

The Fate of the Siberian Exiles:  
On the methodology of studying ethnic cleansing in the Soviet-occupied Polish lands<sup>1</sup>

In September 1939 Hitler and Stalin jointly invaded Poland. Having conquered the state, both dictators applied terror toward its citizens. The Nazis and the Communists aimed “to completely suppress the political and sociocultural life of the Polish people forever,” according to Tadeusz Piotrowski (p. 1).<sup>2</sup> Members of the elite, Christians in particular, were exterminated (e.g., in Katyn<sup>3</sup> and Palmiry). The population experienced a variety of repressive measures, including deportations.

Tadeusz Piotrowski selected about a score of recollections by Polish Christians to illustrate Stalin’s “ethnic cleansing” campaign in the Eastern Borderlands between 1939 and 1941.<sup>4</sup> Unlike the contemporary Polish accounts available at the Hoover Institution,<sup>5</sup> most of these depositions were written well after the Second World War. Therefore they reveal not only the ghastly Gulag experience of the Polish deportees but also their post-Soviet travails. Many of the authors were children during their ghastly exile to the Soviet Union, which gives their recollections a special twist. Many of them refer to their experience as “the Siberian Gehenna.”

Members of the broadly understood elite were targeted first, for example Mr. Borkowski who had been “chairman of a rural co-operative and commandant of an army [mounted] reserve called Krakus” near Rożyszczce (p. 20). Community leaders of all levels and kinds as well as their families were earmarked for arrest and deportation.

In some instances the arrest of the victims was carried out in a calm and orderly manner. At other times, it was rather brutal and chaotic. “We woke to find our mother opening the door, through which three uniformed NKVD men crowded into the room. Grabbing my father they pushed him into a

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<sup>2</sup> Tadeusz Piotrowski (ed.), *The Polish Deportees of World War II: Recollection of Removal to the Soviet Union and Dispersal Throughout the World* (Jefferson, NC, and London: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> The earliest Communist crimes against the Poles were committed in the course of the September 1939 war and its aftermath, when as many as 10,000 Poles died. Ryszard Szawiński, *Wojna polsko-sowiecka 1939*, 2 vols. (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Antyk, 1997); Czesław Grzelak, Stanisław Jaczyński, and Eugeniusz Kozłowski, eds., *Agresja sowiecka na Polskę w świetle dokumentów: 17 września 1939*, 3 vols. (Warszawa: Bellona, 1994-1996); Czesław K. Grzelak, *Kresy w czerwieni: Agresja Związku Sowieckiego na Polskę w 1939 roku* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, 1998); Adam Sudoł, *Początki sowietyzacji Kresów Wschodnich Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej (jesień 1939 roku): Wybrane problemy polityczne i organizacyjne* (Bydgoszcz and Toruń: Wydawnictwo Uczelniane Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogicznej w Bydgoszczy, 1997). In addition to ca. 22,000 who were shot in the Katyn Forest and elsewhere in spring 1940, about 30,000 prisoners were executed during the Soviet retreat in June and July 1941. See J.K. Zawodny, *Death in the Forest: The Story of the Katyn Forest Massacre* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1988); Wojciech Materski, ed., *Katyn: Documents of Genocide: Documents and Materials from the Soviet Archives Turned Over to Poland on October 14, 1992* (Warszawa: Institute of Political Studies and Polish Academy of Sciences, 1993); Bogdan Musiał, “Konterrevolutionäre Elemente sind zu erscheinen”: *Die Brutalisierung des deutsch-sowjetischen Krieges im Sommer 1941* (Berlin and Munich: Propyläen Verlag, 2000). Earlier estimates, which only considered Poland’s western Ukraine, put the death toll at around 10,000 for the summer of 1941. See *Zbrodnicza ewakuacja więźniów i aresztów NKWD na Kresach Wschodnich II Rzeczypospolitej w czerwcu-lipcu 1941 roku. Materiały z sesji naukowej w 55. rocznicę ewakuacji więźniów NKWD w głąb ZSRR (Łódź, 10 czerwca 1996 roku)* (Warszawa and Łódź: Główna Komisja Badania Zbrodni Przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu – Instytut Pamięci Narodowej i Okręgowa Komisja Badania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu w Łodzi, 1996), 10-11; Krzysztof Popiński, Aleksander Kokurin, and Aleksander Gurianow, *Drogi śmierci: Ewakuacja więźniów sowieckich z Kresów Wschodnich II Rzeczypospolitej w czerwcu i lipcu 1941 roku* (Warszawa: Karta, 1995).

<sup>4</sup> See also Krzysztof Jasiewicz, *Zagłada polskich Kresów* (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Volumen and ISP PAN, 1997); Tomasz Strzembosz, ed., *Studia z dziejów okupacji sowieckiej, 1939-1941: Obywatele polscy na Kresach północno-wschodnich II Rzeczypospolitej pod okupacją sowiecką w latach 1939-1941* (Warszawa: ISP PAN, 1997); Krzysztof Jasiewicz, ed., *Pierwsi po diable: Elity sowieckie w okupowanej Polsce 1939-1941 (Białostoczczyzna, Nowogródzczyzna, Polesie, Wileńszczyzna)* (Warsaw, London, and Paris: PASFT, ISP PAN, Oficyna Wydawnicza „Rytm,” 2002); Krzysztof Jasiewicz, *Lista strat ziemiaństwa polskiego, 1939-1945* (Warszawa: Pomost and Alfa, 1995); S. Kalbarczyk, „Zbrodnie sowieckie na obywatelach polskich w okresie wrzesień 1939 – sierpień 1941: Próba oceny skali zjawiska oraz szacunku strat ludzkich,” *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość: Biuletyn Głównej Komisji Badania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu – Instytut Pamięci Narodowej* nr. 39 (1996): 16-21; S. Kalbarczyk, “Żydzi polscy wśród ofiar sowieckich w latach 1939-1941: Zarys problematyki,” *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość: Biuletyn Głównej Komisji Badania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu – Instytut Pamięci Narodowej* nr. 40 (1997-1998): 173-194.

<sup>5</sup> Some of them have been published in English as Irena Grudzińska-Gross and Jan Tomasz Gross, eds., *War through Children’s Eyes: The Soviet Occupation of Poland and the Deportations, 1939-1941* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1981), which is a shortened version of Jan Tomasz Gross and Irena Grudzińska-Gross, eds., “*W czterdziestym nas matko na Sybir zesłali...*”: *Polska a Rosja, 1939-1942* (London: Aneks, 1983).

chair and placed a bayonet into his mouth demanding that we hand over our weapons," recalled one of the witnesses (p. 17). According to Adela Konradczyńska-Piorkowska, "the Russians burst into my uncle's home and shot him as he opened the door, while his oldest son disappeared without a trace. My aunt and two children were taken to Russia" (p. 26).

Even if usually the actual seizure of the victims was less violent, the shock of arrest and deportation undercut the will to resist at least for some. For Wala Miron Lewicki's grandmother the experience "had crushed her completely. Her world had collapsed." (p. 17) However, others were sustained by nationalism ("Cruelly stolen from the Motherland and home, each of us with a handful of holy earth bade farewell to our beloved country" at p. 25) and family tradition ("I rode with my head held high, almost in triumph, for we were following in the footsteps of our ancestors who had been exiled to Siberia, in chains, for fighting the Russians" at p. 25).

The victims were transported to the Soviet interior in cattle cars. They were underfed and maltreated. Some died. In the first large deportation of February 10, 1940, many children and elderly froze to death.

The Milewskis counted 27 persons in their car (p. 16). Marysia Wilgut Pienta claims that "we were packed in boxcars in groups of fifty" (p. 21), and so did Adela Konradczyńska-Piorkowska. Jerzy Wróblewski remembers 58 passengers in his cattle car, and there were 40 cattle cars for prisoners and three cars for their escort (pp. 27-28). Anita Kozicka Paschwa insists that "in each boxcar there were from 50 to 70 people" (p. 24).

Anna Mineyko recalls that their trip lasted 28 days (p. 26). Urszula Sowińska's journey took 42 days (p. 68). Stefania Buczak-Zarzycka remembers that during 21 days in transit they received 8 pieces of bread and soup every other day (s. 18). According to Tadeusz Pieczko, "by the time we reached the labor camps of Siberia about ten percent of the people had already died," the old and the very young in particular (p. 19).<sup>6</sup> The dead were first stored in a separate flatbed car and then dumped at the next station (pp. 19, 23).

Upon the arrival at their destination, the NKVD guards passed the deportees onto the local militia (p. 28). Then, the prisoners were escorted to the places of their exile. In at least one instance, they were delivered there "on sledges pulled by reindeer" (p. 34).

They were in for another shock upon arrival. At times, they were dumped into a complete wilderness to fend for themselves. In one instance, they were assigned to a kolkhoz built by Ukrainian deportees, victims of the collectivization campaign in the 1930s, most of whom had perished. Usually they were assigned to rural settlements-cum-open labor camps. Even in the milder regions of the USSR the situation left much to be desired: "the living conditions in Kazakhstan were worse than those in an American slum. The lice were as numerous as flies" (p. 58). The deportees lacked food, clothing, and fuel. "Money had no value: everything was bartered for food" (p. 73).

Diseases were rampant and deportee recollections frequently turn to those who died. The survivors wore rags and jostled for food. Waiting for everything in ubiquitous lines was a universal sign of socialism. "Hatred was born in these people as they pushed past one another in those queues to obtain something," according to Sabina Łukasiewicz-Kukla (p. 60). The situation was sometimes exacerbated by the locals resenting the Poles as "Polish lords" and setting dogs on them (p. 73). The specter of the official terror was always palpable to the unfortunates. In addition, the existence of the exiles was punctuated from time to time by non-governmental violence: "One day under the bridge we saw Uzbeks beating a man to death – he allegedly killed and ate their dog. I saw his outstretched hand, grasping the mud and unbelievably swollen. I shivered. What brutality!" (p. 81)

The exiles were immediately put to slave labor. The mother and two children of the Milewski family, for example, were ordered to perform timber work and when the mother objected, "the [Soviet] commandant told me that we had to go, and that he could [sic! couldn't] care less about the children. As far as he was concerned we could all starve to death!" (p. 50).

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<sup>6</sup> This estimate, although oft-repeated, should be treated with caution until more research is done and name lists of victims are compiled. Pieczko himself admits that "I don't think, however, that anyone in our boxcar died." (p. 19)

Some Polish exiles were arrested for various transgressions and punished harshly (p. 44). Urszula Sowińska's was beaten horribly for refusing to denounce her own father (p. 69). A Polish woman who sold her own two pillowcases for two pounds of grain to save her family from starvation was apprehended by a secret policeman:

He grabbed my hat, pulled it from my head, pulled my hair and kicked me with his heavy leather boots, yelling, 'Now if you want to live, tell me the name of this man [buyer] or I will kill you!' At that moment he pressed his gun against my head and kicked me again. I was so scared that I thought it was the end of my life. Not knowing what was going to happen to me at that time I urinated so much on the floor that his shoes got wet from it. Then he jammed the gun into his pocket, pulled my hair again and pushed me with all his might into this urine. He stuffed a dirty rag into my hand and told me to wipe it or lick it, but the floor had to be clean (p. 68)

The victims of the NKVD also included the father of a hapless schoolgirl who mispronounced Stalin's title. A parent of another girl who cracked a mildly anti-Soviet joke was sent to a concentration camp for 6 months. The same fate befell the father of a boy who drew spectacles to Stalin's official portrait and another parent whose daughter dared to paint an angel on the holiday (Christmas) tree at school (pp. 54-55). As a result, many Poles shared the sentiment that their Soviet supervisors, the NKVD men in particular, "are animals, not human beings." (p. 53).

Social interaction with Soviet citizens was complex. It was easier to co-exist with the locals, if the latter also resisted Communism. "Tall, handsome and yellow-skinned, the [Uzbek] people wore eastern clothing and were Islamic. They prayed in rows five times a day and had not Russified their language or culture" (p. 83). The Poles bartered with them.

As far as the Polish children are concerned, they were the principal target of Sovietization. Their teachers frequently informed them that there was no God but Comrade Stalin. Some of the Polish (as well as Jewish and Ukrainian) children, orphans in particular, forgot their mother tongue and spoke Russian (p. 84). At times, parents would lower the age of their children to prevent them from attending school and, thus, saving them from "communist propaganda" (p. 76). Nonetheless, the children endeavored to have as much of a normal life as was possible. They played with Samoyed and Soviet youngsters and went on successful begging trips among the Kazakhs (p. 55, 59). They also frequently cracked jokes and transgressed against the "divinity" of Stalin.

The adults were much more careful but even they refused to compromise on principles. The most important issue for the Poles was their religion. An excerpt from the diary of the Milewski family illustrates the point perfectly:

May 1, 1940 Today is a great communist holiday. They are organizing celebrations and a show in the club.... We are cleaning the house and preparing an altar for May prayers and rosary.

May 3, 1940 Today is our holiday [Polish Constitution Day]. We pray the rosary and have services every day (p. 37)

August 15, 1940 Ascension of the Blessed Virgin. We pray for salvation from this hell. (p. 42)

February 19, 1941... We are overwhelmed by the tremendous goodness of people, which saved our lives. God is good." (p. 47)

Their faith sustained them throughout their ordeal. "The cross is a powerful thing," exclaimed one person upon her arrest (p. 16). Another victim recalls that "People sang religious songs during the journey. It sounded very beautiful because everyone sang to God sincerely, straight from their hearts." (p. 26) They credited their survival to divine intervention: "Much later we learnt that after receiving the letter from Russia the family offered Mass in the cathedral at Lutsk [Łuck] for my Mama's return to health" (p. 61). The exiles made sure that their compatriots had Catholic funerals (p. 57). "I'll never forget burying my sisters, Basia and Ela. My father and brother had to hold the tiny wooden boxes with sticks so they would not turn over because the graves were filled with water. The image of my mother lying across their graves still remains frozen in my heart and mind" (p. 62).

Christian funeral tradition was strictly observed despite the initial Soviet repression. "At first, crosses on grave sites were prohibited, but these always appeared overnight. After a few months the officials turned a blind eye to these" (p. 56). Indeed, sometimes the Soviet supervisors were rather confused: "Our camp director was a strict communist but when his child got sick he asked the Poles to pray for him" (p. 58). Anna Mineyko recalls that

Praying was forbidden. Nonetheless, every evening we said our prayers with children kneeling down, and with feeling. We did not stop even if someone stood behind our backs. An old Kazakh woman asked us if the prayer was to God; she asked whether we realized that she could denounce us. When I said that we did know, she admitted that she, too, had faith and prayed. She was a Muslim.

On another occasion, Kyrillo, our overseer, went away for a few days and his wife, Natasha, gave birth to her third son. Natasha came to us asking if the 'old holy woman' (my mother) would christen her child with the same name as the baby I had left behind in Poland. She said that she believed in God, but her husband did not, and that if he found out he would denounce her to the Party. But, when Kyrillo came home, he came ashamed and cap in hand to ask my mother the same favor, requesting that we should not tell his unbelieving wife! (p. 72)

The deportees sustained themselves by repeating rumors of an imminent German attack on the Soviet Union or other international intervention that would bring freedom to the slaves of the Gulag. And indeed it came about like that: "June 23, 1941, Monday: Happy news and hopes of returning home: War!" (p. 50). The Polish government-in-exile signed an agreement with the Soviets, who were obligated to free all Polish citizens. In Kazakhstan, Wisia Danecka Reginella recalled the happy day when

Some general from the NKVD told us that our situation was different now, that some fellow called Sikorski had signed a treaty with Stalin, whose titles he now recited in full. At this point a solicitor, a Jew from Poland, rose and said: 'I beg your pardon, but that is not some fellow Sikorski, but the Commander-in-Chief and Prime Minister of the Polish Government in London.' The Poles applauded and sang the Polish national anthem. Silence fell. The Russians were speechless. The NKVD men talked among themselves, then the general rose and commenced a speech of apology. A storm was averted (p. 93).

Reluctantly, the Soviet freed some prisoners. Others ran away on their own to join the Polish army that began to form. Most of the deportees remained behind in the Soviet Union, including some Polish children who were kidnapped by the authorities (p. 92). Only about 120,000 Polish citizens (chiefly Polish Christians and Jews), the most fortunate, left for Iran with General Władysław Anders's army. "Although the conditions on board ship were very bad,... we were happy because we were leaving the Soviet hell!" (p. 80). They were uniformly happy to be free. Very few of them were able to look back at the Russians as fellow victims: "The Russian people are the most helpful, honest, and kindest people I have ever met. For it is not easy to be good under those circumstances" (p. 71).

The ordeal of the ex-prisoners was not over. In Iran, thousands of Poles died of malnutrition and disease brought from the Gulag. "Hundreds of people were suffering from dysentery... Everyone was soiled with excrement," recalls an exile (p. 94). The deportees were bathed and clothed. "Our lice-ridden rags were thrown into incinerators which burned continuously for days" (p. 100).

The morale improved immediately. Jane (Janina) Żebrowski-Bulhman remembers the first days: "it all seemed so unreal, like a wonderful dream. We were out of the hands of communists and finally free" (p. 102). Anita Kozicka Paschwa recalls that "when we arrived in Pahlavi we all screamed: 'Freedom, freedom, freedom!'" (p. 102). After the Soviet ordeal, Iran appeared positively paradisaical: "As we traveled by bus from Pahlavi to Tehran I thought that we were passing through the most beautiful place in the world. This must have been the Garden of Eden. The vegetation was lush and green and fruit grew all along the way" (p. 101).

People were searching for their friends and relatives. Many families were reunited, if only briefly, for the men departed with the Polish army. Women, children, and the elderly stayed behind. As soon as they recuperated, the Poles began rebuilding their institutions in exile. "In Tehran, we were able for the first time since leaving Poland to attend religious services" (p. 110). Churches and schools

appeared immediately. Children learned foreign languages and crafts. They also played sports. Further, "scouting played a major role in the lives of the exiles, especially in the difficult period after their exodus from the Soviet Union" (p. 98).

Iran proved to be a by-way station for the Poles. The institutions established there were taken along with the exiles to the next stages of their peregrinations: India, Palestine, Lebanon, Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika, Mexico, South Africa, and New Zealand.

In each of their recollections, the exiles remember church, school, and various games they played, including perpetrating mischief. In Malir, now Pakistan, "we were also busy collecting lizards and red spiders... We'd pick them up and throw them at the girls" (p. 135). In Lusaka, then northern Rhodesia, the Poles played soccer against British soldiers and Italian POWs (p. 166) and in Kasisi they admired a black congregation singing Polish church songs as instructed by Polish missionaries (p. 168). In Bwana M'Kumba, "toward the end of the Mass, a mamba measuring a meter and a half fell out of the tree and landed on the altar. Panic followed" (p. 171).

Almost everywhere the Poles met with the benevolence of the locals and the charity of the Allied personnel: British, Indian, American, and other. The Americans in particular were well liked. The GIs cut the barbed wire and entered the Polish civilian camp illegally to woo girls and shower the children with chewing gum (p. 119). The MPs turned a blind eye to the pranks of Polish kids. In another setting the Polish deportees "received quite a welcome from the American soldiers, many of whom could speak Polish" (p. 198).

As for the locals, according to Ryszard Tyrk, "many Persians understood enough Russian to communicate with us. They were well-wishing, very cordial and presented the Polish youth with sundry delicious tidbits" (p. 104). Upon arriving in Tengeru, Tanganyika, the exiles were welcomed warmly by the natives: "Africans carrying large baskets of oranges offered them to us with the greeting: '*Jumbo, lazungu*' (Hello, white people!)" (p. 150). According to a witness who sojourned in Masindi, Uganda, "after the sad and nightmarish experience in the 'inhuman land,' our time on the dark continent can be said to have been idyllic" (p. 146). In Bwana M'Kumba, "there was close cooperation between the Polish and Negro parishes... The Negroes bring to church all the riches of their culture and temperament" (p. 171). In Oudtshoorn, South Africa, the blacks "very quickly mastered the Polish language and became our translators. Their linguistic capabilities were a source of amazement to us all" (p. 179). In Napieri, New Zealand, "the Maori invited our entire group to their school, which is associated with a monastery, for a snack." (p. 185). In India, "the local community offered a great deal of assistance" to the Poles (p. 126). Hindu physicians endangered themselves to rescue tropical disease-prone Polish; prince Jam Saheb invited a thousand Polish child refugees to his realm and built a settlement for them in Balachadi. A Polonophile, the Maharaja of Jamnagar loved Polish art and literature, including Władysław Reymont. "He will remain in our hearts until the end of our lives as an exceptionally pleasant, kind-hearted, and sincere friend of the Polish children" (p. 130). In Mexico, "the local people showed us a lot of sympathy and, when the occasion presented itself, visited us gladly. Our *Śmingus-dyngus* custom appealed to them the most, and they would participate in it with pleasure, sloshing girls they met with water from head to toe" (p. 202). An orphan who found himself with nuns in Santa Rosa recalled that "looking back, I think that the most memorable and enjoyable time of my life was the time I spent in Mexico. To this day, I love Mexican music. I cannot say the same for their hot food" (p. 197). Thus, the Polish exiles shared their heritage with the locals and, in turn, were invited to partake in the traditions of their hosts.

But the Poles were still were taken aback by some of the local customs. Andrzej Czcibor-Piotrowski says: "I sympathized with the Persian women who, irrespective of age, went about in loose garments and breeches and in wraps that hid the face leaving only one eye exposed" (p. 118). During Ramadan, the Polish children were shocked to see "a group of men, some of whom were naked to the waist, who sang, shouted, and chastised their bodies with whips. We were seized by great fear and made tracks as fast as we could" (p. 120). In Karachi during a visit to a cemetery, "we were told that people brought food for the dead to feed on. We found this to be a strange custom" (p. 134). In New Zealand, a few children also encountered strange customs of another sort. According to Maria van der Linden, "at the age of 16 I was very shy, having led a sheltered life in boarding institutions. I was shocked to learn of the lesbian relationship between two English nurses resident at the nurses' home" (p. 192).

Admittedly, there were also some misunderstandings with the locals. In Tengeru, “the Africans within earshot burst out laughing so hard that some threw their children, baskets of fruit or chickens in the air. Others were supporting themselves, as they almost doubled over with laughter.” The uproarious laugh fest was occasioned by a Polish woman using an innocuous Polish word “kuma,” meaning godmother, which in Swahili is a nasty way to refer to a private part of the female anatomy (pp. 152-53). In Ifunda, the relations between the Poles and the Africans oscillated between mutual suspicion and cordiality. According to Filomena Michałowska-Bykowska,

The blacks were recruited to do the heavy work in the settlement, such as chopping wood for the kitchen, carrying water, and maintaining the grounds in the vicinity of the houses. Initially they looked at us as if we occupied an inferior status position, but after a little while we got to know each other and our daily contacts became rather cordial. Actually the obligatory regimen of the settlement clearly forbade a display of friendship toward the natives, but having gone through the Siberian Gehenna we did not always understand the reason for this prohibition and explained our behavior by our felt need to treat everyone equally no matter [sic matter] what the color of their skin. Moved by pity for the poor black mothers, we gave them our clothing, blankets and some home furnishings as well. We even began to purchase chickens, eggs and fruits from them – an activity that was forbidden. Unfortunately, as they got to know us better they began to covet our own possessions. They simply attacked individual homes during the night and stole everything in sight. I remember such a restless night when three black men with javelins broke into our home.... To be sure, the blacks, spooked by the screams, ran off, but they still managed to take my new shoes and dress (pp. 162-63).

In Jerusalem, Arab children pelted a Polish girl with rocks. She was rescued by a neighbor. “It all ended well with apologies from the father of the children who from that moment became my friends” (p. 122). In Malir, “one of the older girls who had gotten up to use the outdoor bathroom during the night was kidnapped by [Pakistani] cooks working in our camp. Although she was found unharmed, we were no longer allowed to go anywhere alone and always had to watch out for each other,” according to Anita Kozicka Paschwa (p. 135).

All that notwithstanding, conflict with the locals was an exception. Its manifestations were remembered precisely because they broke the monotonous routine of everyday coexistence.

On a personal level, the immediate post-Soviet experience was rather positive. The deportees recuperated and regained their strength both physically and psychologically. On the collective level, the post-Soviet life became increasingly depressing because of the political situation in the world. The whole world of the exiles revolved around their nation. They lived and breathed free Poland. They were patriots through and through.

While watching a documentary about Poland on “Thursday, December 7, 1944,” one of the girls reflected: “These beautiful images brought tears to my eyes. I have already traversed so many lands, but the most beautiful one is our beloved fatherland” (p. 184). At the Polish Children’s Camp of Pahiatua, New Zealand, “the main street was named in honor of General Tadeusz Bór-Komorowski” (p. 182). The deportees kept in touch with the Polish government-in-exile and other Polish institutions. According to Wanda Nowosiad-Ostrowska, “from Abercorn packages were sent on a regular basis to POW camps and help was organized for fighting Warsaw” (p. 173). Then, the news reaching them became increasingly morbid. Jadwiga Morawiecka-Zaborowska recalls that in Tengeru “we listened to the news together... and together we despaired, as for instance when we heard that the Warsaw Uprising had failed” (p. 159). In Morogoro, when they learned about the fall of Warsaw, the Poles sang and wept (p. 164). After Yalta, it was commonly held that “we had been sold out by our Allies. Most of us had relatives or had lost relatives who had been fighting alongside these Allies, relatives who had fled to England to join Polish forces there” (p. 153). Arguably, one of the greatest slaps on the face landed when the Roosevelt Administration refused to let Polish deportee children in. They went to Mexico instead, not even an Allied nation (pp. 194-95).

Nineteen forty-five was a bitter year for the Poles. Poland lost the Second World War. Stalin ruled over their homeland. In Palestine, “some people decided to return to Poland, but we dared not because of my father’s prewar anti-communist activities” (p. 125). In Pahiatua, “an envoy of the Warsaw [Communist] government appeared in the camp. The boys run away from her” (p. 186). In

Tengeru, Tanganyika, the Communist sent emissaries whose orders were to lure the exiles back under Stalin's heel. They met organized opposition:

During the meeting Father Rogiński and his altar boys suddenly appeared on stage dressed in rags and carrying picks and shovels typical of prisoners. Spontaneously people gasped aloud as if in pain. We all reflected on our time in Siberia and some stood up singing 'sto lat' (hundred years) in support of the demonstration the priest was making. Others in the audience produced rotten tomatoes and other missiles forcing the [Communist] representatives to quit (p. 154).

In addition to mistrusting the Communists, most of the deportees had no place to return to because eastern Poland had been incorporated into the USSR. They stayed in the West. As Krystyna Skwarko put it, "we knew that Poland was not free" (p. 190).

So much for the witnesses. The "Introduction" penned by the editor, Tadeusz Piotrowski, provides the reader with very useful background information to these events. His introductory remarks are incisive and thoughtful. However, they require a few qualifying remarks and a methodological elaboration.

The scholar correctly posits the continuity of Soviet terror against ethnic Poles. He dates it from the anti-Polish measures of the 1930s. This is an underestimation. In fact, many Poles in Russia found themselves targeted by the Red Terror immediately after the Bolshevik seizure of power. The statistics of the early victims remain unknown, but many Poles were repressed and shot for their real and alleged crimes that were traced to their ethnic, social, and political backgrounds, including their involvement in the clandestine Polish Military Organization (*Polska Organizacja Wojskowa* – POW). It can be assumed that most victims were members of the Polish intelligentsia, Catholic clergy, and nobility, as well as anyone who actively opposed the Bolsheviks. It can be conservatively estimated that, in addition to 100,000 Polish victims of the Polish-Soviet War of 1920, at least twice as many persons of Polish origin died in Russia during the Revolution, most of them victims of the Communists.<sup>7</sup>

The Stalinist terror of the 1930s was much broader than its earlier Leninist manifestation. Professor Piotrowski lists 10,000 Polish "kulaks" deported from the Soviet Ukraine alone between 1930 and 1933. Altogether, between 1929 and 1936, at least 160,000 ethnic Poles were deported to the Gulag from their ancestral lands in the Ukraine and Belorussia. How many more died of starvation or were shot for opposing collectivization? Robert Conquest estimates that the terror famine and its aftermath resulted in ca. 15 million victims.<sup>8</sup> Since many, if not most, rural Poles in the Soviet Union, including Soviet Belorussia and Ukraine, were petty gentry, they all qualified as "kulaks." Hence, they all must have been repressed; some undoubtedly were shot. Because of their nearly uniform social make-up as descendants of petty gentry and, therefore, "enemies of the people," ethnic Poles must have been over-represented among the victims. Thus, we can guess that perhaps as many as 300,000 of them died either in the western regions of the USSR or in the Gulag.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Norman Davies, *White Eagle, Red Star: The Polish-Soviet War, 1919-20* (London: Orbis Books, Ltd., 1983), 247; Roman Dzwonkowski, *Kościół katolicki w ZSSR, 1917-1939: Zarys historii* (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, 1997), 74-80, 349-352; Wojciech Lizak, *Rozstrzelana Polonia: Polacy w ZSRR, 1917-1939* (Szczecin: Prywatny Instytut Analiz Społecznych, 1990), 35. And see note 6.

<sup>8</sup> Ukrainian scholar Stanislav Kulchytskyi has recently argued that the victim count should be lowered to 3.5 million. Compare Robert Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 306; and Stanislav Kulchytskyi, "How Many of Us Perished in the Holodomor of 1933," *Dzerkalo tyzhnia*, No. 45, 23-29 November 2002 (in: Serhiy Makhun and James Mace, *The Day Weekly Digest* [Kiev], 20 May 2003, at [http://www.artukraine.com/famineart/fam\\_hearing7.htm](http://www.artukraine.com/famineart/fam_hearing7.htm)). See also S.V. Kulchytskyi et al., *Holodomor v Ukraïni 1932-1933 rr. : bibliohrafichnyi pokazhchuk* (Odessa and L'viv: Vyd-vo M.P. Kots', 2001).

<sup>9</sup> Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 485-486; Merle Fainsod, *Smolensk under Soviet Rule* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 276-277; Andrzej Maryański, *Przemiany ludnościowe w ZSRR* (Warszawa and Kraków: Centrum Badań Wschodnich Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego and Wyższa Szkoła Pedagogiczna w Krakowie, 1995), 16-18; Piotr Eberhardt, *Przemiany ludnościowe na Ukrainie XX wieku* (Warszawa: Biblioteka "Obozu," 1994), 59, 67, 77-78, 132, 144; Piotr Eberhardt, *Przemiany narodowościowe na Białorusi* (Warszawa: Editions Spotkania, [1994]), 92; Mikołaj Iwanow, *Pierwszy naród ukarany: Polacy w Związku Radzieckim, 1921-1939* (Warszawa and Wrocław: Polskie Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1991), 372, 377; Janusz M. Kupczak, *Polacy na Ukrainie w latach 1921-1939* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1994), 308; Marek Sobczyński, "Polska autonomia narodowościowa w ZSRR," (in: *Mniejszości polskie i Polonia w ZSSR* (Wrocław, Warszawa, and Kraków: Zakład Narodowy imienia Ossolińskich and Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1992), 53-59.

The second stage of Stalin's onslaught claimed more Polish victims. Tellingly, when the NKVD launched its "Polish operation" in 1937 and 1938, it was ostensibly also aimed against the allegedly ubiquitous "POW." The operation netted 143,810 persons targeted solely because of their ethnic roots. Of these, 111,091 were shot almost immediately.<sup>10</sup> As was customary the families of the "enemies of the people" were usually repressed as well. Thus we can estimate that many – probably at least another 150,000 – were shipped off to the Gulag.

But the victims of the Great Terror included not just ordinary Christian Poles but also Polish-Soviet Communist functionaries. For example, between 1934 and 1939, ethnic Poles disappeared completely from the leadership of the NKVD.<sup>11</sup> In addition, Stalin annihilated the leadership of the Communist Party of Poland (Komunistyczna Partia Polski – KPP) and dissolved that organization in 1938.<sup>12</sup> To sum up, between 1917 and 1939, the Soviets victimized up to one million people of Polish origin, killing an estimated 400,000 of them. It appears that most victims were targeted mainly because of their ethnic roots.

The victim count ballooned during the Second World War and its aftermath (1939-1947). Once again, mass executions, deportations, and the Gulag became the order of the day under the Soviet occupation of eastern Poland from September 1939 through June 1941, and again after January 1944.<sup>13</sup>

As for the statistics of the deportations, Professor Piotrowski calculates that up to 780,000 Polish citizens found themselves in Soviet captivity as prisoners, deportees, and draftees.<sup>14</sup> That figure includes an estimated 400,000 ethnic Poles. The scholar even considers sympathetically the Polish government-in-exile's contemporary estimate of 1.6 million Polish citizens deportees. He questions the recent Polish and Russian revisionist claims that have lowered the number of deportees to about 320,000. (This latter figure pertains to the four large waves of civilian deportees in February, April and June 1940, and May-June 1941.) Nonetheless, Piotrowski cautions that "no one really knows and chances are that no one will ever know the full scale of that Soviet ethnic cleansing campaign" (p. 4). He could be right. His opinion, however, ought to be qualified. We shall not know until there is full access to post-Soviet archives.

During my recent research trip to Russia I discovered documents, suggesting that the scale of deportations between 1939 and 1941 may have been even greater than is now accepted. As early as May 1939, the Soviet government founded the Resettlement Authority with the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR.<sup>15</sup> The purpose of this body was ostensibly to remedy the problem of under-population in the north-eastern regions of the Soviet Union. In reality, the Resettlement Authority busied itself with organizing deportations of the so-called undesirable element. After the Soviet

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<sup>10</sup> Professor Piotrowski relied on Andrzej Paczkowski, "Poland: the 'Enemy Nation'," in Stéphane Courtois et al., *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), 363-393. See also notes 5 and 6.

<sup>11</sup> On July 10, 1934, there were 4 Poles (ex-Christians) in the strict leadership of the NKVD, constituting 4.17% of the top posts; on March 1, 1937, there were 5 (4.5%); on July 1, 1937: 4 (3.54%); on January 1, 1938: 1 (0.78%); and none (0%) on July 1, 1939, January 1, 1940, and February 26, 1941. See N.V. Petrov and K.V. Skorkin, eds., *Kto rukovodzil NKVD: Spravochnik* (Moscow: Zvenia, 1999), 495.

<sup>12</sup> The leaders were all Soviet citizens. Admittedly, however, the leadership was multiethnic, including Poles, Jews, Ukrainians, and others. See Gabriele Simoncini, "Ethnic and Social Diversity in the Membership of the Communist Party of Poland, 1918-1938," Nationalities Papers (Special Issue): Ethnopolitics in Poland, supplement no. 1, vol. 22 (Summer 1994): 55-66; Henryk Cimek, *Komuniści, Polska, Stalin, 1918-1939* (Białystok: Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1990), 106-107.

<sup>13</sup> An estimated 15,000 to 30,000 of the first wave of deportees (5%-10%) died because of executions, diseases, hunger, and maltreatment. About 120,000 Polish citizens (mostly ethnic Poles) were evacuated from the USSR to Iran in 1942. On the other hand, about 100,000 Poles, Silesians, and others were shipped from Poland to the Gulag after 1944. However, according to a secret Soviet report as of August 15, 1946, there were 247,460 "former Polish citizens" in exile in the USSR. See Sekretno, Zametiteliu predsedatelja Soveta Ministrov Soiuza SSR tovarishchu Kosiginu A.N., Dokladnaia zapiska o realizatsii sovetskopol'skogo soglashenia ot 6-20 1945 goda, 4 September 1946, GARF, fond A-327, op. 1, d. 14, l. 26-36. See also [Zoe Zaidler], *The Dark Side of the Moon* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947); Keith Sword, ed., *The Soviet Takeover of the Polish Eastern Provinces, 1939-1941* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991); Jan T. Gross, *Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988); "Zachodnia Białoruś," 17 IX 1939-22 VI 1941, 2 vols. (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Rytm, 2001), in particular vol. 2: *Deportacje Polaków z północno-wschodnich ziem II Rzeczypospolitej, 1940-1941*.

<sup>14</sup> Stalin instituted a military draft, illegally according to international law, in the territories of the Polish state incorporated into the USSR.

<sup>15</sup> The Resettlement Authority had analogous subordinate bodies on the republican, oblast, and krai levels. Among other things, the Resettlement Authority assumed the functions of two Jewish agencies recruiting and settling "toiling Jews" in various "Jewish settlements" in the USSR. The Jewish agencies were "liquidated by the NKVD." See Spravka, I. Karpov, 27 October 1942, Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiyskoi Federatsii [afterward GARF], fond A-327, opis 1, dela 1, lista 45-47.



invasion of Poland and the occupation of her Eastern Borderlands, the jurisdiction and workload of the Resettlement Authority increased.

On October 27, 1942, a senior Soviet official responsible for “evacuees,” reported that

in 1939 a total of about 10,000 households [*khoziaistva*] was resettled. The plan for 1940 initially envisioned resettling 29,500 farmsteads. However, the quota was increased to 105,000 households to be deported to Siberia and north-eastern areas of the Kazakh SSR according to resolution no. 572 of the SNK SSSR [Soviet of People’s Commissars of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics] and the TsK VKP(b) [the Central Committee of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks)] of January 21, 1940, on the ‘Deportation to the Eastern Areas of the USSR.’ Additional resettlement operations, which occurred between regions, affected 142,880 households and, in total, 162,127, including actions that took place within the republics and special operations.

In fact, in 1940, 135,061 households were resettled, which included over 600,000 people.

According to the plan for 1941, the Resettlement Authority was already obliged to resettle over 200,000 households, mostly to the eastern areas of the Soviet Union – to Siberia and the Far East.<sup>16</sup>

It is unknown to what extent the plan for 1941 was fulfilled. Until the deportation project was terminated in late June 1941, up to 100,000 households may have been affected. Thus, on the basis of the aforementioned document, it can be estimated that, between May 1939 and July 1941, the Soviets deported to the Gulag a minimum of one million and a maximum of two million people.<sup>17</sup> Because the Resettlement Authority was established before the outbreak of the Second World War, its plan for deportations in 1939 was to be fulfilled primarily, if not only, within the pre-September 1939 territories of the USSR. However, even if the Resettlement Authority did not anticipate the Nazi-Soviet Pact of August 23, 1939 (and thus failed to plan mass deportations of Polish and other foreign citizens *a priori*), it can be safely assumed that after the conquest of Poland’s Eastern Borderland, the Kremlin, first, automatically extended the jurisdiction of the Resettlement Authority onto the newly acquired territories and, second, increased the overall quota of households to be deported. It can be thus suspected that at least a portion of 10,000 households deported in 1939 came from eastern Poland. Further, it is obvious that after the 1940 plan was increased from 29,500 to 135,061 households, the bulk of the deportees originated from the newly conquered territories of eastern Poland, the Baltics, Finland, and Rumania. The same applies to the 200,000 households slated for deportation in 1941.

To summarize, just under the aegis of the Resettlement Authority, the Soviets deported to the Gulag from one to two million between May 1939 and July 1941. Most of the deportees came from the newly conquered territories, chiefly eastern Poland. The Resettlement Authority worked hand in glove with the NKVD, but not all persons in the custody of the secret police fell under the jurisdiction of the former institution. Individuals and groups arrested, interrogated, imprisoned, and shipped east by the NKVD for any other purpose than resettlement are most likely not included in the count above. That means that the estimate of between 1 and 2 million persons deported excludes prisoners of jails as well as labor, concentration, and POW camps under the direct supervision of the NKVD.

Granted, the preliminary inquiry outlined above is based upon an interpretation of a single Soviet report. However, this very important report needs to be explained by the revisionist scholars who, it seems, have managed to locate only a portion of the records regarding deportations but tend to treat them as the final word.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> See Spravka, I. Karpov, 27 October 1942, GARF, fond A-327, opis 1, dela 1, lista 45-47.

<sup>17</sup> Of course, Soviet official statements made public subsequently denied such estimates. For example, a Soviet official misquoted and lowered the 1940 figure of deportees, depicting it as cumulative for the whole first occupation period: “during the period of 1939-1941 around 135,000 families of up to 500,000 people were resettled to the areas of the Far East, Siberia, and other regions.” Nonetheless, during the same meeting, the Soviet officials admitted that in the eastern parts of the Russian Federative Soviet Socialist Republic alone there were over 5 million “evacuees.” Were all of them truly “evacuees”? See Zapiska t. A.V. Gritsenko, K.p. povestki Zasedaniia Biuro Sovnarkoma RSFSR, September 1945 [no daily date entered], GARF, fond A-327, op. 1, d. 1, l. 12.

<sup>18</sup> The most prominent purveyors of this figure are Stanisław Ciesielski, Grzegorz Hryciuk, and Aleksander Srebrakowski, *Masowe deportacje ludności w Związku Radzieckim* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2003), 260-61. At p. 246, these

Pending further research we should heed Professor Piotrowski's words of caution and also pay attention to his methodology. He proposes to scrutinize the entire process of the deportations, diligently examining each of its stages. Let us retrace the mechanism of deportations. First, the Politburo gave orders to deport and approved the quota. Second, the details of the plan were worked out by the NKVD high command and disseminated down to the raion level.<sup>19</sup> Third, on the raion and village level the lists of the individual "enemies of the people" and their families, which had been generated through the operations of the *agentura* at the grassroots,<sup>20</sup> were harmonized with the general categories of the undesirables to be deported, which had been sent in from the center.<sup>21</sup> Fourth, the deportation lists thus compiled, the NKVD troikas descended on particular settlements and individual households. At this stage, the lists were not closed for it was left at the discretion of the NKVD and its local collaborators to include additional victims.

Fifth, having rounded up entire families, the NKVD and its auxiliary militia escorted the victims to a place of concentration, usually a railway depot. At this moment, the deportees were handed over to the railroad troops of the NKVD, who counted them and compared their tally against the lists supplied by the local secret police authorities. Similarly, sixth, at the end of the trip to the eastern and northern parts of the USSR, the railroad NKVD surrendered the victims to the local NKVD officers, who – after counting the human cargo and checking the lists – would then escort the unfortunates to their place of resettlement.

We need to look carefully at the transfer mechanism, for it is mostly based on the documents of the railroad NKVD that the revisionist historians stake their claim to lower victim count. As Professor Piotrowski points out, Polish émigré victim estimates are based upon approximations regarding trains used in the deportation process. Another way to estimate the number of deportees is to calculate the average victim load per cattle car. On October 11, 1939, NKVD General Ivan Serov ordered that "an estimate of 25 persons to a car should be observed" but that "it is not permitted to break up a family" (p. 208).<sup>22</sup> As mentioned, the victims, quoted by Professor Piotrowski, attested that at a minimum there were 27 persons per car, but more often "about 50" and even the maximum of up to 70. Thus, it seems, that the NKVD railroad troops violated the order, or perhaps overinterpreted it so as not "to break up a family."

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authors claim that between 1940 and 1941, the Soviets deported 4.5% of the pre-war population of Poland's Eastern Borderlands or "over 300,000" people, including about 200,000 ethnic Poles, ca. 70,000 Jews, ca. 25,000 Ukrainians, ca. 15,000 Belorussians, and several thousand Germans, Czechs, Lithuanians, Russians, and others. It seems that the authors overlook those Polish citizens who found themselves in the USSR as prisoners, draftees, refugees, and by other involuntary means. These latter categories are noted, however, in Daniel Boćkowski, *Czas nadziei: Obywatele Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w ZSRR i opieka nad nimi placówek polskich w latach 1940–1943* (Warszawa: Neriton and Instytut Historii PAN, 1999).

<sup>19</sup> See strictly secret Order of the People's Commissar Serov for the Interior of Lithuanian SSR in 1940, Order No. 0054, Kaunas, 28 November 1940; and Instructions regarding the manner of conducting the deportations of the anti-Soviet element from Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, Strictly Secret, *Lituanus: Lithuanian Quarterly Journal of Arts and Sciences*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (Winter 1988), posted at <http://www.lituanus.org/>.

<sup>20</sup> *Pace* Professor Piotrowski (at p. 6), it was not only "collaborators from among the ethnic minorities including the Jews and Ukrainians." Ethnic Poles provided their share of secret police snitches as well. See *Polskie podziemie na terenach Zachodniej Ukrainy i Zachodniej Białorusi w latach 1939-1941*, 2 vols. (Warszawa and Moscow: Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych i Administracji Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej and Służba Bezpieczeństwa Federacji Rosyjskiej, 2001). On ethnic relations in Eastern Poland during the Soviet occupation see Mark Paul, "Jewish-Polish Relations in Soviet-Occupied Eastern Poland, 1939–1941," *The Story of Two Shtetls*, part 2, 173–230, 243–44; Mark Paul, *Neighbours on the Eve of the Holocaust: The Polish Minority and Jewish Collaboration in Soviet-Occupied Eastern Poland, 1939–1941* (Toronto: PEFINA Press, 2002) (forthcoming); an abridged version is posted on the internet at <<http://www.kpk.org/KPK/toronto/sovocc.pdf>>; Bogdan Musiał, "Stosunki polsko-żydowskie na Kresach Wschodnich R.P. pod okupacją sowiecką (1939–1941)," *Biuletyn Kwartalny Radomskiego Towarzystwa Naukowego*, vol. 34, no. 1 (1999): 103–125; Marek Wierzbicki, *Polacy i Białorusini w zaborze sowieckim: Stosunki polsko-białoruskie na ziemiach północno-wschodnich II Rzeczypospolitej pod okupacją sowiecką, 1939–1941* (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Volumen, 2000); Marek Wierzbicki, *Polacy i Żydzi w zaborze sowieckim: Stosunki polsko-żydowskie na ziemiach północno-wschodnich II RP pod okupacją sowiecką (1939–1941)* (Warszawa: Fronda, 2001); Ben-Cion Pinchuk, *Shtetl Jews under Soviet Rule: Eastern Poland on the Eve of the Holocaust* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1990); Don Levin, *The Lesser of Two Evils: East European Jewry Under Soviet Rule 1939-1941* (Philadelphia and Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1995); Jerzy Robert Nowak, *Przemilczane zbrodnie: Żydzi i Polacy na Kresach w latach 1939–1941* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo von borowiecky, 1999); Jerzy Robert Nowak, *Polacy i Żydzi na Kresach w latach 1939–1941* (Warszawa: von borowiecky, 2002); Evgenii Rozenblat, "Evrei v sisteme mezhnatsional'nykh otnoshenii v zapadnykh oblastiakh Belarusi, 1939–1941 gg.," *Białoruskie Zeszyty Historyczne* [Białystok], no. 13 (2000): 89–103; Michał Gnatowski, "Radzieckie dokumenty o polskim podziemiu niepodległościowym w regionie łomżyńskim w latach 1939-1941: Część II," *Studia Łomżyńskie*, vol. 8 (1997): 224.

<sup>21</sup> Aside from the deportation order reproduced by Professor Piotrowski as Documents A and B at pp. 203-209 of *The Polish Deportees of World War II*, Serov's order is also available at Appendix, Instructions regarding the manner of conducting the deportations of the anti-Soviet element from Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, *Lituanus: Lithuanian Quarterly Journal of Arts and Sciences*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (Winter 1988), posted at <http://www.lituanus.org/>.

<sup>22</sup> See note 21.

Why would the railroad NKVD ignore their orders? Well, there could be an insufficient number of railway cars available, so people had to be crammed into fewer cars than anticipated. Also, if the railway police troops were issued with food for 25 people per car, that was not only insufficient to feed the actual number of about 50 people per car but also it left little for the guards to steal for themselves. This would explain why the deportees suffered hunger on the way to their places of exile. Strange as it may seem, on paper, there were strict regulations against starving deportees and prisoners. And the plan – a Soviet deity – which stipulated that “an estimate of 25 persons per car” were to be fed was an ironclad guarantee that prevented the guards from drawing additional rations for any additional prisoners. Hence, on paper, to tally with the omniscient plan, a transport of a hundred box cars with 5,000 people would have to be reported as an echelon of 2,500 deportees. As often was the case in the Soviet Union, fiction masqueraded as reality. According to Anne Applebaum, who studied the Gulag intensively, Soviet statistics are notoriously unreliable.<sup>23</sup> Why would it be any different with the NKVD railroad records?

On the face of it, the NKVD railway troops should have accepted the deportees at the point of origin, transported them, and passed them on to the appropriate authorities at the destination. However, it appears that invariably the railroad NKVD was forced to accept a number of people which exceeded “an estimate of 25 persons per car,” thus violating Serov’s order. If the cattle cars were thus stuffed with more deportees than permitted, as they were, it was in the interests of the NKVD guards to lower the count. Mortality among the deportees, estimated by some at 10%, certainly helped. But it was not sufficient enough to eliminate the overpopulation on cattle trucks to the desired level of “an estimate of 25 persons.” Instead, since both the deportees had to be delivered and at least lip-service had to be paid to the standing orders, the NKVD railway troops may have doctored the deportation lists, revising them downward. Those lists would be submitted to the superiors at the NKVD railway command. Next, while passing the deportees on to the local NKVD at destination, it was enough to produce the original lists generated by the local NKVD at the point of origin. And these individual lists remained forever at the local level. Most likely only some general summary reports from each locality were sent up to the raion and then oblast authorities of the NKVD. There, they were further diluted and combined with other similar reports to be dispatched to the republican and, lastly, central commands of the NKVD. And at that point, they disappeared into the inscrutable and inaccessible bowls of Soviet secret police archives.

It seems that the key is to re-focus on the deportation process at the point of origin and at destination. And even more appropriately, scholars should begin by scrutinizing the Soviet occupation on a micro-scale, compiling databases with names of victims of Communism. Juxtaposing them against official Soviet lists would allow us to come to reign in the chaos of the official statistics. Alas, hitherto there have been almost no case studies of small localities under the Soviet occupation.<sup>24</sup>

Another problem is that the historians may be looking at partial evidence for they have focused on narrowly ethnic and regional concerns, such as the deportations from eastern Poland, instead of Soviet imperial considerations. After all, small deportations from a periphery could be easily subsumed under large deportations at the center, and thus overlooked.

Then, there is the question of Communist nomenclature. It is possible that in the Soviet bureaucracy there was a separate category to denote the deportations of “enemies of the people” referred to in ethnic terms as Poles, Jews, and other “former Polish citizens,” and yet another, perhaps partly overlapping category, that described “enemies of the people” strictly in class terms. Hence, it is possible that scholars have overlooked, say, some “kulak” deportations, with their point of origin unspecified, which at a closer scrutiny may prove to have occurred in eastern Poland. (Parenthetically, it should be noted with appreciation that Professor Piotrowski has recognized the problem of Communist nomenclature, commendably putting quotation marks over such Soviet slogans as “amnesty” and “liberation”.)

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<sup>23</sup> Anne Applebaum, *Gulag: A History* (New York: Doubleday, 2003).

<sup>24</sup> One of the few exceptions is Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, *The Massacre in Jedwabne, July 10, 1941: Before, During, After* (forthcoming from East European Monographs/Columbia University Press). Zbigniew Romaniuk has carried out a detailed analysis of deportees from the Brańsk area. See Zbigniew Romaniuk “Twenty-One Months of Soviet Rule in Brańsk,” (in:) *The Story of Two Shtetls, Brańsk and Ejszyszki*, Part One (Toronto and Chicago: The Polish Educational Foundation in North America, 1998), 54-70.

We should thus start looking at the Soviet terror from the point of view of the imperial victimizers, and not solely at individual victims. This approach forces us to recognize that “the Polish problem” was subsumed under all other imperial considerations and was just one factor, among many, behind Stalin’s terror.

Last but not least, scholars are looking at fragmentary evidence because the post-Soviet archives are still not fully accessible. To overcome this handicap at least partly, micro-studies of accessible localities, in the Białystok region for example, should urgently be undertaken to understand better the period between 1939 and 1941.<sup>25</sup>

And what of the Soviet crimes in Poland between mid-1941 and mid-1944?<sup>26</sup> What of the Soviet deportations in 1944 and after? Andrzej Paczkowski and others talk about 100,000 people, Home Army soldiers, Silesians, Pomeranians, and real and alleged Germans, deported from the territory of Poland. But which Poland? The “people’s republic”? Then what about the Eastern Borderlands? The available data for just two pre-war Polish provinces of Wilno and Nowogródek show that more than 20,000 persons, mostly Poles, were deported to the Gulag after the return of the Soviets.<sup>27</sup>

Here again, to understand the mechanisms and dynamics of Communist terror, we need detailed case studies. This kind of indispensable microhistory has not yet found favor among mainstream scholars.<sup>28</sup> The greatest resistance may be encountered in academia among the generalists who have ruled the field without properly researching it first. Nonetheless, case studies can now be undertaken with ease in Poland, Lithuania, and to a much lesser extent Ukraine and Russia and even less so in Belorussia. One of the first indispensable steps in micro-history is individual recollections. Kudos to Professor Piotrowski for providing us with an important English language sample of these and a thoughtful methodological introduction to the problem.

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Washington, DC, 8 October 2004

Tadeusz Piotrowski (ed.), *The Polish Deportees of World War II: Recollection of Removal to the Soviet Union and Dispersal Throughout the World* (Jefferson, NC, and London: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2004). McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, Box 611, Jefferson, NC 28640, ph. 1-800-253-2187, [www.mcfarlandpub.com](http://www.mcfarlandpub.com)

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<sup>25</sup> Some preliminary work has already been done for the region of Białystok in general and the Łomża area in particular. See Michał Gnatowski, *W radzieckich okowach: Studium o agresji 17 września 1939 r. i radzieckiej polityce w regionie łomżyńskim w latach 1939-1941* (Łomża: Łomżyńskie Towarzystwo Naukowe im. Wagów, 1997); Michał Gnatowski, *Niepokorna Białostoczczyzna: Opór społeczny i polskie podziemie niepodległościowe w regionie białostockim w latach 1939-1941 w radzieckich źródłach* (Białystok: Instytut Historii Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku, 2001); Wojciech Śleszyński, *Okupacja sowiecka na Białostoczczyźnie w latach 1939-1941: Propaganda i indoktrynacja* (Białystok: Agencja Wydawnicza Benkowski and Białostockie Towarzystwo Naukowe, 2001).

<sup>26</sup> Here I am referring to the crimes of the Soviet and pro-Soviet guerrillas against the Polish independentist underground and Polish civilian population. The Polish side suffered an estimated 10,000 casualties in the conflict. See Zygmunt Boradyn, *Niemen rzeka niezgody: Polsko-sowiecka wojna partyzancka na Nowowgródczyźnie, 1943-1944* (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Rytm, 1999); Bogdan Musiał, ed., *Sowjetische Partisanen in Weißrußland: Innenansichten aus dem Gebiet Baranoviči, 1941-1944: Eine Dokumentation* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2004); Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, Piotr Gontarczyk, and Leszek Żebrowski, eds., *Tajne oblicze GL-AL i PPR: Dokumenty, 3 vols.* (Warszawa: Burchard Editions, 1997-1999); Piotr Gontarczyk, *Polska Partia Robotnicza: Droga do władzy, 1941-1944* (Warszawa: Fronda, 2003).

<sup>27</sup> Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, *After the Holocaust: Polish-Jewish Conflict in the Wake of World War II* (New York and Boulder, CO: Columbia University Press and East European Monographs, 2003), 216.

<sup>28</sup> One of the very few exceptions is Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, ed., *Ejszyszkki: Kulisy zajęć w Ejszyszkach: Epilog stosunków polsko-żydowskich na Kresach, 1944-1945: Wspomnienia-dokumenty-publicystyka* (Warszawa: Fronda, 2002).