

**ABSTRACT OF THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION**

**UNIVERSITY OF LODZ**

**FACULTY OF INTERNATIONAL AND POLITICAL STUDIES**

**TITLE OF DOCTORAL DISSERTATION**

**Jan Burbo**

**Repatriation of the Polish population from Eastern Europe  
after the Second World War in the context of myth and collective  
imaginings**

PhD thesis written

at the Department of Political Theory and Political Thought

under the guidance of

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## **KEY WORDS:**

Repatriation, international agreements, Republic of Poland, Soviet republics, USSR, Romania, international relations, historical backgrounds, repatriation movements, social myths, disinformation, legal documents, Eastern Europe.

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Introduction to the subject of research of the doctoral dissertation**

#### **Justification of the choice of the research problem and its significance**

The confrontation of myths and collective imaginations on specific topics, in this case about repatriation and repatriates arriving in Polish after World War II, gives the opportunity to juxtapose two realities – political, media and social. The reality of the media is often shaped by the political system and the system of the state, so the content presented in the media (press, television, radio) often differs fundamentally from the actual socio-economic situation. This was the case with the repatriation of the Polish population from Eastern Europe to Polish after World War II, and the factor determining these differences was the political system of the Polish state, a state that was a unit dependent on another state – the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Dictatorship and socialism, whose overarching ideology is communism, determine both the functioning of the media and the functioning of society. The content presented by both the media and the politicians themselves is not adequate to the social reality, because the communist ideology is based on mechanisms such as propaganda, manipulation, terror and distortion of social reality in order to keep the ruling party in power for as long as possible.

A broad propaganda campaign of the Polish authorities in favour of repatriation, related to the support of left-wing Polish diaspora circles in France – especially "during the sessions of the First Congress of Polish Emigration in France and the Second General Congress of Emigration (28–30 July 1945

After regaining independence, Poland fought for a sovereign and independent state, beyond the influence of other countries, especially Germany or the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the Second World War ended at least unfavourably for Polish. On the one hand, this entailed

legal and administrative changes in the borders of the state, and on the other hand, changes in the social reality. The consequence of the solutions adopted for Poles at that time was the Soviet totalitarian system – the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, whose basis for functioning remained the communist ideology, changing the social reality of millions of Poles by shaping narratives inconsistent with the facts.

Terms such as "repatriation" were used in an inappropriate context – the USSR used this term to describe the mass resettlement of Poles, not the actual repatriation action aimed at a voluntary return to the homeland. The term repatriation could not be used to describe the forced departures of the inhabitants of the Eastern Borderlands, which were associated with the decisions of the population made in fear and under duress.

The political and social background of repatriation after World War II is a key element allowing for the assessment of changes taking place in the socio-political space of the Polish state. Understanding the importance of the problem requires an explanation of the dependencies between the Republic of Poland and the USSR and the impact of these dependencies on Polish society. The image of the world shaped and perpetuated by the Soviet authorities is a metaphorical one, with all elements of metaphors being subjective, depending on the views of the ruling party.

The key to shaping these images was the language of hatred, the essence of which focused on the use of words in such a way that a properly selected set of signs and presented in the context created by the authorities ensured public support for all actions taken by the ruling elite. The subjective metaphor of the USSR was the basis for the creation of myths and collective images in societies affected by this type of pathology.

The distortion of truth and the manipulation of the image were aimed at changing the meaning, which was based on the replacement of positive associations with negative values. The valuation of repatriation in the semantic field is changing, from a positive, voluntary process in which the repatriate is the decision-making centre, to a negative, coercive process, dependent on decisions made by decision-making centres. This was also the strategy adopted by the USSR towards the citizens of the Polish state after World War II. However, the Polish state is no exception – the actions of the Soviet Union have not changed over the past decades, and the strategies of data manipulation used to intimidate societies have survived to this day.

The relationship between the decision-making centre and its system of values and the social situation was expressed in the process of repatriation of the Polish population from Eastern Europe after World War II.

The research problem addressed in this doctoral dissertation are myths and collective perceptions about repatriation after World War II. The aim of the work was achieved through a systemic analysis, which allows to present processes and phenomena in the broader context of evolution, because these phenomena and processes interact with each other, affect each other in various configurations, complement each other and become mutually dependent. In this analysis, the political science method was applied, using political science categories such as: (1) global order, (2) international relations, (3) socio-political changes, (4) international politics, (5) political decisions, and (6) prognostics.

### **Objectives and research hypotheses**

The main aim of the paper is to analyze the myths and collective perceptions concerning the repatriation of Poles after World War II in the context of the evolution and changes of the political system, its determinants and individual factors shaping these phenomena in Poland in the studied period. The achievement of this goal required a thorough meta-analysis based on a systemic approach, conditioning the possibility of showing the relationships between the individual phenomena studied and their impact on social transformations, determined by political myths, aimed at modifying the attitudes and behaviors of society.

The intermediate objectives of the study are related to the application of the comparative method, thanks to which the shape and form of international cooperation in the field of repatriation between Poland and the other republics of the USSR (Ukrainian SSR, Byelorussian SSR, Lithuanian SSR) were determined. Intermediate objectives of this doctoral dissertation: (1) presentation and discussion of international agreements concluded between the Polish government and the governments of other republics of the USSR, (2) description of differences and similarities between individual variables, (3) indication of the dependencies between the political system of a given country and the shape of the agreement concluded with Poland, (4) comparison of the course of the repatriation process according to the adopted classifications, (5) comparison of the conditions of the adopted political solutions on the (6) comparison of myths and collective perceptions of repatriation in the countries analysed. The aim of comparative studies is to determine the characteristics of similar or identical and differentiating

individual repatriation processes, depending on the country responsible for the "transfer" of the population.

Not without significance was also the issue of pragmatic rationality, which is the basis of the decision-making method, based on the indication of the economic and legal conditions of myths and collective perceptions, closely related to the groups influencing it, procedures, pressure groups, issues of pressure and the system of values – both social and political. The decision-making method was used to achieve specific objectives, such as: (1) the influence of particular pressure groups on the myths and collective images shaped around repatriation, (2) the importance of pressure in individual decisions, (3) the determination of repatriation procedures and the variables determining them (coercion and its types), (4) the determination, description and comparison of the system of social and political values, (5) the characterization of repatriation procedures according to the adopted categories.

**The main hypothesis of the thesis:** myths and collective perceptions surrounding the process of repatriation from Eastern Europe after World War II were conditioned by the political system and regime.

**Detailed hypotheses:** (1) the shape of international agreements between Poland and the republics that were part of the USSR depended on the political system and regime, (2) myths and collective perceptions about the repatriation process were shaped by the communist authorities of the USSR, which had an impact on the socio-political situation in all the union republics and in Poland, (3) myths and collective perceptions about repatriation were at odds with the actual social situation of the process (4) the course of the repatriation process depended on political decisions, (5) the process of repatriation of Poles from Eastern Europe after World War II was different from the one presented legally and in the media, (6) the discrepancy between myth and reality was determined by political conditions.

### **Topicality of the research topic**

Despite the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the Russian state has not yet come to terms with the loss of the lands to which it claims. Over the decades, the values of the decision-making centre and foreign actions and policy have not changed. The phrase "in its essential form" indicates the contemporary situation, in which the Russian state does not appear as socialist, and the real social situation has not changed since 1991.

The issue of repatriation is raised in the literature on the subject both in the context of the migration of the Polish and Jewish population living in the eastern territories of the Second Polish Republic, as well as in the context of terminological abuses, the assumption of which was to create an alternative reality by means of propaganda based on a change in the valuation of concepts m.in. It was based on the myth of voluntariness guaranteed by the treaty of 9<sup>th</sup> September 1944 year.

Problems and inaccuracies concerning the myth of repatriation and its components contributed to the creation of a work about the actual shape of the process of "repatriation" of the inhabitants of the Eastern Borderlands. The Eastern Borderlands were part of the Second Polish Republic – can the term repatriation be used to describe the forced resettlement of people living in an area belonging to the Polish state, which was taken over by another state as a result of a decision not taken by the country that lost it?

The modern approach to the repatriation process allows it to be defined in the category of voluntary and fully conscious actions dependent on the individual. Some data, however, indicate that the element of this process was often actions, as a result of which "a Polish citizen, against his will, was arrested and deported by the Soviet repressive apparatus during the war outside the territory of the Republic of Poland". Many citizens of the Second Polish Republic lived in difficult conditions (e.g. in the gulag or prison), they were often brought to physical destruction, which caused them to die and could not return to their homeland.

## **Work Structure**

This dissertation consists of five chapters preceded by an introduction and closed with a conclusion summarizing the collected data and their analysis.

Chapter I. Development of international agreements between the Republic of Poland and the USSR and Romania

Chapter II. Characteristics of the repatriation agreement with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Chapter III. The Formation of Repatriation Movements from the Lands Taken After World War II

Chapter IV. Historical Analysis of the Course of Repatriation Processes Between Individual Countries

## CONCLUSION

The doctoral dissertation written under the supervision of Andrzej Dubiecki, PhD, DSc, professor at the University of Lodz, is a very constructive and interesting consideration from the point of view of the research topic entitled "*Repatriation of the Polish population from Eastern Europe after World War II in the context of myths and collective imaginations*".

Within the scope of my doctoral dissertation, I made an insightful characterization of the development of international agreements between the Republic of Poland and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and Romania, as well as agreements with the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic; the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic and the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic.

The political and social conditions of repatriation movements and the shaping of these repatriation movements from the lands taken after World War II in the Eastern Borderlands of the Republic of Poland were analysed. Within the scope of the thesis, I have made a detailed historical analysis and verification of the course of repatriation processes between individual countries and an insightful thematic analysis of research on collective imaginations and social myths in the field of repatriation relations.

The aim of this doctoral dissertation is to analyze and synthesize facts from the Polish-Romanian-Soviet political history after World War II. These facts relate to myths and collective imaginations, and the subject of their interest is repatriation and the various ways in which it is interpreted and understood. A thorough understanding of the events that took place during the period under study, and which shaped both myths and collective perceptions of repatriation, requires a presentation of the geopolitical situation and the balance of power in Europe during the period under study. It should be noted that the pressure exerted by Russia is a characteristic element of the changes in Eastern Europe, which Russia considers to be its sphere of influence and which it expresses in numerous actions aimed at subjugating other independent states, as was the case in Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia or in Ukraine in 2022.

This goal was achieved thanks to a thorough explanation and discussion of the problems concerning: repatriation agreements between the Soviet Union and Poland and

Romania (Chapter I, in which the main ideas and assumptions of the repatriation projects in the indicated areas are presented); the formation of repatriation movements from the territories taken after World War II, divided into two main periods (Chapter II); and the development of legislation between Poland, the USSR and Romania (Chapter III). A thorough historical and political analysis provided the basis for the reconstruction of the actual events of that period, concerning various conditions of repatriation from the seized lands, which was collected in the part concerning the analysis of the course of repatriation on the Polish and Soviet sides (chapter IV), which became the foundation of the picture built for the purposes of this work, concerning myth and collective perceptions of repatriation, presented in Chapter Five.

**The main research hypothesis presented in the introduction of the paper has been fully proven that** the myths and collective perceptions surrounding the process of repatriation from Eastern Europe after World War II were conditioned by the political system and regime.

**In the whole of the study, detailed research hypotheses have been presented and scientifically proven, namely:**

- the shape of international agreements between Poland and the republics that were part of the USSR depended on the political system and regime,
- myths and collective perceptions of the repatriation process were shaped by the communist authorities of the USSR, influencing the socio-political situation in all the union republics and in Poland.
- myths and collective perceptions about repatriation were at odds with the real social situation of the repatriation process and its economic background,
- the course of the repatriation process depended on political decisions,
- the process of repatriation of Poles from Eastern Europe after World War II was different from the one presented legally and in the media,
- The discrepancy between myth and reality was determined by political conditions.



Both myths and collective beliefs are forms of narrative that present multidimensional data. Therefore, the method of data collection is the narrative interview, and the complement is the critical analysis of the literature. The empirical material obtained as a result of the use of properly selected research tools allows to obtain images of reality created on the basis of interpretation, typology and categorization.

In this work, I paid particular attention to the space "between" myth and reality. This space is created by the so-called *fourth estate* – the media (television, press, radio, internet) and is created by means of linguistic components made public by the state in the form of various messages during specific events. In this part, the media image of the repatriate and repatriation in the Russian press and the press of the countries formerly belonging to the USSR bloc was analysed, taking into account the period of the change of the borders of the Republic of Poland as a result of the war in 1939. For this reason, the analysis of media elements in the composition of repatriation takes into account only those newspapers whose history dates back to at least the 20s of the twentieth century.

**A special and important research source were the direct eyewitness account sand participants of the events were divided into two categories. The first of them are the accounts recorded in the justifications of court judgments, telling the stories of individual, though repetitive, problems of repatriatesin exercising the rights promised and due to them. The second category consists of the accounts of the participants of these events collected in the form of interviews, constituting an important primary source, confirming the content of secondary sources, such as case law or literature on the subject.**

A very important and significant supplement to this research work was an annex containing the following documents:

- Mentions of repatriates from Eastern Europe, which are published on the social network Facebook and directly used in the work;
- Direct memories of Jan Burbo – a repatriate from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics;
- Repatriation documents – legal acts and photographs;
- Judgments of the Supreme Administrative Court.

Finally, I would like to emphasize that there is no social and cultural reality in the world that is not shaped by myths and collective imaginations. They can be found at every level of human social functioning, co-creating cultural, social, religious and especially political reality.