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VICTIMS OF RUSSIAN AGGRESSION
– PRELIMINARY FINDINGS ON A HISTORY
OF THE POLISH CHILDREN
OF OUDTSHOORN, SOUTH AFRICA

INTRODUCTION

On the 10th of April 1943 five hundred Polish refugee children, and their caregivers arrived in the Oudtshoorn Children's Home after surviving being deported to Siberia by the Russian NKVD and the subsequent journey out of Siberia. The Polish Government-in-Exile in London as represented in South Africa by the Consul-General, Dr Stanisław Łepkowski, entered into negotiations with the Smuts Government that resulted in an agreement being reached for five hundred Polish children and their caregivers to find safety and refuge in Oudtshoorn. The primary objective of this research project that this paper is based is to document the untold lived experiences of the Oudtshoorn Children.

This project draws some inspiration from Jochen Lingelbach's *On the Edges of Whiteness. Polish Refugees in British Colonial Africa during and after the Second World War*, where he discusses the attitudes of the British African colonial authorities towards the Polish refugees. Lingelbach argues that the Polish refu-

gees' encounters with Africans might have helped to facilitate the downfall of a carefully constructed image of a supposedly white superiority that British colonial rulers and settlers tried so anxiously to keep up (Lingelbach, 2020).

TABLE 1. THE AGES AND NUMBERS OF OUDTSHOORN CHILDREN GIRLS AND BOYS

AGE	NUMBER OF GIRLS	NUMBER OF BOYS	TOTAL
4	1	1	2
5	-	-	-
6	2	2	4
7	-	6	6
8	8	12	20
9	9	5	14
10	11	13	24
11	6	11	17
12	13	35	48
13	16	70	86
14	31	73	104
15	41	67	108
16	27	4	31
17	13	-	13
18	18	-	18
19	4	-	4
20	1	-	1
TOTAL	201	299	500

Source: DPD 1.

There were 59 caregivers, 30 women and 29 men in the Oudtshoorn camp (Jaworski, 1993, pp. 70–71).

This project also draws inspiration from Sally Peberdy's study *Selecting Immigrants. National Identity and South Africa's Immigration Policies 1910–2008*, where she gives an extensive discussion on Indian and Jewish immigrants to South Africa and the legislation enacted, via the 1913 Immigrants Regulation Act, the 1930 Quota Act and the 1937 Aliens Act, to curb and discourage im-

migration by these two groups of people (Peberdy, 2009). The studies by Lingelbach and Peberdy provide the foundation for comparative research on the multidimensional and multifaceted history of the Polish refugees of Oudtshoorn.

RATIONALE FOR THIS PROJECT

The region that Poles were deported from is known as the Kresy (Eastern Borderlands) and was a largely agricultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious region of Poland that amounted to nearly half of the territory of inter-war Poland. During the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth period the Kresy region was the historical and ancestral homeland of the Polish deportees, and the re-emergence and demise of the Kresy after the Second World War is of significance, and nostalgia, to its Polish citizens.

The existing literature, except for the multi-dimensional work of Lingelbach (2020), while largely one-dimensional, demonstrates that research and publications are available on the Polish refugee camps that were established to house these refugees in Uganda, Kenya, Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia, New Zealand, Mexico and India (Skwarko, 1974; Krolikowski, 1983; Dolinska, 1992; Anuradha, 2012; Zarzycki, Buczak-Zarzycka, undated). There is a dearth of scholarly work on the Oudtshoorn refugees.

When the Oudtshoorn Children Home was closed in 1947 approximately half of the children remained in South Africa to start new lives there. Other children were reunited with family members in the Polish refugee camps that were established in the then British colonies of Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika, Northern and Southern Rhodesia. These refugees and other Oudtshoorn Polish refugees started new lives in countries such as Canada, the UK, the USA, Australia, Brazil and Argentina. Approximately six Oudtshoorn Children returned to Poland to be reunited with their family who survived the Second World War. One of the Oudtshoorn boys, Stefan Adamski, made a copy of the list of the Oudtshoorn children sourced from the Hoover Institution Archives (DPD 1). On this copy Adamski made notes alongside those names of the Oudtshoorn children who left South Africa.

Three legacies that the Oudtshoorn Children have left behind were: a monument that was erected in front of the entrance to the military camp, the Polish section in the CP Nel Museum in Oudtshoorn and a copy of the Black Madonna of Częstochowa icon that hangs in the crypt beneath the main altar of Oudtshoorn's Catholic Cathedral. The Black Madonna icon is a venerated icon that is housed in Jasna Góra Monastery, Częstochowa, Poland. Unfortunately, the

monument was demolished to make way for the construction of a dual carriage road. The copy of the Black Madonna icon was presented to the Cathedral in 1993 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the arrival of the Polish Children into Oudtshoorn. Reunions are held in Oudtshoorn on a regular basis and it has become the spiritual home of the Oudtshoorn Children and their descendants. Reunions in Oudtshoorn have been held in 1993, 2003, 2006 and 2013. Another reunion was held in Oudtshoorn during September 2018 to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the arrival of the refugees into Oudtshoorn. During this reunion the South Africa Poland History Project was discussed and consensus reached on the future direction and project themes and activities to be undertaken in this Project. The South Africa Poland History Project has been registered by Dr Cobus Rademeyer as an official project at Sol Plaatje University in Kimberly, South Africa. The stained-glass legacy project was conceived during this reunion. During the reunion of September 2021, the stained-glass legacy project was unveiled and blessed in the Black Madonna chapel by the bishop of the diocese of Oudtshoorn, Bishop Noel Rucastle.

BROAD PROBLEMS AND ISSUES TO BE INVESTIGATED

In 1942 Polish military authorities in the USSR informed the Polish Government in Exile in London of the presence of large numbers of orphaned and/or deported Polish children in Russia. The Polish Government-in-exile acting through its South African Consul General, Dr Stanisław Łepkowski, secured an agreement from the Union Government of South Africa to transport 500 children from Persia to South Africa, which happened in 1943. The Dom Polskich Dzieci (Polish Children's Home) was organised at the military camp in Oudtshoorn for their temporary accommodation, care and education (DPD 2).

Prior to the arrival of the Oudtshoorn Children, preparations were made to accommodate and teach these Polish Children. A Polish priest Fr. Franciszek Kubieński, was tasked with the actual planning and implementation of the Home, to make it as comfortable as possible for the children ahead of their arrival. Included in his tasks was the sourcing of funding to make alterations to the army barracks and to also establish a chapel and a schooling curriculum for the children (DPD 3).

The South Africa Department of Social Welfare also played a supporting role, making its inventory available to the Children's Homes. Included in this inventory were films, books and musical instruments. The Department of Social Welfare undertook regular visits to Oudtshoorn to inspect conditions at the

Home and to make recommendations to increase the comfort levels of the children as well as to ensure the supply of adequate and healthy food. Considering the war conditions, the Oudtshoorn Home provided comfortable accommodation, suitable nourishment, clothing, medical and spiritual care and education. The management of the Home, appointed by the Polish Government-in Exile, was at various stages in the hands of Fr. Kubieński, Mr Tarnowicz and Dr Zygmunt Skowroński (DPD 4).

When the Home was closed in 1947 those children who remained behind in South Africa continued their schooling at a range of South African schools. After schooling, many of the girls found clerical and secretarial work. A group of forty boys were schooled in Pietermaritzburg and many attended the University of Natal and studied Civil and Mechanical Engineering. As professional engineers they designed bridges and buildings including the Sugar Terminal in Durban harbour. Many of the other boys continued their education at trade and apprentice schools, learning for example, carpentry, leatherworking, drafting and fitting and turning, tool and die making. Boys also went to work in the gold mines in Klerksdorp, Carletonville, Stillfontein, Welkom, Johannesburg, Springs and Benoni (Jaworski, 1993).

Joanna Pawelczyk interviewed 15 South African Poles, 14 Siberian Deportees, 10 who were in Oudtshoorn and one each from camps in Lusaka, Palestine, Koja in Uganda, Marandellas in Southern Rhodesia and one Pole was transported to a slave labour camp in Germany. Eight of the subjects are women with seven male subjects. Pawelczyk's project covered the lived experiences of the interviewees during the Second World War and in Siberia and very briefly covered their lived experiences after the war (Pawelczyk, 2011).

Wanda Chunnnett explored the entrepreneurial spirit of three groups of migrants who entered South Africa, namely the Rwandan refugees, the Polish refugees and the Chinese migrants who were entitled to remain in South Africa after the indentured Chinese labourers were repatriated to China. Polish entrepreneurial businesses include bee keeping, engineering consultancy, sweet making, barber and fancy goods dealers, fibreglass manufacturing, precision engineering, construction, steel fabrication, and a tour and safari company (Chunnnett, 2018).

The Oudtshoorn Children established various Polish Associations across South Africa, with the first being established in 1948, the Polish Settlers Association of South Africa. This Association was renamed to the Johannesburg Polish Association. Polish Associations were established in Cape Town, Pretoria,

the Vaal Triangle and in Durban. These Associations assisted Poles in settling in South Africa after escaping from communist Poland as well as assisting those Poles in Poland financially, ideologically and morally ahead of Poland regaining freedom and democracy in 1989. These Associations continue to arrange social gatherings and publish newsletters. The Polish Association of Siberian Deportees in Africa was established in 2006.

The Oudtshoorn Children were classified by the South African government as alien and/or stateless and many sought naturalization and the Government Gazette lists the names to whom certificates of registration and naturalisation were granted in accordance with the provisions of section 39 (d) of the South African Citizenship Act of 1949 (Return of Naturalization, 1959). After Poland regained its freedom in 1989, the opportunity arose for the Oudtshoorn Children to regain their Polish citizenship and with it their Polish passports.

NARRATIVES OF THE DEPORTATIONS WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF POLAND'S NATIONAL NARRATIVE

The first book written on the deportations was initiated by General Sikorski who commissioned Zoe Zajdlerowa to write a book on the deportations and she was given access to the official records of the Polish government-in-exile. For her safety, Zajdlerowa's book was published anonymously in 1946. The book covers the history of the deportations, Polish-Soviet relations until shortly after the end of the Second World War and includes the formation and installation of the communist Lublin Government (Anonymous, 1946). Scholars have devoted attention to the deportations of 1939–1941 and these have been studied in the context of national identity and gender. Jolluck points out that while most of the arrested persons were adult males, the majority of deportees were women and children. She goes on to show that these individuals, in contrast to those incarcerated, were not charged with any crime, but were merely subject to administrative decree (Jolluck, 2001, 2002).

Tadeusz Piotrowski's edited volume of recollections is based on a compilation of first-hand accounts of deportees, men and women, from nearly all the African camps, including an Oudtshoorn girl, Bozena Masojada-Pilacka. This author contends that the displacement affected almost every social group, including workers, artisans, peasants, foresters, soldiers, judges, the clergy, professors, scientists, attorneys, engineers, and teachers along with anyone listed as „anti-Soviet elements” – essentially Poland's middle class. His main focus is on the deportations and lived experiences in Siberia. Piotrowski covers the

evacuations from the Soviet Union to Persia during March to September 1942 of approximately 115 000 people, mostly women of whom 18 300 were children (Piotrowski, 2004).

On reaching Persia, a selection of approximately 2000 of the 18 300 Polish children wrote essays on their experiences of Soviet captivity. These essays are archived in the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, San Francisco. Irena Grudzińska-Gross and Jan Tomasz Gross selected 120 of these essays, reviewed them and published their findings. Common threads running through are, firstly the brutal, oppressive nature of the occupation of the Kresy by Russian soldiers. Secondly, children report the mixture of awe and resentment by the Russian soldiers upon encountering a land of relative material and cultural advancement and sophistication. The third common thread focuses upon the abrupt, brutal, and terrifying ordeal of deportation and resettlement in Siberia. The writers provide graphic descriptions of the incredible suffering and deprivation they faced. The horrific conditions endured were compounded by the open ethnic bias displayed toward the Poles by their captors (Grudzińska-Gross, Gross, 1981).

The history of refugee camps in the British colonies and dominions, as well as in Mexico, has also been subject to scholarly attention, describing the living conditions, schooling, and cultural life in these camps (Wróbel, 2008). Schooling and religious instruction of the children was addressed soon after their arrival in Tehran, Persia and continued when the children arrived at their various refugee camps. The Fundacja Archiwum Fotograficzne Tułaczy (Photographic Archive of Wanderers Foundation) in Warsaw published two books, coffee table styled books with many photographic images, on the various refugee camps. These books describe schools and cultural centres that were established to provide education for the children, the running of these settlements, the schooling curriculum, the scouting movement and its importance for children in exile and the Polish Catholic Church's ministry to the Polish refugees (Kubalska-Sulkiewicz, 1995; Antosiewicz, Kubalska-Sulkiewicz, 2004).

Mary-Ann Sandifort discusses the Polish refugee camp in Abercorn, Northern Rhodesia, now Mbala, Zambia. Her primary sources on Abercorn are found in the Zambian national archives in Lusaka and she discusses the attitude of the British colonial authorities towards the Polish refugees. British colonial authorities viewed the Polish refugees as poor white paupers that could form a threat against the image of the colonialist and against the colonial system (Sandifort, 2015).

EARLY POLISH IMMIGRATION TO SOUTH AFRICA

The history of Poles in South Africa dates to the late 1400's to the Portuguese voyages of discovery to India and the Far East. Arkadiusz Zukowski traces the history of Poles in South Africa to their participating in these Portuguese voyages, their service in the Dutch East India Company and their settling in the Cape Colony (Zukowski, 1992). Mariusz Kowalski has published papers on the early history of Poles in South Africa. The numbers of Poles who settled in the Cape Colony were small compared to Dutch, French or German migrants. Nevertheless, these Poles assimilated into the emerging Boer/Afrikaner families and their influence can be seen by familiar South African surnames such as Roos and Meyer. The descendants of these Polish soldiers became an integral part of the South African society (Kowalski, 2006, 2009, 2012, 2015).

POST TRAUMATIC GROWTH AND SEARCHING FOR LOST FAMILY AND COMMUNITY NARRATIVES

Post traumatic growth (PTG) denotes positive changes that arises because of one's struggle with traumatic experiences. There is a general notion that the more traumatic an event, the more impaired an individual will become, and thus, the more difficulty they will have recuperating. However, contradicting these observations, Amanda Chalupa mentions that from other studies as many as 70% of the people who have been surveyed reported positive aspects of having gone through traumatic experiences, including changes in interpersonal relationships, perception of self, and philosophy of life. Although the idea that negative experiences can stimulate positive changes has not been unfamiliar throughout history, scholars have shifted their interests to measuring positive outcomes of traumatic events with the development of scales that measure positive growth (Chalupa, 2020). Further studies on PTG on Polish war victims, in particular Polish child war victims are now emerging. Unresolved war trauma can help explain impacts on subsequent generations and the need to search for family narratives, particularly in refugee families.

A useful starting point is Małgorzata Głowacka-Grajper's discussion on the sense of a double loss, forcibly being removed from one's ancestral homeland, the Kresy, and the destruction of traces of the former inhabitants. She argues that a relocated community has little chance of surviving if it is detached from its own territory and if it is transferred to a completely different social context. However, caring for a collective memory in such a situation can take place in so-

cial conditions that are conducive where experiences of the past and memories can help reshape one's identity and that of the community. Emotions can be key to understanding the process of transmission of social memory and the connections between a person and a community. Głowacka-Grajper further argues that invoking emotions, remembering them, objectifying them and developing common narratives about the past are tools to building up group solidarity and identity. Encounters with living witnesses of traumatic events provides a range of emotions, a sense of loss, sadness but, significantly, also hope. She emphasizes that these emotions become the starting point for the creation a common bonding memory, mediated by individual narratives, into the history of a nation, objectified and memorialised through organisations (Głowacka-Grajper, 2015).

Many deportees find comfort and hope in their religious beliefs and Jozef Gula discusses the role of religion in the deported Polish community in Siberia, Persia and then the various refugee camps. For many Poles religion was the only safe and firm ground in a world shaken by the cataclysm of war. In Siberia, religion, in the sense of an intimate faith, was the only section of their life inaccessible to their atheist persecutors. Religious symbols such as crucifixes, medals, pictures of the Black Madonna and patron saints were a constant reminder of their previous identity and freedom and a sign of hope for a better future. Prayer had a profound psychological effect. It was a way of escaping from the horrifying conditions of everyday life with its uncertainties, cruelties and corruption. Priests were also deported as a means of victimising and punishing the clergy. An unintended consequence was that, through the clandestine activities of the priests, close familial bonds were established through prayer and religious meetings. Gula argues that not only did religious faith strengthen under the conditions endured by the deportees, but this strengthening was to affirm their stance against communism and atheism (Gula, 1992).

Narratives based on reconstitution, particularly in a new social setting, after rupture, loss and displacement is an area of research where the window of opportunity is rapidly closing with less and less Siberian Deportees being available for interviews. Oudtshoorn second generationer who lives in Canada, Helen MacDonald Bajorek, obtained her primary data from interviewing 38 Siberian Deportees, 13 women and 25 men, including her father, Jan Bajorek. The primary focus of MacDonald's research is to understand the lived experiences of the Poles after arriving in Canada and to understand their relationship and attitudes to Polishness and Canadianess. Study participants expressed their preference that their children marry a partner of Polish descent, and a Roman Cath-

olic, however, few imposed their wishes on their children citing compatibility and happiness as more relevant factors. MacDonald highlights the challenge facing the Canadian Polish diaspora and its maintaining a Polish identity (MacDonald Bajorek, 2001).

Helen Therese Evert, within the skills set of psychiatry, medicine and health sciences discusses the Polish-Australian aged community from a life-span perspective that includes war experiences and their psychological and physical health. Evert pays attention to the factors associated with the longevity of the trauma response. The quantitative component involved the interview of 72 Polish elderly migrants, 38 women, 34 men, across the Melbourne Metropolitan area. The most commonly reported traumatic events were the loss of home and belongings, lack of food and water, bombardment and forced separation from family. Coping strategies mentioned most frequently were the use of religion, talking to family and friends and avoiding any reminders. Thematic analysis revealed that Polish elderly described their accounts of trauma and physical deprivation in the context of individual, familial and community suffering. Survival mechanisms such as acts of defiance, using one's own skills and having hope were described at an individual level. Family was identified as an important survival resource. Community was another resource identified by study participants such as the „acts of kindness by strangers” that often made the difference between life and death. The theme of community and family suffering meant that the individual was not alone in trauma but surrounded by others in a similar situation. Community structures were an important part of the recovery and healing that took place after the war (Evert, 2007).

Amanda Chalupa has published her preliminary findings on her study on the Pahiatua children based on narratives written from memory 60 years after their arrival in New Zealand. Chalupa's preliminary results are based on the analysis of a selection of 29 written narratives, 16 women and 13 men. The method used to analyse the narratives is that of Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI), which identifies and evaluates the five factors of PTGI. Thematic content analysis was done by coding the narratives and identifying words, groups of words, or sentences that fit the PTGI items included in the PTGI. The most positive description that emerges across the narratives is the impact of New Zealand as a receiving society that provided both a social context of welcome and well-being, along with the importance of caregivers. The narratives in this study demonstrate that positive growth may occur despite the experience of a number of traumatic events. Chalupa emphasises the numerous positive

growth factors, even a wide array of them, that emerged in the narratives that were analysed (Chalupa, 2020).

Alexandra Rush explored the lived experiences of Polish survivors of the Second World War and their descendants, and examines the transmission of trauma, loss, and posttraumatic growth across three generations. She defines „resilience” as ‘a phenomenon or process reflecting relatively positive adaptation despite experiences of significant adversity or trauma’ and is considered a superordinate construct, encompassing two dimensions: positive adaptation and adversity. Positive legacies involving resilience can be passed on to descendants as themes of strength and resourcefulness as well as hope, ambition, and determination all of which can positively impact future outcomes. Rush emphasizes that trauma recovery is best served by shifting one’s focus from individual pathology to resilience-building in families and communities. Data for her study was obtained from 13 participants, four female and nine were male, first, second and third generationers. Loss emerged as a central theme across all three generations and presented itself as the essence of trauma. Ambiguous loss or loss which „defies resolution” wove through participants’ narratives and across all three generations. Loss also presented itself as a harsh and abrupt curtailment of survivors’ developmental trajectories, resulting in long-term consequences over their life course. The timing of the war decidedly impacted young Poles who Rush refers to as the „lost generation”. All participants, with the exception of one third generation descendant, felt that the catastrophic losses and suffering experienced by Poles during the Second World War is not recognized nor acknowledged by the general public. Outside of Polish circles, avenues for participants to express their feelings or mourn their losses were limited and they felt they were not part of the larger social conversation (Rush, 2021).

Paul Sendziuk argues that the refugee camps of the Middle East, India and Africa provided a level of security and physical, psychological, and moral rehabilitation that was largely absent from the European Displaced Person camps after the war (Sendziuk, 2016). Antonia Bifulco discusses the links of family narrative to social context and intergenerational impacts of Polish deportees seeking to understand their cultural heritage and identity (Bifulco, 2018). The international system for governing refugees became standardized in the aftermath of the Second World War as the Allied Powers tried to manage people whom the war had displaced. This resulted in the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the United Nations High Commissioner

for Refugees in 1951. Peter Gatrell noting the absence of refugees from mainstream historiography discusses a history of population displacement in the modern world that pays attention to the links between the circumstances, actions and trajectories of refugees through time and space. Gatrell's article draws attention to the refugees' own engagement with history (Gatrell, 2016). Kjartan Selnes and Tatiana Senyushkina edited a publication that compiled a series of papers from east and central Europe, including Russia, based on historical agency and political memory (Selnes, Senyushkina, 2013). Susanne discusses the understanding of present migrations through their historical „making”, comparing present migrations with other past migrations and what can be learnt from these migrations (Lachenicht, 2018).

DISCUSSION

The review of secondary literature post traumatic growth of children and childhood by professionals in the fields of Social Anthropology, Sociology and Psychology should provide the reader with a useful conceptual understanding of the lived experiences of Siberian Deportees having endured of dislocation, rupture, loss and reconstitution later in life. Scholarly research of this nature is yet to be done on the Polish children of Oudtshoorn. Nevertheless, this review does provide insight into an aspect of the lived experiences of the Polish Children of Oudtshoorn in coping with the traumas experienced. It is tragic that with the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 another generation of children, Ukrainian children, are now suffering dislocation, rupture, loss and to endure reconstitution later in their lives. Similar to the Polish children who were deported to Siberia, these Ukrainian children have had their childhood stolen from them.

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OFIARY ROSYJSKIEJ AGRESJI
– WSTĘPNE USTALENIA DOTYCZĄCE
HISTORII POLSKICH DZIECI Z OUDTSHOORN
W REPUBLICIE POŁUDNIOWEJ AFRYKI

STRESZCZENIE

Niniejszy artykuł opiera się na dotychczasowych wynikach badań na temat polskich dzieci z Oudtshoorn w RPA. 10 kwietnia 1943 roku do Domu Dziecka w Oudtshoorn przybyło 500 polskich dzieci-uchodźców i ich opiekunowie, którzy przeżyli deportację na Syberię przez rosyjskie NKWD i późniejszą podróż z Syberii. Polski rząd na uchodźstwie w Londynie, reprezentowany w RPA przez konsula generalnego dr. Stanisława Łepkowskiego, podjął negocjacje z rządem Unii Smutsa, w których wyniku osiągnięto porozumienie w sprawie polskich dzieci i ich opiekunów, aby znaleźć im bezpieczne schronienie w Oudtshoorn. Głównym celem tego projektu badawczego jest udokumentowanie niezliczonych przeżyć dzieci z Oudtshoorn podczas ich deportacji na Syberię, podróży stamtąd do Persji, a następnie do Oudtshoorn oraz ich życia w Afryce Południowej.

Słowa kluczowe: Syberia, zesłańcy, dzieci, Oudtshoorn, RPA