"Forced Migration and Human Capital: Evidence from Post-WWII Population Transfers" by S.O. Becker, I. Grosfeld, P. Grosjean, N. Voigtländer and E. Zhuravskaya *American Economic Review 2020, 110(5): 1430-1463*

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Becker et al. (2020) focus on studying human capital investment decisions of descendants of displaced Poles from the Eastern part of Poland in the aftermath of World War II (WWII). Around two million Poles were resettled from the Eastern Borderlands region (*Wschodnie Kresy*) due to the westward shift of the Polish frontiers.[1] Most of them went to the former German regions (*the Western Territories*). The authors use both historical and survey data and show that descendants of forced migrants from Kresy have significantly more years of education than descendants of voluntary migrants from Central Poland who moved to the Western Territories in a similar period.

The authors explain this finding with the stronger attachment of displaced Poles to human capital than to tangible wealth. They argue that the trauma from leaving their homes and abandoning most possessions increased the preferences of the resettled Poles for education as an investment that an individual always carries with him. The authors also mention that settling down in the Western Territories was perceived as very uncertain as many Poles were concerned that the frontiers might be re-shifted again. However, the forced resettlement did not affect the whole of Kresy uniformly. As the authors mention, in the regions that are now part of Lithuania and Belarus, the Soviet authorities encouraged Poles in rural areas to stay (p. 1437). The *Ancestry Survey* conducted by the authors has data on the respondents' education and the origin of their ancestors.[2] According to Table 1, only 9% of respondents had at least one ancestor from today's Lithuania and Belarus who was forced to flee their home. Divergently, the equivalent share for respondents with an ancestor from today's Ukraine is 32%.

Table 1: Respondents who have an ancestor from a region which is in a listed country today*

	Today's Belarus	**Today's Lithuania**	**Today's Ukraine**	**Neither**
Number	305	225	1,215	1,943
Share of forced migrants	34%	34%	51%	3%

*And not from any other country that is not Poland now.

Source: *Ancestry Survey.*

The survey results are consistent with historical estimates according to which 40-50% of Poles from a Kresy region, which is in today's Lithuania or Belarus, were forced to flee, and around 90% of Poles from today's Ukraine (Ciesielski and Borodziej 1999, Kurzowa 1993, Sienkiewicz and Hryciuk 2008). Hence,

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[1] Eastern Borderlands is a historical name of a region that covers today part of Western Ukraine, Belarus, and Lithuania. Similarly to the authors, I will denote this region as "Kresy".

[2] As "ancestors," I classify parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents. Becker et al. (2020) also include ancestors of higher degrees.

the experience of traumatic resettlement is relevant mostly for the Poles who, before the war, inhabited territories that are within today's Ukrainian border (Lviv, Volhynia, Stanisławów, and Tarnopol regions). In line with the authors' results, the respondents who have an ancestor who was forced to flee their homeland in the aftermath of WWII are significantly more likely to accomplish higher education (by 7.5 p.p).[3]

In this comment, I discuss other mechanisms which might have contributed to the main results presented by the authors. They are consistent with the "uprootedness" hypothesis but would need further empirical investigation to estimate their importance in explaining the human capital decisions of displaced Poles and their descendants.

1. The Volhynian massacre

The Volhynian massacre was an ethnic cleansing that took place in the Volhynia and Eastern Galicia region in the period of February 1943 - May 1945.[4] During that period, Ukrainian nationalists, motivated by the propaganda of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, killed around 100 thousand Poles. Also, they killed around 1 thousand Jews who were against the Ukrainian nationalist movement.[5] After a Polish family was murdered her house was often plundered by her executioners. Thousands of Ukrainians were also murdered by the nationalists: those who helped Poles or were married to them. In retaliation, the Polish army killed around 10-12 thousand Ukrainians.

The authors only mention the "high animosity between Poles and Ukrainians" (p. 1437 and 1452). The deportation to the unknown land after WWII might have been traumatic, but many Poles were escaping the terror of the ethnic cleansing. One of the estimates claims that 300 thousand Poles escaped the ethnic cleansing orchestrated by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (Ciesielski and Borodziej 1999). Poles have been very traumatized by the atrocities that they, their family, or friends witnessed in their homeland. Potentially, this trauma might have also contributed to shifting preferences towards education.

Before WWII, the Ukrainian population in Eastern Kresy did not have equal access to education as Poles or Jews.[6] This is reflected in relatively low literacy rates among Ukrainians in that period. The pre-war Censuses in Poland only registered data on literacy by declaring religious confession. However, in that period, a confession was a good proxy of ethnicity, which can be inferred from data by the first language spoken. Table 2 shows data on the mother tongue and declared confession for Poland and regions where the ethnic cleansing took place.[7] Table 3 shows the same information for the rest of the Eastern Kresy regions (Białostockie region is missing as most of its territory has remained in Poland after WWII).[8]

As we can see in Table 2, while Ukrainians were a minority in interwar Poland, they constituted a majority in the Lviv countryside, Volhynia, Stanisławów, and Tarnopol regions. Also, in these regions, the Eastern/Greek Catholic or the Orthodox religion was mostly practiced by them. Conversely, the Polish population mostly practiced the Catholic religion. Table 3 shows the same statistics but for the Kresy regions where the Polish population constituted a majority, and Ukrainian less than 5%. In these regions, the largest minority was Belarussian. However, for the Polesie and Nowogród regions, the Orthodox religion was mainly practiced by the Ukrainian minority. For Vilnius, a similar share of Ukrainians and Belarussians practiced the Orthodox religion. The Polish population presented in Table 3 constituted 11% of the country's population, and in Table 2, with the majority of Ukrainians, 26%.

[3] In comparison to respondents whose ancestors came from any region before the WWII and were not forcefully displaced.
[4] One of the historical books about these events available in English is Motyka (2022).
[5] Most of the Jews in that region (150-200 thousand) were killed by the Nazi army in 1941-1942.
[6] Ukrainians were systematically discriminated against by the Polish administration during the interwar period. For example, they faced employment barriers in public institutions and limited access to education in the Ukrainian language.
[7] Lviv, Stanisławów, and Tarnopol region were part of the Eastern Galicia region.
[8] I did not include the Jewish population as nearly 100% of Hebrew and Yiddish speakers declared Judaism as their confession. Also, Armenian Catholics were a very small minority which mostly spoke Polish.

Table 2: Polish Census of 1931: Population, first spoken language and declared confession in Poland and in the Eastern Kresy regions where the majority of the population was Ukrainian* (in thousands)

Mother tongue and declared confession	**Poland**	**Lviv region (w/o Lviv)**	**Lviv city**	**Volhynia region**	**Stanisławów region**	**Tarnopol region**
All population	31,915.8	2,815.2	312.2	2,085.6	1,480.3	1,600.4
Polish	21,993.4	1,606.8	198.2	346.6	332.2	789.1
As percent of Polish population:						
Roman or Armenian Catholic	92%	80%	79%	92%	71%	73%
Orthodox	2.3%	0.04%	0.1%	5.8%	0.05%	0.06%
Eastern or Greek Catholic	2.2%	8.4%	7.9%	0.3%	20%	20%
Ukrainian	3,221.8	555.2	24.3	1,418.3	693.8	402
As percent of Ukrainian population:						
Roman or Armenian Catholic	0.4%	0.5%	1.7%	0.1%	0.3%	0.9%
Orthodox	47%	0.1%	1.1%	97%	0.04%	0.1%
Greek or Eastern Catholic	52%	99%	97%	0.6%	99%	99%

*with the exception of the Lviv city.

Source: Own calculations based on the Polish Census from 1931.

Table 3: Polish Census of 1931: Population, first spoken language and declared confession in the Eastern Kresy regions where the share of Ukrainian population was less than 5% (in thousands)

Mother tongue and declared confession	**Vilnius region (w/o Vilnius city)**	**Vilnius city**	**Nowogród region**	**Polesie region**
All population	1,080.9	195.1	1,057.1	1,131.9
Polish	633	128.6	553.9	164.1
As percent of Polish population:				
Roman or Armenian Catholic	88%	63%	72%	75%
Orthodox	10%	2%	26%	22%
Greek or Eastern Catholic	0.04%	0.07%	0.1%	0.2%
Ukrainian	0.223	0.143	0.48	54
As percent of Ukrainian population:				
Roman or Armenian Catholic	17%	10%	7%	0.1%
Orthodox	39%	43%	70%	98%
Greek pr Eastern Catholic	45%	41%	20%	1%

Source: Own calculations based on the Polish Census 1931.

Hence, not only the population in the Ukrainian majority regions was the largest in Kresy, but also the forced resettlement was mostly an experience of Poles from those regions than from the other Kresy territories. The authors check whether there are heterogenous effects with respect to ancestors' origin characteristics (Appendix, Table A.13, p. 34). They find that the share of Ukrainian speakers does not play a significant effect. However, the city of Lviv was also indirectly affected by the massacre because a lot of Polish people fleeing the ethnic cleansing searched for asylum there and in other municipalities with the Polish majority.

Tables 4 and 5 show literacy rates for all the Eastern Kresy regions. There is a striking difference, especially in the countryside, between the literacy rates of the Orthodox and other confessions. The smallest literacy rate for the Orthodox is in the Volhynia countryside (39%) where most of the ethnic cleansing at the end of WWII took place. While municipalities were mostly inhabited by Jews, in the countryside the Orthodox population constituted a majority. For example, in the countryside of the Volhynia region, 76% of the population were Orthodox, while in municipalities in the Volhynia, they constituted only 24% of the population.

Table 4: Polish Census of 1931: Literacy rates in 1931 among the population aged $\geq$ 10 years old in Poland and in the Eastern Kresy regions where the majority of the population was Ukrainian* (in percent)

		Poland	**Lviv region**	**Volhynia region**	**Stanisławów region**	**Tarnopol region**
Municipalities and countryside	All confessions	72	73	50	62	68
	Roman or Armenian Catholic	77	81	72	80	72
	Orthodox	46	-	40	-	-
	Greek or Eastern Catholic	60	62	-	54	63
	Jewish	83	85	80	88	88
Municipalities	All confessions	85	87	80	82	80
	Roman or Armenian Catholic	87	87	87	90	81
	Orthodox	74	-	70	-	-
	Greek or Eastern Catholic	72	74	-	66	68
	Jewish	84	90	82	89	88
Countryside	All confessions	67	70	46	57	66
	Roman or Armenian Catholic	73	79	68	73	69
	Orthodox	45	-	39	-	-
	Greek or Eastern Catholic	56	61	-	53	62
	Jewish	77	81	78	87	87

*with the exception of the Lviv region where the Polish population was a majority (but not in the Lviv countryside).

Source: Own calculations based on the Polish Census from 1931. Literacy defined as the ability to write and read.

Table 5: Polish Census of 1931: Literacy rates in 1931 among the population aged $\geq$ 10 years old in the Eastern Kresy regions where the share of Ukrainian population was less than 5%* (in percent)

		Vilnius region (w/o Vilnius city)	**Vilnius city**	**Nowogród region**	**Polesie region**
Municipalities and countryside	All confessions	56	83	58	50
	Roman or Armenian Catholic	56	80	60	79
	Orthodox	53	-	51	41
	Jewish	83	89	86	84
Municipalities	All confessions	78	-	83	82
	Roman or Armenian Catholic	77	-	86	89
	Orthodox	68	-	68	69
	Jewish	85	-	88	85
Countryside	All confessions	55	-	55	45
	Roman or Armenian Catholic	55	-	58	75
	Orthodox	52	-	51	40
	Jewish	82	-	83	82

*without Białostockie region.

Source: Own calculations based on the Polish Census from 1931. Literacy defined as the ability to write and read.

Therefore, there might be another mechanism that played a role in shifting preferences of the resettled Polish population who, in large part, experienced the effects of the nationalist propaganda spread among the Ukrainian population for years. The ideology of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army motivated some Ukrainians to kill even friends or neighbors who were Polish. The nationalist discourse, as with any populism, is easier to propagandize among the uneducated population (Guiso et al. 2017, Hainmueller et al. 2007). Ukrainians, lacking access to any schooling and often suffering from discrimination by the Polish authorities, might have been especially susceptible to the idea of a "great Ukraine without any Poles". Consecutively, the resettled Poles might have perceived education as a shield against, as it turned out, a very dangerous nationalist ideology.

2. Resettled academia from Kresy

Becker et al. (2020) do not discuss the importance of resettled Polish professors from the pre-war Lviv universities in the establishment of Polish academic institutions in the former German territories.
The Silesian Technical University in Gliwice, the Wrocław University, and the Technical University in Wrocław were all founded in 1945. The curricula and courses of both universities were prepared and taught mostly by professors from the pre-war Technical University and Jan Kazimierz University in Lviv. In Wrocław, a new rector of the Technical University became Edward Sucharda, who had held an equivalent position in Lviv before the war. At the same time, he was a lecturer at the Department of Chemistry at the Silesian Technical University. Moreover, the Higher Academy of Economics in Wrocław was created in 1947 as a private university with academic staff mostly from the University of Foreign Trade from the pre-war Lviv. In turn, the professors from the pre-war Stefan Batory University in Vilnius (and from Jan Kazimierz University in Lviv) shaped the curricula of the Mikołaj Kopernik University in Toruń, which was founded in 1945. Finally, the University in Opole is, in part, a continuation of the Department of Theology from Jan Kazimierz University in Lviv.

Given that the newly founded academic institutions in the former German territories were mostly shaped by the professors and specialists from the pre-war Kresy region, the rest of the resettled population might have perceived attending a university as a chance to retain a sense of identity. Not only did the resettled Poles have to leave their homelands, but also, the communist propaganda did not allow public (and private) discussion of the loss of the Eastern Borderland region (e.g., by forbidding the use of the word "Kresy" or saying that Lviv had been Polish before the war). Resettled Poles could not say where they were born or show any cultural affiliation with the pre-war Kresy region.
Attending a university, composed mostly of academics from Kresy, might have allowed the displaced Poles to keep their identity and memory about their places of origin.

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