

Poles and Germans: A Thousand Years of a Business Relationship¹.

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Abstract: In this paper the mutual perceptions of Poles and Germans are discussed. Theoretical background for this paper comes from the field of social anthropology (specifically, from Chapman, M. 1992a). The empirical data was collected during the face-to-face interviews with executives from these two countries. The findings presented here are the result of qualitative analysis, within a bigger study comparing the perceptions of executives from three countries: Poland, Germany, and the United Kingdom.

The authors argue that the German/Slavonic contrast (expressed here as that between Germany and Poland) bears a strong resemblance to other core/periphery ethnic relationships (for example Anglo-Saxon/Celt, Northern European/Southern European). These ethnic oppositions have been conditioned by the domination of Germans in philology and historiography of central Europe which is similar to the domination of the English speakers in the British Isles for example. The metaphorical oppositions have, therefore, been a fertile ground for the construction of ethnic characterisations of Germans and Poles, particularly from a Germanic perspective.

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INTRODUCTION

The fall of the so-called 'iron curtain' created new opportunities for diverse business co-operations, through the opening of the new markets in Eastern and Central European countries. Among these emerging markets, Poland has been widely recognised as a desirable location by foreign investors. The EU states, and Germany in particular, have been the natural sources of investors in these countries, through the Association agreements and their candidacies for accession to the EU. This paper focuses on the mutual perceptions of Poles and Germans in a business context. It aims to identify and explain the main differences in perceptions of the executives that took part in such co-operations.

The study of managerial perceptions is an increasingly important tool in business research and economic analysis, and cannot safely be ignored (see for instance: Simon 1983, Cyert and March 1992, March and Simon 1993, Buckley and Chapman 1997). The same applies to cultural differences between countries and organisations (e.g. Adler 1991, Hickson and Pugh 1995, Hofstede 1980, 1994, Schneider and Barsoux 1997, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 2000). This study offers some new insights into business co-operation during the market integration of Eastern European countries with the European Union. It also attempts to achieve a more 'expansive' approach to international business inquiry, by drawing upon qualitative methods and anthropological literature. The potential utility of such approaches and ideas has been extensively discussed in many contributions (for example, d'Iribarne 1996/7, Chapman 1996/7, Marchan 1996, Buckley and Chapman 1997a, 1997b), and hopefully needs no further urging.

TEUTONS AND SLAVS

Part of the background to this paper is to be found in a book published by one of the authors (Chapman 1992a), some years ago. The book concerned the meeting of a centralising and colonising people with its own periphery. It concerned the way in which the many differences between centre and periphery were expressed in terms of ethnic oppositions – oppositions expressed in imagery, metaphor, writing and action. The particular ethnic group on which this earlier study focussed was the people popularly (if contentiously) known as the Celts. The Celts, and the picture we have of them, were shown to have grown out of the activities and perceptions first of the ancient world (the Greeks in contact with their northern barbarian neighbours, the Romans in contact with the Gauls and the Britons), and then of mediaeval and modern Europe (as the centralising polities of England and France came into contact with the Celtic-speaking peoples of the modern period – the Scots, Irish, Welsh, Cornish and Bretons).

Chapman commented, in his introduction to this work, that the relationship between the English and the Celts, as popularly expressed, bore a strong resemblance to other core/periphery ethnic relationships. In particular, he drew attention to the opposition between Northern European and Southern European (or Germanic and Latin), and the opposition between Germanic and Slavonic. This paper is an attempt to pursue this idea, in relation to the Germanic/Slavonic contrast, specifically as expressed in one of the most vital and local of such contrasts, that between Germany and Poland. In 1992a, Chapman wrote: ‘I leave undiscussed the many points of similarity between the Celtic, Latin and Slavonic examples. This ... must wait for another work’ (Chapman, M. 1992a:xv). Since 1997, Chapman has been working with a Polish doctoral student and ACE-Phare scholar, Hanna Gajewska. A second impetus to this paper comes from her. Her research has involved interviewing Polish, British and German managers about Anglo-

Polish and German-Polish business co-operations. From her research data has come a wealth of material illustrating popular perceptions of the German/Polish difference. Chapman had expressed an interest in the German/Polish opposition in 1992, and shelved the subject for want of time, material and energy. Gajewska's work has brought new supply of all of these, and the problem has been taken down from the shelf, to be addressed here with material deriving from her research.

Much of the theoretical basis of this paper is elaborated in Chapman's work (1992a) to which reference has already been made. That work contains many references to the relevant anthropological literature, which there is not space here to reproduce. The academic field of international business is conceptually underpinned by the academic discipline of economics, with a large supporting role for various forms of psychology. Social anthropology is less commonly drawn upon, and for the most part international business scholars are innocent of social anthropological literature and concerns. In the context of an EIBA conference, therefore, and in the context of this paper, it needs stressing that the ideas adduced here are mature ones, multiply sanctioned by literature of good repute. The ideas of 'opposition', and 'symbolic opposition', are much drawn upon below, as ways of explaining how ethnic groups define and understand one another. Such ideas are drawn from the literature of structural, semantic and symbolic anthropology, where they are commonplace (see, for a very few references among many that might be cited, Evans-Pritchard 1956; Leach 1961; Levi-Strauss 1962; Douglas 1966; Ardener 1971; Crick 1976; Parkin 1982). The application of these ideas to ethnic definition and self-definition is also routine (see, for example, Ardener 1972; Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985; Tonkin *et al* 1989, Chapman 1992b). A particularly telling example, relevant to this paper, is provided by Forsythe (1989), in a discussion of German identity. It is to this literature that we have looked for inspiration, in the writing of this paper. There is of course a large existing

literature on ‘culture and management’, and ‘culture and international business’. Work inspired by the ideas of Geert Hofstede is perhaps the mainstream of this literature, but there are other tributary streams. We are aware of this work, and have even to some degree contributed to it (see Chapman and Antoniou, 1998) but we have not drawn directly upon it here. We are trying something else (although see note 7 for suggestions tying the material of this paper to Hofstede’s dimensions). One reviewer of the first submission of this paper, noting that the paper did not draw heavily upon standard literature in ‘culture and business’, implied therefore that it must be considered speculative and unsupported. It is not. The supporting literature is there to be consulted, for those interested in going beyond the existing confines of debate.

The relevant argument from Chapman’s earlier work needs to be briefly summarised. The Celts are typically recorded in history from the perspective of other people. *All* peoples have a strong tendency to characterise themselves as orderly, civilised and properly human, and to regard other surrounding peoples as failing to achieve these virtues, often spectacularly. The ethnographic record from all over the world is rich in examples. Any cultural differences can be used as material for the construction of differences in this domain – notable, however, are issues to do with food preparation and diet, dress, sexuality and kinship, conventions of non-verbal communication, and so on. Oppositions constructed from material of this kind have an inherent moral equality: Group A thinks hard things of Group B, and Group B thinks equally hard things of Group A (both, for example, in all likelihood think of the other as ‘unruly’, to suggest only one of the more central metaphors). In many cases, however, the historiographical record is strongly biased towards one series of accounts rather than the other. This is certainly the case with the Roman/Celtic and English/Celtic oppositions. When we inspect the record, we find a picture of the Celts constructed as the ‘other’ of those doing the recording. Thus, a picture is created from a series of oppositions something like this (Figure 1):

Figure 1: Self / Other – the basic oppositions

Self	:	Other
Rule	:	Disrule (absence of rule)
Order	:	Disorder
Culture	:	Nature
Human	:	Animal
Controlled	:	Uncontrolled
Lawful	:	Lawless
Clean	:	Dirty
Reason	:	Unreason
Intellect	:	Emotion
Constant	:	Inconstant
Modern	:	Backward
Progressive	:	Regressive

(from Chapman, 1992a, p.210-11).

The ‘self’ which is doing the writing is the one whose picture is recorded. The picture of the ‘other’ constructed through this series of oppositions is almost entirely negative. Another turn in the argument is required for completeness. We can cite Chapman’s earlier work verbatim:

With the intellectual revolution that we call romanticism, the entire system of oppositions listed above undergoes a subtle metamorphosis. What I have called the ‘centre’ continued to characterise itself by the left-hand column, and the ‘periphery’ by the right-hand column; but the balance of virtue shifted. Where previously goodness had resided on the left margin, romanticism shifted it to the right. As it did so, new adjectives appear which, while expressing the same series of oppositions, also express the new moral valuation. The list above, therefore, acquires a new series of glosses from the romantic reappraisal (the original list is in parenthesis, Figure 2):

Figure 2: Self / Other – the Romantic Reappraisal

Self	:	Other
Constraint (rule)	:	Freedom (disrule, absence of rule)
Predictable (order)	:	Unpredictable (disorder)
Artificial (human)	:	Natural (animal)
Urban (culture)	:	Rural (nature)
Reserved (controlled)	:	Impulsive (uncontrolled)
Formal (controlled)	:	Informal (uncontrolled)
Conventional (lawful)	:	Unconventional (lawless)

Sterile (clean)	:	Fertile (dirty)
Calculation (reason)	:	Imagination (unreason)
Measurement (intellect)	:	Passion (emotion)
Dull (constant)	:	Exciting (inconstant)

(Chapman, 1992a, p.212)

We can stop there, perhaps (the book is a long one). The first list, above, is, as already noted, one in which the ‘other’ is constructed out of almost uniformly undesirable characteristics. We can see easily enough that this is an argument made from one side only, and that no people is ever likely voluntarily to characterise itself using terms from the ‘other’ side of the oppositions. The second list, however, with glosses derived from the romantic reappraisal of primitive naturalness, allows an entirely desirable picture to be drawn from the images of ‘otherness’, and casts an undesirable and dreary pall over the ‘self’. It is from these ideas that most modern British people construct their idea of the modern Celts. It is important to note, however, that the ‘other’, while desirable, is still somebody else’s construction; the ‘self’, dull or not, is still in the metaphorical driving seat.

Let us move straight on to the Germans and the Poles. Anybody that knows a little of popular European ethnic characterisations will probably recognise that the metaphors invoked above, drawn from the Anglo-Saxon/Celtic contrast, have at least some applicability in the German/Polish context. Just as the English speakers have dominated the telling of history in the British Isles, so too have the Germans dominated the philology and historiography of central Europe. The Germans took Christianity to the Slavs; this was, indeed, the source of the founding events of Polish nationhood. Christianity, a formal system of rectitude, written and recorded, has always been a force giving powers of definition to those that wielded it, and from the first the Germans were, in a sense, a step ahead of the Slavs. Popular thought in central Europe often produces images of civilisation in the West (where Germany is the West), which progressively

dissipates towards the east. This is a popular idea within Poland as well, where, for example, Poznan in the west looks down upon Bialystok in the east, and Bialystok in the east is glad, at least, that it is not in Belarus. The passage of many elements of what now look like ‘modern’ ideas and technologies, from west to east, has tended to confirm this picture over the centuries.

The metaphorical oppositions already listed have, therefore, been a fertile ground for the construction of ethnic characterisations of Germans and Poles, particularly from a Germanic perspective. Forsythe (1989) discusses the concept of ‘German-ness’, what a German is, and how Germans define themselves in relation to others. She argues that German perception of Germanness is built up out of metaphors of opposition, where foreigners of various kinds are accorded qualities different to those of the Germans. German-ness, in her account, is associated with order, and with qualities regarded as positive - cleanliness, stability, whiteness, Christianity, familiarity, and reliability. Foreign-ness, by contrast, is associated with disorder, and with negative qualities such as dirtiness, instability, darkness, and non-Christianity. However the distinction between *Deutsche* and *Auslander* is not clear-cut, and there are many shades of grey:

[...] between these two categories lies a kind of no-man’s-land along the continuum in which are placed foreigners who are neither *Auslander* in the usual restricted sense, nor *Deutsche*. These anomalous foreigners are seen as having characteristics somewhere between Germaness and foreignness, being quite similar to Germans at the Dutch end and quite similar to *Auslander* at the French end (Forsythe 1989, p. 151).

The problem is a sensitive one, of course, because the ethnic characterisations of popular discourse were grown, in the 20th century and in Germany, into racial and would-be scientific characterisations whose basis and intent now seems unequivocally evil. Nazi Germany put into operation the idea that the Slavonic peoples (as well as others, of course) were less-than-human, and could be treated accordingly. The first list of oppositions, above, forms an instant tool-kit for the creation of such ideas. Because such ideas have assumed so ugly a form, however, and

because they are not avowable in progressive circles, does not mean that we should not discuss them.

Nor, and this is a crucial point, does it necessarily mean that such ideas have gone away. In some respects the simple perceptual issues which lie behind such ideas, can be argued to be still in existence. The problem is too complex for full discussion here. Remember, however, that peoples in positions of dominance (dominance variously and at once structural, moral, symbolic, political, and so on) construct others as inherently 'disorderly'. We have seen some pre-1939 evidence for this from Germany, and we have noted the way in which such ideas were put to use within the racial ideologies and practices of Nazi Germany. Germany since 1945 has made a sustained and profound attempt to renounce the Nazi past, and to recreate itself as a model member of the community of nations. It is potentially controversial, therefore, even perhaps wounding, to seem to argue that there is, in terms of inter-ethnic perception, any continuity between the Germany of the 1930s, and the Germany of the early 21st century. The matter is complex, and not susceptible to full discussion here. We can surely argue a case for great changes in public opinion in this domain; ideas that were fashionable in Germany in the 1930s, are unfashionable and publicly disdained today. We can surely also, however, argue a case for some degree of continuity, covert and disguised though this continuity might be. The work of Forsythe, for example, clearly expresses popular metaphors of definition and self-definition, which readily mesh with those from an earlier period; and Forsythe's work was based upon fieldwork carried out in the early 1980s. There is no surprise in this. If one were to observe that English perceptions of the Irish in the late 20th century bore some relationship to English perceptions of the Irish in the late 18th century, no one would cavil, or be offended. The same is true for many other inter-ethnic and inter-national relationships. Suggesting any kind of continuity in Germany, however, seems like suggesting that the German attempt to re-make

Germany after the Nazi-period has been less than wholly successful. We do not wish to make this suggestion. Perhaps the best we can do is remember our earlier generalisation: characterisations of 'self' and 'other', using oppositions of the kind discussed here, are found in inter-ethnic characterisations everywhere where such characterisations are created and discussed; they are not a German property.

Forsythe (1989) argues that although twentieth century Germany is well defined as a geographical and political entity, the category of being German has not been clearly identified.

The author gives the following reasons behind that phenomenon:

Over the past century, Germans have been exposed to a series of explicit but conflicting national ideologies. Under Bismarck, Wilhelm II, and Hitler, the State attempted to promote German nationalism. After the Second World War, the Allies instituted the programme of 're-education' and 'denazification' designed to destroy German nationalism, substituting an image of 'the good German' as a non-nationalist. As people attempt to clarify their feelings about being German, they confront layer after layer of contradictory images of what they have been told they are and ought to be. In recent years public interest in coming to terms with this issue has sparked a good deal of discussion in the Federal Republic on various aspects of the so-called German question (Gaus, 1983; Haussling et al., 1985; Weigelt, 1984) (p. 138-9).

Some of the structures of opposition expressed by the list of oppositions can be built into the very different post-war experiences of (West) Germany and Poland. (West) Germany experienced the post-war miracle, a period of spectacular economic growth, and restoration of prosperity and civil society. Poland, by contrast, experienced forty five years of central planning, with the gradual revelation of the inherent weaknesses of this vast experiment. The economy of Poland, the entire consumer and industrial fabric, grew in many obvious respects increasingly ramshackle over this period. A well-dressed German, in the early 1990s, might well have looked over the border at the Polish neighbours, and found metaphors from a much earlier period still appropriate to what he saw. It is interesting, as an aside from the main material of this paper (a future paper will return to this), that the German managers who were interviewed tended to see

the communist period in Poland as only a minor event in a much longer story (see for example a quote from interviewee D3_GE on page 20); the U.K. managers, by contrast, saw modern Poland as having been defined in most important respects by the experience of fifty years of communism.

A third impetus to this paper comes from a work published in 1935 by Chalasinski. This fascinating work contains, among other things, an extraordinary propaganda leaflet from a plebiscite held in Upper Silesia. The inhabitants of the region were, in effect, asked to which country they wished to belong. The leaflet is a kind of social allegory, where the oppositions first listed above take visual and verbal form, grown around the German-Polish divide. Chapman came across this document while writing an MBA dissertation (see Chapman, M. 1990), and has been waiting for an excuse to write about it. It is reproduced below.

‘POLNISCHE WIRTSCHAFT’ – A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The confrontation of German and Slav has had a long sometimes bitter history (see Czubinski and Pajewski 1987, Burleigh 1988, Sugar and Lederer 1969); it is a confrontation which has been strongly economically marked for most of the last two hundred years – by relative prosperity, through differential political rights, by occupational differences, by the Capitalist–Communist divide, and now by the frontier of the European Community, with its tacit line between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’ (Chapman 1994, p. 244).

In discussing the history of Polish-German interaction one can go right back to the founding mythologies of Polish statehood. Consider for instance, the battle of Cedynia (972)¹, the Gniezno Alliance (1000)², or the thirteen years war between the Poles and the German Order of Teutonic Knights (1454-1466) (Kowalski et al. 1998). In more recent times, the structure of modern Polish-German relations is remembered through two particular eventful periods. The first of these was the invasion of Polish territory by Prussia (as well as by the Hapsburg Empire and by Russia) in 1772, and the subsequent partitioning of Poland into Prussian, Russian and

Austrian spheres. As a result of these partitions Poland, as an independent political entity, disappeared completely from the map, and did not reappear until independence was regained after the First World War (1918). The second period began when Poland once again lost its independence, after German occupation, in the events that led to the Second World War, a period when Poland suffered particularly severely. The rapid breakup of the Nazi Empire also led, of course, to Poland's subjection to Soviet domination for most of the rest of the century.

The role of history and tradition in social relations has been pointed out by Chalasinski (1935) in his sociological study of Polish-German antagonism in a small industrial settlement in Upper Silesia. The author suggests that if one day the inhabitants of the investigated settlement could forget their traditions, then Poles and Germans would no longer be enemies. By extension one could argue that without certain events from the past, without the different traditions of both nations, the differences in perceptions simply would not exist. To wish away the past and tradition, however, is to try to wish away the world as we know it.

Although in the politics of the present day there have been several efforts to improve Polish-German relations (e.g., Treaty on Good Neighbour Relations and Co-operation in 1991), these historical events have left the two nations with a very specific attitude to one another. For example, during the partitions in Poland a stereotype of a 'German enemy' was created, which assumed antagonism as an unarguable fact. It was reflected in a popular saying: *'Jak swiat swiatem, tak Niemiec Polakowi nie bedzie bratem'* [*As long as the world exists a German will never be a brother to a Pole*] (Chalasinski 1935, p. 61). The German view was reciprocal, and is well-expressed in the referendum leaflet from 1921, to which reference has already been made (see Figure 3, p. 10). This leaflet had the aim of persuading the population of a small part of Upper Silesia to vote for the accession of their region to Germany (Chalasinski 1935). Stereotypical images of Poles and Germans were used to present an unconditional dichotomy of

these two nations. In this manner Germans were pictured as wealthy, proud, diligent and well-looked-after by the state (orderly, one might say, or rule-governed); this contrasted with the Poles, who were poor, inferior, violent and feckless (disorderly, to go back to the first list of oppositions above).

It is, of course, arguable whether these ideas from long ago can be found relevant to the present day. As noted above, the issue, in Germany in particular, is sensitive and controversial. One can at least observe that echoes of these characterisations, from 80 years ago, can be readily found in popular humour in present-day Germany. In a typical German joke a Pole often appears as an ill-mannered idiot, a dirty fellow, a drunk, and a car thief (Cywinski 1997). The last image was even published in the form of a car sticker in the youth magazine '*Pop Rocky*', whose text went as follows: '*Wie nennt ein Pole seinen Sohn: Klau's*' [*What name does a Pole give to his son? Klau's*] (source: Cywinski 1997). This is a play on words; in colloquial German 'klauen' means 'to pinch/steal' something, and 'Klau's' is an imperative form of this verb ('pinch/steal!') (Clark and Thyen 1995).

Apart from the jokes about Poles, the term '*Polnische Wirtschaft*' is commonly used in Germany. It is used to express the disorganisation and waste of the Polish (command) economy (Wilczynski 1998). Attitudes like this presumably lie behind the results of the survey conducted by the European Commission among the citizens of the member states of the European Union regarding Polish accession. Germans were the second strongest opponents of accession, with the Austrians first (Cywinski 1999).

Interestingly enough 'while opinions about Poles are deteriorating in Germany, in Poland the liking for Germans is increasing' (Cywinski 1997, p. 67). According to CBOS³ 'a stereotype of a German as the eternal enemy is being overcome'. In 1993 a liking for the Germans was declared by barely 23 percent of Poles, however by 1996 this number had increased to 43

percent. During the same period the aversion towards the 'Western neighbour' declined from 53 percent to 31 percent, according to the same source (Cywinski 1997).

Figure 3: Unconditional Dichotomy of German and Polish Character.

Compare and vote! Porównaj i głosuj! Vergleiche u.wähle!

Here Germany!	Hie Deutschland!	Hie Polen!	Here Poland!
The sick German worker	<p>Chory robotnik niemiecki</p>	<p>Der kranke polnische Arbeiter</p>	The sick Polish worker
The German worker at old age	<p>Der kranke deutsche Arbeiter</p>	<p>Chory robotnik polski</p>	Long live work!
The sick German employee	<p>Robotnik niemiecki na starość</p>	<p>Der polnische Arbeiter im Alter</p>	The Polish worker at old age
Pension plan	<p>Der deutsche Arbeiter im Alter</p>	<p>Polski robotnik na starość</p>	Unemployment benefits in Germany
German farmer	<p>Chory pracownik niemiecki</p>	<p>Der kranke polnische Angestellte</p>	The sick Polish employee
"Freedom"	<p>Der kranke deutsche Angestellte</p>	<p>Chory pracownik polski</p>	The Polish providing for old age
	<p>Niemiecki robotnik rolny</p>	<p>Polnische Arbeiter</p>	Polish farmer
	Tu Niemcy!	Tu Polska!	

The German civil servant	Hie Deutschland!	Hie Polen!	The Polish civil servant
The German civil servant	<p>Pracownik niemiecki</p>	<p>Der polnische Beamte</p>	The Polish civil servant
Long live war!	<p>Der deutsche Beamte</p>	<p>Pracownik polski, Podam do nog</p>	Long live war!
Your money or your life	<p>Niech żyje praca!</p>	<p>Ein Hoch dem Kriege!</p>	Your money or your life
	<p>Ein Hoch der Arbeit!</p>	<p>Niech żyje wojna!</p>	
	<p>Zapomni dla bezrobotnych</p>	<p>Geld oder das Leben</p>	
	<p>Erwerbslosenfürsorge</p>	<p>Życie albo pieniądze</p>	
	Tu Niemcy!	Tu Polska!	

Wiec prawdziwą kartką głosowania jest następująca: Also ist für jeden der folgende Stimmzettel der richtige:

Deutschland Niemcy

Germany

Adapted from Chalasinski J. (1935), Antagonizm Polsko-Niemiecki w Osadzie Fabrycznej 'Kopalnia' na Gornym Slasku. Studium Socjologiczne, Sklad Główny: Sp. Akc. Dom Książki Polskiej w Warszawie, pp. 61-62.

RESEARCH METHOD

Defining a sample of the study is one of the elements of setting its boundary (Miles and Huberman 1994). The empirical data for this paper was collected during the semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with executives in Poland and Germany. It is a part of a larger study conducted in order to identify the perceptions of cross-border Mergers and Acquisitions (M&As) of executives from Poland, Germany and the United Kingdom. The selection of participants for the study started from identifying Polish companies in different sectors where some at least of the capital was held by German or British investors. The criteria for an investor company were large size (more than 500 employees) (UNCTAD), and with a subsidiary or partner located in the western part of Poland. The area of interest was narrowed down to this region of the country, Wielkopolska, for two reasons. One is that the area is a major Polish host to FDI, being the third most important region in Poland (after Mazowieckie i Slaskie). Two, is that one of the authors of this paper comes from the region; this meant that research costs could be minimised, and that the author's extensive background knowledge of the area could be exploited. Data on the companies was drawn from publicly available sources⁴. The respondents selected for the study were general managers from the Polish companies, and area directors responsible for Eastern Europe in the parent companies.

Data collection took place in two stages. The first stage, an exploratory study, comprised face-to-face interviews with 10 general managers from companies in Poland. Subsequently general managers from the German (7) and British (2) companies were selected and interviewed in the same way. In 4 out of the 19 cases, face-to-face interviews had to be replaced by telephone interviews; in the face of time constraints on the part of certain executives, this turned out to be the only practical (second-best) solution.

The interviews were intended to be unstructured, with the plan of inviting executives to talk about M&As activity, but then allowing them to discuss whatever issues they saw fit. In the event, however, and especially in Germany, some interviewees expressed a desire to see a structured questionnaire in advance of the actual interview. Therefore, a check-list of open-ended questions was developed, which covered general topics regarding the background of the company, style of management, competition, possible merger and acquisition activity, and so on; this was constructed so as to impose minimum constraints on potential topics of interest.

The results from the exploratory study served as a basis for investigation during the second stage of data collection. It consisted of 44 face-to-face interviews, of which 24 were conducted in Poland, 10 in Germany, and 10 in the United Kingdom (a total of 63 interviews in both stages). The interviews were held with at least 2 general managers from each of the companies; the second and subsequent managers in the same company were recommended by the first (the so-called 'snowballing technique'). The interviews were unstructured; from experience during the exploratory study, however, the researchers developed a Research Protocol, which contained a one-page questionnaire investigating the biographical data of the respondent, and a check-list of questions originating from the themes identified in the exploratory study. The language in which the interviews were conducted varied depending on the country. In Poland all the interviews were carried out in Polish, as it was the first language of both the researcher and the interviewees. In Germany and the UK the language of communication was English. It is worth pointing out that all the German executives were quite fluent English speakers (in one case only the interview was assisted by an interpreter).

The method of analysis applied was based on interpretive approach, which as argued by D'Iribarne (1996/97), is particularly useful in comparisons between organisations from different countries. It offers a more certain and precise understanding of the societies under investigation,

from the point of view of those who are under study (D'Irbarne 1996/97, Miles and Huberman 1994, Yin 1994). Written up data were compared across interviews and across the companies, and analysed for common themes, stories, and issues. This was achieved by multiple readings of the transcripts. The interviews were then colour coded and a list of the main topics, themes, and stories was developed. The texts from the interviews were then sorted according to these themes. The main themes were the issues repeatedly mentioned by the interviewees, discussed by many of them, or pointed out by executives as important. The attention of researchers was also directed to 'important absences', and the reasons behind them. The lists of Polish/German oppositions from this paper were among the themes identified in that way.

It can reasonably be argued that the themes identified were influenced by the subjective perceptions of the authors, rather than being 'really there'. This is a theme which could be endlessly discussed, and there are no right answers: researchers in the positivist tradition regard subjectivity as a threat, to be annulled if possible; researchers of a more ethnographic and interpretive bent might prefer to argue that giving up subjectivity would be akin to giving up intelligence. There are at least several considerations, within the present work, which might serve to reassure the positivist reader. In the first place, the authors themselves come from two different cultures (e.g., British and Polish), so their subjectivities are different. Secondly, 10 of the interview transcripts were sample-coded by the researchers, and this coding was verified by 2 other colleagues. Thirdly, one of the principles of data collection is using multiple sources of evidence in order to achieve triangulation (Yin 1994); here, primary data were complemented by various other sources (e.g., annual reports and leaflets of companies, press cuttings, internet sources). And finally, the narratives were supported with the verbatim responses of the executives under investigation, to offer the reader the opportunity of drawing their own conclusions (Marchan 1996).

Specialist qualitative analysis software packages available (such as QSR Nudist) do not support data in more than one language, and so were not used. Presented with this difficulty the researchers developed their own method of data organising, by using Microsoft Word features for managing long documents. The text was grouped under the main themes identified, each of them constituting the main document, with coded company names as sub-documents. Each main document (theme) was again colour coded (a highlight option in Word), and the list of sub-codes was created. This served as a basis for writing up the narratives.

HOW THE SLAVS SEE THE GERMANS?

First of all, the Polish executives strongly emphasised that their German colleagues were very different from them. The interviewees would talk about this issue with enthusiasm, as in their view this difference was an advantage of the Poles. Figure 4 represents a summary of the opposition between the German and Polish characters, identified in perceptions expressed by the Poles, concerning themselves and their German neighbours:

Figure 4: The German / Polish contrast, as perceived by the Poles

Germans	:	Poles
'cybernetic' society	:	imaginative
lack spontaneity and poetics	:	spontaneous
perform routine tasks	:	creative
down to earth	:	romantic
limited	:	versatile
cold and reserved	:	warm and open
uninspired	:	intelligent
credulous	:	smart
show their superiority	:	privileged to work for Germans
presumptuous	:	(modest)
responsible	:	avoid responsibility
professional	:	(unprofessional)
well organised	:	chaotic
disciplined	:	need authority
very wealthy	:	(poor)
clean and tidy	:	(dirty and untidy)
diligent	:	(lazy)

(N.B. Items in the above list, under the Polish characterisation, which are in parenthesis, were not explicitly articulated by interviewees. They are inserted into the above table, however, since they are opposites to the characteristics attributed to the Germans. The contrasts are implied, and we will return to this issue in the conclusion to the paper).

Poles consider themselves much more imaginative, versatile and spontaneous than the Germans, who are perceived as uninspired and blindly following regulations. We can quote a few examples:

Yes, definitely they are different, and I am saying it is an advantage of our [Polish] employees. In my opinion our employees are more open. This means that if you look at a German fellow for example, let's call him Helmut, who is an employee, and who is to perform a task in a certain way, [you will see] that he will be doing only this task and not thinking of anything else. And if we now go back to Poles [a Pole with the same task], he will be thinking, he will be trying to make his work easier, and he will display greater vivacity and sharpness than an average German (A2_PL).

[...] They [Germans] perform their duties from A to Z [...] (G2_PL).

It is quite a uniform and disciplined nation. Maybe they are a bit uninspired and without imagination. What they read in regulations is sacred for them (G1_PL).

One of the executives even presented a 'cybernetic' vision of his Western neighbours:

We are very different from them. [...] Germans are a society of a higher level of social organisation, one could describe it in this way. A social and cybernetic [organisation], and everyone taken out of the context of their organisation, falls into oblivion of our manager, who is much more versatile. He can react much better in a crisis situation, and has much better knowledge and preparation. [...] A specialist [from Germany] for example from the construction business is trained very well in his subject and virtually leaves no room for discussion. However when one tries to go beyond his narrowly specialised knowledge one totally loses contact with this person, and one is not able to continue conversation (C1_PL).

In his view these differences between the two nations have been conditioned historically. Germany has a long tradition of a state of order, where the above-mentioned 'cybernetic structure' of the society functions without interruptions, and where the basic needs of the society

are fulfilled. Poland by contrast is a ‘young democracy’ where these characteristics are scarcely developed; this has forced Poles ‘to manage as one can’.

The analysis of the qualitative material has shown that Polish executives also regard the Germans as reserved and showing their superiority. The latter is particularly evident in their contacts with Polish employees:

They [Germans] are a nation which does not like to admit their mistakes. According to my own observations they do not hesitate to show their intellectual superiority, it changes however after some time. A German person needs some time to understand that Poznan, Poland is a country of educated people, who can be easily partners even for Germans. Moreover, they are disciplined, presumptuous and cold, the latter meaning, that it is difficult to get through to a deeper layer of their personality (A2_PL).

In general we get along very well here. However they [Germans] have this little vice, that whatever they invented here, what they propose is the best, and there is nothing better. One has to be very intelligent and smart, to do what one wants to do without going against their opinion, and without explaining that this [what they propose] is not the best (C1_PL).

In this context some of the interviewees also differentiated between the Eastern and Western Germans, with the former having much a more negative attitude towards them than the latter. The Western Germans were also seen as more relaxed and well-mannered than those from the East. It is interesting that the German assumption of superiority (as perceived by the Poles) is measured in virtues (for example: discipline, reliability) that the Poles are able to perceive as defects, to which the Poles possess the complementary virtues (for example: improvisational skills, imagination). The Poles are prepared to use these skills to get their own way, being intelligent and smart, rather than simply following the rules. The intimation that Germans are ‘credulous’ seems to lie in this confrontation; the Germans lay down the rules, and assume that the Poles are following them, since the Poles say they are; the Poles only respect the rules in as much as they have to, and will maintain that they are following the rules even while evading them in their own

self-interest. The Germans are not able to see this, and so are ‘credulous’. This feature is well-captured by one of the Polish executives in the following statement:

I also know Germans from my father’s stories from the [Second World] War. He was trading meat during that time, and several times mentioned to me what a severe punishment one could get for doing this. For example a friend of his killed a pig without a permission (this could result in execution by a firing squad). German authorities found out about it. A soldier asked him several times if he knew that what he did was illegal, if he new it was prohibited? The terrified fellow would constantly repeat that he knew, and the insistent German soldier would continue his quest. And it was just enough to say that he did not know about it, and the soldier would leave him alone, and he would be able to go unpunished. This is how things were at that time (D2_PL).

While analysing the perceptions of Polish executives towards the Germans, one can observe a striking tension. On the one hand, the Poles felt much more capable and skilful than the Germans; on the other hand, they also felt privileged to work for them (e.g. A2_PL, D2_PL). What is more, the same executives who pointed out their ‘superiority’ over the Germans, would also claim to posses several features which make them similar to Germans (e.g., ‘Prussian discipline’ in A2_PL, C1_PL, P_C1_PL, D3_PL, etc.). There was also a sense that their Western neighbours displayed several qualities that Poland, through circumstance (war, communism), had been denied, and for which its managers had been longing.

One of the features most admired by the Poles, who identified themselves as chaotic and needing authority, is undoubtedly the long German tradition of law and order (e.g., A2_PL, C1_PL, D2_PL, D3_PL)⁵. In the opinion of the interviewees this good organisation and discipline of the Germans are the main reasons for the great economic success of the country (e.g. D3_PL). In this context it was also pointed out that the Germans are very responsible and diligent. Moreover, Polish interviewees commented on German ‘continuity of change’ (e.g., P_C1_PL), which means that they are never satisfied however good the result. In this context Germans are seen as very professional, and setting high standards and requirements.

Polish perceptions towards Germans contain a certain degree of contradiction. Let us look at the following statement:

It is very beneficial for the Polish market, because on the one hand we are, we create [support] a demand for Polish industry, a big demand, and on the other hand we do not create competition for the Polish industry, as everything we do goes for export. In this regard our activity does not cause closing down of any Polish company (P_M1_PL).

On the one hand Poles are proud to work for a German company which, as mentioned earlier, is perceived to be inherently a good and profitable organisation; on the other hand, they feel guilty about this, as their company might represent a threat to domestic firms.

An interesting phenomenon from the data concerns the *Wielkopolanin mentality*, a source of pride to the inhabitants of *Wielkopolska* (the region under investigation). This mentality was shaped by numerous historical events connected with Germany, not least the partitions of Poland, where *Wielkopolska* fell into the German sphere. This was expressed as follows by one of the executives:

[...] Poland is divided into Poland A, B, and C. 'Poland A' is a former Prussian partition, 'B' – Austrian, and 'C' – all the rest. This influences the present order of matters, for example Prussian – diligence, Austrian – order, and I won't mention the rest. Poznan is located in the centre of Poland A. This area of Poland has certain [good] economic habits [...]. Poland A has got a well-prepared workforce, with habits of ethos of work (E1_PL).

This suggests a perceived positive Prussian influence on the work habits of *Wielkopolanie*, discernible in their interactions with foreign investors. An example of this might be the German idea of 'continuity of change', by which is meant the continuous search for improvement in processes and production. This need for continuity of improvement, when introduced by German investors into Polish reality, was said by Poles from *Wielkopolska* to cause confusion and upset to Poles from other parts of Poland, who were used to a stable working environment, as well as relatively low expectations of their work performance. The *Wielkopolanie*, however, believe that they can cope quite well with these challenges. This is due to the fact that they have the ability to

adjust to these new conditions ‘in their genes’, as the remnants of the ‘*dryk pruski*’ (the ‘Prussian knack’, or Prussian discipline). It is interesting that German executives, when presented with this idea, opposed it strongly (e.g. SIE4_GE). The internal diversity within Poland, which the *Wielkopolanie* were prepared to perceive, and to manipulate to their own credit, was less visible from outside Poland (and this is the common fate of strongly held sub-national perceptions of diversity).

The influence of historical events on Wielkopolanin mentality can be also analysed from a totally different perspective. As one of the executives put it:

It seems to me that these are historical implications, because still the longest war of modern Europe [reference to a famous Polish TV series] did affect us here. We did fight economically during the times of Prussian partition. There were many economic innovations created at that time, which exist in one form or another up to the present. I also think that these initiatives, which were instilled into the nation at that time, they result in the existence of many small and medium sized firms, which are developing. (D3_PL).

This means that the Prussian partitions encouraged the development of certain positive work values and attitudes of Poles, even though the development took the form of reaction against Prussian domination. This view could be supported by Davies (1981), who described the Polish movement in *Posnania* in the following words:

The temper and the possibilities of the Poles in Prussia were far better suited to conciliation than to revolution [...]. It [the Polish movement in *Posnania*] was very staid and bourgeois, and in many ways was an avid imitator of German virtues. The Poles of Posen were consciously striving to outdo their German neighbours at their own game. ‘If you are a Polish housewife’, urged an article written in 1872, ‘make your butter cleaner and better than the Germans do: have better vegetables, linen, fruit and poultry. In this way, you will save both yourself and Poland ... Learning, work, order, and thrift are our new weapons’ (p. 122).

HOW THE GERMANS SEE THE SLAVS?

One of the most striking features of German perception of the Poles, was a tendency to discount the influence of the communist period on the Polish psyche. Due acknowledgement was

made of the economic transformation and the collapse of communism; in spite of these stirring events, however, the Germans did not seem to believe that the experience and ideology of Poland during the communist period had had a great impact on the Poles themselves. In a sense, the Germans presented a static, even essentialist, vision of the Poles, whose defining and characteristic features showed few signs of change, and were rooted in a deep past. One of the interviewees, for example, who claimed to have had extensive contact with Poland and the Poles, was asked whether he observed any changes in Polish society; he replied:

I think people don't change a lot. They have the same feeling, but the time changed completely. Friendship everywhere is the same, and maybe what I said about Catholicism, nationalism also, but maybe there is a growing up experience also and changing from the socialistic system to capitalistic system it's you can see it everywhere. I can remember the time when nothing was in the shops. Since 1988 something like that is completely different. But it's kind of materialism, you see of course. They haven't got [did not have] so many cars, the streets are full of traffic (D3_GE).

Some of the German respondents differentiated between the younger and older generation of Poles, with the former being well educated and highly motivated (D2_GE, C2_GE), and the latter 'Western' but only 'on the surface' (C2_GE). This issue did not receive a lot of attention, however. It is worth mentioning here that German executives praised the language skills of the Poles:

The important point is also the language skills of the Polish peoples. I just speak German in Poland. Nobody in our English company speaks German. None. I have to speak English there, but in Poland everybody speaks German. So I don't have to learn Polish, and they speak very, very well, and they are also, they have a good education (D2_GE).

German investors also saw Poles as a source of cheap labour, and stated this as one of the main incentives for entering the market:

Poznan company is very cheap, and has very cheap personnel (E2_GE).

The cheapest way to produce 'product name', the workers are not so expensive. It is also near to Germany and for the transport it is not so far. Most of the people who work there speak German, that also helps (E3_GE).

This view was very strongly expressed by executives from one particular company ('Company E'), which suggests industry specific influence (in this case, the manufacturing of labour intensive products).

German executives strongly emphasised that Poles were very different from them. A few examples:

First, start to think in Polish. Their way of thinking is different than ours. This is based in a history, and we must be aware of it. You have to be aware of the history in the contact with Polish people, as our relations over the centuries have been very specific (C2_GE).

[...] It's very difficult to work together with Polish people because there is another knowledge, another way to work (D3_GE).

The statement that the German-Polish relationship has been 'very specific' might be regarded as a tragi-comic understatement of the case, in the light of 20th century events. It is possible that we are dealing here with issues that are too sensitive for expression (at least in the interview format to which we were tied; other approaches might have been possible). Experience from the face-to-face interviews, as well as the analysis of the interview data, has clearly demonstrated that the Germans were reticent about candid discussion of the Polish-German relationship. The reasons for this reticence are not far to seek. One executive, who had serious problems in characterising his associations with Poland, said: 'I can't describe it, but everybody can see it, on the work together' (D3_GE). Another one, when asked for advice for potential foreign investors in Poland, simply denied the issues:

Not really, I treat Poland the same way as Austria or France. There are no significant differences in approach while investing there (C2_GE).

Interestingly enough it was the same executive who also referred to the Poles as the ones who are 'Western but only on the surface', and who was quoted earlier in this text. From a positivist

perspective, if an informant says ‘there are no significant differences’, than there are not. In sensitive areas, however, we can, within an interpretive framework, take a slightly different view, and look with interest at silences, absences and denials. We do this, as a matter of course in everyday life, as interacting socialised human beings. There is no reason why we should not extend our skills to interpretive research. A recent article concerning Russian identity, concluded ‘in Russia, if you really want to understand, you have to listen also to the silences’.⁶ In Germany also, perhaps, at least when the German/Polish relationship is discussed, silences merit attention.

The issue of difference received particular attention from German executives from the companies that had acquired Polish firms. They emphasised the importance of cultural differences and their influence on compatibility of corporate cultures in cross-border M&As. One of the executives ranked culture in third place (according to importance) after good image and profitability, and just before management attitudes and additional value created. Consider the following quote:

Hm, it [target company] has to be financially strong, or operationally strong, not a weak company, that means a good company. It has to have a good reputation in a market, which means that is in most cases, has to be there for many years, and has to be top market positions, whether in number one, or number 3 or it's the top range for some time. Hm, so this was [these were] two aspects: the image and the profitability. Thirdly, the chemistry and the culture. Culture in many levels. The corporate culture itself; each company has a different culture, hm, so even in Poland for example, there are different company cultures, depending on the area where the company is located, and also depends on the very specific chemistry of the chief executives, whether they fit together. If they don't do, then it will not work out. Forth aspect is, it has to be done, the management has to be friendly towards the take-over of certain portion of shares, which sometimes requires certain structuring of the participation, that the management stay that owners of the company for example. They have interest in supporting the company. Ahm, well, and a fourth [fifth] very important, the strategic aspects, hm, is there an additional value created by adding this partner to our group of companies. The value created for the company, due to ‘Company C’ services, or value created to ‘Company C’, because they have this partner, can answer services which at the moment are not as good in ‘Company C’, or certain markets, so there are many various criteria, or aspects (P_C1_GE).

German interviewees also used a specific term ‘mentality’, while talking about their Polish colleagues. It was for example while talking about a ‘different mentality’ of the people (P_D1_GE), or ‘work mentality’ of the Poles (D2_GE). Moreover, when presented with the statement that inhabitants of Wielkopolska believe themselves to display certain German-like features (e.g. order, discipline, diligence), seemed to oppose it strongly (e.g. G4_GE). This strong objection to any intimation of similarity between Poles and Germans is understandable, in the light of the ethnic oppositions which have already been discussed, and also in the light of the various negative features which the German interviewees noted in Poland. Attention was drawn, for example, to corruption in Poland; also to a rather undesirable form of materialism (e.g. P_B1_GE, D3_GE, G3_PL). Reference was also made to Polish nationalism, which Germans had experienced while doing business in Poland. Consider the following quotes:

It can be also a bad luck. We have placed an offer, but the Polish government gave it to the Polish applicant. There is a little bit of chauvinism there. There are also situations, if you are too late. Yes, it is very important the time you enter (G3_GE).

[...] You see, we were surprised about the laws they had in Poland concerning the production, the construction of a company. They had laws that were even stricter than the German ones, and we didn’t find any Polish producer meeting those standards. We got the impression that the standards are only made for foreign investors, as a kind of protection as well.

[So do you mean that there are different requirements for foreign investors that for local producers?] I guess so. For example, concerning hygienic topics, we had to meet very strict standards and none of the Polish producers could meet that [them]. We are sure. I’ve seen 30 of them (P_B1_GE).

[How do you see the future of your company?] Positively, especially if [Polish] Sanitary Offices will start treating all the companies equally (E5_GE).

The German executives also referred to a Polish tendency to evade responsibility:

The self-control awareness of the employee, positive approach to work, and identification with the company leaves a lot to wish for [in Poland]. There are 70 % of foreigners employed in the production here [in Germany], but their awareness is much higher, they have a positive approach to the environment (E4_GE).

The problem is taking over the responsibility. We have this problem too [in Germany],

but if someone is responsible in certain area they take care of it. In Poland it takes a long time to find a person with relevant education and skills (E5_GE).

This evasion of responsibility by Poles was acknowledged by Poles themselves. They typically saw this as being a direct result of the communist system (and a cogent argument can be made for this). German respondents did not see these issues as related. Rather, they considered that, in order to produce good work, Poles needed to be well managed and motivated. This is because they have a great respect for authority, and do not question the decisions of their superiors.

Consider the following quotes:

One does everything with these people [...], because Pole is capable, but one has to manage them, show them a new way (E4_GE).

If the employees in Poland are well managed, they are better than here [in Germany], but it is very difficult to find good specialists on the lower [than the management] level. On the level of management it is already much better (E5_GE).

[...] Polish employees they work like German ones 15 years ago. It is true what boss says, and they do it, they follow. In Germany this is not the case. They question the boss a lot (C2_GE).

The positive features of Poles mentioned by the respondents were Polish hospitality and warmth (e.g. D3_GE, D2_GE); the positive features tended to be stressed by the same interviewees who had also dwelt on the negative features. As we saw in our introduction, ethnic oppositions of the kind under discussion readily produce both vices and virtues, located in the same people.

German interviewees, while talking about their Polish counterparts, stressed the Polish need to be coached; they also made it clear that the Germans were the best ones to do the coaching, and to show the Poles ‘the right way’. Germans saw Poles working for their companies as privileged ones. As one of them stated:

The motivation is high, they know that if they come to the EU if they come to Germany to work they wouldn’t have the same chance as some Germans, so therefore they see the

chance to work for a German company in Poland as very good, because it can grow in his country, with this company is a big bonus (D2_GE).

This German vision of the Poles may be encouraged by the work attitudes of the Poles themselves, who state for example:

I simply think that if there is instruction, and even if I think it is stupid, one has to execute it, and not to discuss its purpose because one never knows the total picture [...] I would not dare, and also would not like if people working with me told me that this [decision] is stupid (D3_PL).

The German vision of the Poles may also be influenced by the fact that the Poles consider themselves to be incurable romantics. The following statement of a Polish executive can be an evidence of it:

[...] Poles are an intelligent nation. Our bad luck was that nobody showed us 'how to do it'. I think however that managed cleverly, we are the people who are destined to succeed (C1_PL).

Poles need the authority and coaching because they believe themselves to be '*the chosen nation*'. This tendency to live in the world of illusions is seen by Podgorecki (1993) as a result of traumatic national events, especially the loss of independence in the eighteenth century. In his view taking refuge in illusion is a Polish way of explaining harsh realities through legends of undeserved suffering (especially in the light of the country's glory in previous centuries). These attitudes encourage a conviction that 'each grief should be compensated', and that one can expect an intervention 'from above/outside' (p. 20). This can also be related, of course, to the strong Catholic tradition in Poland.

Germans tended to regard working for a foreign (German) company as very motivating for Polish employees, since it offered an opportunity to experience the corporate world of the European Union. In return the Germans expect the Poles to try to understand the German way of

thinking and acting. One German expressed surprise that co-operation with the Poles had gone so well, contrary to his expectations:

[...] I was very surprised with a good co-operation during the restructuring of the company, very good co-operation. I didn't think it would go so smoothly (C2_GE).

Geographical proximity also received some attention from the interviewed investors, with Germans emphasising that Poland was their 'great neighbour' (G4_GE). Some interviewees recognised that in economic terms Poland was not a uniform nation, but rather one which varied from region to region; for example:

At the moment 80% of companies are located in Warsaw, but Poznan is developing as well. For example Volkswagen had opened a factory there. They want to develop the South too, Krakow, Katowice, special businesses there. In the coast there is a lot of development too. The other parts of Poland have a different mentality. For example in Gdansk, or in the North in general, people are not so open for foreigners. Poznan area is very open, as it is close to the border, the same refers to Warsaw, where are a lot of foreign companies, it is very much different in Gdansk. In general North is different from the South, and this is also in Germany (C2_GE).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The relationship between Germany and Poland is a big subject, even when reduced to interactions within the specifically business context. This paper is only a start. It has been our intention to show that opinions and perceptions expressed by German and Polish managers, referring to their mutual interaction, have a certain oppositional logic which has been demonstrated in other situations of ethnic meeting.

We can go back to the lists of oppositions which were presented towards the start of the paper (Figure 1 and Figure 2). They need repeating here, since the issues are rather intricate. Figure 1 was a generic 'self'/'other' contrast, where 'self' was good and 'other' was bad. This was argued to have a long history of application to the German/Polish contrast, in the limited

sense that the Germans had used this series of oppositions to classify themselves as ‘self’, and the Poles as ‘other’ (repeat of Figure 1):

Self	:	Other
Rule	:	Disrule (absence of rule)
Order	:	Disorder
Culture	:	Nature
Human	:	Animal
Controlled	:	Uncontrolled
Lawful	:	Lawless
Clean	:	Dirty
Reason	:	Unreason
Intellect	:	Emotion
Constant	:	Inconstant
Modern	:	Backward
Progressive	:	Regressive

Figure 2 represented essentially the same series of oppositions, but through Romantic (or shall we say ‘rose-tinted’?) lenses. In this formulation, the characteristics of ‘other’ were still determined by opposition to ‘self’, but they had been re-interpreted as virtues rather than vices (repeat of Figure 2):

Self	:	Other
Constraint (rule)	:	Freedom (disrule, absence of rule)
Predictable (order)	:	Unpredictable (disorder)
Artificial (human)	:	Natural (animal)
Urban (culture)	:	Rural (nature)
Reserved (controlled)	:	Impulsive (uncontrolled)
Formal (controlled)	:	Informal (uncontrolled)
Conventional (lawful)	:	Unconventional (lawless)
Sterile (clean)	:	Fertile (dirty)
Calculation (reason)	:	Imagination (unreason)
Measurement (intellect)	:	Passion (emotion)
Dull (constant)	:	Exciting (inconstant)

Now we must repeat the Polish characterisation of the German/Polish opposition, as derived from the interviews with Polish managers (repeat of Figure 4):

Germans	:	Poles
'cybernetic' society	:	imaginative
lack spontaneity and poetics	:	spontaneous
perform routine tasks	:	creative
down to earth	:	romantic
limited	:	versatile
cold and reserved	:	warm and open
uninspired	:	intelligent
credulous	:	smart
show their superiority	:	privileged to work for Germans
presumptuous	:	(modest)
responsible	:	avoid responsibility
professional	:	(unprofessional)
well organised	:	chaotic
disciplined	:	need authority
very wealthy	:	(poor)
clean and tidy	:	(dirty and untidy)
diligent	:	(lazy)

We can see from the Polish characterisation of themselves contrasted to the Germans, that there is a strong presence of Figure 2, the Romantic reappraisal of the self/other opposition. We have argued that this is still a structure within which ordered centrality is represented by the left-hand column of the figure, and that defining power still resides on the left. This, we think, is true of the German / Polish opposition, both in the light of political and economic events of the last two hundred years, and in the light of the depth and intensity of German scholarship directed towards Central European literary, linguistic, philological, ethnic and cultural issues. The exemplar for this argument was the Anglo-Saxon / Celtic contrast, as argued by Chapman (1992a). Norman Davis provides a nearly unwitting confirmation of the appropriateness of the comparison, when he says:

For a newcomer from an Anglo-Saxon country there is an unmistakable scent of Ireland in a Polish atmosphere (and this is not because of a remark by certain great professor that Poland and Ireland are the only catholic countries in the world, where the inhabitants feed on potatoes and vodka). Both [these countries] are full of erratic anomalies. Most of the Poles are 'against' already by nature (translated from Davies, 1998, Vol. 2, p. 672).

Being ‘against’ is what you are if your characteristics are defined by opposition to somebody else, where somebody else is doing the talking and writing. In this sense, the Poles are ‘against’ the Germans, and it is not surprising that this might evoke comparisons with the Irish experience. It is not simply that the Poles and the Irish are ‘the same’, but rather that the larger definitional structures which they both inhabit are similar (there is a similarity, that is, between the Anglo-Saxon / Celtic contrast, and the German / Polish contrast).

It is interesting to see, therefore, the Poles characterising themselves as ‘incurable romantics’. The right hand columns of Figure 2 and Figure 4 are, as noted, very similar. What about the oppositions that are represented on the left-hand column of Figure 4, but absent from the right hand column? Four of these are, in their left hand column versions, are: professional, very wealthy, clean and tidy, diligent. It is noteworthy that the Poles tacitly declined to fill in the obvious oppositions, in their own characterisation of themselves: unprofessional, poor, dirty and untidy, lazy. These characterisations are more difficult to glamorise in the romantic reappraisal (although not necessarily impossibly so). The oppositional logic of the ideas requires these adjectives, and of course we have seen that in non-Romantic characterisations from a German perspective, such adjectives would have seemed fully appropriate. The 1921 propaganda leaflet from Upper Silesia is clear enough evidence of this. Where there was no fear of offending, and where the ‘other’ was not allowed self-characterisation, then we might expect an unvarnished application of the oppositions from Figure 1, where poverty, dirtiness, laziness and incompetence find a natural home in the right hand of the column. We have cited one or two evidences from German popular culture that suggest that the oppositions from Figure 1 still have some resonance in popular thought, although the depth and dispersal of these ideas is undemonstrated by our research. We have also seen numerous evidences of German managers struggling for words, when the direction of their narrative is leading them towards characterisations of this kind

directed towards the Poles. Evasions ('I can't describe it, but everybody can see it'), Olympian detachment ('our relations have been very specific'), and wry hints ('people don't change a lot'), were all in evidence. It is clear that allowing full expression to oppositions deriving from Figure 1, in a business context in modern Europe, in a world of political correctness, and in a question-and-answer interview format, is almost impossible. We should perhaps be glad of this. There is nevertheless some suggestion that the older and currently less reputable ideas from Figure 1 are still present in the structures of opposition through which Germans define their relationship to the Poles. There is certainly abundant evidence that the ideas from Figure 2, are strongly held in Polish characterisation of their own relationship to the Germans. Where ideas from figure 2 are invoked, then figure one is conceptually never far away; indeed, it is an important part of our argument that Figure 2 is only a disguised form of Figure 1.

We have not discussed in any detail a world in which the Poles were in the defining positions of power, characterising themselves as 'self', and the Germans as 'other', in terms of Figure 1 and Figure 2. Such a world undoubtedly existed, locally in many places, nationally for limited periods. In general, however, in the last two hundred years, there is little doubt which of the two groups has played the most powerful defining role. It remains true, in the situations that we have investigated, that the Germans have taken control of Polish companies, rather than the other way round.

It is also true to note that Polish and German nationalisms have shared a great deal of their vision and their rhetoric. Davies (1981), discusses the attitudes of both of these nations in the last decades before the First World War. Both sides would insist on their differences, but their insistence would be identical in its mutual antagonism:

To the outside observer at this stage, the exponents of German and Polish nationalism displayed striking similarities. Both cultivated myths about their own exclusive blood and culture; both believed in their unique civilising mission in Eastern Europe; both regarded the other as a 'reactionary' obstacle to the achievement of their 'rights', and as

a usurper of the 'ancient land of their forebears'. The Polish nobleman who sold his estates to the Colonisation Commission, like the German who took a Polish bride, were both denounced as renegades to their nation (Davies 1981, p. 135).

It is an important part of our argument, however, that Polish and German experience were not equally recorded or empowered. The views of German and Polish managers, that have been reported in this paper, are evidence towards this, in ways that we have tried to discuss⁷.

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NOTES:

¹ The battle of Prince of Mieszko I and his brother Czcibor with German Margrave Hodon.

² Boleslaw Chrobry was officially recognised by Otton III (German Emperor) to be a sovereign ruler of Poland.

³ Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej (Centre for Research of Public Opinion) in Poland.

⁴ E.g. 'The List of Major Foreign Investors in Poland' issued annually by the Polish Agency for Foreign Investment (PAIZ, 1996).

⁵ It is strange that we should regard the country which has been at the centre of so much conflict in central Europe in the 20th century, as having sustained an unbroken tradition of law and order. But so it is. A separate argument is required here.

⁶ The article was an anonymous review from the *Economist*, October 28th – November 3rd 2000, p.150, reviewing *Night of Stone: Death and Memory in Russia*, by Catherine Merridale, Granta publications

⁷ This is not a paper which leans heavily upon the ideas of Geert Hofstede. Nevertheless, there is plenty of material in our data which would be compatible with some of the four dimensions of culture which have become so central to business academia in its dealing with cultural issues. For example, intimations of a Polish / German power distance difference (see figure 3), and a Polish / German uncertainty avoidance difference (see figure 4), leap from the material. This too will perhaps merit a separate paper.