

**THE POWER OF *POLONIA***  
**POST-WWII POLISH IMMIGRANTS TO CANADA:  
SURVIVORS OF DEPORTATION & EXILE IN SOVIET LABOUR CAMPS**

A Thesis submitted to the Committee on Graduate Studies  
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Arts  
in the Faculty of Arts and Science

TRENT UNIVERSITY  
Peterborough, Ontario, Canada

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Canadian Heritage & Development Studies M.A. Program

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0-612-57992-1

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## ABSTRACT

### THE POWER OF *POLONIA* Post-WWII Polish Immigrants to Canada: Survivors of Deportation & Exile in Soviet Labour Camps

Helen Bajorek MacDonald

In August 1949, approximately 900 Poles disembarked at Halifax from an American naval carrier, the *General H. M. Black*. Each carried a one-year farm or domestic labour contract to be fulfilled at various locations across Canada. This group of Polish immigrants was a postscript to the precedent-setting group migration of 1946/47 of 4,527 Polish ex-soldiers who traveled from England and Italy under Britain's *Polish Resettlement Act* to fulfill two-year farm labour contracts.

Their journey began when, through 1939-41, 1.5 million Poles were forcibly deported from Poland to exile in Soviet labour camps or agricultural collectives. In 1942 about 115,000 fled during a brief 'amnesty' period. They eventually made their way to the Middle East where able-bodied men joined the Polish Second Corps under the leadership of Polish General Władysław Anders, and fought alongside the Allies. The civilian refugees lived a diasporic existence in India, then British Africa, where through 1942-50 about 19,000 displaced Poles lived in 22 settlements. After the war, some repatriated to Poland. Others resettled in new homelands.

But what became of the *Anders Poles*? What did they encounter when they arrived in Canada? How have they contributed to Canadian life? How have they reconciled their *Polishness* in or out of mutual expression with *Canadianness*?

This study explores these and other questions and has benefited from the contributions of thirty-eight men and women who graciously and courageously rummaged through their memories and archives that their stories could be entered into the realm of scholarly inquiry.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS and DEDICATION

*This study has benefited from support and direction received from many sources: scholars and memoirists who have documented aspects of the story; willing interview participants; family, friends, colleagues and individuals from Polonia in Canada; and, the inspiration provided by my father, Jan Leszek Bajorek, an 'ordinary' man with an extraordinary passion for remembering his ancestors. It was his emotive words that sowed the germ of the idea.*

*I am grateful for the generous financial support provided by an Ontario Graduate Scholarship from the Ministry of Education and Training and from Polonia in Canada through the Adam Mickiewicz Foundation, the Canadian Polish Millennium Fund, in Memory of Wojtko and Witka Stanislawska and the W. Reymont Foundation in Memory of Mark Nawrot. Financial support also came from Trent University through Entrance Scholarship, through a graduate student expense and conference attendance fund, as well income earned as a Teaching Assistant with the Canadian Studies and History Departments.*

*I wish to particularly acknowledge a few individuals whose support and guidance served me well at the best of times and at the worse of times: my parents, Jan and Christine Bajorek who remain puzzled at my everlasting enthusiasm for research; my family, Roy, Kyle and Garrett MacDonald who have wished me well but who are glad it's over; my 'little' sister, Margaret Armstrong who's been patiently waiting for me to "come out and play"; my brother-in-law Ian Armstrong, the family techno-twit who prevented me from murdering my computer; my mother-in-law, Dora MacDonald, who regularly baked treats for my neglected family; and my friend, Sue McIntosh Larsh for her discriminating editorial eye and her sympathetic ear. My thanks also to Les and Millie Prazmowski, Jozef Czajkowski, Stan Lasek, Jan Zubrzycki, and St. Hedwig Roman Catholic parish priests, Oshawa, Ontario, for assistance with funding and/or research. There also is a lengthy list of friends, family, and colleagues who have offered much-appreciated and much-needed support. Thank you all!*

*I am indebted to several people for their translations of various documents: Jean-Michel Komarnicki, Lucy Hejna Niejadlik, Natalia Pytlak, Magda Zubrzycki, and my father, Jan Bajorek. Kerry Badgley, Pat Milliken, Myron Momryk and other staff at the National Archives of Canada kindly shared their experience and knowledge as they guided me toward useful research materials. I also wish to acknowledge the family of the late Tadeusz Romer who allowed me access to the Romer files housed at the National Archives, as well as acknowledge The Toronto Star for providing access to it's*



"Have Your Say" page where I was able to solicit out-of-print books and potential interviewees. And what would any Trent researcher do without the patient assistance provided by staff at Bata Library at Trent University?

Many thanks to my thesis committee, Professors James Struthers, Sedef Arat-Koc, and Christl Verduyn for their patience, support, and guidance. I am especially grateful to Jim Struthers for the enthusiasm he brought--and maintained--into this project and for his editorial counsel. I hope I have honoured their commitment to my work by producing something they feel proud to be associated with. Also, many thanks to Professor Olga Andriewsky who guided me through complex Eastern European historiography, and to Professor John Wadland, Director of the Frost Centre for Canadian Heritage and Development Studies who, since I first became his student in 1991, has been both inspiration and the source of much perspiration. I also extend a special "Thank you" to Professor Henryk Radecki for kindly consenting to act as external examiner of my work, and whose research serves as an important foundation for others, such as myself, who follow in his footsteps.

My gratitude to the thirty-eight individuals who shared with me their experiences can only be adequately expressed in their mother tongue: *Dziękuję* Bardzo. I wish to express my sincerest appreciation for the kindnesses extended me while visiting and interviewing each participant. How much I enjoyed our chats, how much I appreciate all of your suggestions and your generous sharing of books, documents and photographs, as well as the delicious meals and snacks. I have nothing less than awesome admiration for your courage and appreciation for your faith in this work.

~~~~~  
In her poem, "Children of Our Age," Wisława Szymborska, 1996 winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, has written:

Whether you like it or not,  
Your genes have a political past,  
your skin, a political cast,  
Your eyes a political slant.<sup>1</sup>

The political slant that I bring to this work is that of child of the Polish survivors of deportation and exile in Soviet labour camps. To my father, to those who perished and to those who survived, to those who courageously shared with me their stories, and, especially, to my grandparents, Wiktoria Rosalia Kotowicz Bajorek and Wawrzyniec Bajorek, I dedicate this work.

Helen Bajorek MacDonald; Newtonville, Ontario, October 2000

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<sup>1</sup> Wisława Szymborska. "May 16, 1973," in view with a grain of sand. (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1995) 199.

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## GLOSSARY

|                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>arba</i>                | cart                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <i>Desh Pardesh</i>        | "home from home" and/or "at home abroad"                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <i>diaspora</i>            | from the Greek verb <i>speiro</i> (to sow) and preposition <i>dia</i> (over)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <i>diet-dom</i>            | Soviet orphanage                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <i>diet-sad</i>            | Soviet residential school                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <i>exordium</i>            | <i>Latin</i> : new beginning                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <i>IRO</i>                 | International Refugee Organization                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <i>ius sanguini</i>        | by law of blood (descent)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <i>ius locii</i>           | by law of the land (place of birth)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <i>Junaks</i>              | male youth reserve army volunteers or military cadets                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <i>kolkhoz</i>             | collective farm                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <i>kolonista</i>           | settlers, colonists                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <i>kresy</i>               | Literal translation: border; the confines of the country. In figurative terms, it characterizes confinement of Poles <b>beyond</b> Polish borders; particularly those from the pre-1939 eastern frontiers. An argument might be made in applying the term to Poles 'confined' within Poland during the post-war era under Soviet Communist rule until the ascent of the Solidarity movement of the 1980s. |
| <i>kulak</i>               | a class of prosperous peasant                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <i>lag</i>                 | labour camp                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <i>młodsze ochotniczki</i> | female equivalence of <i>junaks</i> , military cadets; training was gender-specific; e.g. nursing, drivers.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <i>morg</i>                | approximately one acre                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <i>ojcowizna</i>           | a literal translation grounded in the abstract would be <i>fatherland</i> or <i>ancestral homeland</i> ; it can also mean <i>village</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <i>osady; osadniki</i>     | military settlements; military settlers [ <i>osadnicy woskowi</i> ]. Nine thousand soldiers who had fought for Poland between 1914 and 1920 were rewarded by the state with small parcels of land in the eastern borderlands. Keith Sword describes this settlement                                                                                                                                       |

programme as having the characteristics of an *ethnic plantation*, one that never developed on a great scale. It was the *osadniki* who made up the largest group of Polish victims deported February 9-10, 1940, and it was this date during which the majority of study participants were deported.

|                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>NKVD</i>           | [Soviet] People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <i>Polishness</i>     | <i>Polishness</i> embodies the very essence of being a Pole and is innately codified in the word <i>Polskosc</i> .                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <i>Polonia</i>        | generally refers to Poles abroad; the <i>diaspora</i> .                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <i>Polskosc</i>       | [ <i>fern.</i> ] Embodiment of the essence of <i>Polishness</i> : Polish origin, Polish language and manners.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <i>Sybiraki</i>       | the solidifying group identification of Polish survivors of the Siberian deportation and exile experience; communication between <i>Sybiraki</i> living throughout the world is facilitated by <i>Zwiazek Sybirakow</i> [Siberia Organization] which was established in 1918.                                                                                                                                              |
| <i>Udostovierenia</i> | 'amnesty' document, or passport, that allowed Polish deportees to flee Soviet labour camps after 12 August 1941. Issued by the NKVD (National Commissariat for Internal Affairs), the <i>udostovierenia</i> document "vouch-safed" the bearer, a Polish citizen [male head; family members listed], the right to free movement in USSR territory to a stated destination. The permit was generally valid for three months. |
| <i>UNRRA</i>          | United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <i>Wigilia</i>        | Vigil: Christmas Eve. Families prepare a 12-course [sometimes meatless] meal of traditional dishes and set one empty place at the table that a hungry wanderer might share in the bounty. <i>Opliatek</i> [a form of communion wafer] is shared among family members. Following the meal, family members often attend a Midnight Mass.                                                                                     |



## Chapter 1 - GENESIS

*Let there be lights in the firmament...* [Genesis 1:14]

*I shake my memory.  
Maybe something in its branches  
that has been asleep for years  
will start up with a flutter<sup>1</sup>*

### Point of Departure

On 12 August 1949, the American naval carrier, *General H. M. Black*, moored at Halifax, Nova Scotia. Nearly 900 passengers disembarked, carrying in one hand one-year labour contracts with the Canadian government for either agricultural or domestic work and, in the other, every worldly item they possessed. More weighty and more burdensome, however, may have been the memories they carried down the gangplank as they surveyed, for the first time, the new land. Memories few would share [but among themselves] but for glimpses—as tourist snapshots—which would surface in the rare utterance. Even then, the burden remained great, as was the phenomenon of their survival.

My childhood was spent among some of these “New Canadians” in a predominantly Polish Roman Catholic community in Oshawa. Located in Southern Ontario approximately 80 km east of Toronto, Oshawa is largely a working class city that has as its largest employer General Motors. I knew little of their lives but for the images that spoke of an adventurous time in South Africa, then Tanganyika, from a photo album, handcrafted for my father by his first love, Anna, and which he lovingly kept and protected.

And there he is, my father and Anna, she fixing his tie. My father and his mother and his siblings in front of their mud and grass hut in Tanganyika. My father and other characters smiling for the Brownie camera that also recorded savanna, safari, and picnics at the bottom of Mount Kilimanjaro. My father and other young adults excitedly probing the shores off the tip of South Africa. Seemingly a vacation that ran the course of half-a-dozen years.

---

<sup>1</sup> Wislawa Szymborska. “May 16, 1973,” in view with a grain of sand. (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1995) 199.

But my father is Polish. He came from Poland. He came *after the war*. I had been told. But there are no photographs of a Polish landscape in the handcrafted photo album. There were memories—of a happy childhood—of a Poland, but it was a Poland *before the war*. I had heard my father's stories about life as a child on a small farm where children were born in the fields, and all members of the large household ate soup out of the same large pot, and the old died on a straw bed in a crowded farmhouse. I began to question, though, the gap between the period *before the war* and *after war*. I was told it was too painful to remember. "Don't ask."

"They were in camps," my English mother whispered between pitying lips. Some of our neighbours had numerical tattoos on their arms that might be revealed on a Sunday morning, after Mass, at the bakery near our home as sleeves drew back while arms reached across the counter for fresh-baked bread; souvenirs from the Nazi concentration camps. Though my father and aunts and uncles and *babcia* [grandmother] were not so marked, I made the leap: concentration camp.

So I read The Diary of Anne Frank and books on *Auschwitz*, agonizing alone as my child mind tried to comprehend what I thought were the secrets of the family silence. I was wrong. It wasn't until my late teens that I began to hear morsels about experiences I couldn't understand; in part, because it was Stalin who was the villain and not Hitler; it was Siberia that was the scene and not Auschwitz; and the victims were Roman Catholic Poles, and not Polish Jews.

Around the time I began birthing and raising my own children, my mind again pondered my father's past. I couldn't shake the confusion created by photographic evidence of a seemingly happy time: all those smiling 'tourists' casually frolicking in a utopian setting and carefully positioned in the beautifully handcrafted photo album. Photographs which belied wartime upheaval and an inconceivable reality faced by whole families whom I had come to learn were forcibly removed from their homes and transported, as cattle, to remote regions of the Soviet Union, including Siberia, where they laboured for Stalin in the forests, mines, and on collective farms.

In January 1992 my *babcia*, *Wiktoria Rosalia Kotowicz Bajorek* died. Following her  
*Helen Bajorek MacDonald*

funeral at Barry's Bay, Ontario, my father came to me [aided by a little too much liquid sorrow] and insistently said: "Someone has to write the stories. Already now, Babcia's gone. Someone has to write them. You have to write them." And so I began to listen, and now to write. Tidying up for my father. Remembering Babcia.

So began an expansive inquiry: a process of locating and collecting data and stories. I had the good fortune at the time to be enrolled in a course offered by Prof. Jim Struthers at Trent University entitled *Communities and Identities*. One of the first essays assigned to us was an exploration of "sense of place." With my babcia recently dead, I took the opportunity to explore my "sense of place" within my family and my childhood community. It became a consideration of ethnicity as I began to make links between my memories and the 'stories' interwoven throughout the *Polonia* community in which I was raised. More questions presented themselves and I suddenly found myself faced with a personal imperative to bring to a wider audience the relatively unknown stories. And it's no coincidence that Jim Struthers is Supervisor of this research.

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And so I went, even further back than my childhood memories. Back to the opening chapters of the Second World War when approximately 1.5 million Poles were forcibly deported from the eastern provinces of Poland and exiled in remote regions of the Soviet Union where they laboured for two or more years for Stalin's war effort.

Then, under 1941 agreements between Stalin, Churchill, Roosevelt, and Poland's General Władysław Sikorski, those who were still alive were given 'amnesty'. Making taking their families then undertook a remarkable trek from the remote Soviet labour camps and collective farms [*kolkhozes*] to the Middle East where able-bodied men joined the Polish Second Corps under the leadership of General Władysław Anders. In Canadian government documents the Poles thus having suffered the Siberian odyssey are identified as the *Anders Poles*;<sup>2</sup> one term that is used throughout this study to describe the collective group.

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<sup>2</sup> Polish General Władysław Anders was released under the 'amnesty' from a Soviet POW camp for the task of recruitment of ethnic Poles who had been granted Soviet 'amnesty' for enlistment in the military that they would join in the battle to push back German advances on Soviet soil. W. Anders. *An Army in Exile*. (London: MacMillan & Co. Ltd., 1949).

The remainder [mostly women, children, the ill, the infirm and the elderly] were sent to refugee camps in India, then British East Africa, where, through the years 1942-1950, nearly 19,000 displaced Roman Catholic Poles lived a diasporic existence in twenty-two settlement camps until their fates could be determined. Some eventually returned to [Communist] Poland, while others were taken in by such nations as Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Australia, New Zealand, Great Britain, the United States and Canada. Exile, exodus and finally exordium.<sup>3</sup>

Numerous memoirs have been written of these experiences, particularly relating to the Soviet experience, even in the case of Polish ex-soldiers. But it has only been in the last two decades that scholars have begun to seriously explore the experiences of Polish deportees exiled in Soviet labour camps and *kolkhozes* [collective farms] during the Second World War.<sup>4</sup> Nor has there been much discussion about the historic myths around the forcible deportations and exile of Poles numbering at least twenty-three specific group movements dating back to the mid-18<sup>th</sup> Century with the last group movement documented through 1946-53. Consequently, there even exists a term for these Poles: *Sybiraki*.

Equally as interesting and unexamined are the conditions under which they entered Canada; that is, they signed labour contracts either in agriculture, in mining or forestry, or, in the case of most of the women, in domestic work, to be fulfilled in various locations throughout Canada. Indeed, there emerged dimensions of the early Canadian experience that feature some ironic parallels to their Soviet experience, the most notable being a question of *cheap* labour as opposed to *forced* labour.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Exordium*: Latin. A new beginning.

<sup>4</sup> The two most significant challenges faced by researchers of this topic are: access to documents is either limited or denied; and, to fully access documents, researchers must have familiarity with the Polish language, and, in some instances in Canadian archival collections, French, and, if access was sought and granted, in Russian language.

<sup>5</sup> *Forced labour* has been defined in the Soviet/Russian context as "the most brutal of the corrective camps in the northern or eastern regions, the comparatively easy life of many prisoners working near Moscow, or anything in between... [F]orced labour is... reprehensible... [or] at the other end of the scale, conditions may not be very different from those found in our own prisons. It is necessary... to criticize the Soviet Union, not because it uses forced labour, but because of the manner in which it uses it.... it may not be very different from free labour in the Soviet Union," which explains in part why the Poles were referred to as "free settlers". However, "[i]n Canada, when the state deprives a person of liberty, it takes responsibility for providing sufficient food and shelter; it appears that the Soviet authorities assume no such responsibility. They give food and shelter on the basis of an unwritten contract drafted by the state." Thus, "...the main incentive to work in the forced labour camps is provided by offering rewards in the form of extra food for those who surpass a certain arbitrarily fixed standard output, called the "norm". The basic ration fixed is low to increase the incentive to work." And, there is little regard for the age, physical condition, or gender of the worker. NAC RG-25 F6, vol. 2615, #2-20-0. Confidential memo, "Forced Labour in the Soviet Union." R.A.J. Phillips, 26 August 1948; Earnscliffe, 13 September 1948.

Throughout their 'travels' and travails, the *Anders Poles* were pushed from place to place as labour commodities whether as workers forcibly exiled in Soviet labour camps, as soldiers of the Polish Second Corps, or as immigrants in a new homeland where it was their labour that permitted them entry and through which they acquired their freedom. And if it is their ethnicity that was at the root of their experiences, it also is their *Polishness* to which many credit their survival. It was their *Polishness* that also underpinned the community organizational dynamics to which they would commit themselves in the new homeland, on behalf of their memories of the ancestral homeland.

And so, I, a child of these survivors, found myself facing a multitude of questions. Why did Stalin deport the Poles? What was life like for them during their exile in Soviet labour camps and after? What became of the Polish survivors of Soviet exile, so-called displaced persons, in their new homeland[s]? How did they graft or translate their *Polishness* and their odyssey onto the Canadian landscape? What roles have they played in nation building? Did they fulfill their labour contracts? Are there among them poets? Orators in the House of Commons? Doctors? Teachers? Mechanics? Farmers? Astronauts? Did they remain in the communities to which the Canadian government initially transported them to fulfill their contractual obligations or did they gravitate toward established Polish communities? Did the Poles, displaced virtually en masse by staggering historic events, share a common destiny in their adopted country? How have over five decades in a new land shaped/redefined their memory or their childhood experiences or even their identity? What have they retained of their Polish culture/heritage, or *Polishness*? What contributions have they made to Canadian life? How have individuals from simple farm roots translated their life experiences and skills as adult newcomers in an industrial post-war new homeland? How have they come to terms with a shattered homeland, shattered life plans, shattered families? What obstacles did they face in coming to a new land? How did they cope? How did Canadians receive these people, displaced by the war? What can they tell us about be[com]ing Canadian? How was it that a small group of Poles—approximately 900—disembarked at Halifax in August 1949 from an American naval carrier traveling from Mombassa,

Kenya? What became of the other deportees who did not come to Canada?

In asking the questions borne, first, of the confusion in attempting to reconcile my father's past with conflicting visual documentation lovingly maintained in a photo album, I became aware of the enormity of the topic. Through research in primary and secondary documents and texts, and through interviews with survivors of the deportation/exile experience, I have been able to trace and document the nature of the circumstances that resulted in the deportations of the Poles from their homeland in the opening chapters of WWII and the ultimate immigration to Canada of the passengers of the *General Black* and many other Poles, after the war.

But I am not alone in my observation that the stories of the *Anders Poles* are largely unknown. In his *Foreword* comments to the book, Exiled Children, a bi-lingual—Polish/English—coffee-table style pictorial text published in Poland in 1995, Cardinal Jozef Glemp, Primate of Poland wrote:

Occasionally, we come across gaps in our national history. Events and even whole episodes still remain hidden from the collective consciousness of our nation. Preserved in private correspondence and memoirs, vaguely alluded to in historical works, they have not received that amplification—by being told and retold in family circles and through a wider social debate—that would make them naturally resonate from one generation to the next....

This album does not pretend to any literary merit. It is a collection of preserved memoirs and reminiscences of a great odyssey of exile that those young Polish children underwent during the Second World War. Fleeing from their places of exile in the icy wastes of Russia, their journey led them through... a route that would have been beyond the wildest imagination of the Polish Legions in Italy under General Dabrowski. Yet, these children sang the same words as the Polish Legions had sung long before them: "Onwards... Onwards to Poland...".

Those who did survive and who reached the end of the journey proved beyond doubt what it means to be a Pole.... The unshakeable faith... directed towards God, which also reaches out to other human beings.

Thanks to such a strong faith, they were able to comprehend the value of organised community life. Their organised communities facilitated the development of cultural life.<sup>6</sup>

Cardinal Glemp inserts into the text such terms and literary allusions as "literary epic", "pilgrimage", "odyssey", "exile", "diaspora", and "Polish spirit", all drawing to the reader's attention the unmistakable tragedy of the exile experience, while valorizing, through the use of powerful

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<sup>6</sup> Fundacja Archiwum Fotograficzne Tułaczy. Exiled Children. Warsaw, 1995. 6-7.

language and imagery, *Polishness* with its requisite devotion to Roman Catholicism, to the "value of organized community life" and to the historic Polish suffering in the struggle for freedom. However, the book devotes little attention to the historical backdrop to the deportations, glossing over issues related to the forcible removal, at gunpoint, of entire families, the upheaval, and the suffering experienced by the deportees. Rather, the 'story' begins after the Poles have fled from the Soviet labour camps and *kolkhozes* and most of the photographic images more closely resemble my father's embroidered album.

Similarly, there exists in the Canadian story a lack of telling of the *Anders Poles*. While there are references to them in the work of several Canadian scholars, most notably Benedykt Heydenkorn and Henry Radecki, most of the existing literature makes only brief mention of the *Anders Poles*; sometimes only as a footnote! More particularly, the *Anders Poles* are only generally and briefly considered within the limited, yet precedent-setting, scope of the resettlement of 4,527 Polish ex-soldiers who came to Canada under two-year agricultural labour contract through 1946-47 as their migration to Canada set the experiential foundation for all post-war *bulk labour* movements to Canada.

Some contemporary scholars have begun to raise questions about other gaps found in the literature devoted to immigrant histories. For instance, Franca Iacovetta has raised some interesting questions around the neglect of consideration of the relationships between immigrants and the policies that affect them.<sup>7</sup> Among the most noteworthy gaps are those found in the neglect of consideration of the experiences of 'ordinary' people living 'ordinary' lives and especially of women's experience. Even scholars who do explore topics related to *Polonia* in Canada have given little attention to women's experience. For instance, Sarah Van Aken-Rutkowski's study of *Anders Poles* makes little distinction between male and female experience. Only Apolonja Kojder has focused attention exclusively on the topic of Polish women in Canada within *Polonia* organizational life. Jo-Anne Lee writes:

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<sup>7</sup> Franca Iacovetta, "Ordering in Bulk: Canada's Postwar Immigration Policy and the Recruitment of Contract Workers from Italy," in *Journal of American Ethnic History*, Fall, 1991. 51.

Women have always been part of these successive waves of immigration. Yet the resounding silence in Canadian history of the experiences of women... is very troublesome.... Without a point of historical reference through oral narratives and oral history, it is difficult to assess the overall portrayal as an accurate reflection of historical events and experiences.<sup>3</sup>

Thus the imperative to document the 'stories' as told by the *Anders Poles* before the moment of remembrance has completely passed; before all, as *Babcia*, are gone.

### Methodology

As this study has been conducted through the *Frost Centre for Canadian Heritage and Development Studies* at Trent University, Peterborough, Ontario, I have undertaken an interdisciplinary approach with a specific view to enter into discourse several facets of what may appear to oblige an historical approach, but which yield a panoramic theatre of discovery and opportunity for contextualization, and which offer, at many points on the horizon, a number of potential areas for further research.

Most importantly to me as a student of *Canadian Studies*, is my commitment to the "search for adequate methods to secure the inclusion of currently nonacademic knowledge in academic research;"<sup>9</sup> more specifically, the inclusion of the lived experiences of the *Anders Poles*-cum-Canadians as both significant and complementary to primary research and existing literature which is notably limited. It is not my desire to simply document [in isolation from each component] the historical context or relevance of the periods of exile, exodus and exordium through collection of primary and secondary text, data and archival material. Rather, I have chosen to complicate history with narrative, inviting study participants to join me in authorship through the oral interview process. As Robert Harney has observed: "*Flesh and blood, the nuance and inflection of a tape recorded reminiscence, complicate historical analysis, but obviously enrich it as well.*"<sup>10</sup>

This requires, however, that I question relationships between these components, and within these components, of such elements as ethnicity, religion, gender, region, and class. I

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<sup>3</sup> Jo-Anne Lee in "Living in Dreams" in David De Brou and Aileen Moffatt, eds. "Other" Voices. (University of Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1995) 145.

<sup>9</sup> Liora Salter and Alison Hearn. Outside the Lines: Issues in Interdisciplinary Research. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996) 168.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Harney qtd. in Benedykt Heydenkom, ed. Memoirs of Polish Immigrants in Canada. (Toronto: Canadian-Polish Research Institute, 1979) vi.



further explore abstract concepts related to my interviewees' sense of belonging: of their *Polishness* in [or out of] mutual expression with *Canadianness*.

I have not restricted my quest for understanding the experiences of these now elderly 'children' to only an archival or textual consideration, as there has been limited activity in the collection and preservation of the testimonies of the *Sybiraki* who made Canada their home. Thus the significance of their remarkable stories as recorded and transcribed in the qualitative interview.

Altogether thirty-eight individuals graciously consented to participate in this study, welcoming me into their homes where they shared their memories, their photographs, relevant documents, and refreshments and meals. Thirteen were women and twenty-five were men, including my father. Two reside in large cities within close proximity of the Greater Toronto Area, the remainder in the Greater Toronto Area, most in the '905' region. Two former residents of Toronto, however, have recently retired to winterized cottages, one in the upper Kawarthas and the other in the Algonquin Park region. The youngest was born in 1938, the oldest in 1915; thus, they range in age from sixty-two to eighty-five years. One has died since our conversation.

The group of study participants represents but a very small sample. By way of a general characterization of the study sample, most came from small land-holding families, the majority being interwar colonists of Poland's eastern frontiers. Others came from various other geographic and socio-economic circumstances. About two thirds of the study sample were under age twelve at the time of deportations raising, first, questions of memory through a child's eyes as recalled by elderly individuals six decades after events occurred. I do not engage in discussion of memory theory, though recognize such consideration requires research. Testimonies are documented as recalled by study participants with an appreciation that there likely are errors of fact that were not caught through deeper probing as well as gaps and flaws in memory. However, one can hear throughout the testimonies moments of certain clarity as well note elements that stand on their own merits. However accurate their testimonies may or may not be they contribute important details to our history. For instance, there is no question that the 'value' in their testimonies is especially notable and plausible in discussion of their family, community and work experiences as

Canadian citizens.

I have conducted a survey of literature on the topic of *oral narrative* resulting in the development of a questionnaire [Appendix A] for use as guide in the collection of primary data from study participants. I have also developed an informed *Consent and Release* [Appendix B] form that was read and signed by each interviewee prior to the interview. The purpose of producing a Polish language *Consent and Release* [Appendix C] form is to ensure that all study participants know, in the language in which they are most comfortable, their rights and the parameters of the interview. Both the questionnaire and *Consent and Release* form follow *SSHRC Ethics Guidelines* [1995] for research with human subjects and have received approval from *Trent University's Committee on Human Research*.

All study participants have been provided pseudonyms. Some were disappointed to learn their real names would not be attached to their experiences as discussed in this study. By way of excusing this approach, it was strongly recommended by the *Trent University Ethics Committee* that interview subjects, and their families, be protected by anonymity.

The theoretical approach to the use of the oral interview for historical research around which I position this work is grounded in existing debates among feminist historians; that is, inside questions of construction and deconstruction of historical memory and the location of *experience* in historical context.<sup>11</sup>

Although I occasionally use the terms *narrative* and *testimony* to describe the oral component of this study, it is necessary that I distinguish what is meant by these terms. The process by which study participants orally transmitted their stories was not a free flowing telling per se. Rather, it was a process guided by specific questions as determined by myself; thus, the oral interview.

This is also to acknowledge that the interview process has flaws; the most obvious being that the researcher directs, even shapes, through the question/response format, the findings that are documented. Inasmuch as the questionnaire was utilized as a guide and interviewees were

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<sup>11</sup> Joan Sangster. "Telling our Stories: feminist debates and the use of oral history" in *Women's History Review*. Vol. 3, No. 1, 1994) 5-28. See also Jo-Anne Lee, "Living in Dreams" in David DeBrou and Aileen Moffatt, eds., *"Other" Voices*. (University of Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1995) 144-159.

encouraged to speak frankly and freely, the end product, this study, remains one directed by the inquisitor. When transcribing the taped interviews, it became evident at times that in my efforts to satisfy my research objectives—to stay “on task”—as guided by the questionnaire, as well as mindfulness of time constraints, there arose missed opportunities: for the interviewee to continue along a path of memory, and for the researcher to explore more wholly the reminiscences that lay in the further recesses of their memories. This, I regret.

Interviews were recorded on both audio and video tapes and subsequently transcribed. Only one participant declined video recording of the interview. Interviews ranged from 2½ to 3½ hours in length with a prescribed mid-way break as well as occasional interruptions such as telephone calls, and impromptu breaks as required by study participants so that they could pause to collect their thoughts, rest from the emotional strain, or change the direction of the interview. Only a few declined to answer occasional questions and these wishes were respected. One female participant stopped the interview after approximately 15 minutes and was subsequently unable to continue. She indicated she could not return to painful and confusing memories.

An additional ten individuals—all Oshawa-area residents, three women and seven men—were approached with the request to participate in this study, but they denied the request. Some just simply replied, “No, thank you.” Others cited such factors as ill health, said the subject was too painful to discuss, or that they did not want any attention drawn to them.

Some interviewees were located in Oshawa among members of the community in which I spent my childhood. The *Polish Veterans Association* in Oshawa kindly provided some assistance in locating other potential participants. Thus, twenty-five of the study participants are individuals who settled in the Oshawa area. At least forty-eight individuals who live in the Oshawa area are Polish survivors of the Soviet deportation/exile experience. There are/have been more. If I could stray for a moment from evidence and fact and make an ‘educated’ guess, I would suggest it is unlikely the numbers rise any higher than seventy, if that. Much-needed data was also provided by the parish priests, Rev. Poszwa and Rev. Michalski, and parish staff at St. Hedwig [Polish] Roman Catholic Church in Oshawa, as well as the principal at neighbouring St. Hedwig Roman Catholic Elementary School, Kim Walsh.

Other study participants were 'discovered' at a reunion of Polish survivors of the Soviet deportations held in a suburb of Detroit, Michigan in 1996. Through letters to the editor published in the "Have Your Say" section of *The Toronto Star*, I was able to locate out-of-print publications as well as study participants. Yet others were informed by word of mouth of my research and subsequently contacted me. And on a few occasions after conducting an interview, I was informed of yet another individual who might be interested in participating in the narrative component of this study.

There exists in Toronto at the *Multicultural History Society of Ontario* a collection of several hundred taped interviews conducted with Polish immigrants to Canada. Included among them are interviews with *Sybiraki*, including some from the generation prior to my participants; their parents' generation. That the interviews were conducted and archived is evidence of interest in the topic and of a vision to record and preserve the memories of Polish immigrants to Canada. However, these were conducted in the Polish language and therefore are inaccessible to researchers, such as myself, void of the Polish tongue. Consequently, this work suffers from the lack of potentially valuable material. To make the material more widely accessible to non-Polish researchers, a worthwhile project would be translation of the volumes of the narratives.

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As a collector of their testimonies, I found myself acting both as witness and as scribe. Through an open-ended interview process guided by a prepared question format these remarkable survivors of Soviet deportation and exile courageously consented to share with me, and subsequently, with my readers, a painful, yet at times triumphant, rummage through the memories of their childhood and early Canadian experiences. It is through their memories that I have witnessed profound expressions of vitality, love, wisdom, suffering, grief, compassion, and strength of human spirit.

But it is necessary that I acknowledge that in the collection of their stories through oral interviews, and through the theoretical and even organic filtering of interpretive and writing processes, the stories cannot be but transformed. As one source reminds us:

Considerations of who is writing about what and for which audience must be taken into account. Voice is never unfettered; it is always filtered through

contexts, and personal and social agendas.... Accordingly... readers must also account for the hidden voices of their interpreters, those who record the stories.<sup>12</sup>

How have I positioned myself in undertaking this project? It is I the child of these survivors writing through a process that involves I the student and scholar with what is, ultimately, a production of work for an elite scholarly community, within scholarly processes and following strict scholarly guidelines, rather than an application of story into mainstream consciousness. To some extent, the I/eye that is a child of their experiences is in conflict with the student/scholar I/eye as there presses within me an anxiety that the stories which are the script of the hearts, minds and bodies of remarkably 'ordinary' people will, despite my efforts, remain largely unknown or even forgotten as I write for an elite audience. However, I press on and have, in my concluding chapter, put forward a number of suggested potential topics/themes requiring further research with the hope that the conversation I have engaged in with other researchers of this topic will continue. And, I have also begun to take the work to a wider audience through other forums.

All of this is to say I weep with them both tears of joy and of despair, and that this work is not the end, but a beginning grounded in scholarly inquiry. Further, my role is not simply that of sympathetic witness and illustrative scribe. As scholar, I am also inquisitor who, through their memories, must sift for instants where *fact*, as documented, diverges from *fact* which study participants believe but which might equate with a [conscious or unconscious] re-invention of memory. That is, is memory static? Do there exist gaps? Do I hear patterns of phraseology woven within the narratives that act as clues to embellishment, or simply forgetfulness? And what of the possibility that some of these survivors may have, in their memories, in their narratives, "re-imagined themselves,"<sup>13</sup> and/or how might they have re-imagined what it means to be a Pole within *Polonia*?

But who am I to situate myself as witness, scribe, scholar, critic, and inquisitor? The fact of the matter is that it is Hela, a child of these survivors, who is doing the asking. I am not a 'stranger' to them; I am, literally and figuratively, of their flesh. Perhaps it is this privilege that

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<sup>12</sup> Dave De Brou and Aileen C. Moffatt, "Introduction: "Other" Voices and the Challenge from Within" in De Brou and Moffatt, *"Other" Voices*. (University of Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1995) 15.

<sup>13</sup> Aritha Van Herk, "Writing the Immigrant Self: Disguise and Damnation" in *InVisible Ink: crypto-frictions*. (NeWest, 1991) 174.

permits me access—a kind of invasion into their most intimate and private selves—to their homes and ultimately to their stories. It also gives me a special capability for oral communication with those study participants—despite my lack of Polish—who might exhibit in their statements a poor mastery of the English language. There exists the possibility some of the substance of meaning and context of the testimonies might have been diminished, misinterpreted, or even lost because of my lack of Polish, or because of an interviewee's weak English language skills. However, I would submit that it is not outside the realm of reasonableness that I could appreciate the thoughts and feelings expressed by study participants having grown up among these Poles, within the culture of their nuances in oral communication, as spoken by my father and other family members.

This work then is an intimate work. One in which my primary objective is to collect and document existing text related to this topic and to then insert into the [small] body of existing scholarly work 'new' material, including, especially, neglected stories gathered from the narratives of old children.

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In June 1996 I attended, with my father and my youngest son, a re-union of 350 of these individuals that was held in a suburb of Detroit, Michigan. I was moved by their vitality for life and by their shared, yet unique, experiences. Following the banquet and poetry and presentations, a dance was held. The romantic in me cheered on old legs that have walked continents as they stomped and whirled through pulsing polkas—one-two-three, one-two-three—steps even I know as effortlessly as taking in air.

But there were tears at the re-union as yet more names were added to the list of the dead. Their numbers have begun to dwindle rapidly. Through undergraduate research, I came to learn that there is little scholarly research into their experiences and that their stories are largely unknown beyond the Polish community. In the Canadian textual context, a group of 4,527 Polish ex-soldiers whose arrival in Canada after the war set a precedent for post-war immigration policy makes the occasional brief appearance in discussions centred around Canada's immigration policies and/or patterns. Sometimes, it's merely a footnote. But I cannot blame only the

academic community for this neglect, for too few texts written on the subject and published within *Polonia* are produced in the English language. Furthermore, there is reluctance among the survivors to talk about experiences they rather prefer to forget.

And so, it became a personal imperative to collect and document their stories and to explore questions related to their lives in Canada before the moment of remembrance is past. The year 1999 marked the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the disembarkment of the passengers of the *General Black*; it also was declared by the United Nations the *International Year of Older Persons*. On this point I am reminded of a sign I observed outside a flower shop located in Fonthill, Ontario in Spring 2000: *When an old person dies, a library is lost*.

The year 2000 also marks the year *Polonia* observes the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the mass deportations. Yet another reminder that the moment of living remembrance will soon be past.

#### Beyond the Backyard

The arrival of the *Anders Poles* was, as with other post-war immigrants to Canada, a postscript to the precedent-setting importation in 1946/47 of 4,527 Polish ex-soldiers from England under Britain's *Polish Resettlement Act*. Only after intense pressure from the British government did Canada welcome the Polish ex-soldiers. And then only after the Department of Labour could make certain there existed 'suitable' jobs for the Polish ex-soldiers. Indeed, they signed two-year labour contracts, most of which ironically filled labour positions in agriculture or resource extraction vacated by German ex-POWs!

The arrival, in 1949, of the *General Black* Poles was further girdled by other antecedent migrations of Poles to Canada. A group of about 200 technicians and some individuals from Poland's diplomatic corps as well as the arts community came during the war. A group of orphans were settled in a Montreal suburb in 1947, and a group of 100 young women were recruited in 1947 by Ludger Dionne, (Liberal MP Beauce, Quebec) at a German displaced persons camp for work under two-year labour contract in his Quebec spinning mill. The selection and importation of the *Dionne girls*<sup>14</sup> set the stage for subsequent bulk movements of women displaced persons, including the female passengers of the *General Black*, for gender-specific

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<sup>14</sup> The *Dionne girls* are distinguished from the famous *Dionne Quints* of the era born in northern Ontario in May 1936.

contracted labour; primarily, in domestic service.

Some critics argued the government was circumventing the development of a national immigration policy as it appeared, in the Dionne case especially, to be leaning toward "immigration by vested interests". Links were quickly made between the special importation of Polish ex-soldiers for farm labour and Dionne's special [parliamentary] circumstances that netted his spinning mill cheap Polish female labour resulting, eventually, in widespread anti-Polish sentiment.

Although there were sectors of Canadian society that supported post-war immigration of persons displaced by the war, criticism came from many sources. For instance, politicians and labour organizations denounced labour schemes and the Polish [read Soviet puppet] government accused Canada of kidnapping Polish women as white slaves, eventually taking their complaints to the United Nations.

Despite criticism, however, the Canadian government promoted labour schemes without making any formal legislative changes to immigration policy. As a result, precedent-setting numbers of European immigrants came to Canada during the post-war years; most notably among them displaced persons who filled various labour gaps in such industries as agriculture, forestry, mining and domestic service.

It must be noted that among study participants there are some who arrived by means other than via the *General Black* or as Polish ex-soldiers under the British *Resettlement Act*. Further, there were Jews among the *Anders Poles* who, after the war, also sought asylum in Canada but were denied. This is to suggest further research on the topic of the Jewish experience within the context of the Soviet labour camp experience, perhaps something along the lines of Barbara Stern Burstin's comparative consideration of Polish Jews and Christians who migrated to Pittsburgh after the war.<sup>15</sup>

### Archival Research

Documents held at the National Archives in Ottawa have proved to be useful primary

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<sup>15</sup> Barbara Stern Burstin. From Poland to Pittsburgh: The Experience of Jews and Christians who Migrated to Pittsburgh After World War II. (Doctoral Dissertation: University of Pittsburgh, 1986).



sources. I have surveyed the Ethnic Index, Labour Canada files, External Affairs files, Citizenship and Immigration files, and other relevant miscellaneous files, as well as newspaper articles all related to the period 1940-1960.

I was granted access to the papers of the late Tadeusz Romer who lived out the post-war years in Canada and who eventually became a Canadian citizen. Romer was the Polish Ambassador to the Soviet Union during the crucial period, 1941-42 and was actively involved with the negotiations for the release of ethnic Poles from Soviet labour camps, mines and agricultural collectives.

Other collections perused at the National Archives include select papers of Wiktor Podoski, Consul General of Poland in Ottawa during the war years. Podoski played an active role in the war-time immigration to Canada of Poles, as well in the post-war arrival of the Polish ex-soldiers under Britain's *Polish Resettlement Act*, and issues relevant to their living and working circumstances during their early years in Canada among other matters related to post-war Polish immigration to Canada. Further, I have been successful in locating at the National Archives a few small collections of photographs related specifically to this study.

Two other important sites mined for relevant material are the *Canadian Polish Research Institute* and the *Multicultural History Society of Ontario*, both located in Toronto. However, despite the ease of physical access to these collections and the usefulness of some of the primary and secondary materials found within them, the majority of significant works related to the topic are, like the wealth of material housed at McGill University in Montreal, written primarily in the Polish language. Consequently, I must acknowledge the limitations of my research as my sources reflect primarily those available in the English language. While this study contributes to the existing literature new elements of 'the story', it lacks the benefit of Polish language resources.

Other sources include Hansard from the period as issues related to the immigration of Poles [and other displaced persons] after the war rose to the fore of debate in the House of Commons. I refer also to a few discrete documents such as Britain's *Polish Resettlement Act*, as well to a number of atlases and *Statistics Canada* records to plot national and international elements of significance. Further, this study includes an exploration of Canadian immigration

policy and patterns of the post-WWII era and even the period prior to the war as they relate to the *Anders Poles* and also in a cursory consideration of the immigration to Canada of other groups of European immigrants, as such discussion has particular relevance to this study.

### Literature Survey

Few scholarly texts published in the English language and that relate specifically to this topic exist, most having been published in the period beginning in the 1980s. Even in comprehensive historiography texts such as The Oxford History of the Twentieth Century, which treats WWII as the pivotal event of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, there is only a brief mention, typical of the one-line treatment generally given the topic: "Deportations in Polish Belerussia and Ukraine took place during the Soviet occupation under the Nazi-Soviet Pact."<sup>16</sup> No numbers are mentioned. No reason or description of the deportations is given. No substance is given to the human tragedy. Perhaps there is something in Stalin's observation that "*one death is a tragedy, a million is statistics.*" But one historical trickle in the river of misfortune.

The majority of English-language works that more significantly consider this topic are more particularly concerned with the deportation, exile and exodus experiences of the *Sybiraki*, though a few do stray into a consideration of the *exordium*—new beginnings—phase of their lives.

Survivors of the deportation and exile experience have since after the war, published in Canada, the United States, Poland, England, New Zealand and other places literary works, particularly of the memoir genre. In Canada, memoirs written by Polish immigrants became virtually institutionalized through the robust early years of Canada's *Multiculturalism Policy*, introduced by the late Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau in 1971; a phenomenon that begs in-depth inquiry. In 1979 the *Canadian Polish Research Institute* in Toronto issued an appeal for memoirs of Polish immigrants in Canada. It was the only one of three such appeals to achieve any success. Fifty-five memoirs were received, eleven published.<sup>17</sup> Through published memoirs and testimony as collected in personal oral interviews, I explore such themes as agency among

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<sup>16</sup> Richard Stites, "The Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, 1900-1945" in Michael Howard and William Roger Louis, The Oxford History of the Twentieth Century. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 127.

<sup>17</sup> Benedykt Heydenkom, ed. Memoirs of Polish Immigrants in Canada. (Toronto: Canadian-Polish Research Institute, 1979).

the *Sybiraki* while labouring in exile, including survival strategies and efforts to resist *Russification* and, ultimately, preserve *Polishness*.

To commemorate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the deportations, Stanisław Stojarczyk, editor of the Polish-language newspaper *Związkowiec* (Alliancer), has undertaken to publish, in English, a collection of memoirs of Canadian *Sybiraki*. Even on the Internet, I have located memoir and other useful materials.

Through a dissertation search, I was able to locate several American studies that explored aspects related specifically to this study. They include consideration from the thematic positions of political studies, a sociological consideration of the post-war Polish immigrant family, analysis of gender and identity during the wartime period, and one comparative consideration of the immigration experience[s] of Polish Jews and Christians in a large American city. I located only one Canadian-based sociological study of the integration and acculturation of twenty Polish ex-soldiers, male and female alike, conducted for an MA research project in 1982 by Sarah Van Aken-Rutkowski.

In Historiography: An Annotated Bibliography, Volume II,<sup>18</sup> a number of studies which might have potential in a broader consideration—and which were not used in this study—explore such topics as: interwar Polish economic emigration, WWII resistance activities, periods of partitions, Katyn, Yalta, and a study which claims the USSR was the key player during WWII in Poland's struggle for freedom. Several USSR-based dissertations explore such topics as industrial development in Siberia, the Ukrainian diaspora in the USSR, post-war Soviet-Anglo relations and the national question, WWII. Finally, one notable study is a consideration of Poles in Turkey in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries. All are written in German, Polish or Russian language.

Through my research, I have been able to establish that approximately 5,500 Polish immigrants to Canada were survivors of the Soviet exile/deportation experience. I estimate the numbers to range between 8,000 and 15,000. This is to note that the dearth of research and writing on the topic of the *Sybiraki* is a shameful neglect by researchers and writers who exclude from the Canadian 'story' a distinct population of Canadians who share essential elements of

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<sup>18</sup> Historiography: An Annotated Bibliography, Volume II. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-Clio, Inc., 1987.

ethno-cultural historicity, and who have contributed to Canadian life in various ways.

A wide range of texts and journal articles complement the literature survey. For the most part, these relate to particular spheres of discourse; for instance, literature related to diaspora, literature related to the ethics and processes of oral interviews, and literature which relates specifically to immigration and *coming to citizenship* issues, including gender, ethnicity, class, labour and community considerations. I have also been fortunate in discovering occasional articles in contemporary newspapers and magazines that relate either directly, or indirectly, to this study. As well, texts which relate specifically to the Oshawa Polish community have contributed to the investigation of Oshawa *Polonia* vis-à-vis relations between established *Polonia* and the post-war arrivals, as well organizational and community life.

And, finally, there are several references to my own published writing on the topic. At the outset I determined this work would not be a singular effort; that other audiences would 'benefit' from the research undertaken within scholarly realm, its substance written in forms—short story, newspaper articles, poetry—other than theoretical treatise. As I wrote in a recently published story:

I am conducting primary research that encompasses oral narrative. But I am there for reasons beyond purely academic interest. I am a child of the stories I am collecting. And the work is more than discreet analysis of the subject for the stories that could be my grandmother's or my father's, or my aunts and uncles' stories. Stories passed down by elders. Experiences worth remembering.<sup>19</sup>

Study participants also must be acknowledged as "sources" for I seldom left their homes without suggested reading, loaned documents, books or photographs, or recommendation of a potential interviewee, or even friendly 'familial' guidance and support in the work. Throughout the research and writing process, I felt I had a personal fan club and this served as an excellent source of motivation and of inspiration. One for which I am respectfully grateful.

### Chapter Outline

It is essential, first, that I sketch the historical context of events leading to the 1939-41

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<sup>19</sup> Helen Bajorek MacDonald. "Once Upon a War Time" in Canadian Woman Studies. (Toronto: York University, Winter 2000) Vol. 19, No. 4. 143.

Soviet deportation and exile of 1.5 million Poles in remote regions of the Siberian and Central Asian hinterlands, particularly as they relate to Poland's historic relations with its neighbours. Chapter 2, entitled **Exile**, explores questions related to Polish historiography vis-à-vis foreign invasions, conquest and ethnic cleansing.

Why were ethnic Poles targeted specifically for deportation? To contextualize the deportation of Poles during this period, it is necessary to consider Josef Stalin's thinking with particular emphasis on his views of ethnic Poles and on Russian claims to Poland's eastern provinces. The deportations served multiple practical purposes including: depolonization of the eastern provinces, acquisition of a cheap replaceable labour force that would contribute to Stalin's war effort, and an investment in future population and economic growth. Textual evidence has been gathered from the limited existing [English-language] scholarship that is virtually non-existent on the Canadian scholarly landscape. Beyond the textual survey, maps are used to plot the historiography of events that readers may get the larger 'picture'.

In Chapter 3, entitled **Exodus**, I discuss the period September 1939 when Adolf Hitler, then Josef Stalin, invaded Poland, to the June 1941 German invasion of Russia and subsequent events which led to the amnesty permitting some of the Polish deportees to leave the Soviet labour camps. Wanted: soldiers to fill the ranks of the Red Army that they might fight against Hitler. It is here that I begin to draw together memoir, testimony, archive and text as I contextualize the deportation experience, as well as life in exile in the Soviet labour camps and on *kolkhozes*. Living conditions were harsh. Work injuries, illness, starvation, disease and death were commonplace. There was little in the way of medical care, food, aid, or even any indication that the world knew or cared about their plight. The Poles experienced frequent assaults upon their *Polishness* as they were denied the right to speak their language, to practice their faith, or to teach their children their cultural and traditional heritage. Most families [60.5% of study participants] left the bodies of their dead behind, all buried unceremoniously and without the benefit of the last rites or even a grave marker.

Chapter 4, entitled **Exordium**, traces the odyssey of the emaciated Polish families out of

the Soviet Union and the subsequent British paternal benevolence under which the multitude assembled. In other words, the larger sphere of international politics, including a cast of key political players, begins to play a role on the lives of the Poles.

Of the approximate 1.5 million Poles deported, only 115,000 [predominantly] Roman Catholic Poles were documented to leave during the brief amnesty period that began in late summer 1941 ending abruptly the following year. Free from a life of hardship, suffering and death in Soviet labour camps, where did the *Sybiraki* go? Who was making the decisions? What role[s] did the Polish government-in-exile in London play? What of political, church and international aid organizations? It is within the context of these and other questions that I also explore the Polish diaspora—as *Polonia*—in a consideration of events that unfolded through the remainder of the war years and then as it ended in 1945. What then?

Why did some of the *Anders Poles* immigrate to Canada, but not others? And what was the context for their immigration to Canada? Discussion in Chapter 5, entitled **Emplacement**, includes consideration of pre-WWII, wartime, and post-war Canadian immigration policy as well as abridged comparative consideration of parallel migrations of Poles to Great Britain, Australia, Brazil and the United States. Archival research in Canadian government documents, memos and newspaper articles from the wartime and post-war era lays the foundation of inquiry into the circumstances, policies and processes that resulted in the immigration to Canada of the *Anders Poles*. Included is particular consideration of British policy and procedure vis-à-vis the post-war group resettlement in Canada of 4,527 Polish ex-soldiers under Britain's *Polish Resettlement Act*.

And what of the civilian refugees? In Chapter 6, entitled **The Doors Open to Workers and Breeders**, discussion centers round exploration of the terms to which post-WWII immigrants to Canada agreed as condition of entry. As *bulk labour* they were committed to one-year gender-specific labour contracts in such underemployed work as agriculture, forestry, mining, or in domestic service. Ultimately, it was anticipated they would contribute to nation building in the most fundamental of ways: as workers and as breeders. Through the recollections of study participants as well linking this study to existing research, I begin to sketch the early community,

family, and working life experiences of the *Anders Poles* with some comparative consideration of other contemporary immigrant groups to Canada as well as of Poles to other countries such as Brazil, England, and the United States. That is, once in Canada, how did the *Anders Poles* establish themselves, both within existing *Polonia* communities and within mainstream Canadian work and community life?

More particularly, I also explore such issues as [political/cultural] transition through re-imagination or re-invention of their selves as *Canadian* citizens. I became especially interested in the anomaly of construction of the 'self' straddling the *here* and *there* tensions. Is there cohesion in these constructs, or is there rift? Have Canadians made their coming to citizenship easy or difficult? Furthermore, in considering the immigration experiences of the *Anders Poles*, it is essential to examine immigrant women's experience, particularly with respect to relationship[s] to and/or between ethnicity, class and gender. For instance, how does women's experience and expression of experience differ from that of their male counterparts in such areas as language, work, family, and community participation? The difficulty has been, however, that male study participants outnumber female more than 2:1. Thus, weakness in the analysis lies in the unbalanced gender representation of the study population. Indeed, it appears that the male arrivals in Canada from among the *Sybiraki* number somewhat more than female. The large single-gendered group movement of 4,527 Polish ex-soldiers can partially explain this imbalance. Henry Radecki cites that overall three times as many Polish males as females came to Canada in the post-WWII era.<sup>20</sup>

Chapter 7, entitled **Be(Com)ing Canadian**, is a concentrated consideration of the power of ethnicity within the Polish context. Here, I revisit historiographic elements related to the global phenomenon, *Polonia* and a range of interrelationships between the *Anders Poles* and *Polonia*—the Polish diaspora—as well as explore *Polishness* in relation to *Canadianness*.

Although interviews were conducted primarily throughout the Greater Toronto Area and

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<sup>20</sup> Henry Radecki. Ethnic Organizational Dynamics. (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1979) 36.

elements of the interviews have been interwoven through this study, I include in Chapter 7 particular consideration of those who made the Oshawa area home. In recalling the axiom “write what you know,” and with deference to this wisdom and to the very personal nature of this research, it would be remiss of me to not consider the Oshawa *Polonia* community as microcosm ‘case study’. In exploring the Oshawa community, there exists the opportunity to consider their experiences in relation to community building, nation building, and in a concentrated exploration of the concepts *Polishness* in, or out of, mutual expression with *Canadianness*.

I wish to emphasize that due to the nature of the very small sample (38) of study participants, I do not submit this research as wholly representative of the group despite the universal usage of the terms *Anders Poles* and *Sybiraki*. This study represents but one version of the story—and one approach to the research—as defined by the study sample and by the methodology.

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With respect to immigration experience, it must be noted that one generally considers the immigrant also as the emigrant. In the case of the *Anders Poles*, however, while they seemingly represent ‘twice migrants’ having emigrated from England, from Italy, or from British East Africa, they did not choose to leave Poland. Rather they were forcibly deported from their homeland and exiled in Soviet labour camps in remote regions of an unforgiving hinterland. Only after the war was relocation in new homelands one choice occasionally made available to them.

Those who chose to resettle in new homelands, such as Canada, did not make their choice lightly. For them, it was a matter of not returning to a Poland subject to [Communist] Soviet domination. Why? They feared repeat deportation. Instead, many determined they could better serve the homeland outside its borders as *Polonia*. Within established *Polonia* community life, or newly establishing *Polonia* organizations and communities, many engaged in intense efforts to preserve Polish heritage and culture, especially for their children, as well for the future when Poland would be free from Soviet domination. But how did the re-migration to such countries as Canada or the United States ‘sit’ with the *Anders Poles*? In other words, did they



pine for return to the psychic homeland, the Poland of pre-1939? What of the Poland they left behind? Its borders had changed, what of the rest? And, what unified them? Faith? Culture? The deportation/exile experience?

The Poland of their memory is that of a mostly happy childhood which was dramatically interrupted by the trauma of dislocation, deportation, disorder, and disembowelment of family. During the two years they 'lived' in Soviet labour camps, they experienced attempts of forcible erasure of their language, their religion and their history. What, then, is the Polish identity—*Polishness*—in this context? What memories of their homeland, of their exile, exodus and exordium experiences do they share? Withhold? Re-invent? How has memory served these remarkably 'ordinary' individuals? Has it betrayed them? Does it punish them through manifestation in episodes of mental/physical illness? Does it guide them? And how does one locate pain-ridden memories of experience on the theoretical landscape?

These questions are briefly explored inasmuch as they relate to elements of this study. It was my initial intent to survey more widely the field of memory theory, and especially to relate it to discourse ongoing on the theme of Holocaust testimonies. However, it became evident the topic requires a broader exploration and analysis than could reasonably be conducted within the scope of this study. The topic remains open on the very large field of inquiry yet untapped vis-à-vis the *Anders Poles*.

### Finale

My objective in conducting this research was to collect and document neglected stories and to insert into the Canadian historical 'album' absent details, crafted from the narratives of old children and from archival and textual material. Along with a brief summary of this work, Chapter 8, entitled **Finale**, identifies potential topics requiring further study. This is to submit that this study is not a definitive work; that it shall play but a modest complementary role in adding to the small pool of existing text. And to convey my sincere hope that interest in this will topic will grow.

It cannot be stressed strongly enough that the moment of living remembrance is near past

as each year more of these old children leave us. If we allow that the best possible memory could be gleaned from about age 10, most who could adequately recall their experiences are now over age 70. Some among study participants were toddlers when deported to Siberia in 1940, but this is not to say they have no memory of those early experiences, however foggy. Furthermore, they have clear memories of their early Canadian experiences as newcomers and therefore can contribute a great deal to variations on such themes as immigration, ethnicity, gender, class, etc.

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Whenever his six children call into question the wisdom of the un-educated "DP", my father declares, "What? You think I just got off the banana boat?!" He has used this expression since his earliest days in Canada as an assertion of his rights and his abilities for those who would discriminate against him for no other reason than a thick Polish accent. And what did those individuals think would result when my father's children saw him treated as a 'dumb Polak'? While my father does not possess any certificate or diploma of higher learning, he, and the individuals who courageously consented to participate in this study, offers the reader of this text much to consider about the human condition and about what it means, for some, to 'be Canadian', whether or not they just got off the banana boat.

I have dedicated this work to the memory of my grandparents, *Wiktoria Rosalia Kotowicz Bajorek* and *Wawrzyniec Bajorek* who I never met. Dziadek died while fleeing the Soviet Union. Babcia immigrated to Canada via the *General Black* in 1949 but life in her new homeland was not simple or easy. She died engulfed in lonely memory.

It is for her memory, for the memory of my ancestors, that I shake a few branches, waking the stories, and with broom in hand begin to tidy up, before all living memory falls into permanent and silent sleep.

And through these words, I weave yet another connecting thread through the tapestry of stories already documented, passing the needle to the next tailor/teller of tales...

## Chapter 2 - EXILE

### Shifting Borders and Poles - Poland and World War II

*O Exiles! Whose earthy wanderings are ne'er complete  
When you may rest your sore and weary feet?  
The worm has his clod of earth. The wild dove has its nest.  
Everyone has a home: but the grave, for a Pole, is the only place of rest.*<sup>21</sup>

#### Prelude

In 1918 Poland once again became an independent state after 123 years of foreign domination. Two years later, after falling out with his military colleague and former university chum [and brother-in-law] Major Andrzej Błazejowski, my great grandfather Captain Jan Kotowicz sold his farm in the Rzeszów area and purchased a larger, cheaper piece of land in the village of Holoskowice, in Tarnopol province,<sup>22</sup> said village being in the then eastern borderlands on the Russian side of the historic *Curzon Line* [Holoskowice marked on maps throughout]. He moved his wife, Aniela, and two daughters, Wiktoria [my grandmother] and Suzie, several cows and horses, and all his implements to a piece of land that boasted a small wood, a pond, a large pasture, and, in the village, a mill. They were accompanied by four farm hands from the Błazejowski family estate and within a few months they built a home and barn and waited the first harvest.

Around the same time, the period known as the Second Republic, other Poles migrated to the eastern provinces of the ever-shifting historic Polish Kingdom, or Congress, in waves of colonization [or polonization] of the region whose Ukrainian or Belorus majorities had suffered and laboured for centuries under [mostly] absent landlords. Many of the Polish migrants received their lands gratis, or bought them cheaply, as did Jan Kotowicz, in a scheme which recognized military service performed during either or both WWI and the 1919/20 Polish-Soviet War. This migration and colonization process exemplified the movement of ethnic populations between and through the shifting borders of east-central Europe that, over hundreds of years, "resulted in the

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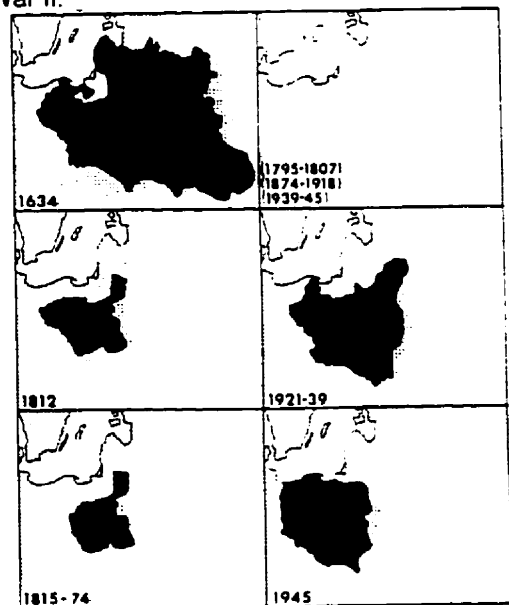
<sup>21</sup> Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz [1757-1841] wrote this verse ten days before his death; qtd. In Norman Davies, Heart of Europe: A Short History of Poland. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 196.

<sup>22</sup> Janice Kulyk Keefer. Honey and Ashes. (Toronto: HarperFlamingo Canada, 1998) 262. In Polish, it's *Tarnopol*; on contemporary maps of Ukraine, it's *Temopil*. Zygmunt the First in 1540 gave the land of the province to the leader of the Polish Army, Hetman Jan Tarnowski. Tarnowski conferred the name, translated to mean *Field of Thorns*.

presence of a substantial ethnic minority population within Poland's borders as well as sizeable Polish minorities within the borders of all the neighbouring nations."<sup>23</sup>

A procession of relatives and former neighbours followed Jan Kotowicz, but within six months of his move to Tarnopol, my great grandfather was dead. An aggressive Polish chauvinist who liked to drink and gamble, his boisterous boasting and boorish egocentricity brought upon him the wrath of some of the locals who, it is said, one day poisoned his ever-handly whiskey. One could argue the man was not endowed with practical sensitivity toward his neighbours who bitterly resented the Polish settlers, whether of the current wave or of previous waves. Had he lived, however, he might have rued the day he moved his family to Tarnopol for, as events unfolded, his beloved wife and daughters and each of their families, along with approximately 1.5 million Poles,<sup>24</sup> were forcibly deported, in familiar Russian custom, to exile in Siberian labour camps in the early years of World War II.

From the threads of this family narrative can be woven aspects of the complex montage of events related to Poland's historic relations with its neighbours. For several hundred years, Poland's borders waxed and waned, even eclipsing into the void of the official landscape during several epochs of foreign oppression. [Map 1] In a definitive consideration of Polish historiography vis-à-vis foreign invasion, conquest and ethnic cleansing, this chapter



Map 1 - Poland's Changing Territory<sup>25</sup>

explores the events that led to the 1939 invasion of Poland by both Germany and Soviet Russia.

<sup>23</sup> Tadeusz Piotrowski. *Poland's Holocaust*. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1998) 3.

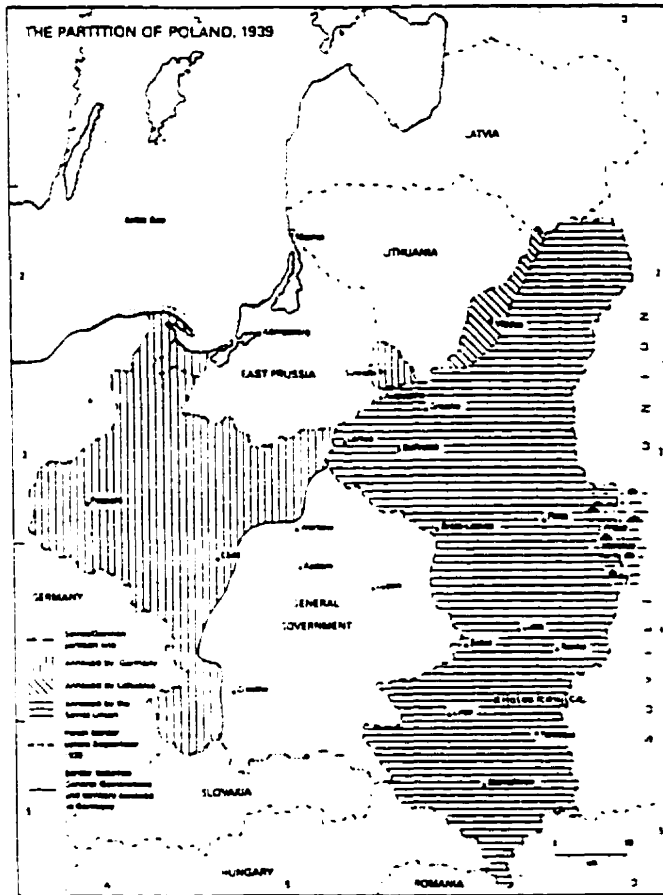
<sup>24</sup> This figure is in dispute and may never be adequately determined, even if/when researchers are granted adequate access to Soviet archival material. I have chosen to use a figure of 1.5 million Poles deported by the Soviet Union during the period 1939-41 as a 'middle ground'. Anders, Davies, Gross, Je'luck, Mostwin, Piotrowski, Siemaszko, Stern Burstin, Sword, Thurston and others posit numbers ranging from 980,000 to 2,000,000. Wiktor Podoski, Consul General of Poland in Canada during the war years, wrote in a letter to Canadian Red Cross, October 23, 1941, of 1.5 million Poles deported to Siberia. NAC RG-25/G-1; vol. 1995, #1206, pt. 1.

<sup>25</sup> Norman Davies. *Heart of Europe: A Short History of Poland*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 354.

and ultimately endeavors to develop a portrait of the foundational rationale and operational considerations vis-à-vis the Soviet deportation of ethnic Poles to exile in labour camps through the years 1939-41.

Waning into the Void

“One swift blow to Poland, first by the German Army and then by the Red Army, and nothing was left of this ugly offspring of the Versailles Treaty,” boasted Molotov in his October 31



[1939] keynote speech before the Supreme Soviet of the USSR.<sup>26</sup> Two months earlier [23 August, 1939], Poland was divided on paper in the German-Soviet *Non-Aggression Pact* [along the Ribbentrop-Molotov line of division] in which they divided what was then Poland, the spoils of the ill-fated union. (Map 2) Germany gained control of the western half of Poland and its 23 million inhabitants, the Soviet Union, the eastern half with its 13 million people. And while Poland fell beneath two totalitarian states, the world simply watched.

Map 2 - Nazi-Soviet Demarcation 1939<sup>27</sup>

But the September

1939 invasion of Poland was not an isolated act of aggression. It was grounded in historic conflict between Poland and its neighbouring states; more specifically, it was grounded in

<sup>26</sup> Norman Davies. *Heart of Europe: A Short History of Poland*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 354.

<sup>27</sup> Richard Crampton and Ben Crampton. *Atlas of Eastern Europe in The Twentieth Century*. (London: Routledge, 1996) 110.

Russian and German efforts at economic, social and political dominance of the region. One might simply say that Poland was in the way, stuck between two mighty aggressors vying for power, territory and, ultimately, the elimination of anything Polish; including, especially, Poles and their unyielding nationalism.



Map 3 – Eastern Europe 1900<sup>28</sup>

When the Great War [WWI] broke out in August 1914, Poland, the geographic state, or the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (the First Republic

crushed in the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century),<sup>29</sup> did not exist having been wiped clean from the map of Europe [Map 3] and “between twenty and thirty million people who might have called themselves Poles lived as subjects of the Russian Tsar, the German Kaiser, or the Emperor-King of Austria. And there was no one alive who could remember the time when Poland had been an independent state.”<sup>30</sup>

#### Waxing into Twentieth Century Sentience

Following the defeat in 1918 of the Austro-Hungarian and German empires, along with the political, ideological and economic erosion of the Russian empire after two internal

<sup>28</sup> Richard Crampton and Ben Crampton. *Atlas of Eastern Europe in The Twentieth Century*. (London: Routledge, 1996) 147.

<sup>29</sup> Norman Davies. *Heart of Europe: A Short History of Poland*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 115.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, 109.

revolutions, the Polish state underwent a moderate, yet discordant, revival. None of the former overseers of the Polish lands was in a position to control the border regions, and so Polish leadership, under Marshal Jozef Pilsudski, moved swiftly to lay claim to a historic geopolitical state. The difficulty, however, was that "there were no clearly definable ethnic frontiers."<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, Polish leadership was not always of one mind.

The two principal characters, each holding conflicting visions for Poland, were Marshal Jozef Pilsudski and Roman Dmowski. A distinguished military leader, the Lithuanian-born Pole Pilsudski was committed to the romantic fight for absolute Polish independence which, among other things, he perceived as necessary in establishing an alliance with eastern borderland states from Finland to Georgia, that they might establish united resistance against Russian intimidation and the peril of Russian domination. Pilsudski's vision was unmistakably anti-Soviet. One might wonder whether 5 years internment in a Siberian penal institution influenced his thinking! There is no question, however, that he was strongly committed to the *Jagiellonian* concept of a free and independent Poland not unlike that of the First Republic of Poland-Lithuania.<sup>32</sup> One that was "a product of history, a community sharing the same values and loyalties, though not necessarily the same ethnicity or origins... a 'multinational nation'."<sup>33</sup>

In contrast was the position taken by Roman Dmowski who initially trained as a biologist and erstwhile writer, but who developed a life-long commitment to Polish politics including a brief stint as Deputy to the Russian Parliament in St. Petersburg. He favoured a Polish state which collaborated with Russia and which was "the result of the God-given division of mankind into distinct entities each possessing its own exclusive language, territory, and history."<sup>34</sup> In other words, one which was exclusively inhabited by ethnic Poles and which bound blood to soil,<sup>35</sup> and which was not unlike the Poland promised in 1914 by Russia's Grand Duke Nicholas: a Poland

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<sup>31</sup> Steven Zaloga and Victor Madej. *The Polish Campaign, 1939*. (NY: Hippocrene Books, Inc., 1985) 4.

<sup>32</sup> Norman Davies. *Heart of Europe: A Short History of Poland*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 110-116. See also 133-157.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

“free in her own faith, language, and self-rule’ **under** the scepter of the Tsar.”<sup>36</sup> [emphasis mine] Consequently, Dmowski did not support Pilsudski’s eastward push of Poland’s frontiers into regions occupied by other ethnic groups nor the state’s social engineering policies of colonization and polonization of the eastern territories; particularly, as the other ethnic groups shared neither language nor the Roman Catholic faith. As it played out, however, the Poland that would rise from the ashes of WWII more closely resembled Dmowski’s [ultimately the Russian] vision; a vision not shared by any of the thirty-eight individuals interviewed for this study.

As the Western powers supported an independent Poland, its frontiers were discussed at the *Paris Peace Conference* in 1919. Poland’s borders were eventually fixed through a combination of treaty and after a series of military skirmishes. The *Treaty of Versailles* (June 1919) involved the transfer to Poland of what became known as the *Polish Corridor*, Prussian/German lands in the northwest region which afforded Poland access to the Baltic [no doubt, the allies were considering eastern access, by sea, to Germany should war again threaten, as it did in 1939]. Poland seemingly ignored the parameters of the *Treaty of Versailles*, as Marshal Pilsudski continued to press Poland’s frontiers outward; notably, eastward.

Also in 1919, British Foreign Secretary, Lord Curzon, proposed what became known as the *Curzon Line*, [Map 4] which “roughly corresponded to the frontier of ethnic Poland... and [was later] used so masterfully by Stalin in World War II as an argument for the retention by the USSR of that share of Poland which accrued to it under the Nazi-Soviet agreement of 1939.”<sup>37</sup> It was on the Russian side of this line to which my great grandfather, Jan Kotowicz, moved his family in 1920.

Through 1919-20, seesaw warring between Poles and Ukrainians and between Poles and the Red Army resulted in victory for the Poles [under Pilsudski] over the eastern frontiers; essentially, the territory east of the *Curzon Line*. Subsequently, through 1920-22, Poland encountered further border disputes between Czechoslovakia and Lithuania. Poland’s absolute

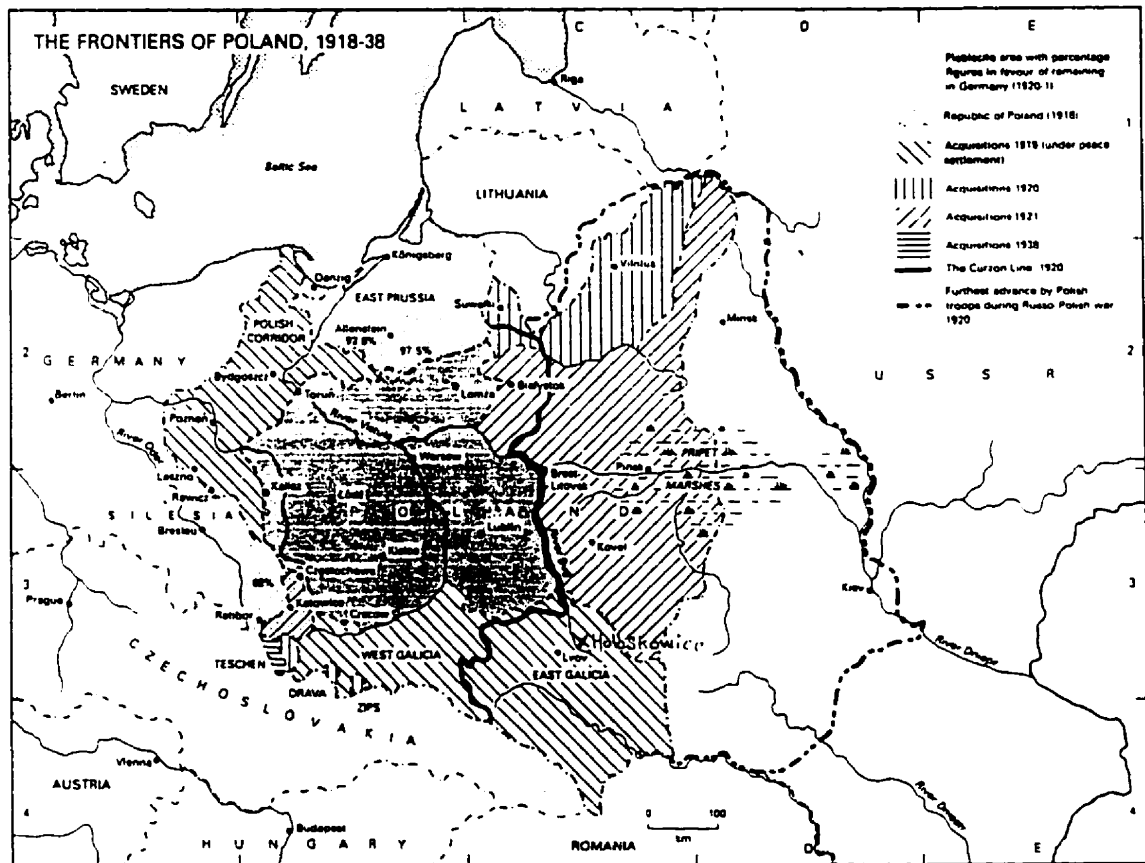
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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>37</sup> Adam B. Ulam. *Stalin: The Man and His Era*. (NY: Viking Press, 1973) 186.



borders then, which were to prevail for less than 20 years, were officially recognized in *the Treaty of Riga*, signed 18 March 1921. All the while, the Allies seemingly “watched approvingly”,<sup>38</sup> perhaps receptive to a greater geographic buffer between Europe and Russia.



Map 4 - Poland: Divisions and Treaty Lines, 1918-21<sup>39</sup>

Divided Polish leadership struggled to advance a long-fragmented state rife with political, economic and social uncertainty, and by 1926 the country faced the threat of civil war. Spurred by supporters and unquestionably a virtual mythical champion of the Polish nation, Pilsudski staged a successful *coup d'etat* after which he remained the national leader of the Second Republic<sup>40</sup> until his death in 1935.

<sup>38</sup> Michael Howard, "Europe in the Age of the Two World Wars" in *The Oxford History of the Twentieth Century*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 103-116.

<sup>39</sup> Richard Crampton and Ben Crampton. *Atlas of Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century*. (London: Routledge, 1996) 100.

<sup>40</sup> Norman Davies. *Heart of Europe: A Short History of Poland*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 115. The *Second Republic* encompasses a region slightly larger than the Polish historic political/ethnic geographic region as fixed prior to 1774.

For the most part, Pilsudski remained more acutely concerned with Russian invasion of Poland's eastern frontiers than with German invasion of its western frontiers. As a result of his military successes against the Bolsheviks, as well as buoyed by a defensive alliance signed with France in 1921, Pilsudski failed to modernize the Polish military—to Poland's detriment, as it would happen. And to further advance the *Jagiellonian* vision of the Second Republic, the state embarked on an intensive program of colonization/polonization of the eastern frontiers. Concurrently, and—as it relates to this study—for a period of time in co-operation with recruitment agents from CPR [Canadian Pacific Rail], Polish policy encouraged out migration [in a utopian drive to establish Polish colonies round the globe] to relieve the state of economic and population pressures; primarily from the eastern regions where it was deemed prudent to eliminate elements "not suitable for polonizing the borderlands."<sup>41</sup> Such policy further exacerbated tensions between the Polish settlers who were in the minority and Ukrainians, Belorussians, Germans, and Jews.

In the meantime, a new generation of Poles was facing their future on their own terms [despite an overwhelming lack of consensus]; not on the terms of foreign oppressors as was the experience of the previous five generations. Poland could be more than "just an idea—a memory from the past, or a hope for the future."<sup>42</sup> As Polish national pride increased, Poland adopted Dąbrowski's Mazurek—*Jeszcze Polska nie zginęła*—as its national anthem in 1926. In part:

*Poland has not perished yet  
So long as we still live.  
That which foreign force has seized  
We at swordpoint shall retrieve.*<sup>43</sup>

#### Polonization of the Second Republic

Following the seeming firm delineation of the Second Republic, Polish administration undertook massive programs to integrate the various currencies, institutions, ethnic groups, and traditions; particularly, in its frontier regions where Poles and *things Polish* were in the minority. Norman Davies offers the following narrative to partially illustrate the complexity of adapting the

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<sup>41</sup> Anna Reczynska. *For Bread and a Better Future*. (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1996) 130.

<sup>42</sup> Norman Davies. *Heart of Europe: A Short History of Poland*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 159.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

pioneering Polish nation [which would be funny were it not too close to reality]:

[T]he ex-Austrian officer... had to consult his French Army manual before telling his ex-Russian infantrymen how to load their ex-English ammunition into their ex-German rifles....<sup>44</sup>

Of particular relevance to this study was the migration and resettlement of a few hundred thousand Poles<sup>45</sup>—many of whom were *osadniki*,<sup>46</sup> and *kolonista*.<sup>47</sup>—within the eastern frontiers which colonies supplemented long-established small pockets of Polish settlement. In addition, officials implemented various strategies in their efforts to polonize the existing majority populations through education and infiltration of other institutional and bureaucratic jurisdictions [although bi-lingualism and bi-culturalism were not entirely restricted nor even decreed illegal; rather, ethnic schools and churches were often, though not always, maintained under the *Minorities Treaty*, 1924.<sup>48</sup> Polish language, values and culture tended, however, to be given greater sway].

It would be a gross omission to neglect to recall that Poles did not *invent* colonization practices. For instance, the *Prussian Colonization Commission* (1886-1913) “aimed to strengthen the German element in the East,”<sup>49</sup> as Lithuania and Czechoslovakia embarked on resettlement programs in Polish territories during the interwar period.<sup>50</sup>

Among the thirty-eight women and men interviewed for this study, twenty-eight believed their families to be among such colonists using such terms as: special resettlers, *osadniki*, and *kolonista*. They further believed they were deported to exile in Soviet labour camps in the early years of WWII *because* the communities in which they lived represented polonization of the

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>45</sup> Myron B. Kuropas. *The Ukrainian Americans: Roots and Aspirations, 1884-1954*. (233) qtd. in Tadeusz Piotrowski, *Poland's Holocaust*. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1998) 180. Kuropas cites official documentation of the movement of 300,000 Poles to the Ukrainian region of the eastern frontier by 1938. Others were resettled through the north and central regions of the eastern frontier. In addition to supplementing existing Polish settlements, high birth rates further increased Polish population of the eastern frontier.

<sup>46</sup> Keith Sword. *Deportation and Exile: Poles in the Soviet Union, 1939-48*. (NY: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1994) 14-15; *fn* 48, 206. *Osadnicy woskowii*: military settlers (6). 9000 soldiers who had fought for Poland between 1914 and 1920 were rewarded by the state with small parcels of land in the eastern borderlands. Sword describes this settlement program as having the characteristics of an *ethnic plantation*, one that never developed on a great scale. It was the *osadniki* who made up the largest group of Polish victims deported February 9-10, 1940, and it was this date during which the majority of study participants were deported.

<sup>47</sup> *kolonista*: settler, colonist.

<sup>48</sup> Tadeusz Piotrowski. *Poland's Holocaust*. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1998) 181.

<sup>49</sup> Norman Davies. *Heart of Europe: A Short History of Poland*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 171.

<sup>50</sup> Tadeusz Piotrowski. *Poland's Holocaust*. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1998) 181.

region, injecting into their narratives such terms and phrases as: political prisoner; bourgeoisie, lesser nobility; intelligentsia; *kulak*,<sup>51</sup> enemy of the state; “because of being Polish”; and “to get rid of Poles, send them back.” There was, however, a broad range of criteria applied for deportations of Poles, among them the *osadniki* or *kolonista*, and *kulaks* as but a few. One interviewee, who identifies his ethnicity and his birth nationality as Ukrainian, was arrested and summarily deported to a Soviet labour camp because he was a Polish sympathizer, an offence equally as felonious as *being* Polish!<sup>52</sup> Among the remainder, five were legitimate prisoners of war: soldiers captured and sent to hard labour camps.

As might be expected, many groups resented the colonization scheme. Moreover, majority ethnic groups, namely Belorussians and Ukrainians, resented many of their new neighbours; particularly those, such as my great grandfather, who exhibited bellicose Polish nationalist attitudes, because they were granted free lands, or bought land cheaply, through Polish resettlement projects when, for aeons, Ukrainian and Belorussian peasants had suffered under the yoke of serfdom, their masters from among an international mosaic of absentee landlords, including Poles.

Interestingly, during a Spring 2000 visit with my youngest son to the village of Holoskowice—sixty years after my father, his family and other Polish villagers were deported—Ukrainian villagers recalled with fondness and respect my great grandmother, Aniela Kotowicz, who applied her convent training to midwifery and who was the local ‘medicine-woman’ skilled in the art of herbal applications. It was her fate about which they inquired on meeting her great granddaughter.

Due to efforts at polonization, as well as to frustration over their reduction to minority status, despite majority numbers, Ukrainians eventually “were seething with discontent.”<sup>53</sup> It didn’t help that during the 1930’s Stalin was snatching every piece of grain from their brethren in Ukraine in an environment rife with fear of drought, starvation or, worse, of punishment for defiance of Stalin’s edicts. Tadeusz Piotrowski writes:

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<sup>51</sup> Jan T. Gross. *Revolution From Abroad*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988) 115. *Kulak*: a class of prosperous peasants.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Bohdan (10 November 1999).

<sup>53</sup> Jan T. Gross. *Revolution From Abroad*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988) 127.

Between 1929 and 1934, during Stalin's unrelenting war against the mythical kulaks and other "class enemies", 20 million farmers were collectivized and 15 million people died—half of them in Siberia, to which they had been deported. In 1932-33 alone some 4.5 million people starved to death within Ukraine and 3 million outside its borders... the Great Terror of 1936-38 also struck at both Ukrainian leadership and the peasantry... the great purges honed the killer apparatus for the Polish campaign [of 1939].<sup>54</sup>

Global economic conditions [the Great Depression] complicated both Poland's rebirth into statehood and Poland's internal affairs vis-à-vis ethnic populations. For, as elsewhere, economic depression struck. As a result, ethnic "Polish politicians and intellectuals sought scapegoats; they denounced Jews and Ukrainians for blocking 'the Polish nation' from decent employment."<sup>55</sup> It was during this period that the government began a policy of reduction of Ukrainian-language education as well as either destroyed Orthodox churches or converted them; most to Roman Catholicism. Further, some leading Polish authorities attempted to initiate emigration schemes [aimed principally at Belorussians and Ukrainians] which would "decrease the number of unruly, decidedly anti-Polish elements which are provoking national antagonism... [such emigration... a means of decreasing the number of unsatisfied elements as well as a means leading to... polonization."<sup>56</sup>

And so, while Poles struggled in their campaign for statehood under the watchful and needful eye of two totalitarians, Hitler and Stalin, Ukrainians—and other 'minorities'—must have felt a staggering crush of hope. Years of oppression by [absent] landlords and warfare from this side, then that, and now a blow to access to Ukrainian-language education and religious expression continued to impose upon, even restrict, their efforts to just be through the interwar period of Polish ascendance in the political sphere; all compounded by efforts to rid the region of them. Such despair and accompanying anger would net Poles yet another enemy collaborating against them at the outbreak and through WWII.<sup>57</sup>

Moreover, minority groups increasingly grew to resent the Polish settlers in the eastern frontiers. Jews, as elsewhere, encountered mounting anti-Semitism while German settlers [from

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<sup>54</sup> Tadeusz Piotrowski. *Poland's Holocaust*. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1998) 9.

<sup>55</sup> Robert W. Thurston. *Life and Terror in Stalin's Russia: 1934-1941*. (NY: Yale University Press, 1996) 217.

<sup>56</sup> Anna Reczynska. *For Bread and a Better Future*. (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1996) 132.

<sup>57</sup> See Tadeusz Piotrowski. *Poland's Holocaust*. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1998).

previous German colonization movements], as those in other areas of Poland, were turning to Nazism.

Those among the women and men interviewed for this study who counted their families among the *osadniki* recounted simple lives on the land, many of them coming from generations of farmers having little formal education.<sup>58</sup> Most recall their pre-war childhood years as "hard but happy times;" little better off than neighbours, but for the fact many could employ Ukrainian nannies, domestics, and/or farmhands.

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After Jan Kotowicz's sudden death, his widow, Aniela, wrote of her grief and plight to her brother, Major Andrzej Błazejowski, sending the letter with the four farm hands whom she could ill afford. Major Błazejowski responded to his sister's distress by sending his loyal attendant, Wawrzyniec Bajorek, who came to work for him when a child and who had accompanied him on all military campaigns. Bajorek remained as farmhand, receiving one *morg*<sup>59</sup> of the Kotowicz land for each year of labour. Six years later, he secretly married Wiktoria Kotowicz, their marriage producing six surviving children, including my father, Jan Lesław Bajorek, second child, born in 1928. They remained on the farm, with Aniela and their children, until the entire family was deported to exile in a Siberian labour camp in February 1940.

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Following Hitler's invasion from the West 01 September 1939, the Soviet Red Army invaded eastern Poland on 17 September 1939, essentially carving up Poland with the aim to wipe it off the map. The Red Army was somewhat taken aback as they were generally greeted with open arms by the ethnic groups other than Poles [who were in the minority in the region] who

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<sup>58</sup> The topic of education is complex and a full consideration is not within the scope of this study. However, it must be noted that the Second World War interrupted the education of most of study participants; several had withdrawn from formal education after completion of Gr. 6, and before the outbreak of the war, that they might contribute to the family economy. A rigorous program of national promotion of Polish education, particularly of Polish history, language, culture and Roman Catholicism, was undertaken through the interwar years for it was, after all, the Second Republic. Of note, few of the parents or grandparents among study participants received much formal education either because of socio-economic status as farmers, or because of lack of national Polish education institutions through the era of the partitions. See Katherine Jolluck, Gender, Identity and the Polish Experience of War, 1939-1945. (Doctoral Dissertation: Stanford University, 1995) 73-76; also, 275-291 re the significance of the role of women and education in the home which became the "last impregnable bastion of 'Polishness'", 275.

<sup>59</sup> One *morg* is approximately one acre.

often assisted in the rapid success of squelching Polish enemies of the Soviet state. Ironically, many Poles initially perceived Stalin as their emancipator from Nazi aggression and so there was little Polish resistance [in part due, also, to the mobilization of Polish forces along the western border where Hitler was trouncing the ill-equipped and antiquated Polish military] thus contributing further to the initial "joyous atmosphere surrounding the entry of Soviet troops... [for] where they came, the Germans did not."<sup>60</sup> The "joyous atmosphere," however, was to be short-lived as Stalin, who one source argues "was really a Trotskyite bent on extending the Soviet system westward," was plotting to correct what he perceived to be a geo-political/clannish aberration with the aid of his arch-rival, Hitler, who had become [albeit for a short time] his buddy in bad times.

#### Stalin Teaches Poland a Lesson in Nationalism

Josef Stalin [Iosef "Koba" Djugashvili] used to tell a story of a trip he made out of Russian to Cracow in the mid-1900s about "a waiter at a railway station in Galicia refus[ing] to serve him when he ordered in Russian, and how Lenin had to explain to him that the local Poles loathed everything Russian. But [argues Ulam], it is unlikely that a Russian revolutionary, Georgian or not, had to be instructed in the strength of Polish national feeling."<sup>61</sup>

That this incident solely created in Stalin hostility toward Poles is dubious. After all, as a Georgian and a former inmate in a Siberian penal institution, Stalin knew too well the scourge of Russian oppression under Tsarist rule, and under which Poland suffered equally. But Stalin, the Georgian, eventually ruled Russia with such "intense Russian chauvinism"<sup>62</sup> that he would perpetuate, even refine, the machinations of Tsarist ideology, particularly, oppression through his unrivalled highly suspicious and fickle version of totalitarianism. Though this extensive subject is not within the scope of this study, it is relevant to the historical framework vis-à-vis Soviet/Polish relations and Stalin's acceptance of the Grand Duke Nicholas' precedent-setting commitment to

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<sup>60</sup> Jan T. Gross. Revolution From Abroad. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988) 32. See also Zaloga and Madej. The Polish Campaign, 1939. (NY: Hippocrene Books, Inc., 1985) 152-153.

<sup>61</sup> Adam B. Ulam. Stalin: The Man and His Era. (NY: Viking Press, 1973) 119.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

an ethnically pure 'free' Poland; one subject to Russian rule.

Since the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, Poland suffered systematic Russian tutelage.<sup>63</sup> Dating a further two hundred years back, the Tsars of Russia fought many bloody wars to claim and retain the lands that Poland [generally] secured in the *Treaty of Versailles* [1919]. Neither Polish nor Soviet representatives attended the Peace Conference held in Paris. While Poland pushed its borders outward, beyond the *Versailles* territory, especially eastward, Russia fell back in defeat, in part due to its weakened state having just emerged from two revolutions.

Following the Polish-Soviet War 1919-20, and while maintaining keen interest in Poland's eastern frontier [all of Poland perhaps], Russia signed with Poland the *Treaty of Riga* [1921] in which Russia and Ukraine "renounced all rights and claims to the territory lying west of the border."<sup>64</sup>

In March 1923, the *Conference of Ambassadors* [Great Britain, France, Italy, Japan and the United States] met to discuss Poland's frontiers. It was agreed "to recognize all Poland's rights of sovereignty over the territories," including [specifically], the eastern portion of Galicia.<sup>65</sup> In essence, Poland regained the "territories that belonged to the first Polish Republic before all the partitions, and more."<sup>66</sup>

Then, in 1932, Poland signed with the Soviets a *Non-Aggression Pact*, renewed for ten more years in 1934, which stated both parties agreed to "renounce war as an instrument of national policy in their mutual relations."<sup>67</sup>

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This historic backdrop explains in part Molotov's bitter distaste of the *Versailles Treaty* expressed on the eve of the German/Soviet invasion of Poland in September 1939. But was it simply an expression of Soviet frustration vis-à-vis desire for what was perceived to be sovereign territory, or was Molotov further expressing strong anti-Polish sentiment? For Russia, too, felt the

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<sup>63</sup> Norman Davies. *Heart of Europe: A Short History of Poland*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 251.

<sup>64</sup> Tadeusz Piotrowski. *Poland's Holocaust*. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1998) 263.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>66</sup> Tadeusz Piotrowski. *Poland's Holocaust*. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1998) 3.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.



wrath of Polish aggression upon its soil. Twice, in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, Poland occupied Moscow.<sup>68</sup>

Furthermore, Poles frustrated historic Russian attempts at Russification in profound expressions of opposition and resistance to and contempt for Russification [which included prohibition of the spoken Polish language, of Polish-language education which was also secularized following the 1939 Soviet invasion, and the banning of Polish-language books].<sup>69</sup> Such contempt and opposition manifested in intense anti-Soviet sentiments that, during the last two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, fostered interest in Marxism among the intelligentsia,<sup>70</sup> and which further resulted in a subversive manifestation of Polish patriotism which eventually "became the object of an intense, secret, and highly developed mysticism."<sup>71</sup> It also explains some of the rationale behind Polish schemes to colonize and polonize the eastern borderlands during the interwar period of the Second Republic.

So it stood, that "[f]or the Pole, few things from Russia have any value.... For the average Russian nothing ever came out of Poland except trouble. The antipathies are reflexive. The Poles expect the Russians to bully them; and the Russians expect the Poles to resist."<sup>72</sup> Not to simplify the record with myth, but there even exists grounding in the folk tale of the brothers Lech and Rus, the legendary founders of the Polish and Russian nations:

*The longest suits are with the men of God  
Or people who are closely linked by blood.  
The feuds of Pole and Russian went on thus,  
Being children of twin brothers Lech and Rus<sup>73</sup>*

One cannot help but pose, in a voice dripping with ironic Russian cynicism: *What class of backward people would reject Russian culture and polish?* The Polish epic hero, *Pan Tadeusz*, responds:

*No one is ever reconciled, they knew,  
Who once has had a quarrel with the Tsar,*

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<sup>68</sup> Adam B. Ulam. *Stalin: The Man and His Era*. (NY: Viking Press, 1973) 563.

<sup>69</sup> Norman Davies. *Heart of Europe: A Short History of Poland*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 265.

<sup>70</sup> Adam B. Ulam. *Stalin: The Man and His Era*. (NY: Viking Press, 1973) 28.

<sup>71</sup> Norman Davies. *Heart of Europe: A Short History of Poland*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 271.

<sup>72</sup> Norman Davies. *Heart of Europe: A Short History of Poland*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 271.

<sup>73</sup> Adam Mickiewicz. *Pan Tadeusz*. [transl. Kenneth MacKenzie] (London: Polish Cultural Foundation (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) 1997) 502.

*But fights or moulders in Siberia.*

...  
*There is no other nation on this earth  
That holds so dear the country of their birth,  
Yet Polish men will to the world's end go  
And live long years in poverty and woe,  
Battling with men and fate, and still withstand  
While this hope shines: we serve our Fatherland.*<sup>74</sup>

Beyond a dislike and distrust of Poles and his ambition to 'reclaim' so-called Russian soil and "reunite all the Ukrainians and Byelorussians within Great Russia" under his fatherly tutelage,<sup>75</sup> Stalin was further preoccupied with flagrant distrust of Hitler; indeed, fearing German invasion of Russia. And while England and France made verbal noises about protection of both the Polish nation and of their Russian ally, Stalin was acutely aware of German threat of war with France. Feeling both threatened and isolated, and while pondering Poland, Stalin came to the conclusion that his best defense included offence against Germany, through Poland. As he felt Poland would not permit the movement of the Red Army through Poland, the Red Army would first have to take Poland.<sup>76</sup> And so, in August 1939, the distrustful and conniving Stalin committed to a *Non-Aggression Pact* with Hitler that included plans, by both Stalin and Hitler, to invade Poland. Simultaneously, Stalin ruminated on how he might protect Russian soil and further expand Communist doctrine and Russian sovereignty, as well as on vanquishing Hitler, for although he entered into a pact with Hitler, Stalin "feared Poland would become a German satellite, thus weakening Russia's western border."<sup>77</sup>

#### The End of the Second Republic - Shifting Borders and Shifting Poles

Under Stalin's heavy cloud of suspicion, anybody and everybody was a potential enemy, but especially worrisome was the "unreliable person who was either passive or who dissented."<sup>78</sup> In its ambiguity, the scope was boundless and Stalin's measures to quell enemies were swift, fierce and, it could be argued, exemplified his paranoia. For under this cloud Stalin had his own

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 440.

<sup>75</sup> Adam B. Ulam. Stalin: The Man and His Era. (NY: Viking Press, 1973) 513.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 491-511.

<sup>77</sup> Adam Ulam. Expansion and Coexistence. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (NY: Praeger, 1974) 261.

<sup>78</sup> Adam B. Ulam. Stalin: The Man and His Era. (NY: Viking Press, 1973) 491.

military leaders, bureaucrats, even friends imprisoned, murdered, or exiled to the *gulag*. As noted by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "*The heart of the matter is not personal guilt, but social danger. One can imprison an innocent man if he is socially hostile. And one can release a guilty man if he is socially friendly.*"<sup>79</sup> Indeed, it was easy to dispatch so-called political prisoners<sup>80</sup> to exile in the Siberian *gulag* in a justice system within which "there was no nonsense about *habeas corpus*;"<sup>81</sup> ergo, one which didn't bother with courts, trials or other trappings of *corpus delicti* [facts connected to a crime]. Overall, during the period 1920 to the 1950s, perhaps tens of millions of people [including Russians] were deported to labour camps or agricultural collectives. Such deportations accounted primarily for the illiterate or those whose mother tongue was not that of the Soviet people.<sup>82</sup> For the scope of this study, it is Stalin's treatment of ethnic Poles, particularly through the period 1939-41, and their fate that is examined. As Tadeusz Piotrowski has written:

[W]ho remembers that the 1.2 million Poles living in the Soviet Union during the interwar years were the first major ethnic group to undergo repression, in 1935-38, by virtue of national rather than class background? In a real sense, September 17, 1939, was simply a continuation of the Soviet policies of the 1930's against the Poles. The ultimate objective of these policies in Eastern Poland was the elimination of all traces of that country's thousand-year history and culture in the borderlands. These policies, in turn, resulted in crimes against peace, crimes against humanity and war crimes... the confiscation of all Polish private and state property began within a month of the Soviet invasion.<sup>83</sup>

Included in Soviet policies against Poles [and other 'enemies'] was the deportation of masses of civilians. Entire families often were removed from their homes [even entire villages] and transported elsewhere; often to collective farms, or *kolkhozes*, where they worked producing crops [e.g. cotton, grain], but usually to life-long exile in Soviet labour camps, or *lagers*, located in remote regions of the hinterlands of the Siberian taiga, or *gulag*, where they laboured in mines or

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<sup>79</sup> Tadeusz Piotrowski. *Poland's Holocaust*. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1998) 16. qtd. from *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918-1956: An Experiment I Literary Investigation*. (1973) 282.

<sup>80</sup> Individuals interviewed for this study overwhelmingly claimed they were 'arrested' as political prisoners, whether distinguishing between ethnicity, residence [as *osadniki*], or military detention.

<sup>81</sup> Adam B. Ulam. *Stalin: The Man and His Era*. (NY: Viking Press, 1973) 46.

<sup>82</sup> Jan T. Gross. *Revolution From Abroad*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988) 187.

<sup>83</sup> Tadeusz Piotrowski. *Poland's Holocaust*. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1998) 10-11.

forests extracting much-needed resources for a nation starving to rise as an unreckonable global power, both through military vim and through economic vigour: an inexpensive and replaceable pool of workers. Such forcible deportations shifted Poles in twenty-three documented organized resettlements dating as far back as 1763, under Tsarist edict. The 1939-41 movement, which is the topic of this study, occurred during Stalinist times, with the last documented mass movement of Poles taking place 1946-53,<sup>84</sup> "and every generation of Polish prisoners and deportees... has reported its contacts with the remnants of previous deportations."<sup>85</sup> Among those interviewed for this study it was typical to encounter Poles, Ukrainians, and Jews exiled in previous deportations, as well as Japanese, Chinese, Russians and Russian minorities such as Chechens. One interviewee recalled:

[T]he guy that was ahead of the wood mill, he was a Pole from First World War. His parents were taken over and he was already free; what would you call it? He wasn't a prisoner.<sup>86</sup>

Although the miller was no longer a prisoner, per se, it wasn't an easy matter to leave "free exile".

Norman Davies submits Poles "probably formed the largest category of political exiles in Tsarist Russia."<sup>87</sup> This was not the case during Stalin's era where at least 27 million Soviet citizens—not just Russians, the majority being Ukrainians—lost their lives and not only to war. And, as is often overlooked: Stalin killed more of his own people than Hitler killed during the Holocaust.<sup>88</sup> Ironically, Stalin, who too was once exiled to Siberia, seemed to take the view the experience was one not to be missed by any of his enemies—or his friends!

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Before entering into discussion of events relating more specifically to the invasion of Poland and the Second World War, I want to emphasize that Poles were a minority in the eastern

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>85</sup> Norman Davies, *Heart of Europe: A Short History of Poland*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 259.

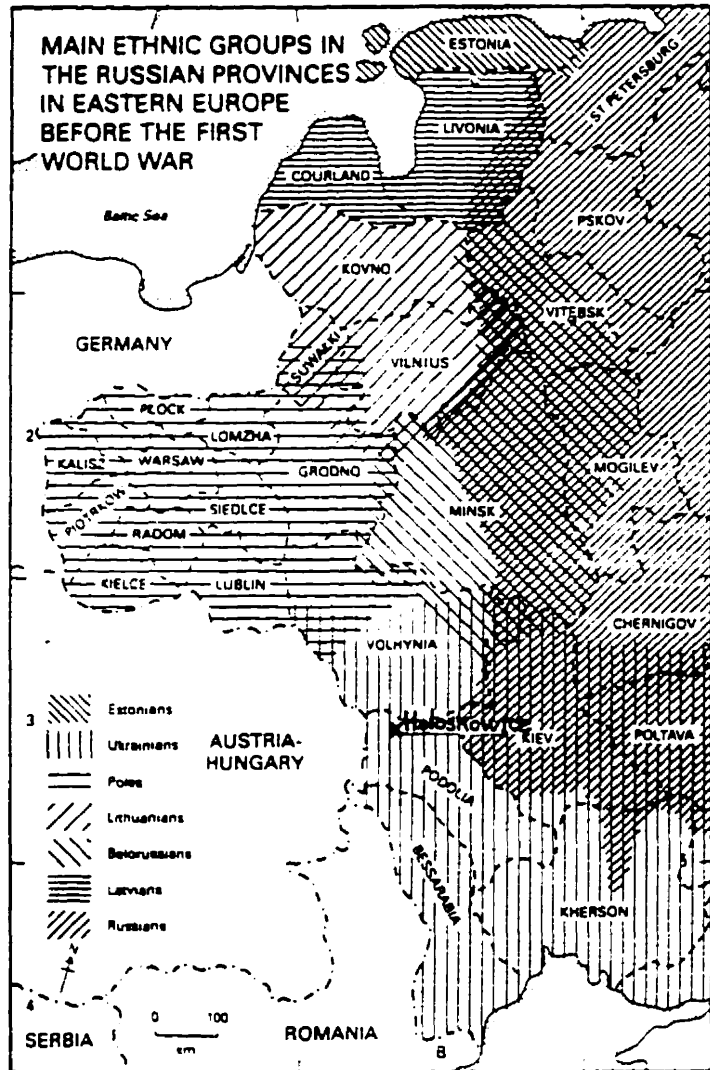
<sup>86</sup> Interview with Adam (18 October 1998) 10.

<sup>87</sup> Norman Davies, *Heart of Europe: A Short History of Poland*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 259.

<sup>88</sup> Norman Davies in published interview with Diana Kuprel, "The Unwritten Chapters of World War II" in *Books in Canada*, January 2000. [www.inscroll.com/search\\_bic\\_ad.asp?id=1498](http://www.inscroll.com/search_bic_ad.asp?id=1498).

territories when the Red Army marched in September 1939. Negligible scattered pockets of Polish settlement had characterized the region historically, but the notable increase in Polish presence in the eastern territories was **only** a result of the intensive interwar colonization program that aimed to polonize the region.<sup>89</sup>

And so, when the Red Army invaded Poland in 1939, Poles represented about one-third of the total population with another one-third Ukrainian and the remainder a mixture



comprised mostly of Jews. Map 5 – Ethnic Groups in Russian Provinces in Eastern Europe Before WWI<sup>90</sup>

Belorussians and “a backwards orthodox peasantry (mostly residents of the Polesie)” as well as an even smaller number of Lithuanians, Germans, and Russians.<sup>91</sup> Although individuals from among all the aforementioned population groups were victimized and many eventually imprisoned, murdered, or deported to exile in Soviet labour camps or resettled in Soviet agricultural collective communities, Poles made up the majority of deportees removed from Polish

<sup>89</sup> For interwar era ethnographic mapping, see Paul Robert Magocsy. *Historical Atlas of East Central Europe*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995) 99.

<sup>90</sup> Richard Crampton and Ben Crampton. *Atlas of Eastern Europe in The Twentieth Century*. (London: Routledge, 1996)

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<sup>91</sup> Jan T. Gross. *Revolution From Abroad*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988) 4.

territory: an estimated 52%.<sup>92</sup> Stalin intended to make good on the Russian aim to enfold Poland and to cleanse the territory of Poles. Would he have succeeded had Hitler not invaded Moscow?

Following the signing on 23 August 1939 of the German-Soviet *Non-Aggression Pact* [with the Molotov/Ribbentrop demarcation line [Map 2]], Germany invaded western Poland in early September. Conquest was swift with both sides suffering heavy losses. Two weeks later, the Red Army invaded the eastern half of Poland. Thus, Poland was wiped off the map. Though Great Britain was quick to reaffirm its obligations to Poland as outlined in a formal written alliance dated 25 August 1939, it would be nearly two years before realistic commitment came and, even then, the Molotov-Ribbentrop [or *Curzon Line*] division of Poland remained. Poland was let down in 1939 by both Britain and France, neither of which intervened on the western front in the first days of the war, nor would either intervene when Stalin made his move.

Following the swift conquest of Poland, Germany and the USSR began to jockey for control of their individual interests in the eastern region of the European continent. Hitler's primary objectives lay in his mission—*Lebensraum*—to establish a great German empire, and in the vital necessity for raw materials required to fulfill his economic and military efforts. In his efforts to shore up Soviet control of what he believed was the 'natural' Soviet region, and to ensure a geographic buffer against Germany which the Soviets feared aimed for absolute control of all Poland thus creating a German satellite on Russia's doorstep,<sup>93</sup> Stalin moved swiftly during the course of the particularly cold fall/winter of 1939/40 to annex the Baltic nations as well as Rumania. Stalin's [well-founded] misgivings of Hitler were further exacerbated by the price paid for bargaining with Hitler; that is, the USSR agreed to provide Germany with huge quantities of raw and manufactured materials that Germany otherwise could not acquire due to British blockade<sup>94</sup> and that were used in Hitler's hostilities against Poland and other nations. Ironically, the Polish deportees exiled in Soviet labour camps contributed their labour to the extraction of

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., xxi. Based on statistical analysis of the 120,000 personal files compiled by the Polish Red Cross in Iran in 1944.

<sup>93</sup> Adam Ulam. *Expansion and Coexistence*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (NY: Praeger, 1974) 261.

<sup>94</sup> Adam B. Ulam. *Stalin: The Man and His Era*. (NY: Viking Press, 1973) 517.

these very resources! In posing the question whether Stalin's deportation projects were, in large measure, a certain means of ensuring a cheap mammoth labour force for the extraction of raw materials—from regions of the USSR which continue today to have difficulty attracting and paying workers due to harsh and inadequate living, working and economic conditions—I refer to a confidential External Affairs [Canada] memo. Entitled "Forced Labour in the Soviet Union" [September 1948] Soviet rhetoric communicates mass employment projects in seemingly benign language, thus de-emphasizing *forced deportations of free people, children included, to forced labour.*

Molotov, on March 8<sup>th</sup>, 1931, addressing the Sixth Congress of Soviets, referred to "these mass projects employing those deprived of liberty."<sup>95</sup>

On the points of so-called 'sovereign' claim, German and Soviet relations became increasingly strained [an historic tension long-established] with each military, economic and diplomatic action and reaction undertaken by and between the two totalitarian states.

Immediately following its invasion of Poland, German military forces rapidly [and successfully] moved through Europe. By the summer of 1940, German domination of Europe was a concern both of Britain and of the Soviet Union which, all-the-while, remained [unrealistically] hopeful of British efficacy in fighting off the advance of Nazism. Though Stalin and Hitler were nonetheless [uneasy] allies, it eventually became clear to both Britain's Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Stalin that only with the aid of the Red Army would Hitler be forced to face a reckoning.

By March 1941, German aircraft began to make regular reconnaissance flights over Soviet territory, and all Soviet protests of such invasion were ignored. Stalin virtually pleaded with Britain for military support, but Churchill advised Stalin that Britain was ill equipped with the necessary forces as it was otherwise 'occupied'. Finally, on 22 June 1941, Germany invaded the USSR.

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During the period of Soviet invasion of Poland [September 1939 to June 1941], Soviet

<sup>95</sup> NAC. RG-25-F6, vol. 2615, file 2-20-0.

purges of so-called enemies of the state resulted in the forcible deportation of approximately 1.5 million Poles along with Polish Jews, Ukrainians, Belorussians and others. Most of the ethnic Poles were practitioners of the Roman Catholic faith. The first deportations that took place in the weeks following the September 1939 invasion by the Red Army were characterized by mass round-ups of worrisome elements such as military personnel, state employees and community leaders. Then, in the New Year, organized mass deportations began in earnest. From the towns, the targets of deportation were state employees such as civil servants, police, judges, teachers as well as priests. However, most were, as my father, his siblings, his parents and his maternal grandmother [widow of Jan Kotowicz], "ordinary people"<sup>96</sup> exiled to Soviet labour camps—where their labour was applied to Stalin's war efforts!—in one of four mass deportations: February 1940, April 1940, June 1940 and June 1941, as well as in renewed deportations through 1944-45 and again in 1946-53.<sup>97</sup> Among the thirty-eight individuals who participated in this study, twenty-eight were deported with their families in February 1940;<sup>98</sup> two in March 1940;<sup>99</sup> three in April 1940; one in June 1942; and, four were taken as military prisoners-of-war in September 1939.

But from whose territory did the deportations take place? In The Soviet Takeover of the Polish Eastern Provinces, Keith Sword notes the difficulty in defining the region of Soviet invasion and deportations as either *Polish* or *Soviet* territory [during the period 1939-41] for, as he asks, can we "talk about deportations 'to the Soviet Union' if the victims are already on territory which has been annexed to the USSR?"<sup>100</sup> by military take-over and through spurious elections. Furthermore, what of the question of whether the regions were Ukrainian or Belorussian, particularly if one considers ethnic demographics? Keith Sword chooses to refer to the region as Polish territory as he argues Soviet invasion and occupation were not, strictly speaking, lawful. Moreover, one could turn to the treaties of *Versailles* [1919] and *Riga* [1921] and the *Conference*

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<sup>96</sup> Jan T. Gross. Revolution From Abroad. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988) 197, 225. Z. S. Siemaszko cites 60% of all Polish deportees were civilian men, women and children [often whole families] in Keith Sword. The Soviet Takeover of the Polish Eastern Provinces, 1939-41. (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1991) 217.

<sup>97</sup> Gross, Piotrowski, Sword, and Ulam.

<sup>98</sup> Katherine R. Jolluck. Gender, Identity and the Polish Experience of War, 1939-1945. (Stanford University: 1995) 83.

<sup>99</sup> There appears to be no documentation of mass deportations in March 1940; therefore, the memories of the two individuals who claim they were deported in March 1940 may be faulty and one might reason either February or April 1940 deportations. It is also possible these deportations were incidents isolated from the documented mass deportations.

<sup>100</sup> Keith Sword. The Soviet Takeover of the Polish Eastern Provinces, 1939-41. (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1991) 232.



of *Ambassadors* [1923] that established the territories as Polish. No doubt, the majority Ukrainian and Belorussian populations [and, perhaps, some contemporary historians] might dispute the validity of these nation-making instruments.

Beyond the ordinariness of those deported and the military prisoners-of-war, who else 'qualified' as an enemy of the state? Among the first to go were "...those whose hands were not worn out from physical labour... 'the Pans', the so-called *beloruchki* (those with white hands) of all kinds... landowners, local officials, and priests in particular."<sup>101</sup> Of particular importance among this grouping of people is the class most resented by Communist Soviets: those who subsisted off the labours of others, as well as those, such as priests and teachers, who could potentially have dangerous influence in fostering dissention among the masses. In addition, during the first days of Soviet conquest, an atmosphere of permissive lawlessness pervaded as many [non-Poles] were encouraged to even up old scores. Thus, individuals found they were declared enemies of the state by personal enemies and were either imprisoned, though most often deported, or murdered outright. In Poland's Holocaust Tadeusz Piotrowski asserts such 'neighbourly' treatment, along with outright Soviet discrimination and condemnation of Poles, was nothing less than a tool in the Soviet scheme of genocide of Poles in an effort to wipe them completely from the eastern borderlands. Why? That the region might be 'restored' to the old [Tsarist] Russian vision of one divided along historic ethnic lines, unencumbered by Polish Roman Catholic breach in the historic 'order' of things.

The use of informants and blacklisting as complicit involvement of Sovietization, along with other strategies, such as mock elections, aided Soviet subjugation of Poles for "[t]he regime so structured opportunities and applied coercion that nearly everyone became *implicated* in it's doings,"<sup>102</sup> further aiding in the ethnic cleansing of Poles.

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And what of the fate of Poland? Such a weighty question demands more than a few words. For this study, however, it is sufficient to recall that Poland suffered under Soviet Communist rule until 1989. Stalin managed to retain as Soviet territory the eastern provinces

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<sup>101</sup> Jan T. Gross. Revolution From Abroad. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988) 44.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

[virtually the area east of the *Curzon Line* of 1919 [Map 4]] while Poland gained compensatory territory along its western borders [at the expense of Germany], an area roughly equal to that 'lost' to Stalin. Ironically, Stalin became an ardent champion at Yalta of Poland gaining a large chunk of Germany that ultimately meant the displacement of 6 to 7 million Germans.<sup>103</sup> What might have been his motives? And what of the Poles in Poland? Jan Gross speculates those who seemingly welcomed the invading Red Army in September 1939 could not have anticipated they were about to be "forced to *commit* [Poland], seemingly forever, to the custody of Soviet sovereignty."<sup>104</sup>

Finally, what of the Poles forcibly deported and exiled in Soviet labour camps? Some fled in 1941-42 during a brief window of prudent and mutually beneficial Soviet/Allies relations that netted their freedom. Some eventually re-migrated to such countries as New Zealand, Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, England, Australia, the United States and Canada. Some eventually were repatriated on Polish soil. Yet others remain, remnants of the historical shifting of Poles beyond a shifting national border.<sup>105</sup>

### Summary

The 1939 invasion of Poland, first by Hitler, then Stalin, was not simply an act of war, though this is not to suggest war, alone, is not damnable. For the first time in human history, millions of people [one out of every five Poles, Poland suffering the highest losses of any country during WWII],<sup>106</sup> perished under the wrath of two totalitarians who included in their military and social engineering agendas the practice of ethnic cleansing.

Both Germany and the Soviet Union imposed change—radical social, political, and economic change upon communities, local and national infrastructure, and, ultimately, the future. In the case of Nazi aggression in the western region of Poland, we cannot but relate the event to the Holocaust; Hitler's *final solution* which became official policy in 1941. While war

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<sup>103</sup> Adam B. Ulam. *Stalin: The Man and His Era*. (NY: Viking Press, 1973) 605.

<sup>104</sup> Jan T. Gross. *Revolution From Abroad*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988) 85.

<sup>105</sup> Tadeusz Piotrowski. *Poland's Holocaust*. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1998) 259. Soviet demographic sources [1989] place 1,126,000 ethnic Poles in the USSR, most in Belarus, Lithuania and Ukraine; Polish demographers [1995] claim 2.5 million.

<sup>106</sup> Steven Zaloga and Victor Madej. *The Polish Campaign, 1939*. (NY: Hippocrene Books, Inc., 1985) 160.

encompasses many distressing and cruel effects upon the invaded, there is nothing in human history which compares with the Nazi treatment and murder of Jews; particularly on Polish soil.

In the case of Soviet aggression of eastern Poland, few among us are aware of the purging and pillaging not only of property, but of culture and of life through efforts at radical Sovietization of eastern Poland along with the forced removal of ethnic Poles for deportation and exile in Soviet labour camps and on *kolkhozes*. Soviet practices and policies were intended to be nothing less than genocidal.

None of the authors who act as source for this study risks comparison of the two episodes. though Robert Conquest, Jan Gross and Tadeusz Piotrowski note that the period of Soviet invasion and deportation to which this study refers [1939-41] precedes the Holocaust and offers limited scope for comparison. As Robert Conquest has written:

There is nothing in the story which compares with the spectacular horror of the Nazi gas chambers. (It is a sad comment on our times that not to have behaved as badly as the Nazis may be regarded as a sign of virtue.) But there are other ways of destroying a nation. To remove it, and scatter it wildly over an alien territory, with a minimum of economic resources, deprived of civil rights, of cultural opportunities and of education in its own tongue...<sup>107</sup>

Although there is no lack of interest in contemporary inquiry into the area of Polish-Jewish relations during WWII, some historians note a void [which is not in the scope of this particular study] in the exploration of attitudes of Jews toward Poles during the period 1939-41 whether as defenders of Poles or as collaborators against Poles. Rather, most research focuses on Polish attitudes towards Jews and,<sup>108</sup> in general, on the Holocaust as a particularly gruesome and unparalleled episode of the war.

Exile was a "widespread European punishment system... the getting rid of criminals and troublemakers by sending them to distant places—the system that contributed to the history of the American Georgia, and Australia, French Guyana, and New Caledonia."<sup>109</sup> Tsarist Russia,

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<sup>107</sup> R. Conquest. The Soviet Deportation of Nationalities. (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1960) xii.

<sup>108</sup> Mark Paul in "Jewish-Polish Relations in Soviet-Occupied Eastern Poland, 1939-1941," in The Story of Two Shtetls: Bransk and Ejszyski. (Toronto: The Polish Educational Foundation in North America, 1998) 223.

<sup>109</sup> Adam B. Ulam. Stalin: The Man and His Era. (NY: Viking Press, 1973) 47.

and later Soviet Russia, practiced deportation and exile of state enemies [entire minority nations deported during WWII included Volga Germans, Kalmyks and Mohammedan nations of Crimea and the North Caucasus]<sup>110</sup> to such an extent that during Stalin's era, Russians had a well-known [and much-feared] aphorism: "*In the Soviet Union there are only three categories of people—those who were in prison, those who are in prison, and those who will be in prison.*"<sup>111</sup> The term 'prison' loosely insinuated exile. But, as some of the invading Soviets casually informed the conquered and deported Poles: "*You'll get used to it, or else you'll croak.*"<sup>112</sup>

In the case of Soviet deportation and exile of ethnic Poles, the practice was more than a continuation of entrenched Soviet policies and practices; it incorporated selective deportations that amounted to efforts at ethnic cleansing. As noted, except for sheer numbers of Poles exiled during the 1939-41 period, Poles had centuries-old familiarity with the practice. Familiarity, however, did not reassure. Rather, it bred perpetual fear of deportation, producing in many the syndrome of "living with a suitcase in hand."<sup>113</sup>

It would seem, also, that deportation of 1.5 million ethnic Poles, a people whom Stalin loathed, served a practical purpose: cheap, replaceable labour for the extraction of raw materials much needed in his war campaign from the unforgiving and inhospitable nether regions of the Siberian taiga. Even today, few choose to migrate to work and live in Siberia,<sup>114</sup> and those who do suffer from overwork, underpay and under appreciation.

What did it mean when Soviet conquerors relentlessly foisted upon the Poles propaganda which claimed "there is no Poland, now or ever"?<sup>115</sup> The 1939 invasion of Poland was but a new chapter in a long history of invasion, partition, and eradication of Poland from the map. In Heart of Europe: A Short History of Poland, Norman Davies submits that the historian who ponders Poland must naturally enquire about human society and human nature. For, he asks: "If Poland

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<sup>110</sup> R. Conquest. The Soviet Deportation of Nationalities. (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1960) ix-x.

<sup>111</sup> Jan T. Gross. Revolution From Abroad. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988) 114.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

<sup>113</sup> Keith Sword. The Soviet Takeover of the Polish Eastern Provinces, 1939-41. (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1991) 80.

<sup>114</sup> Alexander J. Motyl. Will the Non-Russians Rebel? State, Ethnicity, and Stability in the USSR. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987) 159.

<sup>115</sup> Keith Sword. The Soviet Takeover of the Polish Eastern Provinces, 1939-41. (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1991) 77.

were indeed destroyed, how then could it later be revived? If Poland did resurrect, then surely something must have survived its physical destruction. In short, when the Body Politick dies, what is it exactly, if anything, that remains?"<sup>116</sup> Spirit? Soul? *Polishness*? As we know, Poland has a knack for rising from the ashes, and as is explored in later discussion, Poles have maintained a strong sense of identity that has permitted them to re-imagine the Polish nation void of foreign domination. Perhaps it is as Jean-Jacques Rousseau has advised Poles: "If you cannot prevent your enemies from swallowing you... at least you can prevent them from digesting you."<sup>117</sup>

In my mirror, lives the child of a Polish survivor of exile in Siberia who refused to be digested.

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<sup>116</sup> Norman Davies. Heart of Europe: A Short History of Poland. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 315.

<sup>117</sup> qtd. *Ibid.*, 353.

## Chapter 3 - EXODUS

*God led the people about, through the way of the Wilderness [Exodus 14:18]*

*If we'd been allowed to choose,  
we'd probably have gone on forever.*

...  
*We agreed to death,  
but not to every kind.*

...  
*Each of us wished to have a homeland  
free of neighbours  
and to live his entire life  
in the intervals between wars*

*No one wished to seize power  
or to be subject to it.  
No one wanted to fall victim  
to his own or other's delusions.  
No one volunteered  
for crowd scenes and processions,  
to say nothing of dying tribes—  
although without all these  
history couldn't run its chartered course  
through centuries to come.<sup>118</sup>*

### Prelude

By the time of the German invasion of the Soviet Union, June 1941, approximately 1.5 million Poles [along with other so-called enemies of the state] had been deported to exile in Soviet labour camps and on *kolkhozes*. In negotiations with Great Britain, Stalin agreed to participate in efforts to squelch Hitler. Manpower, however, was a problem. Already, Stalin complained of heavy losses. With entreaties of General Władysław Sikorski, who led the Polish government-in-exile in London, and the succor of England's Prime Minister Churchill, Stalin agreed to offer amnesty [though few, if any, as they are quick to note, of the Polish deportees were technically criminals] to the exiled Polish men so that they might join the Red Army in its efforts to subdue Hitler.

Suddenly, Stalin was deal-making as he once again needed bodies to do his bidding; only this time it wasn't mining or felling trees or picking cotton. The Poles would be defending Soviet

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<sup>118</sup> Wisława Szymborska. "One Version of Events", in view with a grain of sand. (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1995) 208.

soil! As it happens, this did not entirely pan out as most Poles refused to fight to defend Soviet soil. Their quarrel with the Nazis would be staged elsewhere in the closing chapters of the war, chiefly on Italian soil.

To aid in the allied war effort against Germany, Britain and the United States provided military aid to Stalin and by 1944 the United States alone had sent 8782 aircraft, 3434 tanks, 206,771 lorries and 2,199,000 tons of food, among other things, including aid to Polish deportees. For his part, Stalin [albeit reluctantly] amnestied the Polish deportees.<sup>119</sup> Of the approximately 1.5 million Poles [approximately 9% of the eastern region's population] deported and exiled in Soviet labour camps, only 115,000 soon-to-be soldiers and their families were mobilized in Iran in 1942.<sup>120</sup> More likely would have fled the oppressive labour camps but some Poles received no information detailing their release from 'public service'. In some instances they were not permitted to leave; most often, through denial by authorities of papers necessary to travel through the Soviet Union as 'free' citizens. In some cases, men left their families behind with the promise to send for them once they reached army recruitment centres, only to either never make it or to lose the opportunity to be re-united following Stalin's sudden and unannounced suspension of the amnesty. The worse off were families whose male heads had perished or who were too ill or crippled to leave during the brief amnesty period, although there were cases of underage sons lying that they might enlist as well some instances of men taking responsibility for a family other than their own. And then, the ever-fickle Stalin suddenly and without explanation closed the window of opportunity, tightening his grip on the Poles. Among those mobilized, 52% [approximately 62,400] were Roman Catholic Poles [predominantly peasant (especially *kulaks*, prosperous peasants)], 30% Jews and 18% Ukrainians and Belorussians.

Of the remainder of the 1.5 million deportees, perhaps 300,000 to 1 million<sup>121</sup> perished in

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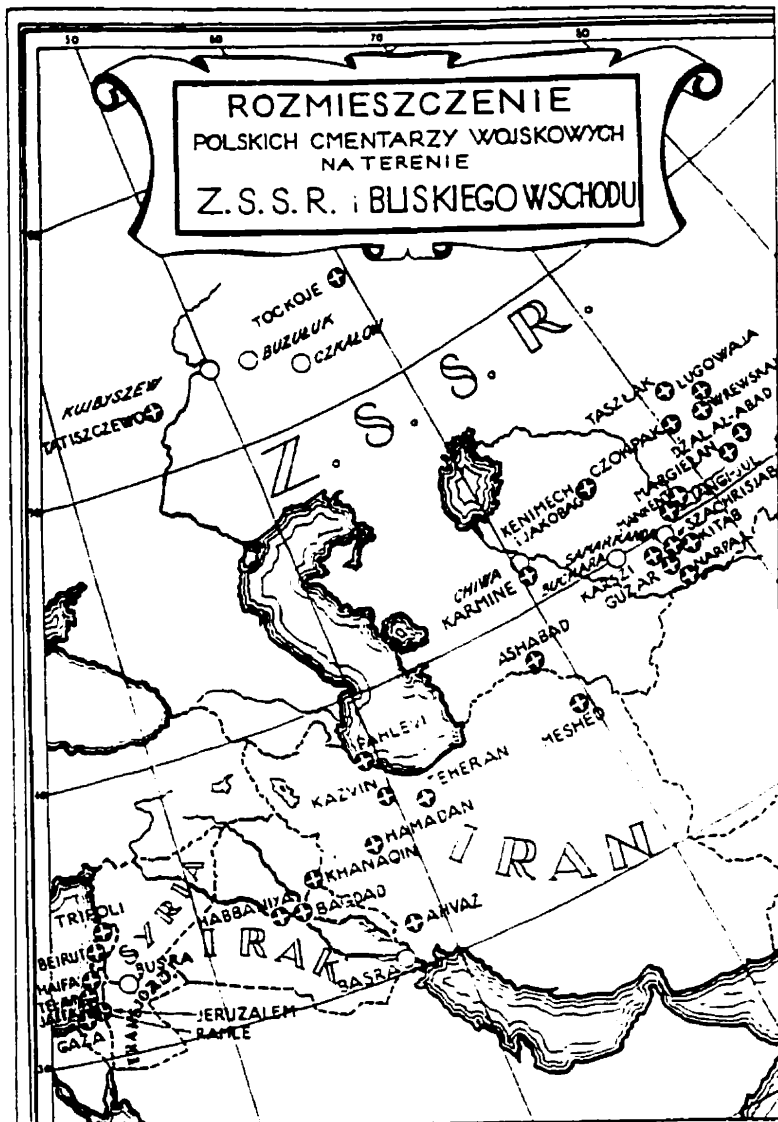
<sup>119</sup> Adam Ulam. Expansion and Coexistence. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (NY: Praeger, 1974) 329.

<sup>120</sup> Jan T. Gross. Revolution From Abroad. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988) xxii, 146, 193-195, 227, 229. 110,000 in Lucjan Krolkowski. Stolen Childhood. (Buffalo: Father Justin Rosary Hour, 1983) 67. 115,000 in Katherine R. Jolluck. Gender, Identity and the Polish Experience of War, 1939-1945. (Stanford University: 1995) 25. 108,000 in Barbara Stern Burstin. From Poland to Pittsburgh. (Doctoral Dissertation: University of Pittsburgh, 1986) 113.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 229. 750,000 in Norman Davies. In God's Playground. [Vol. 2] (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) 451. 1 million in Tadeusz Piotrowski. Poland's Holocaust. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1998) 20.

exile. Among those who did not survive for the liberation odyssey through the Russian hinterlands to Iran was Adam Bajorek, a child born to my grandmother in Archangelsk in August 1940. During the months-long arduous trek from the labour camps to the army recruitment centres in the south, others perished either from disease, exhaustion, or starvation; including my great-grandmother [Aniela Kotowicz, widow of Jan]. And, after leaving their families in the care of

Polish authorities, and after enlisting in the army, many more men perished: victims, also of disease. The death of my grandfather, Wawrzyniec Bajorek, typifies the state of affairs for many Polish families. Although he received a military burial at Szachrisjab, it was without the benefit of a family funeral. In fact, it was weeks before the family learned of his death; years before they would know the exact date of death and the place where he was buried. Likely a mass grave. No family member has ever seen his grave. Alone, then



my grandmother, Wiktoria Kotowicz Bajorek, managed to steal her surviving six children, aged 4 to 15, out of a nightmare

<sup>122</sup> Edward Soltys. Road to Freedom. (Toronto: The Polish Combatants' Association in Canada Inc., 1997) 88.  
*Helen Bajorek MacDonald* 56



from which she and two of her sons would never fully recover.

Most of those who remained [generally unwillingly] in the Soviet Union—among them Poles, Jews, Ukrainians and Belorussians—were arbitrarily deemed by Stalin to be Soviet citizens. And the terms of their citizenship remained as cheap labourers for the state.

What of the fate of the Poles who made their way to Iran? Able-bodied males enlisted in the British 8th Army, Second Corps under the leadership of Polish Lt.-General Władysław Anders who wrote of his first encounter with his fleeing compatriots:

There, for the first time, I saw 17,000 soldiers paraded for my arrival. I shall not forget the sight as long as I live, nor the mingled pity and pride with which I reviewed them. Most of them had no boots or shirts, and all were in rags, often the tattered relics of old Polish uniforms. There was not a man who was not an emaciated skeleton and most of them were covered with ulcers, resulting from semi-starvation...it was sufficient to note their shining eyes, to see the strong will and faith there.<sup>123</sup>

Anders was, himself, released by Stalin from a Soviet prisoner-of-war prison, one of the lucky among Polish officers to have escaped murder in the forest at Katyn in the spring of 1940.<sup>124</sup>

Suffice it to say the image of the women, the elderly and the children [especially the orphans] was sufficiently disturbing. The vast number of Poles [women, children, elderly, military exemptions] who did not join the army was interred in refugee camps in India, then British East Africa [approximately 19,000],<sup>125</sup> where they lived a diasporic existence. After the war, some remained in their host countries. Others resettled either in Poland or, the majority, in a variety of other countries, including—especially as they relate to this study—England [where mothers, wives, children rejoined demobilized Polish soldiers] and Canada.

And what of the fate of the Poles who remained in exile in Siberia? A total of about 300,000 were eventually repatriated on Polish soil in 1945 and again in 1957,<sup>126</sup> still, however,

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<sup>123</sup> Lt.-General Władysław Anders. *An Army in Exile*. (London: MacMillan & Co., Ltd., 1949) 64.

<sup>124</sup> For in-depth discussion of the imprisonment of Polish officers and soldiers and the murder at Katyn, see Władysław Anders [Foreword]. *The Crime of Katyn*. (London: Polish Cultural Foundation, 1989). N.B. Despite overwhelming evidence, no person or state [Germany/USSR] has ever taken full responsibility for the crime though Mikhail Gorbachev admitted to, not apologized for, the Katyn massacre in 1989. Within the ranks of those imprisoned and murdered were academics, teachers, medical practitioners, engineers, lawyers and members of the judiciary, civil servants, politicians, journalists and writers; thus, a symbolic embodiment of Polish leadership and institutions.

<sup>125</sup> Lucjan Kroiłowski. *Stolen Childhood*. (Buffalo: Father Justin Rosary Hour, 1983) 85.

<sup>126</sup> Siedlecki qtd. in Katherine R. Jolluck. *Gender, Identity and the Polish Experience of War, 1939-1945*. (Stanford University: 1995) 25.

under Soviet Communist domination. Two unrelated individuals among those who participated in this study, Jadwiga and Zygmunt, are among this group. Others remain, remnants of the historical shifting of Poles beyond a shifting national border.

#### Deportation - Crowd Scenes and Processions

In the weeks following the German and Soviet invasions of Poland in September, 1939, Poles lived in terror, never knowing what would come next; fearing death, deportation [for there were many accounts from preceding generations of the deportation experience] or another prolonged period of diplomatic isolation and interruption of Polish freedom and independence. By the time the mass deportations of 1940-41 began, many Polish families had already braved the arrest by the Red Army of an adult male relative.

Pola's father was arrested in October, 1939 and the family neither saw nor heard from him again. She explains:

All this time, we [inquired] through Red Cross, through Africa... Cairo... Switzerland, Geneva. No sign.<sup>127</sup>

Then, in 1995 the family was informed his body had eventually been found in a mass grave; his name recorded by Polish archivists as among murdered military personnel. Family members did not pass the information on to their 92-yr.-old mother; their rationale being she had already accepted his death by illness in Russia and she was too frail with few years left in her life to upset her with the grisly details of her murdered husband.

Polish officers and soldiers arrested by the Red Army wound up in such notorious hard labour camps as Kozielsk, Ostaszkow, and Starobielsk [including five interviewed in this study], and from among these military prisoners of war, approximately 15,000 remain unaccounted for. Additionally are the bodies of 4,000 found in mass graves at Katyn.<sup>128</sup> Jurek said of his experience:

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<sup>127</sup> Interview with Pola (01 June 1996) 3.

<sup>128</sup> Edward Soltys. Road to Freedom. (Toronto: Polish Combatants' Association in Canada Inc., 1997) XII. In a April 2000 speech, Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski stated a likely total of 28,857 Polish military personnel murdered. [www.president.pl/news/newsarch.html](http://www.president.pl/news/newsarch.html).

I was taken prisoner by the Soviet Army on the 8th of September in 1939.... I was 18... [when] taken into the Soviet Union. Starobielsk. Only four weeks, thank God. I went to them and I said I am not an officer; I'm just a soldier.... So, they put me on the transport and... 11th of November 1939, we crossed the River Bug and we were given to Germans. And, the people on the other side that wanted to go on the Soviet Union went east. Of course, the Germans put me in a prisoner of war camp.<sup>129</sup>

Jurek credits destiny for his dodging death under the Soviets. He was later transferred several times between German prisoner-of-war camps: each time under increased security, a consequence of his repeated attempts at escape. He finally succeeded in 1945, meeting up with an American unit on the front lines. He was re-united with the Polish Army and in the final months of the war fought with his comrades—many of whom were survivors of the deportation experience—in Italy.

For Poles, the massacre at Katyn represents a profound historic symbol vis-à-vis the martyrdom of Polish men, as well as signifying a powerful socio-political symbol of sacrifice and martyrdom of ordinary citizens neither trained nor equipped as soldiers yet deported nonetheless as enemies of the state to penal labour camps.

"*Katyn has more than one name...*" writes Ryszard Czarnecki in his epilogue to the 5th edition of The Crime of

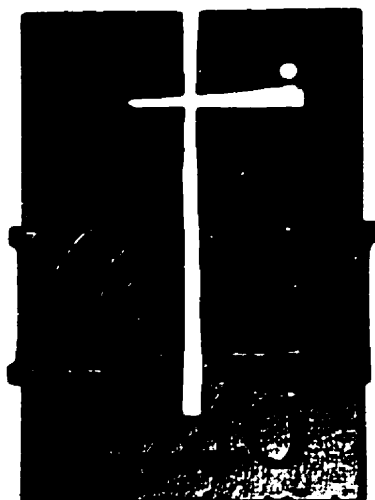


Fig. 1 - Katyn Memento<sup>131</sup>

Katyn.<sup>130</sup> For, as poet Rafal Wojaczek wrote:

The arrested and condemned were placed in 2,500 small camps, composing forty complexes of forced labour camps. The deported resided in 3,000 localities in Siberia and Central Asia. The way there led through hell itself — a peculiar kind of Katyn, worse perhaps than the real one, dragged out over the months and years.<sup>132</sup>

The symbolic has become the mythic, for even among those who contributed their memories to this study, the Katyn massacre is frequently and consistently invoked whether or not

<sup>129</sup> Interview with Jurek (04 September 1998) 6-7. Jurek offers interesting comparisons and insights between prison life under both the Soviets and the Germans. He was among the original 4000 prisoners held at Starobielsk.

<sup>130</sup> Wladyslaw Anders [Foreword]. The Crime of Katyn. (London: Polish Cultural Foundation, 1989) 297-305.

<sup>131</sup> From archives K. Burska, Mississauga.

<sup>132</sup> Wladyslaw Anders [Foreword]. The Crime of Katyn. (London: Polish Cultural Foundation, 1989) 302.

they lost kin at Katyn. The effect, however, partially discounts the significance of their 'ordinary' experiences, as civilians.

In her memoirs, Stella Synowiec-Tobis<sup>133</sup> devotes her final chapter—the last word—to Katyn and Yalta, thus diminishing her own experiences as a child deportee to a Soviet labour camp while valorizing the ultimate [male] war experience: a brave death in the service of one's country; pawns of political and military masters.

There remains a void in scholarly attention to the symbolism of Katyn vis-à-vis the deportations of Polish civilians, especially of the women and children. As Katherine R. Jolluck has written, Katyn sustains little more attention than the deportations in scholarly literature that, she notes, "focuses mainly on Soviet policies, not the way they affected and were interpreted by those to whom they were applied."<sup>134</sup> And while there exists a plethora of memoir literature which documents the deportation experience, there has been no scholarly analysis of the memoir literature; in part, perhaps, because much of it is in Polish; little of it published by mainstream presses. Further, the memoirs of Polish civilians who endured the deportation and exile experience are overwhelmingly overshadowed by the historicity and heroics of political and military personalities, strategies and outcomes as well as the defining WWII event: the Holocaust. Even in popular culture, such films as *Saving Private Ryan*, *Life is Beautiful*, and *Schindler's List*, as well as such books as The Diary of Anne Frank and Fugitive Pieces reinforce such tales and events; thus, the deportation 'story' remains virtually unknown.

To exemplify these points: there is no monument erected in Canada which recognizes the collective sufferings of the 1.5 million Poles deported to Soviet labour camps; yet, the Polish community has erected in Toronto at the lakeshore foot of Roncesvalles Avenue a monument to the crime at Katyn. In part, reinforcing the symbolic mythos of the massacre.

Also worth note is the Szare Szeregi [Grey Ranks] Monument erected at the *Kaszuby* Scout and Guides summer camp grounds at Barry's Bay, Ontario to honour the memory of Polish

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<sup>133</sup> Stella H. Synowiec-Tobis. The Fulfillment of Visionary Return. (Northbrook, IL: ARTPOL Printing, 1998).

<sup>134</sup> Katherine R. Jolluck. Gender, Identity and the Polish Experience of War, 1939-1945. (Stanford University: 1995) 17.

guides and scouts who fought and gave their lives in the 1944 Warsaw Uprising. Again, recognition is given the 'hero' in uniformed ranks, however young, while ordinary civilians who survived the extraordinary experience of deportation and exile remain the cheering section, quietly suppressing their own stories and valor; some even suppressing private desires for some recognition of their suffering by the construction of a monument, one which especially pays homage to those who did not survive. Some study participants question, however—with sincere humility—the purpose of erecting a monument when it won't bring back the dead and when there are pressing contemporary social concerns.



Fig 2 - Katyn Monument, Toronto<sup>135</sup>



Fig. 3 - Szare Szeregi Monument, Barry's Bay

The story, as we say, is the same for those who suffered the mid-night deportation orders that Mark Paul accurately describes as "poignant":

{M}ost often... entire families [were] driven from their homes under harsh conditions with the few possessions they could carry and loaded onto cattle cars destined for labour camps and remote settlements in the far reaches of the Soviet Union... two years before the Germans embarked on their deportations of Jews... though Jews too, and to a lesser extent Ukrainians, Byelorussians, and Lithuanians, were encompassed in the later waves of

<sup>135</sup> Postcard by Art Photo Studio, Toronto. W. Ugluk. From archives of M. Fijal.

<sup>136</sup> Helen Bajorek MacDonald, 1997.

deportations.<sup>137</sup>

In interviews with Polish survivors of the deportation and exile experience, the telling of their experiences is akin to fairy tale conventions. “*Then it was a beginning of story,*” said one interviewee of the night of his family’s arrest and their arrival at the train station.<sup>138</sup> I can only speculate whether this is a result of their living the experience as children, and now relating it through a child’s eyes; or, a result of the practice of narrative [bearing in mind most study participants had limited education by the outbreak of the war],<sup>139</sup> or, a result of efforts to distance oneself, through story-telling conventions, that one might protect against rummaging through painful memories. Thus, constructing a history that the teller can live with now.<sup>140</sup>

The following account exemplifies the memories of those who participated in this study:

Then came the unusually snowy and harsh winter of 1939-1940, and with it the tragic dawn of February 10, 1940 when entire Polish families, including children and the elderly, were loaded on cattle cars.<sup>141</sup>

The overwhelming majority—numbering twenty-eight—of those who participated in this study were among the predominantly rural small landholding *osadniki* [including my father and his family] deemed worrisome anti-Soviet elements [i.e. it was believed they would hinder depolonization efforts] deported February 1940 in the largest of the four principal waves of deportation. Most, as typical of the larger group movement, were transported to the northern Arkhangel’skaia *oblast* and the Komi A.S.S.R.<sup>142</sup> Jan Gross terms the February 1940 deportation as “the most murderous... So common was death among passengers that people got used to the sight of corpses and usually recorded them in a matter-of-fact style.”<sup>143</sup> Yet, there was a higher survival rate among this group “...probably because they were used to hard physical labour and because they were better equipped than citizens taken from towns and cities in a spring or a

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<sup>137</sup> Mark Paul. “Jewish-Polish Relations in Soviet-occupied Eastern Poland, 1939-1941,” in The Story of Two Shtetls (Toronto: The Polish Educational Foundation in North America) 210.

<sup>138</sup> Interview with Alfred (24 July 1999) 8.

<sup>139</sup> Grade 6 or less - 21 interviewees; Grade 7 to some high school - 14; Military school - 1; Agricultural School - 1; Post-secondary studies - 1. A number pursued higher levels at various junctures in the post-war years.

<sup>140</sup> Klaus Theweleit in Katherine R. Jolluck. Gender, Identity and the Polish Experience of War, 1939-1945. (Stanford University: 1995) 512.

<sup>141</sup> Account of Włodzimierz Dohomirecki qtd. in *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>142</sup> Katherine R. Jolluck. Gender, Identity and the Polish Experience of War, 1939-1945. (Stanford University: 1995) 83.

<sup>143</sup> Jan T. Gross. Revolution from Abroad. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988) 217-218.

summer wave. How many June or April deportees thought of taking along heavy winter clothes, for example?"<sup>144</sup>

Again, five cohorts were arrested and deported as military prisoners of war in the early weeks of German/Soviet invasion; the remainder as civilian "enemies of state" (entire families and sometimes whole villages): twenty-eight in February 1940; two in March 1940 (though there exists some uncertainty in their recollections); two in April, 1940; and, one in June, 1941.

There were four major waves of mass deportation. In February 1940, exiles were sent to the remote northern and central regions of the Soviet Union, including the Arctic Circle and the Mongolian border, where the majority laboured in forestry and mining. The second mass movement to less remote regions occurred mid-April 1940; deportees were 'employed' primarily in agricultural work on *kolkhozes*. During the third major wave that took place the end of June 1940, a higher proportion of Jews were deported. And, the final mass deportation moved mostly Poles, but also Jews, Lithuanians and others from the Baltic states through June 13-22, 1941.

Repeatedly, interviewees describe the chaotic arrest scene as rife with fear and hysteria: elderly, women and children crying; fathers often fixed at gunpoint, unable to help their terrified families pack for an unknown destination. In many cases, the male head of the family had already been arrested or was with the army elsewhere. In describing the scene in her family's home, Pola, age thirteen at the time of deportation, recounts her grandfather's reaction:

[M]y grandfather was blind. So, he sat on the steps in the house. He was crying and he said "I don't go nowhere. I die here. I don't go nowhere," but he has to go no matter what. So, my mother was... she was the head of the family and she takes everything... she just told me to help, whatever I can do. So, my brother was grabbing dishes and I take clothing and she get from the storage, food.<sup>145</sup>

There were no consistencies either for the amount of time given to pack [from fifteen minutes to an hour], or in what families were permitted to pack. In some instances they were told they didn't need to take much where they were going [seemingly intended as a cruel joke]. In others, Red Army soldiers explained where they were going and even assisted families with their

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 196-197.

<sup>145</sup> Interview with Pola [01 June 1996] 8.

packing. For instance, Jadwiga, who was only two years of age at the time of deportation with her four-year old sister and their mother, recalls her mother's telling of that night:

[M]y father was at this time already in the army... it was middle of the night; it was very strong winter and he [the soldier] look at two of us sleeping and he said that he has two boys. He doesn't know where they are taking us but he assumed Siberia and he help my mother pack my father's stuff like suits and some winter coats, shirts, you know. He said, "With this you will make a lot of money." He packed [for] my mother; even he told her to take wedding gown. He said, "You will have a lot of money for this." And he packed everything that was important for wintertime because my mother she said she was so nervous then. Instead of packing good stuff, she look for jewelry and small things and he said, "No. No. Leave everything, take this." But my grandparents, they had been in worse situation because when the soldiers came, they had been so angry and under the gun they packed their stuff but they're not allowed to take any food... any food, absolutely.<sup>146</sup>

Such inconsistencies typify the Polish encounters with Soviet authorities throughout the deportation and exile experience whether related to the circumstances of their arrest, regulations, information and propaganda, work consignments and performance expectations, food allotment, treatment of the Poles, and even in relation to eventual amnesty.

After the rude mid-night awakening by Red Army soldiers accompanied, often, by representatives of the local population, whole families were immediately read an arrest order that outlined their status as "enemies of the state." Deportations were to be carried out as set out in an official government order that stated, in part:

The deportation of anti-Soviet elements... is a problem of great political importance.... It must be carried out with absolute calm so as not to spark resistance or panic among the local populace.<sup>147</sup>

Scarce given time to rub the sleep from their eyes the Polish families were hastily dispatched by sleigh or wagon cart to waiting trains. Ryszard explains:

There was about 6 or 7 soldiers with the... guns and all that and they said we were under arrest and we will be dislocated but they didn't tell us where. So, they took us to the nearest railroad station, packed us all in on the boxcars and Father and Mother knew then that they had it all figured that we were destined for Siberia.... They didn't allow us to take absolutely nothing; just barely our clothes and the comforters because it was winter

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<sup>146</sup> Interview with Jadwiga [06 December 1998] 4. Jadwiga further recalled "the Russian soldier was right". Her mother sold all the clothes, including the wedding dress, for food. 12.

<sup>147</sup> Order of Ivan Serov, Deputy Commissar for Internal Affairs, qtd. in Keith Sword, Deportation and Exile. (NY: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1994) 14.



then, and that was probably the coldest winter, you know.... Father was a game warden, so, in those days, although we weren't rich, but we had a man that was helping with the housechores, around; so, he probably knew more than anybody else because he was of Ukrainian background... so he brought a lot of stuff to the station after they already packed us in, you know... food for us.<sup>148</sup>

The majority of the civilian deportees, however, were never officially charged with any crime nor given any details of their so-called arrest. Few among those who participated in this study recall hearing recitation of an arrest order; only one attended a court of law where one might formally confront his/her accusers. Kazimierz recalls his trial as kangerooesque where dubious charges of spying for the Germans were brought against him and several other Polish soldiers; all were summarily sentenced to five years hard labour without benefit of defence or of an opportunity to challenge their accusers.<sup>149</sup>

All who participated in this study express dismay at what most recall as the *Russian system*: the arrest and dislocation of entire families of old people, women and children, including infants, for ambiguous crimes ostensibly committed by male family members. Furthermore, the majority of civilian deportees, making up the largest group of the exiled Poles who were deported without charges or sentencing, were women, children and the elderly.<sup>150</sup> Consequently, while Stalin might have had certain expectations vis-à-vis the contributions the masses of Polish deportees might make to his cheap labour pool, the 'arrest' of individuals less likely to contribute in meaningful ways, or for very long, reinforces the argument his deportation of [predominantly] ethnic Polish civilians from Poland's eastern borderlands was nothing less than ethnic cleansing. Furthermore, the horrific conditions to which they were sent illustrate a complete disregard for basic human rights [e.g. decent shelter, adequate food and health care, fair wages and safe working conditions, and adequate guardianship and education for children], again supporting claims by such historians as Tadeusz Piotrowski of genocide.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Interview with Ryszard (06 March 1995) 1-2.

<sup>149</sup> Interview with Kazimierz (04 March 1995) 2.

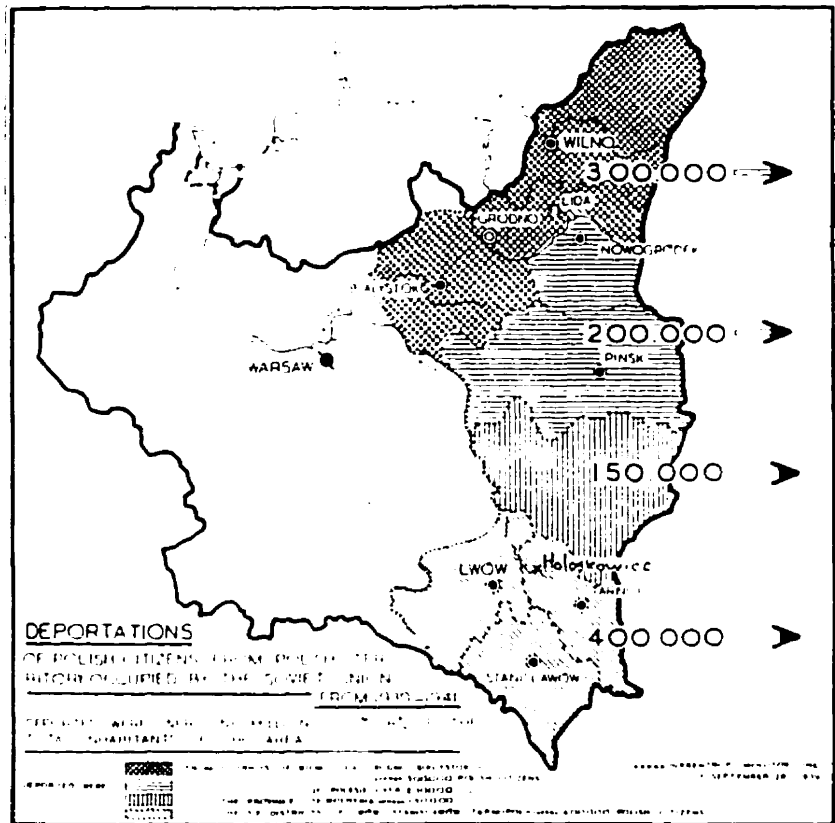
<sup>150</sup> Katherine R. Jolluck. Gender, Identity and the Polish Experience of War, 1939-1945. (Stanford University: 1995) 49-50.

<sup>151</sup> Tadeusz Piotrowski. Poland's Holocaust. (Jefferson: NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1998).

## Special Resettlement in the Wilderness

As previously discussed, a substantial proportion of the 1.5 million Poles deported through the years 1939-41 were clearly distinguished as settlers who had colonized the eastern

borderlands 'annexed' by Poland during the period 1918 - 1922. Ironically, Soviet officials deemed the deported Poles *special resettlers*,<sup>152</sup> and their *resettlement* a practical form of population/labour redistribution which placed minorities/less desirables in work communities [labour camps and *kolkhozes*]<sup>153</sup> where they



Map 7 - Deportations of Polish Citizens 1939-41<sup>154</sup>

were separated from larger groups; thus, quashing ability and/or opportunity to dissent.<sup>155</sup> One could draw a parallel to the segregation of Aboriginal peoples on reservations; indeed, several interviewees did!

Not only were the Poles deported that there would be less resistance by Poles in the newly claimed Soviet western frontier, but they were scattered across the Siberian hinterland that

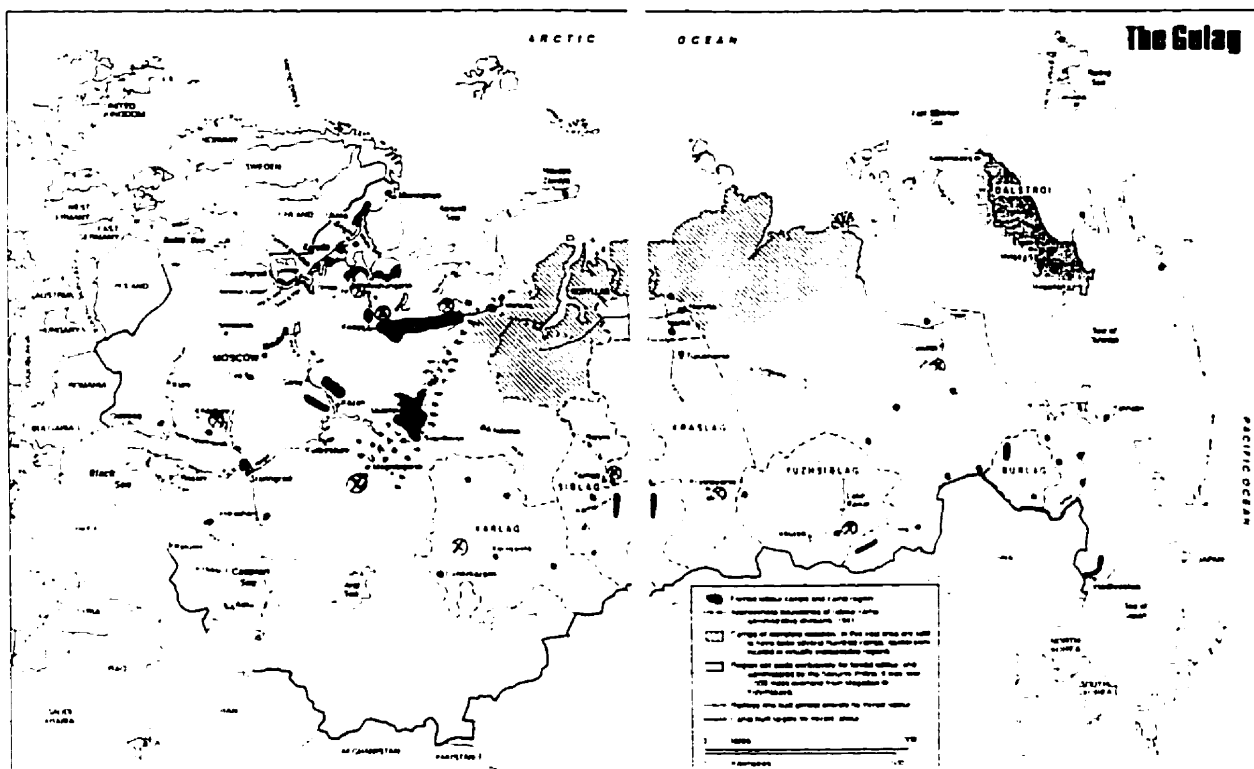
<sup>152</sup> Sometimes also euphemistically referred to as *free settlers*, or said to be in *free exile*.

<sup>153</sup> *kolkhoz* : collective farm.

<sup>154</sup> Irena Grudzinska-Gross and Jan T. Gross. War Through Children's Eyes. (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1981) 29.

<sup>155</sup> Jan T. Gross. Revolution From Abroad. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988) 194. N.B. According to Gross' map, 750,000, or 71% of those deported came from the Central and South regions of the eastern frontiers. Among study participants, a matching 71% were deported from the same regions. Of the remainder, 18.5% were deported from the North/East region [compared to Gross' 29%]; Polish soldiers arrested in the Lwow area comprised the remaining 10.5%.

there would be less opportunity to escape, or, more importantly, to unite and rebel. Similarly, as the frontier region was depolonized by the physical removal of the Poles, the deportees would also encounter exacting pains at Russification during their camp experience, such efforts especially exerted on the children. The below map illustrates forced labour camps located throughout the USSR [1941], with 'x' marking general regions to which study participants were deported.



Map 8 - Soviet Forced Labour Camps [1941]<sup>156</sup>

Following their arrest, the Poles were transported to the nearest railway station where they were crowded into boxcars not intended for human cargo. Makeshift board bunks had been hastily nailed to the walls of the unheated cars. Families scrambled for less-than-adequate space preferring to be near the small stove intended to both heat the boxcar and to serve as mediocre

<sup>156</sup> Gwyneth Hughes and Simon Welfare. *Red Empire*. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1990) 106-107. For a comprehensive geographic consideration of camp locations vis-à-vis resources, climate, etc. see *USSR in Maps*. (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1982) and Martin Gilbert. *Atlas of Russian History*. [2<sup>nd</sup> ed.] (NY: Oxford University Press, 1993).

cook space on which only one family at a time could cook with one pot. There was no privacy among what may have been up to twelve families numbering as many as 70 people crammed into each car. Memory of the stench, of the crying, of the illness and death, of the cold and the hunger, and of the indignity of lack of privacy and of the unhygienic conditions linger as nightmare for those who endured a journey which lasted two to eight weeks. Marysia recalls:

Bedding that we took, this is how we kept warm. But I can remember, one night, I wanted to move my head and I couldn't and I noticed that my hair was frozen to the wall. It was very crowded, very crowded and soon after a very unpleasant thing developed; you know, the lice. Horrible. It was horrible.<sup>157</sup>

Witold, who was fourteen at the time of deportation, volunteered no explicit details of the journey recalling his two-week train trip with near dispassionate—even dissociative—calm; what Jan Gross terms “fatalistic anticipation of the unavoidable”:<sup>158</sup>

You see, somehow, if you were in a big group—at least that's the way I felt—that nothing's going to happen to you because you are in such a big group. You are part of the destination. Actually, you don't philosophize on it. You just go; roll with the punches. Whatever happens, it happens.<sup>159</sup>

His recollection of the final leg of the journey by sleigh from the train stop to the labour camp, however, illustrates the misery of isolation, fear, helplessness, and the numbing cold:

[T]hat's when I... encountered the first death.... it was another blistering cold [night] and we were caught in the snowstorm because they tied... again, all the men and boys, like me, you know, we supposed to be walking and the women, you know, in there [the sleighs] they had comforters and so on and then I heard the women screaming. I don't know what it was. She suffocate the baby. You know, wrapping it so to keep it warm. And, I don't know actually who it was.... Well, it was kind of shocking, but after a while, when you are traveling with that cold and little bit hungry, by gosh you don't think about....<sup>160</sup>

Interviewees recall efforts of their parents to console them during the long monotonous train ride. Singing was a common pastime: mostly patriotic and religious songs. One woman told Barbara Stern Burstin: “When we crossed the border into Russia, everybody sang the Polish

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<sup>157</sup> Interview with Marysia (06 February 1999) 12.

<sup>158</sup> Jan T. Gross. *Revolution From Abroad*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988) 114.

<sup>159</sup> Interview with Witold (23 July 1998) 9.

<sup>160</sup> Interview with Witold (23 July 1998) 9.

anthem."<sup>161</sup> *Poland has not perished yet, so long as we still live...*

After weeks confined in the squalid boxcars the bewildered Polish families, now lice-ridden and suffering hunger pangs, many ill, traveled by sleigh or wagon—depending on the season—into the depths of the forest. Lucjan Krolikowski writes:

The Siberian taiga, stretching from the Ural Mountains all the way to the Pacific Ocean, is a huge, unbroken forest, covering an area larger than the United States or Canada. Since Tsarist Russia annexed Siberia in the 17th century, the taiga has served almost solely as a gigantic political prison. Here the cruellest tormentors are hunger, cold, and all sorts of privation. In Tsarist days the most large-scale deportation took place after the uprising in January, 1863, when over 50,000 Poles were exiled...<sup>162</sup>

It was not uncommon for the newly-arrived Poles to meet up with compatriots having been exiled in previous waves of deportation or even with other similarly exiled groups of people: Japanese, Chinese, Ukrainians, Germans, Romanians, Jews, Russians and various ethnic minorities from other regions of the Soviet Republic. Linking her experience with contemporary events in the former Soviet Union, Jadwiga recalled living among Chechens: "I never heard of them for forty years until now. Stalin send [*sic*] them just like Polish and Jewish people because the Chechen people they never accept Stalin regime... now... they want to have freedom and I think they are right...."<sup>163</sup> After missing the opportunity to leave the Soviet Union, Zygmunt's family was sent to work in 1945 in an iron ore mine where he recalled most of the workers as Japanese prisoners of war as well as thousands of Chechens; most whom he claims died from disease and who were buried in mass graves.<sup>164</sup> We may recall Adam's account in Chapter 2 of his family's encounter with the Polish miller. He further told of an American Polish family that, in 1939, traveled to visit relatives in Stanisława [S/E Poland; now Ukraine] only to get caught up in the war: "...the boy was born in Detroit. Could speak English. He wrote the letter to American Embassy but they never got it I guess. Nobody answer."<sup>165</sup> Adam has no information regarding the fate of this American family.

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<sup>161</sup> Barbara Stern Burstin. *From Poland to Pittsburgh*. (Doctoral Dissertation: University of Pittsburgh, 1986) 102-103.

<sup>162</sup> Lucjan Krolikowski. *Stolen Childhood*. (Buffalo: Father Justin Rosary Hour, 1983) 16.

<sup>163</sup> Interview with Jadwiga (06 December 1998) 12.

<sup>164</sup> Interview with Zygmunt (01 March 1999) 12.

<sup>165</sup> Interview with Adam (18 October 1998) 43.

Several interviewees noted their good fortune at arriving at camps where barracks already stood. And, they expressed profound sorrow for those who went before them and who lost their lives in the Siberian wilderness felling trees that they might have shelter.

*You don't work, you don't eat*

With the exception of the very young, meager rations of food were earned through elementary assessment of labour outputs [based on predetermined *norms* which did not take into account age, gender, health, experience or ability] of the so-called *free settlers*; forced labour and re-education euphemistically termed *free exile*.<sup>166</sup> As the maxim went: *You don't work, you don't eat*.<sup>167</sup> Lodging was provided at no monetary cost. Children to age twelve or, occasionally, fourteen, could be sent, at no expense to their parents, either to orphanages [*diet-dom*], or residential schools [*diet-sad*] where they would receive with their daily bread rations milk and, on occasion, an egg, and intensive re-education. Most parents, however, did their utmost [including sacrificing their own insubstantial rations] to keep the family together that their children would not suffer the loss of their language, their Roman Catholic convictions, and their memory of their homeland. In essence, that they would retain their *Polishness*<sup>168</sup> in a climate that not only oppressed the Poles, but one which penalized them for invoking the homeland, for speaking their language, and even for practicing their faith. Halina recalls how, at age 15 she stood defiantly and steadfastly by her commitment to her faith:

We're not allowed to pray. At first, we would get together in our barrack where my sister and I live and we say the Rosary and we say the prayers together. When it was known to the Commandant, he came... he came crashing on us and told us that was forbidden.... Well, I said to him, "You cannot stop me to pray by myself. Nobody gonna take my prayers out of my soul... and he said, "You go to prison for that." I said, "You can put me in prison another way but you cannot take my faith out of my heart... God out of my heart."<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Adam B. Ulam. *Stalin: The Man and His Era*. (NY: Viking Press, 1973) 391.

<sup>167</sup> This maxim was repeated by interviewees as credo; also, repeated by children in their testimonies in Irena Grudzinska-Gross and Jan Tomasz Gross. *War Through Children's Eyes*. (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1981).

<sup>168</sup> *Polishness* embodies the very essence of being a Pole and is innately codified in the word *Polskosc* [fem.]: Polish origin, Polish language and manners. More detailed discussion in Chapter 6. See Katherine R. Jolluck. *Gender, Identity and the Polish Experience of War, 1939-1945*. (Stanford University: 1995) 12-14.

<sup>169</sup> Interview with Halina (07 February 1999) 14.

Study participants ranged from age 2 to age 25 at the time of their deportation. Table 1 delineates participants into four distinct age groupings that are representative of pre-school age, elementary/intermediate school age, secondary school age, and adulthood [age of conscription: all six participants aged 19 to 25 were males enlisted in the Polish Army at the outbreak of the war].

| Age When Deported | Number   | % Total [38] |
|-------------------|----------|--------------|
| 0 - 5             | 3        | 7.9          |
| 6 - 12            | 12       | 31.6         |
| 13 - 18           | 17       | 44.7         |
| 19 - 25           | <u>6</u> | <u>15.8</u>  |
|                   | 38       | 100.0        |

Table 1 - Age When Study Participants Deported to Soviet Forced Labour Camps

Pre-school age children either remained in the camp barracks under the care of teenage siblings or elderly neighbours who were unable to work, or they were sent by Soviet authorities, or, on rare occasions by their families, to orphanages. Children of school age were sent either to a *diet-sad* [residential schools] located in the nearest town [some miles distant] where food, warmth and supervision were provided, or remained with their families where many worked alongside their parents. Polish women, especially, were tormented by their inability to instruct their children, or to adequately care for them, and, for their part, the children were robbed of familial bonds as well lost opportunities at adequate education due to language and other barriers.

In her study of Polish women exiled in Siberia during WWII, Katherine R. Jolluck emphasizes that the majority of Polish families resisted separation which they perceived as "...the Soviet assault on the Polish family"<sup>170</sup> which, through specific policies, was particularly targeted for re-education. Men and women attended to their work duties that they would meet the norm that they would earn enough bread for their families while they anguished during long periods each

<sup>170</sup> Katherine R. Jolluck. Gender, Identity and the Polish Experience of War, 1939-1945. (Stanford University: 1995) 337.

day, six, sometimes seven days a week, over their children who were undergoing compulsive re-education in Russian language, Communist doctrine, love for the patriarch, Stalin, and "militant atheism".<sup>171</sup> Yet, they made opportunities for the clandestine practice of Roman Catholic religious observances, to reinforce Polish language, and to educate their children in Polish history for it was a particular concern that their children not lose their *Polishness*. Ironically, the now-grown children [most of whom are now grandparents!] held fast to their *Polishness* and many argue they are more Polish than Poles born in Poland since the war!

Ryszard recalled his father's breakdown that he believes to be the result of both the work conditions and the oppressive environment:

He was very, very down. I remember he found a cross; I never forget that scene, where he found the cross Mother was hiding in the suitcase, you know, 'cause that's all we had, two suitcases, and he would take the cross out at night, you know, and he would pray and turn... in the four directions of the... north, south, east and west... He would condemn the Communists, yeah. So, I almost thought that mentally he wasn't strong enough, you know, when I look at the scene like that... so I knew he wasn't going to last long with us. And, then; I mean he was skeleton, you know. Lost all the weight. He had no boots, his feet were wrapped in rags, hands were sores, because he had to work 10 hours from... sunrise 'til sunset.<sup>172</sup>

When Ryszard's father learned of the amnesty he hastily sold to the locals what little jewelry they had, packed up his family and hired a sleigh to escape, for the camp commander refused the Poles permission to leave. They eventually caught a train headed south toward the Caspian Sea. Ryszard picks up the thread:

[W]e were already in the boxcar and... he was appointed to look after the woodstove; like put the wood to keep the place warm. And [clearing his throat]... found him in the morning dead. Yeah. He died of starvation and... he never complained.... There was no burial, nothing. They just removed him and that was the last we saw of him.<sup>173</sup>

In instances where children were separated from families, forlorn mothers would make long treks through the forest on their one day off work to visit their children. In some instances, as in the case of Pola, children would run away, braving the forest in winter that they would be

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 344.

<sup>172</sup> Interview with Ryszard (06 March 1995) 6.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 9.



reunited with their parents. Pola, nearly 14 years old at the time, recalled:

When I was in school in... Siberia, it was very hard for my mother because she couldn't support us, and my grandfather was still living and they take so many money for shoes, for eat. Anything from my mother from the work... they don't support us. And, she says, "I don't know how I will do. You have to come back to me. You the oldest one. You have to help me." So, I ran away with other four girls and three boys. We run from school. It was 40 km. In the winter time. The week before Christmas... and we travel all day, in the snow. It was so cold. And, we were lost because we couldn't see the trail... the trail in the forest, but we left the forest. It was so many kilometers; it was lake, lake, lake, you know; it was such high snow and we lost the trail. And, so it was very hard because we were freeze.... We thought we were close; we supposed to be close to home because we know the forest... There was a hill. From the lake, we went up the hill and saw our barracks. So we came.<sup>174</sup>

To this day, Pola remains a dutiful daughter.<sup>175</sup> Despite that "the women were unable to be the mothers that they wanted to be,"<sup>176</sup> their children remained loyal and devoted to them and to all they learned at their laps. Pola's narrative, as many others, brims over with reverence and devotion to her mother whom she asserts not only gave her life, but who gave her all that her children would live. The care of their now very elderly parents remains a priority that is fulfilled as a devotional covenant. My widowed grandmother, Wiktoria Kotowicz Bajorek, who died in 1992 at age 83, only ever lived at different times with her children and their families until the day she died. She lived with my family over twelve years.

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Their parents, and some of the older participants in this study, laboured [in exchange for food and lodging] in such work as: forestry [logging and lumber work, resin collection]; mining [gold and ore]; on *kolkhozes* [trees, cotton, sugar beets]; foundries; kitchen work; and, on railroad and road construction. Many found opportunities to supplement their rations or to acquire other goods. During the summer months children and the elderly roamed the forests where they picked wild mushrooms and scoured marshes and riverbanks for sour red berries. Year round children

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<sup>174</sup> Interview with Pola (01 June 1996) 31.

<sup>175</sup> See Jane Aronson in "Dutiful Daughters and Undemanding Mothers: Constraining Images of Giving & Receiving Care in Middle and Later Life", in Carol Baines, et al, *Women's Caring*. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1991).

<sup>176</sup> Katherine R. Jolluck. *Gender, Identity and the Polish Experience of War, 1939-1945*. (Stanford University: 1995) 342.

plundered food scraps discarded from the common kitchen. Men and women applied former skills and trades that they could obtain extra bread or other items.

For instance, Roman played his mouth organ for

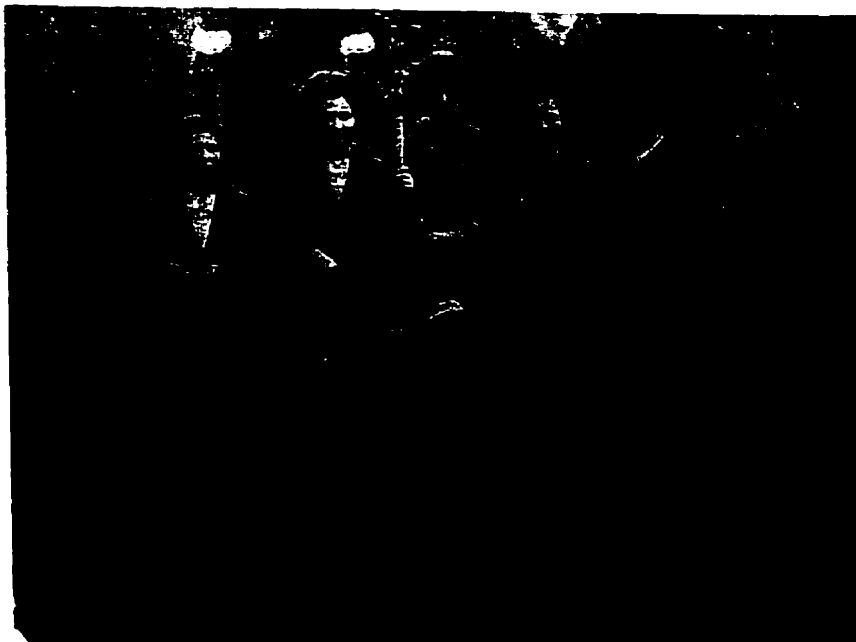


Fig. 4 - Resin Collection Crew 1941<sup>177</sup>

dances and special occasions held by the families of the camp Commandant and other officials and camp personnel, earning extra food coupons that he shared with other Polish families.<sup>178</sup> Some families received parcels from relatives or sympathetic former neighbours [often recalled as Ukrainian villagers]. Food was frequently shared with other families. Items such as clothing were traded for other goods, usually, for food or primitive medical supplies. Ernest recalled receiving five parcels containing such luxuries as sugar, chocolate, and coffee, from his mother's oldest sister who had immigrated to the United States before WWI. "It was like the miracle," he said.<sup>179</sup> Lech's family received one parcel from Poland: a jar of melted pork fat and "very thinly cut onion fried in it." He recalled:

It is amazing... the fat which we appreciated very much. Of course, in the cold you need the fat. Because there's a lot more calories... We needed fat... we would take half a spoon or so each day.<sup>180</sup>

Several interviewees recalled their parents trading goods packed hurriedly the night of

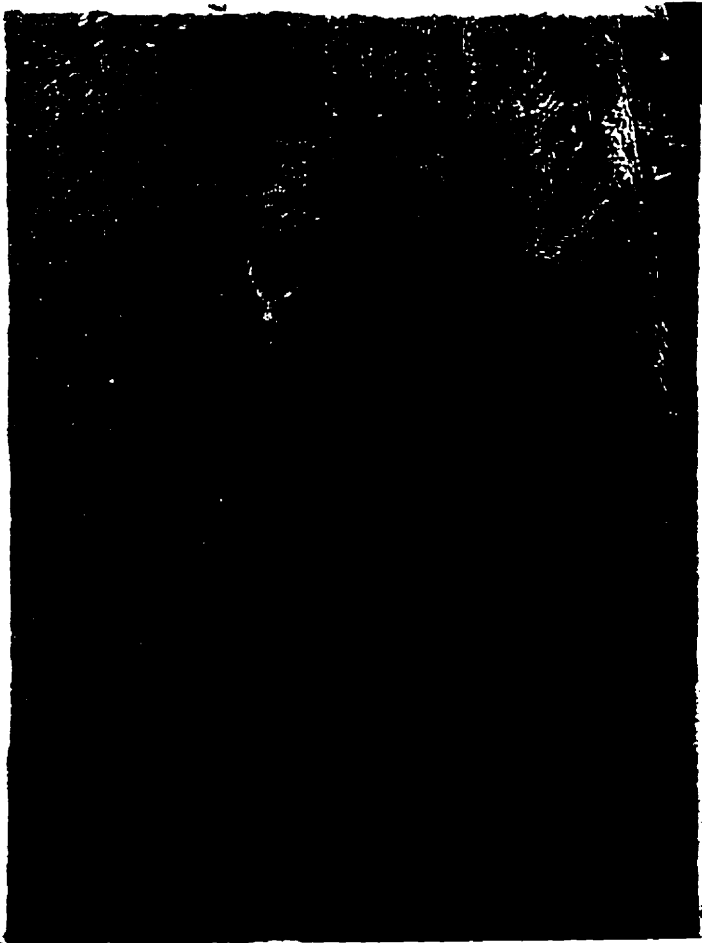
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<sup>177</sup> From M. Fijał Collection. "Working clothes were impregnated with tar to fend off swarms of mosquitoes and black flies and the heads were protected by mosquito nets." (Correspondence: 12 April 1999). Resin was collected for use as synthetic rubber and in production of explosives.

<sup>178</sup> Interview with Roman (27 January 1999) 2.

<sup>179</sup> Interview with Ernest (19 September 1998) 5/6.

<sup>180</sup> Interview with Lech (05 February 1999) 12-13.



their arrest—for instance, Jadwiga's mother's wedding dress—which were generally unavailable to the locals. Marysia's family traded men's suit fabric and her brother's Omega pocket watch for a cow—which they named Tamara—that they would have milk. Later, they butchered the cow selling some of the meat for it could not be adequately conserved.<sup>181</sup>

Jacob's father, a jack-of-

Fig 5 - *Romance in Siberia*: Note 'V' Scar on Tree from Resin Tapping 1942<sup>182</sup>

many-trades [watch-maker,

musician, carpenter] worked cutting logs and, frequently, made coffins for which labour he got some extra food and tobacco that he traded for food.<sup>183</sup>

And then there was Boleslaw, a tall, handsome 25-yr. old Polish soldier whose camp Commandant was a former Pole who had been deported in a previous wave; he presumed during WWI. Her name was Nadia and one day she approached him:

"What your name?"

"My name is Boleslaw."

"How you like it this place?"

"Terrible. I like it [to] eat."

"Oh, no. Oh! Everybody give you bread. What's the matter with you?"

"That's enough for you."

"No. That is no enough. I like more."

"Okay."

I see from her she's... from first time, she looking for me, she loved me.

<sup>181</sup> Interview with Marysia (06 February 1999) 10, 15-16.

<sup>182</sup> From M. Fijał Collection.

<sup>183</sup> Interview with Jacob (17 February 1999) 16.

That's all! [*chuckles*]<sup>184</sup>

Nadia placed Boleslaw in a different job, then begins a pattern of collecting him from the job at the end of the day. For food—candy, vodka, and bread—she seeks sexual companionship. Unfortunately, however, Boleslaw admits to performance dysfunction. He, like one other male interviewee, speculated poor nutrition as the cause. Nadia's tryst with the enemy is found out and she is summarily sentenced to ten years hard labour in another camp. Boleslaw never sees her again.

Scenarios of sexual coercion, sexual exploitation such as forced prostitution or the buying/selling of "wives", abductions of young girls, and the threat of sexual abuse, were more common and acute—as in rape—for women, especially those deported as independent criminals to mixed-gender prison camps for such crimes as counter-revolutionary subversions. Whatever their circumstances, women who refused advances, particularly from Soviet officials, or who fled attacks, were punished with lower rations, worse work assignments, denied medical assistance, or arrested and sent to prison camps.<sup>185</sup> None of the women who shared their memories for this paper identified such experiences: in part, because they were deported as children and lived in the protective environment of family and community.

Katherine R. Jolluck writes that because the topic is a sensitive issue, survivors rarely discuss it with detail or openness.<sup>186</sup> She does, however, document some of the horrors faced by women. For instance, within the prison camps, women encountered "a place of both physical and moral destruction"<sup>187</sup> where rape, particularly gang rape, was common. In the labour camps, such as those to which study participants were sent, there arose the phenomenon of "camp husbands" and "camps wives."<sup>188</sup> "Camp husbands" served as protectors by facilitating improvements—lighter work duties, larger food rations, provision of special goods such as sugar, dresses, boots—

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<sup>184</sup> Interview with Boleslaw (30 September 1998) 14.

<sup>185</sup> Katherine R. Jolluck. Gender, Identity and the Polish Experience of War, 1939-1945. (Stanford University: 1995) 157.

<sup>186</sup> *ibid.*, 148.

<sup>187</sup> *qtd. in* Katherine R. Jolluck. Gender, Identity and the Polish Experience of War, 1939-1945. (Stanford University: 1995) 150 (fn 191).

<sup>188</sup> Katherine R. Jolluck. Gender, Identity and the Polish Experience of War, 1939-1945. (Stanford University: 1995) 152.

in the daily living conditions of their sexual partners. Furthermore, they protected their women from other aggressors. "Camp wives" served as sexual comfort to the protector and could be discarded, even traded or sold, at the whim of the men.

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Norms were difficult to achieve and everyone suffered the pangs of hunger. Sickness, accidents and injuries were common. Death also. Twenty-three interviewees buried family members in the Siberian wilderness [mostly elderly or young children]. Worse than needless deaths were burials [or the horror of death without burial] without benefit of last rites and funeral mass. For the Poles, Roman Catholicism embodied the essence of their living and their dying. And it torments the survivors that family members and neighbours died without dignity and that there is no one today visiting the graves of Poles buried in the Siberian taiga. Czesława Greczyn wrote of her grief: "And I had to leave in that hated land that which was most dear to me, that which had been everything in the world for me."<sup>189</sup> And though she could not erect a tombstone, she placed a cross and tablet on her infant son's grave. She wrote: "*Lesiu Greczyn, a little Pole*; thus inscribing her dead child into the barren landscape as nothing less, nothing more, than a Pole."

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Living conditions were horrific. Barracks were simple wooden structures and were poorly insulated. They were crowded and furnished only with wooden bunks nailed to the walls [as in the boxcars] and an occasional table. A central stove provided inadequate heat and cook space for eight or ten families. Insects were the common enemy. Feliks Lachman dedicates an entire chapter in his memoir to bed bugs. In part: "Bugs were the real masters of the house. Their powerful clan must have numbered at least 50 thousand snouts. These little creatures thrived on our blood, and no legislation protected us from the ruthless and inexorable parasites."<sup>190</sup> My father describes how each night he wrapped a scarf round his neck, and each morning shook the

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<sup>189</sup> Kathenne R. Jolluck. Gender, Identity and the Polish Experience of War, 1939-1945. (Stanford University: 1995) 356.

<sup>190</sup> Feliks Lachman. I Was a Gulag Prisoner. (London: Caldra House Ltd.) 40.

blood-bloated vermin in the snow. Lachman further memorializes the bothersome creatures as well plainly describes his memory of camp conditions and the ultimate freedom fantasy in his poem *De Profundis of a Siberian Convict; A.D. 1941*:

Lice bugs bugs lice  
More bugs more lice  
Rats fleas gnats flies  
And bread-devouring mice

Dirt mud no soap  
Stench filth to cope  
No faith no hope  
In darkness we grope

Our beds bare planks  
Our mates sheer cranks  
Our dreams long ranks  
Of American tanks<sup>191</sup>

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Daily, the Poles struggled against enthusiastic oppression of their language, religion [Roman Catholicism]—their *Polishness*—while clinging to the hope of freedom from Soviet oppression; both of themselves from the labour camps and of their homeland. Camp officials and personnel as well as some of the local people would taunt the Poles with slogans: “*Poland will never rise again*,”<sup>192</sup> “*Zdes zhit budete; here you shall live*”... implying this is where you will die.<sup>193</sup> In testimonies written by Polish children after their families were amnestied from the labour camps, many wrote of their experiences of oppression. One boy wrote: “When we first got to school we were mocked and beaten—if a Pole said there was a God he was beaten up.”<sup>194</sup> Study participants who experienced Soviet re-education frequently recalled a *Stalin as God* or *Stalin the Father* anecdote:

[T]hey manipulated people, you know. Even as young as I was, I was quite aware of what was going on... we had to go to school... I didn't mind the school because at least we had a little bit of hot soup... But, there was Christmas; the teacher, because they tried hard to brainwash us about God,

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<sup>191</sup> Feliks Lachman. *I Was a Gulag Prisoner*. (London: Caldra House Ltd.) VII.

<sup>192</sup> Katherine R. Jolluck. *Gender, Identity and the Polish Experience of War, 1939-1945*. (Stanford University: 1995) 438.

<sup>193</sup> Stefan Waydenfeld. *The Ice Road*. (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 1999) 106.

<sup>194</sup> Wladyslaw T. qtd. in Irena Grudzinska-Gross and Jan T. Gross. *War Through Children's Eyes*. (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1981) 87.

religion, or your origins, you know, as Polish... they tried to crucify us right away... and start working on the children. So, it was Christmas. I remember that moment; the teacher asked different questions and then she came to us and we all sat there... and there was a big box of candies and she says, "Well, if you're going to try to pray to your God, see if anybody will give you candies"... So nobody said anything, you know. So she says "But, see, there's a portrait of Stalin. If you beg him for candies, you're gonna get all the candies [laughing] that you could eat." [S]ome did... and we did get the candies... because a candy was luxury.... We couldn't congregate [for] church or anything. It was all done in secrecy... in places where they watch for the guards... Usually mothers were a great force, you know, to maintain the language and the religion.<sup>195</sup>

In the same breath, Ryszard links the oppression [i.e. *crucif[r]ixion*] of religion, language and *Polishness* to the heroic role played by women to preserve these; despite long laborious days on a subsistence diet. Katherine R. Jolluck notes the despair of the Polish mothers vis-à-vis difficulties encountered in their efforts to maintain language, religion and patriotism among their children [not to mention despair over illness and death]. Who, then, among the children would not, through loyalty to their brave and dedicated mothers, observe the significance of maintenance of their religion, language and patriotic pride in Poland: their *Polishness*? And that Ryszard recalls this incident as occurring at Christmas also is significant; for Roman Catholic Poles, observance of the traditional *Wigilia* [vigil] on Christmas Eve is a symbolic expression of their *Polishness* through their faith. Many study participants, in recalling the trek out of Siberia [1941-42], remembered their first *Wigilia* as reinforcement of familial unity and as symbolic of their absolute freedom from oppression. Further, Ryszard's invocation of the crucifixion is analogous with Polish Roman Catholicism and the historic path of suffering, slaughter and martyrdom of Poles in Siberia, and as a people in general, as Christ's *Golgotha*.<sup>196</sup> Katherine R. Jolluck documents one women's suffering over the death of her daughter:

Even little Krysia died, she was buried in the field. Everyone of us left someone dear in foreign land, the road was marked by graves and crosses, suffering and sadness, we travelled a real *Golgotha*.<sup>197</sup>

There exists adequate, but not complete documentation of the 'war cemeteries' [see Map 6]

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<sup>195</sup> Interview with Ryszard; age 10 when deported (06 March 1995) 4/5.

<sup>196</sup> See Norman Davies. *God's Playground*. [Vol. 2] (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

<sup>197</sup> Katherine R. Jolluck. *Gender, Identity and the Polish Experience of War, 1939-1945*. (Stanford University: 1995) 358.

wherein are buried [mostly] Polish men, such as my grandfather, Wawrzyniec Bajorek, who perished after enlisting in the recently mobilized army. However, there is no documentation of the thousands of burial places—either formal or informal—located throughout of the ordinary civilian victims of the deportation, exile and exodus experience; including my great-grandmother Aniela Kotowicz and my father's infant brother Adam.

The most consequential practice employed by the Poles for maintenance of their *Polishness* was language; *mother tongue*. For through language, patriotic songs and tales could be sung and told, prayers could be invoked, and familial bonding could be maintained, even strengthened as it had been in the homes of Poles for generations through the period of the partitions. The oral tradition was especially strong among the majority of study participants who indicated minimal levels of education among their parents' and grandparents' generations. Further, there were no libraries located in the camps or much time, even, to read.

When her family was deported, Kasia hastily packed her favourite book: the epic poem, Pan Tadeusz, written by the notable Polish writer Adam Mickiewicz in the 1830's. She read it so often in Siberia she memorized portions and during her interview, gave a brief recitation in Polish, then paraphrased: "...give me a homeland... only the person who lost it knows how important, how dear you are. Once you lose it, you realize what you lost."<sup>198</sup> Thus, Kasia's *Polishness* remained unhindered for she carried it with her as text inscribed in her mind for a lifetime. Is it coincidence that today, as an active member of the Polish community in Ontario, she sits on the board of the *Adam Mickiewicz Foundation in Canada*?

Amnesty - "The moment of deliverance came unexpectedly"<sup>199</sup>

By March, 1941, German planes began to cloud Russian skies. On 22 June, 1941, Hitler breached his non-aggression agreement with Stalin when German troops invaded Russian soil. Thus the fate of the Poles would change.

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<sup>198</sup> Interview with Kasia (27 November 1998) 10.

<sup>199</sup> Elzbieta P. qtd. in Irena Grudzinska-Gross and Jan T. Gross. War Through Children's Eyes. (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1981) 175.





Fig. 6 - A. Hitler Taxidermist; *PM*, June 25, 1941<sup>200</sup>

Stalin entreated the Allies to aid Russian efforts to push back and finally subdue Hitler. But the Red Army had suffered heavy losses and it was essential that great numbers of soldiers be quickly recruited and set to the task. Red Army attempts to recruit Poles in the eastern territories netted poor results. Despite heavy losses among the Polish deportees—"almost half of the one-and-a-half million Poles... dead... including 100,000 Polish Jews"<sup>201</sup>—it was put forward that imprisoned Polish officers and soldiers moldering in the Siberian hinterlands would make an effective contribution to the war effort. There was no question that loyalty to their homeland would entice them to fight against Hitler; but their quarrel was also with Stalin and most eventually refused to fight alongside the Red Army, which same army forcibly deported the Poles.

Still, Polish/Soviet diplomatic relations, suspended since the Soviet invasion of Poland, were restored. While it was his need for an army that brought Stalin to the table with the Allies, he

<sup>200</sup> Richard H. Minear. *Dr. Seuss Goes to War*. (NY: The New Press, 1999) 163.

<sup>201</sup> Norman Davies qtd. in Jan T. Gross. *Revolution From Abroad*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988) 229. See also Barbara Stern Burstin. *From Poland to Pittsburgh*. (Doctoral Dissertation: University of Pittsburgh, 1986) 115.

quickly and confidently pressed his demands vis-à-vis Poland's eastern border. General Sikorski is often criticized for not adequately protecting Poland's interests in the discussions but by way of excusing his neglect his priority was the speedy evacuation of the Polish deportees for he feared Stalin's fickle nature. As it happened, his fears proved correct, and too few managed to flee.

After a month embroiled in diplomatic exchange, on 30 July 1941 Polish-Soviet diplomatic relations were restored by mutual agreement signed by General Władysław Sikorski and Soviet Ambassador Ivan Maisky. Attached was the following protocol:

[T]he Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics will grant amnesty to all Polish citizens who are at present deprived of their freedom on the territory of the USSR either as prisoners of war or on other adequate grounds.<sup>202</sup>

And so the emaciated Poles fled the labour camps by whatever means available, traveling south to join the Polish Army which had been evacuated and reorganized in Uzbekistan and Kirghistan, in close proximity to English supply bases, during the winter of 1941-42.<sup>203</sup> After processing through relief and recruitment centers, able-bodied men joined their compatriots and under the leadership of General Władysław Anders, himself freed from a Soviet prisoner-of-war camp, they made up the Polish Second Corps. The first group of *Sybiraki* arrived in late August 1941.

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Stefan Waydenfeld, exiled to a camp at Kvasha located on the shore of the White Sea, north-east of Archangelsk wrote of the amnesty:

Orlov, the Kvasha headman, came out of the Hall and pinned a notice printed in large letters to the door:

**ANNOUNCEMENT**  
THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT HAS GRANTED AN AMNESTY TO ALL POLISH PRISONERS AND DEPORTEES. THE AMNESTY DOCUMENT WILL SERVE AS THE FAMILY PASSPORT AND AS A ONE-WAY TRAVEL PERMIT TO THE DESTINATION OF YOUR CHOICE.

The crowd broke up into smaller groups and the announcement was

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<sup>202</sup> Zygmunt C. Szkopiak. The Yalta Agreements. (London: Polish Government in Exile, 1986) 17.

<sup>203</sup> Lucjan Krolkowski. Stolen Childhood. (Buffalo: Father Justin Rosary Hour, 1983) 48.

analyzed.... The first questions was thus: Where should one go?<sup>204</sup>

Indeed. Where? And, how and when? The Poles didn't waste their time quibbling with the language of the announcement. What did it matter that 'amnesty' is generally a pardon given to criminals? Foremost was the acquisition of the amnesty document, or passport—*udostovierenya*—that would allow them to flee from their unhappy circumstance. Issued by the NKVD (National Commissariat for Internal Affairs), the *udostovierenya* document [Fig. 7] "vouchsafed" the bearer, a Polish citizen [male head; family members listed], the right to free movement in USSR territory to a stated destination [Kirov region in the below instance]. The permit was valid for three months.

СССР  
НАРОДНЫЙ КОМИССАРИАТ  
ВНУТРЕННИХ ДЕЛ  
УПРАВЛЕНИЕ НКВД  
ПО  
КИРОВСКОЙ ОБЛАСТИ

ОТДЕЛ  
"30" Качуэсия 1941  
№ 103.

Гор. Киров  
ул. Лейтен. дом № 21  
телефон коммуналь. управления.

УДОСТОВЕРЕНИЕ

11648 Предъявитель сего гр-н Лейтнер Уосиу Леониле  
виль 1926 года рождения, Урл. О. Вар Оуея-  
Уажилль Фоз. ГесБрауесам Уездо  
на основании Указа Президиума Верховного Совета амнистирован,  
как польский гражданин и имеет право свободного проживания на  
территории СССР, за исключением пограничных полос, запретных зон,  
местностей, объявленных на военном положении и режимных городов  
первой и второй категории.

При нем находятся Фозы "Веллвееда" 1927 года рождения, Свек  
Бочусиуа 1928 года рождения, Доче "Бочусиуа 1939  
года рождения.

Гр-н Лайтнер Уосиу Леониле направляется к избранному им месту  
жительства Лайтнер Уосиу Леониле

Удостоверение действительно на три месяца. Обмену на паспорт.  
Изложенное удостоверяется подписью и печатью.

Зам. Начальника Управления НКВД Кирова  
Капитан Государственной Безопасности

(ЕГОШИН)

Fig. 7 - *Udostovierenya*: 'Amnesty'<sup>205</sup>

Soviet officials did not recognize Ukrainians, Belorussians or Jews in the amnesty and, in fact, arbitrarily assigned them Soviet citizenship. Despite this, many attempted [some succeeding] to join the Polish Army that they might leave the Soviet Union. Army estimates of the day chronicle 92.23% Polish recruits, 3.08% Jews, 2.72% Belorussians, 1.08% Ukrainians, and

<sup>204</sup> Stefan Waydenfeld. *The Ice Road*. (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 1999) 200.

<sup>205</sup> From archives E. Kay, Mississauga. [Trans. Jean-Michel Komarnicki]

0.15 'other'.<sup>206</sup> The most well known among the approximate 4000 Jews evacuated [as both military personnel and civilians] with General Anders' troops was the late Israeli leader Menachem Begin [Prime Minister, 1977-83; *Nobel Peace Prize*, 1978].<sup>207</sup> There were, however, reports of discrimination, particularly, of anti-Semitism. There also were some instances of Ukrainian or Belorussian men passing themselves off as Poles.

For instance, Bohdan, who was among the Ukrainian majority population in the south-east region of Poland [Second Republic] heavily settled by the Polish *osadniki* during the interwar period and who had been arrested and deported to eight years hard labour in Siberia for his crime as "Polish sympathizer," used his Polish-sounding name and his command of the Polish language to enlist in the Polish Army. By the end of the war, Bohdan's proficiency in Ukrainian, Polish, Russian and English secured him a military—and, later, civilian—career in translation and interpretation services, including in Canada's federal civil service.<sup>208</sup>

Many of the Polish deportees were either outright denied *udostoviereny*a or their efforts to acquire the amnesty travel documents thwarted; after all, camp officials would lose a valuable labour pool thus have difficulty achieving quotas. And for this, camp officials could be sent to hard labour! In some instances, there was no male head of the family who could enlist and so whole families of women, elderly and children were unable to leave.<sup>209</sup> By early 1942, Soviet officials began to implement certain restrictions and many of the Poles would be refused/excluded from the amnesty provisions; and, by 1943, the door was completely closed.<sup>210</sup>

As the Poles funneled from the Siberian hinterlands to the southern region of the Soviet Union, a significant relief infrastructure was established [with aid arriving from Britain, the United States, and Canada]; despite imposing challenges created by war. Through 1942 and into the

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<sup>206</sup> Keith Sword. *Deportation and Exile*. (NY: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1994) 59.

<sup>207</sup> Barbara Stern Burstin. *From Poland to Pittsburgh*. Doctoral Dissertation: University of Pittsburgh, 1986) 126.

<sup>208</sup> Interview with Bohdan (10 November 1999).

<sup>209</sup> In her study of Polish women, Katherine R. Jolluck notes some women married local men and therefore, remained. Others were, with their children, 'adopted' by Polish men that they could travel to freedom under their amnesty papers. Jolluck describes this effort as an extension of the Polish commitment to the entire group [nation] as an extension of the family unit, citing Maurycy Mochnecki who wrote "historically Poland 'was more a people than a government, more a family than a country.'" *Gender, Identity and the Polish Experience of War, 1939-1945*. (Stanford University: 1995).

<sup>210</sup> Keith Sword. *Deportation and Exile*. (NY: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1994) 53.

early months of 1943, approximately 800 Polish refugee stations, orphanages, feeding centres, hospitals, schools, administration centres, etc. were established for the fleeing Poles.<sup>211</sup> The exodus of the Poles to the recruitment and relief centres was long, difficult, and rife with hunger, disease, death and despair. Some study participants recall their exodus and eventual freedom by Christmas 1941 as rebirth; of themselves and, they prayed, of the nation. *Poland has not perished yet, so long as we still live...*

Meanwhile, official Polish protests about delays and even prevention of release of the deportees were dead-ended by Soviet officials. And Soviet diplomats skirted questions about 15,000 Polish officers seemingly 'missing'. The mass graves in the Katyn Forest were yet to be discovered [1943] by the invading Germans.

As the Poles left the labour camps, many continued to suffer harassment by Soviet authorities unwilling to honour the *Sikorski-Maisky Pact*, whether camp personnel, railway personnel, and finally Red Army soldiers. Study participants, however, overwhelmingly make a distinction between the Russian *people* and the Russian *system*; for, the Russian people were seen to be equally maltreated by the system; equally suffering. They were also seen to be "good" people. Kazimierz recalled suffering terrible hunger during his trek from the labour camp:

They saved my life... got no eat, no food, nothing. So, we go on the railroad and the [train] stop on the station, so we just open the door and go to the city and asking for bread... for some kind of food, you know. So, one day we have bread; second day we might have onions, raw onions; third day maybe we have some red beets... or potatoes.<sup>212</sup>

Some interviewees noted that the Russian people were so disenchanting with the oppressive Stalinist regime, many welcomed the German invasion that they might be liberated from unmerciful tyranny.

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By April, 1942, the majority of Poles who would be evacuated numbered approximately 115,000; most as army personnel.<sup>213</sup> Though their expatriation was not yet over, they faced a

<sup>211</sup> Barbara Stern Burstin. From Poland to Pittsburgh. (Doctoral Dissertation: University of Pittsburgh, 1986) 109.

<sup>212</sup> Interview with Kazimierz (04 March 1995) 4.

<sup>213</sup> Barbara Stern Burstin. From Poland to Pittsburgh. (Doctoral Dissertation: University of Pittsburgh, 1986) 113.

new beginning in a changed and still changing world. And the world was only beginning to fathom the fullness of the Polish question. A brief article in the *New York Herald Tribune*, January 1943, noted:

More than 100,000 Poles have arrived at an Iranian port from Soviet Russia to bolster the Polish Army in the Near East under General Wladyslaw Anders....

The force was sent from Russia under a November 1941 agreement between the Soviet government and the Polish government-in-exile at London for release of the Polish war prisoners for service with other Polish forces against the Axis.

A reception camp covering 3 square miles has been built to house the Polish force, which is supplied by British food and clothing and Russian arms. The latest contingent to arrive completed the movement of those troops....<sup>214</sup>

There is no mention of the fact the so-called "troops" were mostly civilians, most having never trained for battle. Nor is it apparent that the "reception camp" was a scene of chaos with British and other authorities overwhelmed with the unanticipated emaciated condition of the Poles.

#### Summary

*We were deported. Only then did I realize that it is far from being a matter of indifference where one dies and is buried.*<sup>215</sup>

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Through the period September 1939 when Hitler, then Stalin, invaded Poland, to the June, 1941 German invasion of the Soviet Union, approximately 1.5 million ethnic Poles had been 'arrested' by the Red Army and without due process of the law, forcibly deported as so-called 'enemies of the state' to what they believed would be indefinite toil and strife in Soviet labour camps. And while the Red Army was shifting Poles to exile in the Siberian hinterland, another approximate 2.5 million Poles were undergoing similar relocation under German occupation.<sup>216</sup> In part, said relocations of Polish civilians set the stage for post-war population re-distribution and allocation of Poland's frontiers. In a letter dated February 1943, Leopold Amery, American

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<sup>214</sup> Diplomatic Files: Correspondence with the Vatican 1943, Original Documents Index; Letter from Myron Taylor to the President; 27 January 1943. [www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/psf468/t468c01.htm](http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/psf468/t468c01.htm).

<sup>215</sup> qtd. in Katherine R. Jolluck. Gender, Identity and the Polish Experience of War, 1939-1945. (Stanford University: 1995) 360.

<sup>216</sup> Jan T. Gross. Revolution From Abroad. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988) 227.

Minister for India wrote:

Turning to what should be done with Germany immediately after victory... [t]here is the... alternative of immediate and drastic reduction of Germany's power.... This can be achieved most simply by taking away from her part of her fundamental resources in territory... [including] to allow the Poles to take East Prussia, expelling the German inhabitants and replacing them by the Polish population of those Eastern districts which Russia will undoubtedly insist on retaining.... Such measures, coupled with the appalling losses in the war, should permanently weaken Germany's vis-à-vis her neighbours whose resources and ultimate populations would be strengthened.<sup>217</sup>

Indeed, millions perished on Polish soil through the course of the war, civilians and soldiers alike. Among them Poles and Jews and other ethnic minorities.

Living conditions in the Soviet labour camps were horrific. Work injuries, illness, starvation, disease, and death were commonplace. Most families left behind loved ones [60.5% of study participants], including especially, infants such as my grandmother's son, Adam, and the elderly, such as my great-grandmother, Aniela Kotowicz, all buried unceremoniously; some left as corpses at the side of the rail tracks; others in stark graves hither across the hinterlands; yet others in accidental cemeteries that attempted to push back the engulfing forest. But, for these 'ordinary' people there are no markings—and no documentation—of the graves that they might be tended and the memories of the dead honoured; as there exist for military personnel. For many of the Poles, this stark affront to their beloved reinforces a well-known Stalin aphorism: *A single death is a tragedy, a million deaths is statistics*. And the inconceivable horror of the Holocaust was yet to come resulting, for Jews especially, in a legacy of overwhelming loss of entire families and the anguish of survival of the few.

Meagre food rations were earned through compulsory labour. *You don't work, you don't eat*, is uttered first in Russian language by study participants; then, often accompanied by sardonic laughter, in English. Each family, as well as groupings of families, found means to supplement their diet; either off the land, or through shared resources; especially, of parcels sent from relatives and former neighbours. None of the study participants recalled receiving any aid

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<sup>217</sup> Letter 12 February 1943, Leopold Amery, Minister for India [US] to Myron Taylor. [www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/psf468/t468d03.htm](http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/psf468/t468d03.htm).

during their exile experience from such agencies as the International Red Cross.

Enthusiastic Soviet re-education efforts included compulsory attendance by all at weekly propaganda meetings. Children were especially targeted for depolonization through sinister classroom teasing and trickery: *Stalin is God; Poland will never rise again*. Yet their parents, and others among the exiled Polish community, engaged in strategies to maintain their *Polishness*: the singing of patriotic songs and telling of patriotic stories, and the clandestine practice and observance of religious holidays and ceremonies. For as long as the children lived and knew their Polish Roman Catholic heritage, it was believed Poland could not yet perish.

The *Sikorski-Maisky Pact* included a protocol that secured the amnesty and release of the Poles from the labour camps that they might augment the Red Army's efforts [with the Allies] to push back and crush Hitler. That military officials would become responsible for the desperate families of the men who enlisted created an infrastructure unprecedented in war-time conditions and experience.

Aid for the fleeing Poles came from the United States and Canada. However, Great Britain, in conjunction with the Polish government-in-exile in London and Polish Roman Catholic Church officials, performed the primary role of training Polish soldiers and establishing the bulk of the infrastructure—including, foremost, schools and orphanages—for the care and protection of the Polish women, children and elderly. In part, fulfilling their commitment made in *Agreement of Mutual Assistance between Poland and the United Kingdom* [25 August 1939] wherein Article 1 states:

Should one of the Contracting Parties become engaged in hostilities with a European Power in consequence of aggression by the latter against that Contracting Party, the other Contracting Party will at once give the Contracting Party engaged in hostilities all the support and assistance in its power.<sup>218</sup>

One of the challenges encountered in conducting research on the topic of the Polish deportation and exile experience is the lack of access to Soviet archives. While such access may

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<sup>218</sup> Zygmunt C. Szkopiak. *The Yalta Agreements*. (London: Polish Government in Exile, 1986) 12.



be gained some time in the future, that the survivors of the experience are now elderly and dying [for instance, one among study participants died while the research and writing was ongoing] presents enormous challenges in efforts to explore a wider range of inquiry. For instance, this study includes a consideration of the experience of the children of the Polish deportees. In her doctoral dissertation, Katherine R. Jolluck explores women's experience. Many others trace the military historicity; that is, the male experience. But, what of analysis of the parent/child relationship? Marysia, age 17 when deported, tells us:

[Mother] always said, "The most important thing is to survive. Don't worry about anything." Of course, she lost everything. I mean they worked so hard, my father and my mother. But she said, "It doesn't mean anything. Life, life is important. You have to do everything." And she was very... I remember when we came from work, she was very upset, exhausted and not well dressed, hungry and she would try to take the boots off, wet and frozen and she suffered a lot because of us. But she always said, "Anything has no meaning, life, life, you have to survive." And somehow she always believed that we will survive and she often would say, "I think we are going to get out of this place." I said, "Mother, how come you think how we can get?" "I don't know how but I think we will."<sup>219</sup>

While Katherine Jolluck notes the despair of the Polish mothers as they were unable to just 'be' free Polish mothers who would instill all that they valued of their heritage in their children, and participants in this study acknowledge the powerful role their mothers, especially, played in preserving their Polish heritage as well as the sacrifices made that they might keep their children alive, these two distinct aspects ought to be explored relationally.

Further, there is no work that considers the after-effects of the loss of family members of the children. Many would leave the Soviet labour camps motherless; though, more commonly, fatherless. What impact has this had on their lives: as sons and daughters and, as parents?

And, finally, how has the collective experience shaped the lives and defined the *Polishness* of the survivors as they rebuilt their lives after their exile experience; and, eventually, after the war?

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<sup>219</sup> Interview with Marysia (06 February 1999) 12.

## Chapter 4 - EXORDIUM

Someone Has to Tidy Up

*After every war  
someone has to tidy up.  
Things won't pick  
themselves up, after all.*

...  
*Someone, broom in hand,  
still remembers how it was.  
Someone else listens, nodding  
his unshattered head.  
But others are bound to be bustling nearby  
who'll find all that  
a little boring.<sup>220</sup>*

### Prelude

In June 1941, Germany invaded Russian soil. By August, a Polish-Russian Military Agreement was signed by General Władysław Sikorski for the Polish government-in-exile [in London] and by Ivan Maisky on behalf of the Soviet Union, which agreement resulted in the *amnesty*<sup>221</sup> of the Poles, suddenly termed "free deportees,"<sup>222</sup> that a Polish Army might form on Soviet territory, to fight, alongside the Red Army, Hitler's advance. Even before the war's end, however, the Polish-Russian alliance would crumble and Stalin would again be at the table with the Allies carving up Poland along ethnic divisions of Poland's eastern frontier; that is, virtually along the former *Curzon Line*.<sup>223</sup>

By whatever means possible during the brief amnesty period [late 1941 to early 1943], the Poles fled the Siberian taiga and the life of exile, labour and oppression, that they might fight 'for'

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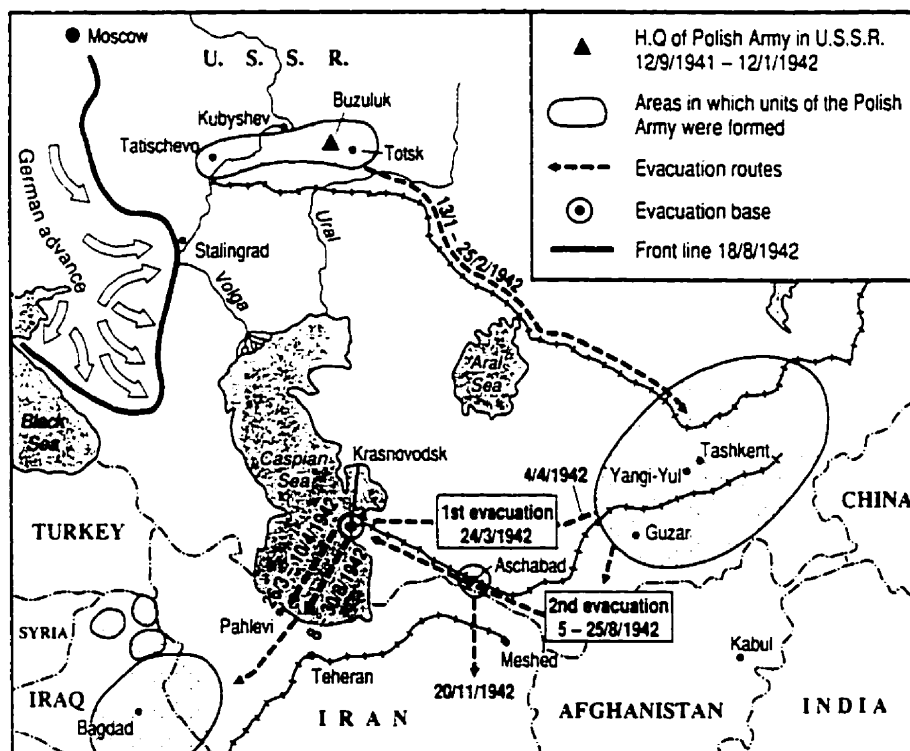
<sup>220</sup> Wisława Szymborska. "The End and the Beginning" in *view with a grain of sand*. (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1995) 178.

<sup>221</sup> The term *amnesty*, was euphemistically equated with "the job done"; for instance, 72,000 [primarily political] prisoners were *amnestied* in 1933 after the completion of the White Sea-Baltic Canal in 1933; another 55,000 were *amnestied* in 1937 on completion of the Moscow-Volga Canal. 60% of the workforce in Soviet labour camps were political prisoners. The Poles [and others], however, had not technically completed their work of mining and harvesting resources for the Soviet war effort and the diminishment of the labour force perhaps explains Stalin's hasty and unexpected stoppage of evacuation of Polish deportees. NAC RG-25-F6, vol. 2615, file 2-20-0. Eamscliffe. Confidential document, "Forced Labour in the Soviet Union". (Ottawa: 13 September 1948).

<sup>222</sup> Michael Hope. *Polish Deportees in the Soviet Union: Origins of Post-War Settlement in Great Britain*. (London: Veritas Foundation Publication Centre, 1998) 20.

<sup>223</sup> The *Yalta Agreement* of 1945 is broadly detailed and debated by historians. This study primarily references documents and witness notes [i.e. diary entries and notes of diplomats and *Yalta* discussants, Churchill, Stalin and Roosevelt] recorded in Zygmunt C. Szkopiak, *The Yalta Agreements*. (London: Polish Government in Exile, 1986).  
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Poland; but where to go? With few possessions in hand [the most valuable being the *udostovierenyja*, or, amnesty permit], they headed south to army recruitment centres hastily established in Soviet Central Asia—Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kirgizia and Tadzhikistan—where they sought the comfort and security of the Polish military and officials. Of the approximately 1.5 million Poles deported to Siberian exile, about 10%, or 115,000, successfully fled in two evacuations before the fickle Stalin closed the door to freedom. Little is documented of the fates of those left behind, but that approximately 300,000 Poles were repatriated to Polish territory in 1945/46 and 1957.<sup>224</sup> Contemporary debate has arisen as evidenced in the *Letters to the Editor* of the Toronto-based Polish language newspaper, *Związkowiec* [Alliancer]: Poland is not advocating repatriation of Poles exiled during WWII in the Soviet Union, and there exists among Canada's *Polonia* a view that Poland ought to take an interest in coming to their aid.



Map 9 - Polish Army in the USSR and Evacuation 1941-42<sup>225</sup>

Once the Poles arrived at recruitment centres, able-bodied men and women joined

<sup>224</sup> Siedlecki qtd. in Katherine R. Jolluck. *Gender, Identity and the Polish Experience of War, 1938-1945*. 25.

<sup>225</sup> Keith Sword. *Deportation and Exile: Poles in the Soviet Union, 1939-48*. (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1994) 82.  
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General Anders in the Polish Second Corps of the British 8th Army, traveling to the Middle East where men underwent military training and performed such duties as guarding oil fields and refineries. The women worked as nurses and supply truck drivers. In his negotiations with Stalin, General Sikorski specifically targeted female recruits for the Polish Women's Auxiliary Corps, or PSK, arguing they were an integral part of the Polish army as essential auxiliary workers. One source suggests his objective was to save as many women as possible by establishing a need for them.<sup>226</sup>

The remainder—unanticipated masses of the old, women and children; though it is surprising that British authorities imagined Polish men would willingly leave behind their families—were eventually granted refuge in India, then British East Africa under the authority of retired British Army officers where approximately 19,000 [predominantly Roman-Catholic] displaced Poles lived a diasporic existence in 22 settlement camps until their fate could be determined.<sup>227</sup> Pubescent boys and girls—seven males among study participants, including my father, Jan Bajorek—were recruited for the *junaks*,<sup>228</sup> where, in the Middle East, their schooling [with emphasis on technical/mechanical training] was resumed and they received pre-military training. Some eventually rose to the ranks of the military, to fight alongside their elder brethren; others received further technical training either in British East Africa or England. For instance, my father and one of his brothers were sent to Oudtshoorn, South Africa, for mechanics schooling under the tutelage of primarily Polish soldiers, while their mother and younger siblings were sent to Tengeru, a Polish settlement camp located at the foot of Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanganyika, about 100 miles from the equator.<sup>229</sup> After the war, some returned to [Communist] Poland, while the majority were taken in by such countries as Britain, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Australia, New Zealand, the

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<sup>226</sup> Margaret Brodniewicz-Stawicki. *For Your Freedom and Ours*. (St. Catharines, Vanwell Publishing Limited, 1999) 167-178.

<sup>227</sup> Lucjan Krolkowski. *Stolen Childhood*. (Buffalo: Father Justin Rosary Hour, 1983) 85.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, 94. Female equivalence ['training' was gender-specific; e.g. nursing, driving] of reserve army volunteers: *młodsze ochotniczki*.

<sup>229</sup> Tengeru was formerly "a German settlement of supposed Lutherans... desolated after the declaration of war when all German nationals were moved to Salisbury... handed over to the Polish settlers who found that the so-called Lutherans were ardent Nazis who had been teaching the natives of the town that 'Hitler was God'." Undated British document from archives of A. Pawelek, "Polish Settlers in British Africa," Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum [England] KOL.174/6A. *Helen Bajorek MacDonald*

United States and Canada.

But, who was making the decisions on behalf of the Poles? This question is particularly material, for families, after surviving the deportation, exile and exodus ordeal, were separated by authorities, and family members funneled to suitable training or military-related service, or to temporary relief settlements. And was it benevolent paternalism which motivated officials or was it expected the Poles would indeed, fight and sacrifice their lives for the Allied cause against Hitler? What roles did the British, Americans, and Polish government-in-exile play? The Roman Catholic Church? And who was funding the recruitment centres and the formation of Anders' Army? What circumstances would lead to the post-war repatriation of the Poles or, for many, abandonment of their homeland? And for those who eventually made their way to Canada, under what circumstances were they granted entry into the country?

#### The Beginning of Another Story: Flight to Freedom

Despite the fact that the Poles were free and that hope was rekindled, not all were able to flee the labour camps. Some were outright prevented the opportunity to leave either as a result of officials withholding details of the *amnesty*, or by officials not providing the necessary travel permit; the *udostovierenya*. For many Polish families devoid of a male family head, leaving was virtually impossible. Jadwiga, though only four years old at the time of the Polish-Soviet agreement, recalled the men leaving the camp:

But, my mother, she couldn't leave.... she has her mother-in-law, two small kids and one teenager. She was young but she had too many people [to care for]... [T]here was no way to escape from this place.<sup>230</sup>

Indeed, escape from the camps was impossible. Then, in 1946 a Russian civil administrator arrived at the camp and informed all Poles they were going back to Poland. Jadwiga remembers:

[P]eople start to prepare... they give us more flour... and the people, when the news broke out that we are going back, the people they ran, they hugged, they kissed, they cried. They went crazy, absolutely. [T]he trucks came and we sit on the trucks and the people they sing... an immigrant song.... [it] always gives me goosebumps.

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<sup>230</sup> Interview with Jadwiga (06 December 1998) 13.  
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For those who did leave, the formidable journey to freedom protracted their nightmare. As the camps were situated in remote regions, transportation from them was, often, a dreadful challenge. And little, if any, assistance was forthcoming from Soviet camp officials who loathed losing their workforce; though there are numerous accounts of ordinary Russian people who offered guidance, food, and other forms of assistance. The Poles today make a clear distinction between the tyranny of the Russian *system*, and the Russian *people* who also suffered under the same *system*. Yet, however much the Poles recognized the shared oppression and exploitation by the *system*, they distinguished themselves from the Russian people. For the Poles, whatever their pre-deportation socio-economic status, downplayed class differentiation amongst themselves in their efforts to aid one another, often describing their community of exiles as “one big family;” thus, making distinctions between “us” and “them”. Further, the deportation and exile experience reinforced the collective Polish identity, as a national/ethnic group, thus, reinforcing their *Polishness* while resisting, as individuals and as a group, Russification.<sup>231</sup>

Families or groups of families devised creative means of travel to railway stations that served as psychological beacons to freedom. Some constructed rafts that they might escape via camp side rivers. Others built carts, and then hauled their meager possessions and their weak over rough trails cut through the taiga. And some walked. For days, weeks, sometimes months, with little food or money, the journey took its toll. Begging was commonplace. Julian, nearly 12 years of age at the time, describes it thus:

We pulled that damned cart... We got to the first village. It was getting dark. So, my mother, myself, and sister, we went begging for food in the village. We got food; went back to eat. Brought some for my father and for brother. We spent the night in, like a blacksmith shop. We travel... then, we come to another village and begging again. And that's how we survived.... They [Russians] give you whatever they could... even a little bit... they give it to you.<sup>232</sup>

Disease took hold of the most vulnerable: young children, the elderly, and overworked, under-nourished men and women. When possible, shallow, haphazard graves were dug for the

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<sup>231</sup> Katherine R. Jolluck. Gender, Identity and the Polish Experience of War, 1938-1945. 271-273, 367.

<sup>232</sup> Interview with Julian (05 December 1998) 19.

dead by weak parents, children, and/or siblings. Most, however, were added to the piles of corpses lying in carts at railway stations; some even suffered the indignity of being left on the side of railway tracks. Jerzy, whose family traveled with several others on a river barge, recalls the nights his 17-yr. old back was put into service for the dead:

...2 o'clock in the morning, we just come to the shore and all who was able to walk, shuffle and go outside and dig trenches.... bunch of guys dig the trenches and another bunch of guys would take all them bodies out and dump it in trenches and cover them up. And so two guys, maybe take 2 or 3 hours... Next day, [more] people die. So, who's dying, just throw in the corner... the same, 2 o'clock everything was done... 2 o'clock in the morning, they come to the shore again, dump it out, you had to shovel, dig the trench and you pick the body.<sup>233</sup>

When asked what he was thinking while performing this task, Jerzy replied: "Nothing. Well, he died today, maybe my turn tomorrow.... So, sometime[s] [now] I'm sitting and thinking; I say, 'Why and how I still live!?'... always like I says, it's with God."

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Despite the hardship and unhappiness experienced in the labour camps, the memories of the journey to freedom are frequently more stark and pain-ridden for survivors. Many remain inconsolable and it is likely these memories are among the prime factors that result in resistance to speak of the deportation/exile experience.<sup>234</sup> To revisit the memories is to stir the emotions of now-old children who continue to grieve for dead parents, grandparents, siblings, cousins, neighbours and friends, [not to mention the collective suffering of which survivors speak; that is, the Polish nation and all her children suffered overwhelmingly *because* of the war], and to be reminded of images they'd rather forget. Even more compelling influences for silence can be found in responses to the question: *Do you tell people about your experiences?*<sup>235</sup> The two most common responses were: "*Why? Who would believe such a story?*" and, "*Nobody wants to know what I went through.*" Most make the observation that their experiences are overshadowed by the horror of the Holocaust. Yet, we can draw parallels between the silence of Holocaust survivors,

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<sup>233</sup> Interview with Jerzy (03 October 1998) 19.

<sup>234</sup> 10 individuals who were approached by telephone for interview declined, stating, for instance: "never mind that stuff," "I want no publicity about that," "I'm too ill to talk about it," and, "It's too painful."

<sup>235</sup> See Appendix 'A': *Foundations of Inquiry of Polish Immigrants to Canada*. #35.

and that of the Polish survivors of the deportation/exile experience:

People usually do not like to be dragged to hell by those who have gone through hell, and the survivors know it; as for themselves, they are not anxious to revive the humiliation and degradation; so they keep silent. But this does not mean that they do not preserve their own memories, burning or rather flickering inside, waiting for a riper time to burst out.<sup>236</sup>

All that might be required for the stories to flow is an expression of interest; including, by academics. For once the now elderly survivors have all died, the opportunity to shake their memories will be past.

*I shake my memory.  
Maybe something in its branches  
that has been asleep for years  
will start up with a flutter.*<sup>237</sup>

At the end of his interview, Waclaw was asked for the details of his mother's death, for earlier he mentioned, simply, "she died in Iran". The tragic story flowed with tears; the essence of it, loss, not uncommon among survivors; for, mothers, fathers, and children were frequently separated by Russian authorities at train stations; or, a parent might leave a train stopped at a station to seek out food, only to return to helplessly watch it pull away. Waclaw recalls:

Mother wanted to run and buy me something, like a little bit grapes or something for me... and when she was coming back, the train move away, and that was the last I saw...<sup>238</sup>

At age twelve, the last memory Waclaw is left of his mother, is that of a frantic figure, food in helpless hands, standing on a railway station platform among a sea of bedraggled travelers. Even to this day he cannot conceive her fate. Is it any wonder, then, that he states simply "she died in Iran," the details of her death [or, rather, *lack of concrete detail*] suppressed in his narrative until pressed?

We can recall Jacob's father building coffins during his time in the camp that he might provide his family extra food. While Jacob lauds his father's ingenuity, he also observes:

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<sup>236</sup> Noa Gedi and Yigal Elam. "Collective Memory - What Is It?" in History and Memory. (Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University Press, 1997) 30-50.

<sup>237</sup> Wisława Szymborska. "May 16, 1973" in view with a grain of sand. (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1995) 199.

<sup>238</sup> Interview with Waclaw (13 March 1995) 35.



[T]hat was his undoing, too, in the end, because doing what he was doing, he had a chance to get some extra tobacco... When we were allowed to leave Russia, we got to the same railroad station—Chomogorki—and we had to wait for days over there for train. And... he went out on the street trying to trade tobacco for some money or bread and a secret agent approached him asking whether he had some tobacco, and he had a couple packages of tobacco and he bought it off him; he arrested him on the spot and the next day was the trial and he got five years in jail for black-marketing. And that's the last I saw of my father. [cries]

After a break in the interview, Jacob continued.

[M]y mother went to the trial. Father got sentenced for five years. She had a chance to have a few words with him and he says, "It's no use for you hang around here or try to go back to the camp." He says, "Keep on going. Maybe you could save yourself." So, when the train was available... well, we had to wait another two days before they took him, so I remember on the last day before we were put on the train again, I went out trying to get something, you know.... I think it was something of my father's clothing that I was trying to trade for a few potatoes or piece of bread, and I went to that one house. There was an old Russian woman. She had a little bit potatoes in the corner of the room there, you know... she give me about 4 or 5 potatoes. She told me. She says "Keep it. It's... [cries]"<sup>239</sup>

Despite suggestions that the interview come to a close, Jacob prefers only a break that he might compose himself, then insists he press on. It's as a flood that can't be stopped.

There were some happy endings to distressful family separations. As they traveled south, my father, Jan Bajorek, [the eldest male child] and grandfather, Wawrzyniec Bajorek, took turns leaving the stopped train to seek food for the family; "...we were going from each railway station, we were looking for piece of bread, going begging, and that's why [I] get lost." My father, 13-years-old at the time, then hopped trains, criss-crossing the Soviet Union for several weeks, in search of his family. Likely because of hunger and illness, he eventually collapsed on a street in the city of Namangan, in the far east of the Soviet Union. A Jewish woman, whose husband and son were away with the Red Army, collected him and another emaciated boy, taking them to her home where she cared for them for several months: long enough for the two boys to regain their health and begin attending classes. One day, while passing by the train station, my father encountered a Polish Officer. After explaining his circumstance, the Polish Officer took him in his care, later reuniting him with his family. Nearly a year had passed.<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> Interview with Jacob (17 February 1999) 18.

<sup>240</sup> Interview with Jan Bajorek (21 February 1995) 3-6.

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While some managed to buy seats on passenger cars, most again spent weeks in unheated, crowded boxcars, for they had limited means to pay for transportation. We can recall Ryszard's sad account of his father's death, of starvation, in one such boxcar. Often, trains would be stopped, all passengers forced to disembark, wherever they might be, for it was wartime and the need to transport raw materials, equipment, and soldiers for the war effort took precedence. They might be stranded for days, or, in some instances, for weeks, with no food, shelter or money. Or, some found themselves traveling in the wrong direction: east.

Interviewees describe a hunger that bolstered increasingly desperate survival strategies. Stray dogs and cats were lynched for their meat. Dead livestock were quickly stripped of their flesh. Children stole food from markets, and food scraps from behind homes and public kitchens. Parents and grandparents grew increasingly weaker; some, in desperation, left emaciated children at orphanages, or *diet dom*, choosing the lesser evil. Some of these children later ran away and made their own way to the south, thus further complicating aid efforts.

Not all Poles experienced such hardship during their flight to freedom. On hearing of the formation of a Polish Army Bolesław, a 25-year-old military prisoner-of-war, simply left the camp situate on the Mongolian border, and hopped a train heading south-west. On arriving at Chelyabinsk, he encountered masses of people. For days, he squatted at the train station even losing his boots, stolen right off his feet one night while asleep. Then, one day Bolesław decided he'd had enough and sought out the local military authorities. Telling them he wanted to enlist in the Polish Army that he could fight the advancing Germans, he is provided with *udostovierenia* papers. But first, he negotiates for an additional twenty-five others to be added to the permit; for he was moved by the masses of Poles stranded at the railway station. The administrator provided Bolesław with sufficient food vouchers for exchange during the journey. He did not, however, have the wherewithal to provide twenty-six train tickets.

Bolesław, a handsome and imposing natural leader who was quickly elevated to rank of Officer on reporting to the Army, was a man endowed with creative resolve as circumstance

necessitated [we can recall his sex-for-food exchange]. He enlisted a young woman to sew red stars on his military coat and cap that he might masquerade as a Red Army Captain. He then barged into the railway station with boisterous aplomb, and as the masses stepped aside he made his way to the ticket wicket where he saluted two Red Army soldiers. He demanded twenty-six tickets; no rubles were exchanged. All twenty-five of his charges rode safely and comfortably directly to the Polish Army recruitment centre.

Similarly, Ernest recalled able-bodied men, including his father, leaving the camp in the winter of 1941 after receiving uniforms and new underwear. The following spring, a Polish Corporal arrived at the camp to collect the families of the new recruits. Six families followed Corporal Bajorek [no relation] from the camp to the railway station and made their way safely to the south.<sup>241</sup>

For the majority of the fleeing Polish deportees, once they reached south-central Soviet Asia, they walked across deserts and through unfriendly territory, often only to be forced again to labour on a *kolkhoz*, or collective farm, where they harvested wheat, sugar beets, tree seedlings, vegetables, or cotton [described by Lucjan Krolikowski as the *cotton fields of Soviet Louisiana*].<sup>242</sup> It was here, 23 December 1941, while the rest of the family was picking cotton, that Aniela Kotowicz, my great-grandmother, died from the effects of dysentery in the arms of her two youngest grandchildren.

And some families were forced to work in mines. Or, a family might, in fact, choose to work on a *kolkhoz* that enough money might be earned for food and temporary shelter, and much needed funds for a train ticket for the final destination: Polish Army recruitment centres.

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As brothers Zygmunt, the younger, and Roman recount their experiences, their family symbolizes the common tragedy: family separation, loss, and grief; family loyalty and dedication to adherence to *Polishness*. Upon learning of the August, 1941 Polish-Russian military pact, the

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<sup>241</sup> Interview with Ernest (19 September 1998) 10-12.

<sup>242</sup> Lucjan Krolikowski. Stolen Childhood. (Buffalo: Father Justin Rosary Hour, 1983) 40-47.  
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two eldest sons [able-bodied soldier material]—Roman, one of them—from a family of nine children were permitted by the Commandant to leave the camp. A month later, the remainder of the family followed. For more than three weeks, they traveled by train. Food was scarce. Disease was rampant. Younger children especially, succumbed to death. First, one brother, his warm body taken off the train and piled onto an *arba*, or cart, with dozens of other corpses, hauled away by camel; presumably to a mass grave. Then, a few days later, the youngest two sisters delirious with typhus, one dies. The family had disembarked from the train, and Zygmunt and his father set out for a coffin. They find another family grieving the loss of a daughter and it is decided the two girls will share the coffin; “just put someplace over there.” No Catholic burial. That day, an NKVD officer asks Zygmunt’s father for travel documents. Learning they are without the much-needed *udostoviereniya*, the family is summarily taken to a *kolkhoz* where, for the next two years, they picked cotton, harvested pearl barley, and performed other general agricultural labour. Thus, they completely missed the opportunity to leave the Soviet Union. Another young sister perishes; this time, Zygmunt helps bury her body, wrapped only in a blanket, in a shallow grave marked only with a large pile of rocks that would serve to keep animals from finding her bones. Zygmunt’s mother grows sick with grief. All she can do is pray. “Pray and pray,” he says.

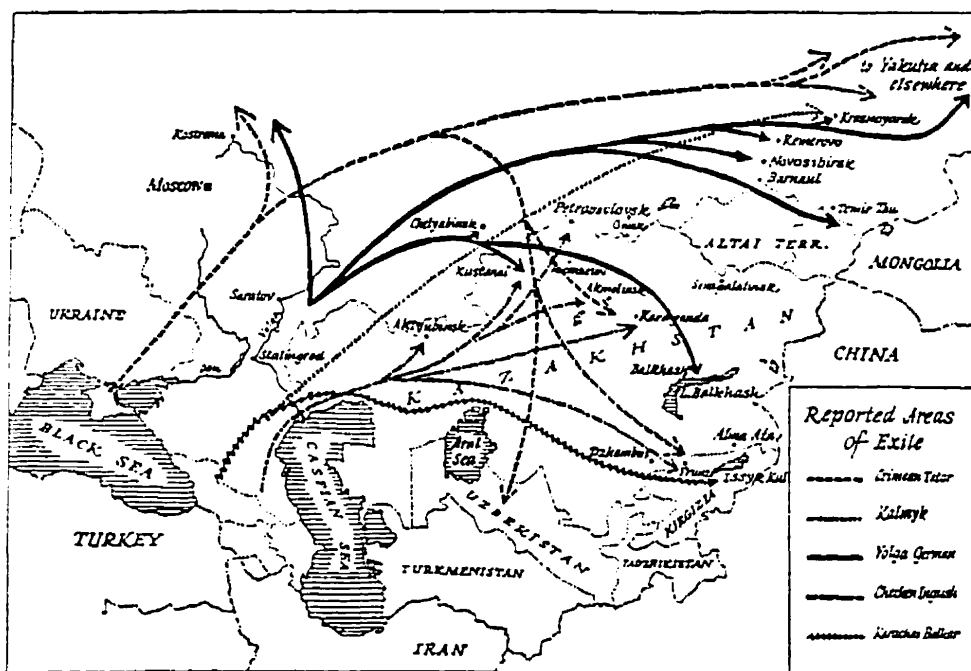
During this period, the *kolkhoz* administrator informed Polish deportees under his authority that they are required to take out Russian citizenship. Throughout the Soviet Union, Poles, Jews and Ukrainians all were suddenly embraced as Stalin’s children. It was 1943 and no more would leave under the Polish-Russian military agreement. The doors were closed. Zygmunt’s father determines it is in his family’s best interests to take out citizenship. His sister, however, refuses to acknowledge to the magistrate she is anything but Polish. She is sentenced to 10 years hard labour; however, after several days’ torture, she suffers a mental breakdown and Zygmunt’s father convinces NKVD officials she would be of no use as a worker. She is released to the family and for six months retreats into silence.

Zygmunt was then called in late 1943 to enlist in the Red Army. His duty: to report to work in the iron mines at Achisay, situate in south-central Soviet Asia. The entire family followed

and his father and 12-year-old sister are also required to work. Zygmunt picks up the thread of his narrative:

Is working maybe 500 kids. Polish, Russian... What you be see these kids what working this to the mine is you be cry. No clothes. No food. You know, just going over there and everyone must got it norm.... And what 12-year-old kids making norm? [cries] Hah?!... And, we live like that to the 1945.<sup>243</sup>

Zygmunt goes on to describe the ill treatment of Chechen, Chinese and Japanese prisoners-of-war whose overworked and underfed bodies filled mass graves. [Map 10]



Map 10 - WWII Deportations to Siberian Labour Camps of other Soviet Ethnic Groups<sup>244</sup>

Meanwhile, of the two elder brothers who traveled to enlist in the Polish Army, only one made the journey alive. The other, Roman, eventually fought, with military distinction, in Italy where, with a team of five others [including one Yugoslavian woman; here lies a story unto itself!], he performed the dangerous role of advance reconnoiter patrol and sniper. Roman was among the Polish ex-servicemen who came to Canada in 1946-47 under the British *Resettlement Act*. His brother, Zygmunt, and the five other surviving family members still in the Soviet Union, were later repatriated in Poland in 1945 on a ten-acre parcel of land in a location other than their home

<sup>243</sup> Interview with Zygmunt (01 March, 1999) 22.

<sup>244</sup> R. Conquest, *The Soviet Deportation of Nationalities*. (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1960).  
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village. Only Zygmunt would later join his brother, in Canada, in 1960.

Though they managed to survive the labour camp experience, Zygmunt and Roman's accounts epitomize the breadth of continued family suffering and separation. First, families were divided during the brief *amnesty* period either by Russian camp administrators, or by choice. That is, fathers and brothers made the journey to Polish Army recruitment centres where they enlisted with the view to be reunited with their families at a later date. Not all succeeded. Masses of orphaned children were left at *diet dom* [orphanages] or *diet sad* [kindergarten] where they likely quickly forgot their Polish roots and where children were encouraged to care for each other. Chris Gladun writes in his poem, "The Orphanage at Zamitan":

*there were no gravediggers  
every morning we carted the little bodies  
to the desert  
on little wheelbarrows  
and made crosses  
from wooden sticks  
for this I received two slices of bread  
and a bowl of soup  
...  
the saddest were the burials  
of my friends  
because we did not have shovels  
to bury them  
at night the wind  
and the wild animals  
played with their skulls  
yes, the howling of jackals  
fighting over the corpses  
of my friends  
was the worst  
I never could sleep  
after such a funeral<sup>245</sup>*

#### Relief for the Fleeing Poles

Of those families who left the camps as a complete unit, and whose members survived the arduous journey to the army recruitment centres, Polish and British military personnel were horrified by the semblance of louse-ridden, wretched human masses that arrived at the recruitment/reception centres. And, they were confounded by the magnitude of the dilemma of

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<sup>245</sup> Chris Gladun. "The Orphanage at Zamitan", in writ 17. (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1986) 8.  
*Helen Bajorek MacDonald*

care and revitalization of the physically emaciated and mentally and spiritually distressed soldiers and their families. The weakened Poles suffered various fevers, dysentery, typhus, malaria, pellagra and other vitamin-deficiency diseases. Disease spread rapidly and there were inadequate medical personnel and supplies to assist the sick and dying. Even food and clean drinking water, necessary to build up the physical strength of the evacuees, were in short supply.

Images of the emaciated Polish children especially captured the hearts of the international community. Halina was sixteen years of age at the time and suffering a severe case of black malaria that left her temporarily blind. Her body was wasted by pellagra after suffering with dysentery over an extended period. She describes the reaction she encountered:

[T]hey inject the water under your skin three times a day... from a complete ruin, the nurse would come and inject... But the pain... so terribly bad. The nurse used to tell me... she would hug me and she says, "You have to do that. If you can stand it, you have to go through it." And so, most of the time, they had to keep me on morphine. [T]here was one nurse who came... a Polish nurse who came from London... and I remember not being able to see the girl and I prayed a lot and asked for help. I wanted to see the sun. I wanted to see the world again. She was such a lovely, lovely lady.... I remember the priest, the army chaplain, [and] a soldier came. When the soldier looked at me, he cried.... The priest, when he came, he just... he made the sign of the cross over me and he just stood there and cried. He looked up to the ceiling and the tears came down his face, he wasn't ashamed. And he said, "Dear God... what did you do to deserve it?"<sup>246</sup>

Halina felt alone in the world but for an older sister who died of a water-borne bacterial infection in the same hospital a few months later. She was too incapacitated to arrange or even attend her sister's burial. A few years later—1946—she would again meet, then marry, in South Africa where he was stationed as a mechanics teacher after suffering a battle injury, the soldier who visited her in the make-shift hospital. After our conversation, Halina sent by mail copies of some of her late husband's documents from which I learned my father was one of his pupils!

By fall 1941, the Canadian Red Cross had sent \$65,000.00 worth of warm clothing and other articles such as medical supplies and blankets to the Poles in Russia. Ernest, now a comfortably retired professional, shared a remarkable story about his family heirloom:

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<sup>246</sup> Interview with Halina (07 February 1999) 23-29.  
*Heien Bajorek MacDonald*

That quilt was given to us in Iran. The Red Cross in Iran. [T]hat was kept by my mother because she was a little attached to that. That was... actually, [it] saved her life, that quilt because, I remember in Iran, after this very rich soup she developed problems in her stomach... Dysentery. And she almost died. I remember [brother] went... she asked for some fruits. You know, she was laying on the bed. So he took her golden bracelets, and went amongst Iranians and sold it and bought some food for that money. It was seven rupees or something at that time. And she was covered with that quilt. That's [the] only thing she had to cover her and she said that saved her life because it kept her warm. Kept it... to Africa, through England and she brought [it] here to Canada too. When we bought the cottage she says, "You take that quilt because you probably need it at the cottage." Pretty cold, you know. [chuckles] She parted with it. But, she washed it. She mend[ed] it nicely because it was torn and used, so she fixed that up and she said, "You take that..." Red Cross. Canadian Red Cross. We have that thing in our special place, packed in a plastic bag and safe.<sup>247</sup>

The 60-year-old quilt was brought out from its special place that I could touch and photograph the family heirloom.



Fig. 8 - Gift of Canadian Red Cross Society 1942<sup>248</sup>

Ernest's story becomes more poignant when linked with a telegram sent October 1941 to the Canadian Red Cross:

LETTER RECEIVED TODAY FROM POLISH AMBASSADOR QUOTE I HAVE JUST HEARD MAGNIFICENT GIFT COMFORTS WHICH CRCS SUPPLIED POLES IN RUSSIA AND SHOULD LIKE TO TELL YOU HOW DEEPLY GRATEFUL I AM TO YOU FOR NOBLE GESTURE STOP I WAS INDEED PROFOUNDLY TOUCHED AS I KNOW ONLY TOO WELL IN WHAT DIRE NEED OUR PEOPLE IN RUSSIA ARE OF SUCH ARTICLES STOP ON BEHALF MY FELLOW COUNTRYMEN WHO HAVE SUFFERED SO MUCH ALREADY AND WHOSE SUFFERINGS

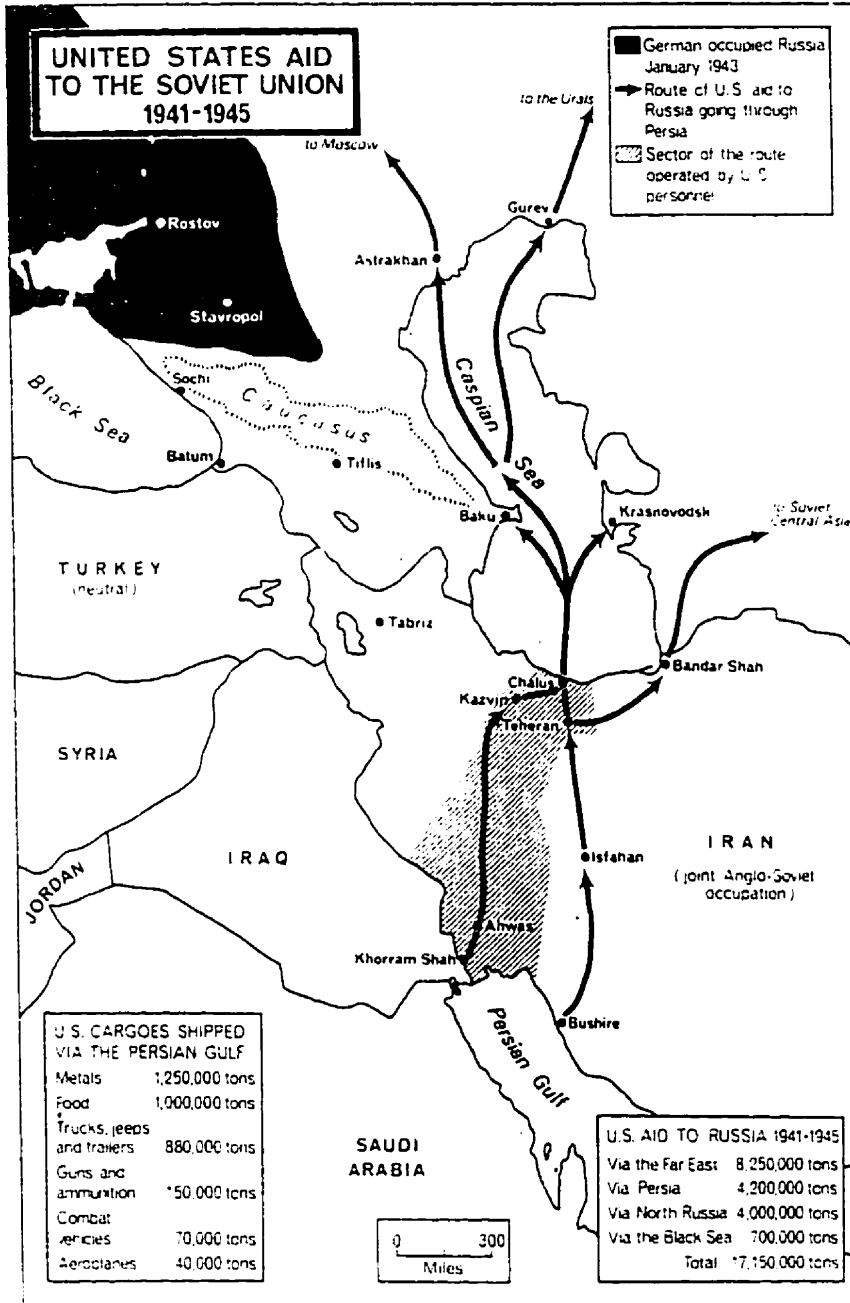
<sup>247</sup> Interview with Ernest (19 September 1998) 27-29.

<sup>248</sup> From the archives of A. Pawelek.



HAVE NOT YET CEASED I THANK YOU MOST SINCERELY FOR THIS GREAT HUMANITARIAN HELP WHICH PRAY GOD WILL ARRIVE IN TIME TO ALLEVIATE THEIR PITIFUL PLIGHT STOP SIGNED EDWARD RACZYNSKI UNQUOTE<sup>249</sup>

In the latter part of 1941, an informal committee made up of representatives from the



Polish Consulate, including Victor Podoski, Polish Consul General in Ottawa, Mrs. H. P. Plumptre, [Canadian Red Cross], Mrs. Angas [Imperial Order of Daughters of the Empire (I.O.D.E.)], Miss Sutherland [Canadian Friends of Poland], and various government officials, including representatives from the War Services Department and External Affairs, met to co-ordinate the collection. shipment, and

Map 11 - American Aid to the Soviet Union 1941 - 1945<sup>250</sup>

<sup>249</sup> NAC RG-25/G-1. vol. 1995. file 1206. pt. 1. Canadian Marconi Marconigram: 17 October 1941.

<sup>250</sup> Martin Gilbert. *Russian History Atlas* (NY: Macmillan Company, 1972) 120.

financing of relief supplies to the Polish refugees.<sup>251</sup> Their commitment to provide aid to the Poles continued through 1942 and into 1943.

Parallel to the military aid the Allies provided Stalin, a mammoth relief infrastructure was created for the wasted Polish soldiers and their families. As military aid traveled into the Soviet interior via the Caspian Sea, the Polish evacuees fled along the same routes, outward, encountering various recruitment centres and/or tent cities where they received medical and other aid. [see Map 11]

The relief infrastructure was managed by Polish officials, Roman Catholic clergy [including financial support from Rome], the International Refugee Organization [IRO; predecessor to the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA)], the International Red Cross [including the Canadian Red Cross],<sup>252</sup> the Polish-American Relief Organization, the American Federation for Polish Jews, and British, Polish, and American military and civilian personnel and volunteers. Funding and other forms of aid—clothing, medical supplies, food—for the Poles were provided by these and a variety of other sources; but, far-and-away, the greatest aid came from North America,<sup>253</sup> including, especially, from American *Polonia* that at the time self-identified as the “fourth province of Poland.”<sup>254</sup> Furthermore, Polish men who enlisted in the Polish Second Corps in the Middle East signed an agreement that allowed for deduction of half their meager wages which was then transferred for the maintenance of the civilian refugee population living throughout the Middle East, India, British Africa as well as orphans sent to Mexico, Australia and New Zealand.<sup>255</sup>

Polish-Soviet relations, though tense from the outset of the negotiations and signing of the Polish-Russian military agreement, rapidly deteriorated. While diplomatic communications

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<sup>251</sup> NAC RG-25/G-1, vol. 1995, file 1206, pt. 1. “Shipment of Clothing Etc. to Polish Refugees in Russia” Meeting Minutes; 10 December 1941.

<sup>252</sup> NAC RG-25/G-1, vol. 1995, file 1206 pt. 1.

<sup>253</sup> Keith Sword, *Deportation and Exile: Poles in the Soviet Union, 1939-48*. (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1994) 96; and Michael Hope in *Polish Deportees in the Soviet Union: Origins of Post-War Settlement in Great Britain*. (London: Veritas Foundation Publication Centre, 1998). Sword especially considers the challenges of raising funds and obtaining and transporting supplies during wartime conditions both for military and civilian aid.

<sup>254</sup> Lopata in Frank Renkiewicz, ed. *The Polish Presence in Canada and America*. (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1982) 278.

<sup>255</sup> Interview with Kazimierz (04 March 1995) 11.

were maintained through July 1941 to April 1943, recruitment of Polish men—and subsequent provision of aid to their families—ran a short fifteen months: October 1941 to January 1943.

Indeed, *official* cooperation lasted only until February, 1942, for already, Polish officials were aware *amnesty* details were being withheld from the Poles as well many more were prevented from leaving the camps. Polish diplomatic enquiries were met with impatient dismissal. Mistrust grew as thousands of Polish officers and soldiers remained unaccounted for with no feasible explanations for their absence forthcoming [until their bodies were found at Katyn, April 1943, by invading Germans].

By spring 1942, Stalin advised he could no longer provide rations for the Polish Army [it was clear from the outset the Soviets had no intention of providing relief to civilians]. Further, Soviet officials [from the diplomatic corps down through to camp administrators] made it increasingly difficult for the Poles to leave. Thus, Polish officials resolved to evacuate the masses who had concentrated in Soviet Central Asia. They traveled by train to Krasnovodsk, a large port city on the Caspian Sea, and then by boat to Pahlevi. [See Map 9] The first evacuation began in late March when, over two weeks 33,039 military personnel and 10,789 civilians were transported. A second, and the last, mass evacuation of 44,832 military personnel and 25,437 civilians followed in August 1942.<sup>256</sup>

Then, in a September 1942 *Aide-Memoire* from the Polish Embassy in Kuybyshev to the [Soviet] People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, an impassioned plea was made for the improved care of Polish children [including orphans] still on Russian soil as well the Polish Embassy petitioned for permission to evacuate "a certain number of Polish children." For, as stated in the communiqué:

In view of the methods applied by Hitlerite Germany which... is endeavoring to destroy the youth of Poland, every Polish child outside the homeland and especially in Allied and friendly countries is of priceless value to the future of the Polish nation.<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> Michael Hope. Polish Deportees in the Soviet Union: Origins of Post-War Settlement in Great Britain. (London: Veritas Foundation Publication Centre, 1998) 40-41.

<sup>257</sup> NAC MG-31, D68, vol. 10, pt. of file Polish-Soviet Relations 1918-1943 Confidential Official Documents, (Polish Embassy in Washington) 196.  
*Helena Bajorek MacDonald*

The entreaty failed to stimulate either sympathy or action.

In February 1943, Stalin declared all Poles, Jews, and Ukrainians on Soviet soil Soviet citizens as well all non-Poles residing in Poland's [1939] eastern provinces. The last small straggling groups of fleeing Poles left Russian soil, without the benefit of an evacuation infrastructure, in the summer of 1943.

In his memoirs, General Władysław Anders observed:

From what happened later I am sure that if we had not left Russia in 1942, we should never have been able to do so, and that the Polish soldiers in my army [and their families] would have been sent back to concentration camps.<sup>258</sup>

Then, in April 1943, Germany announced the discovery of the mass graves at Katyn. Already strained diplomatic Polish-Russian relations came to a halt. In mid-1943, some months after Soviet authorities closed the doors to the Poles, Victor Podoski wrote an "earnest appeal" to J. L. Ilsley, Minister of Finance, pleading for reassignment of Canadian Red Cross financial aid of \$150,000.00 to non-military purposes. Podoski emphasized the needs of young children and nursing mothers in occupied Poland, the Polish evacuees located in Iran and British East Africa, and those stranded in the Soviet Union. Podoski reminded Ilsley of the extent of American contributions of food, clothing, and medicine amounting to \$15 million. Further, he noted the U.S.-based Lehman Committee allocated \$1.5 million for the evacuation and resettlement in Mexico of 700 Polish children, women, elderly and disabled men.<sup>259</sup>

One organization that particularly stands out in the memories of study participants is the Canadian Red Cross; whether or not the family heirloom is a *Gift of the Canadian Red Cross Society*. Several remarked that to this day—despite the 1990's *blood scandal*—they are regular financial donors. Indeed, it is one of the few non-Polish organizations that most often garners their support.

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To prevent further spreading of disease, delousing stations were established. At their

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<sup>258</sup> Lt.-General Władysław Anders. *An Army in Exile* (London: MacMillan & Co. Ltd., 1949) 102.

<sup>259</sup> NAC RG-25/G-1, vol. 1995, file 1206 pt. 1. Correspondence; Podoski to Ilsley, 15 July 1943.

peak, 4000 individuals passed through each day. All personal possessions and clothing were burned. Soon-to-be soldiers were enlisted to staff the delousing stations. Others worked shifts digging mass graves and filling them with dead Poles, Jews, and Ukrainians.

Keith Sword describes reluctance among the evacuees to part with their few worldly possessions.<sup>260</sup> For Wanda, it was the final episode in a nightmare of indignity, displacement and loss, for the family's meager possessions were all that remained as reminders of home. Pillows and blankets, then, become symbolic representations of the essence of home, family and peace:

There was American... organization which has some used clothing for us, and strip us from our things, what we have it, and put us in the [delousing] showers. [whispering] And I get from the shower, and I see our things are burning... I said "We are letting that burn?!", and I save two feather pillows and one comforter. The rest, I was too late... But, they didn't cut my hair... only my sister.<sup>261</sup>

Feliks, himself a Polish deportee who had enlisted in the Polish Army, describes his first 'soldierly' task as delousing personnel:

[O]ne lucky day... put me over for work. Cut women hair. Cut short. Cut everywhere. Then, wash [naked bodies] special green paint. From bottom to top... cut, paint, wash... eyes... I see women cry. I said, "Close your eyes. Don't worry, I'm not going to do something to you."... Paint, wash, dry, and given them to the clothes [and] ship 'em to Africa.... English clothes.... oh... [and] corned beef.<sup>262</sup>

One might draw a parallel between the scene and that of sheep bleating while shorn before being shipped to market. Feliks also volunteered for the gruesome task of gravedigger; for extra food, he says. "I remember one trench I put sixty dead. Just grab by leg, by hand. Threw 'em. Died from hungry, I guess. Polish. Jews. Children. Women. And they have, those Uzbeks, people cry, if you die. [mourners] They cry like a jackal. No priest." For despite the delousing stations, masses of the emaciated Poles died from the effects of starvation, dysentery, typhus and other illness and disease.

Ryszard recalls his encounter with death at age eleven at the recruitment centre:

[P]eople started to die... I remember, streets were... they were putting the

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<sup>260</sup> Keith Sword. *Deportation and Exile: Poles in the Soviet Union, 1939-48*. (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1994) 70-71.

<sup>261</sup> Interview with Wanda (22 March 1995) 14.

<sup>262</sup> Interview with Feliks (28 November 1998) 11-13.

corpses on the side of the road, you know. And army trucks were coming and throwing the corpses on the trucks and taking them to the burial places... then my mother, she got sick... typhus. And my sister and my brother, so I was left alone... I had no place and I lived on the streets. So, how I survived... I was stealing anything I could. I got caught. I got beat up. And, eventually, I got typhus fever too. So there was nobody to turn to. Nobody to look after [me]. So, I sort of give up. I sort of passed out on the street. And the next thing I knew, I was in an army truck and taken to a compound they had. It was in the desert and reminds me, like from the old Polish movies, you know, where the tartars attack and they have those... how you say in English? a fortress, yeah, yeah. It was built with solid walls. And they brought us in there and just unload, throw us out. I still had enough strength and I crawled and... I can remember... I crawled and I opened the doors and I see... this is the scene that stays with me forever... corpses wrapped in the sheets right up to the ceiling. When I saw that, then I realized what... why they brought me here.... So, I said, "No way! I'm not gonna give up!" So, I crawled... I went to the other side of the walls and I was picked up again, by the Polish Army... they asked me questions... they took me to the army hospital... when they found out I was orphaned, this is where they put me in the army already. [reference to *junaks*].<sup>263</sup>

Eventually, Ryszard was reunited with his mother, brother and sister, and all four were transported to the Koja settlement in Uganda.

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Once survivors received medical care and their strength was built up, able-bodied males and some women were conscripted into the Army or, for some boys and girls, into pre-military training with the *junaks* and *młodsze ochotniczki*. Widows and other adult females were encouraged to join the Red Cross, to care for children or the elderly, to work as seamstresses and/or in food preparation for the military, or to enter into some form of military training as nurses or supply truck drivers learning also to do small mechanical repairs. The women of the Women's Auxiliary Corps, or PSK, wore such peculiar uniforms they were dubbed "penguins".<sup>264</sup>

Elderly [predominantly widows] and women with small children were settled in various refugee camps, first in India, then in British East Africa where their various domestic skills and trades were employed: sewing, cooking, cleaning, carpentry, and cobbling. Children—many virtually illiterate—resumed their education in Polish language for there was overriding concern for both inadequate and missed educational opportunities during the two-year exile period; or, worse,

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<sup>263</sup> Interview with Ryszard (06 March 1995) 10.

<sup>264</sup> Margaret Brodniewicz-Stawicki. For Your Freedom and Ours. (St. Catharines, Vanwell Publishing Limited, 1999) 167-178.

of Russification. They were taught by Polish teachers and/or Polish priests, themselves deportees.

Orphaned children were placed in the care of Polish nuns in one of twenty-one boarding schools/orphanages, situated

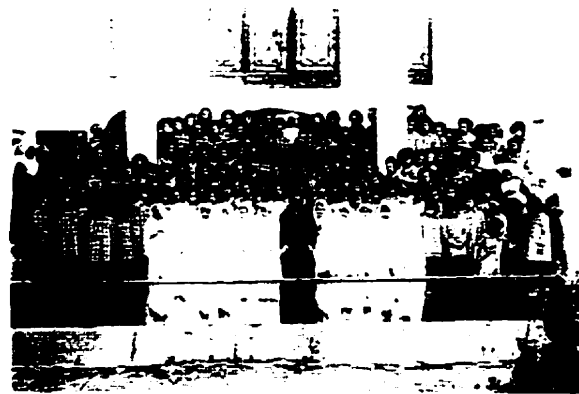


Fig. 9 - First Holy Communion: Sisters of Charity, Isfahan, 1942<sup>265</sup>

at such sites as former mosques located in the ancient Persian City, Isfahan. [see Map 11] Here, the children not only resumed their studies

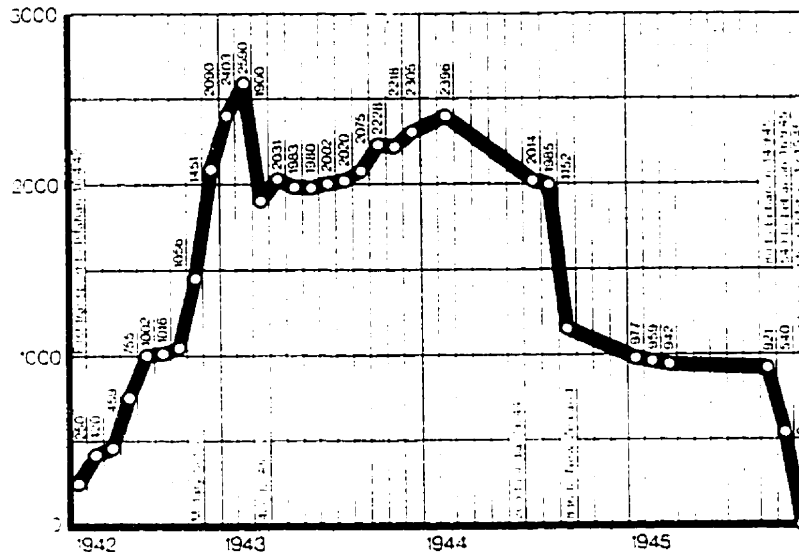


Fig. 10 - Polish Population in Isfahan 1942-1945<sup>267</sup>

in the Polish language, they also were re-acquainted with Roman Catholic religious practices, as well received physical, mental and spiritual healing.<sup>268</sup>

In 1943, the numbers of orphaned Polish children in the care of Isfahan

orphanages peaked at over 2,500. Irena, who recalled terrible conditions and ill treatment of Polish children such as herself in Russian *diet dom*, describes her time at age sixteen in the orphanage in Isfahan as a "wonderful... home away from home. [T]here were nuns... and the teachers were great."<sup>268</sup>

As soon as they were able, the fleeing Poles were asked to provide testimonies of their

<sup>265</sup> From the archives of S. Przybylowski.

<sup>266</sup> Irena Beaupre-Stankiewicz et al. eds. *Isfahan: City of Polish Children*. (Sussex: Association of Former Pupils of Polish Schools, 1989; 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.)

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*, 127

<sup>268</sup> Interview with Irena (06 February 1999), 25.

experiences. Over 20,000 interview transcripts as well as about 2,300 written and visual compositions produced by children were collected and preserved in various archival collections; including the Ambasad (USSR) Collection at the Hoover Institution in the United States.<sup>269</sup> It is from the large body of children's compositions that Irena Grudzinska-Gross and Jan Tomasz Gross drew material for their affecting text, War Through Children's Eyes, which compositions they assert "constitute a unique historical, sociological, and literary document... [which] are micro-history as told by young and perspicacious authors."<sup>270</sup> The children's compositions are, for the most part, written in the simple language [a kind of oral representation] of children who lacked adequate literacy or composition skills using "a strangely attractive mixture of Polish, Polish dialects, and Russian."<sup>271</sup> This relates, in large measure, to their socio-economic origins in Poland before deportation for most were born to small land-holding farm families with simple means and simple lives.

The children describe the deportation boxcars as coffins or tombs where wailing cries of women echoed. They equate their treatment by camp officials as worse than that of dogs. Food is described as not fit for dogs. Fear, death, hunger, loneliness are portrayed in stark simplicity. All similar to the narratives shared by these now-grown survivors who, even as adults, continue to suffer the anguish of suffering and, especially, of loss. Some of the compositions are written in the language of poets:

Compensation was so poor that what we got was used up in a few weeks, and then began slow death from hunger and cold. In the huts with snow up to the roof and with no heat provided at all and neither with warm clothes nor with food we awaited the deliverance of death. And it came more and more often taking the weakest. We prayed for them and we envied them. In every family it took someone, leaving the others in the hut swelling with frozen limbs. When hunger reached its greatest pitch and it seemed that no one would live to see the spring, they tossed several kilograms of grain to us like dogs to stay vanishing life a few more days. Spring came and communications were opened again with our "sales outlet" and a few more things were sold, the last pillow pulled from under the head of a sick child and taken to the bazaar and we begin to come back to life again. I say

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<sup>269</sup> Irena Grudzinska-Gross and Jan Tomasz Gross. War Through Children's Eyes. (Stanford: Stanford University, Hoover Institution Press, 1985).

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, xxvii.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, xxvii.



come back to life: because all winter we sat like badgers in a burrow, dying and in total consciousness staring approaching death straight in the face.<sup>272</sup>

Particularly heart wrenching are the segments naming the dead, especially of family, and the lists of names of those left behind. For instance, Adam R. concludes his composition thus:

Of the families who were with us in the same kolkhoz the following died: the whole Woloszyn family, i.e., father, mother, and two grown sons, in the Worotylek family (Ukrainians) six people died, fate spared an 8-year-old girl Hela, whom the Polish government agency took care of later, in the Misiewicz family the father and seventeen-year-old Franek died. My father went off looking for mushrooms and the Uzbeks killed him only because he had new Polish boots on. Mama died leaving me and four sisters in the kolkhoz. All these disagreeable and very painful memories bind me to the "Soviet paradise."<sup>273</sup>

Grudzinska and Gross argue few of the children's writings reveal signs of serious psychological or emotional disturbance, despite their experiences with death, starvation, and deprivation and that, perhaps, those unable to meet or resist such conditions and hardships simply perished. For the remainder, they suggest survival is linked with "powerful allies: family, religion, and patriotism."<sup>274</sup> While evidence among those who contributed their memories to this study bears this out, it is not easily cut-and-dried; for, while they survived, siblings, parents and grandparents who shared similar value systems and familial bonding did not. Further, there are among this small group of study participants cases of mental and emotional breakdowns in adult life; yet, no definitive analysis has been undertaken which investigates potential links to their childhood experiences. However, there is little doubt faith and family and patriotic vigor provided, and for most remained, steadfast foundations of the majority's lifelong adherence to their personal sense and outward expression of *Polishness*.

Katherine R. Jolluck encapsulates the explicit purpose of the documentation project: that the testimonies of the Polish survivors of forced deportation and exile in Soviet labour camps would expose the "true nature of the Soviet system to the Western world, which had entered into an alliance with the Soviet leaders."<sup>275</sup> Yet, the Allies would, at war's end, again sit at the table

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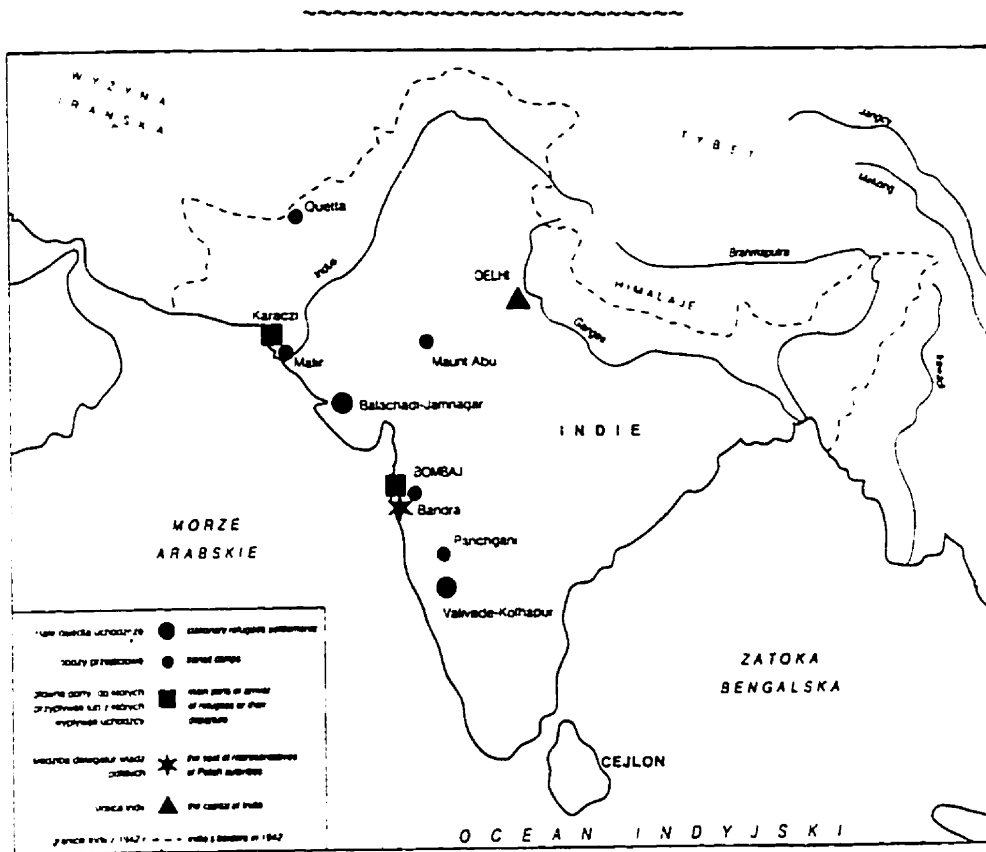
<sup>272</sup> Irena Grudzinska-Gross and Jan Tomasz Gross. War Through Children's Eyes. (Stanford: Stanford University, Hoover Institution Press, 1985) 76.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*, xxviii.

<sup>275</sup> Katherine R. Jolluck. Gender, Identity and the Polish Experience of War, 1939-1945. (Stanford University: Doctoral Helen Bajorek MacDonald

with Stalin and carve up Poland: virtually ignoring all the Poles suffered for their freedom.



Map 12 - Polish Settlements in India 1942 - 1947<sup>276</sup>

The exhaustive efforts expended by the British government to find countries that would take in the Poles had yet to net results. All, including Canada and the United States, "were either hostile to the idea or else hedged their offers with such conditions that they proved impracticable."<sup>277</sup> Finally, in June 1942, an agreement was made between the British government and a few East African governments that they would permit temporary settlement of the Poles until they could be repatriated. The twenty-two camps, housing 19,000 Poles most of whom were members of small land-holding farm families from Poland's eastern borderlands, remained in operation until 1950.<sup>278</sup> The Mexican government agreed to take several thousand Poles, and a

Dissertation, 1995) 583.

<sup>276</sup> *Exiled Children*. (Warsaw: Photographic Archives of Exiles Foundation, 1995) 81.

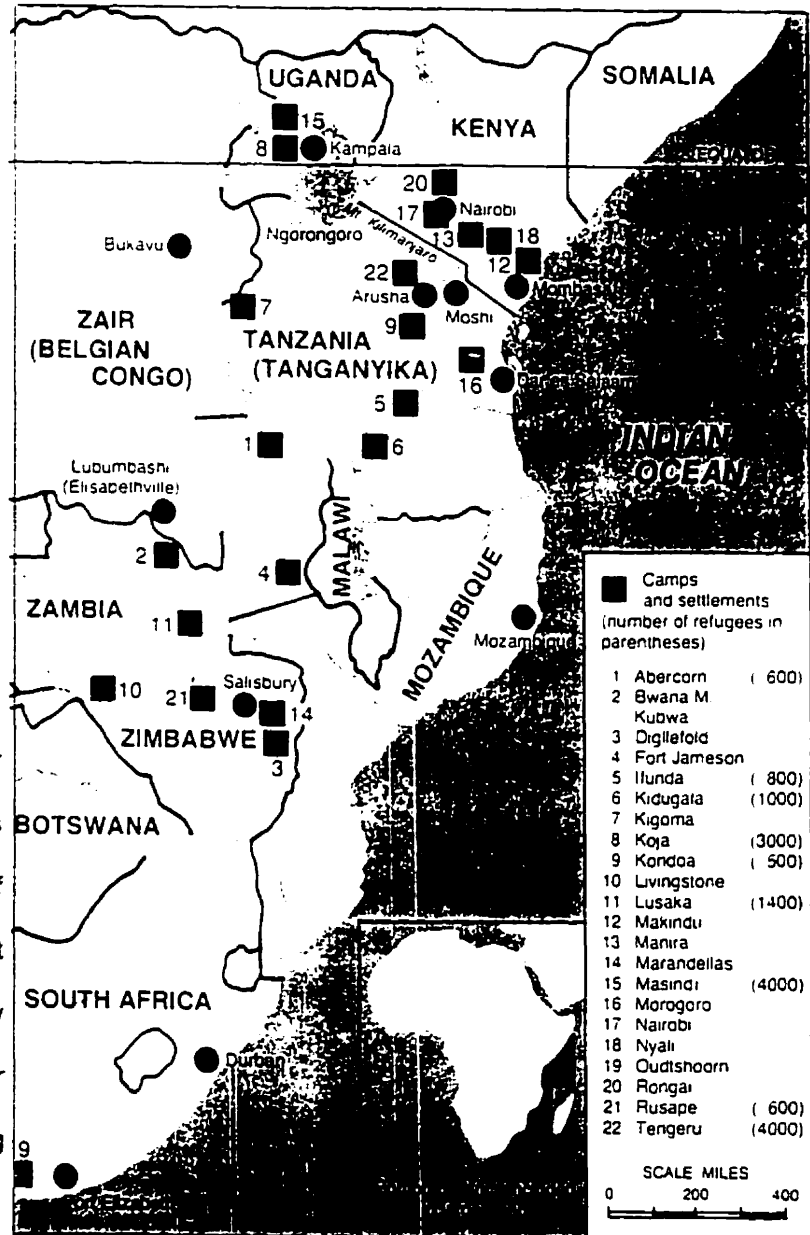
<sup>277</sup> Ketih Sword, *Deportation and Exile: Poles in the Soviet Union, 1939-48*. (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1994) 84.

<sup>278</sup> Lucjan Krolkowski, *Stolen Childhood*. (Buffalo: Father Justin Rosary Hour, 1983) 85.

few hundred university students traveled to Lebanon to resume their studies. New Zealand and Australia also eventually took in some numbers. The settlements in British Africa would further grow in 1947 after India achieved independence.

From exile under Soviet tutelage, the Poles became virtual wards of the Allies with Great Britain taking primary responsibility for their care, and for the training of the newly formed

Polish Second Corps.



Map 13 - Polish Refugee Settlements in British Africa 1942 - 1950<sup>279</sup>

There was order and purpose in their lives, despite the families had been separated. And, they were 'free'. Yet, there was sorrow. General Anders wrote in his memoirs:

We who left Soviet territory... numbered something under 115,000... But what about the rest of the one and a half million Poles the Russians had deported and detained? We considered that half of them had already died, their bones scattered over the vast spaces of the Soviet Republics. We who survived, had survived by a miracle. For us the summer of 1942 was the dawn of freedom. But we left behind us in Russia hundreds of

<sup>279</sup> Lucjan Krolkowski. *Stolen Childhood*. (Buffalo: Father Justin Rosary Hour, 1983).  
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thousands, and our hearts were heavy.<sup>280</sup>

Following training in the Middle East,<sup>281</sup> the men would take up arms to fight alongside their allied brethren for Poland and for all Europe. The remainder would wait out the war, building their strength and especially caring for the children; for the future of the nation had become a serious preoccupation of Polish authorities.

And still, mixed with sentiments of gratitude and sorrow, some quietly harbour bitterness for the price paid for their freedom. For at the close of the war, they found themselves without a home they could call theirs; thus, many refused repatriation in Communist Poland.

#### Anders' Army: Polish Second Corps

*There is a sound of arms, and we old men  
Rejoice that Poland's fame grows loud again,  
And once more the Republic will be free!  
For liberty springs from the laurel tree.*<sup>282</sup>

Following training and tours of duty which included security patrol of oil fields and refineries located throughout the Middle East, the majority of Polish soldiers of the Second Corps were mobilized and transported through late 1943, early 1944, to Italy; a place laden with Polish patriotic symbolism, as Adam Mickiewicz wrote of *Dąbrowski's March*, the Polish national anthem:

*...first was played in the Italian regions  
Upon the trumpets of the Polish legions*<sup>283</sup>

Thus, that Polish blood might be shed on Italian soil for Polish freedom—*Poland is not yet dead*—was not, for Poles, an unreasonable sacrifice. There was no question. For, in the Polish psyche, as well reinforced in Polish literature, that Poles would be called from the land to fight for Polish freedom was unquestionably a way of being. Mickiewicz continues:

*The thing which all men talk of, and which you  
Have heard so oft from me, at last is true!  
The war has started, brother, yes a war  
For Poland! Now we shall be Poles once more!*

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<sup>280</sup> Lt. General Władysław Anders. *An Army in Exile* (London: MacMillan & Co. Ltd., 1949) 116.

<sup>281</sup> The Middle East as discerned during WWII as a strategic "wide belt of countries ranging from Egypt to Iran" which was administered by the Americans, British and Free French as "a single military theatre for operational and supply purposes." Micheal Howard and Wm. Roger Louis. *The Oxford History of the Twentieth Century*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 253.

<sup>282</sup> Adam Mickiewicz. *Pan Tadeusz*. [trans. Kenneth MacKenzie] (London: Polish Cultural Foundation [3<sup>rd</sup> ed.], 1997) 28.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

...  
*And for my brother's sins I bear no blame,  
 I've done my duty and I've ploughed my plot.*  
 ...  
*But I'm a Pole and Poland I will aid,  
 And give my life. My swordmanship's not great*<sup>284</sup>

Others saw action in North Africa: some had previously been transported to England where they undertook training in such specific fields as translation services, or aircraft maintenance, navigation and operation; or, in the case of much lesser numbers of women, nursing.

The military contributions and sacrifices made by Polish men to the Allied war effort demand—and have received—substantial scholarly and popular attention. Even *Wojtek*, a brown Syrian bear—the Polish Second Corps' variation of *Winnie the Pooh*—that, as an orphaned cub, was rescued by two newly recruited Polish soldiers as they were evacuated from Russia through the mountains in Iran in 1942, has been the subject of a delightful intermediate children's novel. In *Soldier Bear*, the reader follows *Wojtek's* antics and roles as heavy labourer and morale-booster with the 22<sup>nd</sup> Company from the time of his rescue in 1942, through his contributions to the war effort in Italy, to his death in the Edinburgh Zoo in 1963.<sup>285</sup> So adored by the 22<sup>nd</sup> Company, a rendering of an upright [and sober] *Wojtek* carrying a large bombshell constitutes the Company insignia.



Fig 11 - *Wojtek*, Mascot of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Company, Polish Second Corps<sup>286</sup>

After a period of rudimentary schooling which was complimented with technical or mechanical training [in areas useful for military purposes] some among the ranks of the *junaki* took on such soldierly duties as messenger boys or communications technicians in Italy. For instance,

<sup>284</sup> Ibid., 270-274

<sup>285</sup> Geoffrey Morgan and W. A. Lasocki. *Soldier Bear* (London: Gryf Publications Ltd., 1970).

<sup>286</sup> From the archives of J. Dulinski.

Adam trained in Egypt with the *junaks* as a radio operator for the Signal Corps. He was then transported to Italy where, just a few months shy of age 17, he worked first as a radio operator, then was assigned the daring task of 'runner' delivering messages by motorcycle between military outfits.

He recalls his role:

Yeah, I used to run all over the place on that motorcycle. That was good. The only thing you have to be careful that you weren't exposed. Because usually this is who they tried to pick off, the snipers.<sup>287</sup>



Fig. 12 - Polish Message 'Runner'—Italy 1944<sup>288</sup>

The Polish Second Corps—numbering 120,000—made up the largest contingent of Polish troops consolidated during WWII. Of the 121,000 Polish troops that participated in the Italian campaign, 8,737—including 614 Officers—were wounded, including several among study participants. Nearly 4,000 are buried in designated Polish graveyards located at Monte Cassino, Casamassima, Loreto, Ancona, and Bologna.<sup>289</sup> [Map 14] Their sacrifices are memorialized in graveyard altars and battlefield monuments such as the cross erected over the cemetery at Monte Cassino. Constructed immediately after the battle from the wreckage of a tank in which the first Polish

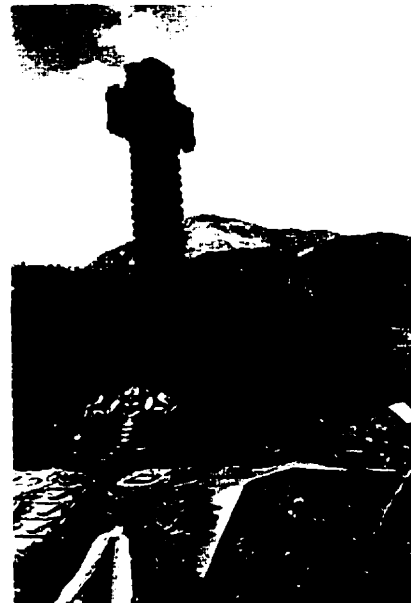


Fig. 13 - Monument over Monte Cassino<sup>290</sup>

<sup>287</sup> Interview with Adam (18 October 1998) 19

<sup>288</sup> From the archives of P. Sosin.

<sup>289</sup> Edward Soltys, *Road to Freedom* (Toronto: The Polish Combatants' Association in Canada Inc., 1997) 16

<sup>290</sup> From the archives of J. Kuropas.



of being, simply, Polish. Again, Adam Mickiewicz writes of the Polish condition in the 1830s, his epic poem remarkably germane a century later:

*A year I laboured in a Prussian jail,  
Once I was put on the Siberian trail,  
And thrice my back has felt the Russian truncheon;  
The Austrians later thrust me in the dungeon  
Of Spielberg where I toiled in vile duress—  
But God delivered me from my distress,  
And granted I should die among my kin  
And with the sacraments.<sup>293</sup>*

God, kin [*family* and *nation*], and the sacraments shape the sum and substance of all that the Poles would ask in life and in death. That these were denied in the Soviet labour camps reinforced the devotion to preservation of *Polishness*, even if that meant dying in a battle for Polish freedom on foreign soil or living in diaspora in self-imposed exile until Poland is Poland and not a Communist satellite.

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It is not surprising that those men and man-boys who came out of the Soviet experience recall their years of military service among the best of their lives. Plenty of food. Someone you trusted making the decisions. Just do as you're told, no responsibilities. Camaraderie in the company of brothers who spoke the same language and who prayed to the same God. If death came, it came with honour and the sacraments. And if you were wounded, what was a little late life back trouble, hearing impairment, or surfacing of shrapnel while shaving? It was all for your beloved Poland.

Whatever their training, however, most of the Polish servicemen who arrived in Canada after the war came with few 'marketable' employment skills resulting, for many, in lifelong employment in factory work. Thus, they contributed their labour to Canada's post-war industrial development.

Indeed, the criteria for Polish ex-soldiers to come to Canada under the British *Resettlement Act* targeted experienced agricultural labourers whose rudimentary knowledge of

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<sup>293</sup> Adam Mickiewicz. *Pan Tadeusz*. [trans. Kenneth MacKenzie] (London: Polish Cultural Foundation [3<sup>rd</sup> ed.], 1997) 475.



agricultural practices afforded entry on commitment to two-year agricultural labour contract. Department of Labour officials anticipated many would then work in mines or forestry or even on the land after completion of their contracts. Few did. [Further discussion to follow]

### The Yalta Agreement

The significance of various Allied agreements which determined the fate of Poland ought not be overlooked nor under-emphasized both in historical context and in terms of sociological impact upon Poles living in diaspora throughout Europe, British East Africa, and elsewhere. For all through the war, their one belief—one goal—was that, in fighting alongside the Allies, they were fighting both for the collective interests of freedom from Nazi and Soviet oppression as well that at the end of the day they would return to their homeland.

Agreements made at the *Yalta Conference* in February 1945, followed by *Potsdam* that summer, forever changed Poland. These followed the tone and direction of Allied discussions as set in *Teheran* in 1943 where “Roosevelt and Churchill had readily agreed with Stalin, and without any Polish representation whatsoever, to the existing annexation of the eastern half of Poland, with the frontier to correspond to the *Curzon Line*, originally proposed as an ethnic frontier... in 1919.”<sup>294</sup> [See Map 5] By the time the Allies met at Yalta, Poland’s fate was irreversible. Indeed, the Polish government-in-exile described the *Yalta Agreement* as the “Fifth partition of Poland, now accomplished by her Allies,”<sup>295</sup> making reference to the historic repetition of the shifting of Poland’s borders by parties other than Poles; the last, which Poland ignored, occurring in 1919, and delineated in the *Versailles Treaty*.

Furthermore, Churchill proposed Poland be shifted 150 miles westward; thus, Poland would be compensated with German territory, but more importantly, Stalin’s territorial demands for the eastern frontier were met, contributing to the clear delineation of eastern Europe under Soviet Communist domination. It was to the western regions that many exiled Poles would be

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<sup>294</sup> Michael Hope. Polish Deportees in the Soviet Union: Origins of Post-War Settlement in Great Britain. (London: Veritas Foundation Publication Centre, 1998) 47-48. Others make similar note: Anders, Davies, Fischer, Szkopiak, Ujam, et al.

<sup>295</sup> Michael Hope. Polish Deportees in the Soviet Union: Origins of Post-War Settlement in Great Britain. (London: Veritas Foundation Publication Centre, 1998) 50.  
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repatriated in post-war years that Polish sovereignty over the region—through colonization—would be assured.

Immediately thereafter, a Communist organization, the *Union of Polish Patriots*, was created by the Soviets.<sup>296</sup> It became the official rival—as puppet administration—to the Polish government-in-exile located in London, and by mid-1945, other nation-states withdrew recognition of the Polish government-in-exile. The then Polish Ambassador to the United States made the following comments in an official statement to the American government which adequately advances the sentiments of Poles displaced by the war; indeed, most of *Polonia*:<sup>297</sup>

Poland, represented by her legal Government, was never admitted to participate in discussions of Polish-Soviet relations. The conference at Teheran and Yalta are examples in point. The decisions concerning Poland must therefore be regarded by the Polish Nation as verdicts “in absentia”. No nation, no Government truly representative of its people, could ever accept decisions about their territory or system of government being taken without their participation.

The Polish people are deeply attached to their traditions of individual and national freedom. They will never cease to fight for these ideals. They will never sacrifice them as the price of agreement. They will never accept any system of government contrary to these principles and imposed upon them by any foreign power or group of Powers.<sup>298</sup>

Indeed, it remains a thorn among *Polonia* particularly that the Allies sold Poland out at *Yalta* in what Jozef Gula describes as “the absurd end of the Polish tragedy—thousands of friends lost, the loss of families, bloody battles, all their sacrifices had been in vain.”<sup>299</sup> For those living in diaspora outside Poland, there was little question of returning to a country governed by a foreign power in a manner altogether unacceptable; that is, they outright rejected Communism, particularly of the nature expounded by Stalin.

Of particular interest to this study was the Polish [Communist] government’s post-war efforts to repatriate all exiled and displaced Poles that the crushed and crumbled nation could be quickly rebuilt; for Poland’s population had fallen by about one-third of its 1939 figure to 23.9

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<sup>296</sup> Edward Soltys. *Road to Freedom*. (Toronto: The Polish Combatants’ Association in Canada Inc., 1997) 23.

<sup>297</sup> The term *Polonia* is an all-encompassing reference to Poles living outside Poland.

<sup>298</sup> Zygmunt C. Szkopiak. *The Yalta Agreements*. (London: Polish Government in Exile, 1986) 44.

<sup>299</sup> Jozef Gula. *The Roman Catholic Church in the History of the Polish Exiled Community in Great Britain*. (London: School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London, 1993) 131.

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million. Beyond the obvious shortage of workers that would contribute to the rebuilding of the nation, two other population groups suffered depletion in greater proportions: Polish intelligentsia and Polish Jewry<sup>300</sup>

However, the most prodigious repatriation efforts were concentrated on Polish children, for both Germany and Russia had depleted the Polish nation of millions of children: of Poland's future. Said efforts were played out noisily and aggressively on the international diplomatic theatre. And Canada would be a stage for the drama, in scandalous fashion. [More discussion in Chapter 6]

### Temporary Transplantation: The Polish Diaspora in British East Africa

What happened to the orphans, separated families, and those without a male head? Until war's end, women, children, the elderly and disabled men lived a virtual paradisiacal existence in tropical settlement camps located throughout Persia, India, British East Africa, New Zealand and Mexico, while their fathers, brothers, uncles, sons and husbands contributed heroically to the Allied war effort. Indeed, it was my father's beautifully embroidered photograph album that confused my understanding of his wartime experience and even of his pre-war life.



The photographic collections which study participants shared during the course of their interviews are a montage of the tourist's diary: smiling adolescents and young adults frolicking in tropical oceans, exploring ancient ruins, or posing modestly before scenic backdrops. All belie any hint

Fig. 14 - Mechanics School; Oudtshoorn, South Africa - C1947<sup>301</sup> of the misery of two years' exile in Soviet labour camps. Few have photographs from their childhood in Poland; for these could only—if at all—come from relatives who survived the war, many years later.

<sup>300</sup> Norman Davies, *God's Playground*, [Vol. 2] (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) 491.

<sup>301</sup> From the archives of J. Bajorek.



Fig. 15 - Polish Military Girl's School; Rehovoth, Palestine - 1943<sup>202</sup>



Fig. 16 - Nurses in Training, Egypt C1944<sup>203</sup>



Fig. 17 - Lebanon Cedar: C1948<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> From the archives of E. Kay

<sup>203</sup> Ibid

<sup>204</sup> From the archives of S. Przybyłowski.

During this seemingly extended 'vacation' period, children were engaged in intense programs of education, and religious [Roman Catholic] and cultural instruction; that is, all energies were directed primarily toward the preservation of *Polishness*. After all, they had lost over two years formal instruction and the children were the future of the Polish nation.

Domestic and skilled trades training were designed to prepare young adults for their future role[s] in rebuilding a nation ravaged by war: that young men and women would be conscientious workers who would contribute to the reconstruction of the nation and that young women would become good Polish mothers. Particular emphasis was placed on training in such fields as agriculture and mechanics, and in such skills as seamstress, teacher, bookkeeping, and household management.<sup>305</sup>

A Canadian Red Cross despatch dated June 1943 includes photographic compositions of the Poles engaged in various activities. Some of the captions are as follows: "*safe and happy these Polish children learn their reading, writing and arithmetic outdoors,*" and "*no one is idle at the camp, the women work in the fields, grow their own vegetables;*" and, finally, "*precious tools must be cared for and these Polish workmen know how to repair and keep them in good condition.*"<sup>306</sup> It astounds how eager, content and capable the Poles were despite their simple origins and their pitiful circumstance!

Study participants describe a carefree existence during which it was accepted that at war's end, they would return home: Poland. After *Yalta*, however, resistance to returning was widespread. Though uncertainty prevailed, for many there was no question of their returning to a Soviet puppet state. Though some did eventually return to Poland, most refused; thus, they remained, a Polish diaspora, for several years after the war. Many were eventually reunited with their military male family members, most in England. Others made their temporary homes permanent homelands. Yet others would be 'taken in' elsewhere; however, they remain a Polish diaspora.

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<sup>305</sup> For more detailed consideration of the post-evacuation lives of Polish refugees, see Lucjan Krolkowski, *Stolen Childhood* and Fundacja ARCHIWUM FOTOGRAFICZNE TUŁACZY, *Exiled Children*.

<sup>306</sup> From the archives of A. Pawelek.

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The Polish military and the International Red Cross became clearinghouses for correspondence from anxious Poles seeking lost relatives. At age seventeen, Halina was alone; but for her father who had sojourned to the United States prior to the outbreak of the war with the intent of bringing his family over after saving enough money, and a brother whose whereabouts were unknown to her. Thus, she was categorized as an orphan by Polish authorities on her evacuation from Russia. In late 1944, after regaining her health and strength, Halina was selected to travel with a group of 733 Polish children and 100 teaching/care-giving staff to an orphanage settlement established at Pahiatua, New Zealand. However, she asked to be excused from the group as she felt it more likely that she'd find her brother and father if she remained geographically closer to Polish centre of activity. Indeed, Krystyna Skwarko who traveled to Pahiatua as Principal of the boys' school notes in her memoirs others similarly reluctant.<sup>307</sup>

Already Halina had begun a hopeful letter-writing campaign in the Middle East that she continued on arriving in South Africa in 1944. She wrote to the International Red Cross seeking assistance in finding her brother. Meanwhile, ingrained in her memory was a mailing address in America and so she borrowed some money to buy a stamp and an envelope and wrote to her father at the remembered address. Unfortunately, he had died in 1942 after suffering a work-related injury in a munitions factory. The news was devastating:

My uncle wrote to me and he said that your father is dead and when he died... and he was happy to hear that I had survived and that I am in a safe place and I would be taken care of. And I remember him sending me 5 dollars and I felt like a millionaire. I had some money of my own (laughs). [But] you can imagine... When I got the news I cried and cried and cried and I thought my heart would break. And I said, "There goes my chance to see my father." ... So, and then a week later... I have received that letter that was traveling all over the world from my brother looking for me, finally the letter was directed from Iran... to East Africa to Kenya and they said to look in South Africa.<sup>308</sup>

Finally, there was someone. Halina recalls she was "crying and laughing and everything else at the same time.... I said, 'At least I'm not alone anymore.'" And still, she treasures the

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<sup>307</sup> Krystyna Skwarko. *The Invited*. (Wellington, New Zealand: Millwood Press, 1974).

<sup>308</sup> Interview with Halina (07 February 1999) 33-35.

envelope that carried the good news across continents: King George was *cancelled* in four countries!

There exist numerous memoirs written by survivors of the deportation experience; however, few comprehensive diaries or collections of letters exist. Members of one family maintained diaries and letters that yield details in the immediate, not as memory.

Janina Sułkowska Gładun (1914-1997) was imprisoned and tortured by the NKVD for being a member of the Polish underground. Many friends and family members also were deported to various labour camps throughout the Soviet Union. Early letters are written as to ghosts; inscribed with desperate hope that family members are alive and that their eyes would see them. Worry, details of hardship and suffering, questions, and profound affection commingled with heart wrenching longing for reunification fill the pages. Joy is tempered by sadness. Despair by hope.<sup>309</sup>

### The Polish Diaspora

Although this is not a comprehensive study of the Polish *diaspora*<sup>310</sup> per se, it is necessary to wade into diaspora thought recognizing that beyond this brief consideration there exist broad questions and challenges in the contemporary debate among scholars that attempts to articulate *diaspora*. On the most basic level, one historian cautions:

I think the concept of diaspora is one that should be approached with a fair degree of skepticism, as well as with an appreciation of its potential robustness.<sup>311</sup>

It is the robustness of the term and of the Polish diaspora that have drawn into this study a consideration of diaspora. As the term applies to the Polish question: as the nation-state has waxed and waned on the map, so too has the Polish *diaspora* waxed and waned.<sup>312</sup> And with

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<sup>309</sup> Chris Gładun. *Sułkowski-Gładun Letters* (unpublished) [1939 (date of deportation) to 1960s (early Canadian Life)].

<sup>310</sup> *Diaspora* from the Greek verb *speiro* (to sow) and preposition *dia* (over). Robin Cohen. *Global diasporas*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997) ix.

<sup>311</sup> Donald Harman Akenson. "The Historiography of English-Speaking Canada and the Concept of Diaspora: A Skeptical Appreciation" in *The Canadian Historical Review*. 76-3, September 1995. 378.

<sup>312</sup> "[S]ocieties may wax and wane in diasporism, depending on changing possibilities.... And a shared, ongoing history of displacement, suffering, adaptation, or resistance may be as important as the projections of a specific origin." James Clifford. "Diasporas" in *Cultural Anthropology*. Vol. 9, No. 3 (August 1994) (Virginia: American Anthropology Association) 306.

particular regard for study participants who emerged from a distinctive nationalistic era in Polish history as well from the ethno-mythic crucible of the deportation/exile experience, the post-WWII Polish diaspora is on the wane for they are ageing and dying. And the world, as their beloved Poland, has so dramatically changed since 1939 that the relationship of *Polonia* to/with Poland also is changed.

William Safran has observed that "'diaspora' and, more specifically, 'diaspora community' seem increasingly to be used as metaphoric designations for several categories of people—expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants, and ethnic and racial minorities *tout court*,"<sup>313</sup> all such designations applying to "that segment of a people living outside the homeland."<sup>314</sup> James Clifford would add to the list: "guest-worker, exile community, and overseas community,"<sup>315</sup> all applying to the Poles who make up this study—*Sybiraki*—on their arrival in Canada as a group which identifies with Polish history and mythos, whose members chose self-imposed exile, and which group came to Canada on labour contract. As he plainly notes: "[d]iasporic populations do not come from elsewhere in the same way that 'immigrants' do."<sup>316</sup>

Study participants came to Canada as virtual guest workers, and only after their labour obligations were fulfilled could they apply for citizenship. Many believed their stay in Canada to be temporary, and even after realizing Canada had become 'home', they didn't perceive themselves to be typical immigrants. Furthermore, they were particularly committed to maintaining their *Polishness* through community solidarity, never fully abandoning the homeland. Some Canadians responded to this solidarity and steadfast adherence to *Polishness* through expression of anti-Polish, anti-Roman Catholic sentiments. This reaction can be linked to reinforcement of feelings of isolation within Canadian society among some of the Poles who then

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<sup>313</sup> William Safran. "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return" in *Diaspora*. Vol. 1, No. 1 (Spring 1991). (New York: Oxford University Press) 83-99.

<sup>314</sup> Walker Connor qtd. in William Safran. "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return" in *Diaspora*. Vol. 1, No. 1 (Spring 1991). (New York: Oxford University Press) 83-99.

<sup>315</sup> James Clifford. "Diasporas" in *Cultural Anthropology*. Vol. 9, No. 3 (August 1994) (Virginia: American Anthropology Association) 303.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, 307.



responded by living in Canada more comfortably and more dynamically *within* the Polish diaspora.

Parallels can be found in other so-called opportunistic diasporic communities,<sup>317</sup> though the *Sybiraki* found or made opportunity only after they were forcibly dispersed from the homeland to be scattered hither and yon during and after WWII. For instance, the Sikh diaspora made up of Sikhs who migrated by choice from the Punjab throughout the world, primarily to British colonies including through British East Africa, share with the Poles similarities in movement, but not in basis, has also been seen to similarly maintain "a strong commitment to religious and ethnic reconstruction."<sup>318</sup> There arise, however, disparities, the most notable distinguished by racialized friction. Poles who chose to assimilate more easily did so. As Roger Ballard observes, however, the Sikh in Bradford, England, for instance, can be isolated by the host society, pushed to the margins and thus remain a 'citizen' of the diaspora whether or not s/he chooses.

Robin Cohen explores various states of diaspora that he proposes frame the following typologies: victim, labour, trade, imperial and cultural. His exploration is grounded in William Safran's key characteristics of diasporas, to which he adds some complimentary modifications; thus, the following common features characterize, when more than a few are aligned, diaspora, most applying to the Polish group of this study.<sup>319</sup>

- they, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from an original homeland, often traumatically;
- alternatively, expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions;
- they retain a collective memory, vision or myth about their homeland including its location, history and achievements;
- an idealization of the putative ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation;
- the development of a return movement;
- a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history and the belief in a common fate;
- a troubled relationship with host societies and so may remain partly separate;

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<sup>317</sup> Donald Harman Akenson. "The Historiography of English-Speaking Canada and the Concept of Diaspora: A Skeptical Appreciation" in *The Canadian Historical Review*. 76-3, September 1995. 381.

<sup>318</sup> Roger Ballard, ed. *Desh Pardesh: The South Asian Presence in Britain*. (London: C. Hurst & Co. Pub., 1994) 23.

<sup>319</sup> Robin Cohen. *Global diasporas*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997) 26, 180. See also William Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return" in *Diaspora*. Vol. 1, No. 1 (Spring 1991). (New York: Oxford University Press) 83-99.

- they continue in various ways to relate to that homeland and their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity are in an important way defined by the existence of such a relationship, and;
- the possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in tolerant host countries.

Further, Robin Cohen notes preponderance among the above diaspora characteristics of distinct links to, and maintenance of relationship between, the diasporic group and the homeland.

Key to his interpretation is that:

[D]ispersal from an original centre is often accompanied by the memory of a single traumatic event that provides the folk memory of the great historic injustice that binds the group together... also, to allow the case of not only the "maintenance or restoration" of a homeland, but also its very creation. This will cover the case of an "imagined homeland" that only resembles the original history and geography of the diaspora's natality in the remotest way.<sup>320</sup>

Adding his voice to the discussion, James Clifford writes:

Diasporas usually presuppose longer distances and a separation more like exile: a constitutive taboo on return, or its postponement to a remote future. Diasporas also connect multiple communities of a dispersed population... [and] predicaments denoted by the terms *border* and *diaspora* bleed into one another.... [D]iasporic forms of longing, memory and (dis)identification are shared by a broad spectrum of minority and migrant populations.<sup>321</sup>

For the Poles who are the subject of this study, the diasporic identification connects each generation since 1768 to the memory of trauma and injustice experienced through deportation and exile in the Siberian hinterland, as well to a longing for the ancestral homeland to return to its distinct preeminence as the Polish Republic of the pre-1795 period. And the trauma of deportation and exile during WWII which followed the intense interwar period of Polish nationalism—the Second Republic—reinforced their ethno-cultural/religious self-identification so tenaciously as to result, for many after the war, in choosing exile over return to a homeland which they perceived to not be home. Furthermore, they developed an intense resolve to maintain and preserve Polish culture for the day it could be restored to Poland when once again independent.

In his exploration of the origins of the term *diaspora* Robin Cohen also is mindful of the ancient Greek application as reference to migration and colonization. However, the term has

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<sup>320</sup> Robin Cohen. *Global diasporas*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997) 23.

<sup>321</sup> James Clifford. "Diasporas" in *Cultural Anthropology*. Vol. 9, No. 3 (August 1994) (Virginia: American Anthropology Association) 304.

taken on particularly potent meanings when applied to a collective trauma through banishment, where one but dreams of home while living in exile. The Jewish diaspora prevails as the benchmark conceptualization in our understanding of the term. But, he asks, “must notions of diaspora remain confined to the victim tradition? And... how do we transcend the Jewish tradition?”<sup>322</sup> Ergo, his exploration of five distinct typologies within the context of certain diasporas; for example, Indians under British colonialism: labour diaspora.

Though Robin Cohen examines forced migrations and exile from the homeland of various groups that he proposes as analogous to the Jewish victim tradition—e.g. African slave trade, Irish potato famine and Armenian displacement in Turkey—there is no mention of the forced migrations and exile of numerous distinct populations in labour camps or on *kolkhozes* under either Tsarist rule or Soviet totalitarianism, whether of Poles or other groups. For even the Poles deported to Siberian exile through 1939-41 met Poles, Ukrainians, Chechens, Jews and others from previous waves of deportation, many who remain to this day. And, within the collective Polish memory the deportation/exile experience was/is manifest as myth for stories of previous deportations were passed down as innate oral heritage from generation to generation—*they were taken...she died over there...only one came back*—thus reinforcing the folkloric cosmos within the collective Polish consciousness; what Robin Cohen terms the “ethnocommunal consciousness”.

William Safran briefly explores the Polish *diaspora* of the partitions era [1795-1918], especially as it compares to the Jewish and Armenian diasporas; the latter having lost the bordered definition of a nation-state, also having similarly encountered Soviet chauvinism up until the era of *glasnost*, as well having been influenced by the Roman Catholic Church/faith. He explores the role of the Church during the partitions—within a quasi Polish diaspora—in preserving Polish language, culture, and religion [Roman Catholic]. Furthermore, he designates a genuine diaspora among those Poles who chose to live in what they believed would be temporary exile in France—as “fighting middlemen” in the service of the causes of the state<sup>323</sup>—between

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<sup>322</sup> Robin Cohen. *Global diasporas*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997) xi.

<sup>323</sup> William Safran. “Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return” in *Diaspora*. Vol. 1, No. 1 (Spring 1991). (New York: Oxford University Press) 83-99.

1830 and 1918 and, again, those who fled Poland between 1939 and 1944. But, he does not fully explore the question. Particularly in relation to the forced deportations, which are documented as early as 1768 with the most recent wave documented as taking place through 1946-53. He does, however, write:

The diasporic dimension of the Polish nation was illustrated in a saying that made the rounds during World War II to the effect that Poland was the largest country in the world: its government was in London, its army was in Italy, and its population was in Siberia.<sup>324</sup>

Despite awareness of the existence of the Polish population—which 1939-41 numbers are not negligible at 1.5 million!—exiled in Soviet labour camps and *kolkhozes*, William Safran, among others, ignores the historicity and the mythic implications and dimensions of the Polish deportation and exile experience which spans several generations. The same might be said about the Ukrainian diaspora that shares geo-political, historical and migratory patterns with Poles. That such ignorance prevails raises the question of diminishment. How has the simplification, or even disregard, by researchers, analysts, theorists, and so on, affected the survivors of the deportation/exile experience? Has lack of interest and discourse among writers and scholars been equated by survivors with invalidation of the experience? Thus, do the survivors feel abandoned outside the margins of documented experience with the result being a theoretical diaspora that reinforces the corporeal *Polonia* diaspora? These questions, and others, require broader analysis.

For instance, within the growing fields of scholarly inquiry and debate around theories which explore the culture of survivors within the contexts of *collective memory*,<sup>325</sup> *repressed memory*, *traumatic memory*, and so on, virtually no consideration is given the topic as it relates to the Poles. Nor do many researchers probe a Polish diaspora consciousness or questions related

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<sup>324</sup> William Safran. "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return" in *Diaspora*. Vol. 1, No. 1 (Spring 1991). (New York: Oxford University Press) 83-99.

<sup>325</sup> "Memory is life... It remains in permanent evolution.... History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer." Pierre Nora qtd. in Noa Gedi and Yigal Elam, "Collective Memory - What is It?", in *History and Memory*. (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1997) 47. One would begin with the work of Emile Durkheim, Maurice Halbwachs, Amos Funkenstein, and others, then more widely expand the scope of inquiry.

to the post-war global dispersal context.<sup>326</sup> Particularly with regard to the loss of “home”, as the Poles of the interwar period knew it, to Soviet Communist rule, or of the conditions [e.g. as migrant (displaced) proletariat breeders] and the character of the welcome of the Polish exiles in new homelands, and the aspiration[s] of and the role[s] played by *Polonia* as citizens in their new homelands. Aspects of these questions will be further explored in the following chapters but only within the limited scope of this study.

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Despite the fact that deportees were arbitrarily ‘granted’ Soviet citizenship, there have been many efforts by the Poles to preserve their language, and cultural and religious traditions both within the exiled community and from outside, when possible. There even exists a term for those still in exile: *kresy*.<sup>327</sup> Aid is provided for exiled Polish families situated in various regions of the former USSR, including Kazakhstan, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova and Lithuania, through the aid organization, *Rada Przyjaci Fundacji na Rzecz Pomocy Szkołom Polskim*—Friendly Aid Foundation for Assistance of Polish Education—which head office is ironically located on a street named Monte Cassino in Szczecin, Poland. Children’s books, in Polish language, as well as Polish dictionaries are particularly welcome.<sup>328</sup>

The *Canadian Polish Congress*, as other *Polonia* organizations, also provides aid to Poles still in the former Soviet Union. Funding has been directed to such projects as:

- financial aid for Polish education and hearing aids for children in Belarus;
- financial aid to Polish educational institutions in Lithuania;
- summer camp funding for Polish children in Ukraine;
- aid for immigration of Polish families from Kazakhstan to Poland;
- aid for invalid Polish ex-soldiers living in Argentina, Brazil, France, Germany, Italy and Poland.<sup>329</sup>

There further exists the solidifying group identification of Polish survivors of the Siberian

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<sup>326</sup> As at October 2000, yet to be released in Polish language by publisher Wydawnictwo Literackie, Poland: *Diaspora Polska*, Adam Walaszek, ed.; includes 40 chapters written on various aspects and themes of Polish diaspora.

<sup>327</sup> Literal translation for *kresy*: border; the confines of the country. In figurative terms, it characterizes confinement of Poles beyond Polish borders. More particularly, *kresy* are those Poles ‘annexed’ to the Soviet Union from the eastern borderlands after WWII. An argument might be made in applying the term to Poles ‘confined’ within Poland during the post-war era under Soviet Communist rule until the ascent of the Solidarity movement of the 1980s.

<sup>328</sup> “Announcements and Notes” in *Sarmatian Review*, Vol. XV, No. 3: September, 1995.

<sup>329</sup> Canadian Polish Congress, Charitable Foundation. [www.kpk.org/FC-KPK/kadencja96\\_98english.htm](http://www.kpk.org/FC-KPK/kadencja96_98english.htm).

deportation and exile experience in the term *Sybiraki*. Communication between *Sybiraki* living throughout the world is facilitated by *Związek Sybiraków* [Siberia Organization] that was established in 1918.<sup>330</sup> Members pay annual dues and can subscribe to a monthly magazine that is published in Poland. Two chapters of *Związek Sybiraków* are located in Poland: one in Warsaw, the other Wrocław. Three are located in the United States and one in Canada.

The mandate of *Związek Sybiraków* has been to foster communication between *Sybiraki* [particularly between the great numbers living outside Poland] and, through the latter half of this century, to petition successive Russian governments for compensation for loss of property due to forced deportations during WWII. Success has been limited. The Russian government has granted compensation to **only** those Poles who returned to Poland.

Political entreaties are further made to the governments of other nations. For instance, the *Związek Sybiraków w USA* [Siberian Society of USA], Illinois chapter, maintains an ongoing correspondence with the American President that appeals to the American government "as the world's human rights leader, to encourage Russia to finally resolve this issue." The *Związek Sybiraków w USA* makes particular note of the recognition and restitution advanced in favour of survivors of "German concentration camps... and for Japanese-Americans who were incarcerated" in the United States during WWII. Thus, the Siberian Society appeals for American diplomatic advocacy that encourages Russia to similarly "meet its moral obligation and responsibility to acknowledge this [deportation/exile/deaths] grave injustice. Moreover," writes Henryk Scigala, President of the Siberian Society, Illinois, "Russia should reimburse the remaining survivors and descendants for the great loss of life and property."<sup>331</sup>

In 1996, Scigala again wrote to the White House, pleading for attention to the matter. In part, "For Us, - the time is crucial. For ageing survivors, restitution and compensation for grievous loss of Stalin's oppression is very important. It is a matter of law and justice."<sup>332</sup>

Indeed, among study participants there is an overwhelming feeling of international

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<sup>330</sup> From the archives of J. Lasek.

<sup>331</sup> Henryk Scigala letter to President Bill Clinton, 15 April 1995. From the archives of J. Lasek.

<sup>332</sup> Henryk Scigala letter to Warren M. Christopher, Secretary of State; 21 August 1996. From the archives of J. Lasek.  
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ignorance of their experiences and the absence of justice as seen to have been done. It is a matter of particular consternation that no person or state was ever called to answer—including at the Nuremberg trials—for the deportation to forced labour camps of entire families where conditions were inhumane and where human rights were abused, or for the murders at Katyn. Further compounding and even confusing these frustrations is the fact that the Allies—which nations would later become host countries to many of the displaced Poles—are perceived to be complicit in the injustice inasmuch as there have been no demands forthcoming—ever—for accountability of Stalin and the Soviet government.

It doesn't go unnoticed that 'other groups' receive restitution and compensation for their losses and sufferings under similar circumstances, as noted by Henryk Scigala. In 1989, when Mikhail Gorbachev admitted to—not apologized for—the Katyn Massacre of Polish officers and soldiers, the civilian *Sybiraki* quietly noted their absence, still, from the record. Again, in April 2000, on the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the crime at Katyn, Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski laid a wreath at the *Tomb of the Unknown Soldier* located in Warsaw at Piłsudski Square to commemorate the murder of the Polish military personnel. In his tribute only a passing mention was made of "the fraternity of suffering" linking Poles to others who endured time "in the dreadful Gulag Archipelago."<sup>333</sup>

Yet, only 10 study participants, or 26%, would demand compensation; however, for some among this group the process is perceived to be "a hassle," not worth the fight. And it is not money that is desired. Rather, most would be satisfied with the return of lands to the family, or, have other ideas. For instance, my father's preference has always been that the lands be turned over to village use. I learned while visiting the village in Spring 2000 that the Ukrainian family relocated by the Red Army in 1940 from Lwów [now L'viv] to the Bajorek farm in Holoskowice came from dire circumstances and that they have lived off the land the past sixty years in conditions somewhat improved. No longer does my father consider compensation a matter of import. As he plainly said:

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<sup>333</sup> "President pays tribute to Katyn victims." [www.president.pl/news/newsarch.html](http://www.president.pl/news/newsarch.html).  
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I am sitting in my chair here and it is mine. They are sitting on the land in Ukraine and it is theirs. I have my chair and I am fine. They need the land. There is no question. It's crazy to fight for it!<sup>334</sup>

Two interviewees suggested public acknowledgement would suffice; in the form of a monument (especially that memorializes the suffering of Polish children) such as that erected to commemorate the Katyn massacre. It is presumed the Russian government would erect and care for such a monument; that is, that Russian acknowledgement be permanent and public. Some note that Poles who suffered similar circumstances under Hitler receive compensation in the form of a pension or sum payment; therefore, they ask, why shouldn't those who survived Siberia?<sup>335</sup>

Twelve, or 32% are firm in their stance that they don't want anything; despite that other groups are receiving restitution and compensation.<sup>336</sup> "Bygones is bygones," was Julian's flat response. Within this group is an awareness of the limited resources available for such compensation for they see daily in the media the plight of the Russian people and the many minorities, as well the troubles with breakaway states such as Chechnya. One suggested it was compensation enough that Stalin was dead.<sup>337</sup> Finally, some indicated an awareness that repatriated Poles were 'settled' in the west in the infamous 'land swap' that Polish sovereignty would be secured on former German lands. Therefore, they perceive other Poles benefited from their 'loss'.

Among the remaining 16, or 42%, there is vacillation or uncertainty. "Who would pay?" they ask, or "What would I do with that land? I have it good here," or "The people there need it." Magda's difficulty in articulating her feelings exemplifies the uncertainty for many. For how does a Polish survivor of the Soviet deportation/exile experience appeal for sympathy and compensation for her wartime suffering when the Jews suffered worse horrors, on Polish soil no less?

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<sup>334</sup> Conversation with Jan Bajorek, 26 September 2000.

<sup>335</sup> Adela Uchanski, a teenager when kidnapped from a Polish village in 1941 by German police, was transported to eastern Germany where she spent four years working in a military clothing factory. Now 76, she receives a German pension for her labour amounting to about \$70.00/month. Susan McClelland. "I Lost Everything" in *Maclean's*. Vol. 113, No. 31 (31 July 2000) 23.

<sup>336</sup> E.g. "It was a historic moment for the hundreds of thousands of people forced to work for the Third Reich during the Second World War" (Poles, Jews, Ukrainians) in Susan McClelland. "I Lost Everything" in *Maclean's*. Vol. 113, No. 31 (31 July 2000) 22-23. Also: "An appeal is being issued to Diasporan Ukrainians by the joint litigators in the current class action suit brought against German companies... deals with the matter of forced and slave laborers who were taken from their native lands by Germany during World War II" in [www.brama.com/news/press/990915forcedlabor.html](http://www.brama.com/news/press/990915forcedlabor.html) - Ukrainian Community Press Releases.

<sup>337</sup> Interview with Ludwik (10 February 1999) 30.



[S]omehow we feel now that it's absolutely, you know, taken by the Jewish as if [Poland] was their suffering ground only... but when we have seen that one person—survivor of the concentration camp—coming to Auschwitz and it was shown very emotionally—very loud—suffering... When I went [to] my mother's grave, in 1994, I didn't cry that loud, but I cried. [crying] Very deeply... because we don't do it as... very loud... don't show our emotions very loud, it somehow... it doesn't have the same effect as if we didn't suffer very much. And, I think that upset me because I just compared myself—my own suffering—and yet I am not trying to be too loud about it. Very deep. [crying] [We] don't want to be forgotten. And, they can somehow provide this, you know, that... it's more... people take notice of it. And, that hurt us, Polish people.<sup>338</sup>

The crux of Magda's pain and frustration lies partially in what she perceives as widespread ignorance of the Polish suffering; in part, because of the silent nature [imposed from within] as well in her perception that international attention is concentrated on the Holocaust. No one is suggesting there is a 'contest', a race to the statistics pool, where the numbers would be tallied: who suffered more? how many more died? who was the worst tyrant? However, there is growing debate on the matter of the neglect of the Polish story. Tadeusz Piotrowski asks:

[I]f we agree that the Holocaust was an event in historical time involving an officially sanctioned policy of *genocide* and that genocide is the systematic destruction, in whole or in part, of indigenous populations as *such*, then by what rationale should the Soviet Union be excluded from responsibility for its part in either one of these phenomena?... Moreover, Soviet genocidal policies both preceded the rise of Nazi Germany and continued after its defeat.<sup>339</sup>

And each time the story repeats itself—in Bosnia, in Kosovo, in Rwanda, in Nicaragua—Magda is plunged into memory where the suffering of others intensifies her ongoing nightmare. That is, “there is still the same things are going on.” In other words, what is restitution and compensation when humanity has not learned?

Along these lines, Robin Cohen has written:

Diasporas themselves articulate their demands in terms of human rights or “group rights”. More exactly, the loudest mouths in the diaspora communities articulate these demands, often leaving little room for the dissenter, the individualist and the person who does not wish to affirm any special ethnic identity.<sup>340</sup>

In the case of the Polish survivors of the Soviet deportation/exile experience, articulation

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<sup>338</sup> Interview with Magda (10 March 1999) 44–45.

<sup>339</sup> Tadeusz Piotrowski. *Poland's Holocaust*. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1998) 1.

<sup>340</sup> Robin Cohen. *Global diasporas*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997) 196.

of the need for sympathy, restitution, and compensation may not have been soon enough, or loud enough. Nor, it appears, has their need to be remembered garnered assurances of remembrance: of theoretical discourse and of documentation.

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Various other means of communication between members of "the Polish diaspora" thrive whether by way of communication in Polish language press [e.g. *Związkowiec*, in Canada] or journals [e.g. *Sarmatian Review*, Rice University, Houston] and magazines, such as the Polish language monthly, *Exodus*, which is published in Germany. An "interesting little magazine with a distinctly Catholic flavour," *Exodus* publishes topics relevant to the Polish diaspora in Europe and South Central Asia [former Soviet Union].<sup>341</sup> It is noteworthy that this publication distinguishes both *Polonia* and *Sybiraki* as representative of "the Polish diaspora". It would be worthwhile to explore further the respective relationships vis-à-vis such variances as Capitalist/Communist systems and East/West divergences.

Every three to five years, *Sybiraki* who lived out the war and early post-war years in the twenty-two settlements established in British Africa meet for a re-union which gathering is known among them as *Rendez-Vous Afrykanzczyków*. The gatherings move around the globe, with the last held at Orchard Lake, Michigan in 1996. And each time these old Poles get together to revisit old times, more names are added to the list of the dead as their numbers dwindle.

And then there is the *Order of St. Stanislas*<sup>342</sup> that links the Polish diaspora to the historic martyrdom of St. Stanislas in 1079. After being drawn and quartered, St. Stanislas' body parts were scattered, after which, legend has it, they miraculously came together. Thus, the martyrdom of St. Stanislas served as spiritual inspiration during the partitions for Poles who prayed that Poland would similarly be re-joined. And therein lies within the Polish spiritual mythos a powerful symbol that reflects the idea of *diaspora* and the diffused nature of *Polonia*.

Through the promotion of the "well being of people of Polish ancestry, the presentation

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<sup>341</sup> "Announcements and Notes" in *Sarmatian Review*. Vol. XV, No. 3: September, 1995.

<sup>342</sup> [www.ststanislas.org/papers/diaspora.html](http://www.ststanislas.org/papers/diaspora.html)

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and promotion of Polish culture, and dedication to charitable good works<sup>343</sup> *Polonia* members of the *Order of St. Stanislas* maintain ongoing ties with the homeland through "Priories" located in at least twenty-four countries, including Canada. The *Order* was preserved by the Polish government-in-exile during the post-war period and, according to one source, until 1990 its legitimacy was recognized by various states, including the United States.

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Parallel to political advocacy among *Sybiraki*, ongoing remembrance of the deportation and exile experience further shapes and solidifies the individual with the group identity. The year 2000 marks the 60th anniversary of the major waves of deportation during WWII; a time to unite in collective remembrance of loss, of suffering, and of survival. Not only does the anniversary unite the group in remembrance of the WWII deportation/exile experience, it further solidifies in the collective memory the repeated forced dispersals of Poles into the Siberian void. Further, they have not forgotten their fellow deportees still living in the Soviet hinterlands.

To memorialize the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first major deportation of WWII, February 10th, 1940, commemoration masses were held at St. Stanislaw Roman Catholic Church located at the centre of Toronto's long-established Polish community, as well at St. Stanislaw's in Hamilton, and at St. Hedwig's in Oshawa, Ontario. A special mass and banquet, attended by over 500 people, were held in August 2000 at the General Sikorski Polish Veterans Hall, Oshawa, with the mass conducted by the St. Hedwig's Polish Roman Catholic parish priest. Ceremonies included the erection of plaques to memorialize the Siberian experience. *Lest we forget...*

Even the term *Polonia*—Poles outside Poland—acts as a peculiar form, or signifier, of *diaspora*. For *Polonia*, whether the emigrants themselves or subsequent generations, are all embraced as Poles: Poles **outside** Poland. And this no matter the factors for emigration or dispersal from Poland. Thus, in the case of Poles who migrated in earlier waves [pre-WWII] to other lands [e.g. Brazil, Argentina, North America] in search of a better life, there have been attempts to formalize the process as one of *colonization*. That is, a form of self-imposed exile;

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<sup>343</sup> [www.ststanislas.org/papers/diaspora.html](http://www.ststanislas.org/papers/diaspora.html)  
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living outside the homeland, while dreaming of the contribution to the 'greater glory' of the homeland as a constituent in the colonization/polonization process; what Cohen describes as the *imperial diaspora*. The difficulty has been, however, that such groups of Poles floundered in exiled communities for the homeland essentially cut all ties. In part, because there was a presumption they, as most were of peasant class, were better off than they were in Poland; as well, the homeland was otherwise distracted by borderland pressures and economic, political and population issues.<sup>344</sup> And then came the Second World War, further cutting off *Polonia* from the homeland.

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*Diaspora* took on a new meaning for the Poles after the conference at Yalta. First, having suffered the trauma of forced migration by an invading power to exile in Soviet labour camps—thus adding yet another chapter to the “folk memory of the great historic injustice that binds the group together”<sup>345</sup>—compounded by the virtual elimination of the Poland—the Second Republic, no less!—of their experience and memory, the Poles, after Yalta, felt betrayed and abandoned and homeless. All factors which contributed to what Cohen terms the “idealization of the ancestral home”.<sup>346</sup> For the majority, there was no way for them to see their way back to a Poland under Soviet Communist rule as the remembered homeland was overrun by unwelcome foreign forces. And, as a result of the shifting of Poland’s borders, they were dispossessed of “home”; the ancestral homeland—the Second Republic—with which they distinctly identified and which was altered without Polish comment. Thus, from forced dispersal and exile, the Poles imposed upon themselves an extension to their exile by virtue of their rejection of the ‘new order’ forced by foreign authorities on their ‘new’ homeland. One form of exile shape-shifted through political expediency to another.

Although the Poles were homeless, they did not, however, perceive themselves to be

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<sup>344</sup> Marcin Kula, “Polish Emigration to Latin America” in Renkiewicz, Frank, ed. (The Polish Presence in Canada and America. Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1982).

<sup>345</sup> Robin Cohen. Global diasporas. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997) 23.

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.*

stateless for they could conceive of **being** Polish outside *their* Poland as there exists in the language—in the collective understanding of Polish identity—the term for their exiled state: *Polonia*. And, as *Polonia*—serving the homeland from outside the borders—they could also strive toward freedom—‘save’ Poland—of the remembered and now imagined homeland, with the anticipated result of one day returning home. Indeed, they perceived themselves to be the standard-bearers and ambassadors for the ‘true’ Poland and many today argue they are “better Poles” than those since born in Poland whose *Polishness*, some argue, has been diluted and poisoned by Soviet Communism.

Their ‘fight’ for Poland outside Poland thus satisfies Safran’s characteristic that the “expatriate minority community... believe all members of the diaspora should be committed to the maintenance or restoration of the original homeland and to its safety and prosperity.”<sup>347</sup> This view, commonly held among post-WWII *Polonia* eventually led, as will be discussed in the next chapters, to conflict between the *Polonia* and the new arrivals to Canada’s *Polonia* communities.

The committed efforts of *Polonia* in this regard have been facilitated through such organizations as the established *Związek Sybiraków*, and, in the immediate post-war period, through the creation of *The Polish Combatants Association* [chapters in Great Britain, Canada, and the United States]. None of these organizations, nor many of the Poles as individuals, have ever recognized anything other than the Polish government-in-exile as representative of the Polish state, until the *Solidarity* movement of the 1980s. Ergo, an invisible near virtual-esque Poland existed throughout the world through *Polonia*; one from which enormous political, economic, and social energies were invested in the freeing of Poland from Sovietization and Communism. That Poland regained its independence in the 1980s evokes but a modicum of enthusiasm: for though Poland is not dead, the Poles in exile—the Polish diaspora—lament the death of the Poland of their memory. The ancestral Poland they attempted to preserve from the outside—whether through efforts to maintain Polish language, cultural traditions and the Roman Catholic faith for their families born and raised in new lands, or through fund-raising and advocacy

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<sup>347</sup> Robin Cohen. *Global diasporas*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997) 23.  
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work on an international scale which would elicit sympathies and pressure for the release of Poland from Soviet rule—no longer exists. All that exists is a memory that is linked with the polonization era of the Second Republic and the trauma of deportation and exile. For study participants, these are powerfully tied to childhood memories of happy, though hard, times.

What happened to *Polonia*, furthermore, was unexpected. *Polonia* assimilated in their host countries; even developed bonds of loyalty that compete on an equal plane with their love and loyalty to Poland. For their children and grandchildren, the desire to preserve or maintain a memory of a Polish nation—the Polish memory—is moot. And the homeland of the memories of the exiled Poles no longer exists. What, then, was/is home? Exile? And what is the state of the Polish *diaspora*; especially, in relation to contemporary Poland and *Polonia*? And finally, what relationship, if any, exists between the Poland of the new millennium and *Polonia*? All questions that require further investigation.

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Returning to Cohen's typologies, the Polish diaspora responds, first, to *victim* and *labour* characteristics. That is, forced dispersal and forced labour in exiled communities during WWII. After the war, a form of self-imposed exile was embraced for political events [not military] resulted in such dramatic changes to *their* Poland that there was no question about their feeling displaced by circumstance from the ancestral homeland. The Polish diaspora further responds to *victim* characteristics for the exiled Poles were victims of events. Furthermore, the Polish diaspora responds to *imperial* characteristics for they had to go somewhere. Most were taken in by nations among the British Empire or by others such as Argentina and the United States, in part for humanitarian reasons, but mostly, as is later explored, they were invited for the labour and breeding they would perform in post-war nation-building.

That Poland regained its independence in the 1980s was cause for celebration as well pause for reconceptualization of the Poland of yore. Though Poland is not dead, do *Polonia* imagine half a century of Sovietization can be undone? And, what role[s]/influence[s], if any, have the ageing Polish exiles imagined for themselves in "rebuilding" Poland? And what of the

'substance' of the Poland they might articulate: one grounded in 1939 and one which ignores the changed world of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? And, finally, do their children or grandchildren care? Again, more questions for further consideration.

### Summary

The forced deportation and exile of 1.5 million Poles in Soviet labour camps during WWII not only disrupted their lives, but also reinforced the collective memory and mythos of the traumatic experience. That the ancestral homeland would be a changed and uninviting place after the war capped the absurdity of the Polish tragedy.

After two years' hardship, loss and suffering, and of oppression of their *Polishness*, and only after the German invasion of Russian soil, Polish men were permitted to leave the camps that a Polish Army could be mobilized in the Middle East to fight alongside the Red Army in the Allied bid to quell Hitler. Families fled with their men resulting in a protraction of the nightmare of suffering and loss that exemplifies the common Polish tragedy. Furthermore, the numbers of fleeing Poles [115,000] and their emaciated condition presented enormous challenges for the British Army that unexpectedly became the guardians of soldiers and civilians alike. Subsequently, a massive international aid infrastructure was established to aid the Poles, but not before many lives would be lost to various diseases and starvation.

Polish men and adolescent boys were recruited for military training and action in the final chapters of the war; most, in North Africa and Italy. Women, children, the elderly and disabled went separate ways to refugee settlements situated primarily in India and British East Africa. There, education, domestic skills and technical training, religious practices and Polish customs were reintegrated into their lives that they would be prepared for the day when they could return to Poland, their families reunited, and contribute to the rebuilding of the crumbled nation.

At war's end, however, at the conference at Yalta, Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin carved up Poland without any consultation with Polish representatives. The borders shifted 150 miles to the west in accordance with Stalin's preferences, and in accordance with Allied strategic

restructuring and 'management' of Germany after the war. A Communist government, a puppet of the Soviet Union, was installed in Poland but has never been acknowledged nor accepted by the Poles who remained in exile—the Polish diaspora—who refused to return to Communist Poland. Polish soldiers who fought alongside the Allies especially felt betrayed.

Among those who survived forced migration and exile in Soviet labour camps with their families, the arduous exodus in a flight to freedom, and, finally wartime action in the fight for freedom from Nazism, victory was hollow. Indeed "Victory!" notes Micheal Hope of Adam Zamoyski's declaration was "devoid of any meaning to any Pole and their isolation had become



total."<sup>148</sup> For not only had Hitler and Stalin brutally assaulted their beloved Poland, the Allies, through political expediency, completed the indignity.

For the Poles who refused to repatriate to Communist Poland—who ignored appeals to their "patriotic duty"<sup>149</sup> to rebuild the nation—their forced exile became a longer-term self-imposed form of exile: thus, *the Polish diaspora* sought host countries which would take them in until the time they could return to their ancestral homeland—the remembered and imagined homeland—free from the yoke of Soviet Communism. However, not only have they chosen to not return to the now-independent

Fig 18 - 'Justice?'<sup>150</sup>

<sup>148</sup> Michael Hope Polish Deportees in the Soviet Union: Origins of Post-War Settlement in Great Britain (London: Ventas Foundation Publication Centre, 1998) 52.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 53

<sup>150</sup> From the archives of J. Kuropas.



Poland. Some suggest a type of Polish *diaspora* exists *within* Poland's borders; a result of half a century 'poisoning' by Communism and Sovietization.

*Polishness*, through maintenance of language, cultural and religious practices, is further reinforced by the group through manifestation of group identification as *Sybiraki*. Unified by the mythos of the trauma of forced deportation and exile experience *Sybiraki* represent one aspect of *Polonia*—Poles outside Poland. Communication is maintained with the group through various organizations and publications; as well, as a unified group *Sybiraki* engage in political advocacy that there is acknowledgement of their experiences and restitution and compensation for their experiences. Further, remembrance through ceremony unites the survivors with their collective memory of the mythos of the trauma of loss and suffering.

The testimony 'project'—interviews with adults, compositions by children—which began the moment the fleeing Poles came in contact with Polish authorities in the Middle East—failed to alert 'the world' to the Polish tragedy. Even today, survivors are reluctant to discuss their experiences outside the familiar of the Polish 'community' and language despite a 'trend' in public acknowledgement of war crimes against humanity and of restitution and compensation for it. For there is diminishment, even among themselves, of their experiences, especially when compared to the loss and horror of the Jewish Holocaust. Some do observe, however, that articulation of a need for sympathy, restitution, and compensation may not have been soon enough.

That the majority of study participants were children throughout the deportation/exile experience complicates the obstacles to both articulation and any confidence or sense of 'worthiness' in the 'telling'. In a recent newspaper column in which Holocaust denial was the locus of discussion, Michele Landsberg considered the challenges children face [even when they are 'old children'] when trying to remember and then articulate particularly horrible experiences. She quotes Dr. Robert Krell:

The most pervasive preoccupation of child survivors is the continuing struggle with memory, whether there is too much or too little... For a child survivor, an even more vexing problem is the intrusion of fragments of

memory—most are emotionally powerful and painful but make no sense.<sup>351</sup>

Among the Polish children who survived—who lived to tell—there is one clear sense: the Polish tragedy—the mythos of the collective memory of repeated trauma—is overwhelmingly ignored by the world. Thus, *Polonia* remains in psychic isolation. Yet Poles have contributed in various ways to nation building projects in their new homelands as well maintained a keen interest in developments in the ancestral homeland. That is, while re-imagining their *Polish* identity in new lands, the memory of “home” held fast to the pre-1939 imag[i]nation.

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<sup>351</sup> Michele Landsberg. “Instinct to deny ugly reality can be overwhelming,” *The Toronto Star*. 05 February 2000. N1.  
*Heien Bajorek MacDonald*

## Chapter 5 - EMPLACEMENT

*I move about the planet  
in a crush of other debtors.  
Some are saddled with the burden  
of paying off their wings.  
Others must, willy-nilly,  
account for every leaf.<sup>352</sup>*

### Prelude

On 12 August 1949, the American naval carrier, the *General H. M. Black*, moored at Halifax, Nova Scotia. Nearly 900 passengers [identified in Canadian government documents as the *Anders Poles*] disembarked, carrying in one hand one-year labour contracts with the Canadian government for either agricultural or domestic work and,

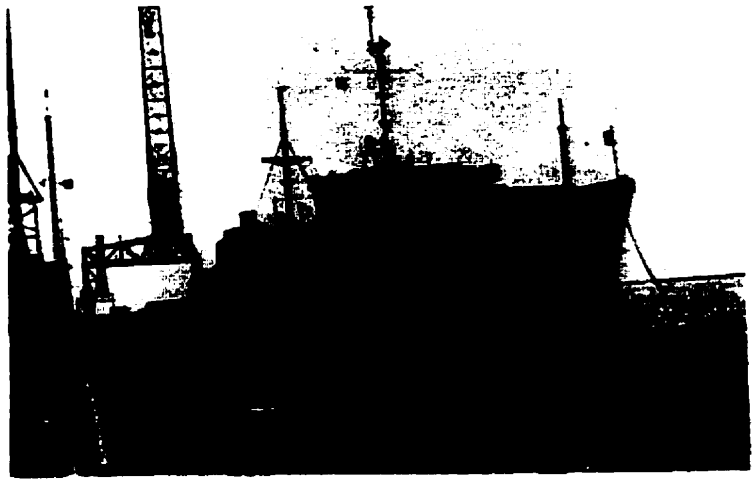


Fig. 19 - *General H. M. Black* moored at Mombassa, Kenya, July, 1949<sup>353</sup>

in the other, every worldly item they possessed. Among them were my grandmother, Wiktorja Kotowicz Bajorek, my father, Jan Bajorek, and his five surviving siblings: a last-minute addition to the ship's register.

'*Crude, indeed....*' writes Melchior Wankowicz in his novel, Three Generations which traces three generations of Polish immigrants [through male eyes] who arrived in Canada through the early decades of the 20th Century; "*Crude, indeed, was that human raw material bound for Canada, crude and sheathed in ignorance, like seed that hides its power of growth in the sheath*

<sup>352</sup> Wisława Szymborska "Nothing's A Gift" in view with a grain of sand. (Orlando: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1996)

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<sup>353</sup> From archives of A. Bialecki

of its hard husk.<sup>354</sup> But unlike earlier waves of Polish/Galician *bread immigration* to Canada, the *Anders Poles* were not sheathed in ignorance for they had seen more of the world than most through the horrific experience of war. They were not fleeing Poland but rather were seeking a temporary homeland having been displaced by the war: the *Anders Poles* were among the Polish survivors of forced deportation and exile in Soviet labour camps who refused repatriation in Communist Poland after the war.

The arrival in Canada of the passengers of the *General Black* was a postscript to the precedent-setting migration in 1946-47 of 4,527 Polish ex-soldiers who traveled from Italy and England under Britain's *Polish Resettlement Act*<sup>355</sup> to fulfill two-year agricultural labour contracts. Historians write, almost always in passing, that the movement of the Polish ex-soldiers provided Canadian officials with the experience that would lay the foundation for post-WWII bulk labour movements.<sup>356</sup> Few discuss, however, the arrival in the post-war era of other Polish immigrants to Canada such as the men, women and children who disembarked from the *General Black* in 1949.

Building on existing scholarship, this chapter explores the *Anders Poles'* immigration experience within the context of British policy and procedure vis-à-vis resettlement of Polish veterans post-WWII, abridged comparative consideration of international policy in relation to post-WWII Polish immigration, and Canadian immigration policy of the pre-war, wartime, and post-war eras, particularly in relation to Poles and displaced persons and refugees.

#### Setting the Stage for Post-WWII Polish Immigration to Canada

By-and-large, Canadian immigration policy has historically evolved on an *ad hoc* basis in response to inside and/or outside pressures. Policies were discriminatory and emphasized labour requirements. For example, pre-1885, Chinese labour was invited to toil on railroad construction designed to help the new country physically span its territory, from sea to sea. Then, seemingly

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<sup>354</sup> Melchior Wankowicz [transl. Krystyna Cekalska], *Three Generations*. (Toronto: Canadian-Polish Research Institute of Canada, 1973) 25.

<sup>355</sup> Great Britain: 10 & 11 Geo. 6. Ch. 19; *Polish Resettlement Act*, 1947.

<sup>356</sup> Gerald E. Dirks. *Canada's Refugee Policy: Indifference or Opportunism*. [Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1977] 142. See also Franca Iacovetta, and Valerie Knowles.

having outstayed their welcome, Chinese immigration was officially discouraged when the government imposed a costly head tax on all potential Chinese immigrants.

The turn of the century saw the successful policies of Clifford Sifton, Minister of the Interior [Liberal], who sent agents—representatives of the *Canadian Pacific Railway* (CPR)—to Eastern Europe to recruit the good quality “stalwart peasant in a sheep-skin coat, born on the soil, whose forefathers have been farmers for ten generations, with a stout wife and half-a-dozen children.”<sup>357</sup> Sifton’s ‘immigration procedure’ was an extension of the ‘national dream’ inasmuch as a railway would avail east-west sovereignty over Canada, so, too, would the railway transport new Canadians who would colonize, clear, farm, and develop the land, and populate vast open regions. By defining [albeit informally] who was to be recruited and for what purposes [assimilable farm labour], Sifton’s methods were, by nature, exclusionary. Such attitudes and procedures certainly influenced post-WWII immigration policies, procedures and the attitudes of officials, including selection teams.

In another instance, Canada instituted in 1908 the *continuous journey* stipulation that effectively prevented immigrants from India from entering Canada, unless they managed to travel on one vessel directly to Canada. Potential vessels were discouraged from taking on board Indian travelers to Canada.<sup>358</sup> This stipulation could easily have been applied to post-WWII displaced persons whose journey from the homeland—a direct result of the war—was a virtual global hopscotch from place to place to place.

Only after efforts to attract people of British origin floundered, and frequently, only after internal/external pressures, did Canada relax discriminatory policies. In the immediate post-WWII years, Canadian officials reacted to global circumstances with piecemeal “catch-as-you-can” policy designed to meet economic needs: labour and market; workers and breeders. Selection

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<sup>357</sup> Clifford Sifton qtd. in *Maclean’s Magazine*, vol. 35, 01 April 1922. 16, 22. From: Desmond Morton and Morton Weinfeld, *Who Speaks for Canada?* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1998) 57. In September, 1925, the *Railways Agreement* of Mackenzie King’s Liberal government cemented for the CPR and the CNR the principal role in Canada’s post-WWI immigration/colonization process. See Brian S. Osborne and Susan E. Wurtele, “The Other Railway: Canadian National’s Department of Colonization and Agriculture” in *Prairie Forum*. Vol. 20, No. 2, Fall 1995.

<sup>358</sup> “History of Immigration Laws and Policy” (Law Union of Canada, 1981) 26.

criteria dictated who got in and was founded on historic ethnic and gender stereotypes and prejudices that were entrenched in Canadian immigration procedures and policies.

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In the immediate post-WWI years, Canada, as Argentina, Brazil and the United States, became the primary targets of migration from Poland resulting in the establishment of Polish subcommunities in new lands: *Polonia*. Most were of the peasant class seeking land or jobs—the group often defined as “bread immigration”<sup>359</sup>—thus representative of Sifton’s “stalwart peasant” characterization. Some were sojourners, intending to return to Poland with the financial wherewithal to purchase land. Yet others came on special farm or domestic contracts; a pattern repeated after the Second World War.

We will recall that the inter-war period was a renaissance in Poland—the Second Republic—during which time Poland encouraged out migration of poorer peasants and minorities from the eastern borderlands to relieve the state of political, economic and population pressures. [See Chapter 2] There is no question that opportunity to acquire land in Canada was more than adequate enticement for the Poles to emigrate, for it was known such opportunity was diminished in the United States. Furthermore, a certain mythology around Canada—an offshoot of the *American dream*—had begun to develop throughout Polish villages as seen in the colloquial term *kanada* as synonym for “plenty, abundance, and richness.” Canada flowed with milk and honey and was, truly, “paradise”.<sup>360</sup> One Polish veteran recalled why he decided to come to Canada from England after WWII under Britain’s *Polish Resettlement Act*, rather than travel to New Zealand where his two younger so-called orphaned brothers had been sent:

We been thinking that some guys had... some kind of cousins in States or in Canada; they have letters from so-and-so. Even I remember when I was in old country, my neighbours had this sister was some place in Oshawa and one guy, Ukrainian guy in Poland, he was here in Oshawa working in Fittings.<sup>361</sup>

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<sup>359</sup> Anna Reczynska. *For Bread and a Better Future*. (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1996) 6. See also Mostwin, Radecki and Renkiewicz. Reczynska’s work is a seminal consideration of pre-1939 Polish immigration to Canada.

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>361</sup> Interview with Jerzy (03 October 1998) 31.

It was cross-Atlantic letters, especially interwar correspondence, which inspired Jerzy to immigrate to Canada. As the Polish ex-servicemen were given the opportunity, Jerzy specifically requested placement on a farm near Oshawa, Ontario, because it represented familiarity to him. Since his arrival in 1947, Jerzy has lived, worked, raised a family, and retired in Oshawa.

Other Polish immigrants to Canada were influenced by Arkady Fiedler's book, Kanada pachnaca zywicą (Canada Smelling of Resin), first published in 1935 in which Fiedler wrote:

[Canada] now has unlimited possibilities as once did the United States... first in the world in the production of nickel, second in the production of gold and cobalt and third in the production of silver, not mentioning wheat.<sup>362</sup>

This was a very popular book as three editions were published. As well, word of the book quickly spread through oral custom. Consequently, when asked "What did you know about Canada before you came?" study participants, like Witold, recalled interwar cross-Atlantic correspondence from relatives and former neighbours. He also remembered "there was one book I read once, you know. It was Canada Smell of the Pine... or Tar? He was describing his life in the bush camp as the young fella and his partnership with a Chinaman. He was kind-of light [humoured]."<sup>363</sup> Some of the veterans even had access to the Polish language book while in Italy! Thus, in the Polish psyche, vast forested lands represented potential for a carefree life on the land with self-driven hard work leading to prosperity; without the uncertainty of living under threat of war and/or oppression by foreign dominators. Paradise.

The "paradise"/*kanada* mythos is manifest throughout study participants' narratives: first, as sarcasm in "Siberian paradise"; then, with biblical connotation as the "Edenic paradise" [despite the diasporic reality] of India and Africa; and, finally, as a rebirth metaphor for freedom, human rights protection, and opportunity in a new homeland: *kanada is paradise*. In describing his first impressions of life in England after the war, one Polish veteran wrote in a tone dripping with sarcasm: "...there is no doubt that Britain is a paradise for old people, dogs and cats...."<sup>364</sup>

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<sup>362</sup> qtd. in Anna Reczynska. For Bread and a Better Future. (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1996) 24.

<sup>363</sup> Interview with Witold (23 July 1998) 29-30.

<sup>364</sup> Statement qtd. in Keith Sword. The Formation of the Polish Community in Great Britain, 1939-1950. (London: School of Slavonic and East European Studies, 1989) 366.

For many of the Poles "paradise", in the British context, connoted hardship and discrimination.

Despite their initial disappointment in their inability to return to the motherland, there is no question Canada wasn't just the booby prize; for, as the Polish folk maxim tells us: *Nothing bad happens to us that some good cannot come from it.*<sup>365</sup> Thus, Canada, as many will tell you today, was the prize. However, it is imperative to distinguish that for Poles, including many among both pre- and post-WWII immigrants, Canada initially functioned both psychologically and physically as a transit juncture with *America* fixed as the final goal. What kept the thirty-eight study participants in Canada, however, were such factors as propinquity to and involvement in local Polish community, marriage/family, and contentment with employment. Only one interviewee mentioned he considered leaving Canada for the United States as he became engaged to an American woman whom he met at the wedding of Polish friends in Sudbury, Ontario. However, he broke off the engagement as he couldn't picture himself in Pennsylvania.<sup>366</sup>

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The global economic depression of the 1930s allowed Canada to put restrictions on immigration, many of which were outright racist. Then, in 1938, one year prior to the outbreak of war in Poland, the Canadian government "without passing any formal legislation... adopted a restrictionist refugee policy with tragic consequences for every human being that Canada *could* have accepted but *did not*" throughout the war years. A memorandum prepared by Department of External Affairs and Department of Mines and Resources officials for Cabinet advised:

We do not want too many Jews, but in the present circumstances we do not want to say so. We do not want to legitimize the Aryan mythology by introducing any formal distinction for immigration purposes between Jews and non-Jews.<sup>367</sup>

Similar recommendations flowed from government officials to selection teams dispatched to Eastern Europe during the post-war years as well from American officials.

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<sup>365</sup> Leonard F. Chrobot, "The Pilgrimage from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*: Sociological Functions of Religion in the Polish American Community", in Frank Renkiewicz, The Polish Presence in Canada and America. (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1982) 81-95.

<sup>366</sup> Interview with Jacob (17 February 1999) 36.

<sup>367</sup> Barry Broadfoot, The Immigrant Years. (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre Ltd., 1986) 35.



During the Second World War, Japanese immigration was cut off, and all Japanese-Canadians found themselves, as did many [male] Austro-Hungarian-Canadians during WWI, removed from their homes and communities, all property confiscated by the Canadian government, and interned in [predominantly] agricultural labour projects for the duration of the war. When, in 1987, the Canadian government publicly apologized to Japanese-Canadians and established a compensation fund, Polish-Canadian survivors of exile in Soviet labour camps and *kolkhozes* took quiet notice for they were not unaware of the parallels in wartime circumstance. And in 1989, when Mikhail Gorbachev admitted to—not apologized for—the Katyn Massacre of 15,000 Polish officers,<sup>368</sup> the civilian deportees again quietly noted their absence from the record.

During the war, Canadian war aid was typically channeled through such organizations as religious groups and, especially, through the Canadian Red Cross. In the immediate post-war era, the greatest extent of Canada's humanitarian efforts involved financial contributions to the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and to the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), both of which contributed to the relief efforts expended for the Polish civilian survivors of exile and exodus from Soviet labour camps. Although immigration in 1946 rose to levels not seen since 1930, few immigrants of that year came from the pool of refugees and displaced persons.

Through the war years, a few hundred Polish skilled technicians and scientists were permitted entry to Canada through Great Britain in order to make technical/scientific contributions to Canada's war effort. The Polish government-in-exile took responsibility for all expenses.<sup>369</sup> Further diplomatic efforts [1940-42] netted Canadian visas for a number of high-ranking Polish officials and members of the arts community to live out the war in safety that Polish talent might be preserved for when the war was over. Among this group was Victor Podoski, Consul General of Poland's government-in-exile, who would later impress upon the Canadian government the

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<sup>368</sup> Theresa Kurk McGinley. *A Cry for Human Rights: The Polish Displaced Persons Problem and United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1951.* (Doctoral Dissertation: University of Houston, 1995) 32.

<sup>369</sup> Gerald E. Dirks. *Canada's Refugee Policy: Indifference or Opportunism.* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1977) 91.

need for the *Anders Poles* to establish themselves in a new homeland: Canada.

The establishment of the International Refugee Organization [IRO] to aid displaced persons in reconstructing their lives was, essentially, the creation of an international employment pool. For Canada's part, about 40,000 displaced persons would be selected from Europe's DP camps through the post-war years. These numbers eventually swelled four-fold as a result of later immigration of dependants and other relatives.

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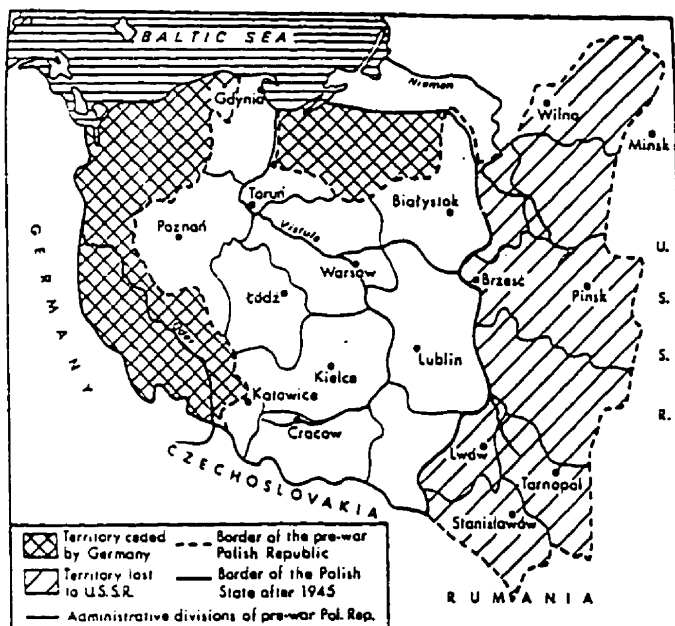
Since WWI, Canada disallowed immigration on labour contract [P.C. 23, January 1914].<sup>370</sup> Following the end of WWII, most 'ordinary' Canadians felt threatened by an influx of 'foreigners' into Canada, though there were those who, for humanitarian reasons, welcomed immigration of persons displaced by the war. Canadian policy-makers advocated increased immigration to aid post-war economic and national growth. Canadian business and industry interests and various government officials placed significant value on the immigrant worker [most of whom were displaced by the war] as an economic commodity in her/his role as preserver of the *assimilable character* of a growing nation. How was it, then, that the Anders Poles came to Canada under labour contract?

#### A Crush of Poles: Where to Go After the War and Great Britain's Role?

There was little interest among Polish veterans and civilians, especially the *Anders Poles*—most originating from Poland's eastern borderlands—in returning to a Poland occupied by a foreign power, one with which they had the unhappy experience of deportation and exile in forced labour camps, and a prospect they feared and did not wish to repeat. Karl, one of my thirty-eight study participants, was a Polish Second Corps ambulance driver and paramedic stationed in Italy. He recalled post-war pressure from Polish and British military and diplomatic authorities for the Poles to repatriate to their homeland. After all, the *Yalta Treaty* [more specifically, the associated *Leipzig Agreement*] and guidelines developed with the establishment

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<sup>370</sup> Valene Knowles. *Strangers at Our Gates*. [Toronto: Dundum Press, 1997] 116.



Map 15 - Poland's New Frontiers After 1945<sup>373</sup>

Do not employ Poles- repatriate them, as they must go home... no such thing as an unrepatriable Pole. UNRRA, U.S. Army Corps, workshops, et cetera, to fire all Poles...<sup>374</sup>

Intense post-war discussions among soldiers in Italy ensued and, finally, many heeded their beloved General Anders' counsel: return to Poland under Soviet Communists was risky. Still, Karl agonized between loyalty to the homeland and entreaties from family to return, and fear of the unknown; and, especially, of Siberia. Confused and paralyzed with indecision—*wracać czy nie wracać* (to return or not to return)—in what Keith Sword describes for the Poles as “a moment of national and personal crisis”,<sup>375</sup> Karl determined to let King George VI resolve the question for him. He tossed a British coin: heads for Canada; tails, Poland. The King won.<sup>376</sup>

Meanwhile, among the civilian population, one woman plainly recalled the predominant post-war sentiment: “We are not going to Poland because we don't trust Communists. We were

<sup>371</sup> Theresa Kurk McGinley. A Cry for Human Rights: The Polish Displaced Persons Problem and United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1951. (Doctoral Dissertation: University of Houston, 1995) 101 & 107.

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>373</sup> Keith Sword. The Formation of the Polish Community in Great Britain, 1939-1950. (London: School of Slavonic and East European Studies, 1989). 75.

<sup>374</sup> qtd. in *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>375</sup> Keith Sword. The Formation of the Polish Community in Great Britain, 1939-1950. (London: School of Slavonic and East European Studies, 1989) 357.

<sup>376</sup> Interview with Karl (05 October 1998) 30.

of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration [UNRRA] specified compulsory repatriation<sup>371</sup>—especially of Poles—in what Theresa Kirk McGinley argues to be coercive tactics that exemplified the insensitivity on the part of UNRRA officials toward the Poles.<sup>372</sup> A memo written by an employment officer with UNRRA emphasizes this point:

once in their hands. We don't want to go to Siberia a second time. NO WAY! WE ARE NOT!"<sup>377</sup>

A 1946 UNRRA report identified the major factors deterring the Poles from repatriation to include:

- a) Political, b) an increased sense of insecurity in their own country, combined with a feeling of possible future security elsewhere, c) problems relating to the media and character of information reaching the Poles. With regard to the political factors, the **single most important deterrent is a fear of the Soviet Union and a distaste for what is believed to be a growing tendency toward communism and totalitarianism in Poland.**<sup>378</sup> [my emphasis]

Poles, after the war—whether ex-servicemen in England or in Italy, or refugee families living in British Africa, Lebanon, Palestine, or elsewhere—were not isolated from details of post-war political events pertinent to their beloved Poland, which they considered enslaved by foreign domination. While the Polish government-in-exile was no longer officially recognized by the West, its representatives as well military leadership which fought alongside the Allies “regarded themselves responsible for the well-being of all Polish military personnel, their families, and war refugees.” They believed that the maintenance of “a strong and well-organized Polish community in the West would be important, in the future, to the struggle for Poland’s independence.”<sup>379</sup> That is, *Polonia*—Poles **outside** Poland—would lead Poland’s struggle for independence in toils which ran parallel to those expended by Ukrainians or Balts. Indeed, such psychological covenant was made by many who made Canada their home in the post-war years with most regarding their stay in Canada as only temporary. Some anticipated imminent return to Poland while others, including several among study participants, “treated Canada as a stepping-stone to the United States.”<sup>380</sup>

It has been argued Ukrainian displaced persons were similarly reluctant to return to Soviet-dominated Ukraine and that nationalist leaders within the Ukrainian community encouraged Ukrainians to migrate to such countries as Canada where they could potentially

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<sup>377</sup> Interview with Wanda (22 March 1995) 21.

<sup>378</sup> Displaced Persons Operations, Report of Central Headquarters for Germany, April 1946, p. 10, qtd. in Theresa Kurk McGinley. A Cry for Human Rights: The Polish Displaced Persons Problem and United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1951. (Doctoral Dissertation: University of Houston, 1995) 90.

<sup>379</sup> Edward Soltys. Road to Freedom. (Toronto: The Polish Combatants' Association in Canada Inc., 1997) 23.

<sup>380</sup> Benedykt Heydenkom. The Organizational Structure of the Polish Canadian Community. (Toronto: Canadian Polish Research Institute, 1979) 145. Henry Radecki cites other studies which similarly note pre-WWI Polish arrivals in Canada also came on a temporary basis; however, their objectives were strictly economic and not political as in the post-WWII arrivals. Ethnic Organizational Dynamics. (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1979) 33-34.

“regroup and recoup strength for the protracted struggle for a national homeland”.<sup>381</sup> Of Lithuanians, whose homeland was likewise geo-politically affected, Milda Danys writes of the practical political choice to resettle in Canada in a bid for “food, freedom, opportunities for work” while fleeing “the menace of hunger, another war... and forced labour, seizure by the Soviets and a boxcar train to Siberia.” Thus, of the motivating factors “[m]ore of the ‘push’ appears than the ‘pull’... Canada was accessible, available, the best bolt-hole of the pitifully few offered to the DPs.”<sup>382</sup>

One of the first organizations to emerge at war’s end was the formation in England of a Polish ex-servicemen’s mutual aid organization, *The Polish Combatants Association*. The main goals included assistance in adaptation to civilian life, education and skills development, and employment support. In an October 1945 bulletin Polish ex-servicemen were advised:

Even though the war is over, we remain still in exile. We cannot, nor can anybody else, predict how long this situation will continue. The question facing us now is how to organize our lives and work while we remain abroad.<sup>383</sup>

Six months later, it became apparent Great Britain had inherited post-war responsibility for Polish soldiers outside Poland. Britain’s Home Secretary, Ernest Bevin, issued his own bulletin in which he wrote, “His Majesty’s Government, has repeatedly stressed that its policy regarding the Polish Armed Forces in the West...is to support the voluntary return of Polish soldiers to Poland....”<sup>384</sup> Further, all Polish armed forces would be demobilized; thus, there would be no unifying organization. Polish civilians were equally encouraged to return to Poland. Although Bevin assured those who deemed return to Poland impossible “because of the existing political reality,” that they would be welcome to rebuild their lives outside Poland, his empathy stopped short of guaranteeing absolute assistance for all. Indeed, his final words urged the Poles to respond to patriotic duty, as well clearly stressed the preference of His Majesty’s Government:

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<sup>381</sup> Harold Troper and Morton Weinfeld. *Old Wounds: Jews, Ukrainians and the Hunt for Nazi War Criminals in Canada*. (Markham: Viking Penguin Books, 1988) 66.

<sup>382</sup> Milda Danys. *DP Lithuanian Immigration to Canada After the Second World War*. (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1986) 136.

<sup>383</sup> Edward Soltys. *Road to Freedom*. (Toronto: The Polish Combatants’ Association in Canada Inc., 1997) 23.

<sup>384</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

I declare that your immediate return home is in the best interest of Poland, which at this time needs the help of all her sons to begin the painstaking process of reconstruction to eradicate all traces of destruction.<sup>385</sup>

In May 1946, the *Polish Resettlement Corps* was created. The *Polish Resettlement Act* that further assisted in the reunification of Polish civilians with their veteran menfolk followed this in March 1947.<sup>386</sup> Its purpose was to assist in the settlement in Great Britain of Polish veterans [including the Polish Second Corps still based in Italy] and their families who refused to repatriate.

Through the latter part of 1946 and into the following year, about 200,000 Polish ex-soldiers settled in Great Britain. Many took advantage of various other resettlement opportunities in such countries as Canada, Australia, and the United States. Only 37,000, or 17.9%,<sup>387</sup> returned to Poland, despite pressures from both English and Polish authorities, including attempts by Polish Communist authorities to convince the UNRRA to facilitate repatriation, as well insistent Communist propaganda that worked through British and Italian press to alienate the Poles from the public.<sup>388</sup> Of General Anders' 80,000 soldier evacuees who survived exile in the Soviet Union, only 310, or 0.004%, returned to Soviet-dominated Poland. A further 32,600 civilians were transported to the United Kingdom through 1946-49: 10,000 from Italy, 15,000 from the Middle East and British East Africa, and 3,500 from India.<sup>389</sup> Thus, about 230,000 Poles were resettled in Great Britain after the war, 91% were Roman Catholic necessitating an enlargement of Polish Roman Catholic priesthood throughout the country.<sup>390</sup> Michael Hope suggests more than 80,000 [ex-soldiers and civilians] among these numbers were survivors of the deportation and exile experience, thus forming "the backbone of the Polish community in Great Britain."<sup>391</sup> And from

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<sup>385</sup> Edward Soltys. *Road to Freedom*. (Toronto: The Polish Combatants' Association in Canada Inc., 1997) 24.

<sup>386</sup> Michael Hope. *Polish Deportees in the Soviet Union: Origins of Post-War settlement in Great Britain*. (London: Veritas Foundation Publication Centre, 1998) 56.

<sup>387</sup> Jozef Gula. *The Roman Catholic Church in the History of the Polish Exiled Community in Great Britain*. (London: School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London, 1993) 146.

<sup>388</sup> Michael Hope. *Polish Deportees in the Soviet Union: Origins of Post-War settlement in Great Britain*. (London: Veritas Foundation Publication Centre, 1998) 53-56.

<sup>389</sup> *Ibid.*, 56. See also Wladyslaw Anders. *An Army in Exile* (London: MacMillan & Co. Ltd., 1949) 287.

<sup>390</sup> Jozef Gula. *The Roman Catholic Church in the History of the Polish Exiled Community in Great Britain*. (London: School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London, 1993) 158.

<sup>391</sup> Michael Hope. *Polish Deportees in the Soviet Union: Origins of Post-War settlement in Great Britain*. (London: Veritas Foundation Publication Centre, 1998) 57. For more comprehensive discussion of Poles in Great Britain, see Keith Sword, *The Formation of the Polish Community in Great Britain, 1939-1950*. (London: School of Slavonic and East European Studies, 1989). See also: *Federation of Poles in Great Britain*: <http://www.zem.co.uk/polinuk/fed/fed.htm>

these numbers, the majority of the 4,527 Polish ex-soldiers taken in by Canada through 1946-47 came from Great Britain with the remainder from Italy. All came under two-year labour contract. Lesser numbers of the veterans and their dependants trickled in over the course of the following two decades as individual immigrants with no links to any particular labour or immigration scheme.

Among the thirty-eight study participants, twenty-one, or 55%, came to Canada through Great Britain: twelve personnel from the Polish Second Corps; two female military medical personnel; the remainder civilians reunified with military male family members. Seventeen, or 45%, came to Canada direct, as civilians; eleven [or near 1/3 total study participants] were among the passengers of the *General Black* that arrived August 1949. Of these eleven, nine made the Oshawa area home as did ten of the Polish ex-soldiers who came to Canada under Britain's *Polish Resettlement Act*.

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Initially, the Polish veterans resided at British military installations including, ironically, in former German POW camps. As families were reunified, 459 hostels were established for the Poles throughout Britain. Some of the men found employment in factories, construction, mining, service industry, railways, textiles, and some became self-employed. A large number "coming from small villages and from families that had for generations engaged in agricultural work, turned again to the land." They also established the *Polish Farmers Union* in Edinburgh, November 1945.<sup>392</sup> However, the majority of the Polish veterans were initially assigned work in post-war reconstruction such as clearance of bomb damage as well engaged in agricultural work gangs. Kazimierz was demobilized near Glasgow, Scotland where he recalled:

After we come, we have this work, you know... on the field, dig potatoes... some, even, working with thresh wheat, uh... helps the people... civilian farmers... [Also] we have armour. We work in ammunition camp, all clean up the ammunition and detonate those charges, you know, for the guns... burn everything... clean up and... open fields; lots of mine[s]... field mines. The Scots people help the British Army put them in [the ground]. But after,

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<sup>392</sup> Jozef Gula. The Roman Catholic Church in the History of the Polish Exiled Community in Great Britain. (London: School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London, 1993) 162-63.

we have to destroy them. Oh, that's dangerous work. I was down there not quite one year.... we was in the school... yeah, evening school, get courses [in English language]. I don't get paid.<sup>393</sup>

Although Kazimierz states he received no payment for his work, he did acknowledge housing and food provided at the army camp as well receiving Army pay of about two pounds sterling per week, after deductions. Since enlisting in the Middle East, half his wages were transferred for the maintenance of the civilian Polish population still residing in the Middle East, India, New Zealand, Australia and British East Africa; none of his family members among them. Kazimierz would, however, eventually marry in Canada one woman who traveled from Camp Tengeru in Tanganyika [Tanzania] on the *General Black* in 1949. Further discussion on "bride price" follows later.

Many among the British public were sympathetic to the Polish tragedy and welcomed the Polish aid in Britain's post-war reconstruction; however, there existed misgivings, even strong objections, related primarily to fears of employment competition. Hostility toward the Polish veterans was especially fierce in some corners of the British press that denounced them as "anti-Soviet warmongering fascists" who were "taking away jobs from the British worker."<sup>394</sup> After all, British ex-servicemen also were demobilized and needful of jobs.

Despite initial reluctance to discuss experiences of discrimination, study participants who spent any time in Great Britain consistently recall British reserve in their associations with the people resulting in the sense they would always be perceived as "bloody foreigners." Many endured ill treatment because of accent, name, or simply for being Polish. "Ah, they treated us as a second class people," said Jurek. "You know, like you get the British noses up in the sky. Pick your own party."<sup>395</sup>

Although the majority remained in Great Britain, those who left did so to escape discrimination and derision as much to seek better opportunities elsewhere. As one woman put it: "In England, you always knew you were a foreigner; Toronto—all kind[s] of people—you felt at

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<sup>393</sup> Interview with Kazimierz (04 March 1995) 9-11.

<sup>394</sup> Michael Hope. Polish Deportees in the Soviet Union: Origins of Post-War settlement in Great Britain. (London: Veritas Foundation Publication Centre, 1998) 55.

<sup>395</sup> Interview with Jurek (04 September 1998) 17.



home."<sup>396</sup> But Canada was seldom the preferred destination since America's *Statue of Liberty* [and prosperity] held popular folkloric sway as it stood in the mind's eyes of most Poles as a constant beacon on the horizon of their dreams for a better future: *the American dream*. Although the United States treasury made significant financial contributions to International Refugee Organization [IRO] administration and operations, the country was the last to accept displaced persons for immigration.<sup>397</sup> When it did, immigration quotas for displaced persons set in the United States allowed for only small numbers of the Poles. Those who were permitted entry were classified as particular target groups; among them, about 1,000 Polish orphans from British East Africa and those accepted under the category "Polish Soldiers Quota".<sup>398</sup> However, the Polish ex-servicemen were told there was a lengthy waiting period and so, many cast their hopes elsewhere. Argentina and Australia competed as preference for some.

Only those who 'upgraded' or enhanced their pre-war skills through enrolment in language courses or in commercial or skills training while in England came to Canada better equipped for better jobs. For the majority of the others, as later discussion will demonstrate, most came to Canada only to be put at the back of the job queue; behind *British* subjects. Altogether, some 57,000 Polish veterans were placed in British industry by the end of 1947.<sup>399</sup>

Concurrent to the matter of re-settlement of the Polish veterans and reunification with family members was the matter of the fates of Polish civilian refugees and displaced persons, including, especially, orphans. A *Guardianship Committee*, established in 1945 for the care of the Polish orphans, determined they ought return to Poland since so many Poles—so much of the future Polish generation—perished or were displaced during the war.<sup>400</sup> However much Poland

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<sup>396</sup> Interview with Teresa (19 July 1998).

<sup>397</sup> Theresa Kurk McGinley. *A Cry for Human Rights: The Polish Displaced Persons Problem and United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1951*. (Doctoral Dissertation: University of Houston, 1995) 166. The United States did eventually take in one-third of IRO immigrants; 190.

<sup>398</sup> Theresa Kurk McGinley in *A Cry for Human Rights: The Polish Displaced Persons Problem and United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1951* (162), documents 30,000 Polish veterans emigrated to the United States from Great Britain. Conversely, Danuta Mostwin, in *The Transplanted Family, a study of social adjustment of the Polish Immigrant family to the United States after the Second World War* (65 & 179), documents 20,000.

<sup>399</sup> Michael Hope. *Polish Deportees in the Soviet Union: Origins of Post-War settlement in Great Britain*. (London: Veritas Foundation Publication Centre, 1998) 55.

<sup>400</sup> Lucjan Krolikowski. *Stolen Childhood*. [transl. by Kazimierz J. Rozniatowski] (Buffalo: Father Justin Rosary Hour, 1983) 174-178.

insisted on the return of the Polish children—denouncing their institutionalization under the suspect care of German clergy and the obstruction of their repatriation as *kidnapping* by Anders' emissaries, calling the affair a "tragedy"<sup>401</sup>—debate raged within *Polonia* whether their repatriation was a *fait accompli*.

One interviewee recalled the Polish orphans also living at Camp Tengeru in Tanganyika and resistance among the Poles to IRO efforts to send them back to Poland, also through Germany. She said, "we didn't want it, orphan[s], to go to Germany and they... stopped giving them food. So, what we did: we stretch our rations and give it to the kids."<sup>402</sup>

Polish/Soviet diplomats took the debate of repatriation of all Poles to the international forum where, for instance, it was argued before the United Nations General Assembly:

...the early return of displaced persons to their countries of origin should be encouraged and assisted in every possible way, ...[yet] the United Kingdom, the United States and occasionally France too had not only not co-operated with the countries of origin of the refugees with a view to their repatriation but had even taken steps likely to hinder it. There were still 400,000 citizens of the Soviet Union unable to return to their country of origin because of various obstacles that had been deliberately created to discourage and impede their repatriation.... [as well] a systematic campaign... to recruit Soviet citizens and send them to the United Kingdom, the United States or South America... [that] estimated the enormous financial and economic advantages that their countries would derive from the immigration of foreign labour.<sup>403</sup>

Implicit in the above statement is the argument that *Soviet citizens* include not only those deemed such by virtue of pre-war Soviet territorial regions, but also those who originated from post-war annexed regions. Poles from the eastern frontiers who were deported to exile in Soviet labour camps and who in 1943/44 were summarily declared by Soviet authorities to have become Soviet citizens as of the date of Soviet invasion [1939] are one example. No consideration appears to have been given by Soviet officials to the possibility that said Poles, as well other groups such as Ukrainians, might prefer to not return to a homeland under foreign domination. One might also read between the lines of the Soviet Union's insatiable need for a massive labour

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<sup>401</sup> NAC RG-25, vol. 3815, file 8522-40, pt. 1; "Political Situation in Poland". Polish Facts & Figures. (London: Press Office of the Polish Embassy) No. 90. 27 March 1948. 3.

<sup>402</sup> Interview with Wanda (22 March 1995) 20.

<sup>403</sup> NAC RG-25/F-6, vol. 2612, file 53. *Third Committee Summary Record of UN General Assembly*, 04 November 1947.

force to work in its vast hinterlands.

The IRO responded with its position that “[i]n no case would refugees be forced to return against their will.”<sup>404</sup> Unlike the UNRRA that had a fixed objective to repatriate persons displaced by the war, the IRO was specifically established to facilitate the resettlement of the unrepatriable masses with emphasis on the protection of the rights of individuals rather than on nationalist interests.<sup>405</sup> The IRO constitution included pre-determined valid objections to repatriation: “persecution, or fear, based on reasonable grounds of persecution because of race, religion, nationality or political opinions...” thus assuring legal and political protection for refugees.<sup>406</sup>

During its six years of operations, the IRO effected what one source describes as the most significant global resettlement program in history; providing for refugees food, shelter, and language and occupational training, as well influencing various national immigration policies, especially those related to special or *bulk labour* movements.<sup>407</sup> In essence, IRO resettlement schemes measured up as employment placement projects that benefited the economies of the receiving nations. Conversely, governments of former homelands argued that the IRO drained them of talent and of a much-needed post-war reconstruction labour pool.

Theresa Kurk McGinley argues that the particular agenda of the United States relevant in the debate of repatriation/resettlement of persons displaced by the war “reveals the effect of the Cold War on both foreign and domestic policy.”<sup>408</sup> That is, the war against Soviet ideology was a prime factor resulting in the United States more readily accepting persons displaced specifically by post-war Communist domination. And those displaced persons, such as the Poles, were subsequently classified and welcomed as *refugees* fleeing Soviet Communism.

Less subtly, Theresa Kurk McGinley asserts that in the clash of philosophies over

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<sup>404</sup> NAC RG-25/F-6, vol. 2612, file 53. *Third Committee Summary Record of UN General Assembly*, 04 November 1947.

<sup>405</sup> Theresa Kurk McGinley. *A Cry for Human Rights: The Polish Displaced Persons Problem and United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1951*. (Doctoral Dissertation: University of Houston, 1995) 15 & 105.

<sup>406</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>407</sup> “The Immigration Program”, in *A Report of the Canadian Immigration and Population Study*. (Manpower and Immigration Canada, 1974) 100.

<sup>408</sup> Theresa Kurk McGinley. *A Cry for Human Rights: The Polish Displaced Persons Problem and United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1951*. (Doctoral Dissertation: University of Houston, 1995) 6.

persons displaced by the war, "power politics, economics and the need for labor, influenced domestic policy and hence took precedence over compassion."<sup>409</sup> Exemplifying the ideological thrust of American policy vis-à-vis immigration of displaced persons, the *Lodge Act* [1950], an addendum to the *DP Act* [1948], reinforced American ideological objectives as the Act allowed for the granting of permanent residence to immigrants from among the displaced persons pools who enlisted and gave five-plus years service in the fight against Communism in Korea.<sup>410</sup> Thus, anti-Communist ideology, in practice, was the dominating factor in American solicitude toward immigrants-cum-new-Americans. How much of this political/ideological thinking filtered into Canadian policy?

By 1947, the IRO threatened to cut off funding for the maintenance of the Poles in *diaspora* putting pressure on the international community to put out the *Welcome* mats. For instance, the IRO instituted privation, including food rationing as discussed in the case of the Tengeru orphans, and discipline to encourage return to Poland.<sup>411</sup> Other tactics included censorship of the press, closure of Polish schools, and the creation of an agreement, in 1946, between the London government-in-exile and Warsaw, which assured no reprisals, would be taken against those who wished to be repatriated.<sup>412</sup> The difficulty with such an agreement lay in the lack of supervisory access of international agencies to ensure the spirit of the agreement was upheld.

Whatever the intent or sentiment, whether couched as patriotic obeisance or as humanitarian solicitude, the repatriation/resettlement tug-of-war underscores the growing economic and nation-building value given displaced persons by officials in Communist countries of origin as well potential resettlement by Capitalist nations. The debate was widespread. Canada favoured voluntary repatriation and rejected compulsion. Further, the

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<sup>409</sup> Theresa Kurk McGinley. *A Cry for Human Rights: The Polish Displaced Persons Problem and United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1951*. (Doctoral Dissertation: University of Houston, 1995) v & 201.

<sup>410</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

<sup>411</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 289, file 1-26-50. Letter from P. Jacobsen, IRO to W. /C. Innes, Ottawa; 21 July 1949.

<sup>412</sup> Theresa Kurk McGinley. *A Cry for Human Rights: The Polish Displaced Persons Problem and United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1951*. (Doctoral Dissertation: University of Houston, 1995) 66.

repatriation/resettlement debate “clouded post-war Soviet-Western relations and complicated social, economic and political stability in Europe.”<sup>413</sup>

After some years of argument, preparations were made in the spring of 1949 for the orphaned children residing in British East African settlement camps to return to Poland; however, at the last instant, the Vatican intervened with the announcement that Canada had agreed to take in the 150 Polish orphans from Camp Tengeru in Tanganyika.<sup>414</sup> Polish/Soviet officials cried foul, taking their protest to the United Nations General Assembly.<sup>415</sup>

Further complicating matters, the Poles were but one ‘group’ within the larger body of over 1 million people displaced from their homes by the war and under the care of the IRO. Over 142,000 Poles refused to repatriate.<sup>416</sup> The debate about their future was played out through media propaganda as well more intensely in the international diplomatic theatre, including via caustic Soviet/Polish delegations to the United Nations.

#### ‘DP’ Bull Labour

It would seem the *Anders Poles* were following in the footsteps of masses of people who, in 1921, fled post-Revolutionary Russia seeking asylum beyond Europe; many settling in Canada’s west, having followed late-19th, early 20th-century *bread* migrations.<sup>417</sup> Thus, awareness of the historic sufferings of victims of Russian oppression would lead some Canadians, especially compatriots and other sympathizers, to express concern for those displaced by the successors of Tsarist Russia: Stalinism and its sycophant, Communism.

Not only had they been displaced from their homeland by deportation and exile to Soviet labour camps in the early chapter of the war, most considered themselves post-war political

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<sup>413</sup> Harold Troper and Morton Weinfeld. Old Wounds: Jews, Ukrainians and the Hunt for Nazi War Criminals in Canada. (Markham: Viking Penguin Books, 1988) 66.

<sup>414</sup> Lucjan Krolikowski. Stolen Childhood. [transl. by Kazimierz J. Rozniatowski] (Buffalo: Father Justin Rosary Hour, 1983) 174-178. The children were placed in the care of the Church in Quebec, then placed in Montreal-area homes.

<sup>415</sup> NAC RG-25. vol. 3317, file 10258-40, pt. 1. Confidential communication from Secretary of State for External Affairs with attachment, “Attacks by Poland on Canada at the Fourth General Assembly of the United Nations.” 23 December 1949.

<sup>416</sup> Theresa Kurk McGinley. A Cry for Human Rights: The Polish Displaced Persons Problem and United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1951. (Doctoral Dissertation: University of Houston, 1995) 114.

<sup>417</sup> For a comprehensive contemporary consideration of the earlier *bread* migrations, see Anna Reczynska, For Bread and a Better Future. (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1996).

refugees: refugees from Communist hands.<sup>418</sup> As Theresa Kurk McGinley found in her study of 100 Polish post-WWII immigrants to the United States, those who refused repatriation to Poland objected to the classification as *displaced persons* for they viewed the terminology as an incorrect reflection of their circumstances and even took the terminology as one advanced as a derogatory misconception of their plight.<sup>419</sup> While the Poles considered their post-war status to be that of *refugees* fleeing Communism, many would spend their early years in Canada suffering under the epithet *DP* [displaced person]. Some today jokingly submit that *DP* means *delayed pioneer* or *delayed pilgrim*. Karl recalled it distorted as *dirty Polak*;<sup>420</sup> implicit is the negative connotation of *dirty Communist*. Others note the term hurled as a reference to *dangerous persons*. And in ignorance and/or lack of effort to distinguish between eastern European peoples, some Canadians extended their anti-Polish prejudice to other groups. For instance, some Lithuanian newcomers were called *damned Polacks*.<sup>421</sup> Until the mid-1970s, I thought it meant *dumb Polak*!

Female study participants relate fewer incidents of discrimination either in the form of reminders of their so-called *DP* status, or otherwise; likely, because most spent their early years in Canada within the domestic sphere and later, in the workplace, with women similarly newly arrived in Canada. Though she experienced the sting of discrimination into the early 1960s, Wanda recalls her ability to deflect the label once she and her husband purchased their first home: *home* in the truest sense.<sup>422</sup>

Indeed, most of those among the twenty-seven study participants who experienced some form of discrimination indicated such experiences continued through the 1960s. In the simplest

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<sup>418</sup> Post-war *refugees* are distinguished as those people who fled totalitarian regimes both before the outbreak of the war as well those who fled East European countries under Communist dominance after the war; defined in the United Nations Convention as "persons who have a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group." Whereas a *displaced person* is distinguished as someone "who had been uprooted from or displaced in their homelands by the war.... [s]ome... concentration camp survivors... [includes] those refusing to be repatriated to Communist regimes." See Valerie Knowles, *Strangers at Our Gates*. [Toronto: Dundum Press, 1997] 127. Although Knowles makes note of individuals displaced by the war who refused to return to a homeland under Communist rule, she makes no note, however, of the Polish survivors of deportation and exile in Soviet labour camps; a frequent oversight among historians.

<sup>419</sup> Theresa Kurk McGinley. *A Cry for Human Rights: The Polish Displaced Persons Problem and United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1951*. (Doctoral Dissertation: University of Houston, 1995) vi & 4.

<sup>420</sup> Interview with Karl (05 October 1998) 41.

<sup>421</sup> Milda Danys. *DP Lithuanian Immigration to Canada After the Second World War*. (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1986) 302.

<sup>422</sup> Interview with Wanda (03 March 1995) 27-28.

form, this was ill treatment because of accent. More serious was restricted access to jobs and/or promotions simply for being Polish. To subvert discrimination, some changed their names to Anglo-sounding surnames so that life could be easier with less emphasis on their ethnicity and more on who they were and what they might contribute; especially, in the workplace.

Yet, despite memories of ethnicized discrimination employed by some Anglo-Canadians, some among the *Anders Poles* today similarly exhibit racially-based discriminatory attitudes and reactions to recent newcomers, as well elements of envy toward contemporary immigrants.<sup>423</sup> For instance, several complained of lack of much-needed community support on their arrival in Canada in the post-war era through such programs as English language classes or work placement assistance, similar to those offered to immigrants today. One suggested all newcomers ought to similarly undertake labour contracts so that there would be “no free lunch”; however, he actually abandoned his contractual obligation for a better paying job!<sup>424</sup> Thus, there exists among some the attitude: *we made it on our own with no help, why should we pay for today's newcomers to take advantage of the system and our taxes?*

Seven study participants expressed strong discriminatory views complaining, for instance, “the country start[ed] sliding downward when they start accepting other rejects from other countries... People who didn't want to work. They come to Canada because it was an easy place to get on welfare; get the food and place to stay for nothing; you don't have to work for it.”<sup>425</sup> One interviewee implied newcomers rob Canada both by manipulating the welfare system as well literally committing criminal acts of theft.<sup>426</sup> Another specifically implicated illegal immigrants from Jamaica who he claimed not only break the law to enter Canada but who then commit such crimes as murder to then end up having a “better life” in a Canadian jail than they might in Jamaica.<sup>427</sup> Yet another simply stated Canada should “let [in] more white people”.<sup>428</sup>

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<sup>423</sup> Edite Noivo, “Neither ‘Ethnic Heroes’ nor ‘Racial Villains’: Inter-Minority Group Racism” in Vic Satezewich, ed. Racism and Social Inequality in Canada. (Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, Inc., 1998) 223-241.

<sup>424</sup> Interview with Julian (05 December 1998) 55.

<sup>425</sup> Interview with Jacob (17 February 1999) 25.

<sup>426</sup> Interview with Zygmunt (01 March 1999) 38.

<sup>427</sup> Interview with Ludwik (10 February 1999) 39.

<sup>428</sup> Interview with Adam (18 October 1998) 44.

Edite Noivo argues "Euroethnics' misconceptions about new immigrants abusing the welfare system or the presumed higher propensity of newcomers to engage in criminal behaviours are largely built on media representations of such populations."<sup>429</sup> Around the time interviews were conducted for this study, media attention was focused on two particularly violent criminal acts: the *Just Desserts* shooting where several black men robbed an upscale Toronto restaurant, shooting and killing Vicki Leimonis, a young woman of Greek heritage, and the shooting and killing of a white female Brampton, Ontario bank clerk, Nancy Kidd, by black robbers.

The majority of study participants, however, noted Canada was big enough for more immigrants without advocating any preferred racial or religious criteria. A few observed the only 'real' Canadians were First Nations peoples.

In her analysis of displaced persons who made Brazil home after WWII, Maria do Rosario Rolfsen Salles argues there does not exist a homogeneous group, *displaced persons*. Rather, she submits, "what exists are the different nationalities that make up that group, divided internally by their religious ties, conflicting political ideologies or even professional activities."<sup>430</sup> This analysis might explain, in part, the vehemence with which study participants reject the term, *displaced person*. There is no question of their identification with the Polish tragedy and myths of deportation/exile to Soviet labour camps as victims of political ideology and events experienced generation after generation, and the perception they were not strictly victims of war. Further, as will be discussed in Chapter 7, these Poles hold fast to a particular concept of *Polishness* grounded in the Roman Catholic faith and, more particularly, in the historicity of the inter-war project of intensive polonization, particularly of the eastern borderlands. Their war-time experiences in Soviet labour camp life with oppression of language and of cultural and religious practices further reinforced among most a steadfast retention of and commitment to preservation of *Polishness*. However, where Stalin failed in his efforts to de-polonize the Polish deportees,

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<sup>429</sup> Edite Noivo, "Neither 'Ethnic Heroes' nor 'Racial Villains': Inter-Minority Group Racism" in Vic Satzewich, ed. *Racism and Social Inequality in Canada*. (Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, Inc., 1998) 229.

<sup>430</sup> Maria do Rosario Rolfsen Salles, "Displaced Persons and the direction of Post-World War II Brazilian Immigration Policy" presented at European Social Science History Conference, Amsterdam. 12 April 2000.



assimilationist pressures in new homelands such as Canada would succeed; for, by the third generation *Polishness* is near completely diluted.

Still, the label *DP* followed many post-war immigrants to Canada, among them the Poles, who often faced derision and discrimination as a result of misguided perceptions that *DPs*, or as a few interviewees recalled, “*f-ing foreigners*” or “*f-ing Polaks*”, took jobs away from *real* Canadians.

One of the *Anders Poles* who arrived on the *General Black* describes it thus:

I felt, personally, that I was persecuted, almost, you know. I wasn't accepted on the terms that my mind dictated [to] me, or [that] my expectations were. But, then, on the other hand I was in the circles of people, working class people, and, you know, older immigrants, the ones that were immigrants, they understood me.... But, the Canadians... that was very hard to understand them, you know... why they persecuted me?... Like calling me a 'DP'... It's very negative! ...it killed the incentive in me... to fully develop and to be grateful to a country that has accepted me as an immigrant... I was drained because of those reactions of the Canadians against immigrants.... the shallow thinkers... they singled you out because of your accent... you were labeled right away... But, there were some compassionate people, but... [there were] the ones... [that] had [a] sort of resentment towards us that we were taking their jobs away...<sup>431</sup>

Another said:

We have 'domestic' [contract]. We could not apply for any other position, no.... they wanted just bulls to work, and that's all. They did not need people with brains because they have plenty of that; only hard work they needed help with.<sup>432</sup>

And, one Canadian wrote to the government:

You were going ahead full-blast building your industry, your cities, your highways, and bringing in those poor beaten people as the bull labour. The low-pay workers. The oxen, if you will. It was outrageous... They were brought to Canada to do the work Canadians wouldn't do... From my vantage point, Canada had very little to be proud of in the way these post-war immigrants from Europe, the Slavs mainly, were handled. I hope they have forgiven you and this country.<sup>433</sup>

Which was it? Immigrants taking jobs away from 'real' Canadians, or immigrants doing the jobs 'real' Canadians didn't want to do? As their voices attest, there is little doubt how the *Anders Poles* themselves felt.

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<sup>431</sup> Interview with Ryszard (06 March 1995) 27.

<sup>432</sup> Interview with Wanda (03 March 1995) 23.

<sup>433</sup> Letter qtd. in Barry Broadfoot. *The Immigrant Years*. (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre Ltd., 1986) 178.

## Gatekeepers: Who Gets In and How?

While many 'ordinary' Canadians felt threatened by the significant influx of foreigners into Canada during the post-war immigration boom, Canadian policy-makers, often at the urging of various business interests, advocated increased immigration to aid post-war economic and national growth. Increased *assimilable* population, it was thought, created a larger market, more economies of scale and greater productivity, not to mention greater sovereignty over unsettled territory and the potential for immigrants to act as links in international trade.<sup>434</sup>

Overall, Canadian business interests and various government officials placed significant value on the immigrant worker as economic commodity. With a view to quickly shift from war-time industrial production to peacetime production, policy-makers saw the value to be had in acquiring a large pool of [generally grateful] skilled and unskilled workers whose education and maintenance into adulthood was not Canadian-borne. Nor would it be necessary to invest energy or money in education reform that might improve the quality of 'made in Canada' skilled or semi-skilled labour.

Australia, which similarly welcomed some *Anders Poles*, likewise recognized the key role immigration might play in post-war reconstruction for, like Canada, the onset of the war complemented the shift from rural economic activity toward an industrial-based economy. As in Canada, post-war immigration satisfied Australian population needs [labour and market; workers and breeders] both "for defence and for the fullest expansion of its economy",<sup>435</sup> with the added goal of filling "the serious gaps in the age structure of the existing population."<sup>436</sup> Thus, research and documentation of the parallel movements of the *Anders Poles* to Australia and Canada, both colonies of Great Britain and both influenced by British policy and affairs, would serve as an

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<sup>434</sup> Howard Adelman, "Canadian Refugee Policy in the Postwar Period: An Analysis" in H. Adelman, ed., Refugee Policy: Canada and the United States. (Toronto: York Lanes Press Ltd., 1991) 178. Also, Valerie Knowles, 126.

<sup>435</sup> John Atchison. "Immigration in Two Federations" in Bruce Hodgins, et al, in Federalism in Canada and Australia: Historical Perspectives, 1920-1988. (Peterborough, Canada: Frost Centre for Canadian Heritage and Development Studies, Trent University, 1989) 205.

<sup>436</sup> Freda Hawkins. Immigration policy and management in selected countries. (Ottawa: Manpower and Immigration, 1974) 24.

interesting point of departure for a comparative study of immigration, economic, and social analysis vis-à-vis *Polonia* and its contributions to national economic, cultural and social life.

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In 1946, the Senate Standing Committee on Immigration and Labour reconvened [standing until 1949] to consider: a) desirability of admitting immigrants; b) preferred type[s] of immigrants; c) availability of such immigrants; d) facilities, resources, and capacity of Canada to absorb, employ and maintain such immigrants; and, e) terms and conditions of such admission.<sup>437</sup> Various business interests identified an immediate need for approximately 44,000 workers for the mining and lumber industries as well for agricultural and domestic work. It was suggested such workers could be culled from among the masses of persons displaced by the war.<sup>438</sup>

In its report, the Committee noted general public approval of immigration, particularly of refugees and displaced persons, and urged the re-opening of immigration offices in Europe. They also stated that qualified **agricultural and industrial workers** who could be successfully absorbed be sought. The Committee also criticized the government for having an exclusionary and restrictive non-immigration policy.

The Polish community sent two delegations to the hearings. One, pro-Soviet, argued Poles should return to their homeland and not drift into the capitalist clutches of such nations as Canada and further that those likely to apply to immigrate to Canada were "not very productive" types who were likely Hitlerite collaborators.<sup>439</sup> The other, anti-Soviet, argued displaced Poles were political refugees fleeing undemocratic conditions and desperately in need of safe haven.

The government's first significant effort to open the doors to persons displaced by the war came with the establishment of the "close relatives scheme" [P.C. 2071, 28 May 1946] which

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<sup>437</sup> Gerald Dirks. Canada's Refugee Policy: Indifference or Opportunism. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1977) 131.

<sup>438</sup> Aloysius Balawyder. The Maple Leaf and The White Eagle: Canadian-Polish Relations, 1918-1978. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980) 19-21. Between 1945-51, nearly 600,000 immigrants entered Canada; through 1947-51, 157,687 displaced persons, 56,549 of whom were Poles. R. K. Kogler lists 62,000 Polish veterans and displaced persons arriving through 1946-1955, in "Occupational Trends in the Polish Canadian Community 1941-71", in Frank Renkiewicz, The Polish Presence in Canada and America. (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1982) 211-227.

<sup>439</sup> qtd. in Edward Soltys. Road to Freedom. (Toronto: The Polish Combatants' Association in Canada Inc., 1997) 26.

permitted the immigration of United Nations *displaced persons* and *assimilees* [mostly anticipated to be Balts and Poles] with close relatives in Canada who could, presumably, maintain them.<sup>440</sup> They must have proven good health and have evidence of knowledge of their destination [i.e. the private address of a relative]. Implicit was that no Mennonites or Ukrainians were to be selected as they were generally considered [by Stalin!] to be Russian citizens as at 01 September 1939.

Still, overriding stereotypes [likely bureaucratic holdovers of the Sifton years] of the Ukrainian “as simple farm folk, non-disruptive, non-competitive, ever docile and prepared to do rural labour”—since rural areas were considered to be the proper place of immigrants—eventually gained some Ukrainians, along with Poles and other Slavs and Balts, admission. Jews, who were generally perceived to be urbanites and therefore competition for employment, were less welcome.<sup>441</sup> Roman Catholics and Protestants were to be selected in equal proportions; again, excluding Jews.

Exclusionary criteria lay inherently within the criteria allowing for assimilees to immigrate to Canada. In some measure, the “close relatives scheme” harkened back to the earlier “stalwart peasants in sheepskin coats” immigration policies of Clifford Sifton and Wilfrid Laurier at the turn of the century that were designed to generate both farm labour and more assimilable citizens.<sup>442</sup>

Edward Soltys makes the following observation:

...[A]s being qualitatively different from immigration policies of later years, is a certain a priori categorization of would-be immigrants according to the ‘traditional’, ‘ethnic’, and occupational preferences. A self-perpetuating limitation of ethnic (i.e. non Anglo-Saxon) immigrants to only one type of employment, limited the ability of ethnic groups to integrate smoothly into Canadian society.<sup>443</sup>

Of assimilees, Prime Minister Mackenzie King would, in a May, 1947 parliamentary speech, classify preferred new Canadians as those who would **not** alter the *fundamental character* of the Canadian population; that is, those who would more easily assimilate into the

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<sup>440</sup> NAC, RG-25-A12, vol. 2113-AR408/4, pt. 1.

<sup>441</sup> Harold Troper and Morton Weinfeld. Old Wounds: Jews, Ukrainians and the Hunt for Nazi War Criminals in Canada. (Markham: Viking/Penguin Books, 1988) 65.

<sup>442</sup> Donald H. Avery. Reluctant Host: Canada's Response to Immigrant Workers, 1896-1994. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1995) 24.

<sup>443</sup> Edward Soltys. Road to Freedom. (Toronto: The Polish Combatants' Association in Canada Inc., 1997) 38.

White Anglo-Saxon Protestant [WASP] majority and whose labour could be absorbed into the Canadian labour market without putting any strain on 'real' Canadians' access to jobs.

Polish Ex-Servicemen and Britain's *Polish Resettlement Act*

In April, 1946, Vincent Massey, the Canadian High Commissioner in London, advised Ottawa that "[t]he British government is greatly worried over the disposition of Polish servicemen who have been or are to be demobilized. Any help that Canada or other countries could give to them would be very much welcome."<sup>444</sup> Of the 200,000 Polish ex-soldiers demobilized in Great Britain, Canada would—though initially reluctant—through 1946–47, take in 4,527 for government officials recognized a *good thing* when it was staring right at them. Although Edward Soltys and Sara Van Aken-Rutkowski explore in greater depth issues vis-à-vis the Polish veterans, it is essential to acknowledge and explore certain aspects as they relate to this study as well to add to existing scholarship.

At the close of the war, many farmers lost German POWs and other interred prisoners-of-war, including Japanese, agricultural labour and subsequently suggested foreign workers be permitted to immigrate to Canada to assist in heavy agricultural work. Sugar beet farmers especially required replacement labour. A senior official of the Department of External Affairs wrote in a May 9, 1946 memorandum to Prime Minister Mackenzie King:

It has occurred to me that we might be in a position to kill two or three birds with one stone by agreeing to take demobilized Polish soldiers—man for man—for the German prisoners of war we would be returning to Britain. This way, we would be getting a supply of heavy labour of the type I understand to be in considerable demand.<sup>445</sup>

As an added bonus, officials with the Dominion Sugar Company of Chatham, Ontario noted the practicality of housing the Polish ex-soldiers in the existing [POW] camps which could be similarly operated "but with much less expense and organization necessary since no guards would be needed."<sup>446</sup> Did no one consider that the Poles had, since 1939, been living variations

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<sup>444</sup> qtd. in Gerald Dirks, Canada's Refugee Policy: Indifference or Opportunism. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1977) 141.

<sup>445</sup> *Ibid.*, 141: Department External Affairs, file 5127-EA-40.

<sup>446</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 275, 1-26-1, pt. 1. Letter to A. MacNamara, 29 November 1946; qtd. in Danys, Milda. DP Lithuanian

of camp life whether in Soviet labour camps, army camps, displaced persons camps, or demobilization camps?

In analyzing potential political fall-out, officials with the Department of External Affairs thought that Polish ex-soldiers who would be coming specifically to take the place of German prisoners-of-war in agriculture and lumber work "would diminish or remove the danger of political controversy."<sup>447</sup>

By late May, 1946, the Prime Minister had a scheme endorsed by Cabinet. In July an Order-in-Council [P.C. 3112] permitting the immigration to Canada of "4,000 single ex-members of the Polish Armed Forces who served with the Allied Forces... and who are presently located in the United Kingdom and Italy and are qualified for and willing to undertake agricultural employment in Canada" was passed. Altogether, 4,527 would enter under Britain's *Polish Resettlement Act* movement, all committed to two-year labour contracts in farming, mining or forestry.

The British treasury covered transportation expenses from England and Italy to Canada. The departments of Labour and Mines and Resources assumed transport and administration expenses on Canadian soil. Civilian work clothing [great coats, work mitts and coveralls] was to be provided by the War Assets Corporation [P.C. 46/4202]. As late as spring 1949, Order-in-Council [P.C. 825] gave authorization for the payment of a range of medical and hospital expenses incurred by the Polish veterans from the time of their arrival. Such infirmities included tuberculosis, lingering war injuries, mental illness, as well as a growing number of other afflictions such as ulcers, hernias, haemorrhoids, and venereal disease.<sup>448</sup>

Within days of Cabinet approval, a telegram from Canada's [Acting] High Commissioner in London informed officials at the Department of External Affairs that the United Kingdom was grateful for Canada's offer to take the Polish ex-soldiers; "man for man"; however, it was advised that the scheme to replace German POWs with the Poles:

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Immigration to Canada After the Second World War. (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1986) 84.

<sup>447</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 626, file 23-7-2-1, Polish Veterans, vol. 1. Confidential letter to Humphrey Mitchell, Minister of Labour, 14 May 1946.

<sup>448</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 897, file 8-9-77. Correspondence to A. MacNamara, Deputy Minister, Labour from A. Ross, Deputy Minister. Defence; 21 November 1946.

...not be unduly stressed in any publicity...because of adverse effect it would have upon Polish morale. The best type of man will probably volunteer for labour service in Canada under conditions prescribed if early assurance could be given that satisfactory behaviour would lead to ultimate qualification for Canadian citizenship, but if emphasis were put on their role as relief for enemy prisoners of war we would be less likely to get satisfactory applicants.<sup>449</sup>

By late July, meetings between General Anders and H. R. Hare, Chief of Canadian-Polish Movement Unit, were underway in Italy. Hare described to Anders agricultural conditions in Canada as well program details and logistics of the movement of the Polish veterans.<sup>450</sup> Anders accepted, on behalf of the Polish ex-servicemen, "status as wards of Canadian Government, but would resent personal interference from present Polish Legation in Canada." In other words, Anders held fast to his rejection of the Polish/Soviet Communist government and his loyalty to the London-based government-in-exile.

In an impassioned plea to the Minister of Labour wherein he indicated he felt "responsible as if they were my own sons," Anders expressed concern over the welfare of the Poles should there be difficulties with the agricultural labour contracts. Further, Anders inquired after the post-contract status of the Poles as "immigration card and identity slip are insufficient" documents to allow for post-contract employment. They also left the Poles in a citizenship void. And finally, Anders asked that a four-person Polish administrative team, as well as six priests to minister to the religious needs of the Polish veterans, be permitted to accompany the Polish ex-servicemen to Canada so that they might monitor and assist the Poles should the need arise.<sup>451</sup>

Canadian officials responded in the negative to the requests for the priests and four-person support team. Canada did, however, accept moral responsibility for the Polish men; but, they would remain in a citizenship void until as late as 1955, since they were admitted as "non-immigrants" and later granted permanent landing status only after completion of their two-year labour contract. That is, they did not even qualify for consideration of citizenship until after the

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<sup>449</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 626, file 23-7-2-1, vol. 1. Telegram; 05 June 1946.

<sup>450</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 626, file 23-7-2-1, Polish Veterans, vol. 1. Telegram No. 1778; 26 August 1946.

<sup>451</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 626, file 23-7-2-1, Polish Veterans, vol. 1. Telegram [Ancona, Italy] 31 August 1946.

two-year probationary period during which they could be deported, and after another five years' residence in Canada. Thus, participation in Canadian society was based more particularly and tentatively on their contractual obligations than on any certainty of permanent citizenship.

Deportation procedures were begun in a few cases, in part to make a point about the fragile nature of Canada's benevolence. However, officials with the Department of Mines and Resources determined it was neither worth the potential diplomatic nuisance that might arise in attempting to return "criminals" to Poland nor worth the potential fallout that might ensue among the other Polish veterans in Canada.<sup>452</sup>

About 4,210, or 93%, of the 4,527 Polish ex-servicemen were granted permanent landing through 1948,<sup>453</sup> but only after it was brought to the attention of the Deputy Minister of Labour, Arthur MacNamara, that "the greatest discriminatory action taken... is our refusal to accept Polish veterans as "landed immigrants"."<sup>454</sup> This observation occurred only after pressure on the Department of Mines and Resources from the *Polish Combatants Association*. The Association further informed the Department of a propaganda campaign undertaken by Communist agents who argued that Canada discriminated against the Polish ex-servicemen since other individuals later recruited under bulk labour movements were immediately granted permanent landing status. They were also required to fulfill only a one-year agricultural or domestic labour contract, against the two-year undertaking of the Polish veterans.<sup>455</sup>

All study participants acquired citizenship as soon as was permissible. Among the Polish veterans who came to Canada during 1946-47 under the *Polish Resettlement Act*, citizenship was generally acquired in 1955/56. All the while, each man was gainfully employed, most owned their own home, were raising a family, and paying taxes. None, however, complain today about the lengthy period between landing on temporary status and acquiring citizenship. All accept the

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<sup>452</sup> NAC RG-76, vol. 841, file 553-53-1, 4,000 Polish Ex-Soldiers; Agricultural Work. Memorandum; 19 February 1949.

<sup>453</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 628, file 23-7-17-5-1. Memorandum to A. H. Brown from W. W. Dawson, Director, Department of Labour; 15 December 1953.

<sup>454</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 628, file 23-7-17-5-1. Correspondence from W. W. Dawson; 19 February 1948.

<sup>455</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 628, file 23-7-17-5-1. Correspondence from A. L. Jolliff, Director Department Mines and Resources to A. MacNamara; 18 February 1948.



interval as one of "paying dues" to the country which took them in. Gratitude overrides criticism.

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A significant bureaucratic infrastructure developed for administration of the scheme beginning with the dispatch of selection teams, which included members of the RCMP and medical personnel, to Italy and England, through the two-year contract period and even, in small measure, beyond. Among those whose narratives contributed to this study, sixteen were Polish veterans who fought with the Allies; most notably in Italy. Ten qualified under the *Polish Resettlement Act* to immigrate to Canada after the war. The six remaining lived in England until immigration to Canada in later years; most in the early 1950s.

Canadian officials in Italy received approximately 7,000 applications [Appendix D: *Polish Veteran's Application Form*] from mostly single Polish ex-servicemen. Officers were not favoured. Forty-five hundred applicants were initially screened as potential immigrants; 1,248 among this number were interviewed and from this first round, 669 Polish ex-servicemen were accepted.



Fig 20 - General Anders, Predapil, Italy 1946<sup>156</sup>

Further screening and interviews ensued and by November 1946, two ships, the *Sea Robin* and *Sea Snipe*, set sail from Italy with 2,902 Polish ex-servicemen bound by two-year contracts for agricultural work in Canada [Appendix E: *Schedule I - Undertaking*]. The remainder required to fulfill the 'quota' of 4,500 would be recruited in England in the spring, 1947, and sail to Canada on *Aquitania*. Altogether, among study participants who came to Canada under the *Resettlement Act*, five were recruited in Italy, and five in England. Each underwent an elementary medical examination, a brief interview with Canadian officials

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<sup>156</sup> From archives W. Wojtasiak.

that included finger-printing by the RCMP; said interview often mediated by a priest who acted as translator. Several recall taking the crucial "agricultural test": identification of various grains and exhibition of knowledge of planting and harvesting seasons, of farm machinery and livestock, including gestation for cow, horse and incubation period for chicken. After all, it was experienced agricultural workers which selection teams sought.

Roman, an Agricultural Youth Education leader as well as having two years' Agricultural schooling prior to the outbreak of the war, recalled arguing with the selection agent about white and red clover. He left the interview to later return with clover from an Italian field. Having proved his point, Roman was among the first successful applicants. He then earned extra pocket money as urban-raised comrades paid him to "teach them" how to pass the test.<sup>457</sup>

Witold recalls that his interview with an RCMP officer lasted about five minutes, including fingerprinting. The medical was a production-line-type visual examination: eight men stripped down were asked by a medical doctor to stretch, turn this way, then that.<sup>458</sup> As a result of such sloppy procedure, numerous Poles arrived in Canada with various diseases, including Witold who was afflicted with tuberculosis. But the experience gained from a variety of such careless screening procedures, or lack of procedures, informed subsequent selection teams to better screen subsequent *Polish Resettlement Corps* and other potential new Canadians from displaced persons labour pools.<sup>459</sup>



As mentioned, the movement of the Polish veterans involved a significant administrative and transportation infrastructure that included discussions between federal officials and farmers as well representatives of mining and logging/lumber industries. From these discussions, remuneration was ostensibly set at a rate commensurate with that a Canadian agricultural worker would receive at the time at \$45.00/month, plus room and board. This, however, proved

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<sup>457</sup> Interview with Roman (27 January 1999) 25-26.

<sup>458</sup> Interview with Witold (23 July 1998) 27.

<sup>459</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 283, file 1-26-24-1, pt. 2. Letter from Humphrey Mitchell to W. E. Harris. 08 June 1950.

immediately inadequate and unacceptable.

Naval carriers facilitated transatlantic travel. Rail transport in Canada was facilitated by CNR-CPR that called back into service the old "colonist cars".<sup>460</sup> All provinces [but not the territories] received some of the Polish veterans. Quebec, however, was initially reluctant to do so for Quebec officials argued it would be more worthwhile to encourage Canadians to stay on farms than to import would-be farmers. The majority were placed in Ontario, with the prairie provinces a distant second.<sup>461</sup>

On arrival at Halifax, the Polish veterans were photographed in groups; however, this time-consuming procedure was abandoned. Papers and fingerprints were cross-referenced. None of the men who participated in this study complained of the process as discriminatory. In his memoirs, one Polish veteran of the Polish Second Corps wrote of the disembarkment process:

Nobody was in a hurry to disembark. Then someone started spreading the rumour that the Canadian police, as well as the customs guards, would be searching us because they didn't want any soldiers bringing in souvenirs such as firearms or other explosive materials. As for me, all I had was a knapsack and a suitcase.... After waiting a half-hour in line, I asked a buddy to watch my stuff while I went back on ship to the toilet. When I opened the toilet door, at first I thought I'd made a mistake and had wound up in the munitions storeroom. The whole floor was covered with grenades, and there were all sorts of revolvers, German automatics, Tommy guns and even some explosives, which we used to call "Sausages" or 808's. I took one quick look around and shoved a pistol into one pocket of my uniform and another one into the other pocket, then put about six grenades under my jacket and walked out as if nothing had happened.... When I went up to the desk I boldly threw my knapsack and suitcase onto the table. The clerk at the table asked me if I had any guns or liquor. I answered that I didn't have anything and for him to go ahead and search me if he wanted to. He put a chalk mark on my knapsack and suitcase, and that was it as far as customs was concerned. I noticed that others were given a thorough search.<sup>462</sup>

He further recalled that after dinner on their first night on arrival at a military base in Southern Ontario, a delegation of Polish-Canadians visited the Polish ex-soldiers at the camp, giving them a "warm welcome."

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<sup>460</sup> Brian S. Osborne and Susan E. Wurtele. "The Other Railway: Canadian National's Department of Colonization and Agriculture" in *Prairie Forum*, Vol. 20, No. 2: Fall 1995.

<sup>461</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 3033, Polish Veterans Statistics, file 26.

<sup>462</sup> Jozef Bauer. "The Youngest Soldier" in Benedykt Heydenkorn, ed., *Memoirs of Polish Immigrants in Canada*. (Toronto: Canadian-Polish Research Institute, 1979) 5.



Fig. 21 - Polish Ex-Servicemen Disembark *Sea Robin* at Halifax; November 1946<sup>163</sup>



Fig. 22 - Verification of Identity/Fingerprints  
Polish Ex-Servicemen—November 1946<sup>164</sup>

<sup>163</sup> NAC C144924; RG-27, vol. 3041, file 131, Pictures, Polish Veterans: 1946.

<sup>164</sup> NAC C144930; RG-27, vol. 3041, file 131, Pictures, Polish Veterans: 1946.

OWNER'S COPY

O.K.

PERSONAL IDENTIFICATION

DESCRIPTION  
 BORN 20-7-1922  
 HEIGHT 5'9"  
 WEIGHT 165 lbs  
 EYES Blue  
 HAIR Brown  
 COMP. H.C.B.

SIGNATURE *[Signature]*

FAMILY NAME BIALY

NAME BIALY

FIRST NAME LTD

RIGHT INDEX FINGERPRINT  
 TAKEN ON DEPARTURE

A

PERSONAL IDENTIFICATION  
 NO. 5174

EXPIRES *[Signature]*

Fig 23 (a) - Personal Identification for Entry into Canada<sup>165</sup>

I. & O. PASS

APPROVED *[Signature]*

CANADIAN IMMIGRATION  
 18 FEB 1947  
 ADM. BLDG. 100  
 ST. JAMES ST.  
 WINDSOR, ONT.

ADMITTED TO IMMIGRANT  
 18 FEB 1947  
 H. J. MacNamara

Fig 23 (b) - Obverse Personal Identification for Entry into Canada<sup>166</sup>

Costs to transport the Polish ex-servicemen to Canada were borne by Great Britain. Initial Department of National Defence estimates for the transportation, food, landing medical expenses such as chest X-rays, accommodation, "reception and distribution" staff, ordnance services and supplies, born on Canadian soil were assessed at about \$162,000.00<sup>167</sup> These rose dramatically when, for instance, other administrative and medical expenses were incurred during



the two-year contract period, and even for a time after. For instance, ninety of the Polish veterans were hospitalized for various periods for tuberculosis [some, as Witold, for the duration of their two-year contract period and beyond], said costs rising to over \$107,000.<sup>168</sup>

Fig 24 - Polish Veteran at Brandon, Manitoba TB Sanatorium, 1947<sup>169</sup>

<sup>165</sup> From archives of F Bialy.

<sup>166</sup> From archives of F Bialy.

<sup>167</sup> RG-27, vol 3021, Polish Veterans Correspondence, vol. 3. Letter from W. G. Mills, to A. MacNamara: 08 February 1947

<sup>168</sup> RG-27, vol 3021, Polish Veterans Correspondence, Vol. 3. Letter from George V. Haythorne to A. MacNamara: 21 February 1947

<sup>169</sup> From archives of C. Borek.



Fig 25 - Polish Veterans  
Leather Crafts - Brandon,  
Manitoba TB Sanatorium, 1947<sup>170</sup>

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The arrival of the Polish veterans followed closely the return of Canada's own ex-servicemen who sought reintegration into the workplace. Although the immediate post-war period of high unemployment was in decline, pockets of labour unrest prevailed. Thus, not all Canadians were enamoured with the arrival of the Polish veterans, no matter their contributions to the Allied war effort or their plight. And so the Poles would again face discrimination and derision as experienced in England, as those who immigrated to the United States would encounter American mistrust of foreigners.<sup>171</sup>

Even parliamentary debates swirled around the subject of the Polish ex-servicemen. These included personal appeals from Members of Parliament, such as from Lawrence Skey, [Trinity], who stated:

I have served with a number of these men to whom I am referring, namely Polish airmen. I know the tremendous loyalty, courage and powers of endurance which they possess. I know they would be good citizens.<sup>172</sup>

Some parliamentarians, however, viewed the Polish veterans with derision and suspicion.

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<sup>170</sup> From archives of C. Borek. *Practical employment skills?*

<sup>171</sup> Theresa Kurk McGinley. *A Cry for Human Rights: The Polish Displaced Persons Problem and United States Foreign Policy 1945-1951* (Doctoral Dissertation: University of Houston, 1995) 165.

<sup>172</sup> qtd. in Edward Soltys. *Road to Freedom*. (Toronto: The Polish Combatants' Association in Canada Inc., 1997) 32.

For instance, John Blackmore [Lethbridge] expressed concern over the “un-Britishness” of the Poles. Further, he questioned a preponderance of Roman Catholicism as potentially harmful to the religious balance of the country, as well he questioned the political sway—whether toward nazism or communism—of the Polish ex-servicemen. Finally, he challenged whether they would easily assimilate—abandon their language and culture—so that they might become “good Canadians”.<sup>473</sup> Others questioned the need for immigration until all Canadians were employed.

Questions also arose vis-à-vis costs associated with the movement of the Polish veterans. Douglas Harkness [Calgary East] maintained the moneys “expended to bring out the Polish soldiers... be considered as loans” which the Poles ought to repay. Further, he argued, financial assistance and preference ought first be extended to immigrants from the British Isles who “follow our way of life; they have essentially the same laws and particularly they speak the same language... they are assimilated almost immediately.”<sup>474</sup>

Labour groups were divided in their response to the Polish veteran resettlement scheme. On the agricultural front, the Vancouver branch of the Canadian Congress of Labour, which feared increased tensions between employers and sugar beet workers, argued the scheme would create “a supply of cheap labor, this again creating a supply of workers who will be forced to work for any wages or conditions imposed on them by the bosses.”<sup>475</sup> One branch of the Orange Lodge echoed these sentiments arguing that the Polish veterans were displacing Canadians from farm work.<sup>476</sup> And soon after the Poles arrived in Canada, the United Farmers of Alberta protested against their abandoning the farms and their contractual obligations.<sup>477</sup>

Others complained the Poles would take jobs away from Canadians. For instance, Local 1804 (Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan) of the Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners expressed complete disagreement with the importation of any labour groups “while there is un-employment”

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<sup>473</sup> Hansard. 28 August 1946. 5514-5518.

<sup>474</sup> Hansard. 05 May 1947. 2765.

<sup>475</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 3531, file 3-26-38-1, pt. 1. 18 June 1946.

<sup>476</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 626, file 23-7-8, pt. 1. Correspondence 01 December 1946.

<sup>477</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 3532, file 3-26-38-1, pt. 3. Correspondence to Humphrey Mitchell; 29 December 1948.

in Canada.<sup>478</sup> Others, such as the North West Council Labor Progressive Party<sup>479</sup> and the U.M.W. of A.<sup>480</sup> denounced the ex-soldiers as *Polish Fascists*, as did the Polish Communists of Canada.<sup>481</sup>

Yet others recognized both the humanitarian merit in welcoming the Polish ex-servicemen as well potential economic contribution in such under-employed areas as agriculture, some industry, mining, and forestry. For instance, the Industrial Relations Institute in St. Catharines, Ontario wrote to the Minister of Labour, Humphrey Mitchell, that although there were eighteen hundred men registered in the Niagara District as seeking employment, none would come forward to fill one hundred and fifty heavy labour foundry work positions.<sup>482</sup>

Various community organizations responded, again, either in favour or against. After hearing "recurrent news" that the government was contemplating retention of some of the German POWs for farm work, the Polish Societies in Canada sent a telegram to Prime Minister Mackenzie King urging the government to instead import more demobilized Polish soldiers "[i]n the interest of Canada and in fairness to these brave soldiers... that they be given preference to men who have contributed so much to loss of lives, misery and distress in the world."<sup>483</sup> Ordinary Canadians debated the scheme in letters-to-the-editor in community newspapers as well wrote directly to the federal government. Most complained about "foreign help... putting a Canadian out of work"<sup>484</sup> while others argued "Canada for Canadians" doesn't need "riff raff other countries don't want... European scum."<sup>485</sup>

Brazilians opposed to post-war importation of displaced persons to Brazil expressed similar sentiments. Although the tide of opinion led policy toward favouring such immigration, one

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<sup>478</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 3531, file 3-26-38-1, pt. 1. Correspondence to Humphrey Mitchell; 03 May 1947. Of note, the Saskatoon branch of the Canadian Polish Congress was, in 1951, led by Communist Poles who supported the Soviet-dominated Polish government. Efforts were made to shut the branch out of Canadian *Polonia* activity. See Benedykt Heydenkorn, *The Organizational Structure of the Polish Canadian Community*. (Toronto: Canadian Polish Research Institute, 1979) 159.

<sup>479</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 3531, file 3-26-38-1, pt. 1. Telegram to Prime Minister Mackenzie King; 20 November 1946.

<sup>480</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 3531, file 3-26-38-1, pt. 1. Correspondence to Prime Minister Mackenzie King, 10 September 1946.

<sup>481</sup> Benedykt Heydenkorn. *The Organizational Structure of the Polish Canadian Community*. (Toronto: Canadian Polish Research Institute, 1979) 155.

<sup>482</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 3531, file 3-26-38-1, pt. 1. Correspondence to Humphrey Mitchell; 07 June 1946.

<sup>483</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 3528, file 3-26-18. Telegram to Prime Minister Mackenzie King from P. T. Andree; 12 December 1946.

<sup>484</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 3532, file 3-26-38-1-4. Letter March 1949.

<sup>485</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 3531, file 3-26-38-1, pt. 1. Letter February 12, 1947.



particularly caustic statement published by a Brazilian psychiatrist expressed the most vitriolic disapproval of importation of displaced persons. In part, he wrote:

We are importing the dregs of a convoluted Europe, materially and mentally... Our feelings of human solidarity can find other manners to assist the unfortunate victims of such situation without having to import a whole legion of unfit, neurotic people, of beings so emotionally traumatized that we will never be able to readapt them to the conditions of the mentally sane life.<sup>486</sup>

Among Canadian farmers, most who wrote to government officials about the effectiveness of the resettlement scheme were satisfied; many paid more than the \$45.00/month originally stipulated in the contract. However, there were challenges as well as some definite negative experiences. One farmer wrote: “[t]here are good, bad and indifferent specimens in these Polish immigrants. I happen to have a very fair man... [but] the main difficulty is the language barrier and the slow, precise, way these men work... It is impossible to change slow-moving, slow thinking people in a short time.”<sup>487</sup> Another complained the Polish veterans had the audacity to demand “8 hour days” and pay equal to that earned by Canadian farm labour, despite that “it was impossible to get [Canadian] men.” Further, he wrote:

This man I think, is typical of all of them, if he stays among English speaking people until he learns the language & customs of the country, he will eventually make an average citizen, but turn him loose among a bunch of bohunks in a packing plant, or steel mill & he'll always be what he was, a foreigner.<sup>488</sup>

The tone of the letters is overwhelmingly paternalistic. The Polish veterans are described as ignorant to the ways of “freedom” and of “our ways and language” and therefore some were viewed as “useless” and as “complainers”, “whiners”, and “unappreciative”; or, in the alternative, as “anxious to please”, “satisfactory”, “happy and contented”, and “thrifty, refined, intelligent and very sensible in every way along with a perfect sense of humour.” Some are described as requiring “much care... a world of time and patience trying to make good citizens of them”, or as “a child of the family”, or “as tho [sic] he were my son.” Indeed, a common statement is that the

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<sup>486</sup> qtd. in Maria do Rosario Rolfsen Salles, “Displaced Persons and the direction of Post-World War II Brazilian Immigration Policy” presented at European Social Science History Conference, Amsterdam. 12 April 2000.

<sup>487</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 628, file 23-7-13-3. Letter 02 November 1947.

<sup>488</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 628, file 23-7-13-3. Letter 01 November 1949.

Polish veteran was welcome as “one of the family”. One farmer wrote of his humour at his “very expensive man” who is “really adapting himself to our ways of farming and very capable.”

Others were described as “not skilled in farming”, as “careless and bull-headed”, as “arrogant” and “aggressive... and as soon as they are on an equal basis with Canadians and able to speak our language, they will be telling us what to do”, as “scrupulous in their dealings and like all foreigners are after all they can get”, and, as having “destroyed and damaged” equipment. One farmer wrote: “In no respect do they compare with the Japanese workers we have received thro (sic) your auspices and for whom we have nothing but praise.”

And finally, a number are characterized as “honest”, “loyal”, “very clean and neat, a perfect gentleman and very dependable”, “really willing to work”, and “very industrious”. Most farmers recommended the government offer English language courses to the Poles that they would be better able to communicate in the work environment, as well as more quickly assimilate. For instance, one farmer wrote: “A farmer can waste a hell of a lot of time chasing his men around continually showing them with much palaver and gesticulating every damn little thing.” Some would readily welcome another Polish worker—even a Polish female domestic was requested by one farm family—while others suggested the government ought select preferred immigrants from Great Britain, Holland or Scandinavia.<sup>489</sup>

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In December 1946, R. C. Smith & Son, Limited, Toronto, was engaged by the federal government to ‘advertise’ the arrival of the Polish ex-soldiers [P.C. 90/4981].<sup>490</sup> The sum of \$9,000.00 was budgeted for newspaper, periodical and radio advertisements and promotion. Though particulars are not articulated in the Order-in-Council, it is evident emphasis was placed on informing farmers that the Polish veterans were available to undertake two-year farm labour contracts; however, as early as September 1946, *Farmer’s Application for Polish Veteran* [Appendix F] had been distributed by the Unemployment Insurance Commission to farmers.

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<sup>489</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 1300, file 23-7-13-3; RG-27, vol. 628, file 23-7-13-3; RG-27, vol. 628, file 23-7-17-3; RG-27, vol. 3531, file 3-26-38-1, pt. 1; RG-27, vol. 3532, file 3-26-38-1-4, RG-26, file 3-11-1. Various letters.

<sup>490</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 3033, Polish Veterans #27.

Perhaps, then, there also was awareness that public relations in the form of positive publicity might subvert public protest. For there arose some negative press as well complaints from farmers and other Canadians.

Indeed, a significant news clipping service was instituted by various federal departments. It traced editorials and articles related to the Polish veterans, as well government-generated press releases and 'advertising' and promotion of the scheme, including radio interviews conducted with various government officials. Early media reports clearly communicate to farmers the benefits of making application for a Polish veteran worker as well as propagandize the motivations and potential benefits of the scheme. As early as late August 1946, the *Ottawa Evening Journal* reported offers pouring in from timber and pulpwood companies for the Polish veterans; notably from the Renfrew area that boasted a substantial established Polish-Canadian community. Unnamed Labour Department officials, however, assured Canadians "there was no basis for the apprehension that the 4,000 men would be brought to Canada, established in a solid racial bloc... to create a 'little Poland' in any section of the country."<sup>491</sup>

Much ado was made of the arrival of the Polish veterans who are portrayed as strong, highly skilled agricultural workers; some among them heroes in the fight against nazism, as one *Toronto Star* headline announced: "First in Monastery; Polish Hero Arrives".<sup>492</sup> Alternatively, some press reports sensationalized the arrival of the Poles in excessive negative context; in one extreme case, their presence in Canada was headlined as "141 Nazi Poles on Farms Here".<sup>493</sup>

There is evidence government officials channeled positive public relations items through the media both by regular dispersal of press releases as well as by photo-opportunity invitations to farms and other similar internally generated 'stories'. For instance, the *Toronto Globe & Mail* published several photographs under the headline "Pleased With Work of Polish Vets, Simcoe Farmers Will Hire More." One photo caption describes 33-yr.-old Tony Nawojczyk receiving from

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<sup>491</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 1299, file 8, Department of Labour. *Ottawa Evening Journal*, 31 August 1946.

<sup>492</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 3033, Polish Veterans file 27. *Toronto Star*, 23 November 1946.

<sup>493</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 626, file 23-7-8, pt. 1, Publicity. *The [Montreal] Standard*, 03 May 1947.

his farm employers "an impromptu lesson in reading his identification papers." Another describes Frank Kobaszick, as "one of the family" with five-year-old Helen on his knee and dog "Brownie" at his side. Others are photographed, in repose, or happily at work.<sup>194</sup> Yet another unsourced 1948 newspaper photo essay headlines Ottawa-area Polish veterans thus: "Enterprising Polish Boys on Farm: It's a Long Day — But a Free One—".<sup>195</sup>



Fig. 26 - Two Polish Vets Relaxing on the Farm - C 1947<sup>196</sup>

One [unsourced] news clipping made the rounds among government officials. It opened:

On Cassino's bloody slopes... and at the cracking of the Hitler Line, the Polish troops of General Anders etched an indelible page in the annals of the Second World War.

But it wasn't Hermann Goering's division or crack fighting men of Germany's paratroop division that gave Private Leibeidz... his biggest fight.<sup>197</sup>

As it happened, Joe Leibeidz set out for the Nova Scotia bush to cut a Christmas tree for his farm family. He returned to the farm, however, without the tree and greatly agitated. The

<sup>194</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 3033, Polish Veterans Publicity, file 27. *Toronto Globe & Mail*, 14 June 1947

<sup>195</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 626, file 23-7-8, pt. 1, Publicity *The Journal* [?], June 1948.

<sup>196</sup> NAC C144922: RG-27, vol. 3033, Polish Veterans Publicity, file 27.

<sup>197</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 626, file 23-7-8, pt. 1, Publicity "Moose Just Sissy" So Polish Veteran Fights Him "Fair", January 1947

farmer. unable to comprehend from Joe's broken English the source of his agitation, collected his gun and rounded up a posse of game warden and a neighbour before following Joe back into the bush to investigate the nature of his alarm.

What did they find? Dead, on the ground, a full-antlered bull moose. As reported in the article, while carrying home the Christmas tree on his back Joe's path was blocked by a bull moose. Having never seen a moose before, "Joe, trained to meet danger, dropped his tree and picked up a stout birch pole... The moose charged. Joe sidestepped. He belted the animal back of the neck as it passed. The moose stumbled. Joe went at it again." Until, finally, Joe killed the frightful beast, *mano a mano*.

Having read the news clipping, W. K. Rutherford, Chief Employment Officer, Moncton, New Brunswick, wrote in a brief memo: "It would appear... you have secured at least one man who has adapted himself to a changed condition of living in a grand fashion. The new method of hunting which has been adopted by these pioneers will no doubt obviate the necessity of guns and shells in the future."<sup>498</sup> Perhaps an early signal for contemporary gun control laws?

Polish-language media in both Canada and Poland also covered the scheme; often negatively. One Warsaw-based newspaper reported:

Canada "Smells of resin". Canada sounds of gold. She is an earthly paradise, briefly speaking. Such is more or less the opinion of an average Pole about that country. No wonder therefore that many of our countrymen living abroad and deluded by hostile propaganda saw in Canada a land in which a fairly bearable life might be found.

...The Canadian reality proved to be... dark and very painful.<sup>499</sup>

The article bases its assertions on the "testimonies" [excerpts from letters to Poland] of seven Polish veterans—who may have then been investigated by Canadian government officials—most of whom describe homesickness and longing for reunification with relatives, as well as disenchantment with the two-year labour contracts as virtual "servant[s] to a Canadian 'bauer' (peasant)". It is ironic that the article evokes Arkady Fiedler's popular pre-war literary

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<sup>498</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 626, file 23-7-8, pt. 1, Publicity. "Newspaper Clipping - Polish Veterans", 14 January 1947.

<sup>499</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 1914, file 1-100-64-25-2-31, POLAND. *Rzeczpospolita (Republic)*, Warsaw, 06 November 1947.

fascination and waxing of Canada in a mocking tone: *kanada* no longer is paradise, from the viewpoint of the 'new' Poland.

On completion of their two-year agricultural contracts, most of the Poles left the farms — 100% of those who participated in this study—following the contemporary pattern of movement of workers from the land to urban factories. Although federal officials sustained strict monitoring of the Polish veterans during their two-year contract period, there is no evidence of substantial follow-up data or studies. Yet, the importation of the Polish veterans was the model on which subsequent *bulk labour* immigrant movements were based. Thus, through 1947-1952 the contract system functioned as the process by which displaced persons were welcomed to earn their place in Canada.

Meanwhile, complaints arose from farmers, ordinary Canadians and from some Canadian media that the Poles were potentially displacing Canadians from jobs while their labour was still needed on the farms. And, as many were quick to remind, the Poles had been imported strictly for placement in agricultural labour, most on sugar beet farms that had to give up their inexpensive German POWs.<sup>500</sup> It was late 1948-49 and national unemployment rates were on the rise.

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Complaints that arose either from a farmer or "his Pole" directly addressed the belief that the Poles would not abandon their contractual obligations. In a letter to Arthur MacNamara, George V. Haythorne wrote:

[H]ad we not been able to meet, at least in the majority of cases, the complaints that arose... many of these men would have today been in some other industry.... I am sure there would have been many... who would have left their farms had our local federal or provincial officials not been on the spot and able to remove sources of irritation when they arose. The percentage of transfers... has been fairly uniform across Canada.<sup>501</sup>

In April 1947, the Department of Labour [on behalf of the Dominion-Provincial Farm

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<sup>500</sup> Franca Iacovetta. "Ordering In Bulk: Canada's Postwar Immigration Policy and the Recruitment of contract Workers from Italy", in *Journal of American Ethnic History*. (Fall 1991) 55.

<sup>501</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 3033, Polish Veterans Statistics, file 26. Correspondence, 22 July 1947.

Labour Service] began to regularly publish and distribute a tri-lingual newsletter [English-Polish-French] to the Polish veterans. Its purpose was to communicate such information as the legal requirement to pay income tax, work conditions and regulations as well general propaganda regarding penalties for abandonment of contract and abuse of the program. It also provided a list of Polish-language newspapers as well contact details for the Canadian Legion and the Polish Combatants' Association, language assistance, the establishment of a Blue Cross Hospital Plan, details regarding permanent landing status [1948], and other general information.<sup>502</sup>

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And what of the Polish veterans? How do they describe their experiences as temporarily contracted agricultural labourers; or, as interviewee Jerzy describes it, Canada wanted to “buy some hard working Polish guys”?<sup>503</sup> Of the ten study participants who arrived in Canada through 1946-47 under the Resettlement scheme, one, Witold, spent his two-year contract period recuperating in a Brandon, Manitoba TB Sanatorium. Only one other ex-soldier among study participants did not fulfill his obligations. Even before arriving in Canada, Adam did not agree with the premise of the labour contracts, but he desired to flee the sting of discrimination in England where it was becoming increasingly difficult for many of the Polish ex-servicemen to get a job or even rent a room. And so, he could overlook his distaste of the labour contract for, as he plainly observed, “how else could I get here?”<sup>504</sup>

After a few months hard work—his hands bleeding from the calluses—on a Port Perry area farm, Adam set out for Toronto where he threatened government officials with vandalism if they didn't either send him back to England, or get him off the farm. His efforts were rewarded with an employment book that he quickly took to an Oshawa employment office where he was successful in finding factory work. A notation in government files documents “reputed sickness” as explanation for his refusal to work in agriculture.<sup>505</sup> After a short period of employment drifting,

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<sup>502</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 627, file 23-7-16, vol. 1, and RG-26, vol. 96, file 3-11-1, Labour Department.

<sup>503</sup> Interview with Jerzy (03 October 1998) 30.

<sup>504</sup> Interview with Adam (18 October 1998) 25.

<sup>505</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 627, file 23-7-16, vol. 1, Polish Combatants' Association. 23 September 1947.

Adam eventually settled permanently in Oshawa where he has, since 1950, lived, worked in a factory, raised a family, and is now retired. All ten study participants who came as ex-servicemen to Canada under the *Polish Resettlement Act* scheme, settled in the Oshawa area.

Feliks also was unhappy in his first placement on a farm near Caeserea, Ontario. Mostly, he said, because the “stupid dog” was better fed than him and he, even now near 80 years old, is an imposing man; tall and solid. He complained to government officials who transferred him to another farm just north of Oshawa, Ontario. “They are good people!” he declared.<sup>506</sup> Among the many letters sent by farmers to the Department of Labour is one from the farmer with whom Feliks was subsequently placed. The farmer acknowledges Feliks’ unhappy circumstance in his original placement and that “some very miserable farmers... do not use these men right....” Of Feliks and another Polish veteran in his employ, the farmer further wrote:

We... like them fine.... [but] we have taken a lot of pains in breaking these men to our ways.... [and] when these men go to our town which is Oshawa... they meet some of their fellow countrymen who tell them a lot of things which are not true especially in regards to wages.<sup>507</sup>

Again, the paternal attitude and tone prevail. Overwhelmingly, the farmers preferred that the Poles remained ignorant of their rights and options and that they did not fraternize with other Poles for this could potentially be dangerous; they might learn something! Although many farmers exhibited awareness that the Poles were lonely, it was their view the men ought fully assimilate and leave everything of their *Polishness* behind that they might become “average”, if not good Canadians. And how, some wondered as above, would this be possible if they did not permit themselves to be *broken to our ways*? Some of the Polish veterans casually noted their function as cheaper, steady farm labour, thus freeing up farmer’s sons for either a university education, or abandonment of the farm life altogether.

Typically, the Polish veterans recall dismal first impressions of Canada: forest, trees, woods, bush, and more forest were all they saw from the train as it traveled from the harbour at

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<sup>506</sup> Interview with Feliks (28 November 1998) 22-23.

<sup>507</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 1300, file 23-7-13-3. Correspondence 22 October 1947.



Halifax across country. A little too like Siberia. However, as they traveled through Quebec, then Ontario, they took notice of the sight of a car standing in most driveways. Even on farms. This sight confirmed for most they had made the right choice. Canada might smell like resin, but it dripped of honey! The train then stopped at various cities across the country, where groups of the Polish veterans disembarked. They were 'processed' at military bases and then taken to a local unemployment office where they were 'turned over' to their farmer. The farmer then drove them 'home'. By all accounts, everything was well organized.

Only Jacob compared the farm work to that performed in the Soviet labour camps, saying his small unheated room at the back of the farmhouse "stinked like hell" as well describing a terrible loneliness.<sup>508</sup> All of the men recalled the work as hard and the days as long. Adam recalled: "At 9 o'clock, when I come in, I just wash my face and underneath my arms, I lay down on the bed, I never took the shoes off and I fall asleep. I slept like that 'til 5 o'clock in the morning."<sup>509</sup> Most, as Feliks and Jacob, recall gnawing hunger and unbearable loneliness. In large measure, their loneliness could be linked to their inability to communicate in the English language. There were instances where employers placed unreasonable demands upon their contracted labour, employers [and employees] occasionally strayed from contractual obligations, and language barriers often led to misunderstandings and laxity of the spirit of the program.

English was learned in a variety of ways. Jerzy claims everything he knows he learned from the dairy herd; actually, by practicing the language with the cows.<sup>510</sup> Karl learned the English language from the farmer's ten children: "It was: ceiling, ceiling... *pointing to ceiling*. This is the floor, floor... *pointing to the floor*." After completion of his contract, Karl got a job in a factory, and then enrolled in a night course at a local high school so that he could learn to read and write in English.<sup>511</sup>

All recall early connection with the local Polish community, as well the Roman Catholic

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<sup>508</sup> Interview with Jacob (17 February 1999) 31.

<sup>509</sup> Interview with Adam (18 October 1998) 24.

<sup>510</sup> Interview with Jerzy (03 October 1998) 32.

<sup>511</sup> Interview with Karl (05 October 1998) 41.

parish, if possible, ministered by a Polish priest. Many were anxious to settle down and have a family, and so attended Saturday night dances at Polish community halls—for instance, Polish Alliance Branch 21, Oshawa—where prospective brides might be found. Endogamy rates are high not only among this group, but among all study participants. More discussion will follow. Of the Polish veterans, only two married non-Poles, one a Canadian of Polish descent, the other also Canadian, but of Hungarian descent. Both are Roman Catholic. The remainder married either Canadian women of Polish heritage or Polish women who immigrated to Canada after the war.

Among the first purchases made by the Polish veterans—in large measure to facilitate the search for a bride—were a suit, followed by a bicycle. For, as Jacob asked, how could they go to Church or be invited to Sunday dinner by a parish family wearing only a tattered uniform or work coveralls?<sup>512</sup> Karl bought the requisite courting suit, then saved his money to buy a mattress, his marriage bed.<sup>513</sup> And as Jurek flatly stated, “we didn’t socialize with the Canadians.” For the Polish veterans who managed to acquire a bicycle, it afforded much-needed freedom to get into

town where they could meet other Poles, and go to Polish community dances where “the girls and the other guys were coming from farms in the area and we were coming together and swap stories and have a few drinks.”<sup>514</sup> Thus, the Polish brotherhood bonded and prospective brides were sought.



Fig. 27 - Polish Veteran Chums Gather—Oshawa, Ontario C1947<sup>515</sup>

There was no question for the Polish veterans as well many other post-war Polish immigrants, they would marry a Roman Catholic Pole. For wasn’t it their *Polishness*—language, culture, and religion—that was threatened by the war, as well as all that they suffered for and

<sup>512</sup> Interview with Jacob (17 February 1999) 30

<sup>513</sup> Interview with Karl (05 October 1998) 50

<sup>514</sup> Interview with Jurek (04 September 1998) 27-28

<sup>515</sup> From archives of W. Wojtasiak.

fought to preserve? And isn't the home—the family—the fundamental place where it is best preserved?

Altogether, the movement resulted in a virtual man-for-man transfer of 4,500 German POWs who were sent to Britain in exchange for 4,527<sup>516</sup> Polish ex-soldiers.



Fig 28 - Polish Veterans at Spirit River Lumber Camp Park Bros Ltd ; Winter 1947/48<sup>517</sup>

As much as possible, government officials made considerable efforts to track down those Polish veterans who abandoned their obligations, and either encouraged them to return, or re-established them elsewhere. In the instances where there arose conflict between farmer and Pole, mediation by government officials most often restored good relations.

The question then arises as to

Although the overwhelming majority fulfilled their two-year farm labour contractual commitments, there were some cases of non-compliance, belligerence, and abandonment of farms. Some found other work in mines or lumber camps during the winter months, but returned to the farms in the spring.



Fig 29 - Polish Veteran at Lumber Camp Quarters, Cormack, Ontario: C 1947<sup>518</sup>

<sup>516</sup> NAC RG-27 vol. 628, file 23-7-17-5-1 Polish Veterans Summary: 06 September 1949.

<sup>517</sup> From archives of J. Dulinski.

<sup>518</sup> From archives of T. Nowak.

"success" of the scheme. If the intent was to import much-needed heavy agricultural labour, the scheme succeeded only as long as the duration of the two-year contract period. One government official wrote in March, 1947 of the scheme: "...our experience to date with the Poles strongly supports the contention that did we not have an undertaking, many of the Poles would have already left the farms for other types of employment."<sup>519</sup> Further, as was noted in one post-scheme summary based on farmers' responses to a questionnaire, indications were "that many of the farmers do not intend to hire any Poles in the future."<sup>520</sup> No reasons are given. Yet, the Director of Manitoba's Farm Help Services wrote on the eve of 1949 to the federal Department of Labour about Manitoba's need to secure sugar beet workers: "Everything else being equal our preference would be for Polish Veterans in place of single DPs."<sup>521</sup> Still suffering shortages in manual agricultural labour, the sugar beet industry's preference for Polish veterans represents satisfaction in their contributions to the industry. The 'problem', however, was there were no further plans to transport and resettle bulk movements of Polish veterans; yet, Canada had begun a year earlier selection of workers from among the civilian population living in displaced persons camps in Germany.

The federal Department of Labour issued a press release May 19, 1949, "Canada Proving Land of Opportunity for Polish Veterans." It stated 250 of the 4,527 Polish veterans who came to Canada through 1946 and 1947 for jobs on farms were, after fulfillment of their contractual obligations, either operating farms for themselves or had well-laid plans for doing so in the future.<sup>522</sup> Nine particular cases of Poles still working in agriculture were cited as "typical examples of the rapid progress made by these new Canadians in establishing themselves." In evaluating the experiment to import essential agricultural workers, it appears there was an overall 5.5% success rate.<sup>523</sup>

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<sup>519</sup> RG-27, vol. 275, 1-26-1, pt. 3. Correspondence from George V. Haythorne to A. MacNamara, 06 March 1947.

<sup>520</sup> RG-27, vol. 626, file 23-7-9-1. Correspondence from W. Duncan, Winnipeg Regional UIC Employment Officer to A. MacNamara, 03 December 1948.

<sup>521</sup> RG-27, vol. 626, file 23-7-2-1, vol. 2. Correspondence from H. R. Richardson to W. W. Dawson; 30 December 1948.

<sup>522</sup> "Department of Labour news release" in Soltys, Edward. Road to Freedom. (Toronto: The Polish Combatants' Association in Canada Inc., 1997) 23.

<sup>523</sup> William Boleslaus Makowski, in History and Integration of Poles in Canada, (Lindsay: The Canadian Polish Congress

The majority of those Polish veterans who had satisfied their two-year farm labour agreements saw “greener pastures” in other employment. The difficulty arose, however, for the professionals and skilled craftsmen among them who discovered “their qualifications were not recognized by professional organizations or trade unions.”<sup>524</sup>

Only one among the ten veteran study participants considered farming after completion of his contractual obligation. Jurek’s carefree pre-war life was one of privilege and plenty. He was well educated with a certain future in a promising military career as an Officer, but he describes a love of working on/with the land. Ironically, the federal government scuttled his plans. Having heard of federal assistance for WWII veterans under the Veteran’s Land Act (VLA), Jurek approached the Department of Veteran’s Affairs for assistance in establishing himself on a farm. He was told, however, he was not a Canadian veteran and therefore did not qualify. He likely was unaware at the time of the irony of Canada’s own merchant marines similarly rejected for assistance under the VLA as well other veterans programs, but for different reasons.<sup>525</sup>

Disqualification from the VLA contradicted Jurek’s understanding of his potential role and opportunities in agriculture in Canada under the *Resettlement* scheme as described to him by English officials on his application for immigration to Canada. It then represented a symbolic form of isolation from Canadian opportunity, by the government and, by extension, by Canadian society. This feeling of isolation was further reinforced during his short involvement with the Knight’s of Columbus where language was the isolating factor. And so, Jurek went on to contribute his energy and time to Polish-oriented institutional, social and political activities. It is impossible to categorically assert he did so strictly out of loyalty to the Polish community and/or to preservation of Polish culture for the community and his children, especially—though this was, in fact, a powerful motivator—but there arises a faint hint he felt disadvantaged in the larger

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Niagara Peninsula, 1967) tracks 3% of post-war Polish immigrants who came to Canada on labour contract remained on farms either as farm hands or owners, the remainder moving immediately upon completion to towns and cities where they found various types of jobs; 204.

<sup>524</sup> Henry Radecki and Benedykt Heydenkom. *A Member of A Distinguished Family*. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976) 49.

<sup>525</sup> As at February 2000, George Baker, Minister of Veterans Affairs, announced Canada’s merchant marines would receive compensation for previously unrecognized wartime service. “Demanding their due”, in *Toronto Star*, 17 February 2000.

mainstream Anglo community. Jurek would not call it discrimination; rather, discomfort.

Stanisław Zybala has said of the intense organizational activity exhibited among post-war Polish arrivals as having its roots, in part, in the Scouting movement. In this regard Jurek is no exception; even his five children were heavily involved in the Canadian Polish Scouting movement as well as other Polish cultural activities. Further, suggests Zybala, such individuals as Jurek who are employed in physical labour[s], "compensate for their daily exertions by becoming pillars of Polish Canadian organizations."<sup>526</sup> Frank Renkiewicz also observed that working class Poles more readily devoted themselves to Polish institutional life in Canada than did the intelligentsia. Jurek's involvement in Church, veteran affairs, and Scouting activities is expressed in leadership roles where he stands among his peers as a pillar. One source describes the emergence of ethnic leadership in the United States thus:

Finding their own aspirations blocked, emergent "ethnic leaders" organized forms of resistance and encouraged the development of ethnic institutions such as churches, schools, newspapers, and voluntary organizations.... To some extent these "ethnic" institutions contributed to national movements in the immigrants' home countries, but the disruption caused by two world wars and intermittent Americanization drives left most ties to home as affective, romanticized memories.<sup>527</sup>

On the other hand, Karl recalls an offer by the federal government of cheap land in the north that he declined because he was pre-occupied with finding a Polish bride.<sup>528</sup> Today, several study participants manage large market-size gardens for domestic use as well cash crops; more likely, this is a reflection of their rural upbringing in Poland than of the Canadian farm experience.

And so, with a young family to support, Jurek resigned himself to factory work and subsequently found employment with General Motors where he worked 30.5 years until his retirement. Indeed, the primary employers among this group were Oshawa-based factories: General Motors [manufacture of automobiles],<sup>529</sup> Fittings Ltd. [manufacture of industrial,

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<sup>526</sup> Aleksandra Ziołkowska [transl. Wojtek Stelmaczyński]. Dreams and Reality. (Toronto: The Adam Mickiewicz Foundation in Canada, 1984) 93.

<sup>527</sup> Linda Basch, et al. Nations Unbound. (New York: Gordon and French Publishers, 1993) 42.

<sup>528</sup> Interview with Karl (05 October 1998) 44.

<sup>529</sup> Ten of the male study participants worked in General Motors until retirement; two working only in the short term, finding jobs in other auto-related factories during a lay-off period. Three female study participants worked until retirement in the Ajax [Chrysler] Trim Plant. Altogether, male and female combined and including those who worked in Duplate, Fittings,

commercial and residential brass fittings], Malleable Iron [foundry], Duplate [automobile glass], and Peddlar People [manufacture of tin goods such as ceilings, roofs and eaves troughs, etc.] where each put in over thirty years' work in the singular place of employment. And each has a 'story' to tell about successful job search and acquisition strategies, whether slipping a 26-oz bottle of OV whiskey to the Irish foreman, or making contact with a "nice big Pole" or whether engaging in a spirited debate with unemployment office officials—including, in one case, slugging an unemployment officer—or meeting a sympathetic Canadian veteran. Other factory employers include: Dunlop [tire manufacturers] and Houdaille [manufacturers of chrome bumpers].

Only one among the Polish veterans in the study group who came to Canada under the *Polish Resettlement* scheme eventually left industrial work. Jacob worked at INCO in Sudbury for sixteen years before migrating to Oshawa. There he upgraded his education, beginning with high school, then enrolled in an electronics program at Durham College, to eventually train and qualify as the Chief Operator for one of Durham Region's largest sewage treatment plants where he worked for sixteen years, retiring after suffering some health problems.

In recalling his Canadian experience, Jacob jokingly submits Canada does not smell like resin [a distinct contradictory reference to Arkady Fiedler's Canada Smelling of Resin] but otherwise, as he recalls in this anecdote:

[I]n Ancona, we had this Grade 7 [class]; I went to finish that. There was a professor that was doing Geography and some other thing and he says a lot of people think that Canada is a country that's smell of pine pitch and stuff, something like that. He says, "No. It smells of cow manure and a lot of hard work, sweat. But, you see, if you ever have a chance," he said, "go because you have a chance to make a life for yourself."<sup>530</sup>

Thus, Jacob's first impressions of Canada as a farm labourer and lumberjack echo the words of his Geography teacher: "Canada stinks of cow manure and sweat." And he does not miss the irony of his long service in a sewage treatment plant!

This particular group is not representative of the findings of Rudolf Kogler and Henryk

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Dunlop and Houdaille. eighteen of the twenty-five Oshawa-area study participants [72%] worked in the Oshawa-area automobile-based industry.

<sup>530</sup> Interview with Jacob (17 February 1999) 26.

Radecki, both of whom found most of the Polish veterans did not work exclusively in factories, but that many found 'better' jobs; in part, because of higher education and skills training in Poland or a result of skills/educational enrichment after the war. However, among the eleven ex-servicemen who participated in this study, all but two had rudimentary education no higher than Grade 8, and a third, Jacob, advanced his education and subsequent employment opportunities in mid-life. Overall, twenty-one of the thirty-eight study participants had education no higher than Grade 6. In moderate contrast, Poles who made up the largest number of immigrants accepted under the American *DP Act* had an average 7.9 years education.<sup>531</sup>

### Summary

In the early chapter of the Second World War, 1.5 million Poles were forcibly deported to exile in Soviet labour camps in the Siberian hinterland. Millions more would be otherwise uprooted or perish through the war years.

After the war—after either fighting with the Polish Second Corps under General Anders, or waiting out the war in temporary settlements located in the Middle East, India, or British Africa—many of the survivors of the deportation/exile experience refused international pressures to repatriate to their ancestral homeland that was under Soviet [Communist] domination.

Some would find their way to Canada through various resettlement schemes. The first group of *Anders Poles* to arrive in Canada through the years 1946–47 was among the majority within the group movement of 4,527 Polish ex-soldiers who came under Britain's *Polish Resettlement Act*. Other documented *Anders Poles*, or *Sybiraki*, who made Canada their home after the war—thousands more trickled in in later years—include 150 orphans, and the near 900 passengers of the *General H. M. Black* American naval carrier, to yield a total of about 5,500 *Sybiraki*.

But Canada was not their first choice. Most preferred to repatriate to Poland but they feared post-war political conditions in their ancestral homeland; they especially feared repeat

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<sup>531</sup> Barbara Stern Burstin. From Poland to Pittsburgh: The Experience of Jews and Christians who Migrated to Pittsburgh After World War II. (Doctoral Dissertation: University of Pittsburgh, 1986) 241.



deportation to Siberia. America was the next preferred destination. Still, freedom in a new homeland symbolized for them the opportunity to preserve the Polish nation—as *Polonia*—and Polish culture. It was as patriotic duty, grounded in the political cause, that they chose Canada where they could regroup and get on with their lives after nearly a decade living in a chaotic state of void and flux in various manifestations of camp life.

For its part, the response of Canadian government officials to global circumstances of the post-war years resulted in piecemeal “catch-as-you-can” immigration policy designed to meet economic needs: labour and market. Selection criteria dictated who got in and was founded on historic ethnic and gender stereotypes and prejudices that were entrenched in Canadian immigration procedures and policies. The resettlement of the 4,527 Polish ex-soldiers who came on two-year agricultural contract laid the foundational experience for the importation of *bulk labour* and for the development of post-war immigration policy, inasmuch as it was.

## Chapter 6 – THE DOORS OPEN to WORKERS and BREEDERS

*Thus a pilgrim shakes the dust from his sandals  
oblivious to the road, eyes fixed up on the goal.*<sup>532</sup>

### Prelude

The resettlement of the Polish ex-soldiers through 1946-47 [all of whom signed two-year labour contracts] set the experiential stage for Canada's welcome of refugees and displaced persons in terms of *bulk labour* selection, transportation, and distribution: the quintessential employment of human scales of materialist output! Such a selection process had built-in exclusionary components, not the least of which was the exclusion of women through reduced numbers; including, the Italian wives of a small number of the Polish veterans.<sup>533</sup>

Learning from mistakes, pitfalls, and successes experienced through the bulk movement of the Polish ex-soldiers, Canadian officials determined, first, that such movements had potential for making practical contributions to Canada's need for labour and population. Furthermore, it was determined pre-selection screening of potential immigrants/workers be tightened; especially with regard to medical screening so that Canada did not inherit healthcare dependants. Also, contract periods were reduced from two years to one. However, there remained an apparent ignorance of the seasonal nature of the work undertaken by new arrivals, and of their vulnerability.

This chapter explores the policies established and procedures followed for the importation of *bulk labour* to Canada after the Second World War and related questions, especially as they apply to Polish immigrants. And, now, half-a-century later, what can we learn about how the *Anders Poles* translated their Polish origins and their Soviet labour experience into work, family and community life in Canada?

### The Doors Open to Assimilable Workers and Breeders

After re-opening the door to immigration and in response to increased pressure from

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<sup>532</sup> Florian Smieja. "Exile" in Not a Tourist. (London: Third Eye, 1986) 56.

<sup>533</sup> NAC RG-27. vol. 287, file 1-26-33, Polish Ex-Soldiers/Italian Wives, 1948-50.

industry and from many Canadian religious and ethnic organizations, as well as Parliamentarians and individuals, Prime Minister Mackenzie King laid the foundation for Canada's immigration policy in a 01 May 1947 speech in the House of Commons [though no formal legislative changes were made]. In essence, the Prime Minister stated Canada was not obliged to take in post-war refugees or displaced persons, notwithstanding a moral obligation that could be met by welcoming a certain number of immigrants based on Canada's employable *absorptive capacity*. Further, the Prime Minister stated that regulated immigration could both enhance the Canadian population and economy, so long as there was no "fundamental alteration in the character of our population."<sup>534</sup>

While the doors had been opened for European immigration to Canada, virtually all other potential immigrants were excluded; including Chinese and Japanese. Thus, almost two years following the end of WWII, Canada officially accepted its moral obligation to assist refugees and displaced persons inasmuch as numbers could be usefully *absorbed* into the domestic economy, without changing the *fundamental character* [presumably WASP] of the country. Balts and Poles, however, were growing out of favour; Jewish refugees continued to encounter restrictive policies and exclusionary views among government officials and the general public.

At a meeting of the Interdepartmental Committee in June 1947, Dr. Keenleyside, Deputy Minister of Mines and Resources, clarified the current views on immigration:

...it was the desire of the Government that immigration should not effect any major changes in the existing ratios of the Canadian population. In view of steps that had already been taken involving the recent admission to Canada of considerable numbers of persons of Polish and Jewish race, and of the Catholic faith it would be desirable in the present instance to give priority to persons who do not fall into these categories.<sup>535</sup>

Through the summer of 1947, five mobile selection teams established operations in displaced persons camps in Germany and Austria; their goal, "...to select able-bodied refugees like good 'beef cattle, with a preference for strong young men who could do manual labour and would not be encumbered by ageing relatives', to use a description employed by... the late John

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<sup>534</sup> Prime Minister Mackenzie King. *Hansard*, 01 May 1947. 2644-6.

<sup>535</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 278, file 1-26-4. *Minutes*.

Holmes.<sup>536</sup> They arrived with orders for bulk labour in hand. Wanted: heavy labourers for mining, lumbering, logging and agricultural work. Women—including wives, mothers, sisters and other female dependants of the men contracted for their labour—need not apply.

The selection process undertaken in screening potential post-war immigrants to Canada was designed to ensure that those who got in exhibited strong anti-Communist sentiments. Given that unions were perceived by many to be slightly left leaning in their political sway, there was some desire, particularly among capitalist interests, to prevent strong leftist agitators from entering the country. A representative of the RCMP was assigned to travel overseas to the displaced persons camps with the selection teams to ensure no “undesirable” pro-Communist elements got through the screening process. Tanya Basok suggests that immigrants fleeing Communism “may have also served ideological purposes by highlighting the advantages of the capitalist system... the “free market” economy and could preach the “horrors” of living under Communism.”<sup>537</sup> Furthermore, with a view to quickly shift from wartime industrial production to peacetime production, policy-makers saw the value to be had in acquiring a large pool of [generally grateful] skilled and unskilled workers.

J. M. Dymonds, Director, Department of Labour, Wartime Bureau of Technical Personnel, wrote to Raymond Ranger, Privy Council, regarding the admission of technicians from DP camps:

[T]here would seem to be something to be gained by introducing men with these higher skills from other countries so that they may not only fill the present gaps, but also impart some of the specialized knowledge to the young Canadians who are bound to be associated with them.<sup>538</sup>

Consequently, by admitting skilled individuals, the government did not have the prior responsibility of paying for their education and maintenance into adulthood, nor was it then necessary to invest energy or money in education reform that might improve the quality of ‘made in Canada’ skilled or semi-skilled labour.<sup>539</sup> What’s more, such express selection presupposes

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<sup>536</sup> Valerie Knowles. *Strangers at Our Gates*. (Toronto: Dundum Press, 1997) 132.

<sup>537</sup> Tanya Basok. “Refugee Policy: Globalization, Radical Challenge or State Control”, in *Studies in Political Economy*. [No. 50, Summer 1996] 146.

<sup>538</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 278, file 1-26-4. Letter.

<sup>539</sup> John Porter. “Migration and Class Structure” [from *The Vertical Mosaic*], in Howard Palmer, *Immigration and the Rise of Multiculturalism*. (Toronto: Copp Clark Publishing, 1975) 70.

that immigrants were selected not only under the criteria which apply to immigrants generally, but were also required to meet definite needs of specific employers.

Initially, selection teams primarily sought single young males for work in agriculture, mining, lumbering and logging. They were specifically advised to ensure that no dependants were left behind so that Canada might, by default, become responsible for dependant relatives; however, many slipped through the very large cracks in the selection process. Lesser numbers of single females were eventually selected for domestic or some factory work as well some accommodation was made for family migration. In contrast, however, Brazil favoured families over single migrants, with an age limit of fifty years for the eldest members.<sup>540</sup>

#### The Dionne Scandal

One particular incident is worth mention, though it merits in-depth study. The circumstances of the selection of the *Dionne girls* [no, not the quints!] from what were eventually called *DP labour pools*, and their importation to Canada in 1947 resulted in an uproar against the government both from internal sources [media, public, labour organizations and political opposition], and external sources [Poland].

Most important, however, the incident set a precedent for future bulk movements to Canada of female labour from the DP camps/labour pools for gender-specific work, mostly, in domestic service. For instance, the female passengers on the *General Black* were selected to come to Canada only because they contracted to enter domestic service and officials were able to transport and deliver the women to prearranged employment postings. Selection teams listed the name, age, marital status, religion, ability to speak English, dependents, if any, and brief remarks identifying the gender-specific employability skills of successful applicants in agricultural, factory, or, more commonly in the case of the women, domestic work. For instance, one entry in IRO records lists a family comprised of head, wife, daughters (2) and sons (2) recruited in Uganda:

Husband and wife have 17 years experience in all branches, including bee-

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<sup>540</sup> Maria do Rosario Rolfsen Salles. "Displaced Persons and the direction of Post-World War II Brazilian Immigration Policy" presented at European Social Science History Conference, Amsterdam. 12 April 2000.

keeping. Anna is practicing dressmaker. Mikolaj is clerk in the I.R.O. office, but is willing and able to do farm work. Andrzej is working as carpenter in the camp, and Weronika has completed dressmaking course. Most of the family speak English, Mikolaj very well, all are in good health, and all are employable.<sup>111</sup>

Although the *Dionne girls* were not *Anders Poles*, the scandal around their importation to Canada as *bulk labour* contributed to increased anti-Polish sentiment in Canada that impacted negatively on subsequent Polish arrivals

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In May 1947 Ludger Dionne, MP for Beauce [Liberal] traveled to a DP camp in Germany where he selected 100 young Polish, Ukrainian and Yugoslavian women and subsequently flew them to Canada to work in his rayon spinning mill at St. Georges de Beauce, Quebec

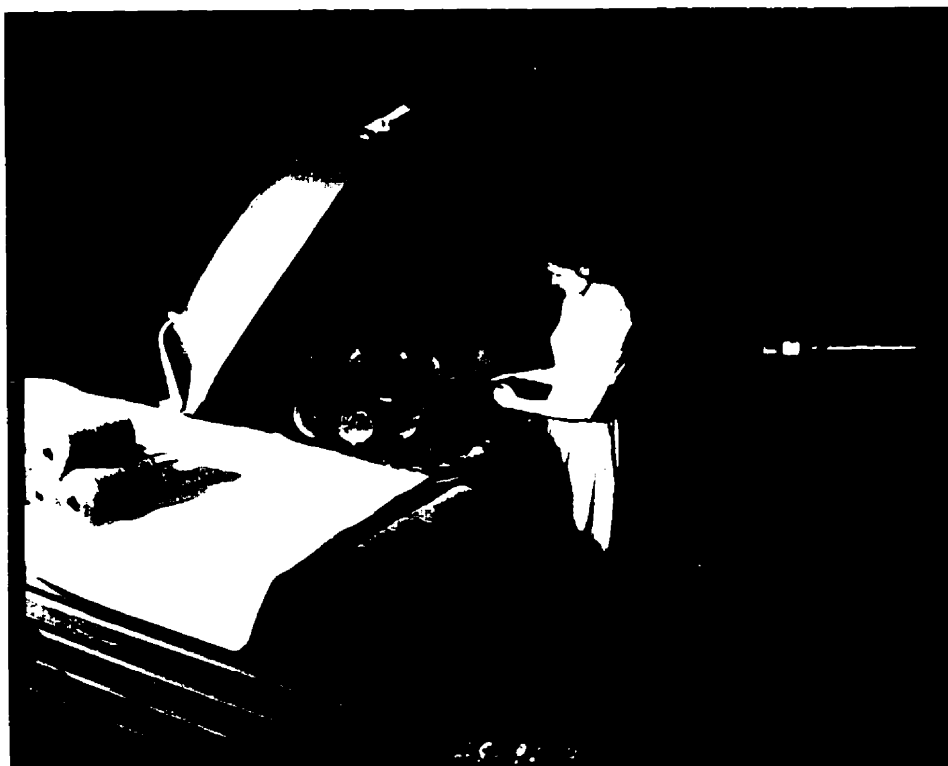


Fig 30 - Displaced person at Dionne Spinning Mills - 21 May 1948<sup>112</sup>

The Roman Catholic women were housed in a Catholic hostel administered by nuns. Their two-year contract initially included deductions for room and board and contribution toward

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<sup>111</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 289, #1-26-50, "Immigration from Beirut" "Polish Refugees in Koja Camp, Uganda, Volunteering for Resettlement in Canada," International Refugee Organization [C 1949] 12. An aside: I immediately recognized the family name and subsequently confirmed by telephone conversation with Andrzej that this family, among a few others listed in the IRO records, was among the passengers of the *General Black* who settled in Oshawa, Ontario.

<sup>112</sup> NAC PA-115757, *The Gazette*, Montreal, 1948, [with permission].

repayment of Dionne's \$42,500 transportation costs. That a Member of Parliament was perceived to have exploited his parliamentary position without regard for federal law which prohibited prepaid importation of contracted labour **and** that he and the government were seemingly oblivious to the perception of—if not an outright—conflict of interest, was cause for national and international scandal.

For instance, the *Dionne girls* were known in the United States as the "100 Flying Virgins".<sup>543</sup> Critics vehemently denounced Dionne's scheme as the unscrupulous exploitation of forced labour for his personal gain without regard for worker rights, humanitarian ethics, the vulnerability of the young women, or Canada's reputation in the international theatre. Outside Canada, Polish officials condemned the movement as a human rights violation as well as obstruction of repatriation of all Poles and, ultimately, of the rebuilding of war-ravaged Poland.



Fig. 31 - Labour Minister Humphrey Mitchell with Ludger Dionne, MP<sup>545</sup>

The media enthusiastically recorded the scandal. Political opposition noted Dionne's and, by nature of his Parliamentary position, the Liberal government's disregard for Canadian law [Alien Labour Act] that prohibited the prepaid importation of contracted labour. Both Progressive Conservative and CCF critics condemned the scheme as a "back-door method" of manipulation of traditional parliamentary procedure and policy.<sup>544</sup> Labour declared the industrialists importation of cheap labour an underhanded attempt to undercut wages in exploitative conditions. Not

surprising, employers across the country made application to Humphrey Mitchell, Minister of Labour, for equal opportunity to import cheap labour under similar conditions as those singularly extended to the Honourable Member, Ludger Dionne. Other critics suggested the government

<sup>543</sup> Theresa Kurk McGinley. *A Cry for Human Rights: The Polish Displaced Persons Problem and United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1951.* (Doctoral Dissertation: University of Houston, 1995) 117.

<sup>544</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 1300, file 4. *Toronto Canadian Tribune.* 04 June 1947.

<sup>545</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 1300, file 4. *B.C. District News.* 13 June 1947.

was circumventing the development of a national immigration policy; rather, it appeared to be leaning toward “immigration by vested interests”. And it wasn’t long before some critics made links between the scheme to import Polish ex-soldiers for farm labour and what were perceived to be Dionne’s special [parliamentary] circumstances that netted his spinning mill cheap Polish female labour resulting, eventually, in widespread anti-Polish sentiment. From *The Winnipeg Tribune*:

A whole range of emotions, political, racial, religious, sectional, and “class” was stirred during an extraordinary debate in the House of Commons Monday, provoked by the admission of 100 Polish refugee girls, by order in council, to act as textile hands in the mills of Ludger Dionne, Liberal M.P. for Beauce... M. J. Coldwell... objected to manner in which the Polish girls had been brought in under contract—in the face of Canadian tradition and even Canadian law which prohibited the importation of “indentured labor.” Under the Alien Labor Act, he declared, it is illegal to prepay transportation of labor to Canada, under contract.<sup>546</sup>

[Communist] Polish officials expressed outrage not only to Canadian officials, but also to the international community, at the “kidnapping” of the women, “shipped ‘by contract’ [where] in the beautiful resin smelling Canada, they were locked in like slaves”<sup>547</sup> until some managed to escape the horror of their circumstance. Polish newspapers, both in Poland and in Canada, were quick and righteous in their condemnation of the importation of Polish and Ukrainian “girls” as a form of white slave traffic in which Canada took advantage of defenseless war victims for capitalist exploitation. One Polish journalist appealed to “the conscience of honest Canadians, expressing her hope that public opinion will prevent the slave traffickers to make fortunes out of the tragic fate of the defenseless war victims.”<sup>548</sup> Another suggested in outrageous verbal caricature that the “little sisters” were chained to the dubious care of nuns further making veiled references to a notorious sect of nuns [the *Mariawitkas*]<sup>549</sup> of ostensibly frivolous morals.<sup>550</sup> Between the lines, however, lay Poland’s own need for the *Dionne girls* in nation building. One hundred young women could be put to good use not only to help rebuild Poland’s cities and

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<sup>546</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 1300, file 4. *Winnipeg Tribune*, 03 June 1947.

<sup>547</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 1914, file 1-100-64-25-2-31, Poland. *Wroclaw Courier*, 13 October 1947.

<sup>548</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 1914, file 1-100-64-25-2-31; “White Slaves”, transl. from *Republic*. Warsaw: 03 November 1947.

<sup>549</sup> *witka: twig*.

<sup>550</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 1914, file 1-100-64-25-2-31, Poland. *Wroclaw Courier*, 13 October 1947.



economy, but also her population! Furthermore, such propaganda might counsel Poles who would not return to Poland of the unhappy fate into which they might plunge.

The Canadian Polish Congress submitted a brief to Humphrey Mitchell, Minister of Labour, in the matter of the *Dionne girls* as well made comments regarding the Polish veterans. First, the Congress asked the Minister to abolish the Polish veterans' contracts declaring them "discriminatory, undemocratic and unjust in every respect" for other post-war immigrants had been imported to Canada on shorter-term contracts.<sup>551</sup> In regard to the *Dionne girls*, the Congress asked the Minister to intervene on behalf of the 100 women to, first, investigate charges of oppression, censorship, prison-like living conditions at the convent, as well to investigate attempted suicides, and, finally to ensure safe working conditions for the women. I have not been able to ascertain what, if any, action was taken.

The scandal resurfaced in September, 1948 when, after *Dionne's* workers, including the Polish *Dionne girls*, had been on strike for near two months, the Confederation of Catholic Workers publicly denounced *Dionne* "as an exploiter of the working class because he... declined to meet his employees' requests for wage increases."<sup>552</sup>

All the while, Polish diplomats protested both to Canada and at the United Nations General Assembly what were termed Canada's ill use of Polish 'slave' workers in agricultural work. And again, in November, 1949, Polish officials condemned Canada on the *Dionne* question, as well post-war immigration [termed as *forcible detainment, kidnapping or abduction*] of the group of 123 Polish children from the Tengeru settlement camp in Tanganyika, during debates on "Refugees and Stateless Persons" held at the General Assembly of the United Nations.<sup>553</sup> In both instances, Polish officials charged "[s]uch kidnapping was very characteristic of the whole activity of IRO and clearly demonstrated that IRO had violated the international agreements which

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<sup>551</sup> NAC MG-30 - E230, No. 1. Wiktor Podoski. 1947.

<sup>552</sup> NAC RG-25 F-6, vol. 2615, file 2-20-0. Secret telegram No. 33. 24 September 1948.

<sup>553</sup> NAC RG-25, vol. 3317, file 10258-40, pt. 1. Confidential communication from Secretary of State for External Affairs with attachment. "Attacks by Poland on Canada at the Fourth General Assembly of the United Nations." 23 December 1949.

it had assumed"<sup>554</sup> and they demanded repatriation of the Polish citizens. Indeed, the larger debate around repatriation of Polish citizens suffering under capitalist constraint in Canada trickled through the early 1950s in more general terms that again echoed Fiedler's Canada Smelling of Resin. "Canada smelling of... crisis", screamed one newspaper headline published in Poland followed by reportage of Canada's economic stagnation and calamitous unemployment.<sup>555</sup> Canada, most notably through Senator Cairine Wilson, firmly and categorically denied Poland's "very grave and irresponsible accusations" arguing Canada admitted the children strictly on humanitarian grounds.<sup>556</sup> There was no 'official' mention of the *Dionne girls*. The question, however, still presses for attention: *Whatever happened to the Dionne girls?*

The short-lived Dionne scandal did not, however, curb Canadian solicitation of female labour in displaced persons camps. Within months of the arrival of the *Dionne girls*, large group movements of female domestics from DP camps in Europe were co-coordinated. In 1948, a quota was established for approximately 8,500 single women, widows, divorcees or women whose husbands disappeared [with no more than one child, no older than 5 years of age], who were to be selected for domestic work either in homes or in institutions in what Franca Iacovetta identifies as "the lowest-paid sectors of the female job 'ghetto'... taking on "the 'dirty' jobs that Canadian women shunned."<sup>557</sup> On their arrival in Canada, the government recommended their children be placed in boarding schools or in children's homes as the mothers were committed to domestic contract; with the view, of course, that mother's ought to have regular access to their children! Lastly, couples without children, or with one or two children, were accepted for domestic/agricultural work.

Overall, however, the scales tipped more favourably for men seeking refuge in Canada than for women in what Warren Kalbach terms the historic "normative" sex-ratio immigration

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<sup>554</sup> NAC RG-25, vol. 3317, file 10258-40, pt. 1. Statement by Mr. Altman (Poland) 04 November 1949.

<sup>555</sup> NAC RG-25, vol. 3317, file 10258-40, pt. 1. *Głos Wybrzcza* (Voice of the Coast); Gdansk, 03 March 1950. See also RG-25, vol. 3317, "Poland/Canada Relations". Editorial in *Wola Łudu*, #129; 11 May 1950.

<sup>556</sup> NAC RG-26, vol. 110, file 3-24-12/pt. 1, "Refugees and Stateless Persons". Telegram No. 247, 05 November 1949.

<sup>557</sup> Franca Iacovetta, "Remaking their Lives" in Joy Parr, ed. A Diversity of Women. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995) 137.

pattern which is disrupted only in extreme circumstances such as seen during the Depression and war years.<sup>558</sup> One source cites three times as many Polish males as females came to Canada during the post-WWII era.<sup>559</sup> Mirjana Morokvasic observes that theoretical considerations of migration generally distinguish migrants as "sex-less units; if they are constructed into sociological objects then they are male and... a number of investigations [which] mentioned women [did so] within the framework of the family, and in relation to children."<sup>560</sup> For instance, Kalbach discusses women first, in relation to sex ratio; male:female. They are then discussed in child:woman ratios. Perhaps this explains the dearth of literature on the *Dionne girls* in comparison with the volumes written on the Polish ex-soldiers as well on those Poles [male] who contributed, as professionals, to Canadian life, whereas women contribute in different ways, mothering but one.

However, as Mirjana Morokvasic observes, much of the literature on immigrant women more often "relies on stereotypes of migrant women as dependants... unproductive, illiterate, isolated, secluded from the outside world."<sup>561</sup> But even among the least educated female *Anders Poles*, they were far from isolated or unproductive even though many maintained strong ties with the Polish community. Indeed, within Polish community voluntary organizational life, many played significant roles which were particularly aimed at benefiting the children of *Polonia* in Canada by establishing and, especially, maintaining Polish cultural/educational opportunities such as Scouting and Polish school, or in fundraising for such activities, for the church and/or for scholarships. In addition, most worked until retirement, or periodically, that they might supplement the family income. Overall, however, their 'work' was more particularly gender-specific including, especially, childbearing and childrearing.

The *Dionne girls* and other displaced women who immigrated to Canada in the immediate post-war years followed in the footsteps of earlier movements of female labour under the rubric

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<sup>558</sup> Warren E. Kalbach. The effect of immigration on population. (Ottawa: Manpower and Immigration, 1974) 11-17.

<sup>559</sup> Henryk Radecki. Ethnic Organizational Dynamics. (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1979) 36.

<sup>560</sup> Mirjana Morokvasic. "Women in Migration: Beyond the Reductionist Outlook" in One Way Ticket: Migration and Female Labour. ed. Annie Phizacklea. (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983) 13. See also Franca Iacovetta, "Remaking Their Lives" in Joy Parr, ed. A Diversity of Women. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).

<sup>561</sup> *Ibid.*

"domestics". As early as the 17th Century *filles du roi* were recruited from France to nation-build: crudely put, breed. Through the late 19th and early 20th Century, working-class United Kingdom women were also recruited to aid in the development of the colony [including young Dr. Barnardo girls (and boys) also imported for domestic work], and to preserve white supremacy [otherwise spun as the *assimilable character* post-WWII] of a growing nation.

Milda Danys writes domestics were, as a commodity, "easy to deal in." Little skill is required; all that is needed is that the prospective domestic be in good health and able-bodied. If she didn't already have experience, she could quickly learn to cook or operate a washing machine. She required little supervision and, as she worked in relative isolation from Canadian society and, especially, other workers, there was virtually no chance of agitation for better wages or working conditions and even less likelihood of agitation for union protection.<sup>562</sup> The debate is further compounded when one then factors into the equation that in the post-war era in Ontario, "'ethnic' women made up... almost 40 per cent" of the workforce, about half post-war arrivals.<sup>563</sup>

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Though there exist common interests that lead to the development of policies that open the doors to immigration to Canada, a larger question arises as to whether there are competing interests between government [nation-building; economic growth/stability], business [profit-making], and immigrants [establishment in a new land].

Parliamentary debates of the immediate post-war years further complicated the question of immigration by attempting to distinguish between immigration policy and immigrants, and refugees and humanitarian obligation. Furthermore, Alistair Stewart, MP [Winnipeg North], raised the issue of an apparent division "into preferred [presumably WASP] and non-preferred groups such as Ukrainians and Poles, and those even lower,... the Jewish people," clearly making reference to 1928 policy. Stewart pressed the government, insisting Canada ought to show "great

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<sup>562</sup> Milda Danys. DP Lithuanian Immigration to Canada After the Second World War. (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1986) 128.

<sup>563</sup> Franca Iacovetta, "Remaking their Lives" in Joy Parr, ed. A Diversity of Women. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995) 153.

moral leadership to the world” by taking in more refugees and rescind “any policy which brands an immigrant from the Ukraine or Poland as non-preferred and which discriminates against him, or any policy which excludes Jews because of their religion... in the name of democracy and in the name of decency.”<sup>564</sup> Stewart did not, however, champion the cause of Chinese or Japanese immigration that were concurrent topics of debate.

The question would not be adequately addressed—as is exemplified by Canada’s discriminatory practices toward post-war Jewish immigration, despite growing evidence and awareness of the Holocaust, as well toward Chinese or Japanese immigration, and in some measure toward Poles and other Slavs—until the *Immigration Act* of 1976 came into effect in 1978; despite the admissions of refugees into the country on an *ad hoc* basis since the arrival of the Loyalists in the late 18th Century.<sup>565</sup>

While the federal government welcomed and expedited importation of *assimilable* immigrants who could be *successfully absorbed* into the growing post-war industrial economy that they might make meaningful contributions to the capitalist infrastructure [labour and market] inasmuch as there was no displacement of ‘real’ Canadians from preferred jobs, not all Canadians welcomed even assimilable refugees and displaced persons. Criticism fell particularly on the bulk labour scheme.

In a *Globe & Mail* editorial, the government was criticized for an immigration policy that amounted to labour recruitment for employers who would compel workers to labour under “semi-servitude utterly at variance with Canadian notions of human rights and freedoms.”<sup>566</sup> Overall, labour was a “judicious supporter” of immigration. However, elements within the labour movement cautioned against “unplanned immigration” which did not reflect contemporary economic needs and cycles.<sup>567</sup> There existed some anxiety that mass immigration of cheap labour, especially of so-called hard core Poles—despite general agreement vis-à-vis the

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<sup>564</sup> Hansard. 04 February 1947. 112-116.

<sup>565</sup> Tanya Basok. “Refugee Policy: Globalization, Radical Challenge or State Control”, in *Studies in Political Economy*. [No. 50, Summer, 1996] 138.

<sup>566</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>567</sup> Freda Hawkins. *Canada and Immigration*. (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1972) 72, 350.

contributions of the 4,527 Polish ex-soldiers—would result in an undercutting of workers' standard of living as well as erosion of worker rights, thus potentially displacing *real* Canadian workers by employing *cheap* foreigners. Quebec MPs repeated their historic reluctance to accept new immigrants, having already threatened in 1944 to boycott any post-war mass immigration scheme.<sup>568</sup>

In letters to the government, some Canadians complained of a lifetime of hardship in clearing and farming land to then reach old age broke yet paying taxes to “keep” imported immigrants. Others expressed outrage that Polish ex-soldiers were already displacing Canadian war veterans from jobs and housing and that more immigrants would only compound the problem. Ironically, the government provided Canadian veterans with government positions, education and training opportunities, and housing and financing assistance, whereas the Polish veterans worked two years as contracted farm labour and received no government-assisted employment training or placement nor pension for their service. Evidence illustrates that increased movement off the farm to urban and industrial areas caused a shortage of farm and resource [mining, lumber, logging] labour. Yet others were not shy in stating their aversion to the importation of so-called left leaning, Communist-agitating Poles—and other Slavs—and especially of Roman Catholics. The question of public views of Jewish immigration to Canada in the post-war years is another significant matter well documented by Irving Abella and Harold Troper in *None is Too Many*. As well, others document post-WWII immigration under the *bulk labour movements* of such ethnic groups as the Italians and Lithuanians.<sup>569</sup>

While some Canadians wrote letters of complaint to the government, to newspapers, and otherwise made their disgruntled views heard, the post-war immigrants to Canada had little or no voice or channel for complaint. And most Canadians, including immigration and labour officials, seemed oblivious to the seasonal nature of the jobs for which they were recruited; as well, in

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<sup>568</sup> John Atchison, “Immigration in Two Federations” in Bruce W. Hodgins, et al, *Federalism in Canada and Australia: Historical Perspectives, 1920-1988*. (Peterborough, Canada: Frost Centre for Canadian Heritage and Development Studies, Trent University, 1989) 207. See also Basok, Dirks and Knowles.

<sup>569</sup> See Franca Iacovetta and Milda Danys.

many instances, to the abuse suffered by workers, poor wages and/or unsafe working conditions, and of the isolating nature of work in agriculture or on frontier jobs such as mining and forestry.

In the two decades following the war, during which Canada experienced an industrial boom, the labour force benefited from the injection of immigrant workers who doubled the workforce and who also contributed quality skills to Canada's economic [industrial] development with little Canadian-borne expense. Some sources have argued immigrant labour replaced cheap unskilled Canadian workers who fled for better wages in the United States.<sup>570</sup> During the first period [1946-55] Canada followed historic patterns in its admission of agricultural workers, resource workers, labourers and domestics. This period reflects the peak of post-war Polish immigration to Canada. In the second decade [1956-67], Canada's priorities shifted to the importation of more skilled and semi-skilled workers.<sup>571</sup>

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Due to persistent public pressure, especially from the well-organized umbrella Polish-American Congress, the government of American President Harry Truman reluctantly passed in 1948 the *Displaced Persons Act [DP Act]* which passage occurred one month prior to official creation of the IRO, and a few days after the Berlin Blockade.<sup>572</sup> Thus, argues Theresa Kurk McGinley, American immigration reform was more closely linked to ideological [more specifically anti-Communist] objectives and labour needs than to humanitarian beneficence. Following Canada, Great Britain, and Australia<sup>573</sup> as the leading recipients of displaced persons, many of whom were accepted because of labour contracts, American immigration reform was designed to allow for the acceptance of certain qualified workers needed in the United States.<sup>574</sup>

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<sup>570</sup> John Porter. *The Vertical Mosaic: An Analysis of Social Class and Power in Canada*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965) 58.

<sup>571</sup> Freda Hawkins. *Canada and Immigration*. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1972) 41-50.

<sup>572</sup> Theresa Kurk McGinley. *A Cry for Human Rights: The Polish Displaced Persons Problem and United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1951*. (Doctoral Dissertation: University of Houston, 1995) 112-113, 138.

<sup>573</sup> In the case of Australia, mass immigration of displaced persons fulfilled a need for population both for defence purposes as well economic expansion for increased participation in growing post-war international trade. John Atchison, "Immigration in Two Federations" in Bruce W. Hodgins, et al, *Federalism in Canada and Australia: Historical Perspectives, 1920-1988*. (Peterborough, Canada: Frost Centre for Canadian Heritage and Development Studies, Trent University, 1989) 200-227.

<sup>574</sup> United States Congress. *Emergency Displaced Persons Act*, House Report 1854, p. 19, qtd. in Theresa Kurk McGinley, *A Cry for Human Rights: The Polish Displaced Persons Problem and United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1951*.

Over 200,000 American visas were distributed among Europe's displaced persons, predominantly among Balts. Jewish applicants were largely at a disadvantage as the American policy stipulated that 30% of those admitted under the Act must be farmers; it was widely known that Eastern European Jews lived and worked primarily in towns and cities and were typically not farmers.<sup>575</sup>

Suddenly under increased international pressure to take in more than a few Polish ex-soldiers, Canada sent more selection teams to Europe's DP camps in search of potential workers and citizens. However, no formal reform of immigration policy was instituted.

Canadian selection teams faced stiff competition from England, Australia and the United States all of which, by mid-summer, 1948, had skimmed the cream of the DP crop from the camps in Europe. Though selection teams were advised [it was not *official* policy] to steer away from choosing Roman Catholic Poles, the [predominantly Roman Catholic] passengers of the *General Black* found themselves among the lucky masses whose labour, purchasing power and breeding capabilities were contracted by Canada, almost as an afterthought in June 1949. The dwindling numbers in the DP camps of Europe took IRO officials to Polish resettlement camps in British Africa [Tanganyika and Uganda] as well Beirut, Lebanon, where a speedy round-up of *Anders Poles* from among the remaining Polish survivors of Soviet deportation and exile—who refused to return to [Communist] Poland—helped fill the boat, and IRO quotas. The IRO paid all transportation costs, including traveling costs for Canada's selection team, as well arranged pre-medical and pre-occupational screening. Only "those found acceptable from an occupational viewpoint" would be selected.<sup>576</sup>

One woman, Wanda, whose family was living in the Tengeru settlement in Tanganyika, recalled a tense meeting with IRO officials:

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(Doctoral Dissertation: University of Houston, 1995) 204.

<sup>575</sup> Reed Ueda. *Postwar Immigrant America: A Social History*. (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1994) 37. Harold Troper and Morton Weinfeld. *Old Wounds: Jews, Ukrainians and the Hunt for Nazi War Criminals in Canada*. (Markham: Viking/Penguin Books, 1988) 65. See also Barbara Stern Burstin, Danuta Mostwin, and Theresa Kurk McGinley.

<sup>576</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 898, file 8-9-83-1, pt. 5. Confidential Immigration-Labour Committee Minutes, 12 May 1949.



There was a lady who came and make a meeting. And translator was saying to us and she said, "If we want to go to Canada, we better... come to the office and list ourselves, right? [S]he was Canadian. [And] she said, "Put your name and we will take you to Germany and we... one man and one lady say: "*My do Niemiec nie jeckiemy!*"... "We are not going to Germany!"... And she said, "But you are not going to stay there. You just going..." "NO!" Commission then comes to get us.<sup>577</sup>

It appears it was the IRO's intent to 'process' the Poles through the displaced persons camps located in Germany. The Poles, however, expressed not only anti-German sentiment but also, as Wanda later described, were afraid of being sent back to Poland for fear of repeat deportation and exile in Soviet labour camps.

One member of the Canadian selection team wrote of the Poles he interviewed throughout Lebanon and British East Africa that while they considered themselves "an essential part of Poland" [he likely was unaware of the term *Polonia*] they resisted repatriation under Communism. Of the intelligentsia living in British Africa he suggested they had "no intention of resettling anywhere...[as they were] earning a good living... lead[ing] a life of leisure, with most of the manual work being done for them by native Africans." More specifically of the Poles in Camp Tengeru, he distinctly terms them "fait accompli... hard core".<sup>578</sup> Another official earlier expressed concern about the "spirit in Tengeru Camp" characterizing the Poles as "recalcitrant".<sup>579</sup>

Of the so-called "hard core" displaced persons, whether Polish or otherwise, most were categorized thus by the IRO for they largely did not qualify for labour contracts. They were either elderly, the invalid, children, families with many children, or people with unsuitable occupations such as professionals, artists, scientists, and others who were deemed potential "welfare risks".<sup>580</sup> In other words, their labour potential was undesirable; consequently, by virtue of their situation,

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<sup>577</sup> Interview with Wanda (22 March 1995) 20.

<sup>578</sup> Originating in Great Britain, the term *hard core* was a War Office categorization of Poles "who are unlikely ever to return to Poland and who will thus be for ultimate disposal;" that is, those Poles who not only refused to return to foreign-dominated Poland, but who represented a problem vis-à-vis resettlement. Keith Sword, The Formation of the Polish Community in Great Britain, 1939-1950. (London: School of Slavonic and East European Studies, 1989) 245. Milda Danys in DP Lithuanian Immigration to Canada After the Second World War also similarly uses the term: "...a hard-core of over one million DPs [who] resisted voluntary repatriation.... For these people, returning home meant not only living under a system whose principals were repugnant to them, but also running the risk of losing their jobs and property and, in many cases, being arrested, exiled and sent to their deaths in Siberian work camps." 13.

<sup>579</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 289, file 1-26-50. Letter from M. S. Lush to IRO Chiefs of Mission at Nairobi and Beirut, 15 July 1949.

<sup>580</sup> Theresa Kurk McGinley, A Cry for Human Rights: The Polish Displaced Persons Problem and United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1951. (Doctoral Dissertation: University of Houston, 1995) 118.

they remained outcasts.

Although those selected to board the *General Black* were described by a Canadian recruitment official as "the best available", one may infer they were likely sub-standard potential immigrants for many, especially among the younger "inexperienced" applicants, were accepted because he "felt the existence of an honest desire of these willing applicants to come to Canada."<sup>581</sup> My father recalls the selection process in one of his favourite anecdotes:

They ask mother what you have to bring to Canada. "Livestock," she tells them. "Three girls and three boys." And this is what we bring.<sup>582</sup>

Overall, the objective was to fill the boat and have the workers in Canada in time for the fall harvest, however this might best be accomplished.

DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR  
GOVERNMENT OF CANADA

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERTAKING  
with the  
MINISTER OF LABOUR FOR CANADA

I, BAJOREK Jan T 75 8  
(Surname) (Christian Name) (Identity Card No.) (Serial No.)

do hereby undertake that on my arrival in Canada I will accept employment in ..... or such other employment as may be selected for me by the Minister of Labour for Canada or his authorized representative, at the wage rate and under the working and living conditions prevailing in the locality of employment for comparable classifications of employment, and that I will conform to the prevailing rules and working regulations of the industry in which I am employed.

I understand that I may be required to reimburse my employer for costs paid by him for my transportation to place of employment, under terms and conditions as to repayment approved by the Minister of Labour for Canada.

I agree that I will remain in the employment mentioned above, or such other employment as may be selected for me from time to time by the Minister of Labour for Canada or his authorized representative, for a period of one year.

I acknowledge receipt of a copy of this undertaking.

Dated at Tengeru, Tanganyika on this 9th day of July 1949

Bajorek Jan  
(Signature of Emigrant)

The above memorandum of undertaking was interpreted to the above-named in his own language. I hereby witness his signature.

[Signature]  
(Signature of Witness)  
Canadian Immigration Visa Officer  
(Title of Witness)

Fig. 32 - Labour Contract between Polish Immigrant and Department of Labour<sup>583</sup>

Altogether, about 900 men, women and children were selected to board the *General Black* and in July, 1949, were bound for Canada: for absorption in work as domestics in homes.

<sup>581</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 289, file 1-26-50, "Immigrants from Beirut". Letter to W. P. Black from John A. Sharrer, 09 July 1949.

<sup>582</sup> J. Bajorek (December 2000).

<sup>583</sup> From archives of J. Bajorek.

institutions and hotels, for placement on farms, and for unspecified unskilled factory work.<sup>584</sup> Each signed one year labour contracts. [Fig. 32]

There is no question of his belief in the straightforward expectation that they were permitted entry into Canada with the undertaking to serve the country as workers and breeders.

In contrast to Canada's formal contract of labour, American officials opted to require an *assurance* of employment and residence; thus, displaced persons accepted for immigration to the United States required sponsors [e.g. employers, public/voluntary agencies, individual citizens] who guaranteed that the new immigrant had both a job and a place to live, as well something of a support system.<sup>585</sup> Brazil determined a preference for families welcoming Poles and other ethnic groups to already established ex-patriot communities with the presumption that the integration process would follow easily under the tutelage of fellow compatriots.<sup>586</sup>

Those who were rounded up in Lebanon were predominantly "intellectuals" and professionals. Many among them quickly found work in their fields and thus likely abandoned their contracts.<sup>587</sup> Those from British East Africa were generally members of former small land-holding families with limited education and skills. Among this group were my father, grandmother, three aunts and two uncles as well a number of men and women who were among the families in the working-class Oshawa, Ontario neighbourhood in which I was raised, and whose children attended the same elementary Roman Catholic school, Roman Catholic Church, Polish school and Scouting activities as did I and my siblings and cousins.

A year later, the Canadian government rescinded all previous Orders-in-Council related to immigration. Unemployment was low. The economy was booming. Thus, the doors opened wider to immigration to Canada both in terms of volume and eligibility. That year [1950], Order-in-Council P.C. 2856 broadened the definition of admissible classes to include any immigrant "who satisfies the Minister that he is a suitable immigrant having regard to the climatic, the social, educational, industrial, labour or other conditions or requirements of Canada; and that he is not

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<sup>584</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 898, file 8-9-83-1, pt. 5. Confidential Immigration-Labour Committee Minutes, 28 June 1949.

<sup>585</sup> Theresa Kurk McGinley. *A Cry for Human Rights: The Polish Displaced Persons Problem and United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1951*. (Doctoral Dissertation: University of Houston, 1995) 183-184.

<sup>586</sup> Maria do Rosario Rolfsen Salles. "Displaced Persons and the direction of Post-World War II Brazilian Immigration Policy" presented at European Social Science History Conference, Amsterdam. 12 April 2000.

<sup>587</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 289, file 1-26-50. Inter-office Memo to W/Cmdr. Innes, et al, from M. S. Lush, 15 September 1949.

undesirable owing to his probable inability to become readily adapted and integrated into the life of the Canadian community and to assume the duties of Canadian citizenship within a reasonable time....<sup>588</sup> A few months later, the government rescinded the restriction of entry of enemy aliens; namely, Germans and Japanese. The government also established the Department of Citizenship and Immigration to further enlarge administrative machinations and raise the status of increased immigration as official policy, resulting in dramatic annual increases in immigration to Canada in the following decade.

And, with the closure of the IRO in February, 1951, pre-selection of workers for Canada's bulk labour schemes ended. Thus, the end of the post-war era of mass pre-selection of workers for bulk orders signaled the return to the individual migration process. The emphasis also shifted from ostensible humanitarian motivations to policies which strictly and definitively embraced economic and national growth agendas.

And, finally, the Canadian government instituted a new *Immigration Act* in 1952.

#### The Anders Poles: Contributions to Economic and National Growth

Following disembarkment from the *General Black* nearly 900 Polish survivors of exile in Soviet labour camps began their cross-Canada journey. Many describe a shocking view from the train windows as they journeyed from Halifax: mile after mile after mile of forest alarmingly reminiscent of the Siberian taiga. Then, the *American Dream* began to unfold. Pockets of housing. A car in the driveway. Towns, then cities. Prosperity as only imagined and the *paradise* longingly dreamed of.

The train arrived at Montreal where the women and children were dropped off for 'processing' at the Saint-Paul-l'Ermite reception centre. They were dismayed to find themselves separated from adult male family members who continued the trip to Ontario where they were to be distributed among waiting farmers. In describing her experience, one woman recalled:

They took us from Halifax... on the trains, through the night, we traveled to the suburb of Montreal... and we get there. Unloaded. Was a nice hostel there... beautiful, actually, surroundings... but we didn't stay there long

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<sup>588</sup> Freda Hawkins. Canada and Immigration. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1972) 99.

because the boys [her adult brothers] were taken away from us. Most mothers' sons [were sent] to Ontario without us and we couldn't understand why they would separate us. And, the authorities didn't understand why mothers wanted to have grown up sons with them. That was two clashes of culture, here, and finally we went and demanded "We want our sons back here with us!" So, instead having troubles to bring the sons back, they ship us to Ontario [laughs]...<sup>589</sup>

Such terms as *unloaded* and *ship*, accompanied by sardonic laughter, offer the listener a clue to the interviewee's realization of her self as commodity, to be loaded, unloaded and shipped within capitalist economic structure in conditions reminiscent of the Sifton era of agricultural colonization wherein the Canadian National Railway (CNR) piloted procedures related to selective immigration, colonization, and regional development. According to the Colonization and Agriculture wing (DCA) of the CNR, new settlement facilitated by the DCA contributed revenues of \$1.75 million per year and DCA officials regarded each settler "as a small industry located on our lines and from which we shall secure traffic for an indefinite period of time."<sup>590</sup> Time ran out, however, in 1961 when the government terminated its immigration arrangements with the CNR.

It is surprising that officials responsible for the 'distribution' of these people seemingly overlooked the fact they experienced a similar process



Fig. 33 - Polish arrivals from the *General Black* at Ajax, Ontario DP Reception Centre Formerly DIL Munitions Factory; August, 1949<sup>591</sup>

<sup>589</sup> Interview with Wanda (03 March 1995) 23.

<sup>590</sup> qtd. in Brian S. Osborne and Susan E. Wurtele, "The Other Railway: Canadian National's Department of Colonization and Agriculture" in *Prairie Forum*, Vol. 20, No. 2, Fall 1995, 249-250.

<sup>591</sup> From archives of A. Bialecki.

[under duress] of transport to labour camps in the hinterlands of Soviet Russia, whereupon families were separated and family members perished. A cynic might argue compassion has no place in either a totalitarian Communist regime or in a capitalist democracy. Further implicit in Wanda's account is inherent *Polishness*: "two clashes of culture" in which Canadians did not understand that adult Polish males maintained close familial ties; especially if unmarried.



Fig. 34 - Munitions manufacturing during World War II, DIL Industries, Ajax, Ontario 1940-45<sup>592</sup>

After their arrival in August 1949 at Ajax, Ontario, a DP reception and distribution centre,<sup>593</sup> the *Anders Poles* joined the legions of displaced persons awaiting placement where they would fulfill their labour contracts. A front page article published a few days later by the local newspaper reported they:

...found temporary sanctuary in the comfortable dormitories which once

<sup>592</sup> NAC RD-000823. Roy Mitchell, Photographer. Alexandra Studio Collection. The irony lies in the temporary housing of persons displaced by the war in a former wartime munitions factory.

<sup>593</sup> Termed *hostels*, two main reception/distribution centres were located at Saint-Paul-l'Ermité, Quebec and Ajax, Ontario. Over 50% of all post-war Polish immigrants to Canada settled in Ontario in urban industrial cities. See Canada Multiculturalism Directorate. The Canadian Family Tree. (Don Mills, ON: Corpus Information Services, 1979) 177

housed workers from the now dismantled munitions plant. More than 5,000 men, women and children have passed through the village since it became a stopping place, resting quietly while the Department of Labor determined their qualifications and decided where they could be happily placed.... Carefully screened, these farmers, craftsmen, professional men and healthy young women, the pick of their countries, will take their places in the Dominion and do their part to make a bigger and better Canada.... The only formal attempt to aid the strangers is the class in basic English which is well attended and staffed by teachers.... selective screening in their country of origin guarantees that these new Canadians are a strong, virile people....<sup>594</sup>

The account is reminiscent of Clifford Sifton's "stalwart peasant in a sheepskin coat... with a stout wife and a half dozen children [as] good quality" immigrant. Inherent in the descriptors of the "strangers/new Canadians" are the attributes of "strength" and "virility" as well "good quality" in the phrase "pick of their countries". Further "selective screening" for "strong, virile people" is suggestive of a cattle auction. The newspaper article offers no by-line and thus may be suspect as a government press release; however, I have not been able to substantiate this hypothesis.

Milda Danys argues immigration officials of the era "were still thinking in terms used by Sir Clifford Sifton" as most believed Canada still needed hardy pioneers, ready to work the land.<sup>595</sup> While there existed an awareness of the shift of workers from the land to factory jobs in the cities, including immigrants, it was business-as-usual with the Departments of Labour and Immigration as they continued to supply agricultural labour to meet farmers' demands. Further, we can read between the lines the link to the "twin metaphors of family and democracy" typically made by proponents of immigration during the post-war era.<sup>596</sup> Anti-Communist sentiment was believed to fuel the moral argument for post-war capitalist economic growth.

Of those study participants who were processed through the DP distribution camp at Ajax, all have vivid recollections of the camp and recount anecdotes that note how, almost immediately, they found the Polish community in a neighbouring city, Oshawa. My father, Jan Bajorek, recalled:

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<sup>594</sup> "5,000 Immigrants Handled at Ajax in Year", *The Daily Times-Gazette*. (Oshawa: 18 August 1949) 1. The "dismantled munitions plant" is the former DIL Munitions Factory, 1940-45.

<sup>595</sup> Milda Danys. *DP Lithuanian Immigration to Canada After the Second World War*. (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1986) 162.

<sup>596</sup> Franca Iacovetta, "Remaking their Lives" in Joy Parr, ed. *A Diversity of Women*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995) 143.

It was really good, nice. I thought there were rabbits under those bunks. They were nice, pretty Canadian skunks! [laughter] We don't know what [it] was the kids were catching up, bringing inside because they were calm, easy, cute, and after that the barracks were stinking for a month.... I walk from Ajax to Whitby to find work and to find Canadian beer. We went to hotel, I have money, and buy *Red Cap*. We used to walk from Ajax DP camp to Whitby looking for Polish community, and they told us there is in Oshawa... a Polish Hall, which very good Polish people were... but, they won't let us in... full hall, and we have no money. And, eventually, they did... they give us drinks, and then, every Saturday, walk from Ajax for dances on Olive Avenue [Oshawa, Polish Alliance, Group 21].<sup>597</sup>

As with the Polish veterans who came before them, the *Anders Poles* gravitated toward the familiar. Once having found the familiar in the established Polish community, they then determined to settle in the area; "that like home", as my father said.

The post-WWII Polish immigrants to Canada, numbering about 65,000—among whom I can document at least 5,500 *Anders Poles*; there is no question the numbers are higher—in what some sources characterize as the *fourth wave*, were greeted by established Polish organizations, services and parishes. Conversely, their counterparts who immigrated to the United States after the war were more likely to have relatives or other ties, including sponsors, guide them through 'the system'.

Thus, strategies involving the assistance and guidance of established Polish-Canadians met within the existing Polish community infrastructure were nurtured. Foremost, many of the unmarried Polish ex-servicemen sought Polish community halls where at weekly dances they could meet prospective [Polish-Canadian] brides. As one observed, their lives had been put on hold since 1939, and it was time to settle down and have a family; thus, in some measure, taking to heart the commitment to nation-build. Some eventually married women who similarly shared the deportation/exile experience before coming to Canada.

Some study participants sought private mortgages through Polish-Canadian lawyers or builders rather than apply to a Canadian bank for financial assistance. Others recall obtaining employment through connections with a "nice big Pole" or through a serendipitous meeting with a "nice Ukrainian fella". Few joined Anglo-Canadian professional or community organizations thus

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<sup>597</sup> Interview with Jan Bajorek (21 February 1995) 30; and. (23 February 1995) 14.



networking opportunities were limited to the familiar of the Polish community.

There was some initial tension between the old guard and the new arrivals. One man described the "old-timer" Poles as *Columbusi*, referring to their much earlier arrival in Canada. Further, he recalled they exhibited open resentment toward the post-war newcomers fearing they would take away their jobs.<sup>598</sup> Similarly post-war Italian immigrants maintained a certain distance from the established Italian community, in part because of political/ideological differences.<sup>599</sup>

Still, many quickly became involved within the established Polish community, having sought it out virtually the moment of arrival. After all, near 110,000 Poles emigrated to Canada through the years 1900-1914, and another 55,300 through 1920-1939.<sup>600</sup> And as others have documented, organizational activity in Canada's Polish community was injected in the post-war years with the tremendous [patriotic] enthusiasm of the newcomers.

Many among study participants became involved in the Polish community by establishing new organizations and parishes for despite the ancestral homeland as well as aspects of culture and language as common links, there remained a chasm in ideology and objectives. As Henryk Radecki, Anna Reczynska and others note, pre-war Polish arrivals to Canada had little or no experience of Polish identity association with Poland as a free and independent state. Most left Poland when still partitioned between three different states or during a period when they were likely encouraged to seek greener pastures elsewhere by Canadian recruitment schemes and/or by Polish officials attempting to reduce population and economic pressures. Thus, they did not experience the intensive polonization project of the interwar era of the Second Republic. Coincidentally, pre-WWII Polish emigrants left the same general eastern regions from which the Red Army deported 1.5 million through 1939-41 and which area was the locus of intense polonization during the interwar years.

Furthermore, the post-WWII Poles, many having survived the Soviet deportation

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<sup>598</sup> Interview with Julian (05 December 1998) 45.

<sup>599</sup> Donna R. Gabaccia. "Creating Italians in Canada," in *Diaspora*, 7:2, 1998. 274.

<sup>600</sup> Henryk Radecki. *Ethnic Organizational Dynamics*. (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1979) 32-35.

experience, as well having fought to preserve Polish freedom, retained hope for the day Poland would become, again, an independent state and they could return. Thus, they remained fervently patriotic and more conscious than earlier waves of their Polish [nationalistic] identity. They maintained strong interest in cultural and political events in Poland that informed their organizational dynamics in Canada.<sup>601</sup> In contrast, established Polish-Canadians, especially those affiliated with the long-standing Polish Alliance of Canada [est. 1921], galvanized around issues relevant to, as Benedykt Heydenkorn has termed it, *Canadianism*,<sup>602</sup> that is, they were more particularly concerned with work and family, and less inclined to be actively interested in events in the ancestral homeland. Post-war Polish newcomers to the United States similarly found their political views and worldly experience to be at cross-purposes with the established Polish community and so also established their own organizations. One woman described a common sentiment: "We didn't feel we had much in common with local Polish Americans....[s]o all the immigrants helped one another.... We considered each other as family."<sup>603</sup> After all, many Poles lost family during the war, or had family in Poland who were completely inaccessible to them. Consequently, they were drawn, through common experience, to one another; "carrying with them," as one source explains, "the lonely realization that others rarely shared the understanding of the nature of the world as they knew it."<sup>604</sup>

Meanwhile, in Canada, division between the old guard and the newcomers was never more pronounced as it was over the issue of the "rightful and legal government" of Poland. The newcomers supported the government-in-exile of the Republic of Poland still standing in London, England, while the established Polish community readily acknowledged the [Communist] government of the new Polish People's Republic, even if under Soviet tutelage.

Post-WWII Lithuanian newcomers to Canada—most coming on labour contract—who

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<sup>601</sup> Henry Radecki. *Ethnic Organizational Dynamics*. (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1979) 82.

<sup>602</sup> Benedykt Heydenkorn. *The Organizational Structure of the Polish Canadian Community*. (Toronto: Canadian Polish Research Institute, 1979) 152.

<sup>603</sup> Barbara Stern Burstin. *From Poland to Pittsburgh: The Experience of Jews and Christians who Migrated to Pittsburgh After World War II*. (Doctoral Dissertation: University of Pittsburgh, 1986) 273.

<sup>604</sup> Sarah Van Aken-Rutkowski. *Integration and acculturation of the Polish Veteran of World War II to Canadian society*. (M.A. Thesis: University of Windsor, 1982) 139.

likewise experienced Soviet invasion, deportation, and post-war domination, were similarly motivated in their organizational life in Canada by what Milda Danys has termed a utopian vision of an independent Lithuania, free of Soviet oppression. Whereas the Poles in exile termed their communities as *Polonia* in what is nothing less than an extension of the Polish nation beyond the geo-political construct of borders, the Lithuanians took the view that while in exile they were "modern explorers surveying their New World and deciding where to build their own particular Lithuanian world within it;" again, also believing their stay in Canada would only be temporary.<sup>605</sup> As such, they termed their exile communities as *kolonijos*, or colonies, where they could preserve cultural Lithuanianism as well participate in Canadian life, all the while awaiting the day Lithuania was again independent.

Two of the most notable organizations created by the post-WWII Polish immigrants are the Canadian Polish Congress and the Polish Combatants' Association. Both function as activist/political bases for issues of import to members of Canada's Polish community; particularly, as they relate to events in Poland. However, both are currently suffering a common trend: the decline of the Polish-Canadian population in Canada.

Of significance to this study which included the participation of thirty-eight interviewees, all residents of southern Ontario, is that according to the 1986 Census, in Ontario alone there were approximately 150,000 people of Polish descent, one-half of whom lived in the greater Toronto area. Thirty-eight percent of Canadians who declared Polish as their mother tongue in 1986 were 55 years of age or older. At that time, the Polish community in Canada was the fifth largest ethnic group. Armed with such statistics, the Canadian Polish Congress organized the *Polonia 2000* conference held at Toronto City Hall in 1989 at which participants discussed strategies for participation of Polish-Canadians in Canadian life with a commitment to prepare for the needs of a growing aged population. Two factors were the main points of discussion:

- retention of Polish culture;
- integration of recent newcomers whose values, attitudes, expectations and

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<sup>605</sup> Milda Danys. DP Lithuanian Immigration to Canada After the Second World War. (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1986) 246-47.

experiences over sixty years under a Communist regime differ from the values, customs and traditions of the post-WWII Polish immigrants to Canada.<sup>606</sup>

Using 1991 Census data, 184,695 Canadians were born in Poland. Fifty-nine percent live in Ontario. Thirty-four percent in Toronto area where there are located two homes for the aged: Copernicus Lodge and Wawel Villa. Polish immigrants are, on average, older than the population born in Canada: 32% of all Polish immigrants aged 65 or over compared with 10% of people born in Canada.<sup>607</sup> And so it has become a problem of weighty concern to the ageing Polish population that there is little interest in maintaining Polish-Canadian organizations among the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generations from this group as well among the 1980s wave of Polish immigrants as their goals and objectives as Canadian citizens are greatly removed from the origins of the post-WWII Polish immigrants. Despite the life-long dedication of many to the preservation of Polish cultural activity in Canada, they have reached their old age only to see *Polishness* in decline.

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Like other post-war immigrants who came to Canada under bulk labour schemes, the *Anders Poles* who disembarked the *General Black* in 1949 came only as a result of the successful experiment of 1946-47 in resettling Polish ex-soldiers who arrived under two-year labour contract and, ironically, following the now-forgotten Dionne scandal. They were permitted entry to Canada because they undertook contractual agreement to perform gender-specific labour; in agriculture, mining, or forestry for the men, and, in the case of the women, in domestic service either on farms or in institutions such as hospitals, sanatoriums, and private schools: commodification of human scales of labour.

But what did these ordinary Polish men, women, and children, who lived through extraordinary events, bring to Canada other than a commitment to fulfill a labour contract, and the hands that would do the work in what one woman called their *Sisyphean labours*?<sup>608</sup> It is

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<sup>606</sup> Teresa Kott, et al, eds. Polonia 2000: Strategies for Participation in Canadian Life. (Toronto: Canadian Polish Congress, 1991) 55.

<sup>607</sup> Citizenship and Immigration Canada. A Profile of Polish Immigrants in Canada. [cicnet.ingenia.com/english/pub/profile/9608pale.html](http://cicnet.ingenia.com/english/pub/profile/9608pale.html).

<sup>608</sup> Anna Witko. "The Journey's End" in Benedykt Heydenkorn, ed., Memoirs of Polish Immigrants in Canada. (Toronto: Canadian-Polish Research Institute, 1979) 291.

important to recall that most of the study participants were children at the time of their deportation and exile to Soviet labour camps. Except for a few of the ex-soldiers near two-thirds of study participants had education no higher than Grade 6 equivalency. Most of the remainder had some secondary education; only three had entered post-secondary institutions. All had their education interrupted by the war resulting in challenges, whatever their pre-war class and training, in post-war employment opportunities and work experience.

As Sarah Van Aken-Rutkowski found in her 1982 study of 20 Polish veterans, pre-war socio-economic status, education, and occupational skills levels affected even rapidly and success rates of assimilation and acculturation into Canadian society. The lower their pre-war educational and socio-economic status, the greater was their dependency in Canada on the Polish community resulting in slower or even retarded acculturation. Furthermore, few encountered opportunities to enrich their education for their energies were directed, first, to fulfilling their contractual obligations, learning the language, and, in due course, to supporting/raising a family. Most often in close proximity to a Polish community.

After completion of their labour contracts, both men and women translated their childhood pre-war education and experience into correspondent work experience. That is, they sought jobs in fields suited to the skills brought with them. In some instances, individuals had acquired additional training and education after their exodus from the Soviet labour camps. For instance, boys too young to enlist in Anders' Army, but old enough to begin cadet training, were channeled into the *junaks* where they received various skills training such as automobile mechanic. It was this training that served my father well for he applied it toward thirty years service in the Rejects Department at General Motors, Oshawa, where he worked as a mechanic repairing production flaws as cars came off the line. However, it was his childhood experience on the land and not his mechanical training that qualified him for admission into Canada on one-year agricultural labour contract. Some girls were instructed in nursing, bookkeeping, or more typically, in gender-specific domestic and farming skills. The latter would serve as the primary qualifier for admission into Canada as domestic workers.

Most among those interviewed were members of small land-holding families with limited education and skills. However, as other post-WWII immigrants to Canada, most were drawn to the industrial belt in Ontario.<sup>609</sup> As Henry Radecki documents in his analysis of [predominantly male] post-war Polish immigration to Canada few who arrived through the years 1946-1961 returned to the land. In his study, near 70% worked in blue-collar jobs [both men and women] or in domestic service [women]. At least 20% came with higher education, professional or other specialized qualifications, but rarely were permitted entry to related employment.<sup>610</sup> A few among my interviewees did work in such professions as engineering and nursing, but noted entry to related employment was not guaranteed nor were opportunities for advancement easily secured.

Among study participants, women's experience and expression of experience differs from that of their male counterparts in such areas as language, work, and community participation. Commodification of immigrant women especially during this era is exemplified by the government's efforts to ensure they did not put undue stress upon the treasury in the event they broke their labour contract in order to marry. In one case, a prospective groom—we will recall him as Kazimierz, a Polish ex-serviceman who arrived under the *Resettlement Act*—in late 1949 proposed marriage to one of the women from the *General Black*. He describes how he was required to pay a *bride price* to the government: shipping fees for the DP product!

I meet my wife...later on, in the fall [1949], I like to get marry her. So, I went to Unemployment [office] to see that manager and I ask the manager "Can I marry her?" "Oh! No Problem! Get married, grow, make a family. We need it... lots of room in Canada." So, we get married in February 20... in the spring, there come a registered letter... I have to pay for transportation from Africa [for bride]... they find out she broke her contract... see, I ask before "Can I get married? Any objections?" He never told me if I get married she going to broke the contract where I have to pay transportation... she was supposed to be working domestic [contract]... I meet her and marry her and she broke the contract... I have to pay transportation... \$300.00 or something... at that time it was big money.... on the first letter, I never respond... they got me second letter, registered letter, and they want us to pay or we [go] to Court, or what? Or send **that property** to Africa... [laughs]... So, I pay them... I get a wife.<sup>611</sup>

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<sup>609</sup> Leo Dreidger. *Multi-Ethnic Canada*. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1996) 63. See also Hawkins.

<sup>610</sup> Henry Radecki. *Ethnic Organizational Dynamics*. (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1979) 35.

<sup>611</sup> Interview with Kazimierz (04 March 1995) 16-17.

Government officials intuited by spring 1948 “[t]hese cases... will probably become more numerous as time goes on,” and thus developed a simple formula for calculation of repayment of transportation costs in such instances.<sup>612</sup> Through 1949, the number of domestics requesting release from their contracts rose dramatically with the result that the Deputy Minister of Labour expressed to Unemployment Insurance Commission officials “his concern about the number of releases through marriage and he is particularly anxious that in such cases our officers make certain that there is a genuine marriage, that the man has a job and that the couple have suitable living quarters.”<sup>613</sup> Although there appears concern for the welfare of the couple, more material was the goal that every effort be expended to persuade the domestics to “faithfully complete their undertakings.” Officials were especially preoccupied with the potential for fraudulent requests of release from domestic contracts; thus, it was suggested that in cases of marriage, a clergy’s statement verifying legal marriage be obtained.<sup>614</sup>

All study participants married—92.1% rate of endogamy (Polish/Roman Catholic).<sup>615</sup> The remainder did, however, also marry Roman Catholics. There is a 15% divorce rate among the study group. Following marriage, many of the women became seemingly invisible beyond their ethnic communities—including those who remained or re-entered the workforce—as family and Roman Catholic Church and Polish community [e.g. Polish Scouts, Polish schools, Polish Alliance] became their world, though there are exceptions. Only two engaged in mainstream [Anglo] Canadian organizational life: one as a member of the *Legion Women’s Auxiliary* supporting her Polish husband’s involvement in the Legion, and the other as a volunteer canvasser for the *Kidney Foundation*. None indicated involvement in school parent associations.

Of women’s involvement in community branches of the *Polish Alliance of Canada* [est.

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<sup>612</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 278, file 1-26-3-1, pt. 3. Department of Labour Memo to A. MacNamara from E. Lorentsen. 11 May 1948.

<sup>613</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 278, file 1-26-3-1, pt. 3. UIC Memo to all regions. 19 January 1949.

<sup>614</sup> NAC RG-27, vol. 276, file 1-26-1-7. Department of Labour memo to A. MacNamara from E. Lorentsen. 26 November 1949.

<sup>615</sup> 89.9% endogamy rate in Danuta Mostwin, 163; 75% in Van Aken-Rutkowski, 116. Also Radecki and Heydenkom, 155. Henry Radecki notes by 1961 60% married non-Poles. *Ethnic Organizational Dynamics*. (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1979) 95.

1921], Apolonja Kojder writes: "the women were crucial to the survival of the organization and yet at the same time always at the periphery (sic) of the organization structure... kept within tradition by assuming supportive roles... [yet they] attempted to be part of the mainstream in North America as they saw it by forming their own women's organization."<sup>616</sup> Two eventually emerged in the 1950s: the *Federation of Polish Women in Canada* and the *Marie Curie Women's Club* which elite membership is restricted to women holding university degrees and to wives of Polish professionals.<sup>617</sup> The *Federation of Polish Women* eventually became affiliated with the *Canadian Council of Women* after overcoming initial contact uneasiness for many of the women lacked confidence, especially in communicating in the English language among "very high class... ladies."<sup>618</sup>

Only two of the thirteen female study participants remained in the domestic sphere as full-time homemakers. There were periods, however, of factory or service industry employment that they might occasionally supplement the family income. The remaining eleven worked full-time in such fields as domestic work, nursing, seamstress, service industry, industrial sewers, and other factory work. Two eventually became sole-support [in factory work] single parents. Only those women who were employed by union shops secured company pensions.

Pola, now in her early seventies, describes her working life and that of her very elderly mother:

I was working...learning English right away because I went to [work at a private school]. I was very happy. I had worked in dining room and my mother cleaned the rooms for the students...and after she works with me in dining room, cleaning the dishes, you know, silver and so on... and I was serving the students and after... I understand more English than other [Polish] girls... I was one year [on this contract]... [then] I met my husband... After my son was born, the last one... I went back to [the school] and I work in sewing room, [for] whole school, for twenty years and I love it.<sup>619</sup>

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<sup>616</sup> Apolonja Kojder, "Women and the Polish Alliance of Canada" in Benedykt Heydenkorn, ed. *A Community in Transition*. (Toronto: Canadian Polish Research Institute, 1985) 119-204. Female study participants in Sarah Van Aken-Rutkowski's research similarly felt excluded from benefits of veteran's organizations. 142.

<sup>617</sup> Rudolf K. Kogler, "The Polish Community in Canada", in Benedykt Heydenkorn, ed. *Topics on Poles in Canada*. (Toronto: Canadian Polish Research Institute, 1976) 13-58.

<sup>618</sup> Apolonja Kojder. "Women and the Polish Alliance of Canada" in Benedykt Heydenkorn, ed. *A Community in Transition*. (Toronto: Canadian Polish Research Institute, 1985) 119-204.

<sup>619</sup> Interview with Pola (01 June 1996) 6-7.



After twenty years in domestic service in what Milda Danys classifies as “a lifetime as Cinderella”,<sup>620</sup> Pola earned a [company] pension. Her [widowed] mother, on the other hand, left the institution after two years in domestic service to work first in a laundromat, then, until retirement, in domestic service in private homes. At the time of the interview with Pola, her mother lived in a Polish home for the aged on small Canada Pension payments, savings, and on family support provided by Pola and her brother.

The women clearly understood the gender-specific economic contributions they were expected to make in Canada first, through fulfilling their contractual obligations in domestic service. More generally, and in the longer term, they contributed in such lower-paid and sometimes less appealing work as domestic work and nursing, as seamstresses and as industrial sewers, as well, in some instances, in the ‘informal’ economy performing such tasks as babysitting. They also worked as community volunteers in Polish Scouting and Polish-language schools, women’s auxiliaries and in various educational/scholarship foundations and, in senior’s homes. Furthermore, there was the underlying expectation that they would also contribute to maintaining the fundamental character of Canada’s population [i.e. ‘white’]. However, despite a clear perception among female study participants of their expected supporting role as nation-builders [breeders], there is no evidence of a profound sense of pressure to bear masses of children. Even those who adopted children did so only after suffering failed pregnancies and they adopted only one child that their family might feel complete. Prior to the Second World War, Polish Scouting activity did exist in Canada but it wasn’t until after the war that the new Polish arrivals more effectively and intensively concentrated efforts in the Scouting movement. Thus, after 1950, Polish Scouting in Canada developed as the largest and most influential Polish community organization aimed specifically at development of understanding of Polish culture and heritage among youth.<sup>621</sup>

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<sup>620</sup> Milda Danys. DP Lithuanian Immigration to Canada After the Second World War. (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1986) 145. It is difficult to substantiate whether Pola felt her life as such though the tone of her interview indicates a measure of pride and joy in her lifelong work in domestic service.

<sup>621</sup> Canada. Multiculturalism Directorate. The Canadian Family Tree. (Don Mills, ON: Corpus Information Services, 1979) 179.

In the case of the 100 *Dionne girls*, their [gender-specific] labour was literally solicited for a textile mill by the mill-owner who was also a member of the ruling Liberal government and who paid their transportation costs to Canada, then deducted them from their wages, ostensibly to keep down his costs in acquiring 'product': labour. Jewish women were funneled into garment manufacture.

Male study participants have been more active in community organizations, sitting on committees, some fraternal, nearly all Polish-based. They are more politically active through participation in candidate selection and election processes, while the women maintain community and family harmony and family practice of certain Polish Roman Catholic traditions such as Easter and, especially, *Wigilia* [Christmas Eve vigil, meal].

Among study participants [37 Roman Catholic, 2 Ukrainian Orthodox] male and female alike, childrearing [of 'good' citizens] are reckoned to be among their most significant contributions to Canada [nation-building in the most fundamental sense]. As one woman so plainly put it:

Canada gave me the future for my kids. I brought my skills, my hands [and] I brought up five kids.<sup>622</sup>

One might venture to hypothesize that childbearing and child rearing are inherent psychical covenants of faith. For study participants, the family also preserves its version of *Polishness* through maintenance of language and cultural practices. In the context of our capitalist industrial domestic economy, however, the family—in childbearing and childrearing—plays a vital role in both the family economy and the national economy and is also vital to nation building. Further, nation building in the Canadian context throughout this period also was a racist project; that is, in maintaining the *assimilable character* of the nation. And so, not everyone's reproductive contribution was appreciated, nor welcome; and, especially, was not encouraged by policy.

Immigration policy then functions as a surrogate method of production of citizens,

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<sup>622</sup> Interview with Wanda (22 March 1995) 33.

educated and maintained until adulthood elsewhere, to then be directed, through policy, to fulfill certain economic requirements. And immigrants contribute to the maintenance of the productive apparatus and of the standard of living to which we grow accustomed. Furthermore, argues Andre Gorz, "the absence of immigrant workers would not simply provoke an increase in wages and in the political weight of the 'national' working-class: it would detonate a general crisis of capitalist society at every level, by modifying the whole set of historical conditions on the basis of which the price of labour-power and the wage structure are determined."<sup>623</sup> No doubt, women's experiences in such a situation of upheaval would differ from men's; for instance, women could conceivably face family and/or national pressure to produce more workers/consumers.

### Summary

After struggling through extraordinary wartime circumstances the *Anders Poles* were 'given the chance' to make a contribution to building Canada. The resettlement of 4,527 Polish ex-soldiers who came on two-year agricultural contract through 1946-47 laid the foundational experience for the importation of *bulk labour* and for the development of post-war immigration policy. The importation by Member of Parliament and industrialist, Ludger Dionne, of 100 young Polish women set off intense debate but nevertheless laid similar experiential foundation for the bulk importation of women, mostly for domestic and factory work, in the immediate post-war years. Both instances fostered an increase in anti-Polish sentiment among Canadians that continued at least until the mid-1960s.

Thus, from among those persons displaced by the war, whether *Anders Poles* or otherwise, men suited to heavy agricultural work, mining, lumbering and logging were primarily sought. Lesser numbers of women were solicited to perform 'traditional' women's work—domestic, textile and, ultimately, childbearing. As a last resort, small families among the displaced persons were accepted for domestic/agricultural work. Immigration policy, then—even refugee policy—was designed to meet economic needs: labour and market.

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<sup>623</sup> Andre Gorz. "Immigrant Labour" in New Left Review. 61: May 1970.

But it was apparent nobody was considering that the Poles had, since 1939, been living variations of camp life, whether in Soviet labour camps, Army camps, refugee/displaced persons camps, or demobilization camps. On their arrival in Canada, they were shipped, distributed, and housed as raw commodity. For the Polish ex-soldiers, camp life included reception at military bases then shipment to various labour camps on farms or in the frontier mining and forestry camps. Among the civilian *Anders Poles* camp life in Canada began in DP camps such as that located at the former DIL munitions factory in Ajax, Ontario, and otherwise termed by government officials as reception and distribution centres. Some were assigned jobs as members of work crews on the railroad or in the forests or mines where they lived the camp life of such workers. In all instances where they lived and worked as individuals on a farm, they continued to live a less structured version of camp life for they were but worker-lodgers, subject to house rules and contractual obligations.

Two ironies stand out. The *Anders Poles* were shipped as cheap labour for Stalin's war production of raw materials in mines, forests, and on *kolkhozes* [collective farms]; contributing unwittingly, to the Soviet war effort against Poland. They were exiled to primitive conditions in labour camps located in isolated regions of the Siberian hinterland. Their terms of citizenship were defined by their role as labourers for the state. Further, they—especially the children—were subject to intensive efforts at de-polonization. Stalin termed these Polish 'workers' as "special resettlers".

After the war, Canada actively sought *bulk labour* that gaps might be filled in underemployed areas: agriculture, mining, forestry and domestic service. Thus, the conditions for entry into Canada somewhat mirrored the Soviet experience.

Most willingly accepted both the idea and the terms of the labour contracts as there were few other options available. Only after completion of their labour contracts would the clock begin to tick its way toward the day they could apply for Canadian citizenship. Again, terms of citizenship were defined by their role as labourers for the state.

Although interviewees quickly realized they would remain in Canada, having established

themselves in the workplace, and with their families in their communities, their organizational commitments were primarily fixed on preservation of Polish culture and, more particularly, on efforts to wrench Poland back to its glory days as a free and independent state.

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Despite some negative experiences among the *Anders Poles* [e.g. discrimination, abuse, mental health breakdown], gratitude and praise for Canada are strong emotive expressions. As soon as was legally possible, nearly all acquired Canadian citizenship; thus, despite their life-long loyalty and patriotic devotion to the ancestral homeland, Canada quickly became 'home' to grateful citizenry. Citizenship in a free democracy is elevated virtually alongside devotion to Roman Catholic faith, family and community. One man summarized the shared sentiment:

Everything I got is from Canada, thanks to the Canadian system. The government really is democratic... Canada is my second country and... offered me opportunity to be a good citizen. I have a good job, pay my taxes, not be any nuisance to the country, and this is the way I raise my children, by making myself a good citizen.<sup>624</sup>

This is not to suggest, however, these experiences were exclusive to the Poles; for others, such as Ukrainian, Lithuanian and Jewish immigrants share similar sentiments and experiences of hardship and discrimination, gratitude, and liberty and prosperity, on the road to becoming Canadian.

How has Canada benefited? In their own words, Canada imported grateful citizenry who pay their taxes, who don't become a nuisance [e.g. criminals or welfare 'bums'], who are dependable workers, who produce more workers and consumers, and who conduct themselves as good citizens, discharging their duty which is perceived to be privilege through such acts as consistent exercise of the franchise, or, in a few instances, through involvement at the grassroots level in community politics. Thus, the *Anders Poles*, who lived through extraordinary events and experiences, contributed to Canada in the most ordinary of ways: as workers, as parents, and as community volunteers, albeit within the context of their *Polishness*. What's more, the *Anders*

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<sup>624</sup> Interview with Waclaw (13 March 1995) 33.

*Poles* believe they have honourably fulfilled what they understood to be Canada's expectations of them as citizens.

On an even more subtle level, immigrants, who are overwhelmingly perceived and treated as second-class citizens [not 'made-in-Canada'; ergo, not *Canadian*], make easy scapegoats for national problems. Policy-makers can deflect public criticism during times of economic and political crisis. Business and labour groups can blame immigrants for unemployment or under-employment.<sup>625</sup> Thus, the historic cycle is set: 'real' Canadians don't face the 'real' issues. And each respective wave of immigration is greeted with intense scrutiny—at best—or unrestrained, if not 'polite' discrimination, at worst.

In the case of the *Anders Poles*, many experienced ethnicized discrimination. However, some among them today exhibit a racialized form of discrimination, similarly directed toward contemporary immigrants.

Some proponents of immigration argue that in selecting particular classes or groups of immigrants based on socio-economic and/or demographic attributes, Canada benefits. And while there exists a desire to elevate Canada's humanitarian character on the international scene—especially in relation to refugees—the ultimate goal more particularly relates to domestic economic policy and potential long-term benefits; particularly, with an historic colour-coded emphasis on maintenance of the nation's *fundamental character*. Moreover, Canadian policy-makers are cautious when opening the door to immigration, anxious to prevent destabilizing forces that an influx of refugees might trigger. For instance, while policy might satisfactorily manage "targeted refugees", it might also attract other so-called less desirable, refugees.<sup>626</sup> To achieve balance, Canadian immigration policy has taken an exclusionary approach; that is, in determining who does not qualify for immigration to Canada, policy classifies, in ambiguous terms, who does.

And what do these ordinary people who survived extraordinary experiences and events

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<sup>625</sup> Law Union of Canada. 1981.

<sup>626</sup> Howard Adelman, "Canadian Refugee Policy in the Postwar Period: An Analysis" in H. Adelman, ed., Refugee Policy: Canada and the United States. (Toronto: York Lanes Press Ltd., 1991) 176.

feel they received from Canada? A home. Freedom of expression, of life and of limb. And opportunity; especially for their children. All despite some feelings of guilt about 'abandoning' Poland and some experiences with discrimination. Further, all study participants agree life in Canada is better than it could ever have been for them had they returned to Poland. One Polish ex-soldier wrote:

I have quite a large family in Poland. My uncle is a colonel in the army, my brother is some sort of construction worker in a government factory, my cousin is a director in a dairy, and another cousin is a doctor—while poor little me sweeps floors in Canada! But I'm not ashamed of my work, and from what I've seen in the way of living standards, I consider myself a lot better off than they are.<sup>627</sup>

And where might you find this unique group of immigrants in Canada? Scattered as seed, they settled in every province, and beyond the Polish community, most are invisible to mainstream Canadians. Ironically, while the *Anders Poles* made every effort to maintain their *Polishness*, they also committed to the project of ensuring they and their children, especially, became good Canadian citizens in an environment that encourages assimilation. Thus, whereas Stalin failed in his short-lived efforts at de-polonization, Canada succeeded through its assimilationist environment.

And their story—deportation and exile in Soviet labour camps—is relatively unknown. Why? Outside occasional reminiscences with other survivors, few discuss their deportation/exile experience; even with their children. "Who would believe such a story?" many ask. Most prefer to not remember. As well, some observe the Holocaust overshadows their experience. How to tell when there is a story more overpowering?

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Gerald Dirks writes in Canada's Refugee Policy: Indifference or Opportunism:

Since the arrival of the United Empire Loyalists, Canada has become a new homeland for... frightened, persecuted people. Others...have been denied permission to resettle in Canada... Canada's acceptance or rejection of successive refugee movements has been determined by economic, political, and humanitarian conditions...[and] on its ability to read public

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<sup>627</sup> Jozef Bauer. "The Youngest Soldier" in Benedykt Heydenkorn, ed., Memoirs of Polish Immigrants in Canada. (Toronto: Canadian-Polish Research Institute, 1979) 38.

opinion.<sup>628</sup>

Humanitarianism ranks third. An agreeable capitalist proletariat has been the foundation of immigration to Canada. And the *Anders Poles*, one might say, are a classic Canadian success story.

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<sup>628</sup> Gerald E. Dirks. Canada's Refugee Policy: Indifference or Opportunism. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1977) 254-255.



## Chapter 7 – BE(COM)ING CANADIAN

### ~~~~~ The Power of *Polonia*

*Whether you like it or not,  
your genes have a political past,  
your skin, a political cast,  
your eyes, a political slant.*<sup>629</sup>

#### Prelude

The terms *Polonia*<sup>630</sup> and *Polishness* (*polskosc*) are terms weighted with powerful cultural and historic distinction for most Poles. For study participants the terms hold particular meaning in characterizing personal and group ethnic identity both having been distinctly influenced by intense pre-WWII polonization projects, wartime experiences, and the circumstances of resettlement in Canada after the war.

"*Polonia*," write Henryk Radecki and Benedykt Heydenkorn, "is synonymous with 'Polishness,' where members possess some characteristics and traits that clearly denote a set of special relationships and attitudes to Poland and Polish culture and traditions."<sup>631</sup> They further posit various interpretations for *Polonia* which frame five typologies:

- **Poles in Canada:** the immigrants whose main and persisting frame of reference remains Poland and Polish culture; no internalization or even acceptance of the Canadian values and attitudes which are incongruent with those brought over from Poland; no change in the old values and beliefs; remain transplanted Poles, dreaming of returning 'home' if only to die in the country of their birth; a clear identity and concern with all matters Polish and manifested through participation in activities stressing ideological or political and cultural values, especially those linked with the homeland;
- **Polish Canadian:** largely composed of post-war mature immigrants; knowledge of the Polish language and Polish Roman Catholic affiliation as fundamental prerequisites for membership in *Polonia*; instill Polish culture and Roman Catholic faith in their children; "New Canadians" in transitory phase, adjusting to a new homeland while maintaining the view of Canada as refuge and special feelings for matters related to Poland; likely belong to *Polonia* organizations;

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<sup>629</sup> Wisława Szymborska. "Children of Our Age" in view with a grain of sand. (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1995) 149.

<sup>630</sup> *Polonia*: Latin, Poland; Poles outside Poland.

<sup>631</sup> Henryk Radecki and Benedykt Heydenkorn. A Member of a Distinguished Family. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976) 203-211.

- **Canadian Polish:** maintain clear awareness of ethnic or national background and maintain in practice symbolic aspects of Polish culture and emotional ties to Polish people and the ancestral homeland; maintain Polish language; Canada accepted as permanent homeland and worthy of first allegiance; emphasis on Canadian citizenship; likely to belong to non-Polish organizations;
- **Canadians of Polish background:** born to Polish immigrants or came to Canada as children; limited or complete lack of knowledge of Polish language and non-participation in *Polonia* institutional/organizational life; notions of Polish history, culture and traditions vague with ethnic appreciation derived from parents and/or Polish parish; lower rates endogamy; Polishness likely fully diluted among their children;
- **Statistical Polish:** classified as of Polish origins in Canadian Census [based on personal self-identification]; total assimilation but ethnicity not fully erased where knowledge of ancestry exists.

Using the above terms of reference as point of departure, questions that arise in relation to the *Anders Poles* form the basis of inquiry for this chapter. For instance: how have study participants reconciled their *Polishness* in relation to *Canadianness*? How have the transplanted *Anders Poles* established themselves as *Polonia* in their new homeland, Canada? Furthermore, what can we learn from the majority of study participants [twenty-five among thirty-eight] who made Oshawa, Ontario their home? That is, how have they defined, or imagined, *community* and how have they defined themselves within their communities? And finally, where among the five typologies do the *Anders Poles*, who are the subjects of this study, 'fit' as new Canadians?

### Polonia

Poland has been unique in its self-determination as a Roman Catholic nation with its Christian 'baptism' chronicled at the year 966, which era ushered the *Piast* dynasty. This historic date remains the symbolic locus of the founding of the Polish nation with the *Piast* dynasty having profound meaning for Poles; that is, the era roots Poles to the land, to their faith, and to their culture and language. Since 966, Poles have remained faithful to the Holy See<sup>632</sup> although there have been variances in spiritual traditions practiced by other groups in Poland; most notably, by Jews.

As of 1998, 95% of Poland's 39 million residents were documented as Roman Catholic.

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<sup>632</sup> Zdzisław Peszkowski. Polonia Semper Fidelis. (Orchard Lake: St. Mary's College, 1985) 20.

Of those, over 75% were practicing Catholics.<sup>633</sup> As of 1985, there were documented near 1,200 Polish priests—most educated and trained in Poland—ministering to global *Polonia*, or Poles abroad, numbering approximately 10 million.<sup>634</sup> About 800 organized *Polonia* communities are located in North America, 340 scattered throughout Europe, 120 in South America, 30 in Australia and New Zealand, and 10 in continental Africa.<sup>635</sup> One source argues there is “probably no country in the world where there are no Poles or at least no trace of their presence” further posing the question: “...why is this so? Poland never was nor is now a colonial power and never had any overseas possessions.”<sup>636</sup>

A partial response to this question can be found in earlier discussion that traced migrations from Poland—the so-called *bread migrations*—that were a direct result of domestic economic conditions and/or national policies that encouraged out migration for purposes of population reduction. Elements which effected the preservation of Polish culture and tradition among global *Polonia* include: maintenance of homeland family and community ties, inasmuch as literacy skills allowed; and, more consequential, transplantation of Roman Catholic clergy and establishment of distinctly Polish parishes. Through the maintenance of their Roman Catholic faith, practiced in the Polish tongue and with particular emphasis on Polish-based spiritual observances and traditions, many of which are symbolically tied to Polish historic events and characters (most notably to Saints and national leaders whether from Royal lineage or from the ranks of military leadership), links to the ancestral homeland remained strong as did the influence of the Church.

*Polonia* thus describes a Polish nation that not only includes Poles living within Poland's borders, but also those Poles otherwise scattered throughout the world beyond the mapping of

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<sup>633</sup> [www.3w3.net/Polska/Info/pl-facts.html](http://www.3w3.net/Polska/Info/pl-facts.html).

<sup>634</sup> *Ibid.* See also Zdzisław Peszkowski. *Polonia Semper Fidelis*. (Orchard Lake: St. Mary's College, 1985) 160. The estimated numbers of *Polonia*, Poles abroad, are both elastic and elusive for they are affected by such fluid characteristics as outmigration from Poland, death rates, challenges in documenting an accurate census, and, especially, ambiguities associated with classification of *Polonia*.

<sup>635</sup> Zdzisław Peszkowski. *Polonia Semper Fidelis*. (Orchard Lake: St. Mary's College, 1985) 150.

<sup>636</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

borders.<sup>637</sup> This is a particularly curious conceptualization of a nation as an entity when we reflect on the historicity of the waxing and waning of Poland's geo-political borders. The longest period during which the nation-state, Poland, did not exist was the 123 years of partitions by neighbouring states ending when Poland regained its independence in 1918. To put this in one context, Canada has been a nation for but 133 years!

And *Polonia*—Poles abroad—serves as an informal colonizing network. One which does not necessarily play a role in colonizing the local population, but which attempts to maintain its own colonies—*Polonia* communities in a spectre of diaspora—with the goal to function within mainstream economic life without fully assimilating; without losing language, or religious or cultural ties to the ancestral homeland. An example of a term similarly applied to the Indian diaspora whether in England, Canada, or elsewhere—some of whom share the distinction of being “twice migrants” having also passed through British East Africa after residing there for a period of time—is found in the phrase *Desh Pardesh* which can mean “home from home” and/or “at home abroad”.<sup>638</sup> The question arises: how successful has *Polonia* been in maintaining a distinct community identity, within mainstream assimilationist pressures, and within the breadth of global diffusion and cultural dilution affected by such factors as diversity of experience in multitudes of ‘new’ homelands and growing exogamy rates?

Still, the Pole that leaves the ancestral homeland is said to remain a Pole: i.e. *ius sanguini*, by the law of blood (descent), and *ius locii*, by law of the land, (place of birth). S/he will likely seek out established *Polonia* in the new homeland—or play a role in institutionalizing *Polonia* in the new homeland—that s/he might live and raise a family in a community where the Polish language is spoken and where the priest baptizes and buries his parishioners in their mother tongue. S/he will also likely maintain family/community ties as well as ongoing interest in cultural and political events in Poland that, in large measure, will inform her/his involvement in

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<sup>637</sup> Zdzisław Peszkowski. *Polonia Semper Fidelis*. (Orchard Lake: St. Mary's College, 1985) 158.

<sup>638</sup> Roger Ballard, ed. *Desh Pardesh: The South Asian Presence in Britain*. (London: C. Hurst & Co. Pub., 1994) 4. See also Ballard's reference to Parminder Bhachu on the South Asian “twice migrants” element of the Indian diaspora, particularly in relation to the movement of family units; 23.

organizational life in Canada and her/his personal advocacy efforts. For instance, writing letters to the Canadian government which address issues specific to Polish events. A hot contemporary example is found in the debate and political lobby and letter-writing campaign led by various *Polonia* organizations, most notably the Polish American Congress, related to a piece of legislation under debate in Spring, 2000 in Poland's Sejm, or Parliament, which includes a proposed revision to the definition of citizenship; one which affects all *Polonia*.<sup>639</sup> When possible, individuals, and, especially, *Polonia* organizations, provide financial assistance toward either family or state needs, such as the erection of monuments or emergency relief.

The term *Polonia* also serves as a powerful reminder to ex-patriots of their ties to the ancestral homeland, lest they forget. And the unique identification with other Poles through the conceptualization of a nation—a *Roman Catholic* nation—beyond the geo-political borders of a nation state is reinforced by the Church. More precisely, by Polish-born and educated priests who advocate community support networks, who minister the spiritual needs of the parish community as well who serve as spiritual guides in maintenance of Polish language and cultural traditions. For instance, offering Mass and administering the sacraments in the Polish tongue; observance of particular religious festivals which are distinctly Polish, such as *Wigilia* [Christmas Eve Vigil] and Soldiers' Day mass; the preservation of Polish culture through activities which are facilitated either directly through the Church [e.g. Polish language and culture lessons often taught by Polish nuns] or, in the case of dance troupes and Polish Scouting, by volunteers from the church community. All of such activities, both community-directed and Church-approved and -sponsored, are long established Canada.

The question arises, however, of dilution of traditional cultural practices among post-immigration generations. Do such traditions, as *Wigilia*, become by the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> generation so

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<sup>639</sup> [www.polishnews.com/fulltext/politics/politics49\\_2.shtml](http://www.polishnews.com/fulltext/politics/politics49_2.shtml). 'Citizenship' as set by Polish legislation, 1962, is defined thus: *ius sanguini*, by the law of blood (descent), and *ius locii*, by law of the land (place of birth), and is, in 2000, undergoing revision. Should the proposed changes be legislated, a child with only one parent born in Poland, regardless of her/his place of birth, would be deemed a Polish citizen with full privileges and obligations of Polish citizenship expected of and extended to her/him. Under this definition, I, then, though born in Canada to a British-born Canadian and Polish-born Canadian, would be such a child. However, this definition of citizenship will apply ONLY when such individuals are physically on Polish soil at which time a foreign passport would be null and void.

simplified as to represent nothing more than a symbolic representation of a little understood past? Or, is the shift away from religious practices related in some fashion to the general societal shift from Church influence?

*A Political Past; a Political Cast*

Let us review particular aspects of earlier discussion as they relate to *Polonia* and *Polishness*. After 123 years of non-existence, a result of the partitions, Poland regained independence in 1918, and in 1921 expanded its territory eastward beyond the ethnographic frontier to what was deemed by Poles to be the historic geo-political region of the ancestral homeland; what has become known as the Second Republic. Thus began an intense period of revitalization of Polish nationalism—*Poland is not yet dead*—which included the project of polonization—institutionalized and popularized re-imagination of a particular vision of Poland intended to mirror pre-partitions Poland—and expansion and colonization of the eastern borderlands where ethnic Poles comprised the minority.

Although not within the scope of this study, the question arises: notwithstanding the changed world in which the revived Poland emerged, on what basis, foundation and/or vision was the reconfigured, and reconstituted Poland of the Second Republic re-imagined? For after 123 years of non-existence, there was no living memory of the Polish state of 1795. One source has argued the era of the Second Republic was one governed by hatred of the Soviet Union and guided by leadership stuck in the past.<sup>640</sup> Worth note is the likelihood of the Church retaining its own version of memory through the keeping of records and cultural treasures and through devout pastoral care of the particular version of Roman Catholicism that is distinctly Polish in practice. And so during the partitions, a Roman Catholic Pole was a Pole and for the most part, Polish communities did not fall into minority status.

By 1938, 300,000 Poles were resettled in the eastern borderlands. Most typified generations of simple farmers. Many were afforded the opportunity to purchase land cheaply as a

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<sup>640</sup> Leopold Infeld. "The Polish Question" in *The Canadian Forum*, Vol. XXV, No. 291. (Toronto, 1945) 11.

manner of reward for loyal patriotic service in the military, especially in the 1919-21 war against Russia. This was the case that resulted in my great-grandparents' move to Holoskowice in Tarnopol region [which is now part of western Ukraine] in the late 1920's. Most of the families that made the move to the eastern borderlands considered themselves *osadniki* or *kolonista*—military settlers or colonists—and they were a key element in the project to polonize the region where ethnic Poles were in the minority. Twenty-eight, or 73.7%, of study participants fall within this category and twenty-five among this group settled in Oshawa, Ontario, after the war.

Intense polonization was swiftly enacted through widespread institutionalization and access to public education, cultural revitalization, and population movements such as the establishment of communities of *osadniki* or *kolonista* in the eastern borderlands. An expansive bureaucracy was engaged in the project. There emerged armies of agents of social change: teachers, priests and nuns, police, forest wardens, local magistrates and community councils. These were among the first to be deported from the eastern borderlands by the Red Army in late 1939, and early 1940 that potential for resistance in the immediate vicinity would be quelled.

As previously discussed, after Hitler and Stalin carved up Poland in 1939, Stalin forcibly deported to exile in Soviet labour camps, and on *kolhozes*, 1.5 million Poles through 1939-41. These he termed *special resettlers*. His objectives were many-fold, but one, which relates more particularly to this study was the explicit goal to depolonize Poland's eastern borderlands with a parallel goal to Russify the region and, ultimately, all Poles under his tutelage. It didn't matter how many would perish in the wake of Stalin's military objectives or the execution of his chauvinistic social engineering schemes.

For the Poles, the deportation/exile experience was symbolic of the collective Polish identity and tragedy that had its roots in other organized expulsions chronicled as far back as 1768. Several among study participants recalled anecdotes about relatives or neighbours who had experienced deportation and who came back to tell, as in the case of Eugenia's maternal great-grandfather. Having fought during the Napoleonic campaign against Russia, he was captured and deported to a location near the Mongolian border. There, he fathered a son, and

they later returned to Poland where the family remained and grew until a few generations later, Eugenia with her parents and her siblings were deported to exile in Siberia.<sup>641</sup> More commonly, however, deported family members were never again heard from.

Katherine R. Jolluck describes the shared history as one which connects many Poles to each other and, ultimately, to the nation, to the ancestral roots. Thus, she argues, it was easier to cope with their fate by "deriving meaning and even satisfaction from being a part of this legacy."<sup>642</sup>

One woman who survived the WWII deportation experience wrote:

...the youngest sons and daughters of martyred Poland... who with dignity and heads held high, tread on the road along which for 150 years traveled each generation, a road which through sacrifice and blood leads to Siberia and hard labor. I was proud that I experienced, that I came into contact with Polish reality, that I was part of an unyielding whole.<sup>643</sup>

Beyond occasional fragmentary deportations of the few, twenty-three distinct mass deportations of ethnic Poles have been documented since 1768, the last stretching through 1946-53.

Thus, the deportees would not give up hope that one day they would be among those who live and return to the ancestral homeland, unadulterated by Russification, to tell their chapter in the national story. Until that day, many immediately began to reinforce their Polish identity during the first leg of the deportation journey, in the boxcars, through the communal singing of the national anthem and other patriotic and religious songs. For some, such singing was an act of resistance; for many, the singing had a comforting effect.

What mattered most to the Polish deportees, beyond staying alive while in exile, was the preservation of their spiritual practices and of their language and cultural heritage in what Katherine R. Jolluck describes as a continuous struggle to maintain *Polishness*, which was "continually tested, developed, and rearticulated,"<sup>644</sup> in a climate which included daily attacks on

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<sup>641</sup> Interview with Eugenia (06 February 1999) 3.

<sup>642</sup> Katherine R. Jolluck. Gender, Identity and the Polish Experience of War, 1939-1945. (Doctoral Dissertation: Stanford University, 1995) 383-384.

<sup>643</sup> Janina Borak-Szysko qtd. in Katherine R. Jolluck. Gender, Identity and the Polish Experience of War, 1939-1945. (Doctoral Dissertation: Stanford University, 1995) 384.

<sup>644</sup> Katherine R. Jolluck. Gender, Identity and the Polish Experience of War, 1939-1945. (Doctoral Dissertation: Stanford University, 1995) 23.



their ethnic/national identity as well intense pressures to Russify.<sup>645</sup> The women, as mothers, “saw their children deprived of care, education and religion, they saw them decline from disease and hunger, they saw them die. Not only could the women not fulfill their role as guardians of the moral health of the nation; in many cases they could not even ensure the physical well-being of their families.”<sup>646</sup> Thus, they struggled with feeling they failed to maintain “fundamental aspects of their nationality, their *Polishness*: ‘proper’ womanhood, legitimized and maintained by the Polish historical experience and the Catholic Church.”<sup>647</sup> Their efforts and the apparent suffering of the women, however, did not go unnoticed by their children.

Whereas Polish children were compelled to attend schools which advanced the Russification process as well as oppressed all things Polish, many families hoped in the very least that the school/orphanage—*diet dom/diet sad*—environment might offer the children better living conditions and a better diet that they might live to see Poland, again free. As entire families were deported to labour in Soviet forests, mines, and on *kolkhozes*, grandparents and parents directed their efforts, when not working, toward maintenance of Polish tradition within their families. Thus, family and community efforts—the community often described as “one big family”—to maintain Polish language and spiritual practices included the singing of religious and patriotic songs and the telling of patriotic tales as well as clandestine efforts to follow, inasmuch as possible, traditional spiritual and patriotic observances that they would not be forgotten.

Many among the children who survived the deportation/exile experience recall what are described in some instances as virtual heroic efforts of the community, especially of their mothers, to preserve *Polishness*—faith, family and patriotic vigour—in oppressive conditions. Narratives of study participants include recollections of encounters with other families: sharing, and comfort and assistance when possible. Upon further reflection, however, these now elderly children seldom can conjure concrete memories of the inevitable sufferings experienced by their mothers,

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<sup>645</sup> Katherine R. Jolluck. Gender, Identity and the Polish Experience of War, 1939-1945. (Doctoral Dissertation: Stanford University, 1995) 3.

<sup>646</sup> *Ibid.*, 594.

<sup>647</sup> *Ibid.*, 594.

though many recall that of their fathers. The most likely reason is that their mothers retained what little privacy they could through emotional internalization. A number of study participants recalled the first observance of *Wigilia*, after fleeing from the camps in 1941–42, as symbolic of family unity and freedom from oppression. The Christmas Eve vigil embodies a religious observance particular to Roman Catholic Poles, with the female head of the family responsible for the maintenance of the tradition.

The ardent dedication of their parents, grandparents, and the community-at-large to the preservation of *Polishness* during the deportation/exile period heightened awareness of the import of their cultural heritage. It also set the example that would later be rewarded by the maintenance, in their new homelands when adults, among the surviving children of their distinct version of *Polishness*; one which could be described as a cultural freeze-frame set at 1939 with the interwar socio-political polonization project—an intense period of enlightenment, if you will—as the backdrop.

In other words, the cultural clock and collective awareness were set at a moment in Poland's history which featured profound re-visioning and revitalization of Polish language and historical and cultural education, grounded in pre-partitions Poland. That they were educated in such conditions likely bonded them to an unparalleled patriotic earnestness. That they also experienced fierce oppression of their culture, language and religion as well intense Russification during their exile in the Soviet Union further reinforced in them the value of cultural preservation. Ryszard Czarnecki writes of the treatment of the Poles while exiled in labour camps:

The NKVD and Soviet authorities... tried to destroy their dignity, and make them hate what was dearest to them: their love for their country, their faith in its future, and their hopes for its independence, their very Polishness...<sup>648</sup>

Thus, coming out of the interwar period of Polish revitalization and then having experienced the systematic oppression of what is inherent in the individual and collective identity likely created the psychological conditions for later vigilance in maintenance and preservation of that

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<sup>648</sup> Ryszard Czarnecki in Gen. Władysław Anders, *The Crime of Katyn*. (London: Polish Cultural Foundation, 1989) 305.

which was assaulted: their *Polishness*.

Accordingly, their expression of *Polishness* was, because of the era during which they were raised in Poland and because of their encounter with oppression and Russification, distinctly different from that of the established *Polonia* communities that they encountered in their new homelands after the war. It also separates them by degrees from Poles born and raised in Poland since 1939—those who largely constitute the 1980s wave of immigration to Canada—Poles whom a number of study participants today assert to be *less Polish!* Poisoned by Soviet Communism.

There also are distinct gendered responses to maintenance and preservation of *Polishness*. For instance, even among the male study participants who did not see active military duty, there arises the pride of duty in the traditional male role of fighting and dying for a cause—for the motherland—such patriotism reinforced through religious instruction and through the oral tradition in the national anthem—*Poland is not yet dead*—and in such literary works as Adam Mickiewicz's Pan Tadeusz. And while all but one study participant acknowledged the family practice of certain religious/cultural traditions as symbolic of the most pronounced illustration of their *Polishness* it is in the female realm of responsibility where family (kin and country) maintenance of such traditions and practices lies.

For instance, the female head of the household coordinates family activities for the practice of *Wigilia* [Christmas Eve vigil] and Easter traditions; both “universally and continually adhered to even after all traditions of the old country are lost and forgotten.”<sup>649</sup> But these traditions, by the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generations, often become but diluted [mis]representations lacking, as one source has noted, context or appreciation of the origins of the dishes or the significance of the symbols invoked; food prepared for a particular holiday, and not everyday, is all that might remain of an ethnic identity.<sup>650</sup> It is *her* responsibility to keep the family together, and begins with her choice of a “good Polish” marriage partner, Roman Catholic. One woman said, “I’m not going

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<sup>649</sup> Henry Radecki and Benedykt Heydenkorn. A Member of a Distinguished Family. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976) 161.

<sup>650</sup> Mary Waters. Ethnic Options. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) 118-122.

to marry somebody that's not Polish. I suffered so much just because I'm Polish."<sup>651</sup> Polish women were expected to accept the tradition of their share of suffering for the Polish soul, for Polish soil: raising sons that they could be given in battle; raising daughters that they would bear more patriotic sons. All woven from the interwar polonization fabric which synthesized a re-visioning of the Polish state in the noble and patriotic tradition borne of pre-partitions ideology and reinforced by the Roman Catholic Church.

In her study of the Polish transplanted family in the United States, Danuta Mostwin found that while sharing with other transplanted families "the experience of being uprooted, of being in a transitory situation, and the experience of processes of adjustment which include living within more than one set of values and using more than one language or dialect... [the] difference from other transplanted families in its ethnic commitment to the cultural and national values of Poland, and in its motivation for emigration from Poland [showed] unique results in family patterns of adjustment and in the process of child socialization"<sup>652</sup> as becomes evident in the organizational life of the *Anders Poles*.

In attempting to define her *Polishness*, one interviewee said: "It's [a] hard question.... Our country suffered so much... occupations... partitioning, partitioning.... I'm very attached."<sup>653</sup> For many Poles, it is a matter of what is lost, what has been taken away, that unites the individual to the group identity, and which binds the group to an ethno-cultural [national] identity. One grounded and defined by a memory which is not a living memory and which was reinforced, generation after generation, by suffering and oppression imposed from outside. Thus, there emerged a virtual occupation in and of the collective memory of an imagined past, and the collective memory has, ironically, been reinforced by outside oppressors.

One study participant, however, still cannot fathom how God could let the Poles suffer: "I wish already God feel sorry for Polish people. We're such a small [people/country]."<sup>654</sup> He does

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<sup>651</sup> Interview with Eugenia (06 February 1999) 31.

<sup>652</sup> Danuta Mostwin. The Transplanted Family: A Study of Social Adjustment of the Polish Immigrant Family to the United States After the Second World War. (Doctoral Dissertation, Columbia University, 1971) 27.

<sup>653</sup> Interview with Marynia (06 February 1999) 45.

<sup>654</sup> Interview with Feliks (28 November 1998) 20.

not don his experience as but a measure of that which makes him a Pole. Rather, he has had little to do with the Polish community, including the Church, since coming to Canada in 1946 as a Polish ex-soldier under the *British Resettlement* movement. Nor does he make much contact with the larger Canadian community beyond such necessary daily intercourse as one might engage in in the workplace, at the bank, or at the supermarket. He made particular note of several successful suicide attempts among post-war Polish immigrants to Canada in what he alludes to be linked to their ethnicity; in part, related to the perception of ill-treatment of Poles as inferior. He further confided he shared feelings of their particular suffering, as a Pole, which once led him to contemplate suicide. However, he recalls that late night conversation with God after which he determined he could not leave his children fatherless.

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We will recall Hitler invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941. Approximately 115,000 Poles fled the Soviet labour camps and *kolkhozes* through 1941–42 that Polish men might fight against the German army. Persuasive powers were not even necessary to convince the Poles to take up arms for the idea—the patriotic duty—of fighting for a free Poland was embedded in the Polish psyche; even if the battle might play out on foreign soil. Polish literature, such as Adam Mickiewicz’s Pan Tadeusz, which serves as a powerful symbolic metaphor for national pride, patriotic duty, and spiritual love for Poland, as well as the Polish national anthem—*Poland is not yet dead*—which sprang from the blood of Poles shed on Italian soil in the late 18th Century, reinforced the grip on the Polish psyche of fighting for a free Poland as well as linked the symbolic/mythic past to the present.

Benedict Anderson writes of the idea of *dying for a nation* as conceived as a “horizontal comradeship” that is a “fraternity that makes it possible... for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die” for the imagined community or nation.<sup>655</sup> He argues the notion is a recent construct—tracing it to the late 18th Century—which lies, in part, in the cultural roots of

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<sup>655</sup> Benedict Anderson. Imagined Communities. (London: Thetford Press Limited, 1986) 16, 132.

rising European nationalist movements and the American Revolution.

Is it coincidence that Poland's involuntary passage into the 123-year period of partitions coincides with the origins of the cultural roots of European nationalism? During the partitions Poles refused, as Jean-Jacques Rousseau has put it, to permit their cultural heritage to be digested after having been swallowed by three neighbouring states,<sup>656</sup> through steadfast maintenance of aspects of *Polishness*. As priests acted as guides for the spiritual needs of *Polonia*, as well as links to patriotic loyalty through distinctly Polish Roman Catholic observances and practices, so too did the Church play a significant, though not exclusive, role in the maintenance and preservation of *Polishness*—particularly among the less educated—through the period of the partitions.

Furthermore, Katherine R. Jolluck describes how, in the Polish imagination, the constructs of the Roman Catholic family and nation are inextricably bound together and especially how both are linked to women's roles and identity. She describes the family as "a crucial unit in Polish society" which "bore especial significance for women, whose lives were traditionally centred in the home and around the family."<sup>657</sup> Thus, despite the lengthy period of the partitions and foreign dominance, the home served as a vital sanctuary for the maintenance and preservation of *Polishness* through the traditional teachings and practices of mothers and grandmothers, whether as religious observances, the singing of religious and patriotic songs, or in their passing to subsequent generations [regional] cultural folklore, folk arts and cuisine. Concurrently, the arts and intellectual constituencies reinforced aspects of *Polishness* through cultural works such as, for instance, Adam Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz*, which emphasized cultural nobility and which perpetuated the stereotypes of the devoted mother of patriotic sons and of sons of Poland as loyal patriots.

As discussed, Polish leadership during the interwar period reinforced home-based preservation of *Polishness* drawing idiosyncratic family/community traditional practices from the

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<sup>656</sup> qtd. in Norman Davies. *Heart of Europe: A Short History of Poland*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 353.

<sup>657</sup> Katherine R. Jolluck. *Gender, Identity and the Polish Experience of War, 1939-1945*. (Doctoral Dissertation: Stanford University, 1995) 274.

sanctuary of the home and the village, into formal public policy and practice through polonization project activities such as increased access to public education.

Katherine R. Jolluck further documents how the Polish women, while in exile in Soviet labour camps, “structured their communities... based on ethnic ties, as one large family [where] the ideals governing the community were the same ones that prevailed in their immediate families: solidarity, cooperation, self-sacrifice and devotion to the nation.”<sup>658</sup> Thus, the Polish communities in exile “became both surrogate families and microcosms of the nation” observing distinct Roman Catholic traditions and reinforcing, inasmuch as possible, loyalty to the ancestral homeland.

Accordingly, a Roman Catholic Pole knew s/he was a Pole as defined by/through religious customs and devotion, reinforced daily in the home and practiced in the Polish language, whether s/he lived through the partitions era or was forcibly exiled from the ancestral homeland. Some have suggested this applies whether or not one is born on Polish soil. Thus, the familial language of liturgy—the language of the community—could be imagined beyond the limiting constructs of geo-political borders through the conceptualization—and nomenclature—of *Polonia*. And *Polonia*—Poles outside Poland—has a responsibility to safeguard Polish culture for all Poles, whether on Polish soil or scattered throughout the world.

If it is possible to preserve a nation and maintain a cultural/historical identity over such vast regions and periods of time, then, as some would believe, Poland could never be dead. But in the contemporary world dominated by technology, globalization, and increasing pressures on human populations and the environment, and in light of the economic de-nationalization of Europe, as well as widespread tribalistic/ethnic conflicts such as seen throughout continental Africa and in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the question of a sustainable vibrant Polish nation, as *Polonia*, is one worthy of broader consideration.

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<sup>658</sup> Katherine R. Jolluck. Gender, Identity and the Polish Experience of War, 1939-1945. (Doctoral Dissertation: Stanford University, 1995) 275.

In the light of the emergence of the Second Republic, polonization can be seen to be as much a project of cultural revitalization as it was an anticipatory, almost instinctual, form of socio-political resistance against potential future foreign domination. Effective inculcation of *Polishness*, especially among the young and the illiterate, would serve as a defense against future attempts at depolonization. Though short-lived—lasting only through the inter-war period—the polonization project appears to have achieved a measure of success inasmuch as those Poles who survived WWII and who did not repatriate after the war—such as most among study participants—retain an intense version of *Polishness* peculiar to that nurtured during the interwar period. There is, however, a need for more comprehensive study of this premise.

And so, God, kin (family and nation), and the sacraments—all denied the Poles in the Soviet labour camps—were worth fighting for, even dying for on foreign soil. Under the leadership of General Władysław Anders, the Polish men formed the Polish Second Corps as a distinct Polish unit within the British 8th Army and fought for Poland's freedom, most notably on Italian soil playing out the patriotic role in a dramatic historical re-enactment. Polish priests accompanied the Poles to the battleground that they might not forget their duty to nation and devotion to God, nor make the ultimate sacrifice of their lives without the benefit of the sacraments, given in their mother tongue.

That their Poland no longer existed at the end of the war, having again been carved up by foreign powers and worse, having become subject to Soviet Communist domination, reinforced—even intensified—their *Polishness*. Thus, it became the collective moral imperative of the displaced Poles—the new *Polonia* abroad—to maintain and preserve Polish language, cultural and religious tradition, and historic remembrance of the glory days of the Second Republic for the day that they could return to Poland and revitalize authentic Polish culture and traditions. Clinging, as one critic observed in 1945, to an historic relic still grounded in hatred of the Soviet Union and led by a government-in-exile mired in the past.<sup>659</sup> But more importantly, as another

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<sup>659</sup> Leopold Infeld. "The Polish Question" in *The Canadian Forum*, Vol. XXV, No. 291. (Toronto, 1945) 12.



source observed: "... 'saving remnants' of their people, as nuclei of nations in exile."<sup>660</sup>

The question arises, however, as to the measure of purity of *Polishness* for there are variances in the manner in which communities imagine and sustain themselves. Said variances can be compounded by such factors as: strength of familial ethnic identity and enrichment influences encountered during the interwar polonization project; literacy and access to textual reinforcement of an historical/cultural literary tradition; relative maintenance and rearticulation of *Polishness* while in exile; time, both for commitment to the preservation project as well the span of time away from the ancestral homeland; ties to the ancestral homeland; individual (including gendered) and community perceptions and cohesion; assimilationist pressures in the new homeland; and, intra-generational relations and life objectives. Moreover, how might variations of these factors, and likely others, influence subsequent generations of *Polonia* and any version of *Polishness* which they might retain?

Meanwhile, what of the families of the soldiers and the remainder of the civilian population? While they lived a diasporic existence in the Middle East, India and British East Africa, as refugees in Polish settlements administered by British officials, waiting for their men to win back their freedom that they might return to the ancestral homeland, women, children and the elderly were engaged in intense programs of education and religious (Roman Catholic) and cultural instruction. In other words, all energies were directed toward revitalization and preservation of *Polishness* that they would be ready at war's end to rebuild the broken homeland and to play the important role as the future of Poland in a free Poland. Polish teachers, priests, nuns, wounded and disabled soldiers, and the elderly facilitated the instruction of the children—in Polish language—likely modeling it after that employed during the interwar span of the Second Republic. As Benedict Anderson writes:

What the eye is to the lover... language... is to the patriot. Through that language, encountered at mother's knee and parted with only at the grave, pasts are restored, fellowships are imagined, and futures dreamed.<sup>661</sup>

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<sup>660</sup> Robert F. Harney. "So Great a Heritage as Ours" in *Daedalus*. 117:3-4, 1988. 67.

<sup>661</sup> Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities*. (London: Thetford Press Limited, 1986) 140.

Each refugee settlement was a distinct link in the growing global string of *Polonia* communities, all performing their patriotic duty—reinforced through religious observance—as keepers of *Polishness*, and ultimately, of the Polish nation. In a communication written by the current Honorary Polish Consul in New Zealand, himself a survivor of the deportation/exile experience and among the 733 orphans resettled in 1944 in Pahiatua, New Zealand, he maintains the *Polonia* community of Pahiatua “retained their Polishness, their language and sense of their history... their Catholic religion with special devotion to Our Lady, the Queen of Poland... a special bond and concern for one another - one large family.”<sup>662</sup> He further suggests the unique version and retention of *Polishness* among this group is “probably because we have been isolated from the rest of the world”<sup>663</sup> for they were settled in a camp separate from the general population. There, the commitment and guardianship of Polish teachers, priests and various administrators played a significant role in maintaining the unique version of *Polishness* which roots had their origins in interwar Polish nationalism and polonization dynamics. It is also conceivable that the children, having survived the deportation/exile experience as well having lost their parents, further clung to their cultural origins that they might honour the memory of their ancestors; more specifically, of their parents. Further inquiry is needed.<sup>664</sup>

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As happens with war and the division of the spoils, their Poland—the free Poland of the Second Republic—no longer existed at war’s end. It came as a terrible blow that the Allies, without any invitation extended to Polish officials to attend the butcher’s table, carved Poland, putting into Stalin’s hands the pickings from the private party. They felt betrayed. That they put their lives on the line on foreign battlefields that their Poland would be free intensified the blow; demoralizing some, but re-igniting in many unwavering patriotic fervor as well bolstering their commitment to preserve *Polishness* within the particular diasporan context grounded in historic

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<sup>662</sup> John Roy-Wojciechowski. Auckland, New Zealand; July, 1999. [222.polishheritage.co.nz/PAHIATUA/PAHIATUA.HTM](http://222.polishheritage.co.nz/PAHIATUA/PAHIATUA.HTM).

<sup>663</sup> John Roy-Wojciechowski. Personal communication: 31 May 2000.

<sup>664</sup> Also worthy of study is comparative consideration of the Pahiatua children in relation to other group movements, especially of orphans as, for instance, some sent to Mexico, of the post-WWII era, as well of colonialization practises as applied to the indigenous people of New Zealand.

repetition. But how might they best serve their ancestral homeland? And what of the neoteric Polish diaspora? That is, where and how did post-WWII *Polonia* [re]define its role[s] as keepers of *Polishness* and what types of activities did *Polonia* engage in to meet objectives?

Having suffered the traumatic experience of forcible deportation from their homeland to exile in the harsh conditions of Soviet labour camps, the *Sybiraki* joined the ranks of those who went before them in an experiential coalescence with the collective memory of the trauma, as it has played out since the Mid-18<sup>th</sup> Century. Thus, they would contribute a new chapter to the mythos of the deportation/exile experience, and they began the process of re-imagining their *Polishness* within the broad *Polonia* context. What many chose to do was not return to tell their version. For, when confronted with the dilemma in what Keith Sword has described as “a moment of national and personal crisis”: *wracać czy nie wracać*; to return or not to return,<sup>665</sup> many within the war-time Polish diaspora repelled efforts which encouraged repatriation as they felt they could not return to play their prescribed roles as patriotic citizens, conscientious farmers and workers and professionals, and as nurturing families in the re-building of a Poland under foreign Communist domination. Further, many feared the prospect of repeat deportation to Soviet labour camps. The irony, of course, is that despite the betrayal of the Allies, it was to the allied nations the Poles turned for new homelands where they could be free.

And so, many chose to remain in self-imposed exile wherefrom they resolved to fulfill their patriotic duty as both ambassadors and combatants in the struggle to free Poland from Soviet tutelage, from outside its borders, as well to safeguard *Polishness* as *Polonia*. It could be said that they embraced a role as keepers of Polish culture and, ultimately, as preservers of the *bona fide* Polish nation: the glorious Second Republic which was, in 1939, in a fluid state of creation as a virtual re-creation of pre-partitions Poland; a work in progress of the Polish imagination. As the Polish national treasures were whisked out of Poland at the outbreak of the war and safeguarded in Canada until they could safely return,<sup>666</sup> so too the exiled Poles represented the manifestation

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<sup>665</sup> Keith Sword. *The Formation of the Polish Community in Great Britain, 1939-1950*. (London: School of Slavonic and East European Studies, 1989) 357.

<sup>666</sup> RG-25, vol. 3317, file 10258-40, pt. 1. “Canadian Government continues slighting International Decorum Principles”;

of the safekeeping of the ultimate cultural treasure: *Polishness*. And they would play out their roles in new homelands where many quickly wove their lives around work, family, and *Polonia* organizational life within which they attempted to resist dilution of group identity as well maintain and preserve Polish culture and tradition, as they perceived, for a free Poland.

*I am Polish; I am Canadian*

On arrival in Canada after the war as guest workers with labour contracts in hand, most of the *Sybiraki* immediately sought the comfort and security—refuge—of the existing Polish community; wherever they settled. One of the Polish ex-soldiers, Karl, in recalling his arrival at Halifax invoked comfort on hearing representatives from established *Polonia* organizations who offered the advice that with a little English training they will become Canadian.<sup>667</sup>

For the Polish ex-soldiers, one of their immediate objectives following completion of their two-year labour contract was to marry and have a family for their lives had been on hold for nearly a decade and they wanted the stability that comes with family and home. Many had lost family members either in the Soviet labour camps or otherwise during the war years. Endogamy rates were high: 92.1% among study participants. However, this figure is not representative of other studies of the post-war Polish immigrant population in Canada.<sup>668</sup>

Marriage to a Roman Catholic was equally as important as marriage to a Pole; thus, those who did not marry a Pole did marry a Roman Catholic. Although it cannot be stated with absolute certainty the conscious choice among study participants to marry a Roman Catholic was a result of “a sound weighing of all of the things that could go wrong in a marriage”,<sup>669</sup> it could be argued that it was, indeed, so. Some study participants made the following comments:

*When I get married I'm going to marry a Polish girl. Then when we have*

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translation from Polish newspaper, *Wola Ludu* (The Will of the People); 11 May 1950, No. 129. The Polish treasures, which included objects of art and historic relics, were removed from Poland in the early days of the German invasion of Poland in 1939. Through Rumania, then France, they eventually made their way to Canada for temporary safekeeping but became the subject of diplomatic tension between Poland and Canada in the post-war years, until they were returned.

<sup>667</sup> Interview with Karl (05 October 1998) 34.

<sup>668</sup> 89.9% endogamy rate in Danuta Mostwin, 163; 75% in Van Aken-Rutkowski, 116; also Radecki and Heydenkorn, 155. Henry Radecki notes, however, by 1961 60% married non-Poles. *Ethnic Organizational Dynamics*. (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1979) 95.

<sup>669</sup> Mary Waters. *Ethnic Options*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) 107.

*kids. I'm going to talk to them in Polish.*<sup>670</sup>

*I got a chance to marry German girl or Sheffield girl, but...[laughs]...I like to marry Polish. I like the same language... same religion, same language and same problems.*<sup>671</sup>

*We traveled the same road; share culture, like holidays.*<sup>672</sup>

*We are from good stock!*<sup>673</sup>

Entrenched in the psyche of the post-war Polish newcomers, especially among the ex-soldiers, was an intense commitment as *Polonia*—as Poles in exile—to preserve Polish culture for the day they could return to a free homeland and play the important role of rebuilding their Poland and re-injecting the authentic culture which they feared would be compromised by Soviet Communist domination. This commitment extended to their children. For as the future of Poland/*Polonia* it was necessary that they knew their roots that they might be able to play their allegiant patriotic role[s] on behalf of or in the ancestral homeland.

Consequently, their organizational/institutional objectives in Canada were two-fold. First, as a means of injecting *Polishness* into their family life—especially into their children's lives—beyond that which could be nurtured in the home. Thus, Polish Roman Catholic churches were built. Polish language schools were established. The Polish Scouting movement in Canada experienced a tremendous boom. Dance troupes took to the stages of Church basements and Polish halls. Daughters entered *Miss Polonia* contests. Sons became altar boys receiving spiritual tutelage from imported Polish priests. And within the community, established businesses that offered deli fare or bread or insurance in Polish language grew. New businesses and services emerged. The re-creation of *Polonia* communities in Canada by the diasporic Poles who longed to belong could be characterized as a re-creation of a cultural village, rooted in the memory of 1939. And for the *Anders Poles* such communities represented more than an ethnic enclave. Within their communities and within the organizational life of the community they could maintain a rooted sense of identification to their heritage and culture while establishing “a secure

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<sup>670</sup> Interview with Jerzy (03 October 1998) 30.

<sup>671</sup> Interview with Kazimierz (04 March 1995) 24.

<sup>672</sup> Interview with Teresa (19 July 1998).

<sup>673</sup> Interview with Klara (03 April 1999).

'ground' for a sense of well-being<sup>674</sup> within the dominant culture and thus perhaps maintain some degree of "spiritual well-being and psychological balance in the new environment."<sup>675</sup> At the same time, they could develop confident responses to the pressures and processes associated with assimilation.

All efforts, therefore, represented a means of maintaining continuity of and between two cultures: that of the imagined community as created by the community and unencumbered by the guidance of old country authority figures—though priests continued to play an influential role in community life—and that of life within the larger community of the new homeland where they had to adapt to function within the economy and earn a living, and raise and educate a family. Dirk Hoerder writes of this as a "constant process of interaction of the migrants' customs, their self-perception, and the way they want to be seen within the hegemonic society and other ethnic cultures. In this complex relationship, the experienced culture may become a perceived one... a self-deception about the retention, for example, of old values, which eventually will be corrected through further interactions."<sup>676</sup> This process influences, in both similar and contrasting ways, assimilation rates of the immigrant as well subsequent generations.

Second, they focused on the roles they could play in garnering international support for the Polish cause. Whereas established Polish-Canadians were more particularly interested in issues related to daily living in Canada, the newcomers had one foot straddling the homeland and the other presuming itself to be walking on Canadian soil in a short-lived detour from the final destination. After all, many of the new arrivals to Canada initially presumed their stay to be temporary, whether their final destination was the United States, or back to a free Poland. Where there arose tension between existing Polish community organizations, the post-WWII new Polish arrivals determined to establish their own organizations that reflected their particular objectives grounded in their enduring commitment to the homeland and preservation of *Polishness*.

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<sup>674</sup> Leo Driedger. *Multi-Ethnic Canada*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1996) 133-134.

<sup>675</sup> William Boleslaus Makowski. *History and Integration of Poles in Canada*. (Lindsay: John Deyell Limited. The Canadian Polish Congress Niagara Peninsula, 1967) 228.

<sup>676</sup> Dirk Hoerder. *People on the Move: Migration, Acculturation, and Ethnic Interaction in Europe and North America*. (Washington: German Historical Institute, 1993) 42-43.

The measure of success—the impact, if any—of the lobbying and other activities among global *Polonia* communities is not within the realm of this study but it could form the basis of some interesting research questions. For instance, are there comparable efforts among global *Polonia* communities to those within England that successfully lobbied various levels of government over such issues as the impact of the *Community Health Act* on the elderly Polish community resident in England, or successful appeals for the retention of a Devon home for elderly Poles.<sup>677</sup> Furthermore, how effective, if at all, was *Polonia* in advancing and/or securing Poland's break from Soviet domination? And, if effective, which activities had the most influence? Moreover, with the final passing of the Second Republic *Polonia*, which is fast approaching, how will the changed *Polonia* relate to matters of import to Poland in the future? Will the intensity of patriotic enthusiasm endure or change, or altogether be abandoned?

Into the 1960s, many Polish immigrants experienced some form of discrimination whether centred on their so-called status as DP's or more specifically expressed as plain anti-Polish sentiment. Even parliamentary debate evolved around questions of the likelihood of Poles to assimilate into mainstream [WASP] Canadian life. Despite language barriers, newly arrived Poles understood the discriminatory environment into which they had entered. The Poles conceived various coping strategies and responses—not unlike those employed by other immigrant groups—to discrimination. Some changed their names to Anglo-sounding surnames that they might detract emphasis in the public sphere—especially in the workplace—from their ethnicity; more particularly, from their children's ethnicity that they might 'fit in', especially at school, and succeed. Or, to make life easier. For instance, Ludwik changed his name [although his brothers did not] because Anglo co-workers in an automobile factory couldn't pronounce it or spell it correctly, as there are groups of consonants joined together which are unfamiliar to the Anglo tongue. His Anglo foreman was so relieved with the name change he offered Ludwik extra overtime to help defray the \$100.00 legal fees.<sup>678</sup>

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<sup>677</sup> [www.zem.co.uk/polinuk/fed/fed.htm](http://www.zem.co.uk/polinuk/fed/fed.htm): Federation of Poles in Great Britain.

<sup>678</sup> Interview with Ludwik (10 February 1999) 32.

The desire that their children succeed in Canada led many to cede to assimilationist pressures. For instance, some encouraged their children to participate in Anglo-Canadian activities or, in the very least, did not discourage or shield them from Anglo-conformist activities and/or pressures. Others either ignored the sting of discrimination or, in some instances, responded with verbal rebuke or physical retribution.

For some, however, the unanticipated discriminatory practices in a country which they believed to be free and democratic, especially after having suffered oppression of their culture in the Soviet labour camps, was so unbearable as to kill their incentive to contribute to Canadian society, beyond the workplace. It is therefore likely that among these Poles—among *Sybiraki*—*Polishness* was reinforced by the discriminatory reactions of some Canadians toward the Polish immigrants. In other words, if one is made to feel an outsider, one might respond to such exclusion by drawing inward into the ethno-cultural community that represents 'home'—security—in the ethno-cultural sense. Thus, as Sarah Van Aken-Rutkowski noted in her study, greater dependence on the Polish community in Canada can result in slower or retarded acculturation. This was particularly the case for the elder generations; those who were the parents of study participants, most of who are now deceased. For instance, my grandmother made little effort to learn the English language and until she died in 1992 lived in Canada exclusively in the Polish language, including her last decade with my aunt who retired to the Polish community in Barry's Bay; *Kaszuby*. It was easy to spurn the English language and Canadian community life for since arriving in 1949, she had always lived among her children and within an established Polish community. Even her family physician was a Polish immigrant. Indeed, it would have been virtually impossible for me to interview individuals of this generation for I am not fluent in Polish language and few are/were fluent in English. However, a collection of narratives, numbering in the hundreds, in Polish language, which includes interviews with individuals from this generation, is housed in Toronto at the *Multicultural History Society of Ontario*. That the interviews were conducted and archived is evidence of interest in the topic and of a vision to record and preserve the memories of *Sybiraki*. The 'problem,' however, is that by virtue of the language, they are



accessible only to researchers with a Polish tongue thus limiting the potential for greater numbers of researchers to include the narratives in their work. A worthwhile project would be translation of the volumes of narratives.

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For the children and grandchildren of the *Sybiraki*—the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation; mine and my children's—the desire to maintain or preserve a memory of a Polish nation—one frozen in time in 1939—appears to be moot. How can we relate to a distant homeland and far removed events? Furthermore, as children born and educated in Canada within an assimilationist context, how can we reasonably feel any sense of solidarity to the past or any desire in the present to participate in a distinct cultural life among *Polonia* in Canada? Do we even conceive of ourselves as constituents of a diaspora, or even of *Polonia*? And so, preservation of aspects of *Polonia*, of *Polishness*—of Polish cultural activities and institutions in Canada—beyond, perhaps, token family cultural practices or a quiet pride of heritage, also becomes moot for the objectives and ideals as Canadians—of Polish extraction—are worlds removed from those of immigrant parents and grandparents whose identities are divided between two cultures and centuries of history. As one source has put it: “[t]he native-born... prefer activities that are not defined in ethnic terms.”<sup>679</sup> The question also arises whether there even exist opportunities for individuals who speak, read, and write the Polish language to use the language beyond the *Polonia* community in a meaningful economic context. And so, Polish organizational life in Canada is in decline;<sup>680</sup> not only due to disinterest, but also because of “loss of Polish as the mother tongue, and thus the population eligible for membership in the existing organizations is shrinking.”<sup>681</sup> A Lithuanian Saturday schoolteacher in Montreal similarly expressed her view:

I think that language is an essential thing and that Lithuanian culture would be hard put to survive without it. I wouldn't say that a Lithuanian couldn't be a Lithuanian unless he knew the language—he could be Lithuanian in his

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<sup>679</sup> Jean R. Bumet and Howard Palmer. *“Coming Canadians”*. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988) 193.

<sup>680</sup> There exist, however, some among Canadian-born children and grandchildren of Polish immigrants who participate in *Polonia* activities. Questions around resistance to assimilation among this population, as well other aspects related to the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generations, require further study.

<sup>681</sup> Henry Radecki. *Ethnic Organizational Dynamics*. (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1979) 95.

habits, his love of his country, but he would be a very impoverished Lithuanian.<sup>682</sup>

And the cultural life of the ethnic group living outside the homeland would similarly suffer impoverishment. Indigenous peoples, including First Nations people in Canada, have also suffered cultural impoverishment, a result of colonial influences, including oppression of language.

Despite greater-than-average participation in organizational life than among most other European arrivals of the post-war era,<sup>683</sup> *Polonia* in Canada by the late 1960's anticipated a rapid paring of membership and diminishment of organizational lifespan. The children and grandchildren of *Polonia* were not taking active interest in *Polonia* organizational life, despite intense childhood involvement, nor were there significant numbers of new immigrants entering Canada from Poland that might invigorate *Polonia* organizational and institutional life.<sup>684</sup> A study conducted in 1968 for the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism made the following observation:

The present organizational membership is overwhelmingly composed of and led by the post-war and aging immigrants.... The organizers and leaders admit that they are not successful in recruiting members or participants in some organized body from among the Canadian-born individuals of any generation of Polish immigrants, nor from the comparatively smaller numbers of more recent arrivals from Poland. Should this condition continue it is likely that, with the death or retirement of the present membership, the organizational structure will cease to exist and the Polish group will lose its agencies devoted to maintaining Polish culture. This loss will also mean that the Polish-Canadian community will be without sources of reference and identification... in the eyes of the other cultural groups in Canada.<sup>685</sup>

It was thought by some sources—within the research and *Polonia* communities—that

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<sup>682</sup> Milda Danys. DP Lithuanian Immigration to Canada After the Second World War. (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1986) 321.

<sup>683</sup> "...European ethnic organizations numbered 3-7% of the given group, except that in certain groups (e.g., Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, and Ukrainian) this percentage was somewhat higher, up to the 1970s. However, in all organizations, the participation of the young generation is virtually non-existent." Benedykt Heydenkorn, ed. Heritage and the Future. (Toronto: Canadian Polish Research Institute, 1988) 110.

<sup>684</sup> After 1953, Polish immigration to Canada abated. Between 1961 and 1971, the Polish-Canadian population declined: from 323,517 listed in 1961 Census to 316,425 in 1971. Canada, Multiculturalism Directorate. The Canadian Family Tree. (Don Mills, ON: Corpus Information Services, 1979) 176-177. Further, as shown in the 1971 Census, only 71,000 Poles, or 22%, spoke Polish at home; thus, the Polish diaspora was showing serious signs, through loss of tongue, of cultural dilution within the first generation of Canadian-born. Robert F. Hamey, "So Great a Heritage as Ours" in Daedalus. 117:3-4, 1988. 84. Despite the 1980s influx of Polish immigration to Canada, by 1991 the Polish-born population in Canada had fallen to 184,695; 50% spoke Polish in the home. "A Profile of Polish Immigrants in Canada", [cicnet.ingenia.com/english/pub/profile/9608pole.html](http://cicnet.ingenia.com/english/pub/profile/9608pole.html).

<sup>685</sup> David Sherwood and Allan C. Wakefield, "A Study of Voluntary Associations among Other Ethnic Groups in Canada" qtd. in Jean R. Burnet and Howard Palmer. Coming Canadians. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988) 194.

renewed immigration of growing numbers of Poles through the 1980s would invigorate *Polonia* organizational life.<sup>686</sup> However, *Polonia* in Canada has been unable to interest contemporary newcomers in its organizational life; rather, as seen with previous waves of Polish immigrants who encountered established organizations, there have been tensions between established *Polonia* and the newcomers. The newcomers also do not share the same goals or objectives as Canadian citizens or as ex-patriots. And so, Polish arrivals since the 1980s have either established their own organizations or, more commonly, have not become involved as *Polonia*. No research has yet been published which explicitly explores questions related to this phenomenon which is not singularly Canadian, for as has been observed of the American context which extends the debate beyond the organizational life of *Polonia* into consideration of ethnicity:

[S]ocial and economic mobility of white ethnics in the twentieth century coincided with the drastic reduction in immigration from European sources—which means that the cohorts of Poles and Italians advancing socially and generationally have not been followed by large numbers of fresh immigrants who take over unskilled jobs and populate ethnic ghettos.... The social mobility that makes a symbolic ethnicity possible for these whites might have looked very different if the supply of new immigrants from Europe had not been drastically curtailed.<sup>687</sup>

We will recall Janina whose family repatriated to Poland directly out of the Soviet Union in 1946. Janina eventually immigrated to Canada in 1984 and while aware of her local chapter of *Sybiraki*, she has not involved herself in the organization nor in any other *Polonia* organization. Rather, she has been a volunteer with the Kidney Foundation and has otherwise committed her energies toward employment responsibilities as well in assisting her children with housing, finances, and child minding of grandchildren while their parents upgrade their professional credentials according to Canadian requirements. "I don't have time," she says plainly of her choice to not be involved in *Polonia* activities.<sup>688</sup> For Janina, immigrating to Canada is as much a choice of starting anew, helping her children and grandchildren 'make it' in Canada, as it is a choice of leaving behind the past and Poland.

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<sup>686</sup> Joanna Matejko, "The Polish Experience in Alberta," in Palmer and Palmer, eds., *Peoples of Alberta*, p. 296 qtd. in Jean R. Burnet and Howard Palmer. *Coming Canadians*. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988) 194.

<sup>687</sup> Mary Waters. *Ethnic Options*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) 165.

<sup>688</sup> Interview with Janina (06 December 1998) 26-29.

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Until my mid-teens, I lived in Oshawa, Ontario in a working-class community comprised mostly of post-war immigrants to Canada: near all from Eastern Europe but for a few Irish and my English mother. Most were Roman Catholic. The Polish Roman Catholic Church, the convent, and the Roman Catholic elementary school were central in the community.

The *Polishness* of my childhood was steeped in the memories of those who, like my father and his family, immigrated to Canada after surviving deportation and exile in Soviet labour camps during WWII. It included attendance at Polish mass, enrolment in Polish school, participation in Polish cultural events as well in the Polish Scouting movement including summer camp at *Kaszuby* [Long Lake, Barry's Bay].<sup>689</sup> All this with the encouragement and support of my English-born Roman Catholic mother, and all representative of what Krolikowski, Radecki, and others describe as a concentrated process—with the children of the immigrants the locus—of cultural revitalization and preservation and nationalist enthusiasm which began immediately after the Poles fled the Soviet labour camps. A well-known Polish-Canadian psychiatrist described in 1966 what had become a pervasive concern among the leadership of the *Polonia* community in Canada vis-à-vis the education of children of Polish descent:

...the definition of the Polish-Canadian idea of bringing up a child is needed.... Canadian or Pole....

The Polish school should be a bridge between the past (the Polish cultural heritage) and the future of the Polish child in Canada. Such a school should teach a child to respect Poland, make him proud of his origin, build up his interest in it, but such schools should not lessen his respect and love of Canada.<sup>690</sup>

Such concerns and related efforts and experiences were not specific to the Polish immigrant phenomenon. Lida Somchynsky similarly writes of her experience as the child of immigrants: father, Ukrainian; mother of mixed Polish/Ukrainian origins:

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<sup>689</sup> The Polish community at Barry's Bay/Wilno (north of Ottawa) migrated from the Kaszuby region of Poland in the 1850's and is the oldest established Polish community in Canada. A parallel movement similarly migrated to New Zealand. A worthy topic of research would be comparative study of the two movements, and any others linked to the Kaszuby region and the period, which explores such questions as retention of *Polishness* and survey of assimilationist pressures, ties to the ancestral homeland, contributions to nation-building, self-definition as *Polonia*, relations and contrasts between the earliest immigrants and subsequent groups, etc.

<sup>690</sup> Prof. Dr. W. Szyrski qtd. in William Boleslaus Makowski. History and Integration of Poles in Canada. (Lindsay: John Deyell Limited. The Canadian Polish Congress Niagara Peninsula, 1967) 227.

[M]y father was trying to instill in me lifelong Ukrainian patriotic zeal. I took Ukrainian Saturday classes, Ukrainian dancing classes, and went through a revolving door of endless Ukrainian concerts. He believed that all this activity would culminate in my wanting, along with other young Ukrainian Canadians, to free the oppressed homeland.<sup>691</sup>

But for many of us it stops there. In adulthood there remains little more than symbolic ethnicity through occasional practices of certain cultural traditions which have likely suffered dilution of context and absence of meaning and which might simply constitute "idiosyncratic family values and practices" as much or more than a particular ethnicity.<sup>692</sup> Neither of my sons has the tongue nor much awareness of the substance of *Polishness* that my father might maintain, and which suffered uncompromising dilution among many of my generation. A virtual displacement of cultural heritage. It then becomes a question for further inquiry: How? And, why?

A partial answer can be found in the slippage of the tongue in the home; that is, as the children more frequently interacted within the dominant culture, their mother tongue gave way to the tongue of the neighbourhood and the schoolyard. "Language," writes Mary Waters, "is one of the first elements of the immigrant culture to disappear over the generations."<sup>693</sup> But why do some ethnic communities suffer sooner the loss of language? For instance, one source compares Poles with Ukrainians who have better preserved their language despite lesser numbers of immigrants in the post-war years and despite similar patterns in organizational development and structure.<sup>694</sup> In addition, there also exist variances in the development of a literary tradition in Canada that expose a virtual silence from Polish immigrants in comparison to a strong tradition from the Ukrainian voice; despite both groups sharing similar patterns of immigration dating to the mid-19th Century. Myrna Kostash, however, brings an interesting perspective to this debate:

Ukrainians are now a "legitimate" group because there are no more Ukrainians.... We have accepted the premises of the majority group and once we were safely assimilated we were legitimized.<sup>695</sup>

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<sup>691</sup> Lida Somchynsky. "The First Lady" in Janice Kulyk Keefer and Solomea Pavlychko, Two Lands, New Visions. (Regina: Coteau Books, 1998) 202.

<sup>692</sup> Mary Waters. Ethnic Options. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) 115.

<sup>693</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>694</sup> Alexander J. Matejko, "the Adaptation of Polish Professionals in Canada: Traditional Roles versus Middle Class Realities" in Frank Renkiewicz. The Polish Presence in Canada and America. (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1982) 356.

<sup>695</sup> Myrna Kostash in "All of Baba's Children" in Isajiw, Wsevolod W. Understanding Diversity, Ethnicity and Race in the

Thus, she argues, Ukrainian culture, unaffected by continuous mass immigration over the last half of the 20th Century, has slipped into the mainstream where "the pursuit of ethnic information and the perusal of Ukrainian history are intellectual activities a Ukrainian-Canadian can now undertake without running the risk of confusing his or her identity with that of "bohunk" predecessors. It's not so portentous after all to be proud of one's ancestral Ukrainianness now that there is no organic Ukrainianness to haunt and scandalize the establishment."

Further, there existed no opportunities for involvement of young adults, after age eighteen, within *Polonia* organizational life. At a Symposium held in Toronto in 1983, there arose some discussion around ways to "make senior *Polonia* organizations attractive to them." One suggestion was the development of such mentorship initiatives as "leadership courses." It was also felt that "propaganda should begin at home. We must speak Polish in our homes, popularize Polish culture at home. Without this kind of effort, work in Polish youth organizations and Polish schools is impossible."<sup>696</sup> But when the children of Polish immigrants marry outside the Polish culture, the question of loss of tongue again arises. So too does the question of sustainability of *Polonia* organizational life.

Despite an acknowledgement there existed a 'problem' in retaining youth interest in *Polonia* organizational life, the 'problem' seems to have been forgotten for a couple of years later there still existed few opportunities for young people to make a meaningful social connection within *Polonia* life. One commentator observed: "there was... apparently a lack of either the understanding or the will to create and maintain" the few successes of youth involvement.<sup>697</sup>

For the *Anders Poles*, displacement meant, on the surface, loss of homeland. It also has meant some degree of loss of tongue in what I have described as a "condition of literacy displacement"<sup>698</sup> which is especially notable among those, like my father and most among study

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Canadian Context. (Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, 1999) 198.

<sup>696</sup> Symposium Proceedings. Multiculturalism and the Polish Community. (Toronto: The Canadian Polish Congress, 1984) 100.

<sup>697</sup> Wladyslaw Perchal, "Sins of the Father" in Heydenkorn, Benedykt, ed., A Community in Transition. (Toronto: Canadian Polish Research Institute, 1985) 245.

<sup>698</sup> Helen [Bajorek] MacDonald. "Mapping Memories: A Journey Between the Generations of Polish Inscription on the Canadian Literary Landscape" in Avancer. (Peterborough, 1998) 30-47. See also discussion on the question, "Where are the Poles writing... here?" in Symposium Proceedings. Multiculturalism and the Polish Community. (Toronto: The

participants, who were children at the time of deportation. For they experienced oppression of their language and intense Russification during their time under Soviet tutelage. My father, aged 11 years at the time of deportation, jokingly submits: "Zapomniał po Polsku nie nauczył się po Angielsku—Forgot in Polish, never learn in English." Another study participant explains the dilution of Polish language as a result of two factors: first, it has been 60 years since leaving Poland; second, he was required to learn other languages by virtue of his 'travels': Russian, Arabic, Italian, and English. "So my language is not pure Polish," he notes; then, invoking the image of his tongue: "just like [cut] from the axe. Really hard one."<sup>699</sup> Robert Harney explains:

The prevailing situation is diglossia<sup>700</sup>—immigrants speaking English as a second language, with all the limits that implies, and at the same time slowly losing their mother tongues. Their children speak English as a first language at school and on the street and are either bilingual or unable to speak their parents' language.... Joshua Fishman has noted that within three generations the language of the street usually becomes the language of the cradle.<sup>701</sup>

Many of the deported children, such as Jerzy and my father, had their education interrupted by the war, adulterated by the Russification process while in exile in Soviet labour camps, and then on fleeing the Soviet Union, only received rudimentary education with few among them picking up the threads after the war in new homelands. It was for their benefit and, ultimately, for the benefit of their children, that Polish language schools, churches, cultural and other organizational infrastructure were instituted; that *Polishness* would not only **not** be lost, but that it would be strengthened and preserved for the day Poland would be free. Though this study does not consider *Polishness* in the context of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation, it is relevant to note all study participants indicate among their grandchildren [the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation] there exists virtual oblivion to any identification with *Polishness* or with *Polonia*. What is needed is exploration of questions of *Polishness*, such as language retention and endogamy/exogamy rates, among the

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Canadian Polish Congress, 1984) 41.

<sup>699</sup> Interview with Jerzy (03 October 1998) 49.

<sup>700</sup> *diglossia*: bilingualism in two languages of uneven status in society... the family language, or immigrant language, is the more comfortable medium but the one valued less. In Robert F. Harney, ed. Gathering Places: Peoples and Neighbourhoods of Toronto, 1934-1945. (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1985) 8.

<sup>701</sup> Robert F. Harney, "So Great a Heritage as Ours" in Daedalus, 117:3-4, 1988. 83.

children and grandchildren of the *Anders Poles*.<sup>702</sup>

There are, however, exceptions. Four study participants claim their grandchildren are fluent in Polish language. These four comprise two couples in which both partners are *Sybiraki*. Two of Kryisia and Kazimierz's grandchildren, both in their late teens and born to the eldest of their three children who married a son of Polish immigrants, are not only fluent in the Polish language, but also are practicing Roman Catholics and appreciate the significance of family Polish cultural and spiritual expression. This can be partially explained by the fact Polish has always been the home language, the family has maintained practice of the Roman Catholic faith, and both sets of grandparents have maintained their lives almost exclusively within the realm of the Polish community, and even in large measure in their working lives where factory co-workers also were post-war immigrants, including Poles. Kryisia and Kazimierz even retired to Barry's Bay, Ontario, where there has been since the 1850's Canada's oldest established Polish community in what is termed a *Kaszuby* settlement. They note, however, the *Kaszubians* speak a dialect and version of Polish quite unlike that spoken by later arrivals and so, English is more often the language of choice between different groups of Poles in the community. A cultural chasm within the culture.

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In partial response to feelings of displacement, the post-WWII Polish immigrants to Canada stand out as unique among other Polish migrations. They defined their lives as new Canadians within a framework of ardent preservation and promotion of cultural identity grounded in effusive interwar Polish nationalism, in what Benedict Anderson would describe as "an imagined community." As such, post-war *Polonia* can be distinguished not only by the way in which organizational dynamics developed but also in its strong sense as a diasporic community which differentiates post-war *Polonia* from established *Polonia* and from mainstream Canadians as well other immigrant groups of the era. Of particular relevance to this study, Danuta Mostwin

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<sup>702</sup> It is important to acknowledge that this study also does not include consideration of the elder generation[s] of the *Anders Poles*; that is, my grandmother's and great-grandmother's generations. But for a few studies already conducted, the moment for remembrance is virtually completely past.



has argued: "Poles brought up and educated in the free Poland between 1918 and 1939... tended to have highly developed social consciousness, strong patriotic spirit, and openly expressed "we" feeling. Their interests were political, cultural, and professional, and they shared a bond of common experience."<sup>703</sup> All factors which contributed in Canada to the dynamics of community development and cohesion as well socialization projects directed toward their children, my generation.

James Clifford suggests the term *diasporic community* is distinguished from *ethnic neighbourhood* as the diasporic community more strongly reflects a "sense of being a "people" with historical roots and destinies outside the time/space of the host nation", and that they are "not here to stay.... Diasporic cultures thus mediate, in a lived tension, the experiences of separation and entanglement, of living here and remembering/desiring another place."<sup>704</sup> The question arises whether the Oshawa Polish community responds to and interacts within mainstream Canadian life as a palpable diasporic community, or simply as yet another ethnic enclave, or otherwise.

Many among the *Anders Poles* did not initially perceive they would be in Canada long. Thus, they framed their lives straddling the *here* and *there* tensions; living in Canada, but remembering and longing for the homeland. Nor did they initially feel 'at home' as welcome immigrants; in part, because the conditions of the labour contracts automatically separated them from mainstream [economic] Canadian life. Thus, their organizational dynamics developed around or even separate from established *Polonia*—establishment of fraternities, building of churches and community halls, cultural and educational instruction for their children—reflecting an insulation of *Polishness* which honoured a memory of the homeland; a memory embodying the interwar era of Polish nationalism and one frozen at 1939. Again: can this memory, and correspondingly, can the diaspora be transferred to subsequent generations; to children and grandchildren born into a double process of socialization, and where assimilationist pressures and

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<sup>703</sup> Danuta Mostwin. The Transplanted Family: A Study of Social Adjustment of the Polish Immigrant Family to the United States After the Second World War. (Doctoral Dissertation, Columbia University, 1971) 66-67.

<sup>704</sup> James Clifford. "Diasporas" in Cultural Anthropology. Vol. 9, No. 3 (August 1994) (Virginia: American Anthropology Association) 310-311.

divergent experiences and goals shape their lives and way of being in what is, as home, something more than a temporary/transitional resting place?

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*Polishness cannot be measured.  
I got it from my mother's milk  
and my father's example.<sup>705</sup>*

There is the story, told by his great great grandson, writer and CBC radio broadcaster Peter Gzowski, of Sir Casimir Gzowski who, after being in Canada for some years, attended a Paderewski concert held at Massey Hall in Toronto in 1895. On meeting the Polish pianist backstage, "he had so forgotten his mother language that he wept at his inability to speak it to his compatriot."<sup>706</sup> Several generations later, the language is completely lost and so too is any comprehension even of the origins of the Gzowski family for when Peter Gzowski asked his son where he thought the family came to Canada from, his response came in the form of a question: "Spain?" Yet, Peter Gzowski, great great grandson of a Polish immigrant, has said:

Why do I feel pleasure when Peter Stenkovski (sic) plays well for the Maple Leafs...? Why, as a boy, did I read every library book I could find on Poland? Why do I, a non-Catholic, feel proud when Poland celebrates its thousandth anniversary of Christendom? I cannot, as I say, define my answer, except to say that it gives me something that I would otherwise not have—a sense of identity as an individual within my community.<sup>707</sup>

Mary Waters writes of ethnic identification, even if only through surname or as "symbolic identification", as something that brings pleasure to the individual, and which is "seen as giving one a feeling of community and special status as an interesting or unique individual."<sup>708</sup> Thus, having a sense of "roots" that comes from knowing where one's ancestors originated gives the individual, or her/his family, a feeling of belonging to a wider collectivity,<sup>709</sup> all within the context of feeling as though one belongs as a member of mainstream society.

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<sup>705</sup> Interview with Jurek (04 September 1998) 56.

<sup>706</sup> Peter Gzowski qtd. in William Boleslaus Makowski. History and Integration of Poles in Canada. (Lindsay: John Deyell Limited. The Canadian Polish Congress Niagara Peninsula, 1967) 226.

<sup>707</sup> Peter Gzowski qtd. in William Boleslaus Makowski. History and Integration of Poles in Canada. (Lindsay: John Deyell Limited. The Canadian Polish Congress Niagara Peninsula, 1967) 226.

<sup>708</sup> Mary Waters. Ethnic Options. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) 92.

<sup>709</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

Peter Gzowski's account does not stand alone in the larger narrative of the Polish presence in Canada, which dates to the mid-18<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>710</sup> But it wasn't until after the post-war Poles came to Canada that there emerged within *Polonia* a concentrated theoretical and analytical probing of an essence of *Polishness*, with a limited consideration of mutual expression of *Canadianness*.

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Following a conference held October, 1980 entitled "Poles in North America", the Multicultural History Society of Ontario and the University of Toronto Ethnic and Immigration Studies Program published proceedings from one of the sessions entitled "Polishness" in which the Polish diaspora of North America [*Polonia*] is granted the distinction as "Poland's fourth province". The debate centred round historical, geo-political, and literary considerations of Poland, *Polonia*, and, ultimately, *Polishness*. Much of the debate scanned the generational horizon of post-WWII *Polonia*. One of the outcomes of the discussion was the articulation of a tangible pronouncement of *Polishness* wherein one hears the resonance of diaspora:

*Polishness... can be the equivalent of a psychic fatherland, an interior identity and landscape always with a Pole and thus a personal Poland.... The vitality of Poland or Polonia, that is its lifeblood, only exists when each Pole or descendant of Pole comprehends with pride his heritage.*<sup>711</sup>

Similarly, in what he described a decade later as the very essence of being a Pole, historian Jerzy Jedlicki refers us to the "clear and eloquent expression of the persistent notion of an elusive but real "Polish soul" [which] comes from one of the most internationally known living Poles, Pope John Paul II":

Each of us possesses a heritage within us—a heritage to which generations and centuries of achievement and calamity, of triumph and failure, have contributed: a heritage that somehow takes deeper root and grows new tissues from every one of us. We cannot live without it. It is our own soul. It is this heritage, variously labeled the Fatherland, or the Nation, by which we live.<sup>712</sup>

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<sup>710</sup> Ludwik Kos-Rabcewicz-Zubkowski. *The Poles in Canada*. (Ottawa: Polish Alliance Press, Limited, 1968) 1.

<sup>711</sup> Multicultural Society. *Polishness*. (Toronto: Canadian Polish Research Institute, 1983) iii-iv.

<sup>712</sup> Karol Wojtyła, Pope John Paul II qtd. by Jerzy Jedlicki, "Holy Ideals and Prosaic Life, or the Devil's Alternatives" in Stanisław Gomulka and Antony Polonsky, eds., *Polish Paradoxes*. (London & New York: Routledge, 1990) 41, in Katherine R. Jolluck, *Gender, Identity and the Polish Experience of War, 1939-1945*. (Doctoral Dissertation: Stanford

For Jerzy Jedlicki, the difficulty lies in capturing the full meaning of the word *Polishness* which he suggests is but a diluted English equivalent of the word *polskosc* which he describes as “a word that is fully natural and living, that sounds equally well in a historical dissertation and in current speech. It can signify everything that the dictionary says, but it also signifies something more, something elusive. Polskosc signifies the very essence of being a Pole.”<sup>713</sup> However, he offers no expansion of what might be “the very essence of being a Pole” thus compounding the elusive abstraction of *Polishness*.

An even greater difficulty, however, as Katherine R. Jolluck notes, is that *Polishness* is often “treated as a homogeneous and overriding identity”<sup>714</sup> by some scholars. Consequently, certain variances are overlooked. For instance, gender, class, and experiential relationship[s] of the individual to her/his community and likely also to an historic moment: to the memory or nostalgia experienced by an individual. Thus, individuals not only experience identity differently but they do not always have in mind the same concept when they invoke identity and/or become involved in community development within ethno-cultural contexts.

More research needs to be done which more broadly focuses on the fluid nature of identity and on the dynamic processes associated with questions of identity—*Polishness*—than can be addressed in this study. For instance, which cultural practices and/or traditions does each transplanted Pole discard and which does s/he choose to maintain on arrival in the new homeland? And what becomes of the practices and traditions when transferred to or embraced—by choice—by subsequent generations?<sup>715</sup> Is it merely a “symbolic identification”<sup>716</sup> with the past

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University, 1995) 13.

<sup>713</sup> Jerzy Jedlicki qtd. in Katherine R. Jolluck, Gender, Identity and the Polish Experience of War, 1939-1945. (Doctoral Dissertation: Stanford University, 1995) 12.

<sup>714</sup> Katherine R. Jolluck. Gender, Identity and the Polish Experience of War, 1939-1945. (Doctoral Dissertation: Stanford University, 1995) 14-15. See also Kathleen Neils Conzen, et al, and Dirk Hoerder.

<sup>715</sup> Mary Waters writes: “ethnic identity is a social process that is in flux for some proportion of the population.. [the] degree of intermarriage and geographic and social mobility among whites of European extraction in the United States means that they enjoy a great deal of choice and numerous options when it comes to ethnic identification.” She adds, however, that “if your own ethnicity is a voluntaristic personal matter, it is sometimes difficult to understand that race or ethnicity for others is influenced by societal and political components....” and that “[symbolic identity] is dependent upon the concept that all ethnicities mean the same thing—that enjoying the traditions of one’s heritage is an option available to a group or individual—but that such a heritage should not have any social costs associated with it.... individuals who enjoy a symbolic ethnicity for themselves do not always recognize the options they enjoy or the ways in which their own concepts of ethnicity and uses of those concepts constrain and deny choice to others... [and] the political result... is a backlash against affirmative action programs that recognize and try to redress the inequalities in our society.” Ethnic Options. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) 16, 164, 166-167.

and with their ancestry? And how does the re-imagined self inject her or his conceptualization of tradition, value systems, cultural practices, and identity into the collective process of re-imagining the ethno-cultural community within mainstream society? And what of those who readily and quickly assimilate? What are the motivating factors?

In his discursive contributions to the "Poles in North America" conference, Canadian academic, essayist, poet, and survivor of the deportation/exile experience, Bogdan Czaykowski shared his 1953 analysis of *Polishness* which evokes the Polish national anthem: *Poland is not yet dead*:

*Polacy? To ludzi grupa,  
Co wiecznie niesie trumne,  
Zamiast zakopac trupa!*

The Poles? They are a group of people,  
Who always carry a coffin.  
Instead of burying the corpse!<sup>717</sup>

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The debate continues. In June, 1999, Jolanta Kowalewska-Cabaj, editor of the Polish language newspaper *Kurier* found herself defending her *Polishness* in an editorial after an anonymous caller left her a message: "...are you truly Polish? It does not seem so, really, when one reads what you are writing in this little paper of yours...."<sup>718</sup> She responds first by illustrating the paper's promotion of matters pertinent to *Polonia* and to Poland; for instance, the promotion of Poland's membership in NATO. She then engages in a historical/philosophical discussion that begins with her personal identification as "a Pole living in Canada" who "even revere[s] Canada... [and is] thankful to the 'Maple Leaf Country' for opportunities it presented me with." Jolanta Kowalewska-Cabaj then proceeds to characterize a Pole—the "Polish soul"—as having an attachment to "the tradition": Catholic with tolerance toward other faiths, hospitable, and courageous defender of the weak and of the Polish tradition. All within the mandate of the

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<sup>716</sup> Mary Waters. *Ethnic Options*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) 7.

<sup>717</sup> Bogdan Czaykowski in *Polishness*. (Toronto: Canadian Polish Research Institute, 1983) 11.

<sup>718</sup> Jolanta Kowalewska-Cabaj, "On Being a Pole" in *Kurier*. (1-15 June 1999) No. 11 (737) 23-24.

newspaper that, she argues, fulfils a "valuable service to the Polish Diaspora and to our motherland, the Republic of Poland." What stands out is Kowalewska-Cabaj's ardent defense, as a more recent immigrant to Canada, of her self-assured *Polishness* as well as clear identification with "the Polish diaspora". *Polishness* is linked psychically and intellectually to the ancestral homeland and, especially, to the Roman Catholic faith, and "the Polish diaspora" remains, even to a more recent immigrant, distinguishable and extant. But is the Polish diaspora the same as it was in the immediate post-war years or has time altered its substance?

Among study participants who have lived within the construct of the Polish diaspora since the war, there exists a strong dismay at what they perceive to be a weakened construct of *Polishness* among Poles born in Poland since the end of the war. Why? And in what form[s]?

In describing the superiority of his *Polishness* over that of his born-in-Poland daughter-in-law, one study participant stated: "We are more talking about Polish [history] in here than they talking over there... it's not the same Poland as before. Because Poland still has Communist government."<sup>719</sup> Indeed, study participants share the view that Poles in Poland since the end of WWII received a deficient education under Soviet Communist tutelage, said education neglecting to teach the rudiments of Polish history and geography in a manner which honoured the Polish view. One interviewee observed: "We have been accused by Poles in Poland that we are more patriotic here than they are over there. We fought, we died, we survived for Poland."<sup>720</sup> Another recalls: "[W]e were not on the map for over 1000 years and came back in Poland.... we survived. Why? Because the language was practiced at home and taught by our grandmothers and mothers and also the religion. The religion was there. I think you cling more to your *Polishness* when there is oppression and that's why we survived."<sup>721</sup> This speaker echoes Katherine R. Jolluck's findings wherein she identifies the crucial role played by women in maintaining *Polishness* in the home and, ultimately for the nation.

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<sup>719</sup> Interview with Jerzy (03 October 1998) 49.

<sup>720</sup> Interview with Antoni (03 April 1999).

<sup>721</sup> Interview with Genia (09 September 1999) 44.

In describing visits to Poland, several study participants commented on the difficulties they encountered in speaking Polish that, they argue, is a changed language. One interviewee stated he sympathized with French complaints of Anglo dominance, with particular reference to the language of business. "The Polish language she is bastardized with the English words," he stated, citing the use of such English words as "ventures" and "business".<sup>722</sup>

But how have the *Anders Poles* reconciled their *Polishness* in mutual regard for *Canadianness*? Witold described his ability to feel equally committed to a dual loyalty and identity as "the same as loving your mother and your wife or your daughter... there is no such thing as [a] split."<sup>723</sup> Boleslaw, who lived in England, then Argentina and Brazil before eventually emigrating to Canada, reconciled his mutual devotion to two nations: as love for Poland, the birth country where he first knew his mother, and love for Canada because he has been allowed to live and work here and raise a family.<sup>724</sup>

Comments made by one study participant act as reminder there is no homogeneous Polish identity, whether in the context as *Sybiraki*, or whether in relation to *Canadianness*. Alfred speaks of *Polishness* as often experienced through dual or even multiple origins passed through the generations wherein one parent or grandparent might be ethnically Polish and the other have Ukrainian, Belorus, or other origins. "I look at it as a Slavic race because, eventually, you go back in history, there was one race which branch out, language has changed, and everything."<sup>725</sup>

To document their experiences and reinforce/assert their *Polishness*, memoir writing became virtually institutionalized during the period 1969-1971.<sup>726</sup> Among the memoirs can be found some written by *Anders Poles* in a literal extension of the *Sybiraki* mythos.<sup>727</sup> [see Chapter 4] And to commemorate the 60th Anniversary of the WWII deportations, Toronto-based Polish language newspaper, *Związkowiec (Alliancer)*, issued an appeal in 2000 for memoirs of *Sybiraki*

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<sup>722</sup> Interview with Witold (23 July 1998) 46.

<sup>723</sup> Ibid.. 53.

<sup>724</sup> Interview with Boleslaw (30 September 1998) 60.

<sup>725</sup> Interview with Alfred (24 July 1999) 65.

<sup>726</sup> Edward Mozejko. "Ethnic or National (?): Polish Literature in Canada" in Literatures of Lesser Diffusion, Joseph Pivato, ed. (University of Alberta: Research Institute for Comparative Literature, 1990) 814-815.

<sup>727</sup> Benedykt Heydenkorn. Memoirs of Polish Immigrants. (Toronto: Futura Graphics, 1979).

with the goal to publish a book of collected writings.<sup>728</sup>

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In "Writing About Ethnicity", Roberto Perin asks: "Are we to assume that in the process of migration, immigrants carry their ancestral culture with them, that they transplant it in the new soil, and that it survives, largely unaltered, so that successive generations faithfully live what is essentially a local variant of this culture?"<sup>729</sup> He responds that "...their community's culture and that of the Mother Country do not coincide... Their vocabulary is impoverished... their speech over time has become studded with Anglicisms.... Ethnic intellectuals, who were their community's first historians, either glossed over these anomalies, or worse, whitewashed the immigrants' past."<sup>730</sup>

Another source takes the discussion a little further:

[E]thnicity is not a "collective fiction," but rather a process of construction or invention that incorporates, adapts, and amplifies preexisting communal solidarities, cultural attributes, and historical memories. That is, it is grounded in real life context and social experience.<sup>731</sup>

Crucial to these points is recognition of assimilationist pressures and desire among some newcomers to shed the past in favour of a present and, especially, a future for their children within the context of mainstream [Anglo/white] Canadian life. Again, there also is the matter of homogeneity; that is, within the 'group'—in this instance, the group being the *Anders Poles*—there exist variances in self-identity as well divisions among group members demarcated by such factors as class, gender, politics, and even in the way in which they re-imagined their lives/communities in the new homeland. But unlike other post-war immigrants, such as Italians, there do not exist regional divisions of identity per se, as in links to one's "paese, or home village" or as "people of the Abruzzi around the world".<sup>732</sup> However, it might be argued most of the *Anders Poles* who came to Canada in the post-war years do, in fact, represent a regional identity

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<sup>728</sup> Personal communication with Stanisław Stolarczyk, editor *Związkowiec*; 15 August 2000.

<sup>729</sup> Roberto Perin in John Schultz, ed. *Writing About Canada*. (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall Canada Inc., 1990) 203.

<sup>730</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>731</sup> Kathleen Neils Conzen, et al. "The Invention of Ethnicity: A Perspective from the U.S.A.", in *Journal of American Ethnic History*. (Fall, 1992) 5.

<sup>732</sup> Donna R. Gabbacia. "Creating Italians in Canada": Review of *Eh, Paesan! Being Italian in Toronto in Diaspora*, 7:2, 1998. 275.



inasmuch as the majority were *kolonista* or *osadniki* from Poland's eastern borderlands as well they represent a manifestation of the Polish diaspora linked both to the deportation experience and to a historic moment; i.e. the interwar period. But unlike Indian *Desh Pardesh*, the Poles were not divided along distinct religious or caste lines.<sup>733</sup>

Thus, I return to my point of departure. Most of the study participants were children when they were torn from the breast of the mother[land]. After ten years living in varied manifestations of camp life, and after growing up, they once again had a place to call *home*. But how did they make their new homelands *feel* like *home*? How did they develop their newly imagined *Polonia* communities and within which context[s] did they frame their *Polishness*, if they retained it at all? These are complex questions about which aspects have been considered through earlier discussion, and which are complicated by such variances as gender and class, to mention a few.

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We will recall earlier discussion that traced the arrival in Canada in the post-war years of Polish immigrants. Although they shared many challenges common to the post-war displaced person phenomenon—adaptation, housing, jobs, language, trauma “baggage”, public discrimination and reluctance to accept either Poles or Jews—they were less likely than their compatriots who immigrated to the United States to have relatives or other ties, such as sponsors, to whom they could turn for familial/community support and guidance.<sup>734</sup> After all, at the time there was little in the way of government-sponsored aid infrastructure geared toward the particular needs of newcomers especially those who had suffered the trauma of war.

Still, there existed a strong inclination among the Polish veterans and other *Anders Poles* to gravitate toward ‘the familiar’; that is, a compulsion to locate and mix with the established Polish community, not unlike other waves of immigrants before them, or since. This compulsion manifests more openly and intensely among male study participants who particularly initiated

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<sup>733</sup> Roger Ballard, ed. *Desh Pardesh: The South Asian Presence in Britain*. (London: C. Hurst & Co. Pub., 1994).

<sup>734</sup> Barbara Stern Burstin. *From Poland to Pittsburgh: The Experience of Jews and Christians who Migrated to Pittsburgh After World War II*. (Doctoral Dissertation: University of Pittsburgh, 1986).

various strategies within this context in their search for home, marriage partner, and work. We will recall, for instance, that even before arriving in Canada, Jerzy indicated to officials who administered the *British Resettlement Act* a specific preference to be placed on a farm in the vicinity of Oshawa, Ontario, because it represented to him cultural familiarity borne of pre-war cross-Atlantic correspondence to his Polish village.

Another example is seen in the investment in a bicycle that a Polish veteran might ride into Oshawa to attend Saturday night dances held at the Polish community hall where they sought Polish brides. Or, similarly, my father's Saturday evening hikes with fellow Poles temporarily housed at the Ajax DP reception camp to Oshawa where they enjoyed hospitality and merriment at the Polish Alliance dances. In both instances, the draw was toward urban centres wherein the magnet was, in the immediate, the Polish community; in the long term, it was jobs.

Waclaw, at age 20 years, arrived in Canada in 1949 on the *General Black*. With a few others from the Ajax DP camp, he was hand-picked to work on the railroad in a work gang—not on labour contract—and recalled his abandonment of the transitory job, after nine months, for Toronto because of an awareness "...there was so many Polish people... organization, Polish hall there, Polish Church, Polish restaurant, Polish this, Polish that. We always felt more at home because English, to us, was still kind of difficult and we weren't much adjusted..."<sup>735</sup>

Waclaw further recalls of his time boarding in a private home in Toronto:

We live[d] with a Polish family, in [the] Polish district, Queen Street. There were lots of Polish families living in this area... they wanted to rent to **their own** because some of those older people, Polish people, their English wasn't too good, so they communicate better when we could talk to them Polish. If you want to go to the Polish hall, it was not very far, and there was a big Catholic Church in that place and if you want to find anybody, find a Polish group, or a Polish paper, it's in there; a Polish meal, it's in there. When you walking on the street, you see couple talking Polish. "Hello!" you know, and this-and-that, and right away you start conversation, you find somebody to talk something [to].<sup>736</sup> [emphasis mine]

Waclaw didn't stay long in Toronto, however, for he had difficulty finding a decent job;

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<sup>735</sup> Interview with Waclaw (13 March 1995) 25-26. Toronto population, 1941: 700,000. Toronto Polish population in 1941: 11,000, within established 'enclave'. Robert F. Hamey. *Gathering Place: Peoples and Neighbourhoods of Toronto, 1834-1945*. (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1985) 3.

<sup>736</sup> Interview with Waclaw (13 March 1995) 28-29.

mostly because of his poor English. He traipsed through various southern Ontario cities with a fellow former passenger of the *General Black*, but still had little luck finding decent work. Eventually, they both moved to Oshawa, again drawn to an established Polish community, where he worked in a variety of general labour construction and agricultural jobs before landing a coveted position in 1952 [St. Patrick's Day, he quips!] in General Motors where he worked until retirement.

Waclaw's search for work typifies the experience of most post-war immigrants to Canada who were drawn to the urban centres of Ontario's industrial—and agricultural—belt that stretches "along the shore of Lake Ontario from Oshawa through Toronto to Niagara Falls.... [where] about one-fourth of the entire Canadian population [lived] and within it is concentrated the financial and manufacturing core of the country."<sup>737</sup> About half of all immigrants arriving in Canada during the post-war era settled in Ontario where immigrants as "muscle" were especially welcome,<sup>738</sup> many considered suitable only for the less desirable jobs in such occupations as construction, manufacturing and in the service industry.<sup>739</sup> I am reminded of an aphorism heard through the 1960s, and which likely dates even earlier, which defined a Pole: *strong like bull, smart like streetcar [or fencepost, depending on the speaker]*.

After fulfilling his farm labour contract, Antoni recounts his strategy for seeking a place for him and his young Polish bride [also an *Anders Pole*] to live. On arriving in Winnipeg, he sought a phone book wherein he searched the listings for someone with the same surname. With complete confidence, he called the number and within hours had not only been invited to board at the home, but the female head of the family recommended him for a job which he started immediately!<sup>740</sup> Again, the familiar—the Polish cultural tie—was the beacon of certainty.

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<sup>737</sup> Leo Driedger. *Multi-Ethnic Canada*. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1996) 92.

<sup>738</sup> B.K. Sandwell, ed. *Saturday Night* magazine qtd. in Kelley, Ninette and Michael Trebilcock. *The Making of the Mosaic*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998) 317.

<sup>739</sup> Edite Noivo. "Neither "Ethnic Heroes" nor "Racial Villains": Inter-Minority Group Racism" in Vic Satzewich, ed. *Racism and Social Inequality in Canada*. (Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, Inc., 1998) 231-231.

<sup>740</sup> Interview with Antoni (03 April 1999).

Oshawa *Polonia* – The Imagined Village: A Community of Memory

The question arises whether the Polish community in Oshawa, Ontario responds to and interacts within mainstream Canadian life as a diasporic *Polonia* community, straddling the *here* and *there* tensions, or simply as yet another ethnic enclave, or as something else. But first, an historical overview of aspects of the development of the Polish community in Oshawa is required.

As mentioned, established Polish organizations, services and parishes greeted the post-war arrivals. Those who made Oshawa their home are no exception; however, the community lacked a Polish Roman Catholic church where they could fully develop "...understandable relationships with God, priest and other Polish people."<sup>741</sup>

As Henryk Radecki has noted of the Sudbury *Polonia*, the Polish community in Oshawa was re-invigorated by the post-war newcomers,<sup>742</sup> although there were some tensions, unlike a trend noted in some American ethnic communities where massive suburbanization begun in the 1940s resulted in a bleeding of ethnic organizations of membership.<sup>743</sup> Many Polish immigrants who made Oshawa their home in the immediate post-war period made a concerted effort to locate within an established *Polonia* community close to a church [though it would be the post-WWII newcomers that would provide the impetus for the construction of a Polish Roman Catholic church], Polish halls, and compatriots. Here, within an enclave, they could daily communicate in their mother tongue, thus recreating, in the post-war urban industrial New World context, the Old World village. Several study participants made particular note of this preference, one noting matter-of-factly: "I guess it just comes natural... you looked around that area [only]."<sup>744</sup>

The post-WWII wave of Polish immigrants was not representative of earlier *bread migrations*; that is, among the newcomers were professionals such as engineers and skilled tradesmen. Among study participants, however, few who made the Oshawa area their home had

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<sup>741</sup> Henryk Radecki and Benedykt Heydenkorn. *A Member of a Distinguished Family*. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976) 54-52.

<sup>742</sup> Henryk Radecki in "Polish Immigrants in Sudbury, Ontario, 1883-1980" in Frank Renkiewicz, ed. *The Polish Presence in Canada and America*. (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1982) 327-338.

<sup>743</sup> Mary Waters. *Ethnic Options*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) 149.

<sup>744</sup> Interview with Zbigniew (24 July 1998) 54.

substantive skills beyond a willingness to work hard. And so, for the majority who had no more than high school education, if that, and weak English language skills, upon completion of their labour contracts most sought suitable work in urban industry, leaving low-paying work in agriculture and/or resource-based industry, demonstrating the short-term success of the post-war contract schemes. Those with some education and training met the same fate working alongside their less-trained compatriots in the same factories as they were unable to convert their abilities into employment currency outside the factory environment. And the study group is representative of Leo Driedger's findings that post-war immigrants were drawn specifically to the industrial belt of southern Ontario where many found established ethnic communities from which they obtained aid in gaining decent employment in local factories where they met compatriots and could communicate in the mother tongue.<sup>745</sup>

Many of the newcomers were quick to become involved in established community organizations, and were even more eager to introduce new ideas and participate in the growth and development of new Polish organizations and institutions in the community, all within the context of their intense *Polishness* borne of pre-war and wartime experiences. But there is more to consider beyond living within a *Polonia* community. For instance, what were relations like between the old guard and the newcomers? Where did the newly arrived Poles find work after fulfilling their labour contract obligations? Where did they live? And in what ways did they interact with the larger community?

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One of the privileges and challenges of conducting this study is the fact I grew up in Oshawa, Ontario; a predominantly working class community where General Motors has been the largest employer since early in the 20th Century in what are now General Motors' largest Canadian production facilities. Incidentally, General Motors has put bread on my table nearly all my life, including one summer employment as a student. Outside General Motors, most workers

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<sup>745</sup> Leo Driedger. *Multi-Ethnic Canada*. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1996) 63-93.

find employment in automobile-related industry such as foundries and parts/equipment manufacturers or they commute to Toronto, which is about 80 km west.

Of the twenty-five study participants who settled in Oshawa, men and women alike, all worked in blue-collar jobs; most in factories related to the automobile industry including, specifically, three women who worked in nearby Ajax at the Chrysler Trim Plant and twelve men who collectively gave over 340 years service to General Motors. Ryszard recalls the draw to General Motors:

I worked at Malleable Iron when I came to Oshawa for six months. And I was laid off and some of my friends said that General Motors was hiring, so I went to unemployment insurance on Albert Street... and they said there was one opening, a sweeper, you know. So, I jumped at it... Anything. General Motors, in those days, was... everybody was so proud, you know. I know when they give me a badge, we used to wear those badges... your employee number... on our pants in here [points to upper thigh] so everybody could see. The badge was cast out of iron, you know, and we were so proud. In Oshawa, anybody that work in General Motors, you know, making a dollar twenty, or a dollar thirty cents.... That was a big deal! An hour. Yeah, well, from 65 cents, you know, graduated to double wages, so, and it's not only the wages, the benefits, you know, and, naturally, the union due in those days.<sup>746</sup>

There was nothing extraordinary about my neighbourhood—I thought. My family of nine, including my grandmother, lived in a two-storey house across the street from St. Hedwig Roman Catholic Church. Next to the church was the convent and across from these neighbouring buildings was St. Hedwig Roman Catholic Elementary School that my siblings and I attended. All established after the arrival in the post-war years of Polish immigrants.

The community embodied a microcosm of war-torn Europe as well a manifestation of the post-war immigration boom, concentrated around the Roman Catholic Church. Among our neighbours were Maltese, Italian, Hungarian, Ukrainian, German, Dutch, Irish and Polish immigrants as well some 'Canadians' that I recall were sometimes called "soapy white-breads". Thus, as Robert Harney has noted, the ethnic enclave, such as that which one might call the Polish community of Oshawa, was not homogenously uniform in its makeup.<sup>747</sup> And one might

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<sup>746</sup> Interview with Ryszard (06 March 1995) 28.

<sup>747</sup> Robert F. Harney, ed. *Gathering Place: Peoples and Neighbourhoods of Toronto, 1834-1945*. (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1985) 6.

argue the community represented a microcosmic recreation of Old World geography on a New World urban grid.

Also central to the community was *Oshawa Bakery*, located across the street from the church, where people bought bread in the Russian language, Ukrainian, English, or Polish. Sundays, after Mass, the bakery would be jam-crushed with bodies waiting their turn at the counter. The rotund bakers, also immigrants, had arms as thick and dense as dough ready for the ovens. A mass of flesh and dough seemingly quivered out of the hot back room as if all were fashioned of the same simple grain.

It was in this bakery that questions first began to take shape in my child mind. Questions which I have not had the privilege to seriously explore until I determined to pursue them in the manner of a meaningful scholarly inquiry. Questions that served as the point of departure for this study.

What is it that is extraordinary about what I thought was an ordinary childhood in a seemingly ordinary community? To this point, I have discussed what makes some of the Polish inhabitants of the community extraordinary; worthy of more than a footnote in existing literature which casually notes the post-war Polish ex-soldiers' labour scheme under the *British Resettlement Act* as a precedent in Canadian immigration policy and patterns. That is, they were survivors of the Soviet deportation and exile experience, and they somehow, through a variety of avenues, made their way to Canada. They also demonstrate a particular degree of *Polishness*. But, what of the *Oshawa Polonia* community? What makes it a community worth notice? In part, it represents a new chapter to be added to the existing body of literature; one that explores such topics as immigration patterns and ethnic communities. More specifically, however, it is the dearth of scholarly interest in or writing about the Polish community of Oshawa that inspired this research and that now leads to the final stage of discussion.

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As far back as 1851, there were residents in Oshawa who were of Polish descent.<sup>748</sup> The first documented group settlement in Oshawa of Polish families occurred through the period 1902-1906. Inference is made by the author of the "Kalendarium" of the Polish Community in Oshawa, Rev. Stanisław Poszwa, to the draw of the city's textile industry.<sup>749</sup> By the time of the founding of the McLaughlin Motor Car Company in 1907, the predecessor to General Motors of Canada, Polish workers in Oshawa found employment in related steel mills, foundries, and other feeder factories such as Ontario Malleable Iron Works. Located on Front and First Streets, Malleable Iron, as most call it, was within walking distance of what had evolved into a Polish neighbourhood concentrated around nearby Olive Avenue. Residents of the neighbourhood were not exclusively Polish; however, having grown up in the general area, I recall as late as the 1960s some non-Poles still making pan-ethnic reference to the area as *Popolowski Avenue*. Among the pre-war Polish community, Olive Avenue was termed *Marszałkowska* in direct reference to a major street in Warsaw.

To provide pastoral care to the growing number of Oshawa-area Polish families, Polish priests were regularly imported, beginning in 1909, from Toronto, to the city's oldest Catholic Church, St. Gregory the Great, which was a considerable walking distance from the growing Polish neighbourhood. In 1928, Rev. Władysław Gulczynski was assigned as an assistant at St. Gregory's. That year, the Polish community began to discuss the issue of it's own church.

In 1922, *The Polish Society of Fraternal Help* was established to provide mutual aid to members following several home-based meetings of Oshawa-area Polish-speaking residents. Two years later, the name was changed to *The Polish Society in Oshawa*, and in 1925 construction began on a community hall on a vacant piece of land situate at 219 Olive Avenue. Volunteers constructed the building, opening in 1928, in time to welcome a wave of new Polish immigrants. In 1938, several members broke from *The Polish Society in Oshawa* deciding to join

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<sup>748</sup> Wotum Polonii w Oshawie, 1953-1961. (Toronto: Polish Voice Co. Ltd., 1961) 39.

<sup>749</sup> Rev. Stanisław Poszwa. [transl. Helen Miklaszewski] Events in the Life of St. Hedwig's Parish and the Polish Community in Oshawa. (Brantford: Bialas Printing Limited, 1997) 51-89. Details and data used throughout this study as historical backdrop to Oshawa's Polish community have been gleaned from Rev. Poszwa's text as well from Wotum Polonii w Oshawie, 1953-1961.



with the national Polish organization, *The Polish Alliance of Canada* (PAC) as Branch 16.<sup>750</sup> It should be noted that the PAC was established in Toronto in 1921 after a merger between the *Sons of Poland*, the *Society of St. Stanislaw*, and the *Union*, with the 1907 constitution of the *Sons of Poland* adopted by the *Alliance*.<sup>751</sup> Then, in the summer of 1943, *The Polish Society in Oshawa* entered into an agreement with *The Polish Alliance of Canada*, and in November, *The Polish Women's Society of PAC in Oshawa* was established. A year later, after overcoming various obstacles, *The Polish Society of Oshawa* formally joined *The Polish Alliance of Canada* as *Branch 21*. Members of *Branch 16* re-joined the organization, creating one organization that endures today, *Polish Alliance (Branch 21)*.

Another organization, *The Polish National Union of Canada* (PNUC) (*Branch 7*) was established in 1946, and in the summer of 1950, energized by increased membership and participation of post-war newcomers, construction began of the PNUC hall at 168 Banting Avenue, but a few blocks away from the *Polish Alliance (Branch 21)* hall located on Olive Avenue. Post-war Polish newcomers played a significant role in the development of the PNUC.

A Polish language school was established in 1928 and operated out of the hall at 219 Olive Avenue, as well as an amateur theatre group, *Rozwoj*. Also in 1928, the Oshawa-area Polish community began to discuss the establishment of a Polish Roman Catholic Church, and in November, 1928, three delegates, two Poles and one Slovak, were chosen to meet in Toronto with Archbishop Neil McNeil to discuss the possibility. Discussions with successive Archbishops and Cardinals continued through the 1930s, again in 1949, and in 1952.

There is no question that the post-war population and organizational growth within the community had a positive impact on the discussions. In fall, 1952, formal efforts were begun to

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<sup>750</sup> Apolonja Kojder traces the early primary motivation for the establishment of the *Polish Alliance* organization in Canada as linked to family goals that Polishness would be maintained and denationalization of the young would be prevented. "Women and the Polish Alliance of Canada" in Benedykt Heydenkorn, ed., *A Community in Transition*. (Toronto: Canadian Polish Research Institute, 1985) 132. See also Frank Głogowski, "The Importance of the Polish Alliance of Canada to the Canadian Polonia". Ibid., 99. Zofia Shahrodi adds that the *Polish Alliance* was "a mutual benefit society oriented to the preservation of Polish culture among the immigrants and their children... [taking] responsibility for maintaining 'Polishness'" in "The Polish Community in Toronto in the Early Twentieth Century" in Robert F. Hamey, ed. *Gathering Place: Peoples and Neighbourhoods of Toronto, 1834-1945*. (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1985) 253.

<sup>751</sup> Frank Głogowski, "The Importance of the Polish Alliance of Canada to the Canadian Polonia" in Benedykt Heydenkorn, ed., *A Community in Transition*. (Toronto: Canadian Polish Research Institute, 1985) 98.

organize a Polish parish community in Oshawa, and after a Mass held in October, 1952, St. Hedwig of Silesia, popularly known as “the queen of the poor,”<sup>752</sup> whose feast day is celebrated October 16th, was chosen to be the patron saint of the new parish. The following month, the St. Hedwig Parish Choir was created. In the 1960s it expanded to include a children’s choir led by Sister Regina Marie, Principal of St. Hedwig Roman Catholic Elementary School, and resident of the neighbouring convent, and comprised mostly of students—not only children from Polish families—enrolled at St. Hedwig Elementary School. *St. Hedwig’s Choir and Glee Club* traveled throughout southern Ontario giving concerts of popular songs from such contemporary scores as “The Sound of Music” and “Oliver”; all in the English language. Three records were produced in 1968, 1969 and 1970, the first titled “They Call it Canada” and another exclusively devoted to Christmas Carols. I can still find my face on the album jackets, mouth obediently open wide as if in song, hands clasped mid-torso in strict choirgirl comportment.

Just before Christmas, 1952, at a meeting attended by two hundred and twenty parishioners, it was decided to purchase a plot of land located on the corner of Olive Avenue and Wellington [now Central Park Boulevard South], for the sum of about \$4,000.00; estimated cost of construction of a church on the site: \$100,000.00. By the New Year, an engineer and an architect had been commissioned and fund-raising activity begun in earnest. Later that year, in making formal written request to the Archdiocese in Toronto for permission to begin construction of the church, it was stated the church would serve the “faithful of Polish descent in the city of Oshawa.”<sup>753</sup> Shortly thereafter, in February 1954, official authorization came from the Sacred Consistorial Congregation for the establishment of “an ethnic parish for the Polish faithful in the city of Oshawa.”<sup>754</sup> Until the first Mass was formally celebrated in the lower church in 1954, a Polish priest traveled each week to Oshawa where he conducted mass in Polish language at the

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<sup>752</sup> Born in 1174, and given in marriage at age 12 to Henry, “The Bearded” Prince of Poland and Silesia, St. Hedwig died October 1243 after a life as benefactress to numerous churches, institutions and convents, as well her compassion and aid to the poor. After the death of her husband, she entered into one of the convents she financed where she lived her remaining years in prayer and self-denial. Wotum Polonii w Oshawie, 1953-1961. (Toronto: Polish Voice Co. Ltd., 1961) 5.

<sup>753</sup> Rev. Stanisław Poszwa. [transl. Helen Miklaszewski] Events in the Life of St. Hedwig’s Parish and the Polish Community in Oshawa. (Brantford: Bialas Printing Limited, 1997) 57.

<sup>754</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

*Polish National Union Hall* on Banting Avenue. The 1954 first Mass was celebrated in what is now the church basement hall, where my parents married in 1958. And it would be out of the church basement where children attended Polish school, as well cultural activities such as Scouting. The construction of the upper church was not begun until July 1960, with the church officially dedicated on June 25, 1961. Christine Thomas, the Mayor of Oshawa wrote, in part, in a letter to the parish priest:

The dedication of a new Church will always be an event of importance in the life of a community. The people who have sacrificed and laboured to erect this fine building are to be commended.... In this modern world the spiritual influence must predominate if we are to survive.<sup>755</sup>

In 1964, St. Joseph Polish National parish—which does not recognize the Holy See—celebrated the blessing of its church located on Court Street. Its membership, as St. Hedwig's, was comprised of long-established families as well as post-war newcomers. The following year the St. Hedwig parish permitted the Italian and Slovenian communities in Oshawa temporary use of St. Hedwig Church for the ministering of services in their native languages and, beginning in 1983, Portuguese language Mass was offered for Oshawa Roman Catholic Portuguese. This practice was abandoned in 1997.

The first local Polish library was established in 1931 as well as the first Polish choir, both located at the Polish hall at 219 Olive Avenue. In 1933, ex-soldiers of the Polish Army, veterans of WWI and the 1920 war against Russia, established the *136th Regiment of the Polish Veterans in Oshawa* with the Polish hall on Olive Avenue as their base. It would be over thirty years before the Oshawa Polish ex-soldiers would have a place they could call their own.

The *General W. Sikorski Polish Veterans Hall*, located on Stevenson Road North, broke ground June 17, 1967, and officially opened in November 1968. It was at this location, on August 27, 2000, that Oshawa's Polish community gathered to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the forcible deportation of 1.5 million ethnic Poles to Soviet labour camps with an outdoor Mass conducted by two St. Hedwig parish priests and a guest priest visiting from Lublin, Poland,

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<sup>755</sup> Letter, 04 May 1961. Wotum Polonii w Oshawie, 1953-1961. (Toronto: Polish Voice Co. Ltd., 1961) 13.

followed by a banquet. Over 500 attended. Among them were forty-eight *Sybiraki*—there are others, but these did not attend—as well as a few dozen who traveled from other communities, most notably from Toronto, to attend the commemoration. Also in attendance were Polish veterans who, with the crowd, came to honour the victims of the Katyn massacre.

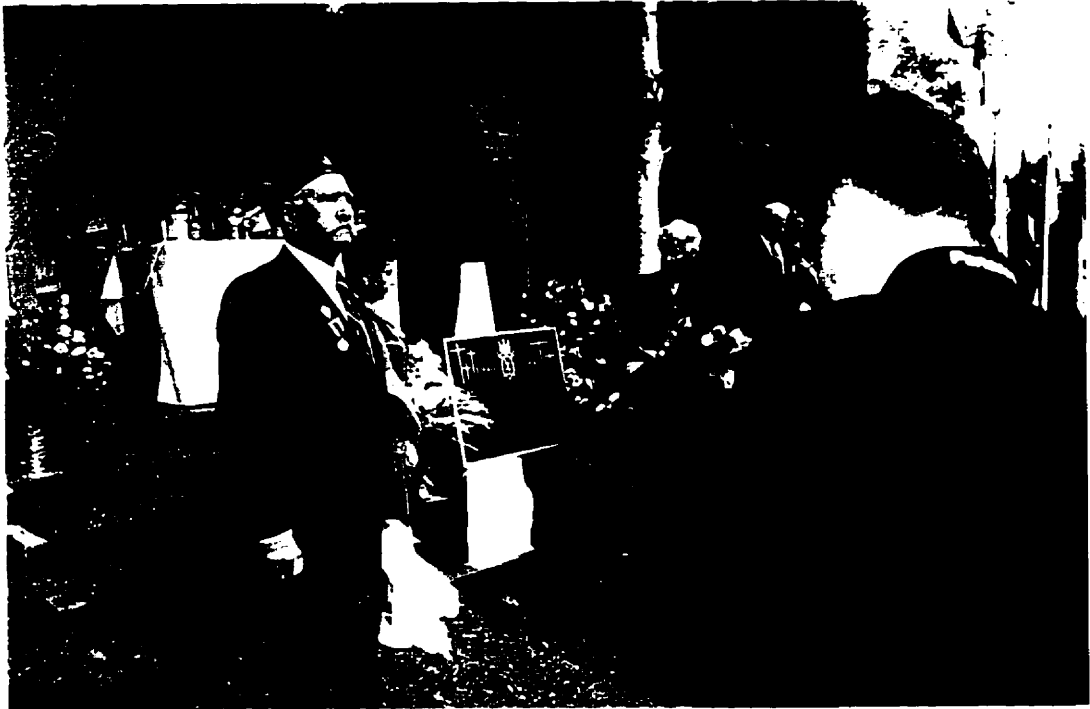


Fig. 35 – 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary *Sybiraki* Commemoration Mass—Oshawa, Ontario, August 2000<sup>750</sup>

Several prominent members of the community and some dignitaries gave speeches calling to memory historic events, those who perished, as well stressing they not be forgotten.

One speaker bitterly stated:

Unlike the Holocaust, this crime against humanity was completely ignored by our so-called Allies, and the criminals were never prosecuted or brought to justice.

Oshawa Member of Parliament Ivan Gross [Lib.], after recalling personal memories of Canada's wartime involvement, made the following compelling remarks:

I have an embarrassing admission to make here. Until I received the background material of what this day is all about, I had never heard that a million-and-a-half Polish people had been torn from their country and exiled.

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<sup>750</sup> From archives of Helen Bajorek MacDonald.

in the Soviet Union. I asked other people about it and it is amazing very few people know about it. Which I think illustrates the fact that we've got to get this information out and we've got to remember.... We must learn from this and never let it be forgotten.<sup>757</sup>

These comments reflect the motivation for this study. If I, as a child of *Sybiraki*, living in the shadow of their experiences, grew up conscious, yet ignorant, of the elusive 'story' in which family members are characters, is it surprising the story remains absent in the public sphere?

The plaque erected by the Oshawa branch of the Canadian-Polish Congress inside the *General W. Sikorski Polish Veterans Hall* has been inscribed in Polish and English:

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1940 - 2000

The 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of mass expatriations of Polish citizens from the eastern part of the II Republic of Poland to the territories of central Asia and the Siberian taiga by Soviet regime.

In memory of Polish prisoners of war murdered in the soviet camps of:  
Ostashkow + Katyn + Miednoje + Kozielsk + Starobielsk

*"If I forget about you, then God above forget about me"*  
Adam Mickiewicz

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In fall, 1938, the Felician Sisters began to have a presence in the Polish community of Oshawa and two Sisters undertook what would become a long-term commitment of the Felician Sisters to Polish-language schooling of children of the Polish community which, by 1939 had grown to sixty families. Around the same time, one of the rooms of a parish home was converted into a small chapel for Polish Catholics. In 1951, the Felician Sisters opened their first Novice School in Canada on Simcoe Street North, in Oshawa in a building owned by the McLaughlin family. It was decided by the parish community, in 1957, to donate several plots of land set aside for the church for the construction of a convent and a Catholic elementary school. The convent became home to the Felician sisters in June 1958, and the school opened the following spring.

The Felician Sisters maintained a parish community presence, particularly in education teaching at Catholic schools in Oshawa, Ajax, and Pickering until July 1984. Only two Sisters remain in 2000 both working as teachers in the neighbouring cities, Whitby and Ajax. Neither is

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<sup>757</sup> Ivan Gross. MP [Lib.]. 27 August 2000; General Sikorski Polish Veteran's Hall, Oshawa, Ontario.

active in the parish community.

In 1992, the parish community was again served by three newly arrived Missionary Sisters of Christ the King, established in 1959 in Poland with a mission to serve Polish immigrants. The Oshawa chapter was the first Canadian location for the Sisters who served, in 1992, five parishes in the United States. The parish purchased a house located in the community, on Chadburn Street, and subsequently, in 1995, purchased and renovated for the Missionary Sisters a house closer to the church on Olive Avenue.

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In a 1941 agreement between Poland's General Wladyslaw Sikorski and Prime Minister Mackenzie King, one of ten information/recruitment offices was located in Oshawa for the purpose of recruitment of soldiers for a Polish provisional army. This scheme likely followed the precedent set by the Polish Military Commission's headquarters located in New York which established during WWI a recruitment centre in Toronto to recruit soldiers for the Polish army in France.<sup>758</sup>

Throughout the wars years, and beyond, the Polish community in Oshawa undertook various fund-raising and other projects to aid Polish victims of war, their efforts mirroring those undertaken by the Toronto Polish community through the First World War. Beginning in April 1942, *Polish Alliance (Branch 16)* collected funds to aid Polish deportees exiled in the Soviet Union. Four months later, the *Slavic Nations Committee* of Oshawa, comprised of members of the Czechoslovakian, Ukrainian, Russian and Polish ethnic communities, organized a rally to raise funds for victims of Slavic descent exiled in the Soviet Union; \$614.45 was collected. In 1944, the *Polish Women's Society of the PAC, Oshawa* through the *Polish Red Cross* raised \$100.00 for aid to Polish orphans recently arrived in Mexico. Through 1945, \$1,802.02 was raised by the umbrella organization representing all Oshawa-area Polish organizations, *The United Polish Relief Fund in Oshawa*. Clothing also was collected and shipped to Poles in transit in German displaced persons camps.

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<sup>758</sup> See Zofia Shahrodi in "The Polish Community in Toronto in the Early Twentieth Century" in Robert F. Harney, ed. *Gathering Place: Peoples and Neighbourhoods of Toronto, 1834-1945*. (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1985) 243-255.

On November 20, 1946, Oshawa area farms welcomed the first group of Polish ex-soldiers, numbering twenty, who came to Canada on two-year labour contract under the British *Resettlement Act*. Three study participants are among this group of early arrivals. That Christmas, the local Polish Veterans' Association appealed to Oshawa-area Polish families to invite the new arrivals to their family traditional *Wigilia*. Shortly thereafter, the Polish ex-soldiers began to make regular contact with the Oshawa Polish community, attending dances, etc. Two other Polish ex-soldiers were formally welcomed June 1947, one of them among study participants. More trickled in later.

On September 04 1949, three weeks after the passengers of the *General H. M. Black* arrived at the Ajax displaced persons transition camp, Rev. Jozef Kucharczyk traveled from St. Stanislaus Kostka Church in Toronto to celebrate a Mass at the camp. Three hundred people attended, including representatives of Oshawa's Polish community. Thus began the regular pastoral care by the Oblate Fathers of Toronto to the people of the Ajax camp. In January 1950, Oshawa's Polish community welcomed other new arrivals from Sweden and Germany, and more Poles displaced by the war trickled in via various routes through the 1950s and 1960s.

Although short-lived, the first Polish language radio program, *Polonia*, began transmitting from Oshawa in 1951 every Sunday evening for one hour from CKLB 1240. That year, 1,436 Oshawa residents were of Polish descent; 1,018 spoke Polish. In subsequent years, occasional hourly programming of Polish Christmas carols and other cultural performances were broadcast on other radio stations.

By 1956, the parish community of St. Hedwig's was well enough established that it could direct attention to issues unrelated to parish or *Polonia* obligations. For instance, funds were raised that year to aid Hungarian refugees who fled Soviet domination after Soviet forces marched into the country to quash the failed uprising. In 1957, fund-raising activity was directed toward the "Bread for Poland" campaign, as well through 1958 care packages of clothing were sent to Poland. This practice continued into the 1980s. The parish community also was involved in 1979 in welcoming Vietnamese refugees to Oshawa. In 1980, the Polish community of

Oshawa made appeals for aid and for the acceptance into Canada of [political] refugees from Poland as well began fund-raising for Polish refugees. Through the 1980s, fund-raising efforts were also directed toward aid for Polish workers—likely linked to the cause of the *Solidarity* movement—as well for the poor in Poland while subject to marshal law. Eventually, in March 1982, a *Refugee Sponsorship Committee* was established that would benefit would-be Polish immigrants to Canada. Other aid activities directed toward the homeland included the collection of shoes on “Shoe Sunday” in 1984 for children in Poland, the “Milk for the children of Poland” project, 1986, and, \$20,000.00 raised in 1997 in response to an appeal for aid for flood victims in Poland.

Ongoing was the offering of prayers “for the increased freedom of the Polish nation and other nations behind the iron curtain.”<sup>759</sup> Invitations were extended to various speakers and persons of particular esteem such as performers and priests visiting from Poland, as well film nights and cultural performances were scheduled with an emphasis on Polish culture and events. All activities reflected keen community interest, particularly among the post-war arrivals, in matters related to Poland and Polish historical events; in particular, attention was directed toward the freedom of Poland from Soviet domination and activities related to preservation of Polish cultural and religious heritage within the parish community. Furthermore, interest in local political matters developed into active participation when, in late 1958 Rev. Felix Kwiatkowski and two parishioners ran as candidates for the local Catholic School Board. One of the candidates is among study participants. Around the same time, Rev. Kwiatkowski encouraged St. Hedwig's parishioners to join the local chapter of the *Knights of Columbus*, a Roman Catholic [Anglo] fraternity. Jurek recalled:

[F]or many years we were just involved in our own Polish community. Now, when Father Kwiatkowski came here, he was a member of *Knights of Columbus* out West. And he said, “It’s about time you got out from your own ghetto; get among the other people and show them what you can do.” And that’s what happened. And [at] one time we had from our community...

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<sup>759</sup> Rev. Stanisław Poszwa. [transl. Helen Miklaszewski] Events in the Life of St. Hedwig's Parish and the Polish Community in Oshawa. (Brantford: Bialas Printing Limited, 1997) 60.



60 members in the Knights of Columbus.<sup>760</sup>

However, few stayed long, Jurek citing language barriers and cultural differences as reasons for feeling alienated within the organization.

In September 1958, 200 students were enrolled in the newly constructed eight-room St. Hedwig elementary school built directly across the street from the church and employing several Felician Sisters resident in the neighbouring convent. Enrolment rose rapidly as in September 1960, 329 students attended the first day of classes. An additional four classrooms were hastily constructed. Parish activity directed toward the education of children of significant Polish historical and religious events further grew with the establishment of the *Polish Youth Group* in 1959, and several Scouting groups in 1960.

During the May 3<sup>rd</sup> celebration of Poland's Constitution held in 1960 at the *PNUC* hall on Banting Avenue, Jo Aldwinkle, Editor of *The Oshawa Times*, was sufficiently impressed with the artistic program that she agreed to undertake with parish member, Jan Drygała, a former delegate in Canada of the Polish government-in-exile, the organization of an Oshawa-based ethnic festival. The *Multi-cultural Oshawa Folk Festival* was formally established a year later—a decade before Canada's *Multicultural Act* was passed—and continues to date. And the late Jan Drygała [d. 1996, age 82] received numerous awards and wide recognition for his efforts directed toward multicultural accord, including the *Order of Canada* in 1983.

Also in 1960, a result of a May conference of Polish communities from across Canada held in Toronto, preparations began with the establishment of a Millennium Committee for celebration of Poland's millennium of Christianity in 1966. The national fund-raising goal was set at \$1 million.

By 1963, it was determined a coordinating body could well-serve the many Polish organizations existing in Oshawa and so *The Polish Organizations' Coordinating Council* was established for inter-organization communication as well for communication with the 35 other ethnic groups then also in existence in Oshawa. Likely linked to the desire for regular

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<sup>760</sup> Interview with Jurek (04 September 1998) 66.

communication within the Polish community, the first weekly issue of the parish bulletin, *Zwiastun Parafii Sw. Jadwigi* was published September 1963.

Evidence of the growing presence and public embrace of the Polish community in Oshawa was seen when, in 1964, in recognition of the May 3<sup>rd</sup> celebration of Poland's Constitution, the Polish flag was publicly flown at Oshawa City Hall.

A particularly poignant historical moment for the Polish community in Oshawa is found in the September 1969 visit and celebration of Mass at St. Hedwig Church by Cardinal Karol Wojtyla, Archbishop of Cracow, who came to Canada for the 25th Anniversary celebrations of the establishment of the *Canadian Polish Congress*; although, it wouldn't be until 1971 that a branch of the *Congress* would be established in Oshawa. One of my brothers served as an altar boy at the historic Mass. Today, Cardinal Wojtyla is more widely known as Pope John Paul II. In the parish Visitors' Book, Cardinal Wojtyla wrote:

As a remembrance of my visit to  
St. Hedwig parish in Oshawa,  
I give my heartfelt wishes  
for God's blessings for the Polish community,  
the priests and the sisters.<sup>761</sup>

Later, in a letter addressed to the Polish community, Cardinal Wojtyla wrote, in part: "Through carrying out personal, family, community and work responsibilities fulfill (sic) them to the best of your abilities and for the good of this country which has welcomed you. Raising the younger generation, instil in them the great and dear spiritual heritage that you brought from Poland. This heritage reflects the real millennium of our Baptism...."<sup>762</sup> In other words, reinforcement of the duality of life as a Roman Catholic Polish Canadian: through family, community and work life, acting and serving as good citizens with a reminder of the obligation to preserve in the young, Polish cultural and religious heritage, fought for and maintained for over a thousand years.

Another significant event to occur within the parish was the shift in 1979 of pastoral care

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<sup>761</sup> Rev. Stanislaw Poszwa. [transl. Helen Miklaszewski] Events in the Life of St. Hedwig's Parish and the Polish Community in Oshawa. (Brantford: Bialas Printing Limited, 1997) 67.

<sup>762</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

from the Oblate Fathers to the Society of Christ Fathers. The rationale is unspecified.

Recognizing there was within the Polish community in Oshawa a growing ageing population—a trend felt throughout *Polonia* in Canada—Sister Klara organized in 1976 the first meeting of parish senior citizens held at the Felician Sisters' convent. Another trend also appears in church records. In 1982, numbers of children receiving their First Holy Communion<sup>763</sup> who were born outside Canada are documented for the first time, and by 1987 a distinction was made between the Polish group and the English group, the latter comprised mostly of students from St. Hedwig Elementary School. Then, in 1991, there was a sudden and marked increase in the numbers of children receiving their First Holy Communion. Half were born in Poland, clearly representative of the 1980's wave of Polish immigration to Canada. By 1996, the Polish group outnumbered the English group, and the following year the groups are ministered on separate dates. Additionally, the numbers of children annually receiving their First Holy Communion have been in steady decline since the mid-1970s. For the purpose of this study, I will only speculate on potential cause[s] as a wider survey would be required to do justice to the question: lower birth rates; family out-migration to the suburbs or to other cities from the parish community; ageing population with few 'replacements' due to dramatically diminished numbers of newcomers;<sup>764</sup> diminished devotion to spiritual practices; and/or other potential causes.

In 1980, the parish community began to welcome new parishioners who were newly arrived in Canada from Poland. Thus, there was an injection of new families to the membership of the parish as well revitalization of Polish language education with the establishment in September that year of the *Cyprian Kamil Norwid Polish Language and Culture High School* at Donevan Collegiate on Harmony Road, located several blocks from the church, and which in 2000 continues to offer High School programs. There grew an awareness of the particular needs of the newcomers, and in late 1981, a meeting was held in the church hall wherein the newcomers were

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<sup>763</sup> This sacrament is received around age 7.

<sup>764</sup> In 1997, Oshawa, a notable receiver community of immigrants post-WWII, was home to a smaller proportion of immigrants than the national average of 17.4 percent foreign born. Roderic Beaujot. *Immigration and Canadian Demographics: State of the Research*. (London: University of Western Ontario Population Studies Centre, 1998) 13.

given assistance and guidance through Canada's immigration procedures.

A survey and subsequent mapping of residential propinquity of the parishioners in relation to the church would serve as a useful tool for making comparison of the present-day Polish community to that which had the church as its locus in 1953; the year the church officially opened. That is, a mapping of the community as it was in the post-war era and as it may or may not be today. Access to church records was denied, however, with church officials citing privacy issues.

If one considers the number of children—less than a dozen of the total September 2000 population, J-K through to Gr. 8, at 259—attending the neighbouring St. Hedwig Roman Catholic Elementary School who are the children of Polish immigrants as any indicator, there is no question the Polish 'community' has moved away from the parish neighbourhood.<sup>765</sup> Consequently, the neighbourhood, the village, the imagined community of 1953—of the post-war imagination—no longer exists in 2000. And the school no longer maintains in its employ as teachers any of the Sisters. However, through the Durham Catholic District School Board International Languages Program, the school offers Polish language classes for elementary school age children, from J-K through to Gr. 8, on Saturday mornings. There are no fees for enrolment. In the 1999/2000 school year, 280 pupils attended, coming from throughout the Regional Municipality of Durham.<sup>766</sup>

In 1988, with the organizational impetus coming from the 1980 newcomers, the Polish community established a branch of *St. Stanislaus and St. Casimir's Credit Union* which operated out of the church basement until 1990 at which time a permanent location was established in downtown Oshawa; membership was over 500.

Also during the 1980s, energies were directed toward renovations of the church; again spurred on by the [younger] Polish newcomers.

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Building on established Polish community organizations and initiatives, one of the first

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<sup>765</sup> Personal Conversation with Kim Walsh, Principal St. Hedwig Roman Catholic Elementary School (06 September 2000).

<sup>766</sup> Ibid.

undertakings by the post-WWII Poles who settled in the Oshawa area was the establishment in 1953 of St. Hedwig Polish Roman Catholic Church in close proximity to the established Polish community, to which were imported Polish priests. A convent for [Polish] Felician Sisters was built next to the church and across the street a separate elementary school rose from a swamp. All within ten years of the arrival to Canada of the Poles. All reflective of the keen interest of the newcomers in establishing and maintaining distinctly Polish religious and organizational life, especially that their children might benefit. All informed by their identification with and links to the interwar polonization era of the 'free' Poland, the Second Republic, and by their experiences as deportees, as Poles in exile and as Poles displaced by the war, and as soldiers who, after fighting for a free Poland, saw their ideals and efforts crushed by political events out of their hands. All reinforced by religious leaders, not the least being Cardinal Karol Wojtyła. And all resulting in the [re]creation of a distinct Polish community as delineated by existing geo-ethnic boundaries, and as shaped by fervent *Polishness*.

Milda Danys writes of an "opinion of many in [Lithuanian] colonies...: "In the end, whatever Lithuanianism lasts, will probably come from the churches. If there's no centre, people never get together."<sup>767</sup> So, too, is the centrality of the church, as exemplified in Oshawa, Ontario, to the vitality of the local Polish community, especially in the post-war era. For since the arrival of Poles in Canada, and as typically representative of the locus of *Polonia* activity outside Poland's borders, priests accompanied or followed Polish migrants to their newly-established *Polonia* communities where through establishment of churches and parish schools, "the religious faith and the Polish culture were very intimately tied together,"<sup>768</sup> and, subsequently, maintained.

Questions arise, however, of the import of the church to the children and grandchildren of the post-war arrivals as well to the more recent Polish immigrants to Canada, and the impact on the parish community—and on the ethnic enclave—created by out migration of parish families and by the ageing and fading population from among the original parishioners. Already we have seen

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<sup>767</sup> Milda Danys. DP Lithuanian Immigration to Canada After the Second World War. (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1986) 322.

<sup>768</sup> Benedykt Heydenkorn, ed. A Community in Transition. (Toronto: Canadian Polish Research Institute, 1985) 19.

from a cursory exploration of student population at St. Hedwig's Roman Catholic Elementary School that, despite the existence of a Polish parish and its neighbouring Roman Catholic school, Polish immigrants are no longer drawn to the community. Except to attend Mass and receive the sacraments in Polish language and to enroll their children in heritage language lessons. Has this trend similarly been noted in other Polish communities established and/or re-vitalized in the post-war era in other cities, such as, for instance, Hamilton, Mississauga, Toronto, Burlington, Sudbury and so on? Are there variances in the settlement of the Poles in other provinces or elsewhere?

These questions, for another study, raise many more about the settlement patterns and trends of the 1980s wave of Polish immigrants. But in relation to this particular study, at least one other source has noted a thinning of ethnic subcommunities—where immigrants had clustered in large American industrial cities until the era of the Second World War—through the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>769</sup>

Since the establishment of St. Hedwig Roman Catholic parish, the larger of two Polish Roman Catholic churches serving parishioners in the Polish language in the Regional Municipality of Durham, the institutions of the parish—church, convent, and school—have undergone a number of changes. For instance, as already mentioned, the shift in pastoral care by the Oblate Fathers to the Society of Christ Fathers, and the shift from the service to the community by the Felician Sisters to the Missionary Sisters of Christ the King. And the student population at St. Hedwig Roman Catholic Elementary School no longer is comprised mostly of the children of immigrants, nor even of children of Polish descent.

As the children of the post-war Polish immigrants grew up and moved either to the suburbs or right out of the city as they followed jobs and, often non-Polish, marriage partners, they left behind an ageing and shrinking congregation. There was an injection of membership from among the 1980s wave of Polish immigrants, as well a period of service to a growing Portuguese population, begun in 1983, but there still remains the demographic fact of an ageing Polish

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<sup>769</sup> Danuta Mostwin. The Transplanted Family: A Study of Social Adjustment of the Polish Immigrant Family to the United States After the Second World War. (Doctoral Dissertation, Columbia University, 1971) 16.

population with low birth rates among recent Polish-Canadian families.

One of the challenges facing the parish priests has been ministering to the needs of the ageing parishioners, many of whom are visited weekly either at their family homes or at area homes for the aged that they are provided in their final years Polish-language friendship, the sacraments administered in Polish language, and personal guidance in family matters.

As a profound example of the significance of *Polishness* in the spiritual context, funeral masses conducted for elderly parishioners are conducted either completely in Polish language, or in portions of Polish/English to accommodate those among funeral-goers who are more comfortable with Polish-language mass with the English incorporated to accommodate those from among the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generations who are not fluent in Polish.

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The Polish ex-soldiers who settled in the Oshawa area in the post-war era built on the existing *136th Regiment of the Polish Veterans in Oshawa* with intense fund-raising activity which led to the construction of the multi-purpose *General W. Sikorski Polish Veteran's Hall* in 1968. The facility functions for the Polish community and is rented for other community events. It is self-maintaining and profitable, but faces, as other elements of Polish organizational infrastructure in Canada, an uncertain future. The administration is ageing and dying and representative of a notable trend revealed in the 1986 Census: thirty-eight percent of Canadians who declared Polish as their mother tongue that year were 55 years of age or older. And they were among Canada's fifth largest ethnic group. Today, they would be 70 years or older, and the falling numbers of volunteers are not being replaced. There are few individuals from among recent newcomers or even from among the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation of this group interested in carrying forward the organizational and operational activities necessary to maintain most Polish-oriented organizations, facilities, and services, including the *General W. Sikorski Polish Veteran's Hall* that has always operated on strict voluntarist principles. As previously discussed, their goals and objectives as Canadian citizens are greatly removed from the origins of the post-WWII Polish immigrants, and in the case of the *Polish Veteran's* organization, there is the question of

qualification for membership: one must be a veteran. Consequently, to attract newcomers, membership was extended to include anyone who served in the Armed Forces in Poland before coming to Canada.<sup>770</sup>

No recent newcomers were interviewed for this study, but study participants who had involvement in *Polonia* organizational life in Oshawa, when asked what they might think to be some of the reasons for the lack of interest among newcomers, had the following to say:

I think we are...my generation are more Polish than those who came lately. Their generation... patriotism was diluted by the government which they did not support, you know. ...[R]ight now, we have the problem [among] Polish newcomers to get [them] involved into any of organizations... not all of them, just some of them. Because, I think it was patriotic to be anti-government, anti-Polish in Poland... You see, we are agonizing now, I'm over 70. 73. And, what are we going to do? So, we are agonizing... I want to retire and there is no replacement from our generation. And you[r] generation we haven't got any members. I don't know.... What will happen? And, apparently, we are not going to live forever.<sup>771</sup>

It's a sickness for every organization gettin' young people to join and to work. They look at those things different than we did. Like, when we came here and established the families, there were children and the jobs and yet we found time to do those things. Now they look at it [in a] different way. They don't want to be involved because they don't want to be tied down, they want to have free time to go and do whatever they want. They don't care, really, about [the] Polish community. They are... raised under the Communists. It's 'me', first, and then the other things later. With us, it was different. They are more materialistic. They look after the material things first. Nice car. Nice house. You know, TV, VCR, computer. That's their priorities. Not the community work. Because committee work doesn't pay. No money in it. "If you pay me, I'll do it."<sup>772</sup>

Yet, despite their concerns about diminishing membership, no mentorship programs have been established to ease potentially interested newcomers into the organizational infrastructure.

Unlike their bigger-city sisters who indicated they played substantive roles in *Polonia* organizational life, the Oshawa-area women have involved themselves in mostly supportive roles with family life and the maintenance of traditional practices such as *Wigilia* and Easter as their most active role.

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<sup>770</sup> Interview with Jurek (04 September 1998) 51.

<sup>771</sup> Interview with Witold (23 July 1998) 53.

<sup>772</sup> Interview with Jurek (04 September 1998) 52.



Of thirty-eight study participants, only thirteen are women. Of those thirteen, five are linked to the Oshawa area and of those five, one ended the interview after only a few minutes and so little data was collected; of the remaining four, all indicated involvement in St. Hedwig Church Women's Auxiliary, two have been active in the *Polish Alliance*, one of these in Scouting, and one with the *Polish Veteran's Association*. All in supporting roles and not as members of the executive decision-making bodies.

Attempts were made to interview other Oshawa-area women, however, all declined. Consequently, what this study most lacks is a broad-based adequate analysis of the experiences and roles of the female *Sybiraki*. This is a topic needing immediate attention; not only because of the lack evident in this study, nor because there are no other Canadian-based studies which explore specific gendered experience of the women, but more importantly because they, too, are ageing and dying and the moment will soon pass for them to play active roles as participants in such research. Permanently silenced.

The community focused its efforts on maintaining the Polish language, folksongs, dance, and an understanding of the history of the ancestral homeland by enrolling their children in Polish school administered by the Felician nuns and operating out of the church basement, as well in Polish Scouting. I attended all such activities along with my siblings and cousins, though I can't claim to be a successful example of the experience for my tongue remains fairly stunted in Polish language.<sup>773</sup>

And despite intense cultural activity, few among the post-WWII Polish immigrants to Canada, including the *Anders Poles* and their children and grandchildren, have emerged on the mainstream Canadian cultural landscape as writers and artists or on the political landscape as decision-makers who might inject *Polishness* into the Canadian narrative. This bears further study. A striking example, unparalleled in the Polish-Canadian community, of the notable success of a WWII displaced person and immigrant who 'made it' in Canada, and who then returned—in

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<sup>773</sup> Research needs to be done measuring the effectiveness of these programs. Radecki identified numbers and locations of such organizations across Canada. Do they still exist? Who participates? How much involvement is there among the 1980s wave?

Cinderella-esque fashion—as a Canadian success story to the homeland, is seen in the 1999 election of former Canadian citizen and Quebec resident, Veira Frieke-Vriebergen as President of Latvia; a nation which shares with Poland aspects of WWII history particularly vis-à-vis Soviet relations.

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And so we return to Henry Radecki and Benedykt Heydenkorn's five typologies in which they frame Canada's *Polonia*: Poles in Canada, Polish Canadian, Canadian Polish, Canadians of Polish background, and Statistical Polish. In which do the *Anders Poles* fit?

It is not a simple matter to casually pigeonhole a population of individuals, however they might be linked. It is easiest to first identify what the *Anders Poles* are not. They are not merely statistically Polish for most clearly identify with the homeland culture, language, with the Polish variety of Roman Catholicism, and with a distinct tie to a historicity that has shaped their way of 'being' Canadian. Nor are they merely Canadians of Polish background for they were born in Poland and there is no question of their roots or of their ethnicity. And they are not what are termed Poles in Canada, whereas many among their parents' generation might be thus described, as they maintained as their persistent frame of reference Poland and Polish culture. And despite many years in Canada, they seldom became fluent in either of the official languages and often managed to live within the *Polonia* community without having to make a concerted effort to otherwise mingle or integrate into mainstream society. They likely experienced cultural and language barriers in their relations with their grandchildren.

There remain two typologies: Polish Canadian and Canadian Polish. Had study participants been interviewed during their early years in Canada—especially in the five or so years before acquiring Canadian citizenship—one would have found their sense of place as "new Canadians" strongly influenced by the memory of the homeland and by their wartime experiences as well fresh with adjustment as they faced in a new environment the challenges associated with cultural modification and exchange. As is evident in their early organizational life in Canada, they were especially motivated to provide opportunities and experiences that Polish culture and

tradition would be preserved for the future, through their children. As we will recall, many initially considered Canada a temporary refuge until they could return to a free Poland, thus they straddled two worlds; making a living in one while yearning for the ancestral homeland. Therefore, within the scope of the transition period they would be described as Polish Canadians.

We are then left with the typology Canadian Polish. And here we are, more than fifty years after their arrival in Canada, exploring through memory questions of identity and citizenship. None, despite occasional visits to Poland, have any desire to permanently return to Poland. This sentiment can be traced to the time they began to 'feel' Canadian and had accepted Canada as their permanent home and worthy of their first allegiance. For some, this occurred the moment they arrived. For others, on such notable occasions as setting up home after marrying, participation in the citizenship ceremony, or the first time they exercised the franchise. As for participation in Canadian life, this they do primarily through Polonia organizations, through their labour in the workforce, and through their family life, but seldom through active participation in non-Polish organizational life. Only a few, for instance, have actively participated in such aspects of Canadian life as political organization, or mainstream charitable work.

The *Anders Poles* have maintained in Canada a clear awareness of their ethnic and national roots; they maintain particular symbolic aspects of Polish culture and emotional ties to all *Polonia*, as well speak the mother tongue daily. But their *Polishness*, while an important element of who they are, of where they came from, and of what motivates them as Canadian citizens does not override the gratitude and loyalty they feel toward Canada, the country that took them in after the war and that has become home to them, and to their families.

And what do the *Anders Poles* have to say on their own account, outside a theoretical framework? Most reject identification as hyphenated Canadians. Rather, they simply state, "I am Canadian."

### Summary

[!]t seems now like it was a dream. I don't even remember all the details.... I remember, of course, all the beautiful tradition... what traditions and

customs I do keep and teach my children and now my grandchildren and so it's more like nostalgic. I'm longing for something that I couldn't really describe to you, you know.... I was taken to Siberia; we were brought up in such patriotic way and such a love of the country, of the soil, all the surround stuff of *Polishness*.... Like *ojcowizna*,<sup>774</sup> there is no translation into English... means your grandparent's home where you went for a holiday, for a vacation, something that had roots to a few generations. And, for me, there is not such a place in the world now.... I have roots, very deep roots in Poland, though I was only thirteen, because of my upbringing, but then I went to so many countries and always changing, always being uprooted and uprooted and uprooted so it's now... I love Canada and I'm very glad that we are here, it's a beautiful country, but my heart is still very, very divided.<sup>775</sup>

The *Anders Poles* who were taken in by Canada after the war made efforts to *become Canadian* but only, as Sarah Van Aken-Rutkowski and, in the American case, Danuta Mostwin have observed, as "transplanted" Poles, burdened with the classic baggage which accompanies the immigrant experience: memory and nostalgia which took hold of their imaginations as they re-invigorated or newly established *Polonia* communities in Canada.

There is no evidence of a desire or even of active attempts to fully withdraw from mainstream Canadian life but there is a demonstrated desire to "fit in," as well to facilitate entry into mainstream society, especially on behalf of their children, through *Polonia* organizational and community life.<sup>776</sup> For instance, some changed their names to Anglo-sounding surnames that they might better fit in; some did not actively discourage their children from entering mainstream Canadian culture and society, including refraining from pressuring their children to marry within the culture. Still, the *Anders Poles* took very much to heart their cultural and spiritual obligations to preserve Polish culture and heritage for the day Poland would be free from Soviet domination. Thus, they retained a distinct version of identity grounded in Polish historicity and reinforced by interwar polonization projects and wartime experiences. For the most part, they snubbed established *Polonia* organizational life and in re-imagining their identities in the new homeland

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<sup>774</sup> *ojcowizna*: a literal translation grounded in the abstract would be "fatherland" or "ancestral homeland"; it can also mean "village".

<sup>775</sup> Interview with Kasia (27 November 1998) 2.

<sup>776</sup> "Historical research shows that, in the past, an ethnic community often was not established in order to withdraw from the new society, but to serve as a material and emotional base from which to enter it." Dirk Hoerder. People on the Move: Migration, Acculturation, and Ethnic Interaction in Europe and North America. (Washington: German Historical Institute, 1993) 44.

they re-defined *Polonia* in Canada within the scope of preserved—transplanted—homeland culture and traditions infused with intense Polish nationalism borne of the interwar era.

However, as Wsevolod Isajiw has put it: “[t]ransplanted things never grow the same... some reconstruction of identity is necessary and begins to take place.... The organizational life of immigrants is usually full of activities never engaged in by the villagers or urban dwellers in their former country.”<sup>777</sup> After all, as study participants acknowledge, their socio-economic status in Canada is higher than it was or even would be today in Poland. And their efforts to Canadianize were concentrated within their interpretation of Canada’s cultural mosaic; that is, the locus of their efforts was maintenance of *Polishness* in an environment that encourages assimilation.

Thus for the *Anders Poles*, maintenance of *Polishness*—borne of the shared mythos of the deportation and exile experience and within the context of the Polish diaspora—shaped their Canadian organizational dynamics as well stalled full assimilation for their generation. What’s more, this particular group of *Polonia* claims to be **more** Polish than Poles born in post-war Soviet-dominated Poland: that is, representative of a kind of cultural freeze-frame. One study participant, Jurek, who has visited Poland six times since 1967 laments how each time he still “feel[s] like a stranger. People... different; different customs; different attitude. Everybody for himself or herself.... The people changed. But then, you have to understand that there was six years under the German oppression; they had to fight for their life... to make a living. Then under Communists, the same thing. Everybody for himself. Now they don’t give a hoot about Poland. There is no patriotism there at all. Just ‘me’.”<sup>778</sup>

Not alone with his views, Jurek not only asserts *Polonia*—Poles abroad—to be “better Poles,” but that there are now more authentic Poles outside Poland than on Polish soil. Again, Jurek’s views are reminiscent of the staunch hold on *Polishness* borne of the interwar era. Yet while the *Anders Poles* might be critical of contemporary Polish cultural and political life that they view to have been poisoned by Soviet Communism, most retain special feelings for the ancestral

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<sup>777</sup> Wsevolod Isajiw. Understanding Diversity, Ethnicity and Race in the Canadian Context. (Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, 1999) 193.

<sup>778</sup> Interview with Jurek (04 September 1998) 43.

homeland.

The Ukrainian diaspora in Canada similarly watched Soviet subjugation of the people of Ukraine until the country gained independence in 1994. At present, academe, politicians and other elites have been aggressively active in making links with the diaspora in North America regarding not only cultural and economic matters, but more importantly in the work of collecting 'history.' A similar effort has been ongoing over the last decade as Polish academics, especially from the Universities in Warsaw and Lublin, periodically travel to Canada to collect *Polonia* artifacts and documents, including material related to the *Anders Poles*. As Wsevolod Isajiw has put it in relation to the Ukrainian diaspora, "[t]he post-war immigrants who have cultivated Ukrainian culture and scholarship may feel vindicated,"<sup>779</sup> so too are the *Anders Poles* excited about the recent and growing interest in their history. Lest they be forgotten.

Lithuanians similarly "saw themselves increasingly bearing the responsibility of maintaining their culture, in case it be annihilated by Soviet policies in the homeland. This role as safeguarders of a threatened culture gave an edge of anguish to the DP's efforts to keep themselves and their families Lithuanian.... The biggest threat to Lithuanian identity was believed to be the marriage... to non-Lithuanians."<sup>780</sup>

And as mentioned, the most unique contemporary example of an ancestral homeland reaping benefits from the diasporic community is found in the 1999 election of a post-war immigrant-cum-Canadian, Veira Frieke-Vriebergen, as President of Latvia, a country similarly linked with Ukraine, Lithuania, and Poland, among others, to a historic moment and to Soviet dominance and oppression. Now, Latvia will benefit from the experience gained during Veria Frieke-Vriebergen's years in Canada—in the democratized West—and also likely from potential economic links.

As documented in the 1971 Census, by which time the children of the post-war Poles had

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<sup>779</sup> Wsevolod W. Isajiw in "The Changing Community" in Lubomyr Luciuk and Stella Hryniuk, eds. *Canada's Ukrainians: Negotiating an Identity*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991) 366.

<sup>780</sup> Milda Danys. *DP Lithuanian Immigration to Canada After the Second World War*. (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1986) 319.

begun to enter the workforce and marry and have children, Poles in Canada were reported to have, alongside Scandinavians, the lowest rate of endogamy<sup>781</sup> thus reflecting a decrease in ethnic cohesion and, ultimately assimilation. Among study participants, despite private feelings of a preference that their children marry a partner of Polish descent, and a Roman Catholic, few imposed their wishes on their children citing compatibility and “happiness” as more relevant factors. They are not really surprised, then, by the diminishment of *Polishness* among their grandchildren. After all, one of their primary goals was to *become Canadian*; this they do through their children and grandchildren.

The obvious, then, needs to be stated and more intensely probed: with the eventual passing of the last among the WWII-era *Sybiraki*, the Polish diaspora of their historic moment will also pass. Consequently, how can subsequent generations and subsequent waves of Polish immigrants from a changed Poland share their particularly distinct version of *Polishness*? How can they share with the *Sybiraki* their distinct goals and objectives within *Polonia* organizational life as created around their historicity and its inherent cultural, political, and social baggage? How can they be expected to share the vision of an imagined new homeland community context when only through the deportation/exile experience and its overarching mythos can all of this be understood and embedded in the psyche, and subsequently diffused through daily life? What would it take for subsequent generations of Poles—for other Canadians, too—to even care? And finally, what of those not included in this study who have ‘removed’ their selves completely from the realm of the Polish diaspora?

Another point made nearly twenty years ago needs also to be re-stated: “Rather than imposing one definition of “Polishness,” their strategy should be to provide a forum for the interchange of cultural models with all versions accorded equal consideration.”<sup>782</sup> After all, it is neither fair nor useful to global *Polonia* for those among Canadian *Polonia* who would wash their

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<sup>781</sup> Karol J. Krotki and Colin Reid, “Demography of Canadian Population by Ethnic Group”, in J.W. Berry and J.A. Laponce. *Ethnicity and Culture in Canada*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 1994) 22.

<sup>782</sup> Jan K. Fedorowicz in “The Future of Polish Organizational Life in Canada” in Frank Renkiewicz, *The Polish Presence in Canada and America*. (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1982) 348.

hands of more recent newcomers simply because their way of being Polish differs, a result of over fifty years' Sovietization. One would think they would retain the memory of what it was like to be a newcomer in Canada and the challenges faced while attempting to integrate not only into mainstream society, but also into existing *Polonia* communities. One would also think they would show more empathy for that which Poles of the Soviet era had no control over and extend a helping hand, rather than criticize and hold fast to personal anti-Soviet feelings. As this study included only one participant who arrived in Canada during the 1980s wave of Polish immigration, it is impossible to articulate the views from the 'receiving end' of the newcomers' experiences with established *Polonia*. Another question for future inquiry.

Some among the *Anders Poles* claim to be **more** Canadian than Canadian-born citing such factors as their appreciation for the freedoms to be had in Canada and a superior 'global citizenship' borne of a greater interest and knowledge of global issues which they suggest is inspired by their many diasporic travels. One source correlates this "pseudouniversal cosmopolitan bravado" to Aihwa Ong's term, *flexible citizenship*; an extension of the diaspora consciousness that is "produced positively through identification with world historical cultural/political forces.... [i]t is also about feeling global."<sup>783</sup> And about living in the new homeland on the margins of mainstream society while making the best of the situation as guests-cum-new-citizens.

Despite the efforts of the post-war Polish immigrants to maintain *Polishness* as a 'way of being' for their families, the children and grandchildren of the *Anders Poles* not only are a Canadian success story vis-à-vis acculturation and assimilation, but most reject active participation in the preservation and maintenance of Polish cultural and institutional life in Canada. And so, study participants lament that their children and grandchildren exhibit vague notions of *Polishness*. Both contrary as well parallel to their efforts to nurture and maintain *Polishness* among their children, they encouraged *Canadianization*—even Anglo-conformity in some

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<sup>783</sup> James Clifford. "Diasporas" in Cultural Anthropology. Vol. 9, No. 3 (August 1994) (Virginia: American Anthropology Association) 312.



instances—that their children might obtain the benefits of Canadian society. However, when asked, study participants were hard-pressed to identify or explain what they might call Canadian culture and/or values. Mary Waters similarly observed among some of her study cohorts that in describing their self-identification with their Irish roots they “stated that it was quite important to them that their ancestors had come from Ireland. But they could not describe any ways in which the Irish were different from other Americans.”<sup>784</sup>

Indeed, the *Anders Poles* have so well assimilated into [white] Canadian society as to be virtually invisible; only through lingering accents and Polish surnames are they ‘exposed’ in public as immigrants. But more particularly, their story is virtually unknown.

Interestingly, most now *think* in English—some even dream in English—unless engaged in Polish conversation that might take place in the home or when in contact with other *Polonia*.

Without exception, family practice of *Wigilia* comes to the fore as the primary manifestation of *Polishness*, even over Polish language conversation with children and grandchildren. As the female head of the household makes all the preparations for *Wigilia*, the maintenance of *Polishness* through the practice of the tradition therefore rests primarily on the shoulders of the women. Even in instances where the female head of the household is not Polish—such as in my family’s case wherein my mother is English-born and raised—she acts as conduit through which family practice of a particular Polish tradition is sustained.

Even more significant than the shared wartime experiences, language and religion contributed to the building of community solidarity, and especially served as a bridge—despite certain tensions—between established *Polonia* and the post-war newcomers. However, the Polish language is virtually lost by the third generation resulting in a lament over communication issues with grandchildren. And while there remain through three generations the practice of certain Polish traditions [e.g. *Wigilia*] grounded in the Roman Catholic faith, the children and grandchildren of the *Anders Poles* are infrequent, if at all, practitioners of the Roman Catholic

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<sup>784</sup> Mary Waters. *Ethnic Options*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) 145.

faith. And despite the creation of a community with the church and several Polish halls as the central gathering places and the locus of cultural and religious activities offered for the children, the children have left the cultural “village” in search of work and/or to establish families elsewhere, perhaps in a suburban neighbourhood reflecting a higher station on the socio-economic ladder. What they might retain of *Polishness* is not reflected in their working lives or in their choice of marriage partners or residential communities. Indeed, some were likely glad to flee the community—the “village” where everyone knows everyone else—and even shed their *Polishness* [can one?]. Mary Waters writes:

...[P]recisely what we crave about community and tradition is also tied to things we don't crave—conformity, lack of change, and rigidity. The maintenance of boundaries around a community involves costs to the individuals inside as well as providing the benefits of nurturance and security. Community seen one way is warm and nurturing; seen another, it is stifling and constricting.<sup>785</sup>

All that remains of the once-vital *Popolowski* neighbourhood in Oshawa, Ontario is an empty convent, a school population virtually devoid of children of immigrants, and a church with an ageing and diminishing parish population also changed by new parishioners whose spirituality is not intimately linked to the historicity that built the structure and the community. The neighbourhood deli and bakery are long gone, and only occasionally might one encounter a couple of old Polish neighbours in conversation over their shared hedge.

*“Dzien Dobry, Pani,” the old fellow shouts over the hedge to Mrs. Polak. She lifts her broom from its task and walks across the driveway to share a proud tale of one of her grandchildren. And so the neighbourly chitchat proceeds, both elders weaving in and out of two languages: Polish and English.*

Other questions arise. How did the village atmosphere affect the children who were undergoing intense assimilation processes in a neighbourhood that was not inhabited exclusively by Polish immigrants—but was inhabited by many post-war immigrants from war-torn Europe—while engaged in socialization practices that often were in conflict with each other? How did it

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<sup>785</sup> Mary Waters. *Ethnic Options*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) 153-154.

affect non-Polish spouses, if at all? And, is there among the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation any evidence of interest in rediscovery of their roots?

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All of this is to note what sociologists have observed: "ethnic identity has a short life in North America."<sup>786</sup> Ethnic identity and the ethnic community are not "thing[s], complete... and unchanging, but... process[es]" which seldom end or reach for any length of time a steady state.<sup>787</sup> Furthermore, the ethnic enclave is not merely a transplanted community for each immigrant brings her or his own idea of what life within mainstream society might be like as well injects into the development of the community her or his vision, borne of individual experiences and influences shaped by such factors as gender and class. In the case of the St. Hedwig parish community in Oshawa, Polish immigrants did not exclusively inhabit the ethnic enclave, and so there likely were neighbourhood issues and concerns that were unrelated to a dominant ethnic group; one that no longer dominates 50 years after its establishment. And although there were high rates of endogamy among the post-war Polish immigrants to Canada, including those who made Oshawa their home, there were some instances of exogamy. How was life within the Polish community, as an ethnic outsider, for these marriage partners and for their children who would be considered *half na Pół*: half-and-half?

Furthermore, Polish ethnic identity is diminished within one generation, and virtually completely diluted in the next. Despite all of the best intentions and the concentrated efforts expended to preserve Polish culture, patriotism and religiosity among the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation born to Polish immigrants—and despite all that came with them of their travels and travails all interwoven within the experiential fabric of *Polishness*—all that study participants see remaining in their grandchildren are occasional sentimental gestures toward select traditional practices, without full comprehension of their meaning, and minimal attachment to the cultural memory or even to a degree of nostalgia of what it has meant to be—to fight for, to die for—Polish.

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<sup>786</sup> Richard Teleky. *Hungarian Rhapsodies*. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997) 166.

<sup>787</sup> Kathleen Neils Conzen, et al. "The Invention of Ethnicity: A Perspective from the U.S.A." in *Journal of American Ethnic History*. (Fall, 1992) 17.

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*Your children are prospering  
and you have dozens of great grandchildren.  
Since you died we have acquired new one-way streets  
and another stoplight.  
And they're finally going to pave your street.  
And according to the papers  
Poland is still there*<sup>788</sup>

Poland is still there. In looking back on his years in Canada, seventy-eight year old Feliks, a Polish veteran who survived exile in a Soviet labour camp and fought in Italy, wryly comments: "I give 38 years work. Canada...I build. I am a Canadian and I am going [to] die here."<sup>789</sup>

In Canadian soil, the wandering Poles will be permanently transplanted.

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<sup>788</sup> John Calvin Rezmierski, qtd. by Danuta Mostwin in "Polish Youth in the West: a Preliminary Reconnaissance", in Frank Renkiewicz. The Polish Presence in Canada and America. (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1982) 384.

<sup>789</sup> Interview with Feliks (28 November 1998) 33.

## Chapter 8 – FINALE

### DISPLACEMENT and EMBLEMMENT Polish Survivors of Deportation and Exile in Soviet Labour Camps Post-WWII Immigrants to Canada

*"The personal goal of most Canadians has been freedom and some security for their family. That caused the settlement of new regions, caused the immigration of new citizens, caused the transplanting of old roots to new ground."<sup>790</sup>*

#### Fin de Siecle

There is a simple structure located on the grounds of Brock University in St. Catharines, Ontario. A suitcase stands alone next to railway ties. The railway ties lead to a small building which houses a sink. Installed in 1997 by UnterbezirksDada, the artists' statement inscribed in bronze reads, in part:

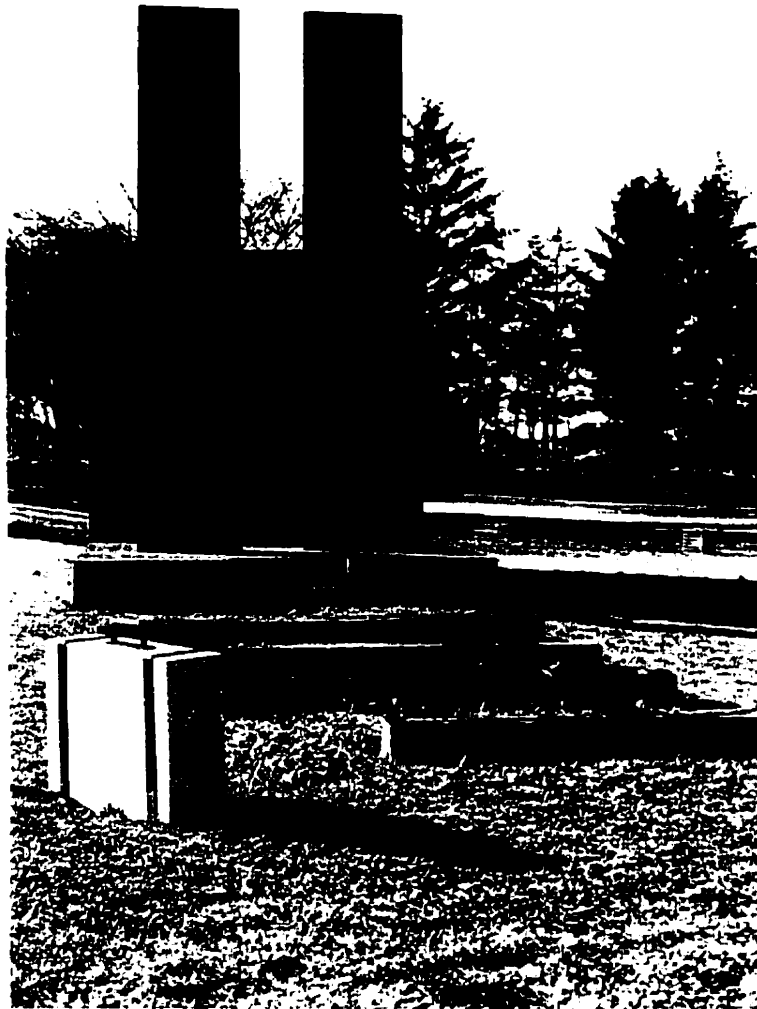


Fig. 36 – *Fin de Siecle* – UnterbezirksDada - Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario.<sup>791</sup>

*Fin de Siecle*... addresses the situation at the end of the Twentieth Century. It takes aim at associations, at options which are preoccupied

<sup>790</sup> Joe Clark, in "Community of Communities," in Building a Nation: The Empire Club of Canada Addresses, 1978-1979, qtd. in Desmond Morton and Morton Weinfeld, Who Speaks for Canada? (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1998) 268

<sup>791</sup> From archives of Helen Bajorek MacDonald; November 1999.

with the great themes of our century: forced removal of people, suppression, deportation, flight, killing, survival, illness, arrival, religious rituals, rites, hidden esoterics or other secrets are also addressed, established ritual traditions such as "I wash my hands in innocence" are symbolized in the altar-like wash basin. *Fin de Siecle* states its case and calls the observer to action.

This study began with the questions of a curious child. One who could not comprehend family silences related to one of the most "pivotal events" of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: the Second World War. It received its final thrust into scholarly inquiry with the death of that child's grandmother. My grandmother: *Wiktoria Rosalia Kotowicz Bajorek*.

My own ignorance, even as a child of post-war Polish—*Sybiraki*—immigrants to Canada mirrors a larger societal, historical and academic ignorance and silence around the topic. As I attempted to make some sense out of my father's and grandmother's life experiences, I came to learn there existed a wide gap in historiographical discourse around the 'story' which, for a variety of reasons, has been virtually absent in the many-faceted telling of WWII history, of Canadian immigration history, and of Polish/*Polonia* history. Has the lack of interest and discourse among writers and scholars been equated by survivors with invalidation of the experience? Yes. Consequently, as the telling of the stories of the *Sybiraki* has been pushed outside the margins of documented experiential historiography, there exists a theoretical diaspora that reinforces the corporeal *Polonia* diaspora.

One historian has written: "*Ethnicity, as identity and as culture, cannot truly exist without history.*"<sup>792</sup> The absence of telling stories, of documenting them, of remembering them, renders them virtually non-existent. And herein lies the imperative for this study. To listen to the stories. To mine archives and other sources for undisclosed details. To document them. To link them to other studies. To ensure they are not lost nor forgotten. To validate them, and to therefore validate the lives of ordinary people who lived through extraordinary events.

*Someone, broom in hand,  
Still remembers how it was.*

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<sup>792</sup> Harold Troper and Morton Weinfeld. Old Wounds: Jews, Ukrainians and the Hunt for Nazi War Criminals in Canada. (Markham: Viking, 1988) xxi.

*Someone else listens, nodding  
His unshattered head.*<sup>793</sup>

The memories and stories exist, the people exist and there is context for their being and for the need to be aware. There exists a history—a powerful story—absent from the telling of the human story: 1.5 million Poles were deported during the opening years of the Second World War to exile in Soviet labour camps and on *kolkhozes*. Thousands made Canada their home after the war, labouring for their freedom, and for most there is a distinct way of 'being' Polish as Canadian and global citizens grounded in historical, socio-political, and spiritual context.

And the story is not simply one of tallying up the numbers of deportees, or of the numbers of deaths or survivals, or of the numbers who fought alongside the Allies, or of the numbers who immigrated to Canada, or more numbers and more permutations of the story. Each story differs. There is the shared common 'starting point'—the deportations—grounded in historic mythos associated with a familiar—familial—trauma dating back to the mid-18<sup>th</sup> Century, but there is not a singular collective experience nor collective memory of experience. Rather, there exists a collection, and this study represents but one chapter among the many that might be collected for insertion into the larger album of discourse. And there remain many other gaps yet to be inserted into the story.

In this final chapter, I briefly review some of the study discussion, tidying up, if you will. I then identify a number of related topics needing further research that the secrets, the silence and the absences might be addressed. For within the scope of my objective to document aspects of the 'story' previously buried in archives or in the memories of the *Sybiraki* and to make available to a wider audience this 'story', I believe it also is my responsibility to consider where gaps remain, and to encourage others to fill them.

Finally, I ask my readers to consider how they might ensure the story is not forgotten. For no one of us who has been introduced to the story can reasonably *wash her/his hands of innocence*. Tell someone. Teach it. Let us shake a few branches. Wake the stories. And

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<sup>793</sup> Wisława Szymborska. "The End and the Beginning" in view with a grain of sand. (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1995) 179.

with broom in hand begin to tidy up, before all living memory falls into permanent silence.

Listen. Let us not permit the moment of remembrance to pass. Let us honour the thirty-eight courageous and generous individuals who consented to tell their stories that they are not forgotten. Let us not forget. Let us take note of the lessons to be learned about the importance of democracy, of the meaning and terms of citizenship, and of the price some pay for freedom.

### Précis

The 1939 invasion of Poland, first by Hitler, then Stalin, was not simply an act of war but represents the first time in human history millions of people [one out of every five Poles, Poland suffering the highest losses of any country during the Second World War]<sup>794</sup> perished under the wrath of two totalitarians. Both Josef Stalin and Adolf Hitler included in their military and social engineering agendas the practice of ethnic cleansing. Both imposed radical social, political, and economic change upon communities, local and national infrastructure, and, ultimately, the future of Poland.

Through the early war years to the June 1941 German invasion of the Soviet Union, approximately 1.5 million Poles were 'arrested' by the Red Army as so-called 'enemies of the state' and without due process of the law, forcibly deported to what they believed would be indefinite toil and strife in Soviet labour camps. While the Red Army was shifting Poles to exile in the Siberian hinterland, another approximate 2.5 million Poles were undergoing similar relocation under German occupation.<sup>795</sup> In part, said relocations of Polish civilians set the stage for post-war population re-distribution and allocation of Poland's frontiers.

In the case of Soviet deportation and exile of ethnic Poles, the practice was more than a matter of putting into action entrenched policies and procedures; it incorporated select mass deportations that date as far back as 1768. There even exists a term that solidifies group identification among Poles: *Sybiraki*. Thus, the forcible deportation of 1.5 million Poles during WWII did not represent but a singular anomalous disruption of the lives of masses of

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<sup>794</sup> Steven Zaloga and Victor Madej. The Polish Campaign, 1939. (NY: Hippocrene Books, Inc., 1985) 160.

<sup>795</sup> Jan T. Gross. Revolution From Abroad. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988) 227.



civilians. It reinforced the collective memory and mythos of the traumatic deportation/exile experience as well bolstered the fervent commitment of *Sybiraki* to maintain their *Polishness* during the exile period, and after. To this day even.

Communication between *Sybiraki* is maintained through various publications and organizations, including the *Związek Sybiraków* [Siberia Organization] established 1918 and which publishes out of Poland a monthly magazine. As well, *Sybiraki* engage as a unified group in political advocacy around such matters as public acknowledgement of their experiences and restitution and compensation for their experiences.

Remembrance through ceremony unites the survivors with their collective memory of the mythos of the trauma of loss and suffering. The year 2000 has been one of remembrance of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the deportations. Throughout North America, *Sybiraki* have organized commemoration ceremonies, masses, and the installation of plaques and monuments that public attention is drawn to the deportations. Lest they be forgotten...

Familiarity with the deportation/exile experience did not, however, reassure. Rather, it bred perpetual fear of deportation, including a fear among many Poles displaced by the war who, after the war, refused to repatriate under [Communist] Soviet domination.

The deportations served multiple practical purposes: depolonization of the eastern provinces, cheap replaceable labour for the extraction of raw materials for Stalin's war effort from the unforgiving and inhospitable nether regions of the Soviet Union and which were much needed in the Soviet war campaign, and an investment in future population and economic growth. Even today, few choose to migrate to work and live in Siberia, and those who do encounter unpleasant working conditions, as well as suffer overwork, underpay and under appreciation.

Living conditions in the Soviet labour camps were horrific. Work injuries, illness, starvation, disease, and death were commonplace. Most families left behind loved ones [60.5% of study participants], including especially, infants such as my grandmother's son, Adam, and the elderly, such as my great-grandmother, Aniela Kotowicz. All were buried unceremoniously. Meager food rations were earned through compulsory labour. *You don't*

*work, you don't eat.* Families found means to supplement their diet; either off the land, or through shared resources, especially of parcels sent from relatives and former neighbours.

Soviet education and propaganda policies and practices were aimed at depolonization, especially of the children, and ultimate Russification. Yet their parents, and others among the exiled Polish community, engaged in strategies to maintain their *Polishness*: the singing of patriotic songs and telling of patriotic stories, and the clandestine practice and observance of religious holidays and ceremonies. The Poles structured their exile communities around ethnic ties, as one large family with the family unit serving as a symbolic microcosm of the Polish nation. Within the communities, women played the most vital traditional roles as keepers and teachers of cultural and spiritual heritage through observance of distinct Polish Roman Catholic traditions and reinforcing, inasmuch as possible, loyalty to the ancestral homeland.<sup>796</sup>

After Hitler's June 1941 invasion of Russia, a pact between Stalin and General Sikorski, head of the Polish government-in-exile in London, included a protocol that secured the amnesty and release of the Poles from the labour camps that they might augment the Red Army's efforts [with the Allies] to push back and crush Hitler. As it happened, few joined the Red Army; rather, they served under General Władysław Anders, himself also an exiled prisoner-of-war, in the Polish Second Corps which had mobilized in the Middle East.

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Desperate families fled with their men resulting in a protraction of the nightmare of suffering and loss that exemplifies the Polish tragedy. The numbers of fleeing Poles [115,000] and their emaciated condition presented enormous challenges for the British Army that unexpectedly became the guardians of soldiers and civilians alike. Subsequently, a massive international aid infrastructure, unprecedented in wartime conditions and experience, was established to aid the Poles, but not before many lives were lost to various diseases and starvation.

Great Britain, in conjunction with the Polish government-in-exile and Polish Roman

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<sup>796</sup> Katherine R. Jolluck. Gender, Identity and the Polish Experience of War, 1939-1945. (Doctoral Dissertation: Stanford University, 1995) 274.

Catholic Church officials, performed the primary role of training Polish soldiers and establishing the bulk of the aid infrastructure, including, foremost, schools and orphanages for the care and protection of the Polish women, children and the elderly.

Able-bodied Polish men and some women, most of whom were civilians, were recruited for military training or auxiliary services, as well adolescent boys and girls were enrolled in the reserves as *junaks* or *mlodsze ochotniczki*. After training, the Polish soldiers served alongside the Allies in the final chapters of the war, most notably in North Africa and Italy. The civilian population went separate ways to refugee settlements situate primarily in India and British East Africa, though some were sent to Mexico or New Zealand. Twenty-two settlements located throughout British East Africa were home for about 19,000 Poles. There, education, domestic skills and technical training, religious practices and Polish customs, were reintegrated into their lives that they would be prepared for the day when they could return to Poland. their families reunited, to contribute to the rebuilding of the crumbled nation. All efforts cultivated fervent *Polishness*.

At war's end, however, at the conference at *Yalta*, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, American President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Josef Stalin carved up Poland without any consultation with Polish representatives. The borders shifted 150 miles to the west in accordance with Stalin's preferences, and in accordance with Allied strategic restructuring and 'management' of Germany after the war. A Soviet Communist puppet government was installed in Poland. Consequently, many of the Poles, fearing repeat deportation, ignored appeals to their patriotic duty to rebuild the crumbled nation, choosing instead to remain in exile—the Polish *diaspora*. Polish soldiers who fought alongside the Allies in the final chapters of the war especially felt betrayed.

Their forced exile became a longer-term self-imposed form of exile. The Polish *diaspora* sought host countries that would take them in until the time they could return to their ancestral homeland—the remembered and imagined homeland—free from the yoke of Soviet Communism. Some now suggest a type of Polish *diaspora* exists *within* Poland's borders, a result of half a century 'poisoning' by Communism and Sovietization.

The testimony project—interviews with adults, compositions by children—began the moment the fleeing Poles came in contact with Polish authorities in the Middle East—failed to alert ‘the world’ to the Polish tragedy. Even today, survivors are reluctant to discuss their experiences outside the familiar of *Polonia* despite a ‘trend’ in public acknowledgement of war crimes against humanity and of restitution and compensation for them. There exists diminishment, even among *Sybiraki*, of their experiences. Especially when compared to the loss and horror of the Jewish Holocaust.

Some do articulate, however, a need for sympathy, restitution, and/or compensation. But for many who were children at the time of their deportation and exile in Soviet labour camps, they have difficulty articulating with any confidence or sense of ‘worthiness’ a ‘telling’ of their stories.

Among the Polish children who survived there are two clear substantive points: the Polish tragedy—the mythos of the collective memory of repeated trauma—roots them to a fervent commitment to *Polishness*. And, their experiences and the events that shaped them are overwhelmingly ignored by the world. Thus, *Polonia* remains in psychic isolation. Yet Poles have contributed in various ways to nation building projects in their new homelands as well maintained a keen interest in developments in the ancestral homeland. That is, while re-imagining their *Polish* identity in new lands, the memory of “home” held fast to the pre-1939 imag[i]nation.



After the war, some of the *Sybiraki* found their way to Canada through various resettlement schemes. The first group of *Anders Poles* to arrive—4,527 Polish ex-soldiers who committed to two-year agricultural labour contracts through 1946-47—under Britain’s *Polish Resettlement Act* set the precedent for all post-war *bulk labour* movements to Canada. The importation of 100 Polish women in 1947, though they were not *Sybiraki*, by Member of Parliament, Ludger Dionne, for his spinning mill operations set off intense national and international debate but nevertheless similarly laid the experiential foundation for the bulk importation of female labour, primarily in domestic and factory work, in the immediate post-

war years. Both instances fostered a certain level of anti-Polish sentiment among Canadians that lasted until the mid-1960s.

Other identifiable group movements of *Anders Poles* who made Canada their home after the war include 150 orphans sent to Montreal, and the near 900 passengers of the *General H. M. Black* American naval carrier, making for a total of about 5,550 *Anders Poles*. I estimate Canada took in at least 8,000 to 15,000 *Sybiraki*. Overall, male Polish immigrants to Canada in the post-war era outnumbered female, once source citing by a ratio of 3:1.<sup>797</sup> The male:female ratio of the small sample of thirty-eight individuals who participated in this study was 2:1.

For its part, the response of Canadian government officials to global circumstances of the post-war years resulted in piecemeal "catch-as-you-can" immigration policy designed to meet economic needs: labour and market; workers and breeders. Selection criteria were founded on historic ethnic and gender stereotypes and prejudices.

From among those persons displaced by the war, whether *Anders Poles* or otherwise, Canada sought *bulk labour* to fill gaps in underemployed areas. Men who were suited to heavy agricultural work, mining, lumbering and logging were preferred. Lesser numbers of women were solicited to perform 'traditional' women's work—domestic, textile, some factory work and, ultimately, childbearing.

But it was apparent nobody was considering that the Poles had, since 1939, been living variations of camp life, whether in Soviet labour camps, Army camps, refugee settlement camps, displaced persons camps, or demobilization camps. On their arrival in Canada, they were shipped, distributed, and housed as raw commodity. For the Polish ex-soldiers, camp life included reception at military bases then decampment and shipment to various labour camps on farms or in the frontier mining and forestry camps, including some camps formerly housing German POWs. Among the civilian *Anders Poles* camp life in Canada began in DP camps such as that located at the former DIL munitions factory in Ajax, Ontario, and otherwise termed by government officials as reception and distribution centres.

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<sup>797</sup> Henry Radecki. Ethnic Organizational Dynamics. (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1979) 36.

Some were assigned jobs as members of work crews on the railroad or in the forests or mines where they lived the camp life of such workers. In all instances where they lived and worked as individuals on a farm, they continued to live a less structured version of camp life for they were but worker-lodgers, subject to house rules and contractual obligations.

Two ironies stand out. The *Anders Poles* were shipped as cheap labour for Stalin's war production of raw materials in mines, forests, and on *kolkhozes* [collective farms], contributing unwittingly, to the Soviet war effort against Poland. They were exiled to primitive conditions in labour camps located primarily in isolated regions of the Siberian hinterland. Their terms of citizenship were defined by their role as labourers for the state. Further, they—especially the children—were subject to intensive efforts at de-polonization. Stalin termed these Polish 'workers' as "special resettlers".

The conditions for entry into Canada somewhat mirrored the Soviet experience while most willingly accepted both the idea and the terms of the labour contracts as there were few other options available. Only after completion of their labour contracts would the clock begin to tick its way toward the day they could apply for Canadian citizenship. Again, terms of citizenship were defined by their role as labourers for the state, and their welcome by Canada was more intimately tied to economic considerations than to humanitarian charity.

Although interviewees quickly realized they would remain in Canada, having established themselves in the workplace and with their families in their communities, their organizational commitments were primarily fixed on preservation of Polish culture, especially for their children's sake and, more particularly, on efforts to wrench Poland back to its glory days as a free and independent state. But despite their efforts, it becomes quickly apparent that assimilationist pressures impacted their children.

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Despite some negative experiences among the *Anders Poles*—discrimination, abuse, mental health breakdown—gratitude and praise for Canada are strong emotive expressions. As soon as was legally possible, nearly all acquired Canadian citizenship. And though there endures a life-long loyalty and patriotic devotion to the ancestral homeland, Canada quickly

became 'home' to grateful citizenry who believe life in Canada for them and their families is better than it could ever have been had they repatriated to Poland after the war.

Study participants suggest Canada has benefited by importing grateful citizenry who pay their taxes, who don't become a nuisance [e.g. criminals or welfare 'bums'], who produce more workers and consumers, and who conduct themselves as good citizens. Thus, the *Anders Poles* have contributed to Canada in the most ordinary of ways within the context of their *Polishness*. What's more, the *Anders Poles* believe they have honourably fulfilled what they understood to be Canada's expectations of them as citizens.

Although they settled across Canada, most are invisible to mainstream Canadians. Ironically, while the *Anders Poles* made every effort to maintain their *Polishness*, they also committed to the project of ensuring they and their children, especially, became good Canadian citizens in an environment that encourages assimilation.

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The *Anders Poles* who were taken in by Canada after the war made efforts to become Canadian but only as "transplanted" Poles, burdened with the classic baggage which accompanies the immigrant experience: memory and nostalgia which took hold of their imaginations as they re-invigorated and re-defined *Polonia* communities in Canada within the remembered frame of pre-war Poland. Furthermore, the strength of the trauma of deportation and exile provided the experiential force for unifying the group. Thus, for many *Sybiraki*, their be(com)ing Canadian was shaped by historic events, grounded in the mythos of the collective repeat trauma of the forced deportation and exile experience—a trauma of loss and suffering—which crystallized group identity and shaped their organizational dynamics as new Canadians.

There is no evidence of a desire or even of active attempts to fully withdraw from mainstream Canadian life but there is a demonstrated desire to "fit in" to an environment that encourages assimilation. Their efforts to Canadianize were concentrated within their interpretation of Canada's cultural mosaic. That is, the locus was maintenance of a distinct version of identity—*Polishness*—through *Polonia* organizational and community life, while at

the same time developing a variety of strategies, such as anglicizing a surname, to ease the entry of their children into mainstream society.

Many of the newcomers quickly became involved within the established Polish community, having sought it out virtually the moment of arrival, injecting *Polonia* organizational life with vigorous [patriotic] enthusiasm. Their primary objectives were twofold. First, to preserve Polish language and culture with efforts concentrated around child-centred organizations such as Polish Scouting, schools and churches. Second, to garner support for the Polish cause: freedom from Soviet domination. In some instances, however, the chasms in ideology and objectives between the newcomers and established *Polonia* resulted in the newcomers establishing new organizations.

Despite their efforts to maintain *Polishness* as a 'way of being' for their families within *Polonia* communities, the children and grandchildren of the *Anders Poles* not only are a Canadian success story vis-à-vis acculturation and assimilation, most reject active participation in the preservation and maintenance of Polish cultural and institutional life in Canada. The children have left the cultural 'village', or ethnic enclave, and while there remain through three generations the practice of certain Polish traditions [e.g. Wigilia] grounded in the Roman Catholic faith, there is diminishment among the first-born generation of Polish culture, patriotism and religiosity, despite the concentrated efforts of their parents to preserve all that came with them from their travails. By the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation, the Polish language is virtually lost. Cultural and spiritual practices are virtually completely diluted as there remain only occasional sentimental gestures toward select showcase traditional practices, without full comprehension of their meaning and minimal attachment to the cultural memory or even to a degree of nostalgia of what it means to be Polish.

Thus, for the *Anders Poles*, maintenance of *Polishness*—borne of the intense interwar polonization project, of the shared mythos of the deportation and exile experience and, within the context of the Polish diaspora—shaped their Canadian experience as well stalled full assimilation for their generation. Some claim to be **more** Canadian than Canadian-born citing superior 'global citizenship'. What's more, many also claim to be **more**



Polish, and better Poles, than Poles born in post-war Soviet-dominated Poland: that is, representative of a kind of cultural freeze-frame. Some even assert there are now more authentic Poles outside Poland than on Polish soil. Yet while the *Anders Poles* might be critical of contemporary Polish cultural and political life that they view to have been poisoned by Soviet Communism, most retain special feelings for the ancestral homeland.

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With the eventual passing of the last among the WWII-era *Sybiraki*, the Polish diaspora of their historic moment will also pass. How, then, can subsequent generations and subsequent waves of Polish immigrants from a changed Poland share their particularly distinct version of *Polishness*? How can they share with the *Sybiraki* their distinct goals and objectives within *Polonia* organizational life especially as they are linked to a particular historic moment, its inherent cultural, political, and social baggage, and to an overarching mythos? How, indeed, could all of it be understood and embedded in the psyche, and subsequently diffused through daily life, unless one had personal experience and context? And, finally, does it matter?

Hovering in the present is the matter of the relationship between post-war *Polonia* in Canada and newcomers of the 1980s wave. Too many from the established community would easily and quickly wash their hands of more recent newcomers simply because their way of being Polish differs, a result of over fifty years of Sovietization.

In the case of the once-vital *Polonia* community of St. Hedwig Polish Roman Catholic parish in Oshawa, Ontario, all that remains is an empty convent, a school population virtually devoid of children of immigrants, and a church with an ageing and diminishing parish population also changed by new parishioners whose spirituality is not intimately linked to the historicity that built the structure and the community. The neighbourhood deli and bakery are long gone, and only occasionally might one encounter a couple of old Polish neighbours in conversation.

And so, fifty years after its establishment, the Polish element of the community no longer dominates. Thus, the short life of the ethnic enclave mirrors the short life of ethnic

identity in North America.

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*Someone, broom in hand,  
Still remembers how it was.  
Someone else listens, nodding  
His unshattered head.<sup>798</sup>*

Awake! Shake the memories from your branches. Tell us how it was. We will listen.

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<sup>798</sup> Wisława Szymborska. "The End and the Beginning" in view with a grain of sand. (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1995) 179.

## THIRTY-FIVE RECOMMENDED TOPICS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

- Translation from Polish language to English language existing text on the topics of the *Sybiraki* and *Polonia*.
- The establishment of a “testimony library” before the moment of remembrance has completely passed; audio and video taping of narratives of *Sybiraki* would better serve a larger research community if produced in English language.
- Broad-based adequate analysis and discussion of the experiences and roles of the female *Sybiraki*.
- Comparative consideration of Poles and Jews either deported or migrated to Soviet Russia during WWII and their eventual immigration to Canada.
- Comparative consideration of *Sybiraki* with other ethnic groups who suffered similar deportation/exile experiences either during WWII or during other historical periods: Belorussians, Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Jews, Chechens and others.
- A broad survey within the context of memory theory: *collective memory, repressed memory, traumatic memory, etc.*, especially in relation to existing discourse on Holocaust testimonials.
- Scholarly analysis of the volumes of memoir literature.
- Post-colonial theoretical consideration of parallels between *Sybiraki* and indigenous peoples such as First Nations peoples in Canada and long-term consequences of: oppression of language, spiritual and traditional cultural practices, intense programs of assimilation, etc.
- Analysis of sexual relations and biological functions during the period of Soviet exile; for instance, performance dysfunction, menstrual cycles, childbearing.
- Analysis of parent/child relationships especially in the context of *Polishness*.

- Impacts on families of loss of family members; i.e. how, if at all, did loss impact survivors, and ultimately their children/grandchildren?
- Analysis of mental illness and breakdowns including an investigation of potential links to the deportation/exile experience and/or experiences of culture shock in new homelands.
- Consideration of aid infrastructure established for the *Sybiraki* through 1941 to 1950.
- Exploration of the foundations on which the Second Republic was reconstituted and re-imagined during the interwar period after 123 years partitions, including consideration of the interwar nationalism and polonization project; that is, how was *Polishness* instituted?
- Exploration of questions vis-à-vis Polish nationalism during 123 years partitions; a period of intense European nationalism.
- Comprehensive study of the Polish diaspora. Potential themes include: a Polish diaspora consciousness; that is, "What is *Polonia* today?"; assimilation rates of *Polonia* in various countries; aid and advocacy work of *Polonia* on behalf of the ancestral homeland, and effectiveness in advancing and/or securing Poland's break from the Soviet Union; and, the Polish diaspora in the context of variations between *bread migrations*, post-WWII, and Solidarity-era dispersals, as well in comparison with other diasporas such as *Desh Pardesh*.
- A detailed discussion of living conditions, activities, etc. of the Poles settled throughout British East Africa, and subsequent dispersal after the war. Where did they go? By what means? How many remained? Did they remain in ethnic enclaves? Retain *Polishness*?
- Comparative consideration of the conditions under which *Sybiraki* found refuge in new homelands after the war—more than 20!—and work, family, and community life in the new homelands.
- Exploration of the experiences and outcomes of the distinct parallel group movements of orphans to such countries as Canada [Montreal], Mexico [Santa Rosa] and New Zealand [Pahiatua] including a consideration of those who were repatriated to Poland. Questions for consideration could include: assimilation rates; retention of *Polishness*; family reunification; etc.

- Analysis of “who” is currently doing the research, and why. Is it, as I hypothesize, children/grandchildren of *Sybiraki* thus remaining within the *Polonia* community, or has the ‘story’ piqued the curiosity of the larger academic community?
- Biographical documentation of the diplomatic roles played in the drama of the *Sybiraki*, including discussion of their roles in facilitating the immigration to Canada of Poles in the post-war period as well their contributions to *Polonia* in Canada and to Canadian life, by two notable figures: Wiktor Podoski and Tadeusz Romer. Papers are housed in the manuscript section of the *National Archives of Canada*.
- Broad survey and historiographical analysis of the Oshawa Polish community which might include: labour and class issues; gender relations; community participation and institutional life, including church, convent, schools, community halls, ‘neighbourhood’; relations between established *Polonia* and each wave of newcomers and between other ethnic communities; history of *Polonia* in Oshawa, etc. The same could be done with *Polonia* communities in other North American cities and in many others where the Poles settled worldwide.
- In-depth consideration of the *Dionne girls*: Whatever happened to them?
- Exploration of the Canadian experiences among the older generation; the parents of study participants.
- DIL Industries in Ajax, Ontario: from munitions plant to DP reception/distribution centre.
- Comparative consideration of Communist and Capitalist systems vis-à-vis use of “free” or “contract” labour.
- Intra-generational relations between *Sybiraki* and their children and grandchildren, with special consideration of *Polishness* in relation to *Canadianness* [particularly vis-à-vis assimilationist pressures and patchy resistance]: in the context of religious practices, cultural traditions and whether there is cultural displacement; relation to *Polonia*, including organizational life, if any; exploration of questions of *Polishness*, such as language/cultural retention and endogamy/exogamy rates, among the children and

grandchildren of the *Anders Poles*. Is there any evidence of renewed interest in 'discovering their roots'?

- Exploration of the cultural traditions and practices preserved by Poles and the rationale for choosing to retain some over others, and the degrees of retention. For instance, is the meaning of *Wigilia* fully comprehended among subsequent generations, or is it merely a diluted tradition practiced in idiosyncratic fashion by a family?
- Exploration of questions of *Polishness*, such as language retention and endogamy/exogamy rates, among the children and grandchildren of the *Anders Poles*
- Consideration of questions related to exogamous marriages: What was life like within a Polish community, as an ethnic outsider, for those marriage partners and for their children who would be considered *half na Pół*. half-and-half? Did they participate in Polish cultural activity, learn the language, or did families enjoy variations in cultural practices/traditions, or fully assimilate?
- Comprehensive analysis, documentation and comparative consideration of settlement patterns of Poles in Canada whether *Kaszubs* in Barry's Bay, Ontario, bread migration of the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, post-war boom, or post-Solidarity wave [1980s] including consideration of rural/urban-industrial variances, relations with other ethnic groups, and potential links to local industry.
- Effectiveness of cultural programs established for children of post-war Polish immigrants: Scouting; cultural heritage programs offered through churches or Polish schools: dance, language, folksongs, history, the arts. How many still exist? How much participation today? If diminished, why?
- Analysis of 1980s wave: contributions to Canadian life; relations with established *Polonia*, etc.
- Analysis of other distinct parallel migrations. For instance, mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century group migration from Poland of *Kaszubs* who settled in Canada [Barry's Bay] with a parallel movement to New Zealand [Otago and Southland]. Topics for exploration include:

language retention/evolution, traditional and cultural heritage retention, assimilation, relations with subsequent Polish migrations, socio-economic evolution, and so on.

- Research on the parallel movements of the *Anders Poles* to Australia and Canada, both colonies of Great Britain and both influenced by British policy and affairs, as a comparative study of immigration, economic, and social analysis vis-à-vis *Polonia* and its contributions to national economic, cultural and social life.

## Appendix 'A'

### Foundations of Inquiry of Polish Immigrants to Canada

THIS QUESTIONNAIRE IS INTENDED AS AN OPEN-ENDED GUIDE WITH ALLOWANCE FOR INTERVIEWEE INPUT...

1. NAME - place of birth; town, country - date of birth  
What did you parents do? How would you describe your childhood in Poland?  
Do you remember fairytales from your childhood?  
Could you tell me something about village characters? a story about your village?
2. Do you remember when you left Poland? Tell me about that day/night...  
how did you leave? who did you leave with? family, etc. why did you leave?  
Why you...why do you think you were deported?
3. Tell me about your journey...where you first went.
  - through the Soviet Union...what was it like on the train? what was it like in the labour camp? what happened to people who were ill? who died? education? work? books/play/entertainment? living accommodation/food? did you get news of the war? of family back in Poland? did you celebrate a birthday/nameday or any religious or other holidays in Siberia? were babies born? did women/girls menstruate? what kinds of survival strategies did your family/other families use; ie., whose knowledge was valuable? did everyone get along?
  - how would you describe your childhood during this period? What kinds of things, if any, did you witness that should be remembered by others?
  - did family roles change? women's? the elderly? they young?
  - where you able to speak Polish?
  - what do you think/feel about Russia? Stalin?Did you ever receive any Red Cross or other relief supplies? Some were sent by Canada to Poles in Siberia in 1941; what do you think of this?
4. Tell me about your journey to/through the Middle East; mode of transport, food, shelter, etc. What do you remember about news of the war? Were there any male members of your family who enlisted at this point?
5. Tell me about your time in India and/or Central/South Africa (in refugee camps).
  - living arrangements/accommodation; food; environment; people; language; religion
  - education; play/entertainment; travelHow would you describe your childhood/adolescence in Africa?
6. When did you leave the refugee camp? Why did you leave? Who made the arrangements? Did you know why Canada 'selected/recruited' you?  
Why did you come to Canada? Did you have other choices? Did you think you might be coming to Canada permanently, or for a time only? Why did others not come?  
What did Canada expect of/from you? - were employable skills a factor? How did you 'prove' your ability?  
Did you have to pay any fees, in Africa, or in Canada, upon arrival?  
\*VETS only: Did you get a pension?



7. Who did you leave with? [i.e.. family members, etc.]
  - Were there any family members who did not come to Canada with you? who? why? If so...did you later sponsor them?
  - Did any family members return to Poland instead? who? why?
  
8. What did you know about Canada?
  - how did you learn about Canada?
  
9. Tell me about your journey to Canada.
  - expectations? - friends? - how long? - scenery? - activity?
  - How many people were on the ship? Do you remember if you picked up any others after you left Mombassa?
  
10. Tell me about your arrival in Canada.
  - first impressions?
  - procedure? how did Immigration treat you? were you fingerprinted?
  - did you know your Canadian destination? could you choose?
  
11. Tell me about your trip to your destination, after landing in Canada.
  - what was your destination? did this change? why? why not?
  - What were your impressions of the DP camp? of Canadians? of the area? of gov't officials?
  
12. How many family members arrived in Canada with you? relationship? inter-generational propinquity? any friction or conflict experienced among family members?
  
13. What work did you do when you first arrived? where? how long?
  - Where did you live? describe the place...
  - What were your impressions of the people you worked for?
  - Did you get a certificate of release [papers] from your contract?
  - What, if any, other kinds of work have you done since?
  
14. How did Canadians treat you? Do you feel Canada took advantage of you?
  
15. Did you experience prejudice/discrimination?
  - from whom? people and/or institutions?
  - When I say 'DP', what does this mean...?
  - Have you experienced feelings of depression in your life? If so, how did/do you deal with them? Do you think your experiences affect your mental/emotional/physical/spiritual health?
  
16. Did you get your Canadian Citizenship? when? tell me about the ceremony. did you take classes? how did you feel?

17. What education did you get in Poland? Did you take any kinds of classes or lessons in Canada? [e.g.. music, language, high school/college, apprenticeship]
18. What has Canada offered you?
19. What have you offered Canada?
20. Have you ever wanted to go back to Poland? Africa? India? Russia? why? why not? Do you think you've recovered from your experiences in Siberia?
21. What does voting mean to you?  
- do you think your vote counts?
22. Have you ever been politically active? who got you involved? when?
23. Did you marry a fellow Pole? what is the language of your partnership?
24. Do your children/grandchildren speak Polish? Do you live with any?  
- Did your grandparents live near you?
25. What do your children/grandchildren know or do to recognize their Polish heritage/traditions?
26. What does it mean to you/your family to speak Polish? to preserve customs, traditions, values? How do you think the preservation [or non-preservation] of these affect the next generations perceptions of the aged and of aging? What are the 'codes', clues, guides to these....? How would you define 'Polishness'?
27. Have you been involved in Polish organizations/community? English-speaking organizations/community? Do you belong to any seniors organizations? Are any of them Polish? Do you find it easier or more difficult to be Polish in Canada now than when you first arrived? Have you had a happy life?

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**Oshawa Group as Case Study Questions:**

- Which city did you choose to live in after fulfilling your contract? why? what did you know about it?
- Did you choose a particular neighbourhood to live in? why? neighbours? school? stores? church? extra-curricular, e.g.. baseball, swimming, music, etc.? work? community organizations? children?
- How would you describe "community"? Is it different now than when you first arrived?
- What was the first major purchase you made?
- Tell me about your first home...
- If other family members came with you, what did they do for work? where did they live?
- Do you think your children had a happy childhood?
- Do you think your experiences have affected them?

28. Did your family lose property when they left Poland? Who has it now? Do you consider the possibility that your family ought to be compensated for it? If so, by whom? If not, why not? Were you or family members paid a wage in Siberia? If not, do you think you ought to be compensated now?
29. Do you know how many Poles were deported to Siberia? How many came out? Do you think there should be a memorial for those who suffered/died in Siberia? What could we learn from your experience?
30. Have you ever been to a re-union?
31. Did you ever enter one of the Polish Immigrants Memoirs Contests?
32. What language do you 'think' in? In your dreams, what language[s] do the characters speak? Do you ever dream about Siberia?
33. What do you think of multiculturalism? Do you travel? Where do you/would you like to go?
34. Do you have a favourite language?
35. You have had some extraordinary experiences. What can you tell me about the human spirit? about human cruelty? about human kindness? Do you tell people about your experiences? why? why not? who? how do they react?
36. Is there anything you think I have missed? Is there anything you would like to add?

APPENDIX B  
CONSENT and RELEASE  
Polish Immigrants to Canada

I, Helen [Bajorek] MacDonald, currently enrolled in an MA program with the Frost Centre for Canadian Studies at Trent University, am conducting a study of Post-WWII Polish Immigrants to Canada.

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this project. Your participation is very much appreciated. Before we begin the interview, I would like to reassure you that, as a participant, you have several very definite rights:

- i) Your participation in this interview is entirely voluntary;
- ii) You are free to refuse to answer any question at any time;
- iii) You are free to withdraw from the interview at any time;
- iv) Your identity will remain anonymous;
- v) If you have any photographic material or papers which you wish to share with me, I would pay for expense of reproduction and give you appropriate credit for ownership;
- vi) All material will be stored in a secure filing cabinet at my home for about 10 years and, if accepted, will be turned over to an appropriate archival facility for careful long-term care;
- vii) Would you permit me to use the information I collect from our interview for future projects? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ [please initial]
- viii) Do you agree to have your interview recorded by audio? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_
- ix) Do you also agree to have your interview recorded by video? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

I would appreciate if you would sign this form to show that I have read it to you, and that you fully understand its contents.

Name: [please print] \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

## ZGODA I POZWOLENIE

### Polscy Imigranci w Kanadzie.

Ja, Helen [Bajorek] MacDonald, obecnie uczęszczam na uczelnię wyższą, Trent University, gdzie robię pracę magisterską na oddziale, o historii ludności Kanady. Tam też prowadzę badania naukowe o Polakach imigrantach którzy przybyli do Kanady po drugiej Wojnie Światowej.

Dziękuję bardzo za wzięcie udziału w tym projekcie. Jestem bardzo wdzięczna za Pani/ Pana udział i obecność. Zanim zaczniemy wywiad, chciałabym zapewnić i poinformować że jako uczestnik masz prawa:

- i) Twoje uczestnictwo w tym wywiadzie jest dowolne;
- ii) Możesz odmówić odpowiedzi na jakiegokolwiek pytanie;
- iii) W każdej chwili możesz skończyć odpowiadać na pytania;
- iv) Twoje imię i nazwisko jeśli sobie tego życzysz będzie anonimowe;
- v) Jeśli posiadasz zdjęcia lub inne dokumenty które chciałabys/ chciałbys mi pokazać, ja zobowiązuję się że pokryje wszelkie koszty za odbitki i Ty otrzymasz uznanie za nie jako właściciel.
- vi) Wszystkie dokumenty będą przechowywane w bezpiecznym miejscu, u mnie w domu przez następne 10 lat. Jeśli zostaną zaakceptowane, będą oddane do archiwum.
- vii) Czy zgadzasz się na użycie informacji które ja zbiorę z naszego wywiadu, na przyszłe projekty? Tak \_\_\_ Nie \_\_\_ [inicjały]
- viii) Czy zgadzasz się aby nagrać na kasetę magnetofonową twoje wypowiedzi?  
Tak \_\_\_ Nie \_\_\_
- ix) Czy zgadzasz się aby nagrać na kamerę video twoje wypowiedzi?  
Tak \_\_\_ Nie \_\_\_

Proszę bardzo podpisać tę formę jako dowód że przeczytałam ją do Pani/Pana, i że w pełni rozumiesz zawartość tej formy.

Imię i nazwisko [dużymi literami] \_\_\_\_\_ Data: \_\_\_\_\_

Podpis: \_\_\_\_\_

**Adres:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Numer Telefonu:** \_\_\_\_\_

*Dziękuję bardzo, Helen [Bajorek] MacDonald*

1998



# APPENDIX E

## SCHEDULE I

### Undertaking

### Zobowiązanie

#### To the Minister of Labour of Canada

#### Wobec Ministra Pracy w Kanadzie

The undersigned does hereby covenant and agree that in event of being permitted entry into Canada:

Niżej podpisany niniejszem przyrzeka i wyraża swą zgodę, że -wrazie uzyskania zezwolenia na wjazd do Kanady:

1. He will accept farm employment to which he is referred from time to time by your representative, at current wage rates and in accordance with living and working conditions prevailing in the locality of his employment and will continue in such employment for a period of two years.

1. Przyjmie pracę na farmie, do której zostanie każdorazowo skierowany przez swego przedstawiciela, za powszechnie tu przyjętym wynagrodzeniem i zgodnie z warunkami życia i pracy, jakie panują w okręgu, w którym będzie pracował, i że pozostanie na tym stanowisku przez termin dwuletni.

2. For this purpose, he will enter into a contract, in form prescribed by the Minister of Labour, with any farm operator to whom he is referred for employment by your representative.

2. W tym też celu podpisze on kontrakt, zalecony przez Ministra Pracy, z właścicielem farmy, do którego będzie skierowany na robotę przez swego przedstawiciela.

3. He understands that should he fail to observe the terms of this undertaking or of any contract of employment entered into by him as above, to the satisfaction of the Minister of Labour, he may be refused permanent admission to Canada.

3. Że przyjmuje on do wiadomości, iż -w razie niedotrzymania powyższych warunków, lub niezastosowania się do dalszych podpisanych przez siebie kontraktów pracy - Minister Pracy może odmówić zezwolenia Władz Kanadyjskich na jego osiedlenie się w Kanadzie.

Signed at \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_ 1946

Podpisano w \_\_\_\_\_ dnia

in the presence of  
w obecności świadka

Witness \_\_\_\_\_  
podpis świadka

\_\_\_\_\_  
signature of farm worker  
podpis pracownika rolnego

Title \_\_\_\_\_

Rank \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Adres \_\_\_\_\_

#### INFORMATION RE FARM WORKER

#### DANE OSOBISTE PRACOWNIKA ROLNEGO:

Surname \_\_\_\_\_ Christian names \_\_\_\_\_

Nazwisko \_\_\_\_\_ Imię \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_

Data urodzenia \_\_\_\_\_ Wiek \_\_\_\_\_

Place of Birth \_\_\_\_\_

Miejsce urodzenia \_\_\_\_\_

Marital status \_\_\_\_\_

Stan rodzinny \_\_\_\_\_

No. of Dependents \_\_\_\_\_

Ilość osób na utrzymaniu \_\_\_\_\_

Photo of worker \_\_\_\_\_

Fotografia \_\_\_\_\_

Finger prints \_\_\_\_\_

Odciski palców \_\_\_\_\_

#### FORMER SERVICE RECORD

#### PRZEBIEG SŁUŻBY WOJSKOWEJ

| Regt. per<br>No. Pułku | Rank<br>Ranga | Unit<br>Jednostka | Date of enlistment<br>Data zaciągnięcia<br>się do wojska | Date of discharge<br>Data zwolnienia z<br>wojska |
|------------------------|---------------|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
|                        |               |                   |                                                          |                                                  |

Undertaking no. \_\_\_\_\_



APPENDIX F

FARMER'S APPLICATION FOR POLISH VETERAN

TO THE MANAGER NATIONAL EMPLOYMENT OFFICE

Name of Farmer.....

Address.....

Nearest railway station.....located on.....railway.....

Nearest bus stop.....Telephone exchange and no.....

I.....the above named farmer

hereby make application for the services of.....Polish veteran (s) to work on my farm on the understanding that:

1. The minimum period of employment shall be for one year unless the employment is terminated at an earlier date by an authorized representative of the Minister of Labour of Canada.

2. Wages will be paid monthly to the Polish veteran during the period of this employment at the prevailing rate in my community, depending on the worker's experience and ability in agriculture but which will not in any event be less than forty-five dollars per month except in the cases of illness or other special reasons approved by an authorized representative of the Dominion Minister of Labour.

3. Living and working conditions, including board, lodging and hours of work, shall be such as considered satisfactory by an authorized representative of the Dominion Minister of Labour.

I agree to complete a farm labour agreement form containing the above conditions upon receiving advice that this application has been approved and that a Polish veteran will be assigned to me.

Application made at.....on.....day of.....194.....

.....  
WITNESS, NAME

.....  
SIGNATURE

.....  
ADDRESS

N.B. If a longer period of employment than one year is desired this should be stated by you on this form.

IF YOU WISH TO SECURE THE SERVICE OF A POLISH VETERAN, COMPLETE THE ABOVE APPLICATION, TOGETHER WITH A REGULAR FARM LABOUR ORDER FORM AND MAIL OR TAKE THEM TO THE MANAGER OF YOUR LOCAL NATIONAL EMPLOYMENT OFFICE.

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## VITA AUCTORIS

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*Helen Bajorek MacDonald*

I am a 'late starter' in academe. After working a few years as a legal secretary, having received a Diploma in Legal Secretarial Science from Sir Sandford Fleming College in Peterborough, Ontario [1979], I retired to raise a family.

I returned to learning when my eldest child entered kindergarten in 1990. Since that time, my sons, Kyle and Garrett, and I have traveled our own unique paths on the wondrous journey of learning.

After receiving an Honours B.A. [1997] in Canadian Studies, English minor, from Trent University where I was awarded the James G. Wharry Scholarship for Excellence in Canadian Studies, I pursued a B.Ed. through the Trent/Queen's University Concurrent Teacher Education program. I received B.Ed. from Queen's University in 1997 and am certified in Ontario to teach primary/intermediate grades. Occasional teaching work, along with a position as Teaching Assistant in the Canadian Studies and History Departments at Trent University, has provided some economic aid for my expensive hobby: research in pursuit of a Masters Degree at Trent University.

I have presented papers related to my research at a number of conferences, including: Crossing Borders 2000, University of Toronto; New Frontiers in Graduate History Conference, York University; International Institute of Social History Conference 2000, Amsterdam; University of Western Ontario; Brock University; Humanities Research Day, Trent University; and, Oshawa Public Library Polish Culture Month. I have lectured on a variety of topics within the broad scope of Canadian Studies at Ostroh Academy in Ostroh, Ukraine [Spring 2000] and at the Summer Explorations in Canadian Cultures Institute at Trent University [1998, 1999 and 2000].

My writing has been published in a variety of genres and publications including poetry anthologies, refereed journals, newspapers, such as the Toronto Star and magazines. Some examples include: "Once Upon A War Time" in Canadian Woman Studies Journal [Winter 2000], "Grand[M]Other Tongue" in Our Grandmothers, Ourselves [1999], "Mapping Memories: A Journey Between the Generations of Polish Inscription on the Canadian Literary Landscape" in Avancer, the Student Journal for Canadian Studies [1998], and "Mapping Flesh with Stone", a poem about a negative experience of a Polish deportee in a WWII-era Siberian sauna which was awarded a prize in the 1999 Thunder Bay Finnish Canadian Historical Society Writing Competition; to be published in 2001.

I have acted as editor of Avancer, as co-editor of Frost Report [Trent University], as well have written a number of contributions for Frostline, the Trent University graduate student publication.

I am involved in my community in social/environmental activism and have received a number of awards for community service, including a Canada 125 Medal [1992] from His Excellency The Right Honourable Ramon Hnatyshyn.

And I know how to execute a passable 'J' stroke!