greater engagement with energy as a social phenomenon, starting not from a ‘political ecology’ perspective, which he argues has historically tended to analyse struggles and contestations surrounding an empirical and separate object called ‘nature ’ ‘out there’ 12, but from an ‘ecology of

11 See Eunice Blavascunas (2017) and Shu-mei Shih (2012) for ethical consideration of applying posthuman lenses to locations where subjects have been historically denied inclusion in the full category ‘human’ - specifically the (postcolonial) postsocialist context.
12 Though this dualist perspective is changing with the influence of concepts such as naturecultures (Haraway, 2008), hybrid natures (Latour, 1993; Swyngedouw, 2006), second nature (Smith, 1984), and cyborg
politics’ point of view, which takes as given that politics are ‘always already ecological’ – that is, shot through, embedded in and tangled up with ecological relations. Huber (2013) has taken this approach and applied it to the way that practices of oil consumption in the US have fundamentally informed and shaped political subjectivities, particularly notions of the American way of life and its entrepreneurialism. He starts to point to the potential for this kind of ‘ecology of politics’ approach in relation to far-right populism with the example of the US Tea Party movement. ‘Not many would classify the US Tea Party as an ‘environmental social movement’, he writes,

Yet the popular forces of Tea Party politics come out of their own lived ecologies – rural and suburban landscapes, commodified access to food and energy and other material aspects of social reproduction, and, perhaps, an avid appreciation for outdoor (gun-based) recreation. Thus, an ecological analysis of Tea Party politics must examine the socioecological relations underpinning their specific political subjectivities – neoliberal ideologies of freedom, competition, and entrepreneurship and hatred of government and taxes (Huber 2015: 487).

He finishes by calling for such a lens to focus particularly on the matter of energy. My thesis picks up from his material-ecological, energy and far-right concerns.

In my thesis, I engage with the matter of coal and its emotional intersectional politics through a predominant focus on male workers’ embodied ecologies, including their atmospheres in smoggy times. Stefania Barca (2010, 2012a, 2012b, 2014, 2015, 2016; Barca and Leonardi, 2018) has pioneered the incorporation of notions of labour and class into political ecological and environmental history analysis of human-nature relations. Most recently she has also led calls to bring those key concepts into environmental humanities – a field in which, she rightly states, the concepts are rarely found, reflecting a wider abandonment of the concepts of class in social theoretical analysis (Barca 2018: 25), but also, I would add, a tendency within EH to work in parallel to empirically-grounded political economic, or classically sociological, concerns due to its posthuman/anti-anthropocentric turn\textsuperscript{13}. Barca takes inspiration from material ecofeminist ecologies (Haraway, 1985; Swyngedouw, 2006).

\textsuperscript{13} A case in point is Jennifer Hamilton’s (2015) entry to the Living Lexicon for Environmental Humanities hosted by the Environmental Humanities journal on ‘Labour’. For Hamilton ‘labour’ and ‘class’ seem to be separable concepts; indeed the word ‘class’ is notable for its absence. Instead, reflecting core posthuman concerns of environmental humanities, the validity and usefulness of the concept of ‘labour’ for the interdisciplinary field she believes lies in ‘radically expand[ing] the definition of labour required to sustain the current system’ - thus to move from human to include more-than-human labour, such as that of plants, animals, machines, minerals and elements. This is a highly worthy trajectory, yet I would suggest that traditional concerns of ‘labour’ related to concepts of class remain highly potent and valid terms of analysis too that require not abandonment as perhaps quintessentially ‘anthropocentric’, but re-ecologizing, as Stefania Barca proposes.
environmental humanities by focusing on the lived experiences of working-class labour of their environment and how this informs and moulds their embodied subjectivities, identities, personhood and ecological and political consciousness more broadly and vice versa. This material-feminist EH approach informs my own work and how I paid attention and to what during fieldwork, though as I outline above, with a light touch. Yet necessarily departing from Stefania Barca’s focus on progressive environmental justice, and the working-classes as under-recognized subjects of such a movement, I instead draw attention to how ‘working-class environmentalism’ (Barca, 2012; see also Cristiano, 2018; Barca and Leonardi, 2018), also in intersectional terms, can move in the opposite direction, towards far-right populisms, and why.

As Martin Ryle and Kate Soper (2016: 119; 121) point out, labour and work are a site that has a ‘fundamentally formative influence on the individual’s subjectivity, intellect and worldview’ and therefore should be brought into ecological analysis. This is particularly the case for the Silesian-Polish masculine working-classes, for whom the body has been their prime form of physical and cultural capital and which more immediately is exposed to, engaged with, and co-produced by material environments ‘at the coal face’, so-to-speak. While nature and culture are entangled up with all human-more-than-human lives, for a growing proportion of people in the Global North these entanglements are increasingly invisibilized (Plumwood 2008). Countering the ‘work’ vs ‘environment’ dichotomy, scholars such as Richard White (1995), Don Mitchell (1996) and Stefania Barca (2014) too have demonstrated, working-class labourers are usually those most intimately bound up with, and exposed to, ecologies through their work that is usually bodily in nature (in both senses). As the next chapter will refer to, Eastern European workers are also disproportionately represented in such kinds of work. Val Plumwood (2008) calls this discrepancy the growing division between ‘mind people and body people’, and it can, in the context of my thesis, map onto the contradictions and tensions populists frame as between dirty ‘elites’ and pure ‘people’. For ‘proximity to dirt... constitutes a divide between those who have little choice in the jobs they do and those who can withdraw from whatever bears traces of contamination and impurity’ (Slutskaya et al., 2016: 168). Again, this can be insightfully looked at through the coal-eyed view prism of mind and body. This ecological positionality experienced through the body, including the embodiment of the contradictions of capitalism, shapes intersectional identities and their emotions in under-examined relational more-than-human ways.

For the purposes of this thesis, contrary to how class has often been understood in the postsocialist East in terms of social stratification related to separable occupational and income
positions’ in society (Ost, 2015), I understand class ethnographically as a lived social and ecological relation to structures of unequal power that is constantly in the process of being defined and produced, experienced and expressed most acutely particularly through the body. Class is both a position within a system of production in a Marxist sense, and it is also a relation of social status, in the Weberian tradition. Furthermore, it is also related to cultural and symbolic capital, in the Bourdieusian definition, where education and access to cultural legitimacy and respectability are key to class experience (see Bell, 2020 who takes a similar perspective). Thus the traditional definition of working class as male blue-collar wage labour in productive industries, which this thesis necessarily engages with, is expanded through Stefania Barca’s (2018: 33) extended definition of the working class in ecological terms: ‘people who make a living out of their metabolic interchange with nature, under conditions of social subordination and dispossession, and who fight the ecological contradictions of capitalism’.

With this ecological outline of class in mind, the body becomes the key locus point through which labour’s ecological politics shows up. For class can be understood as an inflection of embodiment, socially concretized in what Pierre Bourdieu calls the ‘habitus’. Industrial life for manual workers is an especially deeply ‘physical existence’ (Connorton in Gilfillan, 2011: 173) through which the contradictions of capitalism and its power relations are expressed and experienced. Charlesworth (2000: 27) writes that for the working-classes, the centrality of embodied habit is of crucial importance to making sense of their world – including, the ways that that ‘sense of habit stresses determination by their environment’. This relation is elemental and corporeal. For this reason, Stefania Barca (2014: 11) argues that workers’ bodies should be understood as ‘meta-texts where the political ecology of industrial societies [have] been written’. Stacy Alaimo (2010: 43) deploys the image of the ‘proletarian lung’ to exemplify her notion of ‘transcorporeality’ - the idea that ‘the human body is never a rigidly enclosed, protected entity, but is vulnerable’, and is therefore deeply situated in the ‘nature/culture’ network: ‘simultaneously real, like nature, narrated, like discourse, and collective, like society’. Quoting biologists Richard Lewontin and Richard Lewins, Alaimo stresses that: ‘Evidently your body knows your class position no matter how well you have been taught to deny it’. As a result, studies that have focused on industrial working-class experience have often foregrounded the body (Barca, 2014; Charlesworth, 2000; Kideckel, 2008; Rakowski, 2016; Valisena and Armiero, 2017). This is particularly so in the postsocialist context, in which the body becomes the new individualized locus for the distressing traumas of its implications, as participants’ accounts revealed (corroborated also by Kideckel, 2008;
Rakowski, 2016). This, however, is experienced, and narrated, as due to their Polish identity. Class issues are expressed in terms of national identity. But that is perhaps because national identity in the case of Poland at the European scale is often an experience of class.

As earlier mentioned, I primarily (though not only) focus on one particular characteristic of working-class ecology, and its metabolic interchange with nature as a pervasive social object around and through which shifting contemporary concerns, emotions, affects, and embodied subjectivities and identities crystallize and coalesce – the presence of dust or dirt and its embodiment. ‘It is already on the level of particles such as dust…that we encounter political dilemmas of inclusion and exclusion, exposure and security’, writes Jussi Parikka (2012: 1). For dust carries an affective force that ‘sticks’ to specific bodies – particularly as ‘dirt’. ‘Dirty’ work has long been associated with the lower classes, as well as often men in the context of manual and manufacturing, and suitability for such work is usually determined through recourse to class-based (and also racialized-national, gender, ethnicity-based) embodied identities (Kreiner et al., 2006; Simpson et al., 2011; Simpson and Simpson, 2018; Slutskaya et al., 2016). Yet its meaning has changed with time. Indeed, ‘dirty work’ today has been defined as ‘tasks, occupations and/or roles that are likely to be perceived as disgusting or degrading’ (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999: 413). Through the stigma attached to dirt, these occupations can be either physically, socially and/or morally tainted (Ashforth and Kreiner, 2014b), with moral taint carrying the worst affective load. Workers come to personify the work they do by becoming perceived as socially ‘dirty’ themselves. In postsocialist coal country in Silesia, this is a relatively new experience, becoming part of the current class system in the making in intersectional terms. It also extends beyond the realm of work to encompass everyday practices and relations with coal in the domestic and social spheres.

The embodied dimensions of material dirt and its attributed meanings are crucial to understanding how such work is actively made sense of, negotiated and perceived by those who undertake it, yet have tended to be overlooked in this context (Ashforth and Kreiner, 2014a, 2014b; Kreiner et al., 2006; Simpson et al., 2011, 2012, 2016; Simpson and Simpson, 2018; Slutskaya et al., 2016; Thiel, 2007). This includes the ‘significance of the identity characteristics of those involved (e.g. based on gender, class, race)’ (Simpson et al., 2016: 1). In the context of my research, the identity characteristics of miners – working-class, masculine, Silesian-Polish, and increasingly reflexively White – are central to how engaging with increasingly-perceived-as-‘dirty’ coal is here experienced and made sense of in the context of Europe too. In turn, the sensuous materiality of coal’s dirt – its sticky, greasy, and hard-to-scrub-off texture, as much as the bodily experiences of
coal mine life that strain and pain muscles and bones and fill lungs with dusty air – underpin the
way that coal and its work and touch are encountered, and, in turn, how the wider world is then
made sense of through its embodied encounter too. Materiality, morality, value and notions of
modernity are deeply entwined. The material matter of dirt is tangled up with symbolic and
discursive narratives that stick to dirt-entwined bodies in emotive ways – for like mud, indeed
through it, shame ‘sticks’ (Connor, 2001). Thus, while this thesis may be at risk of reifying the
notion that it is ‘angry white men’ or ‘disgruntled working-classes’ that are the root cause of
national populist revival (though I hope it does not), it is rather that I seek to show how class,
intersecting with other intersectional identities through the ecologically-entangled body, ‘turns up’
so-to-speak in banal industrial populism – how it can come to form the grounds of experience in
immediate connection to environments that causes emotional politicized resonance to occur, with
entirely different diagnoses.

In particular, my thesis focuses on the ways that coal’s material dirt, through the issue of air
pollution or ‘smog’ and the labour of mining, becomes an affective carrier and marker of stigma and
class-based shame that sticks to certain subjects and makes them stick together too in fraught and
constructing ways through a visceral emotional, affective politics that numerous scholars have
designated central to populism’s contemporary form. As Sarah Ahmed (2004: 117) writes, emotions
‘work to align some subjects with some others, and against other others’. They do so by ‘sticking
figures together (adherence), a sticking that creates the very effect of a collective (coherence); thus
they ‘bind subjects together’ (Ahmed, 2004: 119). For her it is hatred in particular that binds the
white subject and nation together in the politics of white nationalism: ‘Together we hate, and this
hate is what makes us together’. Likewise, she interrogates a ‘global economy of fear’ as securing
(national) collectives against the figure of the terrorist. In this way the emotional is not individual,
but forms an ‘affective economy’ in which emotions mediate ‘across the social and psychic field’
(Ahmed, 2004: 120) and materialize the surfaces of worlds and bodies too. However, I propose that
in the context of coal country in Poland, it is that toxic substance shame – about being Silesian-
Polish, (off-white) industrial working-class, and masculine, in the wider context of a Europe
heading elsewhere, which coal’s dirt comes to materially-symbolically signify as its excess – that is
the key emotion that binds subjects together in collective populist animation, catalyzing a longing
for a felt sense of a purified home – being ‘u siebie’ (‘at oneself’) or amongst ‘swoje’ (‘ours’) - as its
remediation.

78
I have had mixed reactions to my research topic from within and beyond the academic institution, including within environmental spheres. Presenting my research at the Europe Beyond Coal network in 2019, for example, I was fed back that many of those in my audience, including from Polish environmental NGOs, had said that they ‘hated coal miners – who cares what they think?!’ The bottom line, it seems, was that they needed to disappear, fast. This sort of sentiment was in fact expressed to me also by more than a handful of academics, who have been confused as to why I would choose to ‘go there’. Was I crossing onto the ‘other side’? Why should (white) working-class male coal workers be extended research resources and empathy when there are far more deserving others in a climate changing world they are contributing to? One academic within my research network asked me ‘but why is it interesting what coal people think of coal?’ It seemed actually that indeed, not many in the academy were interested in what ‘They’ thought, felt or did at all. I encountered a general lack of curiosity as to my fieldwork experience.

I found myself deeply troubled by such questions and attitudes. They were evidence of the phenomenon I ended up trying to make sense of – the dispossession and devaluing of working-class lives, in which the academy, as Hugh Gusterson (2017) outlines, has played a central part, and which was a large contributing factor to far-right populist fervour. The fact that I was a part of this world only twisted the sense of irony and my own complicity deeper. The scepticism I faced from some, only intensified when it became clearer and clearer that not only was I going to be writing about coal miners, but also about people with far-right worldviews. Now ‘the other’ was not just an anachronism and a sustainability barrier, but a ‘fascist’ sympathiser too! That sentiment is intended to mark certain people as ‘beyond the pale’ (Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018). But it fails to capture the complexity of the lived experiences and everyday lives of far-right populist politics. It also fails to grant the ‘other’ their humanity – precisely what the environmental humanities is, or should be, about – even if that ‘other’ holds perspectives one might vociferously disagree with, in fact stand against in one’s whole being. Perhaps that is especially when the challenge of empathy and compassion is at its most necessary.

Within the anthropological tradition, studying those one intrinsically disagrees with or rejects is not common. Thus, studying far-right populisms is something anthropologists have tended to shy away from (Bangstad et al., 2019). That is in part because of the core political leanings of the discipline itself, with its emphasis on tolerance, cultural pluralism and openness, and thus the ethical...
and methodological conundrums that present themselves when undertaking such ethnographic research. Getting ‘up close and personal’ with far-right activists, or indeed supporters, is, as Agnieszka Pasięka (2019: 3) writes, described with adjectives I might have myself once used - ‘unpleasant’, ‘uncomfortable’, possibly for some, even ‘deplorable’. This is what Arlie Hochschild (2016) has meant when she sees ‘empathy walls’ as central to this rejection. Negative or disbelieving reactions to ethnographic engagements with the far right (see Pilkington, 2016; Shoshan, 2016; Teitelbaum, 2019; Ware and Back, 2002 for reflections on ethics of ethnographic study with far-right), including accusations of giving them a platform and an amplified voice and legitimizing their politics (as if explanation was the same as endorsement), reveals the sense that ‘these people’ are repulsive, beyond the pale, so ‘other’ that they do not deserve such attention. But anthropology has long held the deconstruction and overturning of Othering as central to its aims. Why / should people with far right views be excluded from this courtesy of empathic engagement, asks Pasięka (2019)?

In today’s context, in which far-right populists are faring so well at the polls across Europe, the US, and beyond, I would shift the question – is it even possible to avoid? For political views do not come in a kind of checklist bounded within an individual, but move about in swirling moods, constellations and weathers that shift and morph across collective landscapes. And at what point does somebody become so ‘tainted’ with far right views and values that they fall off the research agenda? What makes somebody so far right they are no longer right to study? In fact, Jessica Smith (2017), quoting Eliza Jane Darling, in writing about coal miners’ support for Trump, argues that more scholarship is needed that recognizes supporters as ‘real people, worthy of a good argument rather than reduced to a facile parody, heroic or demonic’.

As Pasięka (2019) goes on to say, however, the real difficulty lies not in studying the unlikeable (‘liking’ is not a prerequisite for anthropology as Malinowski himself showed – since liking and understanding are two separate stances) but in realising ‘what if you might like the unlikeable others’? Through conducting ethnographic research, you have developed rapport, trust, connection, a relationship. This is the heart of the very human aspect of anthropological enquiry. Liking, though, doesn’t mean condoning their views. Neither should it mean risking the other extreme – over-familiarization. The productive tension between proximity and distance needs to be upheld (Pasięka, 2019: 6). Yet, at its heart, the central issue here is a liberal righteous fear of ‘contamination’ – of getting ‘dirty’, of yourself becoming an unlikeable other. In a sense it is perhaps a fear of confronting what Foucault (1983: xiii) has termed the ‘fascism in us all’ - in our
heads and in our everyday behavior’ Getting up close and personal with unlikeable Others seems to provoke fear about risking one’s own exclusion from the fold – becoming beyond the pale. I myself had this fear, I will admit, as I described earlier.

Afraid of such ‘contamination’, and sometimes afraid of what I was witnessing (though never of the people themselves), reader, I will admit, during my fieldwork, I realise now that I engaged in my own acts of personal purification too. I spent time with anti-smog activists, part of my research but also, if I am honest with myself, an anchor into a closer world to my own. They tended to be those who were anti-PiS. I attended a few protest marches against the PiS government (though didn’t tell people I lived or hung out with) and chatted to friends of friends who were against the regime, also helping to translate social media posts and materials into English in snatches of spare time. Crossing back and forth, I felt like I was betraying somebody all the time - itself part of the data and experience. But these were my way of keeping a grip on the reality that I knew. Of not losing my own orientation. And of taking ‘time off’ (if that is ever possible in ethnographic fieldwork – it didn’t feel like it). But it was also a way of not letting it fully in. Of not letting myself be changed as I knew a deep encounter would require. Over time, I found ways to ‘stay with the trouble’ and got deeper into coal’s core world, and with calmer steps. By the end of my year I had significantly lessened my contact with the non-coal world. But I still felt anxious about writing about far-right resonance.

But as Jan-Werner Müller (2017) writes ‘talking with populists is not the same as talking like populists’. While we know a lot about far right ideologies we know ‘very little about the people holding them’ (Pasieka 2019: 6). Thus, Pasieka, (herself studying activists) asks the more practical question of not whether but ‘How do we study the people we don’t like?’ She stresses that ‘specific’ or ‘new’ tools for studying the right, these ‘new strangers’, are not required – such studies should not be accorded some kind of ‘special status’ but merely seen as an extension of existing ethnographic practices. After all, anthropologists have been studying connected issues – such as nationalism, religion fundamentalism, and even organ trafficking for decades (Banks et al., 2006; Eriksen, 2010a; Ethnos, 2003; Harding, 1991).

My research was not focused on participant observation with self-proclaimed ‘populists’ (if such a thing were to exist?), nor on populist ‘voters’ as such. The topic of far-right populism emerged onto the scene because it was entwined into everyday life – especially since PiS had taken power just over a year before I started fieldwork. I could not avoid it – it was the ongoing background-foreground static of my fieldwork experience. Thus, my topic of study is not so much
among ‘populists’ and the immediate or national-level ‘causes’ of populism’s popularity, but on the micro-conditions, for want of a better word, or grounds, that far-right populism has sprung up from, which have long sowed themselves with the seeds of its sprouting, in a particular community at a particular point in time. Many of my participants did not vote at all, others did. Most expressed a sort of distancing from the ‘Political’ realm and a huge amount of distrust. ‘Politics divides, it doesn’t unite’ was a repeated mantra. It did not concern them, because it had not been concerned with them. With the arrival of PiS, however, there was a sense, a raised eyebrow, that perhaps something might be different after all.
Chapter three. A coal-eyed view of history: From heroes to villains and victims.

The ‘tale of two Europes’ that we began with, and its East and West energetic schism, is oft attributed straightforwardly to the internal economic and cultural ‘legacies’ of Communist history particularly the comparative economic poverty of postsocialist countries like Poland. But to understand its deeper historic origins, and how it has ended up fuelling and fusing with the ascent of far-right populism through shame-inducing processes experienced as ecological dispossession, it must first be situated in broader relational context with the West’s own tale of how coal receded, becoming planet-threatening dirt, and who were its protagonists, itself shaped by the East. For the meaning and shape of ‘Europe’ itself, and its contemporary capitalist post-coal trajectory that Poland is now vying with, was built in the aftermath of the Second World War and so in ‘Communism’s shadow’ too (Pop-eleches and Tucker, 2017). Coal initially played a central role – indeed long before the war. Here I will briefly outline a transdisciplinary summary sweep of this Western environmental-energetic history and its relevance for the tale at hand. On the Polish-Silesian side, a more detailed historic picture, including its emotional implications, will be outlined in the remainder of the chapter.

In Carbon Democracy, Timothy Mitchell (2013) outlines how coal’s specific materialities underpinned the emergence of mass democracy in late 19th and early 20th century Western Europe. Coal, with its heavy, immovable qualities that made it difficult to transport, and its subterranean spatiality of work, afforded coal miners in Great Britain the capacity to develop autonomy and organized militancy. Coal mines, connected through chains of infrastructure to the entire economy – railway tracks, factories, power stations, homes – exposed the state to a new centralized vulnerability, giving miners a new kind of power; blocking off parts of the segmented production chain thus threatening the entire system with strike action. Increasing democratic gains that contributed to the rise of the welfare state were the result.

Up until the Second World War, Western European economies, including millions of homes, were heavily dependent on coal (Steenblik and Mateo, 2020: 99). The War effort itself was largely coal-powered (Steenblik and Mateo, 2020: 99). Emerging from its aftershocks, however, facing
labour and coal shortages, the US-funded Marshall Plan paid for Western Europe to ‘postpone plans to rebuild its battered coalfields’ and instead purchase Middle Eastern oil with US petrodollars (Mitchell, 2009: 415). It was a Cold War strategy largely geared around preventing the spread of Communism by reviving robust Western European capitalist economies. Having helped secure the democratic gains that it did, it was thus cheapening oil, not coal, that would become the predominant basis for a newly emerging stable international financial liberal order (Mitchell, 2009: 415; Swart, 1992). On the back of oil’s imported pipeline plenitudes and consumer thrills (Mitchell, 2009; Weszkalnys, 2013), rather than coal’s heavy, lumpen labour, an unprecedented peaceful and prosperous new era would dawn – one based of course on exponentially intensifying use of fossil fuels and growing greenhouse gas emissions. The period until the 1970s would become known as ‘The Golden Age of Capitalism’ (UN/DESA, 2017: 23). It would in turn give rise to the neoliberal orthodoxy of today (Mitchell, 2013: 141-143).

However, this peace and prosperity was still supported by the more integrated circulation of coal too. Western governments pumped as much as 30 – 40% of their Marshall aid funds into reviving their coal mines (Steenblik and Mateo, 2020: 101). One of the conditions of American support was the rationalization and liberalization of Western coal industries into an integrated, centrally-administered European market (Mitchell, 2013: 29). Also aimed at preventing war, particularly between France and Germany, in 1951 the European Coal and Steel Community was established – the organization that eventually spawned the ‘European Union’ itself. Within the first fifteen years, however, the ECSC would increasingly run into both political and economic difficulties, eventually overseeing the demise of the industry in the European West yet over a ‘long retreat’ (Steenblik and Mateo, 2020). The subsidized industry lowered coal prices, reduced but attempted to stabilize employment, closed inefficient mines, increasingly imported cheaper coal

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1 The total contribution of the Marshall Plan was the equivalent of 1% of US Gross National Product between 1948 – 1952 (UN/DESA, 2017: 23).
2 More than 10% of Marshall Plan funds were set aside for purchase of oil – the single largest share of funds (Mitchell, 2013: 30). Marshall Plan funds also were used to pay for increasing US coal imports (Steenblik and Mateo, 2020: 100).
3 ‘The Communists are rendering us a great service’, said French President Pierre Mendes-France at the time: ‘Because we have ‘Communist danger’ the Americans are making a tremendous effort to help us. We must keep up this indispensable Communist scare’ (in Mitchell, 2013: 29).
4 The shift from coal was also aided by rising use of domestic natural gas and nuclear (for example, in France) too (Odell, 1992; Swart, 1992). However, from the mid 1960s onwards, it was oil that monopolized Western energy markets (Swart, 1992).
5 The six founding countries were France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. The UK notably refrained from joining, citing arguments about national sovereignty, demonstrating its always-ambivalent relation to the EU long before Brexit. (Taylor, 2017)
from the USA, as oil (and nuclear and natural gas too though to a lesser extent) became the new fossil fuel of choice (cvce.eu, 2016; European Commission, 2005; Steenblik and Mateo, 2020). Aware of the social ramifications, this was no smooth or linear sail however. Accompanied by the bumpy and intense fluctuations of the energy market and social unrest and strike action too – the coal industry in the West did not go without a fight either (Steenblik and Mateo, 2020). As the introduction earlier outlined, it still hasn’t.

Thus, while oil and capitalist modernity increasingly became fused in the West (Huber, 2013; LeMenager, 2014; Szeman, 2015), helping also to lift growing anxieties about urban coal-based pollution through oil’s ‘cleaner, efficient, modern’ - (and largely produced-in-far-away-places) materiality (Buell 2012: 283), opening up space for the Western environmentalist movement of later decades, it was coal that underpinned a very different kind of modernity in the Polish Communist East, as we will see. At the same time, in the Western capitalist imaginary, coal steadily became synonymous with backwardness and filth (Buell, 2012).^6

Accompanying this energetic structural shift and its growing East-West schism was a shift and schism in class-based structures and its values too. By the 1960s, the West’s Marshall-Plan-backed welfare-state modernization effort, saw the rise of the mass consumer society and the social mobility of large swathes of people into the increasingly highly educated ‘new middle classes’ (Giugni and Grasso, 2015; van der Heijden et al., 1992). This was facilitated by the rise of a new public sector and cognitive, service and information-based economies offering white-collar employment (Beck, 1992; Bell, 1976; Tourraine, 1971). Meanwhile, industrial, or blue-collar, work, particularly in coal mining and manufacturing, steeply declined (Gingrich and Häusermann, 2015; Taylor, 1989; Tourraine, 1971). The resultant bleeding out of the traditional working classes, particularly in organised form, in this way was part and parcel of the Marshall Plan’s anti-Communist agenda too – the ongoing threat of trade union and left-wing militancy, particularly from coal miners, still plaguing the West, often linked to international networks of Communist parties (Berger and Laporte, 2010; Buckley, 2015; Langford and Frazer, 2002; Smith, 2000), would

^6 In immediate post-war Britain, writes Lynda Nead (2017), the domestic coal stove still epitomized traditional sentimental working-class cultural values of family, community and nation. But from the 1950s onwards, a ‘modern, clean, streamlined post-war’ society, with rising middle class aspirations required something different – increasingly gas, and oil-based electricity (Nead, 2017). Indeed, Jill Jonnes (in Buell, 2012: 289, footnote 29) points out how important oil and its electricity’s ‘ability to distance or erase coal was to the very idea of modernity’ and so, Frederick Buell (2012: 286) argues, its inscription of others disconnected from oil as ‘backward’ places. The increasing invisibilization of energy infrastructure, where ‘sooty black chunks [of coal in domestic hearths] magically transformed into squeaky-clean electrons’ in distant power stations, would fuel increasing illusions that the ‘coal’ and pollution problem had been dealt with on home turf (Freese, 2006: 166).
be steadily eliminated (Mitchell, 2013: 29). The ‘enemy within’, with its power to strike to force social rights and redistribution, as Margaret Thatcher later infamously called them (Metcalfe, 1990: 41), would be vanquished. Indeed, in the 1980s, it was a power that Margaret Thatcher famously crushed, effectively bringing the British mining industry to its end. It marked a symbolic moment when oil-slicked (Huber, 2013; Mitchell, 2013: 141-143) globalized neoliberal capitalism began to flourish in its ultimate undoing of the welfare state, and its ‘deepening inequalities of income, health and life chances within and between countries, on a scale not seen since before the second world War’ (Hall et al., 2015: 9), a process opened up by Communism’s collapse too. With mining unions defeated, industrial might and communities in decline, coal could more easily become socially accepted as ‘dirt’. Indeed, it was no coincidence that Thatcher would play a big part in putting green issues onto the UK agenda, as well as also becoming the first major politician to promote international legislation on climate change (Vidal, 2013).

The structural post-war class-based changes in the West, resulted in changes to political, sociocultural, moral and aesthetic values and aims too, including identities, that facilitated coal’s demise further (van der Heijden et al., 1992). The move from industrial to post-industrial society (Bauman, 2000; Beck, 1992; Bell, 1976; Giddens, 1991; Tourraine, 1971), saw the rise of the environmental movement in the 1970s, accompanying other ‘new social movements’ (Meyer and Tarrow, 1998), such as the women’s rights, minority rights, and peace movements, inspired and ignited also by the civil rights protests in the US and the decolonial struggles in the Global South.

7 Andrew Metcalfe (1990: 40) writes that the ‘coalminers-as-Communists’ trope became ‘an integral part of miners’ iconography’, particularly in the UK and Australia, but that this classist ‘demonology’ and its ‘moral marginalisation’ has deeper histories.
8 Piotr Żuk and Jan Toporowski (2020: 5;3) note that in many respects the welfare gains made in the West by the left and unionized workers that ‘facilitated the creation of a more social and human face of capitalism’ were in significant part thanks to the threat of the ‘the bogey of communism’, while its collapse enabled the spread of neoliberal ideology and their ultimate undoing. They write ‘some of the successes of the Western left emerged from the adaptive tactics of its opponents – the liberal and conservative right tried to outperform their competitors on the left in the field of social policy in order to prevent the Eastern bloc from building up political support in the West. The disappearance of external pressure in the 1990s enabled the dismantling of many social gains and redistributive mechanisms in Western countries. These processes occurred even faster in Eastern European countries.’ See also David Offe’s (1997) relational account of East and West Germany.
9 Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2016: 38) insightfully observes that green politics in the UK emerged to what it is today on the back of the collapse of trade union power, notably of coal miners, thanks to Thatcher’s iron hand. ‘Had [the miners’ defeat] happened today, perhaps the environmental movement would have cheered. At the time, no radicals rejoiced. Thousands of jobs were lost, and they have not returned’. Yet already in the 1980s, new trends in the British Labour party also began to separate themselves from ‘core’ worker support – that would eventually see the rise of Blair’s New Labour in the 1990s. Gibson Burrell (2017: 9) states: ‘In the need for ‘new’ versions of labourist politics, mining was seen as a drag from the past. Thus, there were sections of the Left that were not likely to support mining communities when they came under real threat because of their presumed resistance to change.’
The new green paradigm, ‘the symbolic centre of this broad cultural emancipation movement’ (Inglehart and Norris, 2016), was catalyzed by the fact that the previously hidden and unknown effects of industrial modernity began to reveal their severity in a new ‘risk’ oriented world (Beck, 1992). As such, the movement’s main impetus was a critique of (fossil-fuelled – and nuclear) industrialism and its central values and ideology (Cotgrove and Duff, 1980; van der Heijden et al., 1992), initially based on personal, immediate perception of local environmental problems, like pollution (Jehlička, 1994: 121). It became widely perceived that, together with increased scientific reports and rising awareness, the concomitant shift towards so-called secular ‘postmaterial’ values were behind this trend. This was the idea that the increasingly young, urbanized, university-educated middle classes in wealthier nations, who indeed dominated the movement, having benefited most from industrialization and so no longer needing to be concerned with ‘material’ scarcity issues, could, equipped with new kinds of ‘cognitive skills’, facilitating new privileged political participation (Inglehart, 2018; Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018: 106–116), concentrate on newer areas to do with quality of life, freedom and self-expression (Abramson and Inglehart, 1998; Inglehart, 2007, 2015, 2018; Inglehart and Flanagan, 1987; Giugni and Grasso, 2015; Chandler and Siaroff, 1986; Zeus and Reif, 1990; van der Heijden et al., 1992; Cotgrove and Duff, 1981, 1980; Gillham, 2008; Skogen, 1996) coupled with a growing shift towards ‘postmodern’ identities (Skogen, 1996). This ‘postmaterial’ explanation was supported by related theories, such as the ‘affluence hypothesis’ and ‘environmental Kuznet’s curve’ (Bell, 2020: 140). When the oil crisis hit in 1973, seemingly proving their salience, environmentalism clashed with the effects of rising unemployment, economic downturn, and concerns over energy security, leading to charges of it being a ‘luxury’ matter, linked also to growing postcolonial guilt of decadence in Western relation to the ‘Third World’ (van der Heijden et al., 1992: 35; Wilson, 2008: 17). The crisis gave brief resuscitation to the coal industry (Steenhlik and Mateo, 2020: 104).

While indeed highlighting the dominant make up of what would become mainstream environmentalism by the 1980s, embodied in the establishment of European Green Parties (Burchell, 2002; Eckersley, 1989; Jehlička, 1994: 116–117; Kaelberer, 1993; Richardson and Rootes, 2006), who notably won major gains in the European elections in 1989 (Franklin and

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10 Through key publications and events, for example, Rachel Carson’s (1962) *Silent Spring*, the 1972 *Limits to Growth* report by the Club of Rome and *A Blueprint for Survival* by the journal *The Ecologist*, and the United Nations Stockholm Environment Conference in the same year etc. Notably the USSR and the Eastern block did not participate in the Stockholm event due to a dispute over East Germany (Biswas and Biswas, 1982: 484).

11 Eurobarometer survey data at the time showed that between 1976-1978, reported environmental concern in EC countries decreased (Hofrichter and Reif, 1990).
Rüdig, 1992), such perspectives however did not always consider the socially uneven costs of environmental policy while it also invisibilized ‘working-class environmentalisms’ (Barca, 2012b; Bell, 2020a, 2020b; Franklin, 2012; Huber, 2019) – struggles over, for example, occupational health and safety and the uneven effects of more localized toxic pollution by poorer, marginalized (often non-white) peoples, that had been taking place for decades (Bell, 2020b). It painted working-class people as uncaring of environmental issues and requiring educating – indeed, even core to the problem, despite the fact that, as the emerging environmental justice movement would point out, they were usually more affected by environmental degradation. Writing in the US context with relevance for Western Europe too, Richard White (1995) stated that, due to an inherent romanticization of ‘pure’ wilderness, ‘Environmentalists have come to associate work—particularly heavy bodily labor, blue-collar work—with environmental degradation’, giving rise to the widespread idea that ‘jobs’ and ‘environment’, indeed ‘humans’ and ‘nature’, are inherently antagonistic, with a gendered and racial spin to it too (see also Cronon, 1996; Foster, 1993). Such attitudes led to the ‘capture’ of what counted as ‘environmentalism’ by the (white) middle-classes, spawning the perception that both NGOs and the movement are antithetical to working-class interests and concerns that stands to this day (Bell, 2020b). Opposed to the traditional interests of the old labour movements, such as conflicts over the means of production and socioeconomic exploitation (Giugni and Grasso, 2015), and against the backdrop of the general decline of class politics based on traditional left-right cleavages (Brooks and Manza, 1994; Chandler and Siaroff, 1986: 303; Clark and Lipset, 2001; Giugni and Grasso, 2015; Lilleker, 2002; Richardson and Rootes, 2006: 7; Taylor, 1989), notably including the idea that ‘class’ was ‘dead’ (Pakulski and Waters, 1995), the Western (white) middle-class environmentalism that would eventually become institutionalized at EU level developed with an absence, or abandonment, of class analysis (Giugni and Grasso, 2015; Jamison, 2008: 93), indeed an unexamined classism (Bell, 2020a, 2020b). Green politics was meant to transcend old concerns, including party politics. The ‘middle class’ was to be the new agent of revolution, not the old-school working-class. Instead, environmentalism was pursued increasingly through universal moral arguments (Giugni and Grasso, 2015: 342), and the

12 Both Extinction Rebellion and Fridays for Future, the two dominant contemporary globalized climate movements, have been criticized for their ‘middle class’ and white predominance (Bell, 2020b; Jeffries, 2016; Knights, 2021; Lanigan, 2019; Wretched of the Earth, 2019).

13 In 1984, leading British environmentalist Jonathan Porritt (in Garner, 2011: 175) wrote ‘the post-industrial revolution is likely to be pioneered by middle-class people… such people not only have more chance of working out where their own genuine self-interest lies, but they also have the flexibility and security to act upon such insights’. 
‘enemy’ became an undifferentiated ‘us’ in moral terms, though with hidden classist connotations (Foster, 1993).14 ‘Green politics’ and ‘class politics’ thus diverged (Eriksen, 2016: 24).

The implications of these sociocultural changes must be set against another shift that was occurring - a radical shift in the societal distribution of status, esteem and access to the kinds of social and cultural capital that come with it. In the growing myth or ‘tyranny’ of meritocracy (Guinier, 2015; Sandel, 2021), (clean) white-collar employment began to be far more respectable route to societal dignity and worth than (dirty) manual and industrial labour, and university degrees became the prime means by which it was apportioned (Goodhart, 2020). In the words of David Goodhart (2020), ‘heads’, like those prevalent in the mainstream environmental network, government and EU, overtook ‘hands’ and ‘hearts’ (what I refer to as embodied professions, also engaged in society’s ‘dirty work’) as the key access points not only to political and economic resources, but also to societal merit, and I would add, lives of ‘cleanliness, comfort and convenience’ (Shove, 2003). Capitalist ‘success’ became a self-made affair, thus ‘failure’ an individualized, personal fault, and as I underscore, proximity to cleanliness and dirt map onto this hierarchy. Meanwhile life expectancy and health disparities have grown between such groups, putting the narrative of ‘progress’, the very purpose of the social contract, into jeopardy (Davies, 2018: 92–119), and spawning rising emotional temperatures.

In the 1980s, the environmental movement went through what has been termed a ‘scale shift’ – increasingly framing its concerns in more global moral terms (Giugni and Grasso, 2015: 348; van der Heijden et al., 1992: 34). By necessity this required more reliance on complex and abstracted scientific data, rather than embodied experience or direct circumstance, to conceptualize (Jehlička, 1994: 117; Rootes, 1999; see also Beck, 1992). Although the transnational nature of environmental issues had always been latent, now it became explicit. Newly emerging global-scale problems, like climate change, and supranational arenas for their discussion, combined with growing opportunities for travel, communication and networking, facilitated this shift. It was this globalized cosmopolitan strand of environmentalism that would, by the late 1980s and 90s, eventually became politically hegemonic, institutionalized and professionalized particularly at EU-level (Jamison, 2008: 90–93, 2010; van der Heijden et al., 1992).15 The ‘professional-managerial class’ took hold of the dominant

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14 See Stephanie LeMenager’s (2014a) book Living Oil: Petroleum Culture in the American Century for an analysis of related trends in the US, and the mainstream white middle-class environmentalist movement’s paradoxical ‘suspension within a culture of oil’.
15 By 1993 national Green Parties also had representation in eight Western European countries (Kaelberer, 1993). Green Parties were themselves dominated again by educated, middle class professionals (Burchell, 2002: 17–18)
environmentalist trajectory (Huber, 2019), mirroring how non-elected policymakers and lobbyists enjoyed a ‘permissive consensus’ within the EU as a whole at the time (Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018: 98; Judge, 1992). Fusing with ascendant neoliberalism to champion an individualized, business-led, consumer-oriented, ecological modernization paradigm (Jamison, 2008, 2010), under the banner of ‘sustainable development’ and ‘green growth’, working with, rather than against, corporations was the strategy of choice. This type of environmentalism found notable expression in the establishment of a growing international NGO network in Brussels from the early 1990s, the setting up of the International Panel on Climate Change in 1988, which published its first report in 1990, and in the technocratic echelons of EU green-growth environmental policy, which started to legislate on climate change already in 1990 – precisely the moment Communism came to an unanticipated end. The environmental movement that had emerged in the form of mass protest and militancy in the 1960s, through to the 1980s, had thus by the 1990s created a Western consensus; it had been ‘becalmed’ (van der Heijden et al., 1992: 35; see also Jamison, 2010; Poguntke, 2002). Climate change, the transnational ‘cosmopolitan issue par excellence’ (Lockwood, 2018: 729) formed the basis of an increasingly classist universalized morality that combined the concerns of the new social movements (feminism, human rights, anti-racism, multiculturalism etc.) to ride the back of accelerating neoliberal globalization (Eriksen, 2016a; Tsing, 2004). This was the rise of what Nancy Fraser (Fraser, 2017) has termed the ‘progressive neoliberal consensus’. Carbon pricing, emissions trading, and other market mechanisms would be applied, particularly to the problem of coal. Morality was masked as neutral market-based instruments that were implemented away from the purview of democratic debate and deliberation and without much care or recognition of the hugely unequal social costs.

16 After the Second World War until the 1990s, write Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin (2018: 96–101), a ‘permissive consensus’ existed within the European Community – ‘one where people were content to leave complex debates about integration to their politicians and bureaucrats’ and non-elected expert policymakers and lobbyists. This began to change. Did they live in the same Europe that they were meant to represent? Increasingly not.

17 The first offices of environmental NGOs were established in Brussels in the early 1990s, indicating a shift in political scale orientation of the now more professionalized movement towards increasingly inter- and trans-national terrains (van der Heijden? 34). As Rootes (2002) writes, environmental movements, with their inherent transnational leanings, were quicker than others to address the EU-level.

18 Andrew Jamison (2010) describes how environmental science, including that of the IPCC itself, became more and more closely coupled to neoliberal capitalist academic interests promoting market-based mechanisms and the commercialization of techno-fixes – an under-examined aspect of the anti-science backlash. Indeed, Żuk and Toporowski (2020:4) note that scientific elites, as well as cultural and political ones, were key to the neoliberal transformation of the postsocialist East, shaping the sphere of social ideas and images and legitimizing and naturalizing its trajectory.
The green-growth consensus and the ‘march through the institutions’, however, as we know, has not exactly been a resounding success (Poguntke, 2002; van der Heijden et al., 1992: 36). Environmental challenges grow and grow, the climate crisis the biggest policy failure of them all. There is a hypocrisy at work. Backlash grows too. Writing about Western environmentalism in the early 1990s, Anton van der Heijden et al. (1992: 36), spotted the troubling signs that were already appearing even then – bottom-up resistance against top-down, technocratic ecological policies by those whose interests were hurt most. As they presciently wrote, ‘The ecological problems are simply too grave, and the necessary solutions too far-reaching in their implications, to remain a matter of consensus.’ Instead, they predicted, a ‘new phase of confrontation’ is likely to emerge through ‘a remobilization and radicalization of the environmental movement’; ‘renewed polarization... seems to be inevitable.’ That is precisely what has occurred. Far-right populism has emerged as an unanticipated key voice.

It was into this increasingly postnational cosmopolitan (Gille, 2010) neoliberal and unconsciously classist green consensus that, after 1989, Poland rejoined the capitalist West and started its re-integration into ‘Europe’, a Europe in which coal had started to become un-European. This was a country that, in relation to the West, was heavily industrial and coal-dependent, formerly Communist, disproportionately working class, itself a class that was disproportionately male, (Hugrée et al., 2020), environmentally polluted through intensive industrialism19, and materially much poorer. How would working-class people in the Silesian-Polish coalfields, with their own histories, narratives and relationship to coal and its dirt, emotionally experience this encounter between two vastly unequal and different worlds as it panned out? The clues are there, but precisely how and why would this meeting of two differing energy cultures end up, a mere 30 years later, with PiS in power? Why did coal and its workers in the East underpin not the basis of a stable liberal democracy, as in the West (at least initially), but an increasingly authoritarian, illiberal, far-right, (nationalist) industrial populist regime? Poland had apparently showed all signs of ‘successful’ transition until it didn’t (Appel and Orenstein, 2018; Feffer, 2017). What happened?

To begin to understand this, the unfolding story must be situated within a longer temporal perspective than is usually offered through ethnographic work alone. In this transdisciplinary environmental humanities project, I therefore now turn to a more in-depth interpretive historical overview of Silesian’s relation to coal, informed by secondary literature as well as ethnographic

19 It is often argued that the postsocialist countries were uniquely polluted in relation to a ‘clean’ capitalism. But this is a flawed perspective based on post-Cold War triumphalism. As we know, capitalism has been one of the most environmentally destructive systems of all, responsible in large measure for the climate crisis today.
insights – a uniquely coal-eyed view of history. I explain how and why coal became so intrinsically enmeshed with a Silesian, and then Polish, sense of self and identity for coal workers – how and why it was experienced as ‘home’, (modern, of value, and moral) before outlining its fall from grace, the trajectory to becoming a source of viscerally-raw shame (backward, worthless and immoral), leading to a felt sense of ecological dispossession understood as an attack on personal, and intersectionally-lived Polishness.

Home is Silesian/Polish coal: The secure base of black gold

‘Coal is, was, and will be’. Such an ontological claim for coal as timeless, endless and plentiful, tied to its apparent geologic solidity, stability and abundance, asserts its material-symbolic status as the existential bedrock upon which working-class Silesian life, as much as the fortunes of empires and nations, have flickered and flourished. Secure. Dependable. A loyal, slumbering mass of black-earth gold; as solid and rich a ground as possible to build a life, a home, a nation upon. Precisely its one-time draw.

This is particularly pertinent in light of Silesia’s complex and turbulent history. A long-standing contested borderland region straddling Polish, Czech-Moravian and German influences (Wódz and Wódz, 2006: 12) it has been characterized by frequent border changes, conflicts, and regime shifts that have swept chaotically through inhabitants’ lives like pawns in a game of chess. Inhabited historically by Slavic and German speaking peoples, Silesia belonged to the Polish Piast Dynasty, then to the Czech Kingdom from 1348, then the Habsburgs (1526-1740), before being conquered by Prussia under Frederick the Great in 1741 (Mrozowicki, 2011: 25) and becoming part of Imperial Germany in 1871. Although coal had been discovered here as far back as the middle ages, it was the Prussians, under whose control almost the entire area remained until 1919, who in the 19th century first developed a sizable network of heavy industry based around Silesia’s thick but accessible coal-seams, including iron, steel, railways, machinery, and later chemicals. By the mid-19th century it became the most important industrial powerhouse of the German economy, later losing this position to the Ruhr, accounting for 21% of German coal production in 1913 (Campbell, 1970). Indeed, between 1900 – 1984 it would be one of the top five global coal producers, together with the US, USSR, UK and Germany (Szpor and Ziołkowska, 2018: 2). Coal was decisively valuable, the route to modernity; a morally worthy resource.
Following the First World War and Germany’s defeat at the Versailles Treaty negotiations, ‘Poland’ reappeared as a modern nation-state after 123 years of partition between three empires – the Russian, Austro-Hungarian and Prussian. The ‘Upper Silesian question’, namely, how to divide the rich industrial spoils of this region between Germany and a newly formed Poland, became a protracted three-year negotiation on the international stage. Local Silesians became pawns in a political game once more. After over 150 years of Germanic rule, there still remained a large Polish-speaking minority in the region, particularly in the area east of the Oder river, most of whom identified more as Slavic-speaking Silesians, who more specifically spoke a dialect of Polish and German. From the beginnings of industrialization in the 19th century, while the German speakers formed the local middle and upper (capitalist) classes, the workers were ethnically Polish, or Silesian. Further, while the Germans were Protestant, the local Poles and Silesians were Catholic. Thus, prior to the war and during this period, both the German state and Polish national activists from outside the region, attracted to the region’s industrial riches, attempted to politicize these schisms and convert generally-resistant Silesian autochthons to their nationalist agendas (Karch, 2010; Michalczuk, 2008; Wódz and Wódz, 2006: 11–12). This resulted in three violently suppressed armed uprisings of (according to official narrative) Polish-speaking Silesian separatists (backed by Polish national activists) against the German ‘oppressor’, which first preceded and then followed a contentious British-imposed plebiscite to settle the border question in March 1921 that initially went in Germany’s favour, when almost 60% of the population voted for annexation to Germany; 40% to Poland (Bialasiewicz, 2002: 113). This led to the eventual League of Nations decision to grant Poland one third of the Upper Silesian territory, with close to half of its population around 75% of its installed industry and around 85% of its coal reserves (Gov.pl, 2021), including 53 mines (only 14 remained in German hands) (Winston, 1956: 47). Famously, the British Prime Minister Lloyd

20 The southernmost part of the region passed from Austro-Hungarian to Czechoslovak hands (Wódz and Wódz, 2006: 15).
21 At the beginning of the 20th Century, around 70% of the Silesian population were workers who had been drawn to the rapidly urbanizing centres from surrounding villages. They found themselves symbolically dominated and spatially segregated from both the German and official Polish culture, and lower educational levels combined with the dialect compounded this. This difference was even spatialized – with German-speaking classes living in urban centres, and ‘local’ Silesians and Poles living in (often separate) closed worker communities in urban peripheries (Wódz and Wódz, 2006: 31). Such a pattern of class geography I experienced in my fieldwork to this day.
22 The nature of these uprisings is a politically contentious issue to this day. As Magdalena Solska (2020: 208) writes: ‘Whereas the Polish authorities regard the Silesian Uprisings as a pro-Polish move and the will of Silesians to join Poland, many Silesians argue that in those Uprisings, their ancestors were fighting for autonomy, some for autonomy within [sic] Polish state, and some within the German state. This is why Silesians often refer to those events as a ‘civil war’.’
George, in a condescending attitude that is resonant of wider historic and contemporary orientalization of the East, remarked that this windfall for Poland was like ‘giving a clock to a monkey’ (Buchanan, 2008: 74). The new border cut a line between former economic and industrial layouts, with disregard for infrastructural cohesion – and for local cultural and family ties too. It was incredibly disorientating and chaotic for inhabitants, many of whom now found themselves on the ‘wrong’ side of the border depending on their preferences, while on the Polish side experiencing a new kind of social downgrading (Strauchold, 2014: 129).

However, at this time, despite repeated attempts to Germanize or Polonize Silesians, through competing propaganda promising various gains and benefits, Brendan Karch (2018) writes that, ‘national activists and state bureaucracies failed, despite zealous efforts, to compel Upper Silesians into becoming durably loyal Germans or Poles’. Indeed, in the interwar years most of the region’s population, particularly Silesia’s workers, regarded themselves as neither German nor Polish, but as autochthons, with, as a peripheral region, a weak sense of national identity (Kühnemann, 1993: 260–261). After all, at the turn of the century 12 languages were spoken here (Bialasiewicz, 2002: 124). National identity was thus instrumentalized – used as a way to get by where declared affiliation was politically required. Loyalty, Karch (2018) argues, instead was the key concept – and this had more localized attachments, where the divisions were more orientated around those who were ‘indigenous’ and ‘strangers’ (Michalczyk, 2008: 51). Indeed, Małgorzata Fidelis (2010: 132) writes that under Prussian rule, Silesians had a sense of identity based on ‘premodern terms of locality and religious affiliation’, while coal mining became more than an occupation for many Silesian labourers, it became ‘a form of cultural identification’ that differentiated them from the Germanic owners and managers who presided over them (Laura Anna Crago in Fidelis, 2010: 133). This indifference to national identity was threatening to those whose interests nationalism served (Michalczyk, 2008), and confrontations between Silesians and the Polish national culture introduced by the influx of Polish intelligentsia soon emerged, particularly when promised post-plebiscite social advancements for Silesians were not delivered (Wódz and Wódz, 2006: 32). Nationalism was always sold on tantalizing promises.

Nevertheless, thanks to German influence, a distinct ‘Silesian work ethos’ (Swadźba, 2001) (contra a ‘Polish’ one), including traits such as discipline, order, ‘cleanliness and diligence’, is said to have emerged (Białasiewicz, 2002: 124). This was fundamentally tied to the coal industry, as chapter five discusses in more detail. Indeed, coal mining as a way of life contributed to work, family and religion becoming core Silesian values (Swadźba, 2014), and the household their
lychpin. Due to constant political upheavals and instabilities, religion and gendered divisions of
labour and the family, in which the woman was to be wife, mother and caretaker for the man whose
dangerous job demanded her devotion (Fidelis 2010: 133), served a deeper purpose in Silesia than
elsewhere where such social dynamics also developed. Family and the household became a
significant point of stability, a safe harbour, in a world of turmoil, and acted as a ballast against
constant outside, national political pressures and tensions (Fidelis 2010: 134) (see chapters five and
six). I would say the same thing about coal itself – despite the risky nature of the work, it was
simultaneously one of the only points of material stability, continuity and durability subtending a
violent and disorderly world. Thus coal, labour, household, family and God underpinned Silesian’s
sense of place and order in a world where wars, conflicts and nationalist campaigns repeatedly
raged. They offered a secure base in a chaotic world. For Silesians, Silesia was a kind of ’private
homeland’ (Ossowski in Wódz and Wódz, 2006: 32) and coal made that possible as a resource of
resistance to nationalist agendas. In the dominant Poles’ eyes, however, they remained second-class
citizens – impure, culturally mixed-up and lower-class, and a threat to national progress and
cohesion. Their coal, however, was to become a valuable national treasure.

In the inter-war years, lacking the managerial cadre, Poland continued to rely on the now-
minority German’s knowledge and expertise to run the mines.23 While Upper Silesia in Germany
developed anew into an efficient industrial centre, the eastern part, under Poland failed to return to
its immediate pre-war economic output levels. Poland lagged behind, the result of a struggle for
export markets too (Winston, 1956: 47). Yet Silesia, which by this time had been granted significant
political autonomy24, was, thanks to its coal, still by far the more advanced (industrialized and
urbanized) region in the country, giving birth to trade unions, cooperatives and the first set of
workers’ rights, just as in the West (Kutz in Bialasiewicz, 2002: 123).25 For many, its early
(Germanic) industrialization placed the region firmly ‘within the European civilization’

23 The German minority, estimated to be between several to a dozen percent of the population at this time,
preserved a relatively strong position in the region’s economy. In 1922, 75% of the heavy industry capital and
85% of land were in German hands; by 1938 Germans still possessed 55% of the capital and nearly the same
24 In 1920, Polish Upper Silesia was granted a special ’organic status’ - the only such region in the country. It
was given its own Parliament (Sejm), with devolved regulatory and administrative powers at the regional
level (województwo) and county (powiaty) and municipality (gminy) level (Bialasiewicz, 2002: 113).
25 Indeed, given its unique political status (see above), and regulations by the Geneva Convention of 1922
that protected minority rights in the region, as a result Upper Silesia thus remained legally, politically, and
culturally un-integrated into the Polish state, thus retaining its separate identity that only became augmented.
Some historians, writes Luiza Bialasiewicz (2002: 114), have characterized this reunion as a ’de facto union
of two nations’, noting the ’almost civilizational divides that lay between the region and the rest of the new
Poland’. 95
(Szczepański in Bialasiewicz, 2002: 122), proving its superior standing. Modern and progressive, thanks to coal, for this reason, Elżbieta Dutka (2012: 80) reports that writers and journalists at this time became fascinated with the ‘exotic’ place of ‘black Silesia’, the internal Other, whose industrial character and landscape became a fashionable topic as it began to be incorporated into a broader Polish national cultural narrative. This led to competing visions for the region either as an advanced civilizational model based on multicultural, multi-national history, the ‘European Other’ (Kutz in Bialasiewicz, 2002: 124), for the rest of Poland to follow which should resist Polonization, or as a region that needed to integrate with and return to the Polish national whole even while retaining a modern regionalism. Enforced Polonization, anti-German rhetoric, and a rejection of multiculturalism, was the latter project’s preferred stance. Such competing frames continue to resurface to this day, notably also in populist form. The result of this struggle over time was a ‘dilution of common feeling of a distinct regional belonging that had previously united most Silesians, regardless of national identification’ (Blaszczak-Waclawik in Bialasiewicz 2002: 116).

Polonization efforts by the state, and the German minority’s increasing vocality, led to ‘progressive “nationalization” of the regional population’ (Bialasiewicz 2002: 116). After all, Silesian coal, a desirable, needed and coveted raw material, was key to the nationalist-homemaking project.

As the Second World War exploded upon Nazi invasion of Poland in 1939, during which Silesia’s mines would power the German war effort, Silesian identity was again diluted in a renewed modernist (this time fascist) emphasis on clearly distinguished, pure national belonging and Germanization during the brutal occupation. The Third Reich’s notorious Deutsche Volksliste served to divide the population into conscriptable ‘Germans’ and supposedly ‘labile’ or undecided others – an estimated 60% were deemed ‘Polish’ in the Silesian provinces (Bialasiewicz 2002: 116-117). The local population were forced to choose and convince authorities of their loyalties once again in order to prevent deportation or expulsion. From the later Polish national perspective, this was framed as opportunism and betrayal (Wódz and Wódz, 2006: 35). For, as a result, Silesians were often drafted into the Wehrmacht and their ‘collusion’ with German authorities made them fodder for another wave of suspicion, repression and recrimination after the Second World War in a revived Polish People’s Republic (Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa - PRL), which would then take control of almost the entirety of the Upper Silesian region. Indeed, the Soviets, invading Poland from the East

26 These were the competing visions of the ‘chadecja’ and the ‘sanacja’ political factions (Bialasiewicz, 2002: 115). PiS is considered a historical evolution of the latter – indeed, the Party leaders refer back to the interwar authoritarian figure of Józef Piłsudski as an inspiration, who first implemented the ‘sanacja’ (or sanitary) revolution – a moral revolution designed to cleanse the state of internal pathologies preventing the unification and progress of the Nation.
in 1944, paid special attention to avoid damaging Silesia’s largely intact mines it intended to inherit from Germany’s retreating hands (Riley and Tkocz, 1998: 218). Another round of ‘ethnic screening’, sorting, and cleansing based on simplistic nationalist categories would occur following new changes in borders (Service, 2010). Coal would now become not only Polish once again, but Communist.

Following the Second World War, while with the help of Marshall Plan funding, the West’s narrative and experience could focus on victory, peace, prosperity and welfare democracy, Poland of course found itself behind the iron curtain. It had been handed over by the Allies to the Soviets already at the Tehran conference in 1943 as a chief bargaining chip for peace (known as a key ‘Western betrayal’ to this day in Poland, see Davies, 2004, 2008; The National Archives, 2020). While remaining a satellite Soviet state not a formal member of the Union, it came under pressure from Moscow to reject Marshall aid along with other Soviet-sphere countries, and so received no such post-war economic package of support to recover while leaving coal behind (Anderson, 1991). This was despite the fact that Eastern European countries, Poland in particular, had been more severely ravaged by the calamities of World War Two than the West in both infrastructural and human terms: ‘The human toll was incomparable to any other region of the world’, writes economic historian Tamás Vonyó (2020: 110; see also Snyder, 2011), a tragic situation the Soviets would also add to (Vonyó, 2020; see also Davies, 2005b; Snyder, 2011). The Marshall Plan and the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community by the West was itself taken as a provocative move aimed at alienating the Communist bloc, and divisions increasingly hardened. The Cold War settled in.

Making the most of limited domestic resources for its post-war rebuilding effort, Upper Silesian coal’s material properties, write Magdalena Kuchler and Gavin Bridge (2018: 6), which again afforded ideas of ‘stability and abundance… played a critical role in reconstructing Poland at

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27 The War had caused damages in the West too of course, but industrial equipment and plants survived relatively intact, while human casualties were largely offset by population growth and migration (Vonyó, 2020: 108). By 1947, industrial production was therefore back at pre-war levels in Allied countries (Vonyó, 2020: 108). In the East, however, not only were towns, villages, and infrastructure wiped off the map, forty million East Europeans died, including more than 5 of the region’s 6 million Jews in Nazi-led genocide (Vonyó, 2020: 110). Poland lost almost 20% of its national population – the highest death count of all European nations, primarily civilians (Easton, 2019). Following ‘liberation’ by the Red Army, the Soviets implemented a further reign of Red Terror, forcing the biggest mass displacement of people in peacetimes through a bourgeois exodus, expulsions, deportations and forced resettlements (Vonyó, 2020: 110). Far greater shortages of labour and a demographic crisis, both of which lasted far longer than in the West, held economic recovery back (Vonyó, 2020).

28 In response to the Marshall Plan, the Communist sphere established the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform) and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA or Comecon).
the end of World War Two’, anchoring imaginaries of ‘national modernization, self-sufficiency and independence’. Silesian coal would be the secure base for this utopian modernization effort of the newly installed Communist regime, forming the basis of an intensified Polish nationalism once again that would propel it. With anxieties about loyalty to the Polish state following the Second World War high, the PRL, pursued its own policy of ethnic cleansing of the region and began a five-year project of deliberate ‘re-Polonization’ (Fidelis, 2010: 138). Yet again, Silesians, and their coal, would be moulded and incorporated into nationalist imaginaries with violent, long-term consequences. For ‘Forging Communism in Silesia visibly overlapped with creating a homogenous Polish nation-state’ (Fidelis, 2010: 138; see also Pankowski, 2010: 54). Over 2.5 million Germans were forcibly resettled, replaced by ‘repatriated’ Poles from the east in a new round of border shifts. This imported a ‘layered palimpsest of new, generally nationalized meanings on an unfamiliar territory’ itself (Demshuk, 2012: 39). Silesians accused of German collaboration were deported to Soviet forced-labour camps. The German language was banned and use of the Silesian dialect frowned upon. ‘Treason’ against Polish nationality came with a new ten-year prison sentence. Silesians were shamed for their sense of self and considered an ‘untrustworthy, nationally doubtful element’, a kind of pollutant, and this was a significant factor in their lack of representation in state institutions (Wódz and Wódz, 2006: 35). In practice, however, this did not mean Silesian culture completely disappeared, it simply retreated further into the household and private relations, which had long served as a bastion of a repressed and marginalized community (Wódz and Wódz, 2006: 16), just as it did for the Catholic faith in an officially atheist state. The feeling of ‘cultural inadequacy’ and not-quite-belonging in the public sphere (speaking to longer histories of shame) indeed contributed to the ongoing ‘sacralization of homeliness’ in the domestic realm that had begun in the 19th century (Wódz and Wódz, 2006: 37-38; 31). All along, Silesians worked the mines.

Over time, fitting the modern nation-building paradigm (Gellner, 1983), dramatically intensified coal-led industrialization itself contributed to the renewed Communist Polonization project. It drew thousands of Poles down to the region for work, initially creating cultural clashes again between ‘outsiders’ (gorals), who were viewed with distrust and suspicion given the region’s history, and ‘autochthons’ (hanyzy). For those who did not emigrate to Germany in the waves of migration under the PRL, Silesian identity, which was now firmly a minority after the Polish influx, found itself both outnumbered and ‘symbolically dominated’ by the official state institutions (Wódz and Wódz, 2006: 13). As I learnt during fieldwork, coal’s risky and dirty labour was to act as the
subterranean melting pot that would, with time, ease such tensions, integrate the workforce, and level out differences, forging pure ‘Polish’ workers. In practice, however, the divide between Silesians and Poles continued; Silesians still tended to be over-represented in the bodily ‘black masses’ below ground, Poles (rather than the Germans now) in the ‘brains’ of the managerial cadre above. But, officially at least, the process of Polonization was well advanced. By 1950, ‘the party-state officially concluded the process of re-Polonization and declared Upper Silesia ethnically Polish. As far as the communist regime was concerned, no Germans, and no Silesians of imprecise national allegiance inhabited the territory’ (Fidelis, 2010: 142). Silesians, in large part thanks to coal, that had been their long-standing secure base, their home, were now apparently ‘pure’ – they were Polish, and Poland was to be their new homeland. Communist slogans such as the ‘fight for coal’ and ‘Poland stands on coal’ drew the substance further into a nationalist project that was to smooth away notions of any remaining alterity.

With time, under Communism therefore, official ‘memory of Silesia’s special character as a multi-national borderland where several cultural and political worlds came together was erased’, and the region became designated, instead, as an economic, industrial zone inhabited by Polish workers supposedly loyal to the authorities – the new mass socialist citizen (Bialasiewicz, 2002: 118). ‘Identity’ became tied to nationally-positioned economic roles, and ‘Polish workers’ were to be the new vanguard of catching up, and eventually overtaking, ‘the corrupt West’ (Karwat in Bialasiewicz 2002: 118). In this way, under Communism, class and national identity became paradoxically fused. Indeed since everybody was ostensibly ‘working-class’ it was not clear who exactly this referred to, leading to the paradox that the working class were a class ‘for itself’ but not ‘in itself’ (Ost, 1996). The Silesian especially ‘did not exist in the party propaganda. We were all workers – working side by side for the good of the nation’ (Wojciech Sarnowicz in Bialasiewicz 2002: 119). By the end of Communism, ‘Silesian’ tradition and dialect had decisively been dissipated, while its ‘different’ history had long been repressed. ‘Polish’ coal would not only make pure ‘Polish’ workers but Polish workers would make pure ‘Polish’ coal too. Thus coal offered a route to a sense now of increasingly secure national at-home-ness, often in opposition to the official Communist state, for it afforded working-class resistance in ‘Poland’s’ name. Indeed, it would become the path to national freedom and independence, in political and economic terms under the banner of the Solidarity movement – a final re-building and recovery from the Second World War and its long aftermath, that the West had long achieved and surpassed with significant American aid. This would become the ceaseless process of ‘catching up with the West’.
It was only after the collapse of Communism occurred in 1989 that a re-excavated sense of independent regional identity began to resurface (Bialasiewicz, 2002; Wódz and Wódz, 2006: 16;), a process given added impetus by EU accession in 2004 (Solska 2020: 194). Led, however, by cultural elites (as nationalisms tend to be, see Anderson, (2006)), rather than an organic process from below, ‘Silesian-ness’ now arguably began to belong less to the original autochthons - the peasant-workers - and more to the local intelligentsia, the cultural and political elite class who ‘considered it their duty to structure the regional identity’ (Wódz and Wódz, 2006: 19), and wished to retrieve and re-elevate the competing vision of Silesia as intrinsically closer to Europe. With the collapse of large swathes of industry, upon which the Silesian regional distinctiveness had largely hinged, the material and ‘social basis for development of regional culture [sic]’ gave way to more of a cultural revivalism against the ‘centre’ (Wódz and Wódz, 2006: 17), with political ends in mind. This championed a growing and idealistic Silesian folk mythology, increasingly divorced from its material base, in which Silesian (German-influenced) traditions increasingly became folkloric icons representing the key traits of the region’s pride – hard work, diligence, cleanliness and efficient organisation. These were to prove Silesia’s credentials as closer to Europe, as against the Polish, backward, ‘Asian’ state (Wódz and Wódz, 2006: 24), which was increasingly accused of internal ‘colonization’ of the region as it began to stagnate. As a result movements, such as the Silesian Autonomy Movement, or Ruch Autonomii Śląska, RAŚ, emerged with some success. In the Polish census of 2002 and 2011, the option of declaring ‘Silesian identity’ was given for the first time. In the latter census, around 850,000 declared themselves ‘Silesian’, with roughly half declaring Silesian identity as primary identity, and half dual Silesian-Polish identity (Orlewski, 2019).

During my fieldwork, while numerous older retired miners felt a clear sense of a Silesian self (speaking also often with a thick Silesian accent/ dialect), today’s younger workers, however, whom I got to know, had an ambivalent relation to their Silesian heritage (if they had it in the family at all – many workers were not historically ‘Silesians’ but descendants of Communist-era ‘incomers’ - or

29 Indeed, the desire to construct Silesia identity as separate to Polish has often been bolstered by reaching out to European institutions and funds (Bialasiewicz, 2002: 125).
30 Patryk Orlewski (2019: 81) reports that: ‘Silesians were especially prejudiced against the inhabitants of Warsaw. They blamed the Polish government for favouring the capital city at the expense of other regions, leading to economic stagnation and high unemployment.’
31 In fact, the first programme of the newly-founded Silesian Autonomy Movement, or Ruch Autonomii Śląska, RAŚ, in 1990, was to bring about an end to the ‘colonial treatment of Silesia’ by Warsaw or Poland. This party, however, also expressed a ‘bourgeois regionalism’ - pro-Europe, liberal-cosmopolitan and pro-free market (Solska, 2020: 196; 205-6).
32 By law, however, in a nation state that prides itself on its (post-trauma) ethnic homogeneity (where almost 97% are ethnically ‘Polish’), they are not recognized as an official ethnic minority.
gorols in the local dialect). As with all identities, theirs were multiple, contextual and shifting. At times they championed their difference with pride, particularly as long exploited Silesian masses by the Polish elite with a distinct regional culture and ethos, yet tended to frame Silesian-ness as a sort of affectionate short-hand for Heimat ('homeland') with a folkloric mythology, or as ‘true’ (meaning salt-of-the-earth) Polish-ness. Many identified simply as ‘Polish’. Polonization had certainly occurred – with inter-marrying of families during the Communist era, combined with the suppression of the teaching of a distinct Silesian history and dialect, finding a ‘pure’ salt-of-the-earth ‘Silesian’, I was repeatedly told, who could speak the dialect and maintained the traditions, was increasingly difficult. While work, family and (to a much lesser extent than might be expected) religion stayed core to coal miners’ identity and values, particularly in the context of rising far-right populism and reflexive ongoing Polonization in the context of an expanding Europe (what could be understood as a new form of the ‘sacralization of homeliness’ earlier described on a bigger scale), I found these were couched in increasingly ‘Polish’ terms. Coal, at the European-scale, was certainly by now a quintessentially ‘Polish’ substance, while retaining ‘Silesian’ inflection at national and regional scales. Yet Silesia, paradoxically as a now ‘backward periphery’, and coal too as an increasingly ‘backward’ substance, was for them often more ‘purely’ Polish than the centre and its ‘elite’ culture. Silesian identity as a kind of ‘true’ Polish identity was thus often increasingly being claimed, and performed, by the current generation of miners, perhaps particularly as I carried out my research in a historically highly ‘Polish’ locale. Long-standing regional anxiety about ‘belonging’ to the nation state for those marginalized at multiple scales, led to increasing desires to assert one’s central national status under increasing European-scale capitalist marginalization that itself took on global-scale terms. Silesian miners who I came to know yearned to belong (regionally, nationally, and internationally), but increasingly on their own terms. They were not interested in separating from Poland now that they had finally arrived in a sense, had built its identity too, thanks to coal, but finding a more meaningful place within it.

With Silesian-Polishness and coal so mutually entwined, with coal’s material and symbolic decline in contexts too of ecological dispossession, however, it was fast becoming an unstable base for attaching identity to, prompting shame and its unbelonging, as I have argued, and will further outline. Some other more stable, more restorative, ingredient was required while promises to re-

33 Indeed, one key study has found that speaking the Silesian dialect among those under 25 is rare (Orlewski, 2019: 80).
34 In the minescape where I conducted my research, roughly 60% of the population had voted to be annexed to Poland in the 1921 plebiscite. The area thus found itself on the Polish side of Silesia following the decision by the League of Nations. It had not been under German rule since before the First World War.
secure it were seductive. ‘Polishness’ would become a securer base, a securer home, than coal, though tied to promises of its for-now continuation, its values too – for they were imbricated. Whereas coal once underpinned a separate Silesian-ness in contexts of external precarity and pressures, now it would be a Silesian-ness couched in the Polishness under new forms of instability and turmoil at larger, emotionally-charged scales. Polish industrial (nationalist) populism would find recruits among Poland’s ecologically dispossessed industrial class.\(^{35}\)

While it is important to provide a longer general historical context to making sense of Silesia, Silesians and their relation to coal and Polish nationality as the deeper backdrop for contemporary industrial populism, I now turn to a brief, more in-depth overview of labour in the Communist period onwards, for this is when coal truly became ‘Poland’s black gold’, and the mythology and cultural narratives connecting Silesia to Polish coal and its dirt intensified. This is also the period when the energetic trajectories of Eastern and Western Europe, outlined in the opening to this chapter, began to diverge (indeed contributing to constructing those categories). Still circulating as lived collective memory today, they form the vivid backdrop to the postsocialist working-class present and the experience of increasing ecological dispossession from coal’s existential mattering and meaning – the material-symbolic wrenching away from this secure base, rendering it shameful, that began with the return to the ‘Europe’ that we started this chapter with.

**At home with Polish Communist coal:***

Nothing epitomizes coal mining, perhaps the most masculine of all industries, more than the iconic image of a muscular man, face smeared in black dust after a day of hard toil below ground. Coal’s black dirt has long entangled with bodies to forge coal’s people materially and symbolically – tough, stoical, working-class, and typically masculine. Yet, unlike in the West, where they arguably

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\(^{35}\) PiS has been notorious for contributing to the marginalization of ‘Silesia’ as an internal Other, with Kaczyński famously calling Silesians ‘crypto-Germans’. Why would Silesian coal miners support PiS then? Magdalena Solska (2020) outlines how two kinds of populism exist in Silesia – a progressive regionalist variant, and a national conservative kind (echoing the historic division between the ‘chadeja’ and ‘sanacja’ narratives of Silesia mentioned earlier) – the type this thesis is concerned with. While the former is represented by the Silesian Autonomy Movement, the latter is represented by PiS’s style of politics. As Solska lays out, the Silesian Autonomy movement and related politics tend not to be based in working-class concerns, but rather are preoccupied with so-called ‘bourgeois regionalism’, adopting a pro-European, liberal-cosmopolitan and free market ideology, also opposing the building of new mines. Miners’ nationally- and regionally- shaped organic embodied ecological politics thus resonated far more strongly with the PiS’s material pro-coal and pro-industrial agenda, even if they denigrated ‘Silesia’, though another reason to distrust Politicians and their claims to represent ‘the people’ too. Silesian elites had also betrayed coal too, and miners were feeling increasingly alienated from Silesia’s own trajectory.
always historically occupied a more peripheral and subordinate position (Jencks, 1967; Metcalfe, 1990; Skeggs, 2004), in the Soviet sphere, dirty, bodily labour, especially the industrial working-classes, were placed front and centre of state ideology as ‘venerated’ and archetypal vanguards of the socialist modernization project (Stenning, 2005c: 986). This would be the externally-implemented (top-down) advancement of a hitherto disfavoured social group, couched in the newly expressed language of class in a supposedly classless society, combined with a new discourse that aimed to delegitimize the former elites (replacing them with a Communist nomenklatura) (Stanley and Cześnik, 2019: 69). Thus, just as the Western capitalist industrial working-class began its fall, the Eastern socialist one began its rise. This was particularly so for the ‘mythologised industrial, manual, working-class male’ (Mrozowicki, 2011: 32; Stenning, 2005c)\textsuperscript{36}, especially coal miners, who occupied centre place in Polish state propaganda.\textsuperscript{37}

According to the People’s Republic of Poland (Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa – PRL) and its state-led propaganda (and hegemonic cultural memories of this period as I found), the coal miner was king. That was because ‘Poland stands on coal’.\textsuperscript{38} Miners wrought and hauled the ‘black gold’ to the surface, turning it into the fuel that powered the nation’s hearths, furnaces and factories.

\textsuperscript{36} Alison Stenning (2005c: 987) writes that ‘feminists have rightly drawn attention to the favouring of the male worker under socialism’ (for example Ashwin, 2000; Einhorn, 1994). This did not mean, however, that women did not work below ground or in coal mining at all. Małgorzata Fidelis (2010: 153) writes that the idea of coal-mining being a solely masculine profession is ‘a modern concept that emerged in Western Europe in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century as a result of the prevailing middle-class ideology’ that saw women’s proper role in the domestic sphere. In actuality, the history of women working underground in Europe was a lengthy one, while in Poland, the Communist regime attempted to present the tradition of female labour below ground as its own achievement, since the interwar Polish state had banned women from working underground in 1924 (Fidelis, 2010: 152). In the 1950s, over 500 women were working below ground in the two major coal mining provinces in Upper and Lower Silesia. Yet traditional Silesian society (both men and women) vocally opposed this trend that was seen as a Soviet-imposed threat to the traditional Catholic gender order – Silesian women were to remain mothers, wives and domestic housekeepers. (Fidelis, 2010: 165-169). Thus in May 1957 the state forbade women from working underground (Fidelis, 2010: 219). To this day women’s role in the history of Polish coal has been all but obliterated in collective memory, including in documented histories by academics (Fidelis, 2010: 153). I found, for example, that collective memory of women working below ground was absent. Likewise, although technically women are legally able to work below ground thanks to an EU-backed gender equality law implemented in 2008, coal miners were not aware that this was the case. In practice women were decidedly left out of the masculine world of subterranean coal work, even as they are over-represented in both processing plant and office-administrative work above ground.

\textsuperscript{37} Reality, of course, often did not fully live up to this myth. Alison Stenning (2005c: 986-987) admits that workers were ‘not always and everywhere reified and celebrated’; strict moral prescriptions for behaviour and identity were in place, assigning hierarchies of respectability and those most deserving in relation to access to security and social mobility. The history of socialism developed as one of steady ‘deproletarianization’ even then, and historical antagonisms fed classist condescensions at this time too.

\textsuperscript{38} Magdalena Kuchler and Gavin Bridge (2018; 6) write that this slogan was widely circulated and disseminated by Party leaders since the 1950s. It has since been re-appropriated by (ironically) the anti-Communist, PiS to declare its ongoing support for coal in a revitalized industrial nationalist populism (see Koch and Perreault, 2019).
Forming the only basis of hard currency conversion in order to access Western technical and capital goods, much coal would be exported West to aid this effort. In response, however, in 1945, Stalin imposed a ‘coal agreement’ onto Poland that would divert the majority of Silesian coal East at the set cost of only one dollar a tonne, rather than the ten Poland could get on the Western market (Sutowski, 2015: 187). This sparked a Soviet-Union-style ‘Stakhanovite’ 39 ‘fight for coal’ that became infamous for its imposed production quotas. Polish Communist propaganda would encourage excessive competitive labour intensity in order to continue exporting to the capitalist West, with enticements of extra earnings, medals and social prestige and a sense of patriotic duty and heroism. 40 This was aimed at aiding the rebuilding effort of a Poland rising from its post-war ashes, thereby proving Communist superiority too vis-a-vis the West. Coal-mining thus became a national service, a moral duty – even replacing army conscription by 1949. In 1948, Władysław Gomułka (in Krajewski, 2019), the first secretary of the United Polish Workers’ Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza – PZPR), stated: ‘Our hard heroic miner, the glory of the Polish working class, has stood up to get to work, and the black diamonds created by his hands, have created the foundations of our entire economy’.

As a result, coal’s exhausting burdens – its risky, dirty work, with its intrinsic material-symbolic link to masculine labour (Ashforth and Kreiner, 2014a, 2014b; Simpson et al., 2012; Simpson and Simpson, 2018; Skeggs, 1997; Slutskaya et al., 2016) – was intended to underpin industrial working-class pride, ontological security, and self-esteem. It was the ultimate path to the crux of modernity, and valued moral standing. Considered a noble national sacrifice, coal mining was respectable, admirable and rewarding, underpinned by the ‘social contract’ forged between a paternalistic socialist state and worker (Crowley, 1997: 13; Kesküla, 2012). As earlier mentioned, thousands migrated from across Poland to work in the ‘Upper Silesian Eldorado’ (Mrozowicki,

39 Alexey Grigoryevich Stakhanov was a Soviet miner in the Ukrainian Donbass region who became a Hero of Socialist Labour when he was credited for mining 102 tonnes of coal in less than 6 hours (14 times his quota) on 31 August 1935. This sparked a ‘Stakhanovite movement’ where workers modelled themselves on this icon to exceed quotas in the name of the nation, eventually contributing to backlash against the system that so exploited their bodily labour. See Lewis Siegelbaum (1990) for a history of this movement.
40 Poland’s own ‘Stakhanov’ was Wincenty Pstrowski. In 1947, Pstrowski outperformed his monthly production quota by more than 270%, a record high, and sought to motivate fellow workers to join him in Poland’s rebuilding in a system of ‘socialist emulation’ (Fowkes, 2016: 13). However, it coincided with a 20% cut in average wages, and resentment towards these higher-paid ‘leading workers’ built, leading to suppressed strikes (Fowkes, 2016: 13). Nevertheless, he received the Order of Polonia Restituta for his ‘sacrificial and efficient’ services to the nation and his famous phrase, ‘Who will give more than me?’, became the stuff of legend when he died at the age of 44. Today he is remembered largely as a victim rather than a promoter of the Communist regime, expressed particularly in resistance to the removal of a statue commemorating his labour in Silesia under PiS’s anti-Communist iconclastic purging (Nauka, 2018).
“Black Silesia”, as it became known for its coal, intensive industrialization, growing pollution and manual labour, was then not a deterrent, but a draw. A civilizational advancement. Meanwhile, the environmental costs of coal’s bounties were deemed at this point almost irrelevant, certainly were not publicly discussed (see chapter five).

The elevation of workers’ social position, and the establishment of ‘Poland’, the national homeland, as providing a secure sense of integration and belonging, especially in Silesia through coal, became particularly established under Edward Gierek. A Silesian-born politician and son of a miner, who had worked in mining in France and Belgium and had lived in Western Europe for much of his early life, he was First Secretary of the Katowice Voivodeship PZPR Committee in 1957, later replacing Gomułka as the national Party leader in 1970 after bloody riots following food price hikes. Influenced by his Western experiences, and following relaxation of draconian labour discipline by Gomułka, he implemented more humane production incentives to the Stalinist ethos, and opened Poland up somewhat to the West. He also borrowed large sums from the West to build 1.8 million flats, and modernize Poland through construction of numerous steelworks and coal mines in his native Silesia, and the most modern train station in Europe, in Warsaw Central, though the borrowing later led to the economic crisis of the late 70s and 80s. Yet, to this day he is known in popular memory by many miners in particular as ‘the good host’. For, in return for their hard graft meeting and exceeding production quotas, which often included working weekends, as well as for their health-affecting environmental exposure, under Gierek, miners were granted increasing special ‘privileges’ not enjoyed by other members of society – including high pay, special ‘G’ (for ‘górnik’ or miner) shops granting access to Western-style consumer goods unavailable elsewhere in Poland.

41 After World War Two, in the great socialist reshuffling of the Polish milieux into a working-class, industrial society, around 1 million people who had not been workers before the war became workers. The vast majority of this workforce consisted of young, poorly skilled males migrating from traditionally poorer regions (Mrozowicki 2011: 26). By 1979, 47% of those employed were working in industry (Mrozowicki, 2011: 21); in 1989, when Communism collapsed, it was 53% (Wóźa, 1998: 163).

42 Gierek borrowed 30 billion USD from Western financial institutions often for unproductive industrial projects, debt which Poland would be paying back for many decades since, an ongoing historic controversy (Reuters, 2001). Yet, as mentioned, he is often remembered very fondly, though public opinion is as ever divided. He opened up the country to Western influence, put meat on people’s tables, made the purchase of ‘Fiat’ cars accessible, and made apartments and free health care widely available in the ‘decade of luxury’ (Szczerski and Wolańska, 2011). An opinion poll carried out in October 1999 among Poles who had reached maturity in 1970s found that the majority remembered it overwhelmingly positively as the ‘good times’, even those less well off (Łukowski and Zawadzki, 2006: 306). Later opinion polls would see the decline of this positive view. He also oversaw the building of sanatoria and miners’ holiday complexes, which chapter five describes. PiS, on the other hand, with anti-Communist zeal has attempted to remove his name from the history books – by for example renaming roundabouts and streets carrying his name in the region, which met with local outcry (Reszka, 2017).
the early 1980s, housing and leisure facilities, not to mention free healthcare provision, schools, subsidized vacations and workers’ meals (Mrozowicki, 2011: 27). From cradle to grave, their needs were provided for. This was augmented with high social respect, epitomized in the national annual celebration of St. Barbara’s (the patron saint of mining) Day, on 4th December, complete with parades, fanfare and speeches. Being a miner under the PRL meant ‘you were a somebody’ in national and local eyes, as people told me. Indeed, miners, steelworkers and university professors together enjoyed the top salaries (Żuk and Toporowski, 2020: 4). As a result, urban centres were designed and built often with the worker hero at their core (Stenning, 2005c: 986). Such stories perforated the hegemonic cultural memories I heard among older miners, revealing more how the past was being viewed through the lens of a critique of the present moment, where it is often, in the postsocialist context, narrated as homely, with the present ‘unhomely’ (Morris 2016: 152).

The sense of being at-home with coal was not solely the makings of Communist propaganda however. Thanks to these resources, including the material ones of coal, the community were actively involved in making themselves at home with it too, including its pollution, which by now was intensely notable, though normalized and not talked about publicly. The benefits of coal were worth its costs to coal’s people too, while the public naming of coal as ‘dirty’ in a negative sense was locally taboo (see especially chapter five, where I provide a more detailed history and overview of this aspect of Communist coal life). Indeed, coal and its dirt at this time rather seemed to unify the collective mining body in a shared visceral fate as a community of industrial labourers. ‘Everybody worked in mining’, as locals said, thus the markings of such dirty work were routine and mundane, simply; everyday life, generating a sense of togetherness and relative equality.

A man in particular was thus made to feel thoroughly at home with the dirt of coal, or at least, it was where he belonged. In fact, his worthy personhood was produced in relation to it, securely embedded within and emerging from, a thick and ‘complete social, economic, and cultural world’ (Rakowski, 2016: 93) backed by national resources and narratives. At the same time, Polish coal’s dirty work made literal Silesian home life, embedded within this dense social fabric, possible, and vice versa (see chapters five and six). As chapter six particularly outlines in more depth, by working in the mines, a man could easily live up to the industrially-generated ideal of male ‘breadwinner’

43 Adam Mrozowicki (2011: 30-31) writes about the explicit ‘productivist bias’ at the core of state socialism’s economy. ‘Workers in core manufacturing branches by law earned 50% more than those outside the production sphere. In 1982, the wages of skilled production workers amounted to 106% of the national average, exceeding those of the non-technical intelligentsia (eg teachers) and white-collar workers. Simultaneously, the wages of unskilled workers in production amounted to 87% of the average, and those in services to only 65%.’ Women in turn earned on average 20% less than men.
(Hanlon, 2012; Hultman, 2017; Janssens, 1997; Seccombe, 1986), including bringing home coal as a household fuel. In the ultra-traditional Silesian family model, where the man worked in the pit, despite Communist policies to promote gender parity, the wife remained in the sphere of the household taking care of ‘kinder, küche and kirche’, or children, the kitchen, and church (Odoj, 2019: 32). Thus, a continuation of trends we saw earlier in Silesian history, work underpinned family life, while family life, in the distinctly separated realm of the home, made the burdens of that labour bearable, contributing to its community-based purification (again, see chapter five for more detail). Polish Catholicism, even, or especially, under Communism which officially was atheist, in turn turned work and family into something sacred. Coal was the material manifestation of this holy trinity – the God-given resource that granted life and built Silesia, elevating coal and its labour morally to spiritual heights. In this way, alongside and often against official Communist propaganda, a private kind of Silesian-Polish coal culture continued to develop, reflecting the deepening split between public and private that scholars have noted at this time (Stanley and Cześnik, 2019: 69; Wedel, 1986). Indeed family and religion became yet more deeply entrenched as general, mutually reinforcing spaces of safety and moral purity away from the Communist state’s surveillance. Yet Polonization was well underway, as we saw, and Catholicism too would contribute to it.

By the end of Communism, coal miners had certainly become used to being considered part of the elite in society, along with its material and symbolic rewards. They had also got used to coal being regarded as a national treasure. But they were no Communist Party loyalists. In fact, among the bodily labourers (physiczini) below ground, Party membership remained very low – while, in the late 1980s, 98% of management (umysłowi), the brains, were members (Battiata, 1989). Just as had occurred in the West, miners repeatedly used their capacity to strike to force greater freedoms and redistribution. The Communist Party repeatedly faced unrest and protest from workers’ during its near 45-year rule, often with bloody consequences, eventually leading to its downfall. This unrest was often couched in the interest of the ‘nation’ even then (Ost, 1996). Interestingly, I rarely heard accounts from older retired miners of these negative and violent aspects in the collective memory. Recalling unusual conversations I had with two retired coal workers who shared bitter memories of the past with regards to their perceived sense of exploitation, oppression and material deprivation, not managing to, for example, receive promotion for unwillingness to join the Party, these were notable for the fact that they were held in private, almost confessed in hushed tones, silenced into corners where they challenged hegemonic rose-tinted perspectives. What stood out in
the present, as earlier mentioned, were collective memories of Communist-era everyday privileges and securities, senses of togetherness and camaraderie, coal as a kind of home, now a loss or absence, even if the wider regime was remembered as absurd, or ‘abnormal’. Again, this expressed more about the present moment in ethnographic senses than it did about the ‘reality’ of that past in objective terms (if that is possible).

In the early 1980s, as standards of living declined, anger over material shortages, food prices, lack of civil liberties (such as the right to strike and have independent trade unions), political exclusion and concern over stagnant wages and benefits even then, intensified, this led to the mass worker unrest that formed the basis of the Solidarity Trade Union movement, a movement that at its peak in 1981 had 10 million members, a third of the country’s working age population (see Kalb, 2014). Environmental issues would also form part of this mass umbrella movement as growing awareness and public articulation of the excessively polluting Communist industrial legacy began to materialize, serving to popularize and legitimize opposition to the authorities (Jancar-Webster, 1998; Jancar-Webster, 1993) (see also chapter five). Under the oppressions of an authoritarian state, the clear enemy, and in the extreme heterogeneity of Solidarity’s constituents (Pankowski, 2010: 56), workers’ rights and environmental concern were at this time united, rather than antagonistic, social concerns. Yet, these concerned were strongly framed in nationalist terms from the start, mobilizing age-old (ethno)national cultural symbols as resources for liberation against an oppressor with anchorage in the Catholic Church (Pankowski, 2010: 59). Yet, it was reform in the name of the nation that workers had mostly been after not revolution. Even as late as winter 1989 the total collapse of Communism was not desired or anticipated (Feffer, 2017: 270).

Thus, joining en masse to bring about Communism’s eventual downfall, the industrial working classes inadvertently also brought themselves down with it, as the next sections will outline. Worker concerns and environmental concerns would diverge – in fact environmental concern would be a key, though under-reflected on and largely backgrounded, driver of workers’

44 Though as chapter five highlights, workers and environmentalists within the broad umbrella of ‘Solidarity’, later co-opted also by the intelligentsia, did not come from the same social classes even then.
45 In Poland, as in broader Central and East European region, nationalism has always been ‘ethno’ nationalism, where national identity has emerged in the absence of a state, and where it has also been forged in relation to opposition to imposed states. (Pankowski, 2010; Verdery, 1998).
46 Nationalist arguments would offer the most potent critique of Communism, while socioeconomic issues would recede (Pankowski, 2010: 60). In the words of Antoni Macierewicz (in Pankowski, 2010: 61), once Solidarity-aligned activist, later key member of PiS’s party, Solidarity was not a trade union but ‘the nation organized’. Revealingly, while Thatcher was pro-Solidarity, Arthur Scargill, president of the British National Union of Mineworkers, her nemesis in the mining strikes of the 1980s, was highly critical of Solidarity, describing it as an ‘anti-socialist organization which desires the overthrow of a socialist state’ (McKinlay, 1983).
dispossession. As Alexei Yurchak (2005) in his ethnographic study of post-Soviet transformation phrased it, ‘everything was forever until it was no more’. That was to ring true not only for the Communist system, but for coal – that existentially always-secure base – and its former material and symbolic industrial working-class privileges and existential securities too. As Poland began its journey back to Europe, coal’s own fall from hero to villain and victim, to shame-inducing ‘dirt’ in today’s compounding un-modern, low-value and increasingly immoral senses, or rapid and abrupt kinds of dispossession, including the ecological kind, would truly begin. Meanwhile, in the postsocialist present, Communist-era coal culture and existence became a distant and unfamiliar dream, generating a pervasive sense of disorientating unhomeliness. An increasingly apparent postcolonial postsocialist condition experienced more and more through the skin, as I will also outline.

The postsocialist fall from grace: Dirty coal, dirty people in a climate-changing world

At the triumphant ‘end of history’ (Fukuyama, 1989), the capitalist liberal democratic West had won the Cold War. This was supposedly to be a jubilant liberation for the long-suffering East. After Poland’s repeated experiences of occupation and oppression, the promise of national autonomy and democracy – rule by the people – now finally beckoned. The joyful ‘return to Europe’, the reclamation of Poland’s rightful cultural heritage, or ‘return to normality’ as it was heralded (see chapter seven), could begin. Yet this narrative masked the fact that for many, Communism had had broad social legitimacy and support (Pankowski, 2010: 60). But now, not only its economic system but its entire lifeworld were abruptly discredited, a lifeworld that in Poland was, if we remember, very rooted in working-class culture and experience, itself rooted in earth’s bodily labours. The West, in this newly unified world, was ‘advanced’ and ‘civilized’, the East ‘backward’ and ‘primitive’, closer to nature. In this way, the ‘East’ was immediately re-'invented' once again in the West’s image as its inferior ‘Other’ through a process of ‘demi-Orientalization’, a process that, as Larry Wolff (1994: 4) writes, drawing on the famous work of Edward Said, had long historic roots:

47 As one German newspaper declared at the time, the ‘Revolution to normality is the crucial metaphor of 1989’ (Hartung in Kiossev, 2008: 2). In Poland, like in other Eastern European postsocialist countries, such as Hungary (Fehérváry, 2002) and Estonia (Raising, 2002), the ‘return’ to Europe was figured as a reunification with the ‘true’ Polish destiny – and leaders sought to re-establish the country’s historic relevance as the Europe’s true ‘heart’ or centre (hence the emergence of the idea of ‘Central Europe’). (See chapter seven).

48 Defined by Edward Said (1979), ‘orientalism’ is the discursive relational construction of the ‘East’ vis-a-vis the ‘West’ in usually stereotypical, derogatory, exoticising and/or essentialist, power-laden terms. Such constructions have material effects, and, Said argues, have been central to the ‘West’s own understanding of itself in superior, universal terms.
It was Western Europe that invented Eastern Europe as its complementary other half in the eighteenth century, the age of Enlightenment. It was also the Enlightenment, with its intellectual centres in Western Europe, that cultivated and appropriated to itself the new notion of ‘civilization’, an eighteenth-century neologism, and civilization discovered its complement, within the same continent, in shadowed lands of backwardness, even barbarism. Such was the invention of Eastern Europe.\footnote{At this time, ‘Eastern Europe’ became a region positioned ambiguously on the Orientalist nomansland border between ‘Europe’ and ‘Asia’, or ‘between civilization and barbarism’, writes Wolff (1994). The concepts of ‘backwardness’ and ‘development’ were called forth to ‘mediate’ between these poles and Europe’s East ‘provided Western Europe with its first model of underdevelopment’ (Wolff, 1994: 7, 9), prefiguring, or emerging in parallel with, broader colonial Orientalism. In Immanuel Wallerstein’s (2011) terms, Eastern Europe was a ‘periphery’ in the emerging capitalist world system.}

Thus the ‘East’ was long culturally constructed in a ‘paradox of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion. Europe but not Europe’\footnote{See also Jerzy Jedlicki (1999) on how Polish elites in the 18th century contributed to Poland’s orientalization as uncivilized and backward in comparison to the West’s construction as a superior model for emulation.}. In the process of postsocialism it was no different. A third of the world’s population, therefore, had to scramble to take their new place in this now-global hierarchy of universalized modernity while striving for recognition of their humanity (Tlostanova, 2015; Melegh, 2006). Notions of cleanliness and dirt were core, though generally under-examined in their lived experience, to this re-ordering – where Europe as a symbol stood for the standards of the former (Gille, 2002: 67), and where the process of postsocialist transition ‘transmute[d] difference into impurity’ (Dunn, 2007: 181).\footnote{Ideals of cleanliness and dirt have been identified as core to processes of Othering, racialization and spatial and cultural derogation in other contexts (Bashford, 2003; Berthold, 2010; Newell, 2019; Walther, 2017), particularly historically in relation to coal miners (Metcalfe, 1990).} This included a reordering of nature and environments, especially coal.

Under such conditions, Western imitation, indeed importation of its ‘superior’ policies, values and lifestyles, would be the new future. For they were presented as natural themselves – rational and universal. This return was thus heavily structured and constricted from the start. Although Poland would not officially join the European Union until 2004, negotiating and preparing for accession into that ‘Europe’ became the immediate policy priority, narrowing and determining the scope of options and possibilities straight away (Shields, 2007). Thus ‘democracy’, including its underpinning pillar ‘civil society’, soon became in many ways a performance dressed as choice and participation (Gille, 2010; Hann, 2020; Krastev and Holmes, 2019).

During the Cold War, however, societal longings for the West and its glittering promises of (oil-based) consumer-oriented utopia, and supposedly clean, efficient economy, had been based on...
the post-war, Marshall-Plan backed Keynesian model of the national welfare state and its liberal market (coal-enabled) democracy. No postsocialist government or society were fully aware that globalizing neoliberalism, combined with accelerating postindustrial sociocultural changes and rising planetary environmental concern, which were only just in their ascendancy under Thatcher and Reagan, offered a very different kind of consensus and problem-solving toolkit\(^{52}\). Thus as Communism collapsed, instead of a Marshall Plan for the East, which had been considered but ruled out by the West as early as May 1990 on ideological grounds (Feffer, 2017: 113-114)\(^{53}\), the ‘Balcerowicz Plan’ was put in place. This was based on the most extreme neoliberal principles that went further and faster than in any other developing region (Appel and Orenstein, 2018). Indeed, Poland was to become the ‘paradigmatic neoliberal exemplar state’ in which the new political project was to ‘import and formulate[\(c\) the neoliberal agenda as common sense’ (Shields, 2012: 360; 362; see also Klein, 2008). This would be achieved through full-frontal ‘shock therapy’\(^{54}\), medicine for Communist supposed ‘backward’ pathology, prescribed by Western technocratic elites – and eagerly administered by Poland’s emerging postsocialist political establishment who lacked alternative visions, and were eager to prove their own Westernized credentials (Shields, 2007: 165; Wedel, 2001)\(^{55}\).

\(^{52}\) Chris Hann (2019c: 22) writes that ‘No one can doubt that the processes of transition in the Visegrád states would have been very different if they had been launched in the 1960s under the aegis of Keynesianism and the Marshall Plan, rather than in the 1990s, when militant neoliberalism was in the ascendant’. As a result, Eastern European countries (like precedents in Latin America) became brutal ‘living laboratories’ (Kilianova et al., 2004) for its full-force machinations. Piotr Żuk (2017: 2) writes that 1989 stood for not just the restoration of capitalism but ‘something worse’ - a ‘capitalism devoid of any of the social protections that were the achievement of social movements in Western European capitalism’ and thus, quoting Wielgosz, the East became more ‘American’ than both the United States or Europe.

\(^{53}\) Instead, though uniquely granting Poland debt relief, Western governments received more in old Communist debt repayments than they gave in both loans and grants to the postsocialist sphere between 1993 – 1996 (Åslund in Feffer, 2017: 114). John Feffer (2017: 114) writes ‘The refusal to consider a Marshall Plan after 1989 in favour of a repeat of the ruinous policies of 1918 [which threw Europe in debt and sowed the seeds of later conflict – indeed the rise of fascism] is a testament to the failure of institutional memory and the victory of theory (or greed) over demonstrable practice’.

\(^{54}\) ‘Shock therapy’ was a remedy for rapid ‘transition’ from a centrally-planned to market economy backed by prominent Western economists such as Jeffrey Sachs and the IMF, and implemented by then finance minister Leszek Balcerowicz that included the immediate withdrawal of regulations, price controls and subsidies to state-owned industries, and the removal of social support and privatization of industry (Feffer, 2017: 111–112). (See also Lipton and Sachs, 1992; Sachs, 1992, 1994). This was one of the most ‘disruptive’ forms of transition in postsocialist Europe, even as it arguably delivered greater ‘success’ in terms of economic growth rates (Hann, 2019c: 23). And such a ‘Great Transformation’ was far more abrupt in the postsocialist states than it ever was in the West, with its more gradual, evolutionary pace (Hann 2011: 35; Hann, 2012).

\(^{55}\) Karol Modzelewski (in Żuk, 2017: 7), a former Solidarity leader and leading left Polish intellectual, was one of few publicly critical voices of the so-called Balcerowicz Plan at the time. He recalls, however, that it was not just a case of IMF imposition of its will - ‘Leszek Balcerowicz’s team did not resist at all. On the contrary, of their own free will, they chose the most radical version of the so-called stabilization policy, which the IMF representatives treated only as a version of the tender’. It was however, writes Piotr Żuk (2017:7),

\(^{111}\)
Intensive neoliberalization would also be the means by which newly-emerging EU climate and environmental priorities would be achieved, particularly applying market instruments to the energy sector, (e.g. privatization, polluter and user pays principles, taxes, fines etc, OECD, 2003), thereby also securing ‘environmental convergence’ with the West, a pre-condition for later EU membership (Andonova, 2003; Carmin and Hicks, 2002; Jacoby, 2001; Kundziewicz and Tosun, 2015: 2). Capitalist civilizing was to be the answer to people’s Communist-induced environmental troubles and all else. Yet such issues were largely not a public or homegrown matter now – in fact the EU and Western-funded NGOs touting the same agenda replaced the Solidarity-era environmental protest movements almost overnight.\(^5^6\) In this ensuing ‘transition’, as it was euphemistically and teleologically called in technocratic-speak, naturalizing its political project (Shields, 2007), having been the iconic vanguard of socialism, and the material vanguard of the Solidarity Trade Union movement (a paradox I will unpack later), the industrial working classes, particularly coal and its coal miners, fell violently and abruptly from grace. For this was part and parcel of the road to the new (green-capitalist) modernity. It was the path the West had taken – though over a far longer stretch of time and via rather different histories and dynamics.

Core to this agenda, Poland’s ‘transition’ to ‘new capitalism’ (Hardy, 2009) involved near-immediate and accelerated privatization of state-owned enterprises\(^5^7\), drastic reduction in public expenditure and the stripping away of the social welfare support system through the ‘internationalization of austerity’ (Holman in Shields, 2007: 163). Workers in the former workers’ state, with its policy of full (mandated) employment, were hit hardest. The result was a sudden

\(^{56}\) Magnus Andersson (2012: 361) writes that following postsocialist transition, the growing environmental movement that helped end the Communist project suddenly found itself rapidly dwindling – former environmental dissidents joined the ranks of government, Polish environmentalists became relatively isolated, reliant on western aid and support and with little clout. The West were heavily involved in the rapid subduing of grassroots initiatives and political professionalization in this way, writes Zsuzsa Gille (2010: 21), who calls this the ‘taming’ of the agents of 1989 and shepherding them in from the streets to the ever cosier offices of NGOs (see also Hann, 2020). Indeed, despite the fact that the environmental movements led to the establishment of the first Green Party in the East, in December 1988, Agnieszka Kwiatkowska (2019) reports that it had very limited success, a case of ‘institutionalization without voters’, and has survived largely thanks to support from the European Green Party. Yet this is now changing again (see chapters four and five, and the post-script).

\(^{57}\) As Piotr Żuk (2017: 8) writes, building on Naomi Klein (2008), ‘the race for the state’s assets began immediately’. Privatization was carried out in haphazard, non-transparent, and dubious fashion – ‘Plants sold were undervalued, well-functioning factories were destroyed, factories competing with Western manufacturers were got rid of’, described Jacek Tittenburn who summarized that process as ‘one big scam’. Such acts coupled with prevalent corruption earned this period immediately following postsocialist change the tag of ‘wild capitalism’ (Harper, 2006).
unemployment rate of 19% (where such a category of being ‘unemployed’ had not previously existed), a fall of national income by 11% in the first year, and 18% in the next, a rapidly rising new problem of homelessness, reaching between an estimated 100,000 – 500,000 people today, and a huge increase in inequality (Feffer, 2017: 111–112). With the demise of the cradle-to-grave welfare system, a new concept of permanent poverty emerged, while social exclusion was enhanced with the eradication of cultural infrastructures (Pankowski, 2010: 71). Low wages, work intensification, and rapidly rising pay differentials accompanied these trends.

For coal miners, the socialist state’s golden icons, this economic dispossession was especially abrupt and brutal. Coal and industrialism more broadly were losing their intrinsic correlation to Western modernity. Rather than demonstrating Silesia’s true European heritage, in this context, Communism’s excessively ‘dirty’, polluting industry now demonstrated European failure or un-belonging (see chapters four and five). As Adam Mrozowicki (2011: 39) reports, quoting Bohdan Jalowiecki, ‘Upper Silesia, with its steaming steelworks and one of the largest concentrations of coalmines… began to be defined as a ‘problematic industrial backwater’ in Poland and in an enlarged Europe’.60 ‘Inefficient, unprofitable and uncompetitive’ (Kuchler and Bridge, 2018: 6) – the coal industry as it stood was perceived particularly by outsider and insider policy elites as an acutely troubling Communist relic. Yet, without a Marshall Plan and in the absence of immediate or clear alternatives, Poland’s path to capitalist economic modernization and development, would still need to be coal-based, as had largely occurred in the West, in order to close the development gap, indeed become Western. To save coal, and make it cleaner and greener in the meantime, it thus needed to be de-Communized, and rapidly Capitalized. This meant getting rid of ‘excess’ coal and its workers, including their prior privileges, the main cause of waste and uncompetitiveness. This would be the dominant narrative about coal’s structural problems for the proceeding decades (see e.g. Jonak-Kowalska, 2014). Though with shifting frames, as we will see.

Thus, although the industry was never fully commercialized or privatized and almost-uniquely remained in state hands, backed by World Bank loans, successive Polish governments thus went about what became a chaotic process of liquidating, consolidating, or, in local parlance, 58 Inequality increased from a GINI index of 26.9 in 1989 to 32.7 in 1996 and 35.9 in 2006. This trend would only deepen. In a single year between 2005-2006, the richest 100 Poles increased their wealth from 18.5% of the national total to 53.7% (Feffer, 2017: 111–112). In fact Polish disparities of income have been found to be the highest in the Central and East European region and far higher than in the majority of European states (Shields, 2012: 369).
59 Only in 2005 were the average gross salaries from 1980 reached (Mrozowicki, 2011: 36).
60 Contrasting to previous decades, in the postindustrializing context, Elżbieta Dutka (2012: 95) comments on the increasing ‘melancholia’ with which Silesia came to be culturally represented at this time, particularly by non-Silesian outsiders, both a ‘disappearing Europe’ and a ‘worse’ Europe.
‘vandalizing’, Poland’s national treasure trove of coal in order to meet the competitive and demand-based logics of the new (more environmentally-efficient) market (Mrozowicki 2016: 39; Szpor and Ziolkowska, 2018:8). This restructuring included near-immediate closures. In the 1990s, more than half of Poland’s mines closed; from 70 mines, 30 remained (Kuchler and Bridge, 2018: 7), leading to a halving of production to 73 million tonnes by 2014, and postindustrial wastelands. This was also how Poland would meet, even far surpass, its initial Kyoto Protocol climate commitments, rather than by a system-wide re-organization of the economy or rising environmental awareness and pressure from below (Ceglarz et al., 2018). For at this time more immediately pressing matters occupied citizens – environmental matters were externally influenced affairs driven by the imperatives of EU membership (Kundziewicz and Tosun, 2015). Through use of incentives, the workforce was reduced from around 400,000 to the c.100,000 still employed in the sector today, with 85% of this reduction taking place before 2002 (Szpor and Ziolkowska, 2018: 3-4). Laid off workers did not receive retraining, while investment into new job creation was not part of restructuring. Suicide rates rocketed – especially among men. In the words of one miner, coal miners went from being an ‘army’, a social force to be reckoned with, to a shrunken, wounded huddle of ‘survivors’. No longer a ‘privileged’ or glorified class, even if that image was often ‘rhetorical lip service’ under actually-existing-Communism (Kideckel, 2008: 29), the remaining coal workers thus lost the respect and many of the entitlements, pride, and ontological security they had come to take for granted. As elsewhere for workers in the postsocialist region, the former ‘social contract’ had ‘virtually all its legs… kicked out’ (Crowley, 1997: 14). Simultaneously, coal would become an alienated commodity – a money-making substance, divorced from its tightly woven mythologized collectively- and nationally-embedded meaning of earlier decades, and increasingly exposed to international markets, discourses and debates.

As such, under the then largely backgrounded, and under-analysed, banner of rising climate and energy policy change, on and under the ground socialist-era personhood and identities

61 Poland like other postsocialist transition countries was allowed to choose 1988 rather than 1990 as its Greenhouse Gas emissions baseline (when emissions were at their highest before the economic crisis) to meet its European 20% reduction targets by 2020 (Nachmany et al., 2015: 3-4). Yet already by 2008, such concessions would end – Poland and other CEE countries would have to continue to curb their GHG emissions at the same pace as the old EU member states (Lis, 2012: 11).

62 Hanna Brauers and Pao-Yu Oei (2020: 4) report that ‘Less than 3% of of all expenditures on restructuring programmes during these years went to job creation in other sectors. As local authorities, which were meant to create new job opportunities, had little experience with this task and received no support, success in that respect was very limited’.

63 Suicide rates in Poland increased by 24% between 1989 and 1992. Men are five times more likely to commit suicide in Eastern European countries than women (Pray, 2013: 39-40).
‘unraveled’, and, as happened elsewhere in the postsocialist region, industrial workers who had once known a life of stability, security, and order, in many ways underpinned by coal’s dirt, found themselves in a disorientating and painful ‘no-man’s land of uncertainties’ (Kideckel, 2008: 10; see also Rakowski, 2016). This was experienced as a ‘true existential catastrophe’, and workers in the ensuing maelstrom had to ‘reshape their expectations, habits, and sometimes their whole way of life’ (Mrozowicki 2011: 37; 12). Although women were often first to lose jobs, resulting into a retreat back into the household (Pine, 2002), men’s sense of self was reportedly hit particularly hard, as their ‘loss of status [was] most extreme’ (Stenning, 2005c: 992; see also Kiblitskaya, 2012; Kideckel, 2004). As early as September 1992, then Polish Prime Minister, Hanna Suchocka (in Kramer, 1995: 669), told the nation that she understood workers’ plight, saying:

> For 40 years [the working classes] were treated as the most important class, on which the whole system of the state stood. And it is very bitter for them to understand that the new conditions require them to step down to a very low role.

Such conditions were also very bitter because they had just played a key role in ushering in such changes through the Solidarity movement in their power to strike and protest as I will unpack later. This was coupled with a parallel decline in workers’ political power (Ost, 2005: 20).

Meanwhile, the international community would praise Poland for its ‘successful’ meeting of GHG emissions reductions targets. Due to the rapid deindustrialization, between 1988 and 1994 alone its emissions fell by 28% (Karski, 2012; Nachmany et al., 2015) – far exceeding Poland’s initial 6% target. Indeed, until the mid-to-late 2000s, Poland’s achievements with regards to Kyoto were praised by political actors of all stripes nationally as well (Kundziewicz and Tosun, 2015). Locally, as a side effect, what was more apparent was that air thick with soot became a thing of the past, as a new environmental baseline emerged (see chapter five). Water quality also improved. Yet cleaner environments came at a heavy price as we see. It was the manifestation of the environment vs labour dichotomy in extreme form, and with long-term consequences.

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64 For insight into industrial workers’ plight across postsocialist Central and Eastern Europe see Ashwin, 1999; Crowley, 1997; Crowley and Ost, 2001; Kalb, 2014; Keskula, 2012; Morris, 2016; Mrozowicki, 2011; Rakowski, 2016.

65 Workers’ collective strength was steadily eroded. By law, workers’ councils in privatized previously state-owned firms were dissolved; whereas in 1980 trade union membership had a 65% density, between 1987-2008, estimated union membership fell from 38% to 16% of those employed (Mrozowicki 2011: 34-35). See also Paul Kubicek (2004) for a detailed overview of the decline of the power of organized labour in post-Communist countries. (See also chapter eight, footnote 61).
The impacts for industrial workers were compounded also by what Michael Minkenburg (2000: 186–7) calls the phenomenon of a ‘third modernization’ in the aftermath of 1989. Postsocialist transition to capitalism, joined forces with the broader transitions sweeping through Europe as a whole at this time to a postindustrial, postmaterial, post-traditional society, during which the working-classes in general took a blow not only to their global economic standing, but their political and sociocultural one too, also through the decline of class as a relevant social category (Bauman, 2005; Beck, 1992, 2000; Fraser, 1997; Giddens, 1991; Sennett, 1999). Alison Stenning (2005c: 991-2) likewise suggests that ‘the end of work’, together with the rise of identity politics and ‘individualization’ under neoliberalism, were ‘coupled with the end of socialism’ to form a sort of ‘double ending’. Western postindustrialism, or post-fordism, meets Eastern post-socialism. In this new world order, cultural, rather than physical (bodily), capital became ‘the main source of power, prestige and privilege’ (Eyal et al in Mrozowicki 2011: 37), heads took over from hearts and hands in the distribution of societal respect (Goodhart, 2020).

Emulating the capitalist West and its postmaterial-meritocratic middle class trajectory, the new dignified, valued ‘modern man’ was thus not an industrial manual worker covered in dirt but an educated entrepreneur or managerial individual sitting in a clean office (Mrozowicki 2011: 43). Or perhaps a climate scientist sitting in his lab or a politician making decisions at an air-conditioned COP gathering, the implications of which would then land most heavily on those labouring in the muck.

In this context, coal’s labour amidst its dirt declined also in prestige and cultural worth. The promotion of new middle class identities and material cultures in general based on consumption, rather than production, through both print and broadcast media, especially newly proliferating advertisements, took the form of portrayals of middle-class professionals ‘engaged in ‘clean’ activities and using high-tech products like cell phones, computers and cable TV’ (Kideckel 2008: 58). Ideals and dreams of the Good Life thus dramatically shifted with ‘little connection to the ‘working classes’ and the labour that they stand for (Kideckel 2008: 58). As a result, the pursuit of

66 The number of university students increased five times between 1990-2005, while those in vocational and technical training decreased twofold (Mrozowicki, 2011: 37). This shift from an industry-centred economy to a knowledge-oriented one has devalued manual labour and its expertise in the process. Similarly, Elizabeth Dunn (2004: 133–4) finds that people employed in production became linked with ‘backwardness’ and herd mentality, while those with higher education and working in ‘modern’ sectors such as sales, were the new vanguard.

67 American TV shows such as Dynasty beamed into living rooms depicting capitalist life as glamorous, luxurious, clean and thrilling. The show substantiated the imaginary of the USA as a place of ‘unfathomable wealth’ – the destination Poland was apparently heading now too. Its airing, writes Jolanta Szymkowska-Bartyzel (2017: 231), ‘perfectly corresponded with the beginnings of capitalism and the dynamics of the Balcerowicz plan’. 

116
what counts as acceptable and desirable in everyday life – especially in the performance of regional, gendered and classed identities – radically altered. As the materiality of newly ‘dirty’ coal receded from everyday working class life (manifest in the shrinking workforce, reduced coal mine operations, and cleaner air) new norms of aesthetic pleasures and desires were moulded too. This was intensified by a new arising lifestyle focus on ‘comfort, cleanliness and convenience’ (Shove, 2003), (encapsulated in the emic term ‘komfort’ to summarize such aspirations) that arrived with the rush of consumer capitalism and pursuit of ‘normality’ branded in Western terms (Vasilescu, 2007). Formerly inaccessible Western goods appeared in newly established shopping malls that began to mushroom. The influx of oil-based products, such as: plastics, mass produced clothing, cars, new cosmetics, and other items, shaped a dynamic sensorium in which sleek, slick, comfortable, and smooth have become the increasing aesthetic orders of the day. This included a new kind of domestic, synthetic-chemical drenched ‘clean’ lifestyle promoted and sold through the new flood of Western cleaning products on the market (Drazin, 2002: 104). Their use now came to ‘index membership in the new social order’ (Drazin, 2002: 104). Thus, in the context of this compounding demotion of working-class lives, the meaning of coal and its dirty work dramatically shifted and working class displacement was accompanied by ‘renewed judgements’ of their embodiment, as happened across Europe and the Americas (Stenning, 2005c: 990). This would include renewed judgments and assessments of their ecological habitat too.

Yet, early on in the transition, the promise from both Western and new national elites, indeed, the means by which these harsh changes and their implications were justified, was that soon, if prescriptions were followed, and people were patient, Poland would ‘catch up’ with the West, and everybody would soon be ‘middle class’, i.e. ‘European’, too (Ost, 2015; Žuk and Toporowski, 2020). Somewhere in the background imaginary, this included achieving ostensibly ‘middle class’, Western-capitalist, supposedly clean, green environments as well in the not-too-distant future, though this would not become more consciously articulated until decades later (see chapter four). Polish people and their environments earlier on were thus salvageable – they could be transformed into ‘civilized’ beings. After all, at heart they were always truly European. Communism had simply

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68 See Helga Dittmar’s (2007) book, Consumer Culture, Identity and Well-being: The search for the ‘Good Life’ and the ‘Body Perfect’, on how Western consumer culture is orientated towards promoting ‘idealised images of the perfect body, desirable consumer goods, and affluent lifestyles’ and yet how under-examined their psychological, and indeed social, effects on the self-worth, emotional wellbeing and identity of individuals. This is arguably particularly pertinent in the context of postsocialism where its influence has been particularly abrupt.

69 Participants would regularly comment on the fact that prior to 1989, plastic was an everyday rarity. There were no plastic bags, and consumable items were wrapped in paper (see Brunclíková, 2017: 385 on this phenomenon in postsocialist regimes of waste).
stained this – covered it in dirt, but this would come out in the capitalist wash. This meant that hope and aspiration were the general hegemonic emotional structures of feeling at this earlier time, or at least ones politicians could whip up to endorse the consensus. The pain was going to be worth it. A new utopia was on the horizon in Westernized form (Feffer, 2017). Poland would arrive home soon, and realise their inherent European destiny. For some this did indeed occur.

However, as Poland began its supposed linear and natural trajectory from centrally planned to free market economy, change for many was inevitably experienced instead as frustratingly turbulent, disorderly, uneven and slow. And of course painful. The coal industry was an acute example. Already in the 1990s, questions about why postsocialist societies were ‘resistant’ to capitalist change preoccupied international and Polish academic, media commentators, and policymakers alike. While at first the Communist state could be readily blamed for initial failures, fairly quickly, this scapegoat receded. After all, Poland was following the technocratic prescriptions set out by the Western model. Who or what was now to blame for the East’s continued ‘backwardness’ and ‘underdevelopment’?

Emerging explanatory discourses drew on long-standing historic constructions of the ‘East’ as the ‘West’s’ Other as we earlier saw – but in increasingly internalized form, attaching itself to newly constellated racialized national and regional class hierarchies on both European and national scales. A new scapegoat was found: the people – or Communist ‘mentality’ and personhood – became the preferred rationale for economic and cultural lag, referring to ingrained traces, habits, and behaviours leftover from the Soviet-stamped past. ‘Only after the influence of Homo Sovieticus mentality is reduced and disappears will we be sure that the Polish nation would cure itself forever from its post-communist trauma’, wrote renowned Polish sociologist Piotr Sztompka, who has done much to propagate this theory (in Buchowski, 2006: 471; see also Bridger and Pine, 1998). A ‘confused social Darwinism’ (Morris, 2016: 19) thus pervaded intellectual and political discourse throughout the post-Soviet region and beyond. A social Darwinism that remains a staple part of hegemonic worldviews to this day.

In this worldview, however, some people were marked as more Soviet, or backward, than others. Most poignantly, industrial workers not only lost their material and sociocultural status, but as the quintessential Homo Sovieticus, the ‘black masses’, as the Silesian workforce are often 70 There is a long-standing domestic and international literature on Eastern European and Polish ‘underdevelopment’, or ‘backwardness’, and its historic causes (see e.g. Chirot, 1991; Janos, 1982; Kochanowicz, 2006; Sosnowska, 2005; Sowa, 2011).
referred to\textsuperscript{71}, not long ago the vanguard of Poland’s socialist modernity, were increasingly viewed as the main barrier to continued progress in essentialist terms; a backward ball-and-chain weighing Poland down from the full-on adoption of capitalist market values and principles that would usher in ‘normality’. Not only did their very existence hamper the achievement of the new modernity in economic terms, but culturally they were also problematic, exhibiting backward ‘mental traits… such as collectivism and fatalism’ (Mrozowicki, 2011: 12). In this way, the so-called ‘losers’ of capitalism, such as workers and peasants, became ‘not people with problems but… themselves the problem’ (Buchowski, 2006: 468). They were portrayed as incompetent, carrying ‘old mental habits’, and failing to adopt the ‘positive features’ of capitalism, such as high work standards, self-discipline, entrepreneurialism, rationality, and an ethic of hard work. Furthermore, their legacy of relative organization, unionism and protest was now itself seen as a ‘dangerous force’, a relic of socialism, irrelevant and possibly destabilizing (Mrozowicki 2011: 43), as I will reflect on again a little later. Rather than seen as evidence of worker empowerment it was indeed portrayed as ‘Communist mentality’ (Żuk 2017: 9) (see chapter four for an in-depth discussion of this concept in relation to contemporary smog).\textsuperscript{72} Industrial workers thus began to be denigrated and vilified as the quintessential new internal ‘Other.’\textsuperscript{73} They were something to be afraid, even ashamed, of, to be

\textsuperscript{71} Stephen Crowley (1997: 202) writes that miners in the Donbass region in the Ukraine were equally derided by intellectuals as the ‘dark masses’ or even ‘cattle’.

\textsuperscript{72} In a review of the situation of trade unions in Poland, Vera Trappman (2012: 10) noted a hostile environment towards them from media, who have tended to take an anti-union stance. Jan Winiecki, Poland’s leading economist, in writing about the mining struggles, offers a typical public depiction of miners as uncivilized, inefficient, ineffective, and a drag on the natural progression of economic development. Michał Buchowski (2006: 469) quotes him lambasting the ‘lumpenproletariat’ as a whole, whose ‘lack of standards’ are stopping ‘the process of evolution in the direction of capitalist normality’\textsuperscript{4} Echoes of this discourse are still heard today. For a paradigmatic example, see Izabela Jonk-Kowalska’s (2014) study of trade unions’ role in negotiating employment and remuneration in the mining industry between 2005-2012. She calls trade unions ‘demanding’ and irrational, citing an ‘urgent need to change their beliefs and attitudes’, a relic of Communism that fails to understand ‘market realities’, as key to ensuring a viable future for mining. Trade Union strength and confrontational attitude causes ‘negative synergy’ in worker and industry relations. Similarly, see an article by economist Piotr Zientara (2010) who criticizes the ‘confrontation and intransigence’ of unions and summarises that, despite having a key role to play, ‘Polish social partners have difficulty building a consensus and cooperating to produce benefits for the entire society’. See footnote 63 in chapter seven for more on this point.

\textsuperscript{73} Adam Mrozowicki (2011: 44) reports on press analysis undertaken by Wiesława Kożek in 2003 in which she finds that trade unions, were consistently represented as ‘destructors’ of market reforms and backward defenders of the socialist status quo. For example, in leading right-wing weekly political magazine \textit{Wprost}, workers were referred to as ‘children of PRL economy’; by contrast the counter ideal is a ‘liberal worker’ ‘supporting his boss and economic reforms instead of trade unions’. Alison Stenning (2005: 990) also finds, in ‘stark contrast to the official rhetoric of socialism’, a narrative of the Polish working classes as ‘useless, worthless and an obstacle to transition’. Using \textit{Wprost} again as an example and another weekly \textit{Polityka}, in May 2004 she describes front page stories depicting workers as ‘hopeless, redundant, aggressive, miserable and pathological’. This echoed language of the neoliberal era demonizing the postindustrial working classes in general in the West and, she argues, can be seen as part of the ‘Westernization of the post-socialist world’
civilized and disciplined, or preferably, banished. Partly a backlash against Communist favouritism, this was also central to the naturalized neoliberal ideology of ‘transition’, in which the industrial working-class were to be erased. As Daphne Berdahl (2000) saw it, the word ‘transition’ encapsulated this perspective, simultaneously rendering labour invisibilized and redundant.74

Westernized discourses of class backwardness, smuggled in silently through environmental discourse and policy too (see chapter four and five) that would only grow in explicit significance, thus began to intersect with historic postcolonial, Cold War-era and postsocialist discourses of Eastern European backwardness in general – indeed, one could say they were fomented and transposed in this manner. Michał Buchowski (2006: 466) calls this a process of ‘internal orientalism’, a ‘postmodern, postindustrial and postsocialist meaning of orientalism’, which, after Said, is ‘a way of thinking about and practices of making the other’ that creates ‘social distinctions’ operating ‘across state borders as well as within them’ (Buchowski, 2006: 465-466). Through this mechanism, writes Buchowski, Poland transferred being the ‘Exotic Other’ in a European, post-Cold War frame onto its own internal ‘Stigmatized Brothers’ - or those lower down the class order (though this aspect was implicit). Silesian-Polish coal workers would take a big portion of this hit. Orientalism found a new inset, national, domestic target in endless cascading chains of ‘nesting orientalisms’ (Bakić-Hayden, 1995; Mälksoo, 2012) – no longer necessarily a discursive representative tool imposed from outside, but internalized within.75 Indeed, increasingly embodied through the skin, as I show.

This internal orientalism has been a crucial tool of worker dispossession. As Don Kalb (2014: 270) writes about Poland:

By regularly invoking the Homo Sovieticus syndrome, liberal intellectuals displaced workers out of the bounds of Europe and into a timeless Asia. At the same moment, they passionately claimed a place for themselves in the new European pantheon, invoking their conscientious and peaceful advocacy of liberal civil society against the communist Goliath and their successful liberalization and privatization of ‘the economy.’ More than that, they prided themselves on their successful imposition of Western-type civil society and individualism on backward, populist eastern nations.

(Stenning, 2005: 984).

74 David Kideckel (2008: 8) states that the word ‘transition’ ‘implicitly defines workers as either anachronistic artefacts of failed socialism or obstacles in the march to capitalist prosperity, or even both’.

75 Lucy Mayblin et al (2014: 11) find in their research on perspectives on diversity in Poland, that indeed informants used the language of inferiority, informed by a conception of hierarchical modernization theory, to describe certain social groups and designate them as ‘domestic others’ who are ‘civilizationally incompetent’, unable to reject old mental habits, or ‘the homo sovieticus complex’. This is akin to Balibar’s (in Chari and Verdery, 2009: 26) concept of ‘class racism’, which he uses to designate the way in which class inequality is naturalized through a perception of sub-humanity.
Indeed, Kalb (2014: 271) continues, ‘Internal orientalization served as one of the style figures of a process of cultural dispossession that accompanied, deepened, and smoothed the material dispossession simultaneously taking place. It was one of the cultural mechanisms that helped produce a Polish ethnic folk figure against a cosmopolitanizing elite’. For working-class Poles, particularly the industrial variety, were, according to this mechanism, increasingly classified as not only backward (un-modern) but also ‘worthless’ (Kalb, 2014) (without value). They were becoming ‘dirty’ in new ways.

Thus, just as Eeva Kesküla (2012: 47) writes in relation to miners in Estonia, Polish coal workers in particular thus not only ‘lost their political and economic significance’, their sociocultural one too, but ‘the heroes have become villains.’ David Kideckel (2008: ix) notes that Romanian coal miners experienced a similar degradation, succinctly summing up the working-class’s postsocialist plight: ‘in a few short years industrial workers have gone from paragons of socialist virtue to near-pariahs of postsocialist uncertainty’. This would be the deliberate ‘unmaking of the socialist working class’ (Kideckel 2003). This symbolic violence was perhaps the harshest blow, the implications of which are evident today. In this sense, previously valorized dirty work was now a mark of alienation, marginalization and even failure, causing national failure too, a material-symbolic marker of the new meritocratic capitalist global, especially European, class value hierarchy in formation. Multiple stigmas stuck to and stained the body through dirt’s adherence.

Adding to this, over time, not just economic and cultural, but also more publicly pronounced ecological discourses of ‘dirt’ would start to ramp up the pressure, overlaying the toxic effects of moral stigma to this potent mix. Western countries were increasingly leaving coal behind, due now not to the threat of Communism but to emerging climate concern and its economic opportunities. Thus ‘Europe’ was increasingly no longer basing its integration on coal. By 2004, when Poland would formally join the Union as an official member state, the European Coal and Steel Community had ceased operating two years earlier. Soon after this, a new kind of transition was awaiting – a transition not only into capitalism, but, as Aleksandra Lis (2012: 11) highlights, a transition into a low-carbon economy, marked particularly by the second phase of the EU Emissions Trading

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76 This had echoes in international discourse too. Consider this excerpt from a 1997 New York Times article titled ‘Poland’s coal miners, once stars, are now surplus’: ‘The coal mines of the Silesia region are one of the biggest drags on Poland’s booming economy and one of the last redoubts of unreformed industry in this country, which threw off Communism in 1989. But Silesia is also a social time bomb, nearly seven million people in the industrial heartland in southern Poland, where big swipes at the coal mines could cause economic and psychological quakes across cities, towns and villages’ (Perlez, 1997). Fear of ‘the masses’ set in.
Scheme coming into force in 2008, coinciding with the Great Recession.\textsuperscript{77} By 2009, the EU had also announced newly-ambitious cuts of at least 80% on 1990 levels by 2050 (Marcinkiewicz and Tosun, 2015: 3). For Poland, the challenge of climate change, which had been rising up the agenda in the international community, now required something much more concerted than simply becoming capitalist alone. It required deepening structural changes still – particularly to coal-based energy infrastructures, if not abandonment of coal completely. This would come with far heavier costs. Furthermore, Eastern European countries were from now going to be required to play on equal terms with the West, rather than being granted concessions as had previously been the case. This was the despite the fact that old EU member states contribute 11% of combined EU emissions, while new ones only 2.4% (Lis, 2012: 32). Resistance to EU climate policy at the national level increased from many sides, especially Poland (Lis, 2012; Marcinkiewicz and Tosun, 2015). As time went on, environmental concern targeting coal only mounted at EU and national levels – coal became ‘Polish’ again in newly international backward ways, while smog, beginning as a politicized issue in 2012 in Krakow, and becoming a huge issue in Silesia in 2017 when I arrived, would be framed as ‘Polish’ too. Over time, too, climate and energy issues became increasingly polarized, with PiS particularly becoming more vocal and polemical on the matter as a way to contest government (Marcinkiewicz and Tosun, 2015).\textsuperscript{78} Meanwhile, the ‘East’ therefore became tarnished as backward once again on the basis of environment and energy practices – in acutely moral national terms. The increased moralizing of the climate issue was symbolized most potently by Pope Francis’s 2015 encyclical which he dedicated to ecological matters, and targeted coal. Poland, a Catholic country, would be shamed by the Church. For PiS, this was thus not a ‘Polish Pope’.

Under intensifying processes of such European integration, the scapegoat for renewed kinds of Polish backwardness once again morphed. In 2017, I found that ‘Communist’ mentality, had

\textsuperscript{77} For an in-depth overview and analysis of Poland’s relation to the EU Emissions Trading System see Aleksandra Lis (2012).  
\textsuperscript{78} Kamil Marcinkiewicz and Jale Tosun (2015) in their analysis of the parliamentary climate debate in Poland in the period 1997 – 2014 conclude that there is no evidence for climate change being used as a basis for political competition between Parties. However, this seems to contradict their findings in the bulk of the paper which state that it was PiS who, over time, became the most dominant and vocal actor on the topic of climate change on the political stage, in the most passionate tones, and also the most prominent climate sceptic. From my reading it seems clear that they uniquely leveraged climate and energy issues as a way to critique government, which Marcinkiewicz and Tosun themselves point out, thereby beginning to popularize themselves amongst the coal class. For while other Parties were also pro-coal, it was PiS that was most visibly and actively so. Marcinkiewicz and Tosun’s analysis also stops at 2014, and is published a year before PiS came unexpectedly to power, just before the Paris conference. Climate and energy matters have been central to PiS’s politics since, especially when other Parties, and civil society, in increasing protests, at this juncture took another path. Other analysis since contradicts this perspective (see Żuk et al., 2021).
decisively been replaced by ‘Polish’ mentality in circulating discourses – it was not so-much Communist traits, but the national stock, that was the issue all along, and their national natures too (see chapter four). Somewhere along way, during the process of EU integration, this shift had taken place. After EU-accession moreover, its failures and frictions, had starkly revealed this ‘truth’.

Under mounting environmental pressures, overlaying economic and cultural shifts, coal and its people, together with their traditional industrial modes of social organisation, have thus become increasingly dirty – ‘matter out of place’ (Douglas 2001 [1966]: 44) – in compounding terms, and at multiple scales (global/intergenerational, EU, national, regional), referencing their purported economic, cultural and national backwardness, diminishing value, and now moral dubiousness as well. This process has occurred historically not in engagement with local social concerns or cultures, as we have seen. Rather their complete abandonment and discarding. Neither has it been well communicated or discussed. As a result, experiencing these shifts in distorted, hazy and confusing means through their own direct embodied encounters with coal under these structural conditions, remaining coal workers today feel that broader ‘civilized’ society is ‘ashamed of coal’, and them too in multiple ways, and this has been increasingly based on their apparent (Silesian) Polish essence, particularly in close proximity to Polish coal, perhaps one of the most potent Polish symbols, especially for PiS. Thus the discourse of ‘dirty’ coal, as a response to forms of ecological dispossession and its postcolonial orientalist tenor, was now being increasingly made sense of as an attack on undervalued Polishness, a Polishness embodied in coal and its people in Silesia. Class and nation were again fused, but in negative, orientalized senses.

The lived experience of navigating this change has also increased in its visceral, emotional effects. This is particularly with the ecological matter. For, of all stigmas, moral stigma ‘hurts’ most intensely (Ashforth and Kreiner, 2014b), especially when that stigma stains the body. Once someone is dirty in the sense of ‘immoral’ by virtue of who they are in essence, as Douglas showed, they are no longer a part of society, they are delegitimized, and they are no longer salvageable, except through banishment or purging, purification. This is made true also in terms of their environment in the case of the coal issue. What was once an enabler of home has become an embodied experience of shame, made potent through its material touch – while the longing to feel at-home, to feel pure and so at ease, which Silesians had long hankered after, as outlined earlier in this chapter – at multiple scales (literal domestic, community, regional, national, European) – intensifies in a feedback loop. For the industrial working-classes, Poland began to be decisively unhomely – indeed, a hostile and stigmatizing environment, not only symbolically but materially
embodied, as I will show, through the skin. Ecological dispossession, of coal as a route to belonging to the Polish nation itself, as well as to Europe, was in full swing.

What must also be understood to frame this experience is the fact that EU membership, however, came with heightened hopes and expectation of the opposite. Dreams and promises of returning home, to a clean ‘normality’ and its dignities and standing only intensified. Yet, over a decade later, the final insult to injury, has been the ongoing economic ‘development gap’ that has remained between East and West. It has become increasingly apparent that the longed for redemption dream of the ‘return to Europe’ and ‘normality’, of ‘catching up with the West’, became instead a process of ‘disenchantment’ and of ‘bitter disappointment’ (Tlostanova 2017: 6; 1) as one’s seemingly permanent secondary place in the new world order revealed itself instead (see also Feffer, 2017). The initially socially-accepted consensus had failed to deliver on its core promises that once were meant to legitimize it – the leftover promises of industrialism, both capitalist and Communist – the promise of a more prosperous and more equal, comfortable society, in which, as I came to reflect on, bodies feel safe and at ease (Davies, 2018; Tsakiris et al., 2021).

For contrary to expectations, the class-based structural East-West societal difference, and its connected inequalities, was further compounded, rather than erased, by Communism’s collapse. Although Poland escaped the Great Recession in 2008 generally unscathed, its workers had been increasingly subjected to what were perceived as de-humanizing conditions including unstable labour contracts, low union representation, stagnant and low wages, and staggering unequal development (Andor, 2019) (see chapter seven). In fact, as Cédric Hugrée et al. (2020: 3) outline, the postsocialist transition generated a new European-scale division of labour, in which the decline of manual industrial workers in the West was further accelerated through increasing outsourcing and displacement to the periphery – particularly to the deeply neoliberalizing East where wages were deliberately lower, worker protections fewer, and regulations more relaxed. ‘Producers’ would concentrate here. As Aleksandar Smolar (1996) points out the generally fetishized middle class is in actual fact ‘a spirit seeking a body’. Agricultural labour, already highly unevenly distributed in the East, also became heavily concentrated in the East”” – and together with Southern European countries, still today they ‘effectively constitute the workshop, the market garden and the breadbasket of countries in the North and West of Europe’ (Hugrée et al., 2020: 3). This outsourcing of industrialism constitutes at the same time an offshoring of Western consumed carbon emissions, not usually calculated in climate policies (Böhm, 2015). At the same time, the East

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79 Where around 12% of people today are employed in farming compare to less than 1% in the West.
became a kind of dumping ground for ‘inferior’ products – those made with poorer quality materials or ingredients (Feffer, 2017: 136), while also an environmental offloading zone – for example, old diesel cars, trash, and unwanted textiles wind their way from West to East (Clean Energy Wire, 2018; European Environmental Agency, 2019; Tsoneva, 2020; Welle, 2020). Amongst this, it also would become shamed for its coal-based energy too. A result of structural cleavages, clean and luxurious normality would be the preserve of some not all, while the striving to achieve it by those still in the dirt, blamed and shamed for it, would only heighten, with acute emotional implications.

This entrenching East-West differential must be highlighted not only in occupational and income terms, but also in bodily (ecological) ones (Hugrée et al., 2020: 14-16). Whereas industrial and agricultural labour, in direct engagement with ‘nature’, is often hazardous to and strenuous on the body, with implications for physical health, wellbeing, and comfort, cognitive, white-collar work that dominates Western societies, while having its own kinds of hazards and stresses, is far safer, physically less taxing (Hugrée et al., 2020). Indeed, discrepancies of life expectancy and health outcomes are notable – in fact, the difference in life expectancy between East and West, rather than narrowing since postsocialist transition, is greater today than it was in 1960, particularly for men (the gap is 12 years for men and 8 years for women (British Medical Journal, 2013), while morbidity and mortality rates are higher in general at every age too (Murthi, 2015). Silesia is a region with one of the lowest life expectancies in the country (netTG.pl, 2019). Access to healthcare and spending on health, education, family policy and unemployment support, are also widely unequal relative to the West, while the taxation system has been one of the most regressive, making economic and social precarity unevenly distributed and felt among bodies that are increasingly insecure, ill, stressed, tired and overloaded (Davies, 2018; Tsakiris et al., 2021). In this way, as John Feffer (2017: 35) states, while ‘Communism was the God that failed’, for an earlier generation, ‘Liberalism is the God that failed’, for today’s. Yet the embodied, and ecological, dimension of this experience is usually overlooked.

And yet, many Poles argue that miners are still an unfairly ‘privileged’ class with a sense of over-entitlement (see chapter four and seven). What do they have to complain about? After all, Silesia is perceived as one of the wealthiest corners of Poland.\(^80\) At the same time, official unemployment rates have decreased over the years – reaching 3.4% in 2018, below the 3.9% national average and the 6.3% EU average (European Commission, 2020: 5). New industries, like automobility and logistics are flourishing. There are jobs everywhere, are there not? Coal mining, GDP per capita was 21,600 EUR (PPS) in 2017, which was above the national average of 20,900 EUR, though equivalent to 72% of the EU average (European Commission, 2020: 5).
for its life- and health-risking labour, is also one of the best paid jobs in the region, one of the most stable forms of employment, and one of the only unionized ones, with rare social welfare benefits like pensions and holiday pay (European Commission, 2020: 6). This is precisely key. Furthermore, what these figures further mask is a spatially and socially uneven picture and a crisis of social reproduction, experienced as deepening economic and social precarity. Rosy macro-employment figures must be offset by the fact that Silesia is experiencing a severe depopulation problem. Between 2000 – 2017, the population decreased by 4.4% (European Commission, 2020: 5), resulting in an ageing population and the shrinking of those in work with knock on investment effects (Anczewska et al., 2020). Environmental issues, particular smog, are becoming a key part of push factors. So-called ‘junk’, or highly flexible, contracts offering minimal social protections (see chapter seven) are also widespread. Existing employment opportunities and incomes are also highly spatially and sectorally uneven. In Silesia, the Tyskie, Katowicki, Bielski, and Gliwicki sub-regions, none of which are today deeply connected to the coal mining sector, have lowest levels of unemployment, while other areas, such as the Bytom sub-region, as we saw have experienced postindustrial devastation (European Commission, 2020: 5). At the same time, coal mining attracts a disproportionate share of people with lower levels of formal education - 40% of employees in mining and quarrying have attained primary, lower secondary or vocational education, and 90% of these employees are male, around half of which are aged 30–44 (European Commission, 2020: 6). These jobs in particular are highly spatially concentrated in certain municipalities in urban peripheries too. Furthermore, energy poverty, and its very real threat, was a growing, though under-articulated, concern (Bouzarovski and Herrero, 2017). On top of that, according to the European Commission’s 2016 Social Progress Index, Silesia was ranked 250th (Poland’s lowest) out of 272 regions surveyed, which included rating such issues as: access to medical care, health and wellbeing, personal safety, environmental quality, access to knowledge, communication and education, level of trust in public institutions, and observance of civil rights (Anczewska et al., 2020).

As a result of such sorry situations at home, 1.5 million Poles (c. 5% of the population, particularly from the younger age group, the largest number to emigrate in peacetime Polish history Feffer, 2017: 398) emigrated abroad in the post-2004 EU accession period in search of a better life81. There they would perform the West’s own ‘dirty work’ too (Aguiar and Herod, 2006; Paterson, 2011), for example, in agriculture, construction, hospitality, packing, or logistics, as well

81 In 2008, an estimated 2.2 million Poles worked outside Poland (Mrozowicki 2011: 38).
as care work and even in the ‘green economy’ (Gregson et al., 2016). This was for higher pay than they would receive at home, yet cut off from social networks, and met with increasing hostility and resentment towards their arrival in the West. Rather than be welcomed with open arms on equal terms, as had been the hope, Poles realised that they remained an inferior, often stigmatized and rejected, internal ‘Other’. Because of their Polishness (disguising the class issue). Yet the benefits initially outweighed the costs. It was a form of escape. Within this vastly differentiated working landscape, coal-mining’s meanings back in Poland, including its dirt, shifted once again. Since Poland is one of the last remaining EU countries to have closed-pit coal mines, and employs half of all of Europe’s coal workers, such work with its specific subterranean conditions appears less and less attractive in the broader labour market. Why work underground in a dirty, dangerous environment, young people ask themselves, when they can go abroad and earn much more doing lighter, safer work above ground? Even construction work, a dangerous alternative, is often perceived as more appealing given it is in the open air. In general, contemporary masculinities no longer require one to undertake risky, physical labour, even if it is still valorized within some working-class communities. While Kideckel (2008: 174) points to the contemporary condition of ‘declining masculinity’, understood as the hegemonic, traditional, conservative norm, it seems that options for masculinities have diversified, leaving those who try to hold on to the former, more rigidly defined roles anxious and uncertain in a context in which labour is less valued in both ‘economic and symbolic terms’ (Mrozowicki, 2011: 99). Coupled with the decline of the ‘breadwinner’ family model in an increasingly feminized service economy, ‘petro-’ (Daggett, 2018) and ‘industrial’ masculinities (Hultman, 2017) are no longer a route to all they once promised (see chapter six). At the same time, entrenching such industrial masculinities becomes a survival strategy.

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82 The continued prevalence of closed or deep-pit mining in Poland must be contrasted with what Jessica Smith-Rolston (2013: 585) describes as the more common contemporary coal-mining work environment in other parts of the developed world, here the US, where, despite the fact that the ‘image of underground manual labor maintains a tenacious hold on public views of the industry’, increased mechanization has meant that actually miners are ‘more likely to operate multi-million dollar equipment in the open air than swing a pick-axe in a tunnel’. In her studies ‘ cliched images of miners covered in filthy black coal dust’ are irrelevant to the ‘real’ lives of Wyoming miners, their ‘hopes and challenges’ (Smith Rolston, 2014: 33). In my field site, such ongoing images and embodied encounters are emphasised as core to claims of victimhood’s moral worth. Similarly, Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2018: xx) describes the common contemporary position of Australian coal miners: ‘In the not too distant past, the iconic Australian miner would have been a gritty, ragged and emaciated man who went underground with his pickaxe, facing great peril for lamentable remuneration until the day he literally struck gold. The typical miner today may have a very comfortable salary, could be either male or female, and may spend their days operating a very large machine such as an excavator from the air-conditioned comfort of a cabin, accompanied by music from their headset, a cold Pepsi max on the dashboard.’ See also Amaranta Herrero and Louis Lemkow (2015) for similar shifts taking place in Spanish coal extraction combined with the tenacity of the dirty, subterranean miner. Miners in Poland are all too aware of the continued uniqueness of the Polish case in a ‘European’ and globalized world.
where dwelling in such environments – Polish ones – requires it. Indeed, as Charlie Walker (2018) finds in postsocialist Russia, neoliberalism, while opening up diversification in gender roles for some, ‘narrows the range of subject positions available to working-class men’. For those left behind, in dirt-covered labouring masculine Eastern bodies, yet excluded from access to desired clean, cognitive-middle-class consumer lifestyles, a social security net, and the respect and social integration it comes with, and called ‘dirty’ for it, in increasingly moral terms too, are increasingly filled with shame regarding this set up, especially when dirt marks the skin.

This is set in the context of the accelerated influx post-accession of neoliberal cosmopolitan EU-backed policies of universalist postmodern or post-traditional ideals regarding ‘foreign’ cultural values such as, not only environmentalism, but also so-called ‘gender ideology’, secularism and multiculturalism, that destabilize traditional industrial gendered and sexuality norms, religious affiliation, and ethnic homogeneity, key platforms for Polish cultural identity, the reassertion of which were also central to the politics of post-Communist transition (Stenning 2005: 991), into additional markers of backwardness and Polish shame, fusing with and shaping growing Polish liberal middle classes homegrown discourses. Postindustrialism meets industrialism, generating rising contradictions and tensions.

All this means that the politics of coal’s dirt in relation to labour are highly unevenly distributed, felt and experienced in both material and symbolic, economic and cultural, and I add ecological terms. Class, gender, national, regional and sub-regional identity and spatial-ecological location matter. This is particularly when set against the distinctly different Communist past. Yet all that is silenced in a context where speaking of ‘class’ and inequality as an outcome of politics, rather than natural selection, is grossly muted, and where a pervasive classist contempt, expressed in national form, is apparent. To this I return below. It is also silenced by the Silesian folkloric myths, tied to Communism’s glory days, which still dominate perceptions of coal lives, particularly for those disconnected from its present reality in a context where media also rarely feature the lifeworlds and voices of ‘ordinary’ people (Świątkiewicz-Mośny and Wagner, 2012).

For coal workers, the postsocialist experience can be encapsulated so far by Rausing’s (in Owczarzak, 2009: 11) comments with regards to Estonia, with resonances for Poland: ‘the country move[d] from the edges of the East to the edges of the West [and] the identity of people seems to be moving from that of being Westerners in the East to being Easterners in the West’. Dariusz Skórczewski (2014: 87), drawing on Tóthöy, refers to this being at a ‘dual periphery’. It is at this juncture, echoing Larry Wolff and Michał Buchowski earlier, that the ‘postcolonial ghost emerges in
the background of the postsocialist drama’, writes Madina Tlostanova (2017: 4). And through which, I propose, the ongoing embodied emotional ecological interplay of shame and home filter through.

**Postcolonial postsocialism: Unhomely shame**

Numerous scholars have sought to consider the explicit application of postcolonial theory to the postsocialist sphere (mostly within literary studies but increasingly further afield– see Bill, 2014; Cervinkova, 2012; Chiani Moore, 2011; Chari and Verdery, 2009, 2009; Fiut, 2014; Janion, 2006; Janion et al., 2014; Kideckel, 2009; Kołodziejczyk and Șandru, 2012; Lazarus, 2012; Mayblin et al., 2014; Morozov, 2015; Neumann, 1999; Owczarzak, 2009; Pucherová and Gáfrik, 2015; Půtová, 2016; RiabeZuk, 2013; Sandru, 2012; Surynt, 2014; Thompson, 2010; Tlostanova, 2012, 2015, 2017; Zarycki, 2014) – a move that for traditional postcolonial scholars might seem awkward if not unjustifiable. For the former Second World has largely remained absent, a ‘blank spot on the map’ (Cavanagh, 2003), within postcolonial theorizing about the First and Third World relationship, itself a Cold War categorization. Yet postcolonial postsocialist scholarship has become its own and growing sub-genre. Claudia Snochowska-Gonzalez (2012: 710) writes that the historic claims to Polish ‘post-colonial credentials can be reduced to the equation: 123 years under partition + 6 years of war + 44 years of political dependence’. Yet, such claims have been hotly contested and debated. Is it correct to label the former empires and the Soviet Union ‘colonial’ powers? Is the East’s relation to the West one of dependence or colonialism? Can postcolonial theory really be imported – what Wierzejska (in Pucherová and Gáfrik, 2015: 13) calls a “mechanical translocation”?

However, sidestepping this debate, as other scholars have led the way, it is more useful to explore the postcolonial concept of orientalism and how a postcolonial imaginary and mode of thinking and being are at work within this context, rather than attempt to prove a ‘postcolonial’ status once and for all (Mayblin et al., 2014: 3). The European East, as mentioned in the last section, with its own multilayered histories of subjugation and exploitation, perhaps one could say particularly in Silesia, is a sphere where a postcolonial sensibility, or ‘complex’ as Maria Janion (2011) has named it – a pervasive felt sense of an imposed ‘backwardness’ or Othering in Giyatri Spivak’s (1985) term - is a deeply-entrenched navigational tool for knowing, ascertaining and measuring one’s place in the world and has been so for centuries, as Larry Wolff pointed out
earlier. This is particularly expressed in constant practices of everyday comparison – between an apparently inferior East and a superior West – that are widespread, banal, applied to anything and everything, as my research revealed to me. In Poland, Lucy Mayblin et al. (2014: 7) call this the ‘Polish inferiority-superiority complex’ - ‘a sense of inferiority in relation to the West, alongside high levels of Polish national pride’, that generate feelings of contempt towards those further East too (Russia, Ukraine etc). Since Poland joined the European Union such experiences and their pernicious effects have resurfaced with shock for postsocialist citizens. Poles, and others, were not welcomed ‘home’.

Thus postcolonial postsocialism should not be understood as an application of postcolonial theory or concepts absent of race – for race is constructed around an East-West gradient (Melegh, 2006) in which Eastern Europeans themselves are denied full entry into ‘Westernness’ defined as ‘Whiteness’ - a social construct, not a biological skin colour, though with real material effects. The politics of Brexit, and the fururo around Eastern European migrants, the notorious ‘Polish plumber’ ‘stealing’ jobs, followed by the stark rise in racially motivated attacks against Eastern European immigrants following the vote, shine stark light on Eastern Europe as an ongoing internal ‘Other’ within Europe’s borders, and how it plays out in contemporary European politics. (Failed – or dirty) Whiteness and its politics increasingly reflexively comes to the fore (see chapter eight). The relation to the West thus becomes a complex ‘mix of desire and resentment, a negotiation, an ambivalent hybrid’ (Mayblin et al., 2014: 12). The West became both an imaginary of aspiration but also of distancing (Mayblin et al., 2014: 13); the East a perpetual nomansland.

Application of an explicitly postcolonial postsocialist lense to empirical study is so far less common. This might involve investigation of what Michael Herzfeld (1997: 96) terms ‘practical orientalism’ - ‘[h]ow the discourse of cultural difference enters the encompassing realm of everyday sociality and sensual habit – how it colours the visual, flavours the olfactory, and tempers the emotional’. This was particularly appropriate in my field research for the experiences of the

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83 Two Polish texts detail the construction of Polish cultures and people by both French enlightenment intellectuals and Prussians in the late 18th to early 19th century in negative and often dirty terms. Maciej Forycki (2004: 52-60), Anarchia polska w myśli oświecenia: Francuski obraz Rzeczypospolitej szlacheckiej u progu czasów stanisławowskich [Polish anarchy in Enlightenment thought: French vision of the Republic of the Nobles at the dawn of the last king of Poland], quotes from the famous Encyklopedie by Diderot and d’Alambert, a description of the so-called ‘Polish tangle’ (plica polonica): ‘tangled mass of hairs resulting from lack of washing and combing of the hair’, also a sign of sickness in the head — ‘the evil that is the source of Polish anarchy has its origin in the sick Polish heads’. Dariusz Łukasiewicz (1995), Czarna legenda Polski: Obraz Polski i Polaków w Prusach 1772-1815 [The black legend of Poland: the image of Poland and Poles in Prussia between 1772-1815], which traces the negative stereotypes of Poles entrenched in German historiography and popular culture ever since Prussia and Russia forged the partitions of Poland in the eighteenth century.
changing meaning of coal. Such narratives are deeply embodied – becoming, indeed, backgrounded
common sense in themselves. Thus Madina Tlostanova (2012: 131–132) asks, ‘what if, instead of
determining if and how we can apply postcolonial theory to postcommunist spaces, we start instead,
with the geopolitics and body-politics of knowledge growing out of the local histories, subjectivities
and experiences of eastern and south-eastern Europe, central Asia, Caucasus or Russia?’ She
argues that what enables the postcolonial and the postsocialist to be brought together is not a focus
on the ‘historical concept of colonialism linked with postcolonial studies’ but rather the ‘decolonial
concept of the global coloniality of power, of being, of gender, of knowledge, of perception’. By
this, she refers to ‘coloniality’ as the dark, violent underbelly of imperial-colonial modernity that
has expanded around the globe since the 1500s and from which ‘no one is exempt’ (Tlostanova,
2017: 5). Coloniality, rather than colonialism as such, thus becomes a global condition, but with
heterogenous, overlapping, cross-cutting, dialectical and ‘pluriversal’, existences, experiences and
expressions. Thus, the imperial-colonial histories of Central and Eastern Europe may be
‘unconventional’, but the lived experience of those whose corporeal existence renders coloniality
materially-discursively real, for example through ‘instances of mind-colonization… resulting in
self-orientalization and self-racializing, inferiority complexes, mimicry and other phenomena’
(Tlostanova, 2012: 132), needs to be reckoned with. This is particularly so in the context where the
far-right, here PiS, are successfully mobilizing and appropriating the very concept of
‘postcolonialism’ for their own political ends.

For my thesis, the utility of exploring postcoloniality as a lived, emotional reality became
apparent when understanding the condition of ongoing contemporary postsocialism as one of in-
betweenness, displacement, a neither-here-nor-there-ness,\(^84\) encapsulated in the notion of
perpetually ‘being in transition’ that the term implies. Of, in fact being ‘matter out of place’ - dirty –
and out of time – backward, encapsulated in the embodied discourse of ‘normality’ and
‘abnormality’ and the constant and restless practices of comparison of East and West as means of
knowing, experiencing, sensing and being. Where home becomes shame, and shame becomes home
in uneasy unhomeliness, most recently in moral terms. In the interstices between the always-
apparent Communist past, the Western European present, and the postsocialist reality, there is a

\(^84\) Renowned Polish feminist scholar Maria Janion (2006) even went so far as to say this is the defining
condition of Polishness itself, plagued with the historic traumas of its own disappearance and annihilation:
‘Perhaps Poland really is nowhere? ‘Nowhere’ is a terrible word. It is associated with deficit, absence,
negation and denial. Somebody whose identity has no place is a troublemaker and opportunist with no roots or
regard for history and tradition. Identity not rooted in the soil arouses fear and uncertainty, is hard to define
and difficult to know what to do with – it is generally misunderstood. And yet it is this absence of place that is
the best definition of Polishness.’
constant process of navigation of the fraught and multiple tensions between a sense of shame and home in its pluriversal and scaleable meanings (the body, self, community, literal household, regional, national and European identity etc) – the feeling of being made to feel not-at-home-in-the-world, and of glimpses, yearnings, of finding ‘resting places’ (Berlant, 2007: 281) as an embodied state of being and orientation.

This can be characterized through Victor Turner’s notion of ‘liminality’, or what Homi Bhaba precisely called the ‘unhomely’. According to Victor Turner (in Czepczyński 2008: 113), in developing the notion of rites of passage, ‘liminality’ is a period of transition where one is in an ambiguous state of limbo – a sense of being ‘betwixt and between’ and un-belonging. Mariusz Czepczyński (2008) has applied this notion to postsocialist landscapes – but it can also be applied to social life and embodied lifeworlds. Indeed, scholars of postsocialism have noted this pervasive sense of liminality through defining the postsocialist ‘condition’ as one of ‘indeterminacy’ (Kesküla, 2018), in ‘between posts’ (Chari and Verdery, 2009; Půtová, 2016), fixated on ‘rupture’ (Müller, 2019), ‘trauma’ (Sztompka, 2016), ‘void’ of a ‘delayed humanity’ (Tlostanova 2017), and (briefly in Jeremy Morris’s Russian ethnography) the ‘unhomely’ (Morris, 2016). ‘Nostalgia’ is said to be a resultant widespread regional structure of feeling in relation to the absent past as a consequence – the longing to ‘return home’ (Berdahl, 1999, 1999; Hann, 2012; Todorova and Gille, 2012). Yet ‘nostalgia’ refers to looking back only to the past – in the postsocialist present, the gaze is cast sideways as much as back and forward – to the West, to Europe, to ‘modernity’. Nostalgia also carries with it a certain baggage of dismissal, as if rendering something ‘nostalgic’ immediately casts it as untrustworthy, irrelevant, romanticized and exaggerated, easily explainable as a misplaced attachment.\footnote{In a similar vein, Chris Hann (2012: 1127) terms nostalgia, particularly in the postsocialist context, a ‘weasel-word, which confuses more than it illuminates’, and can be subject to political and commercial manipulation that simply dismisses any validity to nostalgia’s genuine political and social purchase.} But as Patrick Heady and Liesl L. Gambold Miller (2006: 34-35) propose in the context of postsocialist Russia, ‘nostalgic’ claims ‘may often be true to people’s actual experience’. In my own research encounters I found this emotionally-fraught navigation of mundane temporalities and spatialities filled with both loss and desire, humiliation and aspiration, packed with salient cultural, moral and political value, as my thesis shows. Shame was speaking back to the present.

For Homi Bhaba (1992, 2004), the in fact ‘unhomely’ experience of postcoloniality is also characterized as one of hybridity, a state of in-betweenness, ‘neither the one nor the other’. The colonial presence, in turn, ‘is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and
authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference.’ If, as anthropologist Michael Jackson (2000: 111; 47) vividly defined it, the feeling of being most truly at-home-in-the-world, a world of perpetual movement, is one where one is filled only ‘with the noise of oneself’ free to be oneself ‘without apology or doubt’, then unhomeliness is a condition where ‘noise’, doubt and getting it wrong comes in from different sides. Under postcolonial conditions, this is a state of Bhaba’s uncomfortable, imposed sense of hybridity where one’s own judgements and actions are constantly being considered and re-orientated against and through the imagined or actual judgements and actions of a superior Other. In the postsocialist context, from within this state of unhomeliness – shame arises – as one with muti-layered relationalities - of racialized national, regional, class, occupation and gendered identity. Indeed, I propose that ‘shame’ as an experience of ambivalence is the very condition of an imposed sense of postcolonial postsocialist not-being-at-home-in-the-world, of not quite measuring up and being in-between, neither being fully oneself nor fully what is expected but indeed an impure, not-yet-fully-arrived ‘hybrid’; thus, of Polish postcolonial postsocialism itself, as Czesław Miłosz’s poem quoted at the start reveals. For that reason I juxtapose it, though intentionally do not polarize or it as a binary, not with ‘pride’, which is ephemeral and superficial by contrast as a dichotomous opposite, nor to ‘honour’, which has a history of othering in anthropology (Stewart, 2015), but to the notion of ‘home’ - to the viscerally-verifiable feeling of at-home-ness as its only salve. For as Helen Lynd (in Connor, 2001:) wrote: shame, which concerns who you are, rater than what you have done, ‘has no comfort except to be beyond the bounds of shame’ - i.e. in the comfort of a sense of home, at-ease-ness, belonging, congruence, where who you are is acceptable. Filled ‘only with the noise of oneself’ in Jackson’s perceptive-poetic (2000: 111) words again.

In Poland, the sentiment of ‘at-home-ness’ I found was expressed linguistically in the local idiomatic desire of ‘feeling at home with yourself’ - ‘czuć się u siebie’, where ‘u siebie’ (‘at home’) is literally translated, echoing Jackson, as being fully ‘at’ or ‘with the self’. The search for this sense of home, and therefore its ongoing frictional absence, I again located in the emic search for the discursive ideal of ‘komfort’ (referring to consumer aspiration as much as an embodied state of

86 Indeed, Marek Pawlak (2018; see also Pawlak, 2015, has named ‘shame’ as central to Polish identity in his research among Polish migrants in Norway. His Polish book Zawstydzona Tęsamość, however he has translated into English as ‘Embarrassed Identity’ (Pawlak, 2018a). It is better translated as ‘Ashamed Identity’ - for the root word “wstyd”, the Polish for shame, is crucial. Where embarrassment can be cast as a fleeting emotion, ‘shame’, as I have outlined it, has a deeper significance, fundamentally underpinning a sense of self and one’s orientation in the world.
being of economic security and the experience of ‘arriving’ into modernity)\(^87\), in the metaphorical desire to ‘breathe with full lungs’, and to feel ‘u siebie’, among one’s own, ‘swoje’ or ‘nasze’ - what is ‘ours’, and in the long-held-out search for ‘normality’. It was also expressed in practice in terms of the centrality and importance of the literal household and heteronomous family in coal life.

Shame, on the other hand, ‘wstyd’, is a condition of being in disgrace, when one has crossed moral boundaries or notions of social respectability or ‘brought shame’ to oneself, one’s family, community or nation. Catholicism, often associated with guilt, can itself be understood as ‘shame-oriented’ (Lewis, 1995: 626) – where original sin marks human lives with an intrinsic burden of shame as a condition of being. Cultural orientations towards shame often showed up not explicitly, however, but in discursive as much as non-verbal, embodied signals and communication. It showed up particularly through what I earlier outlined as the emotional embodied ecology of labour, in chapter two.

Shame is often under-analysed in academic research because it is often repressed, or private, and so underreported in interviews (Scheff, 2003: 257) (particularly by men) (Salmela and von Scheve, 2017). Through ethnographic encounter however, where longer-term embodied immersion into pervasive structures of feeling and their historic and emplaced genealogies and articulations is possible, such sentiments, as other scholars have also identified (Friedman, 2007; Salmela and von Scheve, 2017; Wilce, 2009), can be unearthed and given voice. I particularly located shame, and its paired, though not straightforwardly binary, desire for home, in such routinized and repetitive practices and discourses such as ‘cultures of complaint’ (Kesküla, 2012, 2018; Kideckel, 2008; Rakowski, 2016; Ries, 1997), comparison with Communist pasts and Western presents (see also Kesküla 2018), use of normality/abnormality as a deepset self-colonizing explanatory matrix, worry about living up to salient social identities, resignation, gallows humour, disorientated referrals to a ‘world out of joint’, bodily gestures and postures, facial expressions, silences, sighs, pauses, averted gaze, and also in the interstices between my own positional identity as a Western European researcher and my participants who were only too aware of that. Rather than generating ‘false’ data, this only highlighted the power of ‘Europe’ and the ‘West’ as affective ideals that held ongoing everyday weight and my own role in co-constructing ‘the field’. I especially located shame in relation to the

\(^{87}\) As I discovered, Jeremy Morris (2016: 8) found a similar search for ‘habitability’ as a particularly postsocialist quest: ‘The striving for mundane comfort and ordinariness… are all telling activities in terms of how people understand and deal with postsocialist reality a generation after 1991 … The immediate social sphere as a source of ‘comfort’… is integral to successfully developing habitability in the life-world’ in the context of uncertainty, precarity and contingency.’ This underscores the validity of my own findings, particularly when the added context of the Anthropocene and its unhomings are considered.
That shame is both individual (psychological) and collective (sociological) has been widely accepted by scholars of emotion (Ahmed, 2014; Svašek, 2006; Wilce, 2009: 132). Shame is thus defined by psychologists and sociologists as fundamentally relational and social, indeed for Thomas Scheff (2003: 239) it is the ‘premier social emotion’. It is said to emerge from a split consciousness that sees the self as socially deficient or lacking through the eyes of another, either in the imagination or in actuality (Giddens, 1991: 153). This has been called the ‘looking glass self’ (Cooley in Scheff 2003: 242). As such, it is also understood most tellingly as arising when there is a ‘threat to the social bond’ (Lewis in Scheff, 2000) - i.e. when one feels at risk of being cast out of social acceptance, or unable to live up to socially salient and respectable identities. As such, it is deeply interwoven with the notion of stigma, defined by Erving Goffman (1963) as the ‘situation of an individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance’. Being stigmatized is ‘deeply discrediting’ (Goff, 1963: 13), classifying one as not-fully-human, as different in an undesirable way, and so inferior. Thus shame becomes a ‘central possibility’, reinforced by the presence of so-called ‘normals’ (indeed the language of ‘normality’ pervaded everyday life in my fieldwork). Michael Lewis (1995: 589) indeed writes that ‘the very act of stigmatization is shame-inducing’.

Furthermore, shame is fundamentally related with social hierarchies. According to James MacLynn Wilce (2009: 132), through symbolic domination and stigmatization, shame ‘confronts people labelled ‘backward’’. Thus postcoloniality and shame, as articulated by Frantz Fanon (1967), who wrote about the colonizer’s humiliation of the colonized, are intimately linked. In writing about the ‘death of lament’ as a culturally acceptable practice, Wilce defines the condition of modernity as one caught between the oscillations of ‘exuberant ‘advances’ and the sweeping away of ‘tradition’ which causes mass mourning and loss, including a loss of confidence. Since lament as a hyper-emotional expression of that loss, occurring in the peripheries of modernity’s centres, is deemed backward, pre-modern and primitive, repressed shame becomes modernity’s meta-emotion instead.88 This echoes Marshall Sahlins (1992: 24) who has also posited humiliation as a core and ‘necessary stage in the process of modernization’ itself, where, in order to ‘modernize’:

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88 In the book After Defeat: How the East Learned to Live with the West, Ayse Zarakol (2010) explores the way that non-Western states have been historically stigmatized as behind, un-modern, underdeveloped, uncivilized, corrupt, and undemocratic etc, and how this stigmatization has led to senses of ‘national shame’, as well as ‘auto-Orientalism’ and inferiority, leading to those states becoming ‘extra sensitive to concerns about status’ affecting their foreign policy accordingly.
the people must first learn to hate what they already have, what they have always considered their well-being. Beyond that, they have to despise what they are, to hold their own existence in contempt and want, then, to be someone else...The role of disgrace is critical, for in order to desire the benefits of ‘progress’, its material wonders and comforts, all indigenous senses of worth, both the people’s self-worth and the value of their objects have to be depreciated.  

Indeed, it was Norbert Elias ([1939] 2000) who first associated modernity with an increasing propensity towards shame, with a simultaneous tendency to repress it. As notions of class respectability, including ideals of hygiene, cleanliness, and manners, arose in the shift towards an urbanized society, propensity for shame increased, said Elias, while awareness of it decreased, causing shame to go underground and find other outlets – such as anger, resentment, grief and other emotions that shame is bundled up with as a ‘family of emotions’ (Stewart, 2015).

Vulnerability to shame is further mediated not only by one’s national, racial or ethnic standing in the world order, but also, perhaps particularly, via class (Salmela and von Scheve 2017: Sayer, 2005; Sennett and Cobb, 1993; 27; Wilce 2009: 133). ‘Class shame’ (Fox, 1994a) is, according to Andrew Sayer (2005), evoked by the inability or failure to live according to ways in which people value, prompting a search for dignity. He writes that shame is thus a ‘moral sentiment’ and a ‘powerful element of the experience of class’, and should be understood not only as an emotion or affect but a form of ‘emotional reason’ expressing what people value. In turn class mediates access to the ‘social bases of respect’ (Sayer, 2005), making shame an acutely unevenly distributed phenomenon. Under conditions of rising social and economic inequality, and increasing opportunity and propensity for comparison, such shame is said to have intensified to become a ‘growing international phenomenon’ (Wilce 2009: 139). Today, particularly under a meritocratic ideology, capitalism has led to the individualized self being held increasingly responsible for its destiny, and judged accordingly, thus opportunities for shame proliferate (Sayer, 2005). Indeed, Mikko Erkki Matias Salmela (2019) name shame as the ‘master emotion of the neoliberal economic order’, due to increased feelings of insecurity, powerlessness, and anxieties over loss of status and worth, and this combines with increased shame about feeling shame, reflecting a deficient self at fault for its own deficiencies. This is compounded by the fact that under conditions of postmodernity and post-traditionality, as Anthony Giddens (1991) writes, in which identity becomes increasingly self-reflexive, rather than given, ‘the more shame comes to play a fundamental role in

89 See Joel Robbins and Holly Wardlow (2016) for further ethnographic exploration of Sahlin’s notion of humiliation in processes of modernity.
the adult personality’ - and in collective social emotional experiences, what might be called ‘structures of feeling’ (Williams, 1961), or ‘affective atmospheres’ (Anderson, 2009).

What is important in understanding shame is that the standards perceived to be lacking are also at the same time highly valued and internalized by the stigmatized, and thus shamed, person. One can only feel shame about a perceived deficiency if one also believes that it is a deficiency. This causes intense feelings of ‘ambivalence’ of the stigmatized, shamed person towards the self, a kind of dislocated relation to one’s own being. Perhaps especially under postcolonial postsocialism. The unhomely condition of being caught in this interstices motivates, I argue, a search for ways to feel at-home in the self through ridding oneself of shame. Similarly to Helen Lynd, Goffman (1963: 32) writes that one of the only forms of relief for the stigmatized person is to be in the physical company of others who share it, thus withdrawing into a ‘circle of lament… for moral support and for the comfort of feeling at home, at ease, accepted as a person who really is like any other normal person’. This strategy is one that I identified as core to a kind of industrial populist purification that I return to later (see chapter eight). Yet it is a strategy that is precarious in increasingly individualized, alienated, lonely, fragmented times. Thus a more abstracted offer of the same in the form of nationalism can become appealing.

Shame’s ambivalence and its social salience has been highlighted by anthropologists. It can play a Durkheimian role in maintaining social order\(^{90}\), and can also be a positive motivator for protecting honour and virtue (see Friedman, 2007: 236). For this reason, shame has been considered a potential useful tool in mobilizing climate and environmental action (Aaltola, 2021; Jacquet, 2015). In this sense it has a moral meaning – stimulating ‘moral anxiety’ (Spiro in Friedman, 2007: 237) and acting as a ‘moral gyroscope’ (Scheff 2003: 254). Shame as an emotional encounter with the world is a way of knowing (Simon, 2005). But shame is not simply induced by a taking of the moral order as a given – it is also an initiation of contestation over the cultural meaning of morality itself, and also thus about the modernity and value hierarchy one finds oneself in. For shame has both an inner and outer direction – it is a lived experience of the ‘shrinking’ of the self, but also testifies to a critique of, or a refusal or ‘disagreement with the present’ (Boym in Slutskaya et al., 2016: 177). Thus, as anthropologist James Wilce (2009:121) writes, shame is ‘only a stage, prompting a decision about resistance or submission’.

\(^{90}\) Indeed, Thomas Scheff (2003: 256) argues that had Durkheim named a specific emotion he might have named shame as the master social emotion, since the threat of shame is present in all social interactions, no matter how small or insignificant.
In the process of writing about my own research, I discovered that Jack Friedman (2007: 239) had also written about shame in the parallel context of political-economic and symbolic decline of miners in postsocialist Romania, though not in relation to the notions of dirt, and not under added processes of ecological dispossession. He highlights that shame is ‘dually marked’ - as both a ‘social-personal experience of a defective self and... as a reflection of a critical political understanding of problems, contradictions, inconsistencies, and tensions in the moral (dis)order – a world experienced as a turned upside down’\(^91\). Herein lies the ‘dual resonance’ (Friedman, 2007: 235) of shame as both an outwardly-oriented organic, politically-implicated critique of an unjust, disordered world, as much as a paradoxical inner experience of enforced resignation to the position in the current value hierarchy one finds oneself in. It arises in what I designate as the unhomely (postcolonial) postsocialist present, which marks a ‘terrifying moment, the feeling of obsolescence and the sense that one no longer fits into the world’ (Friedman, 2007: 247) - particularly for socialism’s former glorified miners. Previously held values and ways of knowing and being are turned upside down. My contribution to this understanding of shame under the material and symbolic designation ‘dirt’, is that this sense of disorder, of becoming like ‘dirt’ as I propose, out of place, especially as ecological dispossession intensifies its visceral, embodied emotional ecological sense of stigma, thus prompts not only critique and complaint but active pursuits and practices of putting things back into order that have micro and increasingly macro-scale effects – through what I call strategies of purification – the search for a clearly and cleanly visceral at-home-ness, for an embodied congruence with one’s surrounding nature. Material environments through their embodiment become a deep source of shame – an unescapable presence, a part of the self, and so a yet-deeper existential instigator of a sense of unhomeliness – this time from the local and planetary oikos itself. The rise of industrial populism is a larger expression of such practices.

In the context of my fieldwork, postcolonial postsocialist intersectional (national/regional, class, occupational, and gendered) and ecologically-mediated shame showed up through an attention to the accounts and experiences of the embodied emotional ecology of doing coal’s increasingly ‘dirty work’ and dwelling with and among it. ‘Dirty work’ has been defined as ‘tasks, occupations and/or roles that are likely to be perceived as disgusting or degrading’ (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999: 413), thus carry a stigma, though the meaning of this dirty work changes with time. Associated with the working-classes, this is particularly relevant in understanding social hierarchies

\(^91\) Similarly, Marxist literary historian Pamela Fox (1994b) finds that shame in working-class British fiction can be understood as a kind of resistance, or ‘complicated refusal’, where shame fuses with desire for a reclaiming of resources that have been stripped away by those in power, indicating a ‘positive stage in the evolution of a critical class consciousness’ (Wilec 2009: 133).
in the contemporary neoliberal world economy in which ‘norms of acceptability’ and a ‘politics of aspiration’ promote ‘modern’ jobs for the aspirational ‘middle class’, based on higher education, that are ‘virtual, clean, and value adding’ (Bolton and Houlihan, 2009: 3) as earlier outlined, and meanwhile, where, despite promises of middle-class-utopia-for-all, the demand for ‘dirty work’ (including care work, domestic and low-level work, and night-time labour spurred by the 24 hour economy) has actually increased yet with precarious conditions. It is also pertinent in relation to the European-scale division of labour mentioned earlier, where ‘Eastern European migrants’ take on the ‘dirty’ and low-paid physical work ‘local’ people do not want to do such as in agriculture, construction, cleaning, etc in the West, and where jobs that remain in the East end up being predominantly lower-level and lower-paid industrial and agricultural work (Hugrée et al., 2020: 99). In this context being Polish is being working-class, yet as an essentialized trait not an outcome of structural power differentials.

Coal mining has been the quintessential example of a historically ‘dirty’ occupation and yet, as Stephen Ackroyd (2007: 41) argues, questions concerning how far this dirt and its stigmas affect miners’ sense of agency and alienation ‘have not been identified let alone seriously discussed by social scientists’. This is particularly pertinent at a time when coal mining’s ‘taint’ has expanded from economic and sociocultural meanings (backwardness and worthlessness) to include moral stigma, which, as mentioned earlier, is a stigma that ‘hurts’ most intensely (Ashforth and Kreiner, 2014b). Yet why might this embodied emotional ecology of postcolonial postsocialist tension between shame and home mean that industrial working-class people, particularly male coal-workers, are receptive to far-right, or industrial, populism specifically?

The turn to far-right populism:

For some time in the 1990s the rise of far-right populism was considered an alarmingly Eastern European phenomenon (Pasięka, 2017). This was linked to ideas of its as a ‘reactionary, ativistic and irritation’ form of politics – a return to premodern, archaic divisions and hatreds and evidence of a radically inferior political culture to the West’s long-standing democratic tradition (Blokker, 2005: 372). Don Kalb (2009: 209) rightly calls out this discourse as a singular form of orientalism. Such perspectives are still vocalized today. Rather than understanding populism as endemic to modern democracy as a whole (indeed its ‘shadow’ (Canovan, 1993:3; Müller, 2017:11), the West is often taken as ‘liberal’ and ‘democratic’ by nature, with fringe movements that reveal an unusual
aberration that requires specific explanation, while the East ‘is nationalist’ (Kalb, 2009: 209), or a
‘prime incubator of populism’ (Hann, 2019:1). This fails to treat the rise of nationalistic populism as something with shared, if differently articulated and situated, histories and social causes.

Likewise, there is a perceived kind of Othering going on that seems to demonize the working-classes by ‘blaming’ them for far-right populism. While much ink has been spilt in order to rectify the erroneous ‘stereotype’ (Smith and Hanley, 2018) that it is simply a case of an ‘angry white (male) working class backlash’ behind the recent success of far-right populist parties, research has identified that gender and class are salient. Men are far more likely to vote for far-right populists, which tend towards a highly patriarchal, masculinist ideology, while making up the bulk (though not the totality) of supporters, members and leaders (Coffé, 2018; Graff et al., 2019; Greig, 2019; Roose, 2020; Spierings and Zaslove, 2015), while less educated and (white) working-class voters make up the core of far-right populist support – a trend that has remained stable since the 1990s when interest in the rising phenomenon began to emerge (Bornschier et al., 2013; Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018: 17; 24; Kalb and Halmai, 2011; Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017: 101; Oesch, 2012; Rydgren, 2012).92 Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin (2018: 24) note that in Europe, roughly two-thirds of votes going to national populists are from workers. In the context of Central and Eastern Europe, although again a whole spectrum of people form the populist electorate (Gdula, 92 Hugh Gusterson (2017) calls this dominant analytical lens popular in mainstream media the fetishistic ‘blue-collar narrative’. Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin (2018: 17; xix) emphasise that in reality, this simplistic discourse hides the fact that far-right populism ‘appeals to a broad alliance of different groups in society’ sharing similar values, including affluent, non-white, and middle-class voters. Colin Crouch (2019), however, suggests that a unifying factor between seemingly surprising allied groups could be their relative marginalization outside of the core dynamic economic growth zones of the economy, what might be referred to as precarity (Apostolidis, 2021)). It is indeed important to stress that no far-right populist party has ever come to power in Europe or America without the cooperation and ‘collaboration of established conservative elites’ (Müller, 2017: 109; see also Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017: 98). Conservative elites are ‘the enablers of right-wing populism’ and must be held accountable (Müller, 2017: 110). A further criticism of the ‘blue-collar narrative’ that emphasises white communities is that it fails to do justice to the fact that it is often black and minority ethnic groups who have borne the brunt of economic changes and austerity measures, for example in the US (Brown, 2018) and UK, leading to accusations of ‘methodological whiteness’ (Bhamra, 2017). At the same time a focus on men masks the ways in which women too are supportive of far right discourses and even play active roles in the success of far-right parties, historically and today, most notably symbolized by Marine Le Pen’s leadership of Front Nationale in France (Félix, 2015; Passmore, 2003; Spierings and Zaslove, 2015), despite the centrality of misogynist, anti-feminist and gender conservative values to their politics (Graff et al., 2019). Some research, however, points to how female leadership in far-right populist parties entrenches hegemonic masculinity (Worth, 2020) However, at the same time, while there is no one kind of populist supporter, extensive research reveals that it is the less educated and particularly male, ‘white workers’ who most often form the disproportionate core of far-right populist support, and this group is particularly pertinent in relation to highlighting the material-symbolic importance of coal to their cause in Poland. Furthermore, the fact that there are different kinds of supporters of far-right populism does not make an intersectional and class analysis obsolete – in fact such a lens is much needed to understand the complexities of mutual if unlikely alliances.

140
2018), Don Kalb and Gabor Halmai (2011) have highlighted the significance of class anger or the ‘return of the repressed’. While not wanting to perpetuate the erroneous notion of the working-classes as the ‘populist class’ (Mrozowicki 2011: 44), nevertheless it is, as Don Kalb (2009: 208–9) writes, important to ‘uncover the hidden histories of subalternity’ that structure the particularities and specific of working-class resonance with far-right populist politics, particularly in relation to masculinities and coal. For arguably the plight of the working-classes are key in ascertaining the future of democratic societies, particularly within changing capitalist environmental and energy regimes.

This is particularly so in the Central East European context in which the working-classes remain the dominant social group as we have seen (Hugrée et al., 2020; Kideckel 2008: 32; Morris 2019) (the industrial working-class are arguably the largest population segment in CEE countries, writes Kalb, 2014: 262) and in the context of Poland, in which male (Walker, 2019), and industrial worker (Ost, 2018) support for far-right parties has been significant. Workers, writes David Kideckel (2008: 9), are the ‘canaries in the coal mine of postsocialism’ - their plight signals the condition of society at large, as much as the essence of postsocialist fortune. ‘Their lives and possibilities, and the conditions of their spirits and communities, are bellwethers for tracking and managing postsocialist change’ - including at the broader European level. Society ‘ignores them at its peril’ (Kideckel, 2008: 11). Yet, as I outlined, ignore them and treat them with contempt they have. The politics of dirty coal has been increasingly key to this under processes of environmental and energy change, as I outline.

The question of why working-class people in particular have formed a central part of far-right populist support in Central and Eastern Europe, and also specifically Poland, has not been extensively analyzed. Indeed, Don Kalb (2009: 16) writes that there has been very little anthropological work on the dynamics of neo-nationalisms in the region in general while Pankowski (2010: 2) also states the CEE region in general has been relatively overlooked. This is particularly

93 Eatwell and Goodwin (2018: 209) write that workers have good reason to feel angry. By 2017, ‘the share of GDP going to them in the advanced economies was 4% lower than it had been in 1970’. This should also be coupled with analysis of growing health and life expectancy inequalities (Davies, 2018).

94 In 2015, PiS received 46.8% of votes cast by workers (compared with 16.8% for the main opposition party Civic Platform); an additional 13.2% voted for the populist, anti-establishment, Eurosceptic, pro-direct democracy movement Kukiz’15 (headed by former rock star Pawel Kukiz, who formed coalitions with far-right groups), and 4.8% for KORWiN, a hard-right Eurosceptic, paleolibertarian party led by Jan Korwin, making the combined total for populist politics of a far right persuasion among workers almost 65% (TVN24, 2015). By 2019, PiS scored 58% of the worker vote (while the opposition Civic Coalition scored 16.7%) (TVN24, 2019).

95 In general, the causes of far-right populism in CEE have been ‘virtually ignored’ in the literature, particularly through qualitative methods (Mudde, 2016).
in the paradoxical context that they once formed the bastion of the working-class Solidarity Trade Union movement that brought down Communism and ushered in liberal market democratic reform. Yet, as we have seen, the most bitter paradox, of course, is that this ultimately led to the downfall of the very system that had venerated them – thereby securing their own material and symbolic marginalization. Why did workers, those who are most unionized, not organize against this? Why was their emotional pain not, as we saw at the start of this chapter and as Timothy Mitchell (2013) outlined in Western Europe, channelled into continued support for liberal democracy after Solidarity’s enormous success? The work of David Ost and Don Kalb have been key to elucidating the causes of this piece of the puzzle.

As a number of scholars have pointed out, previously highly militant workers were ‘remarkably quiescent’ (Ost 2005: 58) in the face of their drastic and painful postsocialist neoliberal economic dispossession (Ashwin, 1999; Crowley, 1997, 2016; Crowley and Ost, 2001; Kalb, 2009; Kubicek, 2004; Ost, 2005, 2018; Żuk, 2017). There was no strong social resistance to the initial onslaught of capitalism (Żuk, 2017: 8). In fact, the majority of workers and union representatives were initially in favour of market reforms and capitalist ‘transition’ (Mrozowicki 2011: 44). After all ‘Communists’ were the enemy, or pathology, and ‘Europe’ the cure. What they envisioned however – something more akin to a welfare state as well as workers’ self-management, and direct participatory democracy, did not come to fruition. Rather, Solidarity turned out to operate as a kind of ‘protective umbrella’ for neoliberalization (Żuk, 2017: 9), and they quickly abandoned such ideas, and their working-class base too, instead. The postsocialist schism between intelligentsia and labour (minds and bodies) began. Having utilized the workers, ‘the people’, to gain political power in the 1980s, by the time of the Round Table talks in 1989, Solidarity’s new elite had shaken them off; they were not to be trusted. ‘They feared that workers might turn against them too; fear of the masses set in’ (Ost 2005: 56). As a result:

The Solidarity leadership did not want a mobilized civil society once it took power and introduced radical market reform. Anticipating that marketization would stoke anger, Solidarity leaders sought to ward off society’s ability to forcefully express that anger. Thus,

96 Piotr Żuk (2017: 9) writes that in the 1990s workers’ protests were very few in number in Poland. Those that did occur, were portrayed as ‘the remains of communist mentality and actions taken by demanding groups that did not understand the principles of market economy’. These were understood to be ‘anti-reform groups’ and ‘relic of a bygone past’.

97 Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin (2018) argue that this fear of the masses is an in-built feature of liberal democracy especially one increasingly steered by elites – part of the root cause of the populist backlash.
it did not even want local Solidarity unions to get too big. Solidarity leaders now considered labour an obstacle to reform and a danger to democracy (Ost 2005: 57).

This was a democracy they now understood to be not about ‘broad political participation’ but centred on ‘elite leadership and market economy’ (Ost 2005: 57).

Yet, as David Ost (2005: 5) points out that the experience of the collapse of a civilization (socialism) inevitably resulted in not only political and moral but also intense ‘emotional upheaval’. For civilizations are not just political systems they are ‘existential’ ones, and in this collapse citizens of the new Poland entered into an experiential void. This was what Chris Hann (2011) called a ‘moral dispossession’. Quoting Ken Jowitt, who in 1991, predicted that the ‘extinction of Leninism’ would usher in a time of ‘rampant emotionalism’ overwhelming liberal democracy, Ost emphasises that the construction of new meanings, and new ‘emotional lives’, would be a central task for postsocialist states and their societies. Where religion and Communism both offered emotional and existential outlets for life’s frustrations in various ideals of heaven and utopia, however, liberal democracy’s ‘rational impersonalism’ is notoriously weak on these issues. The ‘rampant emotionalism’ of postsocialism, if that is the right phrase, however, must be understood to be politically structured, a result of postsocialist trajectories and key decisions too. With the collapse of socialism as a civilization, it is also accompanied with the jagged collapse of coal as its own kind of civilization, fuelling its own emotional fallout. Liberal democracy’s usual strategy for organising anger, argues Ost, is to channel it into class language and political struggle through unions. Yet neither option was available for Poland’s workers. Furthermore, would anger remain the salient emotion with time?

Firstly, ‘Shock therapy’ was designed to ‘strip workers of their power… distort the markets and.. empower employers against them’ (Kubicek 2004: 3). In turn, labour was instructed to be patient, adapt, even aid the transition. Wojciech Arkuszewski (in Ost 2005: 52), a leading Solidarity activist, advised unionists that ‘The main task of trade unions today’ was not to organize workers’ anger in the interest of their welfare, but to ‘help employees get accustomed to the new economic relations’. As a result Solidarity itself contributed to the weakening and marginalization of labour and trade unions across the country – epitomized in Lech Wałęsa’s famous statement ‘We cannot have a strong trade union until we have a strong economy’ (in Ost 2005: 30; see also Żuk and Toporowski, 2020). In the decades after 1989, union membership steeply declined and the capacity of workers to make demands shrunk (Bernaciak, 2018; Crowley, 1997; Crowley and Ost, 2001; Ost, 2009a; Trappmann, 2012). Thus, the power of organized labour was deliberately decimated –
moving from ‘solidarity to infirmity’ (Kubicek, 2004) and as David Ost (2005: 20) writes, ‘those who made possible the transformation were the ones made to pay the price’. Such was the icing on this poisonous cake. ‘The recasting of labour as the obstacle to democracy was… quite a novel one’ observes Ost (2005), and this underlines one of the most important differences between postsocialist and western old capitalist states. Mrozowicki (2011: 43) writes: ‘Unlike post-war capitalism as it developed in continental Western Europe, based on strategic agreements between employers and active trade unions struggling for workers’ rights, the discourse and practice of post-Communist capitalism… aimed at excluding workers from the active co-shaping of a new institutional reality and redefined their protests as a danger to democracy’. Indeed unions have been largely left out of political debates, such as regarding EU accession (Lis, 2012: 36).

Not only were workers prevented access to meaningful union organizing and representation, precisely at a point when the salience of ‘class’ as a social category emerged as critical in the emergence of rampant new social inequalities under neoliberalized capitalism, the language of class and its enabling of critique of power was stripped out of social and political discourse in Poland and other CEE countries, as it has been in the Western world too (Evans, 2017a, 2017b; Winlow et al., 2017), though with arguably more pernicious effects. In the CEE context, however, this was not only a product of Westernization, it was also because class language was associated with the Communist system that had been delegitimized, the threat of which during the Cold War had indeed sown the seeds of the West’s own working-class decline. So, despite the fact that in the new system ‘class was everywhere’ (Morris, 2017) like never before, David Ost (2018: 118) writes ‘[c]lass talk was dead’. This was also because of a reluctance to analyse unequal power relations with the West when it was meant to be the promised land (Kalb, 2014: 256). Stephen Crowley (1997: 204) reflects that the ‘ironic tragedy for workers in post-Communist societies is that just when class antagonisms [became] more pronounced than any they have experienced, the explicit use of class-based ideologies has become taboo’. In general, the ‘zombie’ of Communism was used by the transition’s winners to naturalize the new capitalist order and ‘to discipline the workforce into giving up social justice claims’ (Chelcea and Druţă, 2016: 525; see also Żuk and Toporowski, 2020). This meant too that Leftist politicians were marginalized and looked down upon, and Leftist politics in general became ‘treated as a serious disease like scarlet fever and put into quarantine’ (Milewicz in Żuk and Toporowski, 2020: 6). It was dirty itself.

Rather, in the 30 years since the fall of Communism successive governments following the Solidarity transition, even those ostensibly of leftist leaning, have pursued the same neoliberal
socioeconomic (and as we saw environmental and energy) agenda as a matter of broad and unquestioned technocratic consensus without alternatives. This included, emphasis on parliamentary, rather than direct participatory, democracy (the latter had been a core Solidarity ideal, but it became quickly delegitimized in favour of formal institutional frameworks), free market reform in the manner described above, and European integration (Pankowski, 2010: 67; 73). Indeed, during the first decade of transition this consensus, supported most staunchly by the former Communists who remained in government positions, had broad democratic support too, particularly the pro-European stance (Pankowski, 2010: 67). Nevertheless, as discussed earlier, it severely limited the scope of political issues that were able to be contested, and genuine socioeconomic grievances in particular were almost totally ignored by the mainstream parties, including the left and trade unions (Pankowski, 2010: 74-75), while trust in existing trade unions in general was itself undermined (Bernaciak, 2019). This would have long-term ramifications.

One strategy for coping with the emotional fallout of postsocialism has been to leave – and, as we saw, in the post-2004 EU accession period many did just that. Denied a sense of home and agency in their home country, one could view this as a kind of en-masse ‘exit’, a voiceless protest (Hirschman, 1993). The other option has been to remain and complain. Indeed, as a result of curtailed worker agency, a ‘culture of complaint’ (Kideckel 2008: 16) arose as a generalized feature of postsocialist life in the Central and East European region, an aspect of everyday life Kideckel (2008: 17) has defined as so fundamental as to become a ‘badge of postsocialist identity’. Who would eventually channel its grievances and take them seriously? Responding to growing disillusionment and unrepresented social discontent as transition failed to deliver on its promises that had at first made its pains bearable, whereas in the 1990s, populist parties in Poland were marginal and minor, by the mid-2000s they began to enter the mainstream, reflecting growing radicalization of Polish politics (Pankowski, 2010; Stanley and Cześnik, 2019). Corruption was starting to be perceived as widespread, for good reason, since a number of scandals emerged particularly embroiling the Communist-party left successor the Democratic Left Alliance (Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej -SLD) (further discrediting Left politics). Social and political trust declined dramatically in general, including faith in democracy (Pankowski, 2010: 74; Shields, 2007).

Lived experience of it had not exactly proved positive for many, while everyday life was lived at a huge

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98 Mrozowicki (2011: 29) and Mazierska (2016: 29) highlight how migration abroad has long been a ‘survival strategy’ for Poles, particularly in the 1980s and again after 2004 in the face of unemployment and low wages – especially for those most actively critical of present conditions (Zuk 2017: 10).
99 In 2005, only 45% of Poles thought democracy was the best form of government. The young were even less inclined to be pro-democratic than the old (Pankowski, 2010: 74):
remove from the democratic institutions and frameworks that were meant to demonstrate its cultural entrenchment (Pankowski, 2010: 73). What remained of the Left in this time receded into oblivion and irrelevance (Pankowski, 2010: 76), while populist politicization of remaining sentiments, including by former dissident Solidarity activists that had been marginalized by its turn towards (neo)liberal democratic consensus in the negotiated transition, resulted in mounting anti-establishment critique of the ruling elites (Stanley and Cześnik, 2019: 72). In a context where socioeconomic issues were rarely in any case framed in terms of left-wing or class terms (as we saw earlier under Communism), this took on increasing nationalist tones (Pankowski, 2010: 76). Environment and energy matters themselves also started to offer a key leverage, as I outlined earlier. Whereas in the first decade or so of transition up until 2009, until when, as we saw, climate change was not particularly controversial and all Parties supported government policies under the Kyoto Protocol, after 2009, when the EU ramped up climate pressure, the debate shifted becoming more polemical, with PiS at the helm (Marcinkiewicz and Tosun, 2015). Again this was framed as an attack on the nation – particularly on its industrial producers.

In this way, far-right populism, became an ‘ideological safety net for Poland’s marginalized population’ (Shields, 2012: 373), including I argue on ecological grounds, and the concept of the ‘nation’, rather than class, came to stand in as an analytical and ideological tool to explain painful changes (Ost, 2018; Pankowski, 2010; Żuk and Toporowski, 2020: 7). It was the only social category made readily available, one that held widespread popular historical resonance, including under Communism itself, yet offering an entirely different kind of political diagnosis (Żuk and Toporowski, 2020: 7). It was not workers, or a social class, who were suffering, but ‘the nation’, while failures were attributed to ‘betrayals of the nation’ caused by elite Communist agents or not ‘real Poles’ (Ost 2018: 118-119). Impure elements, causing corruption and contamination, that needed to be eliminated, or cleansed away. The groundwork was laid long before them, but PiS was particularly adept at championing such discourse as the next, final, section will show. Meanwhile Solidarity itself became a ‘bastion of political illiberalism’ (Ost, 2006: 87), and PiS’s staunchest supporter (Ost, 2018). Class conflict was expressed through identity politics (Pankowski, 2010: 78). For Žižek (2008: 275), this has been the ‘return of the repressed’, where, in the combined vacuum of ‘post-politics’, ‘fundamentalist populism is filling in the void of the absence of a leftist dream’.

But was the absence of class language the sole reason for the shift to nationalist rhetoric? During my fieldwork the absence of class language and analysis, and lack of its appeal as ‘Communist’ sounding across the social spectrum was notable. In its place, was the widespread
social Darwinist idea of a kind of natural selection when it comes to social advancement, the
naturalization of hierarchies, and a general support and desire for a ‘fully functioning’ capitalism.
There was clearly no desire to return to Communism even if there was a sense of loss for its
securities, stabilities and more equal, collective society. While I therefore concur that the
postsocialist absence of a class framework is a key factor in making sense of the populist shift, this
theory perhaps falsely assumes that were there a Left and access to ‘class’ discourse, workers would
of course see their false consciousness and naturally become the actors one might wish (see also
Eatwell and Goodwin 2018: 29; Mazzarella, 2019). Don Kalb (2009), though largely agreeing with
David Ost’s central insight that underlying ‘headlines of nation’ are ‘subtexts of class’ (Kalb and
Halmai, 2011), also critiques his work, which has done most to promote this argument, as too
focused on the discursive and ideational, claiming that workers have been ‘duped’ or ‘manipulated’
into supporting populists such as PiS in a top-down manner, particularly motivated by concerns
over wages. Ost’s notion of class is thus too prescriptive, says Kalb, coming ‘straight from the
liberal cookbook’. I agree with Kalb that class, and its grievances, is a more relational concept that
emerges through social (and I add ecological) ‘becoming’, or lived experience, in ‘class ways’,
involving also cultural and emotional factors. It is precisely getting up and close intimate with how
class is lived and experienced, rather than talked about through language alone, that an
understanding of the emotional resonance of populism can occur. Likewise, class language absent
of this intimate engagement would remain detached from the everyday lifeworld.

At the same time, the argument that the absence of class language has caused nationalist
appeal overlooks the role that insider and outsider elites have played in dispossessing, and
negatively constructing, workers in precisely overlapping economic, cultural, emotional, and as I
add, ecological senses. Kalb (2009: 208) takes an anthropological perspective to stress, as I have,
that it is the localized ‘hidden histories’ of ‘the dispossession, the silencing and the displacement’
(Kalb, 2011: 2), including through forms of internal orientalism, foregrounded here too, that have
contributed most to ‘neonationalist sensibilities’ (Kalb 2009: 297). For the rise of populism must be
understood in a relational context. This is particularly when we consider that industrial producers,
coal and its people, have increasingly become the nation personified – in negative senses. Derided
increasingly for their apparent inherently backward Polishness – is it any wonder that a renewed,
reclaimed Polishness becomes the solution? To this I have added the overlooked factor of ecological
relationality and its dispossession in a climate-changing world, and at European scales, one that also
removes natures and turns them to shame-inducing dirt, through added moral stigma that renders
some almost-irredeemably beyond the pale, and environmentally displaced, an ecological Other – again, a Polish Other. I have also situated this within a longer historical timeframe than looking at the post-socialist period alone, to position this within deeper dynamics of postcolonial relationality with the West, and with Poland, from a regional perspective. This includes specific dynamics of postindustrial and industrial tensions, within changing energy and environmental regimes, that are also usually backgrounded.

Furthermore, while Ost (2005) speaks of anger and Kalb (2009) of resentment, the two most common emotions named by scholars exploring the emotional politics of far-right populists elsewhere (see p.45), I propose underlying shame as the central emotion being if not organised, then scooped up here. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, shame is an under-analysed emotion within theories of far-right populism (Salmela and von Scheve, 2017). Where anger, and resentment too, imply a sense of being wronged, the crucial difference with shame is that, as I outlined earlier, it implies an internalized sense of being wrong, and is thoroughly linked to social hierarchies and a split relation to the self. This is an altogether different, far more discomforting and toxic, lived experience requiring an altogether different kind of remedy. Over time, when anger about injustice is not possible to express, is suppressed, denied or delegitimized, it can precisely become internalized as such shame. The feeling that there is something wrong about the world, can become a feeling that there is something wrong about you in that world, when nothing changes in your favour. As above, under EU integration processes this has been made sense of on national terms.

Shame thus requires another kind of purging to create a renewed sense of self as a whole. It is not about simply removing the source of anger which is external to you, but removing the source of shame - which is experienced as deeply embedded within. This is especially in the context of the embodied emotional ecology of coal’s dirty politics I have outlined – where what is being shamed is intrinsic to one’s person by dwelling within and corporeally existing with it. To rid oneself of such shame, one must either exit from the social norms that are generating it, and reject them, choosing an alternative, or conform and align with them. For shame is a disciplining emotion. For coal workers, conforming and aligning is a difficult option while they labour among coal. It would result in a kind of self-condemnation.

Resonating strongly with my own findings, and highlighting the importance of their contribution, very recently, as I was three-quarters of the way through writing this PhD thesis, political scientists Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes (2019) published a book called The Light that Failed: A Reckoning, which resonated strongly with my own findings in many ways, though taking
a macro approach. They begin to incorporate notions of the kind of postcolonial postsocialist shame I refer to into a theory regarding why Central and Eastern Europe is in the throes of an illiberal backlash against Western-style liberal democracy. Drawing on political psychology, they argue that the post-Cold War period in the CEE region can be characterized as an Age of Imitation, in which a new moral hierarchy was established between the imitators and imitated (Krastev and Holmes, 2019: 72). Freed from the Soviet Union’s iron grip, Eastern Europe was now expected to import and simply copy Western liberal democracy, with all its cultural values, norms, habits and attitudes, as the new orthodoxy without alternative, while presenting it to the new electorate as democratic. This was to be not only an economic shift but a ‘cultural conversion’ (Krastev and Holmes, 2019:10). With time, this ‘return to Europe’ or ‘return to normality’ as it was championed, left the copycat countries, who have been constantly exposed (by invitation) to foreign evaluation, judgment, measurement and superior condescension as to their progress or its lack, feeling humiliated by their continuous implied inferiority and backwardness, while also caught in the contradictions of wanting to be both ‘original’ and ‘copy’, yet being neither. This dissonance meant that both those who remained at home, and those who left to build a life abroad, found themselves cast into this new hierarchical chain of being, never able to catch up, and relegated to a ceaseless condition of second-rate simulation leading to collective ‘feelings of emotional stress, psychological dissonance, inferiority, imposter syndrome, shame and eventually self-betrayal and nostalgia for a lost authenticity’.

What’s more, argue Krastev and Holmes, the sweeping, fast-paced changes in the West brought on by globalization have created a decisively shape-shifting model that has not stayed still - whereas during the Cold War Western liberal democracy and ‘normal life’ came bundled together with conservative ideals such as traditional gender roles, religion, and (relatively) homogenous societies, today, secularism, multiculturalism, gender fluidity and gay marriage are the new norm. (Coal’s changing meaning, I would flag, is a key part of this shifting model – indeed its energetic underpinnings in the form of industrialism.) Keeping up with the West, and ‘returning to normality’, then, became an impossibly slippery undertaking, leaving Easterners feeling constantly disorientated and ‘cheated’ (Krastev and Holmes, 2019: 52). In this way a schism emerged between the ‘double meaning of normality’ - what is ‘normal’ (widespread and habitual) in the imitating country and ‘normative’ (morally imperative) in the imitated countries (Krastev and Holmes, 2019: 54) creating a decisively discomfiting tension between ‘desire and humiliation’ (Krastev and Holmes, 2019: 69). At the same time, being at home, with the ever widening gap between Eastern
reality and Western ideal, meant trying to reconcile two sets of values and norms – ‘being ‘normal’ in the sense of adapting to the shabbiness of one’s local environment and being ‘normal’ in the sense of embracing expectations taken for granted in the West’, causing acute ‘mental stress’ (Krastev and Holmes, 2019: 50-52). ‘Straddling two identities, parochial and cosmopolitan, they were unlikely to feel at home in either’, and even to experience a ‘gnawing sense of self-betrayal’, write Krastev and Holmes (2019: 51-52).

The global financial crisis in 2008 was the final nail in the coffin (Krastev and Holmes, 2019: 21). The West – those purportedly morally, culturally, economically ahead whom one had spend decades imitating – didn’t know what they were doing after all. Combined with the rise of terrorism, the ‘refugee crisis’, and increased migration, the putative ‘undoing’ of the West (Krastev and Holmes, 2019: 40), the model looked increasingly less appealing. The turn towards illiberalism thus represents not a return to ‘bad habits’ but a rejection of the Imitation Imperative, and a nativist reclamation of the dignity and authenticity of one’s own identity that has been shunned, degraded and seemingly ‘contaminated’ (Krastev and Holmes, 2019: 74; my emphasis) through the humiliations of imitation. Instead, the East are now stating that ‘We are the real Europeans’ (Krastev and Holmes, 2019: 44); an ‘overheated particularism’ became a ‘natural reaction to an overselling of the innocence of universalism’ (Krastev and Holmes, 2019: 57). As such, Krastev and Holmes put shame at the heart of the illiberal backlash. They write:

Shame at reshaping one’s preferences to conform to the value hierarchies of foreigners, doing so in the name of freedom, and being looked down upon for the supposed inadequacy of the attempt are the emotions and experiences that have fuelled the anti-liberal counter-revolution (Krastev and Holmes, 2019: 12).

The rejection of liberalism has its roots, say Krastev and Holmes, in a rebellion against ‘humiliation by a thousand cuts’ and this is experienced as a ‘visceral desire to shake off the ‘colonial’ dependency; an inferiority implicit in the very project of Westernization’. In this way the authentic and pure ‘nation’ must be recovered from ‘contamination by Western modernity’ (Krastev and Holmes, 2019: 74, my emphasis)\textsuperscript{100}, and territorially- and ethnically-bounded solidarity (national

\textsuperscript{100} This echoes Marshall Sahlins’ (1992) notion of the ‘double-edge’ implications of modernization by humiliation. The ‘punitive experience of ‘modernization’ risks provoking a self consciousness of the indigenous culture, as possessed of values better than and distinct from Westernization... all over the world native peoples are becoming aware and defensive of what they call their ‘culture’. The peoples have discovered they have their own ‘culture’. Before they were just living it. Now their ‘culture’ is a conscious and articulate value. Something to be defended and, if necessary, reinvented...The same struggle is repeated: the struggle between the Western attempts to dismember the cultures and the people's attempts to hold them...
distribution of dignity) is retrieved from universalist liberalism. Thus, if there is any doubt, "existential shame… can fuel explosive upheaval" (Krastev and Holmes, 2019: 13). Thomas Scheff (2003:258) likewise identified that "Acknowledged shame, it seems, could be the glue that holds relationships and societies together, and unacknowledged shame the force that blows them apart".

While strongly correlating with the themes of my own ethnographic-based encounters, Krastev and Holmes’s abstracted account is highly focused on the cultural and social aspects of the illiberal turn, and on quite a static notion of Us/Them in terms of the East’s relation to the West. What is missing from their macro-level analysis of shame, is an integration of the role of intersectionally lived classed identities, the role of economic structures and inequalities, and recognition of the ongoing hybrid and ambivalent character of the embodied and ecologically emplaced lived experience of navigating this fraught terrain within longer postcolonial postsocialist histories – not just as a psychological, mental process but as a viscerally encountered facet of dwelling within environmental change, including that of ecological dispossession. This can only be got at through ethnographic engagement. The ‘shabbiness of environments’ that they refer to is here literally referencing the ecological ones of coal. Furthermore, it is not the ‘nation’ as an abstract entity that must be recovered from ‘contamination’ by Western modernity – but the ‘nation’ as embodied in ‘the people’, who themselves feel increasingly contaminated, and in emotional ways.

Furthermore, I found that it is not that individuals wish to ‘throw off’ the West, and ‘return’ to a parochial past, but to finally arrive into a purified moral and modern present, in which the best of both aspects can be blended together on Polish terms – particularly to incorporate the freedoms, wealth, ‘comforts’, aspirational lifestyles, social security, and thus dignities of the postindustrial West. This was the project of local, bottom-up (though elite-structured) purification. To purify its contours so that the sense of self is clear, right, proper, good – where ‘good is good and bad is bad’, as PiS puts it (in Pankowski, 2012: 161), and where dignity is distributed accordingly to modern and valued producers. Working-class coal workers are tired of feeling not-at-home-in-the-world in multiple senses– tired of the toxicities and ambivalences of dirt and its shame. They long for a clean, pure sense of home that fits their own embodied shape and rids them of that shame. Seeking strategies of purification on-the-ground to relieve this tension, industrial populism appeals, even if ongoing cynicism, skepticism and doubt might temper enthusiasm and trust.
The Good Change: PiS’s politics of industrial populist purification

‘The beginning of the anthropocene [can be marked roughly as] the moment that humans worry that we have lost a natural state of purity or decided that purity is something we ought to pursue and defend.’

- Alexis Shotwell, Against Purity (2016: 3).

‘There is a great tradition of work [in Silesia], in industry, mining, but not only in mining, hard, physical work. This was needed, is needed and will be needed. I would like to say that we respect the work very much, we bow our heads to it.’

- Jaroslaw Kaczyński, October 2018 (Polsatnews.pl, 2018)

‘We are and will remain a multi-party democracy. We just want to cure our state of a few diseases so it can recover. The previous government implemented a certain liberal, left-wing indoctrination, as if the world had to automatically move according to the Marxist model in only one direction: towards a mixture of cultures and races, a world of cyclists and vegetarians, who only use renewable energy sources and fight against all forms of religion. This has nothing in common with traditional Polish values. [Our Party] relies on what moves most Poles: tradition, historical consciousness, patriotism, faith in God and a normal family life between a man and a woman.’


In October 2015, PiS’s election marked a fundamental turning point in Polish, and European, politics. Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska - PO), the liberal-conservative party that had dominated the political landscape since 2007, saw its vote plummet and lost a quarter of its seats. For the first time since 1990, no left or centre-left party managed to pass the 5% threshold for entry to parliament. Securing backing that enabled them to take an outright majority (37.5%) – the first time this had also happened in Poland since the start of its democracy in 1991 - PiS’s election also marked a radical shift in Poland’s relation to Europe. Heralded as a model example of a ‘successful’ neoliberal transition to market democracy, and proud of its integration into the EU, Poland was to embark on a seemingly-sudden about-face turn – an active process of ‘de-Europeanisation’ instead (Buras, 2017). De-contamination was to begin reaching into almost every sphere of political and public life. This decontamination was a key part of their winning party programme which promised a morally-loaded ‘Good Change’. The central hypothesis was that Poles had ‘lost’ their sense of self-worth, and that PiS was going to restore it through a cluster of policies referred to as the

101 A few months after coming into office, in an attempted ‘PR counter-offensive’ against criticism and pressure from the international EU community regarding concerns over media freedom and judicial independence following PiS’s election, Witold Waszczykowski, the Party’s then Foreign Minister, uttered these words in an interview with German newspaper Bild on 3rd January 2016, which promptly caused further diplomatic tensions and ridicule at EU-level (Cienski, 2016; Vehlewald, 2016).
'redistribution of dignity' (Ash, 2019) while further dislodging the so-called 'pedagogy of shame'.

Emerging as initially unpopular dissident former Solidarity activists into the postsocialist political scene, this was not, however, the first time PiS had come to power. They had done a two year stint in coalition with two other marginal populist parties, Self-Defence and League of Polish Families, which lasted only two years, 2005 – 2007, before swiftly losing a snap election to the opposition. But the party they were in 2015 was a decisively different one. The PiS elected in 2015 can be regarded as a quintessential national – or far-right – populist party. It has done more than any other postsocialist political actor to entrench a construction and division of the Polish nation into a stark and simplified Them and Us, a 'pure people' and a 'corrupt elite', though this had long historic precedents. In the 2005 election this was pitted as the ‘Solidaristic’ Poland versus

102 Referring particularly to the supposedly ‘imposed’ and morally outrageous idea that Poles and Poland should take responsibility for their role in the Holocaust, but also more broadly to the notion that Poles had been taught to be ashamed of themselves, their culture, way of life and traditions.

103 Set up in 2001 by the Kaczyński twins Lech and Jarosław, two former Solidarity movement politicians, PiS originally began as an unpopular conservative Christian centre-right party. Aspiring to more mainstream status, by 2005, when it successfully ran for parliament to form a far-right coalition government from 2005-2007, it had thoroughly ‘accepted a radical right populist element’ (Pankowski, 2010: 152). Yet in power it failed to follow through on some of its more radical proposals, sticking to neoliberal orthodoxy, which cost it at the snap election in 2007. They would learn their lesson (Ost, 2018: 114).

104 Under Communism, and long before, ‘Them’ and ‘Us’ were key modes through which society was organized against the imposition of other states (Stanley and Cześnik, 2019: 68). Katherine Verdery (1993: 191–193) writes that Communism was itself a project of homogenization and purging in the service of constructing the ‘socialist nation’ as kind of pure, ‘extended family’. She is worth quoting at at some length. The party-state: ‘reinforced its claim to speak for society-as-a-whole by purging the landscape of other organizations that might independently articulate specific interests or grievances. Claude Lefort calls the result ‘the representation of the People-as-One’, built on a denial that society consists of divisions. In consequence of such policies, he says, ‘In the so-called socialist world, there can be no other division than that between the people and its enemies.’ Communist parties constructed their identities by defining and setting themselves off from an enemy: class enemies, the enemy in the bourgeois west, enemies at the border (such as nazism) and enemies. They created a dichotomized universe, dividing the world into the ‘Good’ and the ‘Bad’, communism and capitalism, proletarians and kulaks, party members and those who resisted the parties’ dictates. Their emphasis on the ‘People-as-One,’ combined with the insistence on the moral basis of political community, facilitated establishing the community's boundaries by expelling its enemies. In consequence, dissidents and kulaks were exiled, sent to labor camps or interned in mental hospitals, so as to maintain a clean, un- contaminated, morally pure community.' In this way, Vedery writes, ‘Many East Europeans are used to thinking in terms of secure moral dichotomies between black and white, good and evil. For those who also understand democracy - and they are many – not as institutionalized disagreement and compromise but as consensus, a powerful longing for a morally pure unity can easily solidify around the idea of the nation and the expulsion of polluting aliens: those who are not of the ‘People-as-One.’ Likewise, ‘the result of people's gradual alienation from and moral repudiation of party rule was the opening up, in each country, of a yawning chasm between Us and Them. They’ were always doing something nasty to ‘Us,’ ‘We’ suffered hardship while ‘They’ wallowed in privileges and luxury goods and built fancy houses. Even though the categories ‘we’ and ‘they’ might be elastic, their occupants changing from one situation to another, this elasticity does not weaken the basic split-us, them. In socialist countries the split was pervasive: between public and private, official and unofficial, ‘first’ and ‘second.’ The pervasive us-them split precluded
‘Liberal’ Poland (Pankowski, 2010: 163). By 2015 and onwards it would be ‘the good Poles’ against ‘the worst sort’, traitors to the nation (see Cielemęcka, 2020: 66). Central to studies of populism is the means and processes through which the sense of a ‘we’, or ‘the people’, is constructed as a political practice of including and excluding. For ‘the people’ do not exist; they must be made (Laclau, 2005). PiS, as with most far-right populists, despite, or perhaps because of, its increasing ‘impossibility’ (Shotwell 2016: 4; 10) in a contaminated, toxic, but also overheating, fast-changing world, constructs the enemy and hails its ‘people’ through the language and practice of nationalist purification, offering a revolution that reinstates, or purifies, Polish industrialism’s values and modernity as morally fit for purpose in the 21st Century.

Purification practices, according to Mary Douglas (2001 [1966]: 5), should be understood as ‘impulses to impose order’ on a disorderly world, what I have referred to from an ethnographic perspective as the attempt to reinstate a sense of homeliness under structural conditions of shame. Where dirt or pollution is, as we saw earlier, famously, ‘matter out of place’, or precisely that which ‘offends against order’, eliminating or managing it through cleanliness or purification is a creative and ‘positive effort to organise the environment’ and make it ‘conform to an idea’ (Douglas, 2001 [1966]: 3), particularly the upholding of a certain moral vision of the world. This should not solely be understood as being about ‘anxiety’, therefore; it is an active attempt to ‘make unity of experience’ (Douglas, 2001 [1966]: 3), and is often expressed in moral terms, for purity is the ‘enemy of change, of ambiguity, and compromise’ (Douglas 2001 [1966]: 200). For Alexis Shotwell (2016: 13) ‘purity practices’ as part of this desire for moral order, thus ‘work to delineate an inside and an outside; they are practices of defining a ‘we’’. Echoing Douglas, such practices are ‘productive, normative formulations – they make a claim that a certain way of being is aspired to, good, or to be pursued’ (Shotwell, 2015: 13-14). PiS’s populist purification practices indeed diagnosing political problems as moral problems, aims at a fundamental moral re-organization of a world that appears out of joint to create a new ‘social order where good is good and bad is bad’ (PiS quoted in Pankowski, 2010: 161). It promises to cleanse away shame and restore a sense of home – a Polish home, modern, moral, where ‘true Poles’ feel valued. This includes an industrial order, of which coal is the heart. Such purity practices should also be understood, then, as a simultaneous quest for ownership of ‘modernity’ and its value hierarchy too, to in a sense domesticate it through nativism.

legitimation, but it also did far more: it formed people's very identities.' Thus ‘Them’ and ‘Us’ was a key populist mobilization point around which Solidarity was born. The difference being that this was a populist moment under totalitarianism aiming to move towards democracy (Dzwończyk, 2006: 28).
Shotwell (2016) refers to a second aspect of purity practices – their core relation to modernity. Bruno Latour’s (1993) claims that ‘we have never been modern’ rests on the idea that purity has never been possible – he defines modernity as the practice of ‘purifying’ so-called ‘hybrids’ - it is the attempt to render an entangled, messy, impure world into cleanly and clearly delimited and separable entities, categories, and objects, such as ‘nature’ and ‘culture’. In this way, Shotwell (2016: 14) quotes Law et al as stating that ‘Latour’s argument is that modernity presents itself as gleaming, consistent and coherent; as something that is pure. Not fuzzy’ - even if in practice it can never be so. Similarly, Dipesh Chakrabarty (2007) explores how ‘European’ modernity presents itself precisely as this pure myth, working through translation onto its colonial Others, which then are rendered lacking on its terms. Thus, the unhomely, hybrid, fuzzy (postcolonial) postsocialist present is rendered unmodern – backward – not yet arrived into ‘pure’ modernity, which is always out of reach, particularly for the East. This echoes Zygmunt Bauman’s (1991) notion of the uncomfortable realities of ‘ambivalent modernity’ versus its pure promises too.

Returning to the scene of COP24 that I began with, for PiS it is not coal that is dirty, bringing immoral and unmodern disorder to the world, but ‘imposed’ Western norms and values are the true pollutants, contravening its own coal-based moral value system and its own vision of modernity, its own order. For PiS’s political narrative, the postsocialist world it finds itself in is fundamentally out of joint, in disarray – morally, socially, culturally, politically and economically fuzzy, ambivalent, or threateningly incoherent. Such a world, as described in the quote by former Minister Waszczykowski in the opening to this section, is characterized not by the rooted solidity that coal, God and nation represent, but the porous leakiness, fluidity and disorientation of an increasingly transnational, postmodern, ‘overheated’ (Eriksen, 2016a) post-industrial oil-infused and renewable-energy-driven world, where ‘a mixture of cultures and races, a world of cyclists and vegetarians, who only use renewable energy sources and fight against all forms of religion’ set the rules. By ‘contaminating’ Poland, such phenomena have sullied her self-esteem and sense of self-worth and righteousness, tricking Polish people, especially her industrial people, into believing that they and their coal are the real dirt – stigmatized as backward and failed Europeans. Shamed, not only made to be matter out of place, but out of time. PiS takes that impure fuzziness, calls it a moral crisis, and renders it coherent, meaningful and orderly by offering a ‘Polish path’ to a clean moral modernity, thereby purifying the discomforts of fuzzy hybrids that Poland has long been stuck in. Reasserting Polish industrial, coal-based economic and cultural modernity as clean and moral, as valued, fusing it with the best of Western postindustrial comforts and promises and discarding its cultural
accompaniments, including liberal democracy, it now claims that Poland, and the East, are Europe’s true past-future – its true civilizational heart. ‘We are the true Europeans’.

This has been rendered through, firstly, a zealous policy of cultural purging. On the horizontal axis, a xenophobic, ethnonationalist, and Eurosceptic agenda pits ‘un-Polish’ immigrants, particularly refugee Muslims, abortion-seeking women, ‘gender ideology’ and the LGBGTQIA+ community, atheists and secularists, environmentalists or ‘ecologism’, multiculturalism, EU-liberal cosmopolitan elites, and foreign interest (particularly German and Russian – age-old enemies), as threats to Polish national cohesion and integrity through the language of ‘pollution’. They are either ‘disease-carrying’ migrants, anti-Christian, moral relativist poisonous Europeanizers, itself a kind of Communism or colonial dictatorship, or German and Russian invaders. Calling for a return to ‘traditional family values’, a ‘strong state’ (Ost, 2018: 114), and the rejection of ‘polluting’ and imposed Western norms, PiS has whipped up racist and xenophobic sentiment against Muslim refugees (see chapter eight), increased discrimination and oppression of LGTBQIA+ peoples, heralded the Catholic Church and its traditional values as the central bearer of ‘true’ Polish identity, banned abortion on all grounds, and reasserted traditional gender roles. Through such industrial purification, often in authoritarian form, justified as ‘true democracy’ of the oppressed, the nation, PiS has claimed their election victory as the first real post-Communist democracy, and their radical policies have transformed the Polish political landscape, its society and the state.

Yet its agenda of cultural purging is not only targeted at Western Europe, but also internal elites it says work behind the scenes as part of a shadowy network to undermine the nation. Internally, PiS’s main diagnosis of political and socioeconomic grievances, on the vertical axis of power, is that anti-Polish Communism is still infecting the nation, not only since former Communist figures remain active in prominent political and cultural positions but moreover that the hegemonic liberal elite and its order represent Solidarity’s original 1989 betrayal, and that remnants of this still needs purging (Pankowski, 2010: 73). This would become PiS’s conspiratorial ‘deep story’ of an elite- and Communist-led ‘stolen revolution’ yet with rapidly rising resonance (Stanley and Czesnik, 2019: 73). In a sense PiS also holds on to the notion of Homo Sovieticus, the corrupted backward Pole, but points the finger of blame to different culprits. Their first attempt to decontaminate this was to take hold of the Judiciary and refuse to abide by Constitutional Tribunal rulings, threats to PiS’s radical reforms, effectively ending their independence and putting the safeguarding of the rule of law into jeopardy (Boffey, 2017a; Cienski, 2015b). This sparked mass protest and EU retaliation, but with little effect. They took over publicly owned media to an
unprecedented extent, turning it into an open tool of government propaganda (Kalan, 2019). They waged their campaign through cultural and educational institutions, such as museums and schools, taking increasing ownership of the narrative of history and educational curricula too, including the banning of sex education (Ciobanu, 2017; DW.com, 2019; Hodun, 2017; Radonić, 2020). They pursued a policy of Communist iconoclasm, renaming streets, toppling statues and cleansing the public space (Luxmoore, 2018). The Institute of National Memory under their leadership has become a central pillar of their agenda to reinstate ‘Polish’ values, and Polish narratives, at the heart of a revivified and purified Polish nationalism. All in the name of the ‘true Poles’.

For PiS, a ‘true Pole’ is someone who is morally pure, that is ‘white, ethnically Polish, straight, and Christian’ (Cielemęcka, 2020: 66). They are also ‘hard-working’ and intrinsically morally good simply because they are Polish – pure, thus innocent victims of exploitation and corruption. This is the basis of their deservingness. For PiS ‘hard work’ often means work that involves physical, bodily labour, often in contact with ‘Polish’ soil, or dirty work, such as coal miners, as well as farmers. The ideology of producerism thus is a core moral battle ground to entice a targeted electorate. Their appeal lies in their promise that ‘Instead of giving up home and family to be treated as a second-class citizen in Manchester or Dublin… together we can build a strong Poland where you can stay at home and thrive. [For their electorate] nationalism is not just identity with a swagger, but a concrete economic appeal: we will build industry at home, we will revive the places liberalism bypassed and we will not allow Poles to be treated as neocolonial subjects’ (Ost, 2018: 122).

Indeed, whereas previously PiS had not paid much attention to workers and their grievances, by 2005, when such grievances were becoming more audible, PiS attempted to shift its orientation, with some success. Losing the 2007 election, however, due to abandonment of core promises, when returning in 2015, by then PiS had found its ground (Ost, 2018: 119). Its core electorate were now industrial and blue-collar workers in the large (often formerly) state-owned firms, and a growing precariat – those finding themselves increasingly disaffected by the neoliberal consensus (Ost, 2018: 122). Just before the Presidential elections that year which took place in May, PiS loyal President Andrzej Duda, signed an exclusive agreement with the independent trade union Solidarity, the largest union in the country with its core base also in the industrial manufacturing industry, that promised a suite of worker-friendly reforms in return for their support. They have since been the most vocally supportive of PiS, even coming to their literal defence during street protests. Meanwhile, PiS has sought to take all credit for worker-friendly policies, sideling trade unions
even as they offer a more trade-union-friendly face than any previous government – through this they actually mean to weaken the labour movement and assert themselves alone as workers’ true rescuers (Ost, 2018). PiS does not revive class politics or condemn capitalism as such, but speaks to class issues emotionally by promising to reclaim what is ‘backward’, ‘worthless’ and ‘immoral’ for ‘the people’, defined in ethnonationalist terms. They promise national renewal and revival – precisely what lends them fascistic credence (Ost, 2018). And they do so through highly emotionally-charged rhetoric.

In addition to cultural cleansing, their economic reforms offered recompense for neoliberal turmoil that, particularly following the 2008 financial crisis, was palpably evident but had been silenced and invisibilized by former political elites who had created and enforced an ‘officially approved neoliberal culture’ (Ost 2018: 114). In fact they fundamentally pierced through the neoliberal consensus, that of ‘liberal impossibilism’, through their populist ‘willingness to think the unthinkable, say the unsayable, and achieve the unachievable’ (Stanley and Cześnik, 2019: 80). Their reorientation of the Polish economy towards more interventionist, and social (leftist), or ‘solidarity’, agendas, though on distinctly welfare chauvinistic terms, included implementation of key election promises like lowering the retirement age, implementing a child welfare policy (their flagship 500+ benefit), medical prescription benefits for the elderly, social housing programmes, a limit on the use of short-term insecure or ‘junk’ contracts, that made Poles themselves feel like trash, and an unheard-of raising of the hourly minim wage (to 13 PLN – nearly 4 EUR), the initiation of a new affordable housing programme, improved corporate tax collection etc. PiS thus responded to the rising sense of bitterness (Ost 2018: 115), but also increased aspiration (Gduła, 2017, 2018) for what ‘hard-working’ Poles felt they deserved but did not have. These have had real material effects. The 500+ child benefit policy has been the average equivalent of a 20-40% pay rise and has reduced child poverty by a third in one year (Ost, 2018: 115). Two years into their rule, when I conducted fieldwork, their support remained stable (Stanley and Cześnik, 2019: 84), particularly among the industrial working class. Meanwhile, professional white-collar workers, like those working in the health, social care and education sectors, on the other hand, notably sectors where women tend to be more predominant too, for whom reforms were withheld, would become some of PiS’s staunchest critics (Ost, 2018: 122). In practice, PiS selectively administers and respects social rights (Żuk and Toporowski, 2020: 10).

PiS would also promise labour it would ‘do battle’ with the EU’s and former government’s consensus economic agenda of privatization and ‘re-Polonize’ traditional industry. Since their
election, economic policy has radically shifted in another sense. Whereas industry played only a marginal role beforehand, with no industrial policy in place at all, now, under the new paradigm, outlined in their ‘Strategy for Responsible Development’, industry would become ‘the main driving force behind the modernization of the national economy’ (Kozarzewski, 2019: 7). Nationalization and public investment would be pursued as against the previous reliance on Foreign Direct Investment and market mechanisms – including state ownership of formerly privatized energy companies. This would be a kind of ‘economic patriotism’ aimed at reversing the deleterious effects of transition (Mazzucato in Kozarzewski, 2019: 6), spoken of in the language of decolonization, or national purification (Kozarzewski, 2019: 6). Industries to be developed would not only include traditional ones, like mining and raw materials, but also aerospace, electronics, IT, ecobuildings and electromobility – a blending of traditional and modern into a Polish modern, and all still based on coal’s energy.105 The (white-collar) service sector on the other hand was downplayed (Kozarzewski, 2019: 8).

This re-industrialization policy would also encompass coal mining. Before coming to power, PiS promised to stand up to EU climate policy, which as we saw at COP24 and beyond it largely has, and told coal miners that the reason the industry was in trouble was not their fault, but the fault, once again, of corrupt elites, like those in the last government, who had wasted and damaged its national treasure through neglect, incompetence, greed and their weakness against EU colonial pressure (TVN24.pl, 2017). Kaczyński also blamed the increasing import of non-Polish coal (particularly from Russia), and promised to enforce a ban and change public procurement policy to ensure purchase of Polish coal first (TVN24.pl, 2017). They promised to implement a new long-term coal and energy strategy, which had been absent for some time.106 Whereas in mid-2016 the coal industry was facing 800mln PLN of debt, by mid 2017, when I was carrying out my fieldwork, it was in 1.45 billion PLN in the plus (Dziaduł, 2017a). While PiS of course put this down to the

105 Economist Piotr Kozarzewski (2019:8) notes ironically however that ‘Perhaps unintentionally, the anachronistic stance of ‘re-industrialization’ was stressed by the picture of a factory with smoking chimneys, which decorated the Ministry of Development’s online presentation of the highlights of the Strategy in the industrial sphere. In any case, it looked like a reference to pre-war Soviet posters which advertised industrialization (with slogans like ‘Smoke of chimneys is the breath of Soviet Russia’).’

106 Long-term strategic energy planning in Poland is plagued with a history of inaction, lack of transparency and incoherence. A leading journalist in energy matters has reported that the foundational piece of legislation in Poland’s energy policy –the 1997 Energy Law –has been updated 60 times (on average once every four months), while growing ten times its original length (Szulecki, 2017: 4). According to a report published by the Supreme Audit Office in 2018, documents clearly and consistently presenting the state’s vision of energy transformation towards renewables, even the future target energy mix, were not possible to find. The previous Energy Policy 2030 was not updated from 2009 until 2018, while the Ministry of Energy had apparently abandoned plans for a State Energy Policy to 2050 (Najwyższa Izba Kontroli, 2018).
Good Change’ they had ushered in, in practice global markets had a lot to do with it. Yet, as part of their strategy, they implemented an ‘optimalization and restructuring’ process, liquidating the most inefficient mines, including bringing to life Polska Grupa Górnicza with a clean slate (Dziadul, 2017), as laid out in the introduction. They also tried to limit competition for coal by implementing policies to thwart renewable energy, notably wind, development (Kozarzewski, 2019: 11), and promoted a largely smog-denying stance of indifference to the air pollution crisis (see chapters four and five). PiS’s purification of coal and its people was both a material kind of alchemy, of transforming dirt to gold again, but also a deeply symbolic and emotional one. Coal and its people were being respected – put first – once again, brought home, in multiple senses. The industrial producers were at Poland’s heart once again, their shame cleansed. Coal would once again form the basis of national wealth creation this time for the benefit of ‘the people’, its producers.

Yet coal miners of course were never fully bought into PiS’s utopian visions or others on the scene. Neither did they agree with all their policies. Trust in any kind of Party Politics was still low. Their distrust would bear out. It would not last. Promises would be betrayed. Covid-19 would radically speed up latent contradictions and tensions. The conclusion and postscript reflect on the future. First, we turn to how things stood in the year that was 2017.
On 30th January, 2017, I arrived in Katowice, Upper Silesia’s regional capital, to begin fieldwork on the everyday life of coal. I was met by a thick blanket of smog. I recall my first gulp of freezing, acrid air hitting the back of my throat like powdered vinegar as I disembarked the plane. I saw the noses of my fellow passengers wrinkle with disgust, people were coughing, and covering their noses and mouths with scarfs or pulled up jumpers. Laughing sarcastically and looking at each other in recognition, many rolled their eyes, and joked, ‘welcome home!’ Unusually low levels of wind, high atmospheric pressure, and a severely cold winter that had plunged this part of Europe into a deep-freeze of up to -20 degrees (Associated Press, 2017) conspired to create the perfect meteorological conditions for a toxic lid of particulate matter, benzo[a]pyrene, nitrous oxide, and ozone, amongst other chemical compounds (Durka et al., 2017) that sealed inhabitants beneath a grey cloud of harmful fumes. Thus as I orientated myself in those first winter months, the air was often thick with a distinct tone of grey, and the pervasive smell of something burning. My lungs wheezed and ached as I developed a thick, phlegmy cough that rattled my chest. I was more than a little perturbed at the possible health implications of the embodied aspect of field research, yet this was precisely an everyday matter I was here to investigate. My timing would prove extremely revealing, for, as outlined in the introduction, an issue that had long been taboo in an industrial region historically infamous for being one of the most polluted corners of Europe¹ was being catapulted into the limelight in an unprecedented way at that precise moment. As coal’s hegemony over the region was breaking apart, space for critique and dissension was opening up – with seismic effects. Silesian coal, once a symbol of modernity and progress, now increasingly in the firing line for a host of environmental ills, from more distant climate change to, here, the intimacies of localized smog, lay at the centre of this latest controversy, generating intensifying friction (Tsing, 2004).

¹ See chapter five on the matter of pollution as taboo and for an overview of the environmental history of ‘Black Silesia’ as it was known under the socialist period.
In this first ethnographic chapter, witnessing how coal as *home* was becoming coal as *shame* at the local level, or how the notion of ‘ecological dispossession’ was being played out, I use smog as a lens through which to articulate ‘what was in the air’ so-to-speak, as I embarked on this research encounter with coal. The only chapter that does not focus on the coal mining community, instead, it sets the broader relational scene for the thesis by putting the embodied political ecology of fellow residents self-proclaimed as *actively concerned* about smog front and centre. These social groups, as I discovered, although inhabiting overlapping geographic space (dwelling in the same minescape), were in a kind of dialectically imagined socially antagonistic relation to one another. Focusing on the former thus helps reveal the broader articulations of coal’s shifting meaning, and its politicized, increasingly toxic, atmosphere in the local lifeworld and how it feeds notions of dispossession. This chapter asks – how was smog and coal’s role in producing it being made sense of by actively concerned Silesian inhabitants? What did this reveal about the longer-term context of the rise of PiS-style far-right populism here and its entanglements with the material-symbolic matter of increasingly-perceived-as-‘dirty’ coal and its shame; the core concerns of this thesis?

**Polluted by Polishness: A curtain of smog descends across Europe**

In the first two weeks of January 2017, air pollution levels in Poland reached concentrations not seen for fifteen years (Badyda and Dąbrowiecki, 2017). In the capital alone, hospital admissions for respiratory-related illnesses increased by over 130% (Badyda and Dąbrowiecki, 2017). Authorities

2 Putting a call out for research participants in the region via smog information meetings and online via air pollution Facebook groups, I left it up to individuals to self-declare and define for themselves what counts as ‘actively’ concerned. Such ‘activity’ ranged from being very involved in spreading information and raising awareness online via social media and other platforms, to attending smog alert meetings, to handing out leaflets, to lobbying local councilors, to simply taking steps in one’s personal life to change behaviours. ‘Active’ concern expressed itself as a whole in being willing and wishing to talk to me, demonstrating a strong desire to share one’s story. This chapter is based on participant observation through attendance at numerous smog conferences, information meetings, activist gatherings, and outreach events in various Silesian towns and neighbourhoods, spending time with concerned residents in public spaces, their homes, and on social media groups (local smog Facebook groups and twitter), numerous conversations with individual residents, and collection of media materials. This is supplemented by twelve in-depth semi-structured interviews with self-selected residents in the minescape I conducted the bulk of my research in, through which saturation point was reached. While I originally had the intention of conducting participant observation with official local Polish Smog Alert groups, and attended numerous of their meetings in order to do so in the early days of my fieldwork, I discovered that beyond this, these ‘groups’ were often run by one or two people, were geographically dispersed, while mostly operating online, so I decided to predominantly focus on the broader public and residents in my final fieldwork locale who supported PAS’s aims but were active in more multiple, individual and self-organised ways. It was through such actors that the everyday politics of smog was being metabolized and played out at the neighbourhood level with significant social ramifications.
responded by making public transport free in Warsaw and in Kraków. Schools closed their doors in Silesia. Long before the coronavirus pandemic, residents were encouraged not to leave their homes except if necessary and to wear facemasks if they did. By mid-February, sixteen Polish towns had already surpassed the annual thirty-five-day limit on which air quality norms are legally permitted to be exceeded (Fejfer, 2017b). This was a national public health emergency. Locally, the civil society movement Polish Smog Alert3 rallied into increased action. Two years previously they had already demanded to know, ‘Do Poles have iron lungs?’, in reference to the huge disparity between Polish and Western European air quality and alert levels4. The situation in 2017 only intensified the severity of this European-scale environmental health injustice. Consequently, it was at this moment that Polish smog hit national and, moreover, international headlines. The fact that, according to the World Health Organization, 33 out of 50 of the most air-polluted towns in Europe were to be found in Poland, causing 45,000 premature deaths per year, was broadcast worldwide. ‘Smog chokes coal-addicted Poland’ reported Euractiv (2017). ‘Warsaw grapples with gloomy grey smog’, stated the New York Times (Berendt, 2017). ‘Polish city more polluted than Beijing’, warned the Financial Times (Huber, 2016). Over in Sweden, air pollution levels also ‘as bad as Beijing’s’ were registered in Stockholm in late January. It was blamed on incoming ‘dirty air’ from Central Europe (Roden, 2017). Poland was being publicly named and shamed for being a literal ‘stain’ on the European map – for that dubbed ‘Europe’s China’ (Józefiak, 2017). Yet, nationally, smog was yet further unevenly geographically distributed. Fourteen of these most polluted towns were concentrated in Upper Silesia (Makowski, 2017).

It was in this context of shock and European-level comparison that Poles – particularly in Silesia – reportedly experienced a ‘revolution in awareness’ regarding air quality that year (Józefiak, 2017).

3 Polish Smog Alert (Polski Alarm Smogowy) is a civil society organization that started as a local group of concerned residents in heavily polluted Kraków in 2012. By 2015, it had grown into a national movement with forty local chapters, thirteen of them in Upper Silesia itself. See www.polskialarmsmogowy.pl.

4 Poland not only had the worst air pollution levels in Europe but also, the most liberal rules for smog alert threshold levels (concentrations of particulate matter at which the government is obliged to inform the general public with a health alert.) Since, the EU does not enforce uniform requirements on member states on alert levels they are free to set their own. Thus in Paris, a smog alert is announced when particulate matter – PM10 – levels reach 80 μg/m3; in London, when it hits 101 μg/m3. In Poland, however, new regulations passed under Civic Platform in 2012 increased the alert values from 200μg/m3 to 300 μg/m3 (Polish Smog Alert, 2015). In 2017, as the issue began to intensify, the Environment Ministry under PiS refused to halve alarm levels, despite pleas from the public and experts alike to do so, suggesting that ‘it would mean the need to signal the alarm very often’ (Szulecka and Szulecki, 2019: 17). By 2020, the PiS government, seeking to appease an increasingly concerned public and prove they were taking the matter more seriously than their predecessors had implemented this policy change – a symbolic gesture not backed up by much action however (see next section).
2018). Suddenly, it seemed, everyone was talking about ‘smog’. A rapid proliferation in new smartphone applications that equipped residents with live air pollution monitoring data to continually verify the fact that ‘Polish air’ was hazardous and life-threatening, fueled the understandable uproar. This generated a newly-aware embodied sensory experience of previously under-articulated air pollution that coursed through the region. As I discovered, however, what those who were becoming actively and agitatedly concerned about the matter were waking up to, however, was not only the urgency of this as a public health issue, but, also the fact that, critically, almost thirty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Eastern and Western Europe were still divided by an apparent civilizational border that cut a line through the air. As one worried resident bitterly stated, echoing Polish Smog Alert’s earlier imagery: ‘The iron curtain may have lifted but now we have smog’. Poland, particularly Silesia, was still the exceptional ‘dirty’, ‘backward’ and ‘abnormal’ East in comparison with a ‘clean’, ‘advanced’, or ‘normal’, West, decades after Communism’s collapse. Smog was thus being understood as an unwelcome materialization of failed Europeanness dragging Poland downwards along an ongoing imaginary ‘East-West civilizational slope’ (Melegh, 2006). Coal’s peculiarly dirty ‘Polish’ materiality was centrally mixed up with this humiliation, prompting deep shame. As a result, privately, actively smog-concerned residents that I spoke with, increasingly saw themselves as in fraught opposition to coal and its defensive community that they shared a home with, and vice versa.

Yet, as I also discovered, smog’s comparative humiliation had an added component that made it even more toxic – ecologically, politically and socially. In my encounters with the actively concerned, despair and shame about smog was notably combined with a dual sense of despair and shame regarding the ascendancy of the authoritarian, populist, far-right Law and Justice Party (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość – PiS) who downplayed the severity of the issue and championed coal.

5 It was not the ‘smog’ was a completely new issue, but that it had only started creeping up the agenda, since 2012, when Kraków Smog Alert was established, becoming the national Polish Smog Alert in 2015. By 2017, ‘smog’, previously directly connected with Kraków alone, had started to be seen as a national problem – and particularly, now, a Silesian problem.
6 See chapter five for an exploration of this new smog awareness in terms of Ulrich Beck’s (1992) theory of risk society.
7 This was despite the fact that the campaign group Polish Smog Alert were at pains to publicly present themselves in Silesia as technologically unbiased (not anti-coal). It also did not mean, however, that coal miners and their community were not at all privately concerned about smog and its health consequences (as chapter five outlines), but that those who were publicly ‘active’ on the issue were not from the mining community, revealing the structural constrictions and taboo with regards to openly criticizing coal if one works with it. (See Barca, 2014; Eriksen, 2018; Fagin, 2014; Räthzel and Uzzell, 2011; Ward, 2013 on the ‘jobs vs environment’ or ‘jobs blackmail’ phenomena).
Now in their second year with a full majority in office, they were busily re-orientating Poland away from the ‘normality’ of the liberal democratic European project more broadly too. Smog and PiS were polluting their bodies and the body politic in intermingled toxic ways. Starting to attend smog information and awareness-raising meetings held in cafes, theatres, town halls, and office meeting rooms, organised by local Polish Smog Alert groups, town councils and concerned residents, and beginning to get to know actively-concerned participants who volunteered to participate in my research both on- and offline, I discovered that, unofficially, for them, PiS’s rise to power was itself articulated as a further mark of civilizational degeneracy in comparison to Western Europe. Of sliding ‘backwards and eastwards’ as European Council President, and former opposition Polish prime minister, Donald Tusk, warned (European Council, 2017). In this sense, the crisis of smog represented and stoked genuine fears that haunted these residents regarding the national condition in general – one that was in the combined throes of populist ecological, authoritarian and moral decay. Thus coal and smog combined began to symbolically, and materially embody this conflict, which in turn was embodied by residents. Through the defenselessness of breath, this double contamination that forced Polish ‘abnormality’ on resistant breathers was viscerally acute, generating a forceful affective potency, understandably of anger, resentment, frustration and bitterness.

Tracking similar trends elsewhere regarding environmentalism (see chapter five), smog therefore notably mapped onto perceived growing political polarization, and in Silesia this faultline was most vociferous, centred at times unspeakably around its coal. On January 13th 2017, local journalist, Marek Twaróg, (2017) reported in the regional Silesian daily Dziennik Zachodni that here smog was being perceived as yet another frontier for a newly-intensified Polish-Polish war that had, especially since the ascendancy of PiS, escalated into a classic populist division between an ‘elite’ and ‘folk’ nation, or ‘Inauthentic’ and ‘True’ Poland as PiS put it. Competing visions of modernity,
European and Polish identity and belonging, and moral democratic citizenship lay at its heart. As a result, I was informed – ‘Nobody who actively supports PiS is active on air’; another said ‘You can divide those who worry about smog from those who don’t by those who don’t support PiS and those who do’. ¹¹

In this context, the key postsocialist question forever lurking for actively concerned inhabitants of who or what was to blame for this latest extreme evidence of Poland’s ongoing backwardness and lack of European credentials re-emerged in full force. The embodied urgency of this question demanded a targeted and pinpointed answer. It found one - ‘the people’ - all-too-Polish people exhibiting uncivilized ‘Polish mentality’. Both smog and PiS were pollution by pejorative ‘folk’, low-brow, or populist, Polishness, embodied in dirty Polish coal and correlated polluting home-heating behaviours. Such a direction of culpability generated a toxic atmosphere of resentment that became targeted at an internal Other expressed through a ‘culture of condescension’ (Ryzak, 2020) – a stigmatized, class-based, often coal-tied (usually male) Other constructed on a high/low continuum ¹², charged with causing Polish populist un-civilization. Thus, picking up on themes outlined in the thesis introduction of processes and practices of postcolonial postsocialist ‘nesting’ (Bakić-Hayden, 1995) or ‘internal orientalism’ (Buchowski, 2006), classist (Bell, 2020a, 2020b: 36–47) Othering (Spivak, 1985), and entwined shaming discourses of Eastern European dirt and backwardness that smog experiences and stories are saturated with from this standpoint, I outline how they reveal a long-standing, pre-existing comparative construction of ‘the people’

¹¹ It was indeed the case that nobody I encountered in my year of fieldwork who was publicly active on smog had much positive to say about PiS. See Julia Szulecka and Kacper Szulecki (2019: 17) for an account of political polarization around the anti-smog campaign, a factor which they argue led to at least its partial ‘de-legitimization... among the diehard supporters of the ruling Law and Justice’. Substantiating this further with statistical data, in January 2021, a national survey for polsatnews.pl carried out by the Institute for Public Affairs Research (Instytut Badań Spraw Publicznych) found that the highest percentage of support for the statement that ‘the fight against smog should be a priority for Polish authorities’ was found among supporters of the Civic Coalition (Koalicja Obywatelska) (76.97%) and The Left (Lewica) (71.03%) (founded in 2018 and 2019 respectively) - the lowest amongst far-right parties PiS (45.96%) and Confederation (Konfederacja) supporters (27.26%) revealing the ongoing political polarization of the issue. NB: This survey was carried out four years after the fieldwork referred to here – during which time awareness regarding smog and PiS's own position towards it and coal has shifted fairly significantly (see postscript). At time of fieldwork, when ‘smog’ was only just emerging onto the national political and public radar, and when PiS was at its most reticent and pro-coal, polarization may well have been yet higher.

¹² This echoes Pierre Ostiguy’s (2009) insight regarding a high/low divide characterizing the distinction between anti-populism and populism. As he writes, politicians classified as ‘high’ are ‘well-behaved’, more restrained, and proper, both in manners and institutional procedures’, while those who are ‘low’ ‘sublimate less and are more down-to-earth, coarser, earthier, and personalistic’. In smog terms, this high/low distinction is likewise applied by smog-concerned residents to position themselves in relation to their polluting, often coal-tied Other in class terms. See (Lebow, 2012: 302) for background context on how such divisions between ‘high’ and ‘low’ in Poland have a long history mapping onto class divisions between the urban intelligentsia and the peasantry (shifting slowly into a small but growing working-class), for example, in the interwar years.
defined in disparaging and essentialist nativist terms. Such self-other-shaming classist discourses can be understood as practices of ‘self-colonization’ after Alexander Kiossev (1995). Writing about Central and Eastern Europe, he proposes this as a modernization strategy that is not imposed from outside but willingly chosen by those in peripheral societies who seek to eliminate the trauma of difference. Through an internal orientalism ‘scaled down to the national level’ (Buchowski 2006: 467) the buck of shame is passed down a continually reproduced hierarchy that serves this very purpose. In this way, I show how smog materially and symbolically mediates, and augments, the unintentional inner historical dynamic of ongoing postcolonial postsocialist polarization in Silesia across a continually ‘emerging populism/anti-populism frontier’ (Stavrakakis et al., 2017: 3) that maps onto comparative civilizational and classist categories and individualizes, thus depoliticizes, the causes of environmental and social ills, contributing to sentiments of unjust ecological dispossession.

As Yannis Stavrakakis et al. (2017: 3-4) propose, understanding populism requires one to understand the much-neglected aspect of anti-populism and the ‘revealing’ interconnections and ‘complex choreography’ between the two (Furedi, 2016; Moffitt, 2018; Ostiguy, 2020). That is because ‘populist discourses never operate in a vacuum and need to be situated within the context of political antagonism, within the broader hegemonic struggle’; indeed, ‘populism is inconceivable without anti-populism’ (Stavrakakis et al., 2017: 3;19). But what is ‘anti-populism’? Alan Knight (1998: 239) in his work on Latin American populism has defined anti-populism as populism’s ‘elitist counterpart… that is, a discourse/ideology/style which deplores the coarse, degenerate and feeble character of ‘the people’’. Further, Benjamin Moffitt (2018: 2; 9) argues that it should be understood not so much as a coherent political ideology or proposition, (though liberalism tends to be its general default), but a kind of ethical and moral stance that starts from a ‘fear of the masses’, in particular, in its nativist or nationalist form. In this way, just like the populists, as described in the thesis introduction, anti-populists here divide the world into a simplified ‘pure’ us and ‘corrupt’ them, mobilize the concept of ‘the nation’ to explain painful social failures, and pose political problems as moral problems. This time, however, if populism’s ‘fundamental fantasy… is that of ‘intruders’ who have corrupted the system’ from without (Swyngedouw, 2010: 222), then, here, anti-populism’s fantasy is that corrupted ‘insiders’ are the real intruders - contaminating the system from within, and preventing it from arriving at its true and pure destiny (an imaginary clean, civilized, orderly ‘Europe’). In the context of smog, long-circulating discourses of backwardness (economic and moral) became the means through which those who wielded them re-established bodily and
moral boundaries and kept the shame of the internal contaminant (‘Polishness’) at bay to render one’s own purity, or here European-ness, apparent.\textsuperscript{13} All the while, however, class divisions and interests, and the culpability of powerful corporations and political actors, remain obscured, even as they are reproduced. Anti-smog stories thus articulate the background context, or atmospheres, against which populist backlash, in its shame-induced, nativist, anti-environmentalist and pro-coal stance, in Poland, needs to be understood to have emerged and continue to gather force in dialectical entanglement.

In this way, in trying to make sense of the success of far-right populist politics and its alignment with anti-smog, pro-coal discourse from a longer-term, and relational perspective, this chapter outlines the deeper, long-standing mechanisms of polarization. It makes the uncomfortable case that it is not only ‘outsiders’, or Western institutions and representative discourses, that are culpable for the contemporary orientalization of the East and its resultant ‘illiberal revolution’ and backlash against imitation (Krastev and Holmes, 2018), neither is it simply ‘populists’ who practice violent kinds of ‘othering’ and simplistic divisions of ‘Them’ and ‘Us’ based on binary notions of purity and dirt, but also insider-(self)-outsiders as self-proclaimed anti-populists too, who in everyday embodied-discursive practices unintentionally yet very apparently perpetuate, reinforce, and construct a toxic postcolonial postsocialist ‘East-West civilizational slope’ (Melegh, 2006) that Poland is constantly sliding down, in ubiquitous, oppressive presence with under-examined material and political effects. This included ramifications for how the issue, and life with coal itself, was being politicized, received, solved and reacted to as I will show. Well-meaning Poles who continually enacted these classist practices were unfortunately part of the background context that lay fertile grounds for populist upswell.\textsuperscript{14} As Don Kalb (2014: 271) has argued, such internal orientalization has been one of the key ‘cultural mechanisms that helped produce a Polish ethnic folk figure against a cosmopolitanizing elite’. Here I show it in everyday practice.

\textsuperscript{13} In this way, as Susan Opotow and Leah Weiss (2000: 481) note in their analysis of moral exclusion in environmental conflict, such distancing performs a kind of ‘self-righteous comparison’ in which the narrator casts themselves as ‘environmentally ‘clean’ and blameless in comparison to ‘dirty’ and reprehensible ‘Others’. Thus, coping mechanisms of distancing through othering (see Bickerstaff and Walker, 2003: 53) in the form of denigrating ‘the people’, show how smog is enrolled in constructing those who consider themselves to be ‘not the people’ – those who are highly orientated towards Europe, to internationalist discourses of human rights, and notions of transnational citizenship, thus ‘higher-than’ (or superior to) their constructed Other, indeed, closer to the idealized West on a slippery civilizational slope (Melegh, 2006).

\textsuperscript{14} Similarly, Chris Hann (2019a: 1) poses the question ‘to what extent are liberal intellectuals themselves responsible, through their elitist disdain for the rest of the population’ for the rise of far-right populism in Hungary? (See also Hann, 2020). Here I show how such elite discourses have entered into the mainstream of everyday lifeworlds too in attachment to material practices and ecologies.
It is important to state upfront that of course I do not mean to disparage or undermine smog-concerned residents’ fears, worries and reactions. Air pollution is a serious public health threat that must be tackled, and quickly. Yet, what I mean to do in this chapter is do some of the uncomfortable work of teasing out and questioning the rhetoric and discourse that is unconsciously attached to the issue in order to understand better the sociopolitical and ecological context of far-right populist popularity in its re-politicizing anti-environmentalist stance. In the remainder of this chapter, I will unpack the themes and issues highlighted in this section. I start by providing more detailed background context to the emergence of ‘smog’, its understood causes, narratives and (de)politicized reception.

**Toxic Environments: The divisive politics of Polish smog**

While international headlines and images tended to focus on Poland’s ‘addiction’ to coal-fired power stations as the cause of the smog crisis (Euractiv, 2017; Mortkowitz Bauerova and Martewicz, 2016; Moura, 2018), however, zooming in at the national and regional level, the issue was in fact perceived to be far more localized and complex. According to civil society movement Polish Smog Alert, scientists and policymakers alike, smog’s causes were purely technical and behavioural (rather than political-economic or social), pointing up another kind of ‘backwardness’ (as frustrated residents put it) that Poland was confronting: limited access to ‘modern’ (non-solid-fuel-based) heating infrastructures at the domestic level, combined with poor individual household consumer choices. These were the main culprits, generating 88% of all smog-inducing ‘low-stack emissions’ (Łukaszewski, 2018: 488–489)15 and thus poisoning the shared public space of the air, both materially and metaphorically.

15 Whereas Upper Silesia was designated an ‘ecological catastrophe zone’ in the 1980s because of its intense pollution linked to socialist-era forced industrialization (see chapter five), today, as the Speaker of the Silesian Sejm at the local hearing on the adopted regional ‘Anti Smog Resolution’ in April 2017 commented, it is ‘not industry that is poisoning us – today, we are poisoning each other!’ (From fieldnotes recorded in the Sejm on 7th April 2017). The focus of anti-smog campaigns was very much targeted, therefore, at the household level, while coal power plants in the vicinity were invisibilized in discussions. This was because so-termed ‘low-stack emissions’ (those emitted by chimneys of less than 40 metres high and therefore most directly contributing to localized smog) were deemed the main culprit. Thus, despite the fact that, according to the Polish National Center for Emissions Balancing and Management (KOBIZE), coal power plants are responsible for 11% of primary particulate matter (PM2.5), 51% of sulphur dioxides (SO2) and 31% of nitrogen oxides (NOx) emissions (Vasev, 2017: 1148), central heating was rather considered the main offender. It was indeed responsible for around half of all emitted PM10 particles and 84% of cancerous benzo[a]pyrene (Śląski Biznes, 2019).
In around 70% of Poland’s 5.5 million single-family households, more than 10 million tonnes of coal in its various derivations\textsuperscript{16} are annually combusted for domestic heating, most often in ‘primitive’ boilers or stoves that do not fulfil any environmental standards\textsuperscript{17} (Łukaszewski, 2018: 488–489). Due to historic ties with the coal mining industry and often a lack of access to affordable and alternative energy infrastructure such as gas or district heating (discussed in more detail later), Upper Silesian single-family households are especially reliant on personal coal boilers or stoves for domestic heating. Around 80% of these nationally are of the ‘hand-fed’ variety, known pejoratively as ‘kopciuchy’, or ‘smokers’, from ‘kopci’, ‘to belt out smoke’\textsuperscript{18}. For these were the cheapest\textsuperscript{19} and least efficient on the market and could be loaded with any kind of fuel (Stala-Szlugaj, 2017: 103), resulting in a further reported widespread (illegal) practice of using domestic waste, such as plastics, food packaging, rubber tyres, nappies, pieces of furniture, or any other combustible junk to hand, as a source of additional cheap/free heat. Coal, in various ‘low quality’ derivations, and its remaining users were, however, reported to be the lead poison, even as the latter was often officially

\textsuperscript{16} ‘Coal’ is available for sale on the Polish market in various qualities and forms, from most to least efficient and polluting, the price reflecting this accordingly. The most widely used categorization in everyday language divides types of coal according to size – kostka (6-20cm, the least available and most expensive), orzech I (4-8cm), orzech II (2.5-5cm), groszek (0.8-3cm, hardly available any longer on the market), ekogroszek (0.5-2.5cm, so-called ‘eco-pea’ coal), miał (0.1 – 3cm) flot and muł (smaller than 0.1cm with a consistency of icing sugar). The latter were the cheapest, least efficient, most polluting so-called ‘junk’ varieties, banned for use in domestic appliances by the 2017 Anti-Smog Resolution. At the same time, until this resolution was passed, brown coal was also available for sale to domestic consumers. Likewise, no regulations for coal quality standards existed in Poland until 2018. When residents speak of ‘coal’ in the general form, what they typically have in mind is the ‘orzech’ form – the universal image of a ‘lump of coal’ in the hand, so-to-speak. The complexities over local diverse coal categories versus international discourse on ‘coal’ as a singular object, has implications for how debates about ‘clean/dirty coal’ pan out here.

\textsuperscript{17} No emissions or efficiency standards for solid-fuel boilers applied in Poland at this time. It was Civic Platform that in 2014-2015 trialled regulations on coal quality and boiler standards but due to resistance from an already-faltering mining industry that argued that such standards could not be met, this was dropped. In July 2018, however, to comply with EU policy, new regulations were enacted that for the first time banned the sale of solid-fuel boilers lower than a class-5 efficiency rating. In one fell swoop, the country went from having no regulations to the highest level possible. Producers and residents complained alike. Activists and smog-concerned residents, however, welcomed the tardy move. For of the 200,000 or so coal stoves annually sold in Poland in previous years, around 70% have been of this inefficient variety, locking households in to a highly polluting form of heating for a further 10 – 20 years (Polski Alarm Smogowy, 2019a). In Upper Silesia, around 700,000 of these least-efficient appliances are installed in local dwellings (Stala-Szlugaj 2017: 103).

\textsuperscript{18} A word itself with an implied loaded sense of slovenliness or filth.

\textsuperscript{19} A ‘kopciuch’, now illegal to sell on the market, sold for around 2000zł whereas a ‘class 5’ (highest efficiency) ‘eco’ boiler sells for anything from 5000-10000zł. This is in the context of median national monthly earnings of 2350zł after tax and where around 60% of households have no savings whatsoever (Fejfer, 2017a).
the more public (and industry-promoted\textsuperscript{20}) focus. Criticizing coal out loud was still a fraught enterprise.

Not far beneath the surface, however, the once unspeakable tensions over coal were starting to boil over in the public domain just as I arrived. While locally-meaningful and rapidly defensive narratives held onto, and promoted, the notion of ‘good clean coal’, its reputation, particularly in its ‘dirtiest’ formations, (\textit{flot, muls, miały} and burnt in \textit{kopiecchy}), together with those who made use of such fuels, were increasingly tarnished with the label ‘trash’. Coal was inexorably becoming perceived as increasingly dirty, toxic and therefore \textit{immoral} at the micro-level and the fine line between good/bad coal was in danger of collapsing. The literal-metaphorical breathing space remaining for coal in an increasingly ecologically-minded and health-orientated social landscape, not to mention added pressure from EU air quality as much as climate policies reigning down from above, was narrowing fast. Moreover, since the West had long left coal behind as a domestic heating fuel, particularly by those entirely disconnected to the industry, clinging to coal was increasingly perceived as not only foolish but increasingly uncivilized – a mark of economic and moral poverty, of backwardness and worthlessness. This was the potent message of the media headlines we saw earlier.

Aware of this precise situation, and combined with its ‘sudden’ appearance, despite the increasing availability of scientific and medical statistics and information to verify that smog and its health consequences were ‘real’, and to the dismay of actively concerned residents, conspiracy theories and scepticism abounded. A haze of uncertainty, doubt and refusal accompanied smog’s arrival for a significant portion of the population, particularly those connected to coal – a matter I explore in chapter five.\textsuperscript{22} This was not an unusual state of affairs in postsocialist Poland where trust in public institutions, including science, civil society and particularly environmentalists, is generally low (Petryna, 2003; Wilson, 2006). Yet it was compounded by the fact that the ruling far-right populist party, Law and Justice (\textit{Prawo i Sprawiedliwość – PiS}), too, in full-majority power since October 2015 – for they did not take the matter very seriously, choosing to champion the interests of ‘the people’ instead – in this case, coal people. ‘Smog’ was surely a co-ordinated attack by the anti-coal lobby. For those who supported the regime, the fact that the issue of ‘smog’ blew up just

\textsuperscript{20} Two local coal-fired energy companies, Tauron Ciepło and CEZ Chorzów, providing the majority of district central heating in Upper Silesia, sponsored a campaign in 2017 called ‘Low Emissions – High Risk’ in which they informed inhabitants that ‘40% of your neighbours burn rubbish’, such as paper, plastic, furniture and clothing. Data was generated by a contracted social research company, PBS DGA, and based on a survey of 300 households not connected to district heating. See <https://niskaemisja-wysokieryzyko.pl/>.

\textsuperscript{21} See footnote 16 for explanations.

\textsuperscript{22} See chapter five for a more detailed exploration of smog denial and its causes.
over a year after they came to office often made it even more suspect. Why hadn’t ‘smog’ been such a problem before? 

PiS’s initial response was to emphasize the long-standing nature of the issue as a way to normalize it, while criticizing the previous government, under the liberal-conservative Civic Platform, for its inaction, which was in large part accurate (Fejfer, 2017b). At the same time, uniquely, PiS actively downplayed its urgency as a matter of public health concern (VS Moura, 2018), and cast doubt on circulating conspiracy theories and lack of trust in the EU (who ‘imposed’ air quality measures on Poland and ‘demonized’ Polish coal), smog activists, and scientific institutions in the process. In January 2017, as the smog debate exploded, Polish Health Minister, Konstanty Radziwił, caused controversy by describing smog as a ‘theoretical threat’ – blaming public health hazards on ‘real’ problems such as smoking instead. He argued that since many Poles smoke, they were ‘unreliable’ adjudicators of smog (Wantuch, 2019). Likewise, the now-deceased Jan Szyszko, then Environment Minister, was quoted in the media as blaming smog on dust blowing in from the Sahara desert (Wajrak, 2017), and on ‘natural’ dusts from soils and trees (Karasińska, 2017), as well as on people burning non-Polish imported coal (Kaczmareczyk, 2017).

Moreover, they actively championed ‘Polish’ coal. Mere weeks before ‘smog’ went viral, on the traditional celebration of the patron saint of miners’ St. Barbara’s Day, or Barbórka, on 4th December 2016, then Prime Minister, Beata Szydło, (herself the daughter of a Silesian miner), visited the region and stated publicly that ‘there will be no strong Polish economy without a strong mining industry’, for coal is a ‘synonym for development and modernity’ (Kuchler and Bridge, 2017). Political commentator Łukasz Warzecha (2017) in a widely-circulated article on 10th January 2017 in the conservative, pro-PiS weekly magazine Do Rzeczy, articulated these circulating fears best, fanning them in the process. He claimed that the levels of smog-related ‘hysteria’ and ‘panic’ that had swept the nation in the previous few days were suspicious. ‘Who a week ago had heard of some kind of group called Polish Smog Alert?’, he queried. He speculated that something more sinister was at play. Citing eco-business interests, such as renewables companies and car manufacturers cashing in on sales and subsidies for hybrids and eco-upgrades, and the self-interests of eco-organisations (foreign-backed NGOs), he particularly pointed the finger at a nebulous pro-renewable, anti-coal, anti-PiS ‘lefty’ lobby that clearly sought to besmirch coal and ‘create an atmosphere in which Poland will gain the image of the lead poisoner in the EU, in turn helping to put pressure on public opinion in subsequent negotiations on EU environmental packages’. Smog was an anti-Polish strategy aimed at crushing Polish industry and interest. As Julia Szulecka and Kasper Szulecki (2019: 17–18) report, other pro-governmental journalists also undermined the legitimacy and authority of air-quality experts and the quality of collected data. I would hear such views echo throughout my fieldwork, particularly among miners, who were in their own way trying to make sense of mounting atmospheric pressure against the coal they excavated (see chapter five).

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24 Jan Szyszko had also been quoted for calling CO2 a ‘gas of life’ in rejecting the notion of anthropogenic global warming.
PiS thus made its pro-Polish-coal, and smog-skeptic, sentiment clear – reinstating the economic importance of coal-rich Silesia as the heartland of Poland’s future in the process. In the meantime, it sought to ameliorate wider public and EU concern about smog by appearing to act while in reality doing very little. In January 2017, under pressure from civil society and media, PiS announced fourteen smog-tackling actions (Wantuch, 2019), yet did not break with coal.26 27

Congruent with this political inaction and denial, progress on solving smog has thus far been painfully slow. In 2019, since the implementation of the Silesian Anti-Smog Resolution in April 2017 and the national Clean Air Programme in September 2018, offering subsidies and loans for thermo-modernization of private households and for the upgrading of domestic heating technologies, the Polish Smog Alert civil society movement found that only 35,000 orders for boiler exchanges had been placed in the region, realizing only 1% of necessary ambitions if clean air targets were to be met within the next decade (Śląski Biznes, 2019). In addition, the application process has been widely criticized for being cumbersome, slow and lacking information (Neill, 2020). Each winter smog continues to choke inhabitants at record levels, significantly risking citizens’ health and undermining wellbeing and quality of life.28 Smog-concerned residents were understandably already exasperated back in 2017. They could not understand why the alarm wasn’t ringing as loudly in everybody’s ears – the government’s or non-compliant citizens in denial who co-habited with them. In my fieldwork, therefore, anger, disgust and contempt for those people held

25 On the same day, former Defense Minister, Antoni Macierewicz, in a speech at Poland’s largest lignite mine and power plant complex in Belchatów, also underscored the fact that ‘Poland stands on coal and this will not change’, while Minister of Energy, Krzysztof Tchórzewski, gave his own speech outlining Poland as a ‘leader in modern coal-fired power generation’ and ‘the first in Europe in terms of clean coal technologies’ (Kuchler and Bridge, 2018: 1).

26 For a later example of how PiS failed to tackle smog - while standards for coal quality were adopted in 2018, the Energy Minister, Krzysztof Tchórzewski, insisted on maintaining the possibility to include ‘waste’ coals and ‘miński’ as part of the energy mix, (the most polluting varieties), and so a compromise was made: to the better quality coals could be added as much as 30% of these ‘junk’ coals (the separate burning of which was banned in Silesia as of 2017 as part of the regional Anti-Smog Resolution, together with brown coal), rendering the ecological impact of this policy, its flagship promise, null and void. As a result, smog activists and their supporters critiqued Law and Justice for being in the lap of the coal lobby, and putting Polish lives at risk in the process. The Solidarity Trade Union, on the other hand, representing a large segment of the coal mine industry, was pleased (Wantuch, 2018). In this way smog politics continues to be represented by invested actors as an ‘anti-coal lobby’.

27 At time of initial writing, of those promises, only one had been achieved: standards for coal furnaces (Wantuch, 2019). Still, even by October 2020, NGO Client Earth described PiS’s efforts as ‘ineffective, not coordinated and in most cases elusive’ (Neill, 2020).

28 At the time of the coronavirus pandemic, smog also combined with covid to increase the risks and fatalities of the illness. 1 in 6 covid-related deaths could have been indirectly caused by air pollution (Romanowska, 2020).
responsible for dirty air morphed with a disparaging discourse regarding those for whom coal-powered, smog-denying populism appealed, seen as entangled concerns.

Revealingly, residents who self-identified as actively concerned residents, who were in their 30s-50s, came from differing backgrounds, but tended to form part of what could be described as ‘winners’ of postsocialist transition, or ‘glass half full’ people (Feffer, 2017: 6) – those who were doing materially and socially well in Polish post-1989 society, had (prior to smog and PiS at least) felt optimistic about the future, and saw themselves as self-starters who had ‘made it’ in some subjective sense, subscribing to a naturalized-capitalist meritocratic perception of social hierarchies (Bell, 2020b: 42–43). Feeling themselves subjectively to have achieved a satisfactory level of comfort in their lives and decent ‘Western-level’ (or middle-class) lifestyles down to their own hard graft, efforts and skill, these self-respecting and self-selecting individuals tended to be better educated (completion of university degrees or diplomas), and worked in white collar or professionalized sectors as, for example, teachers, business owners, IT specialists, or managers. What united them was a shared sense of identification with ‘Europe’ and the ‘West’, meaning a political and cultural orientation towards the liberal values of individual human rights, the free market, rational deliberation, and secularism. What further united them was a common feeling that ‘things had been getting better’ – that the years following postsocialist transition had been marked by steady improvement, by ‘catching up with the West’. Whether or not these residents were loyal supporters of the previous government under the liberal-conservative Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska - PO), (many were not), I heard the general sentiment that, unlike PiS, they had been taking Poland ‘in the right direction’ - towards the West, and away from the East.

Furthermore, identifying themselves as Polish- or Silesian-Europeans, never as simply ‘Silesians’, who were connected in their imaginary to coal, mining work, older generations, and related traditions at times poured scorn upon, they were also generally personally distant to coal’s world as an embodied reality (until smog changed that), had often never ‘touched’ coal in their lives, even if their relatives once had (though most had not). They certainly did not rely on it directly for their own home heating. Such an embodied distance from coal made the intimacy of coal-induced smog a shock to the system in more ways than one. Whereas there was a clear class differential here between these self-selected inhabitants and their imagined ‘Other’ – in terms not only of income, but also occupation, education, status, lifestyle and cultural capital, and respectability – class as a discourse, and classism as a practice, was invisibilized (Bell, 2020: 43).

29 See chapter five for an overview of literature on the increasing polarization of (mainstream) environmentalism and anti-environmentalism in ideological sociocultural terms.
This was not, according to them, a matter of class hierarchy, but something far more insidious –
civilizational national hierarchy. In the next section I outline how this explanatory framework was
enacted through practices of comparison.

**Are we nearly there yet? Comparative environments along the East-West civilizational slope
and the self-colonizing theory of ‘backwardness’**

It was not possible to experience and understand everyday life here in postsocialist Polish Silesia
without noticing the ubiquity of the yardstick of ‘the West’ as a constant imaginary superior
presence in local ‘mental maps’ (Schenk, 2013). Perpetual practices of East-West comparison I
found were central ‘cultural toolkits’ (Norgaard, 2011: 97-175) for navigating one’s place in the
world for all participants on all manner of subjects, but particularly, for those most concerned about
it, in relation to smog. Attending my first Polish Smog Alert awareness-raising meeting, for
example, in a cultural centre in central Katowice in early February 2017, I was struck by the fact
that it was not only international institutions and media who were articulating and framing the issue
in these terms – it was an everyday trope that I would become very familiar with over the coming
months. Listening to the presenter inform his wistful-looking audience of residents about local air
pollution concerns, he framed this in distinctly comparative terms: ‘We are far behind the West. We
still have a long way to go’, he told them, as he and they looked longingly at the left-hand side of a
map of Europe he was pointing at, splotches of red angrily marking Poland’s air quality
measurements set against a sea of cooling, calm green-yellow. Western standards set the ‘norm’
against which all else was a deviation – abnormal and backward – and this was how smog was
being sensed and made sense of, experienced and politicized here on the ground.30 Such repeated

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30 Elizabeth Dunn (2007: 175) defines postsocialist transition as being about the ‘transfer of standards’
through market discipline. While Dunn explores the way that standards operated in the context of meat-
packing, so factories and firms, through the discipline of audit technologies, here air quality standards can
also be seen as acting in the same way – as establishing hierarchies of value and norms that “transmute
difference into impurity” (Dunn, 2007: 181). Standards coming in from the outside ‘set up a distinct power
differential between the rule-making western European members of the EU, and Poland, which is constructed
as infested, disease-bearing, less technologically sophisticated’ (ibid). Standards also remade personhood – so
that Polish people were required to fit a new model of market actor – rational, individual, bounded and
calculable, which ran counter to the ‘networked and relational form of personhood created under the property
regime of state socialism’ (Dunn, 2007: 186). A similar process can be seen to be occurring with the
environment under postsocialism, where space and ecology themselves and their organization, arrangement,
management and material, aesthetic appearance are re-qualified and re-judged under a process of comparative
standardization. Thus, aesthetic perceptions of comparative dirt and disorder are taken to stand for a
fundamental lack – a lack of standards, or a lack of civilization.
moments led me to wonder – what effect did this constant internalized comparing with a superior Other have on the formation of political subjectivities and the affective, emotional, social field, particularly within the context of the intrusive embodied intimacy of the persistent reminder that was ‘dirty’ smog?

Of course, the injustice of polluted air is rightly labeled as such, and comparison can often be a useful tool in struggles for environmental and social change. For example, Polish Smog Alert’s (2015) campaign slogan ‘Do Poles have iron lungs?’ highlighted the material discrepancies between air pollution levels and norms between East and West. Yet, when fused with long-standing everyday discourses of civilizational backwardness through the language of dirt that translate difference into temporal, spatial and indeed essential inferiority, such comparisons that become practice (embodied as simply common social knowledge – an unquestioned habitual mode of orientation, or a postcolonial postsocialist subjectivity) can – judging by the tapping feet, wringing hands, and sighing at the meeting and the self-reported anger of residents – become socially toxic in unintended ways with under-examined sociopolitical fallout effects.31 For crucially, as Heather Swanson (2013: vi) writes, practices of comparison do not compare pre-existing, given worlds, but actually play a fundamental role in *bringing worlds into being*. They make and remake the very thing they purport to simply objectively describe. Yet, the intensity of their presence within smog stories revealed their deeply normalized and invisibilized explanatory and generative social power, and their role in perpetuating a material-discursive ‘affective atmosphere’ of *shame* unreflexively conditioning everyday life; the ‘shared ground from which subjective states and their attendant feelings and emotions emerge’ (Anderson, 2009: 78), with consequences for how the smog problem and its solutions were being understood and framed.

Speaking to some of the Polish Smog Alert meeting attendees after the presentation to try to understand what had mobilized them to get active on smog, I noted this affective atmosphere wrought through comparison in practice. ‘People see how others live elsewhere, and they start to compare’, said Kamil, a wiry and bespectacled 33-year-old manager at a German car-parts manufacturer whose activeness on smog expressed itself through participating in local meetings like this one, posting information via social media, and signing petitions. He loved traveling when possible, particularly to the West. ‘You see the difference and you start to wonder why things can’t be the same here. It made me angry.’ In this way the ‘East’, ‘Poland’, and ‘Silesia’, as a place,

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31 Social comparisons ‘upwards’ are indeed reported by social psychologists to generate feelings of inferiority, dissatisfaction, resentment, low self-esteem and contribute to declining overall wellbeing (see Buunk et al., 2016; Festinger, 1954; Gilbert, 2013).
environment and culture, were materially-discursively constructed as overlapping spheres of ever-
behind-ness in comparison to the ‘norm’ set by the West. A hidden but pervasive sense of shame
linked to a ‘realisation’ of backwardness was often the prime motivator for action in the first place.
‘If the air problem existed in the whole of Europe, I’d be less mobilized to act’, Kamil admitted.
Through comparison enabled by travel, he had ‘realised’ Poland was still behind – that he was
living in an inferior environment and that, doubly infuriating, things could be otherwise. In short,
shameful negative difference combined with a blueprint for the attainable impelled action.

Similarly, Małgosia, a well-presented, 36-year-old former teacher and now housewife with
two children who spent time leafletting her neighbours about better heating technologies and
techniques, exclaimed, ‘I used to think this was normal until I went to Germany! I came back and
what used to be the nice smell of home became a stink!’ Through travel and comparison, she came
to attune her senses differently, and what was ‘normal’ became ‘abnormal’ - disgusting and
backward. This was a harsh wake up call, sparking simultaneous feelings of inferiority and
yearning, enhancing smog’s bitter taste. ‘These kind of things – looking after ecology – we are only
just starting to learn here’, she added. ‘Other countries – Germany, UK, Ireland, France – they act
on this issue somehow, try to do something, and have clean air, and we have to breathe something
worse all the time. You have to do something in the end to close the gap, it’s about that’. Joining the
EU had increased her expectations that Poland would be on a par with the rest of Europe. Yet a
shocking embodied experience of ‘being worse’ - of being inferior, ‘abnormal’ and lower than,
despite thirteen years of EU membership, shaped the shaming lens through which smog was now
conceptualised.

Toxic conceptions of Easternness as backwardness facilitated by travel and comparison
Westwards were of course not at all new. In this lay their normalized power. As the introduction to
this thesis outlined, comparative practices like these have a long generative history in the ‘invention
of Eastern Europe’ (Wolff, 1994) as backward and underdeveloped, facilitated in large part by
travel across the shifting frontiers of east and west by elites since the eighteenth century.32 Attila

32 This (self)-othering has a long history in Poland as chapter three outlined. See Larry Wolff (1994: 6) for an
overview of how travellers from the West in the eighteenth century were fundamental to the construction of
‘Eastern’ Europe as backward, dirty, barbaric and uncivilized through mechanisms of comparison. See also
Jerzy Jedlicki (1999) on how Polish elites were also responsible for similar constructions of the East through
their travels West during the same period, involving drawing negative comparisons of their home country.
Returning home with a ‘haughty’, ‘contemptuous’, and ‘moralistic’ attitude, they shrouded Enlightenment
ideals, such as the ‘natural rights of man’, in a cloud of ‘stigma of elitism and foreignness’, writes Jedlicki
(ibid: 3-4). When the word ‘civilization’ entered the Polish language in 1795, it was linked to notions of
progress defined by Western European ideals, where the term originated, contributing to a kind of Polish
Occidentalism propagated by the intelligentsia. The most Westernized class of society, they saw themselves
Melegh (2006) usefully conceptualizes this historic discourse of constructed civilizational global hierarchy as the ‘East-West slope’: a temporal line along which people and places are located and moving either upwards or downwards towards greater or lesser civilizational development with the two extreme axis or end points being the superior and advanced ‘West’ and the inferior and backward ‘East’. Practices of comparison between these poles have long formed the central means of its orientalist operationalization creating the very category of ‘backwardness’ as a relational and relative concept. Just as Edward Said noted, with the ‘West’ as the norm or gold standard, the ‘East’ became co-constructed in its image – and vice versa. During the Cold War, such comparisons fueled the competitive tensions between the capitalist West and Soviet East and their opposing models of civilization. However, with the collapse of Communism, ideals of Poland finally ‘catching up’ with the now evidently superior West by a process of simple imitation infused postsocialist politics and imaginaries, as outlined in the introduction. Comparative tendencies, or the ‘imitation imperative’ (Krastev and Holmes, 2018, 2019), intensified, but at this stage, were largely infused with hope and a sense of ‘return’. The ‘overtly simplistic view’ took hold (Herrschel and Forsyth, 2001: 569) that Poland had re-joined ‘normality’ and everything else would follow suit in a teleological, inevitable linear model of development imported from the advanced West – this included progress on environmental matters (Herrschel and Forsyth 2001). For socialism was simply ‘dirty’, capitalism ‘clean’ (Gille, 2002).

Following the postmaterial hypothesis, pursuit of economic development and democratic ‘mainstream politics’, including adoption of ‘Western lifestyles’ (Herrschel and Forsyth 2001: 578-9) through consumption thus came to be perceived as the means of achieving environmental aims. Joining the EU in 2004 and adopting its externally-sanctioned norms, standards and metrics, only amplified this kind of expectation. What I came to understand through such encounters was that since the collapse of Communism, smog-concerned residents had had confidence in the notion that ‘environments’ were part of a ‘post-political’ landscape (Kováts, 2018; Mouffe, 2005; Swyngedouw, 2010), in which such issues like solving dirty air, and also building a democracy, as a part of European culture, while they ‘regarded (their) own country as a poor and neglected suburb of Europe’ (ibid: xiii), thus took on a self-defined mission ‘to pass on the rays of Western light further to the East’ (ibid: 15). Domestic reactions to this included a backlash of Romantic nationalism and resistance to foreign influences – including the ‘curious combination of collective inferiority complex and national megalomania which was to compensate for it’ (ibid: xiii) – a pattern arguably still apparent today.

Social practices of comparison were also one of the main contributions that led to Communism’s collapse – again through possibilities of travel. Increased awareness of Western lifestyles and ways of living following relaxation of borders especially from the 1970s onwards meant increased pressure on the Communist government to make provision for growing consumer desires and material needs – pressures it eventually could not resolve (Szczerski and Wołanśka, 2011).
were merely a matter of importing and implementing the required European standards via bureaucratic technical, and institutional consensus. Thus, as one 38-year-old smog-concerned resident, Kasia, told me, ‘Everyone thought that when we joined the EU there’d automatically be more pressure put on ecology and that things would just start moving, something would happen. That’s how one imagined it.’ For smog-concerned residents I spent time with, this expectation was being by and large steadily fulfilled – until two entwined phenomena sent this assumption spinning – PiS and smog. For actively concerned residents this was thus experienced as an intense and bewildering ‘dislocation’ – the ‘moment of failure that ruptures our established reality and opens up an antagonistic play between competing discursive articulations struggling to impose a new hegemony’ (in Stavrakakis 2017: 11). It was the return of ‘politics’ (Mouffe, 2005; Swyngedouw, 2010) in ‘backward’ populist ecological form. Shame – the embodied sense of not being at-home-in-the-world – was a pervasive result.

The story of Zbyszek, whom I met after another smog information meeting for residents organized by a local chapter of Polish Smog Alert later that month and came to spend time with, offers a helpful insight into the historic background and contemporary operation of smog’s comparative, shame-inducing heuristic. A forty-two-year-old IT specialist, avid cyclist and father of two small children, Zybyszek, unusually, began getting active on smog about a year prior to the 2017 furore, setting up a Facebook group to inform people about the issue in his neighbourhood. Aside from raising awareness, this group provided a platform for residents to post photos of culprits with heavily-smoking chimneys, vent, and share frustrations. In recent times the number of members had skyrocketed. What had motivated him to become active on smog was partly a concern for his children’s health, and frustration with his inability to pursue his active lifestyle in the winter. After meeting a number of times, however, it became clear that there was something further beneath that bothered him even more significantly. He particularly emphasised his distress at becoming aware of inferior standards of living in comparison to the West. ‘Things had been getting better, more and more beautiful’, he told me, ‘yet, here we were on a level of the worst, most dirty countries in the world. It really irritated me that we were supposedly in the EU, that we aspire to be a modern, developing country, but we live in third-world conditions! It was a very sad realization for me.’ This realization came through active practices of comparison. As a cyclist interested in outdoor pursuits, he told me how he began to pay attention to air quality measurements that were already starting to be broadcast on media and via phone apps for specialist audiences, and to compare those to Western readings. It dawned on him that ‘something wasn’t right’. He also started
to experiment with his own nose – cycling out as far as he could from his town to see when and where the air quality changed. Whereas previously he had not paid much attention to it, it was simply ‘normal’, equipped with this new information, the air he breathed on a daily basis began to ‘stink’. The result was disgust, shock and a desire to make change happen: ‘When people start realizing that it could be better, it’s easy to conclude that we need to do something’, he told me. Such comparative modes of knowing and sensing were frequent conversational topics on his Facebook page, as he informed me, and I witnessed myself, sparking similar outrage, resentment, or underlying this – shame – and resultant trajectory of calls to action.

It was not the first time that Zbyszek, and others, had confronted and ‘realized’ Poland’s comparative ‘backwardness’, however. But it was the first time he had immediate sensory awareness of it, and the first time he felt able and entitled to do something about it. Recalling his Communist-era childhood, however, he admitted that the air had also been very dirty back then, with all the heavy industry around, but during those times it was simply a fact of life. Those were Communist days, and so there was nothing to be done about anything. He did not recall noticing the dirt at the time. It was only looking back from the vantage point of the present that dirt and disorder – and shame about that fact, exhibited in downcast and averted eyes and wistful sighing – clung to his memories. This process of dawning aesthetic reappraisal – and shame-induced remembering – began, he told me, just as Poland began its ‘return to Europe’ and the West.

Turning fourteen in 1989, he recalled going abroad for the first time on a family trip to Austria. It was a ‘confrontation with reality’, a ‘huge shock’. Having never occurred to him before as a child, it ‘hit him’ that Poland was poor, ‘behind’. Aesthetic perceptions of dirt/cleanliness melded with moral senses of disorder to vividly highlight this shameful discrepancy:

> Vienna was, you know, a generally developed Western city, right, and Poland in 1990… It was a huge contrast. Back here it was still completely Communism, grey, dull Communism. But there it was so colourful! So orderly! They had this honesty box for selling newspapers – for me that was something cosmic! It made me aware of how much of a distance separated us in those times.

Yet, from Zbyszek’s perspective, at that time, this difference was explainable in terms of the system that entrapped them. Comparison with the West under Communism and just after its collapse was accepted as proof that Poland needed time to ‘catch up’, that it was Communism that had been to blame for shortcomings and that Capitalism would soon sort everything out. At this time, the West provided an aspirational model and a compass for the possible. The end of
Communism had therefore brought optimism and hope and a sense of things finally ‘going in the right direction’ - Westwards. At first, ‘people were fighting to survive, it was a kind of economic freedom, it was hard – a shock’. But, three decades on, and his was a generation that had high aspirations for their country, and believed they were being steadily achieved. For he considered himself to already belong to, indeed embody, that ‘normality’ - the West. Living in a pleasant apartment block he had bought from money hard-earned through a job working in the IT industry after completing a degree in computing, he had thought that Poland had almost ‘arrived’ into Western European ‘normality’. But that abrasive arrival of ‘smog’ was sorry proof that the development gap was still yawning – one he could sense with and on his own body.

I had the impression that a rude awakening to smog, and living with the intrusive realities of a PiS government that dismissed it, was the first time in a long time that smog-concerned residents like Zbyszek felt they viscerally bumped up against, on an ongoing and continual basis, purported ‘Polish backwardness’, now an apparently inescapable aspect of everyday life, one that invaded bodily boundaries, where in other areas of life, living well, and living to standards of their own choosing, or ‘on a par with the West’, were possible. Comparison today for people like Zbyszek, after decades of supposed ‘transition’, thus engendered shock of a different nature – not hope, but angry disbelief, grief, even, and shame. Through failed imitation combined with the promises of EU integration, it provided the means to engender toxic feelings of inferiority and failure by being a constant reminder of lack in embodied terms. Smog was now evidence of an ongoing indefensible civilizational (temporal, spatial, environmental, economic, cultural, social and moral) lag and it threatened to contaminate even those who felt themselves to already have ‘arrived’ in the ‘civilized’ world.

Particularly it spoke of a nation unable to take care of itself and one another – still behind on the East-West slope materially and morally. As he explained:

Now it’s completely different, we’re almost on the same level. But we still have some way to go – smog proves that. It shows we still haven’t reached a certain level, like the wealthy Western countries. We’re still developing. It’s like in Asia, Indonesia for example, there they throw waste on the streets. They don’t care for their environment. In Poland, many people don’t yet see a problem either. It makes me angry. It’s a stage you have to reach, the stage of ordering your space. Thirty years ago in the West, there also wasn’t any awareness about this kind of thing. First you make sure you have enough food in your belly, then you tidy up the streets and only then do you start taking care of the air – the invisible terrain. Smog is the next civilizational level.
For Zbyszek, like for others I spoke to, clean air was, then, understood as a civilizational attainment, one that is reached by a linear process of economic development along an inevitable path of ‘progress’ and prosperity, echoing theories of ‘ecological modernization’ (York and Rosa, 2012: 285) along the East-West slope. This was precisely the kind of neoliberalized environmentalism described in chapter three. It was rather an aesthetic as much as economic, environmental and moral internal standard, correlated with the achievement of spatial order, harmony and beauty. As such, modeled as one of the final ‘stages’ of ‘development’, it seemed to be considered as one of the ‘last frontiers’ separating East from West. The feeling of being so close but not quite close enough was what made the experience so frustrating – and shameful.

Paweł, a forty-five-year-old travel agency owner, whom I met at a local town council meeting about smog, had a similar tale to share. His activism on smog took the form of such local citizenly participation, as well as through active conversations with neighbours and friends, posting comments online, and distributing information leaflets too. A flamboyant character with the habit of wearing loud shirts, he was always either returning or about to embark upon some travel expedition or other to far-flung destinations, and was very happy to share his perspectives in a series of conversations we had in ensuing meet-ups. His postsocialist passion for travel and the exotic gave him plenty of opportunity to compare Poland with other countries and thus make sense of his social and ecological reality – and the East-West slope was the dominant heuristic he implemented for doing so.

‘Travel shapes you, you see. People see how others live elsewhere and compare. Once, if you just lived here, what did you have to compare it to? Now there’s an opportunity, we are open to the world, so you can experience the difference on your own skin’, he told me one day over coffee at a nearby shopping centre. Having recently returned from Italy on a skiing trip, he said, ‘There I didn’t cough, here I do – it’s a simple comparison. Something is wrong’. Now when he smelled smog in Poland, rather, he told me, he saw India in his mind – where ‘the stink is worse!’ he laughed ironically. India, further East on the slope, a place he had visited a number of times, inspired in him both awe and disgust - ‘there it is a wonderland of colours and culture, but they have European standards minus 7!’ he said, referring to the ‘dirty’ conditions correlated to poverty. In comparison, for Paweł, utopia was the pristine ecologies of Scandinavia – an ‘uncatchable-uppable reality’, he sighed – ‘clean and beautiful, where nothing can harm you’. Such geographic, sensorial yardsticks were frequently mobilized to position Poland along the East-West slope gradient as an ‘in-between’ nation, with shame-inducing and yearning effects. ‘In other countries – France, UK, Ireland – they
sorted this issue out ages ago. Sometimes I have the feeling I am living in a village of Vikings from 1000 years ago – because it’s that kind of understanding of the world.’ Closed in, narrow, and backward.

At times, these comparisons were also directed to immediate neighbours, with Poland coming out worse, which revealed its unique exceptionalism: ‘Why do we have such a **syf** (shithole) around?’, he asked rhetorically. ‘The Czech Republic, Slovakia, these are our neighbours, and then to the West we have wealthier Germany, but somehow they are able to deal with it! They don’t have an issue! Are we such an inept, stupid country that we can’t find a solution?’ He looked pained, disgusted, angry and crucially, ashamed. Paweł, like others, often had such a distressed tone to his voice, yet he had long decided that he wanted to make his life in Poland, his home, and so he ‘wanted to do something so we could live better here’, he told me. It was the only way to stay. Being active on smog became a means through which to perform and enact his aspirations for a more European Poland, and his own European identity and citizenship in the process. It was a way to maintain his own sense of civilized integrity and **feel** at home.

Like Zbyszek, Paweł had little good to report about Communist times. For him, they were the dark days, and rejoining Europe after the collapse had similarly brought hope that soon Poland would ‘catch up’ with the imagined West:

> I knew there was a problem with the air but I didn’t know how to change it. At that time, we were thinking about changing the system, so that our world would move forward. People in Silesia would often have family in Germany, and the moment they would go there and see how they lived and see how they lived, everything so colourful – that was the first thing that made an impression on you, the colours! – the amount and access to consumer goods, and here how it was grey, that’s all, the air pollution on top, sealing the inevitability of our fate in this grey hopelessness... As young people we wanted to change things. After the fall [of Communism], it was like a falling in love with the world – we got passports, you could leave, I hitchhiked across Europe with a backpack - it was wonderful! It was like breathing with full lungs, and for a time it didn’t matter what was going on back at home. There was this amazing world out there – roads without potholes! You breathed differently, I remember it as a rainbow of colours!

Returning home after this initial euphoria with a bright, orderly, colourful aspirational reality, like for Zbyszek, came growing comparative awareness of Poland’s grayness, shabbiness and ‘dirtiness’ mixed with a sense of wonder, hope and confidence that soon enough, Poland would be just like that shiny world. It was just a matter of time. ‘Smog wasn’t an issue then – we were just happy things were changing – TV, new cars, colours, travel!’ ‘Of course’, he added, ‘the colours of the
rainbow in Poland are correlated badly nowadays… oooh – evil!’ He rolled his eyes. Under PiS, intensified homophobia was part of a growing anti-European Polish atmosphere too. Thus today, combined, smog and PiS were dismal proof that that ‘Europe’ was still, decades later, unattained, even as residents, like Paweł, considered themselves personally to have always embodied European values and norms. Their environment, home, was out of sync with who they considered themselves to be, thus it was doubly toxic – it brought a profound sense of shame.

A pervasive sense of comparative inferiority in relation to the West showed up in relation to my own positionality as a Western-raised-and-schooled researcher too. Olek, a 54-year-old accountant who had moved to Silesia in his twenties from the south-east, responded to my call out on a Facebook group for participants. His activism expressed itself as spending time leafleting neighbours, raising awareness and phoning the local law enforcement officers, or City Guards, when spotting black smoke belting out of chimneys. Memorably showing me his new air purifying machine – an increasingly essential domestic appliance that he had recently installed in his home – he said bitterly: ‘It must seem like an abstraction to you that we have these here’, he said, referring to my Western positionality. I found such a postcolonial postsocialist ‘double consciousness’ (DuBois, 2016) to be painfully common. My participants often looked at themselves through an imagined Western Others’ eyes and seemed to feel they came up short, prompting shame. Here, for Olek, just like for Zbyszek and Pawel it was his environment that came up short – a backward environment (socially, ecologically, morally, economically) he was being forced to dwell in and become with. It failed his expectations for his country and society. As such, Olek elucidated the lived tension that Krastev and Holmes (2019:50) describe as central to the perceived dynamic of postsocialist East-West imitation – between ‘normality’ as embracing the norms and expectations taken for granted in the West (such as, here, for clean air), and ‘normality’ in terms of having to adapt to, even embody, the actuality of the comparative ‘shabbiness of one’s own local environment’. The desire generated for environments other than one’s own – indeed a home to feel at-ease in – bridged this divide with an emotional intensity of longing, resentment and – shame. The most potent question was thus – who and what was to blame for this shame and why?

**Air quality as quality of the nation: Polish-Silesian ‘mentality’ pollutes the demos**

Later that day, Olek took me for a walk around his neighbourhood in the twilight of a wintry evening. He wanted to show me where smog was coming from. He pointed out the fact that the
street where he lived was lined with new housing, built in the last 10 years or so. The houses were large and contemporary-looking, and they were all connected to the gas network; some had taken advantage of previously-existing subsidies (since removed by PiS) and installed solar panels on their roofs. His immediate neighbours were evidently not smog-contributing culprits. His own house had both solar panels and ground-source heat pumps, something he was proud to say he denied himself going on holiday for in order to save the money. He felt that renewables were the future, and wanted to be part of that forward-looking trend. He joked that nearby residents would refer to the street as ‘Beverly Hills’. Yet he did not consider himself to be ‘wealthy’, simply ‘hard-working’ with a moral backbone and the right priorities – his own and fellow citizens’ health.

Just around the corner, however, were old houses, from the 1950s or 60s, so-called socialist-era ‘kostki’ (‘cubes’), often one brick-wall thick, uninsulated, and pumping thick smoke from their chimneys. Wrinkling his nose with disgust and shielding both his mouth and nose with his hand, a gesture I mirrored, he was understandably bitter about the seeming lack of reaction about smog from these poisonous neighbours. He was convinced they were burning rubbish, for he could smell plastic in the air, and certainly now-illegal ‘junk’ coal too, and had phoned the civil law enforcement officers (or ‘City Guard’ - described later) on them a number of times. Why didn’t they care?

Looking at the housing stock through my own critical academic lens, I couldn’t help but reflect on class differences materialized in infrastructural access (e.g. the gas network ended at the top of Olek’s street), deeper histories of housing provision, energy justice issues, jobs blackmail, and other structural inequities that differentiated the life experiences and trajectories of Olek and his neighbours. Yet I wanted to understand what he made of it. I asked him about such matters, and he dismissed my question with a waive of his hand. For him, as was notably also the case with other participants, he told me, poverty or infrastructural issues were not a good ‘excuse’. Poland was no longer a ‘poor country’, he was proof that if you wanted it, and worked hard enough, decent lifestyles were available here. The language of class, social and energy justice or poverty – these were all too Communist-sounding to be of much appetite or political clout.34 Questions of political

34 In general, as also noted in the thesis introduction, I found an absence of a receptive climate for such left-leaning discourses. One set of local activists, for example, argued that claims to ‘energy poverty’ were often used as a smokescreen to simply prevent change. This was a widespread sentiment, with frequent disbelief regarding the notion that people could not afford to switch fuels - ‘but people have three cars in the drive, and a new fence!’ It was put down to a lack of priorities – Polish ‘mentality’, meaning a lack of citizenly care. This was not helped by the fact that the coal industry itself started to adopt the language of ‘energy poverty’ to defend its and its consumers’ interests (see this survey on energy poverty KANTAR TNS, 2017). See, however, also this article from OKO.press, a left-leaning, reader-funded, non-profit, investigative journalist online magazine established in 2016 that outlines the links between poverty and smog (Fejfer, 2017a).
economy, public investment, and broader debates about energy and waste infrastructure provision as a right guaranteed by the state versus consumer product were notably absent in wider debates too.

Yet digging deeper, I discovered that in a national context where rates of energy poverty are some of the highest in Europe (Bouzarovski and Herrero, 2017: 24), particularly among pensioners (Lewandowski et al., 2018), structural and economic causes are a core part of this story. Coal is the cheapest energy source available (in terms of cost per Gigajoule) (Piłat, 2015; see also Adamczyk et al., 2017), while inefficient heating installations are also the most affordable. Regional disincentives to switch include the fact that the 100,000 individuals still directly employed in the coal mining industry receive an annual eight-tonne coal allowance as part of benefits. Many more livelihoods of course depend on coal (if one includes subsidiary and connected industries and businesses – the common calculation is multiply by four) and annual coal sales to the domestic market have accounted for 30% of industry income (Zasuń, 2017). In addition, mass access to

Reflecting briefly also on the relatively under-analysed class differences of anti-smog residents and those who downplayed or denied the matter (see chapter four), Julia Szulecka and Kacper Szulecki (2019: 18) write that ‘As an environmental journalist pointed out, the wealthy urban middle class is happy to support anti-smog campaigns when they target furnaces in tenement houses, but might quickly become skeptical when attention is turned to the need of limiting individual car ownership in big cities’, arguments that smog skeptics also deployed.

An average Polish family spends 12% of household income on fuel and energy costs – in the UK the definition of energy poverty is where a household spends over 10% of income on energy (Wiśniewski, 2011: 45).

This is, however, being increasingly impacted by the EU’s Emissions Trading System and the rising price of carbon permits. When the EU Commission decreased the supply of permits in 2017, predictably, the price increased from 5 euros to almost 30 euros in July 2019, and is, in 2020, at around the 25 euro mark. This is set to make Poland’s electricity costs, heavily coal-dependent, the highest in the EU. It will also have knock-on effects for household heating costs. Historically, gas has been more expensive than state-subsidized coal. According to Eurostat data in 2019, gas prices in Poland were some of the cheapest in the European Union in terms of unit cost per kWh, yet when converted into Purchasing Power Standard, it stood as one of the most expensive, with only five other EU countries paying more (Forsal.pl, 2019). With limited domestic supplies, high prices charged by Putin’s neighbouring Russia to the CEE region, particularly Poland, have stoked geopolitical tensions (Mikulska, 2018), leading also, in 2015, to Poland opening an LNG port to import liquefied gas, particularly from the US. The comparative costs of coal and gas, however, at the individual household level are a much contested topic in the Silesian region – dependent also on questions concerning technological efficiency of appliances, levels of home insulation, and costs of installation.

For those who do not use coal at home, for example, those who are connected to gas, or who live in the socialist-era high-rise apartment blocks formerly built by the mines that are connected to coal-fired-power-plant central heating, they will often sell their deputat, or allowance, on to transfer it into a cash bonus. This type of coal (oreczek - ‘nut’), sells for upwards of 600zł (roughly 135 EUR) a tonne (the price fluctuating with the market). Up until 2017, retired miners were also eligible for this benefit for life, but this ‘privilege’ was ended by PiS, stoking schisms and feelings of betrayal.
other energy infrastructures, primarily the gas network, is highly uneven and restricted3839, concentrated in denser urban areas, leading to so-called ‘white stains’.40 41 Likewise, in terms of the reported widespread practice of waste-burning42; structural factors were also at play43. Furthermore, since the local debate focused almost-exclusively on ‘low-stack emissions’ (i.e. to individuals), the contribution of coal-fired power plants to the problem was invisibilized44. Such path dependencies and disincentives to switch fuels were powerful causes of inertia.45

However, despite these background structural matters, that were admittedly obscured in a

38 The privatization process post-transition led to the chaotic selling off of energy infrastructures, and a current monopolization of gas provision by a single private market actor in the region. Whereas in Kraków, the city owns its own district heating network, in the minescape in Silesia where I carried out research, the network is privately owned. Some residents identified this as part of the problem, but were quick to switch to a pessimistic stance of resignation that this was not something one could do anything about. Most did not think public, localized ownership was an answer – it smacked of Communism.

39 This is in large part due to the complexities and discrepancies between town planning policy and energy infrastructure provision, where the most common means of owning one’s own home is to buy a plot of land and build it yourself – often in areas where there is no district heating or gas network. Thus residents have historically been left to their own devices to install heating, and in the absence of any prior building regulations regarding environmental standards of boiler installations or emissions limits, to their own devices they have turned.

40 In 2011, only 52% of Poland’s population had access to a gas network, and only 20% of those that utilized this access did so for purposes of heating; in Silesia, access covered 61% of inhabitants (Kaliski et al., 2011). By 2018, national access had increased to around 60%, with government-backed plans to increase access to 90% by 2022 (Ministerstwo Aktywów Państwowych, 2018). (In Upper Silesia, the reach of the gas network will always be limited, however, by underground risks posed by widespread ‘mining damages’ and subsidence caused by centuries of exploitation – see Dulias, 2016.) Presently, thus, gas accounts for only 8% of national heat generation, the same for renewables (Wożdya and Chorzelski, 2017: 108). According to the Institute of Environmental Economics, only 17% of Polish domestic heating sources do not contribute to air pollution – those based on gas, district heating networks, electric heating, or renewables (Fejfer 2017b).

41 Yet, even so, often not wanting to rely on risky ‘Russian gas’, ever fearful of possible invasions, occupations, and geopolitical instabilities, Polish coal from one’s own backyard, excavated by known kin and locally embedded persons, remained the reliable and ‘clean’ choice for many. Despite being a country with one of the highest rates of energy self-sufficiency within the EU (Wisniewski, 2011: 42), ironically, Poland however is increasingly relying on coal imports – predominantly from Russia.

42 I found documented evidence for the widespread practice of burning household rubbish unavailable. It was however often the core focus of local campaigns and public discourse. Since this occurs ‘behind closed doors’, any data on household fuel use is based on voluntary reporting. I also never witnessed such a practice – yet due to the discourse of smog, it may have been down to increasing shame around it as an increasingly frowned-upon social practice. Attentive to narratives of waste, and its past burning, however, (shame-soaked ‘confessions’ of prior waste-burning were offered by some), I came to understand any continued practice of burning domestic waste as not only an economic issue, but also a legacy of a paradoxical socialist ecological ethos of resourcefulness and a cultural attitude of ‘waste not, want not’ generated by poverty and scarcity economies (see Gille, 2007 for an account of the ‘cult of waste’ in Soviet-era Hungary and its values of reuse and recycling).

43 Under socialism, participants regularly recounted that there was no such thing as household plastic waste. Memories of waste, particularly in relation to food consumption, were of minimal, usually reusable, and ‘natural’ materials, made only of glass, paper, and metal and the like. With capitalism came plastic – and an overwhelming amount of new kinds of trash. Indeed, municipal waste per capita increased by 18.9% in Poland between 1985 and 1992 alone (Pavlínek and Pickles, 2004: 262). At this point, waste management
political landscape that eschewed such approaches, I found that the causes of environmental ‘backwardness’, were instead widely being understood and articulated in more fundamental terms. They supposedly lay deep within the recesses of national character. Olek and others felt there was something deeply flawed and wrong in the nation’s sociobiological make up itself and this was the main issue. Poor quality air signalled the very poverty of the quality of the nation, its people, not only in economic, but also moral, cultural and even biological or mental terms. In comparison with the West, Polish, or here interchangeably (or more potently) Silesian, ‘mentality’ (mentalność) was thus to blame - a matter distinctly more difficult to rectify or change. For what was meant by this was a kind of deep-rooted, genetically-wired, quasi-racial, ethno-national ‘primitive’ way of thinking, doing and being. It was an ontological rather than epistemological category. A kind of was, consistent with the mass privatisation process underway in the 1990s, outsourced to private companies. Local authorities had no obligation to run waste management programmes at this time – the responsibility lay with householders instead who, since transition, had to individually arrange a contract with a company of their choosing. With the economy in freefall, combined with rising mass unemployment and floundering wages in the first postsocialist decade, many opted for the cheapest, not necessarily most sustainable, option. Unsurprisingly, illegal waste dumping increased during this time – as did the practice of burning newly amassing rubbish to avoid disposal costs. In 2012, for the first time, Local Authorities were handed responsibility for waste management, and at the same time, recycling came into effect. Now Local Authorities needed to arrange collection and implement a system appropriate to their locale. As a result, waste disposal systems today vary widely across the country, as do costs. In Silesia, many of my participants expressed their ongoing confusion about how to navigate a complicated and seemingly non-transparent recycling and waste system. Prices seemed complicated to make sense of. In general, I was informed that each household pays a standard charge, which then is adjusted according to the number of people living in the household, the size of the property, and sometimes the amount of water used by a property in one month. Residents pay less if they ‘segregate’ their waste themselves into separate containers. Due to rapid inflation, however, prices over the last years for waste disposal have ballooned. (Wilczek, 2020) As a result of this patchy and uneven waste infrastructure system, rates of recycling in Poland, according to the EU’s 2019 review, are 34% - well below the EU average of 46%. Nevertheless, mandatory segregation came into effect in 2020, under the EU’s Waste Management Directive, setting a 50% target across member states by 2025 (Wilczek, 2020).

44 This is despite the fact that a report by the Health and Environmental Alliance found that burning coal in power plants in Poland alone results in health costs of PLN 12.5 – 34.4 billion (£3 – 8.2 billion) every year, contributing c.10% to direct emissions for both PM2.5 and PM10 (domestic combustion accounts for 40%), and 32% and 49% respectively of nitrous oxides (NOx) and sulphur dioxide (SO2), (domestic combustion producing only 7% and 21%) (Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL), 2013). It is also despite the fact that past emissions reporting by power plants, only manditory recently, have found to be under-estimated. A 2018 report by Greenpeace, Poland revealed that following the introduction of compulsory emissions reporting under EU directives in 2016, previous measurements based on estimates of the mercury-content of emissions at the Belchatów Power Plant in central Poland, the largest in the EU, by PGE, the state-owned Polish Energy Group, were found to be 18 times lower than the accurate amount – 2.82 tonnes per year, more than the combined emissions of Spanish industry (Greenpeace, Polska, 2018).

45 Chapter six in this thesis further explores the social and cultural gendered structures that likewise slow down or prevent change. 46 For an exploration of a similar anxiety about civilizational backwardness and poor quality people in contemporary (postsocialist) China, see Ann Anagnost’s (2004) article exploring the state’s mobilization, since the 1970s, of the concept of ‘suzhi’, or ‘quality’ as a neoliberal politics of raising the value, or ‘quality’, of personhood for the national project of development.
Standing on the road as it got darker, both of us increasingly engulfed by toxic fumes, Olek vocalized this vividly through intermittent coughs. Asking him who he blamed for the problem, he said resentfully:

I blame people who despite the information keep poisoning – for me he’s the most basic kind of bandit in the world! Air quality is a mark of civilization – it is evidence of the culture of the nation. The worse the air quality, the worse the culture, demonstrating a lack of self-worth, responsibility for future generations, care for one’s own health and that of one’s near and dear. It demonstrates that we, Poles, are a primitive nation. It comes from backwardness, from slovenliness. It is a national defect. We have amazing cultural traditions – artists, musicians, and so on – but in the area of respecting nature, we stand out from all the rest, the statistics show it, like air quality. When we entered the EU, the West already had this issue under control, tidied up and ordered. But us? People still dump their sewage onto their fields. What does that demonstrate, when people pour shit on the ground where they live? And people think they are smart for getting away with it. It doesn’t smell, but it pollutes; it’s that kind of country. That kind of mentality.

Within a neoliberalized postsocialist economy, the cause of smog was then both individualized (down to the level of the household) and then generalized as expressing an intrinsic national mental and moral defect of the Polish household (standing in for nation) itself. In this way, the Silesian case offers a distinctive example of air pollution perception, where rather than other ‘Others’ being blamed on a vertical axis of power, such as government, industry or distant neighbourhoods, with alien characteristics (Bickerstaff and Walker 2003), it is internal, horizontalized Others on a downward slope – neighbours, households, people ‘like us but not like us’ - Other Poles – the ‘worst sort’.  

47 PiS has been notorious for its populist division of Poles into ‘good’ and ‘bad’ kinds’ - those who support PiS – True Poles – and those who fight against them – whom in December 2015 in a televised address sparking public outrage, PiS Party President Jarosław Kaczyński, labelled ‘the worst sort’ (gorszy sort) (TVN24, 2015). Here I hold up a painful mirror to ask whether such ‘segregation’, as it is referred to in Polish, adopting the language of waste segregation used in relation to recycling, has not long been part of everyday Polish social division.

48 Similarly, Paul Hoggett et al. (2013: 580) in their research on ‘Fairness and the Politics of Resentment’ in the UK, find that discourses of relative deprivation under neoliberalism, predicated on a politics of comparison between social classes, recasts the causes of social deprivation away from that of vertical power relations towards ‘lateral relations between people at the same level of society’, i.e. that the arrow of unfairness and moral indignation is directed on a horizontal plane. They find that ‘people use social comparisons based upon the individuals they encountered in their immediate lifeworld. As a result, resentment and grievance was much more likely to be directed at one’s ‘neighbour’ than at the powerful but less visible groups and elites whose own privileges come a the cost of others’ disadvantage’ (Hoggett et al., 2013: 576). Thus the sense of injustice becomes highly ‘restricted and localized’, and the ‘real and continuing divisions between social classes are obscured by largely imaginary divisions between neighbour and neighbour’. See also Elisabeth Brighi (2016: 417) for an account of the micro-politics of neoliberal failure and its increased
I empathised with Olek’s anger, impatience and resentment. He had been severely ill himself with a lung condition that had developed in connection to smog. I myself was worried about my own lungs. Yet, I could not help find his language quite violent, and his caricaturing of his neighbours, both literal and metaphorical at the level of the nation, as simplistically Othering in invisibilized classist terms. It reminded me that populists such as PiS were not the only ones engaging in simplistic caricaturing, blaming and moral condemnation (Stavrakakis et al., 2017: 16) in Us/Them terms based on a pure/corrupt binary. Tellingly, such sentiment and vocabulary were not exceptional, rather, it was a rhetorical palette I grew accustomed to as a hegemonic discourse. I realised it was an old trope being bluntly recycled for similar ends.

As discussed in the thesis introduction, in the 1990s, as the fabled ‘transition’ to capitalism proved itself to be more painful and slow than first imagined, questions about why postsocialist countries were ‘resistant’ or ‘maladjusted’ to capitalist modes of operation, or so-called ‘normality’, preoccupied international and national academics, media commentators, policymakers, politicians and the public alike. Rather than adopting a nuanced and appreciative perspective on social and cultural histories and difference, or a critical perspective on capitalist categories and the way transition was handled, the reader may remember that Communist ‘mentality’ and personhood were supposedly to blame – referring to the ingrained psychological traces, habits, and behaviours leftover from the Soviet-stamped past that were holding Poland back.49 This was particularly targeted at specific social groups – those lower down the class order, especially the former Soviet-era glorified industrial workers who were being hit hardest by the maelstrom of change.

In this way, it was not just international discourse, but Polish intelligentsia and society too, who, as Michal Buchowski (2006: 466) writes, transferred being the ‘Exotic Other’ in a postcolonial
casting onto individualized horizontal, rather than collective vertical, blame and resentment (which I would define as the projection of shame as a purification strategy).

49 In anthropology, the concept of ‘mentality’ has colonial roots to a mode of investigation and categorization that pitted primitive ‘mentalities’ against civilized European ones. It emerged out of a comparative practice of trying to understand difference from an imperial perspective (Levy-Bruhl, [1923] 2017). Liv E. Feldt (2010: 11) writes that the concept of ‘mentality’ as an answer to essentializing notions of ‘culture’ had its heyday between the 1960s-1980s, particularly in the field of history, where the concept has roots since the 1880s. In the 1990s this concept was so heavily critiqued that it disappeared, she writes, in academic circles. Yet, precisely at this point, within the former Soviet Union it was journalistically popularized as a mechanism by which to try to explain the emerging differences between Western and Eastern Europe (Dubov, 1995). Indeed, writing during this time in the *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, on ‘The phenomenon of mentality’ and its postsocialist origins, Russian psychologist I. G. Dubov (1995: 41), defines ‘mentality’ from a Russian-East European perspective as intersecting with notions of ‘national character’, or those ‘basic personality traits inherent in representatives from a particular nation’. These traits only become noticeable, he writes, when seen in comparison with representatives from other societies – here, the West. As such it operates as a postcolonial postsocialist heuristic.
European frame onto its own internal ‘Stigmatized Brothers’, those lower down the class order. For, with the lifting of the Iron Curtain, such ‘orientalizing discourses transcended geographic boundaries and now encompass social spaces’, becoming internalized and codified nationally, forming a pattern of endless ‘nesting orientalisms’ that cascaded down through the social strata (Buchowski, 2006: 466). The concept of ‘mentality’, a highly unspecified term, became an internalized form of self-colonization based on class-based Othering. ‘Only after the influence of Homo Sovieticus mentality is reduced and disappears will we be sure that the Polish nation would cure itself forever from its post-communist trauma’, exclaimed renowned Polish liberal market economist Piotr Sztompka representatively (in Buchowski 2006: 471; see also Bridger and Pine (1998) on homo sovieticus).

Indeed, Buchowski generates a table listing the binary opposites of so-called ‘socialist’ and ‘capitalist’ ‘mentalities’ promoted by economists such as Sztompka at this historic juncture, including, for example, ‘cynical’ vs ‘realist’, ‘nepotistic’ vs ‘efficient’, and ‘dishonest’ vs ‘honest’, to name a few. The language and binary imaginary of this internalized postcolonial postsocialist concept of ‘mentality’ animates smog discourses today, where those causing pollution were deemed to be ‘irrational’, ‘lazy’, ‘technologically backward’ and opposed to the self-motivated, modern, rational and morally upright smog-concerned residents. The hegemonic capitalist ideology of meritocracy was pervasive, translating social inequality into a naturalized hierarchy of personal moral worth and social value (Bell, 2020: 42-3). As mentioned earlier, class issues remained unarticulated, hidden. The time-worn narrative of Homo Sovieticus blamed for the failures of postsocialist transition was thus now translated into Homo Polanicus, ‘the nation’, the ‘Polish people’, as the contemporary ball and chain dragging dirt through the air and contaminating its

50 Likewise, Lucy Mayblin et al (2014: 11) also find in their research on perspectives on diversity in Poland, that indeed informants used the language of inferiority, informed by a conception of hierarchical modernization theory, to describe certain social groups and designate them as ‘domestic others’ who are ‘civilizationally incompetent’, unable to reject old mental habits, or ‘the homo sovieticus complex’. In his research on social class and Polish migrant lives in Norway, Marek Pawlak (2015) also finds that the process of negative self-othering, and othering of lower classes amongst co-nationals, was very strong, with ‘cosmopolitans’ identifying with an essentialized imaginary of a more civilized West, and the ‘Polakkene’, or working classes, being reified to the status of embarrassment, backwardness and inferiority by that class. In this way he finds that ‘Many Poles seem to be caught in a sort of evolutionary understanding of political, economic and cultural progress’ (Pawlak, 2015: 36) and that Poles more intensively took on self-othering categorizations than other immigrant groups. But this comparative self-othering does not emerge in the direct experience of emigration; as this chapter shows, it is a narrative discourse, indeed postcolonial postsocialist practice, that deeply structures modes of self-understanding, knowledge, and subjectivity within Poland itself in its always-present relation to the Western Other.
rejectors through bodily transgression\textsuperscript{51}. In turn, residents mobilizing such discourses were able to distance themselves from the same, cleansing themselves of the taint of impurity, and performing their own ideal of transnational, Europeanized personhood and citizenship in the process (see also Lawler, 2005; Liechty, 2010).\textsuperscript{52} The stigma of shame was thereby cleansed and passed on down the nested orientalist, cascading hierarchy through projection, while constructing the category of ‘Other’.

Analysing my fieldnotes and interviews, among participants, the concept of this comparative ‘mentality’ I found operated as a catch-all phrase to signify four dominant, negative, interconnected stereotypical traits exhibited by ‘the people’ causing both smog and PiS in their mixed up shameful fusion (coming almost straight out of Buchowski’s table): irrationality, deep-set or ‘folk’ conservatism (connected to religiosity), ‘kombinowanie’ (an untranslatable Polish word meaning the at-times sly at-times cunning ability to ‘combine’ ways of getting around the state or getting by, usually through contacts, connections, and mobilizing the resources one has to hand)\textsuperscript{53}, and intrinsic selfishness. Michael Herzfeld (1997: 157) names the act of stereotyping a ‘discursive weapon of power’ that is ‘by definition reductive, and, as such.. always marks the absence of some presumably desirable property in its object’. In this sense stereotyping often comes riddled with contempt. Underlying these four traits was the implication that Polish ‘mentality’ was the root source of a distinctly backward and immoral character held responsible for causing Polish backwardness.

Irrationality referred to an ingrained imperviousness to expert-scientific knowledge, information and education, as well as short-sightedness and narrow-minded perspectives. Deep-set conservatism identified people as stubbornly stuck in ‘tradition’, fatalistic, habitual and resistant to change, particularly those tied to coal and its intergenerational, biologically-wired cultural determinism (more in the next section). It also referred to an ignorant habit of putting faith in God regarding one’s destiny. ‘Kombinowanie’, or ‘arts of combining’ (Materka, 2014), is a practice said to have been made historically necessary through repeated traumas of war, occupation and occupation and occupation and occupation.

\begin{footnotesize}
52 Beverly Skeggs (1997: 4) writes how the category particularly of ‘working class’ was constructed by middle-class concerns to consolidate their own power and identity by ‘distancing themselves from definable’ others’ in moral terms. Quoting Lyn Finch who writes in The Classing Gaze: ‘The degenerate classes, defined as departures from the normal human type, were as necessary to the self-definition of the middle-class as the idea of degeneration was to the idea of progress, for the distance along the path of progress travelled by some portions of humanity could be measured only by the distance others lagged behind’. In Poland this occurs in a double sense – not only in class but also national terms in the postsocialist civilizational hierarchy.
53 For detailed anthropological studies of ‘kombinowanie’ as a Polish cultural practice see Edyta Materka (2014) and Nicolette Makovicky (2018).
\end{footnotesize}
totalitarianism and the material shortages and discontinuities this imposed. It is usually referred to with a negative connotation as a post-Communist relic – a shorthand for slyness, corruption, and dubious means of operating, though at times is used more positively to mean a cleverness or creativity encapsulated in the saying ‘Polak potrafi’ - ‘a Pole will find a way’. In the context of smog it connotes suspicion with regards to why people behave the way they do, with suggestions of cheating and acting in morally corrupt ways to purchase or burn poor quality fuels in order to spend money elsewhere – for example, on cars or holidays. I heard Olek and others joke that rather than pay for recycling or waste disposal, for example, ‘Poles segregate their rubbish into that which you can burn in the day, and that which you can burn at night!’ This was linked to ideas of intrinsic selfishness which pervaded Olek’s (and others’) accounts – the view that Poles are mean-spirited, selfish, only interested in material gain and self-serving, ‘seeing their own ‘interests’ in everything’ as one participant Marysia put it, and probably polluting the air out of a desire to spite their neighbour, or the authorities to boot.54

Together, these four negative characteristics combined to generate the poor quality of ‘Polish’ people, their ‘mentality’ and morality, and thus their poor quality air. It was likewise used to explain two interconnected polluting and shame-inducing phenomena – coal and PiS too. In this way it was a long-standing postcolonial postsocialist anti-populist device, expressing a fear of ‘the people’ in nativist form, co-constructing ‘Them’ in the process, with implications for how the matter was being politicized, the problem articulated, and solutions identified. Likewise, it revealed the background dialectics of anti-populist-populist co-emergence, the central role of shame in its dynamics, and ‘dirty’ coal’s role as a material-symbolic lightning rod for its sticky substance.

Uncivilized coal: Smog, PiS and the resurgent ‘beetroot-onion maker’

The burning of household rubbish, but also coal itself, particularly of various ‘junk’ forms, was especially considered a kind of shameful populist practice, indeed material, of nativist masses tied to Silesian-Polish ‘mentality’, reflecting the contemporary material-symbolic construction of coal in increasingly ‘dirty’ terms. In my interviews and conversations, coal was consistently described as a

54 This commonplace, self-derogatory view of Poles as intrinsically mean-spirited, envious and spiteful, linked also with class-based Othering, was captured by a gift given to me by one of my smog-concerned participants – a DVD of the Polish black comedy Wesele - ‘The Wedding’ directed by Wojtek Smarzowski (2004) and featuring a typical Polish provincial wedding celebration in which avarice, bribery, corruption and despicably selfish characters are the norm. The participant insisted I should watch the film because it ‘encapsulates the quality of the Polish national character’ - the people. This film was mentioned to me on several occasions in this context.
peculiarly comparative Polish, or Eastern, ‘relic’, a backward industrial-era technology used by Communist-tainted or conservative people that smog-concerned residents longed to leave behind to enter the 21st century – or Western modernity and its morality. As Piotr, a 42-year-old architect I interacted with on Facebook told me: ‘People say it’s always been this way and always will be. But progress depends on making changes – people have to change, to make things better. Communism was a closed, mentally limited world. People like continuity – so they just say smog is a ‘mining tradition’! It’s the Polish mentality! But in the West there has been technological advance!’

Likewise Kamil, whom we briefly met earlier told me: ‘The world is expecting to land people on Mars any time now; using coal is just backward! Soon coal will be something you will just see in the museum’. Marysia, a 32-year-old arts administrator similarly put types of energy into a civilizational hierarchy – moving along the West-East slope from ground-source-heat-pumps equated with Scandinavia (‘a joke in Poland!’) through to electricity, gas, and then ‘Polish coal’. ‘In the 21st century, using coal for heat… is just not so cool’. Likewise drawing on her Western travel experiences, Krystyna, 35, a medical assistant, told me ‘Germans can’t imagine what it’s like to burn coal – for them it’s a fiction! They don’t have illnesses like Poland has – and they recycle, they have it in the blood already, and we are only just beginning to learn these things’. Thus ‘the people’, here coal workers, and coal people, are understood as stuck in the Communist past, resistant to progress, their sociobiological ‘mentality’ causing civilizational lag, with coal its materialization. Olek summed it up thus: ‘The civilized world is moving forward – even China are investing in renewables! But us? We call it our black gold.’ Backwardness in a lump of rock. Burning coal was thus perceived as an old-fashioned, humiliating ‘Silesian mining tradition’, an industrial habit or custom that needed to be shaken off in order to attain the next civilizational level and become ‘modern’ and newly moral too. Coal as home – becoming coal as shame.

Ewa, 37, a graphic designer, who had grown up in the region, told me that understandably ‘everybody used to burn coal, that’s all there was, ten to fifteen years ago.’ Today, however, there are alternatives – technology has advanced. All her friends, like her, choose gas – it is cleaner, easier, and more ‘comfortable’. Since her father used to work in coal mining (a rarity in those I spoke with for this chapter – partly explained by the fact her husband was involved in renewable energy business) she had a much more ambivalent relation to the substance, however. Unlike Olek, Pawel and Zbyszek and others who had no ties to coal, she remembered coal more fondly, tied to affective moments of interaction with her grandfather and father who once worked in the mines, yet she believed times were changing, and Silesian Poles needed to change along with it. Mines were
having to dig deeper to lower, poorer quality seams, coal prices were rising, and as a result, mines were selling off even the waste products – *mul* and *flot* – to reap a profit and keep sales up. Those who couldn’t afford any better chose this option, she felt. Many others recounted the same story. Yet her explanation did not stop at economic difference, broaching on energy poverty. As someone who grew up with the postsocialist possibility of travel – particularly to Western European countries such as Germany, Italy and France – and thus considered herself to be European, like Małgosia earlier, she had seen with her own eyes how ‘life can be different’. Through comparison, what had been normal to her, was no longer acceptable, because another way was clearly possible. It was thus not simply a matter of finance – it was Polishness. ‘In Germany’, she said, echoing Krystyna, ‘they can’t imagine what it’s like to burn coal – they don’t know illnesses like asthma, circulation problems, because they live in clean air. It’s a different mentality…. If you’ve lived here all your life in this smog, in this pollution, burning that coal… you wouldn’t understand’. Her father was one of those older people who believed ‘it’s always been this way’ and it ‘didn’t hurt anyone’. It’s the ‘mentality of Poles’, she told me to think that the ‘problem is theoretical’, and the PiS Minister of Health’s statement created a permissive environment for this kind of thinking. Polish mentality created both PiS and smog in an an unfortunate and self-reinforcing fusion.

Similarly, Zbyszek tied smog to old-stock housing, old-stock coal, and old-stock people and their correlated ‘mentality’ too – yet notions of class poked out in his account that revealed their backgrounded presence. He grew up in a socialist housing block, and, since his family had never been associated with mining, unliked Ewa, he had never touched coal in his life. Such housing was connected through central heating to the local power plant, part of socialist-era modernization efforts. Today, most of his friends also lived in blocks – many of them were not ‘indigenous’ Silesians, none of them were miners and since they did not contribute to the problem of smog through domestic heating, they were ‘shocked’ and ashamed to wake up to this problem in 2017, as earlier indicated. He thus told me:

It’s definitely a problem of mentality… People who’ve never touched coal and live in apartment blocks are in shock – when they drive to work, to a cool, new building, with high quality, civilized standards, and they have to drive through this… it’s like coming up against third world problems! That’s why people living in blocks are more anti-smog than most – we’re not responsible! Friends who live in the block are mostly outsiders – _napływowi_ – from Poland. You see it depends where you are from – some people know these coal stoves or boilers from childhood and for them it’s normal, for others who’ve never seen or touched one, like me, who already live on a high level and have high standards of living it’s a shock that such a problem has arisen suddenly. The middle
classes don’t generate smog – 100%. Those who have already lived there for fifty or sixty years, they are the ones who have the coal stoves. It’s not just Silesians that are the problem, but people who have lived here a long time who are just used to it.

Yet, for Zbyszek, coal-burning, as much as waste-burning, were signs not simply of structural binds or class-related positionality either, but, like for Ewa, of intrinsic ‘primitive’ behaviour – at times deliberately spiteful, (‘Poles are mean-spirited, they will burn illegal fuels just to spite the authorities!’, explained Krystyna while Ewa added ‘The Polish nation is very specific. We complain about everything and just see our own business in things. People don’t care because they think it doesn’t affect them, and the main question is ‘what will I get out of this?’”), at times simply a mark of ignorance or Communist damage (‘It’s the mentality – they are just used to it. The PRL had a negative effect on mentality – that you don’t have to develop, or try, or look after yourself or others’, said Zbyszek). Communism was still infecting the nation, but it was now framed as synonymous to ‘Polishness’ itself – and coal materialized this dirty backwardness.

Furthermore, male coal miners, coal-users, and Silesians, often blurred into one category, were particularly scorned and derided as beyond reform and holding progress back in a pervasive form of obfuscated class contempt. Since miners were not considered financially ‘poor’ (reflecting the widespread idea that class is related to occupational income alone) - after all they were still a relatively privileged group of workers – what possible excuse could they have? Paweł had an answer, describing particularly male miners as ‘stuck in tradition, they can’t do anything else – it’s that short-sighted, backwater thinking, it’s dangerous.’ Typical behaviours, ways of thinking, or talking associated with ‘Polish mentality’ in relation to smog, were often spoken of with the imaginary of a male PiS-supporting coal miner in mind - habitually bound to coal, or ‘wogiel’, (the local Silesian idiom for coal (rather than ‘węgiel’), a word denoting a lower-class, uneducated perspective), and who cared only about ‘his stomach and a TV soap opera episode before his shift’, as Kamil put it. Such a ‘typical’ P(r)ole or ‘Polakkene’, as Marek Pawlak (2015, 2018b) names the Polish way of classifying a working-class, ‘low-brow/quality’ Pole, meanwhile, often had 3 cars in his drive, prioritised going on holiday over buying good quality fuel, drank beer and didn’t care a toot about his neighbours. His moral priorities and behaviours were lacking. Furthermore the notion that energy should be free or cheap, which miners were used to, was backward thinking too. ‘They need to learn that energy costs something’. Such accounts were often accompanied by a change in voice – for example adopting a gruff, ‘Silesian’ accent, accompanied by a rolling of the eyes, or steaming frustration. Once again backward ‘Poles’ and their mentality, seemingly more acute in the
Silesian, male coal-mining variety, and most densely materialized in the masculine substance of coal itself, were culpable.

Returning to Olek, I asked him about his thoughts on the role of coal in this. He pointed to the smoke-chugging houses:

This kind of thinking comes out of the home – primitive thinking! That for so many years by great-grandfather, grandfather, father burned muł or flot so I will too – whoever says this today is an obtuse and backward ignoramus! The hardest thing is to change people’s mentality – in the sense of discouraging coal. Silesia – has to have coal! In Kraków they can say that coal poisons, but here? We are assigned to coal, it’s tradition! The mining lobby has a strong influence on the government and coal has to be! We need workers, they say! But coal isn’t the only thing! Miners, they just take, take, take, and don’t think about future generations. They just want to feed themselves.

He gesticulated with his arms energetically to emphasise his frustration with ‘these people’. Pointing at his neighbour’s grey-smoking chimney, he added fatalistically: ‘I don’t have much hope – nothing will change in my lifetime. Things will improve, we’ve banned muł and flot, but even with class 5 coal furnaces in place, we won’t reach the standards that are beyond the Odra’, referencing the river separating East and West. ‘We have to die in the name of coal in Silesia – there’s no way out. In the name of tradition, and in the name of national ‘gold’. It disgusts me.’ Selfish, greedy, ignorant (mostly male) coal miners – their ‘mentality’ and its materiality - were holding things back, and bringing shame to the country.

This was also in relation to the political choice closely associated with them. Walking back towards his house together, Olek paused to take one more smog-filled breath, before concluding:

We were close to catching up [with the West], and now look what’s happened. Our government is Eurosceptic, and downplays the issue. That Minister Szyszko, he’s from the Eastern part of Poland, such an idiot! The average person doesn’t think about it – voters of PiS – they just need work, a bowl, a sausage, to church, that’s it. They just care about the here and now, and that the government tells them when to laugh and cry. Then you don’t think about it! I don’t want to live in a parochial Poland, where you believe that if you pray you will sort out the air. We are that kind of society – immature, irresponsible.

PiS’s disregard for the matter of air pollution sparked comparison with the fact that Western nations had long, apparently, ‘solved’ their air quality issues due to moral superiority. In ‘civilized’ countries, air pollution did not exist. Likewise, in ‘civilized’ countries, governments took care of
their citizens’ health without the need for pressure – citizens did too. Of course, such a sentiment could be interpreted as accurate – if only perhaps in ideal, longed-for, imaginary terms. In the meantime, the East-West slope provided an explanation for such an absence.

Likewise, speaking to Paweł again at the air-conditioned shopping-centre café, he spat venom on the inter-related issue of both smog and PiS. The state of the nation in general riled him deeply too:

People think smog is a lefty globalist conspiracy – against the President, against the church! You know, things were getting better. I really saw it. Quality of life was improving, infrastructure was developing, roads were being built, everything! And now? This craziness is ruling – it’s history repeating itself! Despite everything, I have warm feelings towards the Germans. But even they let themselves get fooled by Hitler. The same thing is happening here in Poland now! These people sniffing out conspiracies everywhere. The facts don’t seem to reach them. We choked on Europe and now this wild Polishness is already starting to play in the soul - it’s terrifying!

For Paweł, once again, both smog and PiS together were rightfully signs of trouble – yet conceptualized as un-civilization, Eastern-ness, returning in the form of ‘wild Polishness’. The ‘nation’ yet again was to blame for such shame – ‘the people’. What was holding progress back was Poles themselves - ‘I am angry that Polish people agree to this!’ This was particularly in correlation with the current political ‘option’ they have elected into power, further proof of civilizational lag. ‘Let’s just say that, in comparison to the West, they (PiS) are ideologically very different and they are pro-coal, and have done very little about smog’, Zbyszek added dryly. Polish national mentality and its moral lack had elected them into office dragging Poland backwards once more.

For Paweł, too, coal needed to go, but at the same time he feared the consequences for a post-coal Poland – an even more degenerated, backward society, according to him, than existed already.

55 Time and again, for example, I would hear the infamous London Smog of December 1952, be referenced as a comparative turning point in raising ecological awareness and advancing ‘civilizational progress’ in the West. During this notorious episode, around 4000 people reportedly died within a period of a few days due to intense air pollution levels caused by a similar atmospheric inversion. It was, without exception, narrated by smog-concerned actors as an immediate and automatic kind of social and environmental change. It was, without exception, narrated by smog-concerned actors as an immediate and automatic kind of moment of social and environmental change, in which a rational, caring, enlightened and responsive government simply became informed of the problem through scientific and medical data and acted accordingly and immediately to rectify the situation in the interests of protecting its people. The fact that there was already a significant history of struggles over air pollution since the 19th century, and that it took four years to pass the first Clean Air Act in 1956 following the Great Smog, followed by another 12 years before the 1968 Clean Air Act, and that thus there was no direct correlation between the severity of the public health issue of 1952 and government action, was overlooked. In actuality, it was thanks to ongoing active political struggle over air pollution by the National Smoke Abatement Society, set up in 1898 as the Coal Smoke Abatement Society, that legislation to protect Clean Air was passed at all in Britain (Weale, 1992). When I tried to point this out to activists and residents alike I was usually met by disbelief.
one in which Polishness, its nationalism, and low-class ignorance, or ‘mentality’, would reign supreme, sliding the country into inexorable poverty – particularly with even poorer quality people, with doom-laden implications for its future:

Where they have already closed the mines, it’s not great there. I’m afraid to go to those parts of Silesia... People there don’t want to work, they just take the 500+\(^{56}\), why bother working when you can get it for free?\(^{57}\) So we can’t just shut all the coal mines at once! Because then we will degenerate this society completely, because, let’s be honest, Polish society isn’t on the highest level. And where does that come from? History – its conditioned. The elite was always being executed or emigrating.. Both the Russians and Germans killed off our elite. The Communists did the same. In 1981 when Marshall Law came in a large part of the intelligentsia left. And – again – only the peasants with spades remained! Then there was the transformation – people began to be happy – then PO, who really steered this country for some time in a good direction.. and the whole time what I call the Polish beetroot-and-onion maker was sitting beneath the surface, and now? It’s grown back! And again, this kind of patriotism, the good Pole, shaved head, with his neck, looking for an enemy, right? Lefty, Jey, blacks – all enemies. People aren’t taught how to think. They see devils everywhere. But if they were educated, they could see ho this world really looks! They would think differently! They would do something about this smog, instead of chasing Jews, right? Without education there is no progress.

Paweł’s fears about the future of the nation – its quality, the quality of its people and democracy and the quality of its air – wove themselves together into a general pervasive anxiety that the backward, essential Polish ‘beetroot-onion-maker’ was back with a vengeance (a reference to the agrarian, peasant-roots of Polish society) - ‘the people’, the ignorant, ‘folk’ nation in resurgence, were to blame. From his anti-populist stance, he linked this nativist populism itself further back in time to broader European history, to the point when the European concept of ‘populism’ first emerged and when ‘the revolutionary people’ won out over royalists:

It all began with the French revolution! That was the biggest evil – it started the entire destabilization of the continent, of what used to be good. France started the two world wars – it’s a wild country! It’s a theory of a well known Oxford professor that I sign my name to!

The ‘destabilization’ of Europe, re-appearing now through populist resurgence, was put down to the...

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\(^{56}\) 500+ is PiS’s popular flagship family welfare policy introduced in 2015 in which every family received a state benefit of 500 PLN (c.110 EUR) per month per child.

\(^{57}\) Such classist rhetoric is reminiscent of similar contemptuous discourse in the UK regarding the ‘demonization’ of ‘chavs’ and ‘benefit scroungers’, or of working-class people in general, popularly perceived as lazy, immoral, stupid etc (Bell, 2020) Cyril Rybak (2020) writes: ‘In pro-PO circles there is a culture of condescension toward the poorer part of PiS’s electorate, reminiscent of Reaganite discourse about “welfare queens”: PiS voters are supposedly bums who have babies to collect benefits, which they spend on vodka and vacations to the Baltic coast. Among the pro-PO middle class, there are some who have an inability to differentiate, as the great writer of the Polish left Stefan Żeromski once did, between snobbery and progress.’
undermining of the elite, while in Poland, an absent elite, and a lack of education, had let the dormant beetroot-onion grow too. Wild native Polishness was on the rise.

Thus paradoxically Poland could not afford to keep burning coal, but it could not afford to let coal go either. After all, her path to development, the chance of catching up with the West, went through it. ‘Poland should definitely come off coal’, Paweł concluded, ‘immediately would be the best but of course that’s a fiction.’ He paused in reflection and re-considered his words: ‘I’ll put it another way… we can’t allow for that – because it’s work for many people so we should use it wisely’. Coal both held Poland back, but raised her and her people up too – the ‘double bind’ (2016b) (the tension between health and livelihoods) worked against the grain for smog-people too. What could one do in the meantime? Where to direct one’s shame and frustration?

‘Civilizing’ coal: The micro-politics of horizontal naming, blaming and shaming in a polarizing polity

In Kraków, where the issue of ‘smog’ first became politicized in 2012, a successful ban on burning coal and all solid fuels was the strategy of choice for tackling smog by local Polish Smog Alert and the local authority from the start. This was achieved already in November 2013 (Adamczyk et al., 2017). In Silesia, the country’s industrial heartland, where the issue came to the fore only in 2017, such a move has been considered regionally taboo, resisted by the coal industry as much as many inhabitants themselves, who defend their private right to heat their homes however they like, and fear, with not unfounded reason, that smog and coal are mutually opposing interests (see chapters four and five). Thus, in order to prevent feared backlash and stoking circulating conspiracy theories, concerned residents felt they must tread carefully, reserving coal criticism primarily for private conversations. Zbyszek told me:

Here in Silesia, I have to be very careful what I post on my Facebook page. I can’t criticize coal outright. This is people’s brothers, fathers, uncles. We can’t approach things radically or drastically, because then miners will be out on the streets. We have to do things slowly in this region. I’d prefer it to be otherwise, but it’s still a long road.

58 Ten other locales in Poland have since demanded the same (Storch, 2019). 59 In December 2019 – frustrated with the slow progress, two local civil society groups – the Rybnicki Smog Alarm and the Rybnicka Rada Kobiet (Rybnik Women’s Council) proposed that a ban on coal and all solid fuels is the necessary step in Silesia too if targets on PM and benzo(a)piren are to be met. So far the town council has rejected these proposals, arguing that not enough time has passed since the implementation of the Clean Air Programme to be able to judge the effectiveness of its impacts (Radio90.fm, 2019). See chapter five for more on this and the ‘taboo’ on pollution.
In Poland, particularly in Silesia, one must contend with Polishness. Similarly, Krystyna said ‘I’d love it if we could stop burning coal, but I don’t think it is realistic here. Burning coal passes from grandfather, to father, to son – it’s tradition’. Kamil added ‘Poland should move away from coal – there are other options now. But the mines are still a strong social force and politicians and people are afraid to confront them directly’. National ‘mentality’ held things back in this regard too.

Incremental change has thus rather been favoured as a more socially feasible Silesian approach to tackling smog. Piotr, who also worked on promoting more efficient coal-burning techniques through leafletting and holding information meetings together with others in his local community, put it most succinctly: ‘I am a realist. There’s no chance of a total ban on coal in Silesia – it’s not possible. So I take an evolutionary approach. I prefer to first try to at least civilize coal. I’d rather people didn’t burn coal at all, but if you have to burn something, then it’s best it’s real coal rather than muł or flot’, said Piotr. ‘But I wouldn’t say the first part too loudly’. This ‘evolutionary approach’, encompassing ‘civilizing coal’ and associated Polish-Silesian ‘mentality’, has been enshrined in the regional Anti-Smog Resolution passed in April 2017, and focuses on raising awareness of the issue to instigate rational technical and behavioural changes, incentivized by social pressure to switch fuels, (limited) public subsidies to upgrade ageing boilers/stoves to more efficient models (‘class 5’ variety) and thermo-modernize poorly-insulated homes, and bans on, and fines for, use of lowest quality coal types and other illegal fuels (such as waste). Moral pressure has also been applied. ‘Don’t Poison Your Neighbour’ has been the regional campaign slogan of choice.

For my participants, ‘civilizing’ coal has meant neighbourhood-level education initiatives – such as teaching people how to burn coal most efficiently – ‘from below’, rather than from the top, which creates the least amount of smoke possible. Or hanging or posting campaign literature through doors to raise awareness and increase social pressure to change behaviours – i.e. fuel or boiler choices.

Yet while education was considered necessary, fines, sanctions and law enforcement were perceived as the most efficacious means to discipline, punish and force into line. Carrots were necessary, but sticks even more so to achieve the required ‘clean’ behaviour. This itself was

60 Barbara Freese (2006: 154–5) in her history of coal writes that in early 20th century coal-dominated Britain similarly, early efforts to tackle air pollution issues targeted reduction of smoke, and more efficient burning, rather than use of coal itself.

61 Residential dwellings comprise around 67% of Poland’s building stock. More than 70% of detached single-family houses (the predominant variety of dwelling), 50% of which were built before 1980, have no or inadequate levels of thermal insulation. Only 1% of all houses in Poland are considered energy efficient (Buildings Performance Institute Europe, 2017).

62 See the campaign website Nie Truj Sąsiada (‘Don’t Poison Your Neighbour’) http://nietrujsasiada.pl/
considered a peculiar aspect of Polish nature – Krystyna summed it up well when she said ‘I don’t know what it’s like in the more aware countries, but u nas, (‘here in our place’) it has to come from the top’. Like Olek, she believed law enforcement was the only answer ‘in Poland’. That’s because so-called ‘pathological’ burning was tied to ‘pathological’ people – itself a frequent classist trope (‘pathola’ for short) used to describe people in poverty, succumbing to alcoholism, living off welfare handouts and sinking into deprivation – including contributing to smog with dirty habits. Education and facts failed to reach ‘these people’, confirmed Piotr – their backward mentality prevented it. Such smog-producing people thus required heavy handling:

There’s a big group of people on whom education doesn’t work. These are the malign, thoughtless people, those who don’t look after themselves or others – unreformable people. Only law enforcement will work on them – it’s the Polish nature. It’s like cancer, these roots laid down in history, in tradition, in slovenliness, in bad habits. It’s not possible to uproot if you don’t cut it out. There’s no other way, and cutting it out means fining so heavily that they never dare think about poisoning the air again.

Such individualization and essentialization of culpability meant the increasing use of ‘City Guards’ to patrol and enforce the ban on burning of illegal fuels.

City Guards (Straż Miejska) were established in the 1990s and given responsibility for the maintenance of public order, which includes issues related to waste disposal and its management, and the regulation of tidyness of environments, including of the air. While burning certain low-quality fuels and rubbish had been illegal for decades, since the smog issue exploded, the policing and implementation of this law, through door-stop inspections and resultant fines by City Guards, had dramatically increased. Such a practice, intended as a tool of moral shaming and policing, was becoming widespread at the time of my fieldwork, encouraged by local anti-smog campaigns and facebook groups in which photographs of culprit chimneys were widely shared, vented and sworn at. Being a good citizen or neighbour was thus newly requesting that one phone the local telephone number to the City Guards and report on any suspicious activity in one’s locale – i.e. strong-smelling or discoloured smoke coming from chimneys. The City Guards would then visit the described household and inspect the property – prompting the risk of shame from neighbours too.

Yet ‘phoning on your neighbour’ in this manner was grating on old-time local conceptions of morality as solidarity with other residents as a social necessity, contributing to neighbour-neighbour tension and apprehension too. As one couple in their 60s told me: ‘Here, unfortunately, from

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63 City Guards are legally empowered to inspect suspect household boilers or stoves for signs of illegal fuel burning and implement fines accordingly.
communist times, phoning on your neighbour, even in the most understandable circumstance, is a big faux pas and nobody really does it. But it should happen, because if something like this were to happen in Germany, [that a neighbour was emitting black or thick smoke from his chimney] then, I have 100% certainty, not only one neighbour but everyone around would also phone on him and he would stop doing it. But here, the neighbour knows that they won’t phone. Unless they are young or something, those who don’t have the historical baggage we have.’ For them, phoning on one’s neighbour was not the done thing because it would break well-respected social bonds of trust and moral codes of conduct. For historically, one’s life could depend on this. Although they were frustrated by neighbourly behaviour, as they stated ‘We are from this village, we have lived here for years together, we don’t phone.’ Indeed for many the notion of doing so was indeed a particularly foreign imported practice – the link to Germany not coincidental. For Marysia, for example, she said her neighbours had already stopped talking to her because, in addition to being active in anti-PiS demonstrations and failing to go to church, she had ‘brought back German habits of dobbing in on your neighbours’ from holiday. Yet, for her, just as for Olek, as he told me, expressing a broader social shift towards valuing liberal ideals of individual human rights, their health was much more important than their relationship to their neighbours, who rather required disciplining and punishment in order to be brought into moral line.

The values of ‘Liberal Poland’ and ‘Solidarity Poland’, how PiS (in Jasiewicz, 2009) defined the imagined anti-populist and populist divide emerging already in 2005 when they squared it off with PO in the European elections, appeared to be here constituting themselves and conflicting through smog – at the micro-political level. I could not help wonder what the social risks were of the compounding intersections of growing emotionally-charged political polarization combined with the overlapping emotionally-charged tensions over smog at the neighbour level and its policing. At times, I could viscerally feel this tension between households in the gestures of twitching curtains, glares over fences, and the refusal to hold certain conversations outside for fear of being overheard. One young resident I interviewed outside in a park looked furtively over his shoulder and all around him, before agreeing to share his sentiments about smog. He told me that he was afraid for his country - ‘you can feel the tension mounting. There might be a civil war’. Frictions over smog combined with an authoritarian far-right government overseeing its continuity

64 Karen Bell (2020: 48) writes that research has found a distinct difference between working class and middle class social values. Whereas the middle classes tend to ‘strive to become something better’ pursuing individual achievement, the working-classes value fitting in and maintaining their social relations in community. Thus, quoting research by Barbara Jensen in the US, they prefer ‘belonging vs. becoming’. Such a difference could map onto smog-related tensions here too.
were intensifying such fear, bordering on a visceral, affective atmosphere of understandable paranoia. With each breath, the embodied reminder was there that Polishness could not be escaped. Rather than having been eradicated, it was closing in, on the rise.

Another means for dealing with this, itself contributing in part to this tension, was the notion of ‘dobbing in on’ one’s own country – to the EU, outsiders (referring to the legal actions taken against Poland and its pollution by some NGOs e.g. at the European institutional level)\(^65\), a practice additionally described to me by those who disapproved of such actions as ‘airing one’s dirty laundry in public’ - if one is a family, as the Polish nation is often conceived of, including by PiS, one deals with things in-house. Foreigners had no rights to be intervening. Olek, on the other hand, felt it was one of the only mechanisms for dealing with polluting, sloppy Polishness:

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\text{All these norms come from the EU. Unfortunately it’s not because we Poles want to live in clean air, we’re not that organized a society, no, we wait for someone from abroad to tell us we have it bad. It’s slovenliness, dislike of change. The Germans are ordered and proper - like the Austrians.. but the Poles? We just don’t know how to organize anything. Anything that Poles run we just cant make it work, cant make it profitable. We’ve had the Swedes from the north, the Germans from the west, Russians from the east, Austrians from the south, bloody hell.. Nothing was ever beautiful. Everything was always being burnt down, razed to the ground. We don’t know what it’s like to have a beautiful country, orderly, tidy. What can you do? It’s our mentality – that’s how it is.}^{66}
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Pawel likewise said: ‘If it wasn’t for pressures coming from the outside, from the EU, for people like me, our fight here would be like throwing a pea against a wall. People are scared of being Othered by the civilized world. That gives me hope.’ The EU was invited to bring its civilizing mission and moralizing shame to bear on a nation too lazy, disorderly and intrinsically filthy to sort itself out. I understood why – it was often the most potent weapon for those exasperated by their government who refused to take the matter seriously. Yet there were unintended ramifications when set within a postcolonial postsocialist historical framework.

An alternative source of hope – was death – of those people who constituted that nation. For even fines and legal measures, national and international, could only go so far with some people. The elderly were usually considered to be most ‘unreformable’. There was nothing to be done but

\(^{65}\) In February 2018, in response to an action initiated by internationally-backed NGO Client Earth and Polish Smog Alert activists, the European Court of Justice found Poland guilty of excessively exceeding EU air pollution laws, with risks of hefty fines if inaction continued (Barteczko and Koester, 2018).

\(^{66}\) Tomasz Rakowski (2016: 102) also finds similar self-Othering and pejorative discourses in his research among bootleg coal miners in Wałbrzych, Lower Silesia: ‘The Slavs are generally programmed for devastation’.

204
sit back and wait for them to die out for progress to occur. For they were the ones most pickled in
Polishness. As Marysia told me, ‘It’s hardest to fight with that material – you can’t reform old
people so easily. They’re used to using coal, and chucking in any old rubbish. Those who poison,
need to just die out’. Kamil said ‘we still need at least three generations – it will take years, but
slowly, slowly’.

In the meantime, however, due to the ongoing pervasiveness of Polish ‘mentality’ and its
uncivilized moralities and materialities, there was a distinct feeling of resignation that things were
not likely to change in the near future - ‘it will take years still. To be honest, the chance of achieving
normality is low’, said Kamil, referring again to Western air quality standards. Actively concerned
residents knew that even a switch to the highest efficiency class boilers (class 5), what ‘ecological’
heating meant in Poland’, would not totally solve the issue – only improve things somewhat. But,
again, this was Poland. One cannot hope for too much too fast. ‘The only real solution is to leave’,
Marysia confided, as she told me about family plans to move to the coast for winters, plans that
many of her friends were considering too. Asking such residents what ‘clean air’ meant to them –
the word ‘freedom’ echoed back time and again. Smog-concerned residents who chose to stay, thus
felt understandably grim and trapped. It meant bearing the unwelcome burden of smog – and the
backward Polishness of its populist origins.

Conclusion: Dancing the populist/anti-populist tango

Scholars have noted how supporters of far-right populist parties in different countries share a
common feeling that they have been disparaged, denigrated, sneered and jeered at, and ‘held in
contempt’ by increasingly distant, technocratic (and corrupt) elites (Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018: 85
– my emphasis).67 Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin (2018: 91-6) explain that indeed liberal
democracies have an in-built fear of the masses underpinning its political model that ‘illiberal
democracy’ (PiS-style far-right populism) seeks to ameliorate as liberalism’s ‘shadow’.
Furthermore, as liberal democracies have been increasingly dominated by a highly educated cultural

67 In the US and UK, for example, far-right populist supporters have been labelled ‘hillbillies’, ‘rednecks’,
‘chavs’, or ‘Little Englanders’ (Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018: xv; Jones, 2012). During her Presidential
election campaign, that arguably cost her dearly, Hilary Clinton infamously characterized them as a ‘basket of
deplorables’ in a leaked confession (Gusterson, 2017: 211). Likewise academics and universities, Hugh
Gusterson (2017), argues are also complicit in this classist Othering; see also Chris Hann (2019). As the thesis
introduction outlined, in Central and Eastern Europe, where discourses denigrating the working-classes
became hegemonic in the postsocialist transition, such a shift was arguably even more acutely emotionally
painful than in the West because of the stark and rapid change from their formerly materially and symbolically
respected social standing under the socialist regime.

205
and technocratic class in the move from an industrial to postindustrial economy, the social gap between the ‘ordinary’ folk and their leaders has in fact widened, creating a new ‘governance elite’ (Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018: 85; 96). Resultant hegemonic political discourse is most often perceived as classist, with the more educated and higher classes (‘mind’ people), those increasingly making up the political establishment, talking down to the less well-educated and lower classes (‘body’ people), kept outside of it (Clarke and Newman, 2017; Jones, 2012; Nayak, 2006; Tyler, 2008; Vance, 2017; Williams, 2016). As Timothy Garton Ash (2019) writes, ‘Even more than the inequality of income and wealth… what upsets people most is the inequality of attention and respect. A large part of society feels not just economically and socially disadvantaged but above all ignored and disrespected by metropolitan liberal elites’, including being blamed for their ‘own’ failings. Yet, as I discovered in Silesia, this process not only operates at the level of political-elite discourse and practice but also through everyday encounters at the micro level too – and environmental conflict is no stranger to such dynamics. Smog potently revealed this process in action, with heightened localized embodied, visceral and atmospheric effects.

This chapter has sought to show how a broader neoliberal culture of individualized, orientalist and classist condescension and blame infects the Polish social landscape historically contributing to the current polarized political situation that mobilizes ‘the nation’ to explain failings. It contributes to calls for research on the neglected mechanisms by which anti-populists morally distance themselves from, indeed raise themselves higher-than, their adversaries to co-construct them in the process as personally ‘to blame’ for grievances (Moffitt, 2018). Addressing the absence of postcolonial postsocialist understandings of Eastern populism, including how material-symbolic environments imbricate with this (the focus of this thesis), it has shown how embodied narratives about smog and coal, by those self-defined as actively concerned about the issue, draw on long-standing self-colonizing and (invisibilized) classist Othering discourses about Polish dirty backwardness to generate a toxic atmosphere of anti-populist resentment and derogation against which the coal-entangled far-right (national) populist backlash, which is in large part a visceral response to such long-standing shameing (and ultimately depoliticizing) demonization, can be better understood. Targeted at individuals cast as ‘lower-than’ smog-concerned residents, who perceive themselves to be higher up the East-West slope Poland is constantly sliding down, such rhetoric constitute ‘the people’ as polluting, dirty, slovenly, irrational, and uncivilized, the very same characteristics held responsible for general Polish backwardness and the rise of PiS, cast in nativist terms. Likewise, ‘dirty’ coal usage of certain qualities is considered part of this national ‘mentality’
holding back progress, including clean air, and coal itself is constituted as a populist material of ‘the
native masses’ defined in pejorative, often class-inflected masculine, terms. The implication of
these circulating narratives and widely held beliefs is the passing on of stigma and shame onto those
targeted, and their active co-construction and production in the process. It reveals an absence of true
political debate on the broader structural issues at hand, serving to obfuscate them instead.

This very feeling of having been historically blamed and treated with contempt, or dwelling
within an affective economy of shame, as I show in this thesis, is here a central part of the populist
appeal in embodied terms in its construction of ‘the pure people’ vs the ‘corrupt elite’. Populist
leaders therefore define themselves as, unlike disparaging others, willing to ‘accept the
people…without any condescension or judgment’ (Wężyk, 2018). In fact – in the case of PiS, such
populist leaders promise to cleanse the stigma of shame and reverse it instead, pointing blame
upwards towards elites, where none have before. Such populism thus becomes a home for those
who feel themselves to have been unduly shamed by more powerful and distant actors – and a home
for their likewise-scapegoated environments (coal) too. Polishness, including its Silesian, coal-tied
variant, becomes not the problem, but something to feel at-home-in once more. This becomes
entwined with nativism since ‘the people’ and Polishness, or ‘the nation’, have become elided into
one disparaged category: Homo Polanicus – the peasant-rooted beetroot-and-onion-maker – ‘wild
Polishness’, in Silesia embodied in dirty coal’s material stains.

Thus, ‘If populist rhetoric, cited in isolation, sounds melodramatic, it is important to remember
that an equally inflammatory rhetoric prevailed on the other side, in which the populists were
portrayed as being at best deluded bumpkins and at worst primitives, demagogues, anarchists, and
socialists’, Richard Hofstadter (in Stavrakakis et al., 2017: 29) had already admitted back in 1969 in
his critique of American agrarian populism. Thus, as Stavrakakis et al., (2017: 17; 19) note, ‘neither
side is innocent… In the ensuing discursive battle between populism and anti-populism, both sides
performatively employ simplification of what is at stake and demonization of their enemy… Isn’t it
time to re-activate this long-forgotten insight? It always takes two to dance the populist/anti-
populist tango.’ Meanwhile, the deeper causes and issues – such as the power of the coal industry at
large, its part in greenwashing, energy access and poverty issues, an environmentalism absence of
class analysis, and long-term political and institutional neglect of such matters – remain
unexamined and largely let off the public hook.

This historically-rooted rhetorical dance, understood as a hegemonic struggle over the future
of the nation and its democratic project – where ‘Europe and populism are viewed as the two

207
extremes of a radical antithesis’ (Stavrakakis, 2014: 510), is central to the issue of Poland’s contemporary toxic politics as the issue of smog reveals. In this sense it can be understood as part of the ongoing postsocialist struggle over ‘the meaning and ownership of modernity’ (Brandstädter, 2007: 135) – and its morality too. Anti-populism and populism, mediated through material environments and their bodily engagements, are mutually imbricated – understanding this is vital for democratic futures. For, ‘when anti-populists start targeting ‘the people’… we are left on shaky ground’ (Moffitt, 2018: 10–11).
Chapter five. Breathing in Silesia, being Silesian: Smog denial and populist (anti)environmentalism as industrial ecological intimacy

‘If you haven’t touched it, you can’t understand it.’
‘Ecologists are not from round here. We are adapted to this coal.’

In December 2016, and again in January 2017, air pollution was proclaimed the ‘worst in the world’ in Warsaw (Martewicz, 2017). As the previous chapter outlines, it was precisely at this moment that Poland’s poor air quality and its detrimental health consequences hit the national and international headlines, and the issue exploded onto the public scene in unprecedented shaming outcry. As I became more deeply embedded within my core fieldwork site in the Silesian minescape some distance away from Katowice, I began to see smog from a rather different perspective: not from the air down, but, from the earth up. Keeping in mind the context in which smog-concerned residents were making sense of the matter in terms of national-classist ‘backwardness’, how did coal miners and their families respond to ‘smog’ and coal’s role in it here in Silesia? As I discovered, their greater material ecological intimacy to the coal-y earth was not incidental to the answer – for as the repeated refrain I kept bumping up against had it: ‘if you haven’t touched it, you can’t understand it’.

While smog-concerned residents responded to the smog crisis by mobilizing against it, as we saw, participants connected to the coal-mine industry, particularly those old enough to remember its notoriously dirty past under socialism, reacted initially by shrugging their shoulders and joking sarcastically that ‘smog’ had now arrived. Since Warsaw now felt it, 300km away, it seemed that an issue that had ‘always been there’, particularly in the Silesian region, suddenly became newsworthy. ‘We’ve always burnt coal, there was no problem before!’ This was the predominant defensive statement I heard echoing throughout the mining community. They had been breathing dirty air for decades – nobody had cared then. Why did it take distant urban cosmopolitan Warsovians and their ilk to name a problem for society and politicians, both domestic and European, to pay attention and
why now? The generalized sense that ‘Warsaw’ (and ‘Brussels’ too in a contemporary twist) is out to ‘destroy’ Silesia with its historic Germanic connections and wayward independent spirit, exploiting the ‘Heimat’ for her riches (both mineral and human) without giving much in return or taking any meaningful interest, reverberated throughout my time here as part-joke, part locally-accepted postsocialist history, melding a dual sense of neglect and pride.¹ This appeared to be another case of disenfranchisement by stealth, turning fellow Silesian inhabitants against them and coal too and imposing a stigmatizing blemish in the process. Ecological dispossession in action.

Having a mother from Warsaw, thus would often raise eyebrows during my fieldwork research. Artur, a 68-year-old retired miner I came to know, a lynchpin within the senior community, said to me: ‘Tell people your grandmother is from Malopolska – they will like you better!’ He was right. Often joking with me about my Warsaw connections, he told me with relish one day, ‘We call Warsovians, cwaniaki! (sly-folk) At the time he was sitting at his customary place at the head of the dining table in his living room that was decked with professional family portraits and mining mementos (coal-carved figurines and beer tankards) from his former decades in the intergenerational business – one that Warsovians, and non-coal-tied Silesian residents too, knew nothing about. ‘They sort out everything on their terms, reaping all the rewards, and let everyone else rot!’, he contined. ‘For a start, they’ve let the mining industry go to ruin. Smog is just the last nail in the coffin!’ As Silesian as they come, with a thick accent, large capable hands and jowly face lined with laughter, Artur then memorably shared with me the following exchange that revealed much about his community’s sentiment towards the capital:

You know, a few years ago some woman from Warsaw rang, something about switching internet providers, and you know what she said? She said, I’m from Warsaw and I know that in the provinces you have less access to information, (as if she sitting in Warsaw knew everything), and I’d said to her - listen, you Warsovians are stupider than our provincial lot over here, and she’d said - how do you know that?, and I’d said - ok, do you know where Kolysek is?, [a small village nearby]. She confessed she did not... well, even the most stupid person in Kolysek knows where Warsaw is! I’d told her - and she’d hung up!

He chuckled with satisfaction, sticking out his tongue.

This sense of outsider educated and far-removed-from-reality Warsovians ‘telling’ the ‘provincial lot’, or ‘the people’ - insiders – what they ‘do not know’ because they ‘lack

¹ See also Philip G. Lewin (2019) for an account of how regional subaltern identity and the core-periphery relation intersects with anti-environmentalism and pro-industry stances in Appalachia.
² For anonymity purposes, the name has been fictionlized.
information’, (i.e. are ignorant and backward), imposing their abstract scientific, so-called ‘expert’ authority upon them in the process while disregarding and shaming their own common sense, was bundled up into the smog debate too, displaying the way it travelled through and reified pre-scored regional, class- and occupation-based1 lay populist channels. ‘Now They want us to get all alarmed about this ‘smog’ concept!’ Artur continued. ‘But down here in Silesia, pollution is normal, we are used to it, and we’ve survived!’, he concluded, leaning back in his chair and folding his arms as if to demonstrate his body as a defiant living specimen. I was given to understand that breathing Silesia, embodying its dirt and all, meant being Silesian. Long known for its ‘dirt’, insider coal people like Artur, and like Erwin who we met earlier, embedded in Silesia’s dense web of social and industrial-ecological ties and long ignored by the establishment and its local emissaries, were at home with it; it was a core part of their sensorial habitus. As another retired miner put it - ‘Ecologists are not from round here. We are adapted to this coal.’ In this way, I was being informed that, when it comes to Silesian matters, particularly coal, outsiders’ motives should be treated with suspicion, while ‘the people know best’ (Bosworth, 2019) in sensorial, embodied terms.

The seemingly sudden appearance of and concern over ‘smog’ in a long-polluted region thus suggested that there was an additional missing ingredient behind its rhetoric – Politics? Business interests? The desire by inter/national ‘concerns’ (like the EU – considered a cover for historic arch-nemesis Germany – or Polish critics) to destroy Polish coal and its miners once and for all? As the widespread Polish saying goes, revealing the pervasive sense of uncertainty and broader smoggy-haziness of the postsocialist present - ‘if you don’t know what it’s about, it’s about money’. In short, as the previous chapter also mentioned, distrust of official scientific discourse regarding air

3 In the coal-mining industry, employees are divided into those who do the hard, physical labour of ‘dirty work’ below ground (fizychni) – ‘Us’ - and those who do ‘clean’ cerebral work in suits and ties above ground in offices – (umysłowi) – ‘Them’. This coal-mine-eyed view of the world then extends outwards to Warsaw and beyond. Here the industrial mind/body dualism transposes onto populist class/occupation-based divisions and their moral implications.

4 See Alan Irwin (1995) for an account of the relationship between abstract scientific knowledge versus citizen-based ‘contextual knowledge’, a form of knowing born of a commitment to place-and-people. In their review of literature related to public understandings of air pollution, Karen Bickerstaff and Gordon Walker (2001: 54) likewise write that ‘low identification of air pollution at the neighbourhood level is tied up with social and cultural commitments to place, and a desire to maintain order and extant boundaries of purity and danger… In contrast, where people lacked a strong commitment to the neighbourhood they tended to attribute a whole series of negative attributes to the immediate environment (such as rubbish, crime, a lack of care) including air pollution’. In this way, embeddedness in place comes to define the notion of insider/outsiders that maps onto a populist Us/Them too. As Edward Relph (in Broto et al., 2010: 954) defines the difference: ‘Insideness represents a commitment to the place not only from an individual but also from a collective perspective; outsidership signifies the separation of the individual, who is transformed into an observer of that place’. One can extend this definition encompassing commitment to place to include embodiment of place, as opposed to the ‘detached’ or ‘separate’, disembodied and dis-embedded observer.
pollution’s fatal health consequences and its links to coal pervaded the Silesian atmosphere, fuelling an eclectic catalogue of conspiracy theories. This was not-least aided by the new-fangled foreign word ‘smog’, with its English etymology, that was now being bandied about by ‘ecologists’, ‘experts’, civil society activists, and, what’s more, even fellow residents in Silesia allied to their interests alike. In an era of climate politics too, ‘smog’ did nothing but point a more immediate, thus threatening, accusatory finger at coal. The smear-campaign against it and people like Artur was felt to be intensifying at the micro-level, with stigma its weapon. Rather than valuing them for the treasure they truly were, coal and miners were being Othered by the inter/national, regional and even local-municipal imaginary as ‘dirty’, backward, worthless and now immoral too, as we have seen. Well aware of this, and echoing Erwin and Lukasz, who we met in the thesis introduction, Artur sighed woefully, ‘Silesia used to be the holy grail. Now its filth’. A sense of unhomelessness, or shame, was encroaching to disembed those like Artur from the comforts of their previously confident, homely modes of dwelling. This hurt.

Scooping – and no doubt stirring – up such denialist, industrial populist sentiment that resonated with their own rhetoric and agenda, pro-coal PiS, who downplayed smog, though not fully trusted (‘never trust politicians!’ Artur and others would say), was at least considered a ‘better option’ by many. They were ‘defending Polish coal’, unlike the previous government under Civic Platform who were seen to bow down to their European masters by neglecting the national coal industry and capitulating to EU environmental (climate and now air quality) governance even while making empty pro-coal promises. They were also resisting a feminization of moral concerns towards those of personal health and ecology (‘Young people are so sensitive these days!’ I’d hear repeatedly), over and above collective hegemonic industrial masculinist ones of industry, its

5 ‘Smog’ is a neologism that was coined in early 20th century England to describe the emerging phenomenon of fog contaminated by smoke – particularly, at the time, coal smoke.
6 The words ‘ecology’ and ‘ecologists’ carry negative connotations for significant segments of the Polish public. ‘Eco-terrorists’ is a common term for environmental activists in Polish right-wing media and everyday discourse as I encountered. See Tracie Wilson (2006: 70) on science, cynicism and environmental discourse in Poland, who writes: ‘Perceptions that damage the legitimacy of environmental activists include the notion that they are radicals, perhaps even terrorists and promote non-Christian traditions. One young scientist at the Polish Academy of Sciences in Krakow told me that he avoided referring to himself as an ‘ekolog’ (environmentalist/ ecologist) even though his research centred on ecology, suggesting that to many people the term connoted extremism… In his mind, most people view environmentalists (ekolodzy) as abnormal and perhaps dangerous. Such images are major reasons for the negative sentiments that some people express toward environmentalists in Poland.’ I noted similar perceptions and connotations of the word ‘ecologist’ (i.e. here environmentalist) during my fieldwork. Yet such perceptions are not unique to Poland. For example, in the US, mainstream environmentalists likewise suffer negative stereotypes and connotations, such as ‘radicals’, ‘crazies’ and ‘starry-eyed’, in public discourse (Allen et al., 2007: 107; see also Klas et al., 2019 for more on the US and Bell, 2020 for UK context).
community and labour. They recognised that ‘smog’ was simply another attempt to smear Polish coal and its industrial people, and a sign of a corrupted generation gone-soft, and that hard-working Silesian-Poles, the producers, the beating heart of the nation, were unjustly bearing the brunt of this attack and stigma. They offered to restore a sense of home, by defending against and purging the burdens of shame with an industrial populism. Yet their own denial, even as it co-constructed it, was bolstered and legitimated by lay versions that had their own logic.

For smog-concerned residents, of course, there was nothing more exasperating than to hear people say ‘it’s always been this way and it didn’t harm anybody!’ Such residents scratched their heads, wondering how fellow inhabitants could reject the overwhelming scientific and medical evidence from international and national institutions alike regarding the dramatic health consequences for self and community and continue to normalize pollution instead? How and why was it possible, in today’s ecologically-aware, scientific, modern age, to sanction PiS’s irrational smog-skeptic stance as national populist policy? In the previous chapter, we saw how this was predominantly explained in pejorative hegemonic postcolonial postsocialist and classist-nativist terms as ‘backward mentality’. However, as Frank Fischer (2019: 148), contends, ‘it is not enough to simply argue that deniers are irrational’; we must look deeper in order to fully understand. Thus, countering this generalized ‘pathologizing’ of science denial (Sarewitz, 2017), this chapter seeks to outline its localized rationality (Norgaard, 2019: 2), through an examination of ‘the social-cultural logic of practical reason’ (Fischer, 2019: 148) that lays behind it. It thus contributes to emerging studies of environmental denial and its links to ‘banal’ (Billig, 1995) far-right populism in the process from an under-examined ethnographic, embodied ecological and postsocialist industrial working-class perspective, revealing how the sentiments of stigma, shame and home, and its regional, gendered, ecomaterial working-class intersections – the core themes of this thesis – are woven through this phenomenon.

‘Smog’ breaks our taboo: Denial and industrial ecological intimacy

For a long time in the social sciences, the environment was considered a ‘valence’ issue – a neutral matter that did not stratify along political divides (Gemenis et al., 2012: 2). Yet recent research has shown that, on the contrary, (mainstream) environmentalism and anti-environmentalism do map onto increasingly polarizing ideological differences (Fisher, 2019; Forchtner, 2019a; Gemenis et al., 2012; Hoffarth and Hodson, 2016; McCright et al., 2014; McCright and Dunlap, 2011; Nawrotzki,
2012). Literature on environmental science denial, which focuses mostly on climate change, has demonstrated its significant contemporary correlation to mainstream conservative ideologies and interests (Anshelm and Hultman, 2014; Hoffarth and Hodson, 2016; Hornsey et al., 2016; Jylhä and Hellmer, 2020; Krange et al., 2019; McCright and Dunlap, 2003, 2011; Poortinga et al., 2011).

More recently, climate denial literature has drawn direct links with far-right populism (Byrne, 2020; Daggett, 2018; Fischer, 2019; Forchtner, 2019a; Forchtner et al., 2018; Hess and Renner, 2019; Jylhä et al., 2019; Jylhä and Hellmer, 2020; Lockwood, 2018; Panno et al., 2019; Stanley et al., 2017). Yet, despite this, the correlation between science denial and far-right populism remains surprisingly under-researched (Forchtner et al., 2018: 1; Jylhä et al., 2019: 1; Jylhä and Hellmer, 2020: 3; Lockwood, 2018), particularly from an empirical, qualitative perspective (Jylhä et al., 2019: 1), and most certainly in the postsocialist sphere. Likewise, denial of other kinds of environmental concerns, such as air pollution, are also far less researched (Björnberg et al., 2017), even as air pollution denial is becoming its own growing international phenomenon (Atkin, 2012).

7 This is likely an unsurprising result of the existential gravity of the situation where, as Matthew J. Hornsey et al. (2016: 1) point out, the anthropogenic origins of climate change is questioned by a ‘critical mass of people’ posing a serious ‘obstacle to mitigation efforts’.

8 These include economic liberty and freedom, respect for authority, naturalization of group-based hierarchies (as well as hierarchies over nature) and protection of traditional or status quo gendered/racial/class-based lifestyles, values and power structures, a phenomenon known as ‘system justification’. Organized denial has also been linked to conservative ideological economic privileges and vested interests (Jacques et al., 2008).

9 See however, Bernhard Forchtner’s (2019: 5) review of climate denial in the European far right and Samuel Bennett and Cezary Kwiatkowski’s (2019) recent work that charts the intersection of climate denialism among far-right non-political actors in Poland and its increasing mainstreaming. One further 2016 study (McCright et al., 2016) based on 2008 Eurobarometer survey data on climate denialism and its correlation with political ideology in the European Union found that, whereas in Western Europe, a strong Left-Right divide existed between those who believed in climate change and supported strong action and those who did not, in the 11 post-Communist countries included in the survey, ‘no such ideological divide’ was found. Yet the authors themselves acknowledge that this finding is likely the result of the fact that the pre-set categories ‘Left’ and ‘Right’ based on Western political and social organisation are difficult to transpose directly into this context for such distinctions are here ‘problematized’. At the same time, the authors also note that the survey data upon which the paper is based is pre-2008 financial crisis, pre ‘climategate’, pre-COP15 and pre-an increase in organized denial campaigns in Europe. It also predates the mainstreaming of far-right nationalist agendas in America and Europe since 2016. It further does not mean that social, cultural and ideological factors do not shape perspectives among citizens. As such, ethnographic engagement is necessary to flesh out denial’s lived realities. See also Julia Szulecka and Kasper Szulecki (2019) on rising political polarization in Poland around environmentalism more broadly.

10 National level data on public climate denial in postsocialist contexts, however, does exist. In Poland, surveys have repeatedly shown that Poles are far less concerned about climate change than citizens in other EU countries (Ceglarz et al., 2018: 826; Poortinga, et al., 2018). See also Bierekowska et al., (2021) for a recent report on how Poles of different generations view climate change in a post-COVID-19 reality as largely ‘not our fault, not our problem’.

11 Research into public perceptions of and responses to air pollution, including social and cultural determinants, is generally sparse (Bickerstaff and Walker, 2001: 135). A systematic review of literature on this topic published in 2020 included only 38 studies (in English), most of them focused on China and the United
2017; E Howard, 2017; Peters et al., 2019) and as research into broader science denial and links with far-right populism is increasing too (Mede and Schäfer, 2020).

Furthermore, existing climate change denial studies often focus predominantly on individuals (Prot, 2015) or on collective elites or privileged middle classes in Western contexts, (Anshelm and Hultman, 2014; Hultman, 2017; Hultman and Pulé, 2018; Jacques et al., 2008; Jylhä and Hellmer, 2020; Norgaard, 2011, 2012) for whom climate impacts are imagined as largely geographically and/or temporally distant. In these contexts denial is either attributed to individual psychological factors12 or shown to be deliberately socially constructed and promoted by (Jacques et al., 2008), and/or serve to protect, the privilege and power of the wealthiest individuals and nations (Jylhä and Hellmer, 2020: 3). For example, building on Stanley Cohen’s (2000) work on the phenomenon of denial of others’ suffering, Kari Norgaard (2011: 121; 216) in her seminal study of climate denial in a rural Norwegian town, and also in the US, focuses on wealthy communities for whom actively ‘holding information at a distance’ helps maintain their comfortable status as those who ‘reap the benefits of environmental inequality’.

But what about for those who are literally at the ‘coal face’, who already embody the contradictions of coal’s hazardous ‘double bind’ (Eriksen, 2016b) (the tensions of jobs vs health) and for whom denial is not accompanied by the privileged ability to avoid, or shield fully from, everyday environmental harms (Bell and York, 2010: 115)? Particularly in the postsocialist context, not readily synonymous with privilege? How might this be perceived from the angle of social and group identities? As Matthew Lockwood (2018: 723) points out, few studies have examined the attitudes of workers within high-carbon industries towards climate denial. Given the greater salience and immediacy I found of the localized issue of smog in Silesia, however, and the limited perceived direct relevance of climate change experienced as a distant issue,13 I focus here on the issue of air States. Over 85% of the included literature was published in the last four years, reflecting a growing concern with this as a global public health issue, yet none were ethnographic in method.

12 Such as the so-termed Big Five personality traits –particularly Agreeableness and Openness, shown to correlate negatively with climate change denial (Jylhä and Hellmer, 2020: 5). Another angle is the correlation of Social Dominance Orientation and Right Wing Authoritarian personality traits (Jylhä et al., 2016, 2016; Jylhä and Akrami, 2015; Stanley et al., 2017; Stanley and Wilson, 2019). These psychologizing factors can offer some insight, but from an anthropological perspective, they fail to situate people historically, socially or culturally and do not grapple with why or how certain people come to adopt these so-called ‘personality traits’.

13 Also likely aided by the fact that information and coverage of climate change in the Polish media and policy is very low compared to other European countries, a phenomenon Zbigniew W. Kundzewicz and colleagues (2019) term Polish ‘exceptionalism’. Indeed, an international study investigating media coverage of IPCC reports in 22 countries put Poland second to last, while another study found that where there was coverage between 2013-2014, much of it was skeptical of climate change, linked to the strength of the country’s coal lobby (Ceglarz et al., 2018: 827).
pollution, though attitudes towards the latter are certainly a gateway onto the closely entangled matter of climate – a fact I will touch on in my conclusion.

Of course, jobs are one obvious answer to what is at stake on both accounts (Bell and York, 2010; Loomis, 2017; Simon, 1998). Those who benefit from or are dependent on polluting industries for economic livelihoods have been shown to be highly unlikely to criticize or even believe in their polluting impacts (Edelstein, 2002; Eriksen, 2016b). No doubt such economic factors were core to miners’ concerns. But as Anna Lora-Wainwright (2017) has argued in her study of resignation to pollution in an industrial town in China, ‘job blackmail’ (Barca and Leonardi, 2018) is only one part of the equation for why denial of here health risks flourish. For an older, retired, or near-retired generation, which this chapter predominantly focuses on, for whom working life is (almost) over, it is not at all a concern. Matthew Lockwood (2018: 727) thus argues that besides structural issues, making sense of environmental science denial requires that ideological factors which mediate their experience be accounted for.

In the present literature on environmental science denial and far-right populism, anti-environmentalism has found most significant correlation not to anti-elitist attitudes per se, held by people from across the political spectrum, but to rejection of a particular ideological worldview that elites are seen to hold – a so-called de-territorialized liberal, cosmopolitan globalism (Forchtner, 2019: 5; Hoffarth and Hodson, 2016; Jylhä and Hellmer, 2020: 14–15; Lockwood, 2018: 727; Norgaard, 2019). A resultant ‘post-truth logic’, and often conspiratorial worldview, acts supposedly in defense of ‘the people’ (Batel and Devine-Wright, 2018: 42) against the interests of this dubious outgroup who are detached from any sense of a rooted collective, and corruptible by virtue of their untethered commitments. This includes scientists, understood to be products of this alien lifeworld and its sociopolitical dynamics (Forchtner, 2019: 6) that threatens far-right populist ethno-nationalist, exclusionary and anti-egalitarian sociocultural attitudes, including opposition to feminism, immigration and multiculturalism, and motivations to protect traditional gender norms and heteropatriachy (Jylhä et al., 2019; Jylhä and Hellmer, 2020). In fact, the link between climate denial and protection of hegemonic masculinities has been increasingly highlighted as itself a critical factor (Anshelm and Hultman, 2014; Daggett, 2018; Krange et al., 2019).  

14 Indeed, the normalization of such risks has been shown to widely occur where it is deemed unavoidable (particularly in so-called ‘dirty work’ (Lucas, 2011; Simpson and Simpson, 2018) and when material benefit is accrued, especially in contexts where other opportunities for secure livelihoods particularly for working-class men appear scarce (Beck, 1992: 35; 41; Bell and Braun, 2010; Kozlowski and Perkins, 2016; Scott, 2010). 
15 Though the security of pension payments arguably remains an anxiety. 
16 Hegemonic industrial masculinity is a core framing aspect within this chapter regarding social identities, and I go into it in more depth at the individual level in chapter six.
In many respects, Artur and others sharing his prevalent perspective, expressed a quintessential far-right ideological populist-type denial of smog as the product of a corrupting, liberal, cosmopolitan, disembodied/disembodied, elite discourse that disenfranchises the industrial hegemonic masculinist hard-working, locally-rooted bodily people’s entitlement to ‘their’ nature, and, who, by contrast, construct their knowledge and values based on intimate, sensory, lived, and so particular and pure, uncorruptable, experience (Forchtner, 2019: 6). Yet existing literature does not do much to explain why or how people come to adopt such views – particularly it fails to situate this historically and within ecologically and emotionally embodied place, thus it does not tend to relate it to perceptions of nature either. Neither does it seem to take so-termed ‘populist’ worldviews seriously as expressions of deep conviction about matters of genuine normative, particularly moral, concern, particularly regarding how you and those you care about are treated, grounded in the practicalities of everyday life, rather than as abstracted, irrational, subjective ideational opinions (Sayer, 2005). It also often fails to account for how ‘the people’ come to know themselves as such in lay terms and how this intersects with historic social identities (Laclau, 2005; Loftus, 2019). Bearing in mind the broader context of orientalized class-based Othering in relation to anti-smog atmospheres outlined in the previous chapter - as I will show, here, populist smog denial emerges from the historic embodied ecomaterial working-class positionality of coal-mining Silesians and their intimate industrial relation to its pervasive dirt that bumps up against that in painful terms. This industrial ecological intimacy, as I call it, has created morally-meaningful ‘bounded normalization’ (Ashforth and Kreiner, 2014a: 17) of dirt’s presence in hegemonic patriarchal terms out of necessity, the socio-cultural logic of which ‘smog’ threatens with dispossessing shame. Exchanging health for livelihood, and making fair and moral use of ‘our’ nature (coal), was understood as a bargain one should be free to make without interference of those from non-coal worlds.17 Outsiders coming in to demean this, especially since they’d not paid much attention before, were not welcome. As Artur stated - ‘down here in Silesia, pollution is normal, we are used to it, and we’ve survived’

Indeed, as a constricted bargain for accessing the material benefits of Silesia’s mineral wealth, a long history of industrialization and its perceived inevitable ecological fallout, locally

17 In a sense this can be understood as the opposite to NIMBYism – Not In My Back Yard-ism: resistance towards the siting of environmentally damaging infrastructures in direct geographic proximity to local communities. Indeed, for a detailed literature review regarding the social non-acceptance of, and resistance to, specifically mining projects as a relatively new phenomenon within the European Union, particularly that of community-level NIMBYism, made more prevalent through the accelerated processes of globalization, democratization and increased access to information, see Jarosław Badera (2015).
sensed and made sense of in the ubiquitous presence of visible ‘dust’, has resulted in its enrollment in the embodied construction, indeed materialization, of sedimented patriarchic regional, class- and gender-based identities and practices over time that have made such a life collectively bearable, meaningful, respectable and morally worthwhile. While Mary Douglas (2001 [1966]) famously defined dirt to be ‘matter out of place’, highlighting the symbolic social construction of pollution, as mentioned in the thesis introduction, she has been criticized for not paying attention to the entangled materiality of dirt (Campkin and Cox, 2007; Sullivan, 2012). In Silesia, coal’s dusts in particular have always-already had a tangible and embodied vitality. It is insistent matter that gets under your skin, and creeps into crevices, indeed, shapes one’s entire sensorium. It could not simply be ignored, but, absent any possibility of perceived alternatives, had to be controlled, tamed and normalized through rendering it meaningful. Otherwise, the touch of coal’s dirt for those who had to labour amidst it to participate in the national economy always held danger of contagion, ambivalent threats of disorder and class-based stigmatization if it was not held in check (Douglas, 1979; Skeggs, 1997, 2004). As a result, place-based and occupationally-relevant, gendered, working-class industrial means of collectively coping and respectfully managing the taint of masculinist ‘dirty work’ (Ashforth and Kreiner, 2014b) through rituals of purification, such as practices of cleaning, washing and collective cleansing, became one of the key everyday methods of domesticating coal, rendering it safe, and keeping its dirt ‘in place’ - thus clean. Of making home, home, by attempting to ward off class stigma. Maintaining social order in a life with dirt, local purification practices thus contributed to the self-understanding and regional mythology of Silesians as hard-working, tough, virtuous salt-of-the-earth folk, bolstered by a Silesian-Polish Catholic-influenced ethic of bearing burdens and suffering as further marker of victimized moral purity (which I elaborate on later). This was always in relationality to an outsider Other, symbolized here by ‘Warsaw’.

Furthermore, ‘becoming with’ (Haraway, 2008) such burdensome environments, dust-immersed embodied working-class subjectivities developed an industrial-eyed ideological view of ‘their’ nature in which ‘the people’ are ‘rooted in and emerging from a particular space, ‘their land”’, viewing humans ‘not as separated from nature but in it’ - a part of it (Forchtner, 2019: 2). Correlating intergenerational industrial hegemonic masculinist perceptions of environments, pollutants, embodiment and health that naturalized dirt and thus made life in Black Silesia possible and meaningfully bearable too, continue to shape how ‘smog’ is experienced today, reflecting how ‘rationality’ is related to ways of thinking that ‘are consistent with, and support, particular ways of life’ (Baxter, 2009: 772) – here an industrial way of life. Likewise, then, the products of their
labour with and through ‘their’ nature (coal) were considered righteous and natural by definition, and the elements emerging from that space, including dirt and industry, *in place*, or ‘*in harmony*’ with it (Forchtner, 2019: 2). Such harmony, however, was not found, but had to be made - through labours of purification. In a naturalized Christian-industrial-patriarchal hierarchy of dominion, where humans are rightfully *in control* of nature they are to make God-given use of, subduing and taming her in this manner came to underpin moral worth in the name of national, regional and community progress.

As part of this industrial existence, talking about ‘pollution’, particularly publicly and in direct relation to coal, had thus long been socially organised as *taboo* – both out of political necessity under the PRL and also out of hegemonic complicity with its affirmation of ecologically-embodied, Silesian, gendered, working-class material and moral worth. In postsocialist, post-EU-accession times, however, this industrial ideological-moral rationality and order, however, as we have seen, having underpinned the wealth and advancement of the economy, has increasingly found itself in mounting tension with that of ‘outsiders’ from non-industrial worlds, such as Warsaw, Brussels, environmental scientists, or now even Silesian neighbours, who, in clean suits and ties as white-collar workers, or ‘mind’ people, do not know the meaning of working-class grit, grime and struggle of the ‘bodily’ kind, or its internally ordered world, yet reap its benefits.¹⁸ Not only was working-class life in general increasingly neglected and denigrated by these self-same people (as the thesis introduction and previous chapter outlined), their ‘smog’ was now breaking what remained of Silesia’s sacred taboo that held the residual lifeworld in moral harmony with its industrial nature – that is, at-home with coal. This threatened that affirmation of worthy social identity via a further stigmatizing, shaming gaze, and reordered its human-nature relation too – from one of masculinist control, morality and material progress, to one of feminized vulnerability, *immorality* and decline. Ecological dispossession again.

Ulrich Beck (1992) usefully conceptualises this ‘friction’ (Tsing, 2005) as that generated by the contemporary paradigmatic shift from industrial to postindustrial risk society. As Beck put it, the new globalized ‘risk society’, in which pervasive ecological hazards come to increasingly dominate, epitomized in the scientific knowledge politics of ‘smog’, and intrinsically identified with the cosmopolitan-globalist agendas of ‘Warsaw’¹⁹, was breaking through the ‘protective shield of

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¹⁸ Blake Ashforth and Glen Kreiner (2014a) write that the changing meaning of dirty work is correlated also to the rise of a liberal-hygienic order in which social distancing from dirty work and so opportunities for social comparison have grown.

¹⁹ Beck (1992: 39; 46) saw the supra-nationality of pollution that requires transboundary/global solutions by definition to accelerate the necessity of the ‘utopia of a world society’ - the project of cosmopolitan globalism.
taboos’ surrounding the ‘industrial modern’ society and its previously ‘latent’ polluting side effects, in order to be “born scientifically” in scientized civilization’ (Beck, 1992: 34), destabilizing the previous order. As Mary Douglas (1979: 68) defined it, a taboo is an unspoken ‘ban or prohibition’ on touching, eating, seeing or speaking about something, what A. R. Radcliffe-Brown (2014 [1939]: 73) conceptualised as ‘ritual avoidances’ and ‘ritual prohibitions’. The taboo upholds a sociocultural order and its continuity based on an agreed system of classification that renders an inherently untidy and always-ambivalent experience ordered, neat and stable. To break a taboo threatens to ‘unleash dangers’, while maintaining it enables avoidance of them. As Mary Douglas (1979: 68) writes, thus ‘whereas to an outsider the taboo is irrational to the believer its rightness needs no explaining’. For challenging a taboo represents a breach in the foundations of not just a minor classification but an entire social system. This is why it ‘arouses such strong feeling’ for ‘a great investment has been made’ in it (Douglas, 1979: 71).

As Beck (1992: 32) helps to further explain, the naming of ‘pollution’ by outsiders, brings with it an ‘anathema of ecological morality’ that generates new villains out of the heroes of old, thus introducing the specter of disorder to a previously internally-ordered social system, violating its internally-coherent principles of embodied morality. The ‘boomerang effect’ (Beck, 1992: 37) of this process, in which industrial actors (even the rich and powerful) are increasingly held publicly accountable for polluting effects, rather than lauded for their wealth-generating contribution to society, meant that now self-perceived heroes were becoming perpetrators; risk takers, risk producers. Or, in the terms of this thesis – home was becoming shame. Miners and the industry were tottering from socialist heroes, to not just postsocialist economic villains and victims but now post-EU-accession environmental perpetrators. Risk society in the form of ‘smog’ thus represented the ‘ecological devaluation and expropriation’ (Beck, 1992: 38), what I have termed ecological dispossession, of not only private economic interests, but an entire habitat and lifeworld – one that had already been suffering devaluation for some decades. For miners, it was thus the signature of an elite and ‘exclusionary environmentalism’ (Doshi, 2017: 126), one that had only ever extracted what it wanted from the region, while now bringing stigma to it through its designation ‘dirty’, a stigma that was now invading it from the inside too through its converts. Through doing so, it bound those experiencing the brunt of its material-symbolic postcolonial postsocialist shame increasingly reflexively together as ‘the industrial people’ looking for representation and affirmation (or home), as the chapter will outline.
Yet things were not quite so clear cut. Michael Herzfeld (1997), using the examples of corruption, and, more prosaically, plate-smashing in Greece, proposes the useful phrase ‘cultural intimacy’ as a way to make sense of those aspects of cultural life that for ‘insiders’ form an intrinsic part of the basis of cultural belonging and identity, while for ‘outsiders’ constitute a basis for stigma, critique or denigration of that culture. In this way, ‘cultural intimacy’, marking an increasing reflexive embarrassment and shame about those aspects of everyday life, is characterized by a paradoxical posture of ‘rueful self-recognition’ (Herzfeld 1997: 6) - both something regretful yet familiar. As such, defensiveness, including ‘a sense of defiant pride in the face of a more formal or official morality and, sometimes of official disapproval too’ (Herzfeld 1997: 3), together with wistfulness about its attributes forms a key part of its manifestation. Something similar can be said in the case of smog, mediated through regional class, gendered and occupational-based identities and expressing itself through an industrial populist frame.

Here what I call an emerging postsocialist ‘industrial ecological intimacy’ with Silesia’s coal-connected air pollution, reflexively heightened by the arrival of risk-society ‘smog’-talk, underpins and entrenches a defensive publically-expressed denial of air pollution’s health hazards by particularly older (45+) working-class coal peoples. For them, denial of ‘smog’ can be understood as an outsider-facing example of ‘moral boundary drawing’ (Sayer, 2005), a performance of regional working-class social identity-defense against this outsider risk-society gaze laced with stigma. ‘Ecological intimacy’ goes one step further, however, to designate the ‘intimacy’ as deeply embodied and material – as close as one’s skin, in fact, under it. For Silesians, as this chapter outlines, are made through a corporeal relation to Silesia’s industrial dirt. It is who we are – it is what makes us ‘Us’ in classed terms. In this way, the oscillating sense between belonging and shame entangled with this intimacy within the rise of risk society, itself seen as the preserve of elites, are even more acute, for it strikes at the heart of one’s very visceral being, forming kinds of ‘skin-close modes of dispossession’ (Bangstad et al., 2019: 105).

Yet, at the same time, what this confident outsider-oriented defensiveness masks is a growing private ambivalent and mounting inner tension – a ‘rueful recognition’ - regarding the presence of pollution in Silesia, that acknowledges the encroachment of risk society but is caught between resistance and resignation, defensiveness and suppressed resentment, feeling itself increasingly backed into a corner in the growing postindustrial backlash against coal in which the taboo is shattering. Precisely, the tension between a felt sense of an orderly home one belongs to, with all its known imperfections, and an imposed and emergent feeling of disorderly shame about that fact.

221
This is increasingly so for younger Silesian industrial residents who precariously have one foot in both worlds – they seek to be ‘modern’ while holding onto apparent ‘tradition’, long to join the ranks of the ‘middle class’ and its ‘clean’ styles of living, care for their own health as increasingly precarious individualized bodies within neoliberal risk society’s paradoxes (see chapter seven), and are increasingly politicized and mediatized. The former stance is public-facing, directed at the ‘outsider’s’ gaze. The latter is an ‘insider’ phenomenon, shared in moments of unguardedness or amongst those whose lives are collectively bound together in the shared fate and burden of polluted industrial dwelling.\(^{20}\) Generating increasingly intense cognitive dissonance a sense of disorderliness, a resolution of this tension is required – far-right industrial populist purification offered an appealing answer by reinstating, or upholding, the taboo’s industrial moral-ecological order, indeed by pushing back against the unwelcome incoming tide of its alternative, keeping mounting threats of risk-society classist shame at bay.

In the remainder of this chapter I first outline a short environmental history of how ‘Black Silesia’s’ intense industrial residue in the context of taboo has been lived and experienced emically as ‘dust’, increasingly vying with ‘outsider’ risk-society perspectives that designate it in the stigmatizing, taboo-shattering terms of ‘pollution’, based both on secondary literature and oral testimony. I then show how this embodied ecology contributed to self-understandings of Silesia’s industrial ‘coal people’ through what I call the socialist-era biopolitical ‘coal health ecosystem’, involving the triad of the coal mine, the home, and the seaside/mountains, that together operated as a ballast to maintain the taboo on pollution as simply an inevitable byproduct of industrial ‘civilization’. This ballast contributed in turn to industrial localized, occupation-shaped moral gendered-, classed- and regional identities, and their perceptions of place, pollutants, embodiment and health, that linger today, even, or particularly, as this ballast breaks down, with implications for smog’s reception. This is not understood in class terms, however, but in essentialist identity based ones – industrial ecological intimacy, rather than a class-based issue, becomes reclaimed as a mark of ‘truer’ standing as the nation’s underappreciated ‘people’, Polish-Silesian people. I conclude with some reflections on risk society, populist science denial and (anti)environmentalism.

\(^{20}\) This was made most apparent to me when, if I asked about smog directly as a first line of questioning, I found myself immediately being perceived as a threat (I was breaking the taboo) expressing itself in direct defensiveness, yet if I asked general questions about coal, or simply allowed the topic of smog to be brought up by my interlocutors, the tone in this more trusting dialogue was softer, more open, and ruefulness became the more dominant mood. Whether the research telescope was being held pointing from the air down, or the earth up, made a radical difference to discussions. The former was taken as accusatory, challenging the taboo, the latter, as empathic.
Black Silesia and ‘we the industrial people’: From (insider) dust to (outsider) pollution

‘Black Silesia’, as it is designated in the national imaginary, is linked with images of smokestacks, factories, industry, coal mines, and, particularly, dirt or ‘dust’, as it was known internally. As outlined in the introduction, it was here where one of the first applications of the steam engine outside of Britain was implemented in the 19th century under Prussian rule, and where the industrial revolution started to creep its fingers across the globe. After the Second World War, when Upper Silesia became fully part of Poland, industrialization intensified significantly under the newly-formed People’s Republic (Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa, PRL), which was keen to maximally utilize the rich mineral resources lying beneath the Silesian earth’s surface for the utopian project of socialist modernization. Under the PRL, the region was therefore elevated to a status of national importance; it was the venerable powerhouse of the nation’s progress and the vanguard of its working-class-centred society. The ensuing industrialization process notoriously became one of the most ‘concerted and intensive programmes of environmental exploitation witnessed anywhere in mainland Europe’ (Pavlínek and Pickles, 2000; Whitehead, 2005: 275). Nature was conscripted as an inert resource in service of the state’s agenda and pollution became normalized.

Yet, as outlined in chapter three, at this point, dust and dirt were taken as signs of Silesia’s vitality, wealth, and ‘civilization’, evidence of its more advanced European development than the rest of the country, which was far more agriculturally-orientated. Just as in Western Europe, yet with a different history, it was only with time that the darker sides of ‘civilization’ would come to the public’s official attention through rising ecological awareness, particularly after the collapse of socialism – a process continued by the arrival of ‘smog’ today. Such official public ecological awareness was highly class-bound, however, from the start, and was experienced and remembered often as a case of outsider expertise and knowledge coming in to stigmatize and denigrate Silesia and her industrial people bringing shame to the region. How science-based environmentalism and outsider stigma became entwined, and how ‘the people’ of Silesia thus became increasingly reflexively identified with her dust, I outline below.

21 By the end of this period, Upper Silesia was providing 98% of Poland’s coal, 23% of its electrical energy, 52% of its raw steel, and 100% of its zinc, lead, and silver (Chopin, 1992: 1495).
22 Since industry was in the hands of the socialist state, and therefore functioned in the ‘name of the people’, its dirt, too, was represented as a byproduct of socialist paternalistic enterprise. Thus ‘socialism could afford to be a little bit dirtier’ than in a capitalist system where pollution is offloaded onto the public in the name of privatized profit (Herrschel and Forsyth, 2001: 575). Even pollution, then, was a publicly owned resource, setting the context for pollution’s enrolment into ‘we the people’ today.
Contrary to popular notions I found were prevalent that the socialist-era regime had no idea about the ecological effects of its industrialization project because it did not care, in actual fact, state awareness regarding pollution began fairly early with attempts to mitigate it through spatial planning. In terms of air pollution, this awareness was largely couched in the concepts of ‘gas emissions’ and ‘dust’ - how pollution was scientifically measured at the time. Francis W. Carter (Carter and Turnock, 1996) writes that ‘the first disturbing realization of air pollution came in 1959, when it was revealed that the average daily deposition of particle matter in the Upper Silesian District equaled the combined total of London and Berlin – namely 3,000 tonnes over 24 hours’. By the end of the 1970s, a third of all ‘dust and gaseous matter’ in the country came from Katowice alone and by 1980 ‘nearly a million people suffered from intensive fall-out of poisonous and strong toxic dust/gases, with permissible safety limit barriers exceeded several times over’, a situation which continued to worsen into the mid-1980s themselves (Carter and Turnock, 1996: 126). One city councillor in Katowice at the time vividly conveyed just how poisonous the situation was, commenting that the air was so contaminated that ‘apart from the health hazard it also enhanced the corrosion of machinery and equipment’ (Carter and Turnock, 1996: 126).

A significant part of the problem was caused by the high sulphur content of coal mined in the eastern part of the region utilized by power stations at this time, which were responsible for ‘well over a third of the gas and nearly half the dust emitted into Poland’s atmosphere’, combined with inadequate provision and utilization of industrial ‘dust-collecting equipment’ by state-owned

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23 The toxic legacy of the Soviet experiment is well documented (Carter and Turnock, 1996; Feshbach, 1993; Josephson, 2013). Nevertheless, for a critique of the simplified and essentialist narrative that ‘socialism’ and ‘environmental degradation’ are intrinsically linked (part of the Western post-Cold War narrative that ideologically paints Eastern Europe and the postsocialist region as inherently ‘irrational’ and ‘backward’ while the triumphant capitalist West is ‘clean’ and ‘rational’) see Tassilo Herrschel and Timothy Forsyth (2001: 574). Likewise see also Petr Pavlinek and John Pickles (2000: 241-243) for an assessment of the deep-running ‘myths’ of state socialist ‘ecocide’ and almost total ignorance of environmental problems that ‘circulate in Western and Eastern European policy arenas’ to this day. They write: ‘the nature and extent of environmental degradation was actually highly uneven across CEE countries. Polluted regions and environmental hot spots coexisted with areas of ‘pristine’ nature that covered an estimated 30 per cent of the region... Such complexity and unevenness make sweeping generalisations about the state of the environment in CEE countries at the end of the state socialist period difficult, and this difficulty is compounded by the notoriously questionable nature of state socialist environmental data.... [which] focused on the most heavily polluted areas and during periods with the highest levels of pollution.’ Indeed ‘[f]or there were important similarities between state socialism and capitalism in these production and consumption processes, with parallels in both environmental consequences and ideological understandings of nature and society’. See also Zsuzsa Gille (2007) for a challenge to the totalizing perception of the inherent non-environmentalism of state socialism in her account of waste management in socialist Hungary. As Mark Whitehead (2005) also explores in the context of Silesia, the socialist state, rather than simply neglectful and un-ecologically aware, had a proactive agenda when it came to reordering socio-natural relations and a vision for ecology’s role in the planning of urban industrial socialist modernity, even if it failed.
enterprises (Carter and Turnock, 1996: 126; 110-111), because they were considered ‘non-productive’, i.e. generating costs (Szulecka and Szulecki, 2017: 8). Indeed, numerous stories I heard about past pollution referred to the apparently common practice of existing filters, where they were in place, being deliberately switched off at night in order to boost economic output. Other factories lacked any filters at all. 'There was smoke from the mine, an acrid smoke... soot on the windows... Power plants smoked, there weren’t any filters, and all that dust went into the air. That’s how it was’, as one retired miner old enough to remember such scenes put it. Another retired septuagenarian miner told me: ‘The air was poisoned… the chimneys smoked, Silesia was known for that. You could see what you were breathing – that’s how it was. But nobody paid any attention. Coal is what counted.’ Indeed, one British medical student visiting the region in the early 1990s wrote in the British Medical Journal that ‘For 40 years the acceptable level of pollution was that amount the foundries, steel-mills, chemical plants, and coal mines, etc, needed to emit to meet production quotas’ (in Chopin, 1992: 1495).

Combined with the deleterious effects of industrial labour, urban life expectancy was here the lowest in the country, while rates of premature births, genetic birth defects, and spontaneous miscarriages were the highest in Poland (Parascandola, 2018: 4). Upper Silesia thus emerged from behind the iron curtain with the ‘poorest health record of any industrialized country in the developed world’ (Chopin, 1992: 1495). Together with Lower Silesia and the ‘black triangle’ (Pavlínek and Pickles, 2000: 239) that straddled the industrialized border area of Poland, Germany and Czechia, the region infamously became known as the most toxic corner of Europe – sealing Silesia’s fall from grace from proud industrial heartland to problematic postsocialist, post-industrial backwater (Gwosdz, 2000).

During the PRL, however, although Silesians were far from ignorant of these matters through everyday knowledge, they were largely unaware of such scientific studies and findings. Expert environmental knowledge was kept largely within the limited circles of academia and governmental institutions, largely treated as top-secret state information that was hidden from the public in the ‘interests’ of the people. Whatever official knowledge was presented or handed down to citizens was tightly controlled, making sure to under-report the scale of environmental damage and construct ecological exploitation as ‘a necessary facet of socialist development’ (Whitehead, 2005: 289). Research that might expose the direct link between Soviet-era industrialization and health was politically suppressed (Chopin, 1992: 1496). Talking about such matters in daily life was also politically and occupationally taboo, as participants recounted. At the same time, in many ways

24 It was these kinds of practices that earned the regime the contemporary reputation of neglecting and knowingly brutalizing its citizens and their environment – coal and socialism at any cost.
living with dirt was precisely what made working-class Silesian miners the more ‘privileged’ of the regime, with access to luxury goods, meat and prestige. Indeed, in return for coal’s biopolitical bounty, as the Communist powers arranged – employment, housing, social infrastructure, health care, energy access, holidays, community and life as one knew it – you put up with it. What industrial Silesians knew at the time therefore was that life in black Silesia, a place where ‘even the Devil says goodbye’ (Carter and Turnock, 1996: 128), was often simply short, tough, gritty and covered in dust.

In his history of dust, Joseph A. Amato (2001: 7–8) writes that ‘industrial societies created more, and varied, dusts, than had any previous society… industrial society was the great earth mover and, consequently, the great dust maker’. As I came to learn for myself, coal dust in particular gets everywhere. Working down in the pit, (as chapter seven explores), it sticks to sweaty labouring skin and gathers in moist corners, such as the eyes, nostrils and mouth, making it difficult to breathe. Up in the world above, when coal is combusted in domestic stoves or power plants to generate heat and electricity, it produces mercury, sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, lead, cadmium, arsenic, carbon monoxide and of course carbon dioxide. Yet in addition to invisible gases, it also produces further ‘dust’ – a loose vernacular term for a heterogenous assortment of matter perceptible to the naked eye such as ‘soot’ from coal, a result of incomplete combustion, and ‘coal ash’, which is the incombustible component in coal, creating the grey colour of coal smoke. These combine to form coal’s amorphous and wide-ranging ‘dusts’ that indiscriminately traverse the subterranean and open-air worlds and which have historically framed Silesian’s sensual everyday relation to their abrasive home environment in all-pervasive ways. As I learnt, to this day, living with pollution in Silesia is thus often understood by working-class communities in the vernacular as living with the ‘dustiness’ (zapylenie), and thus ‘dust’, or ’pył’, has historically been understood from the emic Silesian, ‘insider’, perspective as the predominant agent of pollution. This is particularly so for the coal community, intrinsically linked to embodied experiences of coal and its dusty materialities.

Despite the fact that dust was often described as something ‘you didn’t think about’ or ‘didn’t notice’, or as one 72-year-old retiree told me: ‘People had more important things to worry about, 25 One miner’s wife who moved to the region from the far poorer Eastern part of Poland to get married, told me that people from Silesia were indeed famously known to dress differently than other Poles at the time because they had more money. This was what drew her, and many others, to the area. The ‘privileging’ of the industrial working-classes in Upper Silesia under socialism, particularly coal miners, I outlined in the introduction. Together with political suppression of the topic, this was a key means through which worker acquiescence and consent to the regime’s industrialization practices, and consequently the normalization of pollution, was achieved.
like getting food on the table’, sometimes, ‘people saw the dust in the air, but it was a moment, and then immediately to work, and you just forgot about it. A moment of enlightenment… and it was gone’. Such moments appeared in circulating memories of past pollution among older mining residents, that solidified a sense of community in the telling and were stuck to dust’s traces, recalling images of uncannily black snow, windows streaked with soot, grimy white shirt collars, and clean laundry hanging out to dry only to be soon rained down upon by grubby particles of dark matter. Dust was thus not exactly innocently experienced even at the time, but, as ‘vibrant matter’ (Bennett, 2010) left a residue of disturbance in its wake. This suggests that ‘noticing’ and ‘not noticing’ were always highly politically charged zones. Although such ‘dust’ was not necessarily considered toxic – more convinced and risk-conscious (Beck, 1992) discourse that has come in with the arrival of ‘smog’ - there was a disconcerting uncanniness about it precisely because it muddied the supposed boundaries of cleanliness and dirt threatening disorder (Douglas, 1992, 2001 [1966]). This was particularly when combined with other sensory encounters, particularly strange smells. Older miners recalled how they might hold their nose walking past a particular factory, or cover their mouth and eyes to stop up the smell of sulphur emerging from a chimney. One retiree recounted: ‘There would be soot on the windows, but it was greasy. It was as if… somebody had taken some hair and rubbed it over the window. If you wiped your hand through it would streak…. There was this constant settling of dust all around.’ In Silesia, what should be clean was always becoming dirty, and what was dirty was constantly encroaching upon and compromising the clean, revealing the inherent precarity and impossibility of such a binary. In 1981, when rationing cards came in under Marshal Law for consumer goods, Upper Silesia was thus one of three places in the country where instead of one bar of soap you were allocated two, and instead of 750g of washing powder you received 1kg.26 It was thus even calculated into official considerations that in these industrial geographic centres people simply needed to wash more often. This perspective on pollution is conceptually linked to the contemporary Polish word for it too: ‘zanieczyszczenie’, which can be literally translated as ‘the process of becoming unclean’ or as ‘too unclean’.

Thus while awareness of the ‘issue’ of air pollution was low, due also to political suppression as mentioned, its felt presence was always on the radar, one with perturbing capacity to mark itself on the body and collective memory, described also in terms of contributing to a general atmosphere of grayness, drabness, even ‘depression’. As such, an ambivalent negotiation of its co-presence with

26 The other two places were the industrial regions of Kraków and Wałbrzych Okręg Węglowy in Lower Silesia. (Information taken from interview with local environmental and social historian Bogusław Tracz, 3rd March 2017, Institute of National Memory, Katowice).
'coal-enabled life' (Valdivia, 2018) as a habitus settled in as the ‘norm’, protected by taboo, and ‘we the people’ of Silesia recognised one another through this shared reality – indeed became through it. To this day a visible border of ‘dust’ even demarcated Silesia from the rest of Poland – with residents explaining that one knew when one was leaving and returning home by passing through a curtain of ‘dust’. There was little alternative but to domesticate it.

However, in the 1980s, due to growing awareness about the alarming levels of industrial pollution, more explicit ecological discourses began disrupting and politicizing these previously quiet, unspoken stabilized even-if poisonous and exploitative hegemonic arrangements. Translating ‘dust’ into newer notions of ‘pollution’ and ‘toxicity’, ecological discourse emerged with force during a period of limited liberalization in the era of glasnost. By the end of the decade there were more than 100 groups active on environmental matters in the country (Andersson, 2012: 63), including active groups in Silesia such as the ‘Silesia Ecology Movement’ established in 1987 (Whitehead, 2005: 287). These still often had to operate in a clandestine manner27 (Whitehead, 2005: 274), were subject to harassment and efforts to maintain state control (Kimla, 2016: 467), and were largely led by young students, or intelligentsia, who ‘formed the core of the Polish environmental movement’ (Piotrowski, 2013: 243; Glnski, 1994; Szulecka and Szulecki, 2017: 8). Yet during this time the ecological movement, drawing on long-standing Polish traditions of youth counter-culture, enjoyed a high level of social legitimacy and appeal28, connected as it often was to one of the only possible outlets of critique of the increasingly unpopular regime possible at the time by managing to pass as ‘apolitical’ (Szulecka and Szulecki, 2017). It was for this reason that environmental issues became entwined with the anti-communist Solidarity movement – ecological concerns opened up possible territory for critique of the state in the run up to its collapse29 (Herrschel and Forsyth, 2001: 578). While it never directly challenged the Communist system, whose economy was failing and whose backlash against the emerging Solidarity movement that was forced underground added to its de-legitimization, environmentalism would ‘prove lethal’ to it, because it channelled frustration and ‘got people together, made them ask difficult questions and demand explanations, created situations of visible non-conformity and enhanced civic activity in ways difficult to mute’ (Szulecka and Szulecki, 2017: 6). The Chernobyl disaster in 1986 only

27 For example, in June 1988 the Silesia Ecological Movement published its first newsletter entitled ‘Dead Nature!’ without an official right of circulation sanctioned by the state (Whitehead, 2005: 274).
28 In 1980, 43% of Poles were dissatisfied with the state of the natural environment, while one third of the total population lived in places where air or water pollution standards were exceeded (Szulecka and Szulecki, 2017: 8).
29 See Barbara Jancar-Webster (1993) for an overview of how the Solidarity movement and the environment intertwined in ‘paramount’ ways.

228
heightened public concern and support for environmental mobilization, while ramping up distrust in scientific and government information and expertise. At this time, civil disobedience, street protests, and confrontational tactics with authorities by environmentalists were granted high social legitimacy by a society used to such relations to power (Szulecka and Szulecki, 2017: 9). At the time, support from Western-orientated media fused with that of the Catholic Church to make such freedom-oriented discourse all the more resonant.

Yet workers were, perhaps unsurprisingly, ‘conspicuously underrepresented’ (Glinski, 1994: 148) in the ecological movement from the start. The Solidarity movement did not consider such matters as of paramount importance, although issues of worker health, which it was concerned with, understandably were, arguably, a more fundamental aspect of their working-class environmentalism, or environmental justice, matters that were long-standing. Furthermore in the tumult of postsocialist transition, such organic histories of emerging ecological consciousness, dissipated and fragmented, and so were buried and forgotten, resulting in ‘ecology’ being perceived as an ‘outsider’ imposition. This has not been helped by the fact that since transition, as earlier outlined, environmental advocacy groups have often been funded by the West, and perceived to import definitions of ‘environment’ and ‘environmentalism’ divorced from local interests and concerns as non-organic interventions (Herrschel and Forsyth, 2016: 579; see also Jancar–Webster, 1998 and on a similar analysis of broader civil society in the postsocialist East see Hann, 2020), indeed with an implicit classist bias.\footnote{Such a perception of ‘mainstream’ environmentalism as elitist and divorced from the real and material concerns of ‘the people’ are not unique to Poland or Eastern Europe (Bell, 2020b). In fact, of course, the perception of dominant environmentalism as classist, racist and sexist led to the development of the environmental justice movement in the US. In Poland, where such a concept is under-developed or adopted, due to its left-leaning critical genealogy, the absence of an environmental justice movement again leaves legitimate grievances over ‘elite’ environmentalism open for other political co-optations. For an overview of the tensions between the ‘two environmentalisms’ of mainstream and environmental justice movements in the US see (Austin and Schill, 1991; Meyer, 2008; Sandler and Pezzullo, 2007)}

One story narrated to me a number of times in different variations encapsulates a pivotal moment in Silesia’s emergent relation to scientific and environmental discourse and its perceived stigmatizing outsider’s gaze. In the late 1980s, a TV programme at the time showed a group of American, or sometimes it was UN, scientists – outsiders, experts – who came to Silesia and said that their research showed that humans could not live here! It was not possible! Human life was not
possible here in this ‘ecological catastrophe zone’. But we lived here!', I was told repeatedly with a laugh. ‘We the Silesian people’. The shaming sense of being told one’s life was inhuman was audible. Yet life was made possible by residents and their tenacity and determination under the given structural conditions as we will see. Such wry humour was a common localized coping mechanism – a contradictory, complex and shifting mixture of impermissible horror, shame, resentment, resignation, belonging and/or proud defiance when reflexively narrating and making sense of Silesia’s polluted past. A reflexive consciousness about the uniqueness of this increasingly shame-inducing, previously morally righteous, tidied-up fact began to entrench the sense that dust and Silesian identity, ‘the people’, were fused – and that environmentalism and scientific institutions were threatening. Emerging industrial ecological intimacy and its shaming rueful recognition in practice.

In the 1990s, growing awareness of concerns about ‘ecology’, the beginnings of Europeanization through capitalist democratization, mass closure of industry, and economic decline came together to further historically couple science and environmentalism with threat. This precipitated a radical shift in air quality (Pavlínek and Pickles, 2000: 244–249). People ‘noticed’ the difference in the texture and smell of the air – it was no longer so ‘thick’, and thus, combined with incoming ecological discourses and new opportunities to travel overseas, a rapidly increasing

31 During the 1980s, when thanks to the Soviet policy of glasnost Silesia began to attract worldwide attention ‘because of the horrendous pollution from its outdated factories’, the Polish Academy of Sciences, headquartered in Warsaw, likewise classified the region as an ‘environmental disaster area’ (Chopin, 1996: 1495).

32 Scepticism about scientific knowledge (and a cultural acceptance of the inevitability of pollution) also developed in relation to the Chernobyl disaster in 1986, memories of which still circulated - ‘We are Chernobyl children!’ See Krista Harper (2001) on how scientific authority (inextricably tied to the socialist state bureaucracy) and technological confidence came into question in the context of the Chernobyl disaster in Hungary provoking a ‘ politicization of knowing’. See also Adriana Petryna (2003, 2004) on the notion of biological citizenship after Chernobyl in the Ukraine which underpinned the development of a focus on injury and victimhood as the basis for citizenship. As Harper (2001: 115) writes, rather, in Hungary, and here too in Silesia, Poland, Chernobyl experiences generated less a focus on injury and more on ‘dislocating experiences of uncertainty’ that shook any remaining faith in the socialist project and its leaders. Tracie Wilson (2006: 67) writes about environmentalism in Poland that ‘Chernobyl marked an important turning point within East Central Europe when the destructive potential of science demonstrated a chasm between official rhetoric on industrial progress and science and reality.’ In this way science can reveal untruths, but it can also ‘destroy’ things by revealing too much causing rupture, instability and dislocation in a previously seemingly stable system. While Harper found ‘Chernobyl stories’ of central importance to the emergence of environmentalist consciousness amongst activists in Hungary, the repeated circulation by industrial residents of this story of scientists coming to Silesia to designate the area uninhabitable can be understood as a pivotal moment for the emergence of an (anti)environmentalist consciousness that put scientific expertise in an ambivalent zone of threat, incredulity and imposed shame.

33 ‘During 1989–1996 dust and gas emissions fell by a factor of three, the quality of water improved and the risk of soil contamination diminished’ (Gwosdz, 2000: 63).
awareness of conditions crept in. Yet, as one elderly miner said; ‘it’s clean now because they closed everything’. Polish industry was sold off for a proverbial ‘złoty’ to foreign investors – the nation’s silver was traded away. The mining community, as we saw, was ravaged. Many today thus believe that ‘ecology’ is still just a cover up for foreign business interests and always come with agendas that will hoodwink and dispossess Polish workers. 34 ‘Ecological issues didn’t exist before transition. They were brought in to make people disgusted by industry, to make its closure more palatable’, said Artur, who we met at the start of this chapter. Again – the tense line between the shame of industrial ecological intimacy and its resentment and reclamation or resistance was never far from being blurred. At the same time, the relative top-down passivity of means by which environmental improvement came about (closure of industry) led to a decline in the perceived rationale for an environmental movement as a grassroots concern (Szulecka and Szulecki 2017: 11). 35 The remaining professionalized environmental NGO network did not champion workers’ concerns but tended to be far removed from it.

Following transition, ‘dust’, as briefly outlined in chapter three, instead of being a material symbol of national progress, thus came to be associated instead with regional poverty and degradation, decline and stigma. It became ‘dirt’ in the more negative connotation of the word – no longer simply materially so, but symbolically, shameful filth. Alongside this, as also outlined in chapter three, with the lifting of PRL-era suppression of Silesian identity and history and the opening up of free speech, the 1990s also saw the emergence of a process of ‘regionalization’, and a resentful narrative regarding Silesia’s internal exploitation, or colonization, by ‘the rest of Poland’, and particularly Warsaw, emerged (Wódz and Wódz, 2006: 90). Its ecological devastation, coupled with labour exploitation, were referred to as evidence of a perceived ‘colonial robber economy’ (Kühnemann, 1993). This coincided with the general fall from grace of the working-classes from heroes to villains (Kideckel, 2008; Ost, 2009b; Stenning, 2005a), and the demotion of Silesia from a place of national ‘importance’ to a place of economic and environmental degradation – a ‘problem’

34 We can see this backdrop as a precursor to the suspicions about smog. That this latest round of ‘ecology’ is understood by many as a conspiracy theory or piece of ‘propaganda’ to ‘destroy Polish coal’ by German business interests or the EU (itself considered an extension of German foreign and economic policy) is not without at least some substantiation (Feffer, 2017). For German Foreign Direct Investment in the Central East European region is by far the lion’s share, 50% higher than that of France, the UK and Italy combined, and is the most concentrated in the continent, while EU climate policy of course does wish the mines closed.

35 Indeed, the fact that Poland met much of its Kyoto carbon reduction agreements (as a transition country it was allowed to chose 1988 as a baseline rather than 1990 like most countries) because of postsocialist closure of industry has implications today for environmental policy. It meant that little actual investment or change in the energy system and structure and little active awareness-raising on environment occurred. Rather the government was able to tout long-term GHG emission reduction success without touching the coal industry (Ceglarz et al., 2018: 825–826)
zone (Gwosdz, 2000; Mrozowicki, 2011: 39). Yet remediation and investment to overcome this have been scant. ‘We the Silesian people’ came to know themselves more and more as Other in dirt-related terms – in terms of their specific industrial ecological intimacy. Class- and place-based stigma, best understood in the framework of the notion of outsiders and insiders, fused and ‘Warsaw’ became a word connoting corrupt power, indifferent elites, and ignorant technocrats far removed from proximity to dirt. Miners often complained to me that ‘up in Warsaw’, where big decisions regarding mining are made by ministers and politicians, particularly mine closures, they are detached from everyday reality ‘down here’, they know nothing about mining, and nothing about its people. They are simply greedy and out to make a profit off the back of the hard labour of Silesian workers who they simultaneously wish to disenfranchise.

Climate change discourse was part of this, yet it seemed much more distant than smog, the air one breathed. Today, as the opening to this chapter showed, ‘smog’ seemed to be coming down from Warsaw, filtered through local smog groups, with similar populist connotations.

Yet under the PRL, due to their ‘double bind’ (Eriksen and Schober, 2018) positionality, its ceaseless and constant presence, and without political channels for being able to organise against it, Silesians had learnt to ‘live with’ dust – by rendering it morally meaningful. This was particularly achieved through the industrial ideological spatial delineation of zones of dirt and cleanliness under the PRL-era regime – that of work and the home, and of industrial or ‘Black’ Silesia and ‘green’ areas of Poland – such as the seaside or mountain regions. Together, these formed what I call a coal health ecosystem that acted as a structural stabilizing ballast for the social legitimation of coal mines’ license to operate despite dust. Whereas under Communism, provision of social infrastructures combined with practices of resignation and adaptation to pollution as ‘normal’ were

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36 See Sarah Wakefield and Colin McMullan (2005: 300) on the widespread (re)conceptualisation of industrial cities and place as healthy/unhealthy in the shift to post-industrialism. Quoting J. R. Short, they point to the fact that whereas the presence of industry was, in the 1950s, a point of civic pride: ‘To call a city ‘industrial’ in the present period is to associate it with a set of negative images: a declining economic base, pollution, a city on the downward slide.’

37 Erwin Goffmann (1963: 9) defines ‘stigma’ as ‘the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance’. Focusing mostly on face-to-face interpersonal relations and personal qualities, other scholars have since extended his notion of stigma to ideas of place and environments (Broto et al., 2010; Bush et al., 2001; Edelstein, 2003; Parkhill et al., 2014; Zhuang et al., 2016). Likewise, in studies of working-class communities and labour, class-based stigma has also been explored, particularly through notions of ‘dirty work’ (Ashforth and Kreiner, 2014b; Filteau, 2015). Here multiple overlapping stigmas are at work.

38 In his ethnography of postsocialist bootleg miners in the Lower Silesian town of Walbrzych, Tomasz Rakowski (2016: 108) similarly finds an ‘undefined ‘Warsaw’ is used to stand in for ‘a world that remains deaf’ to the plight of the ‘degraded’ and downgraded in Poland.

39 In the 1990s, shortly after the collapse of Communism, Upper Silesia contributed 25% of Polish GDP (Parascondola 2018: 4); today it is more in the region of 13%.
part of how the communist regime maintained hegemony and worker acquiescence to industrial life in the Gramscian sense of consent to subordination, in the postsocialist present such remaining routinized practices become their own form of counter-hegemony - understood as what is ‘ours’, what makes us ‘us’. Yet holding on to these becomes fragile and unstable. The secure base is coming under increasing pressure under the combined deterioration of the dominance and material prestige of working-class life, the decline of the socialist state contract, and the material and moral decline of coal and its gendered social organisation, epitomized in the discourse of ‘smog’, and contributing to rising industrial ecological intimacy in search of a reassuring outlet. For, as Mary Douglas (1979: 72) described, it is precisely when a social system and its categories start to weaken, or break down, that taboos weaken too – and disorder threatens. It is to this traditional industrial gendered social order represented in the public/private divide between (dirty) workplace and (clean) home, and dust’s historic role in underpinning it, that I turn to next.

We are Silesian: Burdensome environments and windows onto gender, class, dust and us

Living in the dust, Silesians, rather than be passive victims, found a way to cope, and make it meaningful. Thus unlike for residents concerned about smog in the previous chapter, dust for Silesia’s industrial residents became a significant moral substance – it was a burden that one endured in order to perform one’s required duty for family, community, country and even God. In Silesia, the notion of ‘burdensomeness’ was often used in everyday parlance to refer to the ways in which environmental, political, or social costs are distributed and borne by local industrial inhabitants. The world is more or less ‘uciążliwe’ – burdensome – I learnt, but the burden remains and must be carried and eased somehow. For there is no such thing as an earthly life without burden. It is a fallen landscape simply in a fallen world, expressing the Silesian Catholic-influenced idea that the earth is intrinsically corrupted and tainted – a sinful world, in which human endeavour and environments are inevitably compromised and polluted, both morally and physically, and for which only God offers salvation. Taking on coal’s burdens – bodily, psychological, and environmental – and bearing them well, thus also became core to what being a hard-working, working-class Silesian, and Pole, means, reflecting a Polish Catholic belief in the idea of personal earthly life, as much as the life of the nation, particularly in Silesia, as suffering, struggle, and bearing the cross of arduous survival (Chrostowski, 1991; Kobielska, 2019).

40 Maria Kobielska (2019) writes that ‘being Polish’ and ‘suffering’ have been treated as synonymous throughout the 19th and 20th Centuries in Poland and that thus suffering together with martyrdom have become
me as such a cross. ‘We are doomed to coal: It is what we have’ and though the knots of it are messy ‘we live here because of it’. In this sense, the burden of ‘dust’ became over time a marker of emplaced belonging, while its shared visceral experience bound people together in a collective moral community – as ‘the people’.

Gendered working-class strategies particularly became central to its normalization and moral re-inscription in Silesian working-class life. A cornerstone of this strategy propagated by the industry was the public-private division of ‘separate spheres’ of labour between workplace and home, a key feature of fossil-fuelled industrialization throughout Europe (Ryle, 2011: 342). In highly traditional, Catholic Silesia this was strictly adhered to and enforced through a material and symbolic demarcation of spaces and rituals of dirt and cleanliness where the internalized policing of dust afforded value and respectability to masculine and feminine personhood accordingly (Fidelis, 2004: 317). This is so to this day, with the spatial boundary – between mine and home, public and private – delineated by practices of washing off and cleaning away coal’s Dust as a civilizational border marking dirty masculine ‘coal life’ from clean feminine ‘domestic life, or the ‘wild’ and dangerous from the tamed or ‘civilized’. In this way, through strictly demarcated gendered roles

‘paradigms structuring the Polish identity narrative’. Likewise, Waldemar Chrostowski (1991) writes that highlighting suffering has been central to the Polish nation’s philosophy of history for centuries. Yet, crucially, here suffering becomes not about defeat or proof of the absence of a loving God, but a sign of ‘chosenness’ of the ‘specific mission of Poles’ in God’s plans – i.e. it becomes elevated to the messianic ideology of Poland as the ‘Christ of Nations’. Karol Wojtyła, the Polish Pope, or Pope John Paul II, according to Chrostowski, did much to propagate and consolidate this narrative, which in turn has been much championed by PiS. Wojtyła also did much to develop the Polish Catholic ethic of ‘Solidarity’, which, becoming infused through working-class culture, is born out of the notion of suffering and bearing collective burdens as a moral obligation (Beyer, 2014) Fending off the burden of Communism under the Solidarity ethos, the resultant dissolution of the binding that held Polish identity and Catholicism together (the Communist enemy), today, intensifying pride in Polish suffering has become a cornerstone feature of postsocialist ultra-nationalists who are uneasy with this development, writes Geneviève Zubrzycki (2006). According to Michał Smolorz (2012: 243), Silesia has its own particular brand of myth of elevated collective suffering, that of the ‘Silesian injury syndrome’, seeing itself as the ‘internal Other’ in Poland that was uniquely oppressed and brutalized throughout its turbulent history. Though he sees this narrative as largely ‘imagined’ and constructed, Kazimiera and Jacek Wóźń (2006: 87-8), on the other hand, argue that the Silesian ‘burden of the past’ is real and forms a central element of Silesian self-understanding unique to the region. Thus Silesia can be seen to be beholden to overlaying narratives of suffering and trauma. See also May Mayblin (2010: 68) on what she identifies as a tradition of ‘elaborated suffering’ belonging to Catholic and Orthodox cultures stemming from peasantry in Europe, and here expressing itself in Brazil and Latin American culture.

41 While the binary of public/private, work/domesticity has rightly been critiqued as a too simplistic understanding of the material ways in which gender roles and organization are actually lived and produced, I paid attention to the narratives that perpetuate this ideological notion, for these are still central to the ways in which Silesians (as a regional identity) understand their lifeworld. As Michele Rosaldo (1980: 402) has written, ‘domestic/public constitutes an ideological rather than objective and necessary set of terms’ and this model merely reflects the prevailing gender belief system.

42 This clean/dirty symbolic gendered binary was also spatially mirrored within the household too – see chapter five.
afforded by it, the community found a way of upholding and maintaining social and moral boundaries and order and building a collectively meaningful, respectable life in, and through, a world of dust. 'We the Silesian people' became with dust’s labours – and this was once a source of dignity and pride. For the producers were at the heart of social recognition.

As the thesis introduction described, coal’s dirty work was here, as in numerous other locations worldwide, historically constructed as masculine working-class labour, primarily through its exposure to risk, hazard and grime. Under socialism, dirt became evidence of the hard toil, and so moral virtue and national masculine heroism, of particularly male working-class coal miners. In deliberate contrast, the home was designated primarily the feminine space of safety, purity and cleanliness – presided over by a miner’s wife, who, as a point of pride for the male breadwinner, and as the means to display her own social standing and moral worth, did not work outside the household but became famous for keeping it orderly and spotless, as I will outline. For dust always had sociological dangers that required policing – particularly by women, whose historical role it has been to keep ‘their’ men, and so masculine dirt, in civilized check (Skeggs, 1997: 42).

For in the all-male environment of the underground, away from public scrutiny, in a danger-filled world without windows, the embodiment of coal’s dust had always afforded a kind of hyper-masculinity calling forth aggression, sweat, and even bestiality. ‘Mixing with the dust’ men were enabled to become fully animal, I heard – becoming ‘wild’, implying both an adrenaline-pumping ‘return to nature’ and a bitter dehumanization, equal to ‘rats’ or ‘moles’. One retired miner offered his reflections on the socialist-era ‘fight for coal’ and the strange de-humanizing subjective effects of its dust he had trouble understanding himself:

> When we went below we became different people. We came to work in white shirts, ties, nice bags, and then we got changed into our dirty work clothes and then… we changed. It became a battle for coal, we were fighting each other… But once we came back up and washed, the dust came off, we became human again, everything fell away – all the nerves, tension, stress. You went for a vodka or beer with the people you were arguing with. Those black clothes… you would change, something turned in you… bloody hell. When you came out of that dust, everything changed again.

‘Civilized’ masculinity, understood in classist terms, and its un/doing were only separated by a few hundred metres of descent below ground, and an immersion into dirt, or dust.

43 Similarly, in the ‘most polluted town on earth’, Copsa Mica in postsocialist Romania, Trond Berge (2012: 92) finds that still today, cleaning routines underpin a moral and practical navigation of the town’s industrial emissions.
The pit was also ‘dirty’ and ‘wild’ in another sense, a space where hyper-masculinity could be unleashed in full-frontal brute force. Swearing, course vulgarities, sex stories, and yelling crude orders were reportedly commonplace culture, enabled by the seccrecies of the dirty underground. One exploitation worker, describing the way his foreman regularly screamed and swore at him, told me ‘At first I thought where the hell have I ended up? And then I got used to it, and it became normal’. This combined with a paradoxical kind of homosocial eroticism – naked, sweating bodies, that ‘fuck’ the earth (as foremen were reported to yell), and crack constant innuendos was reportedly commonplace. As a woman I was barred from this world; ‘you don’t want to know what goes on down there!’ ‘It goes quiet when you’re around!’, I was informed, as I paid a few chaperoned visits to the subterranean depths with my hosts, the Health and Safety department. For down here, this was a man’s world. Today, being ‘allowed’ to be fully ‘men’ was considered both a sort of shameful regressive bestial horror and an exhilarating liberation, an undoing of civilizational discipline and restrictions, including those of increasing contemporary feminization, that operate in the world above. It was manageable for a time, but ‘returning to cleanliness’, or ‘getting dressed into our cleans and becoming family men again’, as another miner put it, and so respectability and heterosexual order, was necessary to stay fully ‘human’.

As a result, after a day’s work below ground, a miner longs for the moment he can come up to the surface, take a shower and scrub himself clean again, and return home to comfort and his wife. Washing after a shift was described in the language of ‘returning to normality’ or ‘to civilization’, signaling both relief and regret, revealing an ambivalent sentiment towards masculine relationship with dust and its pernicious effect if left unchecked. Thus practice or rituals of cleaning were key to upholding moral and social order – including respectable masculinities. In this way dust, and its wiping away, had long been taken up into the contradictory yet culturally and socially meaningful embodied spectrum of experience and expression of ‘being a man’ in collective working-class Silesian coal-mining life.

Today, taking that shower at the end of a shift was highlighted to me as one of the two ‘best moments of the day’, according to one foreman – that, and taking the mine-shaft lift at a speed of twelve metres per second back up to the sunlight. ‘They push and fight to get in there, always in

44 See Michael Ekers (2013: 876) for a related take on the ‘homosocial and homoerotic dimensions of work’ in a British Columbian tree planting industry and its relation to rural masculinities.

45 This was also true in the domestic environment, explored in more depth in chapter five. While in the past this was more emphatically taken up as a positive material-symbolic indication of manliness, in contemporary postsocialist Poland such a condition takes on more and more ambivalent and fraught meanings (see chapters six and seven).
such a hurry to leave, and then they stand around having a cigarette in the open air, I don’t get it!’, he laughed. ‘It’s the psychology of the work I guess’. This psychology is symbolized in the simplicity of the miners’ flag – half black, half green. The lower black half symbolizes the dirty subterranean world of the mine, while the green half symbolizes the colourful, bright, airy and clean world above – expressing the coal miners’ longing for sunlight and living matter, as I was told. This longing for the return was true also for wives. Everyday, so the stories go, a post-war Silesian woman would wait at the doorway to the household to kiss her husband goodbye and part with the typical miners’ greeting ‘Szczęśliwość Boże’ (the luck of God be with you), not knowing if he would return. At close of day, wives would anxiously watch in windows through twitching curtains until their husbands were home, whereupon they would be bathed, clothes washed, and fed. Particularly on Saturdays, the last day of the working week, children would wash their father’s legs in a basin as a mark of respect, while the wife was to help make the husband clean, and fully respectable, before attending church on Sunday. Such was the psychological antidote for coal’s grueling labours, part of the localized means of social and spiritual reproduction that made mine-work possible. In the late 1950s, early 1960s, washrooms appeared on the mine sites and coal’s dirt was increasingly more strictly segregated and left behind the workplace gates.

Coal dust’s materialities forged partnerships with wifely domestic labour to co-construct displays of a Silesian woman’s care and social worth too. Joseph Amato (2001: 76) describes how the industrial revolution brought about a new era of dust, but that, paradoxically, it therefore also ‘mounted an arsenal of tools and chemicals for cleaning up bodies, homes, and cities’ such as ‘brooms, brushes, shovels, feather dusters, scouring pads, soaps, and caustic sodas’. In the ensuing ‘great cleanup’, cleanliness became a matter of good moral and social practice in the face of new dirt. In Silesia this was especially so out of intense necessity, and women were at the frontline of this arduous struggle for respectability in the home. If home operates, as in many cultures, as a symbolic safespace, where ‘the greatest control over intrusions from others’ is exercised, and which thus underpins our greatest hopes for protection and freedom (Edelstein, 2002: 559), it does so in Silesia through the unpaid acts of social reproduction of female ecological labour. This was particularly remembered in the form of at least fortnightly, if not weekly, washing of windows. As Katarzyna Kwapisz-Osadnik (2006: 19) writes:

Coal leaves behind a residue; it dirties your hands, face, clothes. Coal is dirt that is not easy to remove. Housewives in Silesia fight with this dirt.. Paradoxically, thanks to this characteristic of coal, Silesia… was famous for its clean windows and white, starched
curtains and shirts. A love of order and cleanliness became inscribed into the naive image of Silesia’s inhabitants.

As mentioned in the historic overview to this thesis, Silesia’s central values of hard-work, religion, family and cleanliness, set them apart from the rest of Poland as proof of their closer connection to Europe through Germanization, as more ‘civilized’ (Wódz and Wódz, 2006). In Silesia, such tales have achieved almost legendary status in the folksy narration of Silesia’s everyday coal heritage. In her research on Silesian identities and self-stereotypes, Jolanta Tambor (2008: 88) finds, for example, that ‘the passion for cleanliness’ was linked by some to awareness of a much greater need for cleaning, scrubbing and washing in Silesia due to pollution. However, for many it simply became part of a mythical construction of Silesian identity as emerging from the intrinsic pure spiritual character of ‘the people’. One respondent quoted from a local newspaper article on ‘The things we were afraid of in the 20th century’ (in Tambor, 2008: 89, translated from the original Polish by the author) wrote evocatively:

Silesian housewives were afraid of dirt. Everything was dirty: the mine, the slagheaps, the streets, the air. The interior, staircase and the courtyard in front of the family home had to shine with purity... Wooden floors and tables were scoured with wire brushes, windows were spotless, and, in them, snow-white curtains were the calling card of the ideal hostess. White drapes hung on the walls above the door or covered kitchen shelves or cupboards, necessarily starched, embroidered with beautiful patterns, and decorated with lace. But a squeaky clean flat was not all. Each wife looked after her husband and children before they left the house too. A white shirt and a fresh handkerchief in your pocket were essential. Added to this, polished shoes, clean nails and well trimmed hair. Because that is what a real Silesian looks like, not afraid of anything except dirt.

A quasi-nostalgia for a strictly gendered world, long since destabilized and redefined through upheavals into the post-traditional capitalist market, belies an affectionate attachment to dirt’s capacity, with its attendant codified practices, to paradoxically support the maintenance of conservative order and familiarity. In a sense if the air is polluted today, it is because women are no longer tied to the home cleaning up coal as they were always tasked with doing. ‘Smog’ is understood not as an ecological phenomenon, but a social one – signaling the moral decay and degeneration of the collective – a tainting of innocence and naivety and disturbing of previously internal, self-disciplined order protected through industrial taboo.

Yet, today, while gender roles are much more distributed, there still persists a strong ethos of women’s work in the home, and many wives of coal miners that I met told me their husbands
would not allow them’ to work (see chapter six). Housework was still women’s work – including looking after the health of the children and household at large, and washing windows (as well as airing out the house) was still a central part of this role. This role extended into housekeepers at the mine too – for women largely worked in the processing plant where coal was sorted into its differing qualities, thus ‘cleaned’, and in the lamp room where equipment was stored and cleaned, as cleaners, laundry room workers, and washroom attendants. Their roles were to keep things tidy and wipe up the dust – which, if it accumulates, can be a fire hazard. To this day, back in the home too, a ‘real Silesian woman’ maintains this ‘tradition’, thus keeping social shaming at bay. Although less frequently, since there is less palpably visible dirt (or dust) to contend with since the closure of much industry in the 1990s, today it is a matter of pride and course to wash one windows thoroughly, particularly for Easter, when spring cleaning takes on a Catholic connotation as preparation for the greeting of Jesus Christ’s resurrection, and much commenting upon the cleanliness of one’s hostess’s windows forms the basis of polite small talk. ‘Oh you have been washing your windows, I see!’, was a way to complement the hostess for the order of her home, or ‘I washed my windows yesterday’, was a way for the hostess to share the pride of her labour. Clean windows ensures that one’s external visage to the world outside presents a face of good moral hygiene and respectability, including displays of proper gendered achievements.

Of course fear was not just of the dirt itself, but of the social scrutiny it brought to bear. The dense social network made sure to police such behaviours with risks of shame for those who failed to live up to its moral standards. Dirty windows, in turn, are frowned upon as a sign of slovenliness, moral disorder, and even ‘social pathology’ within the home, referring to class aspersions about perceived deviant, possibly criminal, behaviour linked with poverty. For example, one miner’s wife I frequently visited, would say about some former neighbours – ‘They never cleaned their windows - the one that looked out onto the street on the ground floor was filthy! I knew they were not so well off, but they could at least clean!’ Another, shuddered when she told me about a former mining town she sometimes drove through where the mine had been closed for some years – ‘the windows are just so filthy, they’re broken, it is just so sad, that kind of ‘pathola’ (short for ‘pathology’). The shame of poverty, and lower class standing, always risked sticking to dust’s visible accumulations. A sign of a world out of joint.

46 Today, more than 90% of women and men believe that childcare, for example, is primarily the role of the woman (Chustecka, 2010: 89). Within mining families in particular a traditional gender has been most resistant to change – in the 1990s, 75% of coal miner wives remained in the sphere of unpaid domestic labour (Klimczak-Ziółek, 2011: 32).
The labour of cleaning windows was thus further linked to practices and economies of feminine care as a substitute for a retrenched socialist state. Danusia, the ex-miner’s-wife I lived with in a former mine-built apartment block, would pay weekly visits to three elderly ladies who lived alone – one of them was psychologically unwell and very unable to carry out everyday practical tasks in the home. Danusia would therefore go over once a month to wash her windows as a way to support her and maintain her standing in society – to avoid the shame of social scrutiny which might cast her out of its belonging. ‘We don’t have good social care in Poland’, Danusia would tell me, therefore such small networks of informal caring performed by women were essential to the maintenance of social wellbeing and order. The woman asked her ‘how can I repay you for your help?’ Knowing that she had little money, Danusia would tell her ‘you can pray for me and my son-in-law who is not well’ – prayer, cleanliness, care, and health intersect through the act of washing windows. She remarked that in today’s world people only do things for money. Window washing thus also performs a perceived disappearing Catholic morality of Silesian solidarity; an ethic of feminine intergenerational care where state neglect, directed by ‘Warsaw’, has left people to rot and ruin in the uncaring, greedy, materialistic capitalist present. Washing windows was a mark of disappearing and marooned Silesian moral values upheld through women’s work.

Windows, too, have a further final special symbolic significance in Silesia. Historically, the home has been a refuge from the Political in a world where frequent occupations, war, authoritarian regimes and forced cultural assimilation processes made particularly the ‘Silesian’ household the bastion of self-preservation, a sense of powerlessness the norm, and a need for adapting to one’s surroundings a necessity for survival. Kazimiera and Jacek Wódz (2006: 37-38; 31) call this the necessary ‘sacralization’ of ‘homeliness’. Likewise under the socialist regime, David Kideckel (2008: 130) notes that socialist societies treated ‘home as a haven’ from state surveillance and political performance. Under communism, for example, infamously the ‘kitchen table’ was the locus of any politically possible conversation (Roxburgh, 2017; The Kitchen Sisters, 2014). The ‘Political’ otherwise was impossible. Looking out through windows is thus a means through which the world ‘out there’ was observed and kept at a distance or felt to be encroaching. Barbara Firla (2012: 54–55, Translated from the original Polish by the author) has more to say on the historical context of this:

Observation from this position [looking out of the window] creates a certain distance to that which is outside. This indifference to what is on ‘the outside’ can explain the history of Silesia. Frequent shifts in borders and resultant state affiliations have meant that that which
is ‘outside’ was perceived as transient and changeable, while durable stability was secured by only what was ‘inside’. That is why looking out of a Silesian window can be understood as a metaphor for the way in which reality is received by inhabitants of this region.

As a result, Fidelis (2010: 134), quoting Polish historian Wojciech Swiatkiewicz, writes that the response to this turbulent history was highly gendered, in that ‘many looked up to the family rather than a national community as the social entity that was the ‘clearest, most lasting, and resistant to historical shifts” and thus ‘traditional division of gender roles became more significant for Silesian than any ‘national, linguistic, political, or cultural loyalties’. Thus ‘[r]esponsible for nurturing the family, women functioned as symbols of continuity in Silesian tradition’ – and the pristine home became the site of this stability. It was thus explained to me, with frustration, by smog-concerned residents that people in Silesia care mostly about what happens in one’s ‘four walls and a ceiling – whatever happens beyond the window is not a matter for concern’. But there is enormous historic value placed in being able to adjust to one’s surroundings, as much as keep one’s head down and get on with the life one has. Over lunch with miner friends, for example, Franek, 71, tells me ‘We’ve had Hitler, we’ve had wars, we survived! We still lived! And Communism and this Capitalism, it’s all the same - we learnt to dance to that tune now we learnt to dance to this one... it's the same thing’. In this way national traumas, exposures of biological and political kinds, structural slow violences, and an ethos of survival could fuse in the downplaying of the severity of pollution as yet another event outside of the realm of one’s influence. Thus you learn to adjust or you leave – and leaving has only been an option for the majority very recently. In this way, as long as one’s home is visibly clean inside to any wandering external gaze, the sociocultural sense is that all is held in check, since the world beyond the window, and here literally the air itself, is outside one’s realm of control. Work, home and Church were the trinity that mattered, and gender in a life of dust drew spiritual sustenance from them.

This spatial-symbolic alienation from the separate realm of the supposed ‘Political’ I noticed to this day. This was particularly the case for speaking about air pollution, and particularly true for women, for whom the public world outside the window is designated a highly masculine zone. For example, speaking to a young female worker in the lamp room, she raised the issue of smog. ‘The air in Silesia is not great, we live in this crap (‘syf’). I guess it has to be this way’, she was looking out of the window as we talked at the grey day outside. ‘That’s how it is, she said. ‘The city are trying to do what they can about it’, waving her arm towards the window in the direction of the town, ‘I guess it has to be that way’, she repeated with a sigh. Later, when I asked her about
smog directly she became defensive - ‘it’s always been like this! Anyway we are used to it’. ‘Being used to it’ had meant gendered identities and subjectivities had become core means of its normalization. Industrial ecological intimacy at work again.

Cleaning and washing, bodies and windows, then, are about ways that livelihood and life itself have been locally maintained, and encroaching chaos and disorder, kept at bay – how Silesian dirt’s ambivalence, and its dark intimations of the fine line between bestiality and humanity, poverty and civilization, denigration and respectability, shame and home, have been negotiated and managed to meaning-producing effect through gendered organization. Clean bodies and windows became ‘signs of life’ (Reno, 2014) and persistent existence despite hardships, acting as localized defences against coal’s dark sides – whether pollution or the sinking into the shame of poverty or post-industrial depression.

Thus, even though visible dirt is less of an issue today in the world outside, the cultural practices of washing and of cleaning windows is still embedded as an internally-policied, moral-social code against dust’s stigmas and simultaneously a point of performing Silesian masculine and feminine worth in spite of, or through, it. Thus it still forges partnerships in the co-production of meaningful and valued regional, class- and gender-based identities, upholding coal’s hegemonic patriarchal order and normalizing pollution in the process, precisely as this arrangement becomes increasingly unstable. In a context where gendered roles and identities are pluralizing, where fewer and fewer people are willing to ‘get dirty’ in mining work for the kind of pay and shrinking benefits on offer (see chapter seven), and where opportunities to work abroad are now possible, and where aspirations to middle-class recognition are growing, attunement to coal’s abrasions only goes so far for a younger generation. This part of the coal health ecosystem is becoming more fragile, the sensorium is shifting again, and desires for cleaner environments – whether working or living – make adapting to coal more challenging, more fraught – and more at risk of calling forth class-inflected shame.

Communist-era-informed perceptions of ‘what counts as a healthy body’, what kinds of pollutants are unhealthy, and ‘what a healthy body is in the context of toxic natures’ (Lora-Wainwright, 2017), particularly mining work, has also been fundamental to the ways that exposure to pollution has been understood and normalized as much as enrolled into a sense of ‘us’. It is to this I turn next.
Civilization’s discontents and industrial bodily natures: Silesian embodied perspectives on place, bodies, pollutants and health

Silesia’s long history of coal-based industrialization and ‘dustiness’ have led to localized perceptions of Silesian ‘nature’ and bodies, or ‘bodily natures’ (Alaimo, 2010), as inevitably tainted or corrupted – a phenomenon that Lora-Wainwright (2017) in the context of an industrial town in China calls resignation to ‘toxic natures’. Everything in Silesia is ‘mennmade’ and so considered compromised. Due to centuries of intense mining, even the landscape is the most anthropomorphized in Europe (Dulias, 2016). This was seen, as described earlier, through a Catholic lens of original sin, inevitable degeneration and human burden. The recounting of memories of pollution (like those earlier of dirty windows and smeared shirt-collars) added to the sense of pollution as a natural background condition – there was no ‘edenic’ time to return to when things were pure. Thus, Silesian bodies, materializing with Silesia’s anthropocenic natures, had to be purified in order to be cleansed of this sin – this time through embodied perceptions of environments, bodies, pollutants and health that rendered their inter-relation meaningful. From this perspective bodies were not impermeable but tough, stoical, hardy, resilient and resistant to civilization’s polluting effects, even as they were always-already compromised. Health, on the other hand, was a matter of inner moral integrity, grace and active practices of recuperation, or purification, (which I will outline later). Bearing such burdens well was what made one morally virtuous.

For a start, Silesian bodies were ‘different’ by their very nature (including their position within it), and this is what made them Silesian. This was because, as David Harvey (1998: 99) has commented, ‘class, racial, gender, and all manner of other distinctions are marked upon the human body by virtue of the different socio-ecological processes that do their work upon that body’. Industrial ecological intimacy marked off ‘the people’ from outsiders in embodied terms. Coal’s labours particularly shaped Silesian bodies in class terms – physically, through postures, comportments, size, shape and texture of bodies, as well as phenomenologically, through producing the sensorium, a process that can be understood as a kind of embodied ‘attunement’ (Stewart, 2011) or altered ‘somatic mode of attention’ (Csordas, 2013). Working at the mine, for both men below and the women working above in the processing plants, lamp rooms, wash rooms and equipment distribution centres, was a daily negotiation of dust. Conditions below ground were of course exceptionally intense. A young miner described them:
It’s loud, sometimes the machines give up to 120 decibels, and the norms are set at 80, so you have to wear earplugs, but even then you can go deaf. It’s hugely dusty, from the shearing machine, and it travels with the air that circulates around the mine. There are gases from the explosive materials used in extraction, like nitrogen dioxide, sulphur dioxide, which you are also exposed to. Its dark most of the time and the climate keeps changing – from hot to cold. It’s warm because we are extracting deeper, it’s humid, sometimes there is water leaking, you are wearing uncomfortable clothes, dirt, dust all the time. Machines that are constantly whirring too.. rocks that can fall on your head.. its just dangerous, everywhere there is a hazard. In such conditions to talk about any kind of comfort.. it just isn’t there.. Everything that is against the notion of comfort occurs there, below, in the work of a miner.

As mining bodies labour in such conditions, they seek to both fulfill the demands placed upon them as commodities in the production process, as well as maintain their own bodily integrity and wellbeing - a tension that has ‘animated’ the industry for much of its recent history worldwide (Smith Rolston, 2013: 586). In such conditions of discomfort their bodies are forged. Through such labour, I was told, it ‘makes you into a tough person – it toughens you up’. The mining body becomes resistant through the development of calluses, thicker skin (literal and metaphorical), stronger muscles, and leathery hands. ‘You can tell a miner from the grip he gives you in a handshake – his biceps have to develop fast!, a foreman told me. Older miners who had worked below for 25 years had hands and fingernails that were never quite free from ingrained coal dust (see chapter six). This ecological intimacy shaped their perceptions and perspectives in the world above too. For the ‘experiential world, the physical presence, the subjectivity and the consciousness’ of a person are ‘partially if not predominantly forged in the fiery crucible of the labour process’, writes David Harvey (1998). Thus, Stefania Barca (2014: 13, 17) argues, it is workers’ embodied experiences of labour that mediate and produce their ‘ecological consciousness’, such as ‘the environmental issues at stake’ - including in relation to smog. For one kind of exposure informed and re-situated the other.

For example, if one worked in mining, intimate daily visceral contact with coal’s material presence mean that one’s sensoriums was often less aggravated by smells, textures and densities of polluted airs outside the mine. As one miner put it: ‘Compared to what I breathe down there, I don’t notice it!’ In this way embodiment of overlapping ecological territories – the mine and the wider industrial region – intersected to produce ‘Real Silesians’ and their capacities to ‘notice’ or ‘not notice’ ‘smog’. At the same time, if one was ‘used to’ daily life in a polluted environment from birth, it was believed that one may be able to accept the discomfort of mining more readily in the
first place. This was so also for female workers, as one 43-year-old woman who worked in the lamp room (where headlamps required for male miners who work below are stored, distributed and maintained) confirmed: ‘When I first started working here I got ill - I had problems with my throat, but you get used to it fast. Anyway, there is dust everywhere – the air outside is worse!’ Another 48-year-old woman chimed in: ‘You are born here, you grow up here. You are Silesian – you don’t notice these things’. Her 52-year-old workmate added - ‘Silesians don’t feel such things, they just live’. In this way, normalization of dirt’s stigma and harm was reclaimed as proof of or evidence of embodied identity, while ‘sensitivity’ to pollution marked one off as un-Silesian, not ‘from here’; Other.47

This was also true in terms of a particular class-based attitude and industrial occupational ideology regarding health. Industrially-rooted, working-class and regionally hegemonic Darwinian, and masculinist, notions, expressed most convincingly by older Silesians, of being ‘used to’ and ‘adapted’ biologically to pollution framed ‘insider’ discourses on the body and health, contributing to its normalization through moral transmutation. ‘My family are from the seaside – people look much younger there’, said 45-year-old trade union leader Jurek. ‘My grandma has lived for 89 years by the sea, she has such soft skin on her face! The average life expectancy in Silesia is of course far less than in the rest of the country, and of course it’s linked to the pollution. A person can get used to anything, hey!’ Some stories recounted that even scientists had found that Silesians were more resistant and resilient to pollution’s hazards from a health perspective too – a rare example of when science had simply stepped in to verify common knowledge48. One retired miner told me that, for example, medical research had shown that ‘people who are not from Silesia are much less resistant

47 Indeed, I noticed that those who complained about smog on internet fora were often subject to tirades of abuse for being disloyal to the region – or ‘anti-Silesian’ (not ‘the people’).
48 While I could not find such a study for Polish Silesia, a similar recent study has found genetic adaptation to polluted environments in the Czech industrial city of Ostrava in the neighbouring Moravian-Silesian region (Rossnerova et al., 2017). People from this city were found to be more able to repair genetic damage caused by smog than in the nearby city of Prague. An older study conducted in Los Angeles in 1982, which compared the health effects of photochemical smog on recent arrivals and long-term residents in the LA air basin, found that the former ‘judge that the effects of smog on their health are more serious and threatening. They experience greater discomfort and respiratory related symptoms than the long-term residents’ (Evans et al., 1982: 1056). However, there was no evidence for biochemical adaptation – rather this was linked to psychological coping mechanisms. Indeed, the study concluded that ‘long-term residents of the Los Angeles basin, relative to newcomers, are more likely to deny the effects of photochemical smog on their health’. We can understand a similar dynamic occurring here in Silesia, although this should be understood more from the perspective of the embodiment of structural class hierarchies rather than through the ‘apolitical’ (Robbins, 2012) ecological lens of environmental psychology or biological models.
and more sensitive to the pollution here. We Silesians who were born here are less susceptible, we
don’t get as ill, our organisms have got used to it.’

In fact, particularly older people claimed that polluted environments were in fact necessary to maintain their health – that they felt ill at ease or unwell when, for example, leaving the region and going to the cleaner climbs of the mountains or the seaside. This was in some ways humorous, but it also underscored an embodied sense of belonging to one’s ‘natal’ environment as a necessary life support, dirt and all. One 54 year old female worker told me that her Silesian mother went to visit relatives in a village outside Warsaw. ‘The air was so clean there that when she got home after a week she was really ill!’ Another 72-year old retired miner with black lung disease and his wife told me that they preferred not to go away on holiday as they take too long to adjust to a different climate, and feel terrible. Silesian biologies, then, don’t just adapt to exposure to pollution or become with it – many need it. In this way, place and ‘local’ (Lock, 2017, 2018) or ‘exposed biologies’ (Wahlberg, 2018) were fused through breathing and dwelling in pollution’s ubiquity; indeed being Silesian meant breathing Silesia. Silesian bodily differences, in turn, were a marker of origin and belonging; a quasi ethno-territorial biological nativist populist rootedness, or regional ‘physical citizenship’ (Parr, 2010: 22), marking off ‘insiders’ from ‘outsiders’ in material, embodied ecological terms: ‘we the morally pure industrial people’ from corrupt elites. For younger workers – the postsocialist generation – however, the trope of ‘being used to’ exposure to wider Silesian pollution was less prevalent, since during the 1990s the air noticeably improved because of the rapid closure of industry during the transformation, thus the environmental baseline in turn shifted, and aspirations in turn moved, linked to wider social changes, (as I explore in chapter seven). However, working in mining today still altered one’s relationship to wider issues of environmental exposure and reportedly made one less sensitive to its urgency. Embodying its effects was still a core part of making burdensome work with coal possible and bearable, and doing so defined one’s moral worth as a hard-working, virtuous person. In turn, accepting that coal’s labour would effect your body as a noble sacrifice was also part of this act of purification.

It was generally accepted that working in coal mining would leave its imprint on one’s ‘organism’, as miner’s referred to their bodies, in terms of capacities, scars, and health consequences. ‘If you work in mining, you either have black lung, or you are deaf, or you go blind, or you have something wrong with your spine or shoulders- there is always something! We all have something wrong with us! Write that down!’ , said one 43-year-old miner, near to retirement age. In a region characterized by heavy, industrial labour, all work was considered to be a wearing away of
this industrial organism. Just as overuse and wear and tear of a machine accumulates over time in its mechanisms, so too a body gets used up, tired, and damaged as a result of usage. As another miner with black lung disease explained to me: ‘An organism with age starts to break down, like parts of a car, right? It’s the same with the parts of a person, they get used up, either the lungs or the heart, it’s the constant work, right? When they are new its great, but when they are old they are like a material that has been frayed.’ This wearing away expressed itself through the ageing process. While ‘everyone starts of healthy, young, and beautiful’, the generally held belief, contra to the supposed usual Western optimism that characterizes perspectives on future health prospects (Edelstein, 2002: 566), was that old age brings nothing but ill-health. ‘People here are prepared and expect to be ill when they are old. People simply calmly accept that this is a fact of life’. As another miner joked with me - ‘There is no such thing as a healthy person here, only a person who has been incorrectly tested, or not at all’.

Thus, industrial life’s scars and marks were believed to eventually catch up with one in the end in some form of disease or illness depending on the quality of the body. Just as the intrinsic quality of a machine will determine whether or not it breaks down or expresses ailments, so too the inherent quality or characteristics of the industrial organism was perceived as shaping its proclivity towards ill-health or disease. One was either more or less weak or susceptible.49 This belief was expressed in the notion that mining work ‘comes out’ in the body in old age, or that disease is ‘triggered’ or ‘induced’ (as though lying in wait) depending on circumstances:

‘With the passage of time it all accumulates, no? So if you work 20 or so years in the mine it all gathers together, right? And then it all comes out in old age.’ - Bolek, 56-year-old retired miner.

‘You have to really work 10, 15, 20 years down there for the disease [black lung] to be triggered, and its not always like that, that everyone will have the disease, because it can also be that it won’t be there, or you avoid it, or, I don’t know, after 10 years your organism simply becomes susceptible to it and catches it. And that’s it. And its also depends on the characteristics of the given organism, right?’ - Wojtek, 54-year old retired miner.

In this way, it was believed that one is born either with the susceptibility to such illnesses or the grace not to acquire them, reflecting a generally held Catholic industrial-eyed view that compromise, even corruption, are a natural part of earthly life, as outlined earlier. Bodies,

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49 Similarly, Trond Berge (2012: 90) found that physical pollutants in an industrial town in Romania were implied to ‘primarily affect people who are already deficient in some sort of way’. 
environments, societies and politics are fallen, or corrupted, by the powers that be, and that is ‘just how it is’ – particularly as ‘This is Poland’. This intersected with structural oppressions caused by a weak, underfunded and faulty national health system, in which corruption and privatization made access to fast, reliable, and affordable healthcare a privilege for the few, combined with historic pessimism with regards to political accountability and lack of democratic faith. What made this burden morally worthwhile was the sense of classed, gendered and place-based nobility and virtue attached to being able to bear it – like only a real Silesian could.

The role of coal dust in conceptions of this corruption, however, both in environmental and health terms, was ambiguous, if not distanced. The belief in coal dust’s ontology as dirt to be cleaned or washed away rather than toxic as such held true also for the internal body, including the lungs. Despite the fact that the link between coal dust and occupational diseases such as pneumoconiosis has been known about since at least the nineteenth century (McIvor and Johnston, 2007: 65), local perceptions told a different story. To my surprise, coal dust, paradoxically, although a source of discomfort, was often emically not considered a direct threat to health. Since coal mining produces heterogeneous kinds of dusts – coal itself was let ‘off the hook’ so-to-speak. The

50 Complaints and tales of corruption (e.g. under-the-table-payments to doctors to access required care, conflicts of interest within medical procurement policies, privileged access through ‘contacts’) within experiences of accessing the public health system were a common feature of my fieldwork. This correlates with national-level findings that public perception of the healthcare sector is very poor, seen as the second-most corrupt sector in Poland, after politics. Furthermore, public healthcare expenditure in Poland is low-5.4% of GDP compared to the 10% EU average. (ECORYS., 2017: 77). A pervasive feeling of insecurity about a vulnerable health system is, according to some experts from the region, part of what contributed to the fact that coronavirus restrictions were initially implemented early and with greater success in Eastern Europe, when compared with the West, Poland included (Walker and Smith, 2020).

51 I could only speculate how this ‘folk’ belief came about, yet it persists to a large degree, part joke, part local knowledge handed down through generations, though less often amongst the young, particularly those without intergenerational family in mining, suggesting it is a form of cultural knowledge. Since pneumoconiosis was recognized in Poland as an occupational illness as late as 1980 by the Interfactory Strike Committee under the Jastrzębie Agreement, which eventually led to the formation of Solidarity, this perhaps provides the wider medical and official historical context in which such narratives have sedimented themselves. By contrast, coal workers’ pneumoconiosis was recognized by the British government for industrial compensation claims in 1943 (McIvor and Johnston, 2007: 2).

52 Coal mining produces not just ‘pure’ coal dust – small fragments, 2 – 5 microns in diameter, of coal’s crumbling materiality (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), 1995: 14) – but also other kinds of dust, such as silica dust, stone dust (dust from stone that is contiguous to and so extracted with the coal seam), and rock dust (distributed in the mine to prevent mining explosions and usually made of pulverized white limestone). In practice, these often intermingle: ‘Coal mine dust is a complex and heterogeneous mixture containing more than 50 different elements that include carbon, crystal silica, and other trace elements such as boron, cadmium, nickel, iron, antimony, lead, and zinc, among others’ (Rey et al., 2015). Thus silica is often part of the coal dust itself, not separable from it. However, from the perspective of miners, these dusts are separately bounded entities, ‘pure’ in their form, thus coal dust (as a pure form of ‘carbon’ in Polish) itself was not harmful. Normalizing exposure, therefore, has also relied upon the discursive and so material neutralization of the local meaning of ‘coal’ itself.
belief that coal dust was not harmful for the lungs was correlated to its understood material properties. The particles of coal dust were described as ‘rounded’ and thus did not ‘stick’ into one’s lungs, unlike stone, rock and silica dust. This, by comparison, was considered the ‘worst stuff’ causing cancer and black lung disease53 because it ‘beats’ itself into the lungs, lodging into the soft flesh, which is why it starts to cause disease through a process of gathering and hardening. Coal dust, on the other hand, was understood simply to collect in the throat and thus was perceived not as ‘harsh’, for it could be ‘washed away’, by taking a drink after one’s shift. Indeed, under the PRL, miners were given a quarter litre of warm milk after finishing their shift precisely to ‘wash down’ the dust. The alternative was to go to one of the numerous bars that then populated the surrounding area of the mine and have a beer with your colleagues, a usually daily social activity at the time, as one miner had described earlier.

When burnt, of course, coal’s materialities create a different set of industrial poisons. Yet, from miners’ perspectives, crucially, again, it was not coal that was understood to be the direct agent of contamination here either. Industrial ‘civilization’ as a whole was to blame, upholding the idea of Silesia’s greater civilizational development and thus closer relation to ‘Europe’, while relativizing its contamination as part of a broader, global narrative of manmade ecological decline linked to modernization that was as inevitable as it was irreversible.54 Thus coal as a substance became mixed up in all manner of other kinds of chemicals, toxins and materials produced by ‘civilization’s’ inevitable haze – simply, once again, the price one had to pay, and had a right to, for material progress and modern lifestyles - encapsulated in the saying ‘something for something’ (see chapter seven). This hegemonic masculinist idea that ‘dirt’ was inevitable and rational, likewise fed into resistance against the notion of ‘clean’ technologies, such as renewables - ‘there is no such thing as clean technology! Somebody has to pay the price! How do you think solar panels are made – with coal!’, I’d be challenged time and again. In many ways it seemed a more honest reading of eco-industrial modernity’s hidden externalities, yet it downplayed the severity of the matter and normalized industrial pollution once again, simultaneously dismissing any ‘eco’ imaginaries of ‘clean’ futures as irrational, utopian fantasy. Class-mediated Silesian’s (masculinist) industrial ecological intimacy had taught them that such notions, for them at least, were impossible.

53 In Polish, this is referred to as ‘dusty-lung’ disease – pylica.
54 This was also reflected in prevalent language regarding ‘civilizational diseases’ (such as allergies/asthma, cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular disease etc) that accompanied increasing industrial post-war modernity (see e.g. Betlejewski, 2007; Kuryłowicz and Kopczyński, 1986). It encapsulates resistance to narratives that sought to particularize Silesia’s environmental condition, particularly its coal, as abnormal – for example the WHO league tables that rendered Silesia the ‘most polluted place in Europe’ and pointed shamefully at Polish coal.
What one could do to cope with this fact, was rely on collective practices of purification. Alongside the somewhat fatalistic view that time would tell whether ill-health would ‘come out’ in the end, there was also the cultural perception that one could participate in practices that would atone for one’s industrial exposures, and cleanse and purify these burdens on an internal, bodily level. Such a perception had been fundamentally shaped by the second portion of the coal health ecosystem outlined earlier – the institutionalized designation of a metabolic rift between ‘industrial’ and ‘clean’ geographic zones in Poland supported by historic occupational access to collective subsidized holidays to the seaside, or mountains, to breathe clean air. ‘Nature’ in pristine form, would cleanse away the ills of industrial ecology. From a perception of pollution as simply dirt to be managed and cleaned away, exposure became something more internalized, unavoidable, embodied but manageable through the pursuit of balance and restorative purification. This was what I later found out to be a product of the Soviet-influenced idea of ‘rational recuperation’ combined with the older German-influenced idea of ‘natural healing’ of the 19th century sanatorium movement. Soviet approaches to workers’ bodies particularly resonated strongly with my findings. Diane Koenker (2013: 13) writes: ‘Like a machine, a person needed repair and recuperation: socialist leisure restored the proletarian machine-body.’ It seemed that this official Soviet-influenced industrial discourse had filtered through into the everyday lifeworlds of how miners conceived of their bodies in Polish Silesia to this day, and therefore how they thought about ‘smog’ and its bodily risks too.

Taking the cleansing airs: Embodied community through building immunity

One of my first introductions to coal mining life was accompanying two coachloads of trade union members up to the Baltic coast for a vacation in early May. In total, I went on three such organized week-long holidays, one to the seaside, and two to the mountains, in the Beskids and Zakopane region. They became a key entry point into the community. These were subsidized by the mine as part of welfare benefits, or ‘privileges’ – a leftover legacy of the socialist system and core business for trade union activities. It was recounted as one of the main surviving draws of membership. Retired mining couples (50+) were the predominant punters, but younger miners (in their 20s - 40s) 55 As Eva Eylers (2014: 670) writes, the sanatorium movement which began life in Lower Silesia, then part of Germany, in the 1850s by Dr. Hermen Brehmer, placed the notion of ‘natural healing’ of man’s rift with nature caused by urbanization and industrialization at its core. Accordingly, the aim of the sanatorium movement was ‘to demonstrate that the human body could be rested, relaxed and returned to health […] through a period of separation from the unhygienic living conditions of much urban […] life’. Rather than to act upon the city, the idea was thus to look for a cure outside it. The theory of the ‘immune place’ in nature was born.
also came along with their families. To my surprise, and without any prompts from me, I found that Silesian air pollution and escaping from it was a very central part of these trips. Indeed later, in the hallways of the separate trade union building that lay a few hundred metres from the mine entrance I saw printed adverts for such expeditions semi-ironically touting such benefits - ‘Come and get what you can’t in Silesia: clean air!’ I was struck by the fact that, contrary to received notions, there was a high awareness of the issue, and in this relaxed, ‘insider’, setting, it was an open topic of conversation – indeed motivation for participation. Speaking to the receptionist at the holiday complex, which had been built by a Silesian mine in the 1970s for their workers, a common practice at the time, he told me that roughly 80% of their clientele comes from Silesian industry. ‘They come here to breathe’, he told me, with an ironic smile and a wink. He was himself from a former mining town in the region.

This purification practice as coping mechanism had long historical precedents. In 1933, the celebrated Silesian author Gustaw Morcinek (2010: 23–24) wrote in a book promoting tourism to the area how ‘Green Silesia’, or the Beskid mountains, operated as an antidote for industrial life. They were ‘the lungs for the huge industrial conglomeration of Black Silesia. Where would a person be able to protect himself from that smoke and soot, if not in the Beskids?... The Beskids are one giant sanatorium for human nerves’, he wrote.56 In the 1950s Leszek Dzięgiel (in Whitehead, 2005: 284–285) finds that indeed a distinctive sub-culture of ‘urban escapism’ into the mountains developed in Silesia as a response to postwar urbanization and industrialization by those who wished to resist Stalinist imposed collective engagement with nature and pursue individual political freedom. Yet later, it was precisely the working classes, though such collective organisation, that were to have access to such luxuries – out of a necessity to keep the production line going. It was now not just nerves that required soothing, an elite concern, but worn bodies that required repair.57 And ‘pure’ nature, industrial nature’s normalizing, moral foil, would offer the goods.

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56 ‘Going to the waters’ in Silesia had a long history, and sanatoria, based on the sciences of climatotherapy and balneology, date back to the 19th century. The first sanatorium in Europe was indeed opened in then-German Lower Silesia in 1854 for the purposes of healing tuberculosis (see Eylers, 2014; Frank, 2012; Geisler, 2014; Koenker, 2013; Warren, 2006).

57 See Greg Mitman’s (2007) account of hay fever in 19th century America, or William Cronon’s (1996) famous account of ‘wilderness’ for how being able to ‘escape’ urban and industrial pollution has for centuries in Europe and America been available only to the elite or upper classes, looking to soothe nervous systems or aesthetic traumas. Under the Soviet system, such an escape was deliberately opened up to the working classes as part of a massification of nature and its curative benefits in the service of industry (Koenker, 2013). This demonstrates that access to escape, and an ecological consciousness that values such escape, is not inherently elitist, but depends on the political economic system in which it participates.
Subsidized group holidays for workers date back to post-Second World War when in 1949 the Communist government established the ‘right to rest’ and initiated a programme of vacations for workers as part of their ideological intentions to build a unified working-class culture and identity. But it was in the early 1960s, when industries, such as coal mines, steel works, the shipyards, and railways, began a concerted effort to build a network of vacation homes for their workers. In the 1970s, under the new national leadership of Silesian-born First Party Secretary, Edward Gierek who came to power under the promise of ameliorating the ‘pent-up consumer needs of Polish society… following rioting over shortages and price hikes’ (Szczerski and Wołaniska, 2011: 181), a rapid boom in the construction of holiday houses and complexes built by and for Silesian industry workers occurred. The ‘decade of luxury’ (ibid) was to begin. Growing concerns with the health of industrial residents and awareness of ecological damage that began to dawn at this time motivated this too. Additional ‘lungs’ for Silesia were to be developed through the planned zoning of Poland’s geography into designated ‘industrial’ (dirty) and ‘natural’ (clean) spaces. ‘Rest’ and ‘recovery’ were to be facilitated by the ‘therapeutic landscapes’ (Winchester and McGrath, 2017) or ‘immune places’ (Eylers, 2014: 667) of the latter by those living in the former. Poland’s vacation geography was thus structurally reinforced by an intensively centralized fossil-fuelled economy at this time. To this day, miners who recall the many such benefits of socialism that were largely the invention of Gierek, fondly credit him as the ‘good host’, with ‘looking after us’, defending Silesian interests as a Silesian within the wider corrupt Polish Communist regime.

For many workers, under Gierek, it was the first time that they went on something called a ‘holiday’, equally, the very first time the majority had left their home town or village. This was part and parcel of leaving peasant life behind, and becoming part of a conscious industrial working-class under the socialism instead. Alongside this, a new kind of pollution awareness began to develop as

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58 The 1970s was when access to information regarding the ecological situation in Poland (Cole, 1998), as well as the wider world, began to break through into media, though of course it was not until the 1980s that it became a rallying political issue through the Solidarity movement.

59 This was to include a planned ‘Forest Protection Belt’ around the ‘Upper Silesian Industrial District’ that was to be a more local antidote for urban industrial, densely populated life – a project that was never fully realised, yet parts of it stand to this day (Kurda and Pukowiec, 2013).

60 As such, it reflected the Marxian process of ‘metabolic rift’ whereby industrialization creates an increasing spatial ‘differentiation between country and city’ in a planned economy (Barca and Bridge, 2015: 371). Daniel Cole (1998: 17–18) writes that ‘due in part to Poland’s system of central socioeconomic planning, which focused industrial development in highly populated urban areas’ Silesia bore the brunt of heavy air pollution. In turn, other parts of the country - ‘most notably the northeast region—remained virtually unscathed by industrial development’. This highlights the way in which the Communist regime conceptualized nature as part of the industrial process of a cycle of work and restoration, which included the large-scale expansion of the public health system and sanatoriums for workers too (see Geisler, 2014).
opportunity for reflexive comparison through travel grew. Radek, one of my 70-year-old participants who worked as a foreman described his own experience of ‘learning’ to go on vacation and therefore ‘learning’ to perceive Silesia’s dirty airs, initiating a process of its conscious presence as part of localized identities:

People were used to the air – because if you sat here all the time, then a person didn’t sense it, you only sensed the difference when you went away to the seaside somewhere, or to the mountains, no? But people in Silesia, especially in the villages, well if you were born here you lived here like that all the time, very few people travelled anywhere, except those kind, right? Like doctors or something – the straightforward, what do you call it, peasant-worker, he didn’t really go anywhere. He had fields to attend to. Everyone accepts the environment they are born into. So at first they had to ask people to go on vacation. Me included.

He recalled the first time he went on such a trip with his family. They slept together in one room – clean, comfortable, perfectly nice. It was only a few days into the holiday that his then foreman came in and showed him that he actually had more rooms – they had a bedroom each! By the summers of the 1970s, the Silesian dialect was the dominant language on the Baltic coast (Oseka, 2013), and by the 1980s, workers holidays had come to be taken for granted. Thus subsidized vacations became a central part of an embodied construction of ‘we the Silesian people’, shaping localized perspectives on pollution, place, the body and health accordingly to this day with implications for smog, naturalizing pollution’s presence in urban, industrial centres as inevitable, morally right, and part of ‘who we are’ in return for progress’s promises.

Indeed, the slang Silesian word for going on holiday is ‘dychnąć’ – which comes from the word to breathe, ‘oddychać’. It means taking a break – a breather – from the toils and troubles of everyday life, particularly from work and Silesia. Yet it also of course meant escaping pollution. Diane Koenker (2013: 13) in her history of leisure and travel in the Soviet Union, writes that indeed holidays in the USSR were also referred to by the similar word – ‘otdykh’ – meaning ‘to recover one’s breath’. Again, Soviet conceptions of health and leisure seemed to still have echoes. As well as ‘taking a breather’, being on holiday was also referred to as ‘having a change in climate’, which medical doctors in Silesia also often prescribed patients suffering from all kinds of respiratory conditions and more, I was intrigued to hear time and again. Yet, this conception had both social and bio-ecological meaning. In Polish, literally ‘a climate change’ (zmiana klimatu) referred to both a change of physical climate, and also the social – a shift to a more relaxed, connected, fun, and collective space – a nostalgic throwback to socialist times where all were equal and solidarity was
easy to find in communal life (Mazierska, 2003). Leaving banality and competitive individualism behind, these holidays were a ‘break from reality’ – a chance to breathe easy. Holidays were both about building community as much as immunity (Esposito, 2011). In fact, I would witness how ‘Silesia’ as a region and embodied identity, ‘we, Silesians’, was further produced as such through this dialectical relationality between naturalized geographies of dirt and cleanliness. Taking the cleansing airs, breathing together with full lungs, fused the mining community together in a sociobiological collectivity. Trouble with breathing in Silesia gave one access to its moral membership.

Both trips to the mountain air and seaside air were said to be ‘good for the Silesian organism’ reflecting theories from the sanatoria movement regarding the therapeutic and healing benefits of ‘clean airs’. Yet coastal air had a particular coveted benefit – iodine. After driving overnight to the resort, my fellow travellers were eager to stretch their legs. Walking along the seashore with Bogusia and Tadek, a couple in their late 50s who adopted me for that week, in gortex jackets, the wind whipping against our cheeks, I was instructed to ‘breathe deeply’. Bogusia explained that it was the iodine they had specifically come for - said to be particularly accessible at this time of year when the waves are big and choppy and so enabling the salt in the sea to vaporize well. ‘The iodine will clean you out and build up your immunity against infections, against the dust’, said Bogusia in a motherly imparting of local wisdom. She was referring to the pollution back in Silesia, 16 hours coach ride away. The air this last winter, was ‘horrible - like breathing under water’, chimed in Tadek, ‘it would even hurt to go outside’. Tadek had retired from mining six months ago after 25-years on the job. His lungs still often ached from working in those dusty conditions. He liked to come and inhale the seaside air because, as he put it, it gave him some relief, cleaned out his lungs and ‘oxygenated his organism’. Bogusia added, ‘the iodine helps to keep you healthy in the winter. Because in Silesia it’s all mines, mines, mines, nothing else. That’s why we come here, because of the pollution. That’s just how it is’. They both laughed. I asked how it was that people came to accept this situation. ‘What else can we do?’, Bogusia asked me. After a pause, she added, as if tempering any potential negative judgment in industrial ecological intimate fashion, ‘But you know, we love Silesia, because that is where we live and that is where we have spent our lives. It’s where we could live.’ So, here we were, hundreds of miles away from Silesia, and yet Silesia was still very present, written as it was into the bodies of the people who had journeyed here to cope with the world that was their home.
Couples like Bogusia and Tadek and others would take daily, if not twice daily, brusque walks along the coast as a deliberate and conscious activity of ‘taking in the iodine’61, no matter the weather. In fact, the windier the better. That’s because such vigorous exposure was considered to ‘toughen up’ the body and ‘build up’ its strength too.62 This would involve not simply walking as per usual, but at times opening ones arms wide and deeply inhaling, to deliberately haul in the medicinal properties of the air, thereby ‘making the most’ of the trip, as a number of holidaymakers put it. Everybody knew they needed to take at least one trip a year to the seaside, if not two, in order to cleanse their system, maintain their health and boost their immunity to last the winter. Such practices of breathing were thus not luxuries, but necessities for survival; a form of social reproduction – the ‘actions and processes that enable labourers to reproduce themselves from day to day’ (Valdivia, 2018: 550). In turn, access to ‘clean’ geographies, made ‘dirty’ ones morally and socially acceptable.

The curative effects were not just physical but also psychological. After lunch in the cafeteria, a noisy, self-service affair of soup, breaded pork escalope with red cabbage and potatoes, I took another walk along the beach, this time with Paulina, also in her 50s and previously a worker at the identification station at the mine, and former trade unionist. Unprompted, she started telling me - ‘I feel so much better by the sea – it lightens a person up. It’s all that iodine. You even breathe differently here – with your whole lungs! A person can’t manage without the sea! Because we live in Silesia, in this huge dustiness, right? It’s always been this way, because there, there is civilization; mines and ironworks, and just apartment blocks and, well, the dustiness... As soon as you get back to Katowice you already feel the difference, it sort of attacks you, that there is this huge pollution, you get headaches, your circulation is poor, things hurt. But here there is clean air.’ The clean air thus did not just cleanse her organism from the inside out, but ‘lightened’ her up, improved her mood and lifted low ‘self-feelings’ (samopoczucie) too. Clean mountain air on the other hand was reported to be good for other ailments. Of particular appeal, it reduced one’s

61 It is unclear where this focus on iodine came from, for I could not find any literature on this. One theory I can propose is that such a concern if not arose, then intensified, at the time of Chernobyl – the memory of which has indefatigably imprinted itself on my participants for those who were alive at the time. ‘We are Chernobyl children’– we all have something wrong with us!’, they joked. Iodine was the thing that was meant to stave off the negative effects of radiation, and it was proscribed by medical doctors for children in particular as a way to deal with the fallout. Zdenek Uherek and Veronika Beranska (2015: 80) in their ethnographic portrait of a small Ukrainian enterprise selling Iodine Spring Water find that within villages located in the Chernobyl area, ‘a generally held conviction that it is iodine that effectively eliminates the negative results of radioactivity’, a belief that ‘eventually led to shortages of its availability in the area’.

62 Similar ideas underpinned Soviet sanatoriums in the past based on the Soviet science of kurortologiia, in which ‘wild’ nature was understood to ‘toughen and strengthen the organism’ (Geisler, 2014: 14).
chances of having a hangover – enabling extra intake of vodka as welcome social lubricant. A change in climate had benefits for the social health of the collective mining body too – a highly prized yet reportedly disappearing value (see chapter eight).

While older, retired miners largely resigned themselves to the fact that ‘we all have something wrong with us’, younger miners (under 35) still working today increasingly demonstrated a more individualized view of the body and personal responsibility for health. They felt that there was much they should personally do to maintain, counterbalance and rectify the bodily damages accruing through their labour. If they did not, then any negative outcomes would be their own fault:

I think that work can of course disturb or impair your health a bit, but I think that if you look after your health after work, it’s not all that bad. You can simply get a hold of it, so that you don’t have so many problems with your health. You have to live aware, and function in an aware way. It’s not like that, that simply work… it can of course at some point harm you, because it sure doesn’t improve you, unless you work in a sanatorium or something haha, maybe… Work can harm, but, you can look after yourself at work and do something about it after work, right? - Szymon, 28-year-old exploitation worker.

When you are young you don’t think about health, only when your health stops performing, then we start going to the doctors. We destroy our own organism, we only have ourselves to blame. That’s what the doctor told me too. People are themselves to blame for finishing themselves off, no? The organism I mean. Because I could rest, I could take some days off, but I don’t. - Wojtek, 30-year-old preparation worker.

Yet rather than going on an organised union holidays, the notion of recuperation for them was framed in terms of more regular individualized routines of going to the gym, going jogging, or doing physiotherapeutic exercises, practices with a very short historical precedent that were signs of this increasingly precarious personalized and privatized labour of self-care in a neoliberal market

63 This change in tone towards more neoliberal ideas of individualized responsibility for health (Ward, 2015) were also reflected in health and safety signs at the mine. In faded paint on the brick walls of the wash house, still visible were signs from socialist times reading ‘the health of your (plural) and your (plural) comrade’s health is in your (plural) hands!’ In contrast, in the equipment room today, just before miner’s head to the shaft to go below, there was a large full-length mirror above which read ‘now you (singular) see on whom your (singular) health and safety depends!’ The formal employment structures of the mine have individualized health too – under socialism there was a pooled social fund for health; as soon as the transformation occurred, each miner was given an individual account, with health benefits accruing in proportion to individual earnings and days worked. Sick days now also have to be worked off – that is, if one takes a day off for sick leave, this day has to be worked in order to count towards the full twenty-five years of labour that qualifies you for retirement.
In turn, collective practices of purification, such as here internal cleansing of the organism, were becoming destabilized in the context of declining trade union membership, increasing appetite for individualized and privatized holidaying, cuts in subsidized holidays for retired miners (it was the last year that this would be on offer), as much as rising awareness of ‘smog’ found even in the places that are designated as ‘clean’ zones. Thus, whereas under Communism, pollution’s burdens were collectively handled and (alongside its benefits) relatively equally distributed with very little possibility for public contestation or unfavourable comparison through a strict taboo, today, this is not so. This meant that the connection between Silesia’s dust and Silesian people as a visceral community, itself a coping and purifying mechanism, was also dissipating – rather it was more and more a marker of Polishness itself.

The social license to operate for coal’s polluting presence that the coal health ecosystem stabilized was coming under increasing pressure, fraying at the seams, due to both intergenerational social change and shifting political context. Within an increasingly stratified society, where fewer and fewer people work in heavy industry, where more and more people travel individually, where social media and EU-democracy combine to give voice to new concerns, and when shifting ideals of modern ‘clean’ living, in which health, fitness and sleek aesthetics have become core values backed by a global advertising industry that sells such lifestyles, this burden was becoming less and less acceptable, or readily accountable for, particularly for a younger generation, causing mounting ‘friction’ (Tsing, 2004). The taboo was rapidly weakening, while the ‘status shield’ (Lucas, 2011) was no longer intact. Miners were left to fend for themselves. The issue of climate change had already rained down on the taboo from afar, but it was smog that truly began to crack it open – for it was a Polish issue, expressed by Polish people, and in the immediate locale.

As a result, air pollution was being dragged into awareness, like it or not, to become a ‘problem’ as defined by the encroaching risk society. One female worker, Irena, in the processing plant said: ‘We were just used to it before, we didn’t pay attention to it, but now after seeing it everywhere on Facebook, in the media, all over, you see it in a different way. You pay attention to it’. Miner Paweł added: ‘its only when they started to amplify it in the media that people really started to notice it – you started to look at it differently. Now you know what exceeding the norm by

64 I went to the gym a number of times with my 32-years-old mining friend, Michał. He told me most of his workmates are gym members. He also participated frequently in outdoor group fitness competitions, increasingly popular in Poland and Europe as a whole, that have been analyzed as possible surrogates for declining church attendance and the search for community in an age of increasing postsocialist individualization and alienation (Czepczynski, 2008).
65 Indeed, in 2016, 20% of all Polish spa towns, which are required to guarantee clean air in order to qualify for this status, were found to have air pollution levels far exceed the set norms (Derylo, 2016).
500% means it has become a problem before you didn’t think about it so much but you knew it was there.’ As another miner, Konrad, put it: ‘They never used to measure it so it didn’t exist before, but now they do, because there are norms that somebody made up, and so now there is smog’. Or as Artur, highlighted ‘last year there weren’t any of those mobile phone applications (to measure air quality) and so everything was fine, there was no problem’. The process of overheating (Eriksen, 2016a) was reaching intensified levels – and the room for manoeuvre narrowing.

Younger miners – a so-called ‘different generation’ – were in pursuit of a more ‘comfortable’ life than their older peers. They would prefer gas if they could afford it for use in domestic heating, and also wanted clean air because they aspired to Western (fabled ‘middle class’) ‘normality’ (see chapter seven) too, but not at the expense of their jobs, earnings or morally stigmatizing coal and thus themselves. Poland’s relative poverty made coal the only rational option still. Poland was poor – coal is ours, it is what we have, and ‘In Poland, in these Polish conditions’ - who can afford anything else? ‘We are fated to coal whether we like it or not’, said one 34-year-old miner. And, increasingly, wanting to belong in the new world, the younger generation did not like this fact yet saw no present alternative – as chapter seven explores. Living with pollution was therefore still both ‘normal’ and yet increasingly not the normal people wished to have. It was a Polish normal – i.e. abnormal. This was particularly so in a context of rising shaming discourse of classed/gendered/regional/national backwardness through which smog was being sensed and made sense of (previous chapter). For younger miners, then, this mounting tension increased the inward stress and cognitive dissonance of industrial ecological intimacy and its increasingly shaming taint, and, without a secure coal health ecosystem at hand to readily purify and support them, highlighted a subconscious need for purification practices that reinstated a sense of being-at-home-in-the-world, (here feeling secure in one’s moral self-esteem and social standing), elsehow. National narratives would appeal. Public smog denial as an active, vocal defensive stance, and locating an external enemy to cast as the true intruding polluters – Germany, Brussels, or non-Polish coal (refugees too – see chapter eight) were prime contenders offered too by far-right populism.

Conclusion: Risk society, science denial, and populist (anti)-environmentalism

Writing about climate change denial and its intersections with the far right, Kari Norgaard (2019: 1–2) reflects on Naomi Klein (2015) and Frank Fischer’s (2019) insights: that it is not the science per se that is rejected, but the message behind it – that revered and security-providing values and lifeworlds are under threat. In this sense, far-right populist interpretations of the science of climate
could actually be understood as a ‘more honest’ reading than that of public media and mainstream politics which tends to obfuscate the real ramifications of the matter in public debate. As Naomi Klein provocatively puts it, on this at least, Norgaard (2019: 2) concurs, ‘the Right is Right’: full acceptance of the science would mean far-reaching social change is required. It is because of this that ‘fact-checking alone will not rid us of the post-truth phenomenon’, as Fischer (2019: 1) boldly argues.

In Silesia, something similar could be said about climate denial too (just as prevalent and closely intertwined), and more immediately, smog denial. This chapter has shown how the breaking of the localized taboo over coal’s polluting presence through the naming of ‘smog’, has disrupted a localized regional-class-based rational-embodied historical social order in which industrial ecological intimacy with ‘dirt’ had been historically meaningfully normalized, as we have seen, through traditional patriarchic gendered practices and discourses of its moral purification that underpinned self-worth. This naming of highly-local ‘pollution’, by those not of working-class background, casts this previously socio-ecologically ordered world into disarray, pointing to the ways in which this was already in a process of undoing – for a taboo weakens when its social structure weakens too. It thus not only threatened livelihoods, but increasingly vulnerable valued industrial embodied social identities, their self-worth, practices, and perspectives on the body, health and relation to nature too, requiring painful reorientation of modernity, value and morality towards new definitions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ persons and lifeworlds. The local hegemonic working-class masculinist embodied moral-ideological imaginary of nature, (here coal and its dirt), in which it was perceived as under the control of the local community, the producers, subdued, tamed and in place – part of who we are as moral persons, suddenly, according to outsider experts, (a ‘fact’ adopted by increasing numbers of local actors too), was no longer deemed relevant either. Indeed, such an industrial ecological intimacy, born out of a particular modernity, was potentially immoral and perhaps always had been. Matter was no longer in place, but out of it – as were Silesia’s coal people. The ‘natural’ order (gendered, ecological, social), was being overturned. Threats of shame thus polluted industrial home with its demeaning and disorientating taint, threatening to pull away the very resource that paradoxically underpinned aspirations for a better (and cleaner) life (social mobility up the class hierarchy) too, the secure base of coal. Far-reaching, ontologically threatening, social change in which entire ways of being and knowing, and aspiring, would be cast into history’s dustbin loomed.
Thus, what Silesia’s industrial residents often meant when they said they did not believe in ‘smog’, or that it was a politically-motivated conspiracy, was not that air pollution did not exist, but that its naming, claiming, blaming and moral shaming had been constructed by ‘outsider’ actors and agents and their unfamiliar and undermining discourses that were not relevant to localized concerns and priorities, contemptuously disenfranchised their claims to resources, material gain and moral recognition, and imposed stigmatizing blemishes on one’s sense of embodied being and doing demonstrating a painful shift of the locus of moral authority. In this sense, it was not smog per se, but the message behind it, and the manner of delivery, that was the issue. In this way, publicly-expressed denial of air pollution as a ‘real issue’ can be understood as a counter-hegemonic form of defense, by those who feel themselves to be embodiedly stigmatized, and on the periphery, to imposed norms, standards, and values, particularly moralities, believed to emanate from a ‘liberal internationalist’ (Machin and Wagener, 2019) civilizing mission of the centres of ‘elite’ power championed by ‘mind’ people – both Warsaw and Brussels, and their ‘kind’. Yet articulation of this, lacking class language, was expressed in identity terms instead. As such it readily resonated with far-right industrial populist politics which rather champions bodily, emotive, industrial ‘commonsense’ of ‘the people’ – the producers. Silesians would not be cast out of the nation again but rendered purer, more truly Polish by virtue of their relation to its earth.

Earlier, I illustrated how Ulrich Beck’s (1992) theory of risk society helps to elucidate this dynamic. As he outlined, often using the prescient example of smog, the transition from industrial to risk society would mean that those remaining intimately tied to industrial ecologies would be threatened with the shaming criticism of a new ecological morality that would increasingly point back at industry’s centre. Whereas during industrial society’s heyday, its hazardous side effects remained largely unarticulated and/or ignored, legitimated and made innocent in the name of overcoming material poverty, in risk society, as material needs become dealt with, science renders late industrial modernity’s ecological effects increasingly apparent – and less acceptable. However, as Beck (1992: 34) himself outlined, prefiguring the debate on post-truth by a few decades, these scientifically-defined risks must pass through a ‘process of social recognition’ to be validated; in other words, they need to be believed, in order to become true. How so?

The industrial era’s confidence in sensory, bodily experience and scientific-technological control over nature is undermined by hazards increasingly invisible to human sensory perception yet increasingly threatening, and thus increasingly reliant on science and ‘experts’ to verify them ‘real’. This, argues Beck (1992: 53; 29; 46), causes a loss of ‘cognitive sovereignty’, rendering individuals...
‘incompetent in matters of their own affliction’, and opening up a ‘fissure’ between ‘scientific and social rationality’ (or, here, mind people and body people); an ‘antagonism’ between ‘those who produce risk definitions and those who consume them’ emerges. While ‘risks’ by definition require social construction, presenting risks simply as ‘fact’, scientized knowledge actually hides the inherently social, ethical and normative component of ‘risk’ definition – namely, the question ‘how do we wish to live’? (Beck, 1992: 28). The increased politicization of science, including skepticism, the pluralization of competing risk definitions, rationalization, and denial, were all likely outcomes, Beck predicted. For ‘knowledge’ regarding industrial modernity’s globalizing risks, and particularly their causality, would be increasingly open to contestation and refusal. Not believing, or denying, ‘expertise’, rather resorting to one’s own ‘social rationality’, was thus wholly possible, and held uncomfortable ‘truth’ and, I’ve argued, its shaming morality at bay. It also retained one’s ‘cognitive sovereignty’, and what remained of the industrial modern story of the promise of material progress that made ‘dirty work’ worthwhile and put the working-classes at its centre. This kept back the shift into a society based not on class, hope, wealth creation and distribution, but on communities of fear, anxiety and the management and distribution of risk – and shame about industrial ecological intimacy too.

As a result of this antagonism, Beck (1992: 223-235), foresaw a number of possible scenarios for the future of liberal democracies in relation to the growing politicization of knowledge – all of them portending inevitably revolutionary change. Although he did not foresee the rise of far-right populism as such, one such possibility he did intimate was that the destabilizations, anxieties and uncertainties of risk society, particularly in crisis mode, could result in return to calls for ‘strong hands’, ‘order and reliability’, the rejection of democratic politics, and potentially the destruction of politics itself. Writing in Germany, he ominously wondered aloud whether its ‘undigested past’ would return to haunt it albeit in ‘different form’ (Beck, 1992: 228). Yet the contestations over science and its implications, he suggested, would ‘not be divided by party lines’ and would take place ‘beyond the doctrinal wars of ideology’ - for all would be pursuing a ‘scorched Earth policy’, and all potentially had stakes in various kinds of denial (Beck, 1992: 38).

However, as we saw, in fact, in the 21st century, such contestation would increasingly take on polarizing politicized form. Risk society’s cosmopolitan-leaning (transboundary/globalist), abstracted, universalist knowledge and social organisation would be contested by those inhabiting and holding on to industrial society’s territorially-bound project of national solidarity and producerist wealth creation, and its correlating moral imaginary of nature and personhood. The
gendered implications of the shift from industrial to risk society perspectives are also critical here. Beck (1992: 104) himself noted that while the former upholds patriarchic gender roles (industrial society’s social ‘basis’), traditional family values, working-class personhood and labour, and control over nature, as its stable moral axes, the latter ushers in a society increasingly concerned with risk, hygiene, safety, and ecological vulnerability – more feminized concerns that strip hegemonic masculinity, particularly its working-class values of toughness, endurance, fortitude etc., of its credibility and worth. It also ushers in ‘reflexive modernization’ in which increased individualization and detraditionalization start to dissolve industrial society’s social structures, weakening its taboos too (Beck, 1992: 104) – both social and ecological. The anxiety of smog’s shame was multiple and intersectional – affecting classed, gendered, place-based and national identities all at once. The postindustrial order vied with industrialism to generate under-articulated class concern – for in the former, class is meant to have been erased.

In Western societies, Beck (1992: 29) argued that the Keynesian welfare state had largely met material needs and thus made this basis for the accepted production of industrial risks less legitimate and class less relevant too. Risk society, which precipitated a shift away from class, was thus the organic evolution of industrial society’s own logic. But in the shift to reflexive modernization, individualization and risk society in the postsocialist East European context, by contrast, where Keynesian economics bypassed the region and the Communist welfare system was eliminated by socialism’s demise and not replaced, and where perceived (comparative) material lack and class continues to be core to life experiences, the arrival of risk society, seemingly from a Western-influenced ‘outside’, is doubly disorientating and threatening. Postsocialist miners have not ‘arrived’ into modernity, as modeled by that post-Keynesian West, and its comfortable upward-mobility promises yet. Any notion that such a promise might be pulled away just as one is getting closer was deeply afeared (see chapter seven). The shame of smog, and climate change too, in its moral threats for coal, was thus also the shame that one might not have the chance to ‘make it’ into Europe at all – but remain ‘Eastern’ forever. For miners had also internalized the discourses of backwardness Poland is steeped in that the previous chapter outlined as a kind of class-based ‘internalized oppression’ (Bell, 2020: 41) expressed in national terms. Yet here its causes pointed at foreign influence and contamination, with purer Polishness the solution (see chapter seven and eight).

What an industrial populist (anti)environmentalist sentiment of denial offers is thus a resolution of these tensions without giving anything up. Affirming the worth and integrity of ‘us’
and ‘our’ industrial way of life against ‘them’, ‘scientists’ and elite others, the real intruding corrupters who render our lifeworld disorderly and immoral, this relieves the shame of dirt’s stigmas by rejecting it as the outsider false agenda it always was. The taboo – moral order – is reinstated; risk society kept at bay. The disorientating ambivalence of industrial ecological intimacy recedes – shame is a clean, orderly home once more. It is in this sense that smog denial can be characterized as an industrial populist sentiment of (re)purification – inverting dirt’s ‘imposed’ stigma by constructing the classic populist division (Mudde, 2004; Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017) between ‘we the hardworking pure people’ versus the ‘corrupt elite’ (white-collar smog-experts), and discrediting or having ambivalent feelings towards abstract scientific discourse in favour of socially-embedded industrial ‘common sense’ that emerges from an embodied ‘dwelling’ perspective (Castan Broto, 2016; Ingold, 2000). In turn industrial populist politics not only purifies its people but also ‘their’ natures they are made through too. Not only its people, but coal itself, both iconic to far-right populist narratives (Lockwood, 2018: 726), and which increasingly belong together in their ecologically intimate stigma, are cleansed. An ethnonationalist conception of ‘nature’, or ‘our environment’ (coal), under threat, is enrolled into the very populist kind of construction of ‘the people’, and becomes part of its substantiation: to ‘the pure people’ vs ‘the corrupt elite’ is added ‘our pure industrial environments’ versus ‘their corrupting elite ecologies’.
Chapter six. The heated domestics of coal: Industrial breadwinning petromasculinities and coal-based heating in the Silesian home

Domestic heating is a heated topic in Upper Silesia. That is because, as we have seen, it is the leading contributor to high levels of localized air pollution, or smog. As chapter four outlined, it is here in 70% of Poland’s 5.5 million single-family households where more than 10 million tonnes of coal in its various derivations are annually combusted, most often in ‘primitive’ boilers or stoves that do not fulfil any environmental standards, thus releasing 88% of all smog-inducing ‘low stack emissions’ (Łukaszewski, 2018: 488–489). As a result, from October to April, known colloquially as the ‘heating season’, a thick layer of smog regularly blankets the Upper Silesian air, causing World Health Organization norms to be exceeded in some locales for over one hundred days per year (Polski Alarm Smogowy, 2019b).

As chapter four also outlined, so far, efforts by both civil society movement Polish Smog Alert and policymakers to ‘fix’ the air pollution crisis, enshrined in the regional Anti-Smog Resolution adopted in April 2017, have thus focused on raising awareness of the issue to instigate incremental rational technical and behavioural changes at the household level, additionally incentivized by social pressure, (limited) public subsidies, and bans on, and fines for, use of lowest quality coal types. As the reader may recall, through a combination of carrots and sticks, but most often through appeal to sticks and voluntary choice, calling upon citizens’ moral integrity, residents have been encouraged to switch energy sources where possible (most popularly to gas), avoid burning illegal fuels (such as newly defined ‘junk’ low-quality coal types and domestic waste), upgrade furnaces to more efficient varieties, and insulate homes so as not to ‘poison their neighbours’.

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1 With permission from the editors and publisher, this thesis chapter forms the substantial basis of a chapter entitled ‘Heated attachments to coal: Everyday breadwinning-petromasculinities and domestic heating in the Silesian home’ for an edited book volume on Gender and Energy Transition: Case Studies from the Upper Silesia Coal-Mining Region (Iwińska and Bukowska, forthcoming 2021).

2 According to WHO norms, the maximum advisable limit for exceeding ‘safe’ levels is set at thirty-five days.

3 See the campaign website Nie Truj Sąsiada (‘Don’t Poison Your Neighbour’) http://nietrujsasiada.pl/
Yet, such rational and information-reliant strategies have achieved slow results as chapter four further mentioned. To recap: since the implementation of the Clean Air Programme in September 2018 to the frustration of the Polish Smog Alert who conducted an assessment of progress in December 2019, only 35,000 orders for stove exchanges had been placed, realizing only 1% of necessary ambitions if air quality is to meet acceptable norms (Śląski Biznes, 2019). At this tempo, they warned, residents would be condemned to decades more such winters, significantly risking citizens’ long-term health and undermining wellbeing and quality of life (Polski Alarm Smogowy, 2019a). So far their predictions have been accurate. As we saw in chapter five, despite these facts, many Silesian residents, particularly older working-class males connected to the industry, fiercely contest the arrival of ‘smog’, arguing that in a region known for its industrial heritage, air pollution has ‘always been here’ and so was a non-issue. Rather, it was a conspiracy against Polish coal, an ecological dispossession, resonating with views of the pro-coal, far-right populist PiS government, criticized for failing to take air pollution seriously. However, they also contested incursions into what they perceived as their private lives4 – the domestic sphere – and passionately defended coal as a fuel for home heating too. Thus, unlike in Kraków, where burning of coal has been totally banned to cope with its own record-breaking smog problem5, as chapter four detailed, in the coal-mining heartland of Silesia, such an approach has so far been considered regionally taboo. Coal remains the home-heating substance of choice – it is affordable if not free (if one works in the industry as part of benefits6), seemingly plentiful, accessible, local (unlike other energy infrastructures like gas), and is mined by those one often knows personally, so is embedded in dense social networks of trust and reciprocity. Yet these factors, though of crucial importance, do not fully explain home-heating choices. What else is on the line?

As numerous studies have demonstrated in other geographic contexts, particularly in relation to environmental issues such as climate change (Norgaard, 2011) but also air pollution (Hine et al., 2007; Reeve et al., 2013), informational and technical approaches to achieving behavioural change often do not take into account not only the political economic causes of structural inertia, but also, more crucially, the embedded social and cultural patterns, and their affective attachments and meanings (Petersen, 2008), that shape identities and their everyday practices, such as here heating.

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4 See Donald W. Hine et al. (2007) and Ian Reeve et al. (2013: 204) for a similar ‘rhetoric of resistance’ by residents in relation to use of wood-burning stoves in Australia.
5 Ten other locales in Poland are demanding the same (Storch, 2019).
6 As part of the economic benefits of working as a coal miner, one is entitled to 8 tonnes of coal annually for use in domestic heating. This used to be true also for pensioners, yet in 2017, under a PiS government, this ‘privilege’ was revoked, causing widespread outcry. This policy change has also been blamed for contributing to pensioners switching to cheaper, lower quality fuels, including coal types.
thus preventing desired shifts. This chapter thus asks: what wider gendered investments were at stake in the shift away from coal-based domestic-heating technologies in a region culturally dominated by the fuel? And how did this further intersect with far-right, fossil-fuelled, anti-ecological, masculinist populist politics?  

The previous chapter explored how a populist kind of normalization and denial of smog, generated by a hegemonic masculinist industrial moral-ecological intimacy with coal and its ubiquitous dirt, that rendered speaking about its pollution taboo as a defense of home (here, affirming collective social identities) against shame, has been a significant contributing factor to smog’s slow resolution and its populist politicization. In this chapter, I turn to focus on coal as an energetic substance, zooming in on its gendered attachments and identity-enrollments in the greater intimacy of the internal world of the literal Silesian home, this time particularly concerning Silesian masculine personhood, most closely tied to its dirt and heat-giving properties. Now it was not just being a coal-mining Silesian that was under threat, but being a worthy male coal-mining Silesian, and the threat was not just outside the household, long considered a Silesian safe space against an encroaching external world, but in it. This chapter therefore argues that in order to make sense of populist coal-tied ascendency, and grapple with the reluctance exhibited by many citizens, especially retired male coal-miners, in not only accepting the concept of smog but here, in particular, stubbornly clinging to coal as a fuel for domestic heating, (if the reader remembers, identified too as a sign of ‘backward mentality’ in chapter four), greater attention needs to be paid to gender, namely historically and culturally regionally-tied ‘hegemonic masculinity’ (Connell, 1993; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005) and its entwined relationship with the materialities of coal in the domestic sphere.

In Silesian intergenerational mining families, home-heating structurally oriented around coal is traditionally the responsibility of the male breadwinner, or head of household. While it is not only men who ‘do’ heating, it is industrial breadwinning masculinity that is held responsible for its necessary provision, practices and knowledge domain, in turn affirming the attainment of that gendered identity and its self-worth through the doing (West and Zimmerman, 1987). Indeed, doing

7 Indeed, for decades, research has demonstrated that increased environmental knowledge and awareness does not necessarily lead to pro-environmental behaviours, since this overlooks affective, non-cognitive bases for decision-making and behaviours (Hine et al., 2007: 27). Furthermore, as chapter five showed, having direct sensory experience of environmental pollution does not necessarily lead to its rejection, for experience of that pollution itself is socially constructed, while other competing social norms (here for example the validity of masculinities) may be more personally important (Petersen, 2008: 6). See also Luís et al. (2018) on a negative correlation between increased awareness and environmental risk perception based on a survey of multilevel data from 33 countries.

267
coal-based heating’s dirty work has long been a primary route for attaining domestic industrial breadwinning masculinity; securing its patriarchic authority and dignity as well as acceptably expressing its familial love and care. Encroaching postindustrial trends towards post-traditionalism and ecological identities, however, like those propounded in the smog debate, increasingly threaten such sedimented arrangements. Combining Cara Daggett’s (2018) concept of ‘petro-masculinity’, and Martin Hultman and Paul Pulé’s (2018) notion of ‘industrial/breadwinning masculinities’, which conceptualize masculinized fossil-fueled attachments and their ecological resistances in productive ways, in this chapter, refusal of smog and a stubborn attachment to coal in the home is therefore proposed as an attempt to hold onto dwindling resources for attaining a regional, Silesian, working-class variation of ‘industrial breadwinning petro-masculinities’, precisely at a time when those most embodiedly invested in its gendered order fearfully feel that their place in the world-at-large, including within the home, is increasingly insecure. In addition, as energy poverty threatens (Bouzarovski and Herrero, 2017), this itself puts such breadwinning masculinity at intensified risk.

Specifically, this chapter focuses on retired coal-miners (over the age of 45) who most explicitly embody the former socialist era’s industrial breadwinning petro-masculine values and habitus, and who find themselves struggling to hold on to their previous identity as productive, worthy, and capable members of both society and the family as they leave work and spend more time in the home. Holding onto coal can thereby be understood as holding onto that sense of home, or of self, that is ontologically at risk (Giddens, 1991), avoiding the discomforts of the shame that comes with a feeling of becoming both unattainable and irrelevant. Coal-based heating becomes a scarce identity-affirming resource and ballast in a gender-disorientating, economically precarious world. In this way, the inertia of the petrocultural status quo (Wilson, Carlson, et al., 2017) can be linked to sunk gendered subjectivity costs and its (in)dignities in times of upheaval. This is particularly pertinent in the context of an empowered far-right, fossil-fueled, anti-ecological

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8 Since 2005, following labour protests, working as a coal miner comes with the ‘privilege’ of being able to retire with a full state pension after 25 years of registered work, including 15 years below ground (Baran et al., 2018: 30). This means that in theory, one could start working at 21 (the legal age today to begin work below ground) and be ready to retire already at the age of 46. Due to early retirement programmes through industry restructuring that has occurred since the 1990s, many miners have been retiring as young as 45 (Ganowski, 2007: 82). The latest retirement age is in any case 55 – ten years earlier than the average Polish male, at 65.

9 The problem of an economically inactive population over the age of 55 in general is a specific challenge in Silesia, particularly following restructuring and early retirement packages, where only 41% of those in this age bracket are still active on the labour market – the lowest number in Poland (Wiatrowski, 2019: 16). This is a particular challenge among men over the age of 50 (Ślimko, 2019: 7).
In her pioneering article on the intersections of gender, energy, anti-ecological resistance and far-right authoritarianism, grasped in her term ‘petro-masculinity’, Cara Daggett (2018: 3) identifies that ‘[i]f people cling so tenaciously to fossil fuels… it is because fossil fuels also secure cultural meaning and political subjectivities’. They ‘contribute to making identities’, particularly (white) masculinities and their entangled ‘oil-soaked and coal-dusted’ historic patriarchal privileges (Daggett, 2018: 1; 3–4) Focusing on the example of the US, Daggett explores the ways in which (white) masculine attachments to fossil fuels coincide with authoritarian desires and a rejection of both feminist and climate politics. Since achieving American hegemonic masculinity has been historically reliant on fossil fuel (here oil) consumption and its work, gendered resistance to ecological modes of being and doing are explained in the context of masculinities’ increasing fragility and vulnerability in the face of both growing ‘gender and climate trouble’ (Daggett 2018, p. 29) that existentially threatens the petro-industry and its associated practices and ontologies. Indeed, Daggett (2018: 33) poses ‘petro-masculinity’ that seeks to double down on fossil fuel use as reactionary, arising in response to a threatened sense of a diminished self that feels the need to therefore ‘inflate, exaggerate or otherwise distort… traditional masculinity’. It is thus a kind of combustable ‘hypermasculinity’; violent, aggressive, tough and pumped up with testosterone, ultimately manifested in Donald Trump’s climate-denying, pro-fossil fuel, fascistic politics. Such
gendered entanglements thus pose significant ‘risks for post-carbon energy politics’, yet have been understudied, particularly within the domain of energy research (Daggett 2018: 25; 28).

As Daggett (2018: 29) herself points out, ‘petro-masculinities’ (plural), however, have multiple and culturally specific variations. In the context of Silesia, I propose a regional variant of petro-masculinity not as necessarily hypermasculine, aggressive, distorted or exaggerated, but as fearfully reflexive; that is, increasingly self-aware of its existential entanglement with coal as a deeply embodied phenomenon, therefore stubborn and defensive in its ontological vulnerability in relation to threats of shame-inducing ecological dispossession, here most directly from being able to use coal as an affordable fuel in one’s private home. With petro- etymologically emerging from the Greek petros (stone) and petra (rock), I argue that Daggett’s concept of ‘petro’-masculinities can be expanded to help particularly elucidate the way that fossil fuel materialities (‘oil-soaked and coal-dusted’) come to matter in how its masculinities are generated. In Silesia, as chapter five and seven touch on too, coal’s petro-materialities down the mine – dirty, heavy, hard, potentially explosive, and subterranean – have historically contributed to co-constructing hegemonic working-class industrial masculine embodiment and its ideals such as toughness, hardiness, physical strength, and endurance (Slutskaya et al., 2016; Thiel, 2007). Through coal’s ‘dirty work’ (Ashforth and Kreiner, 2014; Simpson et al., 2012; Simpson and Simpson, 2018, 2018; Slutskaya et al., 2016; Thiel, 2007), in fact, the very basis of gendered class experience and positionality in industrial society were constituted. This chapter, however, turns towards the home, where coal’s materialities were also experienced as heavy, dirty, smelly, requiring technical skill and know-how (defended as part of the masculine realm) to light and keep alight, while retaining sociomaterial connection to homosocial worlds. This has generated gendered ‘scripts’ (Offenberger and Nentwich, 2009: 87, 2010, 2013) or ‘affordances’ (Weszkalnys and Richardson, 2014: 19) that have co-constituted Silesian petro-masculinities and domestic heating as historic partners in grime. In turn, the payoffs for labour’s petro-masculine embodiment have been the privileges that are enshrined within the hegemonic socioeconomic gendered division of labour (Hanlon, 2012; Thébaud, 2010) that emerged with the coal-based industrial order.

‘Breadwinning’ as the heteronormative family ideal linked to ideas of biological essentialism, came to ascendancy in Europe, including in Silesia, with capitalist coal-based industrialization in the 19th century (Morgan, 2005: 169; Odoj, 2019). It became the ‘archetypal industrial male identity’ (Broughton and Walton, 2006: 2) and its primary patriarchal reward.¹⁰ In the traditional

¹⁰ Underpinning widespread understandings of gendered identities to this day, breadwinning is core to hegemonic masculinity in diverse cultural contexts (Thébaud, 2010: 334). This is particularly so in coal
Silesian family model, in return for his dirty and dangerous labour at the nearby coal mine or steelworks, the male head of household earned a family wage, which was his primary familial responsibility. In turn, as the previous chapter referenced, his wife remained at home, taking care of the unpaid labour of ‘kinder, kuche and kirche’, or children, the kitchen and church (Odoj, 2019: 32). While the wage was obligatorily handed to the wife as the household ‘gospodarz’, or manager/host, the male held overall patriarchal authority, and the woman was financially dependent. Writing about industrialization under Communism, Małgorzata Fidelis (2004: 317) states that although in the early 1950s women were enabled entry into the workplace, including coal mining, by state gender equality policy, ‘traditional Silesian society opposed women’s entry into the mines. Strict division of gender roles was especially prominent in highly traditional coal miners’ families. The man’s coal mining work stood at the center... while the woman’s proper and much celebrated role was that of wife, mother, and household manager.’ The ideology of breadwinning and its organization of social life through a strict public/private divide, combined with Catholicism that reified essentialist notions of gender, arguably made coal mining and its difficult and dangerous industrial labours possible. It was thus defended.

Indeed, as Urszula Swadźba (2014) writes, from the 19th century onwards, work, family and religion, structured through the industrial breadwinning model, developed as the three intertwined and core Silesian values that enabled coal as a way of life to function. Work underpinned family life, while family life, in the distinctly separated realm of the home, made the burdens of that labour bearable. Religion in turn turned work and family into something sacred, so that all three values mutually strengthened one another, and bestowed meaning and heightened significance to mining’s toils.11 St. Barbara, the patron saint of miners, offered labourers protection at work, while Silesian housewives, as chapter five described, did so in the spiritually reviving household they kept spotlessly clean as dirty mine labour’s distinct moral counterpart. Keeping women at home and keeping faith in God can thus be understood as mining’s long-standing psychological-emotional ballasts – what one did mining for. In turn, having authority in the house made up for being subordinated at work (Hanlon, 2012: 110). Industrial petro-masculinity was structurally rewarded with breadwinning’s benefits.

Although Daggett (2018: 36) defines having a breadwinning job as ‘the essential emblem of modern masculinity’ she does not link it directly to her notion of petro-masculinity – how the

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former structures and renders meaningful the latter through its hegemonic ideals and privileges. Neither does she highlight its explicit relation to class, where particularly for working-class males who are literally ‘at the coal face’, their embodied subjectivities are most intimately tied to the petro-materialities of fossil fuels and its historic compensatory breadwinning gendered ‘regime’ (Broughton and Walton, 2006: 10). Martin Hultman and Paul Pulé (2018), on the other hand, explicitly designate the hegemonic masculinity tied to fossil fuels ‘industrial/breadwinner masculinities’, implicating its ‘white male effect’ in forms of climate change denialism and fossil fuel addiction. For them, industrial male elites and working-class fossil fuel labourers are conjoined in mutually-reinforcing and universal gendered attachments that generate privileges and entitlements through the breadwinning model that accrue to these distinct socio-economic masculinities in complicit ways. Yet, too, aggregating such diverse class interests together might serve to overlook inherent tensions, frictions and particularities, as much as power imbalances, between stratified masculinities, particularly in cross-cultural and historical contexts. Thus, going deeper under the skin of the notion of collective patriarchic industrial ecological intimacy introduced in chapter five, in this chapter I draw on, and bring together, both Daggett’s (2018) and Hultman and Pulé’s (2018) concepts to refer to a specifically Silesian ‘industrial breadwinning petro-masculinity’, throwing explicitly masculine gender, class and coal’s materialities, in the context of industrial modernity’s decline, into sharp relief as mutually entangled concerns for embodied fossil-fueled domestic attachments and their far-right populist intersections.

The saying ‘coal is our bread’ reveals much in this regard. Coal was the God-given resource that granted life, built Silesia and created Silesians, (primarily the working-classes). Embedded within a strong Catholic heritage, the symbolic union of coal as bread transmuted the substance into a spiritually elevated and moral sustenance. Furthermore, coal as bread highlighted the ways it materialized the very petro-embodiment of its people. Thus coal was ‘bread’ in more ways than one. Crucially, ‘bread’-winning was not only about bringing home a wage, but also fuel to keep the home fires burning too. As part of the social contract between industry and worker, a ‘deputat’, or annual coal allowance, has been part of the Silesian welfare benefits of working in coal since the late 19th/early 20th century, pre-dating the socialist state. Under the People’s Republic of Poland (Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa – PRL) such provisions, as we saw in chapter three, however, took on a special symbolic significance, becoming part of the national mythology of the elevated working-class hero rebuilding and modernizing Poland and being looked after by the Party state.

See Wioletta Wileczek (2018) for more on coal and religion.
This was particularly true within coal mining, where dirty work below ground was held up as the quintessential masculine and socialist labour, and as a result earnings were almost double the national average (Odoj, 2019: 40); its main draw for thousands who moved down to find work in the Silesian ‘El Dorado’ (Mrozowicki, 2011: 27). Taking coal home was additional material evidence of, and direct reward for, his petro-masculine labour and the tangible umbilical chord that bonded home, industry, national economy and masculine work tightly together, tying domestic industrial breadwinning security (home heating and cooking) to national security (coal mining). Silesian coal was ‘our’ coal in an intimate sense, strengthening its material integration into everyday life.

Beyond work, however, the home itself and its domestic labours, as Bowlby et al (1997: 343) note, and as the previous chapter touched on, have been a central site for the production and reproduction of industrial gendered identities. This includes industrial breadwinning petro-masculinities and their fossil-fueled attachments – a less explored aspect of domesticity. Since gendered identities are always ‘something evoked, created and sustained day-by-day’ (Thompson and Walker, 1989: 865), rather than something congealed or given, patriarchy and masculinities within the domestic space can be understood as a ‘product of men’s investments in social practices’ (Hanlon 2012, p. 8). In Silesia, coal-based heating is deeply imbricated with the notion of ‘doing gender’ (Morgan, 2005). Yet this has not always been the case. Up until the end of the 19th century, most Silesian homes limited heating to one room only – the kitchen, where most family activity was centred, a practice that continues in rural Polish areas to this day. Thus heating was bound up with cooking while lighting and feeding the stove were collective family duties, not rigidly delineated by gender. During industrialization, coal stoves were gradually introduced into homes in urban areas (Nowakowski, 2011). Heating units were removed from the family living area into designated boiler rooms or basements – inscribing a spatialized gender binary into use of the technology as masculine ‘facility management’ rather than what would become the feminized aesthetics of ‘home making’ (Offenberger & Nentwich, 2010: 2). The symbolic binary of dirt and cleanliness outlined in chapter five was central to this – yet this had an internal domestic arrangement too. With its gritty dust-generating materiality, coal-based domestic heating became a primary masculine responsibility, and with it, masculine authority in the home

13 Looking after heating is most often ascribed as symbolically masculine work in other cultural contexts too due to the hegemonic association of fire (Pyne, 2001) and ‘technology’ (see Offenberger and Nentwich, 2010: 9; 16, 2009) with masculinity.

273
was symbolically and materially bolstered. In turn, coal and heating technologies were enrolled in constructing women and children as breadwinner dependents.

Thus not only by having a breadwinning job, but also by maintaining control of coal-based domestic heating, men marked out their territory and domain for which they held authority and were responsible for providing for. To this day, in a number of multi-generational households I spent time in, the most senior male (the grandparents generation) would ‘hand over’ responsibility for coal-based heating to the son or son-in-law upon reaching an age where it became too physically burdensome, thereby handing over authority within the household in a symbolic gesture of masculine domestic power-transfer. I witnessed how being able to heat one’s home to desirable degrees of comfort became an affirmation of industrial petro-masculine breadwinning success and accomplishment. It was the thermo-materialization of the breadwinning ‘dobrobyt’ (prosperity) of the household, and afforded petro-masculine attainment through the performance of specialized skills, knowledge, and practical expertise linked to coal mine work. What is important to recognize, however, is that it was not only industrial breadwinning petro-masculine authority and dignity that was at stake, but also its historically acceptable channels for expressing its familial love, care and affections too.

Whereas both Daggett (2018) and Hultman and Pulé (2018) conceptualize petro-masculinity and industrial/breadwinning masculinity respectively as, in the main, violent and aggressive, and in hard opposition to softer feminized notions of care or compassion, ethnographic encounters in Silesia reveal that industrial breadwinning petro-masculinity can more ambiguously move through curious kinds of fossil love and affective attachments too. As Hanlon (2012: 24) writes, and as I too discovered, by many men, breadwinning, as a kind of paternal duty and moral imperative, is typically understood as constituting masculine care for loved ones.\textsuperscript{14} Breadwinning care put practical tasks and accomplishments associated with the values of protecting, providing and securing at the heart of masculine-centred domestic labours of ‘caring’. Providing heating was central to this notion; crucial for the very survival of the household’s members in a geographic context such as Poland, where winters can be harsh and deep. Indeed, under the socialist regime, in recognition of this responsibility, the deputat, (coal allowance), demonstrated the paternalistic care

\textsuperscript{14} Masculinities and care are not usually theorized together. In fact, defining breadwinning as care is controversial within debates about what constitutes care (Hanlon, 2012: 35), because feminists have rightly long pointed out that domestic care-work has been the unpaid and un-recognized domain of women, while men are traditionally most often understood as on the receiving end of such care. Yet, desires to express care need to be understood as also part and parcel of masculine negotiation of affective attachments that give life security, meaning and sense (Hanlon, 2012: 35), even as they require critical engagement.
of the state for its (particularly male) workers, enabling, in turn, the paternalistic care of one’s family. Industrial breadwinning petro-masculine authority as well as its patriarchal forms of love and care were enabled and institutionalized by such a regime. To achieve desired ecological shifts, then, both deeply historically entrenched industrial breadwinning petro-masculine privileges as well as industrial breadwinning petro-masculine love and care and its forms of socially acceptable expression, require reorientation and reimagining (Hooks, 2004). This requires in part ensuring affordable energy access that might relieve the need for doubled-down petro-masculinities as well as socially integrating working-class male retirees in new ways.

Industrial breadwinning petro-masculinity thus refers to ways that masculine self-worth, drawing on its ideals of authority, dignity and care or affection (Hanlon, 2012), has historically been sought through coal’s material affordances and associated practices, without which, the privileges, powers, but also the very purpose and relevance of such a subjectivity or personhood is called into question, thus raising the spectre of shame, which is experienced as a kind of annihilation. This is particularly so in the context of industrial breadwinning petro-masculinity’s material and symbolic decline, the losses of which are experienced as existentially often acutely painful. For, as the next section will outline, breadwinning as an everyday working-class familial arrangement that was historically underpinned by particularly the coal-based industrial order is most forcefully being undermined and broken apart in the post-traditional context of neoliberalization, growing feminist movements, and ecological rejection of fossil fuels, while also undermining the family and community as stable resources. This entails far-reaching implications for gendered subjectivities, particularly working-class petro-masculine kinds, for whom the fungibility of such embodied investments is most restrained, and for whom the peeling away of breadwinning’s privileges in such a context leaves the residual classed embodiment of petro-masculinity lacking existential ground. In such a vacuum understood as ecological dispossession, industrial masculinist populist politics finds recruits, while clinging to coal becomes an ontological survival strategy for those whose sense of industrial breadwinning petro-masculine integrity and self-understanding feels most at risk where there are few alternatives on offer. This is most pertinent for older, retired working-class miners, those whom this chapter is most concerned with, who have lived memories of, and who embody, the socialist regime, when industrial breadwinning petro-masculinity was both ideal and reality, and who find themselves losing their status as productive working males and cast out of newer masculinities. Dirty coal and its stoves are drawn into their struggles for relevance, as much as...
domestic security, as I will illustrate. First I outline the historic background context regarding industrial breadwinning petro-masculinity’s material-symbolic rise and fall in Silesia.

**Industrial breadwinning petro-masculinity’s instability and decline:**

From the 19th century all the way through the socialist period, working-class industrial breadwinning petro-masculinity was the hegemonic gendered ideal of male personhood in the coal regions of Silesia. This was despite the fact that the PRL regime ideologically promoted gender equity in the labour market, with many women joining the worlds of work, including within mining. Yet, it, too, never questioned nor troubled the biological essentialism of expectations regarding feminine duties within the home (Ashwin and Lytkina, 2004: 192; Novikova, 2012: 96–7; Jarska, 2019). Coal mining families particularly upheld deeply entrenched gendered traditions, while Silesians particularly resisted women’s incursion into mining worlds (Fidelis, 2010). Indeed, into the 1990s, 75% of coal miner wives remained in the sphere of unpaid domestic labour (Szczepanski in Klimczak-Ziółek 2011: 32). In turn, particularly Silesian coal miners maintained industrial breadwinning petro-masculinity as core to their identity and sense of dignified personhood. Dirty work afforded patriarchal powers – both in the public and private spheres.

Despite the fact that in actuality the PRL regime did not achieve gender equality or erode this deeply-rooted hegemonic structure, the postsocialist transition was a process of reasserting traditional gender roles as a reaction against perceived kinds of ‘imposed’ social changes that the socialist system had wrought in terms of gender that were considered ‘un-Polish’. The socialist state, acting as paternal ‘surrogate father’ (Novikova 2012: 97), was felt to have somewhat usurped the man’s ability to ‘realize his masculinity’ (Lapidus in Novikova, 2012: 97), resulting in a neo-conservative backlash following its demise. The resurgent traditionalist ‘gender imperative’, backed by the Catholic Church, dominated postsocialist Polish political discourse and practice for the ensuing decades (Lapidus in Novikova, 2012: 97), a process Gillian Pascall and Jane Lewis (in Novikova, 2012: 100) term ‘retraditionalization’. Women ‘returned to the household’ in large numbers (Occhipinti, 1996; Pine, 2002), being the first to suffer from mass unemployment, while a pro-natalist, pro-breadwinning ideology was promulgated by a generally ascendant ‘postsocialist masculinism’ (Watson, 1993) that championed patriarchy vocally once more.

15 According to historical research conducted by Natalia Jarska (2019), women could be, and were, breadwinners during the socialist regime, but their labour was valued differently and they were never equal to male ones. Their waged work was always perceived as secondary and evaluated in the context of family.
However, paradoxically, just as patriarchic-nationalist ideals of breadwinning were on the symbolic rise (Novikova 2012: 98), the material means to attain this ideal became increasingly beyond reach (Mazierska, 2003, 2008). In Upper Silesia in particular, as earlier described, postsocialism ushered in the arrival of mass unemployment through rapid closure of industry. In coal mining alone, as we saw in the thesis introduction, around half of all active mines closed resulting in a fall of employment in the sector from around 400,000 to the 100,000 today. This was accompanied by the relative decline in and stagnancy of wages; the slashing of welfare benefits and state support (including the ending of provision of core services such as housing and energy); the neoliberalization of labour towards more flexible, mobile and competitive workers; the increased feminization of labour in the move towards a service sector economy; and the rise of consumer opportunities that have rendered incomes weaker in purchasing power on a globalized market. Thus, with the removal of state assistance, while men were increasingly expected to fulfill breadwinning duties, by ‘protecting’ their families from the insecurities, uncertainties and instabilities unleashed by the maelstrom of postsocialist transition, their ability to do so was drastically curtailed. Industrial breadwinning was particularly hit hard, while mortality and alcoholism rates for men soared and life expectancy plummeted (McKee and Shkolnikov, 2001). At the same time, such economic changes meant that after an initial retrenchment, women started to find their way in the new capitalist workplace with greater ease. Since the global financial crisis in 2008, when ‘masculinized’ industries were hit hardest by unemployment (Chustecka, 2010: 87) this trend has only intensified posing contradictory expectations and pressures on men.

For despite these seismic shifts, however, as in numerous other national contexts (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Hanlon, 2012: 109; Morgan, 2005: 169; Thébaud, 2010: 334–335), as a ‘hegemonic masculine’ ideal, breadwinning, is still a ‘master discourse’ (Hanlon, 2012: 24) against which masculinities are measured. In Poland, and particularly in Silesia where coal-mining life retains this as a sociocultural norm, a general sense of masculine pride and prestige associated with being the financial authority of the household remains culturally dominant (Bell & Pustulka 2017: 131).16 As a result, growing discrepancy between what is ideal and real has generated intense ‘gender role stress’ (Kazmierczak, 2010), linked to the broader trend of the popular notion of a ‘masculinity in crisis’ (Clare, 2001; Horrocks, 1994). At the same time, these changes have forced a

16 Coal miner’s households are found to still predominantly follow the traditional breadwinner model thus are more dependent on male earnings than other types of households. Indeed, research shows that the employment rate of women whose partners work in the mining sector (62% 2007-2015 average) are below those of other partnered women. As a result, coal miner households are more dependent on male breadwinner earnings than average (Baran et al., 2018: 32).
re-consideration of gender roles (Klimczak-Ziółek, 2014: 170), including the relevance of industrial breadwinning petro-masculinities both at work and at home. But such threats to remaining stability do not come, of course, without growing reflexivity, resistance, nostalgia, or even backlash, particularly when expectations upon their ability to provide personal, family and societal security remain paradoxically high.

Indeed, one of the of the many laments about postsocialist change in the coal mining community that I encountered time and again, regarded the material and wider symbolic decline of the traditional ‘breadwinner’ family model that has further been perceived as accompanying integration into Europe (Odoj, 2019: 32). The frustration, shame or strain of not being able to ‘live up to’ (Hanlon, 2012: 9) this industrial model were often palpable (see Ashwin & Lytkina, 2004; Kideckel, 2008; Mazierska, 2008; Novikova, 2012: 101; Tereškinas, 2009 for similar accounts elsewhere in the postsocialist sphere). In fact, in comparison with socialist times, when a family wage offered plenty, this inability was a bruising sign of coal mining’s deep economic and symbolic decline and degradation (Odoj, 2019: 39) and its political mistreatment. Now the dual earner model was increasingly common, but rather than delivering increased wealth, simply was reported to enable the family to stay afloat, almost-but-not-quite achieving a certain standard of living that was considered ‘normal’ (Klimczak-Ziółek, 2011: 40–41), or on a par with ‘European levels’ - what any decent, self-respecting job should provide (see chapter seven). The fact that numerous women now ‘have’ to work in order for families to achieve a shot at this approximation to the desired quality of Western-style life, was considered not a sign of progress by many men, and also women, but of a world out of kilter, with ‘the family’ impacted most. Numerous miners lamented to me that this left women ‘less free’ – less free to be the mothers and wives that they were destined and desire to be, and so unable to fulfill their womanhood. Instead, they were now burdened with the toil of the world of work, risking shame for the man who often felt belittled, or at least bewildered, by this state of affairs. At the same time, wifely incomes were always secondary or supplementary, never

17 This shift has been noted in many regional and cultural contexts globally too (Bell and York, 2010; Broughton and Walton, 2006; Walker and Roberts, 2018) as a response to far-reaching changes in labour regimes.

18 In everyday life, my research revealed that couples resentfully perceived that they had less time for one another, less time for their children (particularly mothers), and the increased rate of social atomization, divorces, and ‘family breakdown’ were often blamed on women having to work (see Klimczak-Ziółek, 2011: 40).

19 Whereas some younger miners were very happy that their wives worked – there was often a sense of ‘allowing’ them to do so, even if wives themselves might laugh at such a thought. Women in turn had an ambivalent position. A number of miner’s wives were ‘not allowed’ to work by their husband (a stance strongly correlated particularly with a ‘Silesian’ attitude, and therefore more prevalent among the older generations, yet still apparent), but clearly longed to, for the sake of achieving some relative autonomy,
the core household security on which the family depended. This remained the masculine breadwinner responsibility – a source of both stress and self-worth.

It is in this context of ambivalence that a Catholic, pro-natalist, patriarchic far-right government under PiS, concerned with falling fertility rates, emigration, and liberal Europeanization, especially through the polluting Western norms of ‘gender ideology’ (aka feminist-informed thinking), has increased paternalistic rhetoric and elevated motherhood to the status of honourable national duty once more, retrenching the long-standing ‘Mother Pole’ stereotype and attempting to re-solidify the binary. Gender anxiety reveals gender trouble, including an ‘underlying fear of the social fragility of masculinity’, as well as a shared sense of ‘having personally fallen short’ of the hegemonic industrial masculine ideal yet seeking to reassert its clarity to be able to keep striving for its promised secure affirmations (Daggett 2018: 35-36).

It is not only breadwinning that has declined, however, but also the value and prestige associated with doing ‘dirty work’ (Ashforth and Kreiner, 2014a; Simpson et al., 2012; Simpson and Simpson, 2018), and thus the value of embodied investments into its working-class industrial petro-masculinity. Whereas under socialism, as the thesis introduction demonstrated, getting dirty down the coal pit was a means through which to earn and live well, gain respect, and fulfill ideals of manly work (see also chapter seven), today, the symbolic and physical capital of industry and working-class petro-masculinity has also taken a harsh blow, where particularly male workers, as we have seen, formerly the bedrock of national modernization efforts, went from ‘heroes’ to villains’ practically overnight (Kalb, 2014; Keskula, 2012; Kideckel, 2008; Morris, 2016). In the postsocialist transition to capitalism, they were to be now widely understood as a ball-and-chain preventing Polish progress towards market ‘normality’. In popular culture, western ‘hegemonic masculinity’, based on the ideal of the global businessman, itself predicated on patriarchy, was now held up as desirable instead. With the ascendancy of ‘virtual, clean, and value adding’ (Bolton and Houlian in Simpson et al., 2016: 6) suit-and-tie, office jobs, as much as assembly-line manufacturing over-and-above industrial labour, cultural capital has gained greater value. Thus the physical capital of industrial workers has become less relevant in an increasingly postindustrial, service-oriented economy, and so conventional norms and values related to working-class petro-independence, sense of fulfillment and social connectivity outside of the household sphere (see the later ethnographic story for an example of this). Their weaker private and public authority, however, meant they were often unable to effectively protest. Others were very happily ‘allowed’ to work by their husbands, or did so with his consent, reflecting shifts in norms and aspirations. Others still were resentful that they, too, had to work to make ends meet. This highlights how women can often be complicit in their own subordination in return for the payoffs of perceived security and protection, a strategy Deniz Kandiyoti (1988) has called ‘bargaining with patriarchy’.
masculine prestige, such as muscular strength, fortitude, and endurance, have also become societally marginalized together with those people who embody them (Broughton & Walton 2006; Kideckel 2004; Mrozowicki, 2011: 138; Odoj, 2019: 41). Thus doing ‘dirty work’ today for dwindling reward was less coveted by the young, who aspired to cleaner living as a middle-class aspiration. As a result, ‘young people don’t want to work in mining anymore’, I was often told (see chapter seven), while those who did work at the mine increasingly sought out affirmation of gendered dignified personhood through the market, rather than the workplace. Consumption rather than production was the newer terrain for doing so.

These changes in industrial breadwinning petro-masculinities’ capital have had repercussions in the home regarding domestic heating choices too. Whereas younger miners living in single-family households, who had more aspirational lifestyle goals, would consistently tell me how they longed to switch to gas instead of coal if they could afford it, because it enabled the ‘modern’ ideals of ‘comfort, cleanliness and convenience’ (Shove, 2003), freeing up newly precious time for the pursuit of family or leisure activities, and enabling reminders of work to remain at the mine, older, retired miners, who were more time rich, and were more used to the working-class, socialist-idolized ideal of ‘dirty work’ as intrinsic to self-worth, were often much more attached to their coal stoves and less interested in gas. Toughened in their dirt-dusted embodiment, in fact, connected to coal’s dirt was often where they felt most at home. Thus using it as a home-heating fuel posed more gain than bother. While such participants usually explained this by recourse to economic explanations, it was also clear that gas did not afford the same possibility of demonstrating productive labour in the home. Whereas stove-based coal-heating requires a lot of visible, grubby, time-consuming physical labour, as well as technical knowledge and skill, to light and maintain, by nature, when installed, gas heating is simply controlled by the flick of a switch. For many, this is its precise appeal; the hallmark of a more ‘modern’ way of living, where infrastructure becomes increasingly invisibilized (Kaika, 2004; Plumwood, 2008; Tuvikene et al., 2019: 3). Its more neutral gendered scripts, however, were thus far less amenable to supporting the fulfillment of industrial breadwinning petro-masculinity in the home – and therefore its relevance to the wider national home too.\(^\text{20}\) This was most pertinent for those who felt most attached to this gendered subjectivity.

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\(^{20}\) This loss and sense of threat to ontological security can be extended to include the fact that such ‘modern’ infrastructures as the gas ‘switch’ disconnects the value of industrial male labourers from the wider national economy as direct breadwinning producers of energy into other people’s homes too. As Jessica Smith-Rolston (2019: 3) found among miners in Wyoming, USA, a common lament regarding coal mining’s economic and symbolic decline was the miners’ sense that they had lost their value in the wider national economy. While energy consumers increasingly viewed energy in terms of a rational and detached market exchange and therefore ‘could not see beyond the light switch to appreciate the everyday lives of the people who made that
while left with fewer resources for achieving its ideal or pursue alternative channels of domestic respect – retirees.

**Labours of dignity and care: Coal, coal stoves, and protecting industrial breadwinning petro-masculine self-worth**

‘And then, anyway, they can’t live without the coal mine. I heard of this guy, on his pension, he’d go down to the basement everyday and just sit there. Until a shift passed. Just so that there was darkness, just so he could smell coal, even that kind of coal on a pile for burning.’

- W. Bauer, *Pora Chudy Ch Myzy* (in Wilczek, 2018: 229. Translation from Silesian by author.)

Stefan was 48 when we met through a trade union social gathering connected to the mine. I hit it off with him and his family and began regular visits to their household. He had taken one of the early-retirement packages on offer in the last round of coal mine restructurings and finished working at the mine a few years ago. He had been married to Basia for 23 years, and together with their two teenage daughters, they lived in a large single-family household they built themselves (as is frequently the case) in a semi-rural peripheral neighbourhood. Theirs was a very traditional division of domestic labour, and therefore their story, though particular, reveals cultural and social patterns that are relevant for illuminating broader Silesian industrial breadwinning petro-masculinity and its attachments to coal within the home.

Stefan was still the kind of traditional working-class Silesian man, like Erwin we met in the introductory chapter, whose large hands were so heavily ingrained with dirt that they were no longer possible to wash completely clean (Zandy, 2004). Coal was engrained into his very embodiment – large, heavy-set, stocky, and always smeared somewhere with its black dust. Petro-masculinity was his habitus, verifying the moral values of hard labour that underpinned his integrity. He told me he missed his job at the mine in some ways, for he no longer saw people so often, but he was mostly happy to never have to go down below again. After all, being able to retire after twenty-five years of work is one of the main draws of mine work. Instead, to supplement his pension, which was now consumption of electricity possible’, miners viewed energy in terms of gift exchange, and therefore lamented the decline in appreciation and recognition from society for their hard labour. In Poland we can view a similar trend underway where such a visible and tangible contribution to the national economy, particularly since coal is used directly in domestic heating, is in the process of being terminated. Rendering male industrial labour redundant and invisibilized in a broader symbolic sense. As Smith-Rolston writes, such termination is met with differing logics of ethical obligation, including desire for appreciation and gratitude, and a visceral, emotional reaction when these are not met, helping to explain widespread support for Trump’s politics in US coal country.

281
the securest household income, and remain economically and physically active at least to a degree, he, like others he knew, had started his own firm delivering coal to households in a big blue pick-up truck he kept parked out in the yard. Paid work and a sense of self were thoroughly fused for Stefan, who told me ‘you have to do something!’ The notion of being unproductive was an alien one. One of the attractions of living ‘na wsi’ (in the countryside), rather than in one of the socialist-era high-rise apartment blocks dominating the urban centres, was that opportunities for keeping occupied increase. Friends of his kept pigeons, or bees, in retirement, but he wasn’t interested in such things, and for now, he had his truck, and was often out on the road. As a result, he was usually always wearing a ragged t-shirt and tracksuit bottoms to perform his tasks – whether driving, lifting, carrying, or moving coal around, outside or within the home.

In turn, and as she frequently reminded me, Basia, Stefan’s wife, looked after the entire household herself – meaning the cooking, cleaning, washing, ironing, shopping, and also looking after the children, including their health, education and spiritual wellbeing too (she would take them to church every Sunday, whereas Stefan was less interested in religion and only attended occasionally). During the many visits I paid, she was constantly active, never seeming to pause for a moment with her endless list of chores. Most of the time I spent with her, we sat in the kitchen, where she told me she probably laboured at least four hours a day. It was important to her for her family to have home-cooked, healthy meals. With chickens, and a large vegetable plot and orchard in the garden that she also tended to, she had access to such ‘healthy’ food, meaning ‘natural’ or organic (no chemicals), on her doorstep – another way she also tried to save money in the household budget Stefan brought in but she looked after. She recognized with a sigh that as breadwinner, Stefan had always been responsible for securing the household income, but it was one of her biggest sorrows that her husband did not ‘help’ her more around the home. She would see other husbands today doing it, but his generation was just like that. He wouldn’t allow her to have a paid job, because he considered it to be harmful for the family, but she confided in me that she thought he just didn’t want her to have more autonomy. So instead she was a ‘domowa kura’ - a housebound chicken, and sometimes, she confided, she felt she might go crazy. The strain in their marriage was obvious – but, Basia said, she had no income of her own – where would she go were they to divorce? Anyway, her Catholic faith made such ideas unpalatable, threatening her with risks of shame too. Basia longed for a more emotionally intimate and equal partnership – a contemporary demand on Stefan that he was unable to fulfil or offer. His masculine identity had not been socialized in this manner. At the same time, social change had meant, however, that bringing home
the bacon was no longer sufficient to guarantee the respect that was once his automatic due. This 
was even more so during retirement, when, even though he was bringing in income through his 
pension payments, and through his supplementary job, he was no longer spending long productive 
hours at the mine.

Like many others in his position (see Świtała-Trybek, 2010), Stefan found retiring a 
confusing adjustment. His body-clock for a start ran havoc. He spent his entire working life doing 
night shifts, and so when he stopped working, it took him a long time to switch to more regular 
daylight hours. In the summer time, he would sometimes spend an entire night out in the blow-up 
swimming pool because he couldn’t sleep. When he wasn’t picking up or delivering coal, a job 
which took up around 3-4 hours a day, but was intermittent, he was unused to being around the 
house, a space that was decidedly Basia’s expert and capable domain. It was true that I didn’t often 
see him spending time inside the dwelling zone of the house, except for the occasional ‘retreat to 
the sofa’ (Ashwin & Lytkina, 2004: 19). His large frame and scruffy look always seemed 
incongruous with the cleanliness, order, and pastel-coloured and flower-patterned decoration that 
Basia had favoured within the home. Such an incongruity was a symptom of what, as I earlier 
referenced, Ashwin and Lytkina (2004: 202) have called the post-Soviet man’s ‘weak integration 
into the household’. Instead, when he was not in the living room watching telly, Basia confirmed, 
and I observed, that the basement was where he spent most of his time. Time in the basement was 
spent sometimes drinking, but was mostly justified by tinkering away, adjusting, experimenting, and 
tending to the coal stove.

Down in the basement was where the old-fashioned coal stove was located, where it belonged 
– out of the way and hidden so that its dirt and smell did not get into the house above. Feminine and 
masculine spatial spheres in the home were thus symbolically delineated mainly by where dirt and 
disorder were ‘allowed’ and not allowed, mapped onto ‘technical’ spaces and ‘home-making’ ones21. 
Connected to a central heating system, the basement was also of course the most logical place to 
locate a stove, with gravity and pumps doing the combined work. It was kept in a dedicated boiler 
room that Stefan himself had constructed, and lighting, maintaining, organising, and fueling it were 
his primary domestic duties. A small window from the boiler room opened out onto the driveway, 
and it was through here that Stefan would haul the heavy fuel, roughly six tonnes of coal a winter, 
into the house with a spade; a common Silesian arrangement that was again usually the role of the 
male breadwinner. Doing this type of work generated and involved a lot of dirt and dust. Indeed,

21 See also Ursula Offenberger and Julia C. Nentwich (2009, 2010) on gendered spatial orders and home heating.
explanations for why it was a man’s job to look after the coal stove centred on the fact that it is ‘dirty work’, and so not suitable for women. In many ways this was represented as a chivalrous gesture – protecting the feminine from being soiled. It was also a mark of honour – indeed, a woman’s domestic work should be respected – that’s why upon entering the hallway of a Silesia home, one should always remove one’s outdoor shoes. Such remarks from Stefan told me that he valued Basia’s labour in patriarchic terms, but did not know quite how to communicate this – except by, paradoxically, staying away. In turn, Basia would leave ‘his’ spaces to him.

Sometimes, Stefan told me, he would go downstairs to the basement and just hang out there in the cool and darkness (as the opening quote to this section also referenced). A reminder of mine work, and a space that affirmed his masculine capability rather than impotence, the basement, around the coal stove, was where he felt most comfortable. Unlike the garage spaces in Jeremy Morris’s (2016: 87–102) ethnography of a postsocialist industrial Russian town that were the reserve of male sociality and solidarity organized around practical activity, the domestic basement, like the garden shed in Anglophone culture, was thus here a preserve of lone-range masculine individual retreat from a disorientating and often painful world. Disappearing to the basement seemed to be part of a coping mechanism for a marriage that was tense, and a family in which he was all-too-aware that his role was minimal and in which he failed to live up to newer expectations. I often sensed that he would wish to play a bigger role in his children’s upbringing but, having spent most of his life with attention focused on work, and without the comfort of knowing how to integrate this into his sense of self, lacked the confidence to feel he had something to offer in this domain. This was incredibly shame-inducing. He therefore clung to what he knew. The coal stove became both escape and the materialization of what he could offer – industrial breadwinning petro-masculine skill, authority and care. In turn it offered to secure a positive sense of himself. How so?

For a start, combusting coal gave him a clear sense of satisfaction and accomplishment. Lighting the fire is, in Silesian dialect (a historic fusion of Polish, German and Czech), known as ‘hajcowania’, from the German root word for ‘heat’, heizen, while a coal miner is colloquially often referred to as a ‘hajer’, revealing the symbolic-discursive cultural connection between them (and referring to the historic method of exploitation involving explosives). Hajcowanie is specifically correlated with a flame or fire, thus the process of combustion as a skill is key. Often I would be privy to conversations between male heads of households discussing their specific technique or method for hajcowanie - or exclaiming how hard they had had to hajcować the previous night to keep the house warm. Even though wives were proud to state they were also able to match this skill,
and would frequently contribute to maintaining the stove (and Basia no less), the social practice of hajcowanie was decisively a Silesian masculine terrain, while hajcowanie-talk was a means through which men bonded and exchanged petro-masculine social esteem through demonstrations of technical expertise.

Hajcowanie also connected masculine labour, skill and knowledge to homosocial worlds in another sense. Working with coal within the home, particularly for retired coal miners like Stefan who no longer participated in coal mining life, was the means through which memories of mining and being a valuable part of this broader sociocultural landscape, was kept alive. When spending time with Stefan by the coal stove (something he was initially reluctant for me to do because I am female and I sensed he felt uncomfortable with me in this masculine-reserved space) he would often recount his memories of working below ground, and told me with a laugh, ‘Now I just transfer coal from one pile to another. This is the only time I get to touch coal now!’ Through coal’s touch, along with his job as its deliverer to other households, Stefan was still connected into coal’s socio-material world – its circulation and flow between mine and household, and between stove and home. A bond he was unwilling to relinquish because I saw how his sense of a capable, worthy and valuable personhood was so imbricated with it. While vocally, he explained that they could not afford gas, through spending time with him in this way I could see there was more than finances at stake, though that too was a concern, particularly for enabling him to fulfil his breadwinning duty. Stefan and the coal stove supported one another. In the previous chapter we saw how publically-expressed smog denial worked to keep shame at bay in terms of protecting valuable collective social identities – here the coal stove kept it at bay for the male within the household, a space where failings were increasingly personalized and so shame even more individualized under neoliberalized gendered regimes and therefore threatening.

Through taking care of domestic heating, Stefan not only asserted his authority as household patriarch, but also got to feel that he contributed to taking care of his family, and their home, too. By protecting and providing, he sought to capture a limited channel of both domestic self-respect and family respect and appreciation. Generating a ‘comfortable’ home in the winter months – one in which warmth created a pleasing atmosphere and positive social relations – Stefan was able to materially demonstrate his capabilities as much as familial love through ‘thermal accomplishment’ (Vannini & Taggart, 2014: 68). Because it was a labour – requiring numerous visits to the basement, as many as five to six a day, involving shovelling coal, tending the fire, disposing of waste ash, and getting dirty – tending to the coal stove was a physical effort that acted as an acceptable masculine
carrier for love’s affections or duties. Heating became a ‘labour of love’ (Jalas and Rinkinen, 2016: 55) Generating this heat was about assuring comfort, but also about achieving ‘zgoda’ - or harmonious familial relations. A house that was over- or under-heated might generate tensions and frictions, while a house that was evenly and desirably heated throughout could create an atmosphere of possible relaxation and agreeableness. In this sense, the monitoring of heat carried also the weight of generating the domestic holding space or envelope - either of comfort or discomfort, of positive marital and familial relations, or strained. In this way, tending to the stove was, in Stefan’s case, a way for him to make an attempt at smoothing tensions over in the house, while at the same time providing an opportunity to hide away from facing them and feeling relatively good about himself. ‘I do my bit down here’, he tells me ‘and the girls don’t bother me!’ Producing comfort was also relevant for industrial breadwinning petro-masculine care of guests, where having a warm home was part of local rules of hospitality.22 If one expected guests, the house was prepared through planned extra-hajcowanie, and entering a thoroughly heated home was part of experiencing the family’s material standing and generosity – literally, a warm welcome, eliciting social respect.

Further, Stefan’s role as coal-stove manager put him in the breadwinning position of domestic security keeper. As a sociocultural and economic value, being energy independent, and not reliant on distant (even if relatively nearby) power plants was important to many particularly retired coal mining men I spoke with. In some senses this was a legacy of being a post-war generation, in which tales of deprivation and insecurity from occupying forces and invasions were part and parcel of a Silesian upbringing. The sense that another war or invasion could be impending was never completely banished from the local imaginary – particularly, at that time, from Russia. In that case, having heating technology and knowledge of how to use, maintain and repair it, that was detached from a distant energy grid and distant others seemed prudent.23 This also reflected a postsocialist decline in trust in the state and concomitant desire for self-reliance.24 At times, having a coal stove was not the only form of domestic energy in the house. Sometimes, households would also be equipped with ‘back up’ boilers – run on, for example, gas tanks or oil. Hybrid heating models were also possible – where solar panels were used for electricity but coal-stoves for heating. Technical modalities were patched together and mixed in order to suit the domestic desires, particularly of the

22 See also Mikko Jalas and Jenny Rinkinen (2016) and Ian Reeve et al. (2013) for similar with wood heat elsewhere.
23 See Lars Kjerulf Petersen (2008: 14-16) for how the value of autonomy, self-determination, and freedom were similarly important for off-grid wood-burning home-heating choices in Denmark.
24 A general postsocialist shift in heating provision from a ‘centralised infrastructural regime to an individual and fragmented system has led to a definite loss of trust in the state’, find Tauri Tuvikene et al. (2019: 1)
male taking care of things. Yet coal was considered most dependable – linked to its long-standing sociomaterial historic role in the region, something that had never failed even as wars, borders, regimes, governments had constantly come and gone, or shifted – it had remained underfoot. It was also cheap, plentiful and often free for miners. Another reason gas was sometimes rejected was because of its long-standing association with explosions at the mines – the very word ‘gas’ held traumatic connotations of both coal mine disasters and even not-too-distant Auschwitz too, and I was often told that having gas in the house could be dangerous – a ticking time bomb. Coal was felt to be safer and more reliable – because it was more controllable, tangible and familiar. Thus home-heating with coal was embedded in industrial breadwinning petro-masculine notions of providing security and protecting the home (and homeland), values that coal embodied. At the same time, by choosing coal’s heat and stove technology that demanded it, industrial breadwinning males could retain their skills, knowledge and experience within the four walls of the home, while supporting the industry that employed them and made such skills and personhood relevant too. It was a kind of local economic patriotism.

The topic of smog was not a regular conversation in this household. When it did come up it was often accompanied by hazy talk of uncertain causes and strange changes brought on by ‘modernity’. General health was, however, a key topic. For Stefan and Basia’s two daughters both had allergies, and one had asthma. Since this lay in Basia’s caring domain, she ensured that everyday each of them took their medication and carried out an ‘inhalation’ through a machine she bought online that pumped out saline vapour. More and more people were getting ill these days, she told me. She was not the only person to mention so. Like many others, she was not sure why. She knew many people blamed the coal mines and the smog, but the mines have always been here, and these illnesses, like cancer, diabetes, asthma, allergies were new. According to her understanding, they came with ‘civilization’ - meaning Westernization. It was all the chemicals in food these days, and all the stuff They put into the atmosphere, she told me. Such explanations I heard frequently. When I asked Stefan about it, he shrugged, and also said that he thought that ‘They’, shadowy powerful actors, were poisoning the earth. Coal, on the other hand, was good and clean, (after all it was Silesian soil made morally pure through masculine labour) and if air pollution was anything to do with these illnesses, everybody would be dead here by now. As outlined in chapter five, in the 1990s, Silesia was declared an ‘ecological catastrophe zone’ due to the toxic fallouts of Soviet industrialization. Yet people still lived here – we lived here, Stefan, and others, would laugh ironically. Historic regional structural environmental injustices and exploitations had left a potent
legacy of hardened embodied hegemonic petro-masculinities, where exposure to dirt and pollution was often shrugged off, and where safe toxins were delineated by what was ‘Ours’ and ‘Not ours’, not necessarily by material composition. As we saw in the previous chapter, ‘smog’ was not a discourse that had much purchase here, and Stefan’s word was usually the last on such matters. I sensed it was not such a welcome topic in his presence.

As I prepared to leave my fieldwork site, however, Stefan and Basia were discussing upgrading their coal stove to the new class five efficiency variety of boilers. Theirs was having some ongoing technical issues and according to the new Anti-Smog Resolution law, all households would have to upgrade by 2027 anyway. This would change the labour of coal-heating from being manually-fed to automatic – reducing the amount of work associated with it, so that one would no longer have to tend to the stove so often. Stefan had ultimate say on this decision, and together with his brother they decided to install the new variety. Despite the reduced amount of work linked to the appliance, Stefan was excited about its new digital temperature-setting functions, and that he could experiment with overcoming the restrictions on the kinds of fuels you were technically allowed to put in – limited to ‘ekogroszek’, or pea-coal, that was of a certain parameter and size, and came in bags not piles. He was already trying to see if he could mill down the coal he had already bought and use it anyway. The stove would still occupy him with tinkering and maintenance, perhaps less often, while coal would still need to be purchased and delivered. Yet still, down in the basement it verified his domain in the home as industrial breadwinning petro-masculine authority and carer. An important line of defense against an economy that had largely disposed of him.

As this ethnographic account has attempted to illustrate, coal, coal stoves, and embodiment of Silesian industrial breadwinning petro-masculinity in contexts of neoliberal ecological dispossession are closely entwined. Long-standing investments into their entangled gendered subjectivities influences home-heating choices, attachment to coal, and the denial also of air pollution’s relevance, set in the context of broader collective social identities too as chapter five detailed, slowing down an ecological transition away from coal towards clean air. In this way, this chapter has argued that paying ethnographic attention to locally-tied classed gendered regimes within the domestic sphere set within the broader economy, specifically hegemonic industrial breadwinning petro-masculinity, offers fresh insight into making sense of the locally-lived, root causes behind smog and attachment to coal that are usually overlooked in making sense of the air pollution conundrum. As we seek to move towards fossil-fuel-free futures, those gendered identities and subjectivities with most to lose may harden against and resist such change, especially since they
threaten their integrity with shame experienced as ecological dispossession without a safety net. PiS’s flavour of populism was one possible home for such grievances, whether through tacit or active support.

Conclusion: Anti-ecological, petro-masculinist industrial populism to the rescue

As we have seen in the opening to the thesis, the industrial, particularly male, working-class have been a key (though of course not only) constituent for PiS (Ost, 2018). Part of this appeal, I propose, is that industrial breadwinning petro-masculinity and PiS in context of neoliberalized ecological dispossession are in strong explicit alignment. In chapter five I outlined how, in deliberately direct contravention to European environmental policy, PiS were, at the time of my fieldwork in 2017, noted for actively downplaying the smog issue and refusing it’s public health urgency (V Moura, 2018). Their pro-Polish coal, and anti-EU, anti-ecological, platform (including regarding climate change) were a key part of this reticence. Refusing then to break with coal, to the frustration of many smog activists, instead, they had long envisioned Silesia becoming a centre for innovation around ‘clean coal’ technologies – a kind of industrial revival (Kuchler and Bridge, 2018; TVPInfo, 2018). In addition to this anti-smog, pro-coal stance, their 500+ pro-natal family welfare allowance, their Catholic ‘traditional family values’, their rejection of EU-imposed ‘gender ideology’, and their respect for the hard labours of (male) ‘Polish workers’ serve, in part, as a rescue operation for industrial breadwinning petro-masculinities under threat of irrelevance and abandonment and its shame from ecological dispossession– at the imbricated domestic household and domestic national level too. As Daggett (2018) found in the US, and as Hultman and Pulé (2018) discovered in Europe, masculinities, anti-environmentalism, and fossil-fuel attachment go hand in hand, contributing to the rise of far-right populist politics that most vocally champions and boosts such entanglements by reinstating and upholding the moral worth and dominance of industrial ways of life locally understood. Yet, despite the fact that contemporary far-right populism,

25 The statistically greater appeal of far-right populist parties across Europe and America to particularly (white) male supporters has been noted by numerous studies (Coffé, 2018; Graff et al., 2019; Spierings and Zaslove, 2017; Stockemer et al., 2018)
26 PiS are noted not only for their smog scepticism but also for their climate scepticism (Zuk and Szulecki, 2020)– a trend common to far-right populist parties (Forchtner, 2019; Forchtner et al., 2018; Lockwood, 2018; Malm and Zetkin Collective, 2021) as the previous chapter detailed.
27 For example, in October 2018, PiS party President, Jarosław Kaczyński, visited Silesia to lay out a plan for the region with coal at its heart. He stated that in Silesia ‘There is a great tradition of work, in industry, mining, but not only in mining, hard, physical work. This was needed, is needed and will be needed. I would like to say that we respect this work very much, we bow our heads to it’ (TVPInfo, 2018).
fossil fuel defense, anti-environmentalism and masculinities are increasingly being made sense of together, ethnographic insights remain scarce.

In this chapter I have attempted to show how such politicized gendered dynamics manifest in Silesia through not purely a discursive, but an embodied, relation of particularly working-class masculinities to the materialities of coal here in the everyday environments of the Silesian home with implications for solving the crisis of smog, and on a broader scale, climate change too. With increasingly fearful reflexivity in response to sweeping socioeconomic changes, and encroaching post-traditional and ecological values and norms, what the introduction outlined as made sense of in terms of ecological dispossession, the clinging on to industrial breadwinning petro-masculinity within the household works to re-assert its dominance, defending against shame and reinstating a sense of being-at-home-in-the-world (in the literal home and the national home too) for those most deeply attached to its increasingly vulnerable pay-offs and affirmations as a security strategy, generating friction against ecologically-just futures. Current approaches towards tackling smog, and climate change as well, however, often fail to factor in or analyse the role that gendered identities, particularly at the micro-level, set against broader socioeconomic trends, play in their politicized failure or success. This is especially so in relation to their embodied entanglement with the petro-materialities of coal as a heating fuel.

As a result of such entanglements, while women (and children’s) bodies are represented as particularly vulnerable to smog’s health consequences within campaign literature, they have thus far been under-represented in the public debate about smog and in discussions regarding home heating choices in Silesia. Part of the reason is that within the Silesian household, like that of Stefan and Basia’s, the woman has little authority and say over home heating choices or practices – and has been traditionally excluded from the public domain. Yet, since she is traditionally responsible for the health and wellbeing of the nation, or household’s members – particularly its children, and embodiedly more distant to coal, I found that women were far more likely to be concerned about air pollution and its possible negative health consequences (such as asthma, and lung conditions), even as they often felt disempowered to act on a bigger public stage and uncertain about what to believe in a restricted zone of possibility.

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28 Notably, for example, almost all of the thirteen Silesian chapters of the Polish Smog Alert had been set up, and were led, by men.
29 In researching contamination in built environments, Michael Edelstein (2002: 577) found that ‘Women are also more likely to respond to potential contamination, in part because they are more likely to be engaged in child care and in part because they are less likely to be associated with a polluting industry.’ At the same time women tend to predominate in grassroots activism – comprising some 70% of activists studied at local level (see also Bell and Braun, 2010). Likewise, more recently, females have been found to have higher risk
that husbands were often so closely involved with. Yet the active presence of women in this discussion is beginning to stir, particularly in direct challenge to coal’s hegemony, with reactions revealing much about gender in relation to smog, petro-masculinities and its political imbrications in the region. This challenge, however, is not from within the mining community, but from without.

In December 2019, as PM2.5 levels reached 999µg/m³ (parts per million), and PM10 over 750µg/m³, recognizing the lack of women’s involvement in local issues in general, the newly-established Women’s Council in the Upper Silesian town of Rybnik (Rybnicka Rada Kobiet), the most air-polluted in the region, set up in large part to take action on smog, appealed to the town council with an unprecedented proposal to carry out a local blanket ban on solid fuel use in domestic heating – including all types of coal. Such a proposal – the first of its kind in the region (implemented already in non-coal-connected Kraków since 2013, as we saw in chapter four) – was considered ‘radical’. For the Women’s Council, however, the 2017 Silesian Anti-Smog Resolution with its timeline for upgrading stoves and thermo-modernizing homes extending to 2027 was far too slow and not radical enough. Fearing for their own and their children’s health in the interim, they wanted change – and now. Holding a meeting on 16th December in Rybnik Town Council, a decision among councillors on the proposal was unable to be made, however, because the meeting did not reach quorate. Notably absent were almost all councillors from PiS (who had 9 out of 25 seats – the highest representation of any one Party), bar one, who remained silent throughout and left half way through (Furmanowicz, 2019).

Following from this, the group petitioned the town council to commission an independent expert local review of the 2017 Silesian Anti-Smog Resolution, in order to ascertain whether its programme for action would effectively deliver the promised improvements in air quality to permissible international standards, or whether more stringent action was required, as they feared. On the 19th December that year, the Women’s Council received the reply from the town’s President’s office that no such review would be undertaken since it was too early to do so, and that any more restrictive action must be undertaken with insightful economic and social analysis in order to ensure the most just resolution. The President’s office was confident that the Clean Air Programme would deliver improvements in air quality for PM2.5 and PM10, but admitted that for benzo(a)parin, perception to wide range of environmental hazards, including climate change (Lais et al., 2018: 78) Kari Norgaard (2012: 83) also points to the under-researched phenomenon that in the global North, men tend to have a higher carbon footprint than women. In part a result of such trends, climate scepticism and denial have been linked to the maintenance of (white) male privilege and a heteropatriarchal order (Anshelm and Hultman, 2014; Norgaard, 2012: 83)
acceptable norms might still not be met – yet **significant improvements** will have occurred.\(^\text{30}\) The women were appalled at this attitude that they felt prioritized coal above the lives of citizens. They also felt that it was a typically masculine belittling of ‘women’s concerns’. Members of the group informed me that they had been consistently laughed at in meetings, talked down to, and condescended by local councillors and industry representatives – overwhelmingly male.\(^\text{31}\) As a ‘bunch of women’ they were considered by some to be irrelevant or hysterical (Nowiny.rybnik.pl, 2020) – a classic charge made at previous female ecological activists, from Rachel Carson to Erin Brockovich.

Speaking to local Radio90.fm (2019) prior to the response, Joanna Bulandra, one of the group’s spokeswomen, had defended their call for radical action, saying ‘Everybody has talked about the economic factor – that it’s too expensive, that we can’t afford it, but less attention has been paid to the health costs. These are alarming, because, quite simply, we are dying. Women are also worried about their men, because they seem to look at this data in a very non-urgent, non-radical way, and think that we still have time’. In this statement, Bulandra highlights the intersections of gender, energy, domestic heating and air pollution in Silesia in revealing ways – women are perceived to ‘care’ about health and see smog as an urgent issue; men, not so. Coal comes first.

Such difference between ‘male’ and ‘female’ approaches to air pollution were often explained away (by these activists too) by recourse to essentialist notions of gender, with women represented as more intrinsically ecological because of their ‘softer’, more sensitive, and feminized values of care and nourishment, linked to their domestic role in child-rearing, while men were described as more intrinsically tough, stoical and hard-headed and so less worried about his body’s vulnerability to smog. Yet, this overlooks the way gendered identities are outcomes of practical and performative engagements with environments, technologies and material things also in classed contexts of economic positionality. ‘Masculinity’, (‘femininity’ too), requires props arranged and organised along gendered lines with which to demonstrate itself and therefore accrue self-worth, power and status. Without those props, that secure base, and without that hegemonic arrangement, its strength weakens significantly generating intense ontological insecurity in times of broader precarity as we

\(^{30}\) From letter received by Rybnik Women’s Council dated 19th December 2019 and signed by Janusz Koper, the Deputy President of Rybnik, and which was shared with me by the group.  
\(^{31}\) Out of 25 seats in the Town Council, following the 2018 election, 5 were occupied by women, 20 by men. On 20th January 2020, on hearing an impassioned speech from the Rybnik Women’s Council in a meeting in the Silesian Sejm on the topic, PiS Councillor Zbigniew Przedpełski asked whether they would also be hearing from representatives from the ‘Rybnik Men’s Council’, and since not, whether this should be considered gendered discrimination (Nowiny.rybnik.pl, 2020).
have seen. Industrial breadwinning petro-masculinity and its embodied investments in relation to traditional coal-based home-heating technologies and its divisions of labour, one of the last bastions of the traditional domestic industrial gender regime, lurks behind reticence to part ways, yet remains as yet un-articulated. This chapter has sought to contribute to its excavation, highlighting simultaneously the way PiS’s industrial populism works most explicitly to capture and heal these anxieties through promising to stabilize this order with its smog-denialist, traditionalist, masculinist and pro-industry, producerist, appeals, and its silencing and contempt of women who challenge this too.\textsuperscript{32}

\begin{quote}
32 Such contempt has been noted most explicitly by PiS’s extreme anti-women’s-rights policies. In October 2016, the ‘Black Protest’ (\textit{Czarny Protest}) saw tens of thousands of women and their supporters dressed in black taking to the streets in a mass national public strike against a Church-backed proposal to enforce a total ban on abortion in a country with already severely-restricted abortion rights (now to include in cases of foetal abnormalities, incest and rape). This action, which resulted in the PiS government backing down at the time, sparked a global wave of feminist organising, including the emergence of the social movement Polish Women’s Strike (\textit{Polski Strajk Kobiet}). See Bogumila Hall (2019). In October 2020, defying coronavirus restrictions, mass protest swept the country once again led by Polish Women’s Strike, as PiS used covid as a cover to successfully push this law through Parliament.
\end{quote}
Chapter seven. Desire for dignity: Dirt, labour, and the embodied moral economy of ‘normality’

‘This isn’t mining anymore! I tell you, it’s something else already!’ With that, Stasiek banged his fist on the table in front of him. It was one of my first visits to the coal mining trade union office and I was being initiated into the shame and anger of contemporary mining life. Stasiek, a heavy set, imposingly vocal retired coal worker in his fifties with a greying yet animated mustache, had come to find out from the reps what was happening with PiS’s promise of compensation for pensioners who had had their rights to an annual 8-tonne coal allowance, or ‘deputat’ for home-heating rescinded.¹

¹ Since 2012, and again in 2105, due to economic pressures in mining, coal mine companies began to announce that retirees would no longer be eligible for this long-standing ‘privilege’ - their ‘deputat’. In practice this ended up meaning that some continued to receive it, some didn’t. In Autumn 2016, the PiS government proposed to offer compensation for this maltreatment that was due to be in place by January 2017. However, such promises were slow to materialize. Pensioners anger mounted, and protests were threatened. It was not until September 2017, after initiatives by the trade unions to pressurize government action, that a one-off 10,000 PLN compensation payment was announced in return for signing a document that would rescind rights to claiming the allowance ever again. For many, the symbolic injury remained. Miners were being severed from the umbilical chord of the motherbreadwinner mine and the nation she served. Retirees disgruntled by the delayed compromise saw this as a squashing of workers’ rights by stealth and bribery. Furthermore, not all miners would be eligible, leaving thousands out of the deal. Others felt PiS had dealt with the matter admirably. This was in turn criticized by anti-PiS and anti-coal media as yet another bailout for privileged miners at the taxpayers’ expense to the tune of 2.3billion PLN (money.pl, 2017; wPolityce.pl, 2017). Such acrimony highlights the tone of mining politics in contemporary Polish society. Here I portray it as a conflict over dignity, recognition and respect.
Silesia is no longer a mining place. This isn’t mining! Things are not what they used to be. Young people are treated terribly by the mine. They are depressed, exhausted, poorly paid, if they take one sick day – just one – out of the whole month, they might be fired! The director does not give a shit! I tell you things are really tense at the moment; people are really angry. It could kick off at any moment.

He shook his head, and the trade union reps nodded in agreement gravely. He continued:

Mining used to be a respected profession! Now all you hear in the media and round here is that miners are lazy, earn too much, hold the state to ransom and are even responsible for that ‘smog’ too! People in Silesia used to look up to miners for their hard work. Today they just call him a stupid ‘ryl’². A miner is a straightforward person, who just wants security to live. He doesn’t need luxury or ask for much. He just wants to work hard, have a stable job, support his family, and be treated with respect. That’s all!

Stasiek’s tale of bitter decline, and his plea, was one frequently articulated by particularly the older generation of miners (aged fifty+ and mostly retired)³ I encountered in my research. Yet coal was still being excavated, the ‘kombijn’ machines⁴ were still running, coal miners were still hard at work in the subterranean tunnels. Poland still ‘stood on coal’, didn’t it? With time, I came to understand that, although the bedrock of coal – the geological strata – in many ways remained the same as it always had, its role in the (re)production of cultural and social meaning, or ‘geosocial life’ (Palsson and Swanson, 2016), had drastically changed. Its materiality now afforded entirely different meanings in Poland. As outlined in chapter five, for older miners, with lived experiences and memories of the socialist past, the concept of ‘coal mining’ referred to more than the rationalized extraction of a simple energy commodity. Back then coal had underpinned an entire ‘way of life’ centred around labour, making its shared identity and moral personhood possible. In his angry

² A colloquially insulting term for a miner in the Silesian dialect meaning ‘spade’, thus implying base ignorance. Similar class-laden discourses directed at miners were encountered in chapter four in relation to smog.

³ As outlined in chapter five, one of the ‘privileges’ granted coal miners is that they are eligible to retire after 25 years of ‘service’ below ground with a full state pension, meaning that a miner can theoretically retire at age 46 if they begin work at 21 – the legal age for working below today. The maximum legal age a miner can work below until is 55.

⁴ ‘Continuous miner’ machines are impressively large pieces of machinery used underground in ‘room and pillar’ systems to scrape and cut coal from the seam at a rate of five tonnes of coal per minute. They are operated by remote control and are attached to a conveyor belt that transports the coal from the seam up to the surface for processing. An example of increased mechanization of coal mine labour contributing to the popular idea of mining as being much ‘easier’ than the past. Thomas Hylland Eriksen thus for example writes that coal miners in Australia is a bloke sitting behind a …. In many respects this is accurate, and yet perspectives on working conditions and their acceptability shift with time. This is particularly in relation to the ongoing subterranean conditions of mine labour in Poland in the context of the European labour market.
outburst, Stasiek thus expressed a collective, generational and working-class ‘moral economy’ of coal based on the old social contract of reciprocity between a (predominantly male) labourer and the socialist coal-mine-as-state. According to this formulation, hard, dirty (petro-masculine – see chapter six) work ought to be – indeed used to be – exchanged for ‘money and respect’ (Kesküla, 2012: 134) in the form of social security from cradle to grave, with the mining company supplying not only income but also housing, schools, health care, leisure activities, access to consumer goods, and community. In fact, work itself was a guaranteed right. Yet all that had come to an end – and to top it all off, the director, the elites, ‘did not give a shit’. As a result, the loss of such ‘privileges’ it once afforded was experienced as a violent betrayal, and a crushing personal affront and violation of the anticipated moral code of conduct reflecting the ongoing ‘paternalistic expectations of ordinary people after socialism’ (Morris, 2016: 32). It was a moral-ecological dispossession. Thus, Stasiek’s complaint articulated a widespread concern about what or who was being valued (or not) in the postsocialist present (Crăciun, 2015; Verdery, 2003). He wanted me to know that coal mining as a ‘total social fact’ was ‘already over’ – and ‘Silesia was no longer a mining place. Moral worlds had clashed and theirs had come undone. The resultant moral and ecological ‘dispossession’ (Hann, 2011a), or the collapse of Communism as a moral-ecological industrial social order replaced by the apparent a-morality of an increasingly postindustrial capitalism, left the remaining mining community in existential disarray, exposed to the disorientations of shame as a pervasive ‘structure of feeling’ (Williams, 1977).

5 According to Stephen Crowley (1997: 13), the ‘social contract’ that existed in the post-Stalin period between the Communist regime and society, particularly industrial workers, was based on the idea that workers were ‘given full employment, rising wages, and a wide array of social services in exchange for their political consent and compliance’. What Crowly omits here is that the social contract was also based on the recognition of the embodied risks and dirty work of the job.

6 See also Eeva Kesküla (2012: 111–143) for similar moral economy among miners in post/socialist Estonia. Yet this also has deeper historic roots and can arguably be traced back to peasant cultures where the value of work, particularly manual labour in relation to the soil, as an end in itself and a reflection of moral worth of the person, were paramount (Allen, 2014; see also Hann, 2018: 232–233 in the context of rural Hungary, drawing also on Lampland, 1995).

7 As Sarah Ashwin (1999: 125) observed in postsocialist Russia, even in the late 1990s as the paternalism of enterprises was being eroded, in the ‘mind of the workers’ the idea of the enterprise as a ‘site of social provision’ remained strong and ‘egalitarian principles of social justice persist[ed]’. However, such expectations are prevalent not only in the post-socialist context, but in the broader post-Fordist one too, encompassing Western Europe and the USA. Fordist work relations were also structured around social care for the worker and ‘people continue to yearn for this aspect of paternalism, as condescending and authoritative as it might have been’, leaving behind ‘durable affective structures’ Andrea Muehlebach and Nitzan Shoshan (2012: 331) write in an introduction to the notion of ‘post-Fordist affect’. In Poland, postsocialist affect and post-Fordist affect fuse into a pervasive sense of double loss and betrayal.
While older miners clearly articulated this as a sense of irrevocable, and shame-inducing loss in comparison to the sureness of the socialist past they embodied, how did younger miners still working in mining today feel about, make sense, and navigate their grisly present? Most research on industrial decline in post-Soviet workplace contexts, though limited, centre the perspectives and experiences of an older generation of workers—highlighting how the lived memory of socialism, such as for Stasiek, acts as a valid critique of the present often in the form of complaint8 (Crowley, 1997; Kesküla, 2012, 2018; Kideckel, 2008; Morris, 2016; Rakowski, 2009). Such comparative critique acts as a means of overcoming their indeterminate position in contemporary society and of thereby re-establishing a clear sense of their moral value by drawing on the certainty of past discourses of miner’s worth (Kesküla, 2018: 131). The generation born after socialism’s demise and working post-EU accession, those who lack direct experience of this sedimented history, has received relatively less ethnographic attention. As one retired miner put it: ‘This generation is just totally different. They are a different kind of person. It’s a bit like in music, you have different genres. Well, they are that. All they care about is earning money; they don’t care about the traditions, and for them, it’s just a job.’9 How did these ‘different miners’, those most directly experiencing the brunt of coal’s contemporary changing meaning, make sense of its decline and its increasingly stigmatized status in a rapidly changing world? Why did they do coal’s increasingly-perceived-as-dirty work and how did they feel about it? And how did this intersect with PiS’s industrial populism which coal miners strongly resonated with?

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8 As David Kideckel (2008: 38) reminds us in the context of Romania, memories of socialism were mobilized by the (then) forty+ generation as a useful way to ‘orientate themselves to present-day life’. Likewise Chris Hann (2012: 1127) writes that ‘nostalgia’ for the socialist past should be understood as ‘commentary on the present, even as a form of resistance to the prevailing order, with implications for future alternatives’. See also (Friedman, 2007).

9 This echoes research by Simon Charlesworth (2000: 2) in a postindustrial community in England, who finds that ‘Those around forty have a coherent way of describing their lives’ while ‘as one comes down through the generations, one moves away from the efficacy of any narrative of the social, away from the co-ordinates of class, and encounters an arid individualism devoid of personal embedding in something beyond the ego’. As he writes, the shift is marked by a change in the relation to self – from an embedded, social sense of self, to one mediated by consumption and display (Charlesworth, 2000: 50). Jean Baudrillard (quoted in Charlesworth 2000: 51) defines this change in attitudes to work as a shift from being socialized into a labour force in the industrial era, to being socialized into a force of consumption in the postindustrial. Likewise, Daphne Berdahl (2005) writes in the context of postsocialist Germany, that the culture of neoliberalism in particular is one that ‘re-envision persons not as producers from a particular community, but as consumers in a planetary marketplace’. Personhood is now based on consumption. See also Chris Hann (2018: 236) on the shifting meaning of work as no longer an ‘end in itself’, and the rise of consumer values in which the market, rather than physical labour, becomes the ‘dominant ‘form of integration” in Polanyian terms in postsocialist Hungary.
Whereas previous chapters have explored the embodied emotional ecology of coal in relation to smog and coal-based home heating among the older mining community, framing ‘home’ in terms of regional identity and belonging, and the literal household, here we venture into the subterranean depths of coal’s labour and its fraught emotional politics among the younger cohort. This chapter examines the embodied emotional ecology of coal’s dirt, and a felt-sense of ecological dispossession, that undergirds contemporary coal miners’ engagements with Polish populist politics through a lay ‘moral economy’ of so-called ‘normality’ frame, excavating the visceral micro-ecology of workers’ shame and concomitant desire for a sense of home, understood here in terms of an assured and respectable place in the overlapping spheres of the domestic, national and EU economies (or oikos) of the new modernity.

**Generation gap: Dirty work under dirty capitalism and its dirty shame**

In 2017, Silesia experienced its lowest-ever unemployment rate (Pustulka, 2017). The slogan ‘there’s a shortage of workers’ kept circulating in the media and throughout my conversations during fieldwork. While the 1990s was collectively understood to be a period of ‘wild capitalism’ in Poland, characterized by rapid privatization of industry, sky rocketing unemployment and shady economic practices, the post-2008 economic landscape of Poland was widely portrayed as a remarkable success story. Following the financial crisis that rocked Western Europe in 2008 a mere four years after Poland joined the EU, Poland was the only country that experienced positive GDP growth the following year – 0.4%. As such, it became known as the ‘green island’ of Europe, and the centre-right Civic Platform government led by Donald Tusk championed this image over the next six years. The economy grew a staggering 29% between 2008 and 2015. What was there to complain about? Had not Poland now ‘arrived’ into fully-fledged capitalist ‘normality’?

Peering beneath this dazzling veneer, as the introduction depicted, however, much was in fact awry. Despite macroeconomic success, incomes did not keep pace and inequalities widened. Poland’s share of wages and salaries in proportion to GDP remained one of the lowest in the EU – 38% as opposed to 47% for the EU in general (Wężyk, 2018). In 2014, the median after-tax monthly income was still only just under 2400 PLN (c.530 EUR) (Wężyk, 2018). In Silesia, except in mining districts, average earnings remained below those of the national average, despite the fact that its GDP per capita and labour productivity are higher (Wiatrowski, 2009: 14). At the same time, the national economy experienced a profound intensification of neoliberalization towards increased...
flexibilization and precaritization. Although unemployment declined, boosted by the post-2004 migration exodus when 1.2 million Poles left for the West, what work remained became increasingly precarious. In 2014, 10% of those under-25 were informally employed; 25% had part-time or short-term work (Feffer, 2014). Poland’s ‘green island’ was made possible by becoming the ‘land of junk contracts’ (dubbed śmieciowe kontrakty) (Feffer, 2014). These offered wages that usually did not abide by the minimum standard, job insecurity, no holiday, parental or sick pay, no health insurance, no pension, often falling outside of standard labour laws, and limited access to credit. In 2015, such contract schemes provided ‘employment’ for 27% of working people, or around 1.5 million, again, the highest number among the EU countries (Wężyk, 2018). ‘It’s work stripped of dignity’, Donald Tusk admitted (Wężyk, 2018). Precisely the problem.

Over in the coal mining sector, things were only slightly better. In 2015, a global crisis had hit coal (Evans, 2016). On the world market, coal prices hit rock bottom, while since 2017 the cost of Polish coal itself increased. The economics of coal in Poland, which had been on a turbulent downward trend since 2013 (Bednorz, 2015), worsened further. Domestic coal lay unsold as imports rocketed, management was in turmoil. As coal reserves were reaching, even exceeding, peak extraction, the coal being mined was ever deeper (often as much as over 1km below ground), posing enhanced geological risks, methane hazards, and difficult working conditions. With every additional 33m one descended below ground, geothermal temperatures went up by a degree and humidity rose too. So did costs. Despite the increasingly risky and uncomfortable conditions, however, miners’ wages, a frequently controversial topic of public outcry in the media, were perceived by miners not

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10 In 2009, in response to the financial crisis, the Polish Labour Code was amended to allow for the increased flexibilization (read extension) of working hours. Ania Zybszewska (2012) writes, ‘In the context of Poland’s entrenched overtime culture, insecure, competitive, and unequal labour market, and high level of employment law violations (mainly in connection with working time), the extension of working hours threatens to strain the already difficult working conditions for many Poles.’

11 A further problem was that despite increased trade union mobilization and militancy from 2010 onwards across a range of sectors (e.g. mining, transport, public sector, retail, health, and national-level protests) expressing growing dissatisfaction with neoliberal policies hurting working conditions and labour rights, the government consistently ignored demands, reneged on promises and undermined dialogue (Bernaciak, 2019: 170 - 175).

12 Under the PRL and immediately after postsocialist transition, Poland was a coal exporting economy. Yet since 2008, imports began to exceed exports, with Russia, ironically, the main supplier (68% in 2018). In 2018, exports fell to 3.6 million tonnes, while imports increased to nearly 20 million tonnes. Covid 19 only worsened this situation (Żuk et al, 2021: 3) – see postscript.

13 According to law, a miner can work regularly in conditions of up to 28°C. Where temperatures reach 28.1°C – 33°C, the working hours must be shortened from eight to six. Above 33°C, and only those activities related to rescuing lives are permissible – according to the rulebook. In practice, I was told, the reality was somewhat variable.
to have kept pace\textsuperscript{14}. The economic pressures facing coal meant that ‘privileges’ over the years had been withdrawn, reduced or incorporated into pay packets. The 8 tonne coal allowance for retirees had been retracted. In 2016, the so-called ‘14th wage’, a bonus paid at the end of each year, had also been suspended, with uncertainty of its return.\textsuperscript{15} Guarantees of work post-mine school had been eliminated or reduced, yet at the same time the bars to entry were higher than ever, requiring extra certification. Statistically, contemporary miners reportedly still (just) earned more than the average worker\textsuperscript{16} and held on to certain post-Communist-era entitlements that for others were a fantasy (e.g., subsidized holidays, food coupons, sick pay, bonuses, coal allowance, full state-employee pension after 25 years, etc.). They were therefore often described by outsiders (as Stasiek alluded) resentfully to still be a ‘privileged’ class as a ‘pathological’ legacy of Communism. Insiders of course had a different point of view. Remaining miners strongly opposed the shrinking of entitlements and felt unjustly attacked by their ongoing material and symbolic precarity. Theirs was a gift (coal /provision of energy) increasingly unappreciated by wider society – one that had formerly underpinned a solid, secure claim to national belonging and its dignities (see Sennett and Cobb, 1972: 134–135; Smith, 2019). For this generation of miners, for the risky, dirty work they did, they felt they deserved every penny they got – and precisely for that, it was not enough. Miners reported again and again that their earnings allowed them to just about ‘get by’ and no more. Costs of living were rising – payment of rent, food and energy bills, consumer desires all needed to be satisfied, and it was a struggle. And that was with the added ‘help’ of wives and partners working too. The economy was thus offering them little alternative but to ‘live in ways they [did] not consider acceptable’ (Sayer, 2005: 955).

The sense of injustice and precarity was compounded by the fact that as a result of the 2015 coal crisis, the industry started another round of restructuring, leading to the re-introduction of voluntary redundancy for older miners who had only four years or less until retirement\textsuperscript{17}. Around 7600 miners accepted the offer, a process of bleeding out employment ‘naturally’. The sudden loss

\textsuperscript{14} Between 2015-2016, the average miner’s wage (heavily reliant on the fluctuating coal marker) was in decline. In 2017, it saw a 6% rise (Łukasik, 2018: 14)

\textsuperscript{15} The ‘14th’ wage is a month’s extra wage paid as a bonus to miner’s calculated against average monthly earnings.

\textsuperscript{16} Statistics on miner earnings are hotly contested. According to the Central Statistical Office, the average salary of a miner in 2018 was 7180 PLN (c.1500 EUR), against the national average of 4530 PLN (c. 1000 EUR). However, this average salary calculation includes the salaries of those in senior management positions, thus miners working below argue these figures are grossly inflated (see p. 40). In fact wages vary significantly. According to figures reported in money.pl from consultancy survey data, the average gross (before tax) monthly salary of a miner is more in the region of 4554 PLN (c.1000 EUR) – or the national average. A quarter of the lowest paid miners receive less than 3493 PLN (c. 775 EUR) monthly (Łukasik, 2018).
of older, skilled and experienced miners was accompanied by the loss of their knowledge, practices, traditions and memories creating a so-called ‘generation gap’. The lack of informal apprenticeship into what Jessica Smith-Rolston (2013) in the US-context has termed ‘pit sense’, combined with increased demands on productivity of a shrinking workforce made mining even more hazardous than it already had been, posing increased health and safety risks to inexperienced miners (Gałązka, 2017; Górnicza Izba Przemysłowo Handlowa, 2017). At the same time, since they were wet behind the ears, they earned much less. Furthermore, work at the mine was, according to accounts, disorganised, riddled with corruption and inefficient (described in more detail later). This added to the sense of stress, pressure, and lack of supportive structures, containment and reward that current miners reported experiencing (which I also outline in more detail later), and only highlighted to them the ‘neglect’ and disrespect with which they felt the industry, and they, had long been treated by inept managerial and political elites – a deliberate ploy to damage and destroy it and them from the inside out. Only the costs and burdens fell literally on their shoulders.

Furthermore, as outlined in the thesis introduction, in the contemporary world, the majority of Silesia’s bodies, particularly newly ‘successful’, respectable men’s bodies, were no longer dusted with coal and industrial grime. No longer a marker of modernity, it was connected increasingly with the ‘backward’ working-classes of yesteryear and all that was ‘pre-modern’ to those with other options and aspirations. As also pointed out in the thesis introduction, in ‘the era of smartphones’, the attraction and prestige of coal’s ‘gritty materiality’ and its dirty work had fallen even further down the social hierarchy in terms of its returns on economic and social capital (Smith and Tidwell, 2016: 328). Since ‘everything that is against comfort exists down there’, and the rewards for mining had diminished significantly, young people, I was told, ‘don’t want to work in mining anymore’. Desire now pointed up a new social ladder figured through new aspirations of consumption and

17 This was not the first time this had happened. In 1999, the state mining company froze recruitment for what became six years, the go-to strategy for improving productivity in the mining sector as part of the ongoing transformation and rationalization of the coal industry post-transition (Jonek Kowalska, 2015: 140) During this period too, many older miners retired or opted for early-retirement. By the next round of recruitment in 2005, there was a dramatic lowering of the average age of the work force. This already distilled a particularly sharp generational division between the ‘older’ and ‘younger’ cohort and its ‘socialist’ and ‘capitalist’ realities.

18 Whereas in the past, an ‘experienced’ miner might have had more than ten years under his belt, I learned that after four years, a novice miner would now be considered an ‘old hand’.

19 Writing about the everyday lives of energy transitions in the American West, Jessica Smith and Abraham Tidwell (2016: 328) state that coal mining’s ‘gritty materiality more easily evokes technologies of the Industrial Revolution than an era of smart phones’.

20 David Kideckel (2018: 145) notes similarly that in postsocialist industrial Romania ‘Not a single young man with whom I spoke was enthusiastic about mining’. On lack of willing workers in Polish coal mining and possibility of Ukrainians stepping in see Agata Pustułka (2017).
self-realization in reflexive modernity (Beck, 1992). As one older miner put it, ‘it’s a dying industry, it’s not attractive anymore. It’s dangerous and it will only get more dangerous as mining has to go deeper below ground. It puts people off. Just the matter of having to get changed into dirty clothes is enough to turn people off.’ This was particularly so in the context of the EU with its emphasis on the service economy and on the promotion of good, ‘modern’ work that is ‘virtual, clean and value adding’ (Bolton and Houlihan, 2009: 3). Another miner added - ‘young people today don’t want to get dirty in order to earn little – they want to earn more and fast and they want to go to work in a suit and tie, sit in an office behind a computer’. As a result, older miners complained that the younger generation had gone ‘soft’, expected too much too quickly, and were not up to the task. Such statements betrayed a fear of emasculation. These were not the petro-masculine men of old ‘we used to know’ who ‘simply’ desired a decent, dignified livelihood in exchange for hard, dirty work as Stasiek claimed (see also chapter five). Coal mines in turn complained that there was a shortage of willing and capable workers that would itself lead to the demise of the industry at the hands of the Polish state21. Recruitment for training programs had plummeted, and even the corridors of university-level courses in mining engineering had emptied. There were rumours that soon Ukrainians would have to do the work that Poles refused to do.22 Taken together – a hostile national economy for workers, poor material reward, management that treated them with disregard, and dehumanizing working conditions that were increasingly unacceptable, this was hard to bear. How did younger miners make sense of their degraded position?

During the time of my research, younger miners indeed wanted to particularly emphasize their work-related difficulties, struggles and suffering. Within our interviews and conversations, they focused on what they lacked—primarily respect and dignity. They were keen to present themselves, as Stasiek had as victims of an unjust, immoral world – for increasingly, victimhood appeared to be one of few positions available for claiming resources and compassion that seemed to flow together (see Dzenovska, 2016).23 Yet this had material grounding. Stories of embodied encounters with dirt at work were deeply materially-symbolically core to these tales. For coal’s dirt,  

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21 Adam Mrozowicki (2011: 38) explains that the shortage of skilled manual labour was already noted for the first time just after system change. Yet, by October 2017, such a shortage was described as an ‘exodus’ that existentially threatened the industry by one trade union bulletin, spurred not simply by the lack of skilled workers but by the ‘un-sexiness’ of coal mine work today (Gazeta Górnicza, 2017).

22 There were around 1.2 million Ukrainians working legally in Poland as of 2016, yet a reported 2 million have resettled here. Ukrainians were already reported to be working for the private sub-contracting mining firms – but none ‘yet’ for the state mine company. The discourse with regards to Ukrainians in Poland is reminiscent of that about Polish migrants in the UK.

23 See Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman (2009) on how the condition of victimhood has become a coveted route to cultural and political respectability through the ‘unassailable’ moral concept of trauma.
once a material mark of respect, as we have seen, had been resignified, now associated with a profound sense of being treated like dirt or ‘matter out of place’ (Douglas, 2001 [1966]; Eriksen and Schober, 2017; Keskiä, 2018) – by bosses, industry and political elites, the EU, society at large who, in Stasiek’s words, ‘do not give a shit’. Thus unlike the ‘emotional satisfaction’ which physical work under socialism granted (Hann, 2018b: ix), today, more often, disrespect and stigma seemed to stick to this dirt that in turn clung to bodies from all sides inducing toxic shame and indicating how the material qualities of mine work were shaping labour subjectivities (Rolston, 2013: 584; Weszkalnys and Richardson, 2014). This was a kind of ecological dispossession in which one’s home environment was becoming hostile rather than harnessable as not just an economic but also socio-ecological resource for identity-building. The trouble was, as Beverley Skeggs (2007: 3) writes ‘To not be respectable’, which dirt increasingly designates, ‘is to have little social value or legitimacy’. Further, as Andrew Sayer (2007: 17) argues, ‘[e]ncountering disrespect can be harder to bear and more troubling for workers than low pay or job insecurity’. When all three fuse into one combined experience, the emotional fallout is potent. For in practice these aspects are entwined. Morality and economy, dignity and material wealth, are entangled concerns. And emotions, particularly shame, play a central mediating role in articulating their contours.

Despite the fact that Stasiek’s generation used the socialist past as a comparative reference point with which to critique this paltry present, the younger, (current), generation of miners I got to know were decisively uninterested in it, discredited as it had been by the fact that it was ‘over’. Gone. Finished. What was the point in dwelling on it? Thus, while stories and narratives about its bounties still comprised the background context of their working lives, circulating as handed-down narratives, now almost unbelievable myths and legends, that past was no longer understood as a valuable resource (Kideckel 2008: 12) but as such was seemingly irrelevant. Younger miners suggested, by contrast, that, ‘The past was just different. Let’s leave it at that’. Or, ‘what use are memories to me now? Memories change nothing’. Rather, not recognizing the shared moral habitus that the socialist past undoubtedly furnished, comparison with regards to their present position that left much to be desired, was, for this younger cluster, directed not so much backwards in time, but horizontally in space – Westwards – in relation to wages, social security benefits, contracts, and general labour conditions reported to be prevalent there through firsthand experiences and accounts of European migration post-EU accession in 2004, as I will outline. Miners’ contemporary shame and critique was thus linked to an ongoing sense of comparative inferiority and exclusion from the EU as a broader home (just as in chapter four for smog-concerned residents yet tied here to the
inability to achieve certain material standards of living and ways of life for miners), and therefore a real and perceived lack of dignity, at the national and immediate scale of home. This was perceived as immoral.

Thus unlike Stasiek’s claims that a miner is a person who ‘just wants to work hard’ because for him, manual labour was a route to respect and dignity, for the current generation, I found that doing such dirty, non-modern, and increasingly immoral work was often experienced as a shame-inducing burden in intersectional Eastern European, Silesian, masculine and working-class terms. A feeling of being quadruply not-at-home-in-the-world. It was performed as a kind of conscious (if Faustian) sacrifice across the ‘double bind’ (Eriksen, 2016b) of coal’s labour that pitted work against one’s health, and increasingly dirty labour against a ‘clean’ modern life – summarized in the idea I frequently encountered that life ‘in Poland’ always required bargaining ‘something for something’. ‘Polish’ labour and its (working-class, dirty) conditions was exchanged in return for earning a relatively secure chance of obtaining an imagined and desired middle-class so-called Western or ‘European’ lifestyle, or what they termed ‘normality’, in Poland. A chance that since joining the EU and becoming ‘European citizens’, they felt should by rights be theirs already. This was a life in which one should be able to ‘live comfortably’, which meant the relatively humble desire to have stable employment, a ‘decent’ wage, union protection, social benefits, and attendant affordances, especially the ability to afford a house and a car, support a family, access coveted consumer goods, and take family vacations once or twice a year, like ‘normal’ (read Western European) people. These were not deemed to be ‘luxuries,’ but contemporary necessities in the 21st century for achieving minimum dignity.

In this sense, coal miners who did find themselves at the mine inhabited a lived upwardly-mobile tension between a working-class relation to production and its trapping proximity to dirt and unfulfilled middle-class consumer lifestyle aspiration. Embodying coal’s dirt at work – an important site for securing dignified personhood (Bolton, 2007; Sennett and Cobb, 1972; Sayer, 2007) – in order to not-quite-manage to live a ‘normal’ life, therefore became a material-symbolic mark of shameful European and Polish second-class citizenship, of not-quite-European-ness – of ‘abnormality’. For miners, unlike for smog-concerned residents, this was the rub – not so much smog, which was the only plausible route there that they could envision.

24 In a sense, miners expressed a desire to shift from a coal- to fully-fledge oil-based economy and culture symbolized in the automobile industry that was coming in to replace the coal-based one in Silesia, with all the mobility, liquidity, flow and consumer-excess it promises (Barrett et al., 2014; Buell, 2012; Daggett, 2018; Huber, 2013; LeMenager, 2012, 2014a) as a leap into fully-fledged ‘modernity’. As Barbara Freese (2006: 160) writes, through its material cumbersomeness and dirt, ‘Coal is by its nature less compatible with modern technologies and modern consumer demands than oil or natural gas’.

305
This in/ability to fulfill aspirations and thus achieve dignity is precisely how Andrew Sayer (2005: 947) defines the experience of class (see also Skeggs, 1997). People are disadvantaged, he writes, ‘primarily because they lack the means to live in ways which they, as well as others, value’ with class making access to such a life, or the ‘social bases of respect’, unequal (Sayer, 2005: 948; 954). Such gaps between aspiration and reality generates feelings of ‘class concern’ – particularly emotions of shame, which he argues is a moral sentiment, or form of emotional reason, that is central to the phenomenological experience of class (Sayer, 2005: 953) – and also its political potency. I argue that the material, environmental labour conditions – down in the dusty, dirty mine, amidst the coal that is their bread – particularly affects the visceral experience of vulnerability, threat and class shame, and therefore affords a subjectivity with a particular embodied lay moral economy that is socially, culturally and ecologically shaped. Down in the coal mine, exposure to coal, its dirt and danger, produces the embodied practical consciousness of workers who evaluate their societal treatment-- whether with dignity and respect, or not – through this work, its organisation, and its comparative remunerations and burdens. The subsequent shameful stigmas they experience are deeply, viscerally, penetrating, informing their sense of self, their relatedness to the world, and their position within and perspective on it. Particularly informing their sense of class-based, Eastern European, and also masculine positionality, with its attendant expectations, the mix is forceful. Being Polish, male and working class is lived as a sense of being triply made to feel not-at-home-in-the-world and so disrespected, what Beverley Skeggs (1997: 4) has called living one’s ‘social location with unease’ – cast out of both EU and national economic belonging in embodied terms. This was perhaps particularly so for industrial male workers who as breadwinners, believed they were entitled to something better and responsible for delivering it. As such, shame accumulated within the ‘hidden injuries of class’ (Sennett and Cobb, 1972).

Such dissatisfactions and complaints articulated what was wrong with the immoral economy as it stood. As such, it also contained within it a vision of what a moral economy should look like and who or what was to blame for its lack in lay terms. For these younger workers still longed for a future in which Poland ‘finally arrives’ into ‘normal’, (aka moral), capitalism which could support desires for ‘normal’ (aka dignified) life. The problem was – Polish capitalism was not yet purely

25 Similarly, Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb (1972) write that the emotion of shame, while not limited to the working-classes alone, is central to the experience of being working-class where it accumulates in greater intensity, what Beverly Skeggs (2007: 10; 90) calls the ‘affective aspects of inequality’ or ‘the emotional politics of class’. Likewise, Mikko Salmela and Christian von Scheve (2017: 1) particularly underscore the role of insecurities and fears that manifest in a sense of ‘not being able to live up to salient social identities and their constitutive values, and as shame about this actual or anticipated inability’ in explaining the rise of far-right populism, which are mediated by class position.
capitalist enough. Paradoxically, miners were still ‘desperately seeking Polish capitalism’ (Rainnie and Hardy, 1995) - but a pure, clean, moral variety that treated them with dignity. Such a vision, however, seemed to be predicated on an ideal-type capitalism, imagined as providing a level playing field, with just reward for hard work, meritocratic values, respect, workplace dignity, and the enabled freedom and autonomy to make it for oneself.26 In a sense it was a capitalism with a human face. Whereas the socialist past was at best irrelevant, at worst, it was a lingering legacy weighing advancement down – the cause of Poland’s ongoing failure to ‘catch up with the West’; ‘Communist mentality’ the culprit once again as a kind of internalized oppressive story of postcolonial postsocialist reality. With the economic liberalization of the 1990s, ‘bad Polish-Communist’ characteristics, such as: greed, envy, malice, carelessness (previously supposedly held in check) exploded into ‘wild capitalism’, and fused in a hodge-podge of the not-quite-post-Communist reality to create a particular ‘Polish’ brand of ‘impure’, corrupt, capitalism27 which still structured the harsh neoliberal market realities they were exposed to. ‘Polish’ capitalism was believed to be uncaring, exploitative, devaluing and ineffective, in a word corrupt, or dirty, but not as a byproduct of neoliberal globalization or of systemic worker exploitation, but of Poland’s Communist legacy and its imposed (post)colonial civilizational backwardness; on a polluted ethnicity and national identity, or on ‘Polishness’28 but this time, (similarly to the smog activists but vocalized in populist direction) blamed on the wrong or ‘worst sort’ ‘above’; a corrupt and inauthentic Polishness of

26 Adam Mrozowicki (2011: 146; 233) also found in his research with workers in Silesia that they held an ‘unfulfilled myth of meritocracy’ predicated on an ‘ideal of capitalism as a guarantee of welfare, meritocracy and social justice’ - far from the neoliberal reality that they found themselves in. Similarly, Stephen Crowley (1997: 95) writes about postsocialist industrial workers in Ukraine and Russia that, basing their ideal visions of liberal capitalist market society on utopian notions of the West, their vision of capitalism thus actually incorporated socialist ideals that ‘communism had failed to bring to life’ - including the idea that their productive material labour would secure just reward, that workers would own and control enterprises, and that exploitative relations would cease. Reality proved highly disappointing as a result. Another failed utopia.

27 Adam Mrozowicki (2011: 113) further writes similarly that a so-termed ‘culture of connections’ in Poland, based on old-boy networks, is interpreted as something ‘specifically Polish’ and a reflection of the damaging legacy of the socialist past it is still encumbered by that impedes realisation of a full meritocracy.

28 This has been an ongoing rhetoric of populist Polish politics for decades. Stuart Shields (2012: 372; 365) writes that in the early 2000s already, populists ‘did not attack capitalism as such, but rather what they perceived as the parasitic form that capitalism took because of alleged manipulation by former communists, who were interested solely in enriching themselves, and because of the operations of foreign capital’. This was referred to prior to the 2005 election when PiS first won coalition victory, as the ‘stolen revolution’. Thus there is a pervasive view in Poland that capitalism will ‘overcome problems of transition provided that it it is a national capitalism, and that the real enemy is foreign capital, foreign workers and those perceived as internal social enemies’ - including Communists in disguise.
political and business elites who in turn bow down to EU elites that simply want to devour Poland for their own benefit.  

In this way workers drew on lasting Catholic-socialist and working-class cultural values of egalitarianism, essential human dignity, moral worth, and social justice, to construct ‘we the homogenous, unified and exploited pure people’, articulating this in national terms (‘Polish people’ rather than ‘workers’), while simultaneously discarding the very ideological framework (socialism) that could offer their organic critique a progressive political project. Rather, precisely also because in many ways they longed ‘to not labour’ (Kaufman, 2003) and experienced their degradation in national terms, their claim for dignity was made increasingly on the basis not of labour, but on ‘true’, or ‘pure’, European identity/civilization, not on class-based exploitation but on notions of nation and morality and, especially, entitlements to universal dignity and its felt lack as a Polish person in a European community.

Such a worldview helps to explain the success of PiS’s brand of national industrial populist rhetoric amongst such coal workers in Poland. Embodied experiences of shame understandably motivated a search for dignity in an uncaring, stigmatizing world, and industrial populism offered a potent affective ‘ideological safety net’ (Shields, 2012: 373). In particular, it offered purification of this impure economy through purging of Communist-era legacies and other foreign corruptions into a morally pristine Polish ‘people’s’ economy, one that respected and valued them for their worth and purged them of their shame too by simultaneously elevating them as the truer, purer, realer, hard-working ‘Poles’, the producers, too. In this way, this chapter proposes that ideological resonance of far-right populist politics should not be perceived as simply reactive or motivated by so-called ‘negative’ feelings alone, but that also ‘positive’ and constructive ideals and visions of ‘the good society’, particularly here a ‘moral economy’, (no matter how deplorable they may appear to those

29 At the turn of postsocialist transition, miners similarly blamed their corrupt Communist Party bosses, the management cadres loyal to the Party, and their abuse of privilege, and poor decision-making, for the sorry condition of mining and their material deprivations (long since mythologized out of the hegemonic narrative) then. At the time, striking workers believed that things would improve if only these discredited, corrupt elites were removed (Battiata, 1989). This same narrative continues but in contemporary form.

30 In the thesis introduction I outlined the historic background context to this phenomenon and its links to far-right populist popularity. For example, see Stephen Crowley (1997: 190) on how postsocialist industrial workers in Ukraine and Russia, while still seeing ‘the world in class terms and remain[ing] committed to some of the core ideals of what most others would call socialism (such as workers’ control), they lacked a name around which to package their concerns, since the concept of socialism in any variety remains tied to the Soviet system they held in contempt.’ Thus ‘immunized against class-based ideologies, workers and their dissatisfactions are left available for the appeals of authoritarian populism and nationalism’.

31 Similarly, Michèle Lamont’s (2000: 19) study of white working-class men in America demonstrates that ‘[k]eeping the world in order – in moral order – is at the top of their agenda’, as a strategy for helping them attain a sense of self-worth and dignity.
who disagree\(^{32}\) can emerge from such embodied sentiments. Shame is complexly woven with resentment, anger, but also desire, hope and righteousness, according greater agency to its presence. Shame is an origins for critique and action in the world to change it for oneself (Friedman, 2007) - to find a sense of being-at-home once more through practices of purification. This shifts perception of populist sentiment from simply being reactionary, backward-looking, or 'protest votes', to being a creative, future-oriented world-making endeavor grounded in lived experience (see also Hann, 2015: 906); as making right a world that is seen as deeply flawed.\(^{33}\) Self-perceived victims who are not-at-home-in-the-world attempt to turn the world to home on their own terms, becoming agents in a disempowering world where nobody else takes them seriously – precisely the promise of populism. In the absence of meaningful alternative future visions grounded in material conditions, support for the far-right can therefore be understood as a kind of adaptation or response to entwined socio-environmental change, or perceived dispossession – an attempt to wrest back meaning and enact a renewal or purification of a self – a *dignified* sense of being-at-home-in-the-world, in one’s own skin, in spite of the given circumstances. This was achieved through PiS’s perceived recognition and delivery of a longed-for industrially-rooted ‘moral economy’ articulated by miner’s as a lay moral economy of ‘normality’, as I will outline, formulated by their shared embodied experience’s of the materiality of dirt-induced shame at the workplace.

In the next section I briefly outline the theoretical concepts of ‘moral economy’ to flesh out their critical saliency, before then turning to ethnographic accounts of experiences of navigating the perceived immoral Polish economy and how it works particularly on and through bodies to produce an embodied lay moral economy of ‘normality’ that viscerally resonates with far-right populist discourse.

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\(^{32}\) As Chris Hann (2011b: 195) notes if we understand moral economy to be a ‘nexus of beliefs, practices and emotions among the folk rather than an analytical concept designed to register only those beliefs, practices and emotions which conduce to action which the observer considers to be progressive, then we must conclude that even the reactionary right is entitled to its moral economy’.

\(^{33}\) In this way I build on recent work by Andrew Curley (2019) and Erik Kojola (2019), who examine struggles over extractivism in an era of fossil fuel decline, and expand upon the moral economic framework to argue that such ‘[m]oral economies are not simply traditional beliefs reacting to a changing social order; they are ‘reconstructed normative’ folk ideologies deployed against a capitalist reordering of society for political impact’ (Bernstein in Curley, 2019: 77). Support for far-right populism is thus often a means through which people not only ‘defend’ (Kojola: 2019, 373), but also, I would say, even *enact* moral economies in a forward-, rather than backward-looking, way. Arguing with Kojola and Curley, these ideals and visions do not appear out of thin air, but are grounded in the earthly, lived experiences of the working-classes, particularly here those involved in extreme environs such as coal mines.
Embodied moral economy:

As stated in the thesis introduction, when the Law and Justice party (PiS) took power in 2015, they did so on the back of a party programme promising morally-loaded ‘Good Change’. Core to this promise was the central hypothesis that Poles had ‘lost’ their sense of self-worth, and that PiS was going to restore it through a cluster of policies referred to as the ‘redistribution of dignity’ (Ash, 2019) while dislodging the so-called ‘pedagogy of shame’ oppressing Poles. To do so, PiS proposed a post-neoliberal shift by establishing a kind of welfare state that aimed to improve the lives of ‘ordinary’ hard-working people based on what I have called an industrial populism with coal at its heart. In this way, PiS offered their constituents a sense of cultural dignity and national pride that was felt to have been stripped away by ongoing European and national peripheralization enabled by morally and politically corrupt liberal elites, built on a coal-based order and its traditional values. This proved to be a potent and successful combination. Industrial shame was to be cleansed away with a restoration of a feeling of home. A ‘moral economy’ was going to be restored in the form of a broader ‘moral revolution’, as they called it. This included purging of the internal enemies of Communist remnants.

How should we understand this ‘moral economy’? The concept of the ‘moral economy’ was initially developed by E. P. Thompson (1971, 1991) and James Scott (1976) to analyse notions of economic justice held by the poor in opposition to elites in predominantly pre-market societies. Thompson proposed that ‘bread riots’ in eighteenth-century England by ‘the crowd’ against liberal elites who raised the price of grain during the transition to capitalism, were not just motivated by hunger, but by moral indignation and anger too, informed by local culture and custom. Their moral economy pitted the ethics of sharing and solidarity against the encroaching profiteering logic of the market. For Scott, applying the notion to the peasant class of Southeast Asia in agrarian studies, similarly, he found that it was not rational economic calculation and risk aversion alone, but also a conservative subsistence ethic that underpinned their capacity to survive. Feeling their morality under attack through taxes, rents, and colonial repressions and exploitation, peasants resented the elite, not simply due to material deprivation, but for their demonstrable lack of moral virtues, and so rebelled. The rupture between the expectation of moral norms and obligations to be fulfilled by those in power and their lack spurred unrest. Yet both Thompson and Scott’s conception of ‘moral economy’ were also behind their previous success in the 2005 elections in which they formed a coalition government with Self-Defence and League of Polish Families. This was the election that marked their ‘embracing’ of a ‘radical right populist element’ (Pankowski, 2010: 152), fusing welfare economics with traditional conservative and religious social values.
economy’ tends to make a claim for its relevance only in pre-market or ‘traditional’ societies, at a very specific historical juncture. Modern economies have been assumed to lack a moral framework. It also pits a highly dichotomous view of morality versus economy, partly because of its connection to Karl Polanyi’s (1944) theory of the shift from an ‘embedded’ to ‘disembedded’ economy in his treatise *The Great Transformation*, the dialectic between which can be understood as the ‘master concept’ uniting theories of moral economy and its critique of modernity (Booth, 1994).

Interest in ‘moral economy’ and also Karl Polanyi’s work has recently increased in the wake of the post-2008 financial crisis, when the effects of neoliberal ‘market fundamentalism’ were increasingly recognized as having gone too far (Block and Somers, 2016; Dale, 2010; Dale, Holmes and Markantonatou, 2019; Hann, 2019c; Hann and Hart, 2009; Levitt, 2013; Rogan, 2018). Chris Hann (2019c: xii; 7) argues that in particular the relevance of his work for the so-called Visegrád states, and Central and Eastern Europe more broadly, to explain the history of the last few decades is ‘indispensable, yet few scholars have yet applied it in this sphere (see however Szombati, 2018; Szombati and Scheiring, 2019; Hann 2019b). As Karl Polanyi argued, in the pre-capitalist ‘embedded economy’, there was no separation between ‘economy’ and the social web of institutions, relations, and values of which it was part. In the *Gemeinschaft*, such as that of Scott’s peasants or Thompson’s crowd (or coal miner’s under socialism), the economy was ‘submerged’ within social relations and ‘subordinated to the pursuit of the good life’ (Booth, 1994: 655). Polanyi outlines how the shift towards the capitalist market, or the *Gesellschaft*, was an extraordinary transformation in human history. For the first time, the economy was ‘disembedded’ from the social realm and became its own autonomous, self-regulating sphere. ‘The Economy’ as we know it today made the market all-pervasive, and increasingly extended itself into the full realm of social life – including commodifying land and labour, what Polanyi termed ‘fictitious commodities’, with intolerable consequences for ‘human economies’ (Hart and Hann, 2009; Hann, 2011b). Moral economies are thus projects for re-embedding the economy - part of what Polanyi conceived of as the ‘double movement’, or central contradiction, of capitalism.

According to Polanyi, this ‘double movement’ sees first, the extension of the logic of the market into previously socially embedded realms, thereby eroding the social bonds, values and institutions (including moral) that (invisibly) underpin that market in the first place, and, then, secondly, in response, a countermovement emerges from that very society to seek to try and re-assert the primacy of the ‘embedded’ socially enmeshed lifeworld. This is the dialectical rhythm

35 See the following literatures for historic overviews of the concept (Fassin, 2009; Götz, 2015; Hann, 2011b, 2018a; Palomera and Vetta, 2016).
that Polanyi sees as characterizing the current of capitalism – increasing marketization followed by push back from society for social protection against it. Yet, Polanyi’s conception of an autonomous economic realm against the pre-existing morality of a sealed-off community, has been critiqued for being a far too static and dichotomous a view that fails to make sense of how morality is actually constituted through everyday relatedness to economic institutions, practices, and actions, specifically through work. Polanyi is also critiqued for failing to recognize a class consciousness that exists outside of an external threat (see Burawoy, 2003; Palomera and Vetta, 2016)– unlike E. P. Thompson and Andrew Sayer who focus on individual’s agency.

According to Andrew Sayer’s (2000) conception of ‘lay morality’ and the moral worth of class, recognition and dignity are of central importance here. ‘Lay morality’ offers a conception of moral economy that puts reflective social agents and their everyday encounters and experiences at the heart of analysis. It thus ‘sheds light on conflicts between political classes’ through ‘the day-to-day dilemmas people face’ (Bolton and Laaser, 2013: 515), bridging the workplace and the wider economy. Work is of central importance for an individual’s sense of wellbeing and dignity. As a result, it is also a site of immense suffering and struggle where such dignity is felt to be lacking. In this way, work can become the core means through which ‘the economy’ is experienced at the everyday, micro level, including how resources, opportunities, wellbeing, and dignity are perceived to be distributed or restricted. Lay morality cannot be reduced simply to discourse or sociality, rather it is a deeply personal, cognitive, evaluative, emotional, and class-specific, contextual navigation of the world. Thus, it should be taken as a ‘reasonable’ account of and response to what matters to people, linked to the wellbeing of themselves and others, argues Sayer.

Furthermore, as I seek to show, lay morality, including their moral economies, are deeply embodied encounters with the world. This is what makes them politically potent. They are enfleshed, felt ‘in the bones’ and on the skin, thus the rawness and intensity of their emotional charge. This is particularly true for working-class miners, for whom quotidian labor involves embodied engagement with a harsh material environment. Down in the mine, the abrasive materiality of coal shapes their subjective experience and worldview. Thus just as for Thompson’s hungry crowd and Scott’s barely-surviving peasants, the body has always been a central aspect of classed moral economies and their force, challenging liberal market conceptions of *homo economicus* or the universal rational disembodied individual as the basis of economic and social order.36 While both

36 I was fascinated to stumble across one article by Katherine Lebow (2012: 307–308) which likewise outlines embodied experiences of poverty and degradation ‘on the skin’ as central to interwar Polish memoirs of workers and peasants and their challenge to notions of liberal selfhood and so the limits of liberal citizenship in the form of organic arguments for social rights – a precursor to my extrapolation here regarding
Thompson and Scott wished to emphasize the discursive dimensions of morality as a collective motive of rebellion beyond ‘simple’ bodily survival, it is pertinent to point out that the two are inseparable. Furthermore, it is not only justice or fairness at stake, but the closely correlated sense of dignity, mediated through class and its embodiment. At the heart of lay morality is indeed the question of how individuals are treated, as a main function of economic consideration. From this standpoint, the ‘point of economic activity is to enable us to live well’ (Sayer, 2007: 261) and also, by implication, to become the kinds of good, virtuous, and moral people that we might aspire to be. Moral economies are thus not just ‘collectively held ideological claims about… the proper order and distribution of resources’ (Curley, 2019: 73). The demand for social respect and recognition of moral worth, mediated through shame and dignity, are at the heart of moral economic evaluation. Class, as we have seen, determines one’s access to, and distribution of, these values and affects and thus one’s evaluation of economic morality.

Yet it is not only pre-market or pre-modern societies for whom economies are morally embedded. Contemporary capitalist economies are also highly influenced and embedded within a social and moral universe (sustained and enforced by legal and social institutions), yet this tends to be overlooked by political economists, and invisibilized by liberal economic theorists as scholars have pointed out (Booth, 1994; Hann, 2019c: 25; Miller, 2002; Muehlebach, 2012; Sayer, 2000). Market society itself arguably has is its own kind of moral economy – upholding and instituting certain moral values, such as individual liberty and autonomy, ‘rational’ allocation of resources, and crucially, the disembedding from the patriarchal household, which was the central institution to the embedded economy. These have become so normalized as to appear ‘natural’. As such, the market society is ‘a new form of moral embeddedness for the economy’ (Booth, 1994: 661). This insight is useful for the Polish context, because local moral economies involve a desire for liberal free-market capitalism – but a Polish kind, seen as part of, and not in opposition to, what is considered moral.

Indeed, a particular postcolonial postsocialist industrial moral economy of ‘normality’ seeks to uneasily reconcile both sides of the double movement – viewing the liberties and dignities afforded by capitalism as the ‘true heritage’ and destiny for the eternally European Poland, while also seeking to re-embed it, indeed purify it, within a matrix of humane Polish sociocultural moral values, including re-embedding the economy back into the traditional gendered household and its broader national community. This was not perceived as being contra-capitalism, or protection from it, but actually the materialization of a vision of ‘real’ or ‘true’ capitalist ‘normality’ of a pure, truly embodied lay moral economies.
‘Polish’ kind that puts ‘the people’ at its heart. Polish miners seemingly longed for a form of ‘embedded liberalism’ that formed the basis of the post-World War II consensus in the Western world up until the 1970s – the pre-neoliberal Western world order. As I will show, miners articulated this as a longing for what they called ‘normality’, that enabled them to secure a dignified life, as opposed to what they experienced as Polish ‘abnormality’, that made achieving such aspiration difficult and self-compromising a feat. Enabling achievement of such ‘normality’ was what a moral economy, and industry well-harnessed, should be for.

Even though it is possible to critique moral economies for being conservative, nostalgic, or simply backward-looking, I agree with scholars such as Sayer (see also Edelman, 2005; Wolford, 2005, 2010), who have argued that they possess a profound political worth and play a central role within the broader political economy. In other words, particularly lay moral economies do not represent naïve utopias—they are grounded in the possible and practical. As Andrew Sayer (2000: 81) writes ‘critiques of political economic orders imply the existence of avoidable suffering or disadvantage… [implying] the possibility and desirability of a better alternative, in this case, a less uneven kind of development’. In this way, personal complaints, like Stasiek’s earlier, are often sites in which embodied lay moral economies and their systemic criticisms become articulated. Yet, in the postsocialist East, where, as we saw in chapter three, availability of the language of class is explicitly denied, moral economies risk losing their radically progressive potential, and have become channelled into authoritarian national populist forms. This is also the case, because in Poland, as Chris Hann (2019b: 23) points out, ‘the nation’ has historically long been the most readily available symbolic resource for salvaging self-respect and identity. For younger Polish coal miners, who have come to sound like far-right populists (and/or vice versa), and whose desires for dignity and recognition are articulated in relation to a national and ‘true’ European identity, this risk is clear. Yet even where there may be vocal ‘headlines of nation’ there is a silenced ‘subtext of class’ (Kalb and Halmai, 2011), and this chapter seeks to disentangle this thread as an important part of

37 ‘Embedded liberalism’ was the policy that populist authoritarian leader Józef Piłsudski in interwar Poland was aspiring to implement (and one that Hitler’s Germany and later all Western democratic countries also favoured in the post Second World War era). Ewa Mazierska (2017: 30) writes that state socialism was a continuation of this trend through the instrument of industry nationalisation. In a sense, postsocialist transition can thus be understood as a longing for the final realisation of such a project – one that PiS claims to be the true heir to (Piłsudski being the PiS leader Kaczyński’s hero he models himself on).

38 Indeed William Booth (1994: 664) warned of a central illiberal tendency at the heart of moral economies if one followed fully their ‘internal logic’ down the road they mark out, where questions of The Good are sought to be determined once and for all for the whole of society, rather than leaving them up to the apparent neutral, plurality of the market of ideas central to liberal democracies.
the work of restoring alternative possibilities for responding to workers’ genuine grievances that are at the heart of their embodied lay moral economies.

The next section examines the ways in which, following the fall from grace of miners in the postsocialist transition outlined in chapter three and earlier, exposure to coal’s material dirt, as a result, has radically shifted its embodied meanings amongst the current mining generation, expressive in a lay moral economy of ‘normality’ as a response to ecological dispossession. How miners feel about doing dirty work is a useful lens through which to unpack the class-based moral economy that emerges from their engagement with the material environment of coal and its contemporary standing. Conceptions of dirt and dirty work are a useful way to understand lay moralities because ideas about cleanliness and dirt, as Mary Douglas herself outlined, are at the centre of social systems of morality. Practices to separate the clean from the dirty are essentially a means to (re)establish moral boundaries. Thus, social distancing from dirt, indeed its purification, represents an attempt to create moral order out of chaos.39

**Something for something: ‘Polish reality’ and the moral economy of ‘normality’**

‘Poland lies in a place where ‘East and West mutually weaken each other’.
- Piotr Łukasiewicz (1987: 66) quoting Witold Gombrowicz40

Like most current miners I met, Marek (35), Grzegorz (29), and Łukasz (27), all with secondary education under their belt, told me emphatically that mining was not exactly their dream job – they had simply ‘ended up there’. Marek had never considered it because he had no family connections to the mines – he was a ‘przyjezdny’ or non-Silesian Polish incomer. The idea of tough, dirty work below ground had never appealed to him. For Grzegorz, a born-and-bred Silesian, his whole family, (father, grandfather and great-grandfather, as well as mother and grandmother), had all worked at the mine, but he too did not want a physical, dirty job. Having always done well at school, he had harboured ‘greater ambitions’, as he put it. Likewise, Łukasz, a self-identified ‘local’ Silesian-Pole

39 Many examples from literature on ‘dirty work’ focus on the resultant ‘identity work’ that dirty workers do in order to retrieve a positive sense of self, at least within the eyes of the occupational ‘insider’ group (E. Ashforth et al., 2007; Filteau, 2015; Kreiner et al., 2006; Mejia et al., 2021; Simpson et al., 2011; Thiel, 2007). For example, Kristen Lucas (2011) found that among blue-collar workers in a mining community in the US, individuals ‘foregrounded’ the value and quality of the work performed while ‘backgrounding’ the dirty nature of the job. See also Michèle Lamont (2000) on American workers and their attempts to reassert dignity of manual, dirty labour.

40 Witold Gombrowicz (1904 – 1969) was an anti-nationalist Polish writer and playwright famous for challenging the regimes that occupied Poland and for critiquing the inferiority-superiority complex bedeviling Polish culture.
told me he tried his best to ‘defend himself’ from a job at the mine, and when his father (who had been a miner), found out that he was going to the mine, he did not speak to him for two months. He had hoped his son might venture into new terrain, and extricate himself from the dangers and dirt of such work. In contradiction to the myth that mine work was always proudly handed down the patrilineal line, the slogan in the local Silesian dialect ‘ino nie ić na gruba’ (‘just don’t go to the mine’) had circulated for generations. Often parents who had worked in the mines wanted a life lived otherwise for their children. 41 But whereas ‘everybody used to work in mining’, and where until 1989 more than 53% of people worked in general in industry (Wódz, 1998: 163), dirty work was then the norm, as earlier outlined. Coal mining, for decades, had been ‘all there was’, with zero barriers to entry - yet the post-industrial and European world was radically different. Today, the shrinking importance and stability of industrial work and the shift towards employment in the service sector and knowledge-based economy, and the opening of borders, has opened up a different aspirational landscape, pitting mind over body. 42 ‘Cleaner’ alternatives existed, and everybody was all-too-aware of that alternative world, particularly in the long-glittering promised land of ‘the [imaginary] West’ following Poland’s accession into the EU in 2004. So what kept them here?

In the context of the kind of precarious economic conditions described earlier, within interviews and conversations with current miners, working in the West was almost always described as the only ‘sensible’ alternative to coal mine work in Silesia. Moving abroad was articulated as a means of ‘escape’ (Kaźmierska et al., 2011) from a context that provided perceived limited means for realizing ambitions, including of achieving dignity. 43 Parents would often sadly explain that their children were already planning to leave Poland as part of a life strategy for a better future. Almost

41 Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb (1972: 127-141) in their wonderful exposition of working class lives in the Boston area in the USA in the early 1970s, detail how this ideology of ‘sacrifice’ for one’s children underpins a capitalist meritocratic order in which the pursuit of dignity and respect, and so cope with class shame, is based on the seemingly endless struggle to move up a social ladder into white-collar professional work and become an ‘individual’ as opposed to part of the ‘mass’. Where working-classes fathers find value and meaning in their hard work by thinking of it as a ‘sacrifice’ for their children so that they might live differently, i.e. not like them, the failure of this sacrifice becomes a further affront to the father’s dignity and esteem.

42 Adam Mrozowicki (2011: 37) reports that workers’ resources and social capital were severely challenged by the shift from an industry-centred model of socialist development to a meritocratic knowledge-oriented social order under capitalism. Following transition, there was an educational boom at university (the number of students grew fivefold between 1990-2005 alone), which combined with growing discourse and practice of devaluing manual labour and basic vocational education (in which in parallel, the number of students decreased almost twofold between 1990-2005). As a result aspirational desires for non-manual labour-based lives flourished, turning manual labour itself into stigmatized occupations. This trend can be viewed across Europe and the Western world.

43 Indeed, Poles in particular have for centuries used emigration as a strategy for finding ‘freedom, bread and self-fulfillment’ (Mazierska, 2016),
everybody knew somebody—a relative or friend—who had gone abroad and never returned. I got the sense that the fabric of social relatedness had not just frayed but ripped apart at the seams leaving gaping holes. For a culture (particularly in the Silesian mining tradition) in which the nuclear family was the bedrock of meaning, stability, and security, this was a harsh grievance, the bitter pill of so-called ‘progress’. Without family and wider community to provide a secure base, and existential holding, indeed the point of work, what remained? Yet some did return – precisely for this reason, as we shall see, bringing their experiences and perspectives of the ‘West’ along with them.

Initially, both Marek and Grzegorz had indeed tried working abroad in ‘pursuit of happiness’. Marek, by the time of my research, was a father to three sons. As a young twenty-something he had spent some time working in construction in Germany, before moving to Holland to work for a packing warehouse – which he remembers as comparatively ‘lighter’ and more ‘comfortable’ work than mining. It was undertaken in a clean environment, up in the world above, nothing like at the coal mine! He earned two or three times what he could make back at home, and, combined, this was the major attraction. Grzegorz, meanwhile, on reaching 18, took his chance as a young man with few responsibilities and a desire to make money and headed to Holland too, where he worked with numerous other Poles for a floor-tile manufacturer. Echoing Marek, he described the working conditions as a ‘lighter, nicer kind of work, not so heavy’. Both agreed that life was, in general, ‘easier’ over there – more money for less arduous labour. They also said they enjoyed access to more affordable consumer goods, greater ‘comforts’, and the economy itself was ‘more organized’. For example, Grzegorz explained that there were a lot of small enterprises, which meant that finding work was relatively straightforward. Marek, on the other hand, described how in the West, the company he worked for seemed to run very efficiently, without waste, and he was always paid on time in full. There was trust in management. They were treated fairly, with contracts and protections to ensure it. They were deeply impressed by their experiences of Western capitalism in comparison to the Polish variety.

44 Upper Silesia has the highest concentration of depopulation loss in Poland. In the Katowice conurbation alone, between 1991-2016, there was a loss of 366,000 residents (Spórna, 2018), with a forecasted 12.4% population loss by 2035 according to GUS (Central Statistical Office) figures (Baranyai and Lux, 2014: 130). Yet since 2015/2016, the trend is slowing – a result of PiS’s politics? (Wiatrowski, 2019: 20)
45 See chapter eight for more on social fragmentation.
46 Famously, PiS have also made trying to lure home Polish migrants, to cope with the forecasted shrinking of the Polish population by 12% by 2050, a core priority. In December 2019, also following the Brexit vote, for the first time in eight years, the number of Poles living abroad fell. (Shetter, 2019)
47 I heard such positive accounts repeatedly – even if they were accompanied by accounts of exploitation as cheap labour, this was perceived as fair game on the capitalist market, particularly as for Poles earnings were
However, with time, and no matter the material benefits, Marek and Grzegorz (who by now had one son) both described a feeling of alienation, otherness, and homesickness that was part and parcel of immigrant life in the West. After a number of years, often migrating back and forth between West and East, they wanted to ‘settle down’, get married, and have children. Doing so in the West seemed unthinkable – isolating and dislocating, they ‘did not feel u siebie’ (at home), they told me. They decided to return to Silesia, where they could be close to family and friends and find a feeling of being-at-home-in-the-world. After all, this was what one worked hard for. Through their migration experiences, Marek and Grzegorz thus came to understand what made them feel uncomfortable about Western life – they listed the lack of family, lack of connection to place, the pluralization of cultures in which they felt to be yet another alien face, the foreign-ness of cultural practices and norms (including homosexuality and multiculturalism), and the demoted social position of the working-class, Polish, immigrant no matter how hard one worked. By doing so, they came to increasingly reflexively value what was ‘theirs’ – the traditional heterosexual, nuclear family model, intergenerational family ties, rootedness, Silesian-Polishness. This was to be found back in Silesia, on Polish soil.

Grzegorz told me, ‘Silesia may not be a spectacular region, but a lot of good beats out of it. Tradition, family, lots of character. It is a mini fatherland’. Precisely for this reason, Łukasz had considered going abroad, but just could not bring himself to leave. It had been a tough decision, but he told me he could not face uprooting himself, even for the cash prize. Expressing a common ‘reluctance towards mobility’ (Mrozowicki, 2011: 171), he said: ‘If it were not for the ties I feel here to my family, home, and Poland, I would have been long gone, but these ties lie on your heart’. An avid supporter of the Polish national football team, he said ‘I cannot imagine what it would be like not to have this sense of belonging. For me it’s so important to have these roots, identity. I still impressive, and often such exploitation was the ‘norm’ in Poland itself (See also Fox et al., 2015 on denial of experience of discrimination by East European migrants in the West as a strategy of attenuating or reversing such status discrimination). In addition, other Poles were often highlighted as the ‘worst’ kinds of exploiters. In this sense Polish migrants became willing self-exploiters in the long-range game of competitive moving upwards. However, these accounts also perhaps reflect the change in mobility of Polish migrant workers more broadly since accession in 2004. No longer at this point Europe’s cheapest pool of labour (now Romanians were more likely e.g. to be seasonal fruit pickers), they had indeed ‘moved up’ the pecking order and these accounts reveal the shift in the kinds of work Polish labourers were now involved in - ‘lighter, safer’ kinds. In turn this was raising aspirations for work-based dignity back at home. In one news report, for example, a farmer in Poland, unable to afford to pay pickers domestically in 2019, was quoted as saying: ‘Pickers used to sleep in the barn. Now they want a modern toilet... They want three meals per day and a good salary. At today’s prices, hardly anyone can meet those requirements.’ Migrant labour is now being sourced for the dirty jobs Poles don’t wish to do at home because of its indignities, including mining as we saw. And so the cycle continues. (Wilczek, 2019)
wouldn’t be able to find myself in another place, I’m a patriot to Silesia and Poland’. For Łukasz, a father of two, national identity and its affective, familial attachments trumped material gain. Thus, these three men found that the West’s material temptations were not strong enough to overcome their longing for being-at-home-in-the-world, which they felt was only accessible in Silesia. Their decisions were deeply embedded.

Indeed, Silesia offered the comforts of the familiar through access to close extended kin networks and a correlated sense of place. Here, intergenerational ties remained relatively strong, and intergenerational households, still often the norm. Customarily, miners often built their homes on family-owned plots of land. Many families chose to live side by side, with siblings and cousins at times living in tightly-knit networks of affective and physical proximity. Yet this Silesian ‘tradition’, like many others, was also perceived to be at-risk of ‘dying out’ as young people increasingly desired independent living as a more ‘modern’ arrangement. For example, Marek and Grzegorz, both lived separately with their own families, but their relatives resided a maximum of 30 minutes drive from home. Emigration threatened ongoing social reproduction too. At the same time, a normative desire to ‘build a life’ for oneself remained, and this included – getting married, owning a house, settling down, having children, and thereby attaining the status of social adulthood by ‘putting one’s life in order’. This was always the miner’s version of The Good Life, the purpose for doing mining work in the first place. A house, a family, and a place to call home. That it no longer enabled this so easily was a gross betrayal, leaving the stain of dirt’s labour on the skin.

That being said, family was an ambivalent and contradictory store of value for my participants. ‘There is nothing keeping me here except my family’, was an oft-repeated statement. The notion of going ‘abroad’ dangled a persistently tantalizing possibility of dream-making, influencing choices to stay, go, or return, and how one felt about them. This was compounded by those who had returned after ‘making it’ overseas and were flaunting their success at having achieved much-desired ‘normality’ by buying or building a large home, owning shiny cars, flying off on vacation to far-flung destinations and posting photographs on Facebook, or other markers of affluence. The comparative chalice was yet again a poisoned one, for it generated a persistent, lived tension – a sense that one was always weighing one’s decisions against an unlived alternative – in other words, a better reality. Family and Polishness were experienced as reassuring anchors and a restrictive ball-and-chain. But ‘something for something’, as the saying goes – life, in Poland, particularly in Silesia where options were perceived as limited, must always be an in-between bargain.
The price for this sense of at-home-ness, thus meant a return to a simultaneously decisively frustrating homely and yet unhomely ‘Polish reality’ - returning to the Polish economic market. What was this ‘Polish’ reality? Did it exist on an alternate plane? For miners such as Marek, Grzegorz, and Łukasz, the answer was decisively yes. For them, the West was ‘normal’ and Poland ‘abnormal’, and often ‘absurd’, echoing the normalized usage of these sentiments in society more broadly (as intimated in chapter four). For the normality/abnormality binary was a longstanding postcolonial postsocialist national discourse that ubiquitously frames everyday experience mediated by class (Galbraith, 2003). The meaning of ‘normality’ and its antonym, its causes and symptoms, varied somewhat among individuals, and yet it designated a socially-shared bundle of moral ideals regarding The Good Life, collectively framing encounters with the world. Scholars have documented how this notion of ‘normality’ vs ‘abnormality’ maps onto the historic civilizational tension between West and East, Capitalist and Communist, modern and backward, and also clean and dirty, across the postsocialist world (Fehérváry, 2002; Jansen, 2015; Rausing, 2002; Vasilescu, 2007; Walkowitz, 1995), intensified by the fallout of capitalist transition and expectations of ‘catching up with the West’. Its origin has roots going back to socialist times, when the split between public and private, or the ‘abnormality’ of the corrupt official Communist regime, and the ‘normality’ and morality of the private sphere of the nation – of the second economy of socially networked exchange and home-life – became a key trope for navigating the absurdities of everyday life becoming the basis for an ‘Us’/’Them’ split that is central to a Polish categorical ordering of the world today (Galbraith, 2003; Wedel, 1986).

Piotr Łukasiewicz (1987) writes that the concepts of ‘abnormality’ and ‘normality’ were tropes used both by citizens and journalists to complain about the everyday shortcomings of Communism, as much as by the regime itself, in promising change and progress through official statements. By the late 1980s, a widespread dissatisfaction with the regime with regards to shortages, deteriorating material standards of living, repressions, but also the futile, irrational-seeming, bizarre and inefficient modes of operation of the economy and everyday life (Łukasiewicz, 1987: 64), demonstrated that Poles felt that their country was decidedly ‘abnormal’. Writing still under the Communist regime, Łukasiweicz credits the socialist utopian ideology with raising

48 Vlad Mykhnenko (2005: 97-98) reports that striving for a ‘normal’ life was the common purpose uniting Ukrainian miners in the Donbas region in the run up to the collapse of socialism and after. Such ‘normality’ was envisioned as ‘Western or American(ised) mass media, video or billboard images of affluence ranging from ‘Disneyland to Pittsburgh’ (Walkowitz, 1995). Stephen Crowley (1997: 136) also finds desires for ‘normality’ among postsocialist miners in the Ukrainian Donbass region – an aspiration that one defined as ‘A new, civilized system – where people live as well as they work’.
people’s aspirations towards the system and therefore generating progressive dissatisfaction expressed in such terms. However, while he briefly mentions a ‘geosocial’ comparative sphere, ‘created by other countries we have heard about or seen’, from which Poles felt themselves to be separated, for Łukasiewicz, the yardsticks of ‘normality’ were at this time largely internal: either pre-war Poland, before radical disruption by occupation, war, violence, and the holocaust, or later, ‘better’ Communist periods, such as the Gierek years of relative prosperity in the 1970s, or the more open Solidarity period of the early 1980s (Łukasiewicz, 1987:65-66).

Other scholars, however, have since pointed out that the most powerful yardstick for comparative ab/normalities was always decidedly Westward in orientation and this was a central structural contradiction of the Soviet sphere. In fact, longing for a Western standard of living was a central cause of the eventual demise of Communism, particularly in the realm of consumption. Navigating this tension was inherent to the socialist states’ attempts to maintain order and legitimacy (Fehervary, 2002). In Poland, Andrzej Szczerski and Joanna Wolańska (2011: 180) write that in the 1970s, under the First Party Secretary, Edward Gierek, (himself a Silesian), the Communist regime, in an attempt to appease the ‘pent-up consumer needs of Polish society’, submitted to the ideal of the West as a model for consumer progress. Under Gierek’s governance, ‘keeping up with the West’ became the ‘founding myth’ of the state, and it is partly for this reason he is often well-remembered as the ‘good host’ (Szczerski and Wolańska, 2011: 194-195). In the following ‘decade of luxury’, the West thus came to occupy a paradoxical position – as, on the one hand ‘the official rival and military enemy of a socialist country, and on the other—the ‘Paradise lost’. From a poor country’s perspective, it seemed the only appropriate model to emulate. (Szczerski and Wolańska, 2011: 193). Particularly among the elites, the West was becoming the unquestionable ideal and adopting its standards considered to be the ‘only remedy for the problems of the country’ (Szczerski and Wolańska, 2011: 194). Don Kalb (2009) and others have remarked upon how miners from the Solidarity years were already yearning for capitalist ‘normality’ too, understood as a socialist-capitalist grafted vision of workers’ ownership and self-management. Szczerski and Wolańska (2011: 194) argue that this mode of comparison can be understood as a form of self-colonization, which Alexander Kiossev (2008: 1) defines as the attitude that the ‘Others – i.e. the neighbours, Europe, the civilized World, etc. possess all that we lack; they are all that we are not.’ Yet, these attempts would never overcome their imitative, and seemingly second-class, pretensions (Krastev and Holmes, 2018, 2019). Thus, postsocialist Poland was described as mere
spectacle and fantasy rather than real and given – it was the abnormal normal. On the back of this disillusionment, and the desire for normal normality, Communism crumbled.

In the post-1989 period, as the reader has seen throughout the thesis, the positionality of the East in relation to the West took on an added significance and heightened expectation in the reshuffling European order. Finally, the East was ‘returning to Europe’ and so, it was thought, ‘returning to normality’. As one German newspaper declared at the time, the ‘Revolution to normality is the crucial metaphor of 1989’ (K. Hartung in Kiossev, 2008: 2). In Poland, like in other Eastern European postsocialist countries, the ‘return’ to Europe was figured as a reunification with the ‘true’ Polish destiny – and leaders sought to re-establish the country’s historic relevance as the Europe’s true ‘heart’ or centre (hence the idea of Central Europe).49 Silesia, as we have seen in previous chapters, occupied a particular place in the European canon. Tracing the etymological roots of the word ‘normal’ in Germanic, Roman, and Slavic languages between 1810 and 1850, Alexander Kiossev (2008: 2: 4) found that that it generated a ‘kind of conceptual colonization’ whereby a major principle of modernity became the binary ‘normal/deviation’. This equation of ‘normality’: ‘modernity’, particularly ‘European’ modernity, meant that the ideology of transitology was based on ‘normalization’, imagined to be the complete adoption of European modernity’s organizing principles, or neoliberalism. The ‘democratic daydream’ was directed, however, more humbly towards ‘overcoming the Communist legacy’, and the ‘return’ to a ‘normal state’ that simply ‘fulfilled its official duties towards its citizens’ - law, order, trust, respectability, and efficiency. Within this imaginary, liberal free market capitalism was conceptualized to be the ‘natural’ order of man (particularly of the Keynesian variety however). It was thus also conceptualized, as earlier described, as the ‘moral’ order of man.

In the 1990s, Marysia Galbraith (2003) tracked an emerging postsocialist ‘discourse of normality’ among urban and rural Polish youths, showing how it was mobilized to make the case for ‘how things should be’, and critique how the nation fell short of their desires and expectations. At that time, her respondents felt that ‘our normal is not normal’ (Galbraith, 2003: 8). They felt that Poland remained too-socialist for their liking. What these youths meant by ‘normal’ was varied and contextual, but they complained about social exclusion, especially the threats of high unemployment, low pay, and the high costs of living and consumer goods. This was contrasted with idealized desires for ‘domestic harmony, economic prosperity, and individual and national liberty’

49 Olga Shevchenko (2009: 206) writes how this idea of a return to a ‘natural’ condition and standard of living, as opposed to the ‘unnatural’ one, imposed by the Soviet regime, marks a stark contrast with Russia where a notion of ‘inherent’ Europeanness has never been possible, and so where the ideal of ‘normality’ always ‘belonged to the realm of pure normative imaginary’.
mythologized by the West. Galbraith found that discourses of normality were inflected by class background—where, in the late 1990s, educated urban residents felt a greater sense of capacity to achieve the ‘normal’ and rural residents were more inclined to view Poland as drastically constraining that possibility. This is what can be said to characterize the key difference between smog-concerned residents from chapter four, and working-class coal miners in this chapter.

Echoing Sayer’s earlier contention that class and aspiration, or the ability to live how one aspires to live, are centrally implicated, we can find a similar trend in ever-shifting ideals of the respectable Good Life here in Silesia. Indeed, what is striking is the fact that, contrary to Alexander Kiossev’s (2008: 1) claim that normalization has, in the post-communist world, ‘come to be seen as a ‘fact’, and that the word ‘normal’ was so close to people’s hearts’ but, by implication, is not now, the discourse that Galbraith wrote about so long ago, has not died down, even since Poland’s joining of the EU, but instead seems to have intensified to a greater level of bitterness at still failed expectations. Just as for smog-concerned residents, it was one thing to be ‘abnormal’ outside of the European club, it was another to remain abnormal decades after so-called European integration. Yet for miners this ‘abnormality’ hits them hard in their working lives and material standards of living. The reality of this ‘integration’ has not been the achievement of equality and the imagined ‘return’. Rather, it has been experienced as a distressing and disheartening confrontation with the worst parts of both worlds – a fuzzy hybrid kind of impure modernity, as the thesis introduction outlined it. In a sense, Poles were confronted with the harsh reality that ‘neither capitalism, enlightenment, or democracy has proved as pristine or as accessible as everyone wished’ (Alexander in Sztompka, 1993: 85; similar observations were made in Svašek, 2006). This lack of purity has moral and material dimensions – as does desires to return it to cleanliness, or purity.

While most accounts of the ‘normality discourse’ have focused on issues related to Western-style consumption, reasonable employment standards, and economic frameworks as a means to achieve that end, less attention has focused on the ways this discourse affects the kinds of expectations and aspirations related to work itself – particularly, the kind of work one might imagine oneself doing as a now-European citizen, and, therefore, how this discourse becomes embodied through experiences and practices at work. Through work (or production), not only consumption, ‘abnormality’ and ‘normality’ come to be ontologically embodied and marked, so that

50 Hungarian author Béla Greskovits (1998) foresaw in 1998 that an ‘enduring, low-level equilibrium between incomplete democracy and imperfect market economy’ would characterize Eastern European societies for the foreseeable future. Yet he did not foresee the authoritarian populist backlash here – indeed, unlike in Latin American countries, he erroneously viewed such Eastern democratic arrangements as ‘crisis-proof’ citing ‘patience’ as enabling it. Such patience, however, had by now worn out.
one becomes abnormal/normal in complex and contradictory ways. Again, Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes (2019: 51–2) put it memorably – postsocialism is an awkward navigation between ‘normality’ as embracing the norms and expectations taken for granted in the West and ‘normality’ in terms of having to adapt to, even embody, the actuality of the comparative ‘shabbiness of one’s own local environment’ (this time in material rather than aesthetic terms), producing intense ‘mental stress’. The ab/normality of one’s socioeconomic context comes to define and shape one’s moral personhood. This is the central reason why Polish ‘abnormality’ is deemed to undermine one’s dignity, value, and sense of self-worth, because it thwarts not only the achievement of desired material ways of life or standard of living, but also the achievement of a certain kind of moral, dignified personhood too. It is riddled with the propensity for shame.

Returning to Łukasz, Grzegorz and Marek, coming back to ‘Polish reality’ meant not just returning to the comforts of family, but also returning to an economic reality where they felt they lacked secure, decent employment, were unable to afford a certain ‘European’ standard of living, and were subjected to the whims of an untrustworthy, corrupt state, elite actors and their combined disorganized economy. It meant, in short, ‘becoming Polish’ again. This sense of abnormality and its many frustrations caused them to migrate in the first place (see also McGhee et al., 2012; Polkowski, 2017; Rabikowska, 2010). This was the paradox of home – offering a contradictory, conflicting and impure condition of both shame and homeliness. The draw of mine work, then, in this fuzzy ‘Polish reality’ was best understood when situated in this wider work and economic landscape. Marek, Grzegorz and Łukasz’s personal biographies, amongst numerous others, highlighted a profound sense of perceived insecurity, and threats of the economic realities ‘out there’, that they had both encountered and heard about through stories about bad treatment at the hands of so-called Polish ‘privateers’ (prywiaciarzy).

For example, Marek told me that when he initially returned to the country, he tried working as a coach driver, but found that the contracts were short, if they existed at all, and that one could not trust if you would be paid fairly or on time. Grzegorz, who started working with a private sub-contractor (privateer) at the mine, described how his experience was of never feeling sure that his

51 Supporting such anecdotes, Adam Mrozowicki (2011: 36) writes of the new labour relations introduced by the transition to capitalism – where ‘unpaid overtime, mobbing and forcing employees to work in unhealthy and/or dangerous conditions’ were often the norm. Likewise, economic competitiveness in Poland (as in the majority of CEE countries) was predominantly achieved by work intensification and low wages. Poles worked on average 41.4 hrs/week as compared to 40.3 in the older EU countries in 2005. Labour costs were also much lower here - 4.74 Euros per hour as compared to 24 Euros/hr in the EU-15 and there was judicial support for limited contracts. In 2004, 26% of those employed in Poland had limited duration contracts, the second highest number in the EU – affecting young people in particular. Still by 2014, 10% of those under-25 would be informally employed; and 25% with part-time or short-term work (Feffer, 2014).
pay-cheque would arrive, or if he was being paid his due, or that others who were related to the company director were being paid more. As he put it, ‘If you work at a privateer, you never know, there are different stories’. Similarly, Łukasz complained about working for a private company. There is always an ‘interes’ (‘interest’) - ‘it’s just about money, profit and greed. The earnings are known to be lower and tied to performance and there are no ‘extras’, (by which he meant social security benefits like holiday and sick pay, as well as bonuses). ‘You could be fired from one day to the next and nobody will be there to protect you.’ In short, it was decisively immoral and underhand – dirty business.

By contrast, despite the risky, laborious and dirty nature of the job, which they did their best to avoid, though it increasingly did not offer the guaranteed higher wages it used to under socialism52, coal mining work still offered scarce attractions: relative job stability and security (including secure contracts, sick pay, holiday pay, and other social benefits), and early retirement (after 25 years work below) with a pension. In other words, it was one of the few routes towards intensely coveted Western style ‘normality’ and its dignities. Eventually, it was a route to freedom. I was told that working at the mine was the best available means of building a ‘normal’ life not so much because of how much you earned anymore, but because it was one of few assets that was ‘still’ state owned rather than a private company - ‘so it won’t fall from one day to the next; it can’t close all of a sudden just like that. There are social protections, benefits, it’s stable. Labour laws and regulations are at least in place (though not always adhered to) and the trade unions can help you out’, said Marek. Coal thus provided a quasi ‘secure base’ in an increasingly insecure world and underpinned the possibility for a Polish moral economy. Spending time in Silesia, I had the impression that coal was imagined to provide material grounding and rootedness in the earth – a semi-secure base. As Chris Hann (Hann, 2019a: 5) writes, ‘When things fall apart, it is not surprising that people cling to forces they associate with an earlier age of stability’. After all, the narrative that ‘coal is, was, and will be’ had circulated for generations. Over 200 years, coal mining had survived and continued despite colonial partitions, occupations, wars, uprisings, changing political regimes, the collapse of a civilization, and transition to capitalism. ‘Despite everything’, said Grzegorz to me, ‘it’s still here’. It had always underpinned the potential for dignity at home. That was its industrial promise.

52 Adam Mrozowicki (2011: 42) during the economic growth of 2004-2008 in Poland, unskilled workers in the private sector began to earn more than in state-owned enterprises, but these still provided greater job security.
Of course, this legacy was already fragile and fraying from the inside – the immoral economy had contaminated the national treasure trove. The story was unravelling to reveal its threadbare foundations. Coal was ‘no longer the stable job it once was’ - and yet the narrative legacy of that notion still retained a dwindling power. As Marek said: ‘it’s a job until you retire, that’s what they say’. The ‘that’s what they say’, belied an increasing inability to believe in elders’ wisdom, however. Whereas for the older generation of miners, these aspects of coal mining work were absolute, taken as givens, or as ontological attributes of coal and its labour, for the younger generation, these benefits of coal work are highly contingent and relativized. Coal was becoming only relatively stable in a world of fast-paced change, movement and insecurity. Coal’s stability was now comparative and under constant negotiation and precarity. In the context of coal’s decline, such attachments to coal were strategies for survival for-now, and not for the long-term future. Łukasz tellingly put it:

If the policy carries on, I will work twenty five more years, I think … but, they could change it, but as of now, it’s twenty five. Nobody has said anything about it, but you can’t be sure. I don’t count how long I have left, because you don’t know if things will change. For example, they might raise the retirement age. You just don’t think about it, because the more you think about it, the more it drags on. And we don’t know if in five years they might close us [the mine], or one or two… That’s the feeling. Everybody lives for today. That’s my feeling… We have to influence our children, so that they don’t tie their future to mining – it’s no longer the certain job it once was.

‘If’, ‘I think’, ‘could’, ‘for now’, ‘can’t be sure’, ‘don’t count’ on it, ‘you don’t know if’ – these were the verbal expressions of a precarious life hanging in the balance. Unstable stability had become the Polish abnormal norm.53 But ‘this was Poland’ after all. Something for something.

Coal thus took on the quality of an increasingly wobbly material-metaphorical anchor for the ‘unbearable lightness’ of people’s lives (Kundera, 2009). The secure base was quaking, though still a base. In exchange, however, in Poland, one must get dirty and work hard, I was always reminded. The increasing moral stigmas surrounding coal mining work added to its burden and sense of ecological dispossession. Yet again – something for something. This sense of precarious and compromising reassurance was articulated most succinctly again by Łukasz. Once he got a job ‘under the mine’, so-to-speak, he could ‘breathe a little more’ because he felt he could lean on it – at least in terms of a horizon of monthly timespans. Working for the state-owned mining company

53 So much so that Polish journalist and economist Rafał Woś (2017) recently published a book entitled ‘This isn’t a country for workers’ highlighting the insidious impact of pervasive precarity dogging Polish workers everyday lifeworlds with a persistent sense of insecurity and fear regarding the future and their place within it.
itself was perhaps not 100% reliable in the long term, but in the near term, it was about a sense of assurance and trust. The mine ensured that, that there will be ‘money, and certain money. That on the 10th of each month that money will be there, certain, real... It’s that certainty, that that money, it might not be what you expected or hoped for, but it will be there’. At the same time this money, combined with his wife’s income too, gave him and his family ‘the possibility to survive and no more’. Certainty in increments of months for a chance to ‘survive’. What had happened to the coal dream? To the EU dream? To the ‘return to normality’? Grzegorz, Łukasz and Marek all knew it was the ‘beginning of the end’ for coal in Poland, yet they were willing to bet their lives upon it for the foreseeable future – at least until they retired after the required 25 years. It only needed to last that long. In the meantime, Łukasz told me, he was neither happy nor unhappy with his lot – he ‘just had to accept it’, belying the former statement. ‘Better options in Silesia didn’t exist for me. It is how it is’. Besides, mine work at least compounded regional and community ties – through its hard labour it forged a feeling of ‘togetherness’. Solidarity had ambivalently positive and dirty, shame-infused ties (see chapter eight).

Taken together, both the critique of work for ‘privateers, and the narrated benefits of coal-mine work, these elements comprised and expressed a collective lay moral economy of an aspirational normality which stood as an active critique of the shoddy meaning and quality of work under postsocialist capitalism here in Silesia, and Poland at large – considered a sort of ‘abnormal’, dirty or ‘ill capitalism’. It was the root cause of ecological dispossession. Beneath ‘Polish capitalist’ tales lay a strong moral rebuttal, a lack of trust, and a rejection of labour exploitation and instrumentalization for the sake of selfish and greedy ‘interes’ or profit. This was deeply embedded within a contra-distinctive Silesian-Polish morality of fairness, human dignity and solidarity – or the right to be treated with respect, dignity, equality and care, values of coal life. Such values were apparent under socialism, when, as Caroline Humphrey and Ruth Mandel (2002: 1), find in their edited volume on postsocialist Markets and Moralities, private marketeering was regarded not only as criminal, but even immoral, and these ‘ingrained moralities’ had left their trace. For young people, however, unlike their elders, such morals were increasingly perceived not to draw on the socialist past, though it undoubtedly provided a common foundation for a shared moral habitus. Instead, ‘younger’ miners articulated an organic, political critique of economic injustice based on their shared lived experiences, rooted in a particular subjectivity and positionality (mediated, of course, through class, gender and national identity – and also their embodied ecological
positionality). In particular, they referenced the West and EU ‘norms’, as providing ‘better’ work conditions and economic organization as I have outlined.

Despite its decline, the legacy of the Western welfare state lived on, since, from a Polish perspective, the safety net that remained, known locally as ‘social’, still appeared utopian by comparison, including child benefit/family support and access to decent healthcare, of the likes that most Poles could only dream of – even though they were now EU citizens. As Sayer (2000: 98) points out, the crisis of the welfare state in general and ‘continuing globalization means that countries (or blocs like the EU) are increasingly competing at the level of their social settlements’. Yet, these were not perceived as ‘hand-outs’, or as Communist-style dependencies (that notion was rejected), but as necessary and ‘normal’ conditions, just rewards, for enabling hard-working individuals, like them, to pursue their best capacity to flourish in an open, competitive, individualized yet dignified market. This was particularly so for male labourers – who historically enjoyed entitlements to full employment. The achievement of this model of ‘normality’, based on producerist logic, was perceived as the fundamental purpose of moral and just economic arrangements, and not as a utopian ideal but as a materially-grounded possibility that should be here already. As such, its lack was perceived as immoral because it was the perceived byproduct of a state that did not value its most hard-working citizens, those that most embody its salt-of-the-earth values, nor recognize their moral worth. Rather, that state had exposed them to warped and twisted ‘abnormalities’ such as perceived widespread corruption, lack of security, law-breaking, poor wages and ‘junk’ contracts (Fehérváry, 2002). In enabling conditions for dishing these out, the state had treated its citizens like junk, or dirt, too. Coal’s material dirty work that was increasingly precarious also signaled such contemporary low regard. Yet it lingered on the threshold of a contradictory store of meanings, just about redeeming it.

The shortcomings of ‘Polish’ capitalism were thus understood by Marek, Grzegorz, and Łukasz in national and ethnic terms too. For them, ‘This was Poland’, therefore things were unfair, mired in corruption, underhand, crooked, and unjust, where Polish economic and business elites did shady dealings with Western interest and finance at their expense. In Poland, EU laws, norms and regulations, though officially in place, in practice were ignored, undermined, or avoided altogether. Polish-exceptionalism was connected to the legacies of the Communist past – which doomed its capitalist transition to failure, illness, and incompleteness. Here, the fully-realized, healthy and vibrant

54 Similarly, Eeva Kesküla (2018) writes about postsocialist Russian-speaking miners’ experience in Estonia as one of ‘indeterminacy’ and ambivalence, whereby their meaning as discarded, waste people or those of value hangs precariously in the balance in a modernizing economy.
capitalism of the West, was only a sickly imitation—poisoned by the traces of ‘Communist mentality’ and conniving (still-Communist) elites that failed to live up to its potential, and therefore, took to oppressing its citizens by constraining their agentive capacities. This kind of capitalism was ‘abnormal’ through and through – impure, dirty, and immoral. Grzegorz tellingly put it:

Capitalism in Poland will never be fully realized. It’s a country in which that Commy-ness is so deeply rooted that it’s hard to tell one from the other, because even if the capitalist approach would be implemented, there are always those things that Communism drags downwards. And it will be like that for years still to come.

Marek in turn said ‘Poland is too backward a country, backward mentally – it’s deeply rooted in Communism. You can see it in in the way things are run here. It did harm to people.’ Communism was a disease that Poland was still riddled with. It needed purging.

As ever, as a form of coping with such harsh conditions, once again, we see a withdrawal into the domestic sphere. Home-life was perceived as the antidote, a panacea. This time not to the harsh lack of social embeddedness of the West’s economy that was a result of their migrant status, but to the lack of it here in Poland, at home. Just as in the socialist past, the public/private split in terms of abnormality/normality, home became a place of refuge from which to disconnect from the absurd, public, external world of the immoral economy (as also described in chapter five in the context of pollution). Home became the ‘normal’ anchor of a morally, pure, and altogether superior Polishness that made inhabiting the ‘abnormal’ reality of Poland bearable and meaningful. This was what they put up with it for (see chapter five). Yet this too had shifted in recent times, causing added pressures and dislocation. As experiences of the real (as opposed to idealized) West had increased, significant disjunctures with its imaginary image emerged alongside. The West has turned out not to be everything it was hoped, and it has also turned out that the West has its own problems opening up ‘dilemmas about normality’ (Vasilescu, 2007). As a result, a sharpened and refined assessment of values related to ‘home’ have emerged as a critique of what is missing. and as a response to the realization that there are possibilities for plural normalities that opens up space for hybrid and organic forms – indeed national ones.

While normal/abnormal tropes have mapped quite neatly onto the public/private dualism in the past, this division has begun to blur, encroaching upon the private realm itself. Living and working in the West, and part of the EU project, Poles must confront and come to terms with a new fact – that even their private lives and identities were now subject to the disciplining rubric of European ‘normality’ – which lay at odds with their own sense of ‘Europeanness’ which they felt...
they embodied. Polish Europeanness, for them, was equated with what had increasingly become ‘backward’ and ‘abnormal’, in the contemporary civilizational schema of East versus West thanks to Leftist agendas that were shifting the goalposts: traditional gender identities and roles, heterosexuality, Catholic faith (for some), the nuclear family, and its foundation to social life, rootedness, and even Whiteness (see chapter eight), were now all apparently questionable, even unworthy, and immoral. Thus previously assumed and unarticulated aspects underpinning the basis for the claim to European normality as ‘our heritage’ and ‘right’, were reflexively themselves becoming ‘abnormal’ or questioned bases for European belonging, and compounded their Eastern European subjectivity as a shameful ‘Other’ in the EU home. Traditional, or purer, more intact, ‘European’ values were now available only, paradoxically, at home, where one could therefore feel at-home. Yet that home was now subject to the same scrutiny and comparison as the public sphere. Home therefore did not quite provide the ‘joy’ of ‘dwelling in the mainstream’ (Farquhar and Zhang, 2005: 308) of an easy normativity as once. As a result, an increasing burden was being placed upon upholding this dualism – the pure/moral realm of the private home, as opposed to the impure/immoral realm of the public sphere. Enhanced purification practices, such as the resort to nationalist populist discourse that collapsed the exhausting need for such a binary by purifying both, were highly appealing. Under PiS, Polish normality became a valued abnormality – Our normal; indeed, Our backwardness (see chapter eight). Shame was kept at bay.

In this way, what the three of them come to mean by the concept of an aspirational ‘normality’—one that was always out of reach, a ‘cruel optimism’ (Berlant, 2007, 2011) rather than an actually-lived-experience was, then, not a simple acceptance of and importation of some kind of pre-packaged ‘Western-ness’, but an individually negotiated, emergent, organic, and reflexive critique of all that was once part of that previously-revered ‘normality’. It was an altogether different, compositort of ‘normality’ (and ‘modernity’) that blended both contemporary Western and Silesian-Polish ideals, industrial and postindustrial ones. As Galbraith (quoting Daphne Berdahl, 2003: 10) pointed out thirty years ago, interactions with the imagined West have always been variously interpreted ‘through a dynamic and subtle interplay of imitation and resistance. Correspondingly, just because Poles admired certain aspects of the West, it did not mean that they accepted or adopted it uncritically. On the contrary, the West must compete with people's sense of attachment and loyalty to their place of origin, including ‘Poles’ idealized vision of the West itself’ (Galbraith, 2003: 10) In this way, miners tried to reconcile the tension inherent within the ‘double movement’ of Poland’s own Great Transformation – seeking to re-embed the economy, and its
meaning, into a web of social relations that was theirs and supported social reproduction, while holding onto the benefits of the dis-embedded economy – its allocation of and access to freedoms, rights, autonomy and commodities. Thus, miners’ embodied lay moral economy of ‘normality’ was a contradictory marriage of neoliberal-era entitlements (understood as customary rights due to all EU citizens) and paradoxically Catholic-embedded and socialist-era Polish ideals of a social welfare state. In such a moral economy, such a state supports the social reproduction of a certain moral Polishness, grounded in family values, intergenerational ties, and rootedness, as its raison d’être. As such, coal work, which had always guaranteed this in the past, indeed embodied its store of social value, was a comparatively rare strategy for making the best of one’s situation ‘in Poland’. To be able to build a normal ‘good life’ in Poland, in Silesia, or ‘at home’, for individuals without university degrees or specific professions, such as Grzegorz, Łukasz and Marek, coal work was perceived as the only viable route (or root). In comparison to the West, it would always fall short and its dirty work was a constant reminder of one’s second-class status in Poland and the EU. But it provided a track towards near-normality – and potentially a more homely one at that. They therefore exchanged abnormality (coal mine work) for normality (aspirational lifestyles); ‘something for something’.

As Marek put it, ‘Better prospects didn’t exist for me in Silesia, in the sense of being able to create a family, and think about their upkeep and about the future’. This was ‘Polish reality’. ‘Don’t you understand, nobody does what they want to do in Poland’, Łukasz sighed, ruing his class position yet articulating it as a symptom of backward abnormal Polishness. This tension of having to accept abnormality as precondition for the means to having a shot at achieving normality (being Polish and living in Poland) was at the heart of Łukasz’s story. Reflecting on his earnings at the mine, he said: ‘If you count it in Euros, what is it like, 700? 800? 800 Euros, and you have to work in that dust, in that heat, carrying those heavy loads. But what can you do? It is how it is here for now’.

By choosing to live a life in Poland as a working-class male, striving for ‘normality’ meant adopting a particular traditional male subjectivity too. This subjectivity was forged through coal work. Younger men were reluctant to take it on, because they knew there was ‘lighter’ ‘nicer’ and ‘safer’ work in the West. Employment there was, as Grzegorz told me, gender non-specific. ‘It could be done by either a man or woman; it didn’t matter’. Mine work, on the other hand, is a traditionally highly masculine occupation as the reader knows. Thus, achieving ‘normality’ in Silesia, Poland, for miners, required adoption of a specific working-class masculine habitus and
trying to live up to this designation. Structural constraints of the up-until-now lack of state support for social reproduction, particularly within the family, added to the demand on men to be (breadwinning) men. Women worked, dual-earner families had become the new norm, but women risked precarity and unemployment more often and continued to earn less than men (Tomescu-Dubrow et al., 2018: 34), while their earnings were still deemed supplementary to the male breadwinner’s (see chapter six). Silesia’s young men earnestly wanted to have families. The only way to financially support one was through relying on oneself and one’s social networks, particularly extended kin. With minimal state support for creches and kindergartens, and as long as there was strong value attached to women’s domestic work as ‘good mothers’, women would be dependent on and submissive to men. Men too would be confined to this domestic model and the pressures it implies, for being the man comes with significant (anxiety provoking) responsibilities. ‘Men’ ought to protect their women, provide for them (when there is no dignified work), and shoulder the burden for the stresses, strains and struggles of working life while constantly fearing downward mobility and unemployment.

Being the breadwinner, however, was not always to be prized and desired, but rather often reluctantly accepted as another ‘Silesian-Polish’ pressure and burden, the cost of staying and trying to build that (increasingly elusive) ‘normal’ life ‘at home’. At the same time, as a traditional Silesian value, for many it was seen as a locally-expected aspect of ‘being a working-class man’, (i.e. taking responsibility for your family) or, simply, of being a miner, and so fulfilling such expectations produced a sense of cultural self worth. The more breadwinning you were, the harder you must work – for example, I was told that those who work right up at the coal face, who earn the most (though comparatively not much more than others as used to be), tended to be those whose wives did not work at all. Breadwinning relied on the intimate bread of coal. For Marek, on the other

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55 Natasha Slutskaya et al., (2016) in their research on dirty work, class and masculinity, find that traditional gender roles and identities are called upon and re-entrenched by those who feel themselves to be subordinated in class-terms through their labour as a way of coping with its indignities and re-inscribing it with meaning. Traditional masculine capacities such as strength, endurance, toughness etc, now devalued in the globalized economy, but required in order to cope with mining work, are resignified by working-class men in order to resist and ‘recover’ that value, ‘whilst simultaneously reinforcing their entrapment within such ‘traditional’ subjugated occupational fields’. Performing, and valuing, traditional working-class masculinity becomes both a means of paradoxically attaining freedom and dignity within a society that stigmatizes them precisely for this quality, while also reinforcing their own subordination. Slutskaya et al. (2016: 165) therefore argue that such ‘displays of masculine resilience in the face of devaluation are less indicated of a culture of masculine domination but more of an experience of vulnerability and social dislocation’. As Beverly Skeggs (2004) also sees it, adherence to established working-class masculine values thus reflects constrained opportunity structures. In this case, unable not to take up traditional masculinities as coal miners, social comparisons downwards are reached for as a way of further protecting one’s positive self identity (see chapter eight).
hand, the fact that his wife also worked gave him the freedom not to ‘have to’ go to the coal face but choose a position that was less straining on the body. Thus the amount of strain one bore was related to how driven you were by the desire to achieve ‘normality’ of the Western-Silesian-Polish kind – how ‘traditional’ you wanted to or needed to be, and also how ‘modern’. As Marek said - ‘It’s true that coal work is not the safest kind of work and it’s dirty, but it gives you secure income and benefits, at least for now. I don’t do it because I love it, I do it because I have a family to uphold. So, let’s say, something for something’.

Coal’s dirty work – the burdens of Polish economic reality – for a cruelly optimistic ‘normality’, a tension increasingly experienced in the body.

The everyday reality of working in coal mining provides a vivid lesson in the perceived shortcomings of ‘Polish capitalism’, and its Communist infections and contortions that it imposes on its people. With time, such distortions force them to become ‘abnormal’ persons too – physically and morally – in order to fit the abnormal system they found themselves in. As Łukasiewicz (1987: 68) writes in relation to the pervasiveness of the normality/abnormality binary for making sense of Polish reality: ‘Every absurd, irrational, or incomprehensible fact perceived with one’s own eyes or felt on one’s own skin… can become the stimulus to immediately attribute all of these features to the social order as a whole.’ The coal mine as a microcosm became a central site through which this embodied abnormality, the immoral economy, was experienced and where the bodily burdens of Communist-polluted Polish ‘ill’ or ‘dirty’ capitalism were borne and individualized as shame.

Treated like dirt, becoming dirt: Bearing the bodily burdens of Polish immoral ‘abnormality’

‘Mud is only mud here! Not in other countries! Other countries know how to deal with it. It’s only here that mud is the kind of mud that’ll always be mud.’

- Witold Gombrowicz (quoted in Blavascunas, 2017: 26)

As a result of coal’s growing precarity, the maxim that ‘coal must be profitable’ in order to prove it’s social and economic merit had intensified. Stress, nerves, and pressure filtered downwards from senior management, the white-collar ‘brains’ (umysłowi) of the mine, until it finally reached the

56 Similarly, Michelle Kozlowski and Harold A. Perkins (2016) find that in Appalachia, USA, in return for securing relative ‘privileges’ associated with employment in mining (including lifestyles approximating those of the middle-classes) within the context of a political economy of its scarcity, a certain masculinist ‘coal miner mentality’ in which sacrificing one’s health in order to look after one’s family is normalized. In this way, such relative and double-edged working-class privilege ‘defends the contaminated status quo’ - and defends masculine identities too, by requiring them. (See also Bell and Braun, 2010; Scott, 2007, 2010 on similar conclusion in Appalachia).
depths of the earth, where ‘physical’ miners laboured. If the combine stood still, due to ‘natural’ issues with the coal face, or human error, blood pressures rose. Miners had always been under pressure to produce. Even under socialism, workers had dealt with strict quotas as part of the ‘fight for coal’. Productive pressures were different then, however. They never threatened the very existence of the industry itself, as today. Younger miners especially thus had accepted and internalized the logic and mandates of capitalist production. To survive, the firm needed to be competitive on the market. Costs must be reduced; efficiencies maximized – or employment would be eliminated. Miners’ bodies became the locus point for this accumulation of pressure, where it was felt most acutely as a matter of survival.

The number of workers in the mine had more than halved since the early 1990s, from approximately 6000 to 3000. At the same time, the mines had dug ever-deeper into the earth’s crust, as outlined earlier. In short, there was more work to do, but fewer hands to do it, even given increased mechanization. This work was also heavier and less acceptably risky. The deeper one digs in a mine, the greater pressure is exerted by the coal bed. This means that the ‘obudowa’ or prop-system that keeps the seam from collapsing on workers, needs to be more solid, which means heavier pieces of iron to lift and load. Workers were being exposed to intensifying heat and humidity too. The pace of work had also increased dramatically. As Marek and others told me, there was no time to sit around, unlike during socialism, where (as the stories go) full-employment policies meant that there were three people for every job. Being fired back then was near impossible: even if you ‘stood or lay down’ you’d still be eligible for your pay. To earn an income in contemporary Silesia, and secure one’s job, however, workers felt compelled to demonstrate their worth and ‘keep things moving’ – which resulted in physical over-exertion, and often the breaking of health and safety regulations. At the same time, younger miners were much more aware of and concerned about health and safety than their predecessors. They needed to be – their lives were far more precariously positioned as individualized biographies (Beck, 1992). Yet such risks too, in Poland, could become ‘normal’.

In discussing his first months of mine work, Marek told me:

I felt cheated. I used to come home and barely be able to move. I was working in the preparation division then. I would drink three litres of water and it just ran off me. I didn’t have time for anything. I would work from bell to bell, and everything hurt. I used to feel tremendous pain. Generally, I would come home, and my legs would be pulsating from the effort, from the pain... My spine would hurt, my arms. For the first month, it was like somebody had been beating me until I bled, because my skin had to toughen up from
carrying all that iron. Later, I worked at the coal face, and it was even worse. It was noisy and dusty because of the ventilator. Washing was almost impossible! I wasn’t prepared for something like that. After that, it became normal.

Such is a miner’s normality in ‘Polish conditions’. Marek didn’t blame the sorry economic state of the coal industry directly on what was going on in global coal markets, or on resource constraints, or even environmental change, though that was another pressure miners were aware of. They had more immediate and pressing matters at hand. While many accepted that coal would soon ‘run out’, its present decline and the resultant poor treatment of workers was most vocally attributed to corrupt and inept political and industrial elites (including senior management in the coal industry) who had given in to Europe and neglected or ‘milked’ the industry for their own personal gain – these were considered the malignant and immoral forces that had produced Poland’s ‘abnormal capitalism’ (as described above).

Almost three decades after the fall of the Berlin wall, for miners, (echoing the narratives of smog-concerned residents in chapter four, yet directed upwards) the ghosts of Communism were said to continue to contaminate the capitalist present in the form of: 1) inefficiency and disorganization; 2) nepotism and an unjust society of ‘connections’; and 3) corruption and a lack of transparency among the powers that be. These characteristics were believed to not exist in the ‘normal’ Western world. Coal and its miners were thus the innocent, pure, victims of an abnormal immoral economy. As a result, Poland was unable to make the most of a precious resource that was there for the taking and making, if only it were treated and handled with care – under ‘normal’ conditions that is. Instead, in corrupt and immoral hands, it became proverbial ‘mud’. This sentiment was echoed frequently in stories about foreign private companies from Germany or Australia coming to buy up Polish industry ‘for a cent’, and managing to turn it into a profitable enterprise. One particular example of a Czech private firm that had become highly lucrative following the purchase of a supposedly ‘unprofitable’ Polish mine circulated as a case in point. ‘How come they can make money out of it, but we can’t?’ was the key question. The answer was generally thought to be a mixture of (post)communist corruption and ineptitude of corrupt Polish political and economic elites hoodwinking and dispossessing the hard-working pure people – the ‘true’ ethnic, Polish folk. They were the culprits for coal’s inefficiencies and associated economic, bodily, and moral deteriorations.57 In turn, miners felt as if they too were being wasted, and treated

57 In a sense, this can be understood as an extension of the pervasive feeling during the PRL period that the Communist Party and its cadres were responsible for the same. In 1989, party membership among blue-collar workers was very low, but management was 98% Communist (Battiata, 1989). Since the concept of the ‘stolen revolution’ implies that the Communists never left Poland, it seems logical from this perspective that
like dirt, or mud, in overlapping ways, by Communist mentality. Firstly, as ‘wasted lives’ (Bauman, 2003) – they were an undervalued resource that was made to bear the brunt of elite failings, with little reward. Secondly, as ‘matter out of place’ - a discarded, unwanted, and stigmatized Other. Finally, as actually becoming dirt, in the sense of an imposed, ‘abnormal’ Communist-infected personhood, forced to behave and contort themselves in certain bodily and moral ways. For coal workers, the mine became a microcosm of how wider society was perceived to operate via and perpetuate this abnormality.

Class, and its power hierarchies, are spatialized in the mine in the literal separation of those who work ‘physically’ in the subterranean depths, and those who work ‘mentally’ in the offices above. Thus the more immediate management above-ground (the ‘brain’s so-to-speak) were spoken of as the ‘elite’. Similar to the army, coal mining is hierarchically organised with ranks symbolised by different coloured uniforms. Already the tensions made visible by the comparison between the hard physical labour of ‘dirty work’ below ground, and the ‘easy-peasy’, lazy, ‘clean,’ suit-and-tie jobs in the offices above (particularly management), demonstrated how ordinary resentments around experiences of social inequality played out in relation to dirty work. This juxtaposition of ‘suit and tie’ to ‘dirty work’ is a common class differentiator, revealing the upwardly mobile aspirational tendencies of younger people who wish to join the ranks of ‘clean’ professions, and who view the non-productive/manual labour of white-collar workers with disdain. The tension between those who work below in the pits, and above, in the comfort of clean and airy offices, was often expressed in terms of the clean/dirty divide. ‘They get to sit there all clean behind their desks, drinking coffee and moving bits of paper around, while we work underground getting dirty’. It is here where decisions are made – decisions that mine labourers then have to shoulder the consequences of. Such decisions, too, were increasingly being made at a greater distance from the pit. In the recent reshuffling, the directorate had been reduced and decision-making authority for substantial portions of previously in-house concerns were removed up to Katowice. Miners felt increasingly alienated and in the dark regarding what went on. ‘The corrupt elites’ and ‘the pure people’ were spatialized even in the microcosm of work as an imagined division between mind over body people. No wonder such imaginaries infused the everyday sense-making of broader Politics from a coal-eyed view of the world.

this notion of Them and Us, which so mobilized the Solidarity movement, now finds its expression in a continued populist mobilization against the remnants of ‘Communist’ forces still polluting Poland.

58 This too was highly gendered – since it was a high proportion of women doing administrative office work, or working in the processing plants, ‘above’ and men doing physical, productive work ‘below’. 

336
It was often reported to me that inefficiencies, wastage, and material shortages, caused by those working in the world ‘above’, were rife in the coal industry, causing the mine to stumble and stutter and so hurting the bottom line (i.e., profit margins), and in turn, workers’ bodies who bore the costs. According to Grzegorz, ‘it’s chaos’. The only way to cope with such conditions was a sort of improvisation through ‘combining’59 and through utilizing one’s ‘contacts’. Just as under Communism, ‘you have to have contacts to get things done’, Grzegorz and others informed me. If the foreman tells you to complete a task, and the required materials are not available, it is the worker’s problem to figure out how to execute it. Thereafter, a miner may roam around the labyrinth of the underground world, or venture into unfamiliar territory of the sprawling mesh of storehouses, out-buildings, and warehouses above, to find, syphon off, ‘borrow’, or forage for what is required. If a worker needs to obtain a tool from someone else, one’s co-workers cannot necessarily be counted on if they have taken a personal disliking to you or if they happen to be in a foul mood. If a worker needs to arrange extra transportation in the underground rail-cart when it is not scheduled to run, the only way to negotiate this is if one has personal contacts and good relationships with co-workers. If a worker needs an extra shirt or a new set of boots, connections are essential to ensure that the right size or fit is obtained: nothing is guaranteed. Thus, social contacts and relationships are everything.

If a worker manages to locate any missing materials, by ‘combining’ (e.g. by re-using or refashioning discarded materials from elsewhere) or simply finds things lying about elsewhere, they must be careful to conceal or protect their stash, because other workers from other divisions might steal it. Although it is technically ‘one company’, in practice, shortages result in rivalries to complete routine tasks. Such inefficiencies were thought to be caused by ineffective management, which lacked vision, and had a Communist mentality of running a ‘robber’ economy (rabunkowe) – as in, one based on stealing from and exploiting the people. My informants told me of a ‘winner-takes-all’ attitude among management and so coal workers too, another manifestation of a lack of care, and the ways individual competition played out in relationships as a result. Toxic work practices generated toxic relations based on competitiveness and one-upmanship. Once again this was a legacy of an impure capitalism, not of capitalism per se.

59 The reader may recall from chapter four that ‘combining’ (kombinowanie) is an untranslatable Polish word meaning the at-times sly at-times cunning ability to ‘combine’ ways of getting around the state or of getting by in life, usually through contacts, connections, and mobilizing the resources one has to hand. While in chapter four, smog-concerned residents used the term in a pejorative, negative sense, here miners used it to refer to a necessary, imposed skill of making do and getting by in difficult, ‘abnormal’ circumstances (See Makovicky, 2018; Materka, 2014).
Alongside resource shortages, favouritism and nepotism were also said to comprise a relatively ‘minor’ form of workplace corruption (another apparent Communist-era leftover that ‘always was and still is’). One of the main ways miners cope with the difficulties of their labour was through hard work, perseverance, striving to prove oneself, and opportunism. Such strategies and tactics were used to maneuver into a ‘better’ position. ‘Better’, in this case, meant less physically demanding and dirty for more pay. Doing so, required getting on well with the director, having friendly relations with senior staff, and, simply, ‘knowing the right people’. These people, after all, determined the schedule at the mine, the division of tasks, and promotions. Favouritism and/or personal grudges could ease or block one’s path towards ‘better’ things. It is not what you know, but who you know, that counts. Even getting a job at the mine required ‘connections’. ‘Connections’ also might affect remuneration. Wages are not transparent. Nobody knows how much anybody else makes. Thus, an individual may have a higher daily wage because of friendships in strategic places. One of the most persistent complaints regarded miners who spent their days working above ground doing ‘lighter’ tasks in the open air, but were counted in the pay packet as ‘being paid from below’ (i.e. documented as a worker who has been working below ground, qualifying them for a higher day rate) Suspicion, envy, and resentment about inequalities and injustices between workers were poisonous within the everyday lifeworld. At the same time, the lucky ones held onto what privileges they had managed to accrue, believing it to be a reflection of their own hard work or ability, and told no one. Individual competition saturated mine life, even as collaboration and working together was essential for survival. As a result, everybody became both victim and perpetrator. This, I was told, was the nature of Polish mining life. Coal’s burdens, intensified by ‘abnormal’ Polish ‘ill’ Communist-capitalism, forced one to have to take on ‘abnormal’ personhood – bodily and moral, in trying to simply get by. Dirty work, took on physical and moral salience.

Corruption in the mining world (and beyond) was also reported to be widespread, reflecting its moral evisceration. Rumors infected the atmosphere as a persistent backdrop. As the Polish saying goes, ‘if you don’t know what is going on, it’s about money’. Procurement was one particularly exemplary area where corruption was thought to be endemic. Yet this was also backed up in the media, when such stories would repeatedly break out in the news regarding shady dealings and collusion in contracts organised by directors or senior management, as a way to shave off a

60 Similarly, David Kideckel (2008: 15) found that miners in postsocialist Romania often complained about ‘the poor quality of their tools, often a consequence of corruption in purchasing and maintenance’.

338
For example, Łukasz told me that miners suspected the health and safety standard set by the Mining Office (Urząd Górnicty) and enforced by management ‘from above’, which mandates that all equipment taken below ground (e.g. gloves, goggles, masks, clothing, watches, etc.) must have an ‘anti-static’ guarantee, making every piece that much more expensive. Instead of ensuring workforce safety, this was simply seen as a money-making ‘scam’, demonstrating how ‘strange things’ go on with presumed elite ‘interests’ behind them. In another instance, the foam used to seal off mine shaft entrances was replaced with a different more toxic, more expensive kind. Why? Nobody knew. When the director who implemented this change left, the old foam returned. Nothing could be proven. Nothing was explained. Nothing was documented. Speculation, however, knew no bounds. Such repressed emotions exploded when the Krupiński mine was abruptly scheduled for closure in early 2017 – nobody could understand precisely why. It was good, coking coal, with reserves that, with the right investment, could continue to be excavated for years. Although it had been dealing with steady losses, the company that owned it was in the black. Nobody knew what was going on. No one thought to communicate with the workers. Thus, it must have been about...
cold, hard, and greedy money. Yet again, rather than employ decent and moral practices to take care of coal as a national treasure, for the good of the nation, corrupted elites were pursuing self-serving, private interest at the expense of workers’ livelihoods, and the nation’s wealth, treating them and coal like mud – worse, turning them into it.

Coal miners’ bodies were paying the high price of this ineptitude and sociological ‘pathology’ (or ‘illness’). Bearing the bodily burdens of so-called Polish ‘abnormality’, they were stressed, exhausted, sick, and over-burdened, as Stasiek so tellingly exclaimed at the start of this chapter.

‘Who cares?’ Marek asked rhetorically. ‘No one’, came the answer. One of the main causes for bodily harm was the failure to comply with health and safety rules and regulations. I routinely heard miners describe the ‘impossibility’ of carrying out coal mine work in accordance with the book-length quantity of ‘very nice’ health and safety standards. This was apparently a ‘well known secret’. Although perfectly reasonable and good norms, rules, and regulations existed in the books and were supposed to be upheld by European law, in ‘Polish reality’, I was informed, one had to bend and break those rules. ‘Here, they do not apply.’ For, ‘If we want coal mining to be profitable, and for the mines to stay open, health and safety is not possible’, I was repeatedly told. Such a notion was ‘unreal’ within the bounds of the ‘sick’, abnormal Communist-infused ‘Polish reality’.

As such, Marek and his miner-colleagues felt they absorbed the pressure of making coal profitable, and thus protecting their jobs, onto their own bodies and lives. He told me he would often carry loads that were over the maximum weight limit. Others told me that they did not wear their safety goggles or masks because it slowed work down or made breathing or seeing impossible and that they worked too long in sweltering heat. These were all examples of how the pressure to keep up the pace while working below, and therefore keep coal profitable under Polish capitalist conditions and its immoral economy, mapped onto embodied lives, distorting their personhood in the process.  

340

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Contrast the pervasive feeling of being uncared for, treated like dirt, here in Polish mining with miners in surface coal mines in the Powder River Basin in Wyoming (which produces the majority of US coal) where, as Jessica Smith Rolston (2013: 582) reports, despite capitalist production pressures and the always unequal and antagonistic negotiation of labour relations between mine workers and corporate personnel, nevertheless, workers seem to feel that companies display signs of ‘caring’ for their workforce, as do colleagues, where the use of metaphors of crew members as kin or family is common, an affective relation promoted by the industry itself (Smith, 2019: 12; Smith Rolston, 2010a). Women workers (one-fifth of the workforce) in particular were reported to feel a deep sense of satisfaction with their work in the mines (Smith Rolston, 2010). The reported generalized culture of health and safety violation in Polish coal mining also contrasts starkly with the situation in the Powder River Basin which has been ‘rightfully recognized as one of the safest sectors of the industry’ (Smith Rolston, 2013: 586; see also Rolston, 2010) - the result of years of effective labour union struggle.
The mine’s health and safety division was referred to as the ‘Slużba Pana’ (i.e. there to serve the ‘nobility’, in this context, the senior management elite, above). Whenever they came below for the frequent and pre-announced inspections, everybody had to prepare their area for the test. Management’s presence always creates a nervous energy, because they could ask anybody for concrete answers to questions as a way to test health and safety knowledge. During these oral examinations, an incorrect answer can have serious consequences. If there are any accidents, the worker is almost always at fault. They can be cited for minor mistakes, such as: ‘inefficient attention to walking’ or a ‘lack of concentration’. Work is thus stopped or slowed by such inspections – all the while the clock ticks on. Yet, mine inspections tend to be a ritualized performance, and everybody knows it. It is just another example of Polish ‘absurdity’, governed by elites, and once it is finished, workers have to work even harder to make up for lost time. Yet again, Polish miners’ bodies bore the burdens of such an immoral abnormal reality.

Adding insult to injury, as mentioned earlier, public media and societal narratives (as explored in chapter four) often depicted miners as lazy, over-paid, greedy and backward. Such postsocialist narratives that stigmatized workers were a pervasive background context for all conversations about mining. The main charges hurled against miners in newspaper articles and online (chat forums, social media, memes) centered on their being paid ‘too much’ because they are lazy and no longer work hard. After all, mechanization had surely made mining ‘easy’. It was often said that they work too few hours. Moreover, what other occupation allows its workers to retire after a mere 25 years? They are paid too much in comparison with other equally dangerous, or critical, professions. Moreover, miners get a generous state pension and hold the country to ransom with the way the state ‘throws its money down a black hole’, to avoid strikes and workers ‘going up to Warsaw to burn tyres’ (as depicted in common images). While the miners looked upwards, blaming elites for the failings of the coal industry and its abnormalities, the wider public pointed downwards, blaming the workers themselves. Much of this discourse was heavily class-laden as we have seen. Those disconnected from coal mining often caricatured miners and those working below as ignorant, uneducated and rough, brawny louts (as we also saw in chapter four). Marek, who lacked familial connections to mining, said that before working as a miner himself, he also subscribed to that view. Now he said: ‘if somebody tells me a miner doesn’t work hard….’ He trailed off. This commonly occurred in my conversations, whilst sitting and having tea at miner’s

64 David Kideckel (2008: 100-101) writes of a similar public and media discourse in postsocialist Romania, where miners are considered ‘overpaid, pampered anachronisms whose demands, expressed in strikes and marches, hold Romania back’ and squander, rather than contribute to, the country’s resources
homes, or chatting in the trade union office. This trailing off would be finished off with a clenched fist, or a punch to the hand. Rage at the implied injustice and shame of such denigrating judgements perpetually simmered just beneath the surface.

As a result of such stigma, the miners felt the need to defend themselves, their moral worth and dignity, by continually emphasizing the ongoing physically tough nature of their work, the ‘daily, arduous struggle’, and their unfair position in relation to mining ‘elite’. They explained that senior management’s incomes skewed perceptions of miner’s average pay in the media, since the average worker earned much less. After taxes (which were ‘high’ in Poland for little reward given the lack of trust in health and other public services\(^65\)), what they actually took home was much more limited. As Łukasz put it memorably, ‘If one person eats pasta and another meat, then theoretically together we are eating spaghetti bolognese, but in reality, it’s not like that’. Working hours were a particularly sore point. ‘They say we don’t work many hours’, he told me. A shift is timed from the moment a worker clocks in at the lift, to the moment they clock out when they surface through the shaft. Once a miner arrives at his place of labour, he might work only 5.5 hours straight, but, as Marek put it, they do so at ‘full steam’ with ‘no time to sit’. Since the work was ever deeper and deeper below ground, with further and further to walk to arrive at the coal face, miners spent significant time traveling to their workplace, walking some 4.5 km below ground, with c.4 kg on carried on their backs, in a subterranean mine shaft with 19% oxygen (rather than the 21% above ground). This walking time is paid (and rightly so miners unanimously state). For in such conditions, the body tires faster, it becomes slower, the ground is uneven, often pooled with water. Cables and wires hang overhead. But arriving half an hour before one’s shift starts in order to get changed, grab tools and equipment, and head to the hall to be divided into brigades and delegated tasks, is not compensated for. Miners, therefore, complained that they often worked an hour on top of their shifts for free. Once they emerged at the surface, they must wash – and washing off the day’s dirt is no easy task. It requires harsh and intense scrubbing with soap, and even then black lines likely remain beneath eyes as they head home.

While the dirt and dust was not necessarily the worst aspect of the job, it was symbolically potent. It was the final word that demonstrated why mine work was such a burden. Its vivid materiality under such harsh conditions became the quintessential slur on one’s being. While the corporeal toughness of the work (in terms of heavy lifting, handling, and maneuvering) was often

\(^{65}\) Indeed, Poland has one of the least progressive tax systems in Europe, rather it can be labelled ‘regressive’ - as in, the burden of taxation falls more heavily on those with lower incomes. While most EU countries have a progressive taxation policy (higher taxes on higher incomes), Poland is an exception with taxation of labour linear – the same for low and high income set at 37% regardless of amount. (Sawulski, 2019)
considered the most ‘burdensome’ aspects, the dirt encapsulated the shame and the abjected disgust which made mine work de-humanizing, degrading, and exploitative today. ‘…And in all that dust’, my interlocutors would often trail off in order to emphasize their harsh lot. For all these reasons, dirty work, the fatigue, exhaustion, pain, and strain that accompanied it, was bitter to the touch. ‘But you just have to grit your teeth and get on with it. It’s not about whether or not I like the work, I just have to do it. I have a family to uphold’, said Grzegorz. Thus whilst the older generation, like Stasiek whom we met at the start of this chapter, felt relatively at home amongst coal’s dirt, (as chapter five outlined), because it secured their sense of identity, personhood, and sense of worth for the younger generations, dirty work had no connection with socialism and the certainties of that stable past. Under capitalism it had been decisively demoted in overlapping ways. As a result, they experienced coal’s dirt as a mark of a contingent and decidedly ‘unhomely present’ (Morris, 2016: 151) that they must nevertheless bear. It was the grit and discomfort of working-class life in a postsocialist, yet supposedly still-Communist, Polish economy. ‘You just have to grit your teeth and bear it’, I heard time and again. That sense of ‘gritting one’s teeth’ revealed the tense corporeal presence of working bodies set against the unpleasant realities of everyday life. ‘Grit’ also refers to loose, or coarse, particles of stone – the air-borne coal dust deposited in the mouth. Workers must clench their jaws tightly. This sense of guarding against one’s eco-material environment is a key part of the tense embodied experience of ‘bearing’ it.

Thus, I heard countless stories of complaint, loss, and bitterness which put contact with coal’s dirt symbolically at the heart of feelings of neglect, marginalization, rejection, anxiety, and crucially shame – of being treated like dirt within an immoral economy, and in the process, becoming tainted by an uncaring elite sitting comfortably in sanitized offices above – brains valued above bodies. ‘If you don’t respect something, you treat it like dirt’, Marek told me. This experience was notably different to those of miners in the Bogdanka mine in the Lubelskie region, owned by a private Polish company, in the East of Poland, and renowned for its excellent health and safety record, and economic results too. After a miner friend of mine visited, he returned, full of wonder and awe at its impeccable and efficient organization—remarking on how clean, bright, tidy, and
shiny it all was. ‘Not like our mine’, he said with frustration. Here was an example of ‘healthy’, clean capitalism at last. Why can’t we – the Polish state – get our act together like that? Clearly, for us, the Polish nation, with its corrupted leadership, mud would always be mud for as long as an immoral economy reigned.

Conclusion: ‘Mattering forth of the collective flesh’

‘Everyone in mining supports PiS’, I was told numerous times by varying sources – from workers themselves, to more senior managerial staff. While there were no publicly available statistics to verify this claim at the time, most miners working below that I spoke with in conversations and interviews expressed sentiments and views that resonated strongly with the PiS programme for nationalist populist reforms. (Those working above ground had more mixed perspectives.) Having felt spurned by previous postsocialist governments, those who devalued working-class peoples and their labour and were deemed responsible for the decline in (or ‘vandalism’ of) the coal industry in their neglect and capitulation to ‘elite’ EU demand, by the time of my fieldwork, coal workers were receptive to the beguiling rhetoric of industrial populism offered by the Law and Justice party. Such rhetoric promised to fulfill precisely what was longed for – a moral economy of ‘normality’ based on a more caring form of Polish capitalism, one capable of recognizing and bestowing dignity upon its deserving and worthy people, workers, and industry. ‘Our’ coal for ‘our’ workers - a good, clean, healthy Polish, now ‘normal’, still industrial, capitalism. ‘Our’ coal for ‘our’ workers - a good, clean, healthy Polish, now ‘normal’, still industrial, capitalism. By firmly declaring that ‘Poland stands on coal’, as we saw in the opening to the thesis introduction, PiS argued that the nation’s future development and prosperity depended upon it, as the party sought also to re-nationalize other industries. Such political rhetoric directly appealed to the injured masculinities of Polish miners by elevating dirty work and industrial masculinity to national heroic status once more. These younger miners were not emotionally attached to coal – they simply wanted to make the most of such a resource for their gain while it was possible, and felt this to be a moral duty. Neither were they intrinsically anti-renewables – they just could not see how they would offer a route to dignified

66 Nevertheless, statistics show that Silesia, long a bastion of opposition party Civic Platform (PO), for the first time since 1989 fell to PiS in 2015, when record numbers of Poles turned out to vote (51.6%). PiS won 36% of the Silesian vote, PO 23.7%, while Kukiz, a populist anti-establishment party with links to the far-right received 11.1%, and KORWiN, another far-right party won 5.15%. For the first time the local Sejm would rule without a Left party at all (Cichy and Domagała, 2015). The coal mine trade unions had turned out for PiS, organising large anti-government demos prior to the election. Support among miners was considered key to PiS’s success, and the Unions planned to count on their gratitude (Gruszczyńska, 2015).

344
normality, rather energy transition threatened to worsen the status quo. Working-class coal miners were thus decisively part of the fertile grounds upon which PiS success was being built.

Whether or not they actually voted for PiS, was not the point (when I asked them, however, they often ‘admitted’ yes). Their overall mood, or ‘structure of feeling’, with its lay vision of a moral economy based on a desire for ‘normality’ and dignity emerging from their embodied ecological engagement with the dirty coal mine environment in contexts of ecological dispossession, undoubtedly lent legitimacy and support to such politics, whether tacit or active. It was not that younger miners were ‘attached’ to coal emotionally – they were not. They were attached to its originary industrial promises and normative dreams – of being-at-home-in-the-world. During my fieldwork, however, voting for PiS also carried the stigma of backwardness – supporters were painted as illiterate, ignorant, ‘back-country’ idiots. Yet, this was changing. As one miner put it, ‘We don’t have to be ashamed anymore’. Slowly, many felt they were flowering into a ‘beautiful country’ on the road to a decisively Polish version of normality – a reclaimed normality that placed Polish values, Polish ways, Polish traditions and Polish industry too at the centre of a decent, just, and moral economy. This would raise people’s living standards and their morale too. Another miner told me how much he now enjoyed watching state TV news – well aware of its propagandistic function, he told me however that ‘it makes you feel good about being Polish!’ As stated in the PiS party manifesto: rather than a matter for shame, it was becoming ‘worth it to be a Pole’.

Their flagship reforms like the ‘500+' family welfare policy, which promised each family 500 PLN (c.110 EUR) per month, for every child under 18 (from the second child onwards)\(^67\), made vast material difference. They were able to buy new clothes, flashier cars, more expensive toys for the kids, holidays abroad, and enjoyed better access to credit. At last, this was a government that recognized working families and the hard labour of social reproduction. Such policies bestowed value upon producers and the idealized heteronormative family, and recognized its central role in maintaining societal and national vibrancy. Marek told me ‘Finally the government is recognising our sacrifice that we have given the state children. They are valuing this work’. The national minimum wage of 13 PLN (c. 2.8 Euro) they established – previously an unheard of approach, though less relevant to coal miners, was another sign of the state’s plan for elevating the dignity of working people and taking their aspirations seriously (which previous liberal governments apparently scorned).\(^68\) PiS also deployed strongly anti-refugee rhetoric and practice - a policy that

\(^{67}\) This was later changed to also include the first child in response to public criticism.

\(^{68}\) See Chris Hann (2018) on how long-standing historic discourses of hard work as an intrinsic moral value are being successfully reasserted by far-right populists in contemporary Hungary. The centrality of such values to the far-right populist appeal are notable in their mobilization of the concept of ‘we, the hard-working...
was also of critical and immense appeal (to be explored in the next chapter) - in terms of ‘securing’ and ‘protecting’ producers’ well deserved wealth, Polish families, and their interests.

In the mining sector, PiS was ‘cleaning things up’ too as outlined in earlier chapters. They had ‘rescued’ coal, for now. For Marek, Grzegorz, and Łukasz, this was experienced as a process of increasing ‘normalization’ too. An audit was carried out, to make sense of a historically and organizationally complex industry, and identify its strengths and weaknesses. Thereafter, with the streamlining of the directorate of regional mines (with one director where there had been four), and investments in underground connections and re-organization, the excavation process seemed to be more efficient, collaborative, and streamlined too. PiS seemed to recognise that it was those sitting comfortably in offices above with high salaries that were the main problem, eating up the state budget, not those working hard below. They also restricted coal imports from Russia, for example, to increase the domestic purchase of ‘Polish’ coal, and re-nationalized, or ‘Polonized’, other industries, including the local coal power plant previously owned by French giant, EDF Energy. Finally, somebody was ‘taking the industry into their hands’ and ‘taking care of us’. This included ‘standing up to the EU’, putting ‘Poland’ (rather than the European Union and its interests.), first. PiS promised to ‘make the liberal elites pay for what they had done to the country,’ and place ‘Polish’ values and needs at the heart of politics. In relation to coal, this also meant resisting the EU’s climate change and energy policies. ‘What is good for the EU is not necessarily good for us’, Łukasz told me, ‘We don’t all have to be the same – every state has the right to decide for itself’. Finally, coal miners felt they might be listened to and valued once again. As a result, the meaning of coal’s dirt seemed to be shifting once more, through a process of industrial populist purification, and its ecological repossession. PiS was ‘not ashamed of coal’, rather it was making coal life, and Polish life more generally, a viable, and moral, route to desired dignified ‘normality’. This younger generation was not emotionally attached to coal – they rather saw it as a means to an end while it was still possible. PiS offered that.

Populism, as mentioned in the introduction, has been noted for its particularly intense ‘affective’ style and its desire for more immediate forms of democratic engagement between ‘the people’ and politics (Mazzarella, 2019; Rico et al., 2017). Here I want to draw on one particular pure people’ vs. a corrupt, undeserving elite.

69 Nobody could have at this point foreseen the devastating impacts of Covid-19 on the coal mine industry – see concluding chapters.

70 Yet, despite such promises, by 2018, coal imports from Russia had increased – almost doubling in the first 9 months of the year compared to the same period in 2017 (Reuters, 2018). Eventually PiS, too, would come to disappoint its coal constituency in this regard – see postscript.
anthropological take on populism that offers apt insight for this embodied ecological context of coal mining and its populist imbrications – that of William Mazzarella (2019: 45), who defines populism as an ‘intensified insistence of collective forces that are no longer adequately organized by formerly hegemonic social forms: a mattering forth of the collective flesh’. As a challenge to the ‘liberal settlement’ (which is no longer the norm), populism dreams of a ‘direct and immediate presencing of the substance of the people’ or the ‘affective and corporeal substance of social life’ (Mazzarella, 2019: 49). Liberalism, in contrast, always oscillated between invoking and scorning such popular elements, sometimes fearing them to be ominous, irrational ‘dark matter’ (Mazzarella, 2019: 50; see also Goodwin and Eatwell, 2018 on in-built fear of ‘the masses’ in liberal democracy). For Mazzarrella (2019: 50), recent populisms can be understood as a reassertion and re-establishment of the ‘(raced, classed) precarities, susceptibilities – but also vitalities – of bodies’ and their ‘hunger for immediacy’. As such, we are witnessing the ‘re-enfleshment of the political’ accounting for the ‘affective intensity of the populist symptom’ and its ‘lusty disinhibition’ (Mazzarella, 2019: 50-51).

This includes mobilization of fleshy, embodied ‘archives of experience’ – the shared histories, memories, forms of life that exceed any ‘singular ideological narrative’ (Mazzarella, 2019: 53). These archives underly populism’s potency and potential as it mobilizes structures of feeling, harnessing felt-sense and emotion as fact (Davies, 2018).

Therefore, it is no wonder that embodied moral economies of a longing for ‘normality’ and desire for its dignity, (here outlined as emerging from the encounter between bodies and material environments, of workers’ fleshy selves and coal’s dirt) are part of this ‘mattering forth of the collective flesh’. The desire for a better alternative world has not been dampened down. In this context, PiS offered what has long been yearned – a dignified ‘Polish’ normality. As a result, many miners were open to seeing what PiS had to offer. Whether PiS would live up to such promises remained at the time to be seen. It is important to stress, though, that coal miners are neither an undifferentiated ‘mass’ (see Sennett and Cobb, 1972; Skeggs, 2007: 3)\(^1\), nor are they ‘diehard PiS fanatics’, as some supporters are pejoratively called. They do not uncritically swallow any party’s politics whole.\(^2\) They are not foot-soldiers of populism, nor do they have ‘authoritarianism’ wired...
into their working-class positionality (S. M. Lipset in Sennett and Cobb, 1972: 70). Indeed support, whether tacit or active, for the PiS agenda represented another case, potentially, of ‘something for something’ – a good, for a possible bad. For I heard criticisms of PiS too.

Coal workers expressed a sense of distrust and alienation from all political parties. Dissatisfaction and disappointment already circulated through the subterranean underworld even then, for PiS had already broken promises. While they ‘rescued’ the mining sector, they did so also by reducing the total workforce by a further 3000. While they promised to keep all the mines open, under their leadership at least four additional mines closed, including the Krupiński mine, mentioned earlier. The sector’s ‘simplification’ (via mine mergers) was viewed suspiciously too. Miners wondered whether or not this would simply make future mine closure easier. Furthermore, as stated in the introduction to this chapter, they were dragging their feet on compensation for retirees regarding retracted coal allowance and had also allowed the freezing of the ‘14th wage’ (a traditional annual coal bonus that had been in place for decades). As Grzegorz told me, ‘I never trust any politicians. We will see what they do, but change in this country always comes slowly’. The miners I engaged with were understandably still wary. But their notions of an embodied lay moral economy of ‘normality’ were shaped through firsthand experiences of dirty work. This would not disappear fast. Neither would its corollary – a yearning for a more viscerally immediate, emotionally engaged politics that would recognise, create meaning from, and purify such suffering, warding off shame through moral and ecological repossession. Such is the challenge that any energy transition must reckon with.

The populist promise however is precisely to dismantle these elites and enable ‘the people’ to speak and be heard with one true voice. Such deep-seated cynicism, however, remains.

73 This was due, however, to a pre-existing 2016 agreement between the European Commission and the Polish government in which seven mines (out of which three were collieries) were scheduled to be shut down in ensuing years (Szpor and Ziolkowska, 2018: 4)
Chapter eight. Home is ‘our backwardness’: Coal, class, masculinity and anti-refugee sentiment at the Polish barbecue

‘I imagine that one of the reasons people cling to their hates so stubbornly is because they sense once hate is gone, they will be forced to deal with their own pain’

- James Baldwin (1990)

‘Poland is currently the safest country in Europe’, Tomek announced confidently, leaning back in a deckchair to enjoy the pleasant springtime weather, before adding: ‘and that’s because we are keeping Them out’. At the time, we were sitting in the garden of the coal mine’s social centre to celebrate a May Day barbecue, organized by the trade union I’d been spending time with, to kick off the national holiday weekend. The scene was festive, with a large canvas marquee decorated with bunting and multi-coloured balloons. Following some chit-chat about upcoming summer plans, and without being prompted, Tomek, a slim, clean-shaven, yet tired-looking 40-year-old man who had been employed as a miner for some 20 years, started to talk about refugees and Islamic terrorism, categorical conflations that I would routinely hear during the course of my fieldwork in 2017. Meanwhile, ‘disco polo’ music, a 1990s genre of ethnic-folk Polish pop, almost universally

1 ‘Tomek is a so-called ‘composite character’ made up of different encounters with different people, woven together here to generate a vignette that can do the ‘textwork’ (Maanen, 1988: 159) of showing the complexity of social life as I experienced it. I have chosen the strategy of using a composite character partly to ensure anonymity, and partly as a narrative and storytelling device to bring together a dense range of complex aspects of social reality to the reader that illuminates the issue of anti-refugee sentiment in Polish coal country, or ‘to reveal some typical patterns or dynamics found across multiple observations through one particularly vivid, unified tale’ (Jarząbkowski et al., 2014: 281). Anti-refugee sentiment is (un)surprisingly homogenous – the same discursive tropes circulate throughout everyday conversations even as those who deploy them believe themselves to be ‘independently’ minded, having the ability to ascertain the ‘truth’ – a phenomenon Krzysztof Jaskułowski (2019: 7) dubs ‘incompetent competences’.

2 Krzysztof Jaskułowski (2019: 1) finds that the hegemonic Polish right-wing discourse routinely conflates refugees with Muslims.

3 Emerging onto the Polish music scene in the 1990s, disco polo is a postsocialist cultural phenomenon that merged folkloric tradition with electronic music to produce a ‘Polish’ branded variety of popular music. It is a genre that, since it came from the provinces and is often linked to the countryside, is considered low-brow and inferior by the cultural elite. Thus, writes Monika Borys (2015: 1), it divided the country into ‘the disco polo nation’ and the ‘intelligentsia nation’. Millions of Poles love it precisely for its authentic ‘Polishness’, feel-good aesthetic, and peans to ‘national pride and Polish ideals of femininity and masculinity – a beautiful loyal mother and a noble war-ready man’ (Rymajdo, 2018). At the same time, it is loved for unifying people from all backgrounds – operating as a social leveler at a time when that is sorely felt to be needed. ‘All Poles are one family, whether they’re young or old, boy or girl’, sings popular Disco Polo outfit Bayer Full on one
beloved by miners (and scorned by elites), blasted over loudspeakers. Around one hundred people—couples and families with young children—milled about or sat together at picnic tables, filling paper plates with steaming browned Polish pork sausages, kielbasa, or blackened Silesian blood-sausage, krupniok, from the ‘grill’, with large blobs of bright yellow mustard and red ketchup, to be mopped up with thick slices of Polish rye bread. Women and men drank shots of vodka, laughing, toasting, and frequently dancing at the behest of the DJ-host. The formula of kielbasa, vodka, disco polo seemed to comprise the primary dimensions of working-class entertainment in coal country of Silesia, elevating and reclaiming Silesian miners as the quintessential, salt-of-the-earth embodiment of ‘True’ Polishness.’ Indeed, as I discovered, barbecues had become the quintessential Polish summer pastime in general, to the extent that ‘grilling’ was now described a ‘national sport’ (Miączyński, et al., 2016) or ‘obsession’. Everybody loved a grill and that summer I attended more barbecues than I could ever have imagined in a lifetime. Among Silesian miners, this affection for grilling was particularly apparent. I noted that such popular forms of leisure were familiar, predictable, and comforting in their performative communalty; a stark contrast to the shadowy figure of the ‘Muslim Refugee’ that injected much anxiety into this otherwise banal, reassuring scene. Precisely the problem.

Men in particular, like Tomek, were vocal on this issue, seeming to fear invasion and a challenge to their patriarchal authority. He continued, asking rhetorically, wanting perhaps to appear reasonable: ‘Tell me, do you really think that we can let These people into our home?’ He gestured towards the scene of the barbecue and added: ‘These Muslims, refugees, I mean, you know, do you think we can integrate them, and keep Poland and the Catholic Church strong and not give in?’

4 Anti-refugee and Islamophobic sentiment in Poland is not a working-class nor necessarily far-right phenomenon alone. Opinion polls show that three-quarters of Poles are against accepting refugees from Africa and the Middle East (Cienski, 2017). As Krzysztof Jaskulowski (2019: 7) finds, anti-Muslim and anti-refugee sentiment has a ‘liberal’ version as much as an ‘ethno-nationalist’ one, while young people are the most Islamophobic. Monika Bobako (2018) explains that both liberal and nationalist versions have their roots in Poland’s semi-peripherality. In this chapter I explore how the emotional lives of class, occupational identity, gender and Islamophobia entwine in particularized ways.

5 As referred to in the thesis introduction, whereas the older generation of retired miners tended to more often couch their sense of identity and belonging in regional terms – as Silesians and Silesian miners, the younger generation were more inclined to relate themselves to a broader Polish narrative of national belonging. As one older miner put it - ‘We are all Poles now right? But then, there was a difference between a Pole and a Silesian’. By contrast, many current miners told me ‘Silesian and Polish – it’s the same thing for me’. This is perhaps unsurprising given the decline of the national mythology of the Silesian mining hero. Silesian-ness and Polishness slipped and slid into one another – so that being Silesian was becoming reflexively synonymous with in a sense being more ‘truly’ Polish – more Polish than those at the centre – the elites in the metropolitan citadels of Warsaw, thanks in part to its ‘backwardness’. As one miner put it: ‘Silesia is slower to change than other parts of the country. In Poland they are adopting Western ways, but Silesia is more traditional, more backward. It will take a lot of time for things to change here. We are more resistant.’ This maps onto the nationalist populist notion of the ‘True Poles’ vs the fake, corrupt elite or ‘inauthentic’ Poland (see Koczanowicz in Bill, 2014).
joined his hands together, making the sign of a steeple with his two index fingers, seemingly tall
and proud. Before he let me respond to this rhetorical question, he said, drawing on the
commonplace metaphor of Polish domestic hospitality and the unwelcome guest: ‘It’s a bit like if
you invite somebody to your house for dinner. They come, sit down, and must abide by the rules of
your house—and eat the food that they are given’. He pointed to the grill, ‘Even if they make their
own food in private, in someone else’s house you have to live by their rules and customs... You
can’t just come in and start demanding things, trashing the place, making a mess...’ He was
referring, as I would learn, to the prevalent conviction that the West was ‘doling out’ generous and
enriching welfare benefits to incoming so-called ‘lazy’ and ‘demanding’ ‘migrants’
(who were then building numerous mosques
) to make themselves right at home). He was also referring to
widely-circulated media stories reported on trails of trash that had accompanied the arrival of
refugees on Greek beaches (see Eriksen and Schober, 2017; Thorleifsson, 2017) and transnational
Polish migrant and social-media reports of littering and ‘filth’ on the streets of Western European
cities. Work-shy. Welfare-scroungers. Waste and pollution bringing disorder and filthy chaos to
Europe – such imaginaries were becoming fixed to the spectre of dark bodies. Explicitly racist
terms such as ‘czapati’ (a derogatory adoption of the Indian flatbread to label brown bodies) and
‘brudasy’ (dirty-folk) were frequently used to refer to refugees here too – Tomek’s exposition was
mild in comparison.

He concluded his thought-stream with: ‘This is our home... our house... nobody can tell you
what to do in your own home!’ By this point, he was wagging one of his fingers straight at me,
while his other hand balanced a plate of pork **kielbasa** on his knee that had been brought to him by
his wife Zosia, who had short bouncy dyed-red curls matched to a bright pink t-shirt, and was
helping to dole out the food to other guests with beaming smiles. According to Tomek, as the
widespread apocalyptic imaginary had it, the supposed influx of refugees was associated with an
impending Islamization – as I understood it this seemed to place Catholicism, pork sausage, Polish
women, the purity and social order of the nation, and crucially his own masculine domain at-risk.

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6 This was deeply ironic to me, coming from the UK, where Eastern European migrants, particularly Poles,
have, post-2004, been dealt the same type of deplorable Brexit-fuelling, racializing and demonizing rhetoric
by such tabloids as *The Daily Mail* (see Cekalova, 2008). When I mentioned this, participants responded
defensively by claiming that they were ‘hard-working’, tax-paying, European; they integrated, they were the
‘right sort’ of migrant. Polish migrants’ unhomely treatment in supposedly ‘civilized’ places like the UK
precisely feeds into circulating affective sentiments of shame and its projection and transference.

7 See Kasia Narkowicz and Konrad Pędziwiatr (2017) on the under-researched rising phenomenon of anti-
mosque conflicts and sentiment in Poland. See also Konrad Pędziwiatr (2018) on the ambiguity of anti-
Muslim sentiment in the Polish Catholic Church as an institution which nevertheless contributes to hegemonic
Othering of Muslims, and Kasia Narkowicz (2018) on the Church’s divided public sentiment, yet its internal
far-right alignment among key figures, particularly associated with the notorious far-right Catholic media
channel **Radio Marija**.
But I wanted to know why he personally felt so threatened. What was he and others so scared of, I asked? He paused before answering through a mouthful, shifting to a more confessional tone: ‘You know, people are afraid that if there is change, they’ll have to adjust, that they’ll have to do something that they don’t fully know how to do; something unfamiliar. It’s better to keep going in what is, than to learn something new’. The latter phrase as I re-heard it would often refer to coal too. These words struck me as significant as a contrast to the bombastic masculinist-nationalist rhetoric I had encountered in media and political discourse – fear of having to ‘do something you don’t fully know how to do’ in the face of something unfamiliar – a fear of yet more destabilizing change in a society tired of radical upheaval without end, and of having to adjust, become something one was not, perhaps risking getting it wrong, thus being wrong.

This time, that something ‘new’ was the idea of an imposed westernizing multicultural project, felt, tragically, to be exceedingly un-Polish, where since at least after the Second World War the country went from being one of the most ethnically diverse places in Europe, to one of the most homogenous⁸. It was almost as if Tomek was trying to imagine a ‘Muslim refugee’ here at this barbecue, and wondering how on earth he would need to act, behave, relate, while not losing his position as Man of the House – secure, at ease in his authority, confident and in control. This seemed difficult because he felt he did not know how – he had never met a Muslim nor a refugee before. The problem, though, was perhaps not with an individual Muslim, but in the fact that He comes (in the imaginary) with a full-blown, intact, secure and so competing ‘culture’ – an Islamic one. The strength of this culture was threatening precisely because it cohered and seemed totalizing – something Polishness, perhaps also Silesian-ness, was actually felt to be losing in its apparent Westernizing disintegration.⁹ As Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2015: 10) writes in connection to diversity and integration in Norway, ‘It is exactly in the gap between group cohesion and cultural flows that the main zones of tension in everyday life appear.’ In actuality, church attendance in Poland was in drastic decline, faith was waning¹⁰, likewise ‘gender ideology’ was infiltrating

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⁸ Just prior to the Second World War, around one third of Poland’s population was composed of ethnic and religious minorities, including one-fifth of all the world’s Jews, the second single largest Jewish population in the world. In the 2010s, by stark contrast, 97% of the population declared themselves ethnically solely ‘Polish’, (and 87% ‘Catholic’ –see footnote 10 below), making Poland one of the most religiously and ethnically homogenous societies in Europe (Marcus, 1983; Minority Rights Group International, 2018). This is because, following WWII, as Chris Hann (2015: 2) notes, ‘the former socialist countries had no exposure to the kind of capitalist multiculturalism’ (and I would add postcolonial multiculturalism) ‘which developed in most parts of Western Europe during the Cold War. This was slow to change after 1990’. As such anti-immigrant sentiment in the postsocialist East should not necessarily be surprising.

⁹ This type of unspoken underlying anxiety has been audible in far-right political rhetoric. In 2015, Ewa Danuszek, from the far-right party KORWIN, proclaimed ‘Silesia is our home. Islam has its own’. (Goldziak and Márton, 2018: 133)

¹⁰ Although 87% of Poles officially are declared as Catholic in the national census, this masks everyday social practices. In 2014, the Polish Catholic Church conducted a survey finding that over the previous decade...
popular culture and schools throwing traditional roles and identities – things that had once been secure and infinite, and crucially previously unquestioned – into confusion and doubt. Environmentalism was undermining coal that seemingly held all this together. Self-aggrandizing statements about ‘Polish’ cohesion masked panic about its actual porosity and precariousness, its transformation, requiring an entirely new set of skills, competencies and values entirely.

Tomek then switched tacks, shifting from cultural and social scepticism to an economic argument. Blaming the EU for imposing itself on an underdeveloped (economically and socially) nation, he stated: ‘What they don’t understand is that we are too poor, too backward, to take them in. They don’t even want to stay here! We don’t have social’, he said, referring resentfully (now grateful) to a lack of state welfare benefits in Poland that Western Europeans, by contrast, were known to enjoy (as the previous chapter referred to). At this point, he was distracted by the DJ, who requested that everyone get up and head to the dance floor. Men were instructed to select a female partner and head to a clearing on the grass whilst accompanied to a hit disco polo number: ‘Dance, dance, dance, when all are dancing, and drink, drink, drink, drink a mixer with orange...’ The couples sang along cheerfully. Tomek extended his hand towards me, in a chivalrous gesture. Soon, he was leading me to the dance floor, ready to spin me around in the traditional heterosexual male-female partner-dancing (usually between married couples) that characterized gatherings. He turned to me, grinned, and, again, gesturing to the scene around us, shouted: ‘Hey, but at least this is our backwardness! Let me tell you, one day, it will be our saving grace!’ It appeared that the socioecological industrial coal assemblage, and its material and immaterial foundations, was gaining strength from the shaming scrutinizing associated with the EU’s imposed project of European cultural colonialism, understood to combine enforced feminism (or ‘gender ideology’), anti-coal ecological politics, deindustrialization, individualization and now, supposedly multicultural chaos.

During fieldwork in 2017 I repeatedly had such tricky conversations regarding refugees. Though naively I was unprepared for and very uncomfortable with this, I quickly had to learn to navigate them in ways that allowed me to maintain my integrity, whilst building trusting,
compassionate relations. I opted for a practice of curiosity and empathic listening to hear what lay behind such sentiments. For one thing was certain – in Poland, while anti-refugee and Islamophobic sentiment were some of the highest in Europe, both Muslims and refugees were almost nowhere to be found. Re-orientating my own alarm there with Tomek, I became curious about what phantasmagorical fear of the ‘dirty/polluting’ ‘Muslim (usually male) refugee’ and barbecues among Polish working-class coal miners had to do with one another. The question I came to wonder, was how was this linked to precarious postsocialist industrial masculinities and their life with increasingly-perceived-as-‘dirty/polluting’ coal? For concepts of dirt, pollution and its converse, purity, were rife in both coal and migrant discourses too.

Later that afternoon, I gained a memorable and representative insight. I joined Tomek again sitting in the marquee with friends. He’d had a few drinks by now and seemed more subdued. I ask him how he would describe ‘life on coal’ to an outsider. With a familiar wave of his hand and a pained look in his averted coal-lined eyes (he had just come off a shift, and was in a hurry so did not manage to completely scrub up clean), he told me, ‘Ah this coal mining life... what can I tell you? It’s kaput. It’s over already. They treat us terribly. Health and safety? Girl, what’s that? Today we were working with water up to here!’, indicating with his hand up to his waist, ‘Up above if it rains you can grab an umbrella and protect yourself. Down there? All we were given to wear were a t-shirt, some galoshes – that’s it. We had to beg for anything more. I’m telling you, they treat us like rats.’ I nodded, and offered an empathic expression. Complaints like this about the lack of health and safety were rife, as reported in the previous chapter.

He continued, clearly wanting to offload after the grueling shift he still had not fully unwound from: ‘Apparently there was a French photographer who was down below today – working on a project on industrial Europe, or something. What the hell? Who knows how he got permission. Everyone was annoyed cos’ people were trying to get on with things and he had his flash up in people’s faces’, he paused, before adding, ‘He probably thought – do negroes work here?’, referring to the miners’ blackened coal-dusted bodies, and laughing wryly. ‘Hey, maybe he will go back to France and tell them that in Poland they do have refugees and they have camps for them below ground!’ At this point, a miner friend of his sitting close by heard the tail-end of our conversation and added, ‘Perhaps they will take on that idea in France!’ They laughed together, masking the audible pain and humiliation underneath. Tomek waved his hand again, shook his head, and knocked back another shot of vodka from his glass. Leaning towards me, he confessed, ‘But listen, now is not the time for this, I didn’t come here to talk about that, I came here to have a good

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11 Only 1.6% of Polish citizens are born outside of Poland, while Muslims make up a mere 0.1% of the Polish population (Krastev and Holmes, 2018: 126). According to the UN high commissioner for refugees, Poland pledged to accept only 100 Syrian refugees between 2016 and 2020 (Leszczyński, 2015)
time’, and he turned to the group we were with, including his wife, Zosia, to join in a joke, nodding for me to do the same. We did not return to such topics and I raised my glass too and once again got into the collective, festive spirit of things, for that was precisely the point.

With time, I came to understand that barbecue’s banality was attractive precisely because it performed Polish ideals of easy togetherness or solidarity, what Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2010b: 12) calls ‘secure sociality’ that engulfs one in ‘relaxed intimacy’. This arranged itself particularly around validating and affirming an increasingly threatened traditional, heteronormative, patriarchal order and sense of industrial petro-masculine self-worth protected by a homogenous (increasingly reflexively white) Polishness. Barbecues, in other words, performed exactly what was deemed to be at stake: the increasingly scarce feeling of being at-home-in-the-world organised via industrial masculinist coal life. Miners who felt increasingly denigrated, mistreated and shamed for their enforced Eastern European, masculine, working-class, coal-based livelihoods, ‘treated like dirt’ (as described in the previous chapter), thus increasingly looked to one another to cleanse themselves of this new stigma and feel at-home as morally worthy subjects once again through the purifying ‘social buffer’ of ‘group entitativity’ (Ashforth and Kreiner, 2014b; Kreiner et al., 2006) sealed through leveling and masculine-assuring Polish habits, customs and rituals embodied in barbecuing together. It was its own cleansing and restorative ritual of ecological repossession.

Yet, in the context of postindustrial postsocialism, capitalist competitive individualism, and dis-integrated class bonds, that community was forever pulling apart as it longed to come together. The figure of the dark-skinned, ‘dirty’ Muslim refugee, with his strange ‘polluting’ and alienating habits, one who ‘did not want to work’ at that, thus was imagined to threaten this already-threadbare communal resource. This was defined as an unspoken ‘mutual acceptance of one another’, as one miner described it, forged through industrial labour that was under threat, injecting existential panic among embodied subjects who ultimately felt unmoored and un-homed. The barbecue, and thus Polish-ness-writ-large, stood in for the pure and more transcendental medicinal Home that now required protection, reconfirming a precarious industrial working-class masculine sense of being Master within His Own House - both at the domestic and national levels – where He can, as Tomek did, ‘lean back’, feel a sense of comfort and ease. Thus, in Anthony Giddens’s (1986: 66) term it provided a sense of ‘ontological security’, defined as ‘an attitude of ‘trust’ towards the continuity of the world and of self in the durée of day-to-day life’, achieved via everyday routines. Where such

12 This was precisely at a time when the emic word ‘komfort’ (comfort) was used frequently to articulate an aspirational ideal of The Good Life in conversations with participants about domestic life, consumption and work. See Greg Noble (2005) for a correlated analysis of Australian vernacular ideals of ‘comfort’, or ontological security, and the cultural ‘discomfort of strangers’ connected to questions of migration, particularly for a nation whose self-understanding revolves around notions of being ‘relaxed and comfortable’. 

355
trust is absent or violated, writes Giddens (1991: 67), it provokes the spectre of shame, and, quoting Helen Lynd:

> once this happens, ‘we have become strangers in a world where we thought we were at home. We experience anxiety in becoming aware that we cannot trust our answers to the questions, ‘Who am I? ‘Where do I belong?’... with every recurrent violation of trust we become again children unsure of ourselves in an alien world.

In other words – the world becomes a place where one does not know how to act.

In this chapter I contribute to limited qualitative and ethnographic literature on post-‘crisis’ Islamophobia and anti-refugee sentiment in Eastern Europe, arguing that fear of ‘letting refugees into the Polish home’ amongst my working-class participants, is not so much based on an essentialist racism, nor on ‘ancient hatreds’¹³, but on a fear, and resultant projection and transfer, of postcolonial postsocialist, particularly precarious industrial working-class masculine, embodied shame and a parallel reclaiming and defense of the longed-for, yet always out-of-reach, medicinal balm of a viscerally-felt sense of home that is felt to be at risk. If shame is a relational feeling of defectiveness, as described in the thesis introduction, experienced as the ‘shrinking in of the self’ (Friedman, 2007: 236), an existential fear of social disconnection (Lewis, 1995) and of not being at home in one’s own (dirt-stained) skin, then home is, as anthropologist Michael Jackson (2000) defines it, the complete opposite; a feeling of being at peace with yourself, of being congruent within one’s own embodied existence, being ‘filled only with the noise of oneself’, as he put it – or, being pure. This bears repeating because it sheds light on the seemingly paradoxical aspiration of the purifying reclaiming of backwardness as ‘ours’, as Tomek put it, in the national ‘retreat into the Polish household’ (Pine, 2002) that barbecuing represents.¹⁴ Where Polishness starts to become a more secure base than coal for identity and stability.

Thus, I argue that xenophobic tendencies at work in Polish coal country can be analytically linked not only to anxieties about demographic collapse (Krastev and Holmes, 2018, 2019), but, relatedly, to the combined postmodern, postindustrial and postcolonial postsocialist rise of industrial

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¹³ Katherine Vederey (1993) masterfully refutes the popular notion that nationalist and xenophobic sentiment in Eastern Europe can be explained by recourse to the simplistic idea of resurfacing ‘ancient hatreds’ that Communist party rule had suppressed. Rather, she argues, such phenomena must be understood to have multiple and historically specific causations. See also Ivan Kalmar (2018) for an interrogation of the Visegrad 4’s Islamophobia and how, rather than being a phenomenon specific to the Central Eastern European region and its failure to address history, as many popular interpretations have it, it should be set in context of a broader European and American Islamophobia.

¹⁴ Similarly, Sara Ahmed (2007) defines the embodied feeling of at-home-ness, particularly in relation to whiteness, as one of ‘comfort’, where bodies extend into spaces already impressed with their shape. In a sense, Polish anti-European withdrawal can be considered a case of perhaps continent-level ‘white flight’ (Kruse, 2007),
working-class shame, compounded by increasing atomization, loneliness, alienation and declining feelings of community and solidarity, and thus an acutely knock-on gendered fear of the loss of whatever remains of a sense of perceived homogenous and intimate collectivity that can do the work of affirming embodied Polish masculine at-home-ness. Holding a sense of this home together is thus perceived as crucial for existential, or ontological, survival. This is so particularly today when masculinity is in so-called ‘crisis’ (Clare, 2001; Horrocks, 1994), and when industrial working-class Polish coal-mining masculinities in particular are increasingly in the throes of hegemonic socio-cultural marginalization in the postmodern, post-traditional, post-labour, post-industrial world as we have seen in other chapters in this thesis (Giddens, 2003; Gorz, 1982; Stenning, 2005; Walker and Roberts, 2018). For as Ghassan Hage (2003: has put it ‘to be able to give hope, one has to have it’. Reactions can be understood as part of a process of ‘reflexive modernization’ (Beck et al., 1994) — the situation when what was an unconscious part of everyday life now must be consciously chosen and re-invented, thus is felt to be precarious and endangered. As a result, what remains as familiar and known, or promises reassurance, is urgently clung to and fortified, while that which is configured as alien to it and so threatening is expelled, and this operates at the intimate sensorial, bodily, felt level. As Susanna Trnka et al (2013: 2-3) argue: ‘Ethnocentrism, racism, xenophobia, and chauvinism… are widely viewed as forms of mental or cognitive prejudice and thereby amenable to reasoned refutation and persuasion…. Yet [despite reasoned argument] the intensity of these emotions and attitudes persists… By locating the source of such sentiments in the senses… we can better understand the seeming ‘irrefutability’ of what appear to be our most basic perceptions of the world around us’.

The remainder of this chapter will walk the reader through my own sense-making navigation of this issue, linking together vulnerable industrial working-class masculinities, coal-life, economic and social precarity, ideals of solidarity, and the interplay between stigma, shame and home encapsulated in the seemingly paradoxical notion of ‘Our Backwardness’. First I give a bit more background context to anti-refugee sentiment in Poland and its connections to industrial masculinist discourses and its embodied identity.

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15 See Ghassan Hage’s (2003: 3) Against Paranoid Nationalism: Searching for Hope in a Shrinking Society where he argues that ‘societies are mechanisms for the distribution of hope... the kind of affective attachment (worrying or caring) that a society creates among its citizens is intimately connected to its capacity to distribute hope. The caring society is essentially an embracing society that generates hope among its citizens and induces them to care for it. The defensive society... suffers from a scarcity of hope and creates citizens who see threats everywhere. It generates worrying citizens and a paranoid nationalism.’
Poles had not always feared or discussed Muslims or refugees to such a degree. The pervasive and viscerally-felt underlying Islamophobic sentiments I encountered were a far more recent phenomenon, whipped up by nationalists for electoral ends in 2015 (Cap, 2018).\(^{16}\) That July, the Civic Platform’s centre-right government agreed to accept 7000 refugees into the country, as mandated by the EU quota. In the run up to the October elections that year, the Law and Justice Party (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość - PiS) used the ‘refugee crisis,’ more specifically, the imagined future presence of brown and black bodies on Polish streets, as a platform to foment a veritable xenophobic frenzy. The subsequent moral panic helped to bolster their Eurosceptic agenda; and resulted in the historic victory for the right. Following the November 2015 Paris terrorist attack (Dzenovska, 2016: 1–2), once in power, PiS refused to honor Poland’s quota, and turned the 7000 away. Thereafter, a ‘hegemonic Islamophobic discourse’ (Jaskulowski, 2019: 1) took hold in government-controlled public media outlets, the right-wing press, the Catholic clergy, and within popular culture, reinforced by metaphors of ‘siege’, ‘swamping’, and ‘invasion’. Drawing on Poland’s historic sense of itself in the nationalist imaginary, as the ‘last bastion of Christendom’ and ‘defender of Western civilization’, or Antemurale Christianitatis (Bulwark of Christendom), against ‘encroaching infidels’ (or Muslims) (see Knoll, 1974; Zubrzycki, 2011), PiS appealed to the masses by capitalizing on collective memories and narratives of invasion, occupation, annihilation, and Polish Messianic heroism (Chrostowski, 1991; Zubrzycki, 2011). Refugees (sic: Muslims) threatened not only the nation’s very essence, its Polish-ness, understood in ethnic and cultural terms, but also Europe’s – the true, originary essence Poland increasingly believes itself to actually represent through its ethnic, cultural and religious ‘purity’ untainted by Western multiculturalism and concomitant degeneration.\(^{17}\) By 2017, when I arrived to conduct long-term research, the figure

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\(^{16}\) Elżbieta Goździak and Péter Márton (2018: 130) state that: ‘[P]rior to 2015 there was virtually no discussion of Muslim immigration to Poland, for the very simple reason that almost no migrants from Muslim countries were going there and acceptance of foreigners was growing steadily... [In 2012] CBOS (The Public Opinion Research Centre) conducted a survey of attitudes towards different religions. The attitudes towards Muslims and Islam then were much more favourable than in 2017. Of those surveyed, 48% indicated that they would welcome Muslims in their workplace, while 45% declared that they would not be opposed to having a Muslim son- or daughter-in-law.’ By 2015, when CBOS carried out another survey ‘only 23% of Poles h[e]ld favourable views of Islam and Muslims; 44% declare[d] very unfavourable attitudes towards Muslims and an additional 33 per cent [d][d] not have an opinion.’

\(^{17}\) Indeed, revealing how Europe is increasingly being reclaimed by PiS in Poland’s own image, in 2017, Prime Minister Morawiecki told a Catholic television station in an interview that the government’s agenda is ‘to reshape Europe and re-Christianize it’ (Santora, 2019). A similar rhetoric is notable in Viktor Orbán’s Hungary (see Hann, 2020: 478). In this way as Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes (2019: 73) write, these leaders seek to turn the moral tables by establishing an ‘imagined contrast between the pure and the mongrel’ Europe.
of the dark-skinned, Muslim refugee had become a sort of national spectral phantasm, haunting working-class miners in the south too, like Tomek.

Given that Poland hosts hardly any refugees or Muslims, its ‘crisis’ represents an extreme case of ‘Islamophobia without Muslims’ (Górak-Sosnowska, 2016). Popular fears of ‘invasion’ were coupled with anxieties about Islamic terrorism18 fueled by reports of the ‘failure’ of out-of-control multiculturalism in the West where Islamist terror attacks were deemed rife. Poland, by contrast, was ‘safe’, as Tomek stated, for reportedly no such attacks have occurred east of the Danube in Europe, ‘proof’ of multiculturalism’s causation. Given my personal connections in Sweden and the UK, research informants often asked questions, such as: ‘What’s it like over there? Aren’t you afraid to walk in the streets at night?’ When the London Bridge terror attack occurred in early June that year, my companions in the Polish miner community half-jokingly suggested that I relocate to Poland for safety purposes. When London’s Grenfell tower burned eleven days later, they immediately assumed that it was yet another example of migrant-fueled violence. Such fears of the outside world were based on an eclectic mix of distorted narratives from publicly-owned media (which under PiS has become an extreme propaganda tool), social media, alternative online news outlets, and firsthand reports from friends and family living abroad. These contributed to the collective imagining of anarchic chaos on the streets of Paris, London, Copenhagen, Berlin or Malmö, where turmoil, mayhem, and unruly filth have apparently been caused by dark-skinned invaders and criminal gangs. It seemed clear that Polish Islamophobia is not the straightforward result of geographic isolation, or lack of exposure to Others (see Pickel and Öztürk, 2018)19, rather, that it is simultaneously formed and shaped by the linkages and networks of transnational migration, including via ‘social remittances’ (stereotypes and prejudices circulating across national borders) and ‘pathological Europeanization’, terms Jaskulowski (2019: 6-7) coined to describe the Islamophobic and racist discourses emanating from Western Europe. This is of course compounded by Eastern Europeans’ own experience of being Othered in racialized terms by the West, and here internally in Silesia too by Westernized elites; learning how to be ‘White’ in newly acceptable terms also required asserting one’s fragile claim to Whiteness by rejecting other Others (see Böröcz and Sarkar, 2017).20

18 According to a recent Eurobarometer survey, Poles and Hungarians are most concerned about terrorist attacks compared to citizens of older European member states (Goździa k and Márton, 2018: 14).
19 However, CBOS data reveals that only 12% of Poles personally know a Muslim while those who ‘indicate that they have personal relationships with Muslims are highly educated, have the highest per capita income of the surveyed population, do not go to church, and identify as liberals’ (Goździa k and Márton, 2018: 130).
20 See also Jon E. Fox and Magda Mogilnicka (2017) for an analysis of how Eastern-European migrants to the West, specifically to Britain, have developed racist competencies as a means to become part of British society, dubbed ‘pathological integration’. This connects with research into white working-class racism and how it has developed as a response to the rise of identity in place of class politics, where members of this
Male participants, like Tomek, in particular often told me why Poland was not the place for refugees. Repeated, recycled complaints included: ‘They are not refugees! They are migrants! They don’t want to work they want to live on state handouts! They are Muslims. We are Christians. They’re not like us. They will outbreed us! Soon, Europe will be an Islamic caliphate! They are terrorists – or at least, we can never be sure they are not. It’s their mentality!’ (that word again). What struck me most, however, was not necessarily the homogeneity of rehearsed ‘arguments’

21, but the radical contrast between the social settings, such as this domestic and familiar barbecue, and their discursive performances of insecurity in relation to an invisible threat. Over the course of research, I found it of interest that mining men, in particular, were interested in discussing ‘the crisis’ with me—a Westerner, often seeking me out for such a chat. When men were accompanied by their wives, I found they often nodded along and validated their comments, or tended to remain quiet, at times stepping in to ‘smooth over’ any arising frictions as their social role demanded, by changing the subject or subduing ‘their’ man. Women were far less likely to voice a confident opinion on the matter or initiate such talk.

22 The public discussion was literally carried out largely above their heads, unsurprising perhaps in a region (within a nation) known for its highly traditional gender roles and absence of women’s voices in public debate; increasingly being perceived as an uncontaminated microcosm of ‘true’ Polishness in its now ‘backward’ postsocialist industrial peripheralization. With my Western status, I was a ‘different sort’ of woman, however, and could apparently handle such provocation and debate. It soon became clear then, that concern over class began ‘to learn, in the multicultural climate, how to be ethnic too’ (Gillian Evans in Gusterson, 2017: 212).

21 Which, as Jaskulowski (2019: 7) has also found, participants nevertheless were adamant were their ‘own’ counter-hegemonic views that they had independently verified through trustworthy sources, a phenomenon he dubs ‘incompetent competences’.

22 This is not to say that women are intrinsically more open and tolerant, accepting, and receptive as essentialists may claim, nor to say that women do not share such views, (they often do, although, I found they were far more likely to be uncertain and hesitant about expressing or holding them), but that there is something within the logic, practice, and embodied experience of masculinity in its diverse forms that seems to connect and resonate with fear of the Muslim Other in far-right form in contemporary Poland, and in other countries too. Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin (2018: 13;15) write that while simplistic claims to gendered differences in far-right populist support need careful examination, at the same time, women are statistically less likely to support such parties across Europe. In Poland, it has been found that women under 30 are far more likely to be liberal; In a 2019 poll commissioned by the national newspaper Gazeta Wyborcza, among men aged 18-30, 62% said they supported nationalist, populist or far-right parties and 33% backed liberal or leftwing ones. Among women, 55% supported liberal or leftwing parties and 43% were in favour of the nationalists (Walker, 2019). Likewise, see Agnieszka Graff et al., (2019) for an overview of the misogynist and masculinist core of the far-right worldview, one that is linked to increased devaluation of gender equality and anti-feminism (Ammann and Kool, 2018; Kimmel, 2018; Kuhar and Paternotte, 2017). While no available survey data to my knowledge analyzes gendered differences of opinion regarding the immigration and refugee debate specifically in Poland (nor is there much academic research on this particular topic in general), research has shown how gender is key to the immigration debate in Poland (Goździak and Márton, 2018: 17), and my ethnographic experiences verified this. At the same time, anti-PiS mobilization has been spearheaded by women in Poland (Hall, 2019).
refugees was profoundly gendered. It was a predominantly male preoccupation and public fixation and was framed in such terms. Given the quantitative data that demonstrates that men are far more likely to support far-right populist parties with anti-refugee and ethnonationalist policies, both globally (Coffé, 2018) and in Poland (Walker, 2019), as much as research that connects (industrial, white, working-class) masculinities and Islamophobia or racism (Back, 1997; Fine et al., 1997; Hopkins, 2016; Nayak, 1999; Puur, 2008; Treadwell and Garland, 2011; Ware, 1996), it seems pertinent, then, to examine the interlinkages between masculinities, coal life and the banalities of everyday Islamophobic anxiety. Such linkages were already apparent in the dominant political and everyday trope of the unwelcome guest in the ‘Polish household’, standing in for the nation at large understood in patriarchic, Catholic, ethnic, and ‘traditional’ terms, (those that coal life embodied), combined with ‘threats’ to Polish women and the purity of the nation’s offspring that He represented.

Indeed, in May 2016, PiS Party Leader, Jarosław Kaczyński, defended his decision to deny entry to refugees by telling reporters Poles ‘deserve to feel that they are masters of their own house’ (Cap, 2018: 9). The year before, he had commented that refugees carry ‘parasites’ and ‘pathologies’ that would more literally contaminate the Polish household with viruses (Cienski, 2015a)23. In such abhorrent statements, Kaczyński portrayed himself and his party to be staunch defenders of ethnic and cultural homogeneity and Catholic, ‘traditional family values’, ‘protecting’ a ‘pure’ Poland from literal disease and the more metaphoric ‘social diseases’ of the West (Euractiv.com, 2018) (multiculturalism and so-called ‘gender ideology’). In so doing, he precisely sought to protect ‘our backwardness’, understood to be an intransigent resistance to the unilateral imposition of hegemonic Western EU standards and values.24 Feeling ‘at-home-in-the-world’ requires no longer that the Polish household open itself up more to Europe and European ways, but shut its doors and defend and maintain its inner cleanliness, becoming preoccupied with rooting out pollutants, either in the form of internal or external enemies, and preserving ethnic hygiene. As Krastev and Holmes (2018: 125) write while in 1989 an ‘open society’ meant the promise of freedom, today, ‘openness

23 In July 2017, the weekly magazine ‘Gazeta Polska’ ran a highly controversial cover featuring photo-montaged images of ‘refugees’ from the Middle East with the headline ‘A shocking German report: Refugees bring deadly diseases’. The issue was compared to Nazi propaganda by other journalists, lawyers, and human rights advocates.

24 Dace Dzenovska (2016: 1–2) writes that it was the refugee crisis that led to Eastern Europe’s ‘hard-fought-for Europeanness’, which was always ‘fragile’, to be ‘dissipated’, when they ‘emerged as rogue subjects refusing to ‘play by the rules.’ In the moralizing discourse of European compassion, exemplified by Germany, Eastern Europe once again became ‘failed’ Europeans. Likewise, Chris Hann (2015: 2) argues that insult to injury was added to the imposed expectation that other EU member states share the ‘burden’ of Merkel’s ‘green light’ to incoming refugees, when the West condemned the East’s refusal as proof that it was ‘what it has always been: not just materially backward but spiritually and ethically derelict as well’. In this way the 2015 refugee crisis gave ‘renewed life to old polarities’ dividing West and East in civilizational terms, with shame its foundation.
to the world … connotes not freedom but danger’ including ‘immigrant invasion’. This is a u-urn in the political trajectory of the East, where a politics of imitation of the West has begun to be replaced by rejection and withdrawal. In this sense, I argue, fuzzy, uncomfortable shame, particularly here that linked to industrial life, has begun to be reclaimed through purification into an orderly, comfortable/comforting, ethnically homogenous, predictable home.

Tomek’s invocation of the ‘root metaphor’ (Lakoff and Johnson, 2008; Turner, 1974) of the Polish household under threat from impurity (dirt, disorder, trash, and waste), was a common everyday cognitive model through which to make sense of wider issues, particularly the refugee matter. Explicitly connecting that household to Catholic gendered tradition and family values, working-class coal-mining sociality, and the barbecue (to which he gestures when calling upon the idea of ‘home’), Tomek reifies precisely that traditional, heteronormative, patriarchic industrial household that Kaczyński interpolates too as the ideal under threat. For traditionally the Polish house is indeed headed by a male defender, provider and protector, while ‘Matka Polka’ (Mother Poland) is charged with taking care of the health, moral Catholic purity, and order of the home, both domestically and nationally (as we saw in chapter five). In Silesia, where women conventionally has been yet more staunchly tied to the home, this has historically been even more valorized, even as the masculine breadwinner model is on the wane (see chapter six). Thus, commanding pork-meat, vodka, and women who serve and dance with him at the barbecue, and at ease surrounded by same-skinned folk around the glow of hot coals, Tomek performed his pure ideal industrial masculinity that feels thoroughly at-home-in-the-world. An ideal organised around the value of ‘hard’ physical labour and its just rewards.

By contrast, the imaginary male Muslim Refugee, as an Other that seems to stand in direct opposition to the kind of Polishness celebrated and enacted here, (does not eat pork, does not drink alcohol, does not ‘allow’ women to enjoy themselves in public, is not White, is not Catholic, apparently refuses to labour...), threatens the Polish-Silesian household, already deficient in European eyes, with the potential insertion of more shame – the shame of non-recognition, of disconnection, of dis-comfort and social dis-ease, multicultural illiteracy, if you like, not knowing...

25 Indeed, Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes (2018: 127) add that: ‘The West is viewed as having become heterogeneous and multiethnic as a result of a thoughtless and suicidal policy of allowing easy immigration. The radical revaluation of values here is remarkable. Rather than West Europeans being considered far ahead and East Europeans far behind, West Europeans are now described, in the rhetoric of xenophobic populists, as having lost their way’.

26 In my MA fieldwork in a southern Polish village, which looked at the lived experience of leaving farming in the context of postsocialist transition, I also found that the domestic rural household was a common ‘root metaphor’ for making sense of and understanding the world-at-large (Allen, unpublished 2014).

how to act or behave ('People are afraid they’ll have to do something they don’t fully know how to do'), and of rejection, of being judged deficient ('they don’t want to be here anyway' Tomek said, echoing widespread narratives). How is homosocial solidarity, the social basis of industrial working-class life, to be forged with this stranger? Since masculinity ‘must always be proved, which continually brings anxiety and insecurity close to the surface’ (Garlick, 2016: 12), the supposed ‘intrusion’ of the exotic Other intersubjectively (and in this case, imaginatively) threatens his sense of performative masculine integrity. The spectre of an ‘out of place’ body disorientates because as Nirmal Puwar (2004: 43) writes, it represents ‘a psychical somatic collision. The presence of these bodies in this place defies expectations. People [particular here men] are ‘thrown’ because a whole world-view is jolted’ and in the process the familiar is made strange and so, under conditions of neoliberalized dispossessions, frighteningly, existentially unaffirming (see also Wise, 2010).

Erving Goffman (1955) described ‘face-work’ in everyday practices, as a means to avoid embarrassment and shame. Thus, such ‘banal, routine social actions’, such as here having a barbecue, eating, drinking, and dancing together, ‘form a bulwark against the ‘chaos’ that lurks behind them’ (cited in Scheff 2000: 87). This is particular so under conditions of broader senses of generalized chaos. Likewise, Anthony Giddens (1991: 36) speaks of ‘tact’ as the pivotal means through which to assure ontological security in social settings, through the ability to maintain ‘face’, whether through verbal or body language. Thus, rituals and routines take on an exaggerated importance, because, ‘certainty, order, and security maintain a precarious existence, always on the edge of chaos. This is the case even in the most ordinary social interactions’ (Garlick, 2016: 16)

Steven Garlick (2106: 21) argues that gender lies at the heart of this tact in the contemporary uncertain world of reflexive postindustrial modernization – particularly, masculinity has become a ‘technology’ deployed as a ‘means of managing risk and insecurity’. ‘Tact’, and so the maintenance of social order, is not something masculinity can today take for granted. Thus, the barbecue, with its rituals of collective consumption and performance were imbued with real social importance, as sites where industrial working-class masculinity, could be temporarily phenomenologically collectively secured and enacted in a precarious world when it is coming undone. The nation as the barbecue-writ-large was too.

Although Tomek knew how to be recognized as a man on his home turf, comfortably familiar with its rules, scripts, codes, and embodied expectations that ‘interpolate’ him as such (Althusser in Ahmed, 2000: 23, 2007: 157), clinging on to homogeneity is a strategy to avoid encounters with Difference that might cause yet more dislocation – a feeling of inferiority or inadequacy or ‘getting it wrong’ as I have outlined - and of avoiding the failure of intersubjective masculine validation and
thus the public revealing of a deficiency of the self that already feels deficient and uneasy. This is experienced as a phobia of contamination – fear of the dirt of shame. As Greg Noble (2005: 114) comments in relation to the ‘discomfort of strangers’ in Australia: ‘Our ‘fit’ in an environment requires the ‘acknowledgement’ of other actors, human and non-human, that we fit. This is not simply a relation of cognition, but a profoundly sensual experience grounded in the habits and routines and artifacts of our everyday environments’. In turn as Sara Ahmed (2007) writes, this embodied sensory experience of at-home-ness is racialized as an expectation of ‘comfort’, where White bodies extend into spaces already impressed with their shape. In this way, under conditions of economic, social and ecological precarity, through their highly sensorial phenomenological experience, barbecues are an attempt to reconstruct and retrieve a secure sense of an embracing and equalized homogenous collective body – the ‘body of solidarity’ of old, particularly industrial working-class solidarity, increasingly couched in national, ‘Polish’ (and increasingly White) terms.

Drawing on historically-circulating nationalist imaginaries of the ideal Polish male (as a heroic masculine soldier defending his homeland even in the face of unlikely odds), nationalists and coal miners alike, envisioned and described refugee males as rather the opposite: As well-dressed men with smartphones faking victim status, or as immoral raping criminals. As cowards, they were further emasculated as they were imagined to not want to work, to be fearful of war, ready to betray their families and the fatherland, trading them in for an easy life elsewhere. Thus, men in particular wanted to know: Why were the refugees ‘only men’, rather than women and

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28 Such an imaginary links to Poland’s core national mythology which is (briefly mentioned earlier) that of messianic martyrdom, as a nation ‘assailed by dangerous neighbours’ and the ‘Christ among nations... martyred for the sins of the world and resurrected for the world’s salvation’ (Zubrzycki, 2011: 25). The 63-day Warsaw Uprising of 1944 is a prime example of this visceral mythology. The underground Home Army sought to liberate their capital from Nazi occupation as Soviet troops advanced from the East, resulting in 20,000 poorly-armed dead soldiers, 200,000 civilians killed, and the remaining half a million expelled before Warsaw was razed to the ground by direct order of Hitler as punishment. The Allies had promised support but had actually already agreed that Poland would become part of a post-war Soviet ‘sphere of influence’ at a secret meeting (the Tehran conference) in 1943. The Uprising famously encapsulates the ideal of national heroism in the face of all odds and betrayal, and is an ongoing source of contemporary controversy. More recently, PiS has aimed to instate a new canon of national war heroes – that of the ‘cursed soldiers’ - a band of loosely-organized ‘resistance fighters’ who carried on the Home Army mission of fighting for Polish liberation by struggling against the Communist regime into the 1960s. By elevating these previously marginalized actors, PiS has sought to create a new ‘foundation myth’ through iconoclasm and the establishment of new monuments and a national remembrance day to commemorate these selfless and courageous ‘heroes’ - highly controversial, because to many they should be considered simply bandits or war criminals who perpetrated acts of mass violence and murder, also against women and children. The cultural symbolism of the Warsaw Uprising and the cursed soldiers has become an increasingly potent commoditized nationalist imaginary under PiS’s regime for the far-right in general (Luxmoore, 2018), with patriotic online stores emerging such as Ultrapatriot.pl and Polsycpatrioci.pl selling merchandized products. In 2014, write (Goldziak and Márton, 2018: 129) ‘following the 60th anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising, the ‘Fighting Anchor’, a symbol of hope for regaining independence widely used during World War II, appeared on cars and banners, often accompanied by slogans such as ‘Poland for Poles’, ‘Great Poland’ or ‘Death to the Enemies of the Fatherland”.
children? As deserving subjects, ‘real refugees’ (women and children) might have elicited ‘European compassion’ (Dzienovska, 2016: 4), but men were viewed with contempt, fear and suspicion. They were not ‘refugees,’ but ‘migrants’ wanting welcome and benefits on account of their assured humanity—or worse, perhaps, ISIS militants intent on destroying Europe from within. (Someone, furthermore, must have been funding their trajectories. Was it George Soros or Putin? Who was the malevolent ‘Other’ intent on harming the homeland?) As a result, within media and political discourse, Polish men were called upon to ‘protect Polish women’ from ‘wild Muslim men’ (Goździak and Márton, 2018: 13).

Such a message was clearly represented on the cover of the winter issue of the most popular right-wing weekly wŚieci (The Network) in 2016 (wSieci, 2016). With the headline, ‘The Islamic Rape of Europe’, the issue, featuring a young blonde white woman draped in an EU flag groped by three dark-skinned male arms, was released following the alleged mass sexual assault in Cologne, and whipped up public hysteria regarding the Islamic threat to pure, white European, here Polish, women. Such cultural artifacts depict the way the threat of Muslim incursion is being intimately tied to that of emasculation and the destruction of Poland’s heteropatriarchal family structure, and by extension, the nation itself. It also reflects the way the Polish male is being called upon to enact his nationalistic heroic noble duty to defend woman, child and country. Keeping refugees out was being considered an act of courage and soldierly strength in the face of a feminized, weakened Europe that had fallen to her knees, and a way to demonstrate ‘real’ Polishness.

This filtered through into everyday conversation.

29 See Elżbieta Goździak and Péter Márton (2018: 14) who explain that much social media discourse in Poland regarding refugees referred to TV portrayals of fit, young men. During my fieldwork I also witnessed this gross mis-representation on official state television news (TVP) reporting – e.g. photo-montaged images of boatloads of dark-skinned young men (unspecified origin or even unspecified date, time, location) ‘heading for the continent’.

30 Karla McKanders (2019: 126-127) terms this ‘refugee exceptionalism’. She finds that indeed, young males from Muslim-majority countries have been excluded from gaining refugee status on the discursive basis that they pose a threat to national security, are perpetrators of violence, and unworthy of protection, turning the Refugee Convention into a racialized immigration control mechanism. See also Rita Santos et al. (2018) on similar gendered narratives of refugees in the media and by political actors across Europe and America in terms of the non-deserving status of men versus deserving status of women and children.

31 This is ironically at the same time that women’s rights within Poland have been severely curtailed (see Allen, 2017; Hall, 2019)

32 See also Selga Dagistanli and Kiran Grewal’s (2012: 119) analysis of how Muslim men are being presented as a ‘sexual and civilizational threat’ in global Orientalist discourse.

33 See also Karina Horsti (2017) for similar discourse of the pure Swedish Woman at risk of ‘Muslim rape’.

34 As coordinator Konrad Dułkowski (Goździak and Márton, 2018: 128–129) from the Centre to Monitor Racist and Xenophobic Behaviour stated in an interview for magazine Polityka: ‘Now every action against the other/stranger is praised as the responsibility of a true Pole’.

35 See Agnieszka Graff et al., (2019: 551–552) on circulating fears regarding Polish men going ‘soft’ in the face of the plot of ‘genderism’ that would render Poland vulnerable, indefensible and weak.
Fear of destruction was heightened by ‘largely unspoken’ underlying fears of regional ‘demographic collapse’ (Krastev and Holmes, 2018: 125). With over 1 million Poles having emigrated to the West since it joined the EU in 2004, anxieties over depopulation of the ethnic national body and implications for its existential future feed into this chronic state of crisis. ‘Demographic panic’ (Krastev and Holmes, 2018: 125) contours the refugee panic in overlapping concern, and this is oft-expressed in gendered and racial terms: virile Muslims coming to despoil and dilute the native stock further. Once again men were being required to be men and not only work hard, but stand up for the homeland. Retreating into Polishness and reclaiming it as ‘Ours’ - our backwardness – and therefore not having to confront the militant Muslim in direct (imagined) combat as a Polish male would be called upon to do, following historic noble requirements of national self-sacrifice, was one way to resolve this tension without ‘losing face’.

Yet while such rhetoric seems to communicate bombastic, chest-thumping, and confident, even arrogant, nationalist masculinist self-inflation and pride, what I am trying to propose is that underneath this lies precisely the opposite. Existential anxiety and toxic shame – defined as a fear of a deficient self (Friedman, 2007; Lynd, 1958) and the threat of social disconnection (Scheff, 2000), being cast out from the social bond and not meeting the required standards filtered through intersectional (Eastern European/Polish/Silesian, gendered, and industrial class-based) positionality. In Crying Shame, James MacLynn Wilce (2009: 119) finds that shame is linked to peripheralization and being labelled ‘backward’ - and at the same time, collective means of coping with and expressing shame, such as lament, are increasingly shameful. Thus shame is itself a source of shame in compounding self-annihilation. As I found, it expressed itself most audibly in the form of complaint which, in the postsocialist context, has been labelled a ‘badge of postsocialist identity’ (Kideckel, 2008: 16–17). Yet it tended to fall on deaf ears, highlighting its existential poignancy and

36 To contextualize this panic, Krastev and Holmes (2018: 125) report: ‘The numbers of Central and East Europeans who left their home region (mostly bound for Western Europe) as a result of the 2008 economic crisis exceeds the total number of refugees who came to Western Europe from outside Europe, including the refugees from Syria.’ Additionally, the UN projects that the combined populations of Poland, Hungary, Czechia and Slovakia (known as the Visegrad Four) – will decline by 13% from 64 million in 2017 to 55.6m by 2050, No region in the world is expected to have as fast a decline (Krastev and Holmes, 2018: 211-212).

37 This has been the biggest wave of mass migration from the country for 100 years (Onet Wiadomości, 2014).

38 This is also in the context of a simultaneous influx of migrants from the Ukraine. In 2017, Poland issued more foreign visas than any other European country – 85% of which went to Ukrainians, people whom participants repeatedly told me were ‘more like Us’ that they feel ‘comfortable’ with Them – They are Christian, White, with a kin language and culture, and have migrated to Poland to ‘work hard’ and fill the need for cheap labour – ironically, the jobs Poles no longer wish to do, or have travelled to the West to do. As mentioned in chapter seven, there are estimated to be around 2 million Ukrainians in Poland who have arrived within the last 4 years alone. This reveals the specifically Islamophobic and racialized politics of anti-refugee sentiment (Makana and Martin, 2019).
individualized privacy (Rakowski, 2016: 107; 113), yet again intensifying shame’s atomized lived experience.

Writing about shame amongst miners in postsocialist Romania, Friedman (2017: 247-248) defines shame as a loss of agency and a reciprocal ‘nonrecognition of the other’ that signals a terrifying moment in which one feels one no longer fits into the world. This resonates with my own research that finds a fear of feeling not-at-home-in-the-world in the mundane sense of not being affirmed by one’s world through not knowing how to maintain ‘face’; how to act, behave, connect, relate, with another person perceived to be radically different from one’s ‘Own’. Such social discomfort and dis-ease brings one into a spiral of shame, particularly in the context of a failure of Europeanization. According to Helen Lewis (in Scheff, 2000: 95), shame arises ‘when there is a threat to the social bond’ - it is thus an intense and existential fear of ‘social disconnection, being adrift from understanding and being understood by the other’. Thus, where home can call forth shame (as in the expression ‘Our Backwardness’), shame is never homely, it is indeed its negation, requiring at-home-ness to ease it.

Fieldwork suggested to me that for industrial working-class male miners, the household, both literal and national, was increasingly unable to deliver on its promises to provide safety, security or satisfaction, or a feeling of home, as this thesis as a whole has shown. Rather, pervasive, and deeply embodied, feelings of individualized shame filtered through everyday life to pollute and fragment it; precisely the point at which viscerally-shaped masculinist xenophobic ethnonationalist industrial populism returns with a vengeance as its purifying and collectively-binding salve.

The ‘negro-refugees’ of Poland: Unhomely masculine bodies and ecobiosocial solidarities of shame

‘Shame is a skin thing... Shame, like mud, sticks’

‘In Europe… Satan is black, one talks of the shadow, when one is dirty one is black – whether one is thinking of physical dirtiness or moral dirtiness… blackness, darkness, shadow, shades, night, and the labyrinths of the earths, abyssal depths, blacken someone’s reputation’.
- Frantz Fanon (1967: 188–189)

39 Similarly, in another piece of research on risks of suicide among male veteran’s, shame, identified as the experience of not belonging – of feeling intensely disconnected and socially rejected, of being un-homed – is highlighted as a significant risk factor (Rabon et al., 2019).
Following his defensive exposition about refugees, Tomek’s contrasting monologue regarding his shift at the mine was awash with an overwhelming sense of anxiety and shame about the precarity and degradation of his postsocialist industrial working-class existence (see previous chapter). Whereas mining life had always involved hard physical labour and dangerous conditions, it was the lack of dignity with which he felt they were treated today, the increased physical demands placed upon a shrinking workforce, and reported disregard for health and safety that hurt most. Alongside feeling like a dehumanized ‘rat’, mining is ‘kaput’ and ‘over already’, even as it continues. This injected an acute sense of underlying uncertainty that pervaded the psyche or soul (Berardi, 2009), generating a palpable sense of exhaustion and injustice. The figure of both the ‘negro’ and the ‘refugee’ that he allegorically calls upon, however inappropriate it might seem, encapsulate these twin sentiments of exploitation and precarity, indeed homelessness, that generate a bitter shame at firstly, having to do this work at all (as the previous chapter outlined), and, secondly, in demeaning oneself in doing so, not being able to live up to a previously-attainable masculine ideal – one in which a man is ‘immediately at home within, and in control of, his world’ (Garlick 2016: 200).

Such a claim is a far cry from the days of miners as heroes of socialism, when, as chapter five in particular described, the touch of coal and its dirt was something that guaranteed pride, belonging, identity, the prospects of secure social reproduction, social status, and sense of self-worth. Whereas industrial work once anchored the masculine self, today, it undermines and encroaches upon one’s capacity to affirm and fulfill ideal masculine personhood – ecological dispossession. Indeed, as Kideckel (2008: 67) notes, under socialism, mining’s physical dangers, and the bodily capabilities it called forth, ‘added to [miners’] sense of self, enabling them to see their work, their bodies, and their efforts for the future as strong and effective’, reinforced by a strong collective identity and sense of ‘in-this-together’. At the same time, the socialist regime celebrated workers’ physical power and so this ‘enabled working people to be at least moderately comfortable, proud, and confident in their physical capacity’ (Kideckel 2008: 96). However, Tomek, like a ‘negro’ or a ‘refugee’ in his own words, feels none of these – and like the blackness of skin that he references that marks him as closer to nature, subhuman, this sense of homelessness and alienation is deeply marked upon and felt within his own body - where ‘postsocialism hurts’ most (Kideckel 2008: 6; Rakowski 2016: 99; Klimeczak-Ziółek, 2014: 165–168). Today’s miners narrated to me their fears about their health and fragile bodies in stark contradistinction to the retired generation who drew confidence from their past physical selves. This further contrasted with the youthful physical strength and virility with which the (male) ‘Muslim refugee’ coming to invade the

368

Likewise, David Kideckel (2008: 157) writes that in ‘the more threatened postsocialist work regime’ Romanian miners are increasingly concerned about their bodies failing them and preventing them from earning a living.
homeland was often depicted in media images. An unspoken vulnerability to societal worthlessness and disposability fed these shame-induced anxieties.

Whereas under socialism, the ‘golden age of masculinity’ (Mazierska, 2003: 32), the miner’s body used to be a route to ontological security, it is increasingly the arena in which the tensions and frictions of individualized precarity and risk play out, and the resource which is most relied upon to bear and negotiate it – to hold things together – as a man is meant to do.41 Indeed Adam Mrozowicki (2011: 135) finds that, in the context of working-class coping strategies in postsocialist Poland, the body, its physical strength, and ability to work, becomes a key resource for managing and navigating a rapidly changing environment. In Tomek’s account, the body of the miner particularly stands out for its vulnerability in the face of a constant threat of disintegration – the water below ground, the lack of protective appropriate clothing, the sense of violation of health and safety regulations, all the while not earning enough to ‘live well’. ‘They treat us terribly’ - like dirt (see chapter seven). His bodily gestures – the dismissive hand-wave, the tension in his jaw as he spoke, the averted gaze, and the knocking back of vodka as the medicine – underscored the viscerality of his subordination. This is the ‘painful feeling of being reduced to a labouring body’ (Kideckel 2008: 137).42 As such, being at home in one’s own skin is a fraught enterprise, always threatened by coming-apart and denigration. The French photographer’s flash added insult to injury by directing the Western gaze upon the humiliation of these ‘un-European’ bodies in their subterranean animalism.43 For such outsiders, Tomek seemed to imagine that industrial coal life was perceived as exotic, dirty, base, inhuman and backward and the stigma this gaze carried left its affective and psychological marks – the marks of dirt and entwined shame. Thus, Tomek insisted that the photographer might return to France and let people know that Poland does have refugees (a response to known criticism directed at Poland by the international community); according to him and others in his skin, they have been there all along. Forced to labour for unsatisfactory reward and rejected for doing so.

41 While work has always been in large part the ‘primarily vehicle for the otherwise contingent and unstable subject to achieve a sense of self, to become grounded and located in the social world’, or particularly to provide an ‘opportunity for men to achieve a degree of ontological security within their immediate environment’, today ‘this prospect appears to be steadily receding’ (Whitehead n Garlick 2016: 200-201).

42 This is also at a time when so-called ‘masculinized’ industries (like coal-mining) are on the decline. Following the 2008 financial crisis, in Poland, increased unemployment was experienced more by men. In 2009, male unemployment increased by 25.5% on the previous year, while female unemployment, by 11.2%. This indexes the increasing feminization of the economy adding to masculine precarity. In 2010, the Central Statistical Office (GUS) recorded greater male than female unemployment for the first time since data started to be gathered in relation to gender. (Chustecka, 2010: 87)

43 This recalls Frantz Fanon’s notion of the White ‘look’ on the black body which fixes it as a racialized object and, as Nirmal Puwar (2004: 41) writes, ‘challenged [his] claims’ on the world: on where he could be and what he could be'.
It was not the first or last time I heard coal miners half-jokingly refer to themselves as ‘negroes’ or ‘refugees’, often also as ‘slaves’, categories that tended to be un-reflexively elided into one another, (just as with the categories of ‘Muslim’ and ‘refugee’). Through the hyperbolic analogy of being slave-like ‘negroes’, miners articulated the felt sense that their industrial working-class positionality was racialized into a category of dehumanized subjectivity by the material stains of their labour, setting them apart as exploited, stigmatized, and socially and politically outcast from modernity, particularly so in the anti-coal present (Buchowski, 2006; Kesküla, 2018; Rakowski, 2016). Don Kalb (2014: 253) calls such a condition of racialization into a *classes dangereuses* one of ‘imposed subalternity’, feeding the ‘particular alienations of the resenting classes’. I have referred to this as a kind of ecological dispossession through which they had become ‘matter out of place’ - their personhood and its value conflated with the dirt they embodied; discarded social waste (see also Kesküla, 2018).

Such jokes also revealed the way that coal miners felt themselves to be the ‘True’ or ‘Real’ refugees, within their ‘own’ territory, within their own lives, and within the life of European ‘normalcy’ too: dislocated and unwelcome guests who did not belong, but who felt they should have a greater stake and claim to that belonging and the resources it implies. A reflexive awareness of Whiteness and its standards and expected privileges comes to play a key role here. Not only did coal miners feel themselves to be, as Silesians, and industrial workers, the ‘negroes’ of Poland, but also then, by dint of being Silesian-Polish, doubly the ‘negroes’ of Europe⁴⁶ - the not-quite-European whites that were not quite the right shade of white, particularly not when covered in coal dust, belying a working-class as much as Eastern subjectivity that does not meet the required

⁴⁴ In fact, however repugnant the analogy, workers in other postsocialist countries have also been found to refer to themselves in similar terms (Kesküla, 2012: 105–106; Mykhnenko, 2005: 95), reflecting the alienation and bitter sense of injustice at the heart of their disrespected postsocialist condition. See also Alison Stenning (2005b) on the racialization of the postsocialist worker.

⁴⁵ As Andrew Metcalfe (1990: 46) writes in the context of the UK, miners have for centuries been racialized and stigmatized: ‘the language used to describe them would be called racist if their skin was black by nature rather than occupation’. Indeed, the racialization of working-class coal miners into an Othered category of a ‘degraded form of whiteness’ has been noted also in Appalachia, USA, where they are deemed ‘never quite white enough’ and so vie for recognition and access to ‘typical white privilege’, while simultaneously being perceived as legitimate sacrifices to environmental injustice (Kozlowski and Perkins, 2016: 1292; see also Scott, 2009, 2010).

⁴⁶ This echoes the historic racialization of immigrants to the US – many of them from Eastern Europe, particularly Poland. Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb (1972: 14) report that at the turn of the twentieth century, as large numbers had settled on American shores, ‘attitudes had crystallized toward foreigners whose closest equivalent is what we call today ‘racism’. These attitudes produced a kind of moral hierarchy of national and cultural differences in which the Western Europeans – with the exception of the Irish – stood at the top, diligent, hard-working, and for the most part, skilled labourers, and in which Slavs, Bohemians, Jews, and Southern Europeans stood lower, accused of dirtiness, secretiveness, or laziness’. Their response? Turning to other people ‘like them’ for ‘comfort and warmth’ and in order to create ‘ethnic’ enclaves that were ‘hostile to outsiders’. Home as the antidote to shame.
standards nor is he protected by them. A comparative European discourse about refugees as being deserving of help and of compassion, tied to the perceived ‘doling out’ of generous welfare benefits on arrival, or seen in the discourse of ‘welcome’ extended to refugees e.g. by Germany or campaign groups, confronts the feeling that Poles, particularly working-class coal-mining Silesians in Poland, have not been granted the same privilege of the same welcome into the Polish nor European Home, nor the same compassionate recognition for their suffering, both contemporary and historic, from neither corrupt ‘upstairs’ elites in Poland (those who ‘gave the photographer permission’ to objectify them, who knows how) nor the European community, itself linked to the same elite. As such, equating being a miner to being a ‘negro’ and a ‘refugee’, expresses the profound sense of an industrial working-class masculine Polish subjectivity that is not at-home-in-the-world but awash in the bitter and toxic discomforts of shame. And as Andrew Strathern (1975) finds, ‘shame is on the skin’.

Sara Ahmed’s (2007) work on Whiteness as a phenomenological, bodily orientation in the world is useful here to further understand how increasingly claims to Whiteness, and its instant fragility, are becoming central to Polish forms of embodied self-reflexivity in the post-refugee-crisis world. For Ahmed, Whiteness is produced and experienced as the ability for a body to ‘trail behind’ – as in, become invisible, and also to ‘sink in’ to the spaces it inhabits through being extended by them, an experience of comfort and ease in a world shaped for containing, indeed holding and affirming, Whiteness. To be ‘not White’, means the opposite - it is ‘to not be extended by the spaces you inhabit. This is an uncomfortable feeling.’ (Ahmed 2007: 163). She refers to Frantz Fanon’s recounting of being a Black man, self-conscious of his body in spaces anticipating Whiteness, and how such experience is one of negation. ‘To feel negated is to feel pressure upon your bodily surface; your body feels the pressure point, as a restriction of what it can do… If to be human is to be white, then to be not white is to inhabit the negative; it is to be ‘not’.’ In a sense,

47 Dana Berthold (2010: 2; 10) argues that in the US indeed ‘Whiteness’ as a racialized category has a long historic imbrication with notions of purity and cleanliness, and that it has been conceived of as a ‘lack of a mark of pollution’ with class-based overtones too. Further, ‘Whiteness’ here has long been associated with the mind/spirit and notions of civilization as opposed to non-whiteness ‘as primitive embodiment, closer to nature’. For working-class coal miners in Polish Silesia, similarly, they are triply unable to access ‘Whiteness’ - they do physical labour through their bodies, are exposed to coal’s ecomaterial dirt, and are socially marked as ‘dirty people’ (backward and immoral) in today’s world. Purification practices are required – reasserting the true ‘Europe’ as White and heteronormative once again in reclaimed terms.

48 Chris Hann (2015: 2) contrasts the ‘warmth of the reception’ to refugees in Germany’s initial ‘Wilkommenskultur’ (culture of hospitality), aided by German public funds to integrate, learn the language, and find jobs, with the ‘resentment’ of the ‘EU’s disadvantaged citizens’ in the postsocialist East, for whom such coveted ‘fast track entry to the German labour market’ is out of reach. Instead, many ‘consider themselves to be living in an exploited periphery, with living standards significantly below those of Western Europe, and no sign that the gap is closing’. They have not been given an apparent ‘free pass’ into the European home. Social class, national identity, and relative deprivation feed into this through a postcolonial postsocialist frame.
Tomek and other miner’s claims to being ‘negro-refugees’ is an expression of this felt negation and unhomely discomfort of exclusion, a pressure on the body – of increasing reflexive self-conscious awareness of their working-class, coal-mining, Eastern European not-quite-Whiteness – at least in the eyes of European ‘normalcy’ played out in the French photographer’s flash. At the same time, it is a defensive reclamation of Whiteness as ‘Ours’ on their own terms.49

Recognizing one another through familiar dirt in this way, miners no longer could ascribe to the industrial petro-masculine self-worth of miners described in chapter six, but today, forged a kind of ecobiosocial community of the afflicted – expressing rather a toxic or dirty solidarity of shame. Embodying coal’s material ecological excess, miners now formed a material union of subjects who shared a biological as much as social fate as victims, yet one that was increasingly fractured through the prism of their own individualized lives. Paul Rabinow (2008), who first coined the term ‘biosocial community’, used it to refer to ‘emerging forms of genetic or biological citizenship’ that induce a form of biopolitics based on shared biological traits in relation to health. In doing so, he argued that biology is increasingly becoming the basis of social, collective identity. As such, as Trnka et al (2013: 9) note, biosociality is also about ‘the experience of sharing common social, physical, and emotional struggles’ as a result of or reaction to biological difference. Adding the ‘eco’ in with Rabinow’s conception of biosociality, incorporates the manner in which shared material environments also shape and affect such struggles and difference. Coal dust’s touch is ecobiosociologically performed because it both constitutes the bodies that labour with it, resulting in shared health problems as much as bodily capabilities and their form (as explored in chapter five), and also marks those bodies, as we see, in racialized/Othered terms resulting in a common yet differentiated embodied experience of social and emotional affliction. In this way, Tomek’s exchange of the joke with his friend was an example of how coal miners recognized one another and were able to unite through such shared bodily affliction and vulnerability and through the fact that they are ‘objectified by others’ (Kideckel 2008: 68) - not quite the trademarks of pride, nor the verification of the kind of masculinity they aspired to affirm – that of a self in control, secure and at ease backed by the solid solidarity of the collective – or, a masculinity at-home-in-the-world, like that under industrial petro-masculine-assuring socialism. With the tensions, competitiveness, and resentments of the increased individualization of contemporary capitalist labour, and the discrediting of class identity, workers must fend for themselves, even as they share common experiences; their fates becoming personal indicators of social value. Under such conditions, any

49 This reflects the ways that the figure of the refugee and its entanglement with the ‘negro’ metaphor become important to what Judith Butler (in Berthold, 2010: 9) terms ‘the constitutive outside’ - the non-self that must be continually abjected and excluded in order to delineate the contours of the self.
sense of community is continually fragmenting. This is the more literal definition of ‘precarity’ - a sense of dis-integration, not being securely held together.

The family home, which under capitalism comes to intensify in its role as the affective container for intimacy and emotional security (D’Emilio, 1983: 103; 108), and in Silesia has long had a deep symbolic role as protector from the ‘abnormal’ world beyond (see chapter five and seven), was also increasingly failing to live up to this pressure to nourish and secure the masculine embodied self and purify its dignities (see Stenning, 2005b). This is at the same time that an individual’s main source of valorization and affirmation of identity ‘shifts from the workplace to the home’ (Kideckel 2008: 129). Although I found the ‘breadwinner ideal’ to be waning because it was increasingly impracticable (as much as deemed ‘backward’ in the new European value hierarchy - see chapter six), there was a palpable sense that it was still a culturally-held value and unquestioned norm one would compare oneself to. Ideally, the man should still be the main provider for his family by earning a ‘family wage’, even if many miners’ wives worked (and many did, although many also did not, not ‘allowed’ to by their husbands). Numerous times I witnessed and participated in the cross-gendering of domestic roles, as when eating a family meal cooked by my male miner participants, spending time with father and children, or driving with a wife to work. Thus, hypermodernity has led to a sort of patchworking and piecing together of pragmatic attitudes towards gendered roles.

Yet this new societal shift, as expressed also in chapter seven, particularly within the mining community, was experienced as often another disorientating fact of contemporary Westernized life, one where a man was no longer able look after his woman and family as he used to – and vice versa. Many times I was disorientatedly reminded, as outlined in chapter six, of how socialism had enabled a coal-mining family to live on a single wage – today? Two people work and its still not enough to ‘live well’. The (European) ‘Good Life’ - comfort – remained out of reach. Yet work was tougher on the body.

Marital tensions had reportedly been exacerbated by financial pressures and shifting demands from women looking for greater parity in the public sphere too. Increased divorce rates were said to be the result, and women working was often described as ‘at a cost to the family’. This was said to generate a workforce that is more psychically fraught, and that’s even before they turn up at work. ‘It all comes out of the home’ was the local explanation. Likewise, work-related psychological tensions were then brought back into a home that was no longer able to serve the function of a ‘holding’ space for masculine ontological security. Many were juggling double work timetables, childcare, sometimes two jobs each, thus, married couples might rarely see one another. Driving to work alone, often working on shift alone due to the shrunken workforce (whereas in the past there

50 See Chad Broughton and Tom Walton (2006) for similar trends in the US.
might be 2-3 people on each stand at minimum), and then returning to an empty house – I heard stories of intensifying social isolation that stood in direct contrast to the folkloric image of Silesian mining life.

As a result of such structural societal change, greater ontological self-reliance and resilience was anticipated and expected from the individual male body. The ‘work of masculinity’, or the work of becoming men, in the contemporary present was increasingly ‘directed towards the end of embodying ontological security’ individually (Garlick 2016: 202). For when all else fails, particularly for working people whose labouring bodies are their most precious assets, the body and its materiality, are the only thing that ‘cannot be denied them (it can only be devalued)’ (Charlesworth, 2000: 241). When the body itself is indeed devalued, this exercise becomes especially fraught, binding miners together in a shared visceral experience of alienation and resented shame. Thus, under capitalism, individuals are forced to take greater responsibility for their physical and economic difficulties’ as group relations fragment and become competitive and unequal. While in the West, Kideckel (2008: 68) writes, this is seen positively, in the East, ‘such responsibility signals not empowerment but the absolute end of the security, collectivity, and sense of belonging they felt in socialist society’. In other words, it dealt a mortal blow to a sense of feeling at-home-in-the-world for industrial working-class masculine persons.

To seek to ameliorate, smooth over, and overcome such increasingly isolated and individualized pains of mining life, and re-establish a sense of at-home-ness, the social life of mining sought to affirm one another in a different, more positive, sense and thus, attempted to reconstitute a secure embracing collective body that they could potentially find rest within; the ‘body of solidarity’ of the old industrial order. ‘Do you know why they come here to drink?’, I am asked by the trade union leader at the barbecue: ‘They come here to zahamować (brake, unwind) together – to forget it all, to release all they experience below and deal with the pain of all this uncertainty now. It works on the psyche. There was always stress and nerves in coal-mining life, but it’s getting worse’. For this reason, the collective body and its holding function seemed to become ever more crucial. Indeed, lubricated by the alcohol that Tomek washed down as he leant in to join in the shared joke, indicating he no longer wished to dwell on his private struggles, he demonstrated how social life plays a pivotal role in coping with coal’s individualized burdens. The miner’s fragile and vulnerable individual body is literally ‘held together’ (‘we must hold together!’), the trade union leader had earlier stated in his opening speech for the barbecue, against the employer who threatened to ‘crush them’) in the containment and affirmation of the social body of the collective, generated by alcohol, shared feasting, and collective dancing. We joined the group, and in doing so...
allowed our ‘selves’ to meld together with the bodies of others into a cleansing, containing, supposedly homogenous ‘we’.

In particular, it was the masculine self and body, its fortification and re-integration, for whom all this was laid on for and organized around. ‘Haven’t I deserved all this?’, Tomek asked me later, pointing to the spread of foods on the table, the vodka in hand, and the scene around us of dancing couples. Meat, vodka, and women – these were both the fruits of coal’s labour and its patriarchal industrial petro-masculine rewards. Women, of course, participated in these same rituals, but it was the masculine ideal that formed its centre and purpose – reviving and revitalizing the male body through corporeal ‘regeneration’ (Emery, 2018) and fortification, indeed purification. The barbecue’s aim was to restore an industrial masculine-oriented sense of being at-home-in-the-world, where Tomek could ‘lean back’ and feel affirmed in the reassuring mirror of homogenous sameness and mutual validation. Such social life had always been the antidote to the pains and strains of mining life, as much as of home life’s stresses. What was crucial in the contemporary world, however, was that, unlike in the industrial past, the reflexive need to be ‘cleansed’ of stigma was also paramount to these endeavors. From recognizing each other through dirt, miners sought to affirm one another’s dignity, moral righteousness, pride, and integrity as persons. They sought out ways of transmuting from matter out of place, being dirty, to matter in its place – at-home-in-the-world – therefore, pure, good and clean. Joining a trade union was one strategy by which to secure this feeling.

The trade union’s core function was to literally bring an increasingly fractured, individualized mining body into a union – to attempt to secure the communal base and valorize it’s (mostly) male workers and the families that supported them. This collective body, produced in the ritual of barbecuing, cleansed the stigma of dirty work through its emphasis on sameness and the validation of the moral righteousness of the ‘community’ in its mutual togetherness rewarding good, clean, hard work, particularly masculine industrial labour. Miners left their dirty clothes behind at the mine, washed to become ‘men’ again, and made a point of always socializing in ‘clean’ clothes, as a way to symbolically distinguish between ‘work’ and ‘public life’, or the worlds of de-humanizing labour below and the re-humanizing world of civilization above. They also washed to in a sense become ‘White’ again, reflecting how the removal and exclusion of dirt has always marked the

51 Meat, writes Jeremy Morris (2016: 159; 180), a scarce resource under socialism, was provided for workers as an ‘indicator of their deserving nature’. Likewise, drinking was a ‘moral right’ that was part psychosocial compensation for tough labour and part act of agency of selfhood. In Poland under Communism, meat was notoriously difficult to purchase too, although miners had privileged access to it, their need for physical strength to perform tough labour justifying the need once again.

52 See Tomasz Rakowski (2016: 20) for his reflections on the shift from ‘dirty’ to ‘clean’ and its symbolic significance and relation to the production of anthropological knowledge in the context of a coal mining community in Wałbrzych, Lower Silesia, Poland.
boundaries of racial classification in terms of purity discourse (see Berthold, 2010). What was dirty in the eyes of ‘outsiders’, became clean in the eyes of ‘insiders’, and thus the moral boundaries (Lamont, 2000) between these groups were reset and redefined. In this way, miners reclaimed what they had long felt to be considered ‘backward’ – by Polish cultural elites and by European civilizing discourses – working-class, Polish-Catholic, and masculinist industrial ideals – the reification of the traditional gender order, and of the mono-ethnic, White, civic body, coal too – and reclaimed it as a truer version of Polishness, indeed Europeanness: ‘Our backwardness’. Through these activities, the social life of miners reclaims the identity of Polishness for the industrial Silesian working-classes – it is they who embody the True Poland, and keep the body of the nation alive, fortified, nourished, energized and defended. Polishness is thus reclaimed as superior to Western norms and practices embraced by Polish liberal elites – including that of multiculturalism. It is reclaimed as ‘home’. A true Europe in turn supposedly finds a pocket of salvation in the ‘pure’ East, based on an industrial social order.

In the words of Sara Ahmed (2007: 153; 158), being at home as a White body might mean to ‘feel a certain comfort: we might only notice comfort as an affect when we lose it, when we become uncomfortable. The word ‘comfort’ suggests well-being and satisfaction, but it can also suggest ease and easiness…. To be comfortable is to be so at ease with one’s environment that it is hard to distinguish where one’s body ends and the world beings. One fits, and by fitting the surfaces of bodies disappears from view. White bodies are comfortable as they inhabit spaces that extend their shape.’ To be a body at-home, then, means to be a body that is extended by ‘the skin of the social’ (Ahmed, 2007: 161); a body that can ‘sink’ into a space, comfortably ‘in place’, not one that stands out by being ‘out of place’ – like that of the perceived stranger (Ahmed, 2007: 162). The problem was that access to this ‘social buffer’, or the ‘skin of the social’, the purifications of community and collectivity, was itself increasingly fragmented and precarious. Social life was increasingly privatized, and the experience of ‘community’ and ‘solidarity’, that used to be taken for granted under socialism when there was a clearer and simplified sense of ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ (Ost, 2005; Verdery, 1996; Wedel, 1986), and when industrial life tied things together, was perceived to be a scarce resource in the splintering of the complex, fuzzy, postindustrial postsocialist neoliberal present. It is to this I turn next.
‘People used to hold together more’: Social precarity and the absent body of industrial solidarity

When Tomek declared mining ‘kaput’ and ‘over already’, he was referring not only to the literal threat of mine closure, but also to mining as a social ideal and industrial way of life (just as we saw with Stasiek in chapter six). A sense of community had been central to this. The reported fragmentation and privatization of social and communal life thus added to the present sense of individualized vulnerability. Many ethnographies have highlighted how de-industrialization is often experienced as a concomitant loss of community (Charlesworth, 2000; Dawson, 2011; Degnen, 2012; Thorleifsson, 2016; Vaccaro, 2015; Walkerdine and Jimenez, 2012). Postsocialist ethnographies have also explored how life after socialism is particularly attuned to this loss as a deep scar of system change (Burawoy and Verdery, 1999; Horáková, 2015; Humphrey and Mandel, 2002; Kideckel, 2008; Stenning, 2005b; West, 2001). Andrew Dawson (2003), in his study of ageing in the mining community of Ashington in North East England, argues for understanding community not just as ‘imagined’ (Anderson, 2006) or socially constructed, but as phenomenological – embodied. He writes that community has often been thought about as a cultural resource for mediating change – what if that resource is no longer available, or remains albeit in threadbare form? What is the fallout effect? I propose - an intensification of the felt sense of precarity and alienation, leading to a heightened propensity for shame and wiring for threat signals (Cacioppo et al., 2016), perhaps even an aggressive reassertion of ‘community’ expressed in nationalist terms to absolve it. If industrial community is embodied, as at the barbecue, it exerts more than an imaginary force but serves an existential ‘holding’ function. I would argue that the loss of the body of industrial solidarity is not therefore experienced as simply a ‘decline’, then, which is often how deindustrialized life is euphemistically described, but as a rupture (Muehlebach and Shoshan, 2012) or dis-integration – the coming to pieces and loss of cohesion, or glueyness, that once solidified and stuck that body into a whole. The dismembering of the collective body reduces life down to the body-alone – a body that already feels overwrought with carrying the burdens and pressures of contemporary life and is itself under threat of dis-integration in its condition of precarity, which as we earlier saw, literally means a condition of ‘not being securely held’.

Understanding community as embodied echoes Valerie Walkerdine’s (2010) research with a post-industrial working-class community in South Wales, in which she finds that the dense social

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53 See also Geneviève Zubrzycki (2011) on the national community as phenomenological and embodied through the ‘national sensorium’ in Poland. See also Susanna Trnka et al. (2013) on the importance of the senses to sense of national and communal belonging.
bonds manifested by the steelworks were deeply affective. The very ‘possibility of being for the residents was deeply tied up with how the community was held together and so held them’ – like a skin. This beingness is ruptured, or punctured, when the steelworks is forced to close, generating intense feelings of fear, anxiety, loss and despair – a sense of rupture and spilling out. Thus, Walkerdine (2010: 95) offers a definition of community as a kind of affective communal body that offers a sense of ‘holding’ or of ‘being held, contained, alive’ in contrast to a feeling of being ‘uncontained, unsafe, or dying’; what Anthony Giddens (1986: 66) refers to as ‘ontological security’. Another way to characterize this is with the concept of the ‘body of solidarity’, deemed lost. Andrea Meulebach (2017: 107; 122; 114), writing about a factory community in post-industrial Italy, finds that the ‘body of solidarity’ that used to characterize industrial working life on the shop floor is a collective, intersubjective affect that can only be sensed as a deeply embodied experience – it is the ‘feeling of belonging to a cohesive body’ or ‘coherent organism’ and it is fleshy and corporeal. This embodied solidarity is particularly salient, as Walkerdine (2010: 98) points out, for a community which is organized around the carrying out of dangerous and difficult physical industrial work – such as that of the steelworks, or in this case, mining. For such communities whose life is based around existential anxiety from the risks of labour, the necessity for a sense of security, continuity and ‘holding’ is acute as a coping mechanism. Coal – the secure base – once provided it.

Yet, in Polish coal-country, this sense of ‘holding together’, or being held within a collective, unified body, was precisely the sense that was conspicuous by its increasing absence, experienced now seemingly only fleetingly, momentarily, precariously. A certain quality of sociality correlated with coal-based socialism – a collective solidarity forged on the perceived basis of spontaneity, togetherness, familiarity, sameness and assumed equality – was experienced as erased. ‘People used to spend more time together’, I would frequently hear; indeed, they used to ‘hold together more’. This was not only because social connections were a strategy through which the shortages and material restrictions of life in the PRL were coped with as one’s most ‘precious asset’ (Mazierska, 2003: 34) but also because industrial personhood was made and validated through being embedded in community (Dunn, 2007; Makovicky, 2016). It is easy to dismiss these reports simply as ‘nostalgic’ (Boym, 2002) – yet nostalgia implies a longing to return. Nobody expressed a desire to ‘go back’ to socialist times – and yet, loss, disorientation and grief were apparent. Something had palpably and painfully changed. Jeremy Morris (2016: 165) in writing about postsocialist working-

54 Tomasz Rakowski (2016: 144) encounters similar narratives of disorientating social change among bootleg miners in Lower Silesia, Poland.
class community in Russia calls this dislocation, echoing my own findings, the ‘social trauma of the unhomely present’.  

Socialist times were indeed intensely social times. Coal’s geology supported this comradely sociality, for its labouring dangers and spatial organization around closed-pits had always revolved around a tight-knit hub of community activity – true in every country where coal has played a major role in forging industrial life (Emery, 2018: 79). In socialist Poland, as we saw in chapter three, furthermore, coal mines in particular offered workers the full package of cradle-to-grave facilities for social reproduction – not only housing, but also schools, medical centres, privileged access to consumer goods, sporting and recreational facilities, even churches. The coal mine was thus a ‘thick’ and total lifeworld. Under a socialist regime, after all, the point of work was to build socialism as ‘worker-citizens’ (Stenning 2005b: 985), and collective life was foundational to this vision. Solidarity, then, under socialism, was a core value – of all socio-economic systems it was one that was primarily focused on the building of a ‘global, mass body with collective movements, collective feelings, collective goals’ (Buck-Morss, 2002: 107).

Work and social life were, then, indistinct; indeed, the workplace was ‘the main axis of organization of social life’ (Ciechocinska in Stenning 2005b: 985). Time itself was measured out by the pulse of rotating shifts of mine-work and the fluid and easy (meaning here unplanned, not necessarily non-frictional) sense of social interaction that attended the fact of working and living so

55 It is interesting to juxtapose this sense of loss-at-home with Andrew Dawson’s (2018: 5–6) account of anti-immigrant sentiment in a post-industrial working-class community in Britain (most notably against Poles). Here he argues that an anti-immigrant stance coheres around a ‘backlash’ grounded in ‘widespread perceptions of immigrants embodying locally valorised forms of sociality and personhood that are intimately linked to experiences of work and industrial work in particular.’ Thus, immigrants are rejected precisely because they are deemed to embody longed-for modes of being together and belonging that local white working-classes feel disenfranchised and excluded from in the post-industrial present. While they feel alienated and atomized, ‘immigrants are seen to be able to cultivate these forms of sociality and personhood with ease and, in turn, to belong.’ In this way an ambivalent attitude of resentment and respect and envy coincide: residents ‘love immigrants’ and ‘hate immigration’. I am also reminded of Joanna Rydzewska’s (2013) insightful analysis of Shane Meadows’s 2008 film Somer’s Town, in which the effects of transnationalism and mobility, specifically migration, are explored on British working-class masculinity. Polish working-class masculinity in the figure of the migrant, is represented as a ‘nostalgic pre-modern foil’ embodying ‘many characteristics of the old British working class’ - such as confident, secure masculinity, a strong work ethic, a sociality of homosocial solidarity, and close family ties that is the envy of locals – something they deem they have lost in the post-industrial, post-modern, post-Thatcherite trauma. By contrast, Poland and Polishness is represented as ‘untouched’ by modernity, as ‘a bastion of traditional masculinity which remains unreconstructed by the liberal politics of feminism’, and so ‘pre-modern’. I concur with both Dawson and Rydzewska that this is key to understanding why migrants are the target of rejection – envy and I would say shame (disconnection from the social bond) expressed as anger. In this sense, we can see the Polish working-classes becoming reflexively aware of what is ‘theirs’ and ‘of value’ in the shift to late modernity also through experiences of migration, and likewise fear Muslims because they too are considered to have an even-greater sense of collective identity, cohesion and sense of belonging – so much so, that they would apparently die for it, something Poles used to feel too in nationalist heroic tales as described earlier. This imagined intensity of Muslim feeling threatens the threadbare nature of the present collective, exacerbated by out-migration and demographic concerns, in Poland.
closely together. Since there were always many hands-on deck due to the state’s full employment policy, work was apparently a ‘social occasion’, as the stories related, itself often fueled by alcoholic intake. There is a long-standing stereotype-cum-legend that ‘work’ during the PRL meant a constant state of drunkenness. After all, vodka was currency under the PRL – with a ‘flaszka’ you could ‘arrange’ anything; whether swapping a shift, securing a promotion or begging a favour, a bottle of vodka (or more), paid your way through the shortages and deficiencies of the regime.56 Tales of idling, sleeping and ‘doing nothing’ at work, together with laughter, joking, and tomfoolery, most often characterized accounts of coal mine work under socialism, summarized in the humorous socialist saying: ‘Whether you sit or stand, you’re still owed 2000 PLN in the hand!’ Something the younger generation who are under the disciplining rubric of strict no-alcohol policies involving randomized breathalizer tests and intensified work schedules due to the radically decreased number of employees and increased pressure on labour productivity as the costs of extraction increase (as outlined in chapter seven), have a hard time imagining - ‘it would be unthinkable today!’ Instead, laments about the increasing contemporary ‘regime’ of work and the concomitant decline of collective social life were strewn throughout everyday conversation. A younger miner in his late 20s, sighed: ‘They used to have it so merry, now we have it hard. It used to be far more relaxed, now there is all this rigour, a regime, norms to adhere to etc.’ Yet the difference is not so much nostalgically described as matter-of-factly stated - ‘it was, simply, different’.

Yet there was an ongoing viscerally-felt sense that something had radically changed in the way in which people related to one another, spent time together (or not), and how they did so. The transition to democratic market capitalism had brought in new-fangled conceptions such as hobbies, consumerism, aspirations towards social mobility, and access to new kinds of leisure activities, not to mention divergent political preferences, that splintered the collective into increasingly atomized and competitive individuals with newly differentiated claims on people’s time mediated through the market (Humphrey and Mandel, 2002). Westernization was blamed for bringing inequality, fragmentation, ‘affluenza’ (James, 2007), envy and one-upmanship, as well as a new sense of privatized time and a loss of everyday spontaneity, indeed what Zygmunt Bauman (1994: 24) calls ‘the privatization of common fates’. 69-year-old retired miner Bolek summarized the collective memory well:-

Life used to be a lot merrier, there were no TVs… now everybody has one. But then your neighbour would come and sit on a bench, somebody would start to play an accordion… people were more pally. Today, everyone is rushed, nobody has time. Everyone has a phone and so you don’t travel to each other so much. It used to be that we would just turn up at

56 In the context of Russia, Alena Ledeneva (1998) has termed this the socialist ‘economy of favours’.
each other’s houses, if we just needed something or whatever – but now you can just phone, and you have to call ahead to arrange. There isn’t that contact anymore. There isn’t that level of socialising among neighbours… it’s changed. People have learnt that that one has a bit more, that one has a better car, for example… right? A better house… Kiedys (once), people were poorer, but more... how to say... accommodating, helpful. They shared everything, and today, well he’s rich, that one’s rich, he’s poor, that one’s poor… We used to be more even, equal under Communism, right? More or less we were even... and now... because here a firm was set up, he’s a President of such-and-such, of course, he won’t chat to a mere worker, right? and already the situation changes… I don’t know if it’s for better or worse… but I think for the worse... It’s not that people necessarily argue, but there isn’t that familiarity between people as much as there was... It all changed when Communism was overturned. It wasn’t all of a sudden... it was steadily, as people got richer.

Relations at work were also said to have suffered. ‘People used to be more in harmony’ - ‘there was more of a sense of solidarity’, I was told. Of course there has to still be trust between workers – one’s life depends on it. That being said, many young miners told me that today work relations remained at work. ‘Work is work and private life is private life’. Friendships through work were reportedly becoming rarer – a general wariness and lack of trust filtering daily life. Another older, retired miner described how miners were never ‘friends’ below ground – the nature of the job and its pressures, the ‘fight for coal’ always meant cussing and yelling at one another – still does. But once re-emerged in the world above – washed back to humanity, ‘the emotions would fall away, you’d go for a beer, the anger went away. You’d be mates soon enough!’ Today, however, the ritual of going for a drink after a shift had all but disappeared.

Indeed, alcohol and its shifting practices and meanings is a useful lens through which to sketch the disintegration of the body of a masculine-orientated industrial solidarity. Male homosociality forms the typical core of miner tales of social life, enabled both by women who looked after the home, and alcohol that reportedly fueled such camaraderie. The company bus transporting miners to and from work was one of the main infrastructures that used to generate this working-class masculine ‘sociality of solidarity’ (Muehlebach, 2017: 99), its rhythms, cadences, and pulses. ‘After a shift, a miner would always go for a beer’, said 79-year-old Witek. There would

57 During the period of intensive industrialization under the PRL, thousands of Poles from the mainland migrated to Silesia on the back of promises of work and housing. This led to tensions between so-called ‘hanysz’, or autochthonous Silesians, and ‘gorole’, or ‘przyjezdni’, incoming, migrant Poles. Fights between the hanyzy and gorole, most often over women it seems, were common anecdotal fodder, and to this day, calling someone a ‘gorol’ is short for half-jokingly insinuating that they are entitled good-for-nothings with questionable moral character. ‘Hanysz’ on the other hand are understood to be hard-working, obedient and pure-hearted. It was through the joint labour of mining, the sociality of drinking, and marriages between families, that hanyzy and gorole integrated and the tensions settled, so that telling the difference was only for those with the longest memories. Today, the ‘Silesian’ identity, as earlier mentioned, while important, was often elided with the Polish, depending on the context. Without the labour of mining or the solidarities of alcohol to act as leveler, it was unclear how new incomers could now come to belong. At the same time, this Silesian history of migration was most often forgotten when discussing Muslim refugees.

381
usually be time to kill before the bus arrived, while cars, that require one to be legally sober, were rare consumer objects at that time. But when the company buses were abolished in the late 1990s as part of postsocialist rounds of cost savings, miners were informed that they needed to find a way to get to work alone, or lose their job. Opposite the entrance to the mine, a large area that used to simply be a lawn filled with trees, was now a parking lot over-brimming with brand new vehicles, a potent symbol of the rapid individualization and consumerism that had occurred in the shift to capitalism.58 Thus, ‘Today, a miner does his shift, gets in his car, and just goes home.’ As a result, the number of bars around the mine had decreased from four or five down to just the one, and it was not heavily frequented. Without such rituals to cement relations, atomization was carried out of the mine, into the car, and into the house, where people were said to have become ‘closed in on themselves’. The ‘retreat into the household’ (Pine, 2002) had become generic as social life became privatized around consumption activities and individual preferences. ‘People are fenced in, closed in on themselves’, said one miner’s wife – making the shape of a square with her hands to indicate the way in which literal fences that popped up after transition surrounding people’s houses were now forming psychological barriers, signaling the withdrawal of once socially-embedded persons into private separate selves. ‘You must go out to people’ I was repeatedly told, and going out to people now requires effort, especially without alcohol, risking social anxiety, unease – or comparative shame.

While many miners’ wives told me that they were thankful that the drinking had dried up, so to speak, since they no longer so frequently had to deal with drunken husbands (and the abuse and violence that can attend that), for the men, and the wider community, even the wives, this was experienced as a strange and saddening change. An enhanced emphasis on health and fitness59, together with stringent laws around drink-driving, means that alcohol’s appeal, as in numerous countries worldwide (Llana, 2018), had notably diminished among the young (though alcoholism was still a social problem). Even at weddings, I was told that fewer people drink, or at least people drank a lot less than they once did. The decline of alcohol’s social role, and thus the concomitant decline of an exuberant and intimate, even if at times violent and frictional, social life, was

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58 In the 1990s private car ownership grew rapidly in Central and Eastern Europe; 1.5 million used cars were imported from the West to Poland in 1991 alone (Pavlinek and Pickles, 2004: 262). Cars are huge contemporary status symbols for men looking for affirmation through the new market and buying on credit is widespread. See Jeremy Morris (2016: 189–211) on how car ownership in postsocialist Russia became increasingly important symbolically for notions of masculinities, self-worth, and class particularly for a younger generation. Likewise, Charlesworth (2000: 57) writes that in contemporary working-class life in England ‘Having a car...is the mark of the accomplished adult. Without one, man is a queer thing; And with a nice one, celebrity beckons’.

59 See Cieślikowski and Kantyka, 2018; Mroczkowska, 2018 on the rise of the gym and ideas of fitness in postsocialist Poland in relation to the reflexive self.
experienced as a bewildering loss for an older generation used to its lubrication. For the young it simply alienated them from a past that seemed increasingly absurd and mythical. This loss was made apparent by the changing soundscape outside the mine – no longer a road filled with the noise of rowdy bars but rather that of individual cars and engines. One might say that the oil economy, with its liquid flows and dispersed networks, embodied in the machinery of the car, that has enabled workers to live further and further away by making personalised commutes possible, has come to displace the coal-based industrial order, with its more grounded, localized, and fixed social solidity. Liquid modernity (Bauman, 2000) had come purring in, disembedding social life from its local geology and its alcoholic blood-ties in the process.

The shifting gender landscape was blamed for this loss too. Miners were not only able to participate in communal drinking activity after work because the bus guaranteed safe passage home, but also because, as part of Silesian mining tradition as outlined, men were the breadwinners, and women were assigned to the private sphere of the household, and thus domestic duties were taken care of. Lunch was always prepared and ready to eat once the husband returned safely home post-shift, children looked after, house cleaned and ordered. The home was a safe space that was meant to nourish, soothe and restore the masculine body. Thus, the decline of social life was also often blamed on the fact that today women, too, work, and so men were required to do their share of housework, childcare and domestic labour, and could no longer spend time idling with their workmates. Their time was needed elsewhere. Women, too, who traditionally ‘knit together’ the community through their role in neighbourly and familial relating (see also Walkerdine 2010: 101) had less time to be the extended social caretakers and the glue they once were (even as this role continued via the kitchen in preparation for family occasions, religious festivities, and holidays). Both men and women found the disintegration of the communal body terrifying and ontologically threatening, but it was through its orientation to the masculine that that body fleshed out its contours. Thus, this further loss of the gendered order was particularly acute for the working-class masculine sense of himself in the world, and in the absence of an alternative secure base, causing the scrambling, by some, to reassert it.

Being turfed out of this communal body organized around the ‘industrial breadwinner’ model (Hultman, 2017) – the mining community sensed itself as un-housed – dis-embodied in the collective sense. This compounded miners’ feeling of not-at-home-ness. Unmoored from this holding, participants expressed a lack of secure containment, within which to structure or maintain the integrity of their lives. ‘People used to drop by more often, there was a greater sense of ease’, I heard again and again. Their precarity at work and in life was no longer supported and caught by the dense web of social connections that used to fill the space of the socialist industrial lifeworld, and
the increasing individuation of this fate made the loss of this web, or the reassuring collective body, narrated through handed down stories, all the more stark. Their capacity to ‘lean back’, like Tomek, or into such a firm support was diminished. They were on their own – not just economically but socially. Postindustrial postsocialist communal disintegration was thus experienced as a sort of existential fear. As Tomek, and others, expressed, the mining community felt themselves to be the True Refugees – this time not only from their place in society at large and its accompanying stigmatization and denigration, but also evicted from the solidarity of their own communal body of times past. They felt themselves to be ‘refugees’ vertically and horizontally.

Anne Allison (2012: 348-349), exploring young lives in contemporary Japan, uses the term ‘social precarity’ to describe a ‘condition of being and feeling insecure in life that extends to one’s (dis)connectedness from a sense of social community’ affecting one’s sense of social identity, belonging, and place. She finds that social isolation, and the increasing ‘evisceration of social ties’ that has accompanied the post-Fordist era, is the very underpinnings of a loss of a sense of security and a pervasive sense of ‘refugeeism’. The young precariat is not only ‘refugeed’ from the heteronormative ideal of the good life of the family and home and a stable job, but also from any sense of a secure future. As such, what she terms ‘ordinary refugeeism’ is a ‘longing for ‘normative intimacy’ (Berlant 2007: 285) attached to a time and place that no longer exists.’ Likewise, Gaim Kibreab (1999: 385) writes that the modern world characterized by globalization has generated a pervasive sense of displacement that is the norm. Edward Said (1979: 18) has called this a ‘generalized condition of homelessness’, while Daniel Warner (1992) has argued that ‘[w]e are all refugees’. Whereas such a claim seem distastefully overblown in today’s world, in some sense the figure of The Refugee becomes the ‘incarnation of the homelessness that is part of all our experiences’ (Warner, 1994: 168) (1994: 168) – uncomfortably reminding us of our own inherent precarity and thus needing banishment. This is particularly so for the working-classes for whom, as Simon Charlesworth (2000: 9) writes their (cheap) labour has become ‘unrooted, dis-embedded… made migrant the world over’.

The peeling away of the body of industrial solidarity has disturbed the sense of a mass that could ameliorate such existential fears – and so new forms of trying to piece that back together emerge in place becoming a scarce and threatened resource requiring defense. With the outright rejection of the discredited language of ‘class’ in postsocialist Poland (Ost, 2009b, 2015), as we have seen, the nation, understood as the Polish household-writ-large, is reflexively reached for as a strategy to bind together the social body in non-negotiable and straightforward terms, and for cleansing that body of shame through its reclamation, this time in collective, communal terms. As Zygmunt Bauman (2000a: 15) writes, identity comes to patch up the lack of community – it is its
‘surrogate’. For national identity, in particular, the conditions for entry to belonging are much lower and inalienable to those who see it as a natural birth-right. One simply has to inherit Polish genes, and there is no individualized need to ‘prove’ one’s worthiness to this claim beyond that, unlike other kinds of identity, including occupation or masculinity (Sennett and Cobb, 1972; Salmela and von Scheva 2018: 27). At the same time, since one’s shame is understood as being about national identity and its burdens, rather than class position (as elucidated in chapter four and seven), it is only through reclaiming and celebrating that identity – Polishness – that one’s worth and dignity can be restored. Solidarity becomes framed in increasingly nationalist terms – based on a culturally-defined conception of reclaimed Polishness60. Clinging on to Polishness comes to be the house and home that ontologically secures a masculine-orientated patriarchal industrial order – a literal refuge in difficult, precarious times.

Barbecues appealed as the predominant ritual of choice for generating such valuable affective ties. Firstly, they were about performing and reproducing a felt sense of national homeliness through a homogenous Polishness, through bodily rituals of eating sausage, drinking vodka, and often dancing to popular Polish music – disco polo. Secondly, they reinstated and reasserted a traditional patriarchal gender order linked to the Polish, and particularly mining, way of life. Thirdly, barbecues reclaimed and rejoiced in industrial working-class social life – turning stigma back around to become something to be valorized, valued and adopted with pride. Fourthly, they reasserted a sense of togetherness, belonging and group entitativity, increasingly experienced reflexively as against the perceived threats of an encroaching Other – the figure of the refugee, deemed dirty, dangerous and disruptive, a threat to an always-fragile feeling of being-at-home-in-the-world, yet simultaneously becoming the very glue to bond fractured selves together again into a unified ‘we’. As Sara Ahmed (2000: 22) writes in Strange Encounters, ‘The recognition of strangers is a means by which inhabitable or bounded spaces are produced…not simply as the place or locality of residence, but as the very living form of a community.’ The discourse of ‘stranger danger produces the stranger as a figure… which comes then to embody that which must be expelled from the purified space of the community’ - forging it in the process.

60 As such, it actually builds on the legacy of the Solidarity trade union movement itself – a nationalist movement backed by the Catholic Church, which quickly detached itself from its working-class base once it gained power. In this way, it is not only social anger that is channeled into nationalist moralizing rhetoric rather than into class-based struggle (Ost, 2005), but, crucially, shame.
Organizing an annual family barbecue to celebrate the start of the Labour Day weekend holiday, as well as other social activities (such as mushroom picking, family trips to amusement parks, and longer vacations to the seaside or mountains for miners and their families as described in chapter five), forms the core of mining trade union work. Spending afternoons hanging out in the trade union office with the three reps, people coming in and out constantly, I was struck by the fact that this particular function seemed to take up the bulk of their time. The desks were strewn with vacation brochures, miners would drop by to put their name down on various sign-up sheets for activities, and when first elected, the new head of the Union, Jacek, pledged to reduce the cost of such outings, because he felt this would secure him strongest backing from his membership. (He also believed the previous leader had been embezzling money for vacations into his own pocket – another example of petty corruption fueling an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust). Facilitating social life was core business. That’s how much it mattered. In many ways this was a legacy of socialism. Yet today it took on new meanings. Aside from their intermediary role between employer and employee, on health and safety, pay and employment matters, their most visible, everyday task was to take up the fragmented and often competitive lives of their increasingly individualized and atomized workers, and facilitate and organize their re-integration into the literal and metaphorical collective, unified body. This was one of the main reasons miners joined trade unions. This task
they even called the work of ‘integration’ *(integracja)*, pointing to the perceived sentiment of dis-integration that was everyday mining work-life, intensified by the way that the employer was seen as exploiting divisions between individuals to fragment the workforce (*they are waiting to crush us!*, Jacek had said). The trade union thus principally aimed to defend and protect a particular ethic and quality of miner sociality – that of solidarity – that was perceived to be under threat, if not evaporated, since the collapse of Communism and the literal creation of the Solidarity Trade Union movement of the 1980s. Ironically, as we saw in the thesis introduction, it was often the rise of Solidarity that was linked to its actual decline – since it was Solidarity that led to the ushering in of a particularly brutal form of neoliberal free market capitalism and resulted in the collapse of Communism and the eventual Othering and downgrading of the working-classes – not what miners had dreamed of (see Ost 2005). Solidarity of the communal, values-based kind however, was imaginatively based on brotherhood, camaraderie, spontaneity, and mutual aid, with coal-based working-class industrial/breadwinner masculinity at its heart. Industrial strike action and workers’

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Poland as a result has been marked. By the end of the 1990s alone, there were 23,995 registered trade unions (Gardawski et al., 2012: 33). Such internal fragmentation and union rivalry contributes to weakened integrity. At the mine I carried out research around, employing c.3000 workers, there were 13 different trade unions on site representing different segments of the mining community (such ‘competitive pluralism’ is common in the public sector – Gardawski et al., 2012: 37). This proliferation was also incentivized by the fact that being a trade unionist with min. 150 members, you were exempt from working on site at the mine, and your position was protected by law. As a result, miners frequently reported to me their feelings that trade union leaders were disconnected from the realities of the workers that they served, that they were corrupt, simply ‘protecting their own tables’, and ‘in it for themselves’ – as a way to avoid hard labour while receiving the benefits of miner’s renumeration and pension. This reflected national skepticism about unionism in general; a CBOS survey of Poles found that 74% of respondents did not recognise any positive impacts of trade union membership on the situation of employees (Gadomski, 2015). The main reported draws of trade union membership at the mine were an element of social protection at the workplace, but moreover also access to benefits such as subsidized holidays, low-interest micro-loans, and food vouchers. (Likewise, under socialism ‘the main focus of union officials was welfare administration’ such as ‘allocation of holiday funds, loans, and social benefits’ rather than defending rights of workers against management (Gardawski et al., 2012: 31; 33). (One online article on the Mining Tribunal website, cynically speculated that 100+% union density in mining can be attributed to desire to benefit from multiple low-cost loans and offers of free Toasters and other ‘gifts’ to entice sign-ups (Gałązka, 2016)). Many miners also told me they were not members at all – putting official statistics into question (indeed Gardawski et al., (2012: 51) write that estimating union membership in Poland is difficult because ‘no official statistics are collected by state institutions and a considerable number of trade unions do not have systematic membership records’. They also write that historically membership numbers have often been overestimated, with ongoing interest in inflating numbers (see Gadomski, 2015). At the same time, Polish liberal media, politicians and academics alike criticize mining trade unions for being ‘un-democratic’ (Gadomsk, 2015) (too forceful and dominant on the public stage, taking up a larger segment of the public resource pie than their ‘faire share’), un-cooperative (Jonek Kowalska, 2015), confrontational (Zientara, 2009), unrealistic, irrational, and ‘holding back’ coal sector reform (Jonek Kowalska, 2015). They are considered a postsocialist burden, throwing their weight around inconsiderately, and thus a ‘barrier to successful economic change’ (Gardawski et al., 2012: 34). Indeed, the former government headed by PO – Civic Platform – had a strong anti-union stance (Gardawski et al., 2012: 36). On the contrary, as outlined in the introductory sections, David Ost (2005) has written extensively how strong labour organizing and a mobilized working-class is foundational for a healthy democracy – something he criticizes Polish liberals for failing to appreciate, thus pushing working-class voters to the far nationalist right.
political organizing was there in the background too, of course, but nothing could be fundamentally changed anyway, I was informed. This was Poland after all. The most important thing was togetherness. Barbecues offered the means.

Under the PRL, the 1st May, or Labour Day, was commemorated with nationally broadcast parades, fanfare and speeches. Today, as social historian Piotr Oseka (in Puls Biznesu, 2015) reports, it is less connected to collective public rituals, and more often associated with simply having a private ‘grill’, which kicks off the national ‘barbecue season’, while the 2nd May has now become known as ‘National Barbecue Day’. Thus, Labour Day has shifted from being about Communist-style public celebration and valorization of (a predominantly) masculine, working-class culture and achievement connected to national resources, to a more individualized, capitalist version, organized around consumption and the valorization of private leisure time with family and friends. In the mining world, it is still a chance to affirm and validate the dignity and integrity of workers, but the organisation of this celebration is done through the channels of the Trade Unions paid for by its members, rather than by the workplace, or the nation, itself. Miners, therefore, are today responsible for their own self-validation and championing of their self-worth. Celebration must come from the inside, no longer bestowed willingly from the outside. Barbecuing can thus be seen as its own kind of ritual – one that performs, enacts and affirms a particularly masculine-orientated belonging, togetherness, and equality, restoring a sense of the moral worth of coal’s labour.

That a grill occurs over the stoked-up glow of black coals also has symbolic significance. This is of course not the coal dug up from the mine, but charcoal – a completely different substance made from wood, not a fossil fuel. Nevertheless, their identical look (black lumps) and name (in Polish ‘węgiel’ is used for both coal and charcoal as it is rooted in the Polish word for ‘carbon’), symbolically and discursively ties these materials together, linking to the industrial masculine role as provider securing the nation’s fuel and fire. Having a barbecue is also an opportunity to reassert the traditional patriarchal gender order – not only in terms of the man demonstrating his technical expertise and practical skill at the grill, his achievement in relation to providing meat for the family, and his role as head of the household, but also in relation to the form that socializing around the barbecue takes through the unit of the heterosexual usually married couple.

Writing about the barbecue as central to contemporary Israeli forms of ‘banal nationalism’ (Billig, 1995) as a key feature of Israeli Independence Day, or ‘BBQ Day’, Nir Avieli (2013: 302), writes that it is a ‘Durkheimian ritual of cohesion par excellence, an event during which the community celebrates itself and exposes its social rules and cultural arrangements, reproducing and
reinforcing them’. Barbecues have particular salience for Israeli nationalism and masculinity too, and this is connected to how meat-cooking and eating has long been symbolically linked to forms of racial, classed and gendered power relations, including patriarchal dominance over nature and space (Adams, 2015; Bourdieu, 1984; Elias, 2000; Fiddes, 1992; Lévi-Strauss, 1966; Sahlins, 1978; Thiel, 1994; Twigg, 1983; Wrangham, 2010). Through barbecuing, families come together to generate national ‘togetherness’. Yet, while public meat grilling en-masse ostensibly performs power and masculine authority, it also, Avielie argues, reveals underlying sentiments of vulnerability and weakness in relation to Jewish-Arabic tensions and contestations over territorial claims.

Likewise, in her account of American’s love affair with the barbecue in the Cold War context of the 1950s, Kirstin L. Matthews (2009) writes that it, too, while performing national confidence, reflected underlying tensions and unease. The practice of barbecuing precisely came to dominate ideals of The Good Life and home-line at this time because of growing social discomfort regarding the postwar shifting of gender roles, the increasing fluidity of sexuality, and the ‘threat’ of Communism. Barbecuing restored a sense of ‘continuity and comfort’, a cozy feeling of at-home-ness, to an increasingly individualized and atomized society craving such sentiments, through a ‘big helping of status quo politics’ (Matthews, 2009: 8) and the public performing of Americanness. Particularly it enabled men to assert and display their authority, skill, prowess and patriarchal position within the nation. At the same time, the barbecue was used as a propaganda tool to trumpet the American way of life (consumerism, democracy, leisure, freedom, autonomy, private property, and individualism) as superior to that of Communist ‘depravation drudgery, and oppression’, and became a surprising weapon in Cold War politics, writes Mathews (Matthews, 2009: 9). As such, the barbecue became a ‘symbol of and vehicle for ideologies of nation, self and other’ (Matthews, 2009: 8). But by loudly trumpeting such ideals, the barbecue, particularly its hypermasculine ideal, conspicuously protested ‘too much’ (Matthews, 2009: 28) - and its ubiquity and popularity signaled a society trying to wrangle with new and disruptive realities about race, class, gender, and sexuality.

62 See also Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2018: 20–35) on how barbecues are central to the celebration of Australia Day in their performance of Australian forms of national identity and belonging, particularly the idea of easy-going-ness and egalitarianism.
in America through attempts to ‘diffuse’ and delimit difference’ with a totalizing sameness (Matthews, 2009: 29).

In postsocialist Poland, the barbecue has taken on a very similar performative role, revealing similar underlying anxieties too. Even the Polish word for barbecue, ‘grill’, is an imported American-ism, and its close links to aspirations for Western-style living are obvious. It is no coincidence that barbecue’s popularity has risen within the context of capitalism, coming to prominence with the rise of consumer-culture, leisure-time, and social-status-anxiety and the concomitant sense of increased individualism, alienation, social fragmentation and anxieties about national identity, belonging, social cohesion, within a shifting gender regime and radical demographic change, largely caused by emigration and now prompted by the specter of immigration. The barbecue is a throw-back attempt at reconstructing a sense of easy and assumed, homogenous togetherness and harmonious social cohesion around a timeless fire, while most often (though not necessarily as a rule) reasserting a conservative ideal of patriarchal, heteronormative, gendered order. Barbecuing was therefore about recouping a lost sense of community, belonging, and togetherness, or here industrial solidarity – it was about retrieving a feeling of at-home-ness in a world in which one felt that sense of home to be under threat. It was also about creating rituals of conspicuous consumption and performing affluence to bolster that sense of home as ‘normality’.

It was no coincidence, then, that in the summer of 2017, while PiS was busy quietly dismantling the country’s democratic institutions (see e.g. Boffey, 2017a, 2017b; Connolly, 2017), much of the nation was preoccupied with barbecuing, either on vacation with their families or at home in the sunshine. For those I met who were involved in actively protesting the authoritarian

63 Barbecues of course occurred under Communism, but in very different form. As memories recounted revealed, these were usually around a bonfire or campfire in a rural setting, and were rarer occasions, particularly as access to meat was restricted. Inga Iwasiów (2012) writes evocatively about her memories of meat and its scarcity under socialism, describing how its lack led to a national preoccupation with its procurement, and an intensifying symbolic importance of its consumption. At the same time, desire for meat drove social encounters and practices, including gendered identities and roles, generating an entire ‘meat folklore’ with its collective rituals. The more contemporary idea of barbecuing or ‘grilling’ as it is now referred to, occurs around a barbecue set purchased from e.g. a DIY store often in a back garden, and involving Americanized foods such as ‘burgers’ as much as ‘hot dogs’ made from Polish sausage. The contemporary ‘grill’ is a thoroughly imported Western-hybridized, commoditized and postsocialist affair. As sociologist Dorota Mroczkowska (2012) finds in a consumer research report entitled ‘Poles value their free time’ barbecues are a popular pastime for 66% of surveyed Poles in every warm weekend during the ‘grilling season’ (May – September). She writes: ‘The grill for Poles is a symbol of positive changes in Poland in the last two decades, related to our lifestyle. [The] grill is considered our civilizational conquest and one of the biggest Polish satisfactions after 1989 - as many as 81% of Poles indicated the popularity of grilling as [one of the top five postsocialist] changes they like’.

64 Carnivorous togetherness was central to this. I opted not to be vegetarian during the course of my fieldwork – a practice that would have ‘revealed’ my ‘suspicious’ politics in such a context and prevented my full participation in social life, (as Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2018: 29-30) notes also in the Australian context), which was highly pork-orientated, for it would be taken as a perceived rejection and sign of superiority and so flouted hospitality principles.
incursions that were sweeping the country at large-scale public demonstrations up in Warsaw, the Polish barbecue became a contentious symbol of political disengagement and indifference\textsuperscript{65} – a sign of the uneducated, ignorant and hoodwinked masses – too preoccupied with the pleasures of grilling to deal with the bigger bonfire that was Poland’s democracy; the Polish ‘house on fire’\textsuperscript{66}. That summer, the barbecue thus took on an additional political significance – with those too busy grilling assumed to be PiS supporters, or at least indifferent bystanders. I recall, for example, a friend who drove up to Warsaw for the protests reporting to me in an exasperated voice that that day there was a summer fete in her village, including the all-important ‘grill’. All her neighbours chose to go to that, and only she and her family decided to head to the capital to join the demonstrations. They were judged as ‘Other’ for this explicitly non-conformist action. One of her neighbours was already not speaking to her because they were the only family who did not go to Church and she was also actively vocal about smog and women’s rights. This choice stiffened tensions. Thus, choosing to barbecue became a contested, classed, politicized issue. Whereas the activists’ national home was falling apart, for the barbecuers, all was well and good when home was where the coals were, and Poland’s national house was being ‘taken care of’, in the good hands of its Leader. Such was the hegemonic narrative from their perspective.

That being said, there was an important reason why barbecuing might trump ‘Politics’. Disassociated and feeling powerless, ever distrustful of all political elites who occupy a distant realm ‘up there’, and not particularly persuaded by the idea of ‘democracy’ in a corrupt and indifferent world, the immediate lifeworld was more pressing, as was the desire to generate solidarities where such sentiments were perceived to be lacking. Barbecuing did not make one a pro-PiS supporter by default, of course. In fact, the barbecue was enjoyed principally for the way that it brought people together and leveled out social, and increasingly important in today’s world, even political, differences. It was ‘something for everyone’. This was of critical importance in a society in which the vast social inequalities that have opened up since transition\textsuperscript{67} have left a bitter taste in the mouth – a society unused to such social differences and tied to a perhaps naive if utopian worldview in which harmonious relations and equity are strong values beyond reach.\textsuperscript{68}

\textsuperscript{65} Polish popular actor, screenwriter, film director and drama professor, Jerzy Stuhr (2019), wrote an article entitled ‘I feel increasingly lonely in this country’ for the Gazeta Krakowska about his growing concern for the authoritarian character of the PiS regime. In it he stated his fears that the ‘only form of independence’ increasingly allowed in the country was to ‘drink a beer, have a grill, and sit quietly’.

\textsuperscript{66} The slogan of the Polish ‘house on fire’ was used by activists at the time to express the urgency of perceived attacks on democracy taking place in relation to controversial Judicial ‘reforms’.

\textsuperscript{67} Hanna Cervinkova (2016: 45) writes ‘After twenty-five years of neoliberal capitalism, Poland is now a country with one of the highest discrepancies of income in Europe’.

\textsuperscript{68} See Katherine Verdery (1993: 192) on ideals of democracy as not based on disagreement but on consensus, and on the widespread notion of the ‘People-as-One’ as the legitimate collective subject that was propagated under socialism and continues into today’s nationalisms within Eastern Europe.
Yet, the barbecue at mining events in particular did project a deeper symbolic as well as material significance that might be easily appropriated as a pre-laid social grounds for such national populist narratives that PiS expounds. For a start, Jarosław Kaczyński himself, in an interview for the national daily newspaper *Rzeczpospolita*, had already in 2009 claimed the growing widespread enjoyment of the barbecue in Poland for his own Party’s previous success when in coalition government 2005-2007 (TVN24, 2009). Boasting having overseen a rise in consumption by 31% at the time, in another typically polarizing move, he claimed that PiS had brought more people ‘up’ the social ladder to join what PiS politician, Jacek Kurski, called ‘Grilling Poland’ - from ‘Poland B’ to ‘Poland A’. Yet, still, there was more work to be done – for those still in poverty, earning minimal Polish wages, ‘they do not grill’. Thus, ‘We always stand before a choice: Bavaria or the Third World’, said Kaczyński. Indeed, PiS’s party aim, as Kaczyński told news station TVN24 (2009a), was to ‘enable all Poles, not just the rich, to be able to grill’. PiS was thus offering a ‘revolution’ to bring Poland closer to the promised land of Bavaria represented through the capacity to grill. This time around, particularly through its welfare policies, PiS could claim to have fulfilled this promise by significantly increasing the personal wealth of families. The ability to barbecue was a sort of growing conspicuous consumption; a sign of social mobility, national prosperity, and a government ‘taking care of us’. A symbol of dignified ‘normal’ life; the Good Life (see chapter seven). This was particularly charged with significance in a post-traumatized country that had known mostly war, occupations and depravation. Barbecues symbolized freedom too – freedom to be oneself, Polish to the last.

Yet, returning to the trade union barbecue scene, here too, the barbecue doth ‘protest too much’ (Matthews, 2009: 28), and despite the lubrications of alcohol, the collective dancing to Polish music, and the bodily ingestion of shared Polish foods, underlying these gatherings was a constant sense of tension, dissatisfaction and friction that affirmed the always-creeping suspicion that the ideal of solidarity and the good life are beyond reach, affects long dead that cannot be resurrected, 69 Donald Tusk soon after retorted on a visit to Silesia that ‘There are politicians who believe that they invented the grill and gave it to Poles. I would suggest that everyone involved in the work of building Polish strength reject complexes and excessive pride. I would like no politician to exploit solidarity – big ‘S’ or little ‘s’ – as a means to fight other people’ (Jedlecki, 2009).

70 ‘Poland B’, that of the ‘un-educated’, working-classes or provincial paupers particularly in the Eastern poorer part of Poland, is contemptuously represented by liberals (including academics) in postsocialist Poland as the ‘other’ Poland – un-bookish, ‘budding fascists’, or ‘incurable Homo Sovieticus’ (Ost, 2005: 109).

71 Having gone from a country with one of the ‘worst public care provision[s] in Europe’ (Eurofound, 2010), following introduction of the 500+ family welfare programme, Polands biggest ever social-welfare programme in history, aimed in part to tackle Poland’s falling fertility rate (which at 1.4 is the second lowest after Portugal in Europe), consumption rates in Poland increased at their fastest rate since 2008, increasing aggregate real disposable income by 2.2% (OECD, 2018: 19). Meanwhile the percent of children living in poverty fell from 12% to 3% (The Economist, 2018). The additional support represents c. 12% of the average gross wage in Poland in 2016 (European Commission, 2018).
or ones never delivered. For example, I witnessed how participants complained if they saw others
being given more alcohol than they by the trade union reps who in turn were anxious about ensuring
everyone was treated ‘fairly’ to avoid accusations of favouritism. This was also displayed in the way
that competitive games during the occasion never resulted in a winner, but prizes were doled out for
participation to avoid bad feeling and forge a sense of equality. Later, I saw how participants left the
occasion without clearing away their plates and refuse, leading others to become angry about the
‘lack of respect’ that went round ‘these days’. A pervasive sense, and anticipation, of being treated
poorly underlay the gathering, which itself was meant to soothe such suffering.

However, Polish society was in broader flux too, including gendered identities and roles,
along with pressure to comply with the perceived European project of the pluralization of cultures.
The ‘smell of mixed kitchens’ as Tomek described the encroachment of multiculturalism in my next
encounter with him, was in the air. As such, the EU-backed ‘ideologies’ of feminism,
environmentalism and multiculturalism, which were particularly perceived to bring yet more
destruction to (almost-threadbare) familiar social ties based on coal-based homogeneity and
heteronormativity, were increasingly rejected as alien imports that required being defended against,
rubbing up against traumatic memories of losing one’s sense of self and home – particularly just at a
point in time when participants were meant to be arriving. In turn perhaps this would unite a
fractured collective and bring the utopia to fruition – for I was told ‘Poles do not know how to live
without an enemy’.

The ‘smell of mixed kitchens’: Impurity threatens homogenous sameness

Later on in the evening, after a few hours at the barbecue celebration, I chatted with Tomek again.
This time he was telling a story about a night out during his first and last trip out of Poland to the
UK. I recall paying particular attention to it as it seemed to serve as a core frame through which he
was making reflexive sense of his own Polishness, particularly its supposed homogenous and
predictable sociality epitomized in the barbecue scene surrounding us, which he reclaimed as
superior and preferred, through the comparative telling. ‘So we went to this disco’, he started ‘and
you queue up and you pay someone four pounds to stamp you on the hand, and then you get in
there, and everybody is spread out all over in separate groups, nobody is dancing, and when they do
dance they’re just jerking around by themselves, alone, in a circle, like, and the drinks cost a bomb!
I nearly killed my cousin for that! And so everyone just has a couple and that’s it.. and then they sit
there sharing a bag of peanuts! Ha! Nobody’s talking cos the music is so loud. Then at 2 o’clock, 2!,
they kick you out – that’s it, party’s over. I mean – 2 am! And then everyone goes home!’,
laughed, and everyone else laughed too, and the laughter bound us together in the shared sense of the strangeness of this Other scene. I admitted that the description of a Friday night out on the town in Britain sounded pretty accurate, and said so, which prompted more laughter.

In this opening to the tale, Tomek identified a markedly different sociality that he experienced in the UK as a core cultural signifier that let him know he was not at home. The facts that he chose to stress – that people drink only a couple of drinks at the disco because alcohol is so expensive, that clubs close at 2am and then everybody goes home, that people don’t dance in couples but as individuals, that hospitality extends to sharing a bag of peanuts (rather than an extended meal), led him to experience English social life as a bewildering and confusing disappointment, a cultural shock, in which he felt uncomfortable since, again, *he did not know how he was meant to act*, and what he knew no longer seemed valid in this context. The subtext was incredulity: *‘is this what everybody keeps going on about? Is this the so-called ‘civilized’ West?’* As a result, he seemed to implicitly reflect on his own now more-and-more ‘Polish’ social world with an increased sense of attachment, pride, security and homeliness. By contrast, the family scene around him reassured and reinforced his sense of self in the world – its cultural material assemblage of familiar bodies, gestures, humour, foodstuffs, working-class/folk disco polo music, and the sensual qualities of these infrastructures (smells, tastes, sounds, visual appearance etc.) validated him through addressing and affirming him as a male, Polish, working-class miner at-home-in-his-world. The working-class, coal-based ‘national sensorium’ (Zubrzycki, 2011) in action that provided a visceral *‘sense of belonging’* (Trnka et al., 2013: 5).

He carried on:

> And then everybody spills out onto the streets, and they’re all raving drunk, and throwing up, all the women too and that, and then everybody goes to get a kebab, because that’s what you guys all eat at that time, a kebab, stuffing it into their mouths. And there’s the Indian food, and the Turkish and Arab, for you guys it’s all normal. All these different people, you live together, and it’s normal. You can feel the smell of mixed kitchens when you walk around your streets, that smell… And then the next day, it’s Sunday, and the streets are empty – completely empty apart from all the rubbish and stuff all over from the night before – from the kebabs, it’s a mess. And you go to the supermarket and you try to buy some beers or something at like 10.30am and this woman who works there comes over, and she makes us put them back, because in your country you can’t buy alcohol on a Sunday until after 11am! What a joke! In Poland we have more freedom.’

For Tomek, his experience of Polish social life, particularly in the context of the mining world, was a stark contrast to what he perceived as the alienated, atomized and individualized social life of a British Friday night scene, something he simultaneously connects in his mind to the
apparent messy and disorderly multiculturalist sensorium on display that assaults him as an alien smell of ‘mixedness’, impurity. ‘Different people’ living together as ‘normality’. For Tomek, and for numerous others I spoke to, and as I witnessed, Polish social life, by contrast offered homogenous togetherness, bonding through sharing of ‘national’ food and drink in extended collective ritual, and an emphasis on communal time and simply ‘being together’ in predictable sensorial engagement which Tomek felt at ease and accepted in, and in which he experienced belonging and validation for being himself as he was. Ethnic and social homogeneity – national identity – was a core ingredient of this sensorial togetherness, with alcohol, the essential mediator, and its easy and cheap availability marked Poland as a country not as ‘pathological’ or uncivilized, but on the contrary, a country where group sociality was valued and prioritized, as it should be. Vodka, in particular, was the essential ingredient of this sociality rather than being drunk in a context where ‘nobody’s talking’, or as a means to simply ‘get drunk’, its function, as I repeatedly encountered it, was to facilitate equality and social cohesion through shared corporeal ingestion. Its decline, as earlier commented on, was therefore experienced as a troubling signal of yet more cultural fragmentation and dissolution. A world out of joint, where instead of industrial solidarity based on shared bodily fates, one-up-manship, and difference, now prevailed instead.

Traditionally, vodka in Poland has been essential for creating a visceral sense of group-ness. The purpose of drinking together was always to come together as equals – it was a key social leveler and a central mechanism for forging the collective social body. It was also central to ideas of Polishness and Polish sociality – particularly of the working-class kind. While managerial mining staff prided themselves on drinking beer (which brought them closer to the German tradition), the workers, robotnicy, favoured vodka. Marta Rabikowska (2010b: 24) writes about Polish migrants’ use of vodka to forge a sense of connection to the homeland while in the UK. She writes that vodka is a ‘signifier of sociality and social rituals: in Polish collective memory, building social relationships involves drinking alcohol and any deviation from that practice causes a threat of isolation from the life of the group. Thus avoiding or refusing alcohol among Poles becomes a statement on its own, semantically related to a Polish identity or its rejection’. Reports of migrants increasing their intake of vodka she speculates may well be directly linked to ‘not so much the need to drink it and become intoxicated, but rather to experience the ritual of identification with other.

72 Of course, alcohol throughout human history has been used as a way to cement social relationships, through feasting and sacred rituals (Hockings and Dunbar, 2019; McKie, 2018). Yet, ‘The prevailing tendency to view alcohol merely as a ‘social problem’ or the popular notion that alcohol only serves to provide us with a ‘hedonic’ high, masks its importance in the social fabric of many human societies both past and present’, write Kimberley Hockings and Robin Dunbar (2019). This is interesting to interrogate in the context of the contemporary decline of alcohol intake particularly among the young (Llana and Traub, 2018) and the rise of loneliness and social anxiety.
Poles who share the same imagination of socialization’ - one based on ideals of solidarity, equality and homogeneity. It is in this sense that drinking together purifies the collective into a notion of sameness – un-mixed-ness, which takes on national phenomenological overtones. Particularly as the figure of The Refugee is one who does not drink – thus refuses, or rejects, Polishness, casting the shadow of shame.

At the same time, drinking, and particularly drinking vodka, is also a highly gendered activity in Poland, as it is globally. Barbara Wolska (2001: 11) writes that cultural norms in Poland have historically always encouraged heavy drinking among men, who are able to demonstrate their strength, resilience and toughness through excessive drinking, whereas women were meant to abstain or face ‘heavy social sanctions’. Statistically today, men drink six times more vodka than women (Wolska 2001: 26). By contrast, Tomek is shocked to witness women drinking heavily in the UK and then behaving ‘indecently’ in public by vomiting on the street, just like men. At mining gatherings I frequently witnessed male drunkenness, but almost never female drunkenness, and where it did occur it was commented negatively upon. Often women were responsible for picking up their drunk husbands and ushering them off home when things got too intense. Drinking vodka, then, is a thoroughly masculine-centred practice, meant to generate a particularly masculine-oriented solidarity, or brotherhood.

Likewise, Tomek was unsure about a culture where dancing is done ‘alone’, or in a circle, rather than in couples. Dancing in Silesia, as previously mentioned, is most usually done in heterosexual pairs – either in a married couple, or as a woman, you wait to be asked to dance by another man – two women dancing together is considered inappropriate. In the UK, Tomek was confused by a culture of solo dancing, absent conversation, and drinking to get drunk and vomit, finished off by eating foreign foods and then going home. How was togetherness produced in such an atomized (bodily and socially) culture? In fact, the reason this story was so important to him, was that this experience of alienation horrified him – and he feared that it is a product of Westernization itself, that ‘civilized’ hegemonic culture that threatens Poland with the same through colonial takeover, particularly through the imposing hegemonic project of multiculturalism and its bodily mixing. For Tomek, true ‘civilization’ lies in social cohesion and community life, or solidarity, framed in national terms, and this is something that he feels is jeopardized by the ‘smell of mixed kitchens’ and the multicultural context apparent to him in everyday British social life. It is not exactly something he rejects out right, he stresses that such a scene, such smells, might ‘belong’ in Britain where ‘you guys are used to that’ and your ‘economies are linked by colonialism’, but a fact that he cannot quite reconcile with his own sense of place and orientation back in Poland, in fact it seems to threaten it, calling up traumas of the past. ‘That’s what people are afraid of here. You
know, that different culture. We are afraid to let that in, people are afraid of refugees here. Our lot talk about ‘the unclean’, yeah, it’s right racism. But you guys… you guys all live together, with the Indian, and that, and for you its normal.’ The implication was that for Poland it was abnormal and so unwelcome. ‘Mixing’ - kitchens and bodies – was unclean and impure, overstepping borders and bodily boundaries, and thus threatening true ‘Polishness’ as its felt opposite. Yet there was shame in this recognition – a sense of backwardness, hence the need for swift reclamation and reinstatement – ‘Our Backwardness’.

The feeling of dis-orientation tinged with anxiety, dread even, prompting exactly the spectre of shame, dominated his story. He seemed to feel dislocated, outside the scene, and his personhood did not experience the mirroring and affirmation, or sense of confidence, that he felt he could receive in the pure familiarities of home, where his body, by contrast, felt at ease. ‘I will say’, he added, ‘that you guys have a very civilized culture though. Everybody is always saying ‘sorry’, ‘excuse me’, ‘pardon’!’ he laughed, mockingly parodying the words with exaggerated gestures as he did so. This comment reflected Tomek’s class-based self-consciousness and feeling of being out of step and awkward in this strange and foreign land – that may be more ‘civilized’ yet as such was alien, signaling contempt. The complement was of course back-handed, in that Tomek was commenting on the fact that nice manners, politeness and civility seemed to trump warmth, mutuality and a course familiarity that might demand vulgarity or crudeness, the kind of social connectivity he knew ‘at home’ and was adept at commanding as he did so now, signifiers of an industrial working-class, and ethnically and socially homogenous culture he felt at-home in, or one with. It alone offered to ease the pains of that increasing fractured and fragmented individualization spoken of earlier. Nothing else seemed on hand to do so.

By contrast, then, I came to understand how the figure of the Muslim refugee bedeviled him with the spectral threat of both the shame of not being good enough, both if they were accepted into the Polish household and if they are not, and the shame of increased atomization and embodied alienation, with the sensorial metaphors of domesticity, kitchens, and home, the traditional space of national social reproduction, dominating this perception. The embodied, felt internal arising of such emotion, experienced as visceral sensation, naturalized its presence as seemingly intuitive and a ‘right’ reaction to the objective perception of something ‘wrong’ in the world out there. How can one dispute one’s own senses, after all? Such was the logic of a bodily industrial common sense forged onto repeated instances of state oppression and dispossession. Stealing a moment with him alone after the Friday-night-in-Britain tale ended, he again raised the refugee issue with me without prompt, almost as a cautionary conclusion: ‘If you come here to me, you are a guest in my house, and if somebody comes and I am supposed to be a guest in my own home... then no. Poles will
never let that happen. They are afraid that the country won’t be ours. We have gone through too much to allow our country to be divided once again. We were oppressed by the Germans and Russians for centuries. People have gone through too much. Everyone lives with the stories of their parents and grandparents in them. That’s the only way we learnt our history as it wasn’t in schools. Everyone carries that in them, in their body and mind.’ Barbecues epitomized precisely the ‘normality’ and safety of home that Silesian-Poles, like Tomek, precisely because they had not had it for long, and still felt they had not quite got it, felt they were defending to the last, in body and mind – not only as an imagined collective but as a viscerally, sensorially felt ontological zone of reassurance, of predictable samelessness, understood in ethnic national terms – the supposed antidote to the longstanding postcolonial postsocialist traumas of increasingly individualized industrial shame written in the precariously integrated collective body that increasingly speaks not to longed-for sameness but highlights multiple, proliferating differences.

**Conclusion: Home is ‘Our Backwardness’**

As Zygmunt Bauman (2000a: 2; 10) semi-ironically writes: ‘In a community, we all understand each other well, we… are… hardly ever puzzled or taken aback. We are never strangers to each other…. understanding does not need to be sought, let alone laboriously built or fought for: that understanding ‘is there’, ready-made and ready to use – so that we understand each other ‘without words’ and never need to ask, apprehensively, ‘what do you mean?’” This is the kind of naive longed-for ideal of social harmony that structures the emotional life of the postsocialist present, also in embodied terms, when free market democracy has introduced new political tensions and rising inequalities that disorientate and hurt, painfully revealing solidarity to be no longer a seemingly ready-made condition, but an affect that must be laboriously built. It is precisely this reflexive realization that creates existential disarray – a felt not-at-home-ness. Letting The Refugee into The Polish House provoked fears that that longed-for homogenous solidarity that alone is felt to cleanse one’s shame through collective affirmation would forever be lost, just as it was being found. Indeed, it is alwaysalready absent. As Bauman (2000a: 12) also notes, once community, defined as the ‘warm circle’ of home, is spoken of aloud, it is apparent that it no longer exists.

Simultaneously, collective imaginary fear and rejection of The Refugee with associated unfamiliar smells does the work of binding such a collectivity back together again – an enemy is good for The People. As Marysia Galbraith (1997: 119) writes: ‘Poles have a story they tell themselves about themselves – that they are strong when they face an enemy, but during ‘normal’, peaceful times, they are argumentative, they cannot agree, and everyone looks out for their own
interests’. But how is togetherness stuck together through constructing ‘the enemy’? Through the collective projection and transfer, I argue, of that sticky substance, shame, and its rebinding and purification of home in the process. In his book *The Anatomy of Disgust*, William Ian Miller (1997: x) writes that the emotions of shame, embarrassment, humiliation and vengefulness that confirm our sense of being lowered or lower in the social moral order, exist in a rough economy with the emotions of disgust and contempt that are the experience in turn of ‘reacting to the lowly, failed and contaminating’ – thus emotions that work to affirm ourselves as higher. Thus according to this equation, the more one feels oneself to be lowered in esteem in the eyes of others, and so the more one experiences a sense of existential shame, the more one reacts in turn to others ‘lower down’ the social moral order with disgust and contempt, and these are directly in proportion to one another.

‘Shame marks a failure to adhere to communal standards one is deeply committed to; it is the consequence of being understood to have not measured up. It means loss of honor and hence loss of the basis for self-esteem.’ (Miller, 1997: 34). The result may be disgust with oneself. Whereas the two emotions may have conjoined physiological and psychological experiential qualities, disgust and shame tend to point to different reactions. ‘In disgust we wish to have the offensive thing disappear by the removal of either ourselves or it; in shame we simply want to disappear’. In this way, since self-annihilation is impossible except through suicide, this reactivity needs to find an outlet else-how. Shame and disgust blend to form a potent directive for policing moral boundaries of cleanliness and purity elsewhere.

Far-right industrial populist nationalist ideologies resonate with such sentiments to heighten and compact them.

The figure of The Refugee inserted into ‘home’ generates fear not only that it will be ‘home’ no longer, but perhaps that they will reveal how it was never guaranteed as ‘home’ at all, particularly for those dwelling and labouring in Silesia. Gaim Kibreab (1999: 371) writes: ‘If we realize that we are similar to refugees, we also must realize that the protected home that distinguishes us from refugees is only an illusion… We are all caught within the tensions and uncertainties of modernity, whether we are categorized as refugees or not. The categorization of others as refugees allows us to ignore the dynamics and uncertainties of our own existence. We explain certain psychic trauma by the refugee experience, and, in a way, cast off the demons which exist in each of us’. For Sielsian-Polish coal-mining masculinities, compounding gendered, classed and national/regional, ethnic stigma fuse to set alight the burning discomfort of shame that needs an outlet or a resolution. In an increasingly individualized and lonely world, where the collective industrial body that once did the work of unification through soothing of the senses is rapidly

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73 Such emotions also, Martha Nussbaum (2015: 314) has argued, act as ‘enemies of compassion’ and other ‘pro-social’ sentiments.
disintegrating, thanks to emigration and neoliberal capitalist social organisation, and is itself deemed increasingly backward in postcolonial postsocialist terms both nationally and internationally, that collective now offers threadbare resource to bear or resolve this. Thus one’s own shame, which is always uncomfortable and often un-articulable, particularly for Eastern European, working-class masculine subjectivities, looks to be transferred, or passed over instead. The shame of feeling un-belonging, not-at-home, unmoored, becomes The Refugee’s shame for bringing that feeling to light.

In this sense, the shaming of refugees (as ‘dirt’ and ‘pollution’) is a misrecognition of one’s own shame, perhaps even a misplaced, politically calculated, collective therapeutic means for offloading and transmuting it, or in the psychological sense projecting it, to purify one’s own burden. The Refugee becomes not an economic scapegoat here (after all, there are none in Poland as we earlier saw) but an emotional one – shame is passed on to the figure of The Refugee through the medium of disgust and contempt that enables one’s own shame to be transmuted and purified, bound into a longed-for collective body of moral solidarity in the process all the while displaying it as a performance of strong masculinity – thereby becoming more truly ‘European’ in a purified sense. The (imagined) Refugee becomes the true ‘dirt’; (not-quite)White industrial working-class masculine Silesian-Polish coal miners become ‘clean’. Thus the ambivalence of shame is transformed into the sureness of home through its purifying reclamation and redefinition as something of value – ‘Our Backwardness’.
Conclusion:

When I began my PhD in early October 2015, the world appeared to be a very different place. Barack Obama was President of the United States, seemingly reflecting a growing progressive tide against racism and preaching about the audacity of such hope. David Cameron was the clean-shaven face of the Conservative Party as Prime Minister of a UK whose key position in the European Union did not appear to be seriously in question. In Poland, Civic Platform had reigned for eight years and were still in power with little indication of what was about to happen. COP 21, to be held in Paris that December, promised a last-chance glimmer of proportionate international action to address the urgency of climate change that would offer more than further ‘ritual inaction’ (REF). The ramifications of the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ were yet to manifest themselves. The cosmopolitan liberal capitalist world order with its market-based, technocratic, and consensus-assuming politics (Swyngedouw, 2010) was still spinning its cogs, and just about maintaining the status quo with its well-oiled machinery.

Fast forward six years, and the world is living in the aftershocks of a climate-denying Trump Presidency, Brexit, Black Lives Matter protests, the #MeToo movement, the rise of Greta Thunberg, Fridays for Future, the School Strike for Climate movement and Extinction Rebellion, wildfires in the forests of the Amazon, Australia and the USA, the Covid-19 pandemic (the unexpected implications of which for Polish coal and its politics I comment on in the postscript), and a general backlash against liberal democratic and existing green politics in the form of anti-environmentalist, authoritarian far-right populist ascendancy around the world, not least in Europe and Poland itself.¹ There is a new normal, people are saying. It is marked, however, not by new instability, antagonism and conflict, but its eruption into the centre stage, its new visibility. The liberal hypocrisy of white supremacy, patriarchy, fossil fuel extraction (Malm and the Zetkin Collective, 2021; Mitchell, 2013) and relentless exploitation of additional cheap nature, including labour (Moore, 2015) upon which that liberal world order was built, the previously ‘off-scene’ in the ‘Anthropo-obScene’ - what was

¹ Indeed, already by 2018, eight countries within the EU (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Italy, Poland, Hungary and Slovakia) were being led by far-right nationalist and xenophobic parties (Traverso, 2019: 3). This domino effect played out on the world stage too – Turkey, the Philippines, Brazil, India, one by one country’s were ‘falling’ (or consolidating) to nativist, authoritarian populists.
there all along but rendered illegitimate or suppressed – is now seen in planer and planer sight (Swyngedouw and Ernstson, 2018; see also Mouffe, 2005). The climate crisis together with the prospects of a post-fossil fuel energy transition and their gendered, racial and class-based dilemmas and contradictions are squeezing hard on an already fractious, unequal and wounded world in which nature and culture are ever-more-apparently entangled. Within this context, politics has returned (Swyngedouw, 2011; see also Wamvik and Haarstad, 2021). Yet notably, as this thesis has explored, often not in the form many of us reading this would wish. Eco-fascism, or ‘climate barbarism’, are now not considered paranoid prospects, but increasingly distinct and realistic possibilities as multiple crises converge (Klein, 2019). Meanwhile, political pundits, journalists, politicians, not to mention academics (including PhD students), have been left scratching their heads – where did it all go wrong? How did ‘we’ not foresee this? And, most crucially for this PhD thesis – how and why, at this critical historical juncture, do fossil fuels and far right politics, energy transition and populism, intersect?

In this thesis I have outlined and explored how what had been ‘off-scene’ for quite some time in postsocialist Poland, itself a microcosm of the broader off-scene-ing of globalized neoliberal capitalist tensions, antagonisms and dispossessions to the margins and peripheries (here, of Europe), returned with a vengeance in the form of pro-coal, climate and smog-denying, Law and Justice-style populist politics, a politics that has even been repeatedly re-elected into majority government as part of the United Right coalition in the country throughout the period (six consecutive times since 2015). As such it has offered a unique vantage point from which to analyse and seek to understand this broader convergence of disturbing forces. In the material move away from fossil fuels required to avert the most extreme climate calamity, there is an under-examined fallout effect occurring in relation to its correlated symbolic decline, coalescing around particular subjectivities and identities in intensified form, ripe for mobilization. Jobs, livelihoods and economic security are of course one aspect. Emotional pain and intensity, caused by perceived ‘ecological dispossession’ in contexts of neoliberalized precarity affecting valued and security-enhancing sociocultural identities, another.

In studies so far attempting to understand far-right populist success, however, largely top-down, national-level accounts, the relevance of environmental matters has been overlooked, particularly including the socionatural, or embodied ecological, positionality of its supporters on the ground. Yet identities and lifeworlds, their concerns and worldviews, and their emotions too, are not detached from place and its ecomaterial composition. Particularly in a historic coal-mining region, where they have been fundamentally shaped by coal’s presence for centuries, and will continue to be so given that, while it may recede in economic and sociocultural importance, physically, coal’s geology, infrastructures and materiality will continue to shape the contours of Silesian and other
post-coal regions for decades to come, if not indefinitely. How coal will be collectively remembered, narrated, and historicized, (as dirty and uncivilized? as the substance of civilization? as more ambivalently positioned?) and by whom will have implications yet still to unfold, with contestations over its story charged with ongoing political implications and capital. Where the meaning and memory of postsocialist transition is still shifting and emerging and vividly alive within contemporary debates, so too will the post-coal transition find itself the cornerstone of repeated renegotiation with a long-tail of after-effects we cannot yet map the horizon of. In a sense, postsocialist and post-coal transition must be thought together – for they are part of the same story as this thesis has attempted to sketch out.

In particular, I have examined how the hegemonic environmental politics of increasingly-understood-as ‘dirty’ (materially and symbolically) coal in a climate-crisis world, intersects with the embodied, emotional, place-based and historically situated lives of those most intimately entangled with its materialities, namely working-class, particularly male, (not-quite-)white, Polish-Silesian, coal miners. Such discourse, seen as an EU-imported technocratic project aimed at serving a liberal cosmopolitan postindustrial ‘elite’ agenda, clashes with insider, local cultural and social perspectives on coal’s materiality, morality and meaning, and thus imposes a felt-sense of stigma seemingly from ‘outside’ – in economic, cultural and moral terms. I have shown how this generates and intensifies an affective and emotional charge of mounting intersectional shame with deep historic roots for a working-class in an Eastern European marked by the peripheralizing experiences of orientalist postcolonial postsocialism which coal’s politics is caught up in. This is particularly so because coal once, under the not-so-distant Communist past, used to offer the opposite, especially for Silesian, working-class masculinity; an embodied sense of home, and a sense of coal, were bound together, also in gendered, national, Polish terms. This about-face change, ushered in with postsocialist transition into the European capitalist neoliberal democratic order in top-down fashion, has overseen the rapid material and symbolic erosion of the key resource for constructing positive and productive embodied collective identities and senses of self as at-home, while simultaneously failing to include communities in shaping its direction nor replacing it with meaningfully alternatives. As such, it is encountered as a kind of ecological dispossession facilitated by corrupt and greedy local elites in cahoots with this disenfranchising ‘foreign’ initiative. It is thus experienced on the ground as abrupt, brutal, unnecessary and traumatic, attacking what is understood as moral, modern and of value in industrial terms.

In this wrenched-out moral and environmental vacuum, in which bodies and their ‘nervous states’ (Davies, 2018) feel out of joint, indeterminate, toxic shame creeps in – the shame of un-belonging, of being cast out, of losing one’s ground, and of experiencing a lack of social
recognition, status anxiety and economic and cultural depravation without meaningful replacements or integration – the fear of disconnection and lack of safety. This is particularly an ecological unhoming of its own – where an oikos transforms into the staging ground for a kind of intense collective cultural and social ‘solastalgia’ (Albrecht, 2005) – the emotional, existential pain of environmental change lived as a violation of one’s sense of emplaced personhood, or what Glenn Albrecht, who coined the neologism, termed ‘the homesickness you have when you are still at home’. Yet, here, this does not result from the kind of environmental change typically imagined in such a phrase – melting icebergs, natural disasters, anthropogenic flooding, drought, or rising sea levels, affecting the innocent victims of global warming, for example. This time, it arises for the deemed industrial perpetrators, who, unrecognised for their plight in class-based terms, rather increasingly tarnished with the depoliticized brush of immorality, backwardness and worthlessness and treated like a waste product, start to see themselves as the real, unfairly accused, innocent victims. The shifting meaning of coal is felt as the attrition of bitter loss, injustice and the shame of disposability – being treated like dirt. In this disorientating interstices of agonising and exhausting ambivalence, where arrival to the promised better land has not occurred, blame must be appointed. Shame must be dealt with.

In this thesis, I have argued that, among my participants, it is this intense yet underarticulated feeling of shame that is felt, indeed embodied, through the skin and its literal marking, staining and gendered, regional, national and class-based Othering by the dirt of degraded coal, that lies at the heart of far-right populist appeal here, which resonates with a longing for salvation from its acute discomforts that poses ontological, existential threats. This salvation is offered not on class-based terms, where recourse to class language has been long abandoned, and where intersectional stigmas have been essentialized in terms of national identity, but in the form of an increasingly reflexive, defensive industrial and nationalist politics of purification, which promises to cleanse and purify ‘the people’ of their dirt-induced shame through its countering salve that seems to chime with their own attempts to restore meaning to their world. After laying out the background historical context to today’s conflict in chapter three, in terms of the rise of a postindustrial neoliberalized green consensus, the decline and erasure of class politics, and the moral, social, cultural, political and ecological crisis that was postsocialist transition, each empirical chapter has highlighted a particular strand of purification practice that miners have been engaged in to try to eject that shame and re-assert themselves in this order in which they feel powerless, unrepresented and increasingly vilified and banished, all set within the context of the promises of democracy and progress. Smog denial, in the face of both contemporary and historic depoliticized, classist shaming environmental discourses, holding onto coal as a domestic heating source, a lay
embodied moral economy of coal, and anti-refugee sentiment are key historically, politically and socioculturally structured purification strategies, mapping on to the rise of far-right industrial populist success. They seem to offer to restore a felt-sense of at-homeness, or being at-home-in-the-world, of fitting, being congruent with one’s place again. Such an affect, indeed a viscerally-sensed, embodied state of ease in one’s own skin, a feeling of conservative comfort and of finally ‘fitting’ the shape of the world, is increasingly scarce in a world riddled with compounding crises in which economic, social, political and ecological uncertainty, insecurity, flux, and rapid change is now ever the norm. Clinging to coal, and to Polishness, is a paradoxical strategy for an embodied ontological sense of homely, familiar security in an increasingly insecure world. That is its precise seduction, and as such, can only exist in part as fantasy. And yet… industrial populists make fantasy homely.

I am reminded here finally of a socialist era storybook I recently came across, *The Little Angered Coal-lump* (‘Rozgniewany węgielek’) (Ondřej, 1972), translated from the original Czech into Polish in 1950, and republished in 1960 and again in 1972. It is a remarkable window onto today’s world and the tale it tells resonates strongly with the one I have laid out. On a bright winter’s day, a little lump of coal wishes to play with some children it sees outside. Approaching them, however, the children tell it to go away because it is black, dirty and ugly. Saddened and rejected, the coal lump turns away, and decides to teach the children a lesson. It runs away taking all the other coal lumps in the town, from all the storehouses and factories too, with it. Returning home after playing in the snow, hungry and damp, the children realise that their mother cannot cook them a meal, and they cannot get warm and dry because there is no coal left. The town is dark and the trams and trains have stopped running because the power plants cannot produce electricity. They realise what they have and done and go in search of the Little Angered Coal-lump in order to apologise. They search high and low but no coal is to be found. Finally reaching the mine, a group of friendly miners, giving them shiny uniforms and tools, take them down the shaft to look for him, and show them the hard and dangerous work that they perform for the world. Finding the little coal lump, the children have by now realised the true value of coal, and feel ashamed for how they have disregarded its central worth in their lives. They tell the coal-lump it is beautiful, wanted and needed and decide that they too want to become miners when they grow up and wear such beautiful outfits and perform such valuable work. The coal-lump returns with them back to their house, and all the others return too. The town is saved, and all is well.

In today’s world, in the absence of a such a secure place in the national mythology, a secure sense of value, morality and modernity, the dirt, and slander, against coal is no longer possible to shrug off without taint or emotional pain. Likewise, in the absence of relevant channels for expression and meaningful action in relation to a listening audience, anger becomes internalized,
turning to shame. In a sense, PiS’s style of populism offered what the children offered the angered lump of coal on strike. They seemed to see the shame of rejection, particularly for those whose sense of their life falls short of European promises, and told miners and their coal they are beautiful, wanted and needed. These are deeply existential felt needs. In their promise of a revived industrial populism, placing coal and its miners at the beating heart of its vision of a beautiful Poland, many miners felt the warm glow of recognition, appreciation and acceptance once more, where they had felt it distinctly lacking. This warm glow purified the shame away. Dirty coal was valuable coal. Their labour was worthy, moral and modern. A felt-sense of being-at-home-in-the-world – societal integration, respect and connection, and emotional ease and congruence – was secured.

Yet soon, PiS, in the context of covid-19, too would betray miners in shame-inducing ways. What does this bode for the future?
In September 2020, the unthinkable happened in a world getting used to such events. The Polish government announced an end date for the complete phase out of Polish coal, including closure of all mines; by 2049. Only a few months earlier, in June and July 2020, PiS-backed incumbent, Andrzej Duda, narrowly beat Rafał Trzaskowski, the liberal, pro-European opposition candidate, vice-chairman of Civic Platform and Mayor of Warsaw, in two rounds of a Presidential election controversially carried out in the midst of the global pandemic. During the campaign, although there had been a notable silence about coal in his election programme (Skwirowski, 2020), Duda visited Upper Silesia, the Polish ‘swing state’, and, as an act of paying tribute to the hard labour of its miners, had stood outside a mine symbolically handing out bread-rolls to workers turning up for their shift. In a meeting later that day, Duda addressed miners and journalists to welcoming chants of ‘God, Honour and Fatherland’ and ‘Man and woman, a normal family’, stating that he was happy that he was ‘with the miners, and they with him’ (wnp.pl, 2020c). He had been the clear winner

1 This is of course a date that is considered far too late by climate activists and EU policymakers. It is also a date that is considered wishful thinking by many economic forecasts – Polish coal will likely become completely uneconomic even within the next decade according to analysis by Instrat Foundation (Czyżak and Wrona, 2021).

2 This attracted both national and international concern over its democratic transparency and fairness (Human Rights Watch, 2020; ODIHR, 2020). Particular concerns were expressed over a hastily-approved and unprecedented postal-only voting system that had been proposed if the election had been held in May as originally scheduled, which contravened Constitutional rules on electoral fair planning. Another bill to amend the Constitution in order to extend the President’s term by an additional two years and so cancel the election also raised red flags (Human Rights Watch, 2020b). Postponed until the summer, nevertheless, ongoing criticism of the election’s democratic credentials was directed at the process of registration for voting for Poles living abroad (usually anti-PiS), which was reportedly opaque and rushed (Wilczek, 2020e), while state media was lambasted for heavily skewed coverage of the election, overwhelmingly favourable to ‘their’ candidate Duda. The election was also found to be mired in xenophobic, homophobic, and antisemitic rhetoric (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

3 The election had been marked by a concerted attack on Trzaskowski’s pro-LGBTQI+ agenda, framed by Duda, PiS and the Catholic Church as a neo-Marxist threat to Polish identity, or an ideological ‘enemy of the state’ (Chadwick, 2019; Noack, 2019). The election was presented, by the Chairman of PiS’s executive committee, Krzysztof Sobolewski, as therefore a ‘choice between the white-and-red Poland represented by the current president and a rainbow Poland [of Trzaskowski]’ (Tilles, 2020). Since 2019, 100 Polish municipalities have declared themselves ‘LGBT-free zones’, while there has been a notable increase in anti-LGBTQI+ violent hate crimes (Reszko, 2020), prompting emigration (Pronczuk, 2021) and protest (Roache and Haynes, 2020). Michał Bilewicz, a researcher at the University of Warsaw who tracks the prevalence of
In October 2019, a month after Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki had personally overseen the opening of a new coking-coal mine in company-town Jastrzębie-Zdrój – the first new mine since 1944 (Czoik, 2019) – PiS had also cleanly won a second term in office in Parliamentary elections, gaining notable support again in Silesia (RMF24.pl, 2019). Continuing their assertive pro-coal stance, PiS had become notorious for consistently blocking EU climate negotiations. In 2017 and 2018 they won concessions for coal subsidies in negotiation over the EU’s Emissions Trading System and clean energy package (Simon, 2017, 2018a). In 2019, they refused to back the 2050 EU climate neutrality target (BBC News, 2019), wrangling an opt-out clause on this commitment as a result in the European Green Deal negotiations (Rankin, 2019). They also destabilized EU 2020 budget proposals, threatening to veto its covid recovery fund that further placed Green Deal objectives at its core, stoking Eurosceptic appetite for Polexit (BBC News, 2020). But now the game appeared to be up. The covid-19 pandemic had wreaked havoc with, amongst other things, the global fossil fuel industry, not least the coal industry in Poland (Rathi, 2020; Shotter and Majos, 2020; Vetter, 2021). PiS, for all its promises and heroic rhetoric, was not able to stave off its effects.

In reality, of course, the dawning realization that coal’s days were numbered had been creeping up on them for some time (Elkind and Bednarz, 2020). While ideologically and rhetorically committed to coal, pragmatically it was checkmate (Worland, 2020). The litany of prejudices against minorities in public discourse, argues that LGBTQI+ minorities have now replaced migrants as the ‘nefarious’ foreign other within PiS populist discourse – particularly since after the ‘refugee crisis’ hardly any migrants actually arrived in Poland (Noack, 2019). Another enemy must be sought – from within.

4 The majority of inhabitants in Silesia voted for Trzaskowski (51%), with 49% voting for Duda (netTG.pl, 2020c). Notably, however, in core mining areas, support for Duda was far higher than for Trzaskowski (between 60 to nearly 75% of votes in the core mining municipalities) (Twaróg, 2020). Whereas in other parts of Silesia, particularly the cities, voted overwhelmingly for Trzaskowski (netTG.pl, 2020c).

5 During these elections, for the first time ever, the main opposition party, Civic Coalition (a coalition of Civic Platform, Modern party, Polish Initiative, the Greens as well as the Silesian Autonomy Movement formed in 2018 to attempt to block PiS), included plans to phase out coal in their election programme, while energy transition was a topic in all programmes (Anczewska et al., 2020: 40).

6 Not an approach unique to PiS it must be again stated. Previous governments had also strongly resisted EU climate policies (see e.g. Nelson, 2013; Neslen, 2014) and Poland gained a general reputation in the EU for always bargaining for more (Elkind and Bednarz, 2020). This serves to remind researchers to situate far-right populism and its anti-environmentalist stance not as an aberration but as a continuation and intensification of certain pre-existing and enabling undercurrents and themes, such as mainstream denialism.

7 After prolonged EU inaction in response to events unfolding in its illiberal democratic corners, tensions between Warsaw and Brussels over PiS’s changes to the Constitution and Tribunal once again reared its head, as the EU sought to attach conditionality to EU funds tied to respect for rule-of-law. Both Hungary and Poland fiercely resisted this move initially, characteristically arguing it was a colonial-style violation of national sovereignty, and threatened to veto passing of the 750 billion Euro 2020 budget for the entire bloc, including the covid recovery fund targeted also at achieving European Green Deal objectives, before a compromise was later found (BBC News, 2020; The New York Times, 2020). At time of writing, the countries are challenging the EU in court over the legality of this mechanism (Bayer, 2021).
problems now included: Long-standing declining productivity and rising production costs; an ageing energy infrastructure network seriously in need of upgrading to prevent power shortages; international finance increasingly unwilling to back coal due to tightening EU climate and energy regulations; carbon emissions permit prices on the accelerated rise; renewable costs in rapid decline; and, a tectonic shift in public attitudes domestically towards the environmental impacts of coal, particularly regarding smog since 2017 and climate change too. PiS’s purported love for Polish coal found itself caught between a rock and a hard place. Poland’s own state-backed energy firms, seeing the warning signs, had, since 2019, been steadily abandoning coal and rushing to green themselves well before their own government’s plans caught on, and this was also forcing PiS’s hand (Sutowski, 2021). Covid-19 only sped up and intensified the severity of the situation.

Energy demand from coal, already in a downward trend, decreased by a further 12% due to a warmer winter, the economic crisis, and the intensifying reality of cheaper coal and alternative energy imports from abroad as Polish coal prices rocketed to historically unprecedented levels (Shotter and Majos, 2020). By July 2020, stockpiles of unsold Polish coal were at their highest in years (Đorđević, 2020). Twelve mines had to be closed for three weeks to halt the spread of the covid-19 infection, resulting in record low outputs and sales (Reuters, 2020b). As a result, coal’s share in electricity production, the rapidly rising price of which was hitting businesses and consumers hard in the pocket, reached a historic low: less than 70% (Derski, 2020). Polish Mining Group’s (Polska Grupa Górnicza - PGG’s) losses in November 2020 amounted to 2 billion PLN, with a predicted increase in 2021, threatening the company once again with bankruptcy (Januszewska, 2021). Already in March 2020, PGE, the largest energy company in Poland, announced that its net result for 2019 would be lower by 6 billion PLN than a year earlier, and in

8 These cleared 40 Euros per tonne in February 2021 for the first time, an increase of 20% this year alone, with forecasts predicting only an ever-upward future price curve as EU countries vie for pollution permits in a stricter regulatory environment (Mathis, 2021).
9 While we saw 2017 as a breakthrough moment for smog, climate awareness has also leapt up since then. In a 2019, EU Eurobarometer survey 70% of Polish respondents considered climate change to be a ‘very serious’ problem (compared with the EU average of 79%), an increase of 12% points since 2017 (Elkind and Bednarz, 2020). Polish grassroots activism around climate change, while beginning earlier, has also grown in momentum since 2018, when Extinction Rebellion and the Youth Climate Strike (Fridays for Future) took off, and, in 2019, when the country’s first climate camp (Obóz dla Klimatu) was held (Brzoszkowski, 2019), staging the first mass civil disobedience action against lignite coal (Rushton, 2019). In 2019 the Silesian Climate Movement was also founded after COP24. Protests against the opening of new deep-pit mines has also increased, for example in the Silesian town of Imielin. At the same time, the impacts of climate change in Poland itself have been increasingly tangible – desertification, droughts, sand and hail storms, heavy rains and the warmest temperatures on record, have demonstrated that something is afoot in the natural world order. As a result of these trends and the wider context, a growing consensus in the Polish public can be noted regarding the need to address climate change and also to transition away from coal, though filtered by ideological perspectives – with notably liberal, secular urban residents (Żuk et al., 2021).
10 Between April – November 2020, Poland had the highest wholesale electricity prices in the EU – at almost 50% higher than the average (Kasprzak, 2020).
2021 stated that if it does not separate its coal assets it will also face bankruptcy (Sutowski, 2021).
In February 2021, Tauron, the country’s second largest energy company, said it had to write off 3 billion PLN – its coal assets were less than worthless (Sutowski, 2021). The economic squeeze on coal could not be ignored any longer. Markets had seemingly won over myths. Coal’s fate as a dirty fuel destined to history was apparently sealed.

At the same time, the pandemic accelerated recognition that, despite reporting the smallest effects of the public health crisis on GDP in the EU (Elkind and Bednarz, 2020), if Poland wanted access to EU funds to help it bounce back from recession, it needed to play ball on its climate and energy policy priorities that were only getting more concerted. The IPCC’s stark 2018 report that warned that the world had 12 years to limit temperature rises to 1.5°C or face climate calamity had sparked a wave of unprecedented mass climate protests across Europe and globally, spearheaded by Extinction Rebellion and Greta Thunberg’s Fridays for Future Youth Climate Strikes (also taking place in Poland). The mounting pressure to act on climate led, in the 2019 European elections, to more Greens entering parliament than ever, and, following trends in the US, the birth of the 100 billion EUR EU Green Deal, announced in December 2019 as Europe’s ‘man on the moon moment’ (Elkind and Bednarz, 2020). Despite being rightly critiqued for not going far enough (OpenDemocracy, 2020-2021), it called for implementation of 50 different initiatives spanning the full range of economic sectors, aimed to make Europe the first climate neutral continent by 2050, a target to be enshrined in a binding law, and put forward a 7.5 billion EUR ‘Just Transition Fund’ (since increased to 17.5 billion EUR (Euractiv, 2021) in reaction to criticism that this would be a mere ‘drop in the ocean’ in financing required (Morgan, 2020), though commentators point out that this is still too little), aimed at easing the post-fossil fuel energy transition by supporting

11 The concept of ‘Just Transition’ is currently a ‘hotly debated’ concept, with origins in the 1970s American labour union movement (Stevis and Felli, 2015). Though the notion of what indeed is ‘just’ and for whom is a contested terrain, as it must be to stay relevant (Newell and Mulvaney, 2013: 7), the idea most broadly aims to highlight the inherently uneven social costs of decarbonization, drawing attention to the need to ameliorate them (Healy and Barry, 2017; Hirsch et al., 2017; Newell and Mulvaney, 2013). The ‘Just Transition Fund’, previously known as the ‘Energy Transition Fund’, was a proposal put forward by Polish MEP Jerzy Buzek, a Civic Platform politician, in November 2019 in recognition of the fact that coal-dependent countries like Poland face a far greater challenge in terms of energy transition than Western countries (Morgan, 2019). He said it had been ‘difficult to persuade’ those on the Committee he led about the proposal but eventually it came to pass (Oksińska, 2021). The initial amount put forward was 4.8 billion EUR, again this was criticized for being too little (Morgan, 2019). It also focused narrowly on retraining for coal workers rather than broader goals and is open for application to industry. See later discussion on this.

12 In total, the fund is expected to leverage around 30 billion EUR in investments (European Commission, 2021). For comparison, the German Coal Commission has earmarked 40 billion EUR for its own transition alone, which Eastern European countries say for them is unimaginable (Stam, 2020). Yet EU member states refused to approve requests for a proposed 40 billion EUR fund dedicated to Just Transition that had initially promised to leverage a total of at least 150 billion EUR in investments between 2021-27, including private capital (Simon, 2020). The bloc also voted against allowing financing for any fossil fuels, including gas as a ‘transition’ fuel – a proposal that the Polish side in particular had pushed (Schulz, 2020).
communities – and companies – hit hardest by it, such as carbon industry workers. In launching the JTF, EU climate captain Frans Timmermans said that it was a ‘message to coal miners, peat farmers and oil shale workers’, a ‘pledge of solidarity and fairness’ (Morgan, 2020). Poland, with the biggest coal region remaining in the bloc, at time of writing is in line to receive more than a quarter of these funds.

In May 2020, as the unprecedented impacts of covid hit, conceding to calls from civil society, business and government leaders to make the most of the opportunity, the 750 billion EUR Next Generation EU covid recovery stimulus plan, key to member states’ ability to revive their economies and societies, together with its multi-annual 1.1 trillion EUR 2021-2027 budget that PiS had wrangled so heavily over, would further place Green Deal objectives at their core in similar fashion (Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership (CISL), 2020; Čavoški, 2020). A third of these total funds, the highest ever share of the EU budget, would be earmarked for fighting climate change, aligning member states with the bloc’s 2050 climate neutrality target, whether they liked it or not (European Commission, 2020a). In this context, Polish politicians, such as Michał Woś, Poland’s then Minister of the Environment, and Janusz Kowalski, then Deputy Minister of State Assets, originally decried the Green Deal, as ‘simply impossible’, and ‘a gigantic regulatory and ideological European idea for pursuing a climate policy that will become a burden on the economy’ that apparently failed to concentrate on the real matter at hand – individuals and businesses impacted by covid (Kowalski, 2020). Reflecting such a perspective, it is notable that the ‘Green Deal’ has been translated into the Polish language by all commentators as the ‘Green Order’ (Zielony Ład), implying none of the values of mutual benefit nor solidarity implicit in the word ‘deal’ and thus revealing its politicized capture on arrival for the postcolonial postsocialist Eurosceptic camp. By late July 2020, however, Polish leaders had signed (Perzyński, 2020). Yet there was a catch. Still refusing to back the 2050 climate neutrality target, the cost of this would be that Poland (with predominant implications for Silesia) would only receive half of its allocated Just Transition Funds – 1 billion Euro instead of 2 (Tabaka, 2020b). They have until 2022 to change their minds. Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki hailed the result a victory: ‘We won,’ he said. But it was also a major concession to the EU: Poland accepted that it would lose out on billions of euros unless it quickly changed course’, writes Worland (2020) for *Time*. This would of course not fail to be recognized by those with a critical eye on Europe.

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13 Some coal regions beyond Silesia are not even on the EU Commission’s list for consideration because they have not committed to a timeline for phase out which disqualifies them.
Reflecting this new reality, it was precisely in September 2020 that the Ministry of Climate\textsuperscript{14}, published an update to the state’s ‘Polish Energy Policy 2040’ (PEP2040). Initially drafted in November 2018, it would be the first long-term road-map for the country’s energy sector for quite some time\textsuperscript{15}, and it revealed the tenor of the government’s new attitude: Coal’s share of electricity generation would fall to between 56\textendash{}37\% in 2030 (from over 75\%) and to between 26\textendash{}11\% by 2040, with the second scenario now more likely. By 2030, household coal-use for heating would be phased out in cities, and by 2040 in rural areas too (Ministerstwo Klimatu i Środowiska, 2021). In practice, this meant that in the next 15 years, by 2035, only 15 million tonnes of Polish coal would be required – the output of only two mines.\textsuperscript{16} Instead, through a plan that had typically, in PiS’s centralized and authoritarian style, been drafted without transparency or participation by independent experts or trade unions alike (Wiejski, 2021), the Party aimed to oversee the building of the nation’s first nuclear power plant by 2033\textsuperscript{17}, increase gas usage, develop offshore wind and boost the country’s flourishing prosumer-driven solar PV economy\textsuperscript{18}. That same month the historic decision to end coal by 2049 would be announced.

In an ironic twist of fate, the party that had so staunchly defended coal, might actually be the one to do the most to liquidate it and usher in a post-coal future (Sutowski, 2021). Purifying coal had met its limits – limits it wasted no time in blaming the EU’s climate policies for, policies that had left them with ‘no other choice’ but to now seek alternative energy sources (Wilczek, 2021). It was the EU – its colonial ‘Green Order’ (Zielony Ład) – that had turned coal to literal dirt, or mud.

\textsuperscript{14} The Ministry of Climate was established in 2019, under, not a party ideologue, but a technocrat, Michał Kurtyka, the former president of the United Nation’s COP24 climate talks, itself a sign of the shifting attitude.

\textsuperscript{15} As mentioned in a footnote in the introductory chapters, long-term strategic energy planning in Poland is plagued with a history of inaction, lack of transparency and incoherence. According to a report by the Institute of Structural Research, the discussion on the phasing out of hard coal mining took place largely separately to the drafting of PEP2040 (Sokołowski et al., 2021). In December 2019, the National Energy and Climate Plan for 2021-2030 was adopted in response to EU requirements. It differs in important details from PEP2040 though are both unambitious in envisioning a shift towards a renewable economy (Stasik et al., 2020). The former was not consulted with citizens, local and regional authorities or businesses, despite EU obligations to do so (Stasik et al., 2020).

\textsuperscript{16} This contrasts significantly with the stated proposals published only two and a half years earlier, in January 2018, when the ‘Programme for hard coal mining’ was adopted by the Ministry of Energy. This document specified that in 2030 the Polish economy would still need between 56.5 to 86 million tonnes of hard coal (Szkoczkowski et al., 2020: 7).

\textsuperscript{17} A project that had been in the proposed pipeline since 2009, but had long stalled, but is supported by the majority of Poles and political parties of all stripes from Left to Right (though with a stark gender difference – more men than women are in favour (BiznesAlert, 2020)). It would now supposedly be ready by 2033. Though a location for it is yet to be finalised, the Baltic Coast is a prime contender. Critics fear that the focus on nuclear may act as a ‘smokescreen’ to simply maintain the (centralized) status quo and delay significant and ambitious restructuring of the Polish energy landscape in more radically required ways (Stasik et al., 2020).

\textsuperscript{18} During 2020, Poland became an unsuspecting rising star in solar PV – ranking 5\textsuperscript{th} in the EU in terms of fastest solar power development (SolarPower Europe, 2020), thanks to a government programme called ‘MyEnergy’, combined with rising electricity prices from coal.
The forces of ecological dispossession ‘out there’ had seemingly won. While it is tempting to dismiss such rhetoric offhand as conspiratorial claptrap, in reality it was European membership, combined with Covid, that was largely forcing such trends. Reflecting a growing national consensus that coal’s time was over, though, according to very recent representative survey data, notably concentrated within more highly educated, liberal, secular, urban centres, among those who more favourably assess their material standard of living (Zuk et al., 2021), public conversation underwent a rapid and momentous shift – now it was finally a matter of how and how quickly coal would need to go not if… This would be couched in the Green Order’s newer language of ‘Just Transition’ that PiS would then adopt as part of its own ‘Polish Order’ policy programme. Progress was being made. Coal would be no more. Wouldn’t it?

While Polish and international environmentalists remained underwhelmed by the scale, pace and type of change proposed (Wiejski, 2021), one that was already out-of-date with the EU’s latest upgraded emissions reductions targets of 55% by 2040 (rather than the 40% previously agreed in 2014), thereby further risking access to available EU funds earmarked for transition, what of Silesia and its miners? And had far-right populists, including PiS, totally given up on Polish coal?

‘Poland stands on coal!’ - until it doesn’t:

It should come as no surprise to learn that the mining community were incensed by the news contained in PEP2040. If the reader recalls from the opening to the thesis introduction, it was only two years prior that at COP24 Duda had proudly reassured miners ‘As long as I’m President, I will not let anyone murder Polish mining’ (Wiech, 2020). At the same time, then Deputy Energy Minister, Grzegorz Tobiszowski, had told reporters defiantly that, contrary to EU pressures, Polish coal would not be ending in 2050 (Reuters, 2018). Miners had helped elect PiS on this promise in 2015, and many had once again put their faith in Duda and PiS in the October 2019 elections and those only moment before in the summer of 2020. It was thanks to them in large part that they were in power at all – for as the saying goes, ‘you win Silesia, you win the country’. It was not just PiS, however who had led them up the garden path. Government after government, unwilling to tackle the issue head on, and keen to garner Silesian votes, had promised a continued future for coal to ensure energy security (Kuchler and Bridge, 2018), while critiquing (yet ultimately endorsing) the EU’s environmental policies and failing to invest in serious alternatives. There was no post-coal discussion or long-term vision for either Polish energy or Silesia beyond it to be found. As we saw in the thesis introduction, media of all stripes had similarly propagated the same ‘coal continuity narrative’ for years while under-reporting on climate and renewables (Osička et al., 2020: 22), and...
blaming and criticizing miners for coal’s continued presence, a narrative environmental NGOs tended to adopt too. Both researchers (themselves often based in coal-backed or connected institutions) and industry had, since postsocialist transition, promised restructuring and rational financing could modernize coal for the 21st century, gearing their analysis around managing risks to the coal industry, of which pesky trade unions and its miners were again a big one (see e.g. Jonek Kowalska, 2015). Under PiS, such promises and narratives had simply intensified, taking on an ideological, messianic, Eurosceptic populist flavour – one that offered defense of coal and miners’ integrity and value. A last chance for purification. Hopes had been raised. Promises re-stated until the final hour. Still living in the ongoing aftershocks of the last energy ‘transition’ ushered in with postsocialism, despite widespread pessimism and fear regarding the future of mining that I had experienced already in 2017, the news was therefore experienced as an abrupt shock and a bitter betrayal.

In the disorientation, Chairman of the All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions (OPZZ) Council of the Silesian Voivodeship, Wacław Czerkawski, told reporters that unionists were united in believing that the capitulation to the EU apparent within the PEP2040 document had been just another facade, a case of ‘fake news’ (Baca-Pogorzelska, 2020c), belying an ability to still believe that PiS must be doing all it could to stick to their side of the bargain behind the scenes. For according to Bogusław Ziętek, chairman of the August 1980 trade union, PEP2040 would be ‘catastrophic’ for Silesia, like setting off an ‘atomic bomb’ and then, worse, ‘acting as if nothing happened’ (Czoik, 2020b). The pace of change proposed, (reported in international media as ‘gradual’), what’s more, with no clear roadmap or transition plan in place, was, for them, irresponsibly frightening. 300,000 new jobs were supposedly going to be created, but the details were vague (Baca-Pogorzelska, 2020a). Mining unions predicted apocalyptically that 2 million people would lose their jobs (Wiejski, 2021) – not only those directly working for coal mines, but also in subsidiary mining service companies, linked heavy industries, and all the small shops and businesses supported by the incomes of mining communities. According to figures laid out in the later government social contract with unions the number of jobs ‘liquidated’ nationally will be 82,000 in the mines and 410,000 jobs in subsidiary firms in 73 municipalities (Kojzar, 2021.)

19 See Izabela Jonek Kowalska (2015) for a review of the extensive literature on industry restructuring; see also Jonek-Kowalska (2019) on consolidation as a risk management strategy to extend the life-cycle of mining.

20 Reliable data on the actual number of jobs to be lost and replaced is not openly communicated by the mining companies, while the estimates of the handful of analyses by think tanks on this topic tends not to reach public audiences, writes a WWF report. A study commissioned by the mining industry with questionable methodology, according to WWF, was used by politicians to state that the cost of replacing 200,000 jobs lost was too prohibitive – 45 billion EUR. A lack of official analysis hampers the ability to have an informed public discussion or produce meaningful plans (Anczewska et al., 2020).
Could this really be the end for Silesian coal, that ever-secure base that had survived so much? It had not yet sunk in.

What made it particularly bitter, however, as I will outline, was not only the job losses it impended, but the context and chaotic way in which the decision was executed; with a strong visceral experience of shame-inducing blame, contempt and disregard for Silesia and its miners – both by EU national and industry leaders, as much as the public and commentators, too. This thesis has outlined in detail the broader historical and localized, embodied emotional ecological context for defensive resistance to anti-coal politics among working-class coal mine workers and its entanglement with a shift to the industrial populist far-right. Nervous systems not at-home-in-the-world but wracked with trauma and primed for existential and social threat, are wired in survival mode – fight or flight – not for agreeableness and openness to change (van der Kolk, 2015). If we recall, shame occurs when there is a threat to the social bond, a risk of disconnection and failure of recognition. And as E. P. Thompson (1978) observed, conflict between classes tends to heighten when elites patronise and offend those lower down the class order, where otherwise agreement might more readily be found. Where such responses are delegitimized and suppressed they find alternative outlets (Mouffe, 2005). Slavoj Žižek (2006: 571) has termed this ‘the return of the repressed’. This must also be understood to be the return of repressed bodies, their emotional, visceral embodied ecological sentiments. A more detailed picture of the events from below in the immediate lead-up to this announcement is helpful to further contextualise the emotional fallout and its visceral depth, providing indication of its implications. The turbulent year in the coal industry that was 2020, a year like no other, unsurprisingly manifested itself not only on the economic balance sheet, but also as simmering social unrest in the Silesian mining community. Yet it began well before covid hit the scene.

Urgent labour concerns had once again been brought to the attention of management at Polska Grupa Górnicza (PGG) already in August 2019 by trade unions, with demands for a 12% pay increase from 2020 (Wojsa, 2019).

21 Such negotiations were not new. See Izabela Jonek Kowalska’s (2015) review of restructuring processes in the Polish coal mining industry from a twenty-year perspective, which includes reference to repeated trade union pressure for pay rises during this period. See also her paper on the role of trade unions in employment and remuneration trends between 2005 – 2012 (Jonek-Kowalska, 2015). This should also be set against the wider context of growing national unrest and trade union strike action regarding pay issues since the mid-2000s (Trappmann, 2012: 9–10), particularly following the financial crisis, when trade union disappointment with the increased flexibilization of the labour market led to shift in stance from social dialogue to greater assertiveness, reflecting ‘growing popular discontent with neoliberal policy prescriptions... ostensibly for the sake of future convergence with western European levels of economic development’ (Bernaciak, 2019: 163). This ‘offensive’ against the neoliberal agenda largely halted with the election of PiS in 2015. It remains to be seen, writes Bernaciak in 2019, whether it will be renewed. Growing labour unrest not only among teachers and nurses but also miners too in the last years imply it already has been. Who will be there to channel it?

415
chapter seven outlined, underground miners in particular were long appalled at their pay for the kind of work they performed, the lowest in the regional sector. The company had reported a 500 million PLN profit the previous year, and its business plans predicted a bigger windfall for 2019, yet miners had not seen this reflected in their pay packets (Wojsa, 2019). There were unverified rumours of corruption and cheating of miners’ pay too. Money was of course material, but it was also a proxy struggle over dignity, respect and societal worth and integration where it was felt lacking. At the same time, unionists, ever on the defensive backfoot rather than treated as serious social partners, tired of being kept in the dark, demanded to know the true economic situation of the company, since lower than planned coal extraction had been noted in some mines. Blamed on ongoing inept management with high salaries, fears for the company’s actual profits underlay talks. A string of inconclusive negotiations followed with threats of strikes and occupations hanging in the air (Raudner, 2019a). The end of the year proved miner’s worst fears. While from January – November 2018, the hard coal mining industry had been in the plus, by the end of the same period in 2019, it was reporting losses of 460 million PLN (Przemysław Jedlecki, 2020). Things would only get gloomier.

In mid-January 2020, tensions over uncertainty and mixed signals from industry and government heightened further. Unionists from the PGG-owned Pokój (Peace) mine noted that investment into new excavation was suddenly halted. They feared this was silent indication that the mine was about to be liquidated, signalling the prospect of wider accelerated and sudden liquidations in the region, again, unverified rumours of which had been circulating for some time (netTG.pl, 2020d). The company refused to comment (Raudner, 2020a). Alarm bells were ringing. Anxiety about the future, long a background atmosphere, were intensifying. In the face of this silence, unionists issued a warning that ‘radical’ action on an ‘unimaginable scale’ would follow if investment was not unblocked and the social contract between the state, coal mines and workers, broken – such closures had not been formally announced nor agreed (netTG.pl, 2020b). It wouldn’t be the first time such decisions would be made behind closed doors and communicated without much warning; in fact, such an approach was typical of the industry (Ślimko, 2019: 6). To cite one example, if the reader recalls, in late 2016, contrary to continuous reassurance it would remain open, the Makoszowy mine (the mine I had initially planned to conduct research at) had suddenly been axed (Januszewska, 2020b). PiS had also promised no mine closures, but had overseen four. Miners were wary and on guard. Working in risky and dirty conditions, in conditions of volatility and uncertainty, combined with an absence of trusting, respectful relations between workers, 22 This also reflects global trends in the non-transparency of the mining industry. In a review of over 1000 mine closures between 1981 and 2009, Laurence (in Strambo et al., 2019: 12) found that c.75% of mine closures were premature or unplanned.
industry and state, combined with lack of faith in unions too, who were often perceived to be interested in their own privileges alone, their visceral sensitivity to threat and its collective emotional charge could only heighten.

On 31st January 2020, a damning report from the Supreme Audit Office (NIK) was published on the actual ineffectiveness of the restructure of PGG carried out under PiS when it first came to power; contrary to PiS’s claims of having solved issues, PGG’s 2016-2018 profits had ridden-high on a global coal boom and creative accounting, not on good management (Raudner, 2020a). The industry was in fact in severe trouble. Having sensed this already, the same day, miners operating under the August 1980 trade union, blockaded train tracks running to a coal power plant in order to stop imports from Russia that they blamed for the dire situation (wnp.pl, 2020a). That month, domestic production of coal had already exceeded sales by 1 million tonnes; in the absence of transparent communication, workers now feared that mines would abruptly cease production and they would simply be left without wages (Goślina, 2020). Similar blockades had occurred in 2014 (wPolityce.pl, 2014). But now, imports had never been higher23. This was despite the fact, as we saw before, that PiS, as part of their election campaign in 2015, had also promised to eliminate such practices. In no uncertain terms, PiS were told that things were ‘worse’ than under Civic Platform’s Donald Tusk – a criticism that must have stung (Raudner, 2020). The action also happened to occur shortly after Greta Thunberg visited Silesia for a cosy meeting with senior mining trade unionists as part of her BBC climate documentary in which she was reassured miners knew coal’s days were numbered, prompting accusations of union betrayal just as miners were fighting for survival (Koschalka, 2020). In early February, another blockade was organised, and Jacek Sasin, deputy Prime Minister and Minister for State Assets, responded by announcing that state companies would stop importing coal, ‘I can guarantee it’, he promised on national radio, adding that if it were not for the fact that Poland was a member of the EU he could enforce an embargo (Czoik, 2020c). PiS were washing their hands of blame.

Yet coal imports were not the only issue plaguing miners working for PGG. They were still demanding a 12% rise, in order to retain and attract dwindling worker numbers, and an overdue further restructure of the company to improve its profitability and deal with growing Polish coal imports.

23 Whereas Poland had once been a coal exporter under Communism and in the 1990s, in 2008 imports began to exceed exports (Zuk et al., 2021: 3). In 2014, under a Civic Platform government, coal imports amounted to 10.4 million tonnes. By 2018, three years into PiS’s rule and despite promises to implement a ban, imports to Poland hit a record high – 19.3 million tonnes. In 2020, imports took a sharp knock due to the pandemic, but the share of Russian imports reached its highest level in years – over 80% (BiznesAlert.pl, 2021). At the same time, electricity imports reached peak levels, breaking even the 2019 record (Prończuk, 2020). Trends since then it has not shaken. Meanwhile, stockpiles of hard coal have only increased over the years, rising from 5.2 million in December 2019 (Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, 2020) to 23.5 million tonnes in 2020 (Wilczek, 2020a).
stockpiles that energy contractors were now refusing to collect (Witwicka, 2020). They could see that otherwise the industry faced collapse, and did not wish to bear the cost or the blame, though it was usually directed their way. As if symbolically on cue, it was during this time that PiS’s flagship coal project, the building of a replacement coal-fired block at the retiring Ostrołęka plant in eastern Poland, crumbled into dust. Having already cost 1.5 billion PLN, financing was suspended by the leading companies, citing difficulties in raising further investment capital under EU climate policy (Turp-Balazs, 2020). The dream of Poland standing on coal for the limitless future promised by PiS was fading fast. Yet miners, as described in chapter seven, remained convinced that the true ‘pathology’ of the coal sector in Poland lay in inept political leadership, inefficiencies caused by poor organisation, and fat-cat industry management, worsened by EU pressure too, not the intrinsic worthlessness of coal or their labour.24 All this was what decades of restructuring of the coal mine industry had promised, yet failed, to resolve (Jonek Kowalska, 2015). These were ‘political’ decisions they therefore concluded – in a sense they were not wrong. They were simply presented as technical and economic matters outside of political purview or accountability. Meanwhile liberal blame for coal’s ‘pathology’ tended to be pointed quite literally downwards at miners below ground themselves, particularly their unions25 – purifying populist blame, in response, pointed upwards, at the EU and national elites. Unionists announced a two-hour warning strike and threatened to march on Warsaw if their demands were not met (Raudner, 2019a).

Given the coal industry’s fragile condition, Jacek Sasin, stepping in once again to the fray, initially protested, as PGG had been doing all along, that there was no money for pay increases. ‘Unless we want to liquidate mines we all need to understand the situation and certainly not ask for unrealistic things’, he chided patronisingly, adding helplessly once again, ‘We know what the European Union’s climate policy is and that coal is its main victim’ (Martewicz, 2020). Nevertheless, perhaps with an eye to the upcoming elections, towards the end of February 2020, he would strike a deal with the unions, pledging a 6% pay hike back-dated from 1st January. Calculated as an additional 270 million PLN annual expense for the ailing PGG company, it added grist to the

24 Such an analytical framework had long been core to trade union perspectives (Jonek-Kowalska, 2015: 38–39). The case of the dismissal of Sebastian Darul in early January 2020 by PGG threw additional fuel on that fire. Darul, a former miner and Chairman of the ‘Better Tomorrow for Mining Association’, an association of rank and file coal workers set up in September 2019 by disaffected miners frustrated with the inefficiency of trade unions, was sacked after posting information on social media channels and publishing a statement in December 2019 about scams and corruption within the company, including supposedly independently-verified evidence that the company had been cheating miners with their wages and coal allowances – he was simply ‘telling the truth’, he claimed, and vowed to write all he knew into a book, despite saying he feared the implications (Raudner, 2019b, 2020b).

25 The previous government, Civic Platform, was also known for adopting a similar line (Gardawski et al., 2012: 36). PiS had come into power with an initial shift in tone, ostensibly warmer to union dialogue (Bernaciak, 2019). Yet this had once again changed.
mill of popular opinions that miners were a selfish, elite, privileged class wasting public funds with their unreasonable, irrational demands no other profession were entitled to (Frączyk, 2020; Tabaka, 2020a; Wiech, 2020). Meanwhile, political and industry leaders are not held to account. PGG itself, who had rejected the NIK January 2018 report mentioned earlier as inaccurate, though was under no legal obligation to reveal its true financial statements, continued to remain silent throughout these discussions. However, they reported that in the 2017-2019 period, employees were paid approximately PLN 1.1 billion more than was planned in the remuneration fund for this period, eroding its profits (Przemysław Jedlecki, 2020). The company was keen to blame ‘miners’ too. Sasin promised to systematically reform the hard coal sector and accelerate coal exports to unblock production (Raudner, 2020a). Talks at this point were thus of ‘improving’ the functioning of PGG, something that mining unions and miners, as well as policymakers, politicians and the public, had been desiring for a long time – not its complete liquidation. In return, further threatened strikes and the Warsaw protest were suspended. PiS had ‘bought peace in Silesia’ just before their upcoming elections. At least for the time being. Sasin promised that talks on pay would resume once again in September, when profits, it was hoped, would improve (Jedlecki, 2020), and that by April that year the government would meet once again with unions to discuss such an action plan for the future of the Polish mining industry (Tabaka, 2020b).

Despite the unease in the industry, contradictory pro-coal signals also gave the impression coal might stay central to the Polish energy mix. In March 2020, just as the covid pandemic began its sweep across the globe, in a trade-union backed win against ‘eco-terrorists’, Polish Minister of Climate, Michał Kurtyka, signed a re-licence for the open pit lignite mine in Turów, Lower Silesia, operated by PGE, extending its operations until 2044. This has since become a point of major conflict with both the neighbouring Czech government and the EU who have issued a Court order to close it with immediate effect. A month later, PiS oversaw the opening of a new coal-fired unit at its power plant. In July, 2020, the PiS Ministry of Environment also extended further licenses to operate for all mines to PGG that were due to expire that year, some until 2044 too (Drabik, 2020). Speaking to press at this time, then Minister of Environment, Michał Woś, said ‘Regardless of all

26 This bitterness must be contextualized in relation to strikes led by teachers and nurses during PiS’s rule in which calls for pay increases were met with blanket refusal. Resentment that miners are treated as a ‘special’ case breeds inter-societal divisions and fractures that maintains power hierarchies.

27 Prompting rare dispute and legal action by the neighbouring Czech government who oppose this extension over fear of its effects on local already-overstretched water supplies (Janicek, 2019) In May 2021, the European court ordered the closure of the mine but the Polish government declared it would simply ignore it, despite facing fines. Zbigniew Ziorro, Minister of Justice, and leader of United Poland, called the move by the EU ‘colonial’ (Tilles, 2021). Yet Poland risks losing Just Transition Funding for this region if the mine continues to operate. At time of writing, Poland is seeking out of court settlement with Czechia with the aim of continuing extraction – the mine supplies coal to a nearby power plant that supplies 5% of Polish energy, posing risks, say PiS, for electricity supply.
external circumstances’ (referring primarily to EU climate and energy policy), ‘considering the scale of the necessary investments that are still ahead of us, hard coal mining and energy based on hard coal will for a long time remain the absolute foundation of the country's energy security, raw materials and energy policy’ (Drabik, 2020). Coronavirus, however, would soon turn such statements to ash.

In April 2020, to cope with the upheaval that covid wrought on coal described earlier, PGG proposed cutting wages by 20% for 3 months, unionists had instead insisted on a reduced working week. They could not agree. Sasin was again called in. The evasive company was pressured by unions to deliver a recovery plan by June (Raudner, 2020a). Notions of any further pay increases were never returned to. Instead, the increasingly catastrophic economic situation in mining led to PGG declaring force majeure and suspending some contracts and payments (Sawicki, 2020). This was a different reality now – coal was in a spiraling crisis. So, too, were Silesians. Amidst a swift government response to covid that initially boosted PiS’s national approval ratings (Wilczek, 2020b), mining management, experts and government ministers alike, at first, wanting to keep the industry going, nevertheless reassured miners that working in the pit did not make them any more vulnerable to covid than other workers. Contrary to voices warning of the dangers of mine work in which miners labour in close proximity often in cramped conditions, mines remained open, coal was still to be dug (Januszewska, 2020a). A mass screening programme in the industry and the high density of the Upper Silesian conurbation soon revealed, however, that cases of Covid in Silesia were the highest in the whole country. The local health services admitted to being overwhelmed and ill-prepared, resulting in chaos over testing, with miners waiting too long for results (Wilczek, 2020b). In mid-2020, more than a third of all Covid-19 cases identified in Poland were in Silesia (Platform for coal regions in transition, 2020) with 1 in 10 cases coal miners (Tidey, 2020).

It was at this point that long-dirty Silesia gained a national reputation for being the ‘Wuhan’ of Poland, and a major epidemic of online ‘hate’ towards the region, and particularly its ‘dirty’ coal workers, erupted (netTG.pl, 2020a).28 It intersected with Silesia’s reputation as the most air-polluted region in the country – ‘Silesia ruins things again!’, wrote one social media user. Yet this must be understood as making explicit what had often long been implicit. Historic resentment and contempt for Silesia, the internal impure, Germanic foreign element, the black masses, the Communist-era favourites, boiled over. Working-class, coal-tied Silesians now became internal scapegoats,

28 Examples tweets included: ‘The virus was not brought to Silesia by the government... the Silesians did it to themselves, the lack of cleanliness, hygiene and failure to comply with applicable regulations, and now the government has to help and finance the dirty people - that's the truth!’ (Januszewska, 2020a) ‘Nature has figured out for us how to get rid of mining’; ‘Silesia is abnormality’; ‘Silesia – not only dirty people, we still have to keep them in these mines’ (netTG.pl, 2020a).
reflecting similar covid-related racialized stigmas attached to pre-existing dirt-infused hierarchical social imaginaries elsewhere (Human Rights Watch, 2020a). Then Health Minister, Łukasz Szumowski, suggested that were it not for Silesia, Poland would be covid-free; another ministry representative, Waldemar Kraska, blamed the peculiar ‘sociability’ of Sileans for the spread of the virus (Januszewska, 2020a). The most common proposal from social media commentators as a result was to cordon off the region as a no-go zone, erecting a sanitary border between it and Poland for two months (netTG.pl, 2020a). That might stop ‘diseased’ miners from ‘invading’ Warsaw (Januszewska, 2020a). The internal Other – its dirty coal workers particularly – would finally be contained and pacified through ostracization. One trade union activist said: ‘Miners have been recently the most hated professional group in the country… Miners and their families are discriminated against. Employers ask miners’ wives to bring certificates from the mines confirming that their husbands are healthy’ (in Żuk et al., 2021: 4). There were reports of miner’s children being treated as ‘plague carriers’, and miners being publicly referred to as ‘black people’ in racialized derogatory terms (Januszewska, 2020a). Notoriously, in a meeting of the Parliamentary health committee, a PiS MP deliberately put on her facemask as an MP from Silesia began to speak of their struggle to contain the virus, saying ‘I’ll put on a mask because its from Silesia’, leading to accusations of elite discrimination (Jedlecki, 2020). A celebrity-backed campaign, launched by the southern Silesian mining company Jastrzębska Spółka Węglowa (JSW) called ‘Don’t slander the miner’, attempted to eradicate the stigma and contempt (Raudner, 2020a). Local grassroots campaigns also sprung up to defend Silesian’s dignity, with slogans such as ‘Silesians are people not a plague!’ and ‘Silesia ruins everything? No, we work hard!’ (Nowiny.pl, 2020). The Prime Minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, tried to calm the situation by declaring that aid to Silesia would ‘flow as widely as possible’, itself a source of deepening contention as covid had plunged other social groups into intensifying precarity without similar access to resources, negating public support of miners still further (Wojtal in Taylor, 2021). He also renounced plans to close the voivodeship borders, a move applauded by Andrzej Duda (Januszewska, 2020a). But it was too late. Shame heaped on shame is not easily extinguished. Anti-miner, and anti-coal, sentiment had intensified. The economic context would only exacerbate this.

In June 2020, the PiS government reacted to record outbreaks of the virus and the worsening economic situation of the industry, by closing 12 mines for three weeks (10 in PGG and 2 in JSW), affecting around 30,000 workers (Żuk et al., 2021: 4). The rising death toll in Silesia combined with the national vitriol aimed at them, prompted fury from miners about the fact that the government in cahoots with ‘experts’ had earlier so casually convinced them their lives were not at risk and that they were protecting them. They once again appeared to be victims of a political game. A statement
from the union August 1980 addressed to the Prime Minister, read: ‘You bear the blame and responsibility for the toll that the coronavirus is taking from the miners and their families… Because you preferred to deal with elections instead of mining and protecting people. Because you said that the miners would be safe, supported by the idiotic expert opinions you ordered’ (Januszewska, 2020a). Further suspicion was aroused by the fact that mines were being closed that were not the places where covid cases were at their highest, but rather where less profitable coal is produced (Wilczek, 2020f). Unionists feared this would lead to bankruptcy, and that the government were using covid as a covert pretext to shut mines overnight for good. After all, the Health Minister, had unfortunately referred to the increasing testing and quarantining of infected miners as their ‘erasure’ (Goślina, 2020). That month, a coalition of NGOs and environmentalists had also written an open letter to the Prime Minister calling for the faster phase out of coal due to covid (Pawlik, 2020). Genuine fears of annihilation however were repeatedly denied – including by the Health Minister himself (netTG.pl, 2020b). The mining unions remained pointedly optimistic: ‘We hope the government will go on to restore the mining sector,’ Dominik Kolorz, head of the Solidarity trade union for the Silesian coal basin told reporters (Newman, 2020).

As the mines started to indeed reopen and come back to life in early July 2020 amidst hopes that the covid pandemic had been overcome, the Presidential election took place. Rallies and campaigning, stepped up since May when covid restrictions began easing, treated the epidemic as vanquished. ‘You do not need to be afraid of it now. You should go to vote in large numbers’, Prime Minister Morawiecki encouraged a rally of supporters in the south-east (Rzeczpospolita.pl, 2020). As earlier mentioned, no doubt channelling much of this hope, miners voted in favour of Duda. Perhaps the fact that PiS had agreed to pay miners on furlough during the suspension 100% of their wages – a compensation no other occupation received (others would receive 80%) – helped (Wilczek, 2020b). Though it did not do much for societal opinion towards miners once again. Their special economic status, previously propped up by arguments for preserving access to cheap energy and energy security that were fast losing their validity, was coming into increasing question. Any remaining protective status shield of public service miners were clinging to against public attack was evaporating.

Aware of this, not long after PiS’s victory, unionists wanted to get down to business and, knowing full well they had helped him get elected too, were demanding a meeting with the Prime Minister to discuss the ongoing dramatic situation in mining.. Covid numbers began rising again (Reuters, 2020a). They no longer trusted Sasin who they felt had little credibility at the negotiating table. Strike warnings were issued once more if the Prime Minister did not react. He did not come to Silesia. Rather another unsuspected bomb dropped. The day before a meeting scheduled to take
place in Katowice on 28th July 2020, nevertheless with Sasin, representatives of the Ministry of State Assets met up in Warsaw, where journalists were first to learn of PGG’s unofficial future plans: the closure of two mines by October (Ruda and Wujek – amounting to 5 divisions, including the earlier Pokój), making 30% of miners’ wages dependent on productivity, the freezing of the ‘fourteenth’ bonus for three years, and the closure of the last mine by 2036 (Biernat, 2020). The bankruptcy of PGG was proposed as an alternative. The next day in Katowice, facing uproar from trade unionists who had been excluded from discussions, warned of a mass Silesian ‘uprising’ to rival the historic one in the early 1920s. They were incensed by the idea that Sasin had tried to simply bring a restructuring plan ‘in a briefcase from Warsaw’ and impose it on Silesians without dialogue (Baca-Pogorzelska in Sutowski, 2020). Sasin buckled, called the leaked information ‘fake news’, and did not present the proposal; he did not even show it to the unions (Czoik, 2020a).

Instead he agreed, once again, that by the end of September, a special union and government team would work out a realistic plan for the restructuring of PGG, and maybe even the entire mining industry (Biernat 2020; Czoik, 2020a). It all sounded strangely familiar. The Polish Development Fund even announced willingness to help coal companies, as long as they presented sensible action plans (Raudner, 2020a).

A couple of days later, however, in an interview on 3rd August 2020 with the Dziennik Gazeta Prawna, a daily Polish legal and business newspaper, Sasin, again using the media as a means to communicate policy announcements, defended the initial plan, saying it was ‘based on reality, economically justified and guaranteed the functioning of PGG in the coming years’ (Czoik, 2020a). He blamed the fact that it had been scrapped on the strong negative reaction from unions, saying that as a result it could not be forced (Czoik, 2020a). Once again, his hands were tied. Strike-ready miners were to blame. At the same time, he also announced that the government ‘assumes that the end of coal-based energy in Poland will be 2050 or perhaps 2060’, adding that he was still open to talks with the unions, but that ‘I am the last person who would like to close mines, but many things have happened in recent years that make us reevaluate our view. We cannot be indifferent to the reality that surrounds us’ (Gazeta.pl, 2020; Wilczek, 2020c). He was referring of course not only to covid, but to the EU Green Deal and covid recovery plan the government had just signed – policies Sasin once again made sure to underscore were ‘imposed’ (Gazeta.pl, 2020; Wilczek, 2020b). It was only moments later, on 7th September, that the Minister of Climate, Michał Kurtyka, revealed the fated new Polish Energy Policy to 2040 (PEP2040).
Not only did PEP2040 propose a far faster retreat from coal than any previously officially considered,
but the document had again not been consulted with any of the mining trade unions,
who by now, taking in the post-covid situation, had been willing to talk about 2060 as a concluding
end date for coal. For coal miners in Silesia this was yet again incendiary. Bogusław Ziętek,
Chairman of August 1980, stated ‘It seems that the PiS government has completely succumbed to
pressure from the European Union. When they came to power, they vowed to defend the Polish
mining industry. Now they will have to bear the consequences of unfulfilled promises and face the
anger of the people of Silesia’ (Baca-Pogorzelska, 2020a). Trade unions, threatening renewed strike
action, once again called the Prime Minister to the region for face-to-face talks, giving him a week
to show up or face ‘radical protest action’. He again did not respond (Oksińska, 2020). ‘This is
boorishness and contempt for the people of Silesia’, said Bogusław Ziętek: ‘The prime minister
should be here himself to negotiate their fate. Five million people live here. We’re talking about the
total destruction of an industry employing hundreds of thousands of people’ (Wilczek, 2020d). As a
result of the no show, highlighting a distinct lack of respect, miners began strikes below ground,
reaching around 400 participants across 13 sites within a few days (Oksińska, 2020). This was the
biggest revolt in mining the government had yet had to deal with (Baca-Pogorzelska, 2020b). But
rather than succumb to such ‘blackmail’, as Jack Sasin called it provocingly, again blaming miners,
in an interview on Radio Zet, and deploy the Prime Minister as requested, the newly installed
Deputy Minister of State Assets, Artur Soboń, a person with a background as a historian and no
known mining expertise, was dispatched to lead renewed talks instead (Oksińska, 2020). He would
now be the government face for mining. Again, this was received as a further mark of contempt –
which undoubtedly government would not have been unconscious of. Adopting a more conciliatory
tone, however, and acknowledging the heightened tide of emotion and sense of betrayal, though also
perhaps communicating his own fear of the irrational, angry ‘mob’, he said on Radio TOK FM:
‘We’re going to friends, to those who recently supported us. Nobody will hold back the Vistula with
a stick’ (Oksińska, 2020).

After 5 days of underground strikes, and hours of negotiations, in which unions continued to
press for 2060 as the guaranteed end date for coal, on 25th September 2020, a historical agreement
was signed (Ministerstwo Aktywów Państwowych, 2020), bringing the strikes, and a proposed
official demonstration, to a close, and the industry as a whole to an end, but by 2049. PEP2040 was
now out of date again. Trade Unionists were not proud of their defeat: ‘We have signed the
liquidation of one of the most important industries in the history of the Republic of Poland’ - said

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29 This is despite the fact that, even in its final form, according to environmental experts the strategy
demonstrated a ‘disappointing lack of ambition’ (Jakubowska, 2021).
According to Soboń, however, the drafted vision of a ‘fair and just’ transition was arrived at jointly (Ministerstwo Aktywów Państwowych, 2020). Trade Unions’ hands would not be innocent. What did this ‘fair and just’ transition entail? Would it ease the central burden of shame and offer a longed-for sense of at-homeness by re-establishing societal connection, safety and dignity, addressing the climate crisis and working-class grievances together? Would miners now finally end their struggle?

The government estimated that the energy transformation would cost 280 billion PLN, 60 billion PLN of which would go to post-mining regions, and most to Upper Silesia (Baca-Pogorzelska, 2020a). This would be partly financed through the EU budget, its Just Transition Mechanism as well as, to the chagrin of some taxpayers, state funds. Miners were guaranteed work until retirement, with promises of state subsidies to keep coal afloat in the interim. In April 2021, a more detailed ‘social contract’ was agreed between government and the unions. Miners will have the right to relocate from closed mines to still operational ones, or receive early retirement at 80% of their salaries. Those who choose to leave mining will qualify for an additional severance payment of 120,000 PLN.

While sounding generous, such narrowly economistic and passive ‘golden handshakes’ are reminiscent of approaches to coal closure that weakening trade unions, the industry and government have pursued for years – including in the 1990s with notably poor long-term socioeconomic outcomes (Caldecott et al., 2017: 11), that still contour reality today. As then, a broader long-term vision and plan, let alone one drafted in ongoing engagement with Silesian inhabitants, particularly coal communities and their unions, for the socioeconomic transformation region as a whole, factoring in wider issues related to, for example, access to energy, energy poverty, energy efficiency, cultural provision, the redistribution of work-related dignity, environmental and health inequalities, housing, transport, unionized decent jobs, and post-mining remediation, and including a designated state budget earmarked for related investments, remains elusive (Anczewska et al., 2020; Żuk et al., 2021). The recognition of spatial injustice was totally absent (Bridge et al., 2013; Bridge and Gailing, 2020; Gailing et al., 2020). The healing of class-based symbolic and emotional injustice too. As one miner put it: ‘survival and preservation of human dignity [not mines in themselves], are the miner’s goal. This will not be written into a spreadsheet, because there is no real unit of measurement that determines the value of a human being’ (Kuryło, 2020).

Instead of a long-term plan for Silesia and its coal workers, the ministry of state assets proposed a restructuring of the country’s energy sector through nationalising coal power plants in
order to channel public funds to keep them going until retirement and thereby free up coal companies to ‘go green’ (Farand, 2021). Under this proposal, 70 coal mines will be bought by the state and transferred to a newly established National Energy Security Agency, charged with enabling a ‘gradual and long-term transformation of the power sector’ (Farand, 2021). The problem was, at time of writing, the European Commission would need to approve these deals – and that threatened such promises; the EU were unlikely to agree to state funding for coal (Farand, 2021). This is especially given PiS have not yet enshrined the announced coal-phase out date into its policies, causing consternation from environmentalists, and likely the EU, that this might leave open a backdoor for the continuation of business as usual (Farand, 2021). The social contract agreement also outlined a more-than 16 billion PLN investment in clean coal technologies, suggesting attempts to hold on to coal in some way. Without a firm commitment to an end date, planning for transition cannot begin. This highlighted that PiS was prioritising the preservation of the energy sector, an industry that had long enabled it to consolidate its own centralized authority, above social concerns (Bodziony and Szulecki, 2021; Szulecki, 2018). It was a classic example of the privatization of gains and socialization of losses that was not uncommon in past coal closures elsewhere (Caldecott et al., 2017: 11). Yet PiS’s approach only mirrored the EU’s own in many ways.31

One of the biggest challenges for the successful implementation is that, according to guidelines laid out by the International Labour Organization (2015), it must not be perceived as a top down initiative, but be based on broad social consensus, in order to be perceived as ‘just’. Existing research on the success or failure of previous energy transitions demonstrates that the

31 Under the European Commission’s Just Transition Mechanism, transition is also understood extremely narrowly. Eligible projects for funding may include activities such as ‘productive investments in Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, creation of new firms, research and innovation, environmental rehabilitation, clean energy, up- and reskilling of workers, job-search assistance and active inclusion of jobseekers programmes, as well as the transformation of existing carbon-intensive installations when these investments lead to substantial emission cuts and job protection’ (Gündüzeyeli and Moore, 2020). As pointed out by Éloi Laurent (2020), there is little to no mention of tackling social or environmental inequality, energy poverty or injustice, or of incorporating social rights within the broader Green Deal in general – highlighted by the fact that the word ‘New’, a nod to the public works investment programme under US President Roosevelt, was left out of its name. ‘Just Transition’ is then conceptualized as helping primarily business to adjust not people. Neoliberal consensus redux. A recent report argues that the ‘so-called ‘Sustainable Europe Investment Plan’ does not provide resources for communities, municipalities, or regions to invest in their housing or utilities. Instead, it subsidises private investors, socialising the risks of the green transition while privatising the gains. Those who live in Europe are given no control over the direction of Europe’s decarbonisation... Across the continent, millions do not recognize themselves in the climate movement. Indeed, in fossil fuel-dependent countries like Poland and Hungary, climate change can appear less of a threat than the proposals for addressing it. The EU’s current proposal for a ‘Green Deal’ explains why. By approaching the environmental crisis from the top-down, the EU has failed to show these communities how the green transition will benefit them — by building better housing, securing better jobs, ensuring greater control over their lives. And in doing so, it has sown the seeds of its own failure.’ https://report.gndforeurope.com/
absence of long-term participation from communities in general in energy transition implementation poses major risks (Axon and Morrissey, 2020; Caldecott et al., 2017; Jones and Reinecke, 2017; Morris and Jungjohann, 2016). Yet, as we see, the risks are exactly that. The European Green Deal, or ‘The Green Order’, and its ‘Just Transition’, is indeed considered by significant segments of Polish society to be a threat: to the Polish economy as a deliberate German-led strategy to weaken it; to energy prices; to jobs; to quality of life; and crucially, it is considered by many to not be needed at all (Plac and Piekarz, 2021). A narrative of colonialism and conspiracy clouds its arrival. An ongoing democratic deficit lies at its heart at multiple levels – EU, national and regional.  

On top of that, in the context of growing anti-miner sentiment, miners and their supposed inability to understand the present reality are often blamed and shamed for this lack of buy-in – not countless politicians, industry, media, the EU or other far more powerful players who have not engaged miners in genuine dialogue but pursued too an environmentalism absent of class analysis thus failing to bring them along or treat them like worthy citizens with real concerns. In wider public discussions, voices touting a depoliticized neoliberal narrative of ‘creative destruction’, of the market taking care of things, and of building social acceptance of the necessary pain of ‘transition’ in order to build the new better future, could be heard, questioning the validity of

32 Despite the fact that the EU recognized the concept of ‘Just Transition’ as far back as 2002 (Szkoczkowski et al., 2020), however, it is only since 2015, following the Paris Agreement and since the upsurge in populist backlash to climate and energy policy, that it began to incorporate ‘Just Transition’ provisions in its climate and energy policy levers (Keating, 2020; Simon, 2018b). Until then, writes Claudia Strambo (2020), issues of fairness in EU industrial, energy and climate policy, ‘with few exceptions’, were regarding allocation of decarbonization efforts between member states, or trading conditions, not in reference to the likely ‘losers’ of transition. As we saw in the thesis introduction, this reflects how energy transition has been largely treated as a depoliticized, top-down consensus-based technical matter in general by the full range of actors (see also Skoczkowski et al., 2020; Strambo, 2020: 1). The research community has been largely silent on this matter too. Indeed, according to recent analysis, interest in the concept, and its closely related idea of energy democracy, has only grown among researchers since 2017 (Szulecki and Overland, 2020; see also Heffron and McCauley, 2018; Skoczowski et al., 2020; Strambo et al., 2019: 12). There remains a dearth of research and evidence concerning how to build acceptance for transition (Caldecott et al., 2017: 21), how to develop ‘coherent and desirable transition policy packages’ (Green, 2018), and what lessons to draw on from past experiences (Strambo et al., 2019). A general lack of monitoring and research on its outcomes and impacts, has led to a loss of valuable internal learning. Within Poland this has also been the case (REF). The World Bank (2018), for example, published a first report on the complex challenge of achieving ‘Just Transition for All’ in November 2018. Furthermore, in one review of 154 pieces of literature on past mine closures globally (in English and Spanish – only 7 on Poland) and its effects on societal change, a near-absence of perspectives from households and miners themselves was noted (Strambo et al., 2019: 10). Skoczowski et al., ‘s 2020 article on the Silesian basin purports to be the first to analyse the prospect of transformation from stakeholders’ perspectives. A more damning indictment of the lack of interest on behalf of the academy and policymakers in the views of ‘ordinary people’, particularly working-class miners, could not be asked for. What is clear is that ‘just transition’ only became a moral and policy priority once resistance to climate legislation, particularly under the umbrella of far right populism, became more concerted and visible (Strambo, 2020: 2). As Frans Timmermans has stated ‘We must show solidarity with the most affected regions in Europe, such as coal mining regions and others, to make sure the Green Deal gets everyone’s full support and has a chance to become a reality’ (European Commission, 2020b). It is not hard to understand in such circumstances why such concern is treated with skepticism and suspicion by those ‘losers’.

427
Miners should adapt, accept that things would be difficult for a time, until a new future would appear. Debates about who should lead just transition have so far been often hostile and dismissive towards notions of public participation and community-led planning, citing urgency as a reason to abandon the need (Szulecki, 2021). Furthermore an ongoing notion of the ever-failing ‘Polish reality’ poisons and downgrades ambition from the off creating a serious lack of vision and ‘crisis of imagination’ (REF). A resultant continued championing of ‘experts’ as the natural authorities responsible for steering transition as ‘technocratic guardians’ (Szulecki and Overland, 2020:10) is the only apparent hope. It is precisely the recipe that populists deride – and have built their success upon. This was eerily reminiscent. Was this history repeating itself?

It is worth referring back to chapter three in the thesis in which I outlined the history of how the original Solidarity movement led to the betrayal of workers such as coal miners, whose strike action had been the brute means through which its calls for greater democracy and the collapse of Communism had been made possible in Poland. Abandoning visions of worker self-management, a welfare state, and direct democracy that had been the original Solidarity dream, instead it became a ‘protective umbrella’ for the ushering in of neoliberal capitalism. ‘Fear of the masses’ set in – ‘the people’ were not to be trusted (Ost, 2001: 256). Labour was uniquely cast, not as the crucial social

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33 ‘Why should the rest of Poland shoulder the costs?’, asked Paweł Musiałek, Managing Director of the Centre for Analysis of the republican Jagiellonian Club, in a recent online debate bringing together key cross-spectrum commentators, on Just Transition organised by the initiative Śpięcie (2021). Particularly since taxpayers have been subsidising coal and their pensions for decades. What’s more, miners think that they are owed something, an attitudinal remnant of Communism, (mi się należy), said Polish journalist Marcin Popkiewicz, who specializes in popularizing climate and energy issues – but this is a natural process, a kind of creative destruction, and they need to simply prepare for pain, tears and change. Yet what is important to stress, as lessons from past energy transitions have demonstrated, is that the costs of not paying for a just transition can be much, much higher in terms of the regional intergenerational, social and reputational impacts that can lock-in and exacerbate prior inequalities and forms of exclusion and marginalization, ending with a higher, longer-term social bill (Caldecott et al., 2017: 11; European Commission, 2017: 7). Poland does not need to look far to learn this lesson.

34 In the same cross-ideological spectrum debate as above organised by the initiative Śpięcie (2021) on the energy transition and the appropriate role of the national state and local actors in its implementation, key commentators declared proposals for greater bottom-up participation by Alicja Dańkowska and Kacper Szulecki, a case of ‘exaggerated optimism’, ‘utopian at times dangerous’, representing an ‘exaggerated faith in localism’. ‘Wishful thinking’ that democracy works better at the local level and that participation would help to develop consensual solutions everyone will be satisfied with’. Kamil Lipinski, an engineer working in the energy sector and member of the editorial committee for the left-Catholic magazine Kontakt, felt that the participatory model posed too high risks of failure given the urgency of climate change, the centralized structure of the EU and Polish energy sector, and the disproportionate power of state government and financial institutions – the ‘real instruments’ of energy policy. This could lead to ‘facade participation’. But as Szulecki (2021) points out, the dispute rests on divergent understandings of what ‘energy transition’ means. While the latter commentators were primarily concerned with the transition of the energy sector, Dańkowska and Szulecki were talking more about the social and human aspects of transition. Also as Healy and Barry (2017) point out – charges of ‘utopianism’ and of being naive and unrealistic, which the fossil fuel divestment itself faced, are often simply ways to avoid politics.
guarantor of democracy, but as an ‘obstacle to reform and a danger to democracy’. Instead democracy was envisioned as ‘elite leadership and a market economy’ (REF). Workers instead were pacified, and instructed to be patient, adapt, and aid the transition and become accustomed to the new reality. Miners’ anger was dissipated, and postsocialist democracy was based on a process of excluding workers from ‘active co-shaping of the new institutional reality’ (REF). Curtailed worker agency, decline in power of unions, and the absence of class analysis, led to workers perceiving themselves as nationally betrayed victims, while means to mobilize and achieve their aims were shut down. Eventually, PiS appeared with industrial nationalist populism as its purifying rallying cry. Does this ring any bells?

Commentators refer to the ‘trauma’ of postsocialist ‘transition’, in which inter-generational memories of its devastating socioeconomic effects, ushered in under notions of ‘reform’ or ‘restructuring’ too, as key barriers to implementing a just energy ‘transition’. The fact that there are few positive examples of successful coal transitions elsewhere also adds to the bleak picture. Post-Thatcher Britain is a case in point. This has also not been aided by the fact that projects intended to ameliorate their impact, such as the EU’s own Platform for Coal Regions in Transition, launched only in 2017, has so far not delivered tangible results (Zygmunt, 2020). Yet the ‘trauma’ of transition, (which at times comes to sound like a replacement for the notion of ‘pathology’, rather than a genuine recognition of emotional and psychological pain and impact), must be understood more broadly still. As the story of the ‘Little Angered Coal Lump’ alluded to in the Conclusion, and as the Solidarity betrayal outlines, it also refers to the shifting relation between miners and society at large bound up in the language of ‘dirt’ – their place in the national mythology, their social standing as working-class people, and their relation to elites, the ‘minds’ of society has been radically and painfully ruptured. The severance of this integrative social bond, which is also an ecological one as I have shown, in the new postindustrial, ostensibly meritocratic reality, has left industrial workers increasingly cast out of social recognition, lacking legitimacy and ecologically, socially, psychically home-less. They are disconnected and feel unsafe in their bodies. Furthermore, their entire personhood and lifeworlds are being required to be re-organised to fit the new reality but without clear gains. The embodied emotional ecological trauma of shame and the search for home is key. It is a visceral untethering (Davies, 2018; Tsakiris et al., 2021).

The detailed account of the last year alone in coal politics is already enough to show why their trust is not high. Broken promises, betrayals, lack of transparency and of clear and direct communication, chaotic and contradictory policy announcements and proposals that are reactive

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35 A World Bank (2018: 16) report corroborates this fear: ‘In the coal sector, rarely have closures been supported by successful social mitigation strategies’.
rather than proactive in relation to the EU, absence of meaningful, long-term social dialogue and stakeholder engagement, reactive rather than proactive approach to managing labour conflict and pointing the finger of blame on miners, a media largely uninterested in covering their protests, let alone in an empathic light, a public hostile to greedy and dirty coal workers exacerbated by covid stigma, and, trade unions acting in a reactive and defensive manner often not in direct dialogue with their own members. The rest of this thesis has explained such a dynamic in more depth, situating it within the necessary place-based, ecologically-embedded and historical context true understanding of this requires. Disconnection from society – treated like dirt, discarded waste – is at its root. Connection – re-integration in the form of recognition as moral, modern, valued persons – and thereby establishing trust and safety is its only salve.

And yet, a further unspecific trauma of transition lurks. And that is the broader postcolonial postsocialist societal one lodged in the minds and hearts of those who might consider to have emerged unscathed. This trauma is the unreckoned with psychic shadow of its own real condition. The unintegrated element that comes back to haunt in the form of liberal democracy’s own shadow – populism. In Jungian terms the shadow is everything in us we have chosen to reject or suppress because it is ‘incompatible with who we think we are or are supposed to be’ (Richo, 1999: 1). In Poland miners occupy a central place in the anti-populist imaginary, as covid only highlighted, perhaps the quintessential irrational populist element. In this imaginary, they are not persons but caricatures. Visceral, sweaty, working-class, masculine, muscular, supposedly wielding pick axes, burning tyres, coursing with rage and willing to put their bodies on the line. Communist-era remnants causing irrational trouble.36 Government after government, even PiS, who had a better reputation in terms of its relations to unions, rather than invite them into a well-planned, participatory, long-term, complex, multi-stakeholder discussion on transition and the true future of coal, have treated them with contempt, infantilized and disdained them, throwing them occasional hunks of meat, spinning mythical stories, and promising all will be well without any concrete details to prove it. Trade Unions have also played their part in keeping them in the dark. Environmental NGOs too, also in terms of indifference, have historically added to the mix. Now in the last hour, as miners feared and predicted, coal has been liquidated. PiS, the dissident Solidarity leaders who coal miners helped get into power on the back of promises to salvage the ‘stolen revolution’, have once again recast that labour as an obstacle to its programme, curtailed worker agency, while instructing

36 In a representative survey conducted in June 2020, on the effects of covid-19 on social attitudes towards energy transition and coal, researchers found that 67% of respondents agreed, and 28% disagreed, with the statement that ‘the state authorities maintain the mines because they are afraid of miners’ protests’. This belief was particularly widespread among supporters of the Civic Coalition (86%), the PSL (85%), 83% of the Left, (who also mostly favoured rapid decarbonization) – as against right-wing populists supporting PiS or Confederation who overwhelmingly objected (71% and 81% respectively) (Żuk et al., 2021: 9).
unions themselves once again to pacify their members. Other actors are following a similar path. Did it now matter? After all whereas once it was the speedy return to European normality, now climate change is more urgent, more paramount, the concerns are more pressing. Planetary collapse awaits. Why should the loss of a few thousand coal miner jobs be of concern? Is there time to care? The end of coal is in sight – that is what counts. No?

Edwyn Bendyk (2020) has said that ‘catastrophic thinking is a special and extreme case of technocratic thinking’. It can pave the way for authoritarian politics as we have seen with covid. It can remove the pesky matter of politics itself, and offshore it onto ‘experts’ who know best. But with long-term repercussions. If the social justice imperative alone does not suffice, we do not have time not to care. Such an attitude fundamentally misunderstands the nature of the challenge. For as this thesis has attempted to demonstrate in detail energy transition is not primarily a technical issue – but a social, emotional and political one. Without attention to power, political economy and politics, ‘tensions between ‘decarbonization’ and ‘justice’ will continue’ (Finley-Brook and Holloman, 2016; Healy and Barry 2017). And emotional-ecological fallout plays a key role. Demonstrating this, many miners are not done with their fight. A protest in October 2020 up in Warsaw gathered together a couple hundred workers from coal industries to ‘defend Polish energy’ (Wojtczuk, 2020). In June 2021, now 4000 miners and coal power sector workers, under the banner of the Solidarity Trade Union, once PiS’s staunch defender, gathered together in Warsaw again to protest the coal phase out and the EU injunction to close the Turów mine – keenly becoming a core focus for grievances (Ścislowska, 2021a). Other kinds of miners’ protests not organized by unions may also follow. Who will take seriously, scoop up and organize their raw emotions this time? And in what form?

As David Ost (2018:122) warns us, presciently, betrayals under such conditions can steer pathways ‘into the arms of the open fascists’. ‘Crisis’ is indeed the context in which fascism has historically come to the fore (Griffin, 1993). The current industrial populist backlash to this status quo has already cost the world (both in terms of climate change and workers’ futures) time we do not have, moving us closer to fascist futures, and it has not gone away. The challenge facing Poland, and the wider world too, is decarbonizing while not consolidating the shift rightward further thus jeopardizing climate action in the long term and building a dark future. The fact that millions of people worldwide are still intimately connected to coal should make us sit up and pay closer attention (Strambo et al., 2019: 13). For the energy transition will be deemed just, particularly by those most viscerally affected by its implications, or it risks not happening at all, and with stark political ramifications, as we have already seen. This is not only true in Poland but wider afield. The

\[37\] According to trade union figures, the number was closer to between 7,000 – 10,000 (DW.com, 2021).
success or failure of energy transition in Europe’s biggest coal region, and world’s second largest economy (the EU), could have significant repercussions for its prospects globally (Caldecott et al., 2017: 5). As one Time magazine article put it ‘coal communities around the world are watching closely’ (Worland, 2020). Other actors in Poland are too. So how can this transition be ‘just’? How can shame be turned to a more progressive kind of home for coal’s miners?

Environmentalism with or without class?

In 1991, an American filmmaker, Nick Davidson, made a documentary film entitled *Black Triangle*, featuring the border region of former Czechoslovakia and East Germany, a geographic designation that, as chapter five detailed, also encompassed Polish parts of Silesia too, referring to the Communist industrial legacy of intense pollution. The film, made in the immediate aftermath of Communism’s collapse and focusing on the Czech side, is about the entwined environmental degradation of the socialist era and its disregard for workers’ health and lives in the region. As referred to in chapter three, under the authoritarian rule of Communism, and immediately in its wake, environmental and worker issues were united concerns (Tsing, 2004). The film concludes with a snapshot of the hopeful emerging liberal democratic future at the time. There is to be a local referendum regarding whether nuclear power or continued reliance on brown coal should be the energetic path forward in the long-term, with a planned public information campaign to inform resident decisions. The final shot in the film is of Czech and German miners and green activists coming together to celebrate Earth Day 1990, the first time it is marked in the East. Together they tear down the border posts symbolizing ‘their unity and the international nature of environmental questions’ (Kideckel, 1993: 161) and of labour solidarity too. Whether similar scenes occurred just over the border in Polish Silesia, I am not certain of. Yet as I have alluded to in the introduction and chapter five, the Solidarity movement harboured both red and green sentiment under one umbrella. Then came the promised capitalist democracy. Then came transition in the form it took. And the climate crisis and the way it has been (mis)handled too.

Fast forward 30 years, in 2021, the current dispute over the closure of the lignite mine at Turów in Lower Silesia, on the Czech border, reveals a starkly different picture. The mine is the main source of employment in the area, a PiS stronghold, and contributes 7% of Polish energy in its adjacent power plant. In response to plans to extend its license to operate until 2044, the Czech government lodged a complaint with the European Court of Justice, over concern with water pollution.
shortages and air pollution on its side, stating the extension violated EU law. Following stalled diplomatic negotiations, in May 2021, the EU issued an injunction to Poland to halt mining at the site immediately, which Poland promptly defied citing concerns over economic and energy security and sovereignty. Coal miners have since been protesting its closure, as we saw above. Meanwhile environmental activists on both sides of the border have been rallying in support of the EU for its shutdown, also under the slogan of just transition but not in direct connection with miners, in face-to-face dialogue or joint action. It is that precise lack of bodies and voices engaged together that counts. Borders between movements, and between countries, have been erected. It appears an intractable conflict. Referendums, like those described in Black Triangle, on energy futures and long-term planning have not occurred. Instead, Polexit has been touted as a distinct possibility as Poland repeatedly defies EU court rulings on a range of issues.

One commentator has stated that uniting miners and environmentalists today is ‘impossible’ (REF). In the postsocialist transition, under the guise of neoliberalized green and economic consensus, and the defeatist and depoliticizing notion of ‘Polish reality’, and its unexamined classist assumptions, it indeed appears that way. In 2015 the Polish Green Party did try out this approach – declaring solidarity with coal workers but not the industry (Pytlik, 2019). Such a move should be applauded, though they received open hostility from miners and unions. The link between grassroots green movements and workers’ grievances, the two most powerful agents capable of challenging capital, has been severed under the absence of a class lens and the depoliticizing anti-democratic neoliberal politics of transition leading to long-term lack of trust. But this is not time to be defeatist. There are plenty of real miners out there who would be open to engaging if they were actually treated like mutual, morally worthy, partners in face-to-face dialogue. To borrow a slogan from the inspiring Community Organising group Stand Up for Racial Justice in the US, that has tirelessly worked at ground level to build resistance to far-right appropriation of often white worker and community dispossession one household at a time, in defiance of the mainstream assumption that ‘They’ are not worth engaging for the progressive cause – ‘if we are not organizing them, somebody else is’ (REF). And PiS are not the only players in town.

Indeed, as the political tensions over coal between government and miners were mounting in 2020, other tensions within government were becoming increasingly visible. PiS’s ‘United Right’ coalition, a coalition it had been at the centre of since 2015, has been steadily fracturing since 2019 (Majmurek, 2021). The EU’s climate policy and coal have been central to the conflict. Zbigniew Ziobro, a known climate sceptic, leader of Eurosceptic, Catholic-nationalist party United Poland

39 Who knows whether that one did or what the outcome was, and whether it was adhered to. Though no nuclear power plants have been built since 1987, and what is now Czechia is 50% reliant on coal (predominantly lignite) and 35% nuclear..)
Solidarna Polska, and hardline Minister of Justice, refused to back the government’s PEP2040 energy policy when it passed in February 2021 (as did MP Michał Wójcik), and the proposed National Reconstruction Plan (required for submission to the EU covid Reconstruction Fund) which earmarked 25 billion PLN for the energy transition (Jakóbik, 2021). He accused PiS of breaking its electoral promises and returning to the former liberal conservative government, Civic Platform’s, old ways. Citing concerns over jobs, energy security (predicting increased reliance on both Russian gas and German electricity imports), impacts on consumer energy prices and the cost of transition to the Polish economy, he is aiming to usurp PiS’s old position as the ‘last defender of Polish coal’ and main opponent of the EU’s ‘colonial’ ideologically-motivated climate policies (Dziennik.pl, 2021; Żylińska et al., 2021). Meanwhile, Janusz Kowalski, Deputy Minister of State Assets since December 2019 and MP of United Poland, who has questioned the data on air pollution impacts on health (ASZIDziennik.pl, 2021), was forced to resign in February 2021 due to strong disagreements over energy policy (Forsal.pl, 2021). Such instabilities have posed risks for the government’s ability to govern – particularly on such key issues as energy policy (Majmurek, 2021). In June 2021, the Coalition weakened as three lawmakers left over the issue of coal, leaving PiS and its less-than-United Right without its slim majority for the first time since it came to power in 2015 (Ścisłowska, 2021b).

In addition to fractures within its government, PiS faces coal-friendly challenges to its energy policy from outside too. MPs from the far-right party, Confederation, (Konfederacja), who are affiliated with the fascistic National Movement (Ruch Narodowy), ran a pro-coal campaign in 2019 in defense of miners but not trade unions, who it accused of taking advantage of the situation to secure their own positions, and who came to Silesian miners’ defense during the covid pandemic (Dziennik.pl, 2020), have criticized PiS for succumbing to the dictates of the EU and moving away from coal without a plan for a clear alternative (Energetyka24.pl, 2020; wnp.pl, 2020b). Stressing the need for broad public consent, dialogue and investment into renewables and nuclear, they propose a transformation ‘on Polish conditions, at the Polish pace’ (Bankier.pl, 2021). The tone of opposition has thus notably shifted. It seems that the fear that far right actors will start to abandon denialist territory and instead incorporate green agendas into their own narrative and ideology was starting to manifest. Such nationalist ‘Polish modernization’ narratives have appeal, as this thesis has shown. Confederation currently enjoys 8% backing according to opinion polls (Thefirstnews.com, 2021).

40 United Poland, junior coalition partner, currently enjoys less than 1% support of the Polish public on its own – less than the 3% required to enter Parliament (Koć, 2021), but in coalition it can certainly throw its weight around, and has steadily insisted in differentiating itself from PiS, hoping to steal some of its heft in future elections (Szacki, 2020).
The ‘populist threat’, even the fascist threat, to energy transition (Szulecki and Overland, 2020: 9; see also Dańkowska and Sadura, 2021; Wanvik and Haarstad, 2021; Caldecott et al., 2017; Batel and Devine-Wright, 2018) is thus not disappearing, and its perceived failure over time, particularly in relation to notions of ‘justice’, is highly likely to be exploited by such actors ‘waiting in the wings’ (Dańkowska and Sadura, 2021). It already has been.41 This is not confined to miners and their families alone – as energy prices soar, as they are predicted to under current conditions, and the socioeconomic impacts are felt more widely, this will have ramifications for coal-reliant subsidiary firms, investors, local authorities, households etc. What will happen as the energy transition continues to unfold? Are coal’s days definitely over? Is PiS even the worst face of government we are yet to see? Can polite dialogue and requests for participation in elite consensus solve this impasse?

The coal mine sector represents one of the last bastions of unionized working-class power in the country – and it is set to disappear. As we have seen (Mitchell, 2013), strike action by coal workers has been one of the most effective means that gains for social rights have been advanced historically in the West, and in the East too. True this is not about returning to old-fashioned kinds of revolutionary subjects – but how, in an ideal and ambitious scenario, the very kind that is needed in the face of the fact we have ‘a planet to win’ (Aronoff et al., 2019) and to lose – can this be made the most of rather than shunned and its liquidation celebrated? For ‘coal miners aren’t anachronistic problems to be overcome, they have a crucial role to play in hurrying the transition to a green economy’ if treated as such (Tate, 2019). The energy transition is not just a technological shift, but also a massive power shift, with both shimmering opportunities and frightening costs (Malm, 2020; Mitchell, 2013; Newell, 2021). There is an urgent need to politicize ecology – to ‘politicize apocalypse’ (Bendyk, 2020). To resituate class struggle into the equation. There will be ‘no shortcuts’, or the energy revolution and action on climate change will be cut short – and in ugly ways (Huber, 2021; McAlevey, 2016). The work of forging connections to bridge universals into concrete lifeworlds, returning to Bruno Latour (2004) and Anna Tsing’s (2004) insights into the

41 Alicja Dańkowska and Przemysław Sadura (2021) have recently conducted sociological research in the lignite-mining region around the Belchatów coal-fired power plant in central Poland (Europe’s single largest point source of CO2 emissions – recently announced for closure by 2036), analysing the social acceptance of energy transition here. They find that far-right populist mobilization of the risks and potential failures of transition, high in a town and region built around the monocultural industry that has done much to prevent public debate on post-coal futures, could result in turning it into a ‘laboratory for anti-climatic populism’ that could ‘radiate’ to other regions. This is indicated by the fact that United Poland and Confederation are already strong favourites here. Likewise, Kacper Szułcki together with Jakub Bodziony (2021), has identified ‘energy populism’ as a ‘new’ threat that might destabilize decarbonization in the future. Yet my thesis has shown that the intertwining of far-right populism and post-fossil fuel transition, not unique to Poland, has nevertheless been long in the making, as demonstrated by the rise of PiS, and has a far deeper localized history and emotional ecology that needs to be understood in order to situate further developments in their fuller context.
‘friction’ of scales, will need to be accomplished brick by brick, coal lump by coal lump. As Jerzy Hubka, one of the ill-fated trade unionists who met with Greta Thunberg said in a recent online debate organized by the European Green Party (2021) on just transition, it is not only necessary to challenge stereotypes, which ‘hurt’ coal miners deeply, it is also necessary to go to the miners, on their own turf, with real dialogue to begin the ‘laborious work of building trust and engagement from the foundations in local communities’. The pro-active work of connection. Of making environmentalism relevant to their everyday concerns. Energy transition is not just about replacing coal – it is about rethinking the gamut of practical life processes, from food to transport, to public spaces and health to clean air while identifying and reducing pre-existing inequalities.

As others are emphasizing, the energy transition, particularly a just one, will not be imposed from above, but from below. The EU’s Green Deal is no way near enough to avert climate calamity, or bring about justice, though it is a starting point. History shows that such radical change will never come to pass if left in the hands of the state, but only if ‘the people’, particularly workers, and in broad based alliance, mobilize in their masses to demand it (Aronoff et al., 2019: 6-7; Huber, 2021; Klein, 2019), with their ire directed upwards, to those in power, rather than wait to be invited to the table. The Solidarity movement is a sadly tarnished, yet powerful, example of this maxim. The recent Women’s Strike against anti-abortion law another. The Climate School Strikes, while harnessing the notion of its power, without worker support remains unable to strike capital where it hurts most (Huber, 2021). Covid has shown what kind of state mobilization of resources is possible if the will is there. Although the broader European Green Deal, and its Just Transition, is currently seen as a top-down initiative in Poland – what if it became a grassroots (not professionalized NGO-led) social movement of its own from below, reinstating the word ‘new’ into the title? With demands for not just short-term pay offs, but investment into a wide vision for improved quality of life, wellbeing, affordable energy, decent unionized jobs, a jobs guarantee, accountable public ownership, decent public transport, even universal basic income, as just some of the ideas emerging from this space of ‘radical hope’ (Lear, 2008). Such a vision, grounded in the lived reality and needs of communities, would need to redefine The Good Life for a climate changing, post-coal world. This is precisely what groups in other parts of the world are calling for – from the US, to the UK, Europe and beyond (Ajl, 2021; Aronoff et al., 2019; Chomsky and Pollin, 2020; Huber, 2021; Klein, 2019). It is precisely what is needed for it to come to pass.

As Naomi Klein (2019: 261-262) writes ‘any administration attempting to implement a Green New Deal will need powerful social movements both backing them up and pushing them to do

42 See Karen Bell (2020) for explicit recommendations for how to connect environmental movements with working-class struggle.
more. Indeed, the single largest determining factor in whether Green New Deal mobilization pulls us back from the climate cliff will be the actions taken by social movements in the coming years. Because as important as it is to elect politicians who are up for this fight, the decisive questions are not going to be settled through elections alone." This is also true if the Green (New) Deal is to steer away from fascistic takeover. What if miners and trade unions, in broad alliance with climate activists and other workers, used their power to strike to demand such investments? Stranger things have happened. Far stranger things indeed will. The work of building this alliance, of offering meaningful connection to dissipate shame, must start now.
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