




**Jakub Gałęziowski, *Niedopowiedziane biografie.*
Polskie dzieci urodzone z powodu wojny
(Undertold biographies. Polish children born of war),
Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, Warszawa 2022,
pp. 458**

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DOI: 10.26774/wrhm.387

Originally written in Polish, translated by Language Room Agata Wiącek.



It is the 1990s, the civil war in Rwanda and another one in Bosnia and Herzegovina once again clearly showed the world how terrible gender based sexual violence is. Only then was this oldest of war crimes criminalised on the international level. Almost simultaneously, the first study on this topic, concerning Central Eastern Europe (CEE), was written by Ruth Kibelka (Leiserowitz), a monograph about 'wolf children' in western Lithuania, near Klaipėda: *Wolfskinder. Grenzgänger an der Memel* (Wolf children. Cross-border commuters on the Memel) (1996). Since then, researchers have increasingly become interested in the topic, and this includes Jakub Gałęziowski, who conducted pioneering research based on the fate of Polish women and their children.

Gałęziowski's book arose from part of an international project that covered the phenomenon of children born of war (CBOW) from a global perspective. The research was carried out in various places around the world, including Poland for the first time. Gałęziowski, based at universities in Augsburg and Warsaw, wrote his dissertation as part of a so-called *cotutelle*. I have known and followed publications on this subject for years, but the effect of his research exceeded my expectations. Firstly, the author placed his research on a very solid theoretical foundation, realising that he was entering a difficult area concerning the experiences of people burdened with war trauma and post-war denial of their own fate in the name of avoiding rejection by the majority. How difficult these experiences must have been is proven by the fact that 70 years after the war (the project lasted from 2016 to 2021), only a few 'adult' children born of war wanted/were able to share stories about their own lives. The author managed to conduct only (or perhaps 'as many as') 16 narrative interviews, and he explains why the remaining number withdrew during the research in the introduction. When conducting interviews, the author adhered to the principle of ethical research, i.e. he was careful not to deconstruct someone's experiences to relativise them and thus undermine them. In a broader aspect, he was guided by the perspective of symbolic interactionism and some assumptions of sociological grounded theory. The interpretive framework for oral history is proven principles developed by the classics of the genre, mainly Alessandro Portelli (the theoretical perspective, methodology and considerations regarding research ethics are included in the notes at the end of the book).

Thorough use of archival sources from state and church archives as well as queries in the press and published sources is an advantage of this work. An important role was played by private and institutional archival collections, most of which had never been used for research before. In this way, the author also showed his practical interdisciplinarity, i.e. the ability to professionally use sources that usually belong to distinct academic disciplines. Gałęziowski does an excellent job as a historian, sociologist, and anthropologist, with a great psychological sensitivity.

What was the result of such well-founded research? The book consists of an introduction, three extensive chapters, the first two of which constitute a contextual background for the main chapter, the third one, as well as an *excursus* and a methodological note.

The author introduces the reader to the topic by comparing the fate of a Bosnian woman and a Polish woman – the first raped by a Serbian soldier, the second by a Red Army soldier. Although the crimes were almost 50 years apart, the stories told indicate a certain pattern of women's experiences of war and its consequences. Both women gave birth to children conceived as a result of wartime rape, and both then raised them. The author of the book had the opportunity to meet and talk with both daughters. The introduction ends with a reference to Russia's aggression against Ukraine, which resulted in, among others, children being born of this war.

The first chapter shows the scale of the phenomenon, the functioning of 'adult' CBOW and the ways of relating to them in Poland and CEE. The author's critical review of the state of knowledge provides readers with an outstanding introduction to this research field, and the considerations on terminology, although somewhat tedious at times, enable the placing of Polish cases in a broader context.

The second chapter covers the reasons for tabooing the topic and gradual releasing it into public discourse, including in the cultural domain. In all countries where research has been conducted so far, CBOW has been shrouded in silence. In Poland, this silence can be seen in all dimensions: personal, family, social, and state. In family stories and in the national narrative about the Second World War and its consequences, there was no place for CBOW and their mothers, who, according to Gałęziowski, were perceived neither as victims nor as collaborators (either by society or the state). The desire to forget about their existence, resulting from shame, set a pattern for the fate of CBOW in post-war Poland. They turned out to be the proverbial 'elephant in the room,' a problem known to everyone and collectively ignored. Their representation in literature or film has not yet brought a breakthrough in the perception of this group of the Second World War victims and has not included them in the national master narrative. Perhaps Gałęziowski's book will change this trend.

The last chapter, over 160 pages long, shows the fate of Polish children conceived both in relationships with varying degrees of coercion or of consensual nature (which is always questionable in an occupation situation), as well as because of wartime sexual violence. Four different groups of Polish CBOW are discussed, i.e. children born to Polish women whose (alleged) fathers represented the Third Reich or the Soviet Union, or were prisoners of war of various nationalities; the fourth group are the children of Polish female forced labourers and displaced persons (DPs) fathered among others by German farmers and camp guards or Allied soldiers stationed in the occupied Germany and Austria. A number of children from the last group were forcibly brought to Poland as part of the so-called recovery and repatriation campaign, the face of which was Roman Hrabar.

Most of these children ended up in foster families and orphanages, and then all trace of them was lost. Only Gałęziowski has distinguished them from the so-called stolen children, indicating that there were also children born of war.

According to the author of the book, a topic that complements narration of the CBOW phenomenon in Poland is post-war abortions. This little-known and non-existent in the public discourse at the national level (but present in local awareness) campaign to 'help women raped' due to the 'circumstances of the war' conducted by the Polish Red Cross in 1945 on the basis of orders from the Ministry of Justice is reconstructed in detail in the *excursus*.

The author describes how difficult it was to reach his interviewees. The curse of being a 'Stalinec' ('little Stalin') or a 'Hitlerok' ('little Hitler') – as some of the Polish CBOW was contentiously called – left a stigma for life. Often the oral history interviews became a kind of self-therapy. The story of meeting the first research participant, born nowhere else but in... Augsburg, where the author was affiliated, looks like something from a drama. Renata Juras was born there in 1944, and it can be considered that Gałęziowski's research began with her, what at the same time helped Mrs Juras to uncover unknown traces of her own life.

It was extremely important to reach the files of the Mother and Child Homes that were established just after the war. On the one hand, the state made an effort to take care of single mothers and their babies, but on the other hand, childcare practices left much to be desired. Newly discovered materials from extensive survey research from 1947 (conducted by a team of researchers from Łódź under the supervision of Prof. Helena Radlińska) provides an opportunity not only to look at the issue holistically, but also to study individual cases in greater detail.

The case study of the Mother and Child Home in Słupsk is unprecedented. Emilia Manteuffel from the Polish Institute of Social Service operating in Łódź intended it to be a model centre for others of this type in post-war Poland. Its operation reflects the scale of the care and educational problems, as well as the behaviour of the staff, including the remarkable director of the facility – Aniela Urbanowicz. In the history of this particular institution human attitudes meet authentic altruism with social hypocrisy, which unfortunately also prevails in the attitudes of the Catholic Church and its affiliated institutions in Poland. The paradox remains that, in this very case of the Mother and Child Home in Słupsk a Catholic priest – Jan Zieja – was a founder.

Based on laborious research based on a very good theoretical foundation, Jakub Gałęziowski has written a piece about the individual fates of women and their children in post-war Poland, which are inscribed in the entire system of socio-political transformations. He has given his book the form not so much of an academic work for a degree, but of a story filled with empathy, dynamic, seeking answers to the most difficult moral questions. He achieved this narrative skill also because he did not close himself in the shell of a researcher and was not afraid to reveal his emotionality and sensitivity to the events and fates described. He created a unique work.